

SAN MARCOS BLANCO GARDENS AREA PLAN

DRAFT PLAN: 12/12/2024





SAN MARCOS

BLANCO GARDENS AREA PLAN

SMTX  VISION

M I G



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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 Blanco Gardens neighborhood, make connections to the City’s Comprehensive Plan, Vision SMTX, and provide recommendations for the future of the Blanco Gardens Plan Area (“Plan Area”).

The Plan Area extends from Interstate Highway 35 (“IH-35”), River Road, the San Marcos River, and State Highway 80 (“SH-80”). See the map in Figure 1.1: Aerial View with Plan Area Boundary.

Blanco Gardens generally developed closer to IH-35 first, with new construction spreading later to the south and east. The neighborhood was mostly built out by the 1990s, and there has been limited infill development over the last two decades compared to other areas of San Marcos. These developments consist mostly of single-family homes and small to medium sized apartment complexes. Establishing greater stability and retaining the existing homes, businesses, and public spaces of Blanco Gardens will be the primary focus for the Plan Area’s future.

Figure 1.1



LEGEND

- Blanco Gardens
- Waterbody
- River
- Creek
- Park

Figure 1.2



SMTX
VISION
BLANCO GARDENS



LEGEND

- Blanco Gardens
- Waterbody
- River
- Creek

- Park
- Minor Road
- Major Road
- Highway
- Interstate

2

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 Blanco Gardens 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**

The City continues to experience population and economic growth. This Plan establishes recommendations to ensure that local residents aren't displaced as a result of that growth.

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: • How does it address racial, social, 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 Blanco Gardens 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
- Housing
- Business Community
- Building Form and Development

Each topic describes key concepts and existing conditions within Blanco Gardens. 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



History, arts, and culture efforts work to ensure that the identity of the neighborhood is maintained and celebrated. This includes elevating neighborhood histories and stories of lived experiences from long-time residents. Examples of these types of efforts include public art, historical markers, preservation of existing buildings, and programmed events.



A mural along Clarewood Drive.



1. HISTORY

Blanco Gardens residents and stakeholders expressed being proud of their history. Community members were eager to share their stories of the area during the Plan development process and expressed a desire to have more of their stories written and shared formally as part of the history of San Marcos. They expressed that knowing and sharing their neighborhood's origins can help foster civic pride among residents, especially children². Showcasing community history can also cultivate a positive reputation for the neighborhood and further reflect Blanco Gardens as a meaningful and important part of San Marcos' identity. A wide range of methods can amplify the history, culture, and artistic community in the Plan Area. Several methods are included in this section and other resources may be identified in the future.

Highlighting notable people from the neighborhood and/or events in the neighborhood can further connect Blanco Gardens to San Marcos' overall history. Themes present in the Neighborhood include stories and history of early settlers and the history of prominent industries such as farming. Other themes include the neighborhood's use of the river as recreation, the importance of the San Marcos River, restaurants and anchor businesses such as Cuevas Produce, and annual celebrations or events in the neighborhood.

HISTORY, ARTS, & CULTURE

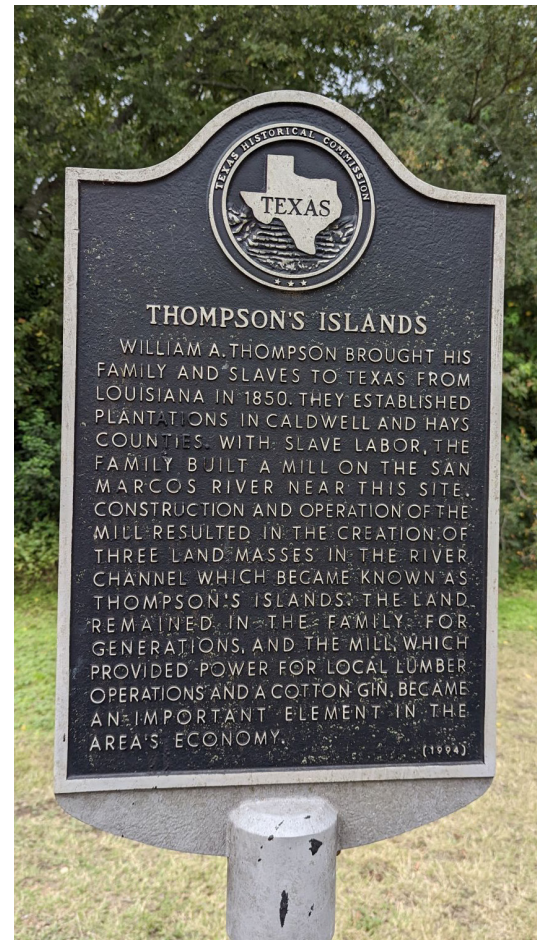
Recommendations

HAC 1.1: Identify ways to tell underrepresented San Marcos stories through programs like the Texas Historical Commission's Undertold Stories Marker Program, and oral histories in collaboration with the San Marcos Library.

HAC 1.2: Approach the San Marcos Consolidated School District (SMCISD) and/or the K.A.D. Korner Store for opportunities to tell and gather stories from neighborhood residents through classroom or after school projects. This would further meet the neighborhood's goal to tell and pass along family stories from neighborhood residents to multiple generations, particularly younger generations.

HAC 1.3: Establish partnerships between the City and any interested institutions such as Texas State University, El Centro Cultural de Hispano, Indigenous Cultures Institute, and the Council for Indigenous & Tejano Community to help share their history of the Plan Area and the broader history of San Marcos. Storytelling events can be held at the San Marcos Public Library through a series of events, videos, and featured personal stories.

HAC 1.4: Create and adopt an action-oriented, equitable, and inclusive community-wide historic preservation plan which takes into consideration the historic and cultural resources in the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood. Consider how a preservation plan can help guide the protection, preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of identified resources.



A historic marker describing the history of Thompson's Islands.

2. PUBLIC ART

The City can use a variety of art-focused strategies to highlight the culture and history of Blanco Gardens. Currently, there is only one identified mural within the Plan Area, which is located on Clarewood Drive. However, several informal art pieces can be found throughout the neighborhood, especially on mailboxes. The City can commission and maintain more public art produced by local artists in the Plan Area over time. This is a low-cost addition that contributes positively to the character of the area.

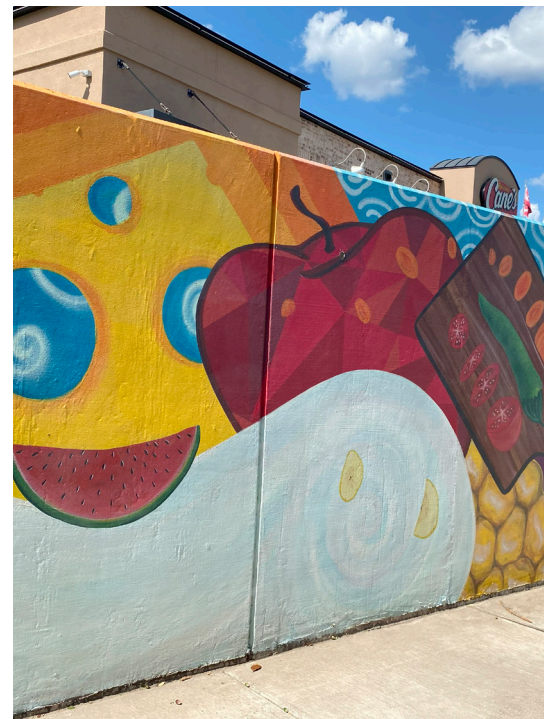
One way to provide opportunities for artists is to expand the existing public art program in San Marcos so that Blanco Gardens can be a priority location for additional art. Potential locations for mural art include existing spaces such as fences, retaining walls, and walls of public facilities or on vacant properties. Less traditional infrastructure may also work for smaller murals, such as utility boxes, manhole covers, and headwalls of culverts that can be painted. Sculptures may be installed at street corners or trailheads, as long as they do not block lines of sight.

Recommendations

HAC 2.1: Collaborate with Blanco Gardens residents to host a community event - such as a “Paint Your Mailbox” day - encouraging residents to creatively and collectively enhance the visual appeal of their neighborhood.

HAC 2.2: Identify visible sites throughout the neighborhood that can be enhanced with public art or where interpretive materials can be installed that highlight the history, landmarks, and people of Blanco Gardens. Specifically, this could be included on existing city facilities, such as the Animal Shelter, in existing public parks, or could be “mini-murals” in strategic locations. Consider multiple mediums including murals and sculptures. The case study sidebar on page 23 offers an example of a successful public art program in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

HAC 2.3: Approach residents or businesses in the Plan Area about “adopting” nearby pieces of public art. This responsibility is minimal, and entails only observing its condition and reporting any vandalism, deterioration, or damage to the art. This also encourages community “ownership” of public art and increases awareness of art installation locations.



A mural found along Clarewood Drive.

HISTORY, ARTS, & CULTURE



Painted mailboxes found along Barbara Drive.

CASE STUDY

THE CITYWIDE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

Albuquerque, NM

The City of Albuquerque, New Mexico has an established public art program that connects artists with opportunities to beautify public spaces, and markets the public art inventory to visitors and residents as a unique community experience. The City’s Public Art Urban Enhancement Division regularly inventories public spaces that are appropriate to house works of art. The Division then issues public Calls for Art to find projects, similar to the Requests for Proposals that cities use to find bids for other types of projects. Each Call for Art ensures that commissioned pieces will be durable, adapted to the hot and dry climate of New Mexico, and contain family-friendly content.

Upon installation, all public art works are maintained in a suite of online maps with details of the artist, medium, location, and where to find the works. A central map lists all citywide public art, and the most visited areas of Albuquerque like Downtown and Tingley Beach have their own dedicated public art maps that visitors can use as guides to tour those areas.

Local artists can also be called upon to contribute pieces to temporary and small “pocket” parks. The dual benefits include that these new spaces are made more attractive and visually interesting with murals or sculptures, while artists gain credit and exposure for their work.

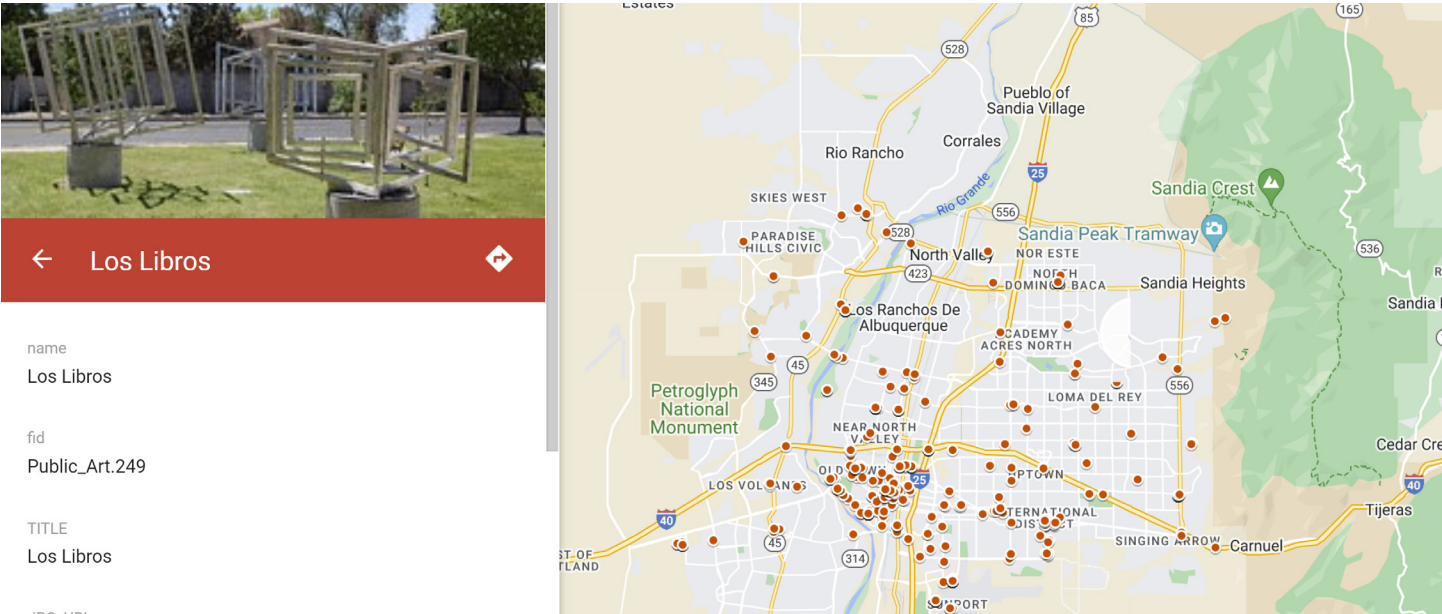


Figure 3: A map of public art locations around Albuquerque.

HISTORY, ARTS, & CULTURE

3. TRAILS AND INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE

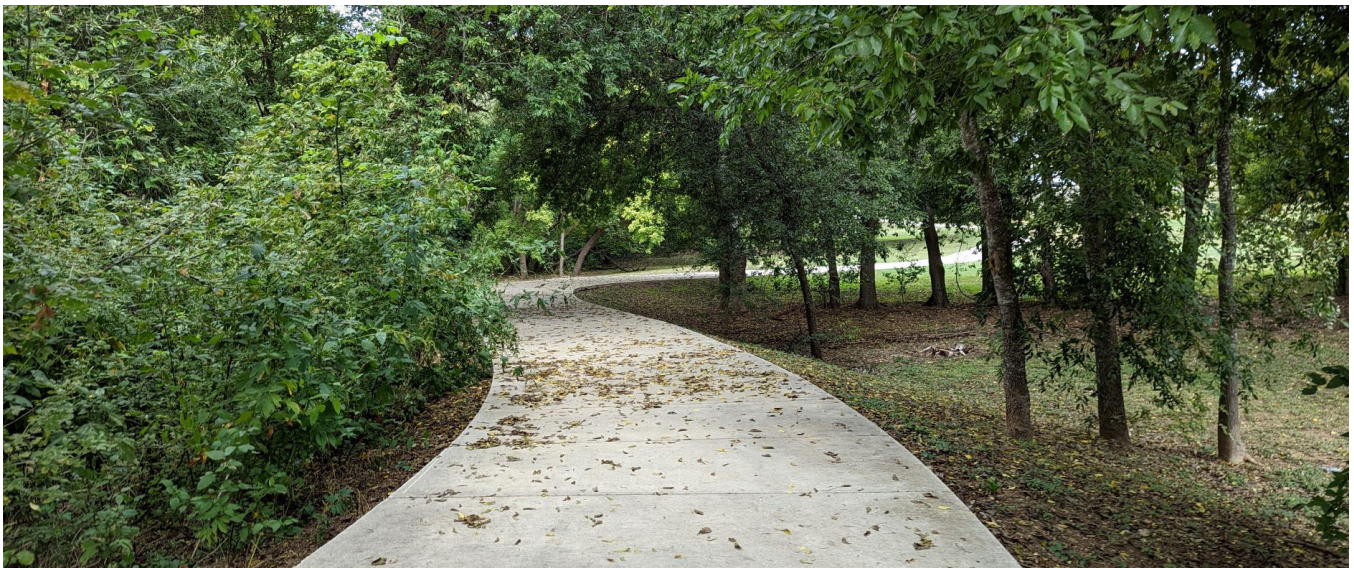
Trails are an important community asset, and residents consistently expressed support for maintaining the shared use path trail along the San Marcos River at the southern edge of Blanco Gardens. Both residents and visitors could benefit from strategically placed route maps, historic markers, signage, branding, and marketing that highlight the trail and how the trail connects to the rest of San Marcos.

The implementation of interpretive signage along existing and future trails can help to brand the community as a unique stop along the route. Examples of regional trail options for the area include the Emerald Crown Trail, a potential trail route being discussed by the Great Springs Project and San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance, as well as local trail alignments envisioned by City Capital Improvement Projects (CIP). Existing and proposed local sidewalks are also important for connecting residents from their homes to trails.

Recommendations

HAC 3.1: Enhance the trail experience along the San Marcos River by establishing a formal name for the trail and adding signage, wayfinding, and public art at trailheads and trail intersections. Additional connections between the trail and points of interest in the neighborhood can be established to foster exploration.

HAC 3.2: Provide signage in both English and Spanish for trail, wayfinding, and educational panels.



The winding, shaded shared-use path along the San Marcos River.



A clean river is a beautiful river

Please help us keep our river safe by picking up after yourself

**Throw all trash and recyclables into the
appropriate bins located throughout city parks**



Damage Caused by Litter:

- detracts from the beauty of our parks and river
- kills wildlife that ingest or become entangled in debris
- adds toxic chemicals to the water
- presents a danger to recreational river users
- degrades the environment for future generations
- Littering is unlawful

Top Ten Litter Items in San Marcos:

1. Cigarette butts
2. Bags/food wrappers
3. Caps & lids
4. Beverage bottles (glass)
5. Beverage cans (aluminum)
6. Cups, plates, plasticware
7. Beverage bottles (plastic)
8. Straws & stirrers
9. Fast food containers
10. Twist ties



#challengeSMTX

Will you take the challenge?

Pick up at least one piece of litter every day.

For more information visit EAHCP.org



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 Blanco Gardens described taking trips by car, bike, on foot, or other means for their daily needs. This section lists key locations and elements to consider for street modifications and other changes to improve mobility, infrastructure, and safety for all users.



Neighborhood access to the shared use path along the San Marcos River.

1. COMPLETE TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS

A complete transportation network is one that can accommodate vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, and other methods residents may use to move around Blanco Gardens and the city. The bicycle and pedestrian network in the Plan Area includes bike lanes, sidewalks, paths, and trails. These facilities don't cover every possible route. However, they offer a strong foundation for a robust network that the City can expand and improve over time, as long as the City balances these with concerns about overbuilding paved surfaces.

Most blocks in the Plan Area have concrete sidewalks on one side of the street. The exceptions are River Road, with sidewalk coverage on both sides, and Sherbarb Street and Harper Drive, which have no sidewalks. Some streets have a landscape buffer separating the sidewalk from the street, such as Barbara Drive, while others have the sidewalk located directly adjacent to the street with no physical buffer separating a pedestrian from the travel lane, such as Sturgeon Drive.

Alleys exist behind Barbara Drive and Conway Drive, and portions of these are paved, but are not found elsewhere in the neighborhood. Figure 3.1: Transportation Systems provides a snapshot of the existing street and sidewalk networks. The City Sidewalk Maintenance & Gap Infill Program is planning to install new sidewalks along several streets including Conway Drive.

Maintaining existing vehicular circulation throughout the neighborhood while improving routes to common destinations is a priority. Common routes identified by residents include access across IH-35, downtown, retail areas to the northeast, and schools to the southwest. Changes to vehicular, pedestrian, transit, and bike infrastructure should be implemented using best practices such as the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)³ to improve safety and align with the Development Code and/or the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).



A segment of Bugg Lane without sidewalks.

GETTING AROUND

Figure 3.1



Recommendations

GA 1.1: Maintain convenient access to and through the Plan Area for residents. Explore potential opportunities to utilize the alley infrastructure behind Barbara Drive and Conway Drive to further connect residents to their destinations.

GA 1.2: Perform a safety study of where crashes have occurred within the Neighborhood to prioritize appropriate physical improvements at key intersections and high-traffic blocks such as the addition of enhanced pedestrian crossings.

GA 1.3: Continue to implement the City's existing Sidewalk Gap Program and assess its success for improving the sidewalk network within the Plan Area, particularly in areas identified by residents as a priority street. If portions of the neighborhood are not recommended for sidewalks or if sidewalks would be infeasible, use traffic calming measures to make walking in the street safe for pedestrians, specifically children, elderly, and those with mobility impairments.

GA 1.4: Perform studies to determine if Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHB) and/or other traffic calming measures - such as roundabouts - are warranted at strategic locations to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrian and bicycle crossings. Potential intersections to study could be River Road at Barbara Drive, as well as a mid-block crossing on Cape Road west of River Road to connect the shared use path.



A cyclist riding along River Road.



The intersection of Bliss Lane and Sturgeon Drive, at the entrance to Conway Park.



Lack of sidewalks along Cape Road.



Pedestrian Hybrid Beacon formerly located at the intersection of Hutchison Street and Fredericksburg Street.

GETTING AROUND

2. PRIORITY CONNECTIONS

Although the proximity to IH-35 provides easy access to the rest of the city, it is also a major divider between the Neighborhood and desired destinations, such as downtown San Marcos. Residents have expressed interest for additional connections to areas across IH-35, as well as to the San Marcos River and additional recreational trails.

Currently, primary vehicular pathways in and out of the neighborhood are limited to IH-35 via the Frontage Road or SH-80. A shared use path that goes under the highway provides a major access point across IH-35 for pedestrians and cyclists. Existing bike lanes along River Road connect to the shared use path.

Recommendations

GA 2.1: Install signage or other wayfinding measures to designate a “walking loop trail” along key streets throughout the neighborhood and consider streetscape enhancements to promote the use of this trail for commuting to services as well as an active recreation/fitness route. A priority route identified by the community is along River Road, Bugg Lane, and Linda Drive. Consider branding the walking loop trail as Cuevas Walking Loop.

GA 2.2: Coordinate City Park, drainage, and flood mitigation projects for opportunities to provide additional multimodal trails that connect to surrounding areas and collaborate with other regional trail initiatives such as the Great Springs Project and the Emerald Crown Trail.

GA 2.3: Evaluate the pedestrian and bike connections across Highway 80 and under IH-35. Collaborate with TxDOT for potential improvements such as lighting, signage, and bike/pedestrian safety.



Shaded trail access.



Trailhead from the Redpoint Apartments.



IH-35 and SH-80 intersection.

3. TRAFFIC AND PARKING

The proximity of IH-35 and SH-80 largely shapes the traffic patterns of Blanco Gardens. The most noticeable vehicular traffic is large truck traffic. Freight and utility traffic is high in the neighborhood due to the adjacent and nearby industrial uses, commercial shopping areas on River Road and SH-80, the Wastewater Treatment Plant, and other non-City facilities to the north. These raise safety concerns and cause wear-and-tear on the neighborhood's roads, particularly River Road. Minimizing or eliminating these issues is a priority that many residents raised throughout the Plan process.

A related issue is managing visitor parking. Residents expressed that they observe visitors driving to and parking their cars in Blanco Gardens to access the river and trails at Stokes Park. The excess parked cars cause concerns for residents, particularly when cars are parked on neighborhood streets rather than in designated on-street parking on River Road. Limited on-street parking on Cape Road was also raised as a concern.

Recommendations:

GA 3.1: Consider designating maximum vehicle weight, size, or axle numbers on routes in and around Blanco Gardens. These designations can help divert large trucks from cutting through the neighborhood and utilizing neighborhood streets.

GA 3.2: Collaborate with the neighborhood to explore potential for a Residential Parking Permit designation on priority streets where parking is a concern.



On-street parking on Cape Road for trail users.

GETTING AROUND

4. TRANSIT

Transit service provided by the Capital Area Rural Transit System (CARTS) runs through Blanco Gardens daily, with stops on Linda Drive, Bugg Lane, and Sturgeon Drive. Buses run daily between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. and about 1.9% of workers use this service for their daily commutes⁴.

Neighborhood residents indicated during the Area Plan development that they would be more interested in using public transportation if there were bus vehicle improvements, improved information on routes and timetables, and expanded service hours. Maintaining and enhancing transit service was identified as a priority for current and future residents.

Recommendations:

GA 4.1: Improve existing bus stops to provide shelters, lighting, and transit information such as bus routes/times and recommended stops.

GA 4.2: Increase the frequency of monitoring the condition of bus stops, benches, and shelters to ensure they remain usable. Report to CARTS any of these amenities in need of cleaning, repair, or replacement. Ensure that paths to bus stops are clear and accessible.

GA 4.3: Partner with CARTS to evaluate opportