



# Downtown Conroe Development Plan

City of Conroe, Texas

Approved By  
Conroe City Council  
July 25, 2019



City of Conroe  
Community Development  
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## INTRODUCTION



### Intent

The Downtown Development Plan establishes a vision and a set of recommendations designed to strengthen the role of downtown Conroe as a destination both unique in its own right and complementary to other experiences Conroe and the region have to offer.

Ideas that formed the basis of the vision and recommendations of this Plan come largely from discussions with the advisory committee, meetings and dialogue with various stakeholders that have a vested interest in the community, prior concepts for the area, and extensive analysis of Conroe's history, assets and brand. They are also the result of substantial research into the ingredients that need to be added to bring downtown Conroe the success that the community deserves, as well as the an understanding of the steps and tools necessary to bring solutions to reality.

**A Reason to Grow**

Downtown Conroe has historically been defined as the area that could be considered the “central business district” and for good reason. The heart of Conroe is home to its major activity centers including the Montgomery County Courthouse, City Hall, the Crighton Theater, the Owen Theater, Heritage Park, Founders Plaza and the historic structures surrounding the courthouse square and extending east to the railroad tracks. The area is clearly defined to the east and south by railroad tracks and to the west by Frazier Street. This is the urban core. It is the place of commerce and governance. It is where the community celebrates and where history is as obvious as the brick used to replace many of downtown’s buildings after the catastrophic fire in 1911.

But downtown Conroe has a bigger story to tell, one that requires a broader canvas and that will be interesting to a larger audience. The area surrounding downtown offers an opportunity to achieve those greater things. More music. More shopping, dining and entertaining. More interesting places to visit. And many new reasons to invest time and money.

**Downtown Conroe Redefined**

The expanded downtown Conroe is generally bounded by Interstate 45 to the west, Dallas Street to the north (with some deviation to the eastern and western edges), 10th Street to the east, and the railroad tracks to the south, with a small extension south to Avenue G along both sides of Main Street. The extended boundaries allow for consideration of the new Veterans Memorial Park, the Montgomery County Central Library, the original plat of downtown Conroe (east of the railroad tracks) and a variety of commercial and residential areas, as well as a number of underdeveloped parcels. It also allows downtown to begin at its natural gateways from Interstate 45 and 10th Street.



## Defining Downtown Conroe

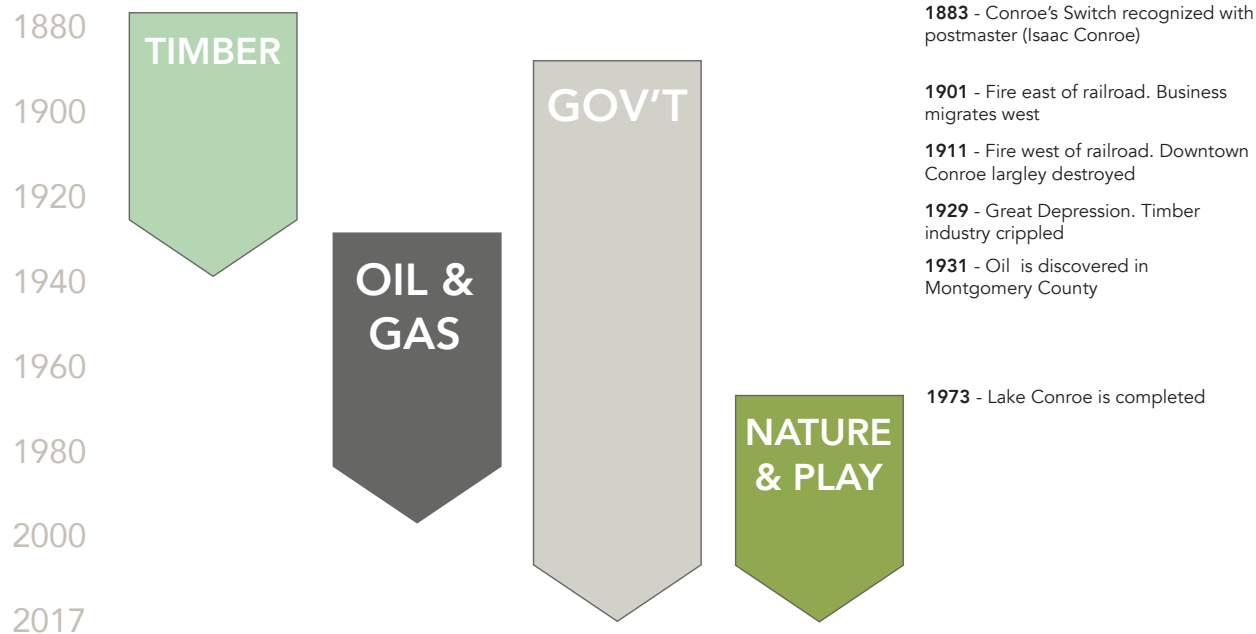


**The Expanded Boundary  
of Downtown Conroe**

**The Previous Boundary  
of Downtown Conroe**

*Map of Downtown Conroe "Redefined"*

## Learning From History



### Conroe the "Miracle City"

Downtown has seen many rebirths since the establishment of "Conroe's Switch". The intense surrounding thicket allowed Conroe to be born as one of several highly successful timber towns in the area. Location and a little political intrigue resulted in Conroe's successful nomination as the county seat (taking the title away from the community of Montgomery). The community migrated west of the tracks to surround the new county courthouse following a major fire.

In 1911, a major fire swept through downtown destroying the majority of buildings. Rather than fold, the community rebuilt, resulting in many of the buildings seen today as part of historic downtown.

Decline in the timber industry and the onslaught of the Great Depression again tested the community, but not for long. The discovery of oil in the area brought an even greater level of prosperity to the City of Conroe.

By the 1970s Conroe transformed again. In 1973, Lake Conroe was completed and the community, along with the surrounding area, became a regional tourist destination. Ironically, once again the future of the community was associated with the surrounding trees.

The consistent story of Conroe's escape from the precipice resulted in the community's title as the "Miracle City." While the moniker may not be the community's next brand, it provides a background upon which to build ideas, amenities and activities.



## Learning From History



*Bridge purported to be a location for Barrow family reunions*

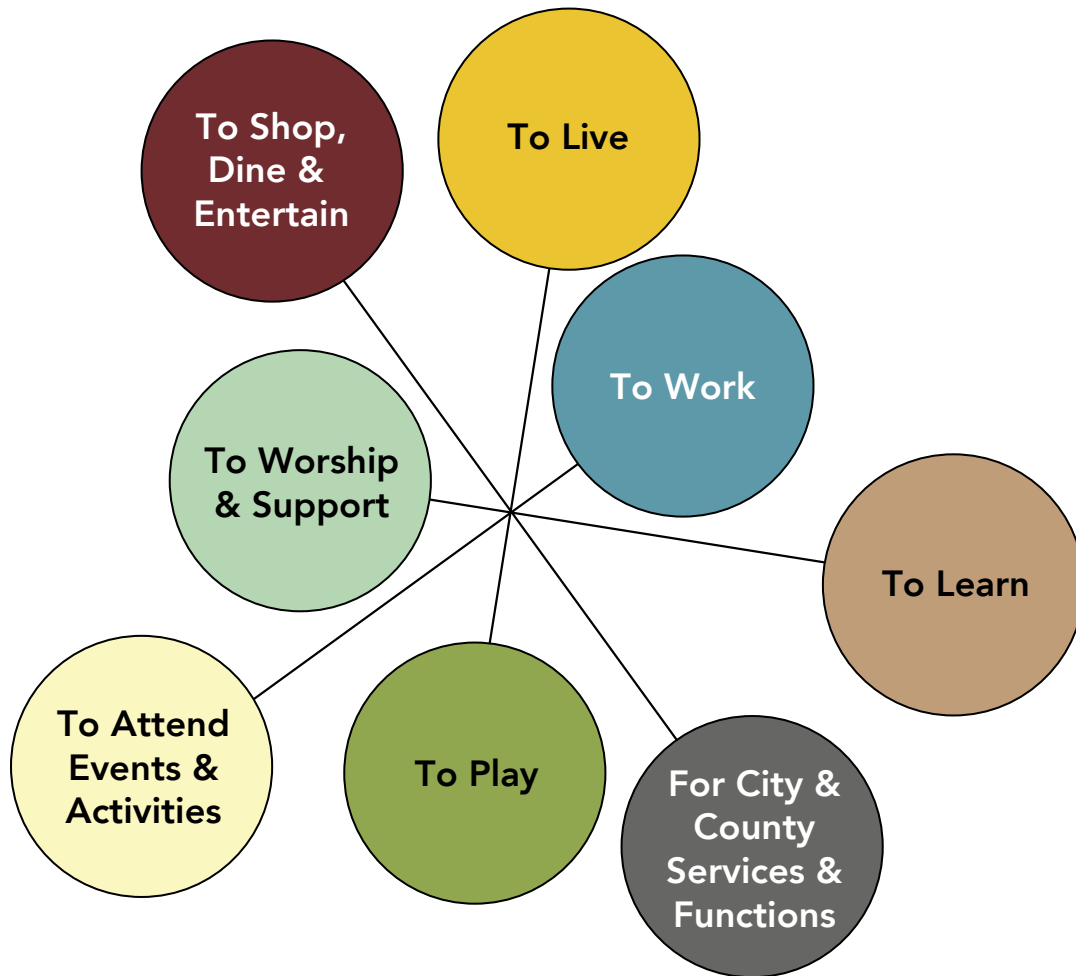
### Always a Reason to Celebrate

Conroe recognizes its past in a variety of ways, including memorials, plaques and efforts to maintain its historic structures. But history is also about great stories and some of those stories are worth telling to a broader audience through musicals, plays, events and festivals. Examples include:

- In 1886, William Conroe describes the area of Conroe as “dense forest inhabited by wolves, deer, bear, wildcats and other wild life”. It is the beginning of a tale of nature but also one of perseverance of the human spirit.
- In 1889, Conroe became the county seat thanks, in part, as vengeance for Willis. The community had previously sought to serve as the county seat; however, Montgomery prevailed. When the opportunity arose, leaders in Willis and other communities joined forces to oust Montgomery as the county seat and move it to the rising community of Conroe.
- In 1911 the business community of Conroe refused to be bested by a fire that left many of the town’s commercial structures in ruins. While reconstructing their buildings, the downtown merchants introduced “Trades Day” to lure customers back into the area. The effort paid off and played a role in the rebirth of downtown.
- In 1920, the City of Conroe successfully constructed its first city hall as a log cabin near the county courthouse. Ironically the log cabin was constructed despite passage of an ordinance specifically prohibiting wooden structures in downtown.
- In the early 1930s the country closely followed the criminal activities of two of the most colorful characters of the Prohibition era - Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow. Unbeknownst to many, Bonnie and Clyde occasionally visited to see the Barrow family that lived in the Conroe area. Occasional family reunions were said to be held below a bridge now abandoned, but standing in poor condition near McDade Park along FM 2854.
- Baseball was long a favorite activity in Conroe. In 1948 George Strake’s Conroe Wildcats were named “America’s Sandlot Team” by the National Baseball Congress following a series of tournament victories, an annual national tournament in Kansas
- In 1955 Elvis Presley came to Conroe to perform at the Davy Crockett High School football field. Following arrival to the concert in a Cadillac, Elvis leaped onto a bench toward the stage which promptly collapsed, leaving the King face down in a truck bed. After the crowd fell silent a revived Elvis jumped to the stage and performed “with an obvious red knot on his forehead”.



## Audiences



### Who Comes to Town?

Many people come to downtown Conroe and do so for a variety of reasons. For some, the area is a place to live and, as a result, those people come into downtown Conroe very regularly. Others come to the area for purposes of worship and therefore are more irregular guests. The majority of people that come to downtown Conroe can be categorized as those seeking to live; to work; to learn; to shop, dine and entertain; to worship and support; to attend events and activities; to play; and to attend city or county services or functions.

Each of these groups is an audience that plays a role in economic activity in Downtown Conroe. Those that come "to play", for example, invest time and money into visiting the green spaces and other recreational features in downtown Conroe. Some people may be encouraged to play multiple roles. For example, an individual that works in the area may take time during the lunch hour to shop or listen to music.

## Audiences



*Home in downtown Conroe*

### Why They Matter

Individuals and families that live in urban neighborhoods are either interested in the eclectic, highly pedestrian lifestyle that is urban living or live in the area because of necessity. Downtown Conroe offers an interesting mix of housing that is affordable and in close proximity to downtown features. Walking and biking could be very viable alternatives to the automobile assuming that a path is available that is safe and enjoyable.

Residential development in the area is comprised of a series of neighborhoods, including homes within the original plat for Conroe. The neighborhood north of the Central Business District includes a number of stately older homes and midcentury bungalows. Most of the neighborhoods have evolved to incorporate additional uses and housing types, including low-density multifamily housing, home businesses and commercial activities such as shops and wedding facilities.

Multifamily housing is available in limited quantity in downtown Conroe, including some residential units located above commercial space in the Central Business District.

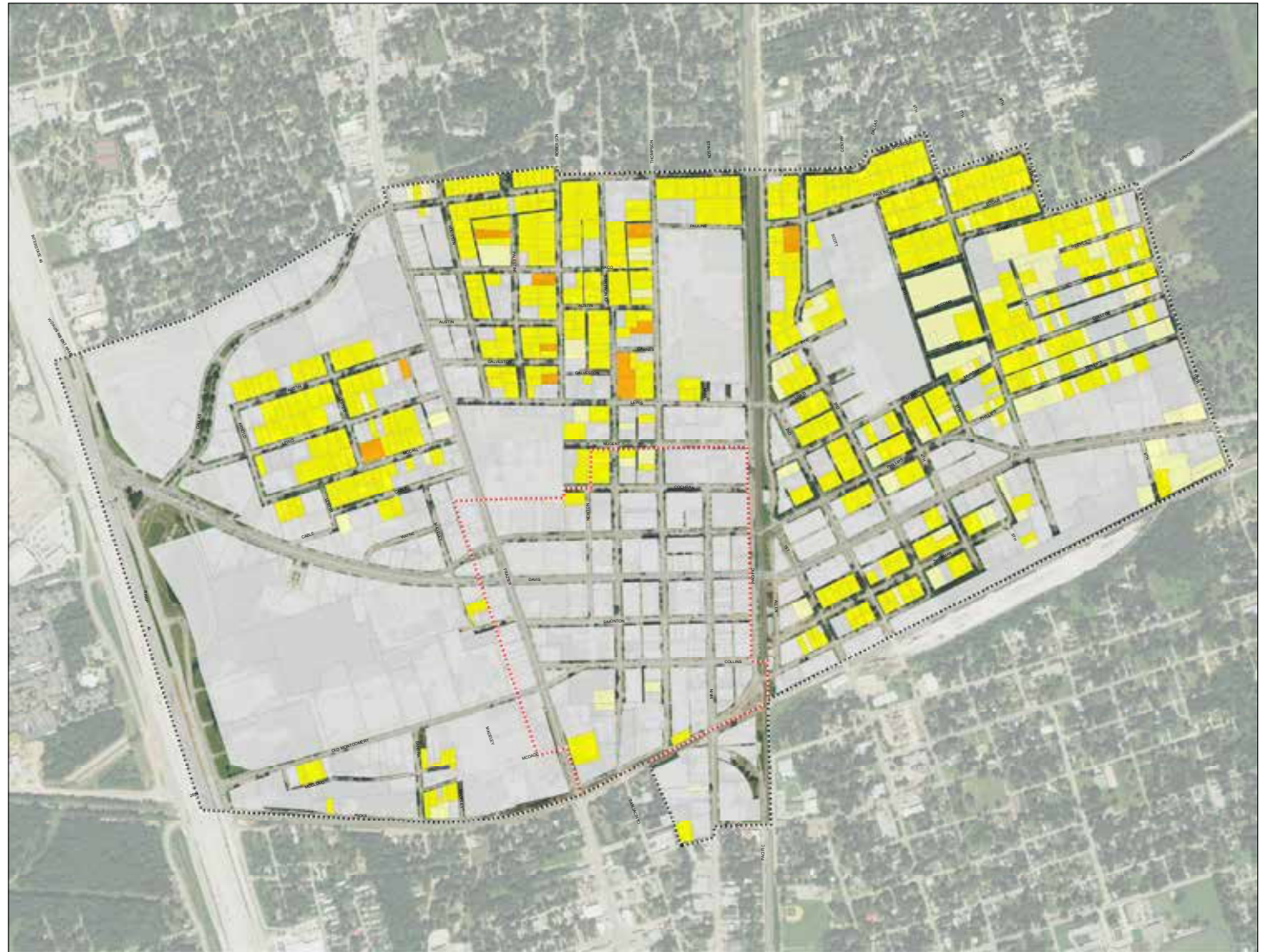
### Broader Information

Downtown Conroe currently consists of slightly less than 700 housing units, the majority of which are single family homes. Approximately 579 households live in downtown leaving a vacancy rate among homes of roughly 16.5 percent. Downtown largely includes a population of renters with less than 40 percent of residents owning their homes. While the number of households choosing to rent is higher than the surrounding area it is not unusual for the central core of the city.

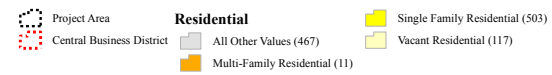
The median household income for the area is approximately \$36,480 and the median home value in downtown Conroe is \$96,354. Both figures are low in comparison to the surrounding area; however, neither figure recognizes that living in downtown has again become an interest to households with substantial disposable income that place walkability and experience above the benefits of suburban living.



## To Live



### DOWNTOWN CONROE



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
Mont. County Appraisal District Jan. 2017  
Map Source: HHA LLP June 2017



## Audiences



*Travis Intermediate School, formerly Crockett High School*

### Why They Matter

Schools and other places of learning have long been considered among the most culturally important places in any community and the same can be said for the schools in Conroe, several of which evoke fond memories for numerous residents. Educational institutions are also among the most diverse attractors in downtown Conroe. Each school and library serves as an employer for teachers and other staff members. The teachers serves students that are often taken to or from school by parents or guardians. Additionally, activities from sporting events and musicals to science fairs and awards ceremonies draw from an even larger potential audience.

Each individual with buying power, from teachers to grandparents attending a spelling bee is a potential guest at a downtown restaurant or shop, or a return customer for a local festival.

### Broader Information

The large majority of students, teachers and other school staff in downtown Conroe are associated with Conroe Independent School District. In total, more than 1,500 CISD students attend school in downtown Conroe and are attended to by approximately 190 teachers and staff.

Houston Elementary serves 740 students from kindergarten through the 4th grade with the support of 75 teachers and other school staff.

Built in 1926, Travis Intermediate School serves 626 students attending 5th and 6th grade with the support of 80 teachers and staff. Many in the area remember the facility as Crockett High School.

Hauke Academy Alternative High School serves 152 students from grades 8 to 12 with the support of 35 teachers and staff.

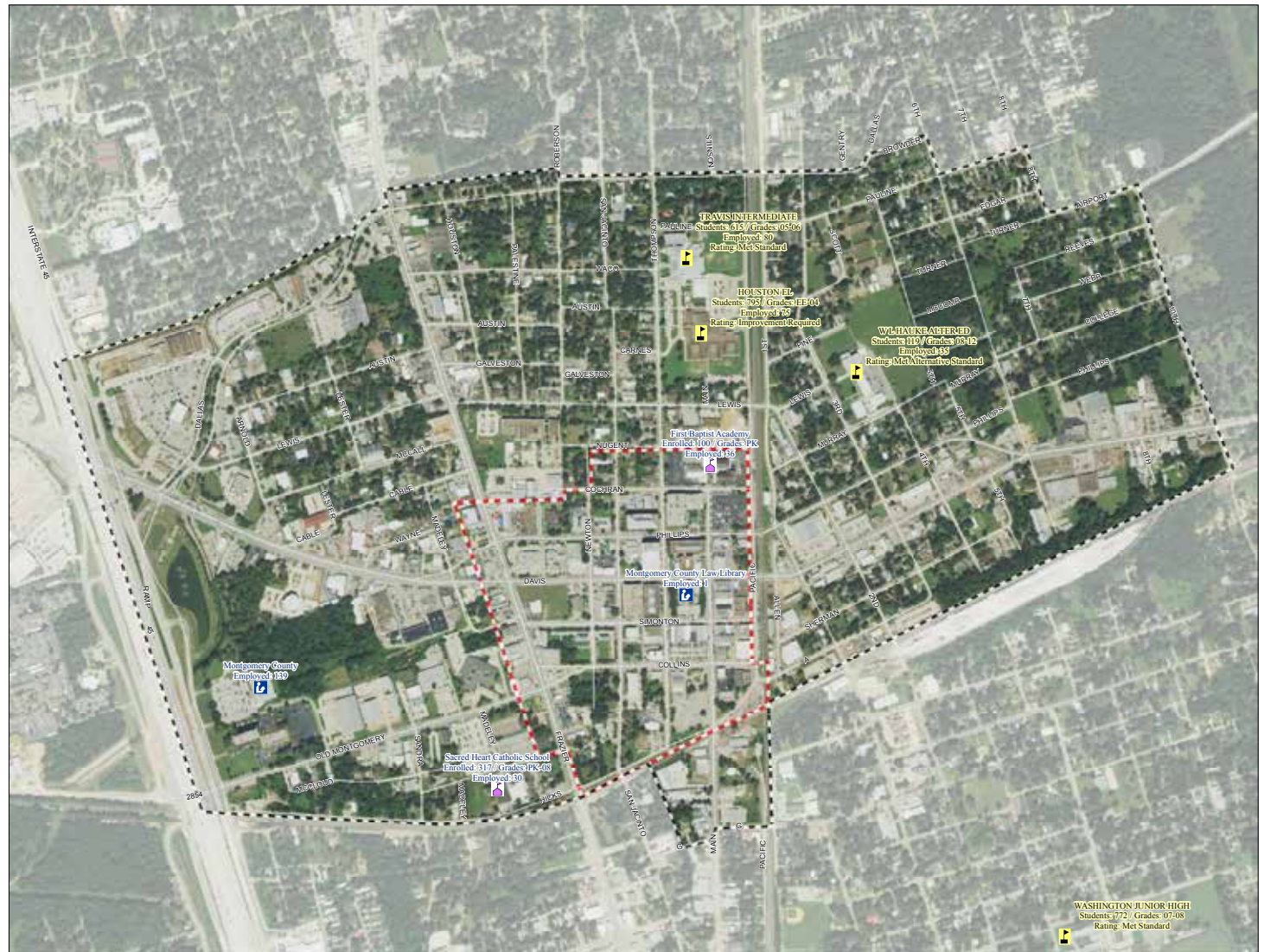
Sacred Heart Catholic School supports 317 students ranging from Pre-K to 8th grade and does so with 30 teachers and staff.

First Baptist Academy also serves Pre-K students.

The Montgomery County Central Library offers roughly 1,200 volumes of reading material through a staff of 139 employees.

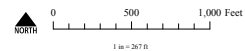
Finally, Walter P. Jett Continuing Education Center provides support services from the former Sam Houston Elementary school.

## To Learn



### DOWNTOWN CONROE

- Project Area
- Road Centerline
- Central Business District
- Public School (4)
- Library (3)
- Religious School (2)



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
Mont. County Appraisal District Jan. 2017  
Texas Education Agency  
Map Source: IHHA LLP Nov 2017

## Audiences



BNSF Office

### Why They Matter

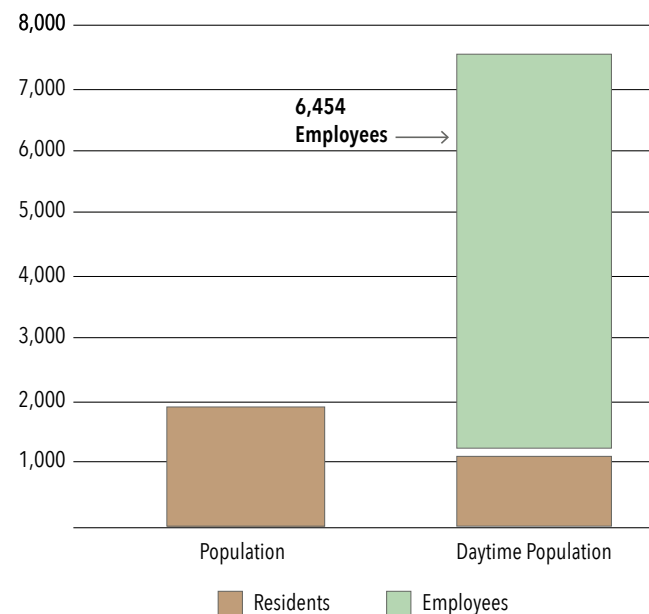
Employees provide the majority of the crowd that fills downtown during the weekday business hours. They represent the regular daytime customers for the area's restaurants, shops and services. Additionally, they are among the audiences most "in tune" with the activities and events that are taking place in downtown and are therefore among the most likely to return for the weekend or evening.

Of the 7,588 persons regularly in downtown Conroe during the daytime, roughly 85 percent are employees.

### Broader Information

Employees work for more than 600 employers that are located throughout downtown Conroe, although the majority of employees work for businesses, government organizations and other entities that are located in the Central Business District. The downtown business community varies widely from financial institutions such as Spirit of Texas Bank or Woodforest Bank, stores such as Mimi's on Main or the Conroe Blossom Shop, and restaurants and pubs such as The Red Brick Tavern and McDonalds.

### Population vs Daytime Population, 2017

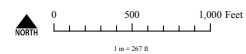
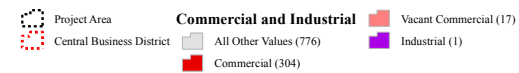




## To Work



### DOWNTOWN CONROE



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
 Map Source: IHIA LLP June 2017

## Shopping, Dining & Entertainment

### Audiences



*Downtown Conroe Business*

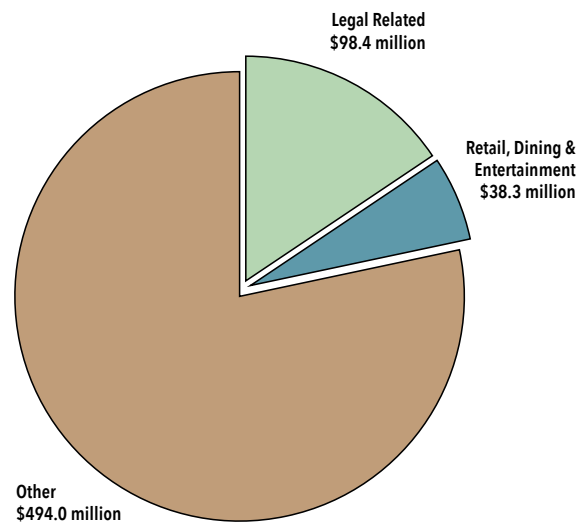
#### Why They Matter

Shopping, Dining and Entertainment are among the critical activities for any successful downtown. If a sufficient number of unique shopping, dining and entertainment venues are clustered into an area they can create an attraction capable of regularly drawing both local and regional interest.

A substantial amount of business in the downtown area includes office activity, including medical services, insurance, finances and legal needs.

The sales tax generated by shopping, dining and entertainment businesses can provide a major capital resource for the City of Conroe.

#### Volume of Sales, 2017



#### Broader Information

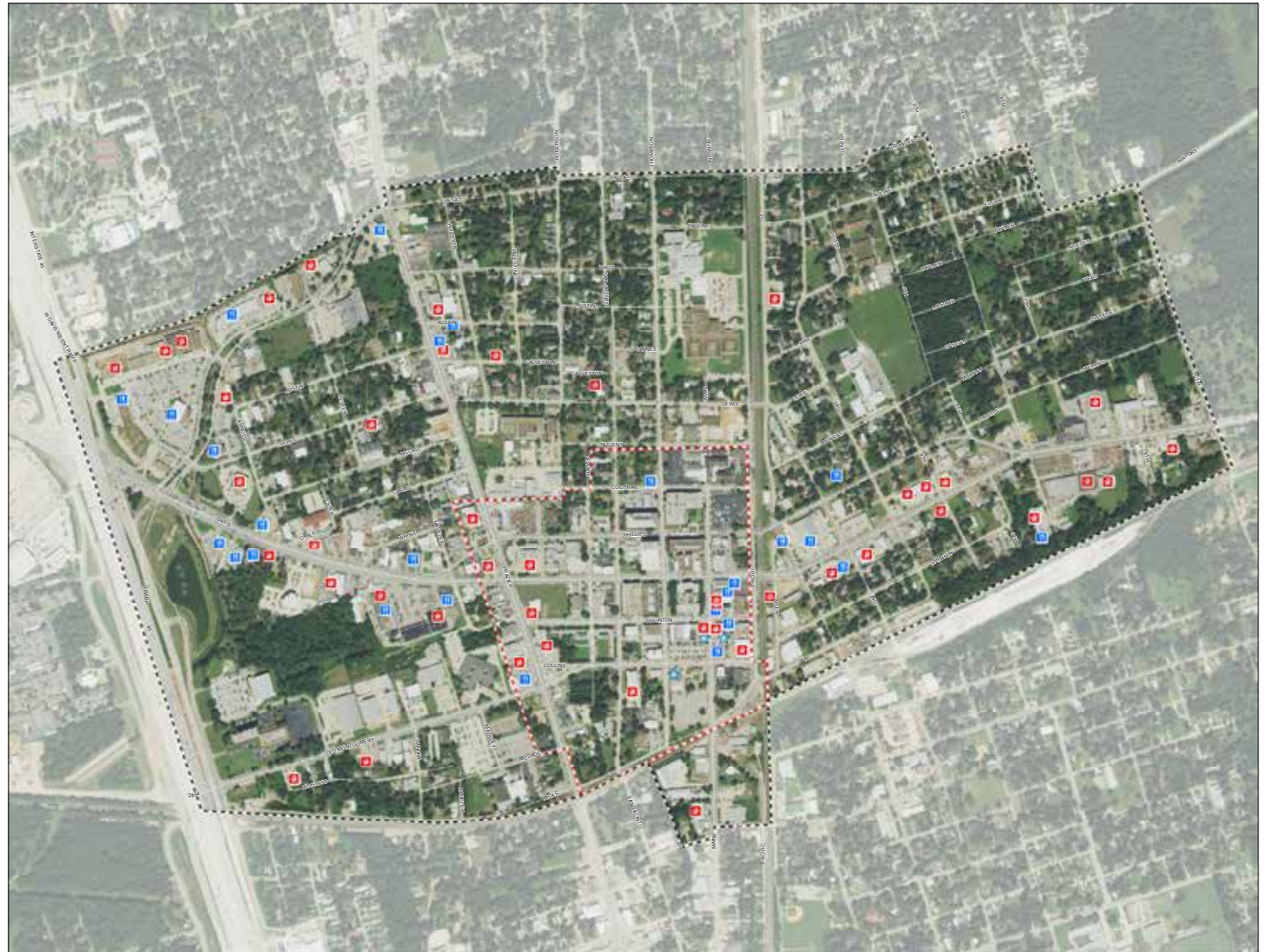
Roughly 80 businesses located in downtown Conroe are directly associated with shopping, dining and entertainment, employ approximately 550 employees and, in 2017, generated roughly \$630,303,000 in sales revenue.

There is a small cluster of shops, restaurants, pubs and entertainment venues in the Central Business District located in the vicinity of Main and Simonton. Music and performing arts take center stage in downtown Conroe thanks in part to the Crichton Theater and the Owen Theater.

A substantial number of the businesses in downtown Conroe are located outside of the Central Business District. Many are located along the major corridors of SH 105 and Frazier Street, including a variety of national brand stores, particularly in proximity to Interstate 45.



## Shopping, Dining & Entertainment



### DOWNTOWN CONROE

**Dining, Shopping and Entertainment**

- Shopping (48)
- ★ Entertainment (3)
- Dining (28)
- Project Area
- Road Centerline
- Central Business District



Data Source: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
Map: County Approval District Jan 2017  
Texas Education Agency City of Conroe  
Map Source: THA LLP Nov 2017

## City and County Government Services

### Audiences



Montgomery County Courthouse

#### Why They Matter

Government offices are necessary to a variety of people requiring municipal or county services. Some may arrive for jury duty or to represent an individual in a court case. Others may need to pay a bill, request a permit, or obtain a marriage license.

Unlike other reasons for travelling to downtown, a trip for purposes of government services may not be the most enticing. Nevertheless, guests may take the time to visit downtown businesses for shopping, dining, entertainment or for services such as surveying or legal counsel.

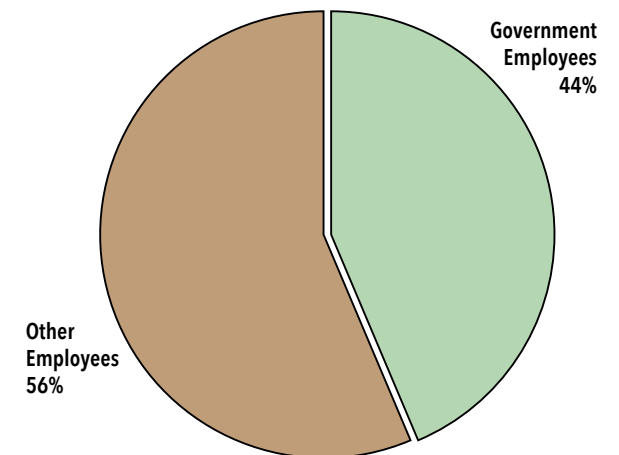
Government services also provide a source of employment, which is certainly the case in downtown Conroe.

#### Broader Information

Nearly 2,700 of the nearly 6,180 employees in downtown Conroe in 2017 were employed by government with the very large majority of those positions in city and county government.

As the county seat, downtown Conroe is the central location for both city and county services. City Hall is located in Conroe Tower, the tallest building in downtown and a landmark visible from Interstate 45. The current Montgomery County Courthouse was constructed in 1936 and has undergone numerous changes over the years. The county also has other offices located in downtown, including the County Tax Collector and offices located in the courthouse annex.

#### Downtown Government Employment, 2017





## City and County Government Services



## DOWNTOWN CONROE

 InfoUSA Listing (74)
  **Owner**
 City (39)

 Project Area
  All Other (1,024)
  County (15)



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
Mont. County Appraisal District Jan. 2017  
Map Source: HHA LLP June 2017

## Audiences



Conroe KidzFest

### Why They Matter

Events and activities draw individuals and families into downtown Conroe for purposes of celebration. They add to the sense that “something fun is always going on” and are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. Depending upon the event, audiences can range in size from the hundreds to the thousands and can stay downtown for part of a day or for multiple days.

Events and activities typically occur during evenings or weekends and draw people into the community that may stay to dine, shop or enjoy other entertainment. Some may also choose to spend the evening which further enhances the amount of time and money spent in downtown.

Regular, recognized festivals or other activities can have the additional impact of reinforcing the community's image as a music destination.

### Broader Information

Downtown Conroe is home to a number of events ranging from large scale weekend activities to smaller evening or holiday events. Examples include:

- The 26 year old Conroe Cajun Catfish Festival hosted by the Friends of Conroe is a major weekend event that features live music, food and craft vendors and a series of kids activities. The festival takes place in October.
- The first annual Conroe Americana Music Festival hosted by the Conroe Downtown Area Association was held in May 2017. The three day festival focused on celebrating a variety of music genres ranging from rockabilly to blues.
- The Sounds of Music Texas Series is hosted by the Friends of Conroe and invites nationally recognized artists to perform at the Crighton Theater.
- The Isaac Conroe Farmers Market takes place every first Thursday of the summer months and includes a variety of food trucks and market vendors.
- Conroe KidzFest is hosted by the City of Conroe Parks and Recreation Department and is designed to provide activities for children ranging from train rides to face painting.
- The Conroe Christmas Celebration is held in early December at Heritage Place by the City of Conroe and features snow hills, camel rides, a live nativity scene and, of course, a Christmas Tree. The event is coupled with the Conroe Friendly Cities Kiwanis Club Christmas Parade.

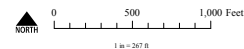


## To Attend Events and Activities



**DOWNTOWN CONROE**

- ★ Venues and Places to Visit (7)
- Project Area



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
Mont. County Appraisal District Jan. 2017  
Map Source: HHA LLP June 2017



## Audiences



*Texas Flag Park*

### Why They Matter

Play spaces offer an opportunity to visit downtown Conroe to relax, enjoy an event or learn. Play spaces also cater to two varieties of users: those that come to downtown intentionally for the purposes of enjoying recreation time and others that visit for other reasons, such as government services or shopping, and stop for recreation or relaxation as a complementary activity.

Play spaces draw a wide audience that can vary in size and character based upon the reason for the visit. Regardless, the impact is a number of people visiting the space along with the potential for spending money and time with other downtown activities.

Audiences are regularly drawn to play spaces that offer close proximity, a unique product, or programming.

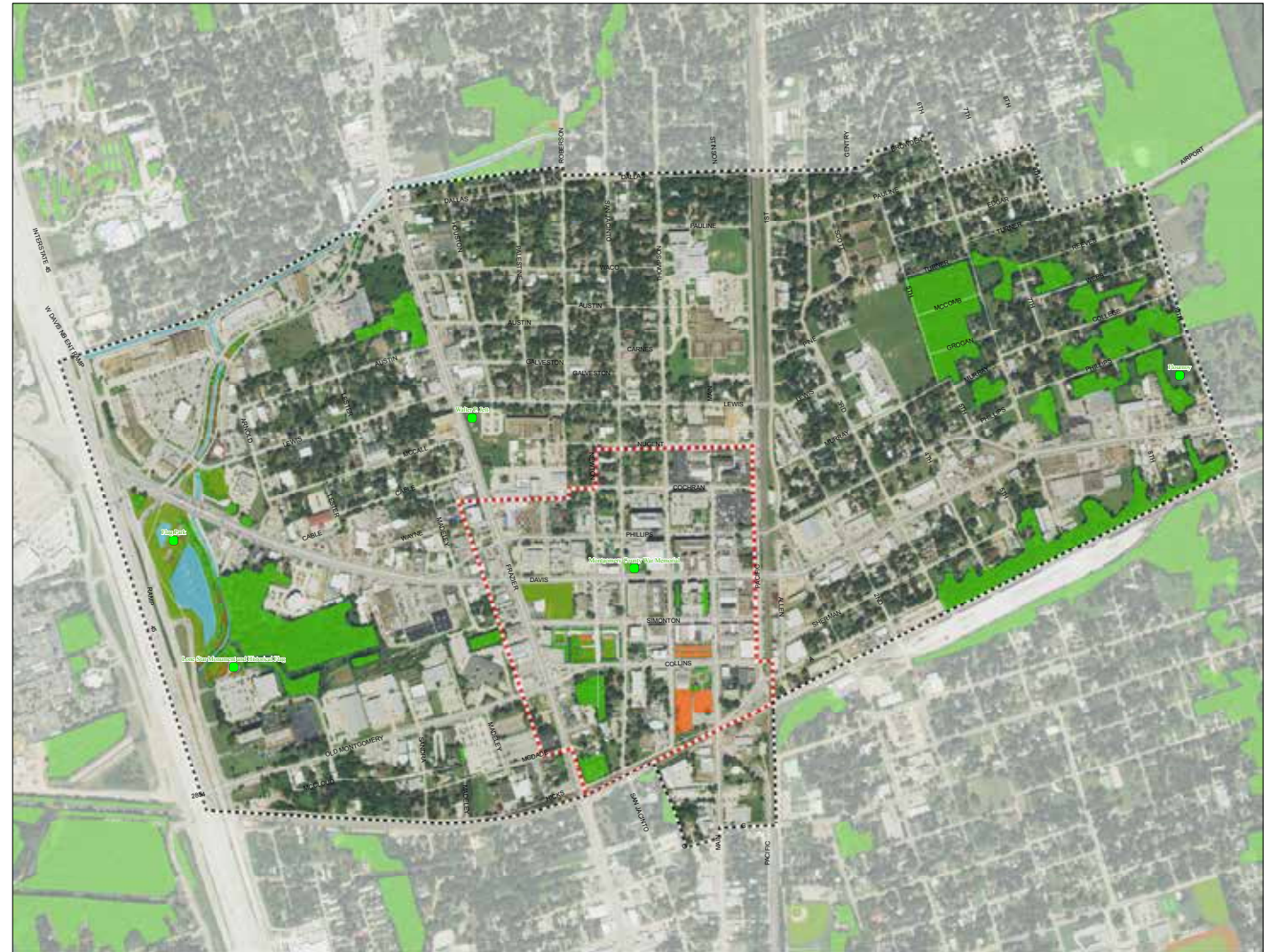
### Broader Information

The Central Business District has a limited amount of literal play spaces. Walter P. Jett Park adjacent to the Walter P. Jett Continuing Education Center and Flournoy Park both provide play equipment. Flournoy Park offers access to an athletic field and basketball courts.

Downtown includes two important gathering places for socializing and events. Heritage Place serves as Conroe's 2.5 acre central lawn and serves as the space for such significant events as the First Thursday Free Concert Series and the Conroe Christmas Celebration. Founders Plaza is a smaller facility with a stage for performances and a water feature.

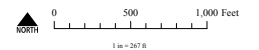
Downtown Conroe is also home to the new Montgomery County Veterans Memorial Park (built to replace a smaller facility that is also located downtown) and the Texas Flag Park. Both amenities provide an appreciation for area history and the people that made it possible and are located in the vicinity of the stormwater detention area adjacent to Montgomery County Central Library.

## To Play



### DOWNTOWN CONROE

<span style="color: green;">●</span> Park (5)	<b>Recreational Area</b>	<span style="color: green;">■</span> GRASS (70)	<span style="color: lightblue;">■</span> POOL (10)	<span style="color: green;">■</span> TENNIS (61)
<span style="color: red;">---</span> Project Area	<span style="color: brown;">■</span> CART PATH (26)	<span style="color: blue;">■</span> MULCH (34)	<span style="color: brown;">■</span> ROUGH (43)	<span style="color: orange;">■</span> TRACK (52)
<span style="color: red;">---</span> Central Business District	<span style="color: green;">■</span> COURT (2)	<span style="color: lightblue;">■</span> POND (10)	<span style="color: tan;">■</span> SAND (14)	<span style="color: grey;">■</span> WALK (180)
				<span style="color: green;">■</span> WOODED (407)



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
City of Conroe, 2016; MCAD Jan. 2017  
Map Source: BHA LLP June 2017



## Audiences



*First Baptist Church*

### Why They Matter

Religious institutions provide a regular influx of people into downtown Conroe on days of religious services and a smaller number of people on those days where group activities or programs are held. The majority of services occur during evenings and weekends outside of regular businesses hours.

