

DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PLAN

A. INTRODUCTION

Among those commonly stated goals established early in the Comprehensive Master Plan participatory process are a series of goal statements that describe a vibrant, diverse, and meaningful downtown core. These goal statements include the following:

1. Create a multi-functional City core that has diverse land uses and attracts a broad range of visitors.
2. Enhance and strengthen the destination significance of the downtown area.
3. Establish a clear identity for downtown through distinctive portals, thematic street signage, enhanced streetscape/ landscape, identifying street furniture, and other enrichments of the public right of way.
4. Establish an effective and continued program of clean up and repair.
5. Make Downtown a central attraction statement.
6. Create a visual presence for downtown Corsicana through signage and/ or monumentation that can be seen from I-45 and along highways leading into the core city.
7. Reinforce the importance of downtown as a center for commercial activities, a hub for vehicular movement, and a hub for rail services.
8. Create more positive and meaningful connection between the City core and its surrounding area.
9. Create a cognitively strong and functionally meaningful entry to the downtown core which encourages the visual enhancement of the areas abutting the entry right of way.
10. Establish a beautification program for 7th Avenue and Highway 287 that will identify them as major approaches to the city core and major thoroughfares within a particular sub-district of Corsicana.

Creation of a strong central core such as that described by these goal statements requires the transformation of present day downtown Corsicana from its current state to a true **destination**. Currently, downtown Corsicana is removed from the major circulation pathways and corridors with greatest traffic density. To be a destination, it must be connected to the city, drawing the major traffic corridors to itself (become a hub). Currently, downtown Corsicana is spatially dispersed and lacking the elements of comprehensible form (center, edge, sub-districts, etc.). To be a destination, it must be a comprehensible place. Currently, downtown Corsicana is lacking visual continuity which makes the few architecturally enriched portions seem out of place in their larger context. To be a destination, it must have coherent visual fabric that gives a clear sense of identity and creates a consistently stable context for commercial investment. Currently, downtown Corsicana has no public place where citizens of the City can celebrate, remember, commemorate, or host festivals and events. To be a destination, it must have

the ability to attract and host the important commercial and ceremonial events of City life.

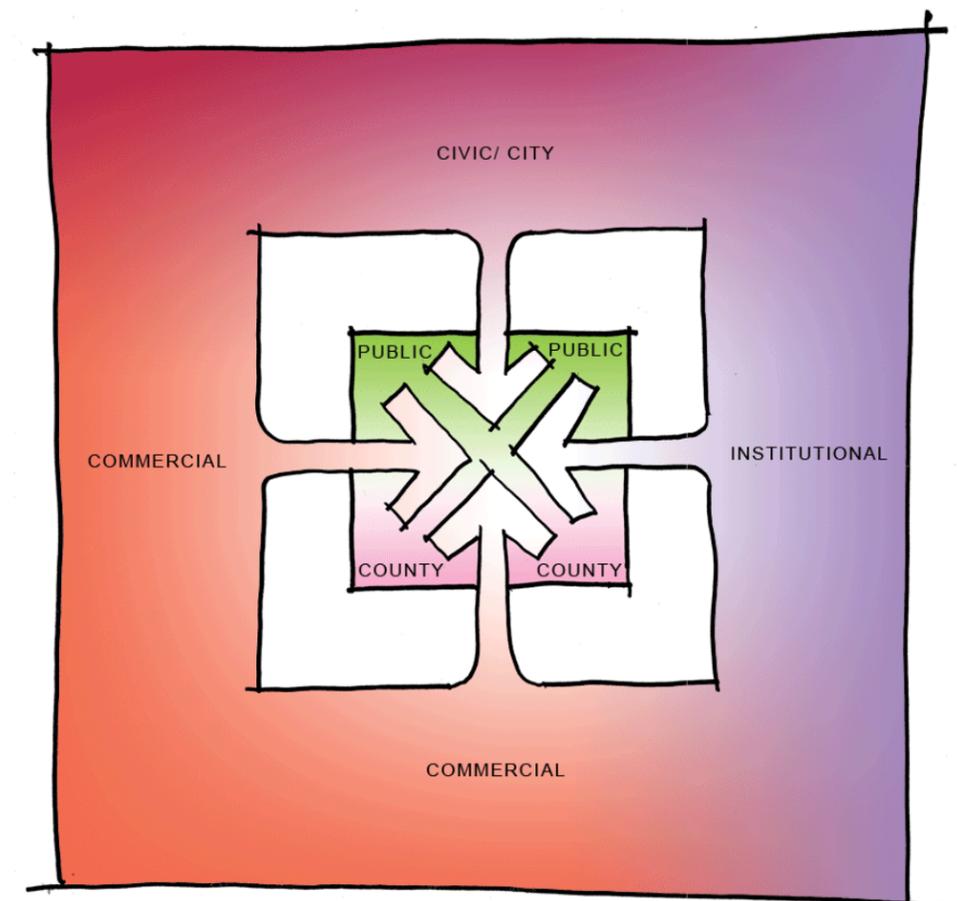
In light of stated goals and needed transformations, a Revitalization Plan for downtown Corsicana is focused on the creation of a downtown destination. Such a destination requires a central element of such symbolic importance that it will change the downtown experience. Throughout the history of Texas, the courthouse square has been this element for many towns and cities. However, the creation of such a space in Corsicana will require:

- Consolidation of the Commercial fabric
- Consolidation of the Government/ Institutional fabric
- Creation of a center within the core that will link the consolidated portions
- Connection of major movement patterns to the center

B. REVITALIZATION PLAN ELEMENTS

Each of these important initiatives is discussed in the following text, as well as their coming together in a final plan. The Downtown Revitalization Plan is built around this coming together in nine basic steps:

STEP #1: CREATE A SIGNIFICANT PUBLIC SPACE (THE TRADITIONAL TEXAS COURTHOUSE SQUARE)



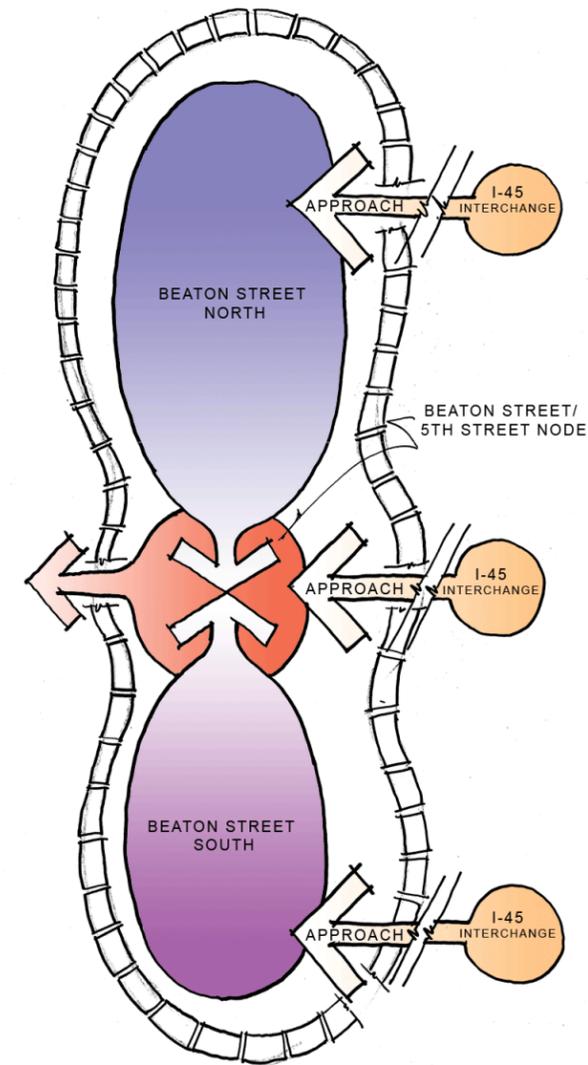
The Texas Courthouse Square has been the icon of viable city/ town centers through out the State’s history. It was the place where varied elements of community life (both civic and commercial) came together in mutual recognition of its prominence, central significance, and symbolic meaning. Historic photographs of the traditional Texas Courthouse Square show a vibrant and public place teaming with activity (some commercial, some daily activity, and some ceremonial). The street space shares a common ground plane with the pedestrian space and/ or the plaza space (that portion of the square immediately surrounding the Courthouse). Therefore, the people, vehicles, horses, and wagons are brought together in a bustling town setting that speaks to the community’s economic prosperity and economic purpose. Over time, the once unified square became subdivided by street, sidewalk, and plaza. Store fronts became separated from the courthouse front by a street and sidewalk that was meant to convey **lineal movement**, not host motorial movement. In this process, the Town Center, which once drew activity to itself and captured that activity within the specific confines of its courthouse square, became a conduit that simply passed traffic through to other emerging hot spots of economic activity (typically associated with a by passing freeway to major highway). Thereby, the “hub” function of the courthouse square became a pass through function and, in this process of change, the Courthouse Square became an aesthetic attraction instead of a commercial hub.

The significance of the Courthouse Square (and thereby its power as a center) lay in its centrality. Centrality was both functional and cultural. It was functional, because the square held the movement patterns of the City within its grasp. All roads led to the square. It was cultural because it brought together the dominant commercial activities (bank, major store, etc.) and the civic/ institutional activities of the community (County Government, City Government, Church, Fraternal Hall, etc.). To have a clear sense of “City”, it is essential that an urban core exists, and dominates both the movement patterns and cultural activities of the community. The Courthouse Square is still the archetype of this type of town center.

Despite its transformation, the image of the Courthouse Square as a place of commercial dominance remains vivid, and has become the inspiration for numerous retail venues across the United States. A local example of such retail application is the Southlake Town Center, Southlake TX, in the Dallas Metroplex. In addition, those communities with a Town Square still intact have gone to great lengths to re-establish lost commercial significance as a way to preserve an identity threatened by rapid outward expansion of major urban centers (such as Dallas).

The Courthouse Square in Corsicana can’t serve this purpose for the City, because early in its history, the commercial fabric of Corsicana became separated from the governmental/ civic fabric, thereby dissipating the significance and energy of the City’s core place. This fragmentation has plagued Corsicana in its endeavors to re-establish downtown as a powerful center that can compete with emerging and more remote areas of economic activity.

Despite this loss, a square, or some other major public space, is the means by which the separated core functions (commercial and governmental/ institutional) will be brought together so that a coherent City Center can emerge.



CONSOLIDATING A COMMERCIAL ZONE
REQUIRES PHYSICAL STRUCTURE AND HEIRARCHY

STEP #2: CONSOLIDATE THE COMMERCIAL FABRIC

Diagram 2

In order to bring the commercial and governmental/ institutional function of Corsicana together in the manner described above, it will be necessary to consolidate commercial activities so that, when a link is made, there is a clear definition of these two functions. At present, Beaton Street is the most contiguous stretch of commercial fabric. However, it is a street without form. It has no beginning, middle, or end. Therefore, it is a remnant of some former state of completion and speaks to the extent to which it has lost its former economic vibrancy. Therefore, it is important to consolidate Beaton Street by establishing a center to its length that will create a clear sense of place for this historically important stretch of commercial frontage. The Downtown Revitalization Plan achieves this by making the intersection of Beaton Street and Fifth Avenue the heart of the commercial component in Corsicana’s constellation of City functions.

