

The physical form and organization of a city visually represents the heritage and identity of a city's inhabitants. Effective development practices and regulations help create unique places and attractive neighborhoods that evoke civic pride. Although most of the properties in Bryan are privately owned, the public experiences the spaces and corridors between these properties as they commute or travel through town. A fundamental premise of urban design is that there is a mutual relationship between quality of life and a city's built environment. Urban form and community appearance influence social and economic opportunity and contribute heavily to civic identity.

7.1 Conditions and Trends

During the public meetings and focus groups the citizens clearly stated their desire to reinforce Bryan's small town atmosphere and friendly character. Residents requested well-defined, walkable and safe neighborhoods with trees, gathering places and parks. An additional public emphasis was the importance of improving major corridors, gateways, historic resources and neighborhoods.

Bryan's historical roots are in the agricultural and banking activities of the early Texas economy. What began as a town site of 640 acres is now the historic downtown of the modern city. The original streets were laid out in a grid system typical of towns of the late nineteenth century. The grid alignment was the entered on Main Street and north-south parallel streets that are now named Bryan and Tabor. As the city grew and prospered, the railroad came to town and the extensions to the east-west numerical streets took a decided jog to the southeast to align with the railroad tracks. Prosperous bankers and merchants built large homes on 27th through 32nd streets within what is now the Eastside Historical District.

Bryan's Downtown was the center of commerce in Brazos County until the 1960's when retail activity began to move southward along Texas Avenue and then later to the Earl Rudder Freeway (State Highway 6). Today, Bryan's main business areas are situated along Texas Avenue, Villa Maria Road, Briarcrest Drive and the Bypass. Fortunately the Downtown is experiencing a revival following the implementation of improvements outlined in the 2001 Downtown Bryan Master Plan. The recurrent theme of reestablishing the Downtown as the heart of Bryan during the last Comprehensive Plan update made obvious the need for a detailed master plan for the area. The master plan led to street and streetscape improvements, the re-opening of the LaSalle Hotel. The private rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of dozens of Downtown buildings, along with rapidly increasing property values, is evidence of the project's success and the importance of comprehensive planning.

However, as Downtown is being revived, other older commercial and residential areas are experiencing decline. A common concern brought up during focus group discussions and public meetings is the need to improve Bryan's appearance and public image. The comments consistently centered on improvements to the City's entrances and major corridors, preservation of historic resources, improving the appearance of neighborhoods and streets and a pro-active code enforcement program to address property maintenance, trash and outdoor storage.

7.2 Appearance Issues

Through the combination of the review of previous plans and input from the Advisory Committee and citizens, the following issues relating to community appearance were identified:

Entrances to the City – A shared concern of the public was the poorly defined entrances and the absence of character at those locations identifying Bryan to visitors. Welcome enhancements to the appearance of the city are the newly placed entry features that have begun to appear at the city limits along major thoroughfares. These features should be installed, along with appropriate landscaping at every high-profile entry point into Bryan. These "gateways" identify the entry points, promote the City and add attractive feature to the City. Future gateway enhancements should consider the addition of sidewalks, curbs, street trees and seasonal planting.

Major Corridors – Improvements to high-profile corridors such as State Highway 21, Texas Avenue, South College Avenue, Villa Maria Road, Briarcrest Drive, Martin Luther King, Jr. Street and the Earl Rudder Freeway will benefit from increased attention to landscaping and street trees, reduction of signage, elimination of clutter, improvements to peripheral structures and future commercial development. Attention should be given to road widening projects, as well as overpasses and underpasses where well designed features can be incorporated into these improvements. An excellent example is the Villa Maria railroad underpass. The incorporation of design element and a mural into this project will make commuting a more pleasant experience and will improve the image and perception of Bryan to residents and visitors alike. Similar projects are included in the Central Business Corridor and South College Avenue plans.

Streets and Streetscape – The public generally agreed that the appearance and condition of pavement surfaces of many of Bryan's streets is poor. This has a profound impact on perceptions about the city. Future road rehabilitation and expansion projects should place a high value on aesthetics and community appearance.

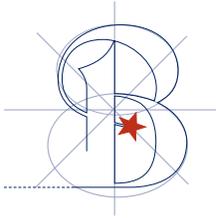
Roadway widths can contribute significantly to the experience of driving or walking along a street. Many of Bryan's streets have been widened to accommodate more vehicular traffic and, in the process, have become less appealing to pedestrians and cyclists. Many major arterials and major collectors are without sidewalks, or only have them for a portion of their length. Where sidewalks are present they are often located along curbs in close proximity to traffic without benefit of shade on hot summer days or landscaping to buffer adjoining parking lots. Improved paving, the addition or extension of sidewalks and adjoining landscaped areas are features that are highly desired by Bryan residents. Whenever feasible, street pavement should be improved, sidewalks and bicycle lanes should be added and overhead power lines should be placed underground.

Historic Resources – The Downtown and Eastside Historical Districts form the core character of Bryan and should continue to be recognized, promoted and protected as valuable assets. The loss or degradation of these assets could fundamentally alter the image and perception of Bryan. The City should encourage the designation of additional historic sites and areas when supported by the residents and owners. The continuing revitalization of Downtown Bryan demonstrates the effectiveness of public-private cooperation. Although Phase Two of the Downtown improvements has yet to be completed, there are opportunities to expand upon the ongoing Downtown revival. These opportunities should be fully explored in order to build upon past success and maintain the current momentum of investment and rehabilitation.

Neighborhoods – Many residents expressed the need for a continuing program to improve the overall safety, appearance and function of older residential neighborhoods, including manufactured housing parks. The rehabilitation of streets, addition of street lights and subdivision or area identification signs may help to establish pride in one's neighborhood and can spur reinvestment and rehabilitation. There is ample opportunity for public-private partnership in this area, including the revival of the City's successful derelict building program.

Wayfinding – One strategy that can promote community assets and image is a wayfinding program – a system of signage established to assist with finding local attractions and amenities and promote a sense of place. The public was gratified to hear that Bryan has already established a Wayfinding Committee to develop identity





markers and signs to guide visitors to unique areas of Bryan. It is hoped that this program will help showcase Bryan's historic districts, commercial areas and the medical district surrounding St. Joseph Hospital.

Underutilization of Commercial Properties and Vacancies – The impact of vacant commercial structures on thoroughfares such as Texas Avenue, East 29th Street and South College Avenue has a profound effect on a community's appearance and on one's perception of safety and economic vitality. Many members of the public expressed their desire to promote the adaptive reuse of these older areas through targeted incentives and considerations within the zoning code. Considerable sentiment was expressed that these vacancies should be substantially addressed before the City promotes peripheral commercial development.

Zoning – The adoption of site design standards has improved the appearance of recent commercial development in Bryan. The redevelopment of the Tejas Center at the intersection of Texas Avenue and Villa Maria Road is the most visible example. Continuous review and improvement of development regulations, site design, required landscaping and sign regulations can not only facilitate the development process but also improve Bryan's appearance and overall image.

Code Enforcement – A major theme articulated throughout the public input process was code enforcement. The need to enforce the City's codes and ordinances on matters such as trash, illegal dumping, clutter, derelict signs and buildings and abandoned cars was expressed at virtually all focus groups and community meetings. Many citizens are convinced that a pro-active approach to enforcing existing laws, rather than the current complaint-driven approach, could dramatically improve the overall image and perception of Bryan. In conjunction with volunteer programs such as Keep Brazos Beautiful and The Big Event, a proactive code enforcement effort could address nuisance issues as well as private property maintenance and perhaps even provide assistance and education to those who, through age or disability, can no longer care for their properties.

7.3 Goal and Objectives

The following goal, objectives and action statements were developed to address the overall appearance and function of the City of Bryan for the next 20 years.

GOAL #1: Provide an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Objective A) Develop attractive entrances and corridors.

Action Statement 1: Continue and expand the current city limit entry marker program. Incorporate appropriate landscaping to demarcate the City and help establish a distinct identity and sense of place.

Action Statement 2: Develop corridor plans for Texas Avenue, Martin Luther King, Jr. Street/Old Reliance Road, William Joel Bryan Parkway, Boonville Road, San Jacinto Street (Highway 21), Wellborn Road and College Main.

Action Statement 3: Implement the improvements outlined in the South College Avenue Corridor Redevelopment Plan.

Action Statement 4: Incorporate streetscape improvements, bike lanes and sidewalks into street widening and extension projects.

Action Statement 5: Develop a program to promote and assist with the rehabilitation of existing commercial structures and infill development of vacant commercial property.

Action Statement 6: Develop streetscape standards and place them in the subdivision regulations for use in new developments and redevelopment.

Action Statement 7: Identify targeted areas for the underground relocation of utility lines as part of capital and redevelopment projects.

Objective B) Showcase and preserve the recognizable and unique identities of the community.

Action Statement 1: Continue the redevelopment emphasis on Downtown Bryan with expanded plans and targeted assistance.

Action Statement 2: Expand the current historic designation programs to include additional areas and individual structures.

Action Statement 3: Investigate incentives for investment in, and preservation of, historic homes and underutilized and vacant commercial structures.

Action Statement 4: Install historic street lighting in designated residential and commercial historic districts.

Action Statement 5: Revisit development codes with the goal of removing impediments to reinvestment in older buildings and neighborhoods.

Action Statement 6: Investigate incentives for investment in underutilized and vacant commercial structures.

Action Statement 7: Adopt a plan of work to implement projects identified by the Wayfinding Committee and incorporate specific projects into the capital improvement program.

Objective C) Implement revised codes and a proactive enforcement program.

Action Statement 1: Conduct a visual property and building maintenance survey in order to establish improvement priorities.

Action Statement 2 Following the completion of the building maintenance survey, adopt a building maintenance code.

Action Statement 3: Establish a proactive code enforcement program to implement current and revised regulations.

Action Statement 4: Resurrect the derelict building demolition program.

Action Statement 5: Update landscape standards for new development and redevelopment.

Action Statement 6: Revise outdoor storage and display standards for commercial developments to restrict outdoor storage of merchandise.

Action Statement 7: Work with owners to bring manufactured housing parks up to adopted standards.

