

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Texas Township Downtown Development Authority has undertaken this current master plan in an effort to ensure the success of its downtown as development continues over the next twenty five year period. For the purposes of this master plan, the word “Downtown” is synonymous with the Downtown Development Authority boundary. While the plan focuses on the area within these bounds, the context of surrounding areas and the community as a whole are important in understanding the future role of the downtown.

Texas Township has taken a proactive approach when considering development of its’ downtown area by forging a vision to reinvent and strengthen its’ downtown area (currently known as Texas Corners). As the Township well realizes, the work of building and sustaining a downtown is an ongoing endeavor. In this light, the Township has undertaken this current master plan as a way to look forward and ensure the success of downtown. The plan recognizes the realities of downtown today, building on its strengths creating a vision that produces a vibrant and economically viable township core. Building upon the goals and priorities set forth by the downtown community, this process of creating a master plan involves developing and documenting abstract goals and objectives and translating ideas into development guidelines and directives that will help promote and ensure the future of downtown. The main goal of this process is to build excitement and momentum for the future of the downtown area while clearly communicating community goals both to township residents and those interested in development within the DDA. Because development does not happen at one time, the plan engages the various pieces that make up the greater whole to allow the downtown to live up to its true potential while at the same time identifying needed infrastructure to lay the ground work for an exciting future.



The process leading to the creation of this master plan involved comprehensive analysis and meaningful interaction with the Texas Township community. The master planning process began in May of 2013 when the Township engaged VIRIDIS Design Group to develop a master plan/vision for the Downtown Development Authority. The planning process was organized to provide ongoing engagement with the DDA with a series of input sessions to gather information and discuss possibilities and identify goals. The Township was involved at many levels, with several meetings with the Planning Commission and Township Board, as well as regular meetings with the Township Supervisor and planning staff to help guide and oversee the planning process. A series of meetings were held at crucial stages to gather data, solicit input and allow stakeholders to share in the process and shape the downtown vision. Based on this input, the following guiding principles were established and employed to ensure the final plan remained true to the needs and desires of the community:

- Create a plan that is realizable, economically viable, consistent with the community’s core values and reinvigorates the downtown and its surroundings.
- Integrate diverse housing options in the downtown to help meet varying lifestyles.

## DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

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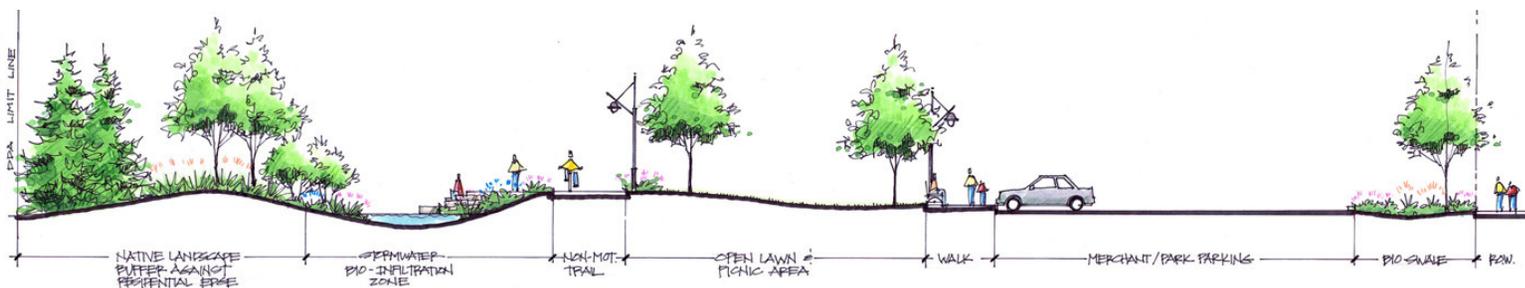
- Strengthen connections to existing businesses and residential areas with pathways, signage, lighting, views, and development.
- Create a destination.
- Create a “walkable” community.
- Create a framework for future downtown development.
- Respect land uses bordering the DDA.
- Reinforce the role of the downtown as an economic catalyst for the Township.
- Organize parking so that it is efficient and accessible but discrete and non-dominating
- Leverage prior successes to move to the next level
- Create a fully functional mixed use, sustainable, downtown environment.
- Develop tools for incorporation into Texas Township planning policies.



