



# CHAPTER 14

# URBAN DESIGN

Urban design is shaped by the regulations, policies, and plans that dictate the form of roads, parks, and sidewalks. These public spaces frame how we move through and experience our communities. Fort Worth residents move through the public realm constantly throughout the city often without notice or recognition that these spaces are the products of professional designers.

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 influences social and economic opportunity and contributes to civic identity. After a discussion of general community aspirations and trends, this chapter focuses on several components of Fort Worth's built environment: streets and streetscapes, public buildings, public spaces, trees, the Trinity River and waterfront spaces, gateways, and scenic corridors. The chapter also describes the characteristic urban design elements of mixed-use growth centers and urban villages. Finally, policies and programs are prescribed to further enhance Fort Worth's quality of life.

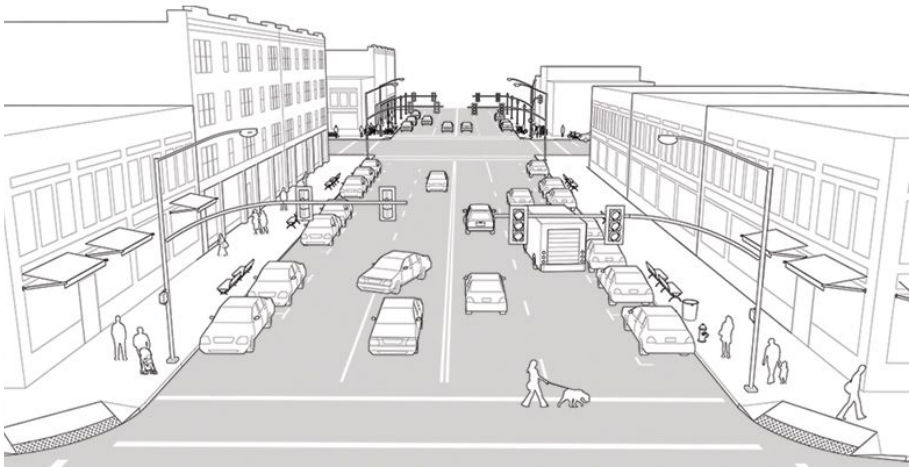
The width of a roadway contributes significantly to the experience of walking or driving along that street. As streets expanded to accommodate more vehicular traffic, they have become less appealing to pedestrians in the process. Along streets lined with building fronts, these walls define the pedestrian environment. Suburban style layouts with buildings placed far away from the sidewalk and street, often separated by parking lots, have narrow sidewalks placed at the edge of the roadway without any buffer between pedestrians and traffic; and street crossings are often dangerous and unmarked.

Good urban design creates a physical environment that makes pedestrians feel secure, while successfully accommodating existing and projected traffic volumes. The spaces between sidewalks, roadways, and buildings can enhance or adversely impact the pedestrian experience. On-street parking provides a comforting buffer between pedestrians and car traffic while reducing the need for surface parking lots. Amenities such as street lamps, landscaping, and benches create a more inviting space. These are important elements of the overall character of a city, and thus are now required in redeveloping areas of the central city.



*The West Seventh development near Downtown provides a walkable environment to live, work, and play. West 7th Street, Fort Worth.*

Before



After



*Neighborhood main streets have high pedestrian volumes, frequent parking turnover, key transit routes, and bicyclists all vying for limited space.*

*Source: Neighborhood Main Street, National Association of City Transportation Officials Urban Street Design Guide.*

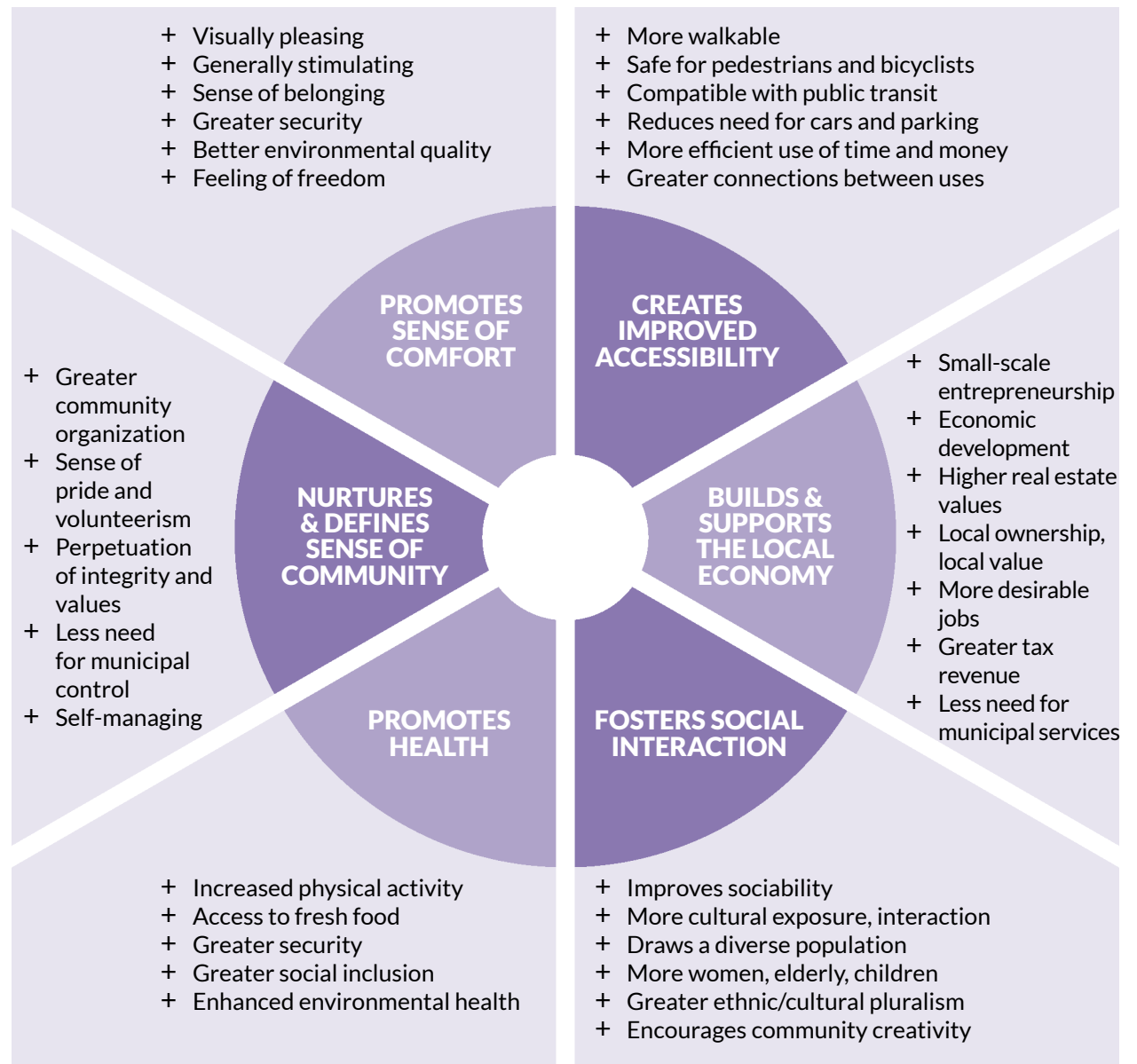
The influence of pedestrian environments and public spaces is far greater than simple aesthetic appeal. Eating at an outdoor table, browsing the windows of a bustling shopping street, and passing time watching crowds walk by are more than just pleasant diversions, they are components of urban social life that attract residents, businesses, and visitors. The thoughtful design of public spaces can provide these experiences and improve the vitality of the urban environment.

Most great places, whether a grand downtown plaza or humble neighborhood park, share four key attributes:

1. They are accessible and well connected to other important places in the area.
2. They are comfortable and project a positive image.
3. They attract people to participate in activities there.
4. They are sociable environments in which people want to gather and visit again and again.



## BENEFITS OF GREAT PLACES



Source: Placemaking: What if we built our cities around places? Project for Public Spaces booklet.

## FORM-BASED CODES

Form-Based Codes are a method of engineering the built environment through zoning ordinances to realize a particular and predictable urban form. Form-Based Codes focus primarily on the quality, form, and relationship between streetscapes and building facades to create pedestrian-friendly environments.

## DESIGN-BASED ZONING DISTRICTS

Design-Based Zoning Districts focus on promoting a walkable, urban form of development, consistent with the surrounding areas' historic urban development patterns. The focus on form promotes buildings that conform to tested urban design principles. Mixed-Use and Urban Residential zoning districts are located throughout the city.

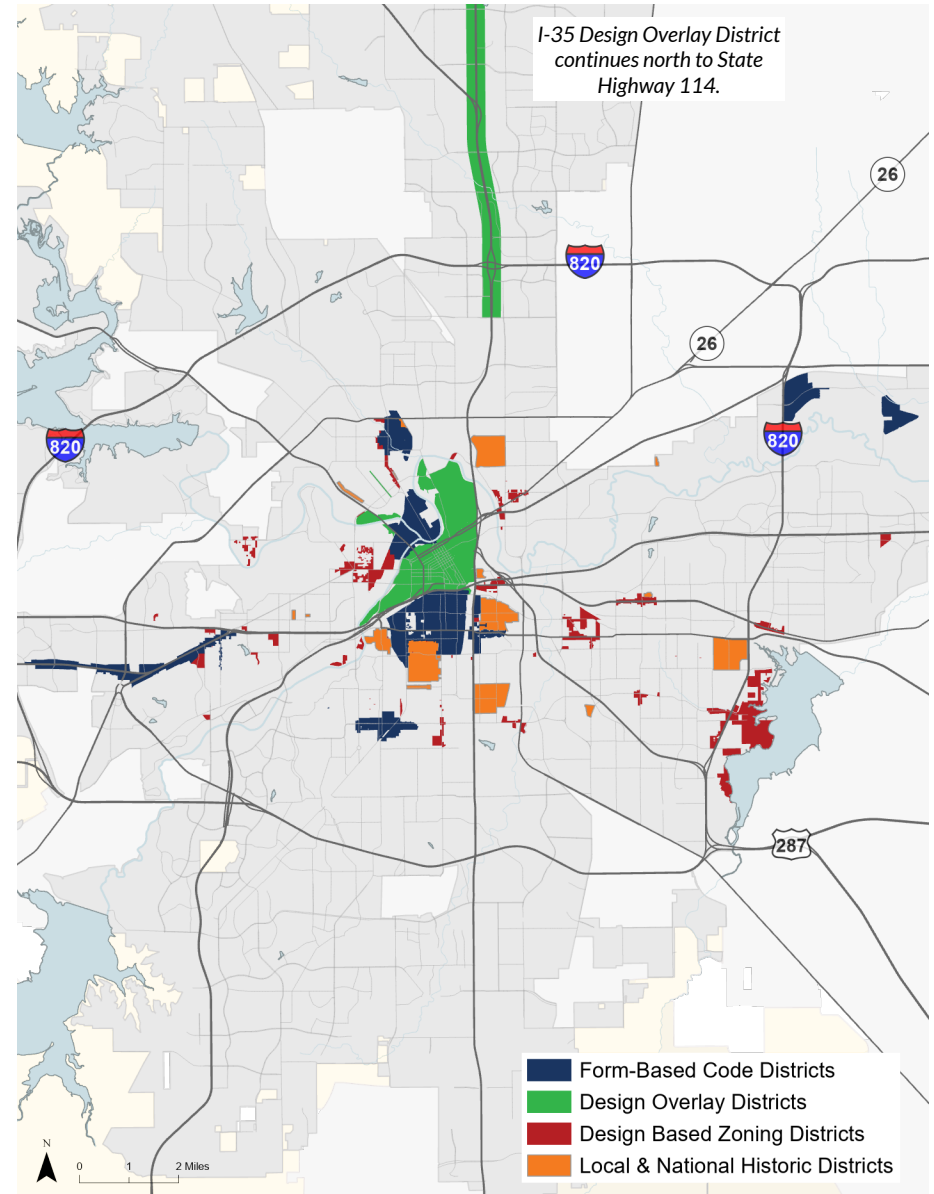
## DESIGN OVERLAYS

An overlay zone is a zoning district which is applied over one or more previously established zoning districts, establishing additional or stricter standards and criteria for covered properties in addition to those of the underlying zoning district. Fort Worth uses overlay zones to promote specific development projects, such as mixed-used developments, waterfront developments, housing along transit corridors, and affordable housing.

## HISTORIC DISTRICTS

Historic districts protect a collection of historic properties related to each other by historical themes or development patterns. Historic districts are the original "design district", as they have regulated the treatment of existing properties and compatible new development within the district since the early 1900s.

## URBAN DESIGN DISTRICTS



Source: City of Fort Worth, Planning and Data Analytics Department, 2023.

## SCENIC CORRIDORS

Scenic corridors are areas that have been recognized as scenic, cultural, architectural, or historic assets. The Zoning Ordinance outlines the criteria for designation. A scenic corridor must include or reflect one or more of the following:

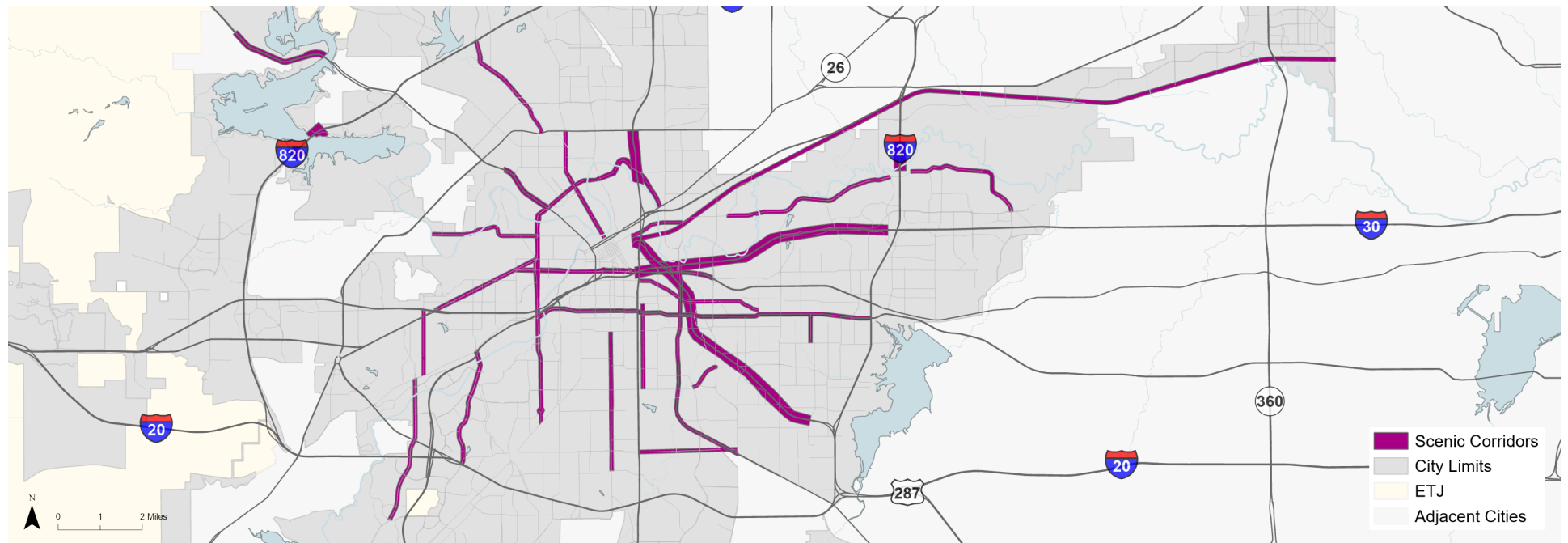
- Character of Fort Worth
- Architectural significance
- Historic event or person
- Character of neighborhood
- Designated historical area
- Views and vistas
- Gateways
- Connecting routes (e.g., connect scenic areas)
- Parks and natural features

The identification of these corridors and previous development regulations protecting the corridors has resulted in some changes now applied citywide.

The city's telecommunications ordinance evolved from the early restrictions established for scenic corridors. Other special considerations remain in place along the corridors, primarily related to billboards and signage.

Examples of existing scenic corridors include the following:

- North Main Street from the Stockyards to Downtown.
- Lancaster Avenue from Camp Bowie Boulevard to South Beach Street.
- I-35W from 28th Street exit south to the centerline of the Trinity River.
- I-30 from Downtown east to Loop 820 East.
- US 287 (Martin Luther King Freeway) from Downtown southeast to Village Creek Road.



Source: City of Fort Worth, Planning & Data Analytics Department, 2023.

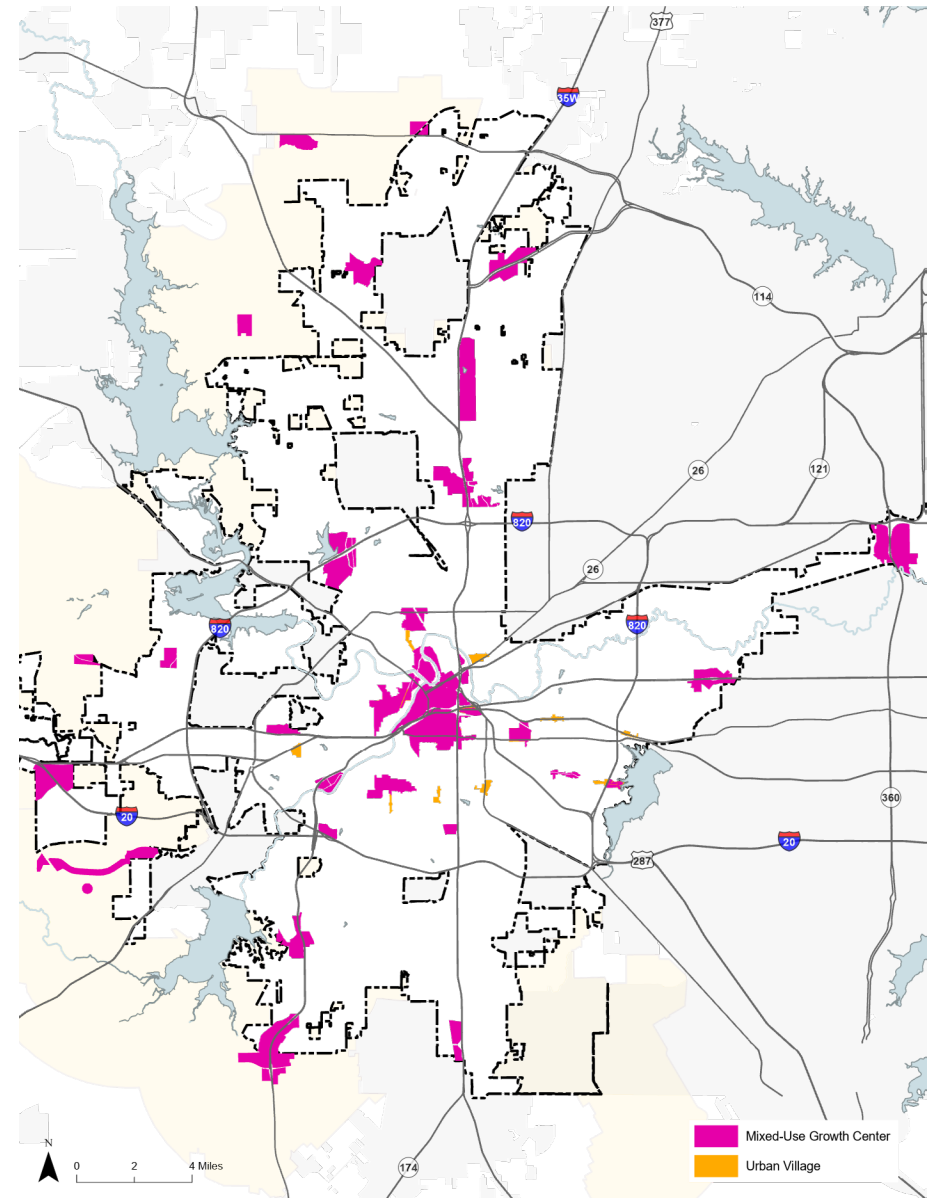
**MIXED-USE GROWTH CENTERS & URBAN VILLAGES**

Nearly all of the urban design principles that have been identified in this chapter (e.g., pedestrian-oriented development, strategically located and well-designed public spaces and buildings, accessible open spaces, etc.) are essential elements of successful mixed-use growth centers and urban villages. These places have a concentration of jobs, housing, entertainment, public spaces, civic buildings, transportation options, and pedestrian activity. This variety of land uses within a walkable, human-scaled environment creates great urban places while helping to reduce automobile dependency.

The character of walkable urban places is influenced by the urban design approaches used to guide their development. Within mixed-use growth centers, the highest density developments should be located near each center’s commercial core. Lower density developments, including small multifamily buildings and single-family homes, should be located on the growth center’s periphery. Within the higher-density core, building fronts should form consistent edges, outlining the street space and defining a public realm in which sidewalk entrances and stoops contribute to social interaction and neighborhood safety.

Mixed-use growth centers should also include a diversity of housing types and densities. Buildings with different footprints, heights, and scales will generate housing options for households of varying size and income within the same neighborhood. The development of mixed-income communities is a goal of the City’s housing policy, and urban design can play a role in ensuring that the initiatives listed in Chapter 5: Housing achieve this goal.

Within mixed-use growth centers, urban design elements should be incorporated that promote walking and cycling as alternatives to driving. A legible, pedestrian-scaled street grid is critical to promoting walking and cycling. Such a network offers the possibility of various routes to destinations, and is more efficient than contemporary cul-de-sac subdivisions. Growth center and urban village streets should be an inviting pedestrian environment enhanced by the streetscape amenities discussed earlier. A network of bicycle routes can provide another safe, non-polluting, transportation option within and between growth centers.



Source: City of Fort Worth, Planning & Data Analytics Department, 2023.

**SUSTAINABLE URBANISM**

The City of Fort Worth has numerous policies, goals, and objectives that, when implemented together, promote a concept known as sustainable urbanism. Sustainable urbanism is defined as walkable and transit-served urban environments integrated with high performance buildings, accessible green spaces, and high-performance infrastructure.



Source: Sustainable Urbanism, Rethinking the Future: re-thinkingthefuture.com

**SUSTAINABLE URBANISM IN ACTION:**

**Walkable Urbanism**

Walkable urbanism requires a wide range of housing types within comfortable walking distance of many daily activities, all connected by pedestrian-friendly streets. The City directs growth towards mixed-use growth centers and urban villages, areas that are intended to have a variety of land uses within a walkable and human-scaled environment.

**Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)**

TOD is a key component of the City’s effort to increase housing options and to improve mobility for residents. TOD describes a compact urban village that is centered around and coordinated with a transit station in its use and design. Significant TOD opportunity sites exist around TEXRail stations and along Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) corridors.

**LEED Program**

The City encourages new buildings and neighborhoods to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification or comparable green building standards. The development standards for both Panther Island and the Near Southside districts accept LEED certification in lieu of required building façade elements. NEZ design guidelines incorporate LEED design elements that encourage new infill buildings to be energy efficient by utilizing natural lighting and ventilation.

The City of Fort Worth uses the following goals and objectives – as well as policies and strategies that follow – to build a city that residents love, visitors remember, and businesses want to be part of.

## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

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- 1 Create an attractive, well-designed city that enhances community image and attracts the private investment necessary to create vibrant growth centers, thriving entertainment districts, and safe neighborhoods.**
  - Employ appropriate urban design principles in all development projects and area plans to create memorable places throughout Fort Worth.
  - Partner with Downtown Fort Worth Inc. to update the Downtown Strategic Action Plan in 2023.
  
- 2 Design and construct urban streets, plazas, and other public spaces that promote pedestrian activity, enable the full enjoyment of the public realm, and create memorable places that people want to visit.**
  - Design and construct streetscape improvements in selected urban villages, mixed-use growth centers, and transit-oriented development (TOD) locations as funding becomes available.

## POLICIES

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- Promote mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, and transit-oriented development (TOD) as described above, in Chapter 4: Land Use, and in the Planning Sector Policies contained in Appendix C.
- Use urban design as a tool to revitalize central city neighborhoods and commercial districts to ensure they are highly desirable places, and to redirect a significant amount of future population and employment growth into these areas.
- Implement policies, strategies, and regulations that ensure good urban design, such as mixed-use and urban residential zoning, form-based codes, and TOD and urban villages development.
- Build on transportation plans and policies to improve the influence of good urban design on complete streets projects, land use and transportation integration, and transportation project delivery.
- Promote and strengthen infill urban development opportunities, such as through the Urban Village Development Program.
- Promote downtown, the hospital district, and other mixed-use districts as crucial generators of economic growth and sources of community vitality that creates competitive advantage for Fort Worth.
- Improve zoning and subdivision regulations to streamline infill development.
- Improve design standards for public and civic building, and spaces.
- Require site design focused on improving the human experience.
- Improve the quality and urban design impact of development standards with regular reviews and amendments.

## STRATEGIES

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- Coordinate with redevelopment organizations to prepare, review, and update development standards and guidelines for mixed-use growth centers, urban villages, and TOD areas.
- Involve affected property owners, residents, and other interested parties in the development of urban design approaches and the selection of appropriate urban design elements.
- Support community efforts to create form-based zoning districts that reflect the aspirations of stakeholders to foster the development of attractive and vibrant walkable urban neighborhoods.
- Integrate practices aimed at improving environmental quality with innovative urban design approaches. An example of this integration is using green infrastructure, accessible green spaces, and low-impact development such as pervious surfaces that absorb stormwater within surface parking lots.