

ACTIVATE
DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE

This section of the Plan includes a framework for Downtown's future that translates community input and analysis into guiding principles, character areas, catalytic projects, and implementation strategies focused on strengthening identity, connectivity, economic vitality, and quality of life.

IDENTITY FRAMEWORK

Character Areas

Downtown Brownsville is organized into a series of distinct yet interconnected character areas that illustrate how different parts of Downtown function today and how they can evolve over time. Each character area reflects its own strengths, opportunities, land use patterns, cultural assets, mobility connections, and community identity shaped through public engagement. These character areas provide a clear framework for guiding future public investment, private development, and placemaking efforts, while improving connectivity and reinforcing Downtown Brownsville's unique culture and border heritage. Collectively, they help organize recommendations and ensure that future change supports community priorities.



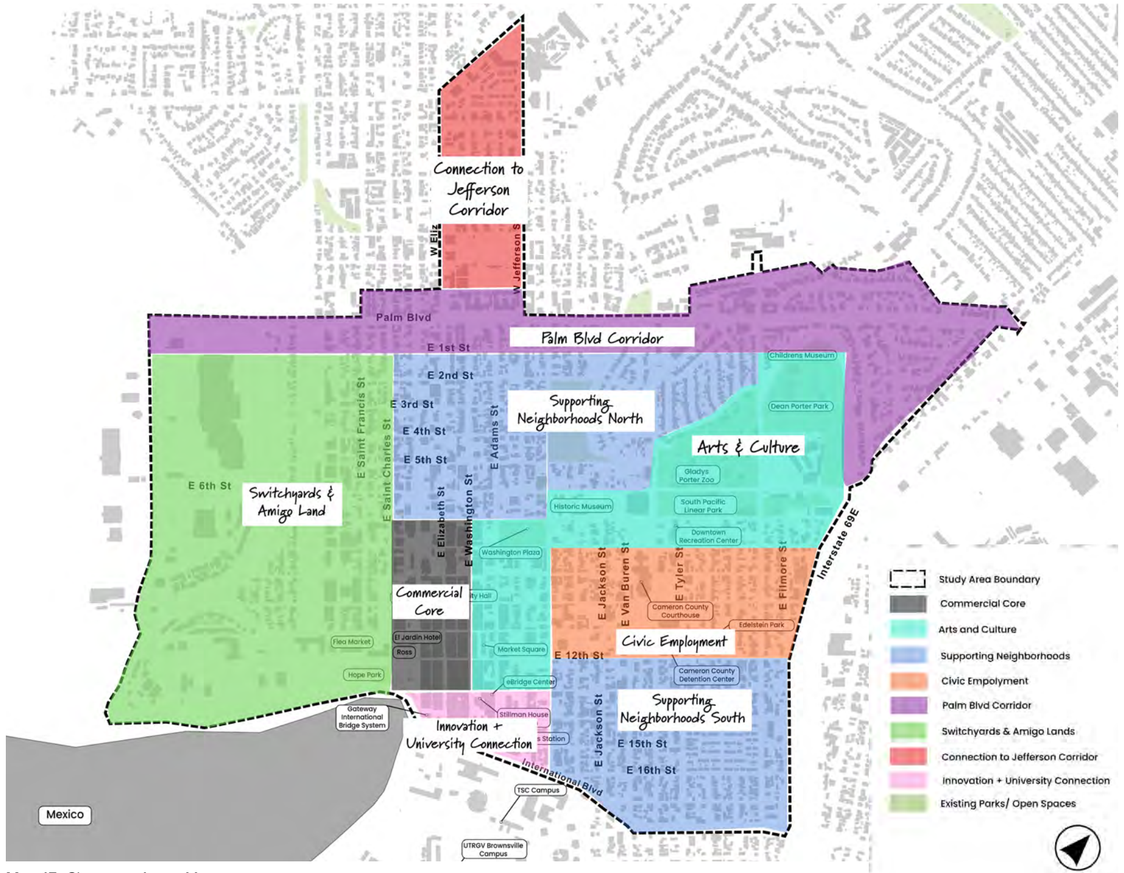






Character Areas Identified:

- Connection to Jefferson Corridor
- Palm Boulevard Corridor
- Supporting Neighborhoods North
- Supporting Neighborhoods South
- Arts & Culture
- Switchyards & Amigoland
- Commercial Core
- Civic Employment
- Innovation & University Connection



Map 15. Character Areas Map

Downtown Core

Commercial Heart and Primary Activity Area

The Downtown Core is the center of Brownsville's commercial, cultural, and social life. Anchored by Elizabeth Street, Washington Street, and Market Square, this area functions as the City's primary destination for shopping, dining, community gatherings, and events. Historic buildings, active storefronts, and strong pedestrian activity define the character of the core, while engagement highlighted the need for enhanced safety, shade, lighting, and business support.

Key Points:

- Primary pedestrian environment and economic engine of Downtown.
- Concentration of retail, dining, civic spaces, and cultural destinations.
- Strong historic character and identity.

Anticipated Uses:

Street-level retail and dining, upper-story housing, offices, hospitality, markets, and event spaces.

Scale:

Typically one to three stories, with opportunities for context-sensitive vertical mixed-use infill that respects historic context.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Additional public parking for everyday and event use.
- Public realm improvements that prioritize the pedestrian experience including lighting, shade, wayfinding, furnishings, and storefront activation.
- Alleyways and secondary streets that support service access and emerging pedestrian connections.
- Economic incentives that support small businesses, reduce vacancies, and strengthen Downtown's role as a regional destination.



Source: City of Brownsville



Innovation and University Connection

Higher Education, Innovation, and the Southern Gateway

This area just south of the Downtown Core links Downtown to TSC, UTRGV, the border Gateway Project, and transit connections near International Boulevard. It is the smallest of the character areas, but it houses many assets, such as a major regional transit station, the City's Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) and the eBridge Center. It represents a key opportunity to integrate education, innovation, housing, and employment. However, it does face challenges related to mobility and connectivity.

Key Points:

- Serves as a southern gateway into Downtown.
- Strong connection to higher education campuses and transportation facilities.
- Includes the international bridge and border crossing.
- International Boulevard is a high-traffic and high-congestion thoroughfare.

Anticipated Uses:

Higher education facilities, innovation spaces, student housing, mixed-use development, and supporting retail.

Scale:

Flexible, with opportunities for mid-density mixed-use development.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Physical and programmatic connections across International Boulevard that facilitate the flow of students and faculty between Downtown and the campuses.
- Address traffic and circulation from the border crossing, especially as it involves navigating the area as a pedestrian.
- Add branding signage for Downtown and higher education institutions celebrating their presence.





