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WHAT IS PLACEMAKING?

Placemaking is a way of designing and programming the built environment. Placemaking focuses on public spaces, including streets, to promote a sense of place, identity, and community. Placemaking enhances the branding and economic development potential of an urban commercial district.

The practice of placemaking can involve the design of a physical environment or the management of a neighborhood or public space. Architects, landscape architects, engineers, planners, urban designers, Main Street Program managers, elected officials, and community organizers are all important contributors to placemaking efforts.

Most importantly, community members must be actively engaged in placemaking so that the efforts are relevant and useful to achieve the local vision of a quality place for the neighborhood.

“Placemaking capitalizes on a local community’s assets, inspiration, and potential, ultimately creating good public spaces that promote people’s health, happiness, and well-being.” — Project for Public Spaces

The Study

The 2007 General Obligation Bond provided funds to improve Western Avenue along a two-mile corridor from NW 36th Street to NW 63rd Street. After years of discussion, the plan was ready to begin construction in the summer of 2013. In 2012, some stakeholders began to raise concerns that the project was not doing enough to enhance the potential of a particular part of the corridor as an urban commercial district.

The team was asked to consider the streetscape proposal and create an alternative proposal that represents best practices in placemaking for urban commercial streets. This “Part I” of the study is called the Placemaking Blueprint, from NW 41st Street to NW 46th Street.

Additionally, as development continues along the corridor, the team was asked to consider the status of the existing land use controls and make recommendations about land use policy. This “Part II” of the study is called the Urban Design Framework, from NW 36th Street to NW 48th Street.

Summary

In the core commercial district, the business and residential community generally wants to see a more cohesive district identity achieved through consistent walkability and street design. A unified street design for the commercial district could enhance both walkability and economic vitality. While this stretch of Western Avenue is already known as an upscale dining and shopping destination, improved street design will ensure that Western remains a top urban district in Oklahoma City.

In the greater corridor area between NW 36th Street and NW 48th Street, current land use controls are falling short of addressing the development needs in the area. The existing zoning codes are not consistent with the character of Western Avenue and are contributing to tensions between residential and commercial areas. Because the codes offer very little design guidance, it is difficult for residents to predict what the development of the neighborhood will look like in the future. New types of development regulations could serve the neighborhood more effectively.
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Western Avenue

Neighborhood Associations
The team attended a meeting of the Helm Farm Neighborhood Association that also included representatives from the Zachary Taylor, Douglas Heights, Meadowbrook Acres, and Brookhaven neighborhoods. The local traffic commissioner was also present.

The attendees commented on the heavy traffic on Western Avenue and expressed a desire for a more consistent sidewalk and pedestrian experience. They were enthusiastic about ideas that would slow down traffic and make the area more walkable.

Some attendees noted that parking from Western Avenue sometimes overflows into the Helm Farm neighborhood.

Several cyclists at the meeting noted that they generally avoid Western when biking. They prefer to use nearby residential streets with slower traffic, such as Military or Shartel. Additionally, they expressed the need for better bike parking in prime locations on the corridor.

Public Meeting
The project’s main public meeting was held on Thursday, April 25, including a walk-in period throughout the afternoon and a presentation and discussion in the evening. Approximately thirty people attended over the course of the day. Members of city staff, the local councilman, and the local planning commissioner were also present.

The presentation covered all aspects of the project, including the preliminary plans for the placemaking blueprint and an explanation of the proposed streetscape. Following the presentation, attendees gathered around several copies of the streetscape plan for discussion. Attendees had a favorable reaction to concepts that would improve walkability, calm traffic, and provide additional sidewalk space for businesses.

Attendees helped point out additional refinements for the plan including opportunities for new street parking.

Few attendees had concerns about the plan, but the most common concern was the removal of the buffer space that allows parked cars to back out of their parking space. To address these concerns, it is possible that temporary curbs could be installed to test the effects of this suggested change on the driving behaviors and street safety.

The findings of this study are based heavily on input received from the community and stakeholders. Through public meetings and workshops, online surveys, and personal interviews, the team gained an understanding of the neighborhood’s issues and preferences. The team maintained an online presence including a website and blog, social media, and an e-mail update list.

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

WALKABILITY WORKSHOP
The City of Oklahoma City Office of Sustainability partnered with the Institute for Quality Communities to bring walkability expert Dan Burden to lead a workshop focusing on Western Avenue.

About thirty participants learned about walkability and urban design concepts on a walking tour of the area. Burden pointed out ways to reduce traffic speed, including narrowing lanes and removing excess space between parked cars and the edge of the travel lane.

Burden also emphasized the importance of creating transitions, suggesting the consideration of median gateways at either end of the commercial district. Burden discussed the transition between commercial and single-family residential neighborhoods. He stressed the importance of good design on the back of commercial buildings and offered suggestions for land uses like a cottage court that could soften the transition.

At the end of the workshop day, the participants broke into groups and worked on large maps of the study area to sketch their own ideas for the street’s design. Many of these ideas and discussions were incorporated into this study’s recommendations.
**Western Avenue**

**The placemaking blueprint focuses on the core commercial district between NW 41st Street and NW 46th Street. The design of the street is the most important part of placemaking and economic development on Western Avenue, establishing the neighborhood as a walkable neighborhood center.**

This stretch of Western Avenue has a complementary mix of commercial uses including entertainment, shopping, and offices. Some portions of the corridor have sidewalks built to urban standards, such as in front of VZDs or Will Rogers Theater, but connectivity between blocks is hindered by inconsistencies in the streetscape and an uncomfortable walking environment.

The online survey revealed many concerns about walking or participating in outdoor activities such as sidewalk dining. Poor sidewalks, perceived danger from fast traffic, and noise from traffic were among the concerns shared by neighborhood residents and business owners. The generally shared vision for the street includes consistent sidewalks with ample space for cafe tables or merchandise displays, clearly defined crosswalk markings, street trees and lighting, and an emphasis on reducing the speed of traffic.

Business owners are interested in creating a destination where customers are able to visit many shops or restaurants in each visit to the area. A unified streetscape can achieve this identity for the district and enable comfortable strolling between businesses.

Pedestrians walking in the large space between the travel lane and parked cars are at greater risk of being injured by vehicles that are passing by, parking, or back out of a space.

Sidewalks often run into dead-ends that are aligned with neighboring parking lots. Looking down the sidewalk and seeing a parked car blocking the path sends the wrong signal to pedestrians.

The lack of spatial definition doesn’t provide drivers with clear direction, often resulting in blurred boundaries of where vehicular and pedestrian zones meet.

Dirt paths and worn-down grass show where people are really walking, also known as “desire lines.”

Large curb cuts create unpredictable vehicular activity into pedestrian zones.

“Steps and elevation changes are difficult for disabled and elderly people to navigate. Even a very small change of a few inches can make it impossible for some people to access a business.”

“There are cases where there is a dangerous mismatch between the location of the crosswalk and where cars will actually stop to look both ways.”

“I can walk to work from where I live and love the area, but it needs sidewalk improvements and crosswalks.”
PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

One-on-one interviews were held with business representatives and property owners in the placemaking blueprint study area. Several key concepts and issues came up.

The most common stakeholder concern during the interviews was parking. Parking is perceived to be a significant issue, particularly nights and weekends in the core of the district near NW 42nd Street and NW 43rd Street. A parking analysis is included in this study.

The team discussed various parking management options with business owners, including timed parking, metered parking, and paid private parking. Most business owners were hesitant about the idea of metered parking, but understood the value of parking management and were open to considering metering in the future. Business owners were more likely to support metered parking if meter revenues could be earmarked for further improvements in the district.

Many business owners have a vision for a walkable street where window-shopping and strolling are possible. Related visions include making the street well-known for a romantic atmosphere, or a destination for food and food retail. One business owner disagreed and noted that he does not consider pedestrian traffic to be important to his business.

Almost all of the business owners expressed concerns about noise level and safety related to the traffic on Western Avenue. They are generally supportive of traffic calming efforts as a way to improve safety and the atmosphere of the street for customers.

Business and property owners are tired of the long process that has occurred throughout the Western Avenue streetscape project. While they are supportive of streetscape improvements, they are concerned about the impact of construction on their sales. The time period from late fall (November) to early spring (March) is an important part of the business owners’ Autumn season.

How often do you travel between businesses?

- Walk 42%
- Drive 31%
- Rarely 22%
- Never 3%
- Sometimes 37%

How often do you have trouble parking?

- Always 5%
- Usually 12%
- Sometimes 34%
- Rarely 22%
- Never 16%

BUSINESS QUANTITY

- Two story building
- Mixed-use (Housing/offices+retail)
- Three or more story building
- Neon signs
- Parking lot fence
- Handicap accessibility

Noise

- Parking lot lighting
- Pedestrian signage
- Mixed-use (Housing/offices+retail)
- Parking lot hedge screen
- Parking lot landscaping
- Handicap accessibility

Limiting factors to walking/Outdoor activities (71)

- Parking lots
- Bus shelter and benches
- Bicycle parking
- Fast traffic
- Handicap accessibility

Walking or strolling are possible. Related visions include making the street well-known for a romantic atmosphere, or a destination for food and food retail. One business owner disagreed and noted that he does not consider pedestrian traffic to be important to his business.

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- Bus shelter and benches
- Bicycle parking
- Fast traffic
- Handicap accessibility

An online survey was opened for one month, publicized through social media and e-mail. The survey received 122 responses. About 50% of respondents reported that they live in the neighborhoods adjacent to the study area including Helm Farm, Crown Heights-Edgemere Heights, and Douglas Park.

The survey focused on three main parts: gathering information about the community’s behavior and influences when they visit Western Avenue, understanding the community’s preferences for the design of the public space on the street, and understanding the community’s preferences for the design of private development.

122 responses

50% live near study area

11% work in study area

7% own business in study area
The team identified “lost space” as the space between the outside of the travel lane and the edge of the angled on-street parking spaces. This space is currently utilized as a way for cars to back out of a parking space without slowing the flow of traffic.

However, the space also effectively widens the lane to produce greater traffic speeds and is used for dangerous driving behaviors such as U-turns and swerving around cars that are waiting to turn left. These dangerous driving behaviors are especially concerning because the lost space is frequently used by pedestrians as a more consistent walking surface than the sidewalks on the corridor. While some community members expressed safety concerns about eliminating this space, the presence of the space is also creating major safety issues.

Returning the lost space to the pedestrian area of the street could allow an enhanced streetscape that is safer for all users of Western Avenue. A similar strategy was used by the City of Oklahoma City for the Plaza District streetscape on NW 16th Street.

“A lot of people I know in this neighborhood want to walk, but it is so hard to do safely with kids.”
The currently proposed street project stretches along Western Avenue from NW 36th Street to NW 63rd Street. The primary walkability goal of the project was to provide an ADA-accessible path on one side of the street along the entire two-mile corridor. The proposed project achieves this goal and improves several pedestrian crossings with ramps and markings. Some streetscape elements such as covered bus stops and benches are included.

Due to budget constraints, the provisions for pedestrian facilities are minimal. ADA-accessibility is typically achieved on the east side of the street in the 41st to 46th Street area. The west side of the street has greater elevation changes and ADA challenges. If not addressed concurrently in a public project, these ADA challenges will fall on private property owners and potentially make redevelopment impossible for some buildings.

Current streetscape plan achieves:
- Meets ADA requirements (along 2-mile corridor)
- Improves pedestrian crossings

Current streetscape plan does NOT achieve:
- Traffic calming
- Cohesive district identity
- Economic value for businesses
- Spaces for public life

Traffic calming can be achieved primarily through narrowed lanes. The proposed changes retain the street’s excessively wide lane widths of approximately 15’. According to on-site comments by expert Dan Burden, an ideal travel speed for a walkable commercial district would be 19 miles per hour, but 15’ lanes would likely keep the street’s typical speed above 30 miles per hour.

A district identity can be achieved through defined thresholds at the corridor’s gateway and consistent street treatment throughout the corridor. District identity will become increasingly important for this commercial district as other urban neighborhoods such as the Plaza District and Midtown offer the cohesive pedestrian experiences desired by consumers.

The proposed changes do not expand economic opportunity for property and business owners along the corridor. The primary goal of a streetscape is to create economic value for businesses and the city. Businesses can use enhanced space in the public realm to expand the footprint of their business into sidewalk patios and outdoor merchandise displays. A quality streetscape will increase property values and sales tax revenues for all properties within walking distance.

Finally, the proposed changes provide a path for pedestrian through-movement on one side of the street, but they do not provide a place for public life to occur. Public life is stimulated by outdoor dining, places to gather groups of people, or places to sit and watch other people pass by.

The changes that are currently proposed for Western Avenue do not adequately address the community’s vision to become a walkable, vibrant community center. They would not provide the significant economic benefits that can be achieved through a quality streetscape.

Research & Analysis

“There are not enough businesses to walk between. Part of strolling past shops is opportunistic, but you need a solid string of businesses to create the experience.”

“It would be really wonderful to slow traffic down in the area.”

“I enjoy patio dining, but there is limited space and what is there takes up part of the sidewalk in some areas.”

PROPOSED GENERAL OBLIGATION BOND STREET PROJECT

“The sidewalks are too small and too close to busy, noisy Western... not quite a calm atmosphere for relaxing.”
Western Avenue

PARKING ANALYSIS

The team conducted five occupancy counts including times of peak parking demand in the district.

**Off-street parking:** 564

**On-street parking:** 181

**Total parking:** 745

Parking was a major concern for business and property owners along Western Avenue. Parking is a much greater concern for business owners and residents than for visitors to the district. The online survey showed that only 17% of people report that they ‘Always’ or ‘Usually’ have trouble parking in the area, while 46% of people ‘Never’ or ‘Rarely’ have trouble parking.

Our study includes an analysis of the status of parking in the area. While the data supports the online survey’s indication that there is no pressing shortage of parking in the district, there are inefficiencies that could be resolved through a variety of parking management strategies.

Peak district-wide parking occupancy is generally about 50%. The parking analysis maps show how parking occupancy is usually skewed toward the southern part of the district where there is a cluster of restaurants and bars. This is apparent when the occupancy rates north and south of NW 43rd Street are examined individually.

The distance from plentiful vacant parking north of 43rd Street to the center of the district near Will Rogers Theater is often a shorter walk than some off-street parking spaces in the large parking lots at 43rd Street. However, the lack of walkability and poor lighting north of 43rd Street prevent customers from seeking parking there.

On-street parking is present throughout the district, but with no time limits or pricing it is frequently full in front of key locations despite overall high parking vacancy. The fact that on-street parking fills before off-street parking means that travelers passing through looking for a quick, convenient stop are unable to find a parking space. Visitors who may be staying all day are free to park in valuable on-street spaces rather than seeking out the off-street parking that is more appropriate for a long-term stay in the district.

Despite signage that indicates parking is privately controlled, it appears that in reality parking is being shared throughout the district. Particularly during busy evenings, visitors may park in the lot for one business, eat dinner, and then walk to spend the rest of the evening visiting nearby bars or event spaces.

<table>
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<th>Observed Parking Occupancy Rates (District-wide)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday 3/15</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>On-Street</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Off-Street</strong></td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Observed Parking Occupancy Rates (South of 43rd)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>On-Street</strong></td>
</tr>
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<td>Friday 3/15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
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<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
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<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 p.m.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 p.m.</td>
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</table>

The team conducted five occupancy counts including times of peak parking demand in the district.
Western Avenue

This report does not recommend an effort to expand the availability of off-street parking in the corridor. Instead, it presents a menu of parking management options that would help bring equity and efficiency.

Shared Parking Agreement
A shared parking agreement could be negotiated through the business association that would allow parking owners to be adequately compensated on an annual or monthly basis.

Private Parking Management
Parking lot owners want to ensure that their parking is available for their own customers. There is not currently a system to adequately compensate parking lot owners when customers of other businesses use their lots. In the absence of a district-wide parking agreement, parking owners may choose to introduce a private parking management system. Parking could be validated by a receipt or token from a participating business. Customers who do not visit a participating business to receive validation could then be charged for parking when they exit the parking lot.

Timed Parking
Introducing time limits to on-street parking could help ensure better parking turnover in the most convenient parking spaces. Long-term visitors will seek out parking with no time limits in off-street parking areas. Timed parking may offer a similar but less pronounced effect as metered parking, discussed below.

PARKING OPTIONS

Metered Parking
Because on-street parking in key blocks is often completely full, the district may consider metered parking priced to achieve 85% occupancy (one or two available spaces per block) at any given time. Short-term visitors or visitors who are willing to pay for a convenient parking space would be more likely to have access to a parking space. All-day visitors or visitors who are not willing to pay would seek out free parking in existing off-street parking lots.

Most business owners were receptive to the idea of metered parking as a way to increase customer turnover and improve the perception of parking availability for people traveling along the Western corridor. However, the district would not support metered parking if revenues were not earmarked to be reinvested along Western Avenue.

Several meter scenarios explore the question of how much revenue could be generated by a metered parking system. The tables show estimated annual revenue scenarios based on how many spaces are metered, two different price points, and a variety of conservative occupancy rates. These scenarios assume peak hour metering at lunch, dinner, and late evening hours.

These revenues could be returned to a fund that could be used to pay for the district’s parking operations, place management services, or bond for physical improvements. See also “The High Cost of Free Parking” by Donald Shoup.

Metered Parking

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<th>Price Per Hour</th>
<th>Average Occupancy Rate</th>
<th>Annual Revenue</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>$163,264.50</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The major placemaking recommendation is a new, enhanced streetscape plan for the core commercial district. The new streetscape would have several priorities:
1. Calm traffic to promote safety and reduce noise
2. Maximize sidewalk space for economic prosperity and public life
3. Increase on-street parking
4. Deliver accessibility solutions for challenging buildings

A driver’s cone of vision dramatically increases as speed falls under 35 miles per hour. An ideal speed for safety in a pedestrian environment is under 20 miles per hour.

Research & Analysis

The major placemaking recommendation is a new, enhanced streetscape plan for the core commercial district. The new streetscape would have several priorities:
1. Calm traffic to promote safety and reduce noise
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A driver’s cone of vision dramatically increases as speed falls under 35 miles per hour. An ideal speed for safety in a pedestrian environment is under 20 miles per hour.

Vision Cone Diagram
PLACEMAKING BLUEPRINT

Proposed Western Avenue Placemaking Plan  26
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Placemaking Priorities  44
Western Avenue
NW 41st - NW 42nd Street

Parking Count

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Businesses</th>
<th>Parking Type</th>
<th>Existing</th>
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<td>Urbane</td>
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<td>Beck's Garage</td>
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<td>VZD's Restaurant</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td>Sipango Lounge</td>
<td>On-street</td>
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<tr>
<td>Musashi’s</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cafe Nova</td>
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<td>Sushi Neko</td>
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<td>The Lobby</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<th>Proposed</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mockingbird</td>
<td>Off-street</td>
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<td>71</td>
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<td>Vater Office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QC Gas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French Cowgirl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundromat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>112</strong></td>
<td><strong>120</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Western Avenue
**NW 45th - NW 46th Street**

- **Parking Count**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Businesses</th>
<th>Parking Type</th>
<th>Existing</th>
<th>Proposed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guinn's</td>
<td>On-street</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northwest Auto</td>
<td>Off-street</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antique Shop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horace Mann School</td>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td><strong>53</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Legend**
  - Existing raised curb
  - Existing sidewalk
  - Existing drain

- **Map**

  - **Guinn's**
  - **Northwest Automotive**
  - **Antique Shop**
  - **Horace Mann Elementary School**

  - **45th Street**
  - **46th Street**
South Gateway
NW 41st and Western Avenue

- Existing
- Proposed

- Screening hedge
- Bioretention basin
- Wheelchair accessible ramp
- Gateway median

Sipango Lounge
NW 42nd and Western Avenue

- Existing
- Proposed

- Low-growing multi-trunk trees under power lines
- Outdoor cafe seating
- Bike parking
- Widened sidewalk
Cafe Nova
NW 42nd and Western Avenue

existing

proposed

- remove or relocate existing trees
- outdoor cafe seating
- widened sidewalk
- tree planter

Spiral Beadery
NW 43rd and Western Avenue

existing

proposed

- wheelchair accessible ramp
- stairs
- additional sidewalk at street level
- flower bed
Western Avenue

The study identifies several levels of priority for sub-areas within the Western Avenue urban commercial district. The entire district is in need of consistent, walkable streetscape. However, if the complete project is not feasible right away due to funding constraints it could be broken down into smaller parts.

Priority is assigned based on economic potential and the presence of an urban fabric that would already support the placemaking blueprint’s streetscape recommendations.

**Area A** consists of the blocks that have a strong urban fabric which are in need of an equally strong streetscape. These blocks are the heart of the district and the greatest concentration of all-day activity. Area A also includes the strong gateway markers that would define the district.

**Area B** also has strong urban fabric, but experiences less all-day activity. Streetscape improvements to this area could be prioritized after Area A.

**Area C** has a weaker urban fabric that would not be immediately supportive to the streetscape. However, introducing the quality urban streetscape to the area could provide incentive for infill redevelopment.

The streetscape concept presented in this plan is consistent with the best survey data available that was also used by the contracted engineer. Approximately four to eight weeks of additional study will be necessary for the contracted engineer to consider how the proposed streetscape will interact with existing utilities and drainage systems. The selected streetscape priority area recommendations can be bid as an alternative within the existing bond project.

The proposed streetscape includes changes that will take place beyond the right-of-way line on private property. The city must ask private property owners in the corridor to donate easements where improvements will be constructed. Property owners should be willing to donate easements in exchange for public improvements that will increase property values and bring their structures into ADA compliance.
Existing Zoning Code 48
Commercial-Residential Edge 50
Recommendations 51
Urban Design Framework Matrix 52
Development controls should provide predictability for neighborhood residents while also providing opportunity for development. Currently, straight zoning with no design or form overlay is not serving these purposes for Western Avenue. The existing zoning throughout the corridor bear little relationship to the actual conditions on Western Avenue and does not provide adequate support to promote the local vision for a walkable retail street.

For example, most of the core commercial district is zoned C-4 General Commercial District. Despite the corridor’s position as a commercial node within an established residential neighborhood, the purpose statement for the C-4 zone states that its regulations are “very much incompatible with residential development.” Some parcels are zoned C-3 Community Commercial District, which states that C-3 parcels should be separated “as much as possible, both visually and physically, from any nearby residential areas.” Appropriate development standards could create commercial and mixed-use development that would be sensitive and beneficial to the residential areas.

The table on the following page shows the specific commercial zoning policies currently in place in the district and regulations that cause concern. Concerns include:

- Allowing inappropriate land uses by right
- Limiting development opportunity
- Discouraging the urban character of neighborhood
- Exerting minimal control over the commercial-residential edge

## EXISTING ZONING CODE

### Existing Zoning Code Evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoning</th>
<th>Purpose Statement</th>
<th>Regulation</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Resolution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C-3 (§ 59-6200) Community Commercial District</td>
<td>The C-3 District is intended for business activity that is located at the edge of residential areas but serves a larger trade area than the immediately surrounding residential neighborhoods. Business uses will most often be found in a wide variety of commercial structures, normally on individual sites with separate ingress, egress and parking. Because of the varied uses permitted, it is important to separate them as much as possible, both visually and physically from any nearby residential areas and to limit the harmful effects of increased traffic, noise and general non-residential activity generated.</td>
<td>§ 59-6200.2 Uses Permitted by Right 8300.12 Automotive: Parking Lots, as a Principal Use</td>
<td>Allows uses by-right that may disrupt the consistent walkability of the district, with no additional design requirements.</td>
<td>Adopt additional design requirements for parking lots that screen them from the sidewalk and hold an urban edge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-4 (§ 59-6200) General Commercial District</td>
<td>The C-4 District is intended for the conduct of wholesale, retail and office business activities that serve the needs of citizens from anywhere in the metropolitan area, rather than being oriented only to surrounding residential areas. Because the permitted uses may serve and employ a large number of people from a large part of the metropolitan area, the activities conducted, and the traffic generated, make this district very much incompatible with residential development. The Comprehensive Plan policy does not support further expansion of the C-4 District.</td>
<td>§ 59-6200.2 Uses Permitted by Right 8300.12 Automotive: Parking Lots, as a Principal Use</td>
<td>Allows uses by-right that may disrupt the consistent walkability of the district, with no additional design requirements.</td>
<td>Limit auto-oriented uses and adopt additional design requirements for allowable auto-oriented uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-2 (General Office)</td>
<td>The O-2 District is intended to provide a place for those office and institutional activities that require separate buildings, or building groups, and whose employees and clientele may come from a wide geographic area. Land, space and aesthetic requirements of these uses make either a central location or a location on large sites between more intense retail commercial areas and established residential neighborhoods desirable, so as to act as a buffer.</td>
<td>§ 59-6200.2 Uses Permitted by Right 8300.12 Automotive: Parking Lots, as a Principal Use</td>
<td>Allows uses by-right that may disrupt the consistent walkability of the district, with no additional design requirements.</td>
<td>Adapt additional design requirements for parking lots that screen them from the sidewalk and hold an urban edge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Zoning Policy

- **Commercial District (C-4):**
  - Maximum Height: Where abutting or within 75 feet of R-1 or HP; 25 ft and 1 story, Between 35 ft and 150 ft of said district 35 ft and 2 stories; More than 150 ft from said district: 6 stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **Community Commercial District (C-3):**
  - Maximum Height: Where abutting or within 75 feet of R-1 or HP; 25 ft and 1 story, Between 35 ft and 150 ft of said district 35 ft and 2 stories; More than 150 ft from said district: 6 stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **General Commercial District (G-1):**
  - Maximum Height: Where abutting or within 75 feet of R-1 or HP; 25 ft and 1 story, Between 35 ft and 150 ft of said district 35 ft and 2 stories; More than 150 ft from said district: 6 stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **Single-Family Residential (R-1):**
  - Maximum Height: 35 ft and 2 stories within 75 feet of R-1, Otherwise 6 Stories
  - Minimum rear yard setback: 15 ft
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **Medium-Low Density Residential (R-2):**
  - Maximum Height: 8 Stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **High Density Residential (R-4):**
  - Maximum Height: 10 Stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **Historic Preservation (HP):**
  - Maximum Height: 4 Stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **General Commercial (C-4):**
  - Maximum Height: 35 ft and 2 stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **Community Commercial (C-3):**
  - Maximum Height: 35 ft and 2 stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **General Office (O-2):**
  - Maximum Height: 35 ft and 2 stories
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

- **Planned Unit Development (PUD/SPLD):**
  - Minimum front yard setback: 25 ft

### Zoning Standards

- **Uses Permitted by Right:**
  - Automotive: Parking Lots, as a Principal Use
  - Automotive and Equipment: Heavy Repair, Heavy Equipment
  - Gasoline Sales, Large
  - Gasoline Sales, Truck Stop

- **Required Setbacks:**
  - Minimum required setback: 5 ft
  - Maximum required setback: 15 ft

- **Special Use Zones:**
  - Commercial-Residential Corridor
  - Commercial-Residential Edge
COMMERCIAL-RESIDENTIAL EDGE

A significant source of land development tension in this neighborhood is the edge between the commercial district and the residential neighborhoods located behind commercial properties.

Parking is one source of tension. Businesses have expanded surface parking lots into single-family neighborhoods. Surface parking lots can be an eyesore and create noise and light pollution in the neighborhood. Additionally, neighborhood residents near nightlife businesses have complained about customers parking in residential on-street parking. As a result, most side streets have now banned on-street parking.

The R-1 zoning only allows single-family residential buildings to be built in the neighborhoods behind the commercial zones. Therefore, residential typologies that might provide a gradual density transition and buffer between commercial and single-family neighborhoods are not allowed.

Another tension is the appearance of the back of a commercial property, which is often the location of loading or service functions that can be undesirable for adjacent residences in the absence of design or form requirements.

Building height in the commercial zone is currently limited without exception based on the adjacent R-1 and HP zoning. The addition of form requirements could give developers the opportunity for slight height increases in exchange for enhanced sensitivity to the neighborhoods.

The commercial-residential edge could be regulated differently to provide additional protection to the neighborhood as well as additional development opportunity in the commercial corridor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The neighborhood and city should pursue development regulations that offer greater predictability and opportunity for residential and commercial property owners. One option to achieve this goal is through a code or overlay that includes form-based elements.

Recommendations for form-based elements to consider are shown in the urban design framework matrix. The matrix includes general suggestions that are based on survey results and interactions with stakeholders. A more intensive process than this study will be necessary to explore the willingness of the community to participate in a form-based code option.

A code for the Western Avenue neighborhood would likely include two character zones: Neighborhood Center and Neighborhood Transition. The Neighborhood Center character zone would shape the form of commercial and mixed-use development directly on Western Avenue, while the Neighborhood Transition zone would define the shape of developments that could occur on infill lots located directly behind the commercial development area.

A form-based code would create a policy environment to allow the commercial and residential districts to grow together in a mutually respectful and beneficial way.
### URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

#### Character Zone

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element Regulated</th>
<th>Western Avenue Neighborhood Center</th>
<th>Neighborhood Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td>Maintain the character of Western Avenue while strengthening development opportunity for restaurants, shops, offices, and multifamily residential.</td>
<td>Create an appropriate transition between the higher-intensity Western corridor and adjacent single-family neighborhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Mix</td>
<td>Mix of commercial (retail, entertainment, office) and urban residential (apartments, condos, live-work).</td>
<td>Mainly mall-scale residential (duplex, bungalow court, small apartments, townhomes) with some office and service uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permitted Uses</td>
<td>Design standards mitigate auto-oriented elements. NA</td>
<td>Build-to Zones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim or Phased Uses</td>
<td>Allow existing buildings and uses to remain with triggers for phasing them out based on investment level and market conditions. Allow existing buildings and uses to remain.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Standards for Auto-Oriented Elements</td>
<td>Building heights generally 2-3 stories.</td>
<td>The Regulating Plan will establish areas of the site where an additional floor could be allowed subject to specific form standards and with appropriate transitions from adjoining uses and consideration of residential neighborhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Heights</td>
<td>The Regulating Plan will establish areas of the site (45'-50' from the centerline of Western Avenue)</td>
<td>Exceptions are allowed to align with a neighboring existing building.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impervious Cover Requirements</td>
<td>70% maximum; area of building footprint is exempt from calculations.</td>
<td>2 1/2 stories (35 ft.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Density (max/min)</td>
<td>De facto density maximum provided by form standards. Building type standards will establish the density standards.</td>
<td>Exception to the building code.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Strategy (on and off-street)</td>
<td>Allow on-street parallel or angled parking.</td>
<td>Establish a single parking ratio for all non-residential uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Standards</td>
<td>Keep existing block structure.</td>
<td>Establish a single parking ratio for all residential uses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Requirements (if any)</td>
<td>Appropriate transition provided by the transition character area.</td>
<td>Building type standards determine transition standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Strategy (on and off-street)</td>
<td>Allow off-street parking in parking structures or surface parking with design standards that include screening elements such as a fence, wall, or hedge.</td>
<td>Allow off-street parking in locations determined by the building type standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to the Regulating Plan</td>
<td>The Regulating Plan will establish street types and ideal cross sections for Western Avenue and side streets.</td>
<td>Building type standards will establish the building scale and massing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frontage Standards</td>
<td>Building frontage standards are based on the street type designation, with buildings on Western Avenue being held to higher standards of pedestrian-oriented design.</td>
<td>Establish street screen requirements for service, loading, and parking areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streetscape Standards</td>
<td>Western Avenue has pedestrian-oriented streetscape standards for street trees, sidewalk width, etc.</td>
<td>Primary entrances must be from the sidewalk; secondary entrances may be used to access parking areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Standards</td>
<td>Focuses on street trees, parking lot screening, and buffering at the commercial residential edge.</td>
<td>Ground floor treatments (doors, windows, building rhythm, etc.) based on street types and building types.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Cross Sections</td>
<td>Cross sections specify number of travel lanes, on-street parking accommodation, and pedestrian accommodation.</td>
<td>A range of building materials should be allowed to reflect the varied style found in the Western Avenue corridor and adjacent neighborhoods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Driveway Standards</td>
<td>Provides standards for driveways and limits driveways on Western Avenue.</td>
<td>Other provisions for rehab/maintenance of existing buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional Urban Design Standards</td>
<td>Establish street type transitions from adjoining uses and consideration of market conditions.</td>
<td>Other provisions for rehab/maintenance of existing buildings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Scale and Massing</td>
<td>Building massing that clearly distinguishes a base and an upper Stories.</td>
<td>Establish standards for appropriately scaled monument signs. NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of Auto-Related Elements and Service Areas</td>
<td>Establish street screen requirements for service, loading, and parking areas.</td>
<td>Establish standards for appropriately scaled monument signs. NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building orientation and articulation</td>
<td>Establish street type transitions from adjoining uses and consideration of market conditions.</td>
<td>Establish standards for appropriately scaled monument signs. NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>Allow long-lasting materials that project a sense of permanence.</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signage Standards</td>
<td>Establish standards for appropriately scaled monument signs. NA</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master Sign Plans</td>
<td>Allow flexibility for developers/applicants to create unique sign plans for specific projects or locations.</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration and Development Phasing</td>
<td>Administrative approval for development that meets the standards established in the code.</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval authority</td>
<td>Administrative approval for development that meets the standards established in the code.</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor modifications</td>
<td>Establish a matrix for minor modifications of certain standards in the code based on specific criteria to provide for some flexibility within the parameters of the code under certain conditions.</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-conforming uses and buildings</td>
<td>May establish appropriate standards for non-conforming building triggers that are based on level of investment proposed and market conditions.</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship to Existing Ordinances</td>
<td>The code’s alternative design standards are established in lieu of site development standards.</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Building Form and Development Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Zone</th>
<th>Building Type Standards (Article 35)</th>
<th>Relationship to Existing Ordinances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Avenue Neighborhood Center</td>
<td>Identify appropriate building types (duplex, small apartment, bungalow court, etc.).</td>
<td>Establish appropriate building types for non-conforming building triggers that are based on level of investment proposed and market conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood Transition</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Establish standards for temporary signs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Relationship to Existing Ordinances

- The code’s alternative design standards are established in lieu of site development standards.

#### Administration and Development Phasing

- Administrative approval for development that meets the standards established in the code.

#### Minor modifications

- Establish a matrix for minor modifications of certain standards in the code based on specific criteria to provide for some flexibility within the parameters of the code under certain conditions.

#### Non-conforming uses and buildings

- May establish appropriate standards for non-conforming building triggers that are based on level of investment proposed and market conditions.
CONCLUSION

Western Avenue has been one of Oklahoma City’s favorite local urban retail and dining districts for decades. Business owners, residents, and visitors to the area are united in a vision of the neighborhood as an attractive, walkable district with a unique local character.

The corridor is set to receive improvements from the 2007 General Obligation Bond, but the proposed improvements are not fully realizing the opportunity to increase economic vitality and a sense of place for the center of the commercial district. Refining the streetscape proposal according to the recommendations in this plan will ensure that Western Avenue continues to be a favorite destination in the Oklahoma City area.

Like many neighborhoods in Oklahoma City, the area along Western Avenue is impacted by a zoning code that is not relevant to established urban neighborhoods. To allow the area to grow and prosper without negative impacts to the residential neighborhoods, new development regulations will be needed.

A form-based code approach to land development regulations could be the appropriate solution for the Western Avenue neighborhoods. Form-based regulations would help by providing additional design guidance, development opportunity, and predictability. This approach will require a separate study by a form-based code consultant with extensive communication with individual property owners.

The City of Oklahoma City has the opportunity to expand the economic potential of Western Avenue by bringing together high quality public space and specific development regulations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Western Avenue Community Members
42nd Street Candy Company, Chase Kerby
A Date With Iris, Kris Balaban
Brookhaven Neighborhood
Café Nova, Shannon Self
Crown Heights-Edgemere Heights Neighborhood
Douglas Heights Neighborhood
First National Bank of Oklahoma, Mel Martin
Freeman’s Liquor, Chris Hancock
Helm Farm Neighborhood
Ketch Design Center, Ronnie Ketch
Meadowbrook Acres Neighborhood
Rug & Carpet of Oklahoma, Steve Street
Savory Spice Shop, Able Blakely
Western Avenue Association, Heather Griswold
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Will Rogers Theater, Sushi Neko, Musashi’s, Carl Milam
Zachary Taylor Neighborhood

Public Officials
Dr. Ed Shadid, Ward 2 Councilman
Janis Powers, Ward 2 Planning Commissioner
Rob Littlefield, Ward 2 Traffic Commissioner

City of Oklahoma City Planning Department
Russell Claus, Director of Planning
Kim Cooper-Hart
Jennifer Gates
Chris Varga

City of Oklahoma City Public Works
Eric Wenger, Director of Public Works
Patty Butenhoff
Ed Degraffenried

City of Oklahoma City Office of Sustainability
Jennifer Gooden
T.O. Bowman
Madeleine Wiens

Huitt-Zollars, Inc.
Bryan Coon
Scott Darr

The University of Oklahoma Institute for Quality Communities
Blair Humphreys, Executive Director
Shane Hampton, Project Manager
Sam Day, Project Designer
Julie Tran, Project Designer
Brad Lonberger, Visiting Professional Fellow (Gateway Planning)

Walkable and Livable Communities Institute
Dan Burden

The City of Oklahoma City has the opportunity to expand the economic potential of Western Avenue by bringing together high quality public space and specific development regulations.