Emphasizing this location reaffirms the importance of Fifth Avenue as a link to Interstate 45 and as a major approach way into the City Core.

Further consolidation is achieved by the creation of portals at Beaton and 7th Avenue as well as Beaton Street and 2nd Avenue. Location of portals at these corners establishes the limits of the commercial zone. Creation of a beginning, an end, and a middle will give Beaton Street a structure that will be cognitively recognized, thereby bringing the commercial fabric together so it can be linked across a major public space to the governmental/ institutional fabric (see diagram 2).

STEP #3: CONSOLIDATE THE GOVERNMENTAL/ INSTITUTIONAL FABRIC

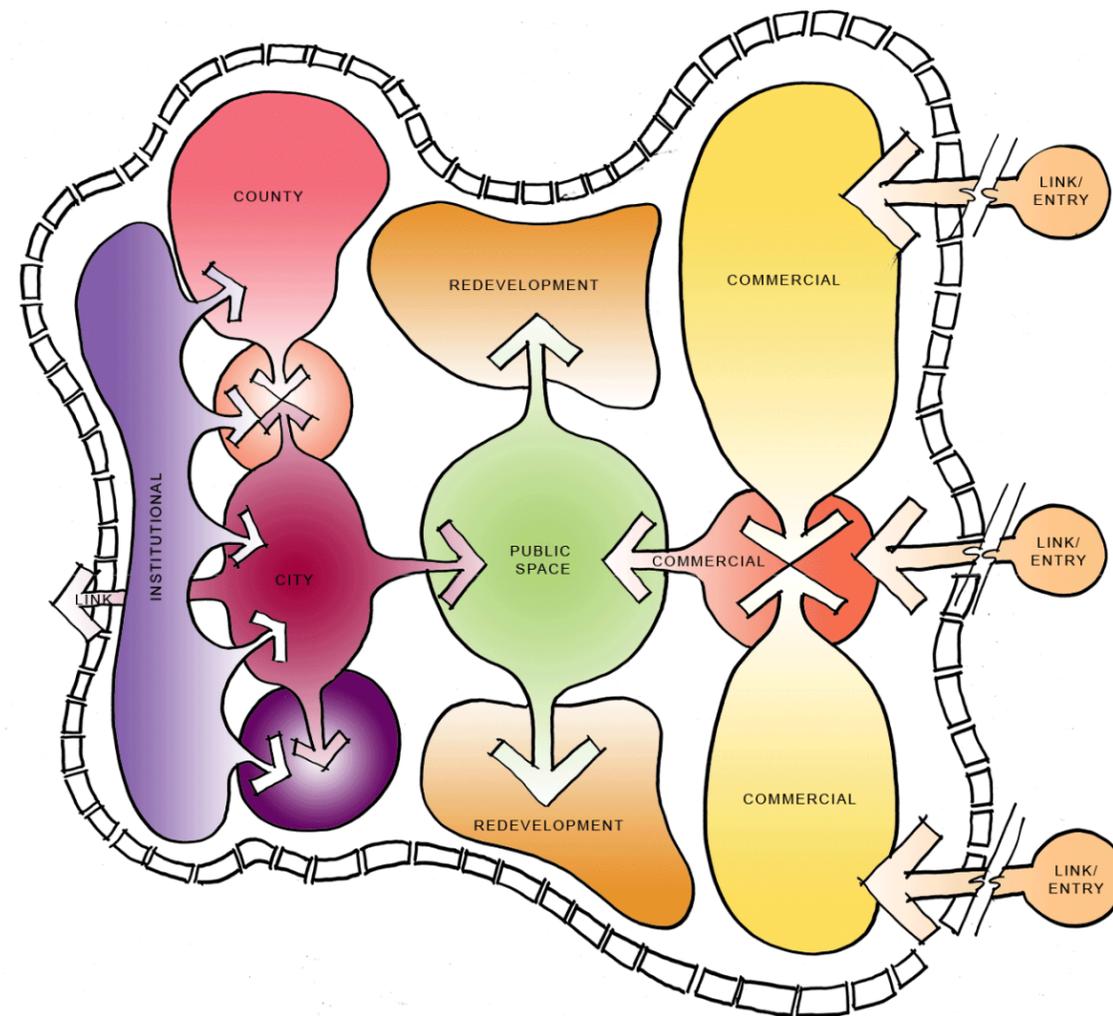


Diagram 3

In order to bring the governmental/ institutional and commercial functions of Corsicana together in the manner described above, it will necessary to consolidate these non-commercial activities so that when a link is made, the participants across that link are substantial. At present, 12th and 13th Streets are the primary civic address. Frontage along 12th Street includes the City Hall, the Chamber of Commerce, the Public Library, the County Courthouse, and various churches. However, like the commercial fabric, there is a sense of physical dispersion that prevents comprehension of this area as a coherent sub-district. Large building plates occupy a building block as a single site (in contrast to Beaton Street which has multiple buildings per block), thereby creating front yards and side yards that fragment any sense of a continuous building frontage (more common to the downtown setting). Therefore, it is important to consolidate the governmental/ institutional fabric by creating a pedestrian link network that deals with the inherent building plates and spatial pattern in a manner that is not an “urban street” but more like a governmental campus located in an urban setting.