## THE MASTER PLAN

The Master Plan has been designed to give distinctive identities to currently underutilized areas within the DDA boundaries, each one complementing existing use patterns. In the future, the downtown will offer a variety of distinct places that expand the retail, office, and housing market opportunities and allow people to stroll easily throughout a larger area. The plan provides a balanced approach to visitor and resident circulation. This is achieved through the development of pedestrian and bicycle amenities that allow for safe and travel without getting back into a car. The plan also includes non-motorized connections to surrounding neighborhoods and existing trail systems.

The Downtown today offers a range of services and business activities. Many of the destinations, however, are located well off the street and sometimes difficult to get to, especially on foot. The Master Plan embraces these destinations, creating more lively activities to complement them. Furthermore, the plan focuses on building upon the downtown’s strengths to encourage a traditional, pedestrian-oriented town center that reflects the character of the community and maximizes the area’s potential. The following pages depict the Downtown Master Plan by taking a closer look at each of the guiding principles and illustrative plans that describe the overall vision.



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**Walkable** - Vibrant downtown areas often are successful because of their easy walkability within a compact area. A five minute walk on Q Avenue takes one from the north to south DDA boundaries. While it would also be a short distance to reach the east and west boundary, there is little to draw one in these directions. Successful downtown areas often utilize traditional grid blocks including complete streets and dense development. In looking at the opportunities for growth in the DDA, four distinct areas stand out in each of the corners of downtown. Each of these corners can develop into compact walkable areas in their own right. With strong connections, these areas create new destinations for visitors to downtown, opportunities to explore a more richly varied and interesting downtown, with Q Avenue and 8<sup>th</sup> Street as the main axis.

**Create a green belt system** - Parks are defining elements that give a downtown a unique identity while also providing essential quality of life. Urban parks can become places of quiet respite from the bustle of the street and activities within buildings, or they can become intense centers of activity themselves, places to meet other people and participate in cultural events and celebrate community. As the downtown grows, a system of open spaces will intertwine the urban fabric, improving access for all and creating opportunities to connect one place to another. Continuous bicycle trails and connected walking paths will make the area a recreational draw in its own right. Investment in parks and open space imparts value to the surrounding real estate, conferring a better address, open views, and access to recreation. The arrival points into the downtown cross the green belt creating dramatic opportunities to announce Texas Corners as a “green” and “people focused” downtown. Park scan also serve more pragmatic needs of a developing downtown. The plan describes a linear park area that provides a buffer between downtown mixed uses and alternative housing options. In addition to the benefits of a park the area could also serve as a downtown specific stormwater treatment area utilizing natural systems to collect and treat runoff as an attractive multi-use amenity.



**Non-Motorized Connectivity** - In Michigan, bicycles are growing in popularity as both a highly visible recreation activity as well as for commuting. Bicycle accommodation in the downtown should be accomplished through a comprehensive approach, utilizing bike lanes on arterials combined with ‘share the road’ integration of bicycles into vehicular traffic on streets having lower volumes, speeds and street widths. In addition, a shared use trail will encircle downtown. Every part of downtown will have direct access to these amenities. This network of paths and routes can connect to the emerging regional trail system to serve both recreational and commuter cyclists.



**Celebrate the points of arrival** - At the north, south, east, and west edges of downtown the sense of identity is the weakest. At these gateway locations into the heart of the “Texas Corners”, a visitor forms their first opinion of the area and identifies a change of environment. In each point, a strong civic identity needs to be coupled with distinctive high quality architecture. A consistent system of wayfinding and signage would orient people to

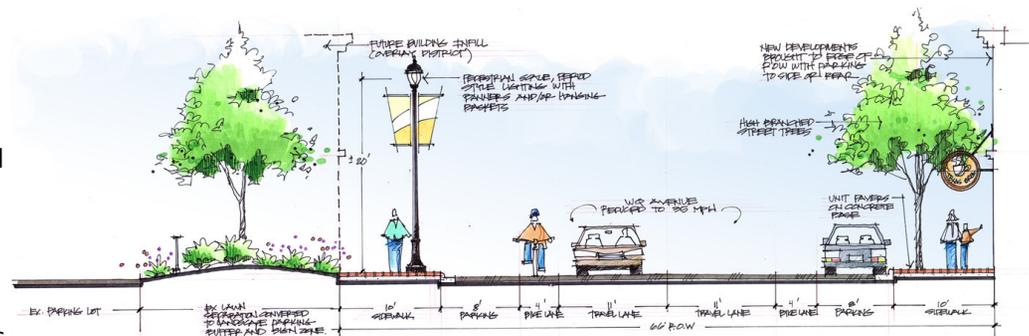
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downtown, public parking, and unique destinations. As new development progresses, streetscape improvements in these outer corners will extend the notion of downtown and make them pedestrian friendly zones. Elements of the streetscape character should be consistent throughout downtown. New development would frame the streets creating the vibrancy and active street life that defines downtown.

**Taming the roads** - Downtowns have the unique challenge of trying to move people and goods while maintaining a high quality of life. Unless carefully thought out, transportation routes can easily become as much a barrier as a conduit. Q Avenue and portions of 8th Street currently act as barriers that bisect and divide the downtown. The premise today is that downtowns need to work equally well for pedestrians as they do for vehicles, especially as we come to appreciate downtowns as residential neighborhoods, visitor destinations, and places to recreate. Guiding road development offers tremendous opportunity for creating desirable new real estate opportunities as well as walkable streets in all parts of downtown. The master plan seeks to develop high quality downtown streets that all carry traffic. While serving as traffic conduits, these streets can be designed to be pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Q Avenue Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Street will continue to serve as arterials, but with appropriate speeds and considerably more aesthetic appeal, they will allow for an improved pedestrian environment.

**Housing Opportunities** - While many new housing units have been built, they tend to be targeted toward traditional single-family housing development. Many noted a need for alternatives to traditional housing option currently available within the township. The current downtown is surrounded by neighborhoods, with mostly single family homes that range in size. These neighborhoods lie directly on the boundary of the DDA, yet walking is quite difficult because undeveloped tracts of land and roadway barriers. Resident households create 24-hour vibrancy downtown. Households demand goods and services and, as such, support downtown retail and service establishments. A mix of household types in terms of age, income, and housing tenure enriches the downtown environment and makes it uniquely urban. As the core area for the Township, the downtown should embody the environmental, social, and economic values associated with in-town living and working. A strong downtown residential base will enliven the streets, support retail, and attract office uses.



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## CONTINUING THE MOMENTUM

Planning is not an end in itself. The true measure of a plan's value is the extent to which it is carried out. Putting the plan into action involves orchestrating multiple activities among a variety of groups to assure consistency with the vision.

- Request Adoption of the master plan
- Prepare zoning regulations and design guidelines for future development
- Undertake market studies to evaluate viable development opportunities
- Market and promote the downtown to business and property owners, residents, developers, and potential investors
- Fully utilize the master plan as a guide and tool with regular updates and continued community participation



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to all who participated in the downtown master planning process. The ideas and input helped frame the plan and ensured that the work of was focused in a positive and meaningful direction.

### **Downtown Development Authority**

Larry Loeks, President  
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Amy Clark, Member  
Chad Kerwin, Member  
Dave Groendyke, Member  
Natalie Fuller, Member  
Shari Groendyke  
Brook Simpson

### **Texas Township**

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Linda Kerr, Township Clerk

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