

TRANSFORM
DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE

This section of the Plan identifies "priorities" for transformational projects in Downtown Brownsville. These are aspirational, impactful projects that will set Brownsville apart from other downtowns in the region, the state and even the nation.

1 ADAMS STREET PASEO

During the Downtown planning workshop, Adams Street was identified for its potential to function as an important multimodal corridor linking major destinations in the Downtown and beyond. At the southeast end, the street connects to the pedestrian spines of TSC and UTRGV, then extends northwest passing by the Plaza bus terminal, Market Square and the south side of Washington Plaza. And while Elizabeth and Washington Streets function as the primary retail streets for Downtown, Adams Street has its own character and is emerging as Downtown's "restaurant row" with several of Downtown's most popular restaurants. Planners and stakeholders saw an opportunity to reinforce Adams Street as both a destination and a transportation corridor that could prioritize alternative means of transportation between multiple destinations.

Shared Street Concept

A "shared street" is a street in which vehicles, pedestrians and bikes "share" the right-of-way (as opposed to separated lanes for each) resulting in slower speeds and enhanced pedestrian activity. In 2020, Brownsville adopted its current Unified Development Code (UDC) which recognized this street type and adopted the term "straza" to denote its function as both street and plaza.

Adams Street, as well as 11th and 12th Streets, are good candidates for this type of street design as they prioritize pedestrian and bike mobility while still allowing vehicular access but at slower speeds. They can also be designed with removable or retractable bollards which allow the street to be easily closed for festivals, street markets, and other community events.

A transformation of the street could begin small, with one to three blocks of the street redesigned as a shared street, likely centered on the Market Square block.

"Bring back the trolley!"

One of the popular ideas that was readily supported by the public and stakeholders, was to bring back the Downtown trolley. Adams Street was seen as a potential route for the trolley that could connect the UTRGV and TSC campuses to the southeast, Downtown's major attractions, and the Mitte District and Gladys Porter Zoo. With the available surface parking in the Mitte District, the trolley could also facilitate a park-and-ride system to bring more daytime visitors into Downtown.



Example of a trolley in El Paso, TX

Source: Tripadvisor, El Paso Streetcar attraction page





Example of a shared street in West Palm Beach, FL

Source: Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU)



Example of a shared street in Sulphur Springs, TX

Source: East Texan Magazine, Sulphur Springs



Before: Adams Street between 12th and 13th Streets.

Adams Street today has a unique character and wide right-of way, but primarily serves vehicular traffic. Conversion of this corridor to a shared street concept would allow better use of space and a flexible right-of-way to accommodate a variety of experiences.

After: the same street segment re-imagined as a "shared street".

Note the flexible use of the street lanes for vehicles, transit and active mobility options. The lack of traditional curbing allows for flexible street-side uses including parking, public gathering spaces or patio dining. When closed down, this becomes a seamless festival street with minimal barriers.



Paseo Design Details

The Adams Street Paseo spans the approximately 60-foot right-of-way, reimagining the corridor to create a unique space that facilitates both movement and activation. At the center, a 25-foot shared street zone prioritizes low speeds and shared use, accommodating slow-moving vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians. This central shared zone is flanked by generous 17- to 18-foot sidewalk realms that incorporate the three sidewalk zones: amenity zone, clear walking zone, and frontage zone. Without curbs, landscaping and other elements within the amenity zone help visually and physically define the sidewalk realm from the shared lanes where vehicles are allowed.

Materials and furnishings along the Adams Street Paseo should be some of the highest quality and quantity found in the Downtown area, including brick or stone paving and the "Specialty" streetscape furnishing family. The Paseo also offers opportunities for installation of unique lighting fixtures (e.g., festoon lighting) and public art works, further differentiating this part of Downtown from the rest of the study area.



Current conditions along Adams Street.

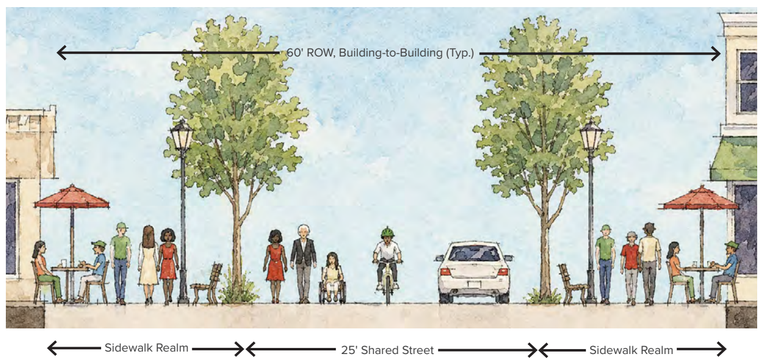


Figure 15. The Adams Street Paseo Conceptual Street Section

The Adams Street Paseo in Context

The Adams Street Paseo reaches far beyond the Downtown Core. This corridor stretches up to the reimagined Washington Park, where it makes connections to the 6th and 7th Street multimodal corridors, which then lead either southwest to the Switchyards and Amigoland Mall redevelopment areas or northeast to the Mitte Cultural District and associated destinations. The Adams Street corridor also stretches south through the Education and Innovation character area, across International Boulevard and ultimately connects to the pedestrian paseo through the UTRGV campus. In this way, the Adams Street Paseo fills in an important missing link between many of the study area's primary activity nodes.

Phasing & Expansion

The phasing of the Paseo should begin with a two to three block pilot section along Adams Street adjacent to Market Square. If proven successful, the concept can be expanded along Adams Street up to Washington Park and down to International Boulevard, including an enhanced crossing to connect to TSC and UTRGV campuses. Once Adams Street is complete, the same paseo concept may be considered for some of the east/west corridors in the Downtown Core, such as 11th and 12th Streets.

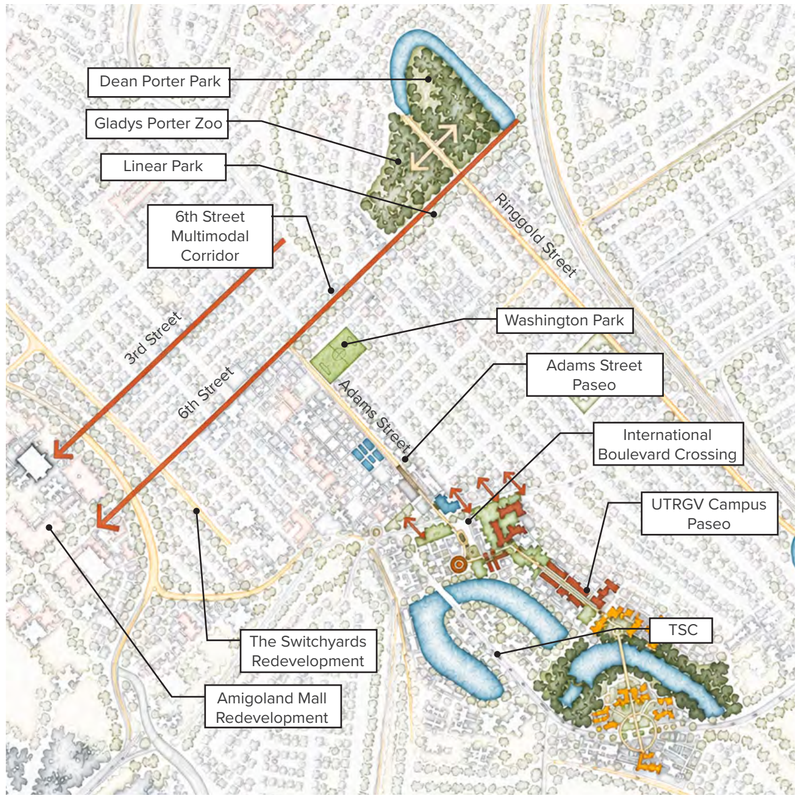
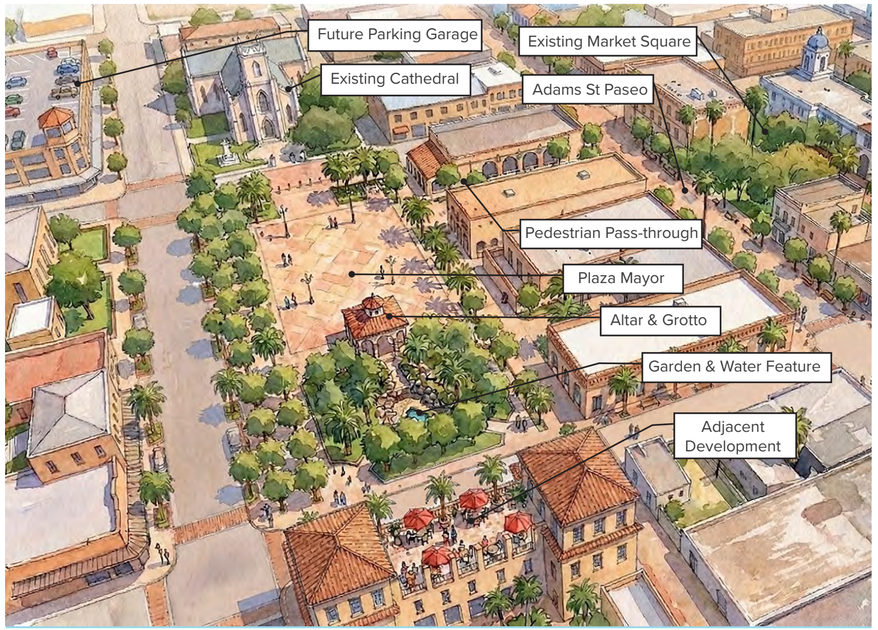


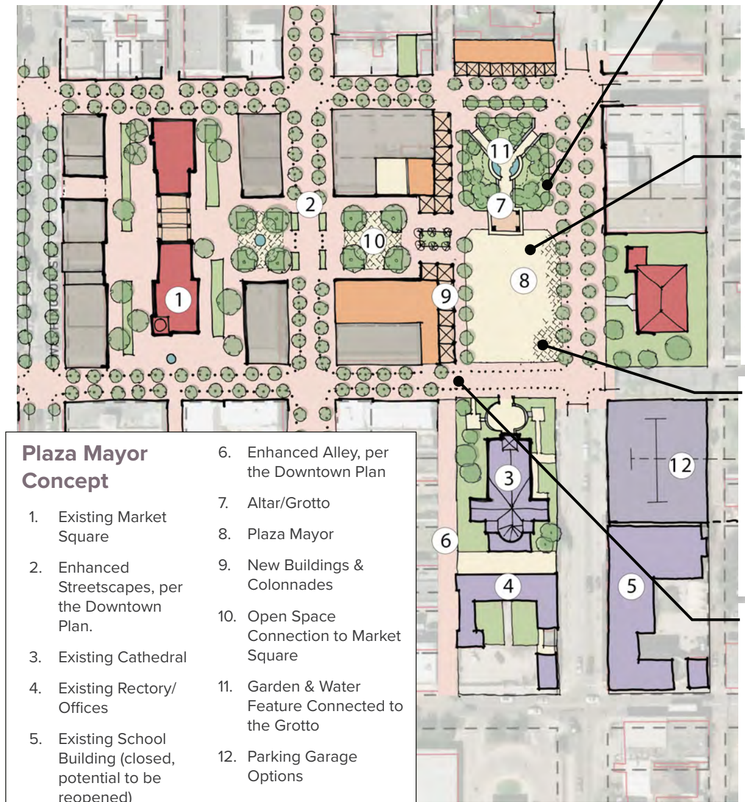
Figure 16. The Adams Street Paseo and Connections

2 PLAZA MAYOR

The Plaza Mayor concept has deep roots in Spanish and Latin American urban history as the central public square where civic, religious, and commercial life came together. Traditionally, it served as the symbolic heart of a city, hosting markets, festivals, ceremonies, and daily social life, often framed by churches, public buildings, and arcaded shops. In Downtown Brownsville, a Plaza Mayor would build on this tradition by creating a shared public space that reflects community identity, cultural heritage, and the City's historic character.

The Plaza Mayor concept presents a phased vision for transforming several blocks around the historic cathedral and Market Square in Downtown Brownsville. Early phases focus on practical improvements such as enhanced streetscapes, a better pedestrian alley, upgraded walkways, and reconfigured parking on cathedral properties. Later phases add larger public features, including the Plaza Mayor itself, an altar and grotto for outdoor masses, a landscaped garden with a water feature, colonnaded liner buildings to support nearby businesses, and a potential small Downtown parking garage. Together, these elements create a destination for residents, visitors, businesses, and community events while improving connectivity, beautifying the public realm, and reinforcing Downtown Brownsville as a civic and cultural heart.





Plaza Mayor Concept

1. Existing Market Square
2. Enhanced Streetscapes, per the Downtown Plan.
3. Existing Cathedral
4. Existing Rectory/ Offices
5. Existing School Building (closed, potential to be reopened)
6. Enhanced Alley, per the Downtown Plan
7. Altar/Grotto
8. Plaza Mayor
9. New Buildings & Colonnades
10. Open Space Connection to Market Square
11. Garden & Water Feature Connected to the Grotto
12. Parking Garage Options

Garden & Water Feature

A lushly landscaped space with shade, seating and a water feature that provides a peaceful experience adjacent to the grotto.



Altar & Grotto Structure

A multifunctional structure, the front of the structure facing the plaza would be an altar from where large outdoor masses can be presided over and the back of the structure facing the garden would be a contemporary grotto.



Plaza Mayor

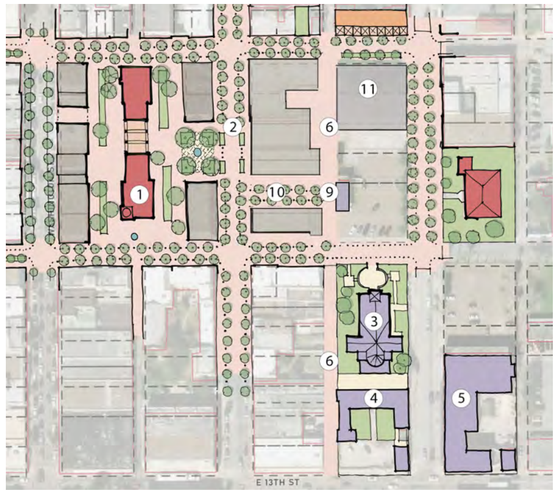
Based on the traditional Spanish plaza, this space is an approximately quarter-block-sized open plaza that can be multifunctional and utilized for a variety of community events, including large outdoor masses.



Colonnade-Lined Buildings

Buildings with colonnades surround the Plaza Mayor and garden to provide shaded walkways, promote interaction between the interior and exterior space, and make space for adjacent businesses to activate the public spaces.



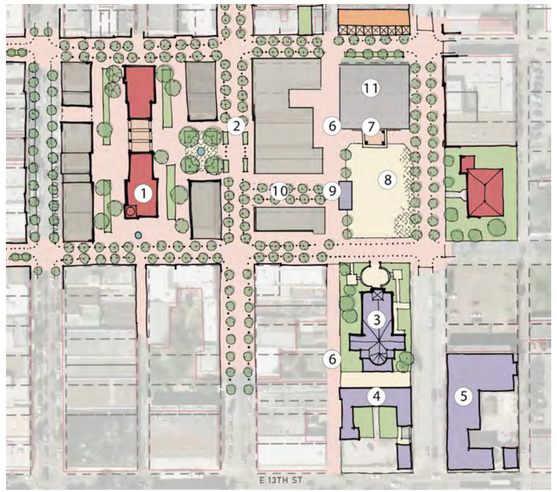


Phase 1

Includes items the City can initiate, such as streetscape enhancements, pass-through walkway from Market Square, and enhanced parking behind Jolie Petit.

Legend

1. Existing Market Square
2. Enhanced Streetscapes
3. Existing Cathedral
4. Existing Rectory/Offices
5. Existing School Building
6. Enhanced Alley
7. 7 - N/A, Reserved
8. 8 - N/A, Reserved
9. Existing Bookstore with mural
10. Enhanced Walkway (current parking lot)
11. Surface Parking (existing lot, updated)

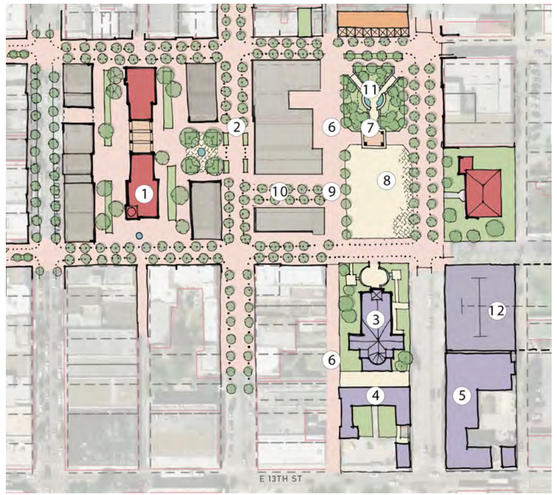


Phase 2

Adds the enhanced Plaza Mayor, but remains a multi-use space that can be used as both a plaza or parking based on need.

Legend

1. Existing Market Square
2. Enhanced Streetscapes
3. Existing Cathedral
4. Existing Rectory/Offices
5. Existing School Building
6. Enhanced Alley
7. Altar/Grotto
8. Plaza Mayor (multi-purpose, plaza & parking)
9. Existing Bookstore with mural
10. Enhanced Walkway (current parking lot)
11. Surface Parking (existing lot, updated)

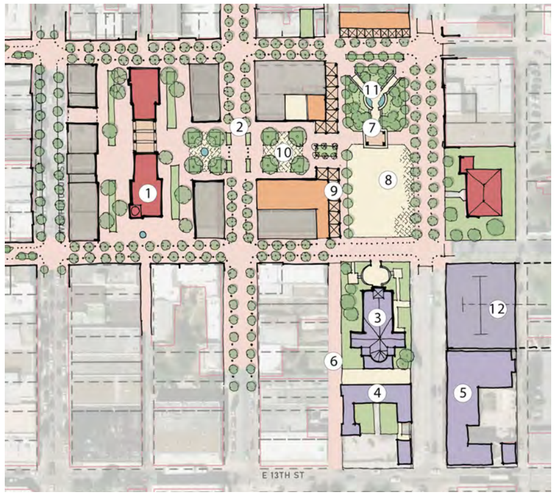


Phase 3

Introduces a parking garage or other parking solution, allowing the grotto, garden, and water feature to replace surface parking and enabling Plaza Mayor to function exclusively as a pedestrian plaza.

Legend

1. Existing Market Square
2. Enhanced Streetscapes
3. Existing Cathedral
4. Existing Rectory/Offices
5. Existing School Building
6. Enhanced Alley
7. Altar/Grotto
8. Plaza Mayor (no parking)
9. Existing Bookstore, removed
10. Enhanced Walkway (current parking lot)
11. Garden & Water Feature Connected to Grotto
12. Parking Garage Options



Phase 4

The City could acquire adjacent buildings and build new liner buildings and small plaza mirroring Market Square. This phase is optional.

Legend

1. Existing Market Square
2. Enhanced Streetscapes
3. Existing Cathedral
4. Existing Rectory/Offices
5. Existing School Building
6. Enhanced Alley
7. Altar/Grotto
8. Plaza Mayor (no parking)
9. New Buildings & Colonnades
10. Open Space Connection to Market Square
11. Garden & Water Feature Connected to Grotto
12. Parking Garage Options
13. Redevelopment of Private Properties on 11th Street with Arcades

3 SWITCHYARDS & AMIGOLAND

The Switchyards is an opportunity to reimagine the abandoned railroad corridor and adjacent industrial uses west of the Downtown Core as a new major redevelopment area. This location is the most appropriate space within the study area to allow new, larger-scale development projects as it does not face the same barriers that exist elsewhere.

Much of the land flanking the former railroad tracks is now owned by the City or the county. So while the City will play a role in incentivizing and catalyzing development at the Switchyards, the private sector will be the primary players in seeing this vision into reality.

Existing assets in this area include the historic depot building located along the abandoned rail corridor between 5th and 6th Streets, and the Amigoland Mall redevelopment that is just west of the Switchyards. Currently, TSC operates out of a portion of the old Mall, with plans to expand in the space.

Rails-to-Trails and Green Spaces

Once a physical barrier, the railroad corridor is a prime opportunity for a "rails-to-trails" project, by transforming it into a green asset for nearby residents and the entire Brownsville community. This transformation leverages underutilized land to support new housing, mixed-use development, and open space while preserving the corridor's industrial heritage.

This linear park and trail corridor will act as the catalyst for redevelopment at the Switchyards and should support walking, biking, recreation, and stormwater management. As new developments come to the area, they should be designed with dual-frontages to address both the adjacent street and trail corridor. Some space should also be reserved along the trail corridor for neighborhood parks.

Integrated landscape features, such as native plantings, bioswales, and seating areas, should be encouraged to enhance comfort and resilience while reflecting the Rio Grande Valley's ecology.

Reconnecting Neighborhoods

In the past, the rail corridor separated neighborhoods and limited access to Downtown amenities. The Switchyards concept reintroduces the gridded street network to restore neighborhood connectivity. New streets are designed to align with existing neighborhood grids, with the intent of seamlessly blending existing and new homes in the Switchyards with the rest of Downtown.

Additionally, the concept recommends extending 6th Street and 7th Street across the current levee to connect to Amigoland and any future development or activity that may happen in that area. This improved access strengthens connections to schools, parks, and retail destinations, making Downtown more accessible to residents across Brownsville.

Targeted Development Opportunities

Strategic redevelopment parcels along the corridor support context-sensitive growth while maintaining transitions to adjacent neighborhoods.

Together, the development types shown in the adjacent diagram and described on the following pages support incremental growth, reduce displacement pressures, and create a diverse, mixed-income district connected to Downtown.

To note, the concept plan is meant to serve as a guide for development in the area and the City should maintain flexibility to adapt to market realities.



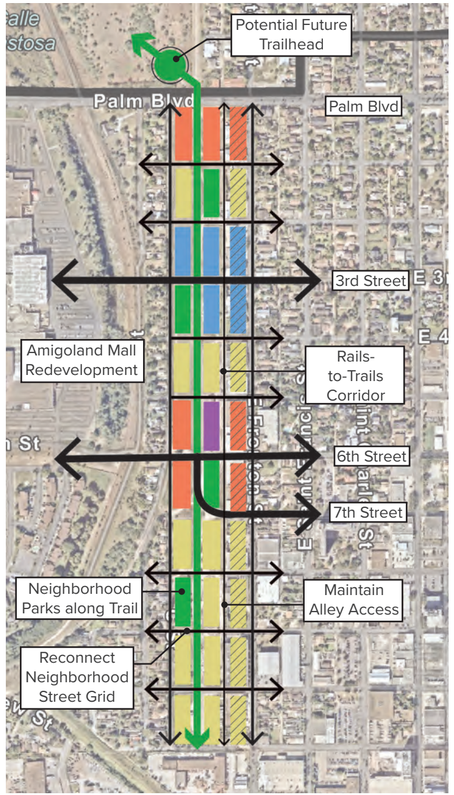


Figure 17. Switchyards Conceptual Redevelopment Opportunities



Medium-Density Mixed-Use

Concentrated near key intersections and trail access points at Palm Boulevard and 6th Street, these nodes support housing or employment above ground-floor retail, creating activity hubs along the corridor. The scale is anticipated to be approximately 5 stories for these development parcels. These blocks present the best opportunity for larger-scale, new development in the entire Downtown study area.



Low-Density Mixed-Use

A smaller scale mixed-use node at 3rd Street serves as a transition to nearby residential areas, these buildings may provide flexible live-work spaces, neighborhood retail, and small offices over ground floor retail. It is anticipated that the scale of buildings in this node are typically 3 stories.

- Medium-Density Mixed-Use
- Low-Density Mixed-Use
- Missing Middle Housing
- Parks & Trail Corridor
- Historic Depot Rehab into Public Space
- Warehouse Adaptive Reuse or Redevelopment













Missing Middle Housing

Townhomes, courtyard apartments, and small multifamily buildings increase housing choice and affordability while fitting within existing neighborhood scale.

Warehouse Adaptive Reuse

Existing industrial structures are preserved and repurposed for creative workspaces, food halls, maker spaces, or cultural venues, bringing new uses while also celebrating the corridor's rail and industrial history. This also presents an opportunity for lower-priced spaces for artists and makers that allows them to be near the Downtown Core without the prices or space constraints.

Parks and Open Space

Park spaces along the trail corridor provide a neighborhood amenity for surrounding residential as well as larger spaces to accommodate rest stop and trailheads along the trail corridor. These also provide opportunities for installation of public art pieces.