The audience for worship and support can often be expected to extend their stay beyond the hours of service to enjoy lunch, shopping or other entertainment if it is available. Additionally, religious organizations will host major events or activities in the area if space is available. Often those activities are intended to draw a larger audience to the area thereby creating a greater opportunity for complementary interest in dining, shopping and entertainment.

### Broader Information

The audience of individuals coming to downtown Conroe to worship is largely dominated by two institutions - First Baptist Church and Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Smaller churches, such as the Vineyard Church of Conroe and the New Testament Baptist Church also dot the downtown landscape.

Sacred Heart Catholic Church has been a part of the Conroe community since prior to 1900 and now provides services to more than 7,000 families and includes Sacred Heart School.

First Baptist Church is located in the Central Business District of Conroe with an equally impressive program of services and outreach to the community, including weekday programs such as First Baptist Academy, an early childhood daycare.

## To Worship and Support

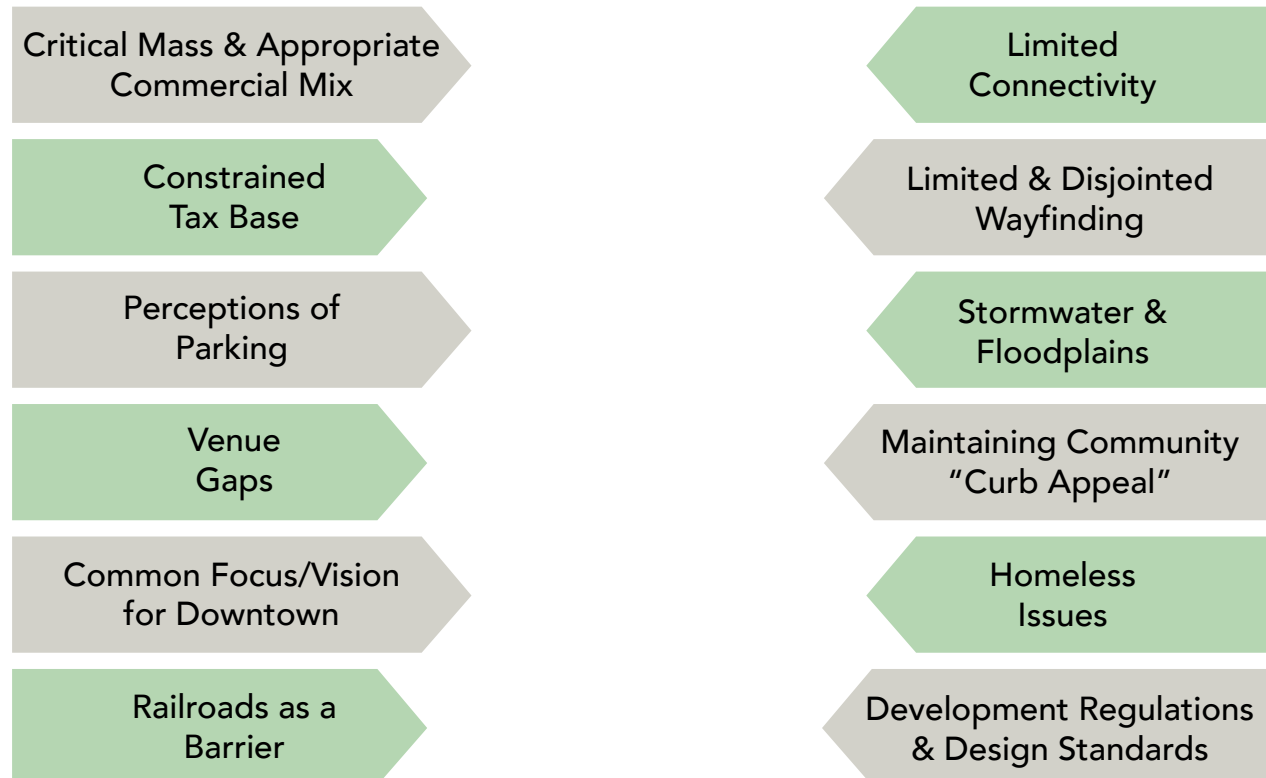


### DOWNTOWN CONROE



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
 Mont. County Appraisal District June 2017  
 Map Source: HHA LLP June 2017

## Issues & Findings



### Challenges and Opportunities

Issues and findings for the Conroe Downtown Development Plan are the result of discussions with property owners, business owners, city leadership and other stakeholders with a vested interest in the success of downtown. They are also the result of substantial data analysis and, perhaps still the most effective tool - simple observation. Issues and findings range in importance to the success of downtown, but all play into creating the character and economic environment needed to see the area thrive. More, many of the findings are interconnected. Connections make it easy to travel downtown, including options for walking and biking, and are key to bringing people to the area more often and for longer periods of time. On the other hand, their impact would be muted if the right critical mass and business mix are in place to create an interesting shopping and dining experience.



## Issues & Findings



*Retail, restaurant and entertainment cluster in the CBD*

### Observations

The shops, restaurants, pubs and entertainment venues have struggled to build sufficient critical mass to make downtown a destination. This is due in part to the large majority of first floor space that is consumed by law-related businesses. Lawyers consume the vast majority of space surrounding the courthouse square, leaving limited space in the downtown core to build a strong cluster of interesting shopping, dining and entertainment businesses to regularly draw residents and visitors into downtown. In total, 110 of the businesses in downtown Conroe are law-related.

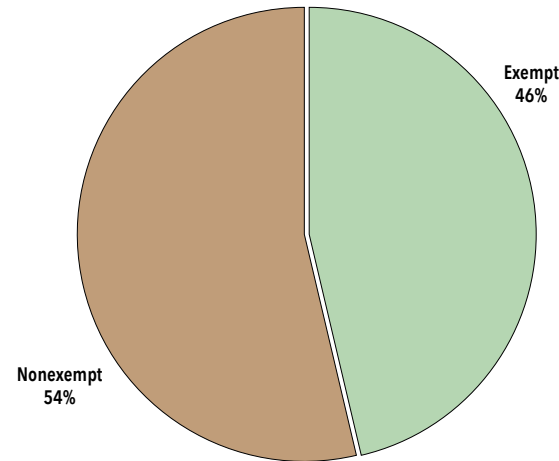
In addition to critical mass, the downtown core lacks the right mix of interesting shopping, dining and entertainment businesses to regularly draw residents and visitors into downtown.

Surrounding areas, particularly along Davis Street (SH 105) are largely auto-dependent and, by design, do not contribute heavily to drawing people downtown for an extended period of time. Similarly, by nature, many of these businesses are disconnected from each other and stretched along major roadways, making walking between businesses very difficult.

## Issues & Findings

### Constrained Tax Base

Exempt vs Nonexempt Property Owners, 2017



### Observations

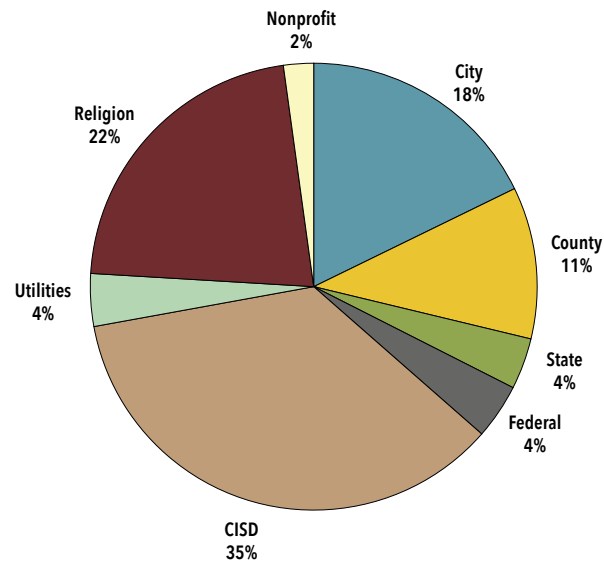
The ability to formulate alternative funding options for downtown reinvestment, such as a management district or a tax increment reinvestment zone, is based on the tax revenue available.

A substantial portion of the property in Downtown Conroe is comprised of government and nonprofit organizations and while they may bring a regular audience to downtown, they do not contribute to the tax base, thereby constraining government funding.

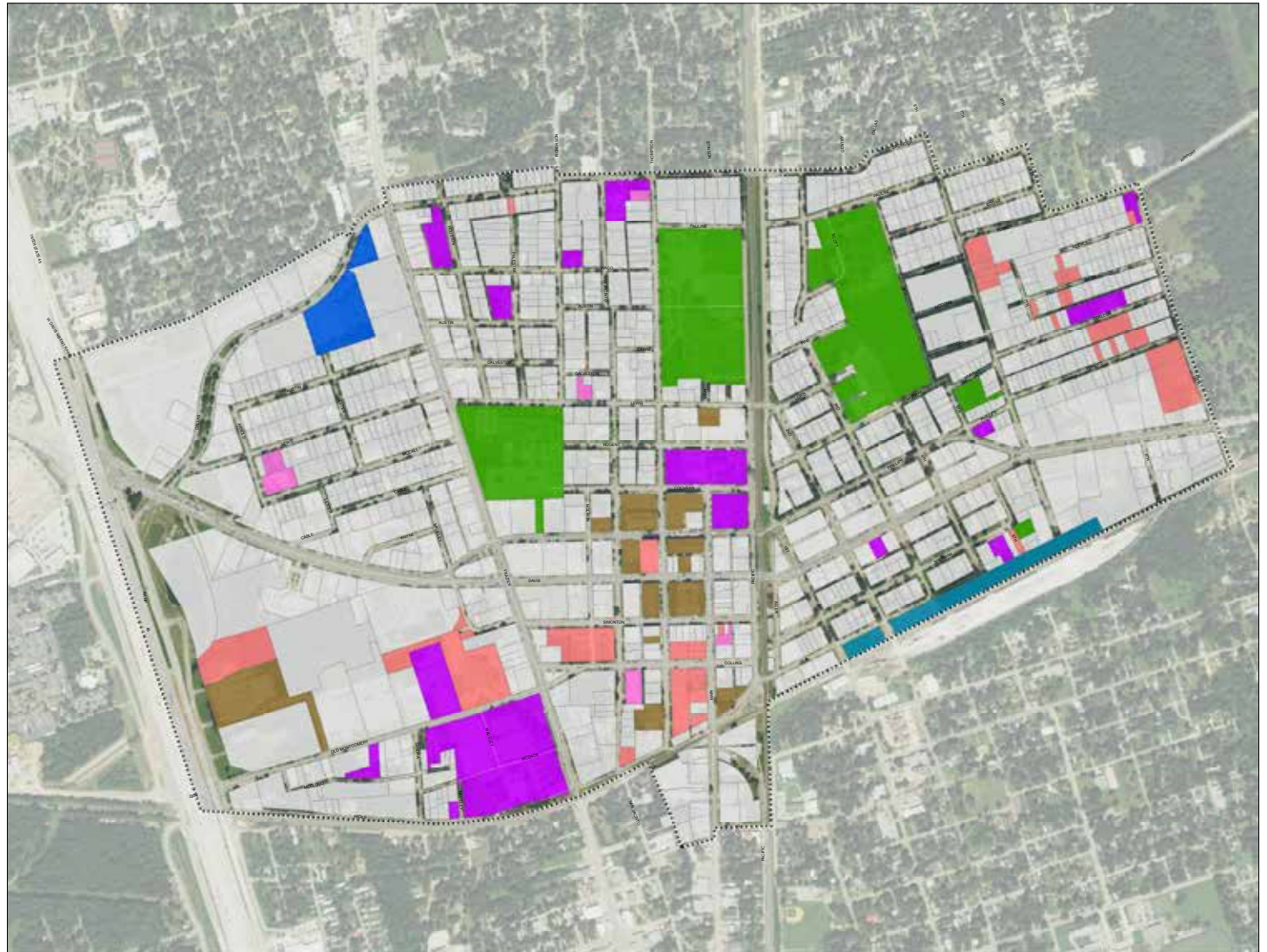
Substantial additional (and strategic) property is consumed by off-street public parking both in the downtown core and the surrounding districts. While parking is necessary, public parking is not taxable and prevents the properties from developing privately.

Finally, several of the major roadways in downtown are excessively wide, particularly given the desired travel speeds, resulting in additional desirable real estate that is not contributing to the value of the tax base. That same space could be providing additional functionality and improvements that could potentially be enhancing adjacent property values.

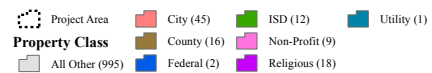
Comparison of Exempt Properties, 2017



## Constrained Tax Base



### DOWNTOWN CONROE



Data Sources: USDA NAIP Aerial Imagery 2016  
 Mont. County Appraisal District Jan. 2017  
 Map Source: HHA LLP June 2017



## Issues & Findings



### Observations

Parking is an oft cited cause of concern from community stakeholders and business owners, specifically in the Central Business District.

Some stakeholders have cited a lack of parking as a constraint to the construction of additional venues or expanding activities in downtown. Some local businesses have further indicated concern with the impacts of activities and events on availability of parking for customers.

Both the City of Conroe and Montgomery County own parking garages that are available, however they are not directly adjacent to some events and many are unaware that the garages are available for use.

Parking, particularly in the downtown core, is free; however, it is limited to two hours which is contrary to the idea of enticing visitors to stay longer in the downtown area. An ideal visit to downtown would include a minimum stay of four to six hours.

Wayfinding for parking is limited in the Central Business District. As a result, navigation to parking, particularly if it is not adjacent to the business, event or activity may be unnecessarily difficult to find.

## Issues & Findings

### Comparison of Area Performance Venues



Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion  
Woodlands, Texas

16,500



Crighton Theatre  
Conroe, Texas

533



Owen Theater  
Conroe, Texas

250



Heritage Place  
Conroe, Texas



Conroe Founder's Plaza  
Conroe, Texas

### Observations

Conroe has been a home to music and the performing arts since the completion of the Crighton Theatre in the 1930s. Since that time the City has coordinated with its nonprofit partners to add Owen Theater as a second indoor facility, as well as Heritage Place and Founder's Plaza for outdoor entertainment. More recently, stakeholders have noted that venues available for performances in downtown Conroe are limited in scope and seats. In fact, there appears to be a venue gap in the regional market that exists between the services provided by the Crighton Theatre's 533 seats and Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion in The Woodlands which offers space for 16,500.

## Issues & Findings

### Observations

A very large number of stakeholders have indicated an awareness of the brand and planning effort established by Destination Development (Roger Brooks) however, an equal number indicate that over time, downtown has lost its sense of direction. There is still excitement about downtown and a desire to succeed but no clear path forward.

Over time, responsibilities for improvements, events, activities, and support for businesses in downtown has been divided amongst a variety of government and civic groups, each with a separate charge. The only common threads are the highest levels of city leadership, which are also responsible for much more than downtown. Organizations that impact downtown include:

- **Conroe Live, Inc.** is a 501(c)(3) organization established "to provide the people of Conroe and of Texas with literary, scientific, arts, entertainment, educational and cultural events, and to support the production of arts, entertainment, educational, literary, scientific and cultural activities by developing

and maintaining an infrastructure that allows for multi-use of venues and related supplies, materials and equipment to that effect." Conroe Live is the closest descendant of Conroe's previous involvement with the Main Street Program. They have been involved in projects aimed at enhancing downtown Conroe (the art benches are an example) as well events and programs.

- **Conroe Downtown Area Association** is an organization intended "to foster, promote, maintain, and encourage the civic, social, commercial, tourist, and economic welfare of the Downtown Conroe area." The Association consists of downtown merchants as well as other interested entities and has historically focused on events and activities that draw people into downtown. Examples of their efforts include the Conroe Americana Music Festival, the Isaac Conroe Farmer's Market, Shakespeare in the Park, the Southern Star Music and Arts Festival and more.
- **Friends of Conroe, Inc.** is the oldest organization dedicated to enhancing downtown Conroe (and greater Conroe). the Friends of Conroe is a "non-profit community oriented organization, committed to the enhancement of the quality of life in Conroe and Montgomery County through civic and cultural improvements." They support a variety of programs, activities, events and capital improvement projects, including the 28-year old Cajun Catfish Festival and the Sounds of Music Texas Series.
- **Greater Conroe Arts Alliance** is a group that includes organizations such as the Conroe Symphony Orchestra, the Crighton Theatre Foundation, and the Young Texas Artists Competition, the Alliance is "a collaborative nonprofit organization, 501(c)(3), whose mission is to actively promote and support the arts and cultural organizations throughout the Greater Conroe Area."
- **Conroe Convention and Visitors Association** provides support for downtown Conroe by incorporating downtown branding, events and activities into the overall marketing effort of the community.
- **City of Conroe** has played a historically aggressive role in the continued reinvention of downtown Conroe through capital improvements, acquisition of property and facilities (such as the Owen Theater), and creation and maintenance of open spaces such as Founders Plaza. The City historically participated in the Main Street Program and, at one time, employed a Director of the program.
- **Montgomery County** serves as an active proponent of downtown Conroe. The county has not historically actively participated in downtown enhancement efforts, although they have indicated interest in being a partner in efforts to benefit the citizens of the county at large.
- **Conroe/Lake Conroe Chamber of Commerce**
- **Greater Conroe Economic Development Council**



## Issues & Findings



### Observations

Two rail lines traverse downtown Conroe including the Union Pacific Rail line and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Rail line. The BNSF line includes a maintenance yard and office located in the eastern portion of downtown. The rail lines physically divide the downtown core from original Conroe and residential areas to the south. While not a strong barrier, it is sufficient that stakeholders struggle to envision customers traveling between areas without solutions to the physical and mental divide.

Rail service is active in downtown. Many in the community have adapted to the presence of the railroads; however, when in service they can be very loud, particularly given the proximity to the major venues in the downtown core as well as the primary retail cluster near the intersection of Simonton and Main Streets.

## Issues & Findings



### Observations

Conroe is very proud to be considered a highly compassionate community and applauds the efforts of local ministries and charitable organizations to support homeless individuals as well as others in need. At the same time, location of facilities in and near downtown results in a visible presence that may impede efforts to attract customers and new investment.

A series of stakeholders have cited concerns for the safety of both customers and the homeless and others in need that have a presence in downtown away from local facilities.

## Issues & Findings



### Observations

The City of Conroe has made a substantial effort to enhance the corridors in the downtown core and extending along West Davis Street to the gateway at I-45. Similar treatments have not yet been installed at other points of entry with less traffic and visibility. The entry into downtown Conroe from the interstate benefits from the stormwater detention improvements maintained by Montgomery County as well as a major entry feature maintained by the City.

Visual clutter is an issue along a number of the corridors, particularly outside of the downtown core. Within the right of way, for example, some areas must contend with an overabundance of signage or a multitude of utility poles in very close proximity. On private property, a number of businesses, particularly outside of the downtown core struggle with issues of maintenance, a lack of commonality and dependence upon signage and the visible presence of off-street parking as their means of attracting customers.

There is limited visible relationship between the downtown core and the surrounding areas thereby making arrival in the downtown core difficult to immediately realize and limiting recognition of the other areas as potentially unique locations.



## Issues & Findings



### Observations

Navigating downtown Conroe by car is relatively easy for guests as well as local traffic. However, moving through the area on foot or by bike can be another matter.

Downtown Conroe is intended to be walkable with a number of amenities, including brick pavers, ornamental street lighting, and a unique series of benches; however, reaching the Central Business District can be a challenge. Obvious, safe, enjoyable, and convenient, walking and biking “paths” into the downtown core from the surrounding districts are limited and not intentionally marked or marketed, thereby severely limiting the desire to move from one location to another by foot or bike. Travel by bike is particularly difficult to or in downtown, including a lack of dedicated bike paths, streetscape enhancements or amenities. In some cases, particularly outside of the Central Business District, the need for maintenance creates a safety issue.

Walking or biking through the urban neighborhoods surrounding the Central Business District can be an enjoyable experience. Some roadways in residential neighborhoods offer sidewalks while others have limited width, overhanging trees and other features that make them enjoyable for walking and cycling without the need for dedicated lanes, sidewalks or street furniture.

## Issues & Findings



### Observations

Wayfinding in downtown Conroe has been applied separately by different organizations and for different purposes. The most recognizable wayfinding system that includes a visible effort to present a common theme and purpose is the signage associated with transit service. While stylistically strong, the signage at local transit stops is exclusively intended for visibility at walking speed.

## Issues & Findings



### Observations

The City of Conroe has taken a minimalist approach to development regulations and design standards and this approach has proven to have pros and cons. In one instance, development can occur relatively unhindered and can occur in a more expedient manner. On the other hand, it is difficult to craft the image and experience desired for downtown without a system of guiding principles.

Those regulations that do exist are designed largely to address the issues faced when dealing with suburban "greenfield" development patterns. They offer relatively little guidance when attempting to redevelop property, particularly in an urban format similar to the Central Business District.



## Issues & Findings



### Observations

Despite a lack of major flooding events in downtown Conroe several prominent properties in the area are located within the floodplain. A substantial portion of that property is located in proximity to the detention facilities maintained by Montgomery County and on the eastern side of downtown within the residential area. In many cases the areas have remained undeveloped and in a relatively wooded state. While the floodplain label makes development in these areas more complicated, it also provides opportunities for green space that can promote and enhance the value of surrounding development and help to protect downtown Conroe during a major storm event if improved appropriately.



Bronze Statue Honoring Young Texas Artists

### Goals for the Development Plan

- 1 Establish the Downtown Experience and Image as a Highly Marketable, Valuable Product
- 2 Increase the Number of Reasons to Come to Downtown Conroe
- 3 Ensure that Proposed Experiences and Amenities Remain Authentic to Conroe
- 4 Propose Catalytic Projects that will Spur Private Investment in Downtown Conroe
- 5 Grow and "Cross-Pollinate" all of the Audiences that Come to Downtown Conroe
- 6 Grow Businesses Locally and Provide the Support Network to Help them Thrive
- 7 Adapt to Changes in Retail Models and Shopping Habits
- 8 Transform Performing Arts and Food from Entertainment into Industries
- 9 Develop Critical Mass for Shopping, Dining and Entertainment in the Central Business District
- 10 Improve Mobility throughout Downtown, Particularly for Local Traffic
- 11 Protect and Promote the Unique Character and Places of Downtown Conroe
- 12 Improve Navigation to and through Downtown Conroe
- 13 Build upon the Unique Set of Assets Available in Downtown Conroe
- 14 Promote Themes of Fun, Family-Friendliness, Nature, Small Town Feel, History and Music
- 15 Add the Details that Enhance Street Life and Keep Downtown Interesting and Attractive
- 16 Diversify and Strengthen Funding Streams and the Tools for Implementation



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## The Overall Plan for Downtown Conroe Improvements



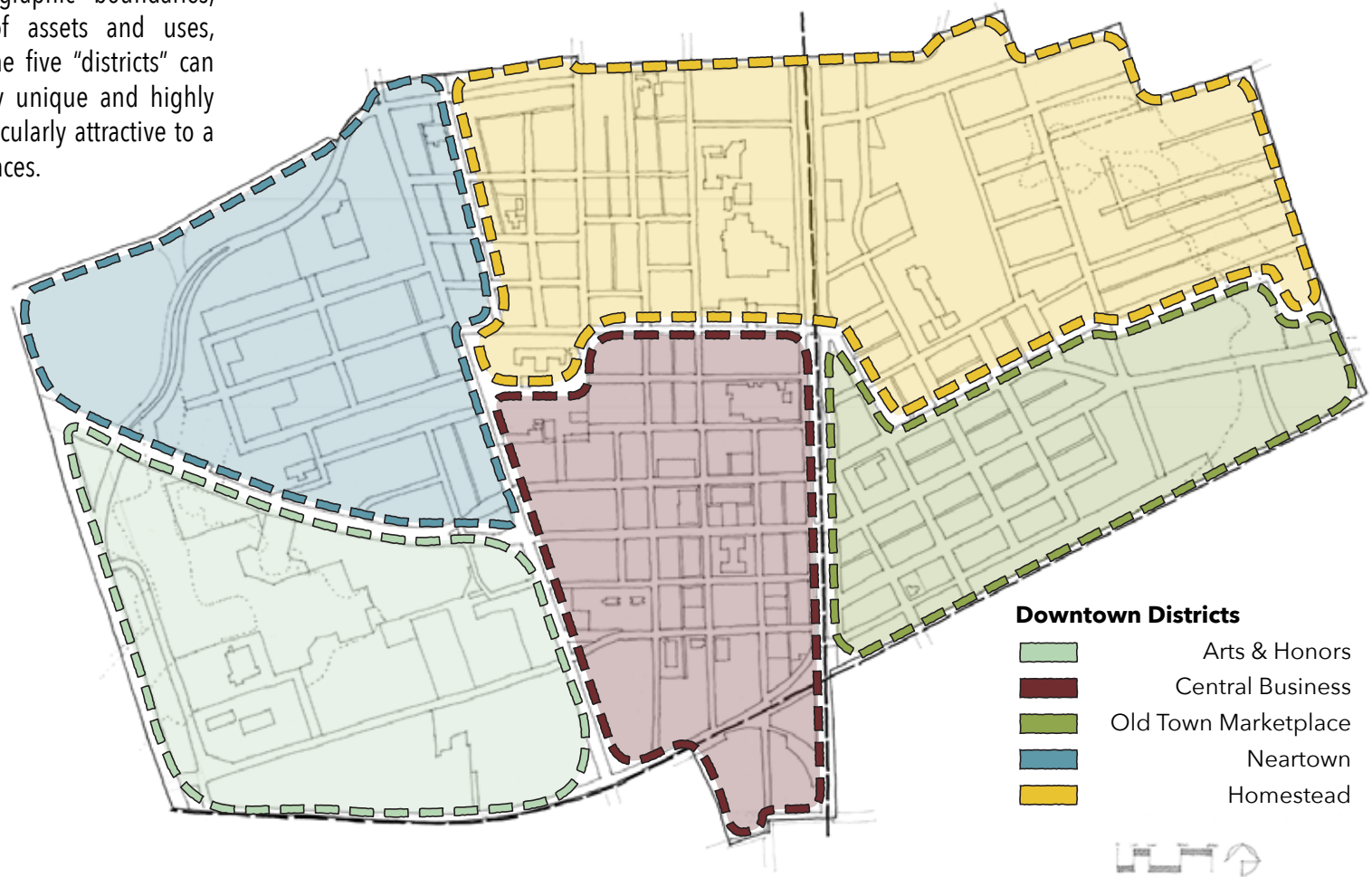




## by District

### Five Unique Sides of Downtown Conroe

Downtown Conroe can be neatly divided into five different areas based on geographic boundaries, economic opportunities, mix of assets and uses, and overall character. Each of the five "districts" can be strengthened to provide very unique and highly complementary experiences particularly attractive to a variety of existing and new audiences.



## by District

### The Concept

An area that welcomes guests and residents alike to Conroe's love of music, its natural setting, as well as local history and heroes.

Proximity to Interstate 45 gives this location immediate visibility to make a first impression and provides access to commuters that enjoy the cross between the small town feel of Conroe and the urban living available in downtown. Access and visibility make the district the logical location for a major performing arts venue and downtown conference hotel.

A Hike and Bike Trail loop proposed throughout downtown Conroe provides access to all of the current and proposed amenities in the district, including a performing arts venue, a business incubator with a focus on music and allied arts, the Montgomery County Veterans Memorial, the Texas Flag Park, Montgomery County Central Library, and a conference hotel.

An improved Metcalf Street allows for development of medium density residential and commercial activity that can add substantial buying power from an audience that enjoys walking, biking or travelling by golf cart to establishments throughout downtown, including the floodplain in the center of the district that is proposed to be preserved and utilized as natural green space.

### District Recommendation by Recommendation Number

- |          |   |           |  |
|----------|---|-----------|--|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Performing Arts Venue</b>                  | <b>7</b>  | <b>Metcalf Street "Complete Street"</b>      |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Performing Arts Incubator</b>              | <b>8</b>  | <b>Commercial Improvement/Redevelopment</b>  |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Enhanced Floodplain/Green Space</b>        | <b>9</b>  | <b>Enhanced SH 105 &amp; Frazier Streets</b> |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Downtown Hike and Bike Loop</b>            | <b>10</b> | <b>Parking "Parks"</b>                       |
| <b>5</b> | <b>Conference Hotel</b>                       | <b>33</b> | <b>Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding</b>       |
| <b>6</b> | <b>Urban Footprint Residential/Commercial</b> |           |  |



## Arts and Honors District Map



# by District

## The Concept

A reintroduction to original Conroe provides new ways to appreciate some of downtown's greatest assets - food, shopping and fun in a family friendly, small town atmosphere.

A linear marketplace featuring a public lawn replaces underperforming commercial areas and provides a new destination to the east side of downtown alongside a location for trucks and containers (located appropriately near the railroad tracks). The market expands from the city's farmers market to a near-daily market with enough variety to draw local and regional attention. The market and courtyard are part of the City's initiative to grow local businesses from incubator, to tent/stall, to truck/container and on to brick and mortar sites in the CBD.

The eastern side of downtown is easily accessible due to improvements that make crossing the railroad tracks a positive experience, the Hike and Bike Loop, and new opportunities to travel downtown by golf cart.

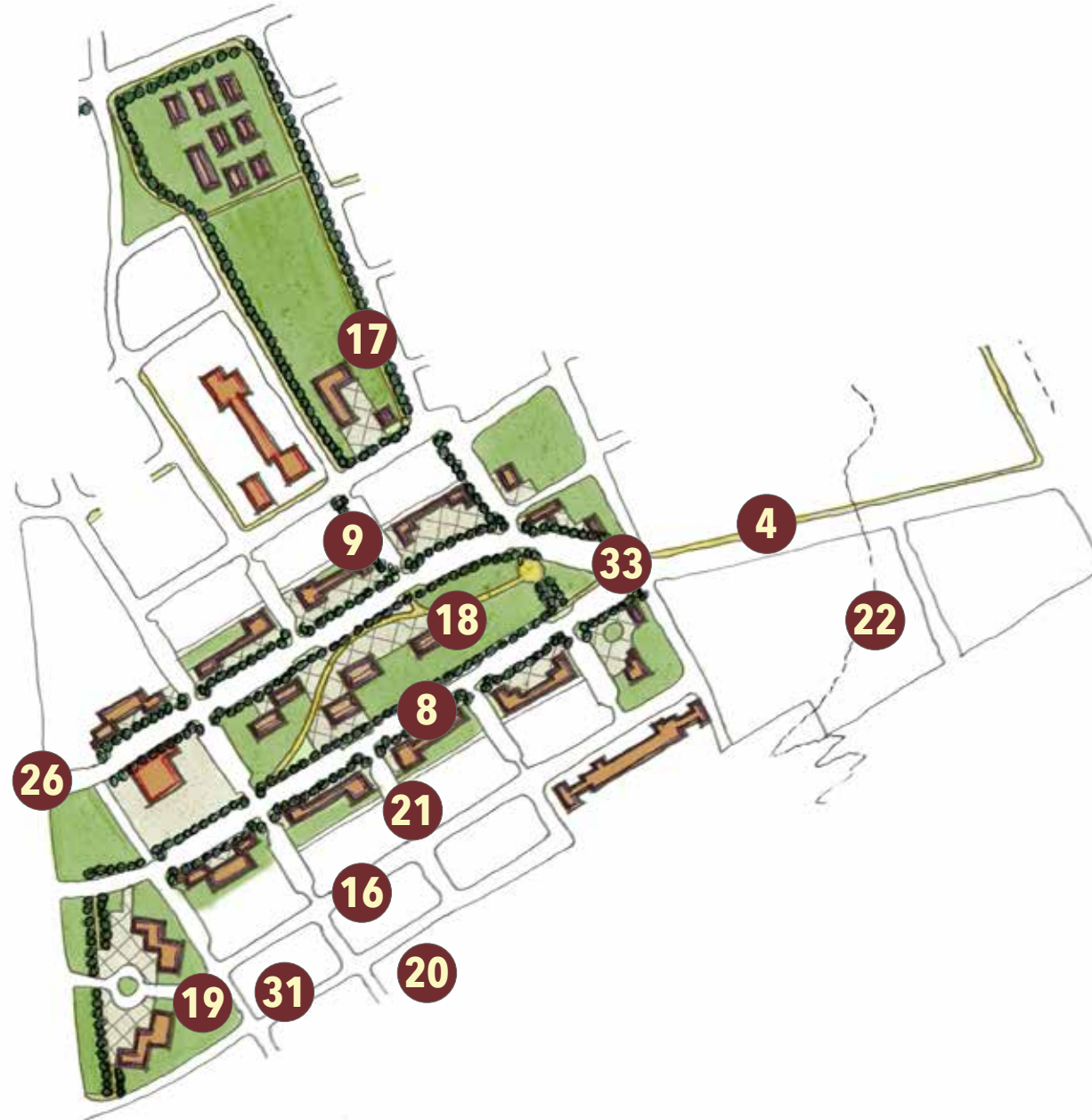
Reinvestment in the original Conroe neighborhood is improved as a result of the marketplace, enhanced connectivity and improvements to the rail maintenance yard. An urban RV park located at the far east end of downtown adds a new audience of visitors, including seasonal guests and traveling artisans.

## District Recommendation by Recommendation Number

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>4</b> Downtown Hike and Bike Loop             | <b>20</b> Enhanced RR Maintenance Yard and Office   |
| <b>8</b> Enhanced Phillips and Davis Streets     | <b>21</b> On Street Parking Improvements            |
| <b>9</b> Commercial Improvement/Redevelopment    | <b>22</b> Urban RV Park and Floodplain Amenities    |
| <b>16</b> Neighborhood Infill and Reinvestment   | <b>26</b> Enhanced Railroad Crossings               |
| <b>17</b> Food Incubator with Commercial Kitchen | <b>31</b> Preservation/Reuse of Historic Structures |
| <b>18</b> Marketplace and Public Lawn            | <b>33</b> Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding           |
| <b>19</b> Container and Food Truck Courtyard     |   |

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## Old Town/Marketplace District Map





# by District

## The Concept

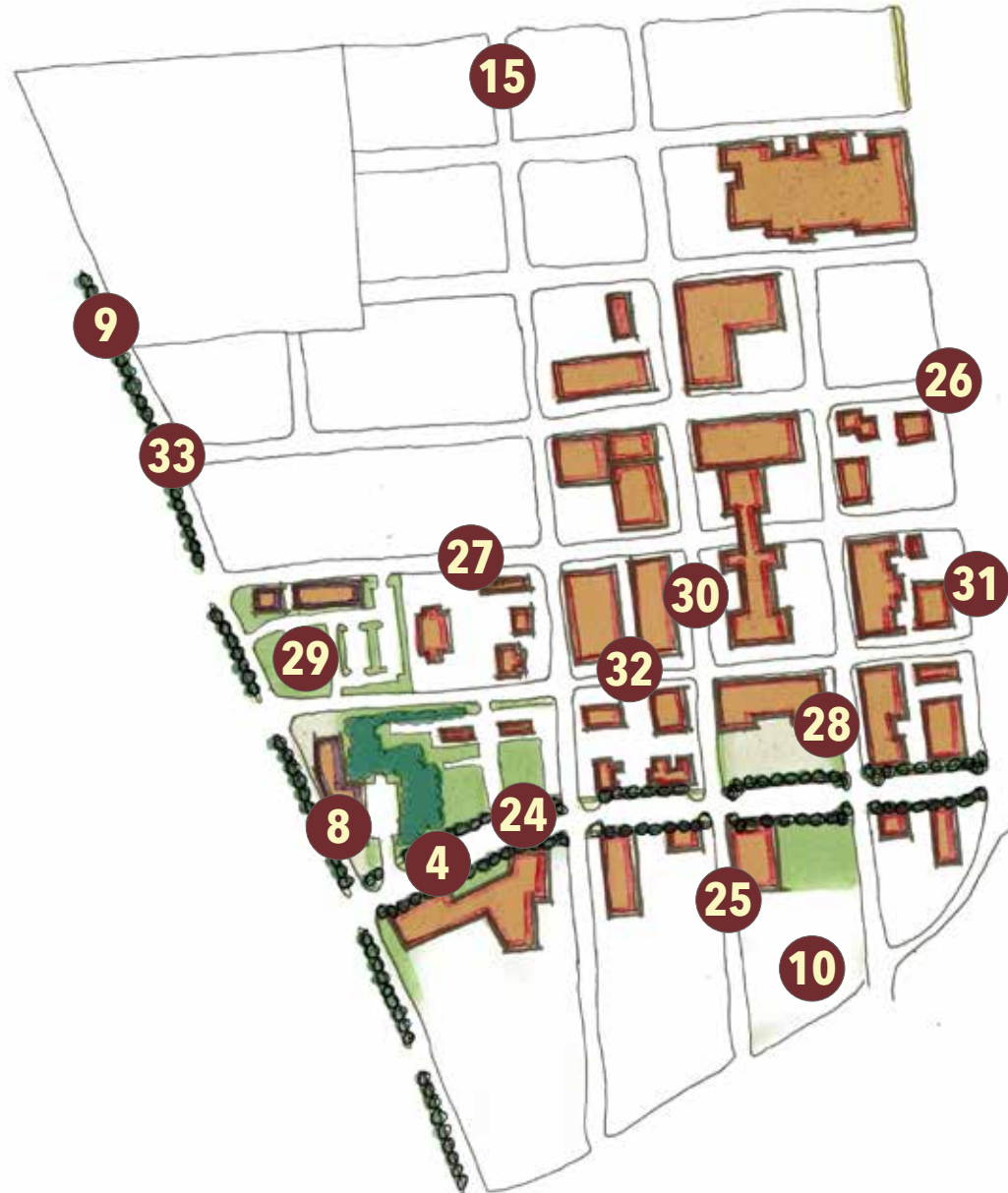
The heart of it all. The Central Business District is a regional hub for local business, including unique shops, restaurants, theaters, bars and various other activities. Visitors and employees of City Hall, the courthouse and various area office buildings now remain in the area during the lunch hour. Perhaps they stroll along the Metcalf Street promenade before stopping at Heritage Place to listen to a young musician offering an impromptu concert on the lawn. New development south of Metcalf has added enough retail, dining and entertainment options to downtown to be well beyond critical mass as a shopping destination. Residential units above the businesses have substantially grown the number of households living in the CBD. They are compounded by the number of people coming in from the surrounding neighborhoods, as well as the region.

Streetlife in downtown has steadily increased after a portion of Phillips, Davis and several other streets were reclaimed for pedestrian activities. Now several restaurants have outdoor cafes and some businesses have extended their wares into the sidewalk. Artwork is abundant. Street performers sometimes draw a crowd to a corner. The applause can be heard in the third story office of the nearby historic building - a recent reuse giving new life to old bones.

## District Recommendation by Recommendation Number

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>4</b> Downtown Hike and Bike Loop                | <b>27</b> Phillips and Davis Street "Road Diets"     |
| <b>8</b> Commercial Improvement/Redevelopment       | <b>28</b> Potential "Road Diet" in Other CBD Streets |
| <b>9</b> Enhanced Frazier Street                    | <b>29</b> Urban Infill and Redevelopment             |
| <b>10</b> Parking "Parks"                           | <b>30</b> Reconsidered On-Street Parking Program     |
| <b>15</b> Designated Neighborhood "Safe Routes"     | <b>31</b> Preservation/Reuse of Historic Structures  |
| <b>24</b> Blended Metcalf Street and Heritage Place | <b>32</b> Tactical Urbanism throughout CBD           |
| <b>25</b> New Shopping, Dining & Entertainment      | <b>33</b> Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding            |
| <b>26</b> Enhanced Railroad Crossings               |  |

## Central Business District



# by District

## The Concept

A vibrant mix of retail, office space and “uptown” living attractive to an audience interested in national brands but also looking for a living or shopping experience that isn’t available in commercial strip centers or suburbs.

Activity in Neartown is focused upon Dallas Street and the adjacent lifestyle center. The boulevard roadway is equally useful to motorists, pedestrians and cyclists, thanks in part to its association with the Hike and Bike Loop that features an underpass below SH 105 to access the Arts and Honors District. Two to three story buildings line Dallas Street and provide a comfortable, urban environment. The lifestyle center is highly marketable as a result of its unique mix of retail, service and residential uses, as well as its convenient connection to the remainder of activities in downtown Conroe.

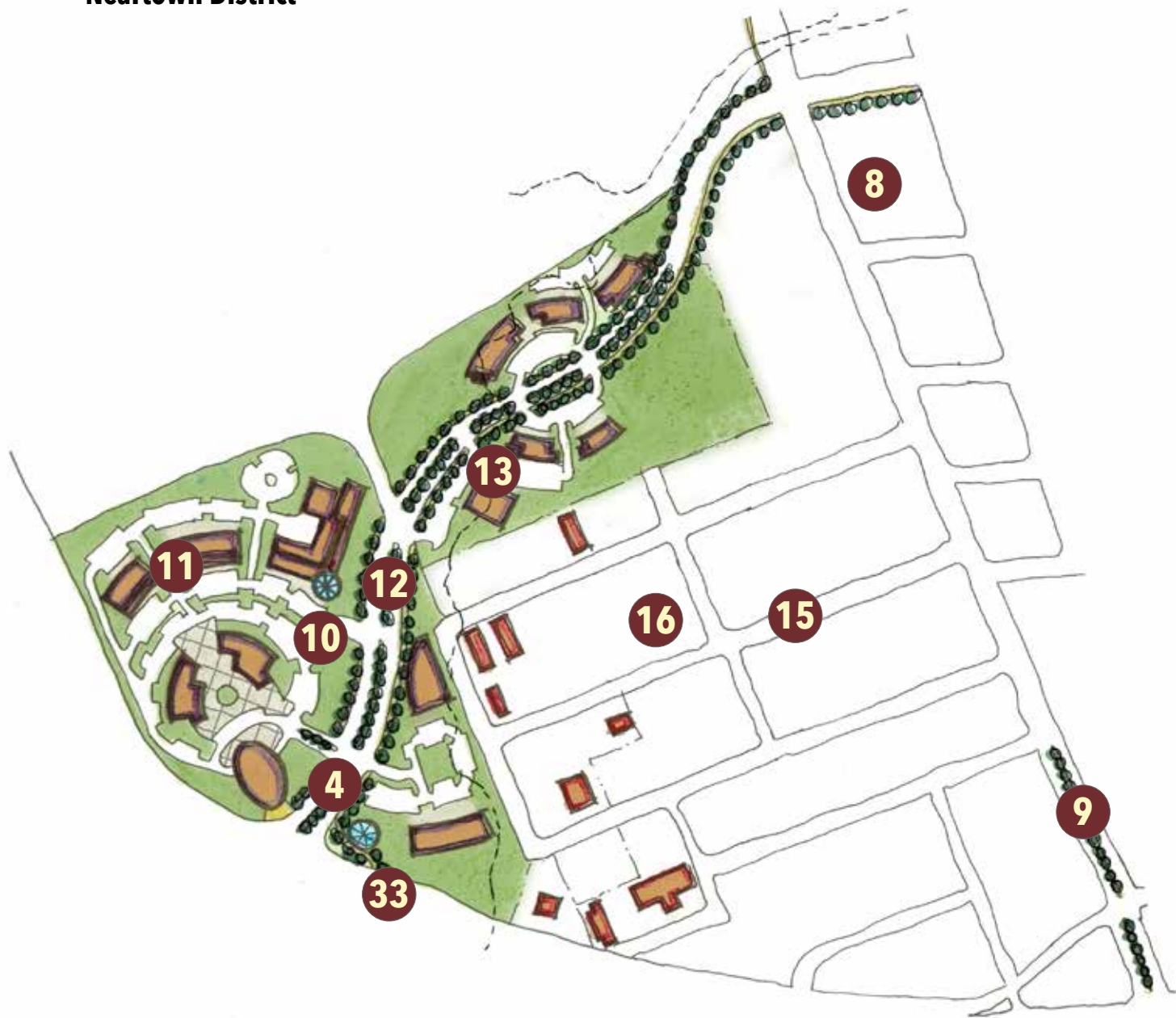
An urban neighborhood provides an opportunity for single family living that is attractive in part due to proximity to downtown amenities, but also as a result of the efforts to promote reinvestment. SH 105 and Frazier Street provide an aesthetic boundary to the area following beautification and enhancement efforts in both the public and private realms.

