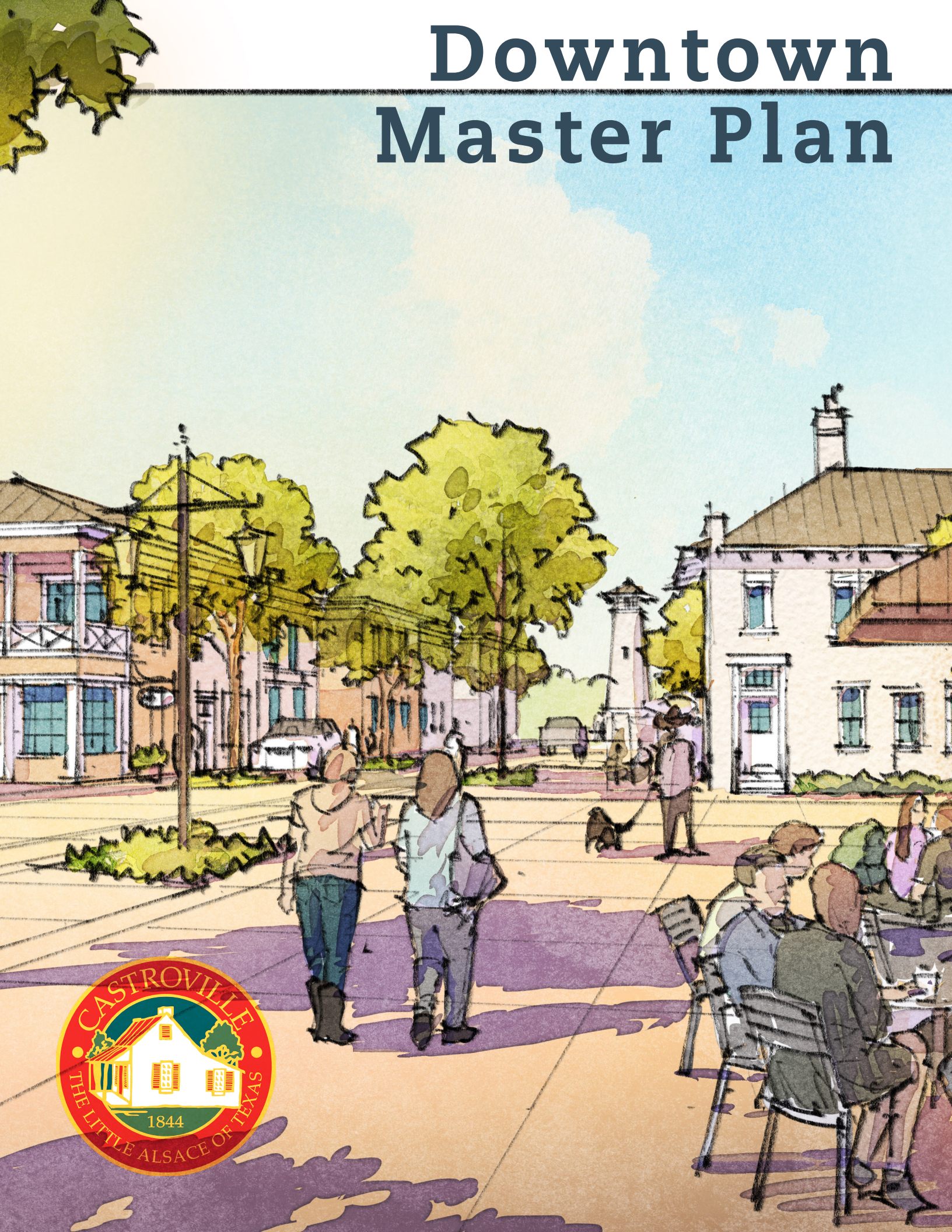


Downtown Master Plan





DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN BOUNDARY

The Downtown Master Plan boundary encompasses the original Castro area overlaid with the TIRZ boundary. The area includes the properties along Highway 90 leading Westward and eastward toward new growth areas. This boundary was selected to help solidify the key Castro area with the financing vehicle established by the city.

The original Castro area was designed for people rather than cars, and it facilitated commerce through an interconnected network of streets, blocks, buildings, and businesses. The new development patterns sprawling along HWY 90 contain a different context and, therefore, require different tools to help the environment adapt to a more Castroville-friendly way of life.

An aerial, hand-drawn style illustration of downtown Castroville. The scene shows a grid of streets with various buildings, including multi-story structures and smaller commercial buildings. There are numerous green trees scattered throughout the urban landscape. A river or large body of water is visible on the right side of the image. The overall style is artistic and illustrative, typical of urban planning documents.

THE CASTRO PLAN- CASTROVILLE'S KEYS FOR SUCCESS ARE HOUSED IN DOWNTOWN.

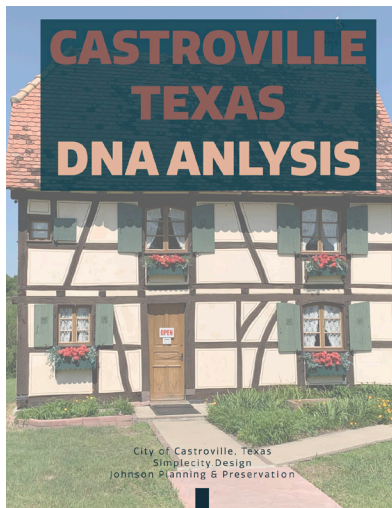
This plan is intended to serve as an inspirational, educational, and transformational guide for downtown Castroville. The plan's elements will help structure projects, establish a list of to-dos for business recruitment and branding, and create the framework for appropriate-scale infill redevelopment within the area while maintaining the rural town of Castroville.

This plan is not an all-inclusive to-do list but rather a detailed series of illustrative plans and projects that would fundamentally advance Castroville. These projects require cooperation and have budgetary implications. Most transformational projects do.

Previous plans were reconciled, and the community is still voicing items. This plan attempts to reconcile past plans and align policies to support the efforts outlined by the community. The great news is the community believes continuing Castroville is the right way forward.

This belief established the foundation for the community's path forward.

Castroville's DNA



In order to extract the key elements that make up Castroville, Simplecity conducted a analysis of Castroville built environment in spring of 2023.

Castroville's DNA is formed by its streets, buildings, sidewalks, blocks, natural settings, and more. When combined, these components create complex environments and complete neighborhoods. At its very core, the DNA Analysis puts a numerical value on the physical elements of the one hundred sixty (160) plus years of history and characteristics of Castroville, including the beloved 13,887 lots. The characteristics that make up Castroville are those of a traditional town, not suburbia, and are what makes Castroville a unique and wonderful place.

The Castroville DNA Analysis revealed many important patterns of the built environment. Five (5) Character Areas were identified in the analysis: Nature, Rural, Residential, Core Castroville, and Highway Corridor.

The Medina River and Castroville Regional park service as natural gateways and outdoor community spaces.

Rural areas include farmland that surround the city and harken back the classic Alsace design of urban places surrounded by agriculture. Examining Residential areas highlighted how prevalent 13,887 square feet lots there are across the city's neighborhoods. The small, mix use blocks with Alsatian architecture and curb-less streets define the Core. These small blocks, almost always 330' x 330', are the foundation of the original grid and have fostered a rural yet walkable streetscape and a higher density cluster of commercial. The Highway Corridor includes low-intensity, auto-oriented commercial development along Highway 90.

In summary, the DNA Analysis identified that Castroville's authentic culture and timeless development patterns are the city's foundation and recipe for success. Small walkable blocks are not only important for the past, they're critical for the future. The findings of the DNA Analysis were shared with the community in a presentation given at the Landmark Inn in December 2023.



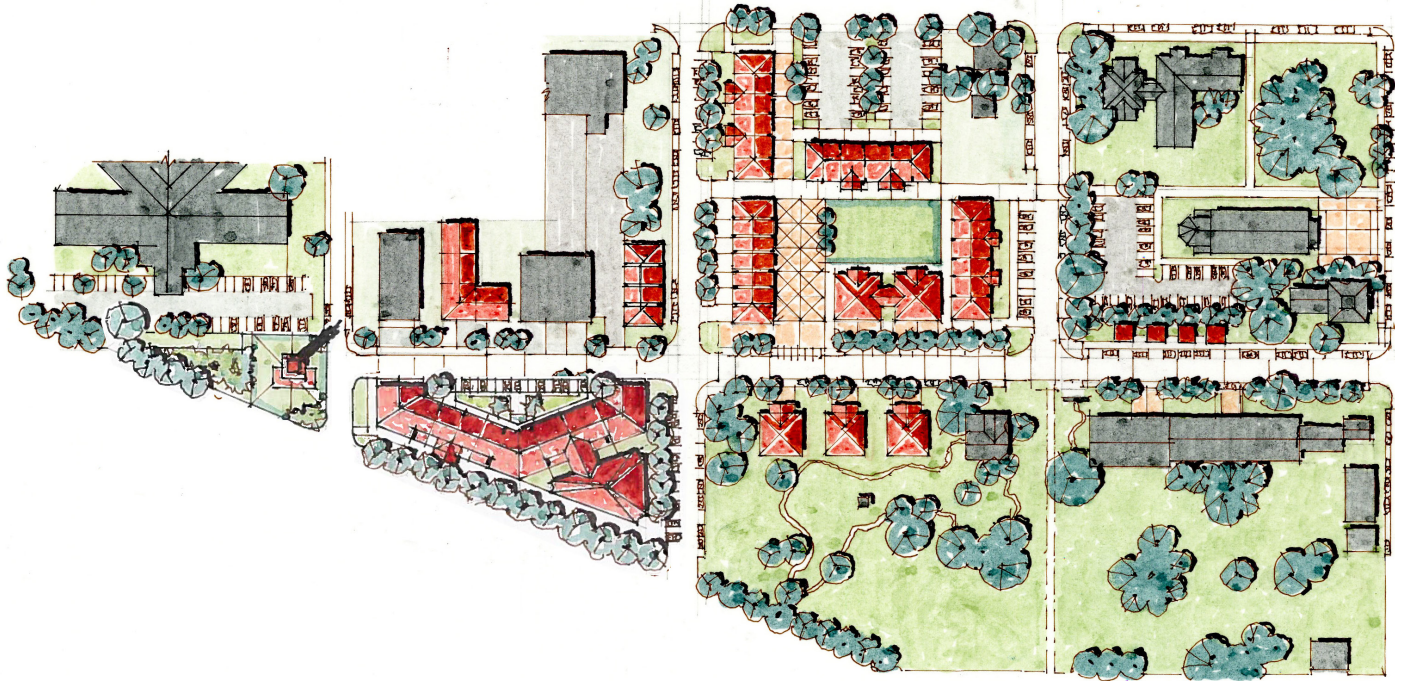
AN URBAN RURAL CORE

Castroville has a unique and uniformly loved built environment that ranges from rural to urban within a close distance. Community members feel that the connection between rural and urban places is the critical element of what makes Castroville Castroville. Preserving the large lot in town living was at the forefront of many conversations. Based on the original grid pattern, the lot configurations yielded a uniform lot standard within several areas of town. As downtown infill development occurs, ensuring that the development styles support and enhance the urban-to-rural feeling will be essential to maintain the integrity of this environment.



Downtown

The Downtown Master Plan focuses on key areas and projects that can quickly advance downtown to its fullest potential. Leveraging existing resources and opportunities, these projects have the greatest ability to be realized. The outcomes of this work can be implemented for transformational community results. These projects were identified through previous downtown plans and the community along this journey.



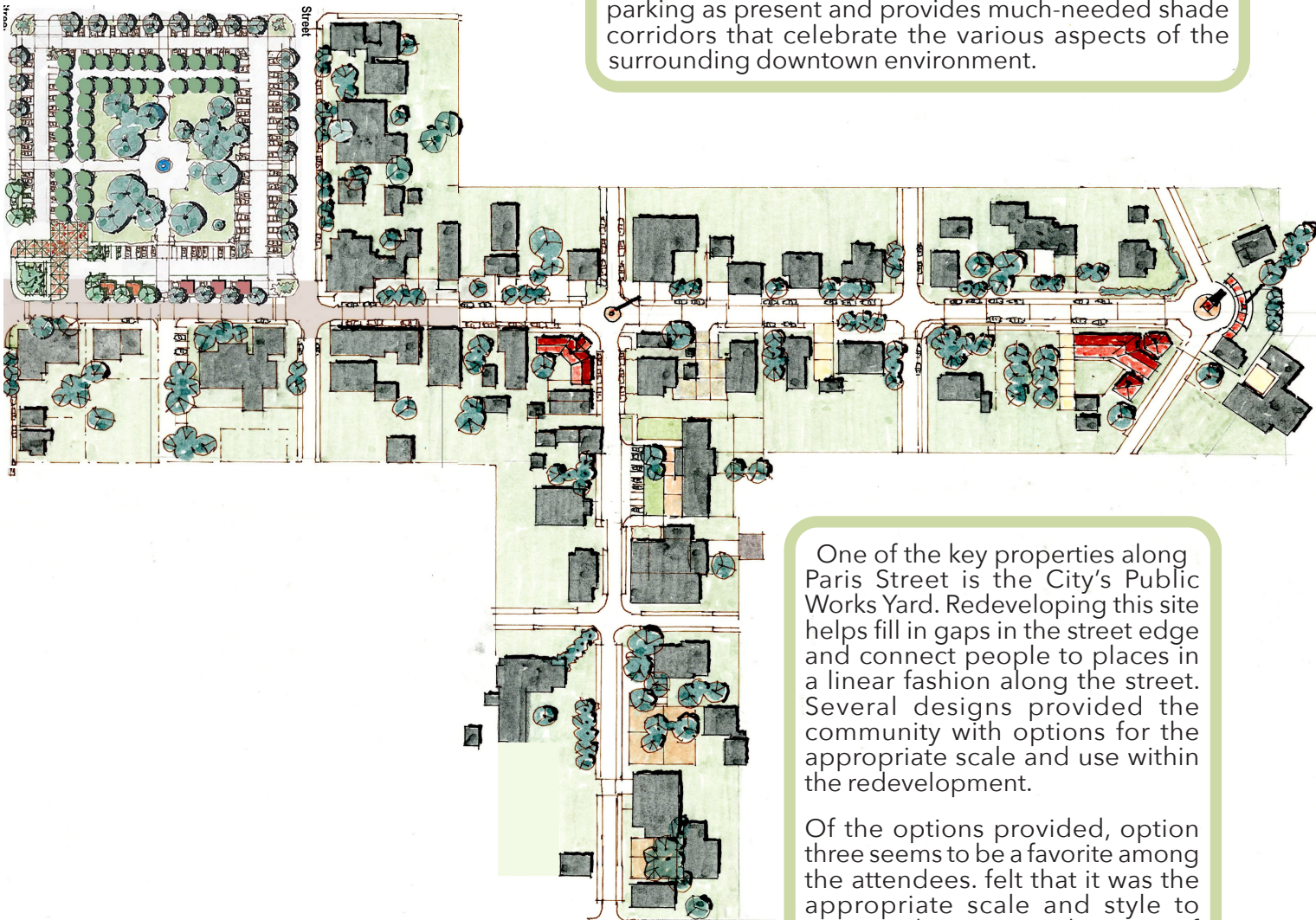
During this planning process and in previous downtown plans, Paris Street was identified as the main street for threading the fabric of the community together. A detailed analysis was conducted to map opportunity areas and threats along this corridor to ensure the street edge and private lot interfaced at the appropriate scale.

This illustrative plan demonstrates key areas where redevelopment and community connections can occur. It also provides a framework for small-scale improvement to dramatically enhance Paris Street into the desired main street.

Reimagined

Houston Square is the central point of the community. It was established in the original Castro Plan and has facilitated the community's gatherings since the founders' arrival.

The design team made several attempts at designing Houston Square, using plaza and park designs utilized worldwide. Several renderings were presented to the community at this time. The community felt landscaping and preserving the existing environment took precedence over a more developed plaza-style square. The design will define the street edges, creating a more walkable environment. It allows for the same amount of parking as present and provides much-needed shade corridors that celebrate the various aspects of the surrounding downtown environment.



One of the key properties along Paris Street is the City's Public Works Yard. Redeveloping this site helps fill in gaps in the street edge and connect people to places in a linear fashion along the street. Several designs provided the community with options for the appropriate scale and use within the redevelopment.

Of the options provided, option three seems to be a favorite among the attendees. felt that it was the appropriate scale and style to support the existing character of Castroville without overwhelming or underutilizing the site.

Paris & Fiorella Street

Paris Street is about a half mile long from to end. There are several opportunities for improvement in creating a cohesive, walkable environment. These improvements range from temporary installations and pavement re-striping to bold, visionary connections and activities. While a range of options are outlined in the plan, the community must prioritize and budget for these elements to become a reality. The action plan below attempts to establish a framework with various tools and resources to help the community leverage its existing assets into fully realized improvements.

Temporary or Permanent Kiosk

Castroville is known for festivals and community gatherings year-round. Using temporary or pop-up kiosks along Paris Street would allow the community to spread out their gatherings while still celebrating in the same area. Pop-up kiosks also allow vendors to test out the market before attempting the conventional brick-and-mortar store. Providing a low barrier of entry can enable someone with a great idea and a little bit of money to serve the community without overburdening huge expenditures. Furthermore, it allows Paris to be flexible and adapt to community demands.



Terminal Vistas

Creating a cohesive connection along Paris Street requires well-defined spaces. One way of creating this effect is through the use of terminal vistas. A terminal vista is a place where a person's view is interrupted by a feature. Terminating vistas can be accomplished through beacons, the placement of buildings, signs, art, or other elements that celebrate and enhance the end of one space to another.



Shared Streets

One of Castroville's most unique and identifiable attributes is its streets. Castroville's narrow streets with shared spaces are the core of establishing the quaint feeling people get upon arrival. Many of the streets are curb and contain the sidewalks within the roadway. Celebrating this design, not only downtown but also new developments, could help retain the small-town feel.

The Castroville grid provides opportunities to establish a hierarchal street network to distribute traffic, pedestrian mobility, and bicycle and golf cart use to certain roadways. There are many opportunities to establish individual networks for different transportation choices. However, in the current environment, most streets are comfortable for all transportation choices. Continuing this availability will help keep the cost of new infrastructure down and support the Castroville context.

Entry Gateways

Establishing gateway entry features, visitors and community members can be greeted by uniquely Castroville features. Gateway installations can be accomplished by engaging local artists, kids, and the community in designing a feature they see every time they return home. Many communities just place a monument sign with the name of the town. While that is an identifying element, it doesn't celebrate Castroville's culture and charm. Establishing a sense of arrival at both ends of Paris Street will inform people that they have arrived somewhere special. Features such as art installations, water features, parks, beacons, greenery, and signage are excellent ways to say, "Welcome to Castroville."



As shown in Castroville's previous Comprehensive Plan



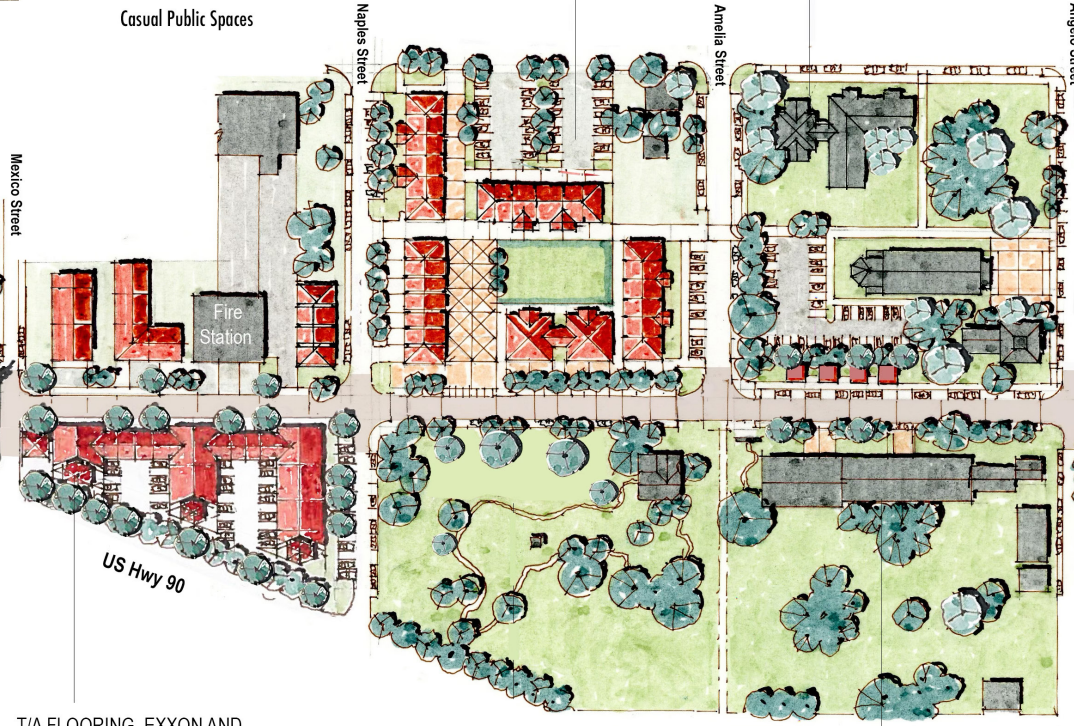
Example of Block Development



Casual Public Spaces

CASTROVILLE PUBLIC WORKS SITE REDEVELOPMENT WITH TOWNHOMES, LIVE/WORK UNITS, MIXED USE BUILDINGS WITH GROUND FLOOR RETAIL AND A SMALL PLAZA - ALL AROUND A COURTYARD

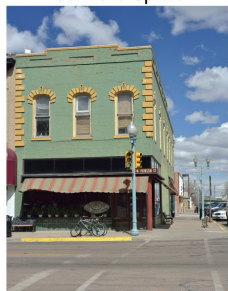
TEMPORARY OR PERMANENT KIOSKS ADDED TO ST. LOUIS CATHOLIC CHURCH SITE TO ACTIVATE THE STREET
TREES ADDED FOR SHADE
CHANGE PAVEMENT COLOR AND TEXTURE



Clock Tower Options

T/A FLOORING, EXXON AND McDONNALD SITE REDEVELOPMENT WITH MIXED USE BUILDINGS OR LIVE/WORK AND TOWNHOMES

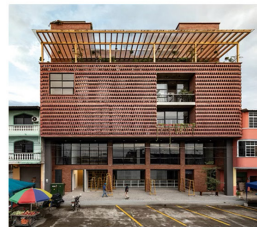
MOYE RETREAT CENTER



Mixed Use



Traditional Townhomes



Mixed Use



Live/Work Units



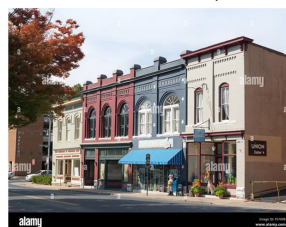
Kiosk



Walled Courtyard Housing



Street Level Mixed Use



Live/Work Units



Small Mixed Use Building

HOUSTON SQUARE **PROMENADE**
OPTION WITH TEMPORARY OR
 PERMANENT **KIOSKS** ADDED ON
 PARIS STREET
 OPTIONAL **PORTABLE CLIMBING**
WALL TO ACTIVATE THE PARK

ADDED **CORNER BUILDING** AND
 VERTICAL **STREET MARKER** AT
 THE INTERSECTION OF PARIS
 AND FIORELLA STREETS
BED AND BREAKFAST AREA

ADDED **CORNER BUILDING**,
 A SMALL **ROUNDBOUT** AND
WATER TOWER
BED AND BREAKFAST AREA



OPTIONAL **CAROUSEL** OR **SPLASH PAD**
 ON HOUSTON SQUARE

RAINBOW
 THEATER

CASTROVILLE
 CITY HALL

THE SALON

CASTRO
 HOUSE
 COMPOUND

MAGNOLIA
 FILLING
 STATION

Traditional Mixed Use

Multi Family

Mixed Use with Small Plaza

Old Fashioned Inn

Promenade at Houston Square

Portable Climbing Wall

Active Street Edge, Street Trees

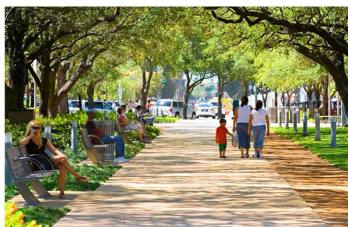
Corner Mixed Use



Kiosk with Seating



Traditional Mixed Use with Active Street Edge



Carousel at Plaza



Splash Pad



Vertical Street Markers



Traditional Bed and Breakfast

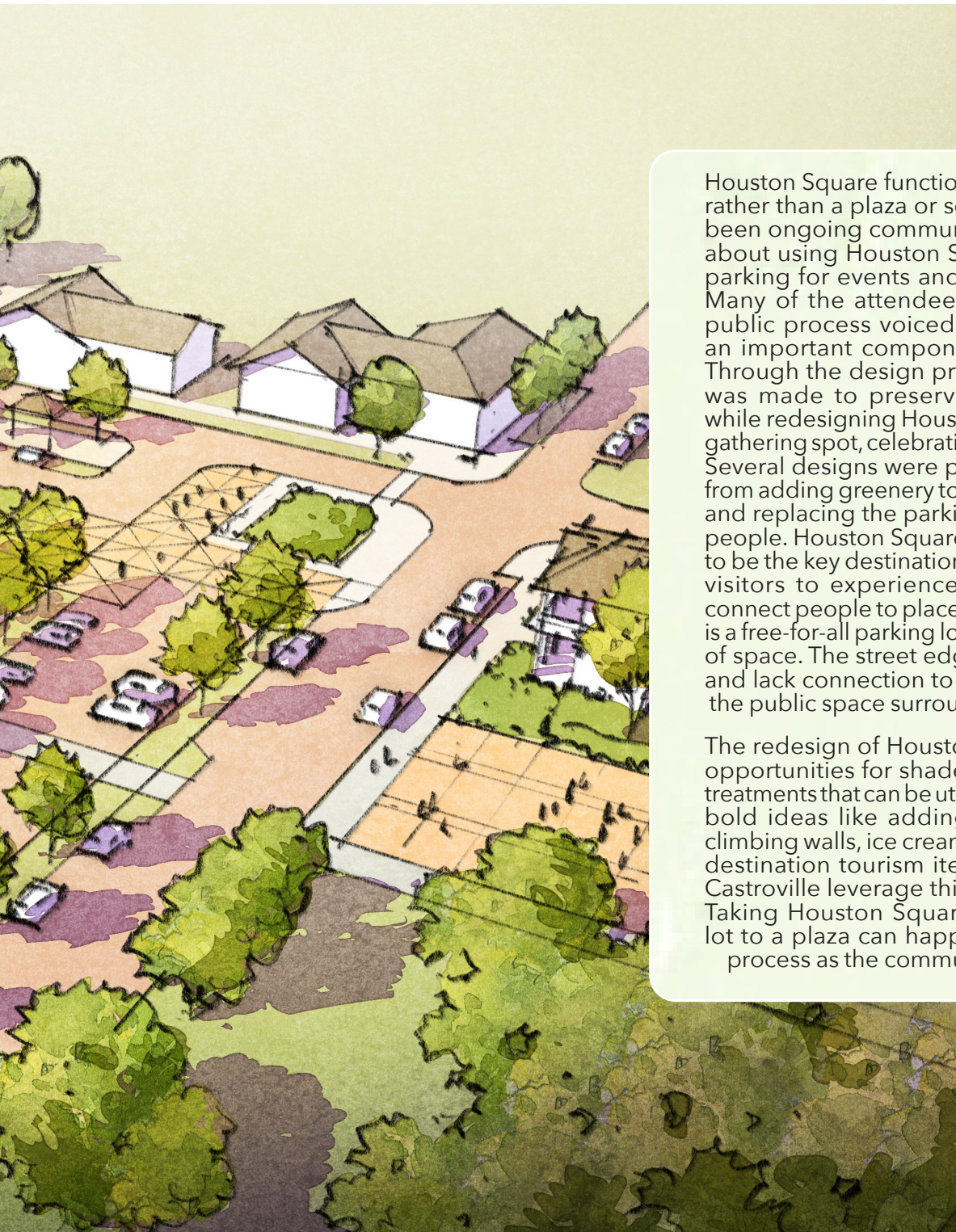


Water Tower

Focus Area & Action Plan

Houston Square



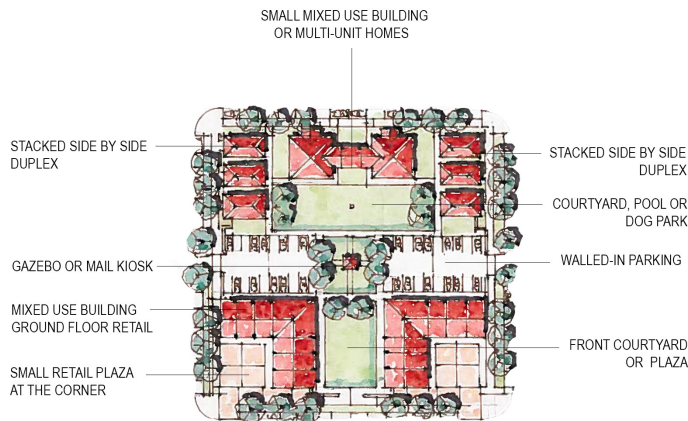


Houston Square functions as a parking lot rather than a plaza or square. There have been ongoing community conversations about using Houston Square to support parking for events and civic gatherings. Many of the attendees throughout the public process voiced that parking was an important component of the space. Through the design process, an attempt was made to preserve ample parking while redesigning Houston Square to be a gathering spot, celebrating all it has to offer. Several designs were proposed, ranging from adding greenery to a hardscape plaza and replacing the parking with places for people. Houston Square has the potential to be the key destination draw for regional visitors to experience how plazas can connect people to places. Houston Square is a free-for-all parking lot with no definition of space. The street edges are undefined and lack connection to the buildings and the public space surrounding the square.

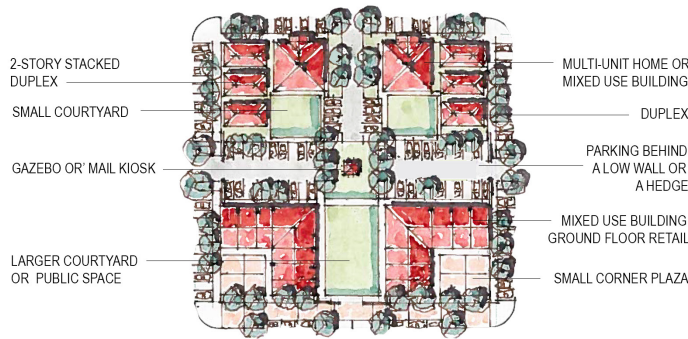
The redesign of Houston Square creates opportunities for shade, includes corner treatments that can be utilized, and includes bold ideas like adding carousels, rock climbing walls, ice cream shops, and other destination tourism items that can help Castroville leverage this important asset. Taking Houston Square from a parking lot to a plaza can happen in an iterative process as the community transforms.

Focus Area & Action Plan

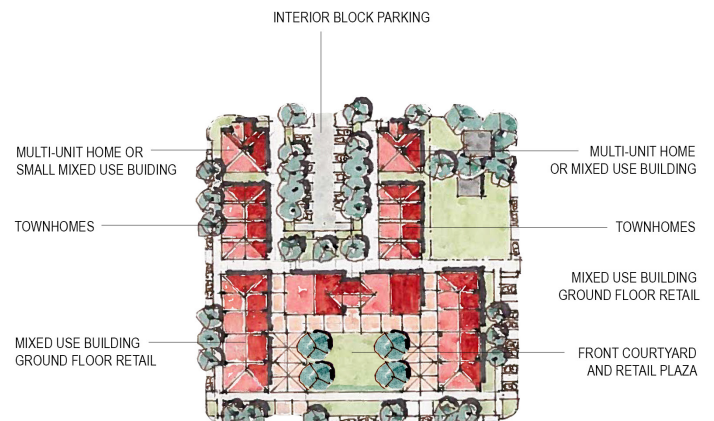
Public Works Yard



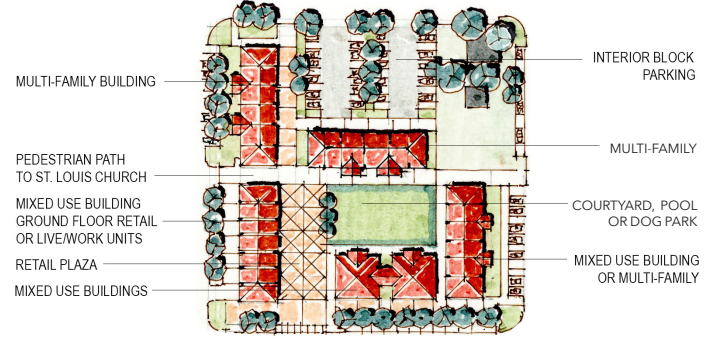
OPTION 2



OPTION 4



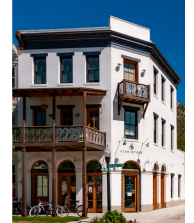
OPTION 3



OPTION 1

Public Works Elements

- Add mixed use buildings to activate the street edge across the street from the car
- Develop the site as a mixed use block with a small plaza and a courtyard
- Add townhome or live/work units on Naples street facing the yard
- Improve pedestrian experience along Paris street with more permanent buildings





One of the key properties along Paris Street is the City's Public Works Yard. Redeveloping this site will help fill in gaps along the street edge and connect people to various places in a linear fashion. Several designs were created to provide the community with options for the appropriate scale and use within the redevelopment.

Among the options presented, option one emerged as a favorite among attendees. They felt it was the correct scale and style to support the existing character of Castroville without overwhelming or underutilizing the site.

The rendering view is of standing in front of the public work yard, looking southwest toward the terminal Vista on Mexico Street. Developing this site will help create the desired main street corridor and provide new housing types for current and future residents. Furthermore, the design creates additional courtyards that emulate places in the original Castro area. The design reserves the formal environment along Paris Street by locating parking to the rear of the site and creating pedestrian connections to and through the block where none currently exist.

The design provides opportunities for further refinement as the community nears finalizing the overall plan. The greens can be courtyards, dog parks, pools, or other civic places the community desires.

The background of the page is a colorful, stylized illustration of a city street. On the left, there are multi-story buildings with various architectural details like windows and balconies. A wide sidewalk runs along the street, with several trees and bushes planted along it. In the distance, more buildings and a church steeple are visible under a blue sky. The overall style is that of a hand-drawn or painted urban scene.

Implementation

To effectively implement the Downtown Master Plan and boost the TIRZ, the city should use the UDO regulations that encourage appropriately scaled development while preserving the area's historic charm and cultural heritage. Start by using the TIRZ board and stakeholders, including business owners, residents, and developers, as the sounding board for the project. Utilize the TIRZ to fund essential infrastructure improvements, incentivize private investment, and support redevelopment projects that align with the community goals and plan. By providing financial incentives, streamlining approval processes, and maintaining a collaborative approach, Castroville can attract new businesses and residential developments that enhance the downtown area's economic vitality and aesthetic appeal, further supporting the vibrant community atmosphere.

Implementing the plan is an iterative process and requires the appropriate allocation of budget staff and support from city leaders. Castroville has notoriously created plans that sat on shelves. This pragmatic plan provides a series of frameworks and designs grounded in reality through proven principles

and methods that have worked for communities nationwide. Castroville can implement this plan through effort and support from community business leaders and city staff.

The Downtown Master Plan must be updated and maintained as projects get accomplished. A new set of goals and standards can be established once each plan element has been brought to fruition. Leveraging the TIRZ can help provide much-needed infrastructure improvements that will help improve the public realm, leading to higher returns on investments for the private market. Businesses will see the community is serious about its downtown and choose to invest alongside the community within the area.

Communities don't get over easily! Castroville must continue this journey to circumvent lost opportunities, prevent redevelopments unsuitable for downtown, and further support the existing businesses and population within the area.



Overview

Castroville celebrates its downtown and takes pride in its unique heritage. This is due in part to the community events and gatherings, large and small, that are commemorated in Castroville throughout the year. The downtown area serves as the established focal point of community life - the historic architecture and authentic character create a feeling of arrival, which pulls people downtown daily and for special events.

If downtown is the backdrop, programming is the storyline or plot - it is what happens downtown, whether formal or informal. Vibrant Community Partners, an advisory firm specializing in downtown vitality, explains downtown programming this way:

"Programming means creating activities that drive people downtown. You want to get citizens and visitors alike to hang out downtown so they'll shop, eat, drink, and maybe stay overnight."

Although public perspectives generally favor not encouraging additional overnight tourism in Castroville, the principles of downtown programming remain the same, even if the aim is to draw local people to downtown during the day or the evening. This goes beyond supporting local businesses—creating a thriving downtown fosters a healthy, strong community and an identifiable culture.

Castroville's events and traditions did not appear overnight. They were refined over time, and it is beneficial to think strategically about how the next generation will experience Castroville's local traditions and downtown heritage.

Downtown Traditions and Festivals

Castroville is a beloved hometown to its residents, many of whom have long-standing generational ties to the region. Part of what makes the local culture so rich is its deep-rooted traditions and programs, both formal and informal, that have developed organically over time. Residents recount stories from just a few decades ago when street dances were held in front of the American Legion building, local crafters gathered regularly to exchange expertise and sell their art, and young people rented bicycles to explore Castroville's unique charm.

Today, the culmination of time-tested traditions takes the form of several unique events and gatherings throughout the year. Not all these events occur specifically in downtown Castroville, but each impacts downtown to some degree. These events include:

- Old Fashion Christmas
- Tour de Castroville
- Alsatian Festival of Texas
- Fourth of July parade
- St Louis Day
- Monthly Fiorella Fridays

These events are authentically Castroville, celebrating the community's values and cultural rhythms throughout the calendar year. However, the success and scale of these events have created logistical and operational challenges in recent years, including high volumes of vehicle traffic and associated parking concerns. This presents an opportunity for the community to proactively consider how to honor beloved traditions while envisioning how these events can operate more smoothly - in a way that is less disruptive to local life.



Goals and Objectives

Reflecting on a rich heritage of cultural gatherings and festivals in downtown, the community now directs its attention to the future. What will be the "draw" for downtown Castroville in the next generation? What programming would bring the local community even closer together and create an environment in which more of Castroville's young people would choose to remain local when they enter the workforce?

Through the public engagement process, the desire to protect and cultivate an authentic Castroville for the local community has been heard. The approach to downtown programming should reflect local stakeholders' desire for community-focused programming rather than programs that target increased tourism. In light of this, a guiding strategy is outlined below.

Focus Areas

Making It Happen

To implement a locally-focused programming vision, Castroville can leverage local resources and partnerships to reinvigorate downtown assets and streamline operations for downtown events.

Partnerships for Downtown Vitality

Several public and private agencies in Castroville, including Visit Castroville, the Castroville Area Chamber of Commerce, and the Castroville Conservation Society, already promote downtown vitality and programs. The City can collaborate with these and other organizations to facilitate stakeholders' working together and holistically making the most of limited funding resources.

The Castroville community also has many social organizations and special interest groups. Members gather around philanthropic causes, youth sports and 4H events, and local heritage, such as quilting and Alsatian dance. Local stakeholders are heavily involved in and invested in their community. This level of civic pride and participation is increasingly rare in towns and neighborhoods, which makes Castroville unique.

This strong spirit of community engagement can further enhance Castroville's downtown by catalyzing volunteerism, hands-on service learning, and friendly competition. To this end, the city will explore partnering with local schools, businesses, and community groups to support downtown programming initiatives shown to the right:



The proposed Steering Committee would not be limited to the initiatives above but could foster additional community endeavors as desired. Formalizing and highlighting existing assets for the local community could take many forms. Opportunities for passive programming, like an updated Walking Tour in which individuals or groups can discover downtown self-directedly, should be encouraged.

The city could also support a Steering Committee in developing partnerships with organizations outside of Castroville (where appropriate) to take full advantage of publicly available resources that align with community objectives like shade tree conservation and stormwater management. This could include many organizational partners; for instance, Texas universities often fund research units that provide technical assistance to communities. One such entity is the Texas A&M Forest Service, which supports designated foresters serving every region of Texas. The City of Castroville can request free resources and training from the San Antonio Region's Urban Forester. It can access detailed technical tools like Tree Ordinance Tutorials, should this be desired for downtown Castroville. Institutional partners, local involvement, and volunteerism can work together to spur an even stronger downtown Castroville.

Downtown Programming Steering Committee

This type of group could ensure that downtown events continue to be well-coordinated among stakeholders and reflect the community aspirations outlined in this chapter. The committee could be citizen-led, composed of residents (including youth representatives) and business owners.

Formalizing the Historic Walking Tour

Local civics classes or after-school library groups could compete to develop a branding and wayfinding strategy to increase awareness of this hidden gem within Castroville. The Walking Tour promotional materials and signage could be updated to include QR codes or hashtags for social media to help a new generation discover historic Castroville through this self-guided tour. Completing all tour stops with a punch-card or digital check-in could be promoted through local business discount rewards.

Beautification and Placemaking

Similarly, community organizations could develop an "Adopt-a-Street" program in downtown and compete for the most well-maintained or beautified street and the best placemaking efforts. Community-led placemaking is often called "tactical urbanism" or D.I.Y. urbanism (although this can apply to towns of all sizes and does not specifically have to be urban in context). A placemaking competition could culminate in a block party to celebrate the winning street.

Artistic Culture Alongside Agriculture

Local schools' art classes could design and create public murals, art installations, or colorful intersection and crosswalk designs (see Figure 1 below). Science students and Castroville's Garden Club could help nurture community gardens (and could even compete to grow the best produce!).

Alsatian Window Box Competition

Downtown businesses could compete for "best window display" reflecting Alsatian heritage using drought-sensitive native plantings.

Patrons of Downtown

Businesses, residents, and philanthropic organizations could sponsor downtown fixtures and enhancements like permeable pavers, distinctive light fixtures, recycling receptacles, benches, or shade structures built by local Scouts troops. Each fixture or element could have the sponsor's name engraved as a patron of downtown. Organizations could host fundraising events to support downtown in this way.

Business Development Mentorship Program

Business development mentorship program. Local business owners could mentor aspiring entrepreneurs or train high-school or college-aged apprentices.

Making It Happen

Streamlining Events and Day-to-Day Operations

Residents have expressed concern over the operational challenges of getting to, from, and around downtown during special events and on a day-to-day basis. Castroville events with a broad draw, such as Old Fashion Christmas and the Alsatian Festival of Texas, have seen hundreds of people converging upon downtown Castroville. It is recognized that many stakeholders do not necessarily want to see tourism increase. However, even assuming a scenario where event attendance numbers do not grow in coming years, current attendance levels invite proactive planning for smoother operations and mitigating local disruption. In addition, an updated approach to the day-to-day operations of downtown would better align with residents' desires to access downtown in various ways.

Major events present logistical challenges because pedestrians, parked cars, and moving vehicles all require limited street space. This requires a thoughtful approach to facilitate a smooth and pleasant event experience, as well as general public safety. For Castroville's largest events, it may be beneficial for the City and/or a Downtown Programming Steering Committee to explore a customized traffic management plan. However, with or without the development of a targeted plan effort, best practice strategies can help streamline downtown event operations and thus limit disturbance for surrounding neighborhoods:

- Offsetting closing times. Event closing times can be staggered to avoid a high volume of pedestrian and car traffic flows all leaving downtown at the same time.
- Temporarily pedestrianizing strategic streets. During peak hours of the event, routes like Paris Street could be temporarily closed to car traffic to facilitate safe pedestrian access to Houston Square.
- Ensuring residential thru-access. Strategically-identified buffer streets can be designated as temporary "no parking" areas to ensure unhindered neighborhood access for residents and emergency vehicles.
- Facilitating safe intersections. Having crossing guards at Hwy 90 intersections during special events could enhance safety for people who want to walk or bicycle to downtown events.
- Continuing to leverage park and ride opportunities. Sites outside of downtown like the Regional Park can absorb excess parking demand and can be used as park and ride locations for event shuttles to and from downtown.

In addition to large events, downtown programming in Castroville frequently takes the form of casual and smaller-scale gatherings. Residents share news at local coffee shops, families gather at restaurants for weekend outings, and local churches convene on Sundays and facilitate groups throughout the week. Downtown is the natural setting for these community rhythms, and the prevalence of pedestrian concerns and perceived parking challenges suggest that day-to-day downtown experiences could benefit from minor operational improvements as well.

Some residents have voiced general concerns over parking availability in downtown, which invites further study. However, when asked a targeted question about downtown parking experiences, only 6% of Castroville Dreamin' online respondents (out of 107) said that there are "hardly ever" or "never" available parking spaces downtown within two blocks of their destination. About 10% of respondents walk or bike downtown, 66% said parking is "always" or "usually" available within two blocks, and 18% indicated that "sometimes" this is the case.

A question about stakeholders' preferred means of getting downtown shed light on a different piece of the puzzle. Of 124 online survey respondents for this question, approximately 56% would prefer to get downtown by walking or biking if safe paths were available. By comparison, 32% would prefer to drive downtown, and 12% would prefer to take a golf cart.

Taken together, the responses to these two questions indicate that current conditions for walking and biking do not closely align with community desires. The following measures can, over time, shape operational aspects of downtown to better reflect stakeholder aspirations:

- Developing safer pedestrian and bicycle paths. The City will further explore these mobility mode issues and potential solutions - recognizing that if everyone who wanted to walk or bike downtown felt safe doing so, then any experienced car parking shortages in downtown would cease to be an issue.
- Supplementing car parking with bike/golf cart parking. In the near term, bike parking racks and golf cart parking areas can be added near downtown to better accommodate those already using mobility modes that contribute to a lessened need for car parking.
- Encouraging people to park once and walk. For those who still wish to drive, facilitating a "park once" environment can be useful for downtown vibrancy - and residents have voiced support for this idea. Small historic downtowns like Bryan, Texas, have implemented this approach, in which most visitors park their vehicles then walk through downtown's recently-revitalized, inviting streetscapes to distinct local restaurants and businesses (rather than driving between each company). Different iterations of this "park once" concept have been implemented internationally, such as a "Park and Stride" Chamber of Commerce program in Ennis, Ireland.