One’s comprehension of the governmental/ institutional zone as a sub-district requires a sense of district structure that is not provided by the street alone. The elements of structure include:

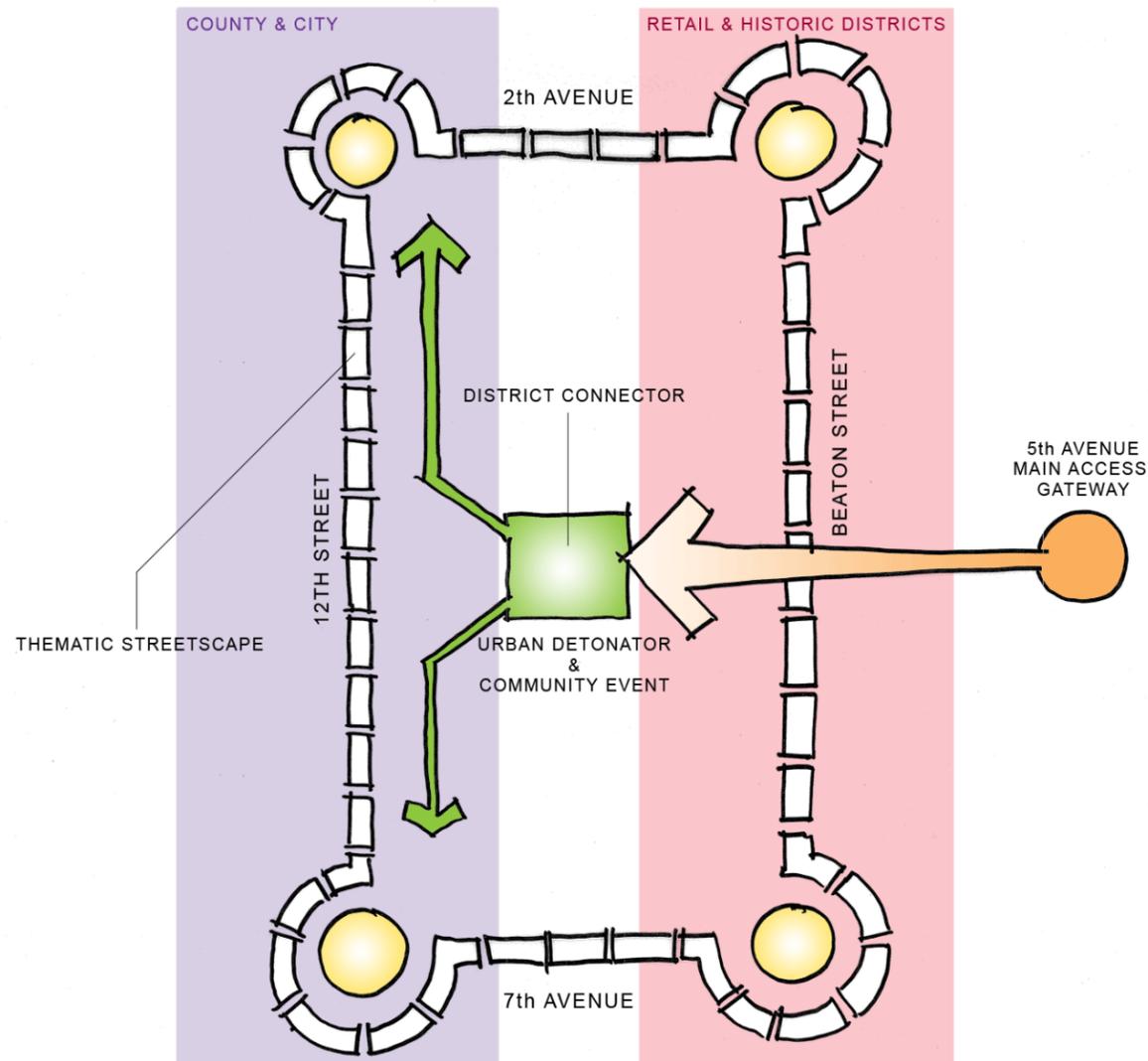
- Central Reference: a central place in the district composition that is the primary link with the other elements of the downtown fabric. A primary point of entry.
- Axial links (internal pedestrian links): a coherent pattern of movement that ties the elements of the sub-district together.
- Termini: powerful conclusions to physical gestures in the plan that conclude the cognitive composition and thereby make it more legible.

To accomplish such a pedestrian structure, it will be necessary to interconnect the various governmental centers with a pedestrian way that allows movement from point of entry to point of entry and physically expresses the inter-governmental relationships that exists between city and county services. This type of connection brings the governmental offices together, creating a sense of government center spatially arrayed around a circulation system that makes governmental functions more legible to the citizens of Corsicana (see diagram 6).

In the pedestrian network that brings governmental buildings together, the Navarro County courthouse provides a visual and functional terminus. Such placement recognizes the landmark importance of the courthouse building and the historic role of county government. The City buildings (City hall, Chamber of Commerce, and Library) are located at the place where the consolidated governmental sub-district touches the public plaza link with the consolidated commercial fabric (see diagram 6).

Diagram 4

THE CITY CORE



STEP #4: CREATE A CENTRAL REFERENCE FOR THE DOWNTOWN CORE AND A MAJOR PUBLIC GATHERING SPACE:

Once the Commercial elements and Governmental/ Institutional elements have been consolidated, it is necessary to provide a meaningful link between them so that the constellation of relationships originally found in historic Town Centers of Texas can be re-established and a true sense of “City Center” can be created. It is important that this link be **public** and its association as a true public element depends upon the extent to which it can host public events and/ or allow visible public expression (recreational, ceremonial,

or festive). Therefore, the essence of the link between commercial and governmental/ institutional is public space. In this way a relationship between core area functions that is more typical of historic Texas Cities be established in downtown Corsicana. Diagram 4 shows the relationships created by a link whose function, purpose, and scale is public.