## District Recommendation by Recommendation Number

- |           |   |           |   |
|-----------|---|-----------|---|
| <b>4</b>  | <b>Downtown Hike and Bike Loop</b>          | <b>12</b> | <b>Enhanced Dallas “Boulevard”</b>            |
| <b>8</b>  | <b>Commercial Improvement/Redevelopment</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>Urban Footprint Residential/Commercial</b> |
| <b>9</b>  | <b>Enhanced Frazier Street</b>              | <b>15</b> | <b>Designated Neighborhood “Safe Routes”</b>  |
| <b>10</b> | <b>Parking “Parks”</b>                      | <b>16</b> | <b>Neighborhood Infill and Reinvestment</b>   |
| <b>11</b> | <b>New Lifestyle Commercial Center</b>      | <b>33</b> | <b>Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding</b>        |



## Neartown District



## by District

### The Concept

A neighborhood setting that is attractive to households interested in the vibrant, eclectic nature of urban living. Life is a little less scripted and a lot more social. This is in part due to the broad array of amenities and activities available in downtown Conroe. It is also a result of the ease with which one can get around. A car is an option, but the Hike and Bike Loop connects to downtown and extends to Candy Cane Park. Roads that are designated “safe routes” provide access to all of the family amenities such as schools and parks. And, of course, there is always the golf cart. The Hike and Bike loop runs through the woods and new stormwater ponds have helped to spur new housing on the eastern side of downtown. New improvements to Flournoy Park offer active recreation opportunities that are inviting to area residents and the guests of the RV park south of SH 105.

The mix of uses in the Homestead District is part of the charm of the neighborhoods rather than a detriment. The various housing types keep the area affordable. Programs to make housing available to artists and entrepreneurs adds to the community character. Some are equally attracted to the area to take advantage of the food incubator, using the commercial kitchen to make the move from the home based business to a spot in the Old Town Marketplace District.

### District Recommendation by Recommendation Number

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>4</b> Downtown Hike and Bike Loop              | <b>15</b> Designated Neighborhood “Safe Routes”  |
| <b>8</b> Commercial Improvement/Redevelopment     | <b>16</b> Neighborhood Infill and Reinvestment   |
| <b>9</b> Enhanced Frazier Street                  | <b>17</b> Food Incubator with Commercial Kitchen |
| <b>10</b> Parking “Parks”                         | <b>23</b> Enhanced Flournoy Park                 |
| <b>14</b> Stormwater and Green Space Enhancements | <b>33</b> Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding        |

## Homestead District





# 01



*The Luther F. Carson Four Rivers Center, Paducah, KY*

## About

Music and performances have a long association with downtown Conroe. A new facility capable of seating 1,200 to 1,500 people would expand that relationship while simultaneously filling a void in the regional market. Today, artists can perform to audiences in downtown restaurants, in the open spaces of Heritage Place or Founder's Plaza, or in Owens Theater or Crighton Theatre. A new facility can grow the potential audience size for an event from the current maximum of 533 seats to nearly three times that number – a scale that is manageable in downtown Conroe and complementary to the regional market. Location in the "Arts and Honors" District offers the opportunity to craft a unique experience within close proximity to Interstate 45 as well as the existing resources in the central business district.

## How It Fits

The performing arts venue adds another attraction to downtown Conroe that expands upon music and performing arts.

## Options

- The facility could be combined with other recommended facilities, including the performing arts incubator or the conference hotel.

## Potential Roles for the City

Collaboration with appropriate partners, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/Public/Nonprofit partnership, Grants/investment acquisition/support.

## Costs to the City

- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A share of costs to construct a facility. Construction cost varies widely based on amenities.

## Potential Partners

Private development, foundations, nonprofit organizations.

## Potential Funding Sources

General funds, Hotel Occupancy Tax/Venue Tax, foundations, nonprofit fundraising, naming rights.

# 02



*The Hangar at 2112 Music Incubator, Chicago, IL*

## About

Downtown Conroe has historically offered music and performing arts as a form of entertainment and an attractive draw. A Performing Arts Business Incubator could transform performing arts from an attraction to an industry and in doing so, make downtown Conroe a location not just for performances but as a place for musicians, artists, actors and other arts related persons to live and work. The performing arts business incubator could provide affordable work space for performing arts related business, such as a musician seeking space to provide lessons, development of a music production business, or perhaps instrument service and repair. The incubator could provide additional resources such as access to investors and business mentors.

## How it Fits

The performing arts incubator establishes the arts as an industry in a manner very unique to Conroe.

## Options

- Preferred to be associated with another facility to minimize the amount of land dedicated to nonprofit/nontaxable activities.
- Addition to Montgomery County Central Library would allow for enhancements to the library and combine reading and study with the performing arts.
- Addition to the proposed performing arts venue could allow for shared space and resources.
- Could serve as an office location for arts related nonprofits.

- Could be part of an artist in residence program designed to promote relocation to downtown Conroe as an affordable place to live and work in a community that actively supports the arts.
- Conroe ISD, Lone Star College System and other college programs could utilize the incubator as part of their respective arts-related curricula.

## Potential Roles for the City

Collaboration with appropriate partners, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/Public/Nonprofit partnership, Grants/investment acquisition/support, Entrepreneurship and business support.

## Costs to the City:

- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A share of costs to construct a facility: Anticipated cost of a facility is roughly estimated as \$1 to 3 million, including space for a recording studio, practice stage, dance/production studio spaces, office/work/collaboration spaces, training/classroom, staff/resident/resource space and equipment storage.

## Potential partners

Montgomery County, Conroe ISD, Lone Star College System, major education institutions, local and national arts associations, angel investor, arts foundations.

## Potential sources of public finding

General Fund, Montgomery County, educational institutions, arts nonprofit organizations, arts-affiliated foundations, angel and/or industry investor.



**03****About**

Floodplain in the Arts and Honors District provides a natural extension of the groomed stormwater detention area that forms the gateway to downtown Conroe. The natural space can serve as a green area connecting all of the major features of the district while improvements can allow for the site to provide additional stormwater relief when necessary. The green space can be particularly critical as residential density increases along Metcalf Street and in the Neartown District. Utilizing the floodplain maintains and protects the sensitive nature of the site, utilizes nontaxable property to add value to surrounding sites and enhances downtown's role as a destination for a variety of audiences.

**How it Fits**

The floodplain can serve as the central greenspace of the Arts and Honors District connecting all of the major features of the district.

**Options**

- Art, historic references or other features could complement the Montgomery County Veterans Memorial Park and/or Texas Flag Park.
- Design could mimic the “big thicket” of Conroe in the 1880s or in reference to the timber industry.
- An open lawn could allow for musicians, dancers, actors, or other artists involved in the performing arts incubator or the local arts “scene” to add entertainment value to the space.
- Tree canopy and other vegetation can be incorporated to soften the sounds created by interstate traffic.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Construction and management of public improvements, Public/public partnership, Land acquisition, Site improvements, Operations and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion or all of land acquisition and site improvement costs estimated at \$1.4 million (excluding land acquisition costs)
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

**Potential partners**

Montgomery County, San Jacinto River Authority, FEMA, nonprofit organizations

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, TIRZ funds, Flood Hazard Mitigation Assistance grant



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## **Preserve and Enhance the Floodplain in the “Arts and Honors District”**



*Example of Treatments to Floodplain Enhancements*

**04**

*Monon Trail roadway underpass, Central Indiana*

**About**

A designated hike and bike loop consisting of sidewalks, dedicated bike lanes, shared use paths, and shared roadways provides the opportunity visually and literally meet each of those desired traits of urban living by connecting all of the major features of downtown Conroe. Access to the hike and bike loop substantially adds to the perception and reality of “livability” of downtown and has the added benefit of a positive impact on surrounding properties. For those seeking a more affordable lifestyle, the loop provides a cost-effective means of travel. At the same time access to a hike and bike network is highly valuable to households with higher disposable income.

**How it Fits**

The Hike and Bike Loop connects all of the major features of downtown Conroe, reinforces the lifestyle brand of audiences desired for downtown, and reduces the impact of added density and demand.

**Options**

- Can be adapted to the character and need of each of the five districts of downtown Conroe.
- Can be extended in the future to reach other areas of Conroe, further encouraging local travel into downtown.
- Artwork, amenities and other features can be added to increase the cultural and social value of the network.
- Provides another opportunity for downtown activities and programming.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Construction and management of improvements as a mobility corridor, Public/public partnership, Land acquisition, Mobility improvements/corridor enhancement, Operations and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion or all of land acquisition, access easement, and mobility improvement/corridor enhancement costs (estimated to be approximately \$6 million for improvements).
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

**Potential partners**

Montgomery County, Houston-Galveston Area Council

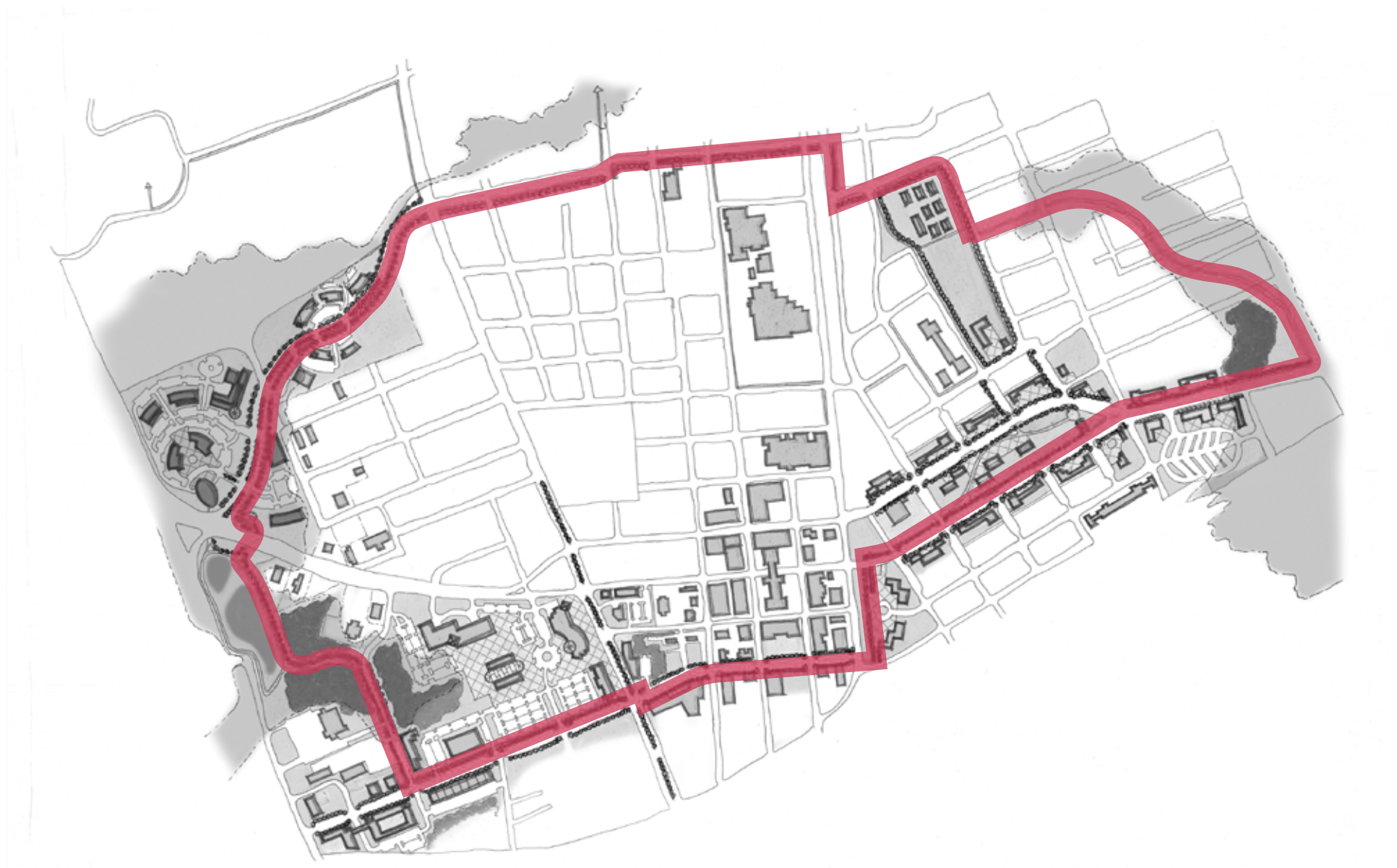
**Potential sources of public funding**

General Fund, TIRZ funds, Congestion Mitigation funds through TxDOT/H-GAC.



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## Construct Hike and Bike "Loop" throughout Downtown Conroe



*Proposed Route for Downtown Conroe Hike and Bike Loop*



## 05



*Courtyard Decatur Conference Hotel, Decatur, Georgia*

### About

A conference hotel would provide Conroe with a location for guests interested in the activities found in downtown that is currently unavailable. The addition of a larger performance venue and proposed enhancements in the Central Business District and Old Town Marketplace District provide the community with ample amenities to attract interest from guests and business interests. A conference hotel could be hosted by a national chain or a boutique venue. A hotel as distinct as the surrounding downtown would have the opportunity to provide a lively, smaller town alternative to facilities available in the Houston area. The hotel is proposed to be located in the Arts and Honors District but in proximity to the Central Business District, perhaps as a corner anchor.

### How it Fits

The conference hotel allows guests the opportunity to stay longer in downtown Conroe and enjoy more of the area's dining, shopping and entertainment options.

### Options

- The facility could be combined with other recommended facilities, including the performing arts venue or retail development.
- The conference hotel could be located at other locations within the Arts and Honors District or the Central Business District if those sites prove more appropriate.

### Potential Roles for the City

Pursuit of appropriate partners, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/Private partnership, Development Incentives.

### Costs to the City:

- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.

### Potential partners

Private development

### Potential sources of public finding

General funds, Chapter 380 Development Agreement/ TIRZ Development Agreement, Hotel Occupancy Tax Revenue

## 06



*Townhomes near Washington D.C.*

**About**

Proximity to Interstate 45 and easy access to all of the amenities of current and future downtown Conroe makes Metcalf Street in the Arts and Honors District a location highly suitable for urban living and office space. Urban footprint, mid-density development that pushes buildings toward the streetscape can transform the area into a pedestrian friendly environment for those interested in the lifestyle offered by downtown Conroe. Simultaneously, the added residences and work space would add both daytime and nighttime support for services and the entertainment uniquely available downtown while also providing the added benefit of increased property values. Emphasizing density near the interstate has the added benefit of reducing the negative impacts on existing neighborhoods while encouraging a highly walkable development pattern promotes shopping, dining and entertaining locally.

**How it Fits**

Urban development along Metcalf Street increases demand for local dining, shopping and entertainment while also increasing property value and redevelopment potential in surrounding areas.

**Options**

- Could include multistory residential, commercial office and mixed use activity with possible daily service commercial activities located on the first floor.
- Parking should occur to the rear of the property or in structured parking.
- Emphasis should be placed on alternative travel options to promote local shopping including the possibility of shared bikes or golf carts.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with appropriate private sector developers, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/Private partnership, Development Incentives, Reconstruction of Metcalf Street.

**Costs to the City**

- A share of costs associated with reconstruction of the Metcalf Street corridor
- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.

**Potential partners**

Private development

**Potential sources of public funding (if needed)**

General funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement

**07**

*Complete Street in Indianapolis, Indiana*

**About**

Increased density along Old Montgomery Road/ Metcalf Street between the interstate and Frazier Street will require improvements to the roadway that can accommodate the traffic demands and character traits of “urban footprint” development. Reinvented Metcalf Street would include equal attention within the right-of-way for pedestrian and bicycle movement as it does for motorists. Characteristics would include relatively narrow traffic lanes to maintain an appropriate design speed of 35 mph, sidewalks of a width appropriate for pedestrian traffic flow, safe bicycle access, accentuated crosswalks, and incorporation of amenities such as vegetation and street furniture. The proposed hike and bike loop could potentially merge into Metcalf Street to reduce duplication.

**How it Fits**

Metcalf Street provides a critical connection between larger Conroe, proposed new residential and office development and the central business district. It can also be improved as a means of spurring desired redevelopment in the area.

**Options**

- On-street parallel parking could be included for resident/customer use and to add a layer of “street friction” that helps to “tame” automobile traffic.
- Bulbouts, landscaping, signage, street furniture, and hardscape enhancements to intersections and crosswalks could add aesthetic value to the roadway.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Construction of corridor improvements, Public/public partnership, Operations and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion or all of mobility improvement/corridor enhancement costs estimated to be approximately \$7.1 million.
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

**Potential partners**

Montgomery County, Houston-Galveston Area Council

**Potential sources of public funding**

General Fund, TIRZ funds, Congestion Mitigation funds through TxDOT/H-GAC



**08**

*Example of enhanced corridor retail*

**About**

The appearance, design and general upkeep of businesses along major corridors leading to the central business district, including SH 105 and Frazier Street, as well as Phillips and Davis Streets east of the railroad tracks, plays a critical role in the perception of downtown Conroe. Through aggressive code enforcement, enactment of minimum design standards and a series of financial or programmatic incentives the city can prompt improvements to corridor property, including buildings, parking areas, vegetation, signage and other site amenities. More substantial incentives could be used to incentivize major redevelopment or complete reconstruction of sites.

**How it Fits**

Redevelopment will have a positive impact on the appearance of major corridors while also very likely resulting in increased local sales and property value.

**Options**

- A façade/site enhancement grant program through the City of Conroe and/or low interest loan program from local lenders can provide a “carrot” to property owners considering site improvements.
- Financial incentives can be restricted to specific types of business or use as a means of playing a role in managing land use without enacting zoning.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with private sector developers, Design Standards/Development Regulations, Development Incentives, Corridor improvements/enhancements.

**Costs to the City**

- Costs associated with grants, loans or other incentives established to promote redevelopment/improvement.
- A portion or all construction costs associated with corridor improvements/enhancements intended to spur redevelopment.

**Potential partners**

Private development, local lending institutions

**Potential sources of public funding (if needed)**

General funds, Community Development Block Grant funds, TIRZ funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement, local lending institutions

**09**

*Broadway Street enhancements, Houston, Texas*

**About**

While the City of Conroe can only offer limited control over the appearance of businesses along the major corridors leading to the central business district, it has a much stronger influence on appearances within the public rights-of-way. By continuing to add to the appearance of the roadway and sidewalk network along SH 105 and Frazier Street, as well as Phillips and Davis streets to the east, the city can directly impact the perception of Downtown Conroe. Extension of the street light and banner program, addition of vegetation and street trees, added improvements to intersections, vigilant removal of visual clutter, sign management, roadway and curb maintenance, incorporation of street furniture and many other enhancements can lead to a more positive perception of downtown. It also has the added benefit of positively impacting area property values and spurring private investors to also make improvements. Additionally, strategic design and placement of crosswalks and the addition of nonintrusive traffic calming devices can result in safe interaction between pedestrian/bike traffic and motorists in the area of Phillips and Davis Streets in the Old Town Marketplace District.

**How it Fits**

Improved impact on the perception of downtown Conroe and traffic safety, particularly where there is potential for interaction between pedestrians, cyclists and motorists.

**Options**

Treatments of SH 105 west of the Central Business District, Frazier Street and Phillips and Davis east of the Central Business District may have a different character due to right-of-way width as well as the unique traits of the respective districts.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Construction of corridor improvements, Public/public partnership, Operations and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion or all of mobility improvement/corridor enhancement costs estimated to be \$3.3 million
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

**Potential partners**

Montgomery County, Houston-Galveston Area Council

**Potential sources of public funding**

General Fund, TIRZ funds, TIP funding/Congestion Mitigation funds through TxDOT/H-GAC



## Enhance the Public Realm of Major Corridors



*Examples of Enhancements to Major Corridors in Downtown Conroe*



# 10



## About

Centralized parking is one of the most effective economic development tools available in urban areas where every square foot of space should be at a premium. By providing strategically located parking throughout downtown, the City can simultaneously spur development, manage the pattern and quality of development and improve area mobility. Adding a strong tree canopy and ample vegetation within parking areas maintains the natural appearance of the area and reinforces the value that the community places on the customer experience.

