

Downtown Brand & Governance

Historic Downtown & Frisco Square

Frisco Square and historic Downtown (or the Rail District) are two significant locations within the City and the greater region. However, throughout the region there is a lack of awareness of what is truly Frisco’s “downtown.” Rather than extending the notion of more than one city center or downtown, or that one district is the “true” downtown over the other, city leadership continues to work to connect the two areas and districts.

THE RAIL DISTRICT & WAYFINDING/SIGNAGE

The Rail District brand is relatively new to Downtown Frisco and this plan stands to help unify the brand messaging with development opportunities and community messaging. Within the Center City District, the Rail District is one of many components to Frisco’s character and culture – one that seeks to celebrate the community’s agriculture and rail history that was foundational to Downtown’s creation.

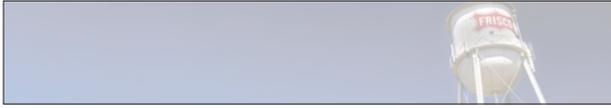
As Downtown continues to develop the City should work with community organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, and local businesses to create consistent messaging on the brand throughout the community.

Wayfinding for Downtown Frisco should be undertaken in phases and as specific development or street infrastructure projects are completed. The City has heavily invested in signage and branding for the Center City District; this plan is not suggesting that strategy or brand be disregarded, but the City should update marketing materials to clarify that the Rail District is one of the many areas contained within the Center City District.

Additionally, within The Rail District, pedestrian-scaled signs indicating public spaces and public parking locations would serve a large benefit to locals and visitors alike, especially since several stakeholders

Figure 27: Downtown Signage Examples





indicated many of the locations available for parking in Downtown are difficult to find or visitors do not know they are open to the public.

Wayfinding and signage related to parking is critically important for efficiency and safety of users in downtown areas. In his book “The High Cost of Free Parking”, UCLA professor Donald Shoup provides research suggesting that up to 30% of auto congestion is related to drivers searching for parking. While this phenomenon is likely more noticeable in large central business districts, it does highlight the correlation between traffic congestion and searching for parking; making it important for the City to create a multi-pronged approach to parking-related wayfinding and signage that focuses on two key user groups – drivers and pedestrians.

Examples of appropriate wayfinding policies and installation for automobiles includes:

- Signage placed on the periphery of the district to inform drivers of parking options before they enter Downtown;
- Signs should indicate the location of public parking, rate information (if applicable), and the hours of use; and
- Additional signage should be made available near public parking lots that indicate parking availability (as technology increases), directions to additional parking if lot is full, policies and guidelines, and pay information (if applicable).

Examples of wayfinding policies and installation for pedestrians include:

- Signs located within parking lots and on Main Street indicating parking locations; and
- Signage indicating current location relative to nearby landmarks.

PUBLIC ART AND ACTIVATION

Public art is a key piece of Downtown activation and character – Downtown Frisco has already begun to install various art pieces throughout the area, including around the gazebo and on some

buildings with murals and other local artist paintings.

The City should continue to work with local artists, galleries and organizations to find events and spaces throughout the area where art could be utilities, either permanently or temporarily. Additionally, the City should make sure to coordinate with the Public Arts Master Plan currently underway to ensure key locations in Downtown, such as the 4th Street Plaza or within the Design District, are included in strategies for implementation and future public art.

Downtown Management Options

Developing a downtown business mix that not only fills market gaps but that also creates the overall atmosphere and synergy needed for the district as a whole to succeed requires diligence, a tight focus on one or two well-defined economic development goals, close collaboration with a broad network of public- and private-sector partners, and an arsenal of tools to attract entrepreneurial talent and support downtown businesses.

Unlike shopping malls, which are usually owned and managed by a single entity, the buildings in older downtowns are almost always owned by multiple property owners. Malls have specific parameters for the types of businesses to which they lease space, with careful consideration of where each business should be located within the mall. For example, businesses that sell complementary products to demographically similar customers are often clustered together to maximize foot traffic and visibility. Businesses that offer convenience products are usually placed in high traffic areas, and anchors are placed at the ends of corridors, drawing shoppers past stores they might not otherwise notice. But downtown leasing decisions are almost always made independently, by individual property owners, usually without an overall leasing strategy for the district to guide their decisions. Also, unlike shopping malls, which almost always have full-time marketing staff who develop and execute sophisticated

marketing programs, downtown marketing often becomes the ad hoc responsibility of downtown business owners and therefore often suffers from volunteer burnout.

Downtown Frisco has several of these elements already in place and ready to go, it is just a matter of identifying a successful management structure to implement the vision. The Downtown Frisco Merchant's Association is primed to take the lead as a downtown management organization as they are already networking the multitude of owners and businesses along Main Street and in the surrounding areas of downtown. Their well-connected network will help set the stage for a successful implementation of the policies and recommendations in this plan that are needed to craft a strong unique and localized branding effort for Downtown.

This has especially already begun to occur, as stated earlier, with the Rail District moniker and subsequent new development projects, such as Patios at the Rail, embracing that name. Working with the Chamber of Commerce and other local merchants, such as the organizers of the StrEATS Festival, the Downtown Merchant's Association can unite the players in Downtown in a platform that allows more financial prowess and capabilities. Additionally, the Frisco Heritage Museum should also be involved and included in the management organization to ensure the historic character and "vibe" of Main Street and the adjacent neighborhoods continues to maintain the element of uniqueness several stakeholders indicated they would like to see remain in Downtown.

It is also important to note that the Downtown Merchant's Association, or any subsequent downtown management organization, work to unite the multiple players in the community. A downtown with too many organizations, entities or individuals trying to steer the direction or implement a vision can lead to brand and development confusion. The creation of such organization under a plan like this one ensures that the vision is implemented in a way that the community understands and can take hold of as more projects and opportunities arise in Downtown.

For these, and many other reasons, a professionally staffed downtown management organization can make the critical difference between

high-performing downtowns and those that perform at an average or sub-par level. Almost all high-performing downtowns employ at least one professional downtown manager. The Dallas Design District has a staff of six focused on the district's management and marketing, plus two allied staff who focus on leasing. Among communities comparable in size to Frisco, the Main Street programs in Amarillo, Beaumont, Denton, Laredo, McKinney, San Angelo, and Tyler, have two full-time staff people; the programs in many communities smaller than Frisco, such as that in La Grange (population: 4,690) support two full-time staff members, as well (other smaller towns with two downtown management staff include Brenham, Ennis, Harlingen, Henderson, Kilgore, Lufkin, Marshall, Mount Pleasant, Rio Grande City, San Marcos, and Seguin).

There are several ways in which Frisco might structure and support a professionally staffed downtown management program:

Texas Main Street Program

The Texas Main Street Program, housed in the Texas Historical Society, selects up to five communities annually to participate in the program. Participation provides numerous benefits, including technical assistance in architectural and urban design, business development, marketing, strategic planning, organizational management, and other topics – and, consequently, the selection process is competitive. In selecting communities, the Program takes into consideration the historic fabric and historic character of the district; the level of commitment of public- and private-sector stakeholders to the downtown revitalization/development process; willingness to fully fund a downtown management program, including employing a full-time professional manager; the cohesiveness of the district's business composition and physical form; and demonstrated need for the State's assistance. The Program also takes into consideration geographic distribution in selecting communities to participate in the program. In communities with more than 50,000 residents, a local Main Street program may be housed in either city government or in a nonprofit organization. Program expenses (including the manager's salary and benefits) are usually shared by the public and private sectors for several years, then are gradually supported (at least in part) by Public



Improvement District and/or Tax Increment Financing revenues as the downtown's economy grows.

The Main Street Approach (Informally Adopted)

The Main Street Approach, developed by the National Main Street Center, involves incremental, comprehensive activity in four broad work categories:

- Design involves all the physical aspects of the downtown district – building rehabilitation, new construction, parking supply and management, storefront design and presentation, window display design, public space design, etc.
- Organization involves leveraging the skills, resources, and vantage points of a broad range of public- and private-sector stakeholders who, together, develop a shared strategic plan for the district.
- Promotion involves marketing the district, using a consistent message and image, to residents, visitors, and potential investors.
- Economic Vitality involves strengthening and expanding the downtown's economy by strengthening existing businesses, developing or attracting new businesses, attracting investment for property development, and ensuring that adequate tools and resources are in place to support downtown business and property development.

Downtown stakeholders, from both the public and private sectors, identify one or two major economic development strategies for the district, then identify and implement key activities in each of these four work categories to advance each of these strategies. This creates a sturdy, shared framework for the downtown development initiative.

Hundreds of downtown districts throughout the US have adopted the Main Street Approach independently to organize their downtown development activities, without participating in a statewide Main Street program. The National Main Street Center prohibits these local programs from using its “Main Street” trademark – but they can join

the National Main Street Center's membership program and attend the Center's conferences and training programs. As is the case with most local Main Street programs throughout the country, these independent programs are usually financially supported by the public and private sectors for several years, then create a Public Improvement District or use Tax Increment Financing to cover part or all of the program's operating expenses (including professional staff) as the district's economic performance improves.

Public Improvement District

Public Improvement Districts are designated areas in which property owners agree to pay an assessment, based on property valuation, in order to cover part or all of the costs of improvements and activities benefiting that area. Many Texas communities have enacted Public Improvement Districts for residential neighborhood development (such as Frisco's Panther Creek PID), but PIDs are also used to support downtown revitalization and development activities. In addition to helping pay for infrastructure and public space improvements, PIDs can also engage in business development, district promotion, augmenting public safety and cleanliness, and enhancing cultural experiences. And, PID revenues can cover the costs of operating the PID itself. Some PIDs (particularly those in urban neighborhood commercial districts) focus primarily on augmenting municipal ‘clean and safe’ activities; others, however, address the full range of revitalization needs.

There are scores of downtown PIDs in Texas, plus PIDs working in neighborhood commercial districts throughout larger cities like Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio. Downtown PID budgets vary, depending on property values and district size. Plano adopted a downtown PID in 2014; the PID's budget is currently \$181,000, with assessments of \$0.15 per \$100 of assessed taxable value. The downtown PID in Waco, which was established in 1988, raised \$450,000 in 2017 with assessments of \$0.10 per \$100.

ROLE OF PRIVATE-SECTOR ENTITIES IN SUPPORTING DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT

Neither the public nor private sector can revitalize a downtown independently; successful revitalization requires active, strategically

coordinated collaboration between both sectors, with each contributing its skills, resources, and vantage points. Financial institutions can make preferential lending programs available for downtown business and property development. Local and regional foundations can provide incentive grants and loan guarantees, and they can support business development, job training, and promotion. Major employers can invest in downtown historic and sustainable energy tax credit projects and sponsor downtown marketing activities. Downtown property owners can support the district's business development strategy. Business owners can support the business development strategy, also, adapting their merchandise mix, activating their storefront window displays, and aligning their marketing activities with those of the overall district. Civic, school, and religious organizations can offer volunteer support for business development, public space improvement, and marketing activities. Industrial development commissions can include downtown space in the region's inventory of industrial space and look for opportunities to place small-scale industries downtown. And so on. There is literally a role for every public and private sector community entity in downtown revitalization.

Mechanisms to bring the Public and Private Sectors Together

The public and private sectors can also collaborate on incentive programs to support and encourage downtown business development. Some particular examples that Frisco might consider:

- **Loan repayment deferral for high-priority, capital-intensive businesses:** It is often difficult for capital-intensive businesses like restaurants, which have high initial outlays for equipment and furnishings, to generate enough cash flow in their first few years of operation to repay start-up loans. Some cities have created programs to help alleviate financial pressure on capital-intensive downtown business start-ups. For example, Winston-Salem, North Carolina launched a program called Restaurant Row to help attract a small cluster of new restaurants to an underused block of downtown buildings. Restaurateurs can borrow up to 70 percent of the money needed to launch a new restaurant; the City then uses Community Development

Block Grant money to repay the loans for the first two years, relieving much of the financial pressure on the new restaurants. The restaurateurs then repay the City for those two years of debt service at the end of the loan term.

- **Forgivable loans for high priority businesses:** Several dozen US cities offer forgivable loans to encourage development of high priority downtown businesses. In Waterville, Maine, for example, entrepreneurs interested in launching a business identified by the downtown management program as a high priority business (or existing businesses interested in expanding to offer products or services identified as high priorities) can borrow up to \$50,000 for five years. They make interest-only payments, with 20 percent of the original principal forgiven each year, as long as they remain in business and conform with the forgivable loan program's requirements (which include being open at least 48 hours per week, changing window displays at least twice monthly, and other practices that benefit both the business and the overall district).
- **Crowdfunding for high priority businesses:** Countless small businesses throughout the US are owned by multiple partners, rather than by single owners. In many cases, the businesses are also the owners' main source of income, and the owners are actively involved in the business's operation. But in some cases, people form investment groups for the specific purpose of creating a business for which they believe a need exists or for saving a business in danger of closing. For example, the members of the local police department in Clare, Michigan pooled their money in 2009 to buy a 100-year-old downtown bakery whose owners were retiring.

Crowdfunding – using internet-based platforms to raise money for a business or a cause – has been around for nearly 20 years. But, with the passage of the federal Jumpstart Our Business Startups (JOBS) Act in 2012 and finalization of its operating regulations in 2014, crowdfunding has experienced exponential growth as a tool for capitalizing small business startups and expansions. Equity-based crowdfunding (one of four types of



crowdfunding) is regulated by Section CF of the JOBS Act. Under Section CF, businesses are permitted to raise a maximum of \$1 million annually from private investors. The amount that individuals can invest is limited, due to the risk involved in investing in small businesses, but it generally ranges between \$1,000-\$10,000 per person.

The City of Frisco and downtown business and property owners could explore and promote these two options (private investment groups and equity-based crowdfunding) for capitalizing high-priority new business development and business expansion in downtown Frisco.