Once established, this central reference for the downtown core becomes a form giving element and primary means of identification of the downtown area. The current diversity of the downtown fabric creates an environment of chaos because there is no comprehensible form. When the downtown visitor begins to understand that the fabric of larger scale & texture (typical of the government/ institutional zone) is coalesced in a sub-district with a clear relationship to a central public element and that the fabric of finer scale (typical of a commercial zone) resides in another relationship, then the whole of downtown takes on the attributes of place.

The economic strategy for Corsicana’s downtown core is to create a greater sense of destination and thereby draw visitors. Creation of destination **requires** the creation of place. The first element of destination is the recognition of place so that the activities which create the destination have a host identity in which they share.

STEP #5: CREATE A MORE CONCENTRATED AREA OF IMPACT REINFORCED BY PUBLIC LINKAGES

The amount of square footage within the downtown core that needs to see some level of revitalization is of such a magnitude that most economic revitalization initiatives can not make an appreciable impact. Therefore most pilot projects become lost in an inevitable dissipation of the economic energy originally generated. For this reason, it is important that an economic strategy for the downtown core define an area of concentration in which pilot projects (such as a specialty retail venue) can have greater economic impact.

For the above stated reasons, the downtown economic revitalization plan is built upon the creation of a major Downtown Public Space (Downtown Plaza) that establishes a cognitive, functional, physical anchor to the whole of the downtown fabric. In achieving this, the Downtown Plaza provides the city core with a physical focus that:

- Defines a central reference for downtown identity
- Serves as a host space for public events, festivals, ceremonies, celebrations, etc.
- Creates a linking element that re-establishes the lost association between the City’s governmental/ institutional fabric and its commercial fabric.
- Provides a focus for traffic and visitor-ship that supports smaller, more “doable” pilot projects by allowing them to have greater impact and aggregating their collective significance within smaller area of influence.

The latter significance of this physical focus relationship is most important to the success

of the downtown economic strategy. Only through aggregation will a limited number of initial private investors be able to realize a benefit from pioneering commitment. The area of concentration is created is defined in two ways:

- Creation of the Plaza (as described above): This creates meaningful differentiation within the fabric of the downtown core. In other words, there is a place within the downtown that is more promising (with regard to return) than other places and available proximity to that place is limited.
- Establishing a relationship between the Plaza and traffic movement: By connecting 5th Avenue to Interstate 45, an approach to the downtown core is created that brings traffic (and the investment values related to traffic) to the plaza and its adjacent properties. This reinforces the value potential of the plaza and thereby attracts more new investors that can collectively precipitate an

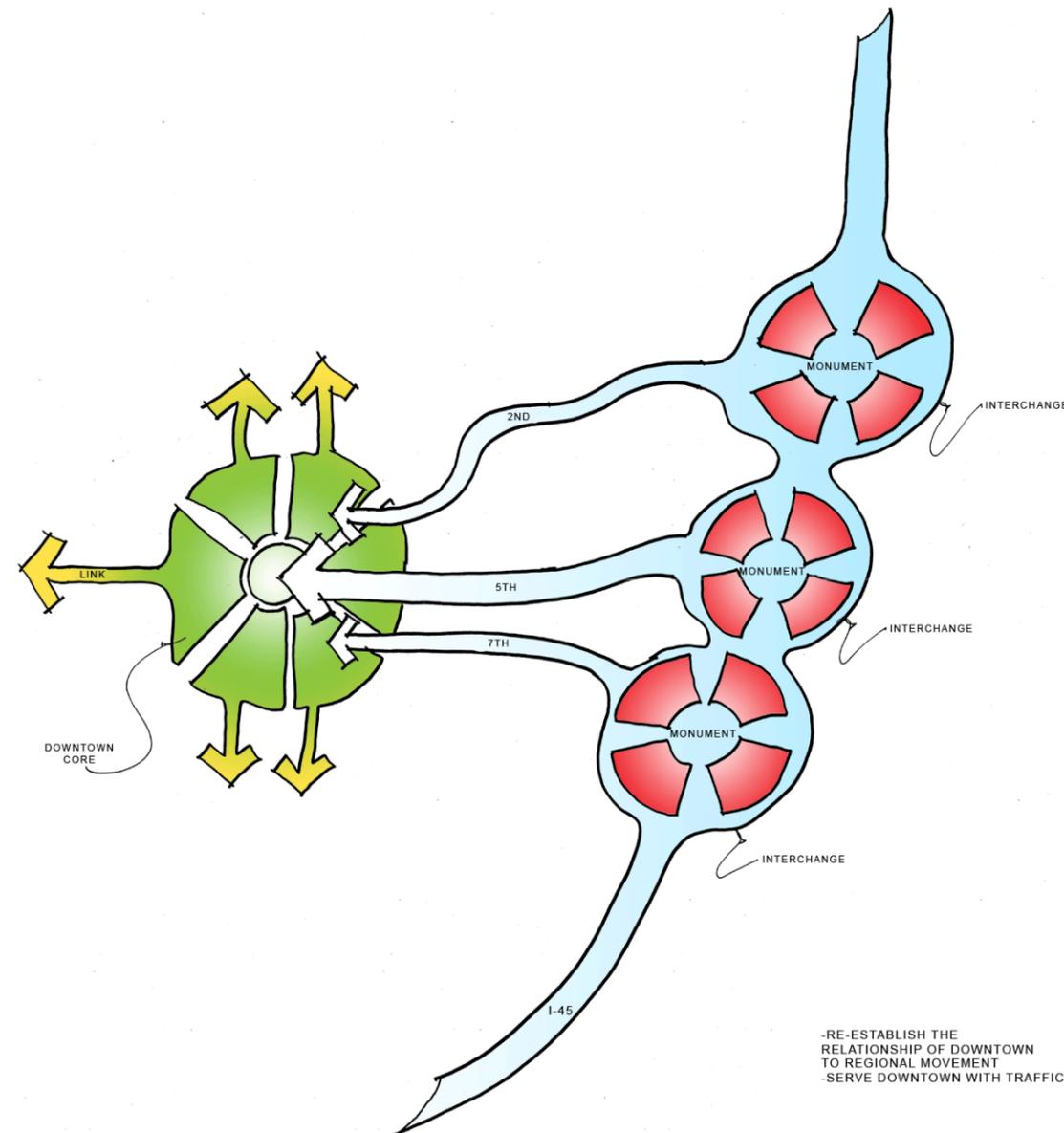


Diagram 5

interest in the whole of downtown Corsicana.