## How it Fits

Strategically located, aesthetically pleasing parking improves the convenience and quality of the customer experience while also allowing development to maximize private space.

## Options

- The city could charge for parking during special events or activities, thereby offsetting some costs.
- As demand for parking increases, a number of surface parking lots can transform into structured parking.
- Amenities such as bike rental racks, golf cart rental stations and spaces with charging stations can make parking lots a location moving from one mode to another that is more conducive to downtown movement. Charging stations allow for people living in the surrounding area, guests traveling with a golf cart, or visitors with access to a rental station, the opportunity to spend an extensive amount of time in downtown while charging their vehicle.

## Potential Roles for the City

Construction of parking lot improvements, Public/public partnership, Public/private partnership, Land acquisition, Operations and maintenance.

## Costs to the City

- A portion or all of parking area enhancement costs estimated at \$5.9 million for approximately 2,500 spaces.
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

## Potential partners

Montgomery County, private investors

## Potential sources of public funding

General Fund, TIRZ funds, private sector resources

**11**

CityCentre, Houston, Texas

**About**

The commercial center along SH 105 that is adjacent to Interstate 45 is particularly well positioned to be the area of downtown Conroe that can successfully capture national brand retail. Unfortunately, the location must compete with every other corner of every other intersection along the interstate for a limited and evolving amount of national brand attention. Converting the commercial center with a focus on convenience into a lifestyle center that emphasizes creating a vibrant customer experience will provide the center with a competitive advantage beneficial to the site and to downtown Conroe. A lifestyle center could include a mix of multifamily residential, national brand shopping and dining, services such as a fitness center or day care, and well programmed social spaces and gathering places.

**How it Fits**

A lifestyle center substantially amplifies the attractiveness of the site to national brand retail and to guests while adding density, taxable value and another walkable destination to downtown Conroe.

**Options**

- A lifestyle center is most often vertically mixed with residential atop commercial activity, but it can also be mixed differently.
- Structured parking would allow for the developer to maximize the site.
- A boutique hotel could be an appropriate addition to the site.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with appropriate private sector developers, Public/private partnership, Development incentives, Reconstruction of Dallas Street.

**Costs to the City**

- A share of costs associated with reconstruction of the Dallas Street corridor
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.

**Potential partners**

Private development

**Potential sources of public funding (if needed)**

General funds, EDC funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement

**12**

*Reconstructed median, New York, NY*

**About**

Dallas street, extending from SH 105 to Frazier Street has the potential to be among the most attractive and multimodal roadways in downtown Conroe. With improvements, the drainage channel extending through the center of the roadway can serve a dual purpose as an attractive means of stormwater conveyance but also as the connection point of the hike and bike loop into the adjacent Arts and Honors District through improvements to allow the option for pedestrians and cyclists to pass under SH 105 via the drainage channel. Additional enhancements include improved sidewalks, incorporation of bike lanes or a shared use path to continue the hike and bike loop, enhanced crosswalks and intersections, and additional aesthetic enhancements.

**How it Fits**

Dallas Street provides a major link between the urban footprint residential and commercial activity adjoining the roadway and SH 105, as well as Frazier Street.

**Options**

- Expanded right-of-way would allow on-street parking.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Construction of corridor improvements, Public/public partnership, Land acquisition, Operations and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion or all of mobility improvement/corridor enhancement costs
- A portion or all of the improvements associated with a bike/pedestrian underpass below SH 105, including safety and aesthetic enhancements
- A portion or all of the stormwater management improvements related to the drainage channel associated with Dallas Street (estimated to be \$6.2 million for mobility, underpass and stormwater management improvements)
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

**Potential partners**

Montgomery County, Houston-Galveston Area Council

**Potential sources of public funding**

General Fund, TIRZ funds, TIP funding/Congestion Mitigation funds through TxDOT/H-GAC



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## Reconstruct Dallas Street into "Dallas Boulevard"



*Reinvented Dallas Street with Amenities*

**13**

*Mixed use development, Issaquah, Washington*

**About**

Dallas Street provides one of three major opportunities to add residential and commercial density into Conroe without eroding the fabric or character of the community, the other two being along Metcalf Street and within the Central Business District. Dallas Street is a particularly strong candidate for urban footprint development due to proximity to Interstate 45 and immediate access to many of the major amenities proposed in downtown. The area would be an obvious choice for households seeking a more dynamic, well connected lifestyle. Among the most desirable activities: townhomes, medium density apartments, mixed-use development, and complementary medium density uses. The activities are intended to coordinate with the enhancements along Dallas Street and the proposed adjacent lifestyle center to add a nationally-branded dimension to living, shopping and dining that would be unique to the Neartown District but highly complementary to activities in downtown. The development provides the added benefit of creating a transition area designed to protect the integrity of the adjacent residential neighborhood.

**How it Fits**

Urban development along Dallas Street increases demand for local dining, shopping and entertainment while also increasing property value and redevelopment potential in surrounding areas.

**Options**

- Parking should occur to the rear of the property or in structures.
- Emphasis should be placed on alternative travel options to promote local shopping including the possibility of shared bikes or golf carts.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with appropriate private sector developers, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/private partnership, Development incentives, Reconstruction of Dallas Street.

**Costs to the City**

- A share of costs associated with reconstruction of the Dallas Street corridor
- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.

**Potential partners**

Private development

**Potential sources of public funding (if needed)**

General funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement



## RECOMMENDATION Transform the Floodplain in the “Homestead District”

# 14



Fairview Park, Sherman, Texas

### About

The combination of an enhanced green space with a hike and bike trail through the eastern portion of the Homestead District should be sufficient to spark new development and redevelopment in this portion of the area. Regardless of the number of times the area has flooded, much of the property in the area has remained undeveloped as a result of location within the floodplain. However, with improvements, it may be possible to reduce the area designated as floodplain while providing an amenity that both adds value to the area and can provide stormwater management for the area when needed.

### How it Fits

The floodplain can be transformed from a largely unmanaged and undeveloped area into a substantial asset that spurs neighborhood growth and redevelopment.

### Options

- Stormwater management facilities and techniques can be incorporated into the space to handle rain events.
- Assets could include passive recreation, constructed wetlands or other natural spaces.
- Preservation of portions or all of the tree canopy would provide a positive aesthetic feature.
- Conservation subdivision design could be used to develop the area in a manner that injects a new development pattern into the area while also respecting stormwater management concerns and the surrounding neighborhood.

### Potential Roles for the City

Construction and management of public open space, Public/public partnership, Land acquisition, Site improvements, Operations and maintenance.

### Costs to the City

- A portion or all of land acquisition and site improvement costs estimated to be \$3.8 million.
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

### Potential partners

Montgomery County, San Jacinto River Authority, Federal Emergency Management Association

### Potential sources of public funding

General funds, TIRZ funds, Flood Hazard Mitigation grant



# 15



*Safe street improvements, Seattle, Washington*

## About

Lewis Street, N. Roberson Street, N. Thompson Street, and N. 3rd Street directly connect downtown neighborhoods to Hauke Academy Alternative High School, Houston Elementary and the Walter P. Jett Continuing Education Center, as well as leading to the hike and bike loop and numerous other current and proposed amenities throughout downtown. By making a series of affordable enhancements, these roadways become highly suitable for walking and biking and further rebuild downtown's images as a great place to safely and conveniently move around – with or without a car. Suggested amenities include designated (and potentially separated) bike paths, well maintained and continuous sidewalks, limited landscape treatments, asphalt stamping, intersection improvements, signage, and a traffic calming system intended to keep motorist's aware of their environment.

## How it Fits

The improvements create a second layer of connectivity intended to enhance the perception of customer service and quality of life in Conroe's downtown neighborhoods with direct connection to schools that have served the community for generations.

## Options

- CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) features may be appropriate to the corridors to add another layer to the perception of safety.
- Markers along each route could provide entertaining information about history or simple Conroe trivia.
- Temporary solutions provide an affordable means of determining the appropriate mix of improvements.
- Community and local nonprofit involvement could result in additional ideas, strong community support and the addition of other resources.
- Cost effective solutions could add a local, creative and fun element unique to downtown neighborhoods.

## Potential Roles for the City

Construction of corridor improvements, Public/public/nonprofit partnership, Operations and maintenance.

## Costs to the City

- A portion or all of mobility improvement/corridor enhancement costs estimated to be \$2.1 million for for the four listed roads.
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

## Potential partners

Conroe ISD, Houston-Galveston Area Council, National Center for Safe Routes to School, local civic/neighborhood organizations

## Potential sources of public funding

General Fund, TIRZ funds, TIP funding/Congestion Mitigation funds through TxDOT/H-GAC

**16**

*Example of neighborhood infill with contemporary look*

**About**

An aggressive urban infill program could strengthen existing neighborhoods by adding new housing, preserving the unique character of the area, promote renovation of existing residences, and offer opportunities for complementary activities unavailable in subdivisions. Elements of an urban infill program should include:

- A special financing program to entice new development and renovation.
- A set of design standards aimed at preserving and enhancing neighborhood character that could be tied to any offer of incentive or financing.
- Renovation or redevelopment opportunities for small scale apartment units and similar existing uses that exist in Conroe's downtown neighborhoods.
- Promotion of uses that complement the character and era of current homes including non-intrusive home-based businesses, bed and breakfast, Airbnb and small-scale additions such as duplexes or accessory residential units.
- Restriction on noxious uses detrimental to the neighborhoods.

**How it Fits**

Urban neighborhoods provide an attractive living environment for households that tend to be more likely to take advantage of the existing and proposed amenities in downtown Conroe. Urban infill and rehabilitation strengthens the local tax base and create more local demand for services.

**Options**

- An affordable housing program to entice artists, musicians, dancers, actors, and others in the performing arts to take root in downtown Conroe.
- Public engagement could allow the community to help to craft the urban infill program.
- Programs can be created for potential homeowners/ investors and/or developers interested in building new housing in downtown Conroe's neighborhoods.
- Can be funded through low interest loans, revolving loans, grants, development agreements or a variety of other methods.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with appropriate partners including local lending institutions, nonprofits and builders/ developers, Program development/management.

**Costs to the City**

A portion of the funds to establish a loan or grant program that promotes construction of new housing, rehabilitation/enhancement of existing structures, and/ or homeownership.

**Potential partners**

Civic associations, nonprofit organizations (for housing affordability or targeted housing), local lending institutions

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, Community Development Block Grant, 380 Development Agreement, local lending institutions

**17**

*Union Kitchen, Food Incubator, Washington D.C.*

**About**

The food and restaurant industry has never been more diverse or offered more opportunities for business and entrepreneurship. A food incubator with a commercial kitchen taps into that market by providing an avenue for people considering the restaurant/food preparation business. The incubator offers facilities and resources otherwise unavailable to burgeoning entrepreneurs or business owners operating out of their homes, including affordable space, a commercial-grade kitchen, networking with similarly interested entrepreneurs, training in activities related to the food industry and general business management, and access to resources such as investors, specialists and mentors. Proposed location at Hauke Academy Alternative High School maximizes the use of nontaxable property to create new businesses ranging from market stalls and food trucks to catering and “brick and mortar” restaurants. It also allows for coordination with Conroe ISD for enhancement of the district’s culinary programs.

**How it Fits**

The food-based incubator fosters entrepreneurship and the economic infrastructure needed for downtown Conroe to locally grow its own restaurants and food industry.

**Options**

- Unused space owned by CISD at Hauke Academy Alternative High School could also support an urban gardening agricultural science program.
- Adjacent open space could support a community garden or grow space for incubator businesses, including food for seniors or others in need.
- Can be self-sustaining through office space leasing/rent, hourly rent for use of the commercial kitchen, cost for use of other equipment (such as feed storage/refrigeration), training and classes.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with Conroe ISD and other partners, Public/Public/Nonprofit partnership, Grants/investment acquisition/support, Entrepreneur/business support.

**Costs to the City**

A share of costs to construct a facility. Anticipated cost of a facility is roughly estimated to be \$3.5 million for a 20,000 square foot facility that includes a full service commercial kitchen, training/classroom, staff offices and culinary business offices/spaces.

**Potential partners**

Conroe ISD, Lone Star College System, H-GAC, US Economic Development Administration.

**Potential sources of public finding**

General fund, Conroe ISD, Lone Star College System, Economic Development Administration grant, angel and/or industry investors, and foundations.



**18**

*The City Market, Kansas City, Missouri*

**About**

The space between Phillips and Davis Streets beginning at 2nd Street until the roadways reconverge into SH 105 offers a unique opportunity to establish a linear open-air marketplace and public lawn that can serve as the catalyst for reinvigoration of downtown Conroe east of the rail line. The site allows for a permanent location for a marketplace strategically placed between the Central Business District and the proposed commercial kitchen and food incubator at Hauke Academy Alternative High School. Design of the site could allow for facilities ranging from designated space for tents to large shade structures or permanent facilities with actual booth space, or a mix that includes limited indoor spaces. The Conroe Downtown Area Association has experience in its operation of the Isaac Conroe Farmers Market that could serve as the genesis of the marketplace. Ultimately, the market should evolve into a robust program open five to six days and evenings of the week. The linear public lawn is intended to allow for programming, resting or playing and provides Conroe with one more green space during major events.

**How it Fits**

The marketplace serves as a major catalyst to spur investment and a new downtown destination that caters to both local and broader audiences. The marketplace also adds to the shopping and dining “feeder system” aimed at nurturing local businesses, including those “graduating” from the proposed food incubator by providing an affordable entry into sale of merchandise, artwork and food.

**Options**

- 2nd, 3rd and 4th Streets can be permanently closed or designed for through traffic under controlled circumstances. Roads can be raised and enhanced to show clear delineation from adjacent roadways.
- The concept is intended to grow over time if determined appropriate. Properties can be acquired and facilities improved over time.
- Could host a series of different, unique markets. For example, one weekday could focus on Hispanic goods and foods while an evening event could offer wine tasting and music.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/public/nonprofit partnership, Operations and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- Land acquisition and site preparation costs.
- Costs for the public lawn and facilities varies widely depending upon the temporary/permanent nature of market facilities.
- A portion of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

**Potential partners**

Conroe Downtown Area Association, Urban Harvest, Houston-Galveston Area Council

**Potential sources of public funding**

General Fund, EDC funds, TIRZ funds, USDA Farmer's Market Promotion Program, Economic Development Administration

**19**

*Granary Row Container Court, Salt Lake City, Utah*

**About**

The site adjacent to and east of the railroad tracks extending to 1st Street marks a transition between the Central Business District and the proposed marketplace. While difficult for permanent construction due to noise generated by rail activity, the site is particularly well suited for a courtyard of containers and/or food trucks. Containers converted into pop-up retail or dining activity could be particularly intriguing given the relationship to the rail line, although the space is ample for food trucks. The site could also serve as an extension of the marketplace during events or if demand for booth space outgrows the proposed space. As with the marketplace and the food incubator, the container and food truck courtyard provides yet another step in the growth of local shopping and dining establishments. While not as expensive as brick and mortar storefronts, containers and food trucks offer command a stronger financial commitment than booth space, but also offer a greater return. The courtyard also serves as a logical bike and pedestrian connection between the Central Business District and the marketplace.

**How it Fits**

The container and food truck courtyard can serve as a complement to the Central Business District and the marketplace but can also stand alone as a destination for a variety of audiences. The courtyard further adds to the shopping and dining “feeder system” by providing a venue that is more expensive than participation in the marketplace, yet more affordable than a “brick and mortar” storefront.

**Options**

- Allen Street may be removed or maintained for purposes of service to the courtyard businesses depending up site design.
- The courtyard may take on the character of the marketplace or have a design with strong association to the railroad.
- The courtyard can be a private investment or it can be managed by a nonprofit organization, City or a management district.
- The portion of the courtyard space proposed between Phillips and Davis Streets may best serve as off street parking for the courtyard and the marketplace.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/public/nonprofit partnership, Public/private partnership, Operations and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- All or a portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs.
- A portion of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

**Potential partners**

Conroe Downtown Area Association, Houston-Galveston Area Council, local lending institutions

**Potential sources of public funding**

General Fund, EDC funds, TIRZ funds, Economic Development Administration, local lending institutions

# 20



*Example of creative screening*

## About

The BNSF rail maintenance yard is not a disorderly neighbor; however, its open, industrial appearance can be substantially enhanced to reflect the history of rail service in Conroe, reduce negative impacts associated with the yard, and improve the area's attractiveness. Improvements could include substantial addition of vegetation, replacement of the chain-link fence with a more aesthetic screen, a more dust-proof ground cover for the yard, architectural enhancements to the BNSF office. A more aggressive approach could include items that celebrate the relationship between Conroe and the railroad such as artwork or historic artifacts or a community space maintained by the rail line.

## How it Fits

Transforms a negative impact on the original residential neighborhood of Conroe into one more cultural feature to the area celebrating the area's relationship to rail.

## Options

- Citizen input could allow for fun, creative solutions that foster the positive relationship between BNSF and the community.

## Potential Roles for the City

Collaboration with BNSF Rail, Public/public partnership.

## Costs to the City

- A portion of enhancement costs

## Potential partners

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Rail Service, Civic associations

## Potential sources of public funding

General Fund, BNSF



# 21



*Example of parking added to neighborhood streets*

## About

Parking demand at the marketplace and the container and food truck courtyard will likely require a series of parking improvements in the Old Town Marketplace District. One particularly simple solution includes the addition of on-street public parking along adjacent streets, particularly those in and around the original residential neighborhood. Streets for consideration include 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Streets and possibly Sherman Street.

## How it Fits

On-street parking provides an affordable solution to parking demand that offers limited intrusion into the neighborhood while also creating “street friction” that can slow motorists thereby making the area more friendly to pedestrians and cyclists.

## Options

- On-street parking could be free or could require a minimum charge that could be dedicated to downtown improvements.
- Parking enhancements could include “bulbouts” that protect parking, enhance local walkability and could be part of larger intersection enhancements.
- Parking enhancements could be completed in coordination with construction of the marketplace.
- The City could install temporary on-street parking with bulbouts and other temporary enhancements to determine a measure of effectiveness prior to permanent installation.

## Potential Roles for the City

Construction of temporary and/or permanent parking improvements, Land acquisition (if needed), Operations and maintenance (particularly if fees are assessed).

## Costs to the City

- A portion or all of parking area enhancement costs estimated to be roughly \$2.7 million.
- A portion or all of costs associated with operations and maintenance.

## Potential partners

Civic associations

## Potential sources of public funding

General Fund, TIRZ funds.

## Add On-Street Parking Along Old Town Side Streets



*Example of Old Town On Street Parking Improvements*



**22**

*Campland on the Bay, San Diego, California*

**About**

Conroe is already an attractive option for people traveling with a recreational vehicle but primarily for the surrounding natural assets. An urban park for recreational vehicles would provide a similar alternative for an expanded audience seeking to also enjoy downtown amenities whether for events or simply as an escape. The site proposed in the Old Town Marketplace District at the edge of the downtown area is located partially in a noted floodplain as well as in a largely undeveloped area in proximity to the rail line. An urban RV park could offer numerous amenities attractive to the market such as access to laundry services; restrooms with showers; groceries; a convenience store for RV accessories, products and amenities; fixed grills, fire rings, picnic tables and lighting. The floodplain area could be improved to include recreational amenities including play areas, volleyball, and even a dog park. The area could also include an open-air pavilion for family gatherings. A golf cart rental facility would allow customers an easy way to access all of the amenities of downtown, as will ready access to the hike and bike loop.

**How it Fits**

An RV park in easy proximity to downtown provides access to an entirely different audience, including those interested in attending events or seasonal travelers desiring a more urban lifestyle.

**Options**

- The floodplain could be managed as part of the RV park or be a part of the Conroe parks system.
- To attract semi-retired or seasonal “RVers” the city could market programs throughout the downtown including special programs in the food incubator, marketplace or performing arts incubator.
- By joining one or more of the RV club networks, the park gains immediate access to a national audience.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Pursuit of appropriate partners, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/Private partnership, Development Incentives.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.
- All or a portion of operations and maintenance of floodplain area.

**Potential partners**

Private development, San Jacinto River Authority, Federal Emergency Management Association

**Potential sources of public funding (if needed)**

General funds, TIRZ funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement, Texas Parks and Wildlife grant, Flood Hazard Mitigation assistance



**23**

*Ghirardi Watersmart Park, League City, Texas*

**About**

An enhanced Flournoy Park provides one more amenity to the Homestead District. It also connects to improvements proposed in the floodplain, provides another feature to the hike and bike loop, and provides additional amenities within a very short distance from the urban RV park. Examples of improvements could include additional play equipment, a dog park, pavilions for family gatherings, a water feature, games, exercise equipment, additional sports facilities, and more. Improvements to the park also serve the purpose of driving additional people to the area and, in doing so, bring more attention to other sites along 10th Street with cultural and historic significance to Conroe, the former site of the Conroe Normal & Industrial College, as well as the Conroe Community Cemetery.

**How it Fits**

Provides amenities intended to spur residential investment and activity in the eastern portion of the Homestead District and to support the proposed urban RV park.

**Options**

- A trailhead at the park with amenities for those choosing to stop at the park, including benches and a bike rack.
- Enhancements unique to this park could be used to draw a greater audience or the park could maintain a more “local” feel to maintain a role as a neighborhood park for the surrounding area and RV park guests.
- A passive portion of the park could be used to promote LID (low impact design) to improve stormwater management and reduce nonpoint source pollution.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Park improvement, operations, maintenance and programming.