Arts and Culture

Creative and Cultural Activity Area

The Arts and Culture character area simultaneously celebrates Brownsville's modern creative energy and border heritage. Centered around Washington Park as a nexus, and the Ringgold Street, Adams Street, and the 6th and 7th Street corridors, this area focuses on destinations with museums, performance spaces, public art, and cultural programming. This area provides unique experiences with major assets such as the Mitte Cultural District, Gladys Porter Zoo, and the Linear Park, along with planned projects such as the Cannery and Museum of Fine Art renovation. Community input emphasized expanding arts offerings, improving walkable connections, and creating inviting public spaces that support both daily use and special events.

Key Points:

- Cultural anchor connecting arts, parks, and public spaces.
- Supports both daily activity and special events.
- Strong identity rooted in local history and creativity.

Anticipated Uses:

Museums, galleries, performance venues, cultural markets, creative studios, cafés, and event spaces along with supporting commercial and residential uses.

Scale:

Generally one to three stories, with flexibility for adaptive reuse and context-sensitive infill.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Washington Park revitalization, in partnership with the Sombrero Fest.
- Creation of a shared street or paseo along Adams Street.
- Safe crossings and multimodal infrastructure along Ringgold, 6th and 7th Streets.
- Investments that focus on multimodal connections between destinations, including a potential trolley or similar transit options that combine mobility with historic programming.
- Strong physical and programmatic connections to the Downtown Core and Mitte Cultural District are essential.
- Public art that reflects local history, language, and bicultural identity.





Switchyards and Amigoland

Redevelopment and Employment Opportunity Area

Located west of the Downtown Core, the Switchyards area is an abandoned railroad corridor surrounded by industrial sites, warehouse buildings, and large undeveloped parcels. West of the Switchyards is the former Amigoland Mall that is partially used by TSC. This area presents a significant opportunity for creative reuse and some of the only locations in the study area that are appropriate for new, large-scale housing and mixed-use development.

Key Points:

- Much of the land along the old rail corridor is owned by the City or county.
- Opportunity for large-scale development or redevelopment with fewer barriers than other parts of the study area.
- Potential to reconnect residential neighborhoods that were once cut off by the railroad.
- Reuse of the abandoned railroad corridor as a recreational and mobility asset.
- The adaptive reuse of Amigoland Mall is likely to continue with TSC expansion in that space.

Anticipated Uses:

Light industrial, adaptive reuse, maker spaces, flex employment, mixed-use development, housing, neighborhood retail, and open space.

Scale:

Flexible, ranging from low-rise adaptive reuse to mid-scale mixed-use development.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Rails-to-trails project along the former railroad track corridor.
- Encourage and/or incentivize adaptive reuse of warehouses and new housing or mixed-use developments in the area.
- New development should help prioritize multimodal access, front the trail corridor and address drainage infrastructure.
- Reconnect the street grids for residential neighborhood formerly cut off by the railroad.
- Connect 3rd and 6th Streets all the way to Amigoland Mall.
- Repurpose the historic rail depot as a destination.





Civic Employment

Institutional and Employment Center

The Civic Employment character area includes key public and institutional facilities such as the Federal Courthouse, county buildings, the Downtown Recreation Center, and Exhibition Hall, along with the planned future City facilities. This area supports daily employment activity and civic services while also presenting opportunities to strengthen the surrounding public realm.

Key Points:

- Anchors civic identity and daytime population.
- Concentration of government and institutional uses.
- Opportunity to enhance public-facing spaces.

Anticipated Uses:

Government and other offices, institutional facilities, supporting commercial and residential uses, and complementary retail and dining.

Scale:

Typically two to four stories, consistent with existing civic buildings.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- General improvements for enhancing pedestrian safety, crossings, and comfort around civic buildings.
- Parking for employees, providing great potential for shared parking agreements between daytime and nighttime weekend users.
- Shaded plazas, seating, and clear signage to support employee and visitor usability.
- Redevelopment or reuse of underutilized parcels and buildings to support business, civic, or residential uses.





Supporting Neighborhoods South

Residential and Infill Growth Area

This area includes the residential neighborhoods south of the Civic Employment area, and plays a key role in accommodating future residential growth while strengthening connections to Downtown destinations. Key corridors include Ringgold, 11th and 12th Streets. Notably, the housing authority's new Buena Vida community is in this area.

Key Points:

- Opportunity for infill and gentle density transitions.
- Supports housing choice and affordability.
- Important link between Downtown and southern gateways.

Anticipated Uses:

Residential development, infill development, missing middle housing, neighborhood retail, small parks, schools and community services.

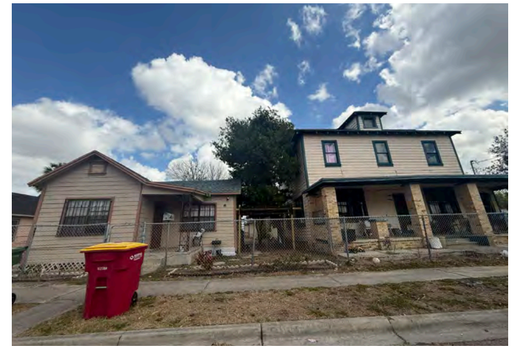
Scale:

Primarily one to two stories, with selective infill and moderate density projects.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Infill residential projects that are appropriate to the historical context.
- Programs that assist property owners with aesthetic and weatherization upgrades.
- Safe crossings and multimodal infrastructure along Ringgold, 11th and 12th Streets.
- General improvements for enhancing pedestrian safety, crossings, and walkability through residential neighborhoods.
- Encourage and/or incentivize neighborhood serving retail, goods, and services within walking distance of residences.
- Housing strategies and programs that expand attainable and mixed-income options while preventing displacement.





Supporting Neighborhoods North

Residential and Community Support Areas

This area includes the residential neighborhoods north of the Commercial Core and Arts & Culture Area, and provides housing, local character, and everyday support for Downtown activity. These areas contribute much-needed residential development to Downtown while preserving established neighborhood patterns. In order to keep residents in Downtown, they must be able to maintain access to everyday goods and services that support convenient lifestyles.

Key Points:

- Stable residential areas supporting Downtown vitality.
- Strong neighborhood identity and character, some historic properties.
- Close proximity to parks and cultural destinations.
- Lacking in serving residents' daily needs.

Anticipated Uses:

Residential infill development, missing middle housing, neighborhood retail and commercial, schools, and small parks.

Scale:

Primarily one to two stories, with selective infill and gentle transitions.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Encourage and/or incentivize neighborhood serving retail, goods, and services within walking distance of residences.
- General improvements for enhancing pedestrian safety, crossings, and walkability through residential neighborhoods.
- Programs that assist property owners with aesthetic and weatherization upgrades.
- Infill residential projects that are appropriate to the historical context.
- Home to commercial conversions are appropriate in this area.





