

SAN MARCOS
NORTH OF
CAMPUS
NEIGHBORHOOD

AREA PLAN

FEBRUARY 2026







SAN MARCOS

NORTH OF CAMPUS AREA PLAN



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INTRODUCTION

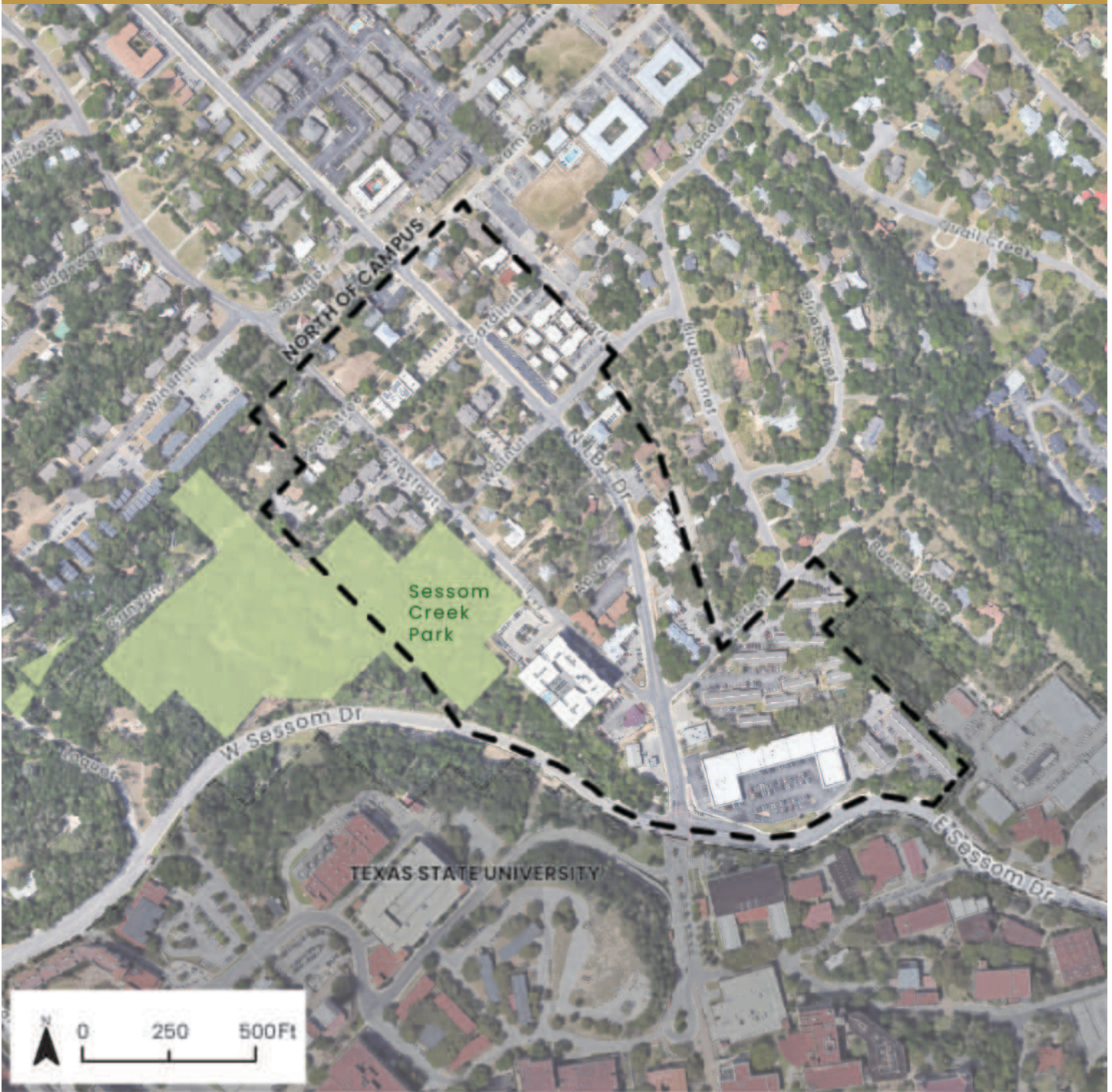
Plan Area Overview

The City of San Marcos (“City”) is comprised of many unique neighborhoods which the community desires to celebrate and protect. The City has seen rapid growth, named the fastest growing city of its size by the US Census in 2013 and 2015, which puts pressure for change on established areas of town¹. While growth and change are inevitable, how the City grows and changes should be properly managed. The purpose of this Neighborhood Area Plan is to describe the existing conditions of the North of Campus neighborhood, make connections to the City’s Comprehensive Plan, Vision SMTX, to maintain the character of the neighborhood and provide recommendations for the future of the North of Campus Plan Area (“Plan Area”).

The North of Campus Plan area encompasses 39.6 acres on the north side of the City of San Marcos. The area is located directly north of Sessom Drive, which forms the boundary between the neighborhood and the Texas State University campus (hereafter “TXST” or “University”). Sessom Creek Natural Area is in the southwest corner of the Plan Area. See map in Figure 1.2: Basemap. The Plan Area is also bisected by North LBJ Drive. The neighborhood includes large commercial areas, apartment complexes, small restaurants, bars, salons, retail stores, townhomes, and single-family homes intermixed with open space. See map in Figure 1.1: Aerial View with Plan Area Boundary.

TXST’s campus edge is a prominent boundary to the south and east of the neighborhood. Historic plat documents indicate that the University, established 1899, has been present since prior to the establishment of the North of Campus neighborhood. The two major subdivision plats include the Park Addition, Third Division (1908) and the Forest Hills and College Heights Plat (1944). The presence of the University played a role in how the Plan Area developed and changed over time.

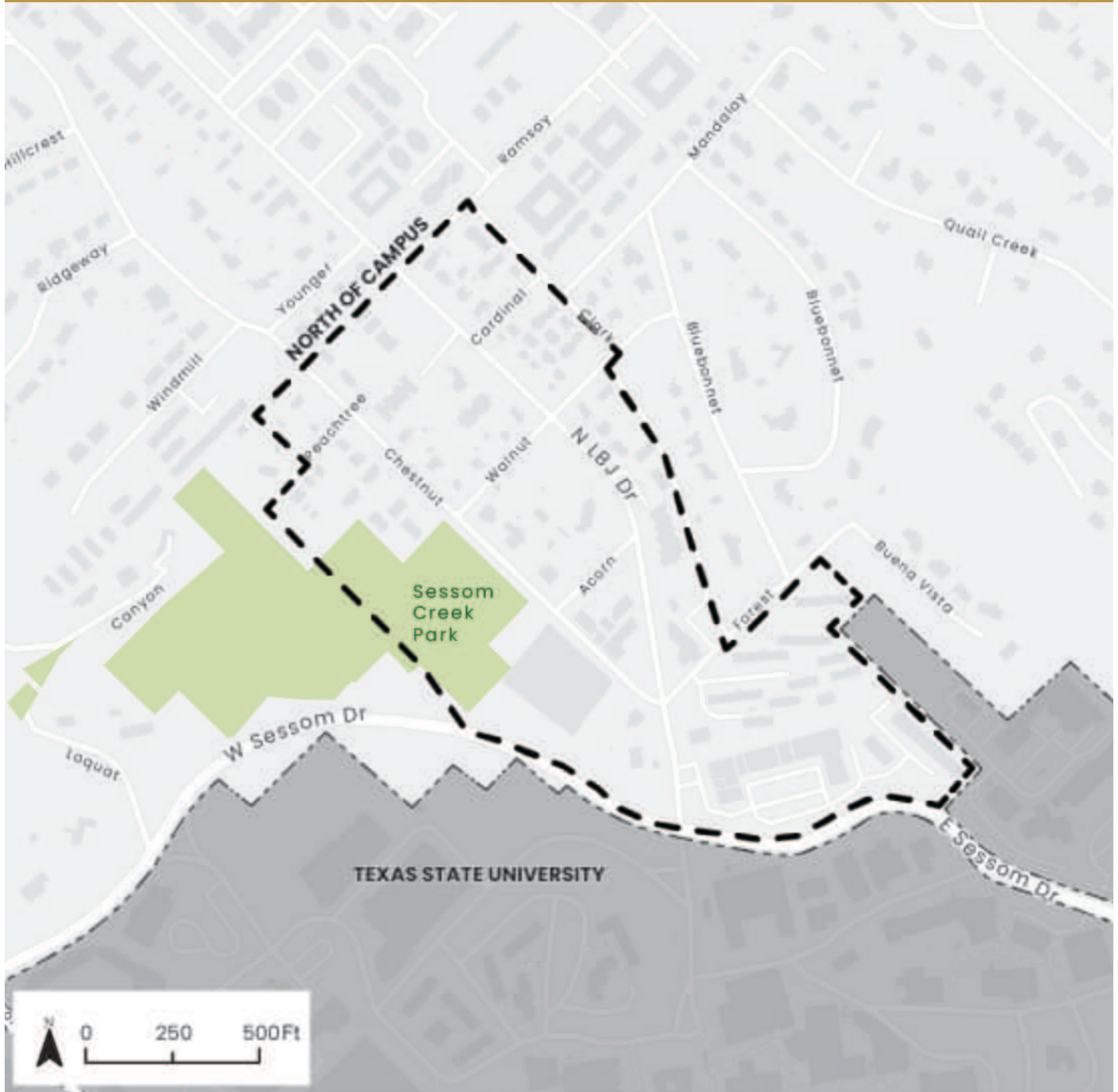
FIGURE 1.1. AERIAL VIEW WITH PLAN AREA BOUNDARY



Legend

-  North of Campus
-  Texas State Campus
-  Parks

FIGURE 1.2. BASEMAP



Legend

-  North of Campus
-  Texas State Campus
-  Minor Roads
-  Major Roads
-  Parks



**PURPOSE AND
APPROACH**

This Neighborhood Area Plan is an extension of the Vision SMTX Comprehensive Plan. Vision SMTX will serve as the record of San Marcos' long-range vision. It will also direct and manage the City's growth and provides guidance for ordinances and the development code. This Area Plan goes a step further by recommending how to implement the Vision SMTX Vision and Goals in the North of Campus neighborhood. With extensive community input, neighborhood residents and stakeholders determined key factors that should guide decision-making for development, amenities, and programs in the Neighborhood.

Alignment with Comprehensive Plan

Vision SMTX, the City's Comprehensive Plan, provides the high-level direction for San Marcos' future growth and land uses. This Plan complements the efforts of Vision SMTX and recommendations generally align with the Comprehensive Plan. The following five Vision SMTX guiding principles are relevant to the Plan Area and were used to guide the creation of this Neighborhood Area Plan throughout the drafting process:

- **Sustainable and Resilient**
- **Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive**
- **Unique and Complete**
- **Supported and Connected**
- **Strategic and Complementary**

Table 2.1

VISION SMTX-AREA PLAN ALIGNMENT		
Vision SMTX Guiding Principles	Description	How We Will Meet This Goal in the Neighborhood
Sustainable and Resilient	Promote and balance economic and environmental resilience, and social sustainability for current residents and future generations.	Consider these questions for each recommendation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does it address racial, social, environmental, health, or economic disparities? • What unintended consequences might each policy or program produce? • How will it advance racial equity or mitigate those unintended consequences?
Equitable, Diverse, and Inclusive	Maintain and create opportunity, choice and a sense of belonging for all residents, regardless of age, race/color, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity, ability, income, education, or political affiliation.	Tailor each recommendation to serve all and meet all where they are. Encourage policies and projects that help support affordability for current and future residents within the neighborhood.
Unique and Complete	Improve access to employment and essential goods and services throughout San Marcos while respecting individual preferences and protecting the unique character of existing neighborhoods and places.	Maintain existing assets, amenities, and physical structures so that current residents and future generations can continue to enjoy North of Campus as they do today.
Supported and Connected	Ensure that existing and new development throughout the community has sufficient infrastructure and access to critical amenities to support and connect residents, employees and visitors now and in the future through multiple modes of transportation.	Consider the Plan Area’s existing infrastructure, its age and condition, and potential expansions or replacements that would be needed to continue to operate in good condition for the long term.
Strategic and Complementary	Ensure that new development adds to the greater whole of the community and that the long-term impacts of development are considered in short-term decision making.	Consider the mix of current land uses, regulatory environment, local climate, and constraints of available land and water supply in each recommendation.



**PLAN TOPICS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section discusses the seven plan topics:

- History, Arts, and Culture
- Getting Around
- Streetscapes
- Public Spaces and Amenities
- Existing Housing Stock
- Building Form and Development
- Business Community

Each topic describes key concepts and existing conditions within North of Campus. Next, they identify community and stakeholder feedback received as part of the Plan development and identifies specific recommendations for the Plan Area. Each recommendation is intended to be carried out by the City of San Marcos; however, possible partners are listed where applicable. Several case studies are also provided to supplement the proposed recommendations.

HISTORY, ARTS, & CULTURE



Efforts to support history, arts, and culture within the North of Campus Area focus on preserving neighborhood identity and celebrating the lived experiences of long-time residents. These efforts include honoring the stories, history and even long-time businesses of the area. Activating public spaces through art and park programming was also expressed.

Over the course of the engagement process, community members consistently expressed strong interest in maintaining and enhancing the area’s unique feel. The community provided feedback through workshops and public review of draft recommendations. Suggestions emphasized integrating art into everyday infrastructure—such as custom bike racks, artist-designed trash receptacles, and painted crosswalks—and highlighted opportunities to incorporate creative elements into the Sessom Creek Natural Area.



Figure 1: LBJ Street and Sessom Drive mural, Morgan Haberle Egan, 2021



Public art within the North of Campus Area is currently limited but demonstrates the potential for expanded expression of the area’s history, elevates the importance of the nearby river and natural resources, or pay homage to past figures or businesses of the area. Existing installations are either privately commissioned by local businesses or funded through the San Marcos Arts Commission. At the time of this Plan’s development, three prominent public art locations are present: 1) LBJ Apartments, 810 North LBJ Drive, 2) Kahvie Café, 900 Chestnut Street, and 3) 111 E Sessom Drive, located on a pedestrian barrier, (see Figure 1.) These installations contribute to the visual identity of the neighborhood, but additional opportunities remain to expand public art into other public spaces, streetscapes, and/or private property and businesses.

Recommendations

HAC 1.1: Identify new locations for public art within the North of Campus Area such as murals, mini murals, sculptures, or traffic box art. New art pieces should enhance the existing public spaces and streetscapes and reflect the Area’s history and/or the community’s heritage and culture. Art pieces should include an information panel to convey the artist, artwork name, and/or information about its significance to the Area. The case study below offers an example of a well-funded and successful art program in Austin, TX

HAC 1.2: Consider the use of painted bulb-outs with flexible traffic posts and painted crosswalks at key intersections to improve pedestrian safety. Consider collaborating with artists for painting design.

CASE STUDY

ART IN PUBLIC SPACES PROGRAM

Austin, TX

Austin’s Art in Public Places (AIPP) program, established in 1985, integrates public art into city capital improvement projects by allocating 2% of eligible project budgets for artistic components. Since its launch, AIPP has commissioned over 300 installations citywide.

Projects range from sculptures and murals to artist-designed infrastructure like bike racks and utility boxes. Notably, Open Room Austin—a large-scale sculptural installation in Edward Rendon Sr. Park—serves as both art and public gathering space.

AIPP emphasizes community engagement through public meetings and open calls, supporting local artists and ensuring projects reflect neighborhood identities. The program serves as a model for embedding art into infrastructure in growing urban areas.

GETTING AROUND



This plan topic covers the existing transportation system and how it promotes or hinders the neighborhood’s accessibility, mobility, and connectivity needs. Residents in the North of Campus Area described taking trips by car, bike, e-scooter, on foot, or other means for their daily needs, and the area sees a significant amount of pedestrian traffic when Texas State is in session. However, public input revealed concerns about infrastructure gaps, safety risks, and a lack of dedicated facilities for alternative transportation options. soon as dedicated bike lanes on both sides of N. LBJ Drive. This section lists key locations and elements to consider for street modifications and other changes to improve mobility, infrastructure, and safety for all users.

The following six recommendations were presented during the planning process, with strong community support for actions that promote multimodal access and safety. The most popular recommendation was GA 2.3, which proposes partnering with local businesses or property owners to establish a small Mobility Hub within the plan area. Suggested locations included North LBJ Drive, Chestnut Street, and the Sessom/Aquarena Drives intersection. The proposed hub would offer a bike and scooter share station, sheltered transit stop, seating, and expanded bike parking. Feedback also included concerns about scooter parking enforcement and suggestions for adding more bike racks.



Vehicular and Pedestrian Traffic crossing Sessom Drive at North LBJ Drive.

Another identified priority is GA 2.7, which calls for consolidating driveway entrances to reduce pedestrian-vehicle conflict. Additional comments highlighted the need for improved pedestrian safety along North LBJ Drive, including raised sidewalks or high-visibility crosswalks at key intersections. Due to the significant elevation change in the North of Campus, cars gain speed when travelling downhill on Chestnut and North LBJ Drive.

Overall, the public feedback reflects a strong desire for a safer, more connected transportation network that accommodates a wide range of users and travel needs.



View of North LBJ Drive. 5 ft. sidewalks constructed in 2015 and bicycle facilities on one side.



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1. COMPLETE TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS AND PRIORITY CONNECTIONS

A complete transportation network is one that can accommodate vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other methods residents may use to move around and through North of Campus Area and the city.

The street network in the North of Campus Area was primarily developed between the 1900's and 1940's.² Most streets are classified as local with the exception of the minor arterial North LBJ Drive, and major arterial Sessom Drive, which serve as primary corridors through the neighborhood. According to traffic counts conducted by the City, the intersection of Sessom and North LBJ Drive sees approximately 11,700 daily vehicles.³ The intersection of Sessom and North LBJ Drives sees a large amount of pedestrian traffic during the Texas State University school year.

Public transportation in the area is served by the Texas State University's Bobcat Shuttle system. The Bobcat Shuttle Route 28 line runs along North LBJ Drive and Chestnut Street providing service between the Texas State Campus and East Holland Street.⁴ Although Bobcat Shuttle does not stop directly within the Plan Area, students that live within the northwest portion of the neighborhood can access the route at East Holland Street.

GETTING AROUND

Recommendations

GA 1.1: Live Oak Street is currently a small unimproved gravel right-of-way that connects Chestnut Street to North LBJ Drive. If future property improvements occur abutting the right-of-way, Live Oak Street could be improved as a “Shared Street” or “Greenway” transportation type. This would allow for necessary pedestrian and/or vehicular connections but would be achieved within a smaller width transportation cross-section that would not require as much impervious cover to construct.

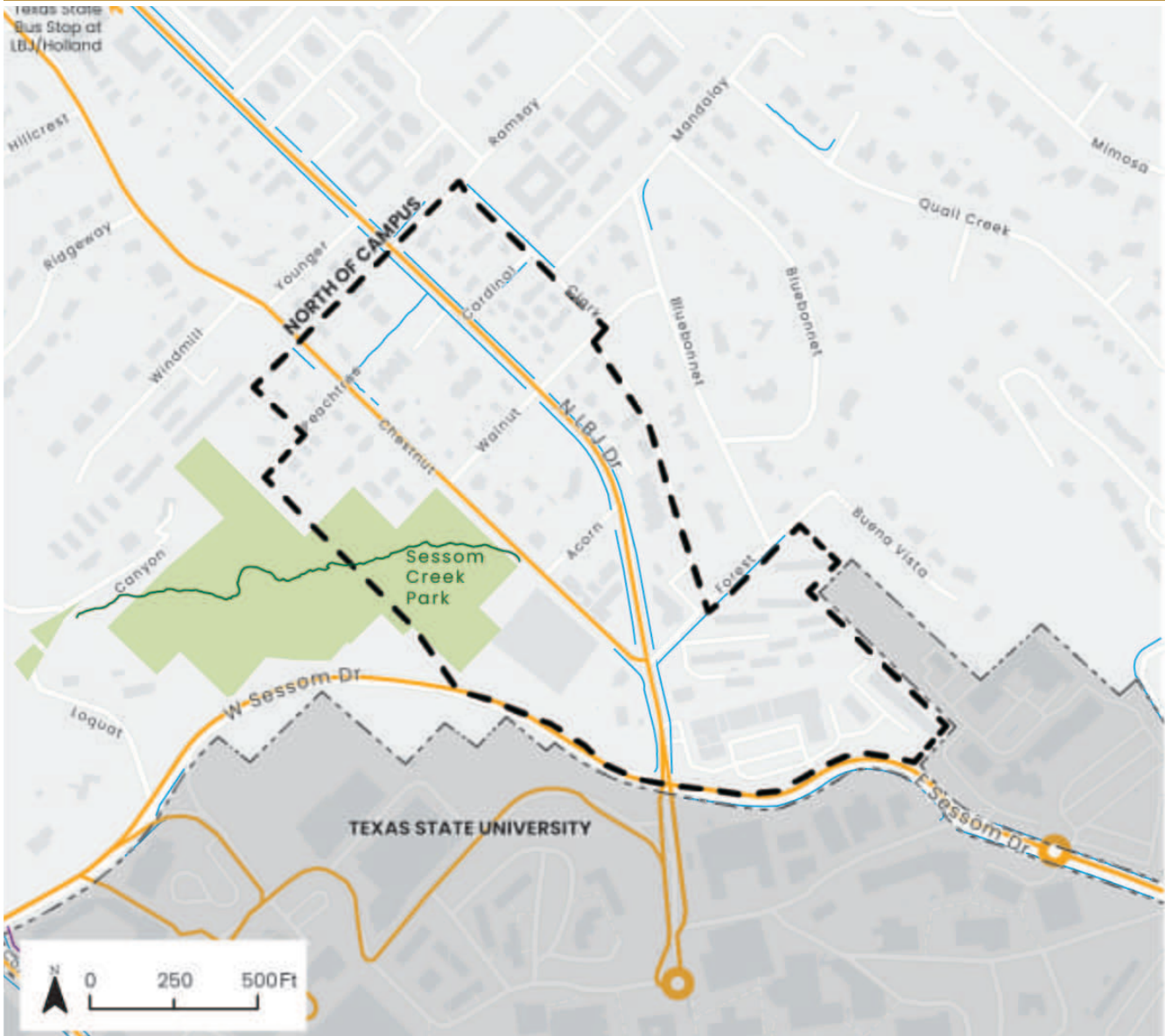
GA 1.2: Consider installing improvements to enhance the pedestrian experience on the portion of Peachtree Street between North LBJ Drive and Chestnut Street which is currently a pedestrian pathway with no vehicles. Improvements could include pedestrian-scale lighting, native landscaping, and a pet waste station to create a small linear park. The linear park could be a candidate for the Adopt-a-Spot program to help with regular maintenance of the area.

GA 1.3: Provide an adequate number of bus stops within the Plan Area in accordance with the Transit Master Plan.



Peachtree Street pedestrian connection between North LBJ Drive and Chestnut Street.

FIGURE 3.1. TRANSPORTATION



Legend

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| North of Campus | Park Trails |
| Texas State Campus | TX State Tram Route |
| Minor Roads | Bus Stops |
| Major Roads | Sidewalks |
| Parks | CARTS Bus Route |

GETTING AROUND

2. MOBILITY FOR NON-DRIVERS

The North of Campus Area is served by a variety of transportation options beyond personal vehicles, including walking, biking, and shared micromobility. In partnership with Texas State University, in the past, the City operated a dockless scooter-share program, which provided access to e-scooters throughout the area. The City is currently in the process of reestablishing the e-scooter program.

Pedestrian infrastructure varies within the neighborhood. North LBJ Drive is equipped with continuous sidewalks and curbs on both sides, supporting safe and accessible pedestrian movement. Chestnut Street features a sidewalk on one side from Walnut Street to North LBJ Drive. However, many local residential streets have incomplete or sidewalk segments, limiting walkability and safe pedestrian access across the broader network.

Recommendations

GA 2.1: Study the pedestrian and vehicular use of the existing platted alley connecting Forest Drive and Walnut Street parallel to North LBJ Drive and consider improving the alley to establish a more formal pedestrian connection that implements green alley installations. Improvements to the alley could be to design it as a bicycle and pedestrian path with limited vehicle access to promote walking and biking for residents and students who already use this unimproved right-of-way regularly.

GA 2.2: Continue implementing the City’s 5-Year Sidewalk Maintenance and Gap In-Fill Plan to complete gaps in the sidewalk network, construct ADA ramps, and repair existing sidewalks by practically incorporating North of Campus sidewalk needs into the Program.



Figure 2: Example from Dubuque, Iowa of a green alleyway conversion. Source: The San Marcos Green Alley Initiative

GA 2.3: Explore opportunities to partner with a viable business/property owner to locate a small Mobility Hub within the Plan Area. Priority locations include properties along North LBJ Drive, Chestnut Street, and near the intersection of Sessom/Aquarena Drives. Mobility Hub installations may include:

- A designated area for bike and scooter shares;
- A transit stop with a shelter, seating, lighting, and route information; and
- A bike corral or larger bike parking area.

GA 2.4: For streets where sidewalks are infeasible, implement traffic calming measures to slow traffic and to enhance pedestrian safety. Specific examples can include bulb-outs and in-street pedestrian paths.

GA 2.5: Evaluate pedestrian crossings across the Plan Area for safety and convenience, especially at the

intersection of North LBJ Drive and Chestnut Street.

GA 2.6: Where possible, consolidate driveway entrances to reduce pedestrian-vehicle conflicts.

GA 2.7: Where possible, utilize permeable pavers for pedestrian infrastructure.

GA 2.8: Install sidewalks on both sides of Chestnut Street.

GA 2.9: Explore opportunities to install and/or improve a “designated deployment zone” within the Plan Area which establishes a designated location to park and pick-up electric scooters that are part of the City’s ongoing bike and scooter-share mobility program. The deployment zone should be clearly identified through painted striping and/or signage.

CASE STUDY

GREEN ALLEY PROGRAM RECONSTRUCTION

Dubuque, Iowa

As a Mississippi River city prone to flash flooding, Dubuque launched the Bee Branch Watershed Flood Mitigation Project in the early 2000s to address repeated flood disasters and improve water quality. A key component of the effort is the Green Alleys Program, which focuses on reducing impervious surfaces by installing permeable pavers across the city’s storm-prone alleys.

To date, over 80 alleys have been retrofitted with green infrastructure, with property owners contributing

approximately 15% of the cost based on frontage. City engineers have recorded a 60% reduction in total suspended solids (TSS) at the treatment plant, indicating major improvements in runoff filtration and pollution control.

Recognized as the Public Works Project of the Year by the Iowa Chapter of the American Public Works Association in 2015, the program demonstrates how environmentally sensitive design can enhance urban infrastructure and reduce long-term environmental risks.

STREET-SCAPES



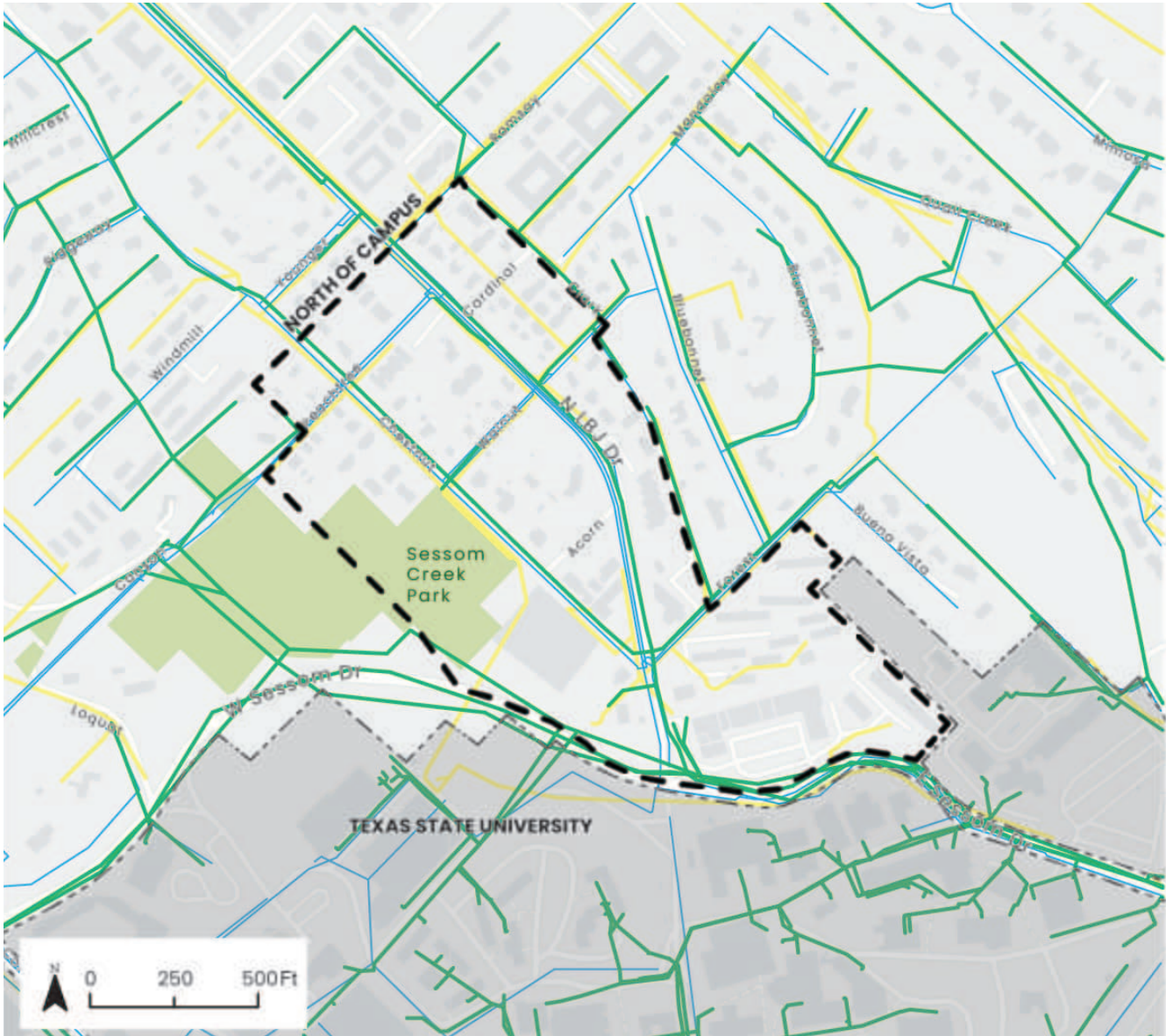
This plan topic focuses on the physical components of the streetscape—how streets and adjacent public spaces are designed, maintained, and enhanced to support safe and enjoyable travel for all users. Streetscapes encompass the entire public right-of-way, including roadways, sidewalks, street trees, utility lines, lighting, and other publicly owned infrastructure. The full street and utility network for the North of Campus Area is shown in [Figure 3.2: Utilities](#).

Community feedback emphasized the need for safer, more functional, and more visually appealing streetscapes within the North of Campus Area. The intersection of Chestnut Street and North LBJ Drive was a frequent concern, with multiple residents identifying the lack of a safe pedestrian crossing as a barrier to accessing key destinations at Sessom Drive and North LBJ Drive. Suggested streetscape improvements include an elevated pedestrian intersection, a high-intensity activated crosswalk (HAWK) beacon, and enhanced crossings with automated beacons and bike/pedestrian protection (e.g., “armadillos” or bollards). Residents encouraged the use and maintenance of permeable pavers and expressed caution regarding impervious surface expansion due to the area’s proximity to creek systems that flow into the San Marcos River.



Chestnut Street Improvements South of Walnut Street with street trees, installed by Vie Lofts, and without installed by the City of San Marcos.

FIGURE 3.2. UTILITIES



Legend

- North of Campus
- Texas State Campus
- Minor Roads
- Major Roads
- Parks
- Waste Water Mains
- Water Mains
- Primary Electrical

STREETSCAPES

Recommendations:

ST 1.1: Install improvements at the intersection of Sessom Drive and N LBJ Drive:

- Establish a visual gateway sign to identify/brand the North of Campus Neighborhood Area;
- Consider techniques to provide a shorter and safer crossing distance for pedestrians crossing the intersection;
- Widen sidewalks to accommodate pedestrian traffic that currently exists.
- Coordinate with Texas State University to implement improvements on University property which would expand the sidewalk and bike network to campus to allow micromobility users to safely cross Sessom Drive from N. LBJ Drive.
- Consider adding trees or landscaping for shade and beautification at pedestrian waiting areas. Installations should be installed so as not to block vehicular or pedestrian sight visibility.



Intersection of North LBJ Drive and Sessom Drive.

ST 1.2: Identify priority locations for incremental traffic calming and placemaking measures, such as colorful sidewalks, bulb-outs, and landscape strips/medians to reduce vehicle speeds and improve the pedestrian experience so that it is enjoyable and safe, the intersection of North LBJ Drive and Chestnut Street being a key focus. When possible, consider the use of permeable pavers.

ST 1.3: Identify priority areas for shade along heavily walked corridors or bus stops with intense sun exposure. Identify suitable places for trees or explore the feasibility of awnings or other shade mechanisms.

ST 1.4: Explore options to extend the Sessom Drive

separated bike lanes past the intersection of N LBJ Drive/ Sessom Drive so that bicyclists can safely access the North of Campus Area and connect to Aquarena Springs Drive safely.

ST 1.5: Repair missing curbs and gutters on key streets and relocate overhead utility lines underground. Evaluate drainage patterns and where there are potential drainage issues in lower-lying areas, install green infrastructure to mitigate runoff and improve street conditions.



View the N. LBJ Drive Streetscape from the intersection of North LBJ Drive and Sessom Drive.

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES



This section covers public spaces and amenities, which include a variety of existing and potential amenities such as parks, trails, and other spaces dedicated to public use. This section notes North of Campus' current inventory of public space and amenities and identifies improvements that may be needed. It also highlights gaps the City may address by adding new facilities or spaces.

Public engagement revealed strong community interest in maintaining, improving, and activating public spaces, particularly in ways that emphasize safety, accessibility, environmental sensitivity, and aesthetic value. Residents consistently identified the Sessom Creek Natural Area as a priority for improvement, citing the need for better trail maintenance and the development of a more accessible, and easily identifiable bike and pedestrian route through the area's natural landscape.

Access to public spaces plays a critical role in supporting health, social connection, and quality of life for residents. Parks, trails, and recreational amenities provide opportunities for physical activity, environmental education, and community gathering, while also contributing to neighborhood identity and livability.



Sessom Creek Natural Area



1. EXISTING PUBLIC SPACES IMPROVEMENTS AND ACCESS

Within the North of Campus Area, Sessom Creek Natural Area is the only designated public park. This natural area provides access to shaded trails, native vegetation, and scenic creek views. In recent years, the City has invested in improvements to the Sessom Creek Natural Area, that include stream restoration, erosion control, native plant restoration, and trail maintenance in coordination with the Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP)⁵ and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).



Sessom Creek Natural Area

SMGA is a local non-profit whose mission is to create and conserve an interconnected system of parks and natural areas for our community and future generations.
<http://www.smgreenbelt.org>
 This map is a collaboration between volunteers of the San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance and the City of San Marcos.
 Map Authors: Josh Lord & Katie Steele

SAN MARCOS GREENBELT ALLIANCE
www.smgreenbelt.org

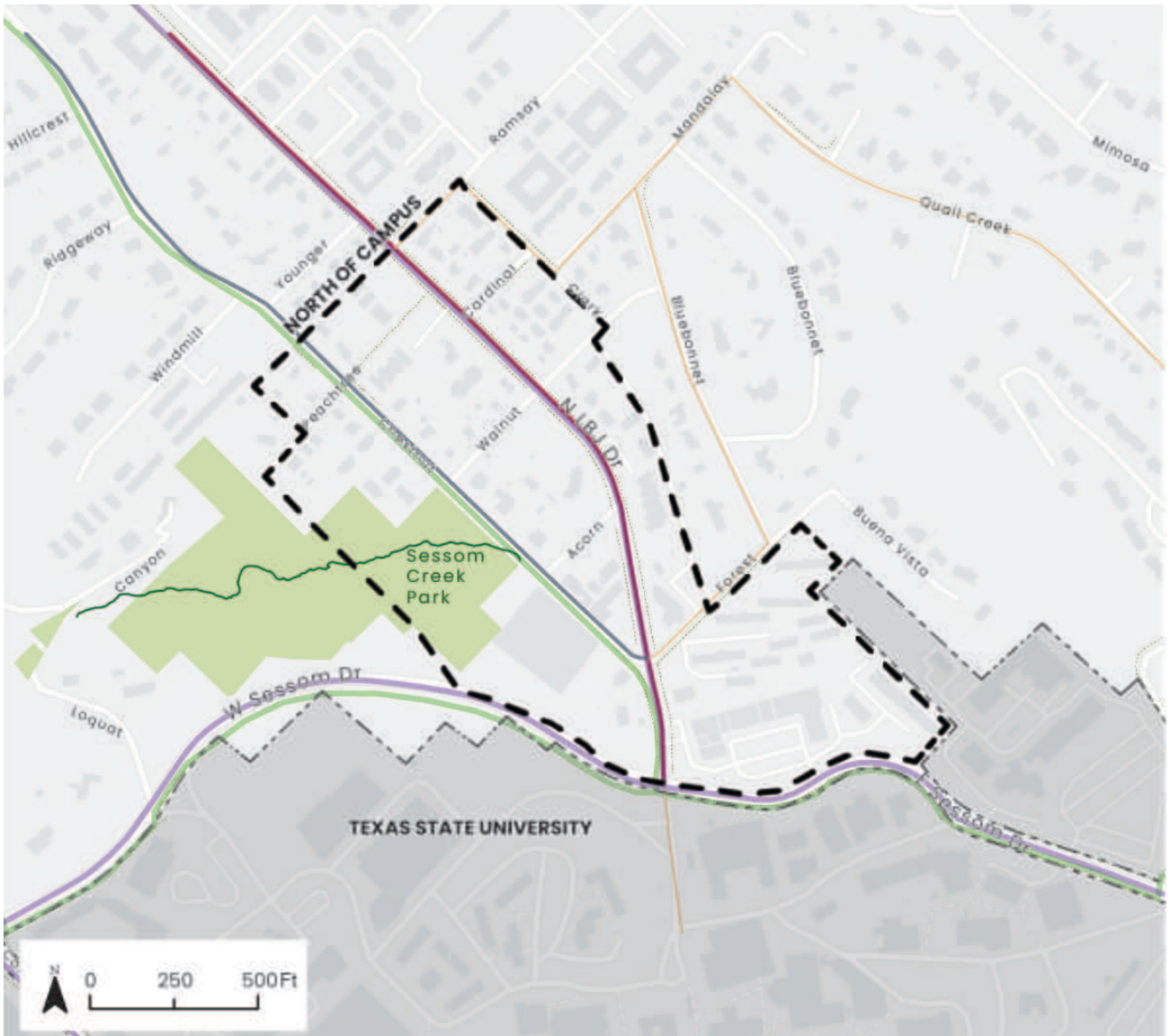
- Park Features**
- Trailhead
 - Parking Area
 - Accessible/ADA
 - Information Kiosk
 - Point of Interest
 - Greenspace Limits

- Park Rules**
- Take only photos, leave only footprints.
 - Park open dawn to dusk.
 - Keep dogs on a leash and remove their waste.
 - Campfires, glass containers, motor vehicles, weapons, horses, and camping are not permitted.
 - Stay on established trails on public property.
 - Bicycles yield to hikers, refrain from biking on muddy trails.
- Report problems to San Marcos Parks & Recreation at (512) 393-8400.
<http://www.sanmarcostx.gov>
 -For emergencies, call 911.
 -Date last revised: November 2019
- 0 0.05 0.1 Miles

Figure 5: Sessom Creek Natural Area Map, Source: San Marcos Parks and Recreation Department 10.4.2024

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

FIGURE 3. BICYCLE AMENITIES



Legend

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| North of Campus | Park Trails |
| Texas State Campus | TMP Proposed Greenway |
| Minor Roads | TMP Proposed Bicycle |
| Major Roads | Sidewalks |
| Parks | Sharrow |



Recommendations

PSA 1.1: Improve entrances to parks to safely allow users to access them from the public sidewalk and street.

PSA 1.2: Develop an artist-designed bike rack program which allows artists to submit functional, yet creative designs for bike racks to be installed in the North of Campus Area that feature or reflect the natural surroundings or history of the Area. This recommendation may be coupled with GA-2.4.

PSA 1.3: Improve Sessom Creek Natural Area by installing or improving key amenities identified by the community:

- **Add a formal park identification sign along Chestnut Street which identifies the park name and is visible from the right-of-way to notify and attract citizens.**
- **Enhance informational trail signage at the trail entrance including a map and park rules. This signage should state where the trail goes, and may include additional educational information.**
- **Provide benches or seating areas at the trailhead and/or within the park.**
- **Install additional/updated trail markers, to enhance park visibility, accessibility, and improve the visitor experience.**
- **Install a more robust activity area at the trail entrance that may include workout equipment.**

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

2. SUSTAINABILITY AND HAZARD MITIGATION

In the North of Campus Area, both nuisances and hazards are present in the form of soil erosion, stormwater runoff, and the loss of pervious surface areas, particularly near Sessom Creek.⁶ These concerns are amplified by the area’s steep slopes, its location within the Edwards Aquifer Transition Zone, and its proximity to a sensitive watershed that contributes to the San Marcos River. Ongoing development pressure and older and/or nonconforming stormwater control measures may result in degraded trails, eroding creek banks, and localized flooding.

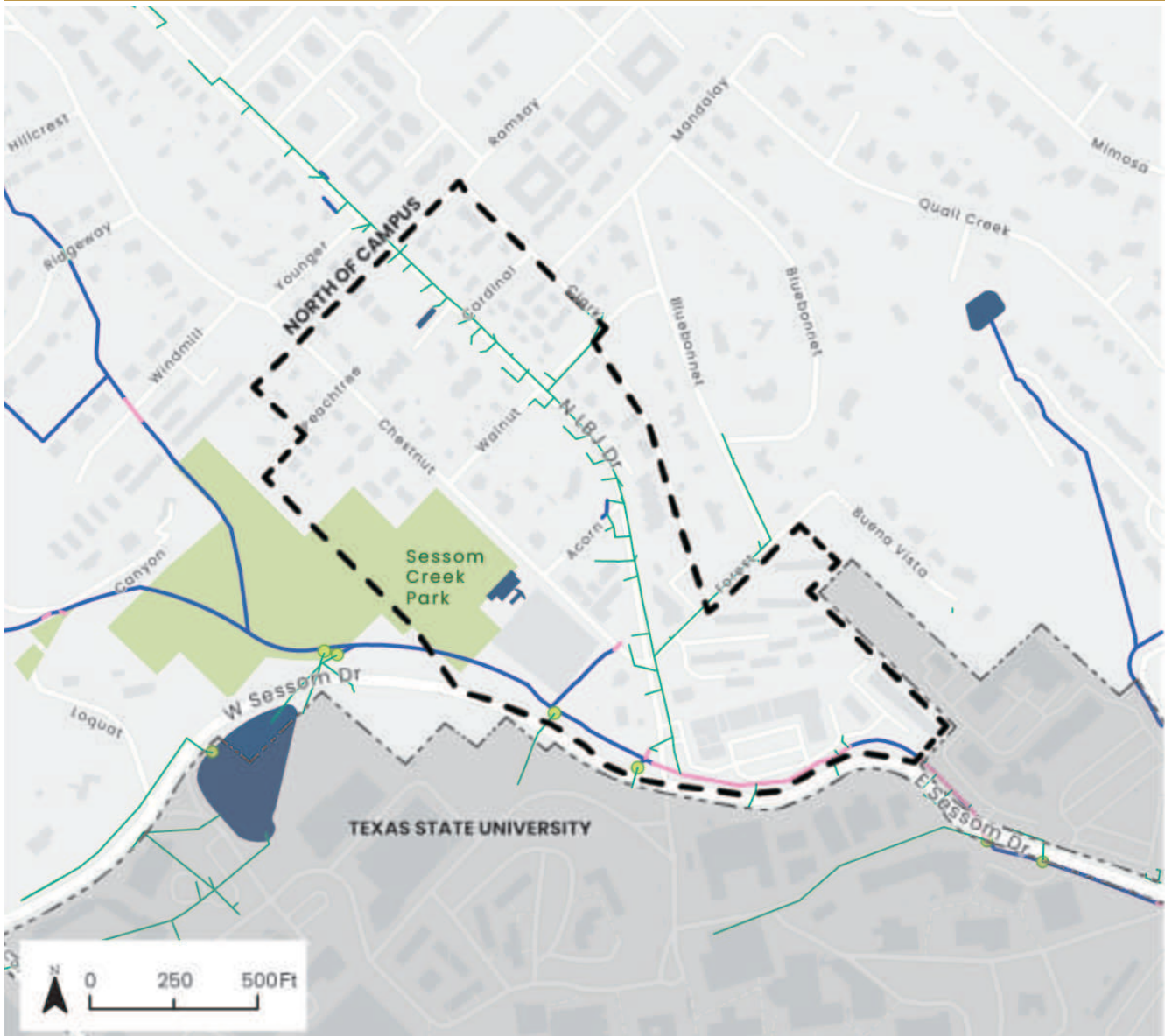
Recommendations

PSA 2.1: Explore the use of low-impact development (LID) installations, such as permeable paving, natural vegetation, and green infrastructure. These sustainable features will enhance public and privately owned spaces and reduce environmental impacts.



Sessom Creek Natural Area improvements.

FIGURE 3. STORMWATER



Legend

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------|
| North of Campus | Storm Channels |
| Texas State Campus | Storm Culverts |
| Minor Roads | Storm Outfalls |
| Major Roads | Storm Pipes |
| Parks | Storm Sewer |

EXISTING HOUSING STOCK



The Existing Housing Stock section identifies key issues and outlines strategies to support the development and preservation of safe, healthy, and diverse housing options to meet the needs of the area. The North of Campus Area faces several challenges that impact housing quality, affordability, and long-term stability.

Residents shared concerns related to the adequacy of parking for existing housing, particularly in older areas with higher occupancy rates. A key concern is ensuring that multifamily housing is safe and well-maintained, especially in student-dominated areas

There are two areas of focus within the Housing section:

1. Managing Redevelopment
2. Diverse Housing Types



Multifamily Duplex Housing



Fenced Single-Family Home

1. MANAGING REDEVELOPMENT

While the North of Campus Area is largely built out, redevelopment is anticipated due to the aging housing stock, shifting market demands, and opportunities to replace auto-oriented multifamily and commercial properties with more walkable, mixed-use development. The area's steep topography and proximity to environmentally sensitive features such as Sessom Creek make low-impact design especially critical. To guide future redevelopment, this plan recommends the creation of multifamily façade improvement programs and functional design guidelines that support improved aesthetics, stormwater management, and more context-sensitive site planning. These tools can help new and existing developments enhance neighborhood character, reduce impervious cover, and prioritize pedestrian access, affordability, and environmental sustainability.

Recommendations

EHS 1.1: Develop a multifamily façade improvement program for multifamily housing. This program would include funding or tax credits that may be applied to a property's street-facing façades at the time of remodeling or redevelopment.

EHS 1.2: Develop design guidelines which provide functional recommendations for rehabilitating and adapting older housing stock. These guidelines can be used by existing or new developments and provide recommendations to improve the exterior of their properties. The guidelines are intended to regulate function as opposed to style (ex: constructing parking in the rear of a property or design suggestions on stormwater improvements.) Existing developments could be able to improve the exterior of their properties using the guidelines.

EHS 1.3: Encourage mixed-use development to replace auto-oriented multifamily housing and commercial areas. These developments should prioritize pedestrian access and could include a range of housing unit types/ sizes to meet various housing needs.

EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

2. DIVERSE HOUSING TYPES

The North of Campus neighborhood is predominantly composed of multifamily housing, with most residents living in apartment-style units. The area includes 38 listed residential properties, which collectively contain 366 housing units. While 25 of these properties are classified as single-family or duplex homes, they account for only 7% of the total residential units in the neighborhood.

The remaining 341 units are in larger multifamily buildings, each with four or more units. Notably, over half of all residential units are concentrated within just three major properties: Vie Lofts (76 units), Treehouse Apartments (70 units), and Vintage Pads (50 units). This concentration reflects the area’s strong student housing presence, some of which has existed since the 1970s and highlights the limited availability of low-density housing types.

Recommendation

EHS 2.1: Support diverse housing types, including accessory dwelling units (ADU)s, duplexes, and townhomes, and small multifamily to meet the neighborhood’s needs for affordable, context-sensitive infill development.



Two forms of new multifamily development on Chestnut Street. 1) Chestnut Street Duplexes, 1106 Chestnut Street 2) Peach Tree Lofts, 1011 N LBJ Drive

Diverse Housing Types Examples: Single-Family Attached Residential



High Transparency on ground floor, but offset in height from pedestrians on the sidewalk.



Townhomes built in a traditional style with low setbacks.



Small setbacks and grade-adjusted heights.



Traditional-style duplexes with façade and rooftop variation, as well as upper and lower porches for sidewalk activation.



Traditional architectural style with moderate setbacks and front yard spaces.



Varying architectural elements to reduce massing.

BUILDING FORM & DEVELOPMENT



This topic covers the physical structures of the neighborhood and provides guidance on adding new structures that would complement those existing structures. The two subsections focus on public facilities and private development. The Neighborhood Character Study in Appendix B expands on this section, providing details of the lot coverage, massing, height, building materials, and orientation to the street of existing structures in North of Campus Area.



906 N LBJ Apartments with large street loaded parking lot and steep topography

1. INFILL DEVELOPMENT

The North of Campus Area features a diverse mix of building forms, reflecting decades of incremental development. Architectural styles range from mid-century single-family homes to low-rise multifamily housing and auto-oriented commercial buildings. This eclectic character is part of the neighborhood's identity and presents both a challenge and an opportunity for future infill and redevelopment.

As the area continues to evolve, it is important that new development remains sensitive to surrounding context, particularly where higher intensity uses border established single-family homes. Setbacks, building step-downs, transitional protective yards and landscaping can help protect neighborhood character while accommodating growth.

Recommendations:

BF 1.1: Promote a flexible architectural style in this area due to documented unique architecture from various decades.

BF 1.2: Encourage Neighborhood Density Districts within the Plan Area to facilitate compatible infill development.

BF 1.3: Respect and protect single-family homes by supporting compatible land uses and zoning changes.

BF 1.4: Explore reducing minimum parking requirements in the North of Campus Area to accommodate infill development and/or new businesses and reduce the need for additional impervious cover in the Plan Area. Reduce minimum parking requirements within the Plan Area to provide property owners with more flexibility to incrementally redevelop existing properties with less surface parking.

BUILDING FORM & DEVELOPMENT

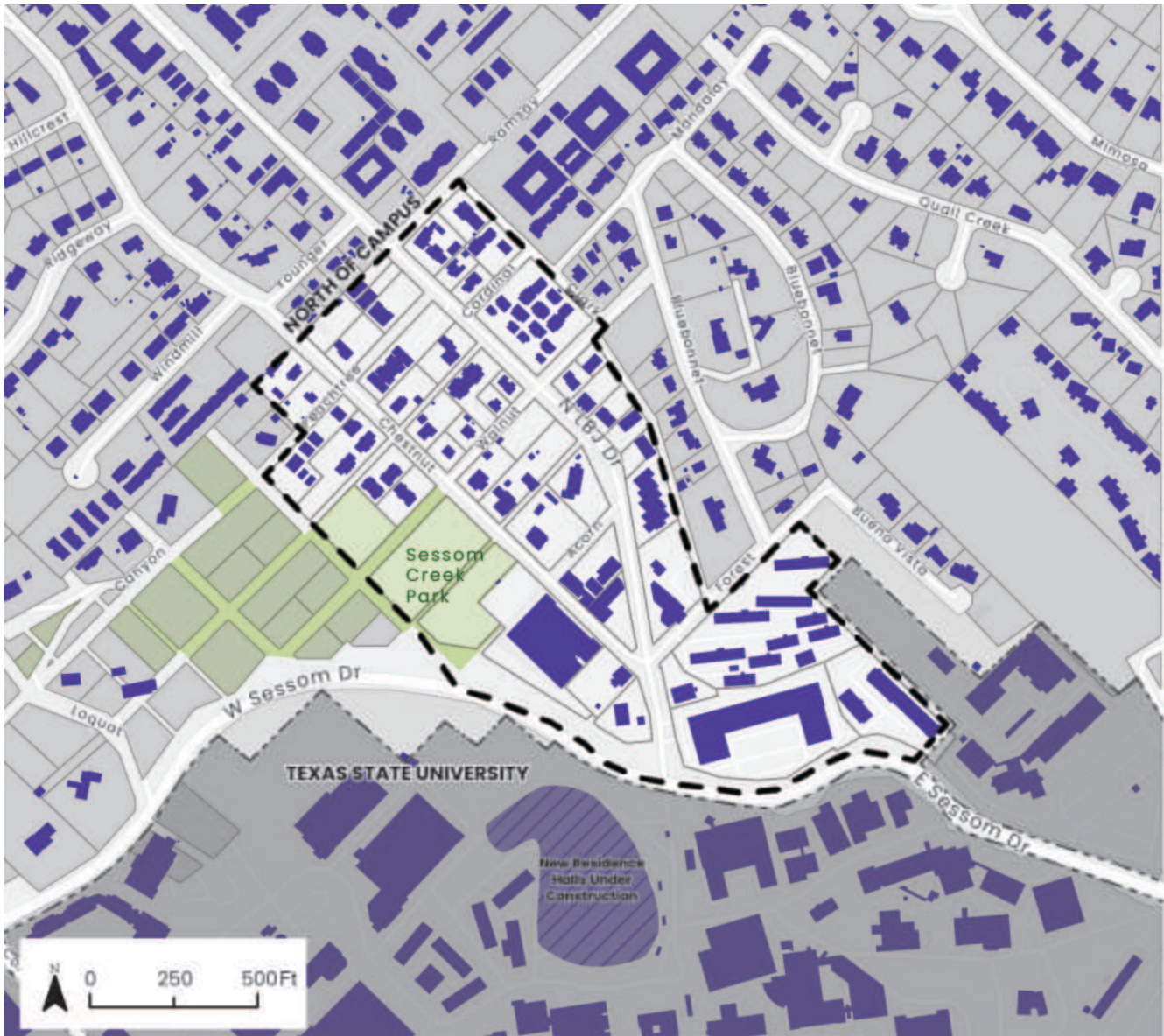
FIGURE 3. LAND USE BY CATEGORY



Legend

North of Campus	Residential
Texas State Campus	Commercial
Minor Roads	Civic/Institutional
Major Roads	Vacant or Greenspace
Parks	

FIGURE 3. BUILDING FOOTPRINTS



Legend

- North of Campus
- Texas State Campus
- Parks
- Building Footprint
- Parcels

BUSINESS COMMUNITY



The North of Campus Area presents a unique opportunity to support small, neighborhood-serving businesses that enhance walkability, meet daily needs, and contribute to local identity. While there is growing interest in expanding commercial activity, especially through small-scale and incremental development, several barriers currently limit business growth and retention in the area.

Through public engagement, residents and stakeholders expressed a strong desire for more small businesses, including corner stores, cafés, and neighborhood services. These needs could be included in mixed-use residential developments. Many also emphasized the need to simplify the development process, particularly for local business owners, and suggested offering financial incentives or technical assistance to encourage investment. This section outlines strategies to foster a more inclusive, accessible, and thriving business environment within the North of Campus Area.



Vie Lofts' Commercial Space, 817 Chestnut Street.

1. BUSINESS VARIETY

The City plays a key role in shaping a business environment that supports daily needs and reflects the character of the neighborhood. These recommendations aim to balance economic growth with safe, multimodal street design.

Recommendation:

BC 1.1: Encourage diverse land uses along N. LBJ Drive, particularly redeveloping auto-oriented businesses with pedestrian-oriented, neighborhood serving, commercial services, such as a small grocery store.

BC 1.2: Consider the delivery needs of businesses and identify a designated loading area along less-traveled roadways so as not to impede on vehicular, bike, and pedestrian traffic.



Shopping Center at 829 N LBJ

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

2. BUSINESS OPERATIONS AND INNOVATIONS

The relationship between the public and private realms plays a critical role in shaping the look, feel, and function of a neighborhood. By supporting façade improvements, encouraging creative use of private space for public benefit, and recognizing innovative design, the City can help elevate the visual identity and walkability of the North of Campus Area. These recommendations aim to create a more cohesive, people-friendly environment where private investment enhances the surrounding streetscape and public experience.

Recommendations:

BC 2.1: Collaborate with the property owner of San Marcos Center (700 N LBJ) to:

- Explore opportunities for façade improvements. This could be coupled with a proposed façade improvement program;
- Implement pedestrian safety and outdoor seating options to increase business capacity without the need for additional vehicular parking; and
- Provide incremental pedestrian improvements:
 - Convert strategic portions of the parking lot, or parking stalls, into public patio spaces, similar to parklets.
 - Add shade structures (awnings/ canopies) along commonly used pedestrian paths.
 - Install or improve asphalt striping within the parking lot to create a pedestrian walkway that leads from the public sidewalk to the building footprint.

BC 2.2: Consider the topographic challenges of the North of Campus Area and evaluate the Development Code for strategies to encourage incremental development in the North of Campus Area. These can address the cut and fill requirements for small developments and design standards for new projects. Explore best practices for cut and fill in environmentally sensitive areas with steep topography.

BC 2.3: Consider a design recognition program, or award, to recognize innovative development/redevelopment within the Area Plan boundaries.

BC 2.4: Expand the eligible area of the City’s existing Business Improvement & Growth (BIG) Façade Improvement Grant to all or a portion of the North of Campus Area. Encourage existing businesses, particularly along N LBJ Drive and Sessom Drive to apply for financial assistance to enhance the appearance of properties and the adjacent streetscape.



Local Business - Pie Society - 700 N LBJ Drive



IMPLEMENTATION

ACTION PLAN, FINANCING TOOLS, AND PARTNERSHIPS

This section explains how to implement the recommendations of Section Three. This includes a matrix of action items (Table 4.1), a matrix of funding opportunities for any recommendations that would not be funded during the regular course of City operations (Table 4.2), and a list of selected partnerships that the City should foster to ensure robust implementation.

Table 4.1

ACTION PLAN

This action plan outlines steps the City can begin to take immediately to implement the Plan’s recommendations. Some recommendations are not fully driven by the public sector. These short term action items indicate some potential first steps to inform City staff workplans over the next several years. It should be considered as a starting point as additional funding, partnerships, and creative tactics may arise over time.

PLAN TOPIC: HISTORY, ARTS, & CULTURE

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders and Partners
History	<p>Adopt citywide Preservation Plan to provide guidance for historic preservation policy.</p> <p>Apply for Undertold Marker Program to tell underrepresented history.</p>	COSM	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners, Managers and Business Owners, Nonprofit or Grassroots Organizations, Hays County, State
Public Art	<p>Evaluate and identify visible sites to install public art and interpretive materials to tell broader history of North of Campus Area.</p> <p>Approach residents or businesses in the Plan Area about “adopting” nearby pieces of public art.</p>	COSM	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners, Managers and Business Owners, Nonprofit or Grassroots Organizations
Trails and Interpretive Signage	Evaluate and identify visible sites to install interpretive material in Sessom Creek Natural Area. Collaborate with the Great Springs Project, San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance, Scouting America, and other organizations to explore opportunities for educational panels.	COSM/Hays County	COSM, Property Owners and Managers, Hays County, Nonprofit or Grassroots Organizations

PLAN TOPIC: GETTING AROUND

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders and Partners
Complete Transportation Networks	Perform studies to determine if Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHB) and/or traffic calming measure are warranted at strategic locations to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrian and bicycle crossings.	COSM	COSM, TxDOT
Traffic and Parking	Collaborate with neighborhood to explore potential for a Residential Parking Permit designation on priority streets where parking is a concern/studied.	COSM	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers

Table 4.1 (continued)

ACTION PLAN

PLAN TOPIC: STREETSCAPES

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders and Partners
Neighborhood Gateways and Safety Improvements	Consider safety improvements at high-traffic intersections and other areas where incidents between pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers are most likely. Specifically evaluate safety concerns along LBJ Dr.	COSM	COSM, Hays County
Right-of-way and Intersections	Identify wide sections of neighborhood streets where travel lanes can be narrowed, and/or sidewalk and traffic calming features can be added into ongoing, planned CIP projects, or street maintenance projects.	COSM and TxDOT	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers
Maintenance	Evaluate the upkeep and maintenance of existing streets and City property for overgrown vegetation. Identify key streets eligible for “Adopt-a-Spot” Program.	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners, Managers and Business Owners	COSM, TxDOT; Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners, Managers and Business Owners, Nonprofit or Grassroots Organizations
Other Upgrades	Begin conversations with Public Works and Engineering Department to determine appropriate alternative surface material and pavement paint, and applicable design and installation criteria that could be implemented within the streetscape. Evaluate current and future CIP or Public Works maintenance projects that occur within the public right-of-way. Determine whether enhancements could be made to native plant installations and/or update the Preferred Plant List to require plants which are most appropriate for the North of Campus Area geography.	COSM	COSM, Existing and Future Residents

PLAN TOPIC: PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders and Partners
Existing Public Spaces	Continue to maintain the Sessom Creek Natural Area trail facilities for regular use and assess frequency of cleaning and maintenance.	COSM	COSM, Property Owners and Managers, Hays County
Park Access and Potential New Public Spaces	Evaluate a location to pilot a temporary pop-up park in the northern part of North of Campus Area.	COSM	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers

Table 4.1 (continued)

ACTION PLAN

PLAN TOPIC: HOUSING

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders and Partners
Neighborhood Context	Adopt a Housing Action Plan	COSM	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers
Market-based Homes	Evaluate potential barriers in the Development Code to the construction of diverse housing types.	COSM; Property Owners and Managers	COSM, Builders, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners
Resiliency of Existing Homes	Research and evaluate cities that have developed existing home improvement or home rehabilitation incentives for owners	COSM	COSM, Builders, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers

PLAN TOPIC: BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders and Partners
Existing Business Community and Workforce	Consider a public marketing campaign to highlight and attract more customers to businesses within the plan area from different parts of San Marcos.	COSM; Property Owners, Managers and Business Owners	COSM, Existing and Future Residents; Property Owners. Managers and Business Owners
Spurring Economic Development	Collaborate with the existing entities such as the Hays Caldwell Economic Development Partnership and Chamber of Commerce to develop strategy to attract business types in vacant spaces that are desired by the neighborhood.	COSM; Hays Caldwell Economic Development Partnership; Chamber of Commerce	COSM, Existing and Future Residents; Property Owners, Managers and Business Owners

Table 4.1 (continued)

ACTION PLAN

PLAN TOPIC: BUILDING FORM & DEVELOPMENT

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders and Partners
Public Facilities	Identify vacant or underutilized properties in the Plan Area that are viable for redevelopment as future parks or recreational spaces.	COSM	COSM, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers
Private Properties	Explore the use of regulatory tools such as Neighborhood Conservation Districts or design guidelines to preserve the distinct neighborhood characteristics (e.g., general form, style, and scale).	COSM; Property Owners and Managers; Builders	COSM, Builders and Development Community, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers
Evaluate Proper Parking Minimums	Explore specific parking reductions and minimums for the Plan Area.	COSM; Property Owners and Managers; Builders	COSM, Builders and Development Community, Texas State University, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners and Managers

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Table 4.2

FINANCING TOOLS

Table 4.2 includes a variety of funding/tools identified during the development of the Area Plan that could be applicable to a variety of Plan recommendations. These tools are useful for recommendations that would not be funded during the course of normal City operations. Additional funding tools may become available throughout the life of this Plan.

Category	Name	Sponsor or Administrator	Type of Financing	Value of Funding	Eligible Applicants
History, Arts, and Culture	Our Town Creative Placemaking Grants Program	National Endowment for the Arts	Competitive grant	\$25,000 - \$150,000	City of San Marcos
Housing	Green and Resilient Retrofit Program (GRRM)	HUD	Grant	Up to \$80,000 per unit or \$20,000,000 per multifamily property	City of San Marcos and/or San Marcos Housing Authority
Housing	Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Housing (PRO-Housing)	HUD	Grant	\$1,000,000 and up	City of San Marcos

Table continued on next page.

Eligible Uses	Requirements	How to Apply	Notes and Links
Arts, culture, and design projects or programs that strengthen communities and advance priorities including health, community development, environment/climate, and public safety.	Complete requirements for each annual cycle announced in the spring.	Apply online in two parts by late summer; annual cycle.	https://www.arts.gov/grants/our-town
Retrofit multifamily housing for climate disaster resilience, water- and energy-efficient upgrades	Only eligible for public housing agency-owned and project-based Section 8 properties with 50% of units or more are federally subsidized. Proposed strategies must meet Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing and other federal rules.	Submit full application on grants.gov .	https://www.hud.gov/GRRP
Develop, evaluate, and implement housing policy plans, improve housing strategies, and remove barriers to affordable housing production and preservation	Proposed strategies must meet Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing and other federal rules	Submit full application on grants.gov .	https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/comm_planning/pro_housing

Table 4.2 (continued)

FINANCING TOOLS

Category	Name	Sponsor or Administrator	Type of Financing	Value of Funding	Eligible Applicants
Business Community	Small Business Development Center (SBDC) resources	Small Business Administration	Revolving loans	Varies	US citizens working to open or expand a small business
Business Community	Small business private capital	Private banks and CDFIs	Loans	Varies	Varies
Building Form and Development	Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant	US Department of Energy	Block grant or voucher	\$127,080 (maximum eligible amount for San Marcos)	City of San Marcos



Eligible Uses	Requirements	How to Apply	Notes and Links
Varies	Varies by lender	Contact SBDC at Texas State or in San Antonio for guidance.	
Varies	Varies by lender	Varies by financial institution	A useful "front door" for exploring these resources is: https://www.liftfund.com/business-support/
Variety of building code, energy efficiency, renewable energy, energy capture and conservation programs. Full list at: https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2023-04/EECBG%20Eligible%20Activities%20and%20Program%20Guidance_4.25_FINAL_signed.pdf	See Application Instructions at https://www.energy.gov/scep/slsc/state-and-local-solution-center/	Apply online by late summer; annual cycle.	https://www.nlc.org/article/2023/04/21/how-small-communities-can-benefit-from-energy-efficiency-and-conservation-block-grant-funding/

PARTNERSHIPS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Each of the groups in this section have different Motivations, priorities, and incentives to act. What they share is a stake in the continued health of the North of Campus community, whether that is Financial, physical (i.e., they live or work here), or simply due to adjacency. The City should capitalize on this interest to propose partnerships that advance the implementation of the Plan's recommendations.

EXISTING AND FUTURE RESIDENTS

Existing homeowners and residents have a significant stake in the ongoing success of the North of Campus Area. The City should continue to elicit feedback as core services are delivered to this neighborhood, and inform residents of new resources and programs as they are launched.

PROPERTY OWNERS/MANAGERS AND BUSINESS OWNERS

Some members of this group are local, while others live outside San Marcos. An important subset are the management and operators of the North of Campus Area multiple apartment communities.

Wherever they may be, the success of their properties and businesses contributes to the Plan Area. Similar to residents, this group should be incentivized to utilize newly enacted programs during regular interactions with the City. The principles of the Neighborhood Character Study

should be widely shared with this group so that any renovations or additions have a clear set of best practices to remain a fit with the existing

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY

With Texas State University as a major neighbor to the North of Campus Area, a relationship between the University and the City when working towards the future of the area is paramount. Students live in the variety of housing types, and work at or utilize the many businesses in the area.

NONPROFIT AND GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

The San Marcos River Foundation is a rich resource of knowledge, advocacy, and potential volunteer power for neighborhood efforts and owns land near the neighborhood. The City should partner with this and other nonprofit groups with an interest in maintaining Plan Area assets (like the river) to strengthen the common bonds and ownership of their neighborhood that residents feel. The San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance has been working to improve the steep topography, reduce invasive species, and general maintenance of the Sessom Creek Natural Area.



OTHER UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD): The federal block grant funds awarded by HUD to the City of San Marcos, including annual CDBG allocations, may help fund the new or adapted programs mentioned in this Plan relate to flood mitigation and disaster recovery.

Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP): The plan is intended to provide assurance that suitable habitat for Threatened and Endangered species will remain in both the San Marcos and Comal Springs.

5

CONCLUSION

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

PROCESS OVERVIEW

The City completed a multi-year long process to seek input and develop this Area Plan, as displayed in Figure 5.1 below. The plan celebrates and facilitates the uniqueness of the North of Campus neighborhood and the needs of the residents, property owners, and stakeholders. This plan recommends actions which attempt to strike a balance between preserving the Plan Area’s existing assets, and addressing the challenges, opportunities, and gaps that community members identified. The City will bear both goals in mind while helping to ensure that existing and new residents alike will enjoy a prosperous, lively, and just home in North of Campus Area.

The Area Plan will be stronger with the addition of periodic updates that reflect changes in the Neighborhood and to the overall planning context such as a major redevelopment project, a change to citywide zoning or other regulations, or major events with potential to significantly change local land use and development. Regardless of the timing of updates, the City should continue to use the City’s website to post and announce plan updates and milestones.

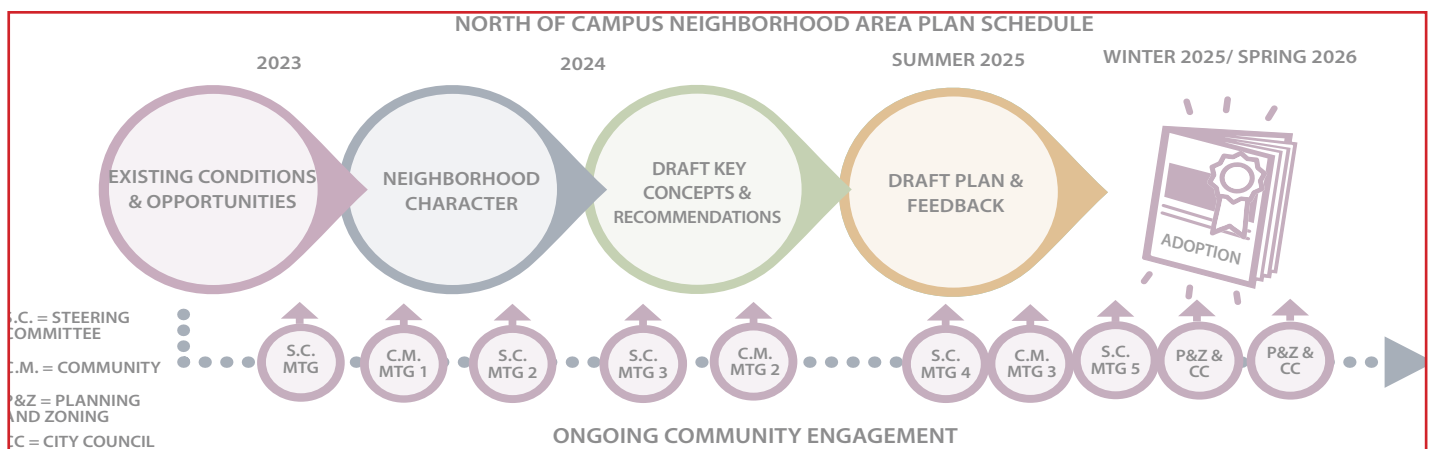


Figure 5.1. Area Plan Development Schedule

Where the City of San Marcos is identified as the key driver in the implementation of this Plan, the following will ensure ongoing success:

- Retain a focus on delivering core services to the Neighborhood (e.g., safe pedestrian routes, flood mitigation and prevention)
- Innovate solutions where business as usual has not yielded results.
- Serve as a leader in bringing other interested parties together where collaboration is essential to achieving a recommendation.

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ENDNOTES

- 1 “Texas Cities Lead Nation in Population Growth, Census Bureau Reports.” Press Release Number CB13-94. May 23, 2013. Accessed June 7, 2023 from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/archives/2013-pr/cb13-94.html>; “Ten U.S. Cities Now Have 1 Million People or More; California and Texas Have Three of These Places. Press Release Number CB15-89. May 21, 2015. Accessed June 7, 2023 from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/archives/2015-pr/cb15-89.html>
- 2 “Hays County Subdivision Recorded Plats,” Hays County. Accessed July 14, 2025 from <https://hayscad.com/subdivisionplats/sublistf/>
- 3 “Traffic Counter Locations” City of San Marcos. Accessed June 5, 2025 from <https://cosm.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d1361e98029e4784bb48f2760238cf03>
- 4 “San Marcos Routes Brochure,” Capital ARea Rural Transit Sytem. Accessed June 5, 2025 from https://www.ridecarts.com/images/uploads/pdfs/San_Marcos_Brochure_web
- 5 “Sessom Creek Improvements Phase II,” City of San Marcos Engineering Department. Accessed July 4, 2025 from <https://www.sanmarcostx.gov/1464/Sessom-Creek-Imp-Phase-II---707>
- 6 “A Watershed Moment,” Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conversvation Plan. July 2021. Accessed July 14, 2025 from https://ae0ec937-6ecf-4655-8267-4339e5b8e509.filesusr.com/ugd/3c31eb_057cacdb8367480590e400522ba1feb9.pdf

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SMTX 
VISION

SAN MARCOS NORTH OF CAMPUS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN

APPENDICES



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Existing Conditions Analysis

North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan

DRAFT – December 18, 2023

1. Introduction

a. Purpose and Objectives

i. What is an existing conditions analysis?

An Existing Conditions Analysis is a high-level snapshot of the North of Campus Neighborhood Plan Area (hereafter “Plan Area”). It looks at relevant factors including spatial context, land use and form, infrastructure, environmental features, utilities, and transportation. Beyond these technical aspects, the analysis includes an overview of the people living and working in the area, including demographics of residents, employment and education, culture, and the intangible identity of this neighborhood.

ii. Purpose

Carrying out the Vision SMTX goals in the North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan (hereafter Plan) requires a deeper dive into the area’s assets, issues, and opportunities. The Existing Conditions Analysis begins this process through a review of those items today. The planning team will use this analysis to understand what the community values, wants, and needs for the long-term future. Following completion of the Existing Conditions Analysis, the remainder of the Neighborhood Area Plan will commence, resulting in a future-focused document on how to effectively add or enhance assets, and resolve gaps and challenges.

This analysis will summarize key considerations and characteristics of the area and serve as a baseline for planning guidance to come, allowing the City of San Marcos to approach future discussions on values, needs, and wants from a shared understanding.

b. Timeframe and Alignment with Comprehensive Plan

The Neighborhood Area Plan process was approved by the San Marcos City Council on August 2, 2022, and the North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan is the fifth of seven to begin since that time. The process began by convening a voluntary Steering Committee meeting and holding a “pop-up” open house, both on September 6, 2023. The Steering Committee met virtually for a second time on November 15, 2023. Additional engagement events will occur in the coming months.

The plan is scheduled to be completed in mid-2024 and presented to the Neighborhood Commission, Planning & Zoning Commission, and City Council for adoption. The Existing Conditions Analysis is the first portion of the Plan and will serve as a baseline and foundation for the full Plan.

The City of San Marcos originally intended for a Neighborhood Character Study to be completed following the adoption of the 2013 Comprehensive Plan, “Vision San Marcos, A River Runs Through Us.” Neighborhood Character Studies are now part of the Area Plan



process. The Neighborhood Character Study will be developed in Winter 2023/2024, partially relying on information detailed in this Analysis.

2. Context

a. Description of the Area

The North of Campus Plan area encompasses 39.6 acres on the north side of the City of San Marcos.¹ As depicted in the Map in **Figure 1**, the area is located directly north of Sessom Drive, forming the boundary between the neighborhood and the Texas State University campus (hereafter “TXST” or “University”). Sessom Creek Natural Area is in the southwest corner of the Plan Area. The Plan Area is also bisected by North LBJ Drive. The neighborhood includes large commercial areas, apartment complexes, small restaurants, bars, salons, retail stores, townhomes, and single-family homes intermixed with open space.



Figure 1. North of Campus location and boundary.

b. Destinations Within and Nearby

TXST’s campus edge is a prominent boundary to the south and east of the neighborhood. Major campus destinations are nearby, including the center of campus, often referred to as “the quad” about a 15-minute walk or 5-minute drive from the Plan Area, and Bobcat



Stadium a 20-minute walk away.² Southwest Texas State Normal School (now Texas State University) was established in 1899. Historic plat documents indicate that the University has been present since prior to the establishment of the North of Campus neighborhood. The two major subdivision plats include the Park Addition, Third Division (1908) and the Forest Hills and College Heights Plat (1944). The presence of the University played a role in how the Plan Area developed and changed over time.

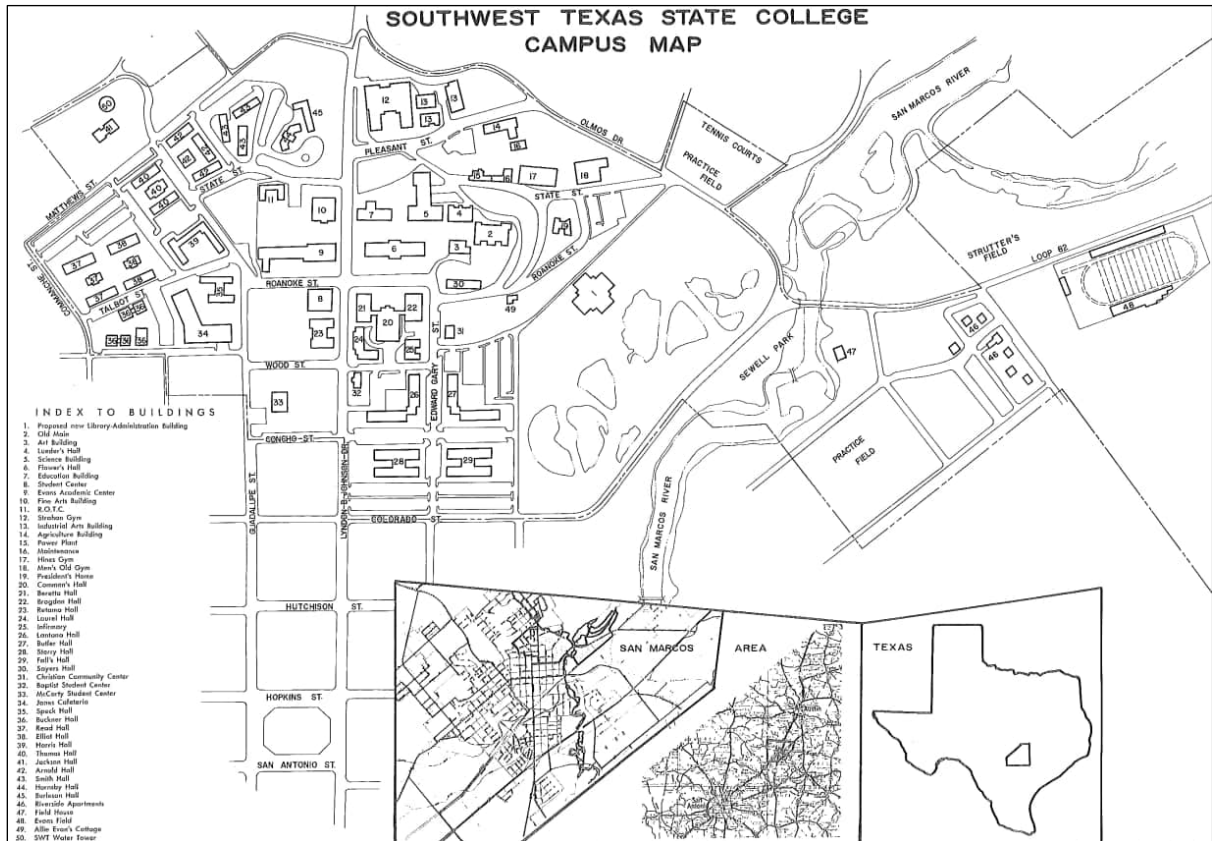


Figure 2. Texas State Campus Map (1967-68).

Many older campus buildings along Sessom Drive face away from the Plan Area including the Music, Pecos, Trinity, and Sabinal Buildings. More recent new buildings and expansions have occurred on the north side of Sessom, including the Tennis Center and the Physical Plant facilities. Most recently, Live Oak Hall was constructed southeast of the Plan Area along Sessom Drive and provides a space for theatre and film production students. This new building was constructed on a former University parking lot and added new landscaping along Sessom Drive and Peques Street. Hilltop Housing Complex is an on-campus housing complex proposed to house approximately 1,006 beds. The project is currently under construction and can be seen from the Plan Area.



The San Marcos Center, located at 700 North LBJ Drive, includes 16 businesses including restaurants, bars, salons, and coffee shops. During the community engagement process, participants stated that it is a common destination for students, university staff, and longtime residents. Dos Gatos Kolache Bakery and Mochas and Javas was mentioned as a popular business and common meeting place in the Plan Area. Grins Restaurant, located on the 800 Block of North LBJ Drive was also cited by participants as a frequent standalone destination.

Nearby neighborhoods include the Sessom Creek, Forst Hills, Spring Lake Hills, and Tanglewood subdivisions. Because these neighborhoods only include residential uses and open space, the North of Campus Plan Area serves as the nearest commercial and retail area for surrounding residents.

There are no existing schools within the Plan Area, although several are nearby. Public school students are in the attendance zones of Travis Elementary School (located on Post Road), and Miller Middle School (located on Hunter Road), and San Marcos High School (located on Rattler Road). The San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District (SMCISD) provides bus service to these schools. There are no existing City of San Marcos municipal offices, houses of worship, or health care facilities in the Plan Area.

c. Demographic Snapshot and Trends

According to the Decennial U.S. Census, the North of Campus neighborhood had a population of 1,641 residents in 2020.³ With the proximity to the Texas State University campus, it is likely that the year-round population is lower, as many are students that are only in residence when TXST is in session. The area population is 58% male and 42% female. The racial demographics of the neighborhood closely match the City of San Marcos as a whole, except for the Hispanic and Latino population, which is lower than the citywide average. See **Figures 3 and 4** for the detailed comparisons.⁴

Residents living in the Plan Area are primarily college-age, with 57% being between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. 29% are aged between 25 and 64, while only 8% are under the age of 16 and 5% are 65 years or older.⁵ There is a high level of educational attainment in the neighborhood. 41% of residents having “some college” and 44% having earned at least a bachelor’s degree.⁶ Despite high education levels, the average household income level is very low, with 58% of households earning less than \$25,000 a year.⁷ These numbers show that the neighborhood’s proximity to the University has a tremendous impact on the demographics of the Plan Area.

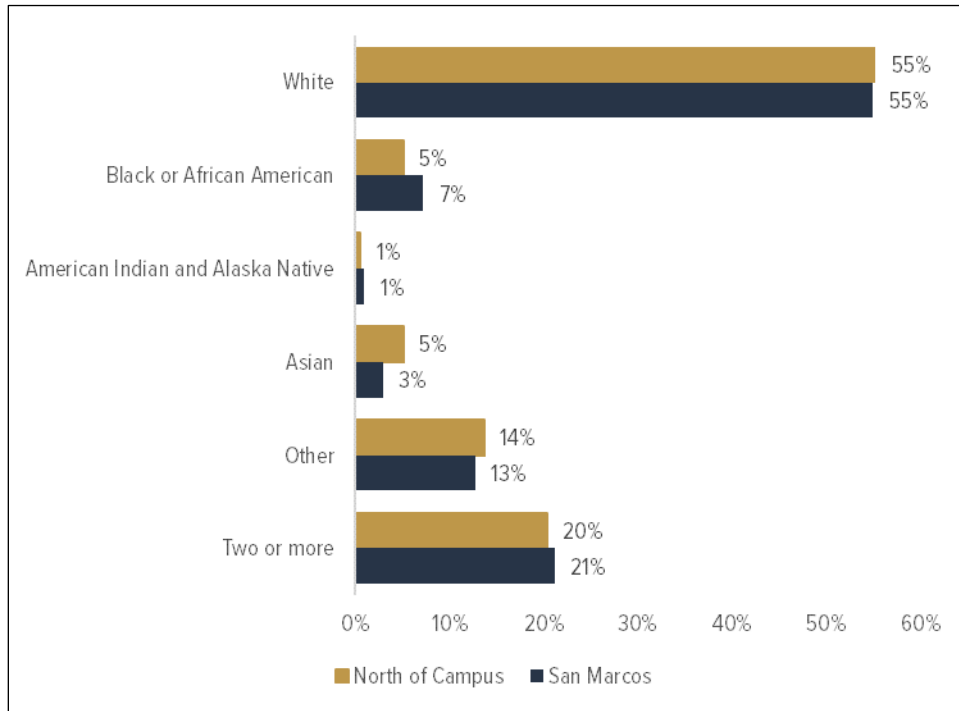


Figure 3. Racial makeup of North of Campus and San Marcos.

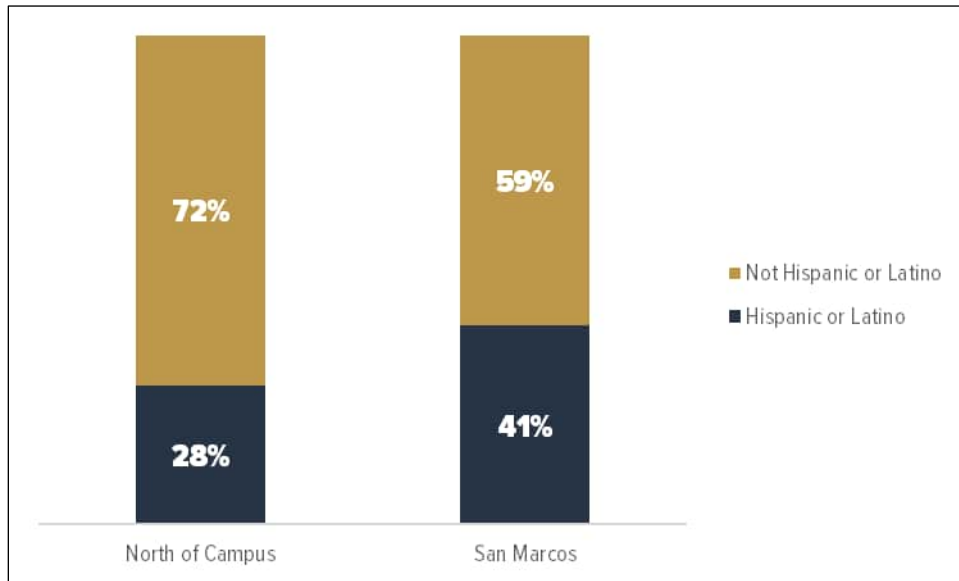


Figure 4. Hispanic/Latino origin among North of Campus and San Marcos residents.

Most residents—87% of area households—speak primarily English at home, with only 13% speaking another language, split between Spanish (4%), other Indo-European languages (4%) and Asian languages (5%).⁸

3. Detailed Area Profile

a. Land Use and Form

The Plan Area includes 49 total parcels, as depicted in the land use map in **Figure 5**. Smaller parcels, mostly residences, predominate in the north and west; a combination of several former parcels donated to the City at the southwestern edge of the neighborhood now comprise the 10.4-acre Sessom Creek Natural Area, which extends beyond the Plan Area to the southwest.⁹ The commercial parcels are mostly clustered in the southeast portion of the Plan Area along Chestnut Street, North LBJ Drive, and Sessom Drive.



Figure 5. North of Campus land uses by parcel.

i. Zoning and Regulations

The neighborhood is zoned primarily for multi-family residential uses, with a maximum of 18 or 24 units per gross acre (zoning district designations of MF-18 and MF-24). Some blocks are zoned for single-family uses (primarily SF-6 zoning districts), with commercial and mixed-use zoned parcels intermixed. There is one existing Planned Development District (PDD) within the Plan Area for Vie Lofts along Chestnut Street which was adopted in 2011. A Planned Development District is an overlay zoning district that may include uses, and other

requirements that vary from the provisions of the existing zoning district. See the map in **Figure 6** for the detailed zoning pattern.

There is a cultural resource overlay covering Sessom Creek Natural Area and scattered environmental overlays in parts of the southern half of the neighborhood. See the map in **Figure 13** for the location of existing overlays. North of Campus is not within a historic overlay or Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ). Additional information on overlays and an analysis of future recommended guidelines for the physical structures of the Plan Area will be provided in the Neighborhood Character Study.

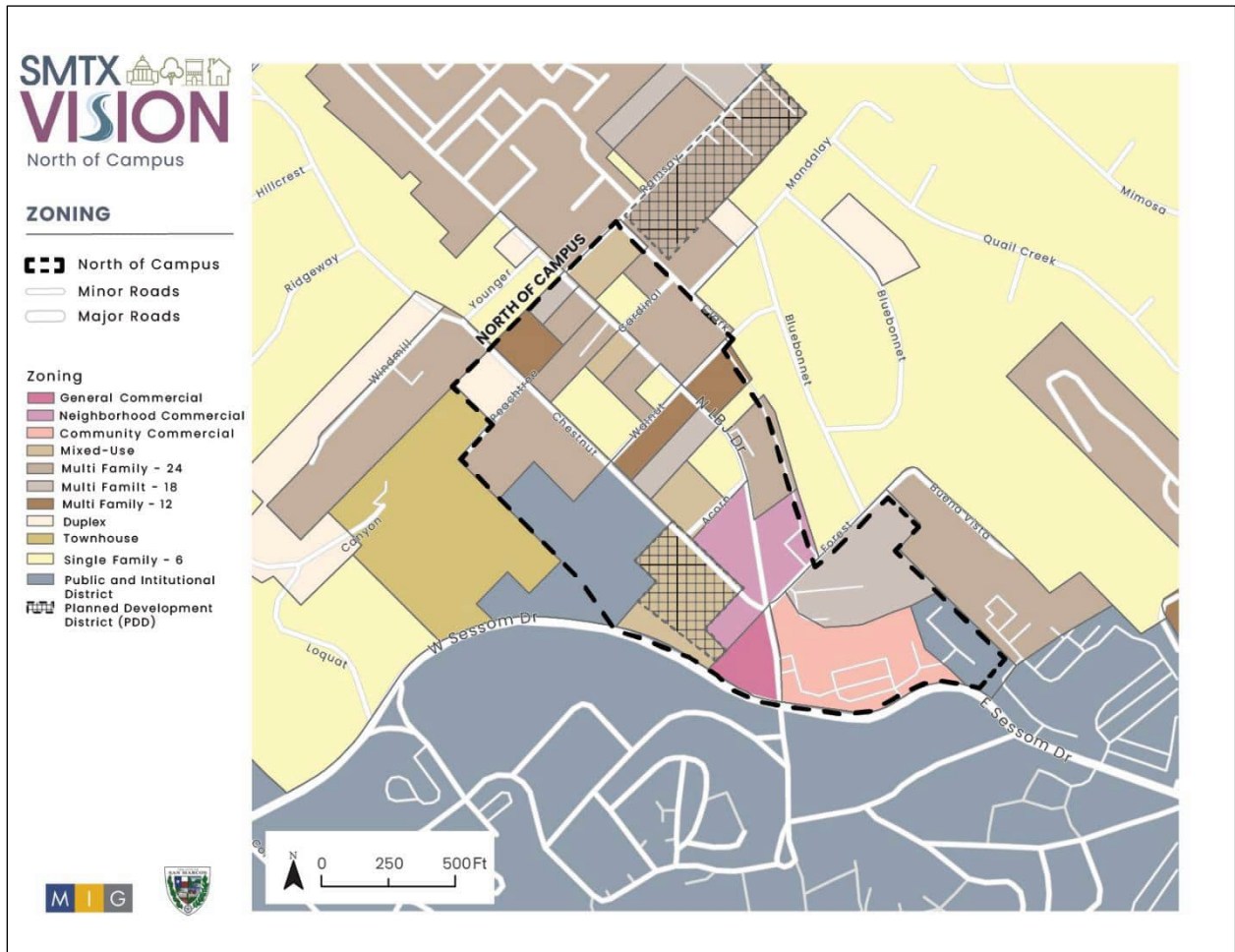


Figure 6. Zoning in and near North of Campus.

ii. Built Environment

Commercial and multifamily buildings in the Plan Area mostly have brick exteriors and are one or two stories, while some newer construction has been taller. Many detached homes, townhomes, and smaller apartments are stick-built and are one or two stories. Some recent mid-rise construction is multiple stories in height and incorporates a mix of uses, like the Vie Lofts at San Marcos with a ground-floor retail space and apartments above. Building

orientation, materials, and other details will be covered in comprehensive detail (i.e., for every structure in the Plan Area) in the forthcoming Neighborhood Character Study.

Even with the many uses referenced in **Section 3a.** above, the building footprints of North of Campus are not extensive. This leaves significant land available for uses like parking, vehicle access, and landscaping. The map in **Figure 7** below shows all building footprints in the area. The pattern of more extensive development and larger building footprints is evident in the South and East portions of the Plan Area with less dense residential uses North of the Plan Area.

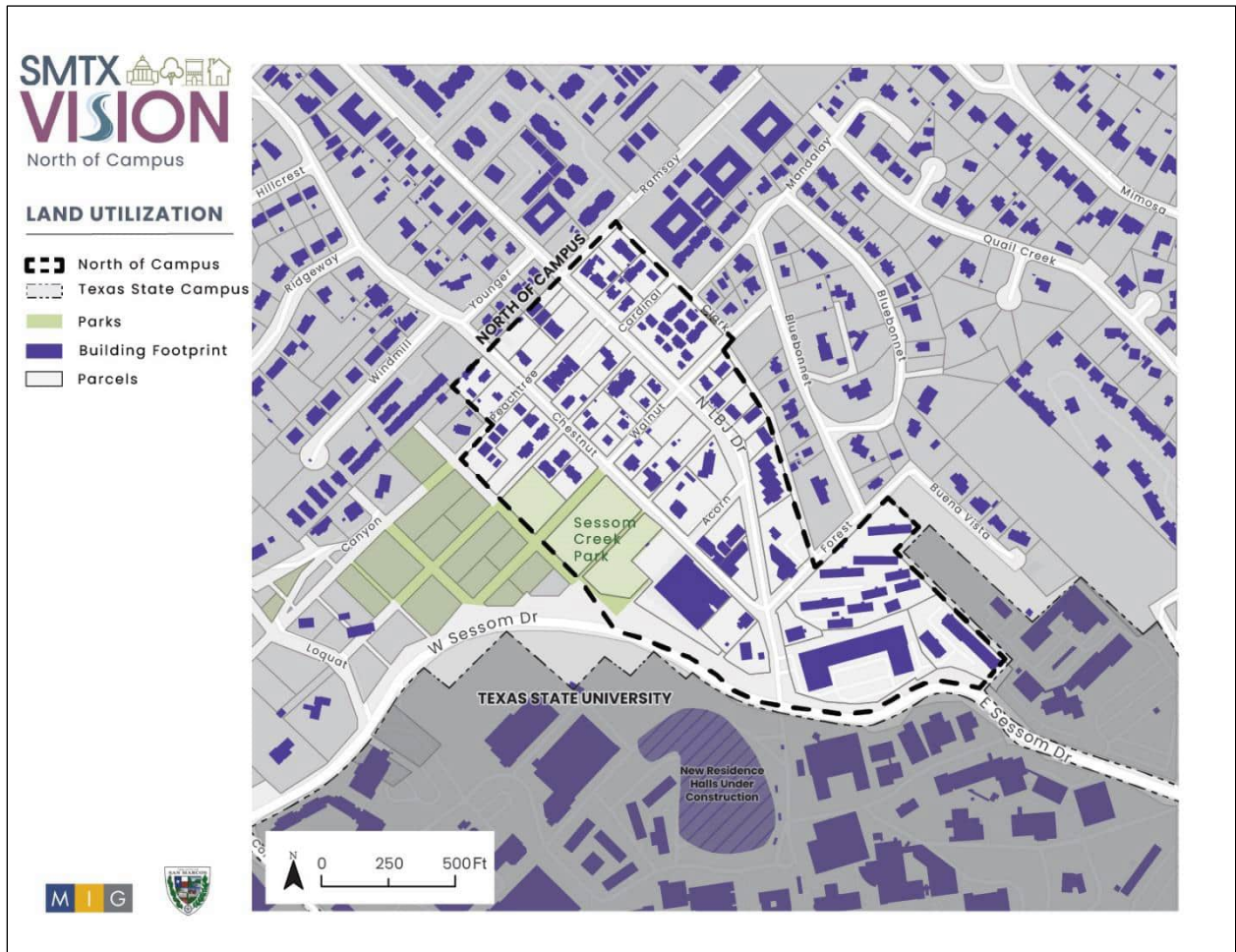


Figure 7. Land utilization in and near North of Campus.

iii. Housing

Housing in the area is primarily rental, with 79% of all North of Campus households renting their premises.¹⁰ Rental options include large student apartment complexes like the mid-rise Vie Lofts on Chestnut Street and the older garden-style Treehouse Apartments on Forest Drive. Some detached homes, townhomes, and small apartment buildings are also offered for rent by owners.



A snapshot of resident tenure in North of Campus indicates that households tend to either live in the Plan Area a short time—fitting with the student presence—or for the long term. Among renters, 33% moved here in 2019 or later, and 63.5% between 2015 and 2018. Only the remaining 3.5% have lived in the area since at least 2014. Among the Plan Area’s owner-occupied homes, the trend is less pronounced and indicates homeowners live in their homes much longer. Over half of homeowners are long-term residents (7% moved in between 1990 and 2009, and 43.5% before 1990). The remaining 49.5% of homeowners moved to the Plan Area in 2010 or later.¹¹ These statistics may vary from year to year because of the small amount of owner-occupied housing stock in the area, but the long tenure of some residents indicates a stable subset of the population that does not turn over as much as students do upon entering and departing the University.

b. Infrastructure and Public Works

i. Transportation Network

The North of Campus Area’s transportation network is defined by its hilly terrain, with most roads and streets featuring curves and slopes that follow the natural topography. This makes the streets visually interesting but introduces potential safety issues and makes maintenance more challenging. **Figure 9** illustrates aspects of the local transportation network. Using the various transportation systems detailed in this section, participants have reported generally good mobility and access, i.e., they can easily and safely get from place to place during their everyday routines.

ii. Transit

The area is well served by the Texas State Bobcat Shuttle and there are two nearby stops close to the Plan Area. Currently, the City transit service (served in partnership by the Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS) does not have a stop or route in or near the Plan Area. However, San Marcos residents can ride the Texas State Bobcat Shuttle, similar to how they would board a San Marcos Bus. The City is working towards a Plan to merge the two systems to provide more comprehensive service to San Marcos residents.

iii. Micromobility

The area is serviced by various alternative methods of transportation, such as scooters and bikes. In partnership with Texas State University, the City of San Marcos deploys a dockless scooter program managed by “Spin”. The program allows riders to rent scooters to commute in and out of the area, with parking available on campus and the downtown aerial. Texas State University operates a “Bike Cave,” that offers education on how to ride and maintain bikes, allows riders to repair their bikes using their tools and workspace, and sells bikes to customers. In addition, the City’s Land Development Code requires many of the new development types common in the area, i.e., student housing, multifamily, restaurants, and retail, to install bicycle racks for parking.



Figure 8. The transportation network in and near North of Campus.

iv. Streets

Sessom Drive is the main east-west thoroughfare within the Plan Area, with four auto lanes and signalized intersections at Peques Street and North LBJ Drive. LBJ is the major thoroughfare in the north-south direction, starting as a two-lane road in the northwest and proceeding to the southeast, before curving to become north-south after Live Oak Street. In the southern commercial center of the Plan Area, North LBJ Drive also gains a center-alternating turn lane beginning at Chestnut Street. Other important local streets include Chestnut Street, Forest Drive, and Peques Street, all of which have significant steep slopes.

The remaining public streets are short with local traffic, paved with asphalt or concrete, and support limited trips to and from local residences. West Sessom Drive from the intersection of North LBJ Drive is undergoing improvements through a Capital Improvement Project. The project will alleviate flooding of adjacent properties through drainage improvements, install new water and wastewater lines, and the intersection of Sessom Drive and North LBJ Drive will be improved for cyclists and pedestrians. The project will also implement a City Council



approved pilot project on Sessom Drive to install painted, buffered bike lines along Sessom Drive.

v. Sidewalks and Trails

Concrete sidewalks are present on selected blocks within North of Campus; see the map in **Figure 8** above for the exact locations. Most of North LBJ Drive enjoys sidewalk coverage on both sides of the street which was installed as part of a Capital Improvement Project that began in May of 2022. The project also expanded North LBJ Drive to a two-lane street, with turn lanes at intersections located at Sessom and Chestnut, and installed a bike lane along the westbound lane of Sessom, while Sessom Street, Chestnut Street, and Forest Drive feature sidewalks on one side of the street. There is currently a Capital Improvement Project (CIP) under construction to install a 10-foot shared use path along Sessom Drive from North LBJ Drive to North Comanche Street, allowing safe travel for students and citizens along West Sessom Drive. Chestnut Street has an incomplete sidewalk network, with some portions having no sidewalk. Typical newly developed streets and dedicated right of ways will require landscaped strips between the roadway pavement and the sidewalk with trees being planted within the landscape strip at regular intervals for maximum shade for pedestrians. Landscaped strips are not prevalent in the North of Campus Area due to the area being mostly established and due to the presence of limited right-of-way.

There is one existing natural trail in the Sessom Creek Natural Area that begins and ends along Chestnut Street and Canyon Street.¹² This trail can be used as both recreation and transportation as it offers a way to get through the Sessom Creek Neighborhood without having to walk or bike on significant steep portions of Chestnut Street or along the busy Sessom Drive. Other nearby recreational trails are in the Spring Lake Natural Area which can be accessed in the Plan Area by traversing through the Forest Hills subdivision and the Schulle Canyon Natural Area which can be accessed by Plan Area residents by traversing through the Sessom Creek and Holland Hills neighborhood.

vi. Utilities and Planned Upgrades

The City of San Marcos provides water, wastewater, and electricity services, and CenterPoint Energy provides natural gas service to the Plan Area. **Figure 9** indicates the extent of utility lines, providing coverage to all blocks within and around the Plan Area making re-development in the area easier with regards to adequate service.

Although not within this Plan Area, an upcoming Capital Improvement Project (CIP) will be replacing the water main and wastewater main along Sessom Drive. will have an impact on North of Campus. The University Drive blocks between C.M. Allen Parkway and Sessom Drive will see replacement of an aging 12-inch water main beginning in 2023.¹³ The reliability of this main has been a concern in the past, with several breaks requiring urgent repairs. Upon completion, North of Campus and other neighborhoods in this vicinity should see improved water service reliability.

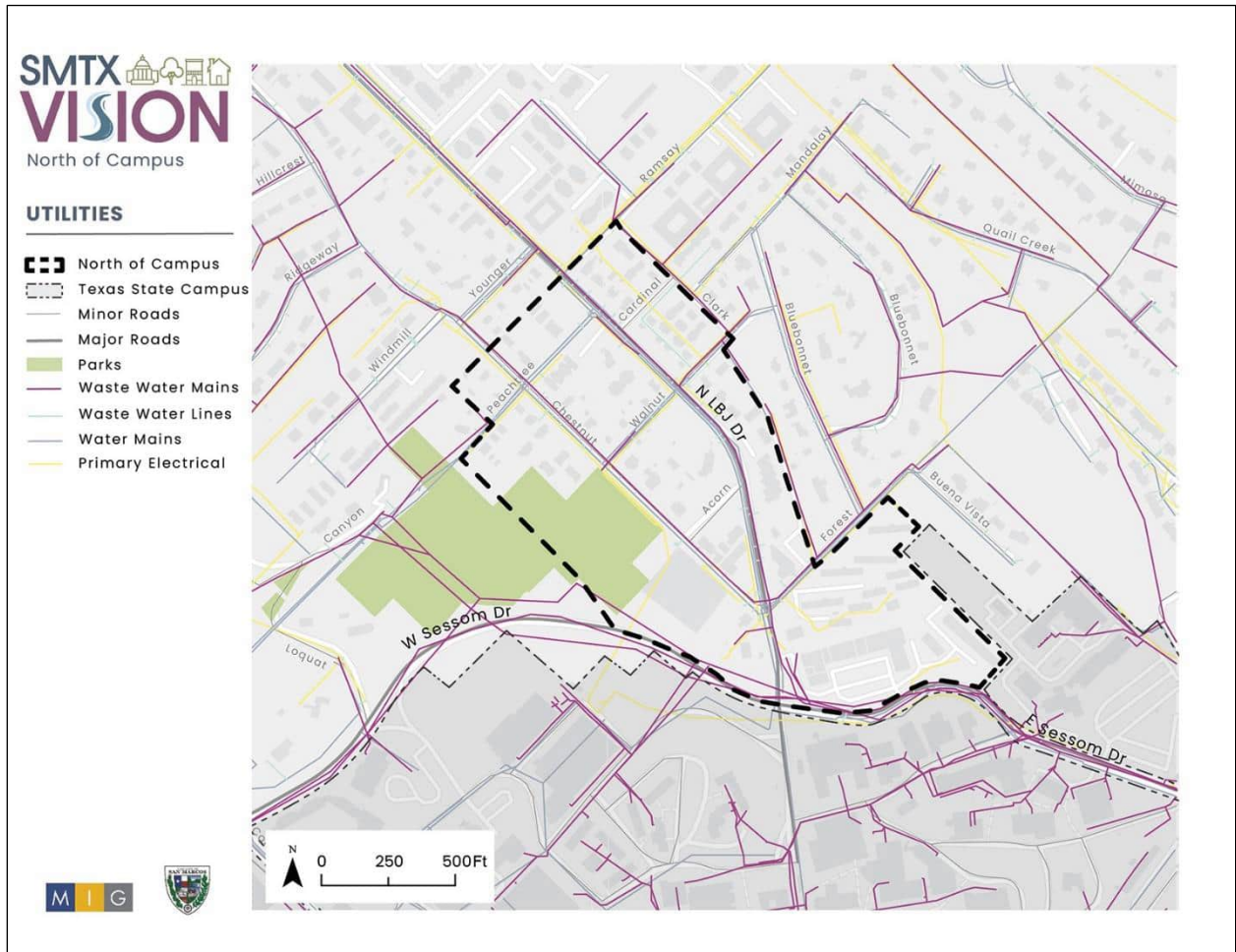


Figure 9. Utility networks in and near North of Campus.

The existing stormwater management infrastructure is displayed in **Figure 10** below. This system ensures proper drainage of the Plan Area and is crucial to prevent flooding.¹⁴ Through a Capital Improvement Project, the city is installing 10 rain and stream gages along major streams in the city including Sessom Creek to monitor heavy rain fall events as a tool to help manage major flooding events.¹⁵



Figure 10. Stormwater Management in and near North of Campus.

Aside from the major capital project listed above, replacement and maintenance of assets in North of Campus is governed by the City’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), five-year street maintenance plan, and sidewalk maintenance and infill plan.^{16 17 18} These documents indicate that the Plan Area can expect ongoing City investment to keep these assets in good condition.

c. Natural Features and Environment

i. Natural Features

Multiple natural features are within the North of Campus Plan Area boundary or nearby, including the Sessom Creek Natural Area, Spring Lake Natural Area, Shulle Canyon Natural Area, Sewell Park and San Marcos River Headwaters, and natural rolling hills and tree canopies. The City-owned parks and natural spaces are publicly accessible and include hiking trails that can be accessed from roadside trailheads.¹⁹



Air and water quality in the area are routinely rated as good. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) assess San Marcos' air quality from a site on Staples Road, several miles south of this Plan Area.²⁰ That site has reported no exceptional concentrations of ozone or fine particulates in the last year. North of Campus may have better air quality than other parts of the city, as there are no major point-based polluters in its vicinity and high-traffic areas like Interstate 35 are relatively far away. Drinking water quality in San Marcos is tested regularly and was consistently below the Maximum Contaminant Levels for all regulated contaminants in 2022, the most recent year with available data.²¹

Elevations range from 597 feet above sea level along North LBJ to 715 feet near the intersection of Chestnut and Peachtree.²² See the Natural Features & Environment map in **Figure 11** for contours showing the area's topography. In one portion of the Plan Area—along Sessom to the west of LBJ—the terrain is likely too steep to support development in its current condition. Other older developments, such as the Treehouse Apartments, have incorporated the hilly features into their design through smaller footprint buildings sited parallel to changes in contours.



Figure 11. The natural features and environment in and near North of Campus.

Tree canopy coverage, indicating the level of ground shaded by trees whether on private properties or in the public right-of-way, is 43.5% within the Plan Area.²³ This is significantly above the citywide average of 22%, and was cited as a local asset by multiple participants. The observed tree canopy cover is localized in the multifamily and single-family areas of the Plan area, while the commercial areas along North LBJ Drive and Sessom Drive have existing impervious cover without much tree canopy. An aerial view in **Figure 12** below shows the tree cover in and around the Plan Area as of 2022.



Figure 12. Aerial view showing tree canopy.

ii. Environmental Considerations

Within the Plan Area residents are never more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile away from a park. As part of the Vision SMTX Comprehensive Plan process and the Parks Master Plan, San Marcos residents have indicated a priority for protecting existing parks and undeveloped open spaces/raw land both for recreational use and to protect the flora and fauna within them.²⁴ As such, maintaining the City's natural areas and ensuring their access are important considerations for the North of Campus Area Plan.

A portion of the 100-year floodplain is located adjacent to the Plan Area along Sessom Drive and extends southeast to the San Marcos River at the intersection of Aquarena Springs Drive and Sessom Drive. These natural features do present possible hazards. The majority of the floodplain near the Plan Area is dedicated as City or University property and impervious cover within this area can be attributed to existing roadways, parking lots, and some City and University facility structures.²⁵ Even though North of Campus does not lie within that floodplain, the threat of flash flooding during and after storms may be a concern due to the significant steep slopes which occur in the Plan Area and drain toward the San



Marcos River. Another concern with the presence of mature trees is damage or injury from falling trees during ice events or thunderstorms. Large tree roots may also buckle or damage existing sidewalks over time or limit the ability to have new sidewalks.

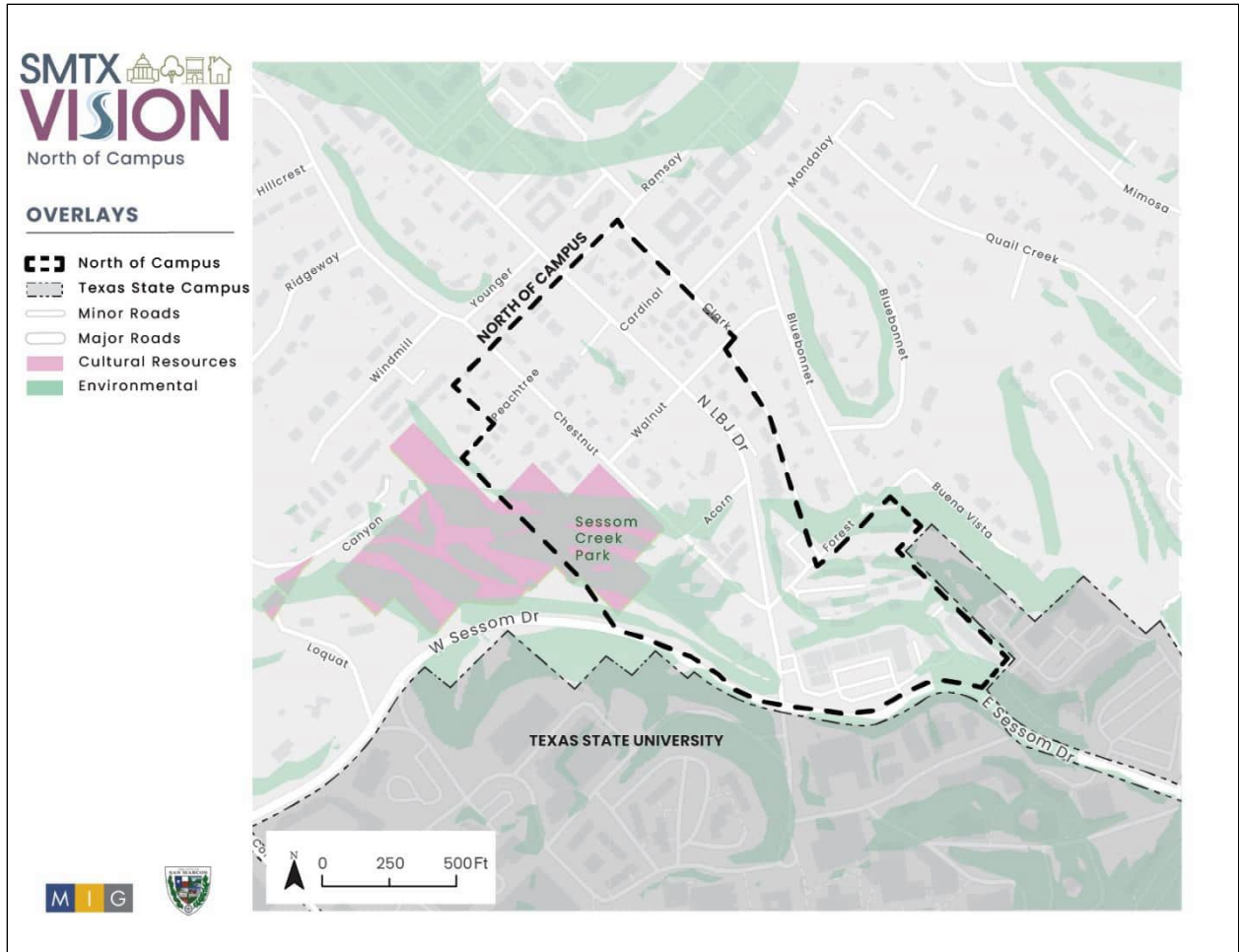


Figure 13. Overlays in and near North of Campus.

d. Economy and Business

i. Businesses

Private businesses operating in North of Campus include over 25 retail and restaurant establishments, 4 taverns or bars, and a handful of offices or university support facilities. These, along with the leasing, management, and maintenance roles of the local apartment complexes, comprise the business establishments within the Plan Area. Most workers commute in to work from other parts of San Marcos and the region.

ii. Employees

As with many San Marcos neighborhoods, almost all employed residents of North of Campus work elsewhere. Commute times to work for area residents are about the same as those of workers throughout the city. The plurality of commuters—almost 50%—have one-way commutes of 15 to 30 minutes, with a handful facing longer times and the rest



commuting less than 15 minutes or working from home.²⁶ Most commuters drive alone, with others utilizing transit, carpools, walking, or bicycling to and from their jobs. While the extent of home-based workers in North of Campus is not yet fully known, the Census Bureau estimated that 7.4% of all employed San Marcos residents were doing so in 2022.²⁷ This means a limited presence of remote, home-based workers is likely to exist here.

e. Informal and Intangible Identity

i. How Do Residents See North of Campus?

In some college towns, the short-term nature of a large student population may contribute to a feeling that no unique neighborhood identity exists.²⁸ However, this was not evident in the North of Campus Area, as many longtime residents and business owners have maintained a continuous culture through longstanding businesses, restaurants, and landmarks. As indicated through the public engagement efforts, residents also value the convenience of living in nearby residential areas just outside of the Plan Area and still having convenient access to the clustered amenities in the Plan Area.

Through the public engagement process, intangible highlights of the Plan Area's identity have also been shared. These are primarily about the area's more welcoming nature compared to Downtown, and the high awareness of its longstanding businesses like Grins, Dos Gatos, and Mochas & Javas or even the longstanding apartment complexes like Treehouse Apartments or Windmill Townhomes

Finally, the "North of Campus" name is purely descriptive, rather than evoking a specific neighborhood namesake. Several residents have noted that a new name for this part of the city should be explored. Naming possibilities include using a natural feature, street, native species, or a historical figure as its namesake.

ii. How Do Others See North of Campus?

As part of the engagement process, San Marcans from other neighborhoods and visitors indicated that they associate this neighborhood with the University, and may not know exactly where North of Campus ends and the physical TXST campus begins. There is also a tendency to associate the full neighborhood with the portions that people know. For example, students may think of North of Campus only as the home of the student-oriented restaurants, bars, and housing areas, while families and people not associated with the University may think of the single-family areas north of the Plan Area where their relatives or friends live.

Another aspect of the area's identity comes from the perspective of University alumni. Even those that move away from San Marcos have noted that they continue to recognize the neighborhood through its landmarks and urban form when they visit.

4. Opportunities and Constraints

a. What's Needed

The following topic areas could be explored to help realize the vision for North of Campus:



Emphasize safety, both as people are going about their everyday lives, and during less common events like storms, other hazards, and busy heavy-traffic events. The transportation networks may include new safety features, expanded service, and future developments should add resilient features, such as Low Impact Development features incorporated into new development, o better account for potential hazards like flooding.

Improve wayfinding and signage. This will better showcase local assets, like the relatively new Sessom Creek Natural Area, and can communicate the Plan Area’s proximity to common destinations. If Downtown, Texas State University’s Old Main and Bobcat Stadium, and other city and campus landmarks are noted by distance on foot or by bike, people may be able to better understand if they can realistically make their daily trips without driving and incorporate these trips into their routines.

Consider a more cohesive brand for this part of the city. The local neighborhood’s identity is well-established but could be bolstered with a name and collateral branding that goes beyond the purely descriptive “North of Campus.”

Recalibrate the future business mix as the area grows. Bookstores, clothing stores, and other brick and mortar retail options have been mentioned as worthy additions and would complement rather than compete with existing businesses. In addition, gas stations do not fit well and may be considered for redevelopment in the long term if requested by a property owner. Finally, the Plan should consider how remote work could be supported if it remains a durable trend. Small places with desks and internet access where people can drop in informally to work, much like university students use study areas, could become a part of the Plan Area’s future.

b. What’s Working Well and Valued

The ease of getting around, especially for non-drivers, is a clear asset. Sidewalks, trails, and the tree canopy help make this possible, as well as streets and parking lots for drivers.

The mix of neighborhood uses is balanced. Renters and homeowners each have options in the neighborhood or just outside the Plan Area, and every block is close to daily destinations. Clusters of businesses are located here—creating a mini-center in this corner of San Marcos—although it is limited by size.

The current business mix is robust. With local owners and welcoming, casual atmospheres, most of the Plan Area businesses are popular. This includes places to meet daily needs and “third places” where students can study, and people can conduct business or meet socially. The attraction of customers from beyond the immediate neighborhood amplifies this success beyond the Plan Area.

The local identity of the area is well-established, bolstered by the presence of long-term residents that have found a pleasant place to live, and business owners that have found a successful niche in the local economy. This is an intangible yet important priority and should be protected.



c. Bringing It All Together

The eventual Plan document will focus on needed improvements topic by topic. **Sections 4a. and 4b.** above comprise a starting point for fleshing out recommendations in the complete North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan.

Finally, the City Council's intent for the Vision SMTX Comprehensive Plan process is to align all area plans and the adopted Comprehensive Plan itself. The high-level vision and guiding principles set by the Comprehensive Plan are in use as the North of Campus Area Plan is developed. In addition, the Downtown Area Plan was recently adopted and the Dunbar and Heritage, East Village, and Blanco Gardens Area Plans are in-progress and/or going through an adoption process. Where those neighborhoods have identified an issue that also impacts North of Campus, their specific recommendations could also be used in this Plan Area, with context-specific adaptations.

¹ Area observations calculated using ArcGIS ArcPro software and confirmed using Google Earth, September 26, 2023.

² Distance and time observations calculated using Google Maps, September 27, 2023.

³ 2020 Decennial Census and 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census. North of Campus is roughly coterminous with Census Block Group 4 of Census Tract 107.03 and Block Group 1 of Tract 102, which were used for all analyses.

⁴ B03002, *Hispanic or Latino Origin by Race*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.

⁵ B01001, *Sex by Age*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.

⁶ B15003, *Educational Attainment*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.

⁷ B19001, *Household Income (in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars)* and B19013, *Median Household Income in the Last 12 Months*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.

⁸ B16001, *Language Spoken at Home*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.

⁹ "San Marcos Park, Recreation, and Trail Master Plan." City of San Marcos, Texas. 2019. Accessed February 11 2023 from <http://sanmarcostx.gov/1193/Master-Plans>

¹⁰ B25003, *Tenure*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.

¹¹ B25038, *Tenure by Year Householder Moved Into Unit*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.

¹² "Sessom Creek Natural Area." City of San Marcos, Texas. Department of Parks and Recreation. Accessed September 26, 2023 from <http://sanmarcostx.gov/Facilities/Facility/Details/Sessom-Creek-Natural-Area-64>

¹³ "10 Year Capital Improvement Program Projects – Water. Project ID: 720." City of San Marcos.

¹⁴ "FY 2022-2031 10 Year Capital Improvements Program." City of San Marcos.

Accessed February 12, 2023 from <https://sanmarcostx.gov/366/10-Year-Capital-Improvements-Plan>

¹⁵ "Capital Improvement Program Projects – Water. No Project ID." City of San Marcos.

¹⁶ "Capital Improvement Program Projects" from <https://www.sanmarcostx.gov/DocumentCenter/View/20788/2021-2030-10-Year-Capital-Improvements-Plan>.

¹⁷ "Public Works – Five Year Street Maintenance Plan" from:

<https://cosm.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=7a09e66341fc41729c2121ce38f9aeb0>

¹⁸ "Sidewalk Maintenance and Gap Infill Program" from:

<https://cosm.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=a5903f2569f9431eb18d2f404ef1c9fb>



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- ¹⁹ "Sessom Creek Natural Area." City of San Marcos, Texas.
- ²⁰ "Yearly Summary Report – San Marcos Staples Road C1675 Site." Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Accessed September 26, 2023 from https://www.tceq.texas.gov/cgi-bin/compliance/monops/yearly_summary.pl
- ²¹ "Water Quality Report: City of San Marcos, Texas Water Public Water System, January – December 2022." City of San Marcos. Accessed September 25, 2023 from <https://www.sanmarcostx.gov/DocumentCenter/View/33973>
- ²² Observations made using Google Earth, September 26, 2023.
- ²³ "Tree Canopy for San Marcos." Texas A&M Forest Service. Retrieved September 11, 2023 from <https://texasforestinfo.tamu.edu/utc/>
- ²⁴ "San Marcos Park, Recreation, and Trail Master Plan." Pages 105-107.
- ²⁵ "2017-2027 University Master Plan." Texas State University, August 2017. Pages 40-41.
- ²⁶ B08303, *Travel Time To Work and B08301, Means of Transportation to Work*. 2017-21 Five-Year American Community Survey.
- ²⁷ HPS00, *Household Pulse Survey*. HPS Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic and Recovery. U.S. Census Bureau.
- ²⁸ "Celebrating Community in a College Town." Campus-Community Connections Newsletter, June 2023. International Town & Gown Association.

**SAN MARCOS
NORTH OF
CAMPUS
NEIGHBORHOOD**

**CHARACTER
STUDY**

AUGUST 2024



SAN MARCOS

**NORTH OF CAMPUS NEIGHBORHOOD
CHARACTER STUDY**



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1

INTRODUCTION



810 North LBJ Apartments, highlight the steep elevation changes in the Plan Area.

The Neighborhood Character Study is a crucial portion of the Neighborhood Area Plan. Data was gathered to better understand and document factors contributing to the neighborhoods' character, such as lot size and coverage, architectural style, and building massing and orientation. The methodology is included in this section 1.

Section 2 provides descriptions of quantitative metrics as well as qualitative factors that are difficult to express in numbers. This is done to better communicate the components of the North of Campus area's physical character. In Section 3, the study recommends how City regulations can be adopted or refined to ensure the neighborhoods' character is respected and maintained.

ROLE OF NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER



Pie Society, 700 N LBJ, Suite 107.



Hair Chartreuse Studio, with customers, 829 N. LBJ.



Dos Gatos Kolache Bakery staff located at 700 N LBJ Suite 102A.

Neighborhood character is the built form of physical structures. Built form includes how structures are positioned on a property, how the structure appears from the street view, and the types of materials used in their construction. Site-related features are also important to neighborhood character. Site features include public spaces, private yards, driveways, and natural features that surround an individual structure or neighborhood.

While these items may seem intangible, architects and city planners can measure these factors and analyze the resulting data to find trends. With these observations, it is possible to better define a neighborhood's physical character. Most importantly, this more detailed understanding can help staff, appointed officials, and elected officials evaluate and shape new development that is compatible with existing neighborhood character. Studying neighborhood character can enable communities to preserve what they love about their neighborhoods while also identifying suitable, context-sensitive improvements that improve quality of life in an equitable manner.

MEASURING NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Quantitative Metrics

Quantitative metrics are characteristics that are currently or often regulated by City Development Codes, and are reviewed for when new development or changes to existing structures occurs. City staff collected data on these metrics for each property within the North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan boundary in early 2024. A variety of methods were utilized, including a tablet app to document observations in the field, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to measure distances and collect existing data, and more detailed written descriptions were developed where needed. The following quantitative data was collected:

- Block Pattern
- Parks
- Sidewalks
- Land Uses and Residential Unit Types
- Lot Size
- Setbacks
- Building Footprints
- Lot Coverage
- Entry Orientation
- Parking Orientation
- Building Height

Qualitative Metrics

Qualitative metrics are important to document and understand but are not typically regulated by the City except through incremental policy changes and incentives. Staff used direct observation through neighborhood walks, photos, and Google Street View in early 2024 to complete all measurements in this section. This was supplemented by comments offered at the first Community Workshop in September 2023, and some existing City plans, such as the 2020 Sidewalk Survey. The following qualitative data was collected:

- Sidewalk Conditions
- Architectural Style
- Roof Form
- Landscaping
- Public Art

2

CHARACTER PROFILE



Vie Lofts commercial space fronting on Chestnut Street. 817 Chestnut Street.

This section contains the results of the character study for the North of Campus neighborhood. The character profile begins with a demographic snapshot of the neighborhood, followed by a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative metrics listed in Section 1. They are accompanied by photos to indicate the condition of many elements. This section also includes an inventory of photos to showcase existing development patterns and supplemental maps to provide additional context.

AREA CONTEXT



Texas State entryway at N LBJ Drive, and E Sessom Drive.



Pedestrian passage connecting Chestnut Street and N LBJ Dr.

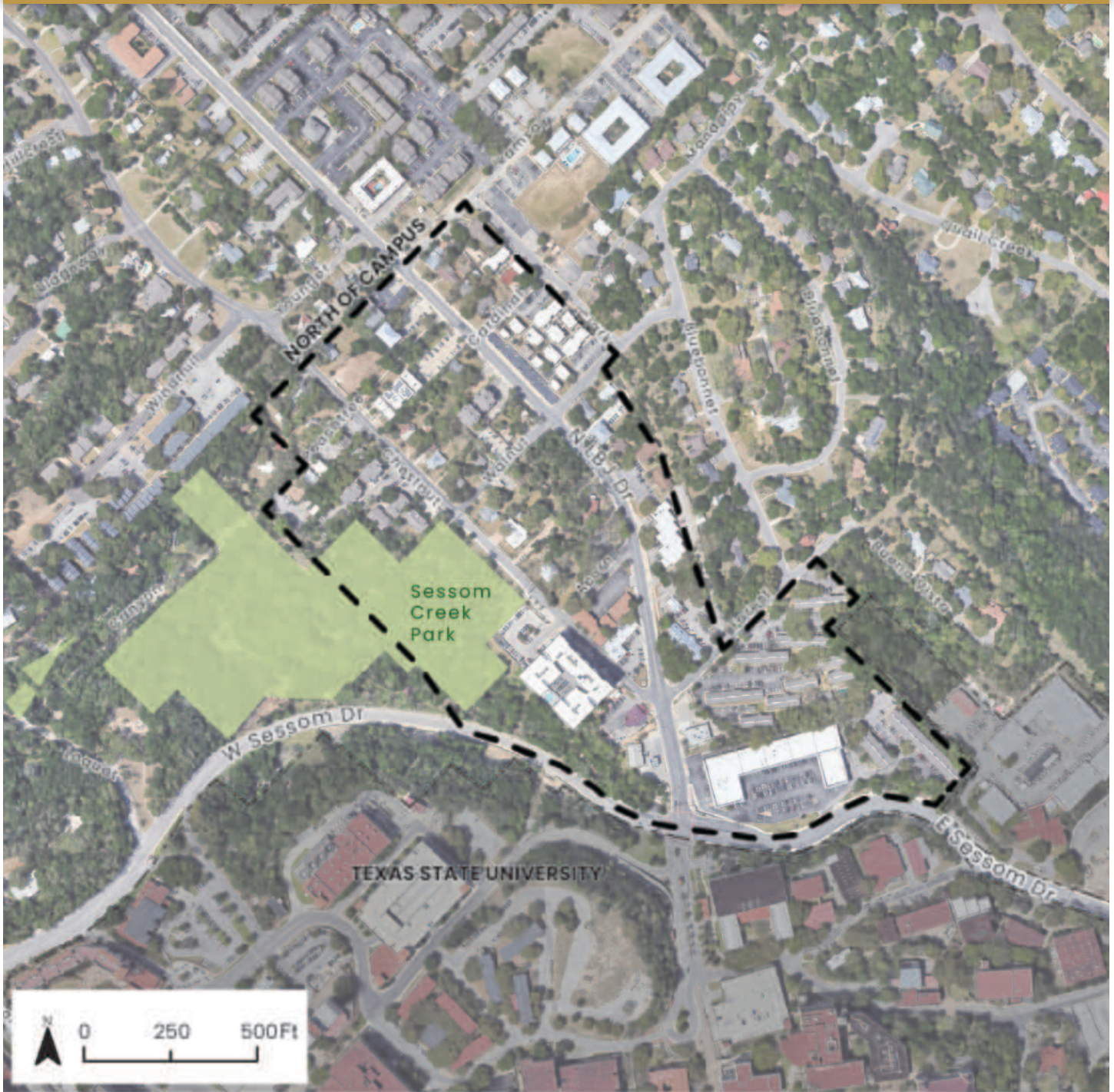


Street improvements at Sessom Street bordering 700 N. LBJ Drive.

The North of Campus neighborhood (Figure 1: Studay Area) is significantly smaller than other neighborhoods in San Marcos, although the boundary is not considered firm – the neighborhood’s commercial center and adjacency to Texas State University (TXST) draws in nearby residents and creates a sense of community more through association with these amenities than physical residency.

North LBJ Drive is the primary connecting street through the neighborhood, connecting the neighborhood to TXST and downtown San Marcos. Sessom Drive defines the area’s southern border and separates the neighborhood from TXST.

FIGURE 1. STUDY AREA



Legend

-  North of Campus
-  Parks
-  Texas State Campus

BRIEF AREA HISTORY

The North of Campus Area is comprised of two main areas defined by their original plats: Park Addition, and the Forrest Hills and College Heights subdivisions. Parks Addition was platted in 1908 and contains 118 single family homes. Currently only 12 of those original homes remain. Most of the original homes have been demolished and developed into large scale apartments (ca. 1980-present day). As a part of the development and platting process, land along the south was designated for Sessom Creek Natural Area.

Forest Hills and College Heights addition was platted in 1925, and the majority of the Plan area was platted by 1948. Since the original plat there have been four major replats, and various smaller replats in the area. See Figure 2: Subdivisions. The intended block structure allowed for an alley that bisects the block between North LBJ Drive (formerly Austin Street) and Bluebonnet Street; which is unique for this area. The alleyway, which is platted right-of-way but only partially paved for cars and partially used as a social trail, makes up the northwestern boundary of the Area Plan. Homes were demolished in the area to make way for Chestnut Plaza, constructed in 1985.



The existing home at 918 Chestnut Street is apart of the Park Addition plat and is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

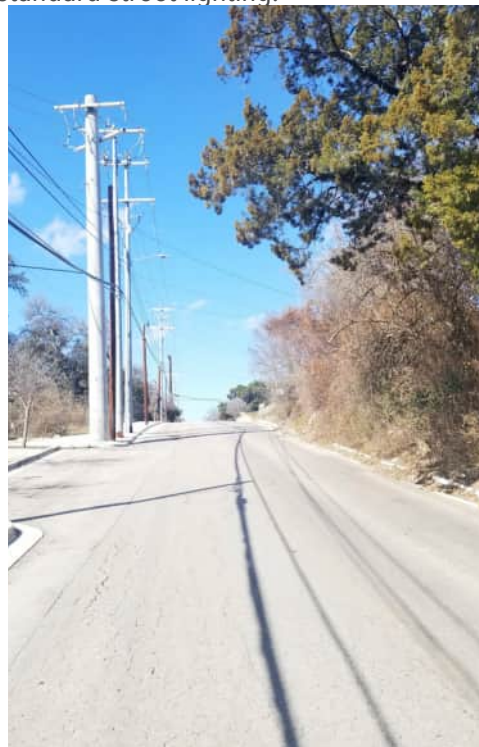
UPKEEP

The North of Campus Area has one building that is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). 918 Chestnut Street, built in 1940, is a pyramidal house, with a stone fence, pond and accessory structures on a 0.71 acre property. Other properties, as well as the area as a whole, were not deemed eligible for a Historic District due to the amount of infill in the area, and the quality of upkeep of potentially eligible structures.

Public spaces in the North of Campus area are kept up well. The recent city capital improvement projects (CIP) along LBJ Drive and Sessom Drive installed sidewalks, curbs, streets, and pedestrian crossings which have remained in excellent condition. Other public spaces are generally in good repair. Exceptions are streets such as Chestnut Drive, as well as other streets that have not been recently improved and gaps in the sidewalk network occur; Chestnut Street is known to be a long steep stretch of residentially lined road with sidewalk gaps, and substandard street lighting.

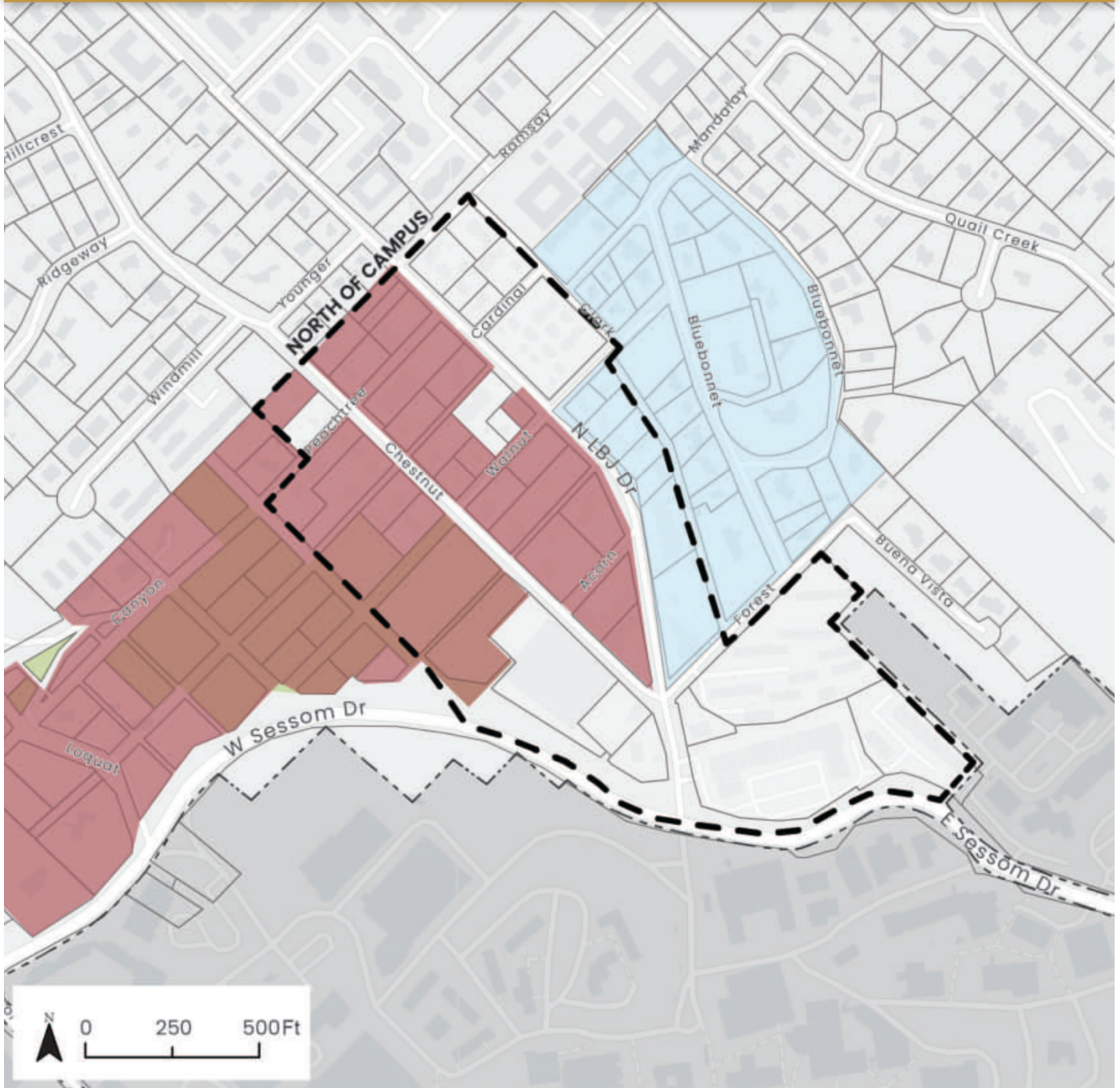


Newly improved sidewalk network along N LBJ Drive.



Chestnut Street with improvements on the South side of the street, while unimproved on the North.

FIGURE 2. SUBDIVISIONS



Legend

-  North of Campus
-  Texas State Campus
-  Minor Roads
-  Major Roads
-  Parks

Historic Subdivisions

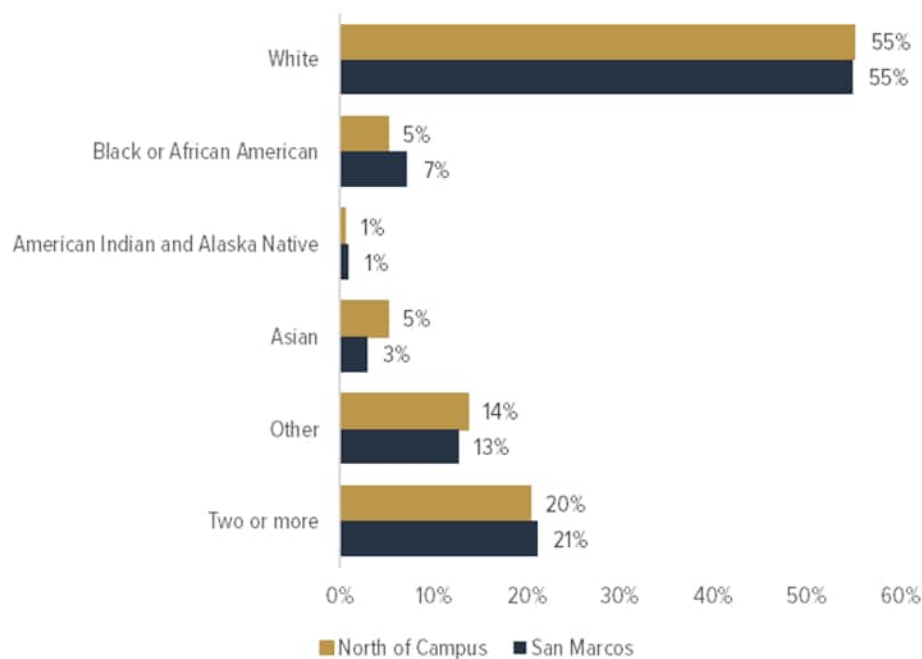
-  Forrest Hills
-  Park Addition

COMMUNITY

Demographic Snapshot

According to the Decennial U.S. Census, the North of Campus neighborhood had a population of 1,641 residents in 2020. With the proximity to the Texas State University campus, it is likely that the year-round population is lower, as many are students that are only in residence when TXST is in session. The area population is 58% male and 42% female. The racial demographics of the neighborhood closely match the City of San Marcos as a whole, except for the Hispanic and Latino population, which is lower than the citywide average. See Figures 3 and 4 for the detailed comparisons.

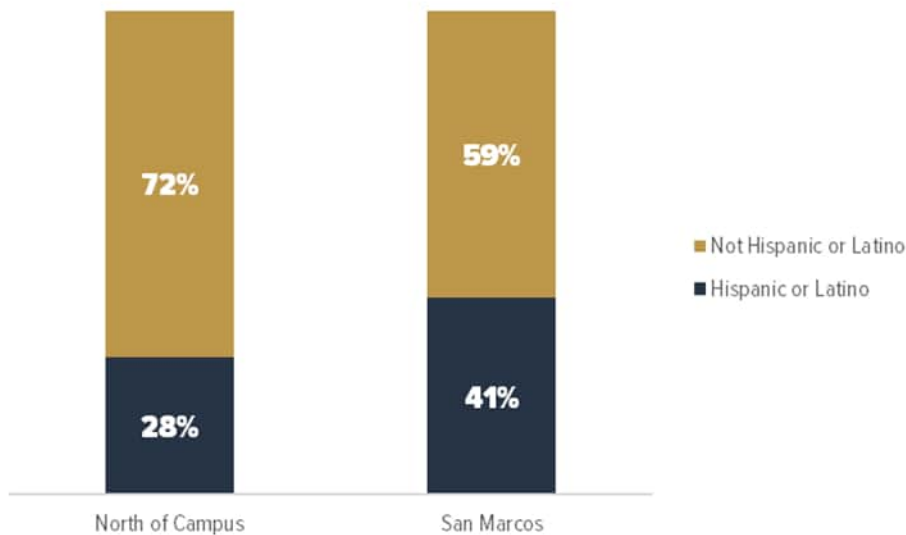
Figure 3. Racial makeup of North of Campus and San Marcos (Data source: 2020 Census)



Residents living in the Plan Area are primarily college-age, with 57% being between the ages of 18 and 24 years old. 29% are aged between 25 and 64, while only 8% are under the age of 16 and 5% are 65 years or older. There is a high level of educational attainment in the neighborhood. 41% of residents having “some college” and 44% having earned at least a bachelor’s degree. Despite high education levels, the average household income level is very low, with 58% of households earning less than \$25,000 a year. These numbers show that the neighborhood’s proximity to the University has a tremendous impact on the demographics of the Plan Area.

Most residents—87% of area households—speak primarily English at home, with only 13% speaking another language, split between Spanish (4%), other Indo-European languages (4%) and Asian languages (5%).

Figure 4. Hispanic/Latino origin among North of Campus and San Marcos residents. (Data Source: 2020 Census)



The Role of People in Shaping Neighborhood Character

Neighborhood character is heavily influenced by the people who live and work in the area. This includes long-term and short-term residents, business owners and employees, students, faculty, and others who have an impact on the community or visit the neighborhood. Residents' values, what they wish to preserve and cultivate, and the intensity of buildings' use affect the look and feel of homes and businesses.

The neighborhood's proximity to TXST is a key defining feature of the neighborhood, as a large portion of its residents are students or staff, and existing businesses support the needs of the university community. Community members have stated that students frequent restaurants and bars within this area as an alternative to downtown. Commercial spaces in the Plan Area are almost always occupied with active businesses, unlike other areas of the city. However, there is a notable reduction in business activity when TXST is not in session.



COSM staff making repairs at Chestnut Street and North LBJ Dr.



Dos Gatos Kolache Bakery, located at 700 N LBJ Drive, Suite 102A.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Blocks and Streets

Because of natural geography and proximity to the river, lots within the North of Campus neighborhood have been developed primarily with an orientation toward either North LBJ Drive or Chestnut Street, both of which converge with Forest Street at the south end of the neighborhood. The street grid is irregular, with small blocks of inconsistent size varying from small single-family lots to large multi-building developments.



Parks

As shown on Figure 5, there is one park within the North of Campus neighborhood – Sessom Creek Natural Area, an 11-acre open space at the southwest corner of the neighborhood. The park is primarily unimproved with significant tree canopy and a short trail connecting to LBJ Drive to Canyon Road. The natural area was recently designated a City park, although its lack of signage has limited community awareness of its availability as a public space.

Sidewalks





Sidewalks are present in about 50% of the neighborhood, including along all of North LBJ Drive as well as the newly developed parts of Chestnut Street, although Chestnut’s sidewalks typically only follow one side of the street. Sections of Sessom Drive adjacent to



FIGURE 5. LAND UTILIZATION



Legend

-  North of Campus
-  Texas State Campus
-  Parks
-  Building Footprint
-  Parcels

commercial uses contain sidewalks, but the formal paved sidewalk ends at the intersection of North LBJ Drive. Attendees of the Area Plan community engagement events have stated that treecover in the Plan Area improve walkability and is an indicator of its legacy as a stable neighborhood. However much of the space adjacent to sidewalks in commercial areas is paved for parking and could be better used for landscaping or amenities. Community members have pointed out that although the neighborhood is compact and relatively easy to get around, the lack of crossing infrastructure and other safety elements for pedestrians and cyclists complicates travel.

Vacant Land

Most of the space within the neighborhood has been developed, with significant infill in recent years. There are only 3 listed vacant parcels, of which one is currently under construction for a single family home and a second is awaiting approval, leaving one vacant parcel open for infill at this time. All three parcels are zoned MF-12 for multifamily housing.

Commercial Uses

Approximately 36% of businesses in the North of Campus area are restaurants and 9% are bars, demonstrating North of Campus' significance as an eating/drinking destination. Of the remaining businesses, 27% provide a service, 12% are retail, 12% are considered "Other", and only 3% (one property) serves primarily as an office.



Mochas and Javas, located at 700 N LBJ Drive.












Red Bus Food Park, "food bus," 801 Chestnut Street.

FIGURE 6. LAND USE



Legend

- | | | | |
|---|--------------------|---|----------------------|
|  | North of Campus |  | Residential |
|  | Texas State Campus |  | Commercial |
|  | Minor Roads |  | Civic/Institutional |
|  | Major Roads |  | Vacant or Greenspace |
|  | Parks | | |

Housing Unit Type

There are a variety of residential building unit types in the North of Campus neighborhood, although most residential buildings are either single-family residential (23%) or multi-family with five or more units (43%). The TXST student population is a likely driver for the high share of multi-family properties (of which 2% are 5-9 unit buildings, 9% are buildings with 10-20 units, and 32% are buildings with 20+ units). Six percent of residential buildings are duplexes and 5% are Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). There are no triplex/quadplexes or townhomes listed in the neighborhood.

Most of the neighborhood’s residents live in a multifamily property. North of Campus has 38 listed residential properties (multifamily properties may contain multiple buildings), but has a total of 366 residential units. 25 of those 38 residential properties are single-family or duplex properties, which make up only 7% of the residential units within the neighborhood. The remaining 341 units are located in buildings with four or more units. Over half of the neighborhood’s total units are actually located within one of the three largest properties: the Vie Lofts (76 units), Treehouse Apartments (70 units), or Vintage Pads (50 units).



Single Family Residential.



Duplex located at 301 and 303 Cardinal Court.



Baynebridge apartments, 1005 N LBJ Drive.

LOT PATTERN

Lot Size

Lot size is the area of a parcel. Commercial lots are approximately twice the size, on average, of residential lots in the North of Campus area. Lot shapes tend to vary, primarily due to the street grid changes which transition from downtown’s North-South grid orientation to match the northern-most neighborhood’s Northwest-Southeast grid orientation.

Average Lot Size	
Residential	0.46 acres
Commercial	1.04 acres

Setbacks

Setbacks are the distance between a structure and a property line. The front setback is the distance between the front property line and the front of a structure. The side setback is the distance between the side property line and the side of a structure. Front setbacks are similar across uses but commercial properties tend to have 50% deeper side setbacks.

	Average Front Setback	Average Side Setback
Residential	42 feet	20 feet
Commercial	40 feet	32 feet

Both single- and multi-family residential buildings within a single block tend to follow consistent front setbacks, although the setback may vary between 3 feet and 83 feet and is not always consistent with neighboring blocks.

Building Footprint

A building footprint is the total square footage of a building. The Development Pattern Map shows a map of building footprints within the North of Campus Neighborhood. Commercial buildings are generally slightly larger than residential buildings.

Lot Coverage

Lot coverage is the portion of a lot that is covered by a building footprint as well as pavement or other impermeable surfaces such as driveways and parking lots. Commercial properties have an average of 23% more impermeable surfaces than residential, likely due to the presence of asphalt surface parking lots.

Average Lot Coverage

Residential	39% (84% max)
Commercial	62% (96% max)

Average Building Footprint

Residential	2,554 square feet
Commercial	3,114 square feet*

**This does not include an outlier, the San Marcos Center, which is the largest building by far at 44,514 square feet.*



Valero Gas Station, 799 North LBJ Drive.



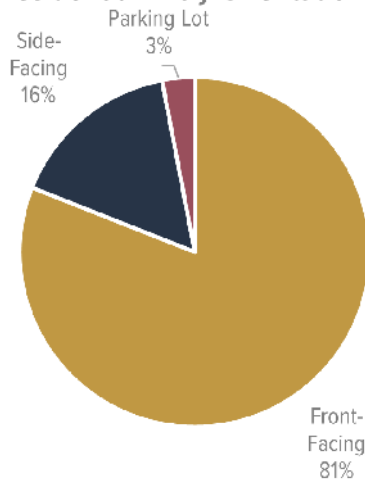
Surface Parking for Peach Tree Apartments, 1028 Chestnut Street.

BUILDING LAYOUTS AND MASSING

Entry Orientation

Entry orientation describes whether the entry point to the structure (primary doorway) faces the front, side, rear, of the structure or faces an off-street parking lot. 81% of residential buildings have a front facing entrance, while 16% have a side-facing entrance, and only 3% have an entrance facing a parking lot.

Residential Entry Orientation

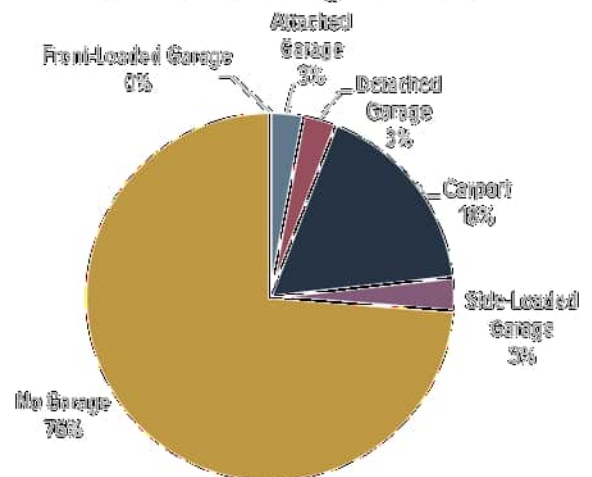


Parking Orientation and Type

Parking orientation describes whether the vehicular access to the lot is from the front or side. The type of parking describes whether the lot includes a garage, carport, or neither, and whether it is attached or detached from the primary structure. On-street parking is extremely limited within the neighborhood.

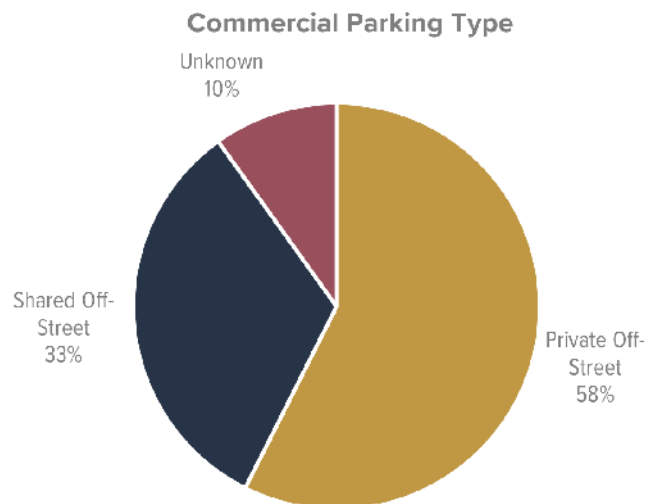
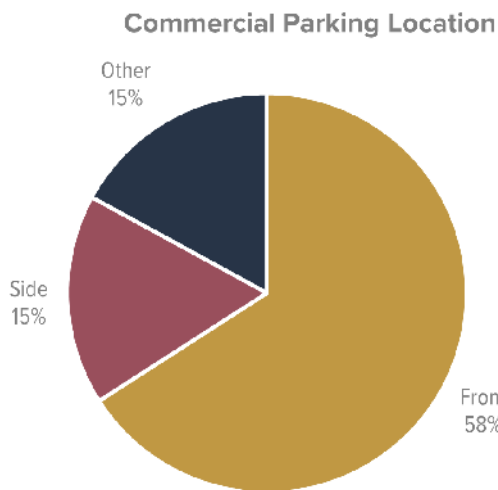
- In the North of Campus neighborhood, 18% of residential lots utilize a carport, 3% of lots have an attached garage, 3% have a detached garage, and 3% have a side-loaded garage. A total of 76% don't have a garage or carport and rely on private surface parking lots or driveways.

Residential Parking Orientation



CHARACTER PROFILE

- Parking for 58% of commercial properties is located in the front of the business, 15% is located to the side of the building, and 15% in other locations.
- Approximately 58% of commercial properties utilize private off-street parking lots, 33% of commercial properties utilize shared off-street parking lots, and 10% provide unknown parking options.



Chestnut Plaza, 829 N. LBJ Dr, with a view of Vie Lofts and Texas State University.



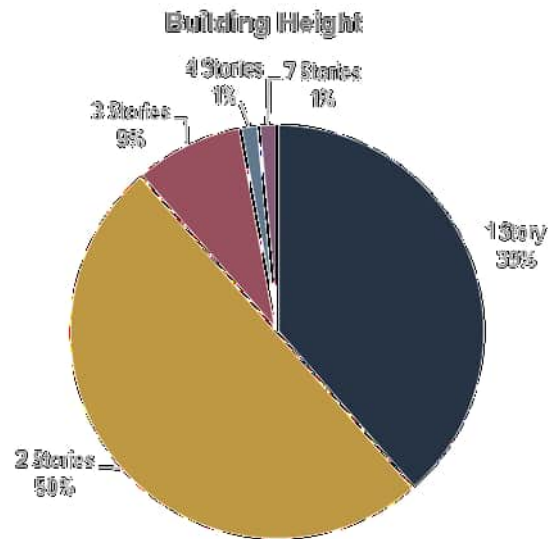
700 N. LBJ Dr surface parking along N. LBJ Drive.

Height

The North of Campus neighborhood includes primarily one-story (39%) or two-story (50%) buildings, accompanied by single-story accessory structures such as garages and sheds. Of the remaining buildings, 9% are 3 stories, 1% are 4 stories, and 1% are 7 stories.

The Vie Lofts is the only building above four stories tall. It is the neighborhood’s tallest building ranging from five to seven stories, adjusting for the site’s steep grade. The Vie Lofts are located at a lower elevation than much of the neighborhood, helping to reduce the visual impact of its height on shorter buildings nearby.

Commercial buildings are primarily one story and tend to include singular uses on separate lots, with the exception of two commercial developments: Chestnut Plaza and the San Marcos Center. Chestnut Plaza, located at 829 N LBJ Drive, is a two-story retail and office suite style development with half the development being two stories. The San Marcos Center, located at 700 N LBJ Drive, is a single-story commercial development with 16 business suites.



Red Bus Food Park abutting Vie Lofts.

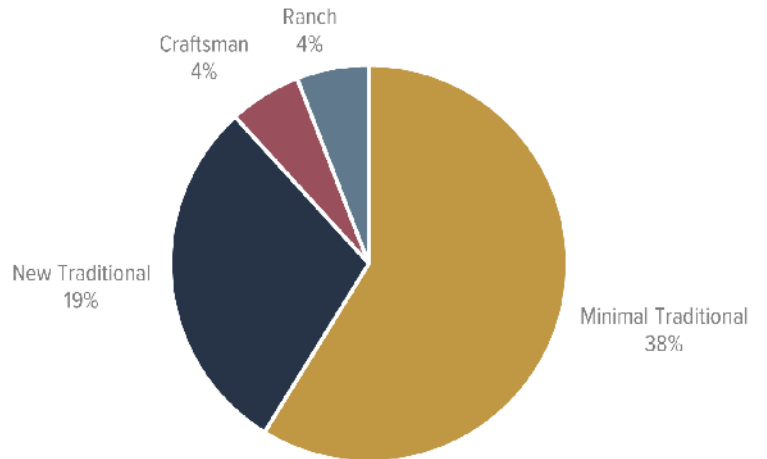
STYLE AND APPEARANCE

Architectural Style and Materials

Residential styles are dictated by the era in which they were platted. Minimal Traditional is the most prevalent style in the North of Campus area, representing 38% of homes, but New Traditional is also a common style at 19%. Craftsman and Ranch styles are both present, each comprising 4% of homes in the neighborhood. The twelve remaining Parks Addition Plat homes contains historic homes that are pyramidal style housing, early American traditional or craftsman style, typically made of wood. The most common exterior siding material for residential buildings in the neighborhood is wood (50%), followed by brick (27%), stone (14%) and stucco (5%).

Both major commercial developments in the area, Chestnut Plaza and The San Marcos Center, can be described as strip centers or mini-malls. The architecture of both, but especially the San Marcos Center, is for convenience of entry into each business from one's automobile and the ability to view the entrances of all of the businesses within the development at one glance. Chestnut Plaza has included a mixture of wood/stone and also allowed large trees to grow throughout and within the development. Some of the buildings containing only one business are designed resembling (or in formerly) residential homes.

Residential Architectural Styles



Vintage Pad Apartments, 1000 N. LBJ Drive.

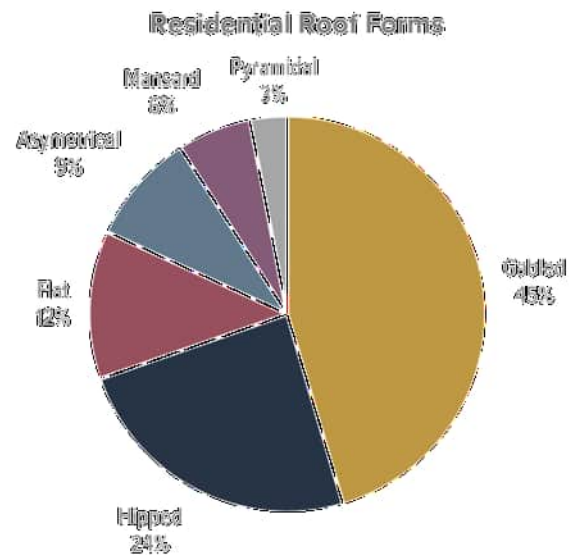


Treff's Tavern, 804 Chestnut Drive.

Notably, the restaurant Grins at LBJ Drive and Forest Drive is styled like a cabin with wood siding and a prominent outside dining deck. The Red Bus Food Park is located in a former single-family residence. The primary building for Wild Flower Designs & Events, located at the north end of the neighborhood, is designed with residential design elements resembling adjacent single-family homes, featuring a pitched roof, single story, and exterior wood and stone siding that matches its secondary building next door, which occupies a former single family residence.

Roof Forms

The style of roofs on residential structures include gabled, hipped, flat, mansard, asymmetrical, and pyramidal. Of the neighborhood’s housing stock, 12% is flat and the remaining 88% is pitched. Gabled roofs were the most common roof type in the neighborhood at 45% and 24% of structures have hipped roofs. The remaining roof forms were asymmetrical (9%), Mansard (6%), or pyramidal (3%). The majority of roofing materials for single-family homes are shingles (91%) and metal (9%).



908 N. LBJ Drive Apartments.



Businesses and surface parking at , 700 N LBJ Drive.

The style of roofs on commercial structures are either flat or gabled. Of the eight commercial structures (some of which contain multiple business units), six buildings are gabled, one building has a flat roof, and one building has a mansard roof (although this building, the San Marcos Center, is the largest commercial building in the neighborhood).

Landscaping/Fencing/Outdoor Space

Landscaping refers to the trees, grass, and other plants or xeriscape on private property or on public streets. In the North of Campus neighborhood, most residential private yards have traditional grass lawns.

Most commercial properties have minimal landscaping (more is now required for new commercial development). Because most sidewalks are attached streetside, there is minimal landscaping in public spaces, with the exception of landscaping by Texas State University at the intersection of LBJ Street and Sessom Drive.

There is tree canopy present along many of the residential blocks, although there is a notable lack of tree canopy in the neighborhood's commercial core.



View of Grins Restaurant on Forest Street.



View of Texas State University from N. LBJ Drive.



Trees planter along N. LBJ Drive at Vintage Apartments, 810 N LBJ Drive.



Mural at Vie Lofts.



Street art along Sessom Drive at 700 N. LBJ Drive.



Painted city infrastructure along N. LBJ Drive.

Public Art

Public art in the area occurs primarily on retaining walls and residential multifamily buildings in the form of murals. The content of these murals is varied, as seen in the photos below. Some of the public murals are organized by the San Marcos Convention and Visitor's Bureau Department. This provides an opportunity for local artists to highlight their work in public spaces. Other murals are curated by private businesses as forms of advertisement or building beautification.



Guitar Mural along Vintage apartments, 810 N. LBJ Drive.



Mural along Sessom Drive that has been since been removed due to graffiti and flood damage.

3

INSIGHTS AND DESIGN GUIDELINES



Repurposed home as part of Red Bus Food Park, 801 Chestnut Street.

This study concludes by offering recommendations to preserve neighborhood character based on the study findings. In many cases, the characteristics of a building or property are valuable and should be maintained. However, property owners and residents may envision making improvements to their property or an existing structure on their property. In some cases they may also envision building something new. The recommendations in this section identify a few key ways in which alterations in the neighborhood can be compatible with the overall character of the neighborhood.

INFILL AND REDEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Infill and Redevelopment

Infill development is defined as when a property owner proposes to build something new on a vacant lot within the neighborhood.

Redevelopment is defined as when a property owner proposes to build something new on a lot that has an existing structure or wants to remodel or add onto an existing structure. To do either improvement, a property owner is required to meet various local, state, and federal regulations such as the San Marcos Development Code, Building Codes, and the City's Floodplain Development Guidelines. The recommendations in this section are intended to be in compliance with these regulatory tools, however, updates to the Development Code or other regulatory tools may be needed.

Infill in the neighborhood has been sporadic and limited since the 1960's. Most projects have been multifamily buildings, although the Chestnut Plaza, completed in 1985 at the intersection of N LBJ Drive and Sessom Drive, continues to provide a major portion of the neighborhood's commercial services. Most of the infill projects consist of two-story townhomes or duplexes. The infill projects have maximized the lot coverage to increase the square footage of the development.

The following include the neighborhood's most notable infill projects:

- **Vintage Pads Apartments** (multifamily property located at 1000 N LBJ Dr, built in 1963)
- **Treehouse Apartments** (multifamily property located at 800 N LBJ Dr, built in 1975)
- **Chestnut Plaza** (commercial property at 829 N. LBJ Dr, built in 1985)
- **PeachTree Apartments** (multifamily property located at 1011 N LBJ Drive, built in 2012)
- **918 N LBJ Dr** (duplex built in 2019)
- **Vie Lofts** (7-story multifamily property located at 817 Chestnut Street, built from 2014-2017)
- **1106 and 1108 Chestnut St** (two single family homes in the process of review and construction at the time of this study)

Recommendations

Residential Infill

The small number of vacant parcels will restrict further development, so current and future needs should be carefully considered during the development planning process. The neighborhood currently has three vacant parcels that lie within the primarily residential north end of the neighborhood. These parcels are sized similarly to nearby single-family properties at roughly 15,000 square feet each. Two of the parcels (1106 and 1108 Chestnut) are adjacent and could be combined to create a multifamily or mixed-use development. However, any of these three lots should accommodate the neighborhood's need for housing; two or more units are recommended in future development of these sites.

Lot Size

Lot sizes tend to vary within the neighborhood, from roughly 5,000 square feet to as much as 143,000 square feet*. Because of the neighborhood's limited space, it is not recommended to combine lots to a total square footage over 60,000 square feet unless the density and intensity of the property's use will greatly exceed neighborhood need for housing.



Vacant properties (shown in pink) consist of Sessom Creek Natural Area, and two privately owned lots.

* The largest lot, the Treehouse Lofts, is 143,106 square feet. However, 94% of the neighborhood's 49 lots are 85,000 square feet or smaller.

Neighborhood Facilities

The neighborhood’s unique role as a TXST housing and commercial hub for students and faculty should continue because the area offers safe and convenient housing and services. Existing vacant commercial spaces could accommodate. Retail or additional restaurants which serve both nearby neighborhood students, and faculty. Although the neighborhood currently has a limited amount of vacant property, future redevelopment opportunities may allow for infill that serves as university-serving facilities. Future university office or residential buildings should be constructed to maximize the space and should consider the design guidelines on the following pages.

Commercial and Mixed-Use

Commercial buildings should be located close to the neighborhood’s current commercial hub at the southern end of the neighborhood. Mixed-use buildings may be located throughout the neighborhood, as long as the building’s density and height is appropriate relative to its immediate context and design guidelines.

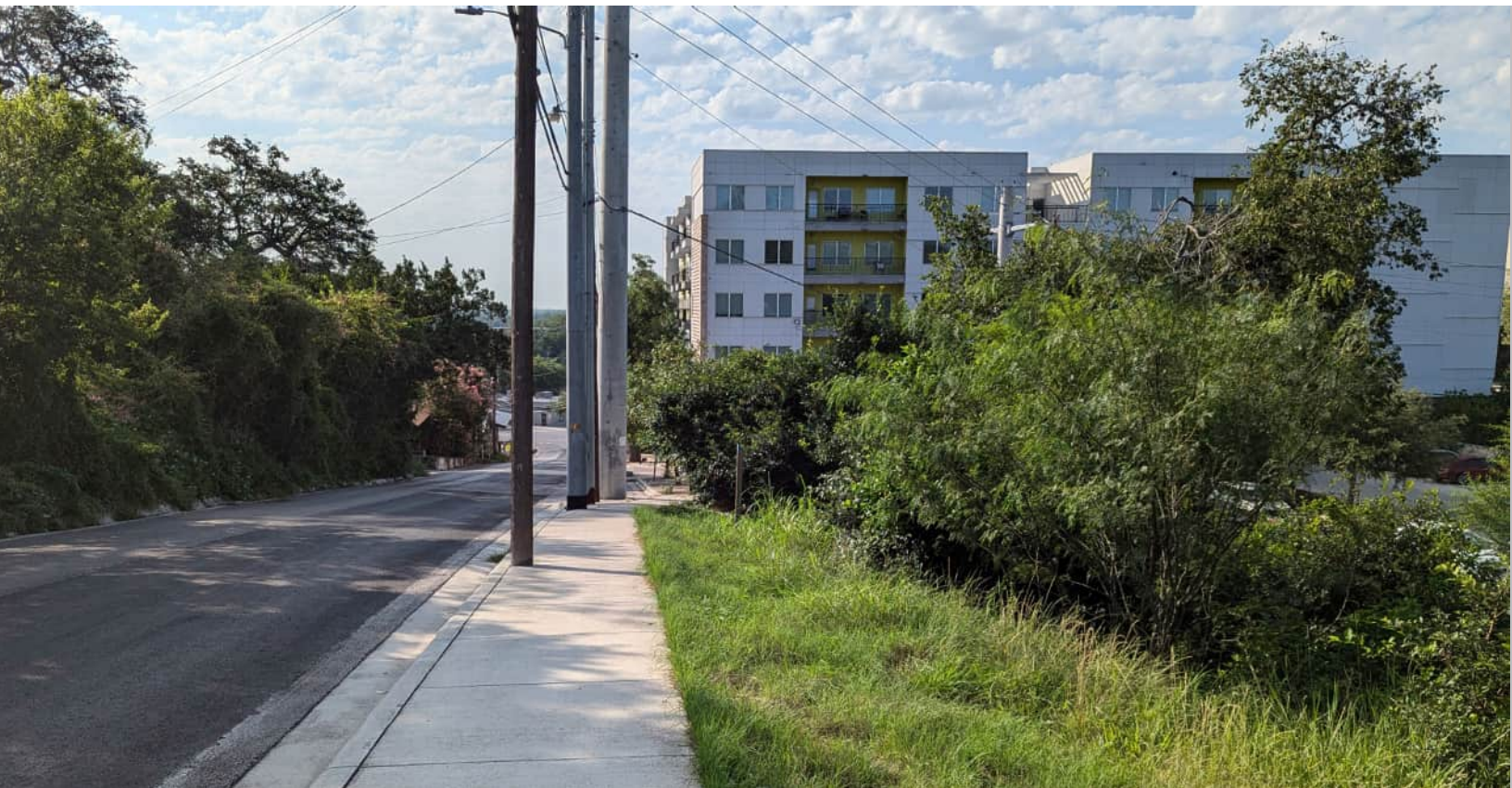


Duplex construction at 1106 Chestnut Street.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

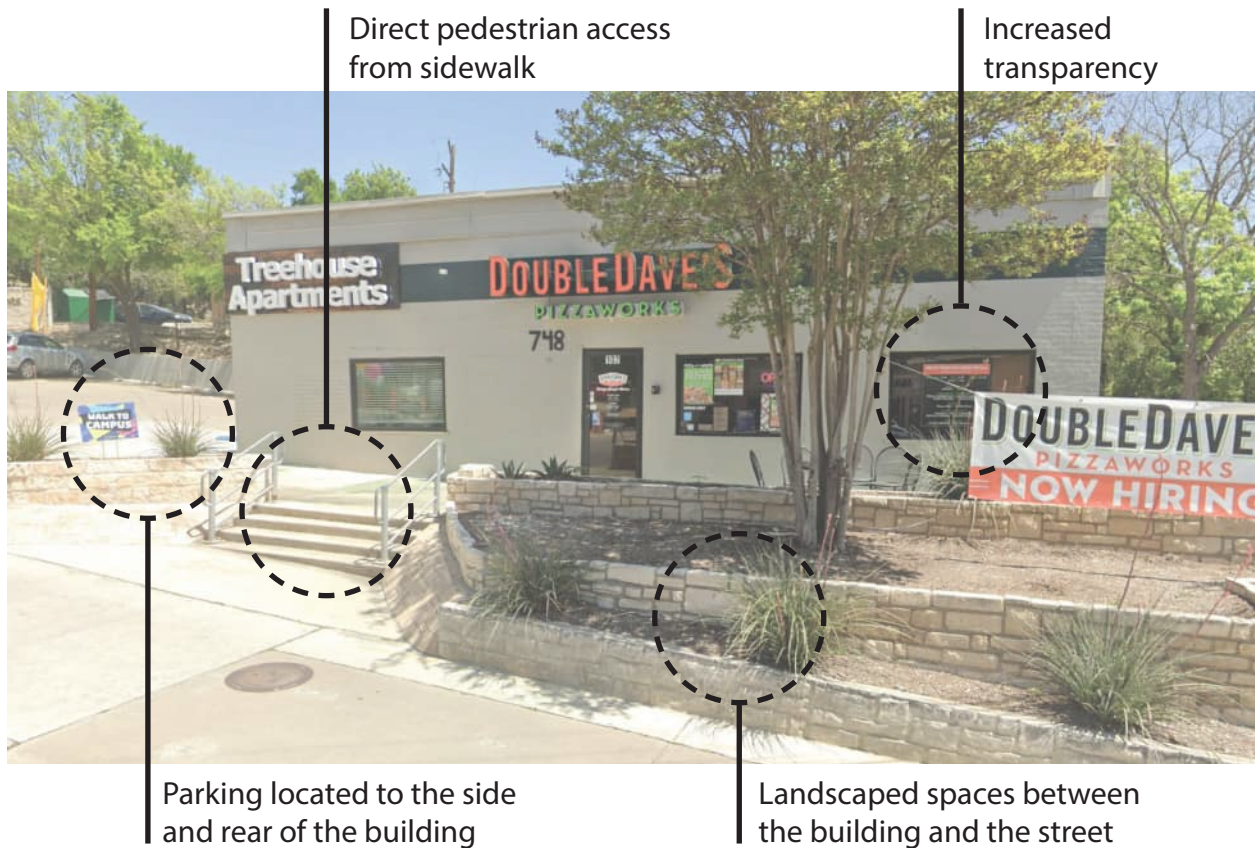
The recommendations within this section provide guidance on how infill development and redevelopment can be designed to be compatible with existing neighborhood character. On the following pages, examples of three kinds of development are visualized and explained in ways that infill or redevelopment can be designed to meet the existing physical character of the North of Campus neighborhood.

The examples provided demonstrate how three kinds of development (Residential, Commercial, and Mixed-use) could best fulfill the community's needs in a desirable and effective way. However, the scenarios that follow may be applied to other building types with sufficient lot size (duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, accessory dwelling units) when new infill or redevelopment occurs. Finally, the examples assume that all other Development Code requirements are met.



Vie Lofts Multifamily Apartments along Chestnut Street.

Design Guidelines: Commercial Retrofit and New Builds



The North of Campus neighborhood’s lack of vacant properties requires either redevelopment or creative reuse of existing structures if a business is to relocate to the area. Examples of effective retrofitting can be found within the neighborhood already, such as the renovation of the former Double Dave’s building, located at 748 North LBJ Drive.

Guidelines

Retrofitting and new construction of commercial buildings should:

- Provide direct pedestrian access from the sidewalk;
- Locate parking to the side or rear of the buildings;
- Minimize front setbacks and activate frontage with dining, seating, landscaping, and shade; and
- Utilize unique facade improvements to emphasize the business’s identity.

Example: Single-Family Attached Residential



- Ground floor commercial serves the Vie Lofts' multi-family residences on the upper floors as well as pedestrians in the Plan Area.
- Artwork and transparency activates the adjacent sidewalk.



- The Red Bus Food Park was retrofitted to operate as a restaurant and food truck park.
- Shaded dining spaces adjacent to the sidewalk help to activate the public realm while also serving the business.



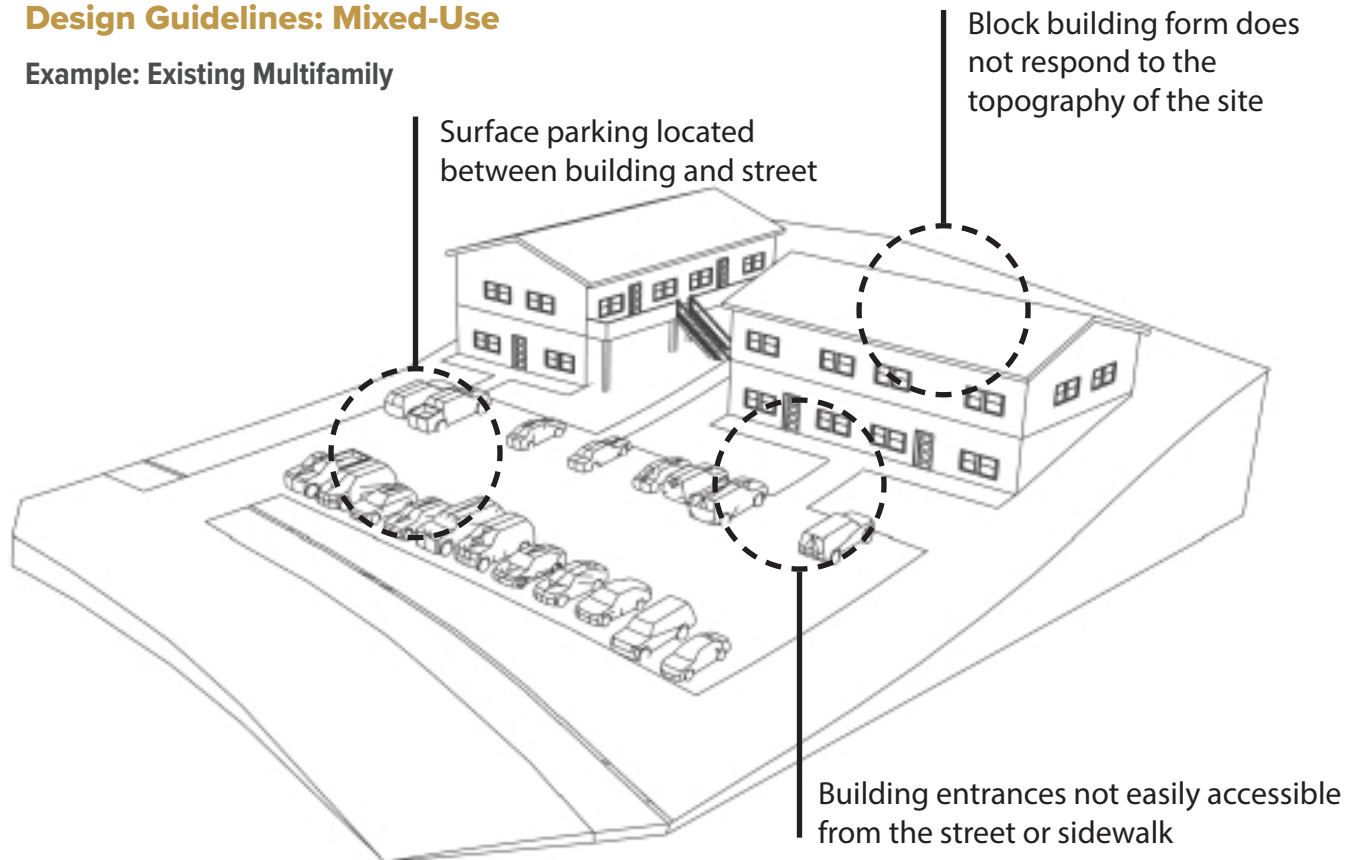
- Window transparency and seating activates the Mochas & Javas walkway.
- Shade provides comfortable outdoor dining and third-place experiences.



- The Wild Flower Design and Events was once a single-family home, but was retrofitted to serve as a commercial florist. It blends seamlessly into the neighborhood.

Design Guidelines: Mixed-Use

Example: Existing Multifamily

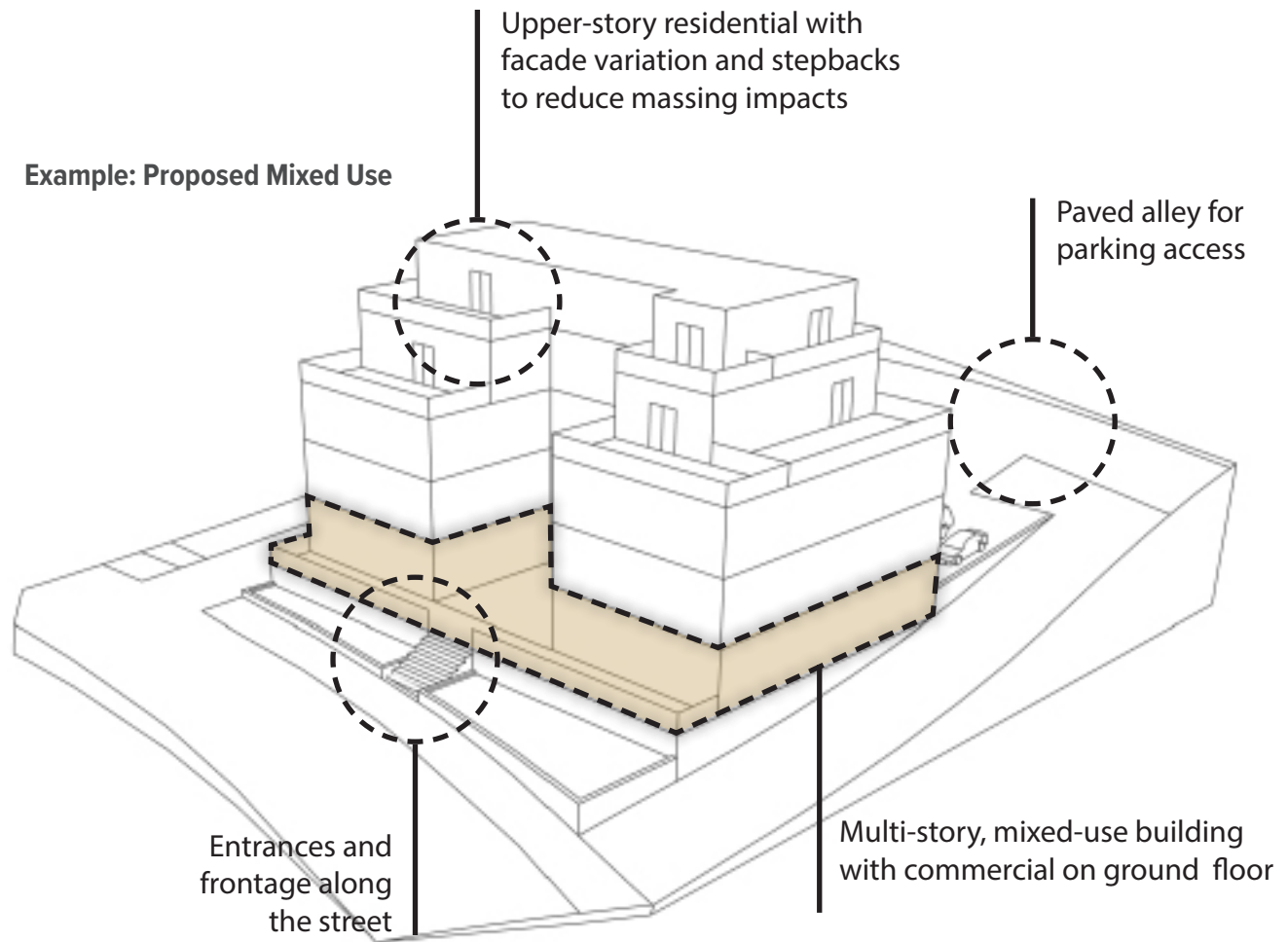


This illustration is of a typical multifamily development in the neighborhood. Properties such as this typically include parking between the street and the building, resulting in low activation of pedestrian space.

Many sites in the neighborhood have significant slopes. This example development does not respond to the slope or utilize it to enhance the site design.

Common characteristics include:

- The building height is 1-2 stories, but its location at the highest elevation on the property increases the overall elevation and massing impacts;
- The building is in a similar traditional, mid-century architectural style to the rest of the neighborhood;
- Deep setbacks result in little activation of the street and pedestrian realm; and
- Lot coverage is low and is largely parking, which is located in front of the building.



A mixed-use development on a site like this might provide commercial services on its ground floor, with residential units on upper floors. The steep grade is acknowledged in the building's design, such as through upper-floor stepbacks or height adjustments.

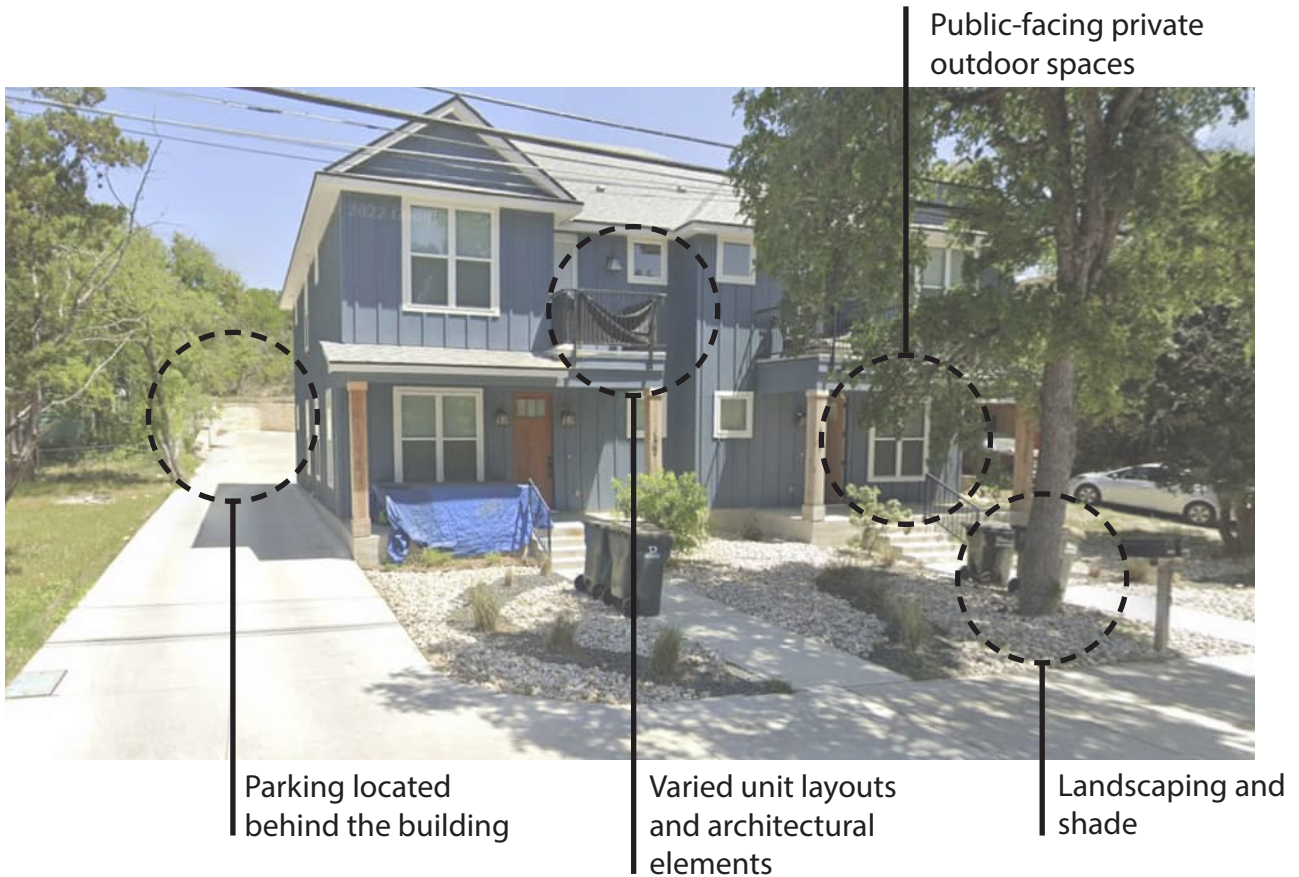
This example demonstrates how a site of any size may meet multiple needs and work with the neighborhood's steep topography.

Guidelines

Mixed use buildings should:

- Include small setbacks, landscaped frontages, and highly transparent ground-floor commercial services to maximize activation of the sidewalk;
- Building height may be as high as 4-5 stories, but impacts are reduced through careful consideration of the existing grade; and
- A paved alley provides access to parking from the rear of the site.

Design Guidelines: Single-Family Attached Residential



The neighborhood's residential stock should be diverse, with both high- and low-density housing in a variety of architectural styles. Although single-family buildings are permitted, buildings with two or more units should be encouraged. The density of the building should be appropriate for its context.

Guidelines

Single-Family attached residential buildings should:

- Include driveways and parking located to the side and/or rear of the building, with alley access when available;
- Density, height, and massing should be appropriate for its immediate context and addressed through stepbacks, entry orientation, and creative design;
- Setbacks are low to moderate in depth and activated through walkways, front porches,

Examples: Single-Family Attached Residential



Varying architectural elements to reduce massing.



Small setbacks and grade-adjusted heights.



Traditional architectural style with moderate setbacks and front yard spaces.



Traditional-style duplexes with facade and rooftop variation, as well as upper and lower porches for sidewalk activation.



High transparency on ground floor, but offset in height from pedestrians on the sidewalk.



Townhomes built in a traditional style with low setbacks.

4

GLOSSARY OF TERMS



Chestnut Plaza, 829 N. LBJ Drive

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Architectural Style

A definite type of architecture, distinguished by special characteristics of structure and ornament
common styles include:

Asymmetrical Roof

Roof design in which one side of the roof is a sloping flat form, with the other side a lean-to, creating a gable in the middle.

Vernacular Architectural Style

A style that is designed based on local needs, availability of construction materials, and reflecting local traditions which tends to evolve over time to reflect the environmental, cultural, technological, economic, and historical context in which the building exists.

Ranch Architectural Style

A style prevalent from ca. 1935-1975 with the following identifying features: broad one-story shape; usually built low to ground; low-pitched roof without dormers; commonly with moderate-to-wide roof overhang; front entry usually located off-center and sheltered under main roof of house; garage typically attached to main facade (faces front, side, or rear); a large picture window generally present; asymmetrical facade.

New Traditional Architectural Style

Contemporary style that borrows historical architectural details.

Minimal Traditional Architectural Style

A style prevalent from ca. 1935-1950 with the following identifying features: small house, generally one-story in height; low- or intermediate-pitched roof, often gabled; roof eaves usually have little or no overhang; double-hung windows, typically multi-pane or 1/1; minimal amounts of added architectural detail; rarely has dormers.

Building Footprint

The total square footage of a building.

Building Height

The number of stories on a structure.

Building Massing

The vertical expression of a building; may be a single mass or may have multiple facets if a building contains setbacks.

Building Materials

The physical materials used to construct a structure.

Density

The number of dwelling units per acre.

Entry Orientation

Location of the entry point to the structure (primary doorway), whether it faces the front, side, or rear of the structure or faces an off-street parking lot.

Infill Development

When a property owner proposes to build something new on a vacant lot within the neighborhood.

Landmarks/Destinations

Frequent places that people visit, including publicly (e.g., Recreation Center, City Hall) and privately owned spaces (e.g., shopping center).

Landscaping

The vegetation (trees, grass, and other plants) on private property or the streetscape (the area between the public sidewalk and the street).

Lot Coverage

The proportion of a lot that is covered by buildings, including the main structure and outbuildings.

Lot Size

The total area between lot lines.

Natural Features

Landscaping, tree canopy, ground cover, and bodies of water on a site.

Neighborhood Character

The built form of physical structure, including how structures are positioned on a property, how the structure appears from the street, and the types of materials used in their construction.

Parking/Garage Orientation

Location of vehicular access to the lot, either from the front or side of the lot.

Parks

Publicly owned outdoor spaces that provide recreation opportunities; can include playgrounds, open fields, athletic fields, picnic areas, and related amenities.

Public Art

Any mural, sculpture, painted surface, or other medium showcasing art within or visible from a public space.

Redevelopment

When a property owner proposes to build something new on a lot that has an existing structure or wants to remodel or add onto an existing structure.

Roof Form

The style of roof on residential structures including gabled, hipped, flat, mansard, asymmetrical, and pyramidal.

Pyramidal Roof

A type of hipped roof with four sloping sides that meet at a peak in the center.

Roof Pitch

Slope of a roof.

Flat Roof

Roof design which is completely, or almost, level.

Gabled Roof

Roof design consisting of two sections whose upper horizontal edges meet to form its ridge.

Gambrel Roof

Usually a symmetrical two-sided roof with two slopes on each side.

Hipped Roof

Roof design where all sides slope downward to the walls, usually with a gentle slope.

Mansard Roof

Multi-sided gambrel-style hip roof design characterized by two slopes on each of its sides, with the lower slope at a steeper angle than the upper, and often includes dormer windows.

Setbacks

The distance between a structure and a property line.

Site Features

Includes public spaces, private yards, driveways, and natural features that surround an individual structure or neighborhood.

Streetscape Planting

Landscaping planted in and adjacent to the street right-of-way, including at curbs, adjacent to sidewalks, and in medians.

Tree Canopy

The overhead cover provided by tree branches.

Unit Type

The residential type expressed by the number of households that occupy it; residential unit types include single-family homes, duplexes, townhomes, and apartments.

Upkeep

The maintenance of a structure and site and natural features.

Xeriscaping

Landscaping that uses drought-tolerant flora, efficient irrigation, and other features designed to conserve water.

Zoning

The regulatory action of a local government that dictates the types of uses that can occupy each lot within its jurisdiction; zoning is typically employed to protect less intensive areas (residential, institutional uses like schools) from more intensive job centers and commercial uses.

CHARACTER METRIC DATA SHEETS

Metric	Quantitative Metrics						Parking Garage Orientation								
	Average & Median Lot Size (sq ft)	Average Front Setback (ft)	Average Side Setback (ft)	Average Lot Coverage (as percentage)	Average Building Height (in stories)	Average Floor Area Ratio	Percent w/ Side-Facing Entrance	Percent w/ Parking Lot Facing Entrance (Apartments)	Percent w/ Rear-Facing Entrance	Percent with Attached Garage	Percent with Detached Garage	Percent with Carport	Percent with No Garage	Percent with Front-Loaded Garage	Percent with Side Loaded Garage
Methodology	City of San Marcos Parcel Data	Digitized setback using Aerial Imagery (Distance between front of house and lot line)	Digitized setback using Aerial Imagery (Distance between both sides of house and lot line)	City of San Marcos Impervious Cover by Parcel Data (Impervious %) Data created for city using 2017 Imagery with 2019 Parcel by Sanborn.	City of San Marcos Building Footprint Data (number of stories) Validated number of stories using google street view and site verification.	N/A	Field Data Collection (Housing Character Data)								
North of Campus	Mean: 0.62 acres Median: 0.356 acres	43.77	21.01	0.45%	One-story (38.57%) Two-story (50%) Three-story (8.57%) Four-Story (1.43%) Seven-Story (1.43%)	N/A	16.22	3%	0	3%	3%	18%	76%	0%	3%

Unit Type							Percent Zoning Districts											Other Land Uses							
Percent Single-Family Home	Percent Duplex	Percent Triplex/Quadruplex	Percent Townhome	# of ADUs (could then be percent of SF homes with ADU - collect list of addresses)	% Small Multi-Family (5-9 units)	% Medium Multi-Family (10-20 units)	% Large Multi-Family (20+ units)	Single Family District	Townhouse Residential	Duplex	Public/Institutional	Community Commercial District	General Commercial District	Multi-Family Residential-12	Multi-Family Residential-24	Manufactured Home	Office Professional	Light Industrial	Character District (Any)	Number of Parks	Acres of Parks	Number of Vacant Tracts	Acres of Vacant Tracts	Number of Public Spaces (Churches, Health/Therapies, Schools, Education, Parks)	
City of San Marcos Building Footprint Data. Validated using google street view and site verification.							City of San Marcos Zoning Data											City of San Marcos City Parks Data				City of San Marcos Parcel Data. Validated using Aerial Imagery.	Observations		
38%	3%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Neighborhood	Qualitative Metrics (general descriptions and estimates)										
	Sidewalk Conditions (on average)					Architectural Style			Roof Form		
	% of Neighborhood w/ sidewalks (Area)	Quality of Sidewalks (PM)	Size Range of Sidewalks (PM)	Sidewalk Materials (PM)	Sidewalk Offset from the Street (range) (PM)	Common Architectural Styles	Common Building Materials	Typical Roof Forms	Estimated % Flat Roofs	Estimated % Pitched Roofs	
Metadata	City of San Marcos Sidewalk Data.	City of San Marcos Sidewalk Assessment 2020 Data. Plus PM to write a narrative section.	City of San Marcos Sidewalk Data. Validated by Aerial Imagery and site visit.	Observation (high level), concrete, brick, grass, permeable pavement, crushed granite, asphalt. Also need photos	Measure manually using Aerial Imagery	Field Data Collection (Housing Character Data) Minimal Traditional, Craftsman, Ranch, Queen Anne, National Folk, New Traditional, Contemporary/Mid-Century Modern, Folk Victorian, Vernacular, Other.	Field Data Collection (Housing Character Data) Wood, Brick, Stone, Stucco		Field Data Collection (Housing Character Data)		
North of Campus	50.31%	Fair	3 ft. - 6 ft.	concrete	0ft-9ft	Minimal Traditional (38.46%), New Traditional (19.23%), Craftsman (3.85%), Ranch (3.85%)	Most common are Wood (51.35%), and Brick (27.03%),	Gabled (45.45%), Hipped (24.24%), Flat (12.12%), Asymmetrical (8.08%), Mansard (6.06%), Pyramidal (5.05%)	12.12%	87.88%	
Notes (see note tab for more room)							Other materials, Stone (13.31%), Stucco (5.41%),				This is all gabled, hipped, pyramidal - mansard, & asymmetrical
Landscaping				Public Spaces/Landmarks			Public Art				
Presence of Yard Landscaping	Presence of Public Space Landscaping (PM check parks master plan)	Presence of Street Scene Landscaping	Presence of Street Trees	Quality of Public Spaces	Amenities in Public Spaces	Nbhd Landmarks/ Destinations/	Presence of Public Art	Types of Public Art	Upkeep of Public Art		
Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood using 3 categories: good, no, or spotty tree canopy. Also included input from workshop or committee.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from workshop or committee.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from workshop or committee.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from workshop or committee.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from workshop or committee.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from workshop or committee and Historic Resources Survey, if applicable.	Observational by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	Observational by walking and driving through the neighborhood to determine if art was damaged or in good shape.			
Traditional grass lawns on residential and multifamily, minimal commercial landscaping	minimal landscaping	Minimal street landscaping except by Texas State University (Sessom and LBJ intersection)	Decent tree canopy along both LBJ and Street North of Chestnut intersection	Sessom Creek is in good condition	Sessom Creek Natural Area is a space for hiking, no man made amenities	LBJ shopping center, Sessom Creek Park, Grimm's	LBJ Street Murals, Commercial Art in 700 N LBJ Shopping Center	Murals/Graffiti	good condition		
*see photos in Noc Nap Photos Folder	Check Parks MasterPlan. Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	New Commercial developments will be required to install streetscape landscaping. *see photos in Noc Nap Photos Folder	Lacking Trees at commercial sites at LBJ and Sessom intersection. *see photos in Noc Nap Photos Folder	Sessom Creek Natural Area is currently undergoing invasive species removal	features 0.5 miles of hiking/biking trails	Neighborhood located between Chestnut Street, and LBJ, and on Alamo street has maintained its historical character. 7 structures were considered NRHP eligible within the Noc Nap boundaries at 918 Chestnut Street	Prominent murals along 815 N LBJ Drive *see photos in Noc Nap Photos Folder		No maintenance plan known (810 N LBJ Drive artwork is an advertisement for "vintage pads apartments")		

SMTX 
VISION

SAN MARCOS
NORTH OF
CAMPUS
NEIGHBORHOOD

COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



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North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan

Steering Committee Meeting #1

September 6, 2023, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Committee Members Present

Charles Campbell, Multimodal Parking Initiatives Manager, City of San Marcos

Chana Temple, local resident and member of Vision SMTX Steering Committee

Dr. Rosalie Ray, faculty member, TXST Geography Department and local resident

Will Moore, TXST sophomore and Urban and Regional Planning major

Chris Wood, developer and local resident

Additional Committee Members

Virginia Parker, San Marcos River Foundation Director, and member of Vision SMTX Steering Committee

Kevin Carswell, local business owner

City Team

Andrea Villalobos, Assistant Director, Planning and Development Services

Craig Garrison, CFM, Planner

Jay Renkens, Principal, MIG

Jonathan E. Tarr, Project Manager, MIG

Purpose of This Plan and Vision SMTX

This committee is a diverse group by design, to help evoke what the City should focus on for this unique area at the border of the university campus and neighborhoods. North of Campus is also an activity center, attracting lots of San Marcans to its commercial areas.

The City's goal for this plan includes dual longtime resident- and student-centric perspectives, and a focus on improving assets like the transport network that includes frequent routes to and through the TXST campus and Downtown. With many small businesses and student residents in North of Campus, there are multiple perspectives to consider, which will make this plan differ from the other Neighborhood Area Plans the City is pursuing.

Major topics we want the plan to cover include focus on physical improvements (both public and private), transportation (streets and mobility), housing, commercial environment, parks and open space. That said, everything is fair game if we identify it as a community priority. This group will help us decide where we need to focus this time.

What's Unique to North of Campus:

1. *Small geography* – Andrea clarified that the boundary for this Plan Area was drawn by City staff, to distinguish it from the residential area behind/beyond us to

the north. That said, there's no strictly defined way to draw that line, and people living beyond the boundary come down the hill to shop, eat, etc. regularly. Think about the fringes of the Plan Area too, because they are interconnected.

2. *Hilly terrain*
3. *TXST campus next door* – The largest concentration of off-campus TXST students may be here in North of Campus.

Committee Discussion:

1. What's working well here?

Will: The diversity and mix of commercial options is a draw; anecdotally, TXST undergraduates prefer to spend time in this area over downtown.

Chana: Natural areas and shaded areas that are walkable.

Rosalie: First, a better mix of commercial spaces than downtown, which has a high concentration of bars and tattoo shops, less desirable for residents. The casual feel helps people feel more like they can spend time here. Second, almost every part of this area has sidewalk coverage; I can walk from home to the river headwaters with a shaded tree canopy and sidewalks on almost the entire route, and there are places to stop along the way – a little over a mile!

Chris: Almost all the parcels are older "legacy", meaning they have been here since the 1980s or longer except for limited infill. As an established community with prime space, the real estate market has always been active with no longtime boarded up/vacant sites, unlike downtown. There is even a flower shop that opened in a former house. The houses between Chestnut and LBJ that have been replaced were the last in the area that wouldn't have fit with the neighborhood character. There's good accessibility for the population that use the spaces we have; glad that this density and student housing didn't go all the way up the hill, so there's still an established single-family neighborhood there.

Andrea: The area is old enough and established enough that there can be an assumption that the land uses we see "have always been this way"; in reality, we're talking about things that have been in the same use for a few decades, when San Marcos was much smaller.

2. What needs improvement?

Mobility and Transportation

Rosalie: First, more and more prominent crosswalks on LBJ would help improve safety. The goal would be infrastructure that indicates to pedestrians: "we want you to cross here," which is not currently the case. The parking lot of this shopping center and the Valero gas station are the least attractive parts of the area: heavily paved and customer parking should be behind the businesses instead of having the large asphalt expanse at the front. While it's hard to change the 100% impervious lots, it is worth a try.

Will: The sharrow on Sessom has been challenging as drivers show hostility toward

bike riders. To ameliorate that and improve safety, rethink the bike network. Sharrows are fine on two-lane streets, but Sessom could call for either a dedicated lane or separated bike trail. Barton Springs Rd. in Austin is a model, Will has ridden there and it feels safer – a City of Austin pilot program.

Rosalie: Bike lanes could be wider to help accommodate that, and the blocks of LBJ north of Sessom have been more successful in staying safe than the blocks south of Sessom (can try to get data but anecdotal observation).

Businesses and Amenities

Chana: The Valero gas station being so near the river is not ideal; if long-term replacement is in the cards, that site is prime from something like a fresh food market or grocery store. Mill Street Market is one model; the “little” H-E-B near downtown is another, but the chain supermarket model may be too large for this area, and we’re not aiming to get that specific in this plan. Jay mentioned downtown Spokane as an idea, where the plan only identified feasibility of several options, and the City eventually chose to open a food co-op.

Chris: Are there entrepreneurs in this area that could be interested in sponsoring such a thing? Cuevas Produce in Blanco Gardens is a model business, providing a long-time shopping destination for the community in a small market.

Rosalie: As for natural space – didn’t realize for 1.5 years this was a real park! Sessom Creek Park isn’t clear and wants to know where the trails go, plus it’s a place where the public is welcome. Andrea notes the park was part of a strategy to offset new development but doesn’t have dedicated parking, a contextual quirk that other City parks don’t have.

Chana: Pet owners need to clean up after themselves. Addressing that while still being pet-friendly could start with adding bag stations in high-traffic areas; should that not be effective, enforcement on public spaces could begin.

Housing

Key Questions: How much new housing will be needed in the future, and what can we do to promote it within the City’s role? What types of housing should we target? If a limited and inflexible approach is adopted, developers may go elsewhere. Referring to the Vision SMTX Comp Plan is a helpful starting point, where place types provide high-level guidance but are quite flexible. We’ll get more specific as this plan process moves ahead, to target what makes sense for North of Campus.

Chana: Would like to explore rebates or other types of incentives from the City to refurbish existing housing, including with green features. This could help aging homes in this area and other neighborhoods, such as an old duplex that started a long-awaited renovation and has made a positive curb appeal difference already. Adding rebates for water savings, among other ideas, could help tip these projects into action.

Chris: Before implementing such a program at the City level, program evaluation is needed to ensure incentives will be effective and can be done without undue red tape. Consider the example of overlay districts – these are working, but will additional requirements prevent such a program from working, especially for properties that haven't changed hands in decades? Threading the needle of what Chana proposed is possible. The types of development I've done here (a duplex on LBJ, a 4–6-unit townhome development) should remain possible for property owners that have interest in pursuing them.

Andrea: Reasonable exceptions can be baked into a program, such as the Local Joe's (in the former Schlotzsky's building downtown). That is a one-story building where the downtown overlay normally requires two-story buildings. The City granted an exemption because they clearly weren't going to add a floor just to operate.

Rosalie: Thinking through what housing types we want to add: it's anecdotal but as a faculty member, it matters that students who live here are on time to class more often than those that live farther out! More broadly, it's a plus to have students living close to campus, and easier to absorb them in areas like North of Campus that already have the sidewalk network, the campus accessibility, and other features than neighborhoods that do not. If adding housing can be done in a way that reduces impervious cover and perhaps gives building height exemptions to add more units, that hits several priorities.

3. What else would you like to share as we embark on this plan?

Additional business owner representation is desirable, but they are all working right now! City staff plan to engage them in other ways, including with drop-in visits.

Next steps include 1) attending the popup event right now! Please stick around and chat with the City staff and see the boards we have developed. 2) The team will share an Existing Conditions Analysis including what we heard at this meeting, and at the popup. 3) We expect to meet at least two more times in the next few months, to provide updates and get further feedback on the Plan as we develop it.



North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan Community Workshop #2

The second North of Campus (NoC) Area Workshop was held on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, at the Vie Lofts Clubhouse (817 Chestnut Street, 2nd floor). Approximately 23 community members participated in the event, providing feedback on the future of the North of Campus area. The purpose of this workshop was to present the community with the draft plan recommendations and gather input on which recommendations should be expanded upon.

A total of 17 informational boards were displayed, with seven designated for community comments. These seven boards covered the following topics:

- Getting Around
- Public Spaces and Amenities
- Existing Housing Stock
- Streetscapes
- Building Form and Development
- Business Community
- Arts, History, and Culture



During the two-hour event, attendees contributed 80 written comments and expressed 106 points of agreement (using “dot” votes) on specific recommendations. Below is a summary of the input gathered for each category.

Board 1: Getting Around

This board focused on three core elements: mobility (freedom of movement), accessibility (ease of reaching destinations), and connectivity (the physical network supporting mobility and accessibility).



Six recommendations were presented, with the most support given to:

- **GA 2.3:** *Explore opportunities to partner with a business or property owner to establish a small Mobility Hub within the plan area.* Proposed locations included properties along N LBJ Drive, Chestnut Street, and the intersection of Sessom/Aquarena Drive. The hub would feature a bike and scooter share area, a transit stop with shelter and seating, and expanded bike parking. This recommendation received six votes. Comments included concerns over scooter parking enforcement and suggestions for additional bike racks.
- **GA 2.7:** *Consolidate driveway entrances to reduce pedestrian-vehicle conflicts.* This received four votes.

Additional public feedback emphasized pedestrian safety on N LBJ Street and the need for raised sidewalks or increased visibility at key intersections.

Board 2: Public Spaces and Amenities

This board addressed parks, trails, and indoor recreational facilities, with a strong emphasis on the Sessom Creek Natural Area, the only public park in the NoC region.

The most supported recommendation was:

- **PSA 1.3:** *Improve Sessom Creek Natural Area by installing key amenities, including park signage, trail maps, seating areas, and updated trail markers.* This recommendation received six votes.

Public comments included opposition to workout equipment in natural areas, suggestions for bioluminescent trail lighting, and calls for highlighting indigenous cultural art. There were also requests for improved signage and maps to help visitors locate trail access points.

Board 3: Existing Housing Stock

The NoC area contains a mix of single-family homes, duplexes, accessory dwelling units, and multifamily housing. Community members have expressed a need for more diverse, affordable, and mixed-use housing options.

The most endorsed recommendation was:

- **EHS 1.3:** *Encourage mixed-use development to replace auto-oriented multifamily housing and commercial areas, prioritizing pedestrian access and affordability.* This received seven votes.

Additional comments called for improved safety in multifamily housing construction, emphasizing structural integrity and fire safety over aesthetic concerns.

Board 4: Streetscapes



This board focused on improvements to sidewalks, streets, and surrounding spaces, incorporating community input on permeable pavers, bicycle wayfinding, and pedestrian safety measures.

The most supported recommendations included:

- **ST 2.2:** *Implement traffic calming and placemaking measures, such as colorful sidewalks, bulb-outs, and landscaped medians to enhance pedestrian safety and experience.* This received six votes.
- **ST 2.4:** *Install sidewalks on both sides of Chestnut Street.* This received four votes.

Public feedback emphasized the importance of maintaining permeable pavers and adding protected bike lanes and raised sidewalks for pedestrian safety.

Board 5: Building Form and Development

This board examined the built environment, including density, height, architectural styles, and parking requirements.

The most supported recommendation was:

- **BF 1.3:** *Reduce minimum parking requirements to allow more flexible property redevelopment.* This received six votes.

Community feedback was divided: some supported eliminating parking minimums to encourage walkability and affordability, while others argued that parking should be required at a minimum of one space per bedroom. Additional input emphasized preserving green space and limiting development in the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

Board 6: Business Community

This board focused on existing and prospective businesses within the NoC area, emphasizing walkability and business-friendly redevelopment.

The most endorsed recommendation was:

- **BC 2.1:** *Improve the San Marcos Center (700 N LBJ) by enhancing its façade, pedestrian safety, outdoor spaces, and shading structures.* This received nine votes.

Another well-supported recommendation was:

- **BC 1.1:** *Encourage diverse land uses along N LBJ Drive, particularly transitioning auto-oriented businesses to pedestrian-friendly services such as a grocery store.* This received six votes.

Public comments strongly supported adding a grocery store to the neighborhood and revitalizing commercial areas.



Board 7: Arts, History, and Culture

This board aimed to amplify the neighborhood's cultural and artistic identity through public art installations and improved public spaces.

The most endorsed recommendation was:

- **HAC 1.1:** *Identify locations for public art, including murals, sculptures, and traffic box art, that reflect the area's history and cultural heritage.* This received five votes.

Public suggestions included integrating art into infrastructure such as bike racks, trash cans, and painted crosswalks, as well as adding artistic elements to the Sessom Creek Natural Area.

Conclusion

The NoC Workshop #2 successfully gathered community feedback on critical topics, providing clear priorities for future planning efforts. Key takeaways included strong support for mixed-use housing, pedestrian and bike-friendly streetscapes, improved public spaces, reduced parking minimums, and enhanced public art initiatives.



Appendix: Event Photos & Workshop Boards







North of Campus Neighborhood Area Plan Community Workshop #3

The third North of Campus (NoC) Area Workshop was held on Wednesday, October 29, 2025, at the San Marcos Activity Center (501 E Hopkins St) Approximately 33 community members participated in the event, providing feedback on the North of Campus Area Plan recommendations. The purpose of the workshop was to present to the community the draft area plan and gather feedback on key aspects.

There were ten boards covering the seven topics of the North of Campus Area Plan:

- Getting Around
- Public Spaces and Amenities
- Existing Housing Stock
- Streetscapes
- Building Form and Development
- Business Community
- History, Arts, and Culture



The boards cumulated a total of 32 comments with an additional three comment cards left by community members.

Board 1: **Getting Around**



This board included recommendations about mobility, accessibility, and connectivity through a series of 13 recommendation statements. Out of the 13 recommendation statements, five received comments. Popular recommendations included:

- *GA 1.2: Consider installing improvements to enhance the pedestrian experience on the portion of Peachtree Street between N LBJ Drive and Chestnut Street which is currently a pedestrian pathway with no vehicles. Improvements could include pedestrian-scale lighting, native landscaping, and a pet waste station to create a small linear park. The linear park could be a candidate for the Adopt-a-Spot program to help with regular maintenance of the area*
- *GA 2.9: Install sidewalks on both sides of Chestnut Street*

Additional comments were left on GA 2.9 recommending the addition of a protected bike lane on Chestnut Street.

Board 2: **Public Spaces and Amenities**

This board included recommendations related to parks, trails, indoor recreation facilities, and any other dedicated public spaces. The four recommendation statements incorporated proposals for art installations and sustainability and hazard mitigation.

Community members were especially drawn to PSA 1.3:

Improve Sessom Creek Natural Area by installing or, improving existing, key amenities identified by the community including:

- *Add a formal park identification sign along Chestnut Street which identifies the park name and is visible from the right-of-way to notify and attract citizens.*
- *Enhancement of informational trail signage at the trail entrance including a map and park rules. This signage should state where the trail goes, and may include other educational information; Benches or seating areas at the trailhead and/or within the park; and*
- *Installation of additional/updated trail markers, to enhance park visibility, accessibility and improve the visitor experience.*
- *Installation of a more robust activity area at the trail entrance that may include workout equipment.*

Community members supported the addition of artist designed bike racks, with recommendations of opening a design contest to the elementary schools, as well as low impact development features.



Board 3: Existing Housing Stock

The Existing Housing Stock board detailed four recommendations to improve the exterior of the existing residential buildings, encourage mixed-use development to replace the established auto-oriented landscape, and supporting diverse housing types such as ADUs and other infill development.

Community members were drawn to exterior and façade improvements as outlined in recommendations EHS 1.1 and EHS 1.2 but also supported diverse housing options with special attention to maintaining the existing character of the neighborhood.

Board 4: Streetscapes

The Streetscapes board provided five key recommendations outlining the physical components of the streets within the North of Campus area. Four comments were left on the board, specifically requesting the addition of more sidewalks and a collaboration with Texas State University on streetscape improvements.

Community members offered notes of support on recommendations ST 1.1 and ST 1.3. ST 1.1 detailed improvements at the intersection of Sessom Drive and N LBJ Drive. Recommendation ST 1.3 noted improvements for shading the heavily walked corridors or bus stop around the NoC area.

Board 5: Building Form and Development

The Building Form and Development topic includes the physical characteristics of the structures of the area. The form and development involve lot coverage, massing, height, building material, and orientation to the street. The NoC recommendations explore reducing parking minimums, promoting a flexible architectural style, and encouraging infill development.

Four community comments were left on the recommendations. One community member wrote in strong opposition to reducing parking minimums and the addition of communal parking lots, while another community member supported reduced parking and increased density.

Board 6: Business Community

The Business Community board discussed the diversity and extent of the businesses in NoC. The recommendations included a diverse of land uses along N LBJ Drive, expanding grant programs for businesses, and adapting to the topographical challenges of the area and evaluate the Land Development Code for potential changes to support businesses.

No comments were left on the board.



Board 7: History, Arts, and Culture

History, Arts, and Culture includes recommendations to ensure the character of NoC is identified, maintained, and celebrated. Two recommendation topics included in the plan outlined identifying new locations for public art and consideration for painted bulb outs and crosswalks at key intersections.

One comment was left, encouraging the inclusion of Texas State University's "Bobcat Culture" within NoC's history, arts, and culture.

In addition to the comments left directly onto the boards, three comment cards were left by community members. Two comment cards suggested a brick material sidewalk on N LBJ Drive, including a small store along the corridor, and support for bike racks, sidewalks, and automated crosswalks on N LBJ Drive and Chestnut Street. Another comment card proposed future area plan workshops to occur in the neighborhood of the area plan.

Conclusion

The North of Campus Workshop #3 successfully gathered feedback on the proposed recommendations for the Area Plan. Key takeaways included the addition of pedestrian-oriented streetscape infrastructure and strong support for infill development and diverse housing types.



Appendix: Event Photos