**Costs to the City**

- Construction costs estimated between \$1 million to \$2.5 million depending upon improvements
- Operations and maintenance

**Potential partners**

Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, US Environmental Protection Agency, area residents and groups with an interest in park enhancement.

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, TIRZ funds, Texas Parks and Wildlife grant, 319 grant for prevention of nonpoint source pollution

# 24



*Bell Street/Park in Seattle, Washington*

## About

A blend of Metcalf Street and Heritage Park creates a new level of opportunity for the Central Business District by creating an entertainment and recreation corridor that essentially extends Heritage Park to the Owen Theater, Founders Plaza and the Crichton Theater. It allows for expansion and modernization of Heritage Park without acquiring additional developable property (unless desired). It also embraces the roadway's new role as part of the hike and bike loop, while still allowing the Metcalf Street to function as a roadway. Among the proposed changes:

- Remove the fence separating the park from the street, where appropriate, and redesign the entry to allow the park to "spill out" onto the street corridor.
- Raise Metcalf Street in the Central Business District to be level with the sidewalk and park.
- Add vegetation and park-like amenities along the route between Heritage Park and Pacific Street by narrowing the lanes of traffic.
- Add amenities such as lighting in trees or overhead, opportunities for outdoor dining, and/or water features/artwork that promote socialization and night life.
- Modernize and enhance Heritage Place to improve functionality and fully blend the park and roadway.

## How it Fits

Blending the street and park substantially enhances the role of both amenities and provides a catalyst for development of dining, shopping, and entertainment venues south of Metcalf Street.

## Options

- Design for placement of temporary bollards that could effectively allow the street to serve only pedestrian and bike traffic during events.
- The concept of "spilling out" the park could also be applied to Main Street from Simonton south as far as Pacific Street over time and if appropriate.
- Redevelopment of adjacent commercial spaces fronting Frazier Street could allow for modernization of the commercial sites while also providing a better backdrop to the park space.
- Continued effort to keep pace with technology will allow for the space to remain relevant and highly marketable in the digital age

## Potential Roles for the City

Construction of park/corridor improvements, Public/Public/Nonprofit partnership, grant acquisition, operations, maintenance and programming.

## Costs to the City

- All or a portion of enhancement costs estimated at \$4.9 million
- All/portion of maintenance and programming costs

## Potential partners

Montgomery County, H-GAC, Better Block Foundation, AARP, local nonprofits

## Potential sources of public funding

General funds, TIRZ funds, Transportation Improvement Program enhancement funds, EDC funds, Knight Foundation, AARP grant, community fundraising



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## Blend and Enhance Heritage Place and Metcalf Street through the CBD



*Blended Heritage Park and Metcalf Street in the CBD*



# 25



*Urban Mixed Use in Midtown, Houston, Texas*

## About

The portion of the Central Business District south of Davis Street provides a particularly strong location to establish critical mass for shopping, dining and entertainment, extending potentially as far south as Pacific Street. In addition to the restaurants, pubs, shops and entertainment venues, the area offers extensive parking lots and some out of place structures that are prime candidates for infill and redevelopment. Focus in this area should be on creating the first-floor spaces for new places to shop, eat, and entertainment that can complement existing structures and spaces. In all cases, development should be encouraged to stack additional residential lofts, apartments and/or office spaces above the first floor to continue to build upon the proven interest in downtown living. Office space in this area, including law firms, should not be located on the first floor, although second floor and above should be considered acceptable.

## How it Fits

Establishes the critical mass for shopping, dining and entertainment as well as opportunities to take advantage of a proven desire for more opportunities for “work” and “live” audiences. Provides the ultimate location for dining, shopping and entertainment establishments moving through the “feeder system” created through incubators, the marketplace, and the container/food truck courtyard.

## Options

- Facilities should incorporate outdoor space and activities into site design where practical.
- Programs could be established to encourage “graduation” of businesses from the incubators, market stalls, food trucks and containers into new brick and mortar storefronts.

## Potential Roles for the City

Collaboration with appropriate private sector developers, Code amendments, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/private partnership, Development incentives.

## Costs to the City

- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.

## Potential partners

Private development

## Potential sources of public funding (if needed)

General funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement

**26**

*Rail Crossing near Jackson Square, New Orleans, LA*

**About**

Railroad crossings are both a mental and physical barrier to extension of revitalization efforts east of the Central Business District. To overcome this, each of the crossings in downtown Conroe should be enhanced to make crossing safe and attractive. Each crossing should have a path for pedestrians and cyclists, including enhancements such as aesthetically designed crossing panels, specialized crossing arms, aesthetic fencing to manage crossings, lighting, signage and other features. More, rail crossings at critical locations could be enhanced with artwork or other features that make rail crossings an event worth watching. For example, kinetic art that becomes active from the wind gusts as a train passes or lighting that announces an upcoming train. Buildings or containers adjacent to the rail tracks could also be treated with artistic murals to make the rail line and rail crossings more attractive.

**How it Fits**

Reduces negative impacts of rail crossings by adding devices, artwork and other amenities that make rail crossings safe and an attractive feature of downtown Conroe.

**Options**

- Citizen input could allow for fun, creative solutions that foster the positive relationship between BNSF and the community.
- Investigate improvements necessary to establish downtown Conroe as a quiet zone.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with BNSF Rail, Public/public/nonprofit partnership, grant acquisition.

**Costs to the City**

- All or a portion of enhancement costs estimated to be between \$300,000 and \$500,000
- All or a portion of operations and maintenance costs

**Potential partners**

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Rail and Union Pacific Rail, nonprofit organizations, Houston-Galveston Area Council, American Association for Retired Persons

**Potential sources of public funding**

General Fund, BNSF/UP, Transportation Improvement Program funds, AARP grant funds, TIRZ funds

**27**

*"Pop-Up Park" on Union Street, Wilmington, Delaware*

**About**

Many of the roads in the Central Business District are much wider than necessary resulting in an environment that negatively impacts pedestrian activity and causes motorist traffic to travel at a higher speed. A portion of the roadway can be "reclaimed" by narrowing the roadways and placing the space back into the public realm. Phillips Street and Davis Street provide the perfect opportunity to reclaim space and allow design speed of the roadways to be more aligned with the local speed limit. Expanding the pedestrian realm adds space for many of the elements that make "street life" interesting including outdoor seating, increased landscaping and signage, bike racks, additional street furniture, food carts and street performers. It also makes the streets and sidewalks particularly more enticing and safe for seniors, children, families, persons with disabilities.

Recommendations include:

- Reduce lanes from the current width to 12 feet
- Reduce parking space width to 10 feet
- Add bulbouts to protect parking areas, reduce pedestrian crossing
- Increase pedestrian space for walking and added amenities

**How it Fits**

Reclaiming roadway space creates a more attractive and multifunctional roadway while increasing pedestrian safety and reducing motorist speed.

**Options**

- Additional enhancements such as intersection improvements could create additional interest.
- Temporary reduction of the roadway over an extended time (three to six months) allows for an assessment of impacts on motorist traffic at little expense. It also allows for incorporation of "pop-up parks" or other temporary improvements before attempting implementation.
- Community and nonprofit input on additions to the reclaimed space can build support and awareness, while addressing local needs.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with TxDOT and Montgomery County, Public/Public/Nonprofit partnership, grant acquisition, space programming, construction of improvements.

**Costs to the City**

- All or a portion of \$9.7 million in anticipated in enhancement costs
- All or a portion of maintenance and programming costs

**Potential partners**

Texas Department of Transportation, Montgomery County, Houston-Galveston Area Council, Better Block Foundation, Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons.

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, TIRZ funds, Transportation Improvement Program funds, Knight Foundation, AARP grant



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## Permanently Reclaim Space along Phillips and Davis Streets



*Example Enhancements from Reclaiming Roadway along Davis and Phillips Streets*

# 28



*Reclaimed street space, Argus, California*

## About

Metcalf Street, Simonton Street, San Jacinto Street, Thompson Street and Main Street are among a number of roadways in the Central Business District that are wider than necessary to meet the needs of the automobile. Reclaiming a portion of that space would allow for a variety of improvements that could increase pedestrian and bicycle activity and, in doing so, provide a visual boost to downtown street life. For example, space along Metcalf Street could be used to create bike lanes to extend the hike and bike loop through the Central Business District. Space can also be used to add outdoor cafés to local businesses, “parklets” with added green space, kiosks, street furniture, space for food carts and street performers. A program could be established that would allow for organizations or businesses to obtain a permit to experiment with a temporary reclamation concept. Successful concepts could provide the template for permanent improvements.

## How it Fits

Reclaiming roadway space along various CBD roadways can make downtown streets more dynamic, attractive and multifunctional while also drawing more people into the area.

## Options

- A program of pop up parks, art spaces, cafés and more could create fun and constantly evolving spaces in the Central Business District.
- Temporary reduction of the roadway over an extended time (three to six months) could allow for an assessment of impacts on motorist traffic at little expense.
- Community input on additions to the reclaimed space can build support and feedback.

## Potential Roles for the City

Collaboration with Montgomery County and local businesses/nonprofits, Public/Public/Nonprofit partnership, grant acquisition, space programming, construction of improvements.

## Costs to the City

- All or a portion of anticipated enhancement costs
- All or a portion of maintenance and programming costs

## Potential partners

Montgomery County, Houston-Galveston Area Council, Better Block Foundation, Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons.

## Potential sources of public funding

General funds, TIRZ funds, Transportation Improvement Program enhancement funds, Knight Foundation, AARP grant, crowdsourcing



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## Temporarily or Permanently "Reclaim" Space along other CBD Roads



*Examples of Improvements from Reclaimed Roadway in the CBD*



**29***Example of urban infill***About**

The Central Business District is intended to be the urban heart of downtown and that should be reflected in architecture and development patterns as new buildings are constructed and sites with existing structures are redeveloped. Among common traits of urban development:

- Buildings typically push to the property line with limited green space except in plazas, minimal front yards and other intentional open areas.
- Parking is pushed to the rear of the site or located in structures (parking requirements are typically reduced – and eliminated in some areas – to reflect increased pedestrian, bike and transit use as well as the availability of public parking).
- Structures are typically multistory to maximize the value of the site.
- Architecture includes more detail than suburban designs (audiences view urban buildings at 3.5 miles per hour and have more time to take in details while suburban audiences see buildings at 35 miles per hour or more) and have a high level of first floor transparency.
- Infill adjacent or near historic structures are not expected to mimic the era of architecture.

**How it Fits**

Building density in the Central Business District is important to expanding some of the core audiences that visit or reside in downtown, thereby adding value and demand to the area.

**Options**

- Buildings could be either single use (such as office buildings) or mixed use (such as retail activities with residential units on upper floors).
- The City might be interested in rewarding interesting architecture to add visual interest to the area.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with appropriate private sector developers, Code amendments, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/private partnership, Development incentives.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.

**Potential partners**

Private development

**Potential sources of public funding (if needed)**

General funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement

**30**

*New meter program, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*

**About**

The minimum amount of time desired for people to stay downtown is four hours yet on-street parking in the Central Business District currently comes with a two-hour limit. It is not unusual to cap the amount of time allotted a person for free parking, particularly if the concern is that spaces are being occupied by employees rather than customers. An alternative approach could allow for better utilization and bring more revenue to the Central Business District. Options include:

- Eliminate limits or increase them to four or six hours – either accomplishes the same purpose.
- Establish a minimal fee for on-street parking with the funds going first to maintenance of equipment and the remainder to either a downtown district or otherwise to downtown amenities. This approach would likely require an educational program so that all parties realize that the revenues are going to downtown enhancements and making the experience “better than ever”
- Establish a minimal fee that can be waived by spending a certain amount in downtown shopping, dining or entertainment. The transaction can be handled any number of ways with varying ranges of digital support.
- Off-street public parking could remain free of charge to avoid a push to remove downtown structures for added surface parking, except during activities and events where the community may see fit to charge.

**How it Fits**

On-street parking is perfect for short-term convenience. Extending or eliminating hours ensures that customers do not feel pressured to cut the downtown experience short. Charging a minimal amount for parking has not proven to be the deterrent it is commonly considered.

**Options**

- The program could serve as a minor funding stream for a management district.
- Administration could occur through a variety of sources including the City of Conroe, the EDC, or a management district.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with local businesses/nonprofits, construction of improvements, operation and maintenance.

**Costs to the City**

- For elimination or extension of hours: the cost associated with changing signage.
- To establish a fee: the cost of installation and maintenance of equipment and any associated marketing of the program

**Potential partners**

Local businesses and nonprofit organizations, management district.

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, TIRZ funds, management district funds

**31***Example of Adaptive Reuse***About**

A strong part of the appeal of the Central Business District stems from the number of historic structures present that provide unique character and a glimpse into Conroe's past. To the extent practical, those historic structures should be preserved and adapted to meet today's demands for space. The City of Conroe has options to consider for historic preservation including:

- New restrictions that require preservation and adaptation of historic structures or that make preservation the first required path to follow.
- A façade maintenance program in which the City or another entity supports maintenance and upkeep of the exterior of historic buildings.
- A program that rewards adaptive reuse of historic structures through financial incentives.
- Development of design standards that offer guidance on adaptive reuse.
- Consideration may be warranted for some level of protection for historic "places" that could include property on which the building has been altered beyond recognition or sites with cultural importance beyond a historic structure.
- Offer an opportunity to "crowdfund" preservation enhancements, likely with an associated protective covenant or easement.

**How it Fits**

Preserves a unique part of the Central Business District that substantially adds to the value and history of the area while also expanding residential and commercial development.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with appropriate private sector developers, Code amendments, Land acquisition and site preparation, Public/Private/Nonprofit partnership, Development incentives.

**Costs to the City**

- A portion of land acquisition and site preparation costs, if needed.
- A portion of construction costs, infrastructure improvements, grants, loans or other terms associated with a public/private partnership and/or development agreement, if needed.

**Potential partners**

Private development, downtown business community, local nonprofits

**Potential sources of public funding (if needed)**

General funds, 380 Development Agreement/TIRZ Development Agreement, crowdfunding



**32**

*“Pink Balls” overhead, Montreal, Canada*

**About**

The concept behind “tactical urbanism” is to seek out cost effective ways to add life to downtown. Tactical urbanism adds an element of excitement and anticipation to downtown visits and new ideas draw people back into downtown. Examples of tactical urbanism could include:

- Lighting draped over the right of way along a block or intersection such as one block of Simonton Street, Main Street, or Metcalf Street.
- Small parks, cafés, outdoor art studios or other features within two to three parking spaces. As an example, a wine tasting event could include a variety of vendors located throughout an area of the Central Business District.
- Crosswalks and/or bulbouts created with tape, paint or other materials as an experiment to see if the impact would be worthy of permanent installation and to raise awareness of pedestrian and bike presence.
- Street or sidewalk art that creates a new interest in downtown activity.
- Installation of musical steps along a sidewalk, a musical trashcan, or other experiments to see how people react and to create excitement to walk downtown.
- Members of the Conroe Symphony could “take over” the street for an outdoor “performance”.

**How it Fits**

Street life is one of the most underrated means of creating interest and vibrancy in downtown in a cost-effective way.

**Options**

- Tactical urbanism can become a program administered by the management district, parks department, downtown association or other entity that could fund projects. Coordination with a local university and/or Conroe ISD could be an experiment in social behavior.
- Funding for a tactical urbanism program could be provided by a private organization as a community service.
- Community input, including contests, class competitions and social experiments could provide an added layer of support and local excitement.
- Successful ideas can be redesigned as permanent amenities.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Installation, operations, maintenance and programming.

**Costs to the City**

- All or a portion of grant and/or program awards
- All or a portion of project costs
- All or a portion of operations, maintenance

**Potential partners**

Houston-Galveston Area Council, Association for the Advancement of Retired Persons, the Better Block Foundation, local nonprofits.

Potential sources of public funding: General funds, TIRZ funds, AARP grant, community fundraising, crowdsourcing

**33**

*Wayfinding Signage, Aberdeen, North Carolina*

**About**

Gateway treatments provide a recognizable means of knowing that a visitor, employee, resident or potential investor has arrived into downtown Conroe while a strong wayfinding program helps to navigate confidently throughout the area. To be most effective, gateway and wayfinding features should be designed to be complementary. Gateway monumentation does not necessarily have to be located at the entry into an area. It can also occur at the location where the experience of downtown Conroe is expected to begin. Downtown's most prominent gateways occur along SH 105 and Frazier Streets. More specifically, gateways are proposed to be added or enhanced at the current entries at SH 105 (near Interstate 45 and where Davis and Phillips Streets converge east of the Central Business District, north and south entry into downtown along Frazier Street and entry into downtown from Main Street. The wayfinding program for downtown Conroe is proposed to begin simply by providing direction to known destinations, parking areas and other areas and should provide a series of signage intended to be useful to motorists and pedestrians. As new features are added, the wayfinding program can be expanded.

**How it Fits**

Gateways and wayfinding provide a sense of arrival and information that allow for confident navigation through the area. They represent one of the first steps in providing excellent customer service to interested audiences.

**Options**

- Coordinate with other entities such as Montgomery County, Conroe ISD to ensure that visitors see a single, common signage program.
- Consider the wayfinding program associated with transit stops in downtown Conroe as a template.
- Consider minor adjustments to the overall theme to establish the five separate districts – such as adjustments to color or background graphics.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with Montgomery County and any other jurisdiction with community signage, construction and maintenance of improvements.

**Costs to the City**

- Gateway signage can range from \$30,000 to \$150,000 per installation depending upon design, materials and function.
- Anticipated costs for design and implementation of a wayfinding program include an estimate of \$100,000 for the plan and conceptual design and a range of \$4,000 to 5,000 per wayfinding sign.

**Potential partners**

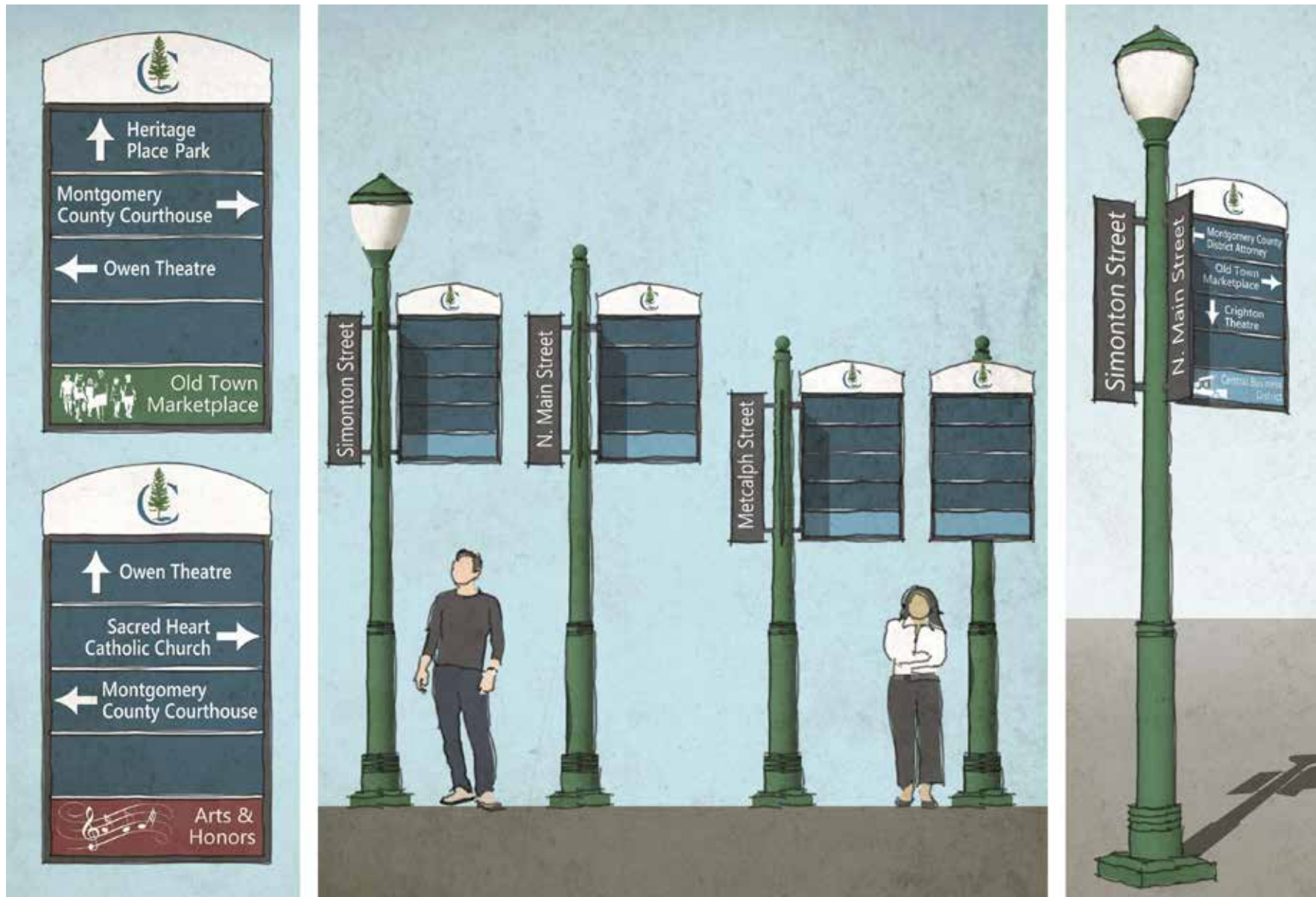
Montgomery County, Conroe ISD, Texas Department of Transportation

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, EDC funds, TIRZ funds, Hotel Occupancy Tax, management district funds



## Establish a Common Gateway Treatment and Wayfinding Program



*Example of Wayfinding for Downtown Conroe based on existing improvements*



# 34



**Desired Standard of Development**  
(*what the community strives for*)

**Public Sector Improvements**  
(*set the standard and raise the bar*)

**Incentivized Standards**  
(*that local market and politics will bear*)

**Enhanced Development Regulations**  
(*that market and politics will bear*)

**Current Development Regulations**

## About

The City of Conroe has historically taken a minimal approach to development regulation. While the upside is minimal public intrusion, the downside is that private investment has no concept of the city's development preferences (without verbally consulting with staff) and the public sector has no means to achieve desired character, development patterns, land uses, and development intensity. Additionally, some current regulations, such as setbacks, are not appropriate to the urban development pattern desired for areas such as the Central Business District.

The Downtown Development Plan proposes a set of enhanced development regulations accompanied by more aggressive voluntary design standards in order to provide a clear understanding of desired and required aspects of development while respecting the community's efforts to avoid overregulation. One method of crafting regulations and standards involves:

- Establish the character, land use, development patterns and intensities desired in downtown Conroe with the understanding that aspects may be different in different areas or districts (for example, urban densities desired in the Central Business District are not as desirable in the Homestead District, particularly in residential neighborhoods). The result represents the community's desired vision for downtown Conroe.

- Determine the minimum features acceptable in downtown Conroe needed to implement the Vision for the area. Development regulations should strive to achieve the full Vision for downtown Conroe but should, at minimum, require those features.
- Establish design standards that include desired site and architectural features above and beyond development regulations and create incentives to encourage development to a higher standard of quality. Design standards can be used by the City as well as partners such as local lending institutions to spur high quality development. Those standards may or may not fully reflect the vision for downtown Conroe depending upon what the community determines the market will bear. A developer is not obligated to meet these standards but will do so if interested in benefits such as development incentives or special rates for reconstruction loans.
- Determine the highest level of development fiscally possible and establish that as the threshold for public sector projects, thereby allowing the public sector to set the standard of development.

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## Adopt a Balanced Set of Development Requirements and Design Standards

Features to be considered as part of development regulations and design standards include:

- Development limitations intended to protect sensitive areas and sites such as floodplains, neighborhoods, and historic structures.
- Site Design features including parking, landscaping/green space, lighting, signage, fencing/screening, dumpsters and accessory structures.
- Building Massing features including setbacks/build-to lines, building height, lot coverage, and floor to area ratio.
- Architectural Elements including materials, frontage, transparency, articulation/differentiation, entries, awnings/porches, roof type, murals, and screening (of mechanical equipment).
- Site Amenities including artwork and water features.
- Land Uses including those that should be actively promoted in certain areas of downtown, uses that could negatively impact the character of the surrounding area without appropriate mitigation for issues such as lighting or noise, and those with substantial impacts that would be detrimental to the character of the surrounding area.

### How it Fits

The combination of development requirements and voluntary design standards provide a balanced means of establishing expectations for the character, land use, development patterns and intensities of development in downtown Conroe.

### Options

- A policy to construct public facilities, amenities and site improvements to meet or exceed voluntary design standards adopted by the City of Conroe.
- Coordination with partner entities, such as Montgomery County, Conroe ISD, Lone Star College System and private partners such as lending institutions to agree to construct facilities, amenities and site improvements to meet or exceed the voluntary design standards.
- Develop design standards in a manner that they can also serve as criteria for incentives such as development agreements, façade grants, and special commercial or residential improvement loans by lending institutions.
- Development regulations can take on a number of formats. A form-based code provides an easy to follow format designed specifically to define character, limited land use regulation (if determined appropriate to include in development regulations), development patterns and intensity similar to the manner needed for downtown Conroe.

# 35



*Example of Storefront Lighting*

## About

Storefront and façade lighting standards should be incorporated into development requirements and potentially design standards once they are in place. In the interim, it is important to clarify the role of storefront and façade lighting in downtown Conroe, particularly given recent technologies that have made window and storefront treatments substantially cheaper. As a rule, storefront and façade lighting should be both permitted and promoted as a means of enhancing both aesthetic value and safety to downtown Conroe. However, it is important that lighting be designed and installed in a manner that adds to the value of the community and does not create glare or pose a distraction. Following are recommendations suggested for downtown Conroe:

- Storefront and façade lighting, including lighting for signs, where appropriate, should be actively encouraged.
- Lighting should be designed in a manner to avoid casting a glare on the sidewalk, street or adjacent structures. Lighting associated with a façade or sign should be shielded in a manner that the desired effect is seen while the lighting is not.
- Lights associated with a storefront should be in the white spectrum and should match the color temperature of the shopping, dining or entertainment environment that is available inside. Warmer colors (3,000 to 3,500K) are recommended.

- Internal lighting for signs should utilize cooler color (5,100 to 7,000K) to provide a whiter, "crisper" appearance.
- Lighting fixtures should be appropriate to the architecture and mounted as features appropriate to the building.
- Façade and sign lighting should be consistent in placement and design and should be part of an overall lighting strategy.
- Strobe or flashing light should be prohibited.
- Holiday lighting should be allowed to incorporate color as appropriate.

## How it Fits

Lighting plays a very important and positive role in the appearance of downtown Conroe, particularly in regard to identity, merchandise and public safety.

## Options

- Separate lighting standards for different areas within downtown Conroe to allow greater flexibility in areas outside of the Central Business District but also greater restriction in residential neighborhoods.
- A minor grant program to encourage the appropriate use of lighting.
- A common lighting program for use full time or during events, such as lighting placed atop buildings in the Central Business District.



**36****About**

A successful downtown program requires management of a wide variety of “moving parts” including implementation of projects and programs, coordination with a number of organizations, support and growth of the local business community, marketing, innovation, fundraising, and many of the other skills necessary to ensure that downtown Conroe remains desirable and market competitive. In essence, it is a full-time job that requires a full-time position. A Downtown Manager could be tasked with:

- Implementing and amending the Downtown Development Plan
- Maintaining a unified vision and voice for all of the many local partners invested in downtown Conroe
- Focusing on building and maintaining a strong support system for local businesses
- Establishing and overseeing a municipal management district for downtown Conroe, including marketing the concept and building support for the necessary legislation,
- Collaborating with the various nonprofit organizations, public institutions, and various other entities interested in downtown, and
- Seeking out revenue streams for downtown projects and programs

**How it Fits**

The Downtown Manager position can serve as the individual responsible for bringing the Downtown Development Plan to fruition and focusing on the unique small business and tourism aspects of downtown.

**Options**

- Could be initially funded by the City of Conroe with a mission to evolve into a semi-independent position funded with resources outside of general funds.
- If the City of Conroe should pursue a municipal management district and/or a tax increment reinvestment zone, then the Downtown Manager could manage those entities and receive funding through one or both resources.
- Consider employing an individual with experience in downtown management or similar public/private experience, as well as a strong understanding of brand awareness and how to work with and cultivate a successful small business community.
- Could choose to employ a contract position or a consulting firm to fill the role of a Downtown Manager if determined to be more appropriate than a full-time city employee with full benefits.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Creating and funding the position (at least for the short term), Collaboration with the downtown business community and local nonprofits regarding the position.

**Costs to the City**

Salary and benefits for the Downtown Manager position.

**Potential partners**

Local businesses and nonprofit organizations.

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, management district funds, other grants

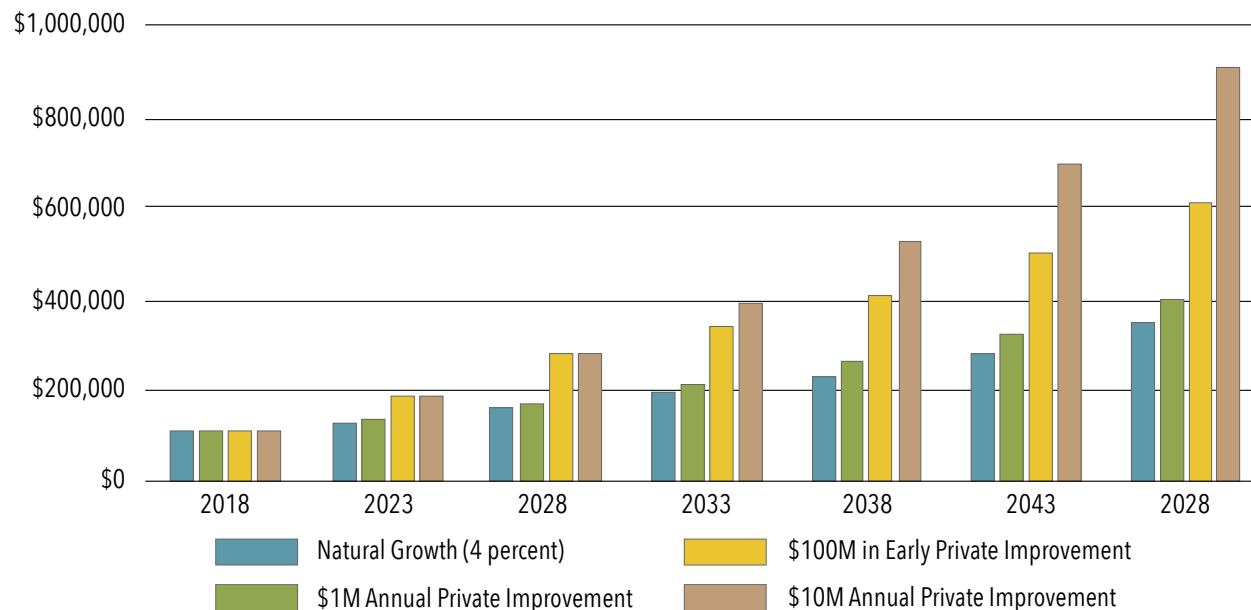
# 37

## About

A municipal management district in downtown Conroe would provide an oversight organization with the capacity to make limited improvements, provide maintenance on physical enhancements, administer activities and programs, and more. A management district would begin with limited resources and should be charged with a mission of growing revenue streams in order to effectively serve downtown Conroe. However, it is important to recognize that creation of a district is a long-term strategy that will initially provide administrative support that can expand to take on additional projects and costs as revenues grow.

A management district in downtown Conroe could accrue revenue through a property assessment or property tax. Downtown Conroe includes property appraised at a value of approximately \$256.0 million. Nonexempt property makes up approximately \$137.6 million. Extracting single family homes results in a total assessed value of roughly \$108.5 million in assessed value. Based on these figures, a management district would initially accrue roughly \$107,000 in annual revenue; however, those figures should substantially increase as the tax base in downtown grows, particularly as the private sector responds to proposed major catalyst projects.

## Management District Growth Scenarios



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## Pursue a Downtown Conroe Municipal Management District

Methods for increasing revenue for the management district include:

- Complete private and public sector improvements that boost the taxable value of property in downtown Conroe.
- Reduce the amount of nontaxable property or better utilize it to spur investment on taxable properties.
- Expand the boundaries beyond those currently proposed for downtown Conroe.
- Create additional revenue streams for the district. For example, if the management district were charged with managing the marketplace then rental fees and other charges (beyond covering costs) could provide added revenue.

### How to Make it Happen

Creation of a management district will require substantial community and political support. A district includes a petition process to prove community support, creation and passage of state legislation, and a willingness to be taxed or assessed an additional amount in order to provide the district with revenue.

### How it Fits

A municipal management district provides an organization that can be charged with implementation of the Downtown Development Plan by building revenue streams, engaging in active partnerships with other organizations and administering and maintaining

projects, programs and improvements.

### Options

- The district could employ and fund the Downtown Manager.
- A management district could also administer a tax increment reinvestment zone, can acquire and manage property, issue debt, and promote and administer events.
- A management district can receive and utilize resources from other organizations such as HOT funds from the CVB, Type B funds from the EDC, or grant funds from state or federal entities.

### Potential Roles for the City

Political support and collaboration with the community, local organizations and state and local elected officials

### Costs

Approximately \$100,000 necessary to create the district.

### Potential partners

Local businesses and nonprofit organizations, local and state elected officials

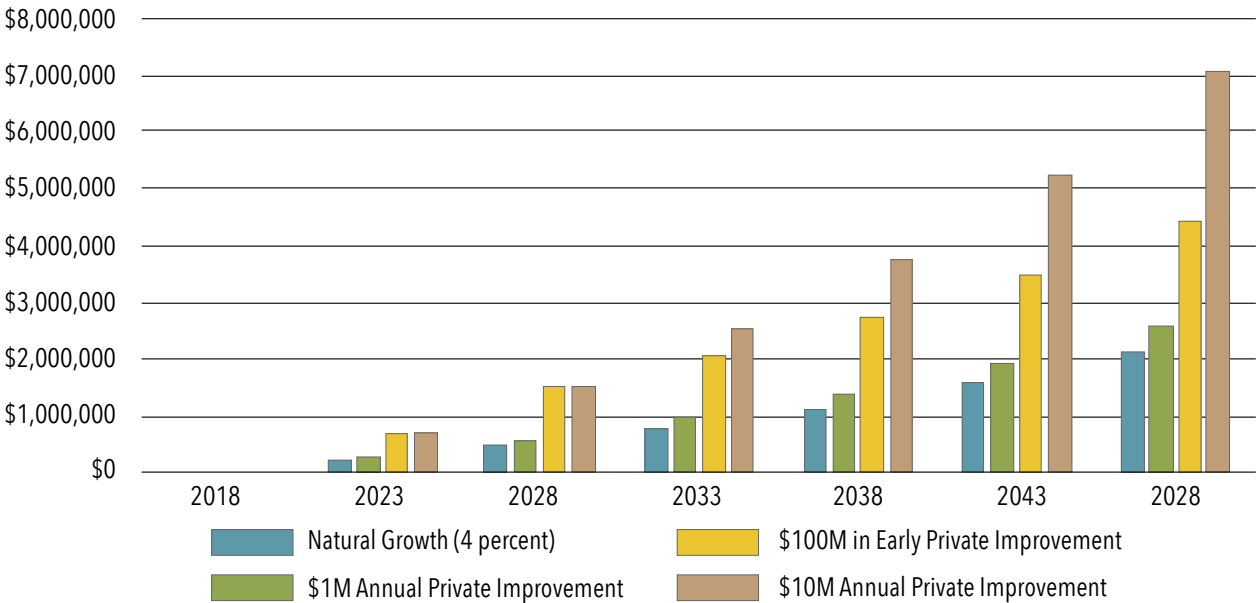
### Potential sources of public funding

General funds (for creation of the management district)



38

Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone Growth Scenarios



About

A tax increment reinvestment zone can provide resources for capital and economic improvements in downtown Conroe, including roadway, sidewalk and trail improvements; parks acquisition and enhancement; landscaping, lighting, signage and other beautification enhancements; water, wastewater and stormwater improvements; economic development projects and agreements; and more. A reinvestment zone receives revenue from the incremental growth in tax revenue above a "base value" – the tax value (and accompanying tax revenue) available at the year that the reinvestment zone begins. As a result, a tax increment reinvestment zone begins with very limited funding. However, the amount of revenue available will quickly increase as new investment drives up taxable value.

In 2018, after excluding single family homes, the remaining area of Downtown Conroe is estimated to provide slightly more than \$983,000 in tax revenue to the City of Conroe and Montgomery County. Assuming 2018 as the "base value year", any additional tax revenue from natural growth or new investment above the base value is available for use by the TIRZ. As shown in the provided examples, even steady natural growth can result in increment; however, private investment in downtown Conroe is key to creating substantial revenue.

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## Create a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone for Downtown Conroe

A TIRZ can utilize available tax revenue to finance projects in a variety of ways, including:

- Reimbursement to a private, public or other entity for completion of an eligible capital project.
- Direct financing through available revenues
- Debt financing
- Development Agreement
- Partial funding by leveraging resources from other entities

Methods for increasing revenue for the reinvestment zone include:

- Ensure full participation by as many eligible taxing entities as possible, including the City of Conroe and Montgomery County
- Complete private and public sector improvements that boost the taxable value of property in downtown Conroe.
- Directly spur private sector development through incentives or other means of support.
- Reduce the amount of nontaxable property or better utilize it to spur investment on taxable properties.
- Expand the boundaries beyond those currently proposed for downtown Conroe.

### How it Fits

A tax increment reinvestment zone would provide a major financial resource capable of supporting larger scale capital and economic projects devoted specifically to downtown Conroe, including several in the Downtown Development Plan.

### Options

- A tax increment reinvestment zone can be managed directly by the City of Conroe, a management district or redevelopment authority, or a third party.
- Neighborhoods CAN be included as part of a reinvestment zone with some limitations.

### Potential Roles for the City

TIRZ creation, adoption of project plan and reinvestment zone financing plan, zone management

### Costs

The costs associated with creation of the reinvestment zone.

### Potential partners

Local businesses and nonprofit organizations, local elected officials

### Potential sources of public funding

General fund for creation, TIRZ funds

**39****About**

Downtown is a major economic engine for the City of Conroe with the capacity to be a substantially greater generator of jobs, entrepreneurship, tourism, tax revenue, wealth, and culture that, in turn, can provide an enticing lure for large scale industrial, commercial and residential developers. While the Economic Development Council has historically focused its Type B resources into attracting and retaining manufacturing and industrial employers to the area, the same funds can be applied to downtown's tourism and small business efforts, including several supportive catalyst projects and physical improvements. Ways in which the Economic Development Council can support downtown investment include:

- Setting aside an annual stream of funds that can be used to leverage investment in eligible improvements or programs. The funds could be managed by the EDC, the City or by a municipal management district.
- Participating in eligible major investments, programs or activities as the opportunities arise.
- Sponsoring programs aimed at attracting and growing small business, particularly with a focus on downtown Conroe.
- Providing an immediate financial resource while downtown property value sufficiently grows to support downtown revitalization, including efforts that spur private investment that adds to the value of the management district and tax increment reinvestment zone.

**How it Fits**

Type B funds can provide one more revenue stream that can be applied to implementation of the Downtown Development Plan.

**Potential partners**

Conroe Economic Development Council, local businesses and nonprofit organizations, local elected officials

**Potential sources of public funding**

EDC funds



**40**

*Revolving Loan Fund Recipient, Providence, R.I.*

**About**

Revolving Loan Fund programs have a long history of success for communities with strong support from local lending institutions. A revolving loan fund serves as gap financing or incentivized financing to be used to promote activities that may either be difficult to traditionally finance or that the community would like to promote. Willing lending institutions agree to place an amount of funds into a pool, often alongside funds allocated by the city. Those funds are used to supplement a traditional loan for large scale projects, fully fund limited scale loans, or provide microloans. Loans are repaid and the interest is used to grow the loan pool. Uses could include:

- Promotion of housing rehabilitation or new construction in accordance with the community's design standards.
- Specific housing programs established for particular audiences such as musicians, artisans or culinary entrepreneurs.
- Small business loans/microloans catering to home-based businesses or other startup activities.
- Low interest loans for businesses "graduating" into the marketplace, the container/food truck courtyard, or a brick and mortar downtown establishment.
- Façade and site enhancement funds for construction to the community's design standards.

**How it Fits**

Provides a means of locally financing private investment that leverages city funds while simultaneously reducing lending risk to community lenders.

**Options**

- Can be administered through the individual lending institutions, the City of Conroe or through the management district.
- A loan pool could begin with a small amount with each lending institution adding more over time based on the success of the program or initiate as a fully-fledged program.
- The City could opt to take on or support loans with the greatest risk.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Collaboration with local lending institutions, particularly regarding program guidelines, lending criteria and program administration; management of program

**Costs to the City**

- A portion of the funds needed to establish the revolving loan fund (either as a single, initial amount or a regular addition to the pool of funds). An initial allotment can range between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000
- All or a portion of costs associated with management of the fund.

**Potential partners**

Local lending institutions, private "angel investors"

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, EDC funds, Community Development Block Grant funds, private investment

**Consider Membership in the National Main Street Program and Complementary Programs****About**

The Downtown Manager will need access to a variety of resources in order to implement the array of tasks proposed in the Downtown Development Plan. Organizations such as the Texas Downtown Association, Main Street America, and the Texas Economic Development Council offer services and resources with no other commitment than membership. The City of Conroe may also choose to pursue the Texas Main Street official designation through the Texas Historical Commission (as it has in the past) as a means of gaining access to other resources, including technical support. Similar to Conroe's history as a Main Street community, the community would be required to submit an application and agree to employ a downtown manager for a period of three years.

**How it Fits**

Memberships provide low cost access to resources and understanding of a variety of topics to support the aspects of downtown improvement, including marketing, small business growth and retention, urban design, and regulations/incentives.

**Options**

- Consulting services could replace or complement the resources provided by membership to organizations, including the Texas Main Street program, although it could not replace the official designation.
- Membership to organizations, including the Texas Main Street program may be delayed until warranted, if a delay is determined to be more appropriate.

**Potential Roles for the City**

Membership in organizations determined to be supportive downtown redevelopment efforts

**Costs to the City:**

- All or a portion of membership dues.
- All or a portion of the salary and benefits for a downtown manager as part of the designation as a Main Street community.

**Potential partners**

Local nonprofit organizations and businesses, Houston-Galveston Area Council, Texas Historical Commission, Texas Downtown Association, Main Street America, Texas Economic Development Council

**Potential sources of public funding**

General funds, management district funds