Palm Boulevard Corridor

Northern Gateway and Mobility Corridor

Palm Boulevard serves as the major northern entry into Downtown Brownsville. Community feedback emphasized safety, crossings, aesthetics, and streetscape quality along this corridor.

Key Points:

- Palm Boulevard is both a functional and visual gateway into Downtown.
- This is a high-traffic volume corridor.
- High visibility corridor for Downtown identity.
- Key route for multimodal movement.
- Currently, safety is a concern with many driveway cuts and even trail crossings causing conflicts.

Anticipated Uses:

Institutional uses, mixed-use infill, housing, and neighborhood-serving retail.

Scale:

Varies along the corridor, with opportunities for mid-scale development near key intersections.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Keep the character of the palm trees along the corridor, and enhance with additional landscaping with a focus on shade creation and aesthetics that also support biodiversity.
- Add branding signage for Downtown.
- Promote historic preservation of the applicable properties along the corridor.
- Remove/relocate driveway cuts where feasible.
- Enhance the trail crossing(s) for safety and visibility.
- Streetscape improvements that prioritize pedestrian safety with sidewalks, lighting, shade, and enhanced crossings.





Connection to the Jefferson Corridor

Health and Employment Connector Area

This area along the Jefferson Street corridor was strategically included in the study area due to its connections between Downtown, Memorial Stadium, Valley Baptist Hospital, and the Housing Authority's Bougainvillea redevelopment. Engagement emphasized the need for safe, comfortable multimodal connections and a coordinated corridor identity. The corridor can support future development and investment associated with Valley Baptist Hospital, nearby neighborhoods, and surrounding employment centers.

Key Points:

- The Jefferson Corridor can strengthen connections between Downtown, Valley Baptist Hospital, and surrounding neighborhoods.
- Jefferson Street is an important local corridor to Downtown.

Anticipated Uses:

Healthcare-related services, housing, supportive services, neighborhood-serving retail, employment uses, and transit facilities.

Scale:

Generally low- to mid-rise, consistent with surrounding development.

Primary Opportunities and Investments:

- Focus on facilitating transit, bike, and pedestrian connectivity along the Jefferson Street corridor to Downtown.
- Enhanced and safe crossings into Downtown across Palm Boulevard.
- Encourage land uses along the Jefferson Street corridor that support and are supported by proximity to Downtown.
- The Bougainvillea redevelopment is anticipated to provide accessible, service-enriched supportive housing that supports long-term housing stability and improved access to services. The project aligns with broader goals of strengthening the Jefferson Corridor, expanding housing opportunities, and supporting community investment around Valley Baptist Hospital and Downtown.





PUBLIC REALM FRAMEWORK

The public realm in Downtown Brownsville includes all publicly accessible outdoor spaces such as sidewalks, streets, plazas, parks, and alleys. These spaces shape the daily experience of residents and visitors and strongly influence perceptions of safety, comfort, identity, and vibrancy. Well-designed public realm improvements can serve both functional and social purposes, supporting walkability, economic activity, and community life.

High temperatures, limited shade, inconsistent sidewalk conditions, and gaps in connectivity between destinations currently limit how long people stay and move through Downtown. Public realm strategies in this chapter focus on creating a shaded, walkable, and welcoming environment that reflects Brownsville's culture and supports everyday use as well as special events. These strategies are intended to be applied across Downtown's character areas, with flexibility to respond to each area's context, intensity, and role within the broader Downtown network.

A good public realm is about creating a great experience for people, it should aim to make walking in Downtown safe, comfortable, interesting and purposeful.



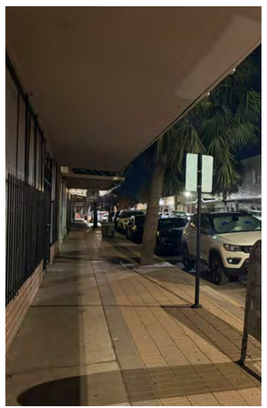
The physical framework examines Downtown Brownsville's existing built environment and physical conditions, including land use patterns, buildings, streets, open spaces, and the movement of people and vehicles. These elements influence how Downtown functions on a daily basis and shape safety, comfort, economic activity, and overall sense of place. Understanding these conditions helps identify both barriers that limit Downtown's potential and opportunities that can support reinvestment and revitalization.

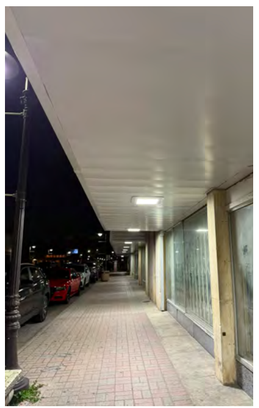
The Physical Framework Map highlights key destinations, civic and cultural anchors, parks, and activity centers within Downtown Brownsville. In the Walkable Destinations Map on page 35, a quarter-mile walking radius is shown around these destinations, representing an approximate five-minute walk. Areas where these walk sheds overlap indicate locations where pedestrian activity is strongest and where investments in sidewalks, crossings, lighting, and streetscape amenities can have the greatest impact. These areas also represent priority locations for future commercial activity, housing, and public space improvements.

Downtown Brownsville benefits from a compact and connected street grid that supports walkability and access to destinations such as Market Square, Washington Park, civic buildings, and cultural facilities. However, the quality and consistency of pedestrian infrastructure varies across the study area. Gaps in sidewalks, limited tree canopy, inconsistent lighting, and exposure to heat reduce pedestrian comfort and affect the use of public spaces, particularly during daytime hours.