STEP #6 CREATE A CONNECTION TO, AND APPROACH FROM, INTERSTATE 45

As stated above, 5th Avenue provides an opportunity to create a needed association between the heart of downtown Corsicana and traffic movement from Interstate 45. Pushing 5th Avenue (east of Business 75) to Interstate 45 along the current right of way of Rhone Road creates a major approach to downtown’s core and an opportunity to establish a monument entry at the freeway that will attract visitors. This connection and approach is essential for greater visibility (and thereby visitor-ship) within the downtown area. The approach to downtown begins to introduce the thematic elements of downtown’s identity within the approaching right of way. This facilitates arrival and gives visual reassurance that the route so visually defined is a pathway to a desired destination.

At present, land around the Rhone Road interchange (at Interstate 45) is vacant. Therefore, great opportunity exists to manage development of the intersection and create a monumentation at the over pass that will celebrate downtown and the destination venues it has to offer.

STEP #7 ESTABLISH A DOWNTOWN PLAZA DISTRICT THAT PROVIDES A REGULATORY STRUCTURE FOR THE APPLICATION OF PUBLIC/ PRIVATE STREETScape, STREET INTERFACE, AND ARCHITECTURAL GUIDELINES

(Downtown Plaza Guidelines section of the report)

Much of the identity and distinctive sense of place for the Downtown Plaza District will emerge over time as the Plaza District builds out and various planned public/ private improvements are made. Therefore, it is essential that such growth and development be guided by carefully crafted guidelines. Application of guidelines requires the creation of a regulatory structure suited to this task. The downtown revitalization plan calls for the establishment of a Downtown Plaza Overlay District.

An Overlay District is able to institute guidelines without changing the existing zoning. It adds a suffix to existing zoning which signifies that the Guidelines referenced in the Overlay Ordinance are attached to whatever development is executed under current zoning entitlements. The Overlay Ordinance is a design document, not a land use/ zoning document and becomes an appropriate mechanism by which needed design guidelines can be used to guide downtown restoration, redevelopment, and/or new construction.

Proposed Guidelines for the Downtown Plaza District are included in this section (see sub-chapter entitled Downtown Plaza District Development Guidelines). These guidelines address streetscape, street interface, and architecture for public and/ or private restoration,

redevelopment, and/ or new construction.

STEP #8 ESTABLISH A MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE FOR THE DOWNTOWN PLAZA

Once the Downtown Plaza is established, it will be necessary to “operate” the public facility much like a City would operate its Convention Center. Success of the revitalization strategy depends on the success of the Downtown Plaza as a true place of public expression and activity of civic importance as well as entertainment. Hosting such events and/or activities taking place in the Corsicana Downtown Plaza will require a Plaza management structure and an executive director charged with the responsibility of finding, booking, and organizing them. The director salary and operational costs associated with management operation could be funded by the events booked, once the number of such events is significant. The City of Grapevine, Texas has taken a similar approach and over the years that management position has transformed a simple downtown into a destination venue.

The management function and Plaza Director could be operated out of a Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Chamber of Commerce, or the Corsicana Main Street Office.

STEP #9 BRINGING TOGETHER THE PROPER ELEMENTS OF PLAZA AND DISTRICT DESIGN

Diagram 6 is a plan view of the proposed Downtown Plaza and Diagram 7 is a conceptual rendering of the Plaza in an enhanced downtown core. Both images show the relationship of the Plaza to its surrounding, and Diagram 6 shows how the Government/ institutional and commercial sub-districts are linked by the Plaza’s central position and size. The Plaza images also display important design concepts that enhance economic impact potential. These include:

- **5th Avenue:** In this design, 5th Avenue connects east to Interstate 45 where a portal monument announces the presence of and directs traffic to the downtown core. 5th Avenue also extends west to the Historic Carriage District, making a ceremonial connection to that neighborhood through a landmark portal at 5th Avenue and 13th Street.
- **Walkways:** Pedestrian flow and convenience that is provided without displacing the automobile traffic or parking is key to the success of the design and its intended purpose. Enhanced sidewalks coming from the Commercial Frontage Zone (along Beaton Street and 5th Avenue east of the Plaza merge with a more campus-like walkway system that radiates from the Plaza to adjacent governmental/ institutional functions, ultimately terminating at the Historic County Courthouse.
- **Activity Space:** For a place intended for public use to be viewed as truly public, it is

necessary that the space be big enough to host a variety of public events. The unintended consequence of undersized public space is seen in many Dallas area communities who have tried to create a Town Center, but failed to provide sufficient acreage within that center for public function. Southlake is an example of a City who foresaw the spatial needs of its citizens and provided an appropriate amount of public commons within its new Town Center. As a result of good planning, Southlake Texas sees heavy use of its Town Square and such use has been an effective economic stimulus to retail within the Center and surrounding area. The rendering of Corsicana’s Downtown Plaza (see Diagram 7) shows a Christmas celebration as it could be planned in such a space. Note the appropriate relationship between size and event and the public-ness of the event as a result. A proper public Square for a smaller City should fill one City block (the typical area devoted to such use in the historic Courthouse Square). Corsicana’s proposed Downtown Plaza is one full City Block.