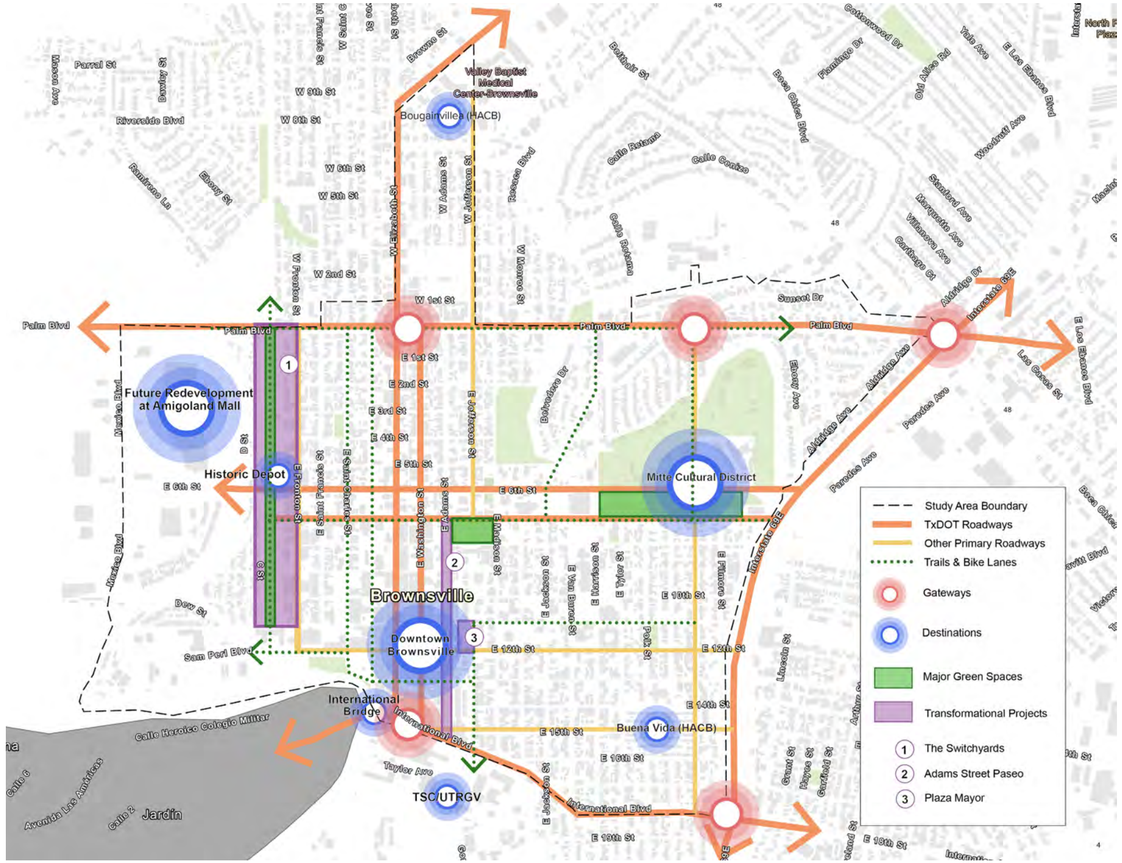
Several major corridors, including Palm Boulevard, International Boulevard, and U.S. Highway 77/Interstate 69E, function as key gateways into Downtown but also create challenges for pedestrian movement. These corridors require targeted improvements to crossings, streetscape design, wayfinding, and green infrastructure to better connect surrounding neighborhoods, institutions, and employment centers to the Downtown Core. Together, these physical framework considerations help guide future investments that strengthen Downtown Brownsville as a connected, walkable, and resilient urban center.







Examples of inconsistent lighting in Downtown Brownsville.



Map 16. Downtown Public Realm Framework Map

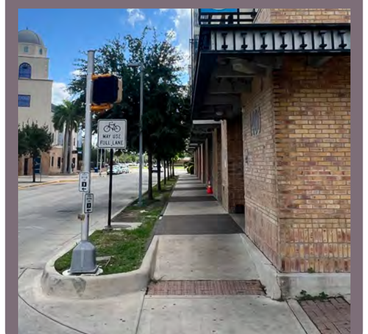
Sidewalks

Downtown sidewalks are a vital part of the public realm and play a key role in shaping the Downtown experience. Beyond movement, sidewalks function as social and economic spaces that support walking, gathering, dining, and shopping. High-quality sidewalks improve safety, comfort, and accessibility while reinforcing Downtown identity and supporting active street life and local businesses. Sidewalks may vary in width in different contexts throughout Downtown, being wider in high-pedestrian traffic areas. Sidewalks encompass all of the elements behind-the-curb to the building face and may include various zones.

The Amenity Zone: The strip of space directly adjacent to the street that provides a buffer between pedestrians and cars and accommodates streetscape elements like street trees, lighting, and seating.



The Walking Zone: The clear, unobstructed portion of the sidewalk dedicated to continuous, accessible pedestrian movement. This should be a minimum of 4 to 6 feet wide, widening significantly based on anticipated pedestrian volumes, up to 10 feet wide in primary pedestrian corridors. This area should be kept clear of any intrusions; any encroachments into the public right-of-way, including overhead elements, require formal authorization through a license or permit.



The Frontage Zone: The area immediately adjacent to buildings that supports storefront activity such as entrances, window displays, sidewalk sales, outdoor dining, and other business operations. This space allows out-swinging doors without obstructing the walking zone and allows the businesses to "spill" out into the sidewalk and activate the public realm. This should be a minimum of 2 feet wide, up to 4 to 6 feet.



Intersections

Safe intersections are essential as they are the primary points where pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles interact. In a compact, mixed-use environment with high levels of foot traffic, well-designed intersections help reduce conflicts, slow vehicle speeds, and improve visibility. Comfortable crossings encourage walking between destinations, support access to businesses and civic spaces, and ensure that Downtown streets are welcoming and usable for people of all ages and abilities.

Designing safe Downtown intersections requires a combination of geometry, materials, and operational strategies that prioritize people. Common approaches include high-visibility crosswalks, shortened crossing distances, curb extensions, raised intersections, accessible curb ramps, pedestrian-scale signals, and adequate lighting. These improvements enhance safety and contribute to a more walkable, vibrant public realm.



Landscaping and Street Trees

Shade and cooling were among the top needs identified through engagement. In Brownsville's climate, street trees and landscaping are essential not only for aesthetics, but for comfort, safety, and public health. Expanding tree canopy along priority pedestrian corridors can significantly reduce heat exposure, improve walkability, and encourage people to spend more time outdoors.

Landscaping should include native and drought-tolerant plantings, consistent tree spacing, and the use of bump-outs and understory planting where sidewalk space is constrained. Plant palettes should reflect regional ecology and culture while reinforcing Downtown's identity. Flexibility in tree planting may be required in areas where utilities or space limitations exist. Species choice must consider soil volume, micro-climates, drought tolerance, and nuisances such as dropping fruit that may not be ideal for urban environments.



Site Furnishings

Site furnishings such as benches, bike racks, shade structures, trash receptacles, and planters are essential to comfort and walkability. Furnishings should be durable, coordinated in style, and selected to support long-term maintenance.

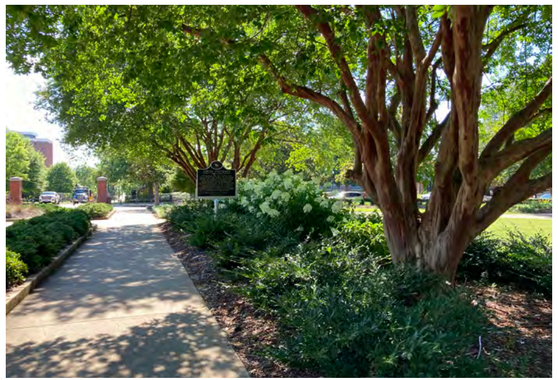
Community input emphasized the importance of shaded seating and frequent resting opportunities. Furnishings should therefore be paired with tree canopy, overhead shade, or structures that provide relief from the sun. Placement should support accessibility, encourage social interaction, and maintain clear pedestrian paths.



Provision of Shade

In Brownsville's climate, providing shade is essential to creating a comfortable, usable public realm. Extended periods of high temperatures and intense sun can discourage walking and outdoor activity if shade is not abundant. Thoughtfully designed shade allows sidewalks, plazas, and streets to remain active throughout the day, supporting local businesses and improving overall public health and comfort. Shade also plays a key role in equity, ensuring that all users, including seniors, children, and transit riders, can comfortably use Downtown.

Effective shade strategies typically combine natural and built elements. Street trees with broad canopies are one of the most impactful tools, providing long-term cooling benefits while enhancing character and aesthetics. Complementary solutions such as canopies, awnings, arcades, shade sails, and covered seating areas can provide immediate relief, particularly in commercial corridors and at intersections, transit stops, and gathering spaces. When coordinated with building design, streetscape standards, and maintenance plans, shade becomes a defining feature that supports a vibrant, resilient Downtown environment.



Lighting

Lighting was identified as a key priority through community engagement, with many participants noting that portions of Downtown feel dark or inactive during evening hours. Insufficient lighting affects perceptions of safety, limits walkability, and reduces nighttime business activity.

Lighting improvements should prioritize pedestrian-scale illumination along sidewalks, crosswalks, seating areas, and key pedestrian routes. Decorative and accent lighting can enhance plazas, outdoor dining areas, alleys, and cultural destinations. Festoon or string lighting may be used selectively to add warmth and support evening programming, and may be especially effective in activated alleyways.

All lighting should align with Downtown Brownsville's character and branding, minimize glare, and balance safety, visibility, and ambiance to support a comfortable and active nighttime environment.



Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design or uses public realm design to promote visibility, activity, and natural surveillance, helping deter crime while improving user comfort and perceptions of safety. CPTED can play an important role in creating safe, welcoming downtown environments that support traditional public safety efforts. In downtown settings with a mix of uses and extended hours of activity, CPTED spaces reinforce a sense of ownership among businesses, residents, and visitors. Common CPTED strategies in downtown areas include:

- **Natural Surveillance:** Design spaces to maximize visibility through clear sightlines, transparent storefronts, active ground-floor uses, and appropriate lighting.
- **Access Control:** Use sidewalks, entries, landscaping, fencing, and pavement treatments to clearly guide movement and discourage unauthorized access.
- **Territorial Reinforcement:** Define public, semi-public, and private spaces through design elements such as signage, paving, landscaping, and building orientation.
- **Lighting:** Provide consistent, pedestrian-scale lighting to improve visibility at night and reduce areas of concealment.
- **Maintenance and Management:** Keep streets, buildings, and public spaces clean, well-lit, and in good repair to signal care and stewardship.
- **Landscaping Design:** Use plantings that maintain visibility and avoid creating hidden or enclosed areas.
- **Active Uses:** Encourage uses and programming that generate regular activity and "eyes on the street" throughout the day and evening.
- **Clear Wayfinding:** Use signage and visual cues to improve legibility and reduce confusion in public spaces.

Materials Palette

A coordinated materials palette is essential to reinforcing a cohesive and recognizable public realm in Downtown Brownsville. Materials used in streetscapes, plazas, gateways, and site furnishings should reflect the area's historic character while supporting durability and ease of maintenance.

Preferred materials include brick masonry, decorative concrete with brick accents, stamped or textured concrete, industrial metals such as steel or cast iron, and limited use of weathered wood. Materials should complement existing historic buildings and streets while allowing for selective variation that supports creativity and local expression. Consistency in materials should define the public realm framework, while flexibility allows individual projects and businesses to contribute to Downtown's evolving character.



Wayfinding Signage

Wayfinding signage is an essential tool for helping people navigate a downtown easily and confidently. Clear, consistent signage improves legibility for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers by directing them to key destinations such as parking, civic buildings, parks, and commercial areas. Effective wayfinding reduces confusion, encourages exploration, and helps visitors feel comfortable spending more time in Downtown.

In addition to navigation, wayfinding signage reinforces downtown identity and sense of place. Coordinated graphics, materials, and messaging can reflect local character while providing clear, easy-to-read information. When integrated with streetscape design and placed at key decision points, wayfinding signage supports accessibility, strengthens connections, and contributes to a more welcoming and intuitive downtown experience. Wayfinding may be static or digital and interactive and content must be bilingual in Brownsville.



Regulatory Signage

Regulatory signage is necessary to support safety and traffic management, but must be carefully coordinated to avoid visual clutter. Where possible, signs should be consolidated onto shared poles and placed to maintain clear pedestrian travel paths.

Signage design should align with Downtown Brownsville's materials palette and branding standards to ensure consistency and minimize visual disruption. Clear, well-placed signage will improve navigation while contributing to a cohesive and attractive public realm. All signage in Downtown Brownsville should be bilingual to the extent feasible.



Public Art

Public art can be a low cost and highly effective contribution to Downtown Brownsville's identity and enhances the character of streets and public spaces. Murals, sculptures, artistic shade elements, and interactive installations can transform underutilized areas into recognizable landmarks and gathering places.

Public art should reflect local culture, history, language, and Brownsville's border identity while creating opportunities for local artists. Temporary installations, rotating exhibits, and community-based art programs can create ongoing interest and flexibility. Art should be thoughtfully integrated into gateways, alleys, pocket plazas, trails, and primary pedestrian corridors. Murals should be applied to appropriate surfaces and generally avoided on brick facades of significant historic buildings that have not been previously painted.



Branding

Branding helps communicate Downtown Brownsville's identity and assists visitors in understanding the area's cultural and historic significance. Engagement feedback highlighted the importance of creating a stronger sense of place.

A coordinated branding system should include gateways, directional signage for vehicles and pedestrians, trail markers, and interpretive elements. Branding elements such as banners, decorative lighting, specialty paving, and culturally inspired motifs can reinforce identity block by block. Seasonal or event-based branding can support festivals, nighttime markets, and tourism-driven programming.

The City, and in particular the Conventions and Visitors Bureau which is located in Downtown, have already created a strong brand, which should be incorporated into public realm elements to the extent possible.



Building Frontages

Building frontages play a defining role in shaping the character and activity of a downtown. Active, well-designed frontages create a strong relationship between buildings and the public realm by providing interest, activity, and transparency at the ground level. When buildings engage the sidewalk, they support walkability, enhance safety through natural surveillance, and contribute to a lively, human-scaled public realm.

Effective downtown frontage design emphasizes ground-floor uses that interact with the street, such as retail, dining, and civic spaces. Common strategies include clear and welcoming entrances, large windows, minimal blank walls, and architectural details that add rhythm and variety along the block.



Public Facilities and Open Spaces

Public spaces play a critical role in daily life, community gatherings, and family-oriented activity in Downtown Brownsville. Survey feedback emphasized the need for more shaded areas, comfortable seating, and welcoming places to gather without requiring a purchase.

Parks, plazas, and civic open spaces should include shade structures, benches, water features, play elements, and flexible areas that can accommodate both informal use and events. These spaces should connect seamlessly to the pedestrian network, encouraging walking between destinations.

City facilities such as the library, recreation center, and civic offices should reinforce the public realm through shaded entrances, small plazas, and improved sidewalk connections that support visibility, comfort, and everyday use.



Innovative Stormwater Management

Stormwater strategies can serve both functional and aesthetic purposes. Heavy rains and localized flooding impact walkability and infrastructure performance, while unmanaged runoff can affect water quality in nearby waterways.

Where feasible, rain gardens, bioswales, permeable paving, and planted curb extensions can be incorporated into streetscapes and parking areas to slow runoff, reduce flooding, and improve water quality. These green infrastructure strategies should be prioritized in areas with redevelopment potential where they can also enhance streetscape comfort and visual character.

Correct design, installation, and maintenance are essential to ensure long-term performance. When coordinated with street reconstruction or redevelopment, these strategies can provide multiple benefits while reducing long-term infrastructure costs.



STREETSCAPE TYPOLOGIES

Downtown streetscapes should provide elements of the public realm toolkit, such as shade, lighting, and landscaping, to create a comfortable environment year-round. Survey responses consistently emphasized the need for more trees, safer crossings, and shaded walkways. However, not every street requires the same level of investment, especially in an area a large as the Downtown study area. The following are the streetscape typologies identified for Downtown Brownsville.

Primary Commercial Streetscapes

Primary streetscape corridors function as Downtown's commercial spine and should receive the highest level of investment. These streets are the most active and visible areas of Downtown and should prioritize pedestrian comfort, business activity, and placemaking.

Improvements include widened sidewalks, enhanced paving materials and landscaping, pedestrian-scale lighting, coordinated street furnishings, and clearly defined sidewalk zones. Allowance for a generous frontage zone is especially important along these streets to encourage outdoor dining and retail displays. Ground-floor uses should be active and transparent to create an engaging street edge and support a lively day-to-night environment.

This typology applies to: Elizabeth Street and Washington Street.

These streets are on-system corridors for TxDOT, meaning coordination with that agency will be required for any improvements. Additionally, these two streets have constrained rights-of-way, so there may not be room for landscape and street trees, in which case continuous architectural overhead elements, such as canopies or balconies, should be encouraged.

Primary Multimodal Streetscapes

Multimodal streets accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, transit users, and vehicles within a balanced right-of-way. By prioritizing safety and comfort for all users, multimodal streets support walkability, improve access to businesses and destinations, and reduce reliance on single-occupancy vehicles. Thoughtful design elements such as wide sidewalks, bike facilities, transit stops, safe crossings, and traffic calming help create streets that function efficiently while reinforcing Downtown character and supporting a vibrant, people-focused public realm.

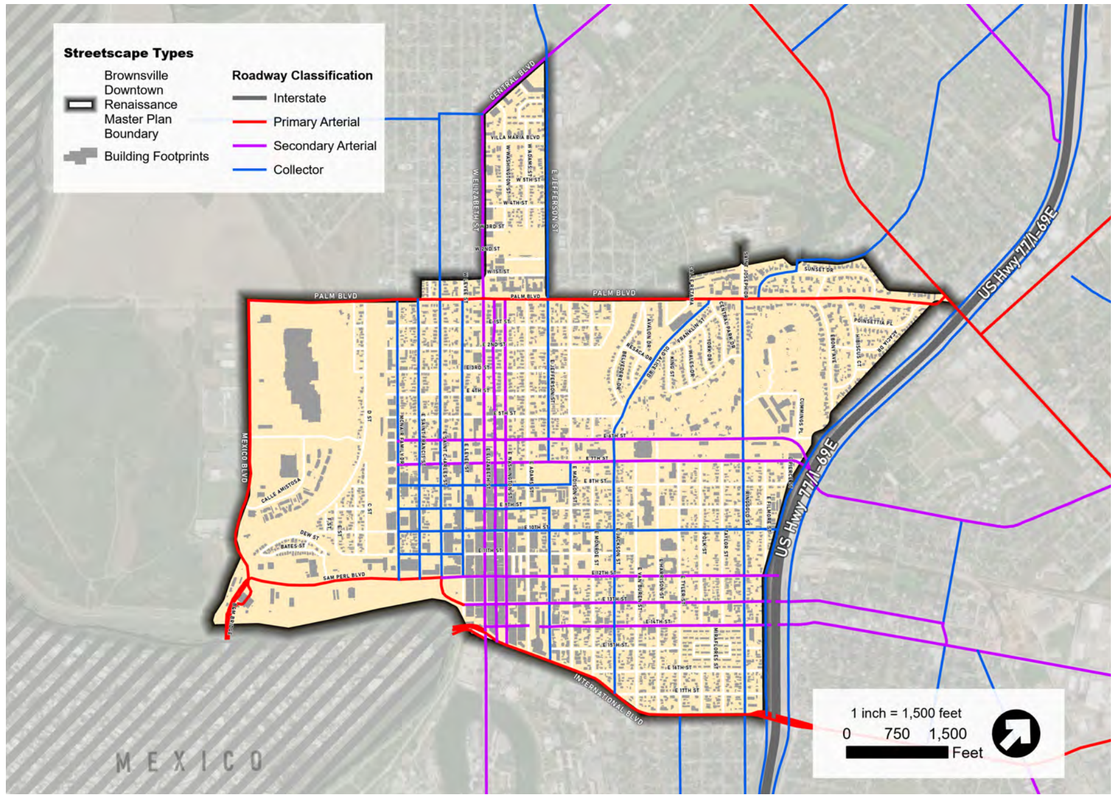
This typology applies to: 6th Street, 7th Street, Ringgold Street, Polk Street, and the portions of Adams Street, 11th Street and 12th Street that are not covered by the Paseo/Shared Street typology.

These streets are likely to have the right-of-way space to accommodate enhanced landscaping and continuous street trees. Some on-street parking may be removed to allow space for wider sidewalk, streetscape elements or bicycle infrastructure.

Strategies for Restricted Rights-of-Way Complete Street Approach

Often in historic contexts such as Downtown Brownsville, there is limited right-of-way (ROW) space available to implement transportation, utilities and public realm elements. A "complete street" approach focuses on maximizing function and safety within limited space while prioritizing the most critical users and Downtown goals. Suggested strategies for restricted ROWs include:

- Maintain the clear Walking Zone in the sidewalk realm, but the amenity or frontage zones may be reduced.
- Plant street trees in structural soil, tree grates, or large planters where in-ground planting and planting strips are not feasible.
- Utilize curb extensions or "bump outs" at select locations to create space for seating, landscaping, and pedestrian amenities without widening the entire sidewalk realm. These may be incorporated among on-street parking spaces.
- Focus streetscape enhancements at intersections, crossings, and key destinations to achieve the greatest impact.
- Utilize building-mounted features such as awnings, canopies, and lighting to provide shade and reduce sidewalk clutter.



Map 17. Streetscape Typology Map

Paseos and Shared Streets

Paseos and shared streets provide flexible, pedestrian-oriented connections within Downtown and create a unique and recognizable experience. These spaces should prioritize people over vehicles and be designed as intimate, human-scaled environments.

Design elements may include flush curbs, specialty paving, decorative lighting, seating, shade, landscaping, and public art. Vehicle access should be slow-speed and clearly secondary to pedestrian movement. Paseos can support cafés, pop-up vendors, and events that add vibrancy and social activity.

This typology applies to: Adams Street, 11th Street, and 12th Street in select portions of the study area.

Secondary Streetscapes

Secondary streets support the primary network by providing additional access, circulation, and opportunities for redevelopment and infill. While typically less intense in character, these streets should maintain high-quality sidewalks and a consistent streetscape that reinforces the Downtown identity.

Improvements can be focused at key intersections and gateways and may include upgraded crossings, accent paving, lighting, landscaping, and flexible curbside spaces. Secondary streets also offer opportunities for smaller-scale business activation, outdoor seating, and transitional uses between core commercial areas and adjacent districts.

This typology applies to: through streets with commercial uses across the study area that are not primary corridors.

Neighborhood Access Streetscapes

Neighborhood access streets connect surrounding neighborhoods to destinations and play a critical role in making residents comfortable with Downtown living. These streets should emphasize safety and access to homes rather than high levels of activity or throughput of traffic.

Design strategies may include consistent sidewalks, improved lighting, and street trees. Traffic calming and streetscape treatments should reinforce slower speeds and create a comfortable walking and biking environment for all ages and abilities.

This typology applies to: streets throughout the study area with heavy residential uses where slow traffic speeds are warranted and through traffic should be discouraged, such as most roadways in the North and South Supporting neighborhoods.

Activated Alleyways

Alleyways present a significant opportunity to expand Downtown's public realm and support economic activity beyond the main streets. When activated, alleys can function as pedestrian routes, gathering spaces, or destinations in their own right.

Improvements may include enhanced paving, lighting, murals or public art, and wayfinding. Active rear building entrances, windows, and service functions may be encouraged to increase visibility, safety, and everyday use. Active alleys can be closed to vehicles, or designed so that during delivery and service hours those vehicles can still use the alleyway.

This typology applies to: select alleyways that help connect primary pedestrian routes and destinations throughout the study area.



Example of an Activated Alley

Traffic Calming Strategies

Traffic calming is a critical tool for creating safer, more walkable downtown environments by reducing vehicle speeds and improving conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. This is especially important in areas with large volumes of pedestrians or within residential neighborhoods. Traffic calming measures help shift streets from vehicle-dominated corridors to shared public spaces that support local businesses, outdoor activity, and everyday movement. When thoughtfully applied, these strategies improve safety outcomes while reinforcing character and supporting multimodal use.

Rather than relying on enforcement alone, traffic calming uses design to influence driver behavior. Street geometry, materials, and visual cues can naturally encourage slower speeds and greater driver awareness at intersections, crossings, and along active blocks. Traffic calming strategies are most effective when implemented as part of a coordinated streetscape approach and tailored to context, street function, and surrounding land uses.

Traffic calming strategies that are appropriate for Downtown Brownsville include:

- Narrowed travel lanes to reduce vehicle speeds and shorten crossing distances
- Curb extensions (bulb-outs) at intersections and mid-block crossings
- Raised crosswalks or intersections to emphasize pedestrian priority
- High-visibility crosswalks and enhanced pavement markings
- Tightened curb radii to slow turning movements
- On-street parking to create a buffer between vehicles and sidewalks
- Street trees, planters, and landscaping to visually narrow the roadway
- Pedestrian-scale lighting and street furnishings to reinforce human scale
- Gateway treatments or signage signaling entry into a slow-speed district
- Textured or specialty paving to cue drivers to reduce speed
- Speed tables, raised intersections, and speed humps in neighborhood-adjacent and pedestrian-priority areas to reduce speeding and improve safety





STREETSCAPE FURNISHINGS

Street furnishings (or lack thereof) in a downtown environment can have a high impact on user experience. Furnishings should be selected for durability and long-term performance, with materials and finishes that are graffiti- and tamper-resistant and able to withstand heavy use and weather exposure. Furnishings should be easy to maintain, clean, and service, while remaining comfortable and usable for a wide range of users. Design, character, and scale should reinforce Downtown identity and respond to surrounding context, ensuring furnishings feel intentional, cohesive, and appropriate to their setting.

Furnishing Nodes

Furnishing nodes are concentrated areas along downtown streets where seating, lighting, landscaping, and amenities are clustered to support rest, gathering, and social interaction. By organizing furnishings into intentional nodes rather than dispersing them evenly, these spaces reduce sidewalk clutter, preserve clear pedestrian movement, and create comfortable, inviting places to pause within the downtown environment. The basic furnishing node includes benches and waste receptacles, and should be repeated frequently along a streetscape, with the distance between nodes dependent on the corridor context.

- **Primary Commercial Streetscapes:** Furnishing nodes should be provided every 150 to 250 feet, with emphasis at intersections and at least one mid-block node to support lingering and commercial activity.
- **Primary Multimodal Streetscapes:** Furnishing nodes should be spaced every 200 to 300 feet, coordinated with crossings, transit stops, bike facilities, and curbside activity areas while maintaining clear pedestrian and bicycle movement. A unique furnishing element to consider for multimodal corridors are bicycle repair stations, which may be provided at a few target locations along the corridor, such as at trail connections or in park spaces.
- **Paseos and Shared Streets:** Furnishing nodes should be integrated every 100 to 200 feet, concentrated near entries, seating areas, and gathering spaces to reinforce pedestrian priority and social activity.
- **Secondary Streetscapes:** Furnishing nodes should be located every 300 to 400 feet, placed at intersections and areas of increased pedestrian use, such as adjacent to transit stops or park spaces.
- **Neighborhood Access Streetscapes:** Furnishing nodes are not expected on most neighborhood streets, but may be selectively placed at areas of increased pedestrian use, such as adjacent to transit stops or park spaces.
- **Activated Alleyways:** Formal furnishing nodes are not expected in activated alleyways, as these spaces are anticipated to be uniquely furnished and activated based on the use.



Lighting

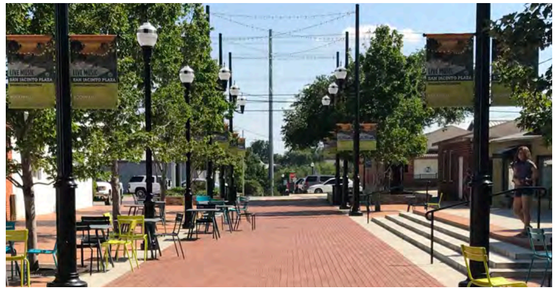
Lighting is another basic element of good streetscapes, and was called for repeatedly during public engagement. This is specifically referring to pedestrian-scale lighting that is illuminating the sidewalk zones, not street lighting. However, pedestrian fixtures can sometimes utilize the same pole as streetlights to reduce pole clutter. Final light fixture spacing should be adjusted based on fixture type, mounting height, light output, tree canopy, and ambient lighting conditions. Currently, there are multiple fixtures being used in Downtown; consistency of fixtures along most streets can help reduce visual clutter along streetscapes.

- **Primary Commercial Streetscapes:** Pedestrian-scale lighting should generally be spaced every 50 to 70 feet to provide consistent illumination along sidewalks, highlight storefront activity, and support nighttime safety and vibrancy. Additional lighting may be provided by businesses on their building frontages.
- **Primary Multimodal Streetscapes:** Lighting should be spaced every 60 to 80 feet, especially at crossings, transit stops, and bike facilities to ensure visibility for all users while maintaining clear sightlines.
- **Paseos and Shared Streets:** Pedestrian lighting should be provided every 40 to 60 feet, using lower-scale fixtures, string lighting, or wall-mounted lights to reinforce pedestrian priority and create a comfortable, unique atmosphere.
- **Secondary Streetscapes:** Lighting should typically be spaced every 70 to 90 feet, with enhanced lighting at intersections, key destinations, and areas of increased pedestrian activity.
- **Neighborhood Access Streetscapes:** Pedestrian-scale lighting may be primarily located at intersections and pedestrian or trail crossings, to support safety and orientation without over-lighting.
- **Activated Alleyways:** Lighting should be spaced every 30 to 50 feet, supplemented by wall-mounted fixtures, overhead lighting, or accent lighting to enhance visibility, safety, and activation.

Other Furnishings

In addition to the basic nodes, additional furnishings should be considered to enhance user experience in the study area.

- **Bicycle Racks:** At least one bicycle rack should be located on each block along Primary Corridors and Paseos, with the ideal location being a mid-block node to allow the most convenient access to all businesses on the block. Additional bike parking may be provided by businesses in front of their location. Bike racks should also be included at areas of increased traffic, such as transit stops and park spaces, for secondary and neighborhood streets.



- **Planters and Tree Grates:** Planters and tree grates may be appropriate along the Primary Commercial Corridors, in locations of restricted ROW or to create a more urban feeling environment. However, these should be used sparingly as the limited soil volume usually does not allow street trees to thrive in an urban environment.
- **Bollards:** Bollards may be used as needed for safety purposes, such as at intersections or trail crossings.

Maintenance of Furnishings

It is not enough to simply provide these furnishings, ongoing maintenance of these elements is essential to preserving safety, usability, and the overall quality of the public realm. Well-maintained benches, lighting, trash receptacles, and other amenities signal care and stewardship, reinforce perceptions of safety, and support consistent use by residents and visitors. Regular cleaning, repairs, and replacement help extend the lifespan of furnishings, protect public investment, and ensure that streetscapes continue to function as welcoming, comfortable spaces over time. The City must have a proactive maintenance and replacement plan for Downtown furnishings, as well as the staff and funding to back that plan up.

Furnishing Materials

Material choices can have a major impact on usability and maintenance impact of street furnishings. Firstly, materials should be commercial grade and selected for durability, longevity, and performance in a downtown environment with high use and exposure to weather. Preferred materials include powder-coated or galvanized steel, cast aluminum, and reinforced concrete for structural elements, paired with sustainably sourced hardwoods, recycled plastic, or composite materials for seating surfaces. Finishes should be resistant to corrosion, fading, and chipping, and designed to withstand frequent cleaning and maintenance.

Material choices should also support comfort, safety, and Downtown character. Seating and touchable surfaces should minimize heat retention and provide comfortable edges, while textured or matte finishes can reduce glare and visibility of wear.

Furnishing Style Families

Furnishing style is a balance between creating recognition and consistency while allowing for variation by street typology or district. Materials, colors, and forms should reflect the context, balancing timeless design with durability to ensure furnishings remain attractive and relevant over time. Furnishings are one of the unique opportunities to do something fun or unique in the streetscape, so long as the elements remain functional for their intended purpose. In community conversations three style "families" emerged: the Everyday, the Specialty and the "Surprises".

The Everyday Furnishing Family

The Everyday family of furnishings focuses on simple, durable, and highly functional elements that support daily use throughout Downtown. These furnishings should be utilitarian in form and easy to maintain. Consistency and practicality are key, ensuring that everyday furnishings blend seamlessly into the streetscape and provide reliable comfort without competing visually with surrounding architecture.

This furnishing style is applicable in most situations throughout the study area, unless otherwise noted.

To note, there is potential to allow for variety in benches and bike racks along Elizabeth and Washington Streets, especially in the mid-block furnishing nodes. This could allow adjacent businesses to design and maintain a unique bench or bike rack in front of their property, creating additional opportunities to showcase the business's identity and stewardship of the public realm.

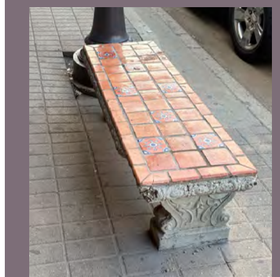




The Specialty Furnishing Family

This family of furnishings emphasizes traditional materials and forms that reflect Downtown's heritage and architectural character. Materials such as brick, stone, tile and iron should be used, along with detailing that reflects historic building elements and the unique "Brownsville Style". These elements may be custom, and therefore more expensive. Because of that, they are reserved for special space where aesthetics are the highest priority.

This furnishing style is applicable along Paseos and Shared Streets as well as at major public spaces, such as Market Square, Washington Park and the new Plaza Mayor.







The "Surprises"

The "Surprises" furnishing approach introduces distinctive, playful, or artistic elements in select locations and key nodes throughout Downtown. These furnishings may incorporate bold colors, unique forms, public art, or interactive features that create memorable moments and encourage lingering. Used sparingly and intentionally, "Surprises" add character and delight while reinforcing placemaking goals and highlighting important gathering spaces, gateways, or cultural destinations.

This furnishing style is applicable in small quantities and most likely in public plazas, so long as it is respectful of historic context. To note, this does not mean these must be historic aesthetically. In fact the juxtaposition of historic architecture with a modern or contemporary "surprise" element is part of the intention and can even help to highlight the historic elements through contrast.