- **Event and Market Structure:** The Downtown Plaza design includes a major structure that provides roofed outdoor space for events, markets, etc. Such facilities do more than provide weather protection and shade; They make a statement that the space is equipped with the infrastructure to service public gatherings. It also provides a dominant element within the space that gives the space **form and structure**. Without such items the spaces impress the user as vacant. For this reason public spaces throughout history are most often dominated by a Courthouse, a Gazebo, a Cathedral, etc.
- **Block Termini:** In order to maximize the potential number of head in street parking spaces and provide needed public space within the commercial street (along Beaton and 5th Streets), the end of each block has been expanded along the edge of head in parking to provide a clear place (called a Block Terminus and shown in Guideline Diagram 7) from which to stripe the block for head-in spaces. The expanded areas also provide needed sidewalk space for furniture groupings, kiosks, decorative planting, handicap ramps, and other street hardware/ furniture. Through the creation of sidewalk space that is not dedicated to “directed” movement, the sidewalk becomes more nurturing of pedestrian activity and social interchange.
- **Portals:** The boundaries of the Downtown Plaza District need to be clearly designated by portals that announce the point of entry and visually celebrate the special nature of what lies through the point of passage identified. Portals are shown in the overall Plaza District plan view (Diagram 6) and shown in more detail in the Guideline Diagram 3 Portals are essential structural elements of one’s mental/ cognitive map by which each person is able to carry an image of a “district”.
- **Enhanced Pavement:** To make the public domain within the Downtown Plaza District read as special, distinctive, and reminiscent of history, it is important

to return key street to the glory of their former brick pavers. Distinctive pavement can transform an ordinary street into an inviting space that does not discourage people use and calms traffic with its textured surface. The Downtown Plaza District plan shows brick pavement along 5th Avenue from its point of entry into the district at Business 75, across the Downtown Plaza, to the Carriage District Portals (at 5th Avenue and 13th Street), and through the Carriage District. Such articulation makes 5th Avenue read as the central boulevard of the Downtown Plaza District and located both early investment and the Plaza at a key place within the vision.

- **Enhanced Intersections:** To facilitate pedestrian movement and to further clarify a cognitive structure that will enhance District identity/legibility, the Downtown Plaza Plan shows enhanced intersections along streets that front the commercial and governmental clusters united by the plaza. Therefore, an enhanced intersection exists at both Beaton and 12th Streets when they cross 7th, 6th, 5th, 4th, 3rd and 2nd avenues.
- **Enriched Landscape:** Uniform tree planting as shown in the Downtown Plaza District plan view will enrich the visual character of the sidewalk enhance pedestrian use of the sidewalk and provide a structure from which supplemental lighting will be provided to create an ambient light level better suited to pedestrian activities.
- **The Historic Jail:** The Historic Jail structure is an important landmark relic from the glorious past of Corsicana. It is very appropriate that this particular building sits in the public plaza and thereby allows public interaction with their own history.
- **Event:** Events are key to making the Downtown Plaza real, meaningful, and relevant to the daily lives of Corsicana citizens. The Plaza rendering (Diagram 7) shows a Christmas celebration in process. Christmas, Easter, Founders Day, Fourth of July, Veterans Day, etc. all become times when the people of Corsicana, as well as visitors (drawn to the quality of life that such expressions of culture and common history seems to evoke) can come together in mutual appreciation of a great City and its great public space.

C. DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION MAP

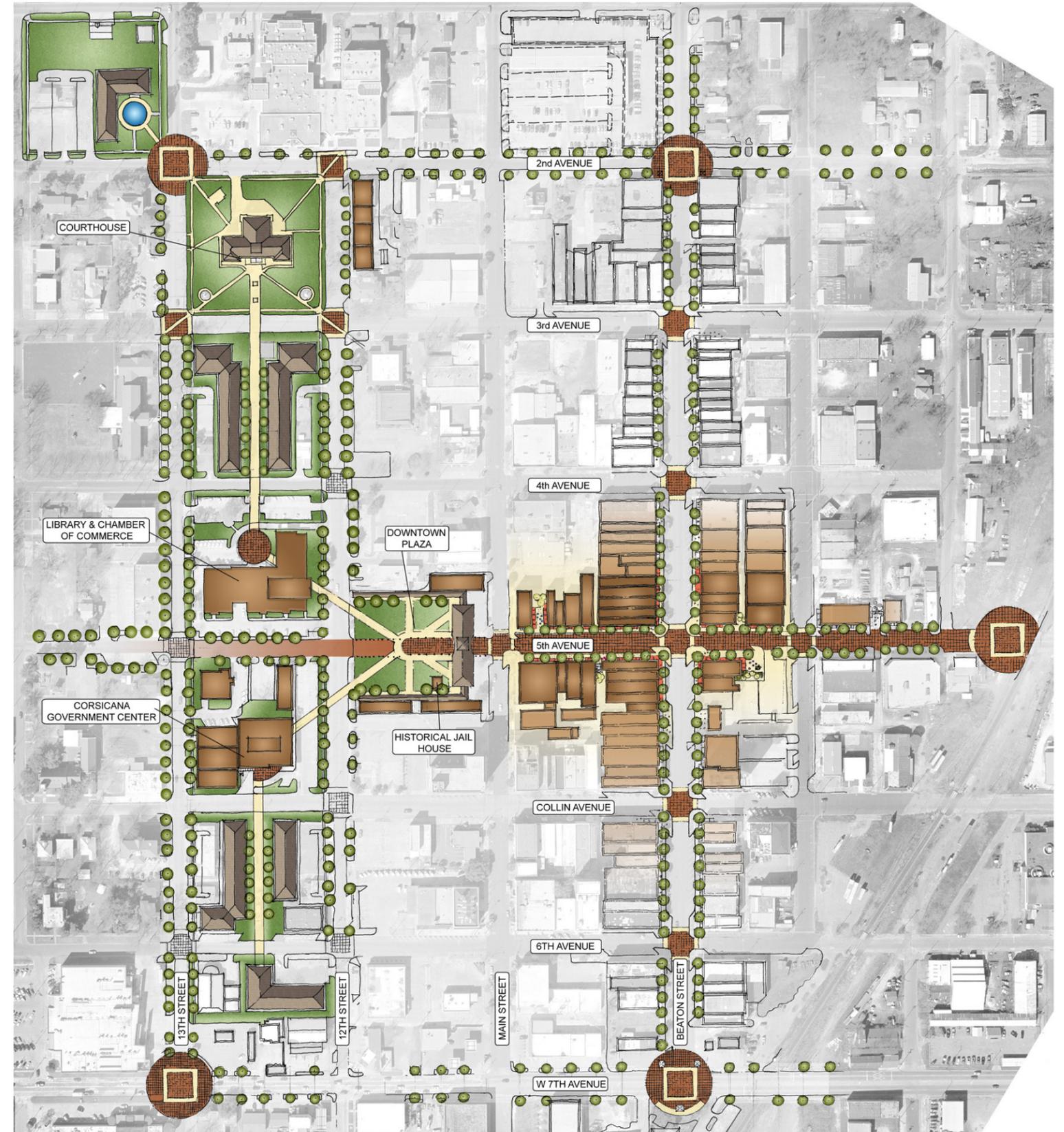


Diagram 6

D. DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION VISION RENDERING

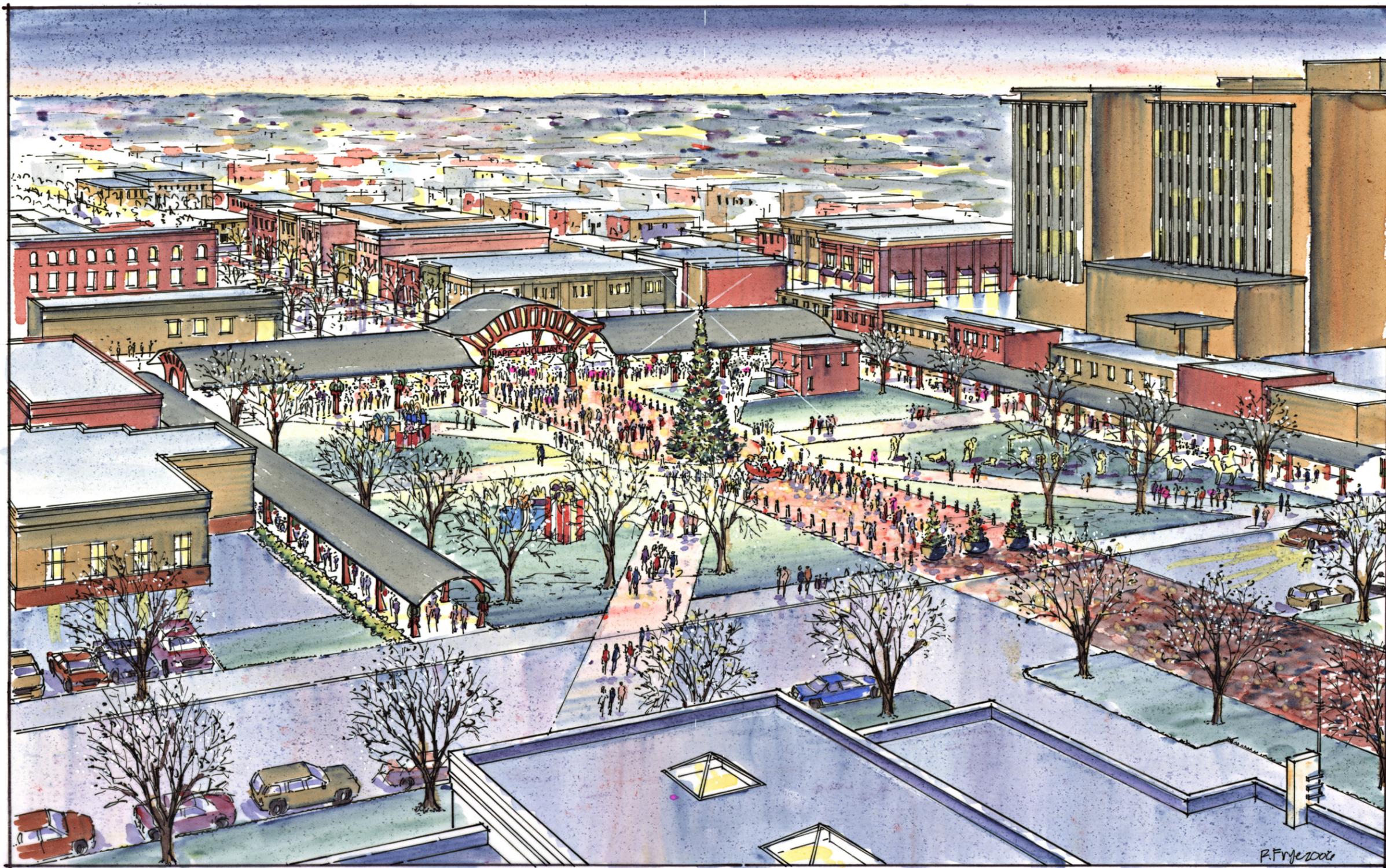


Diagram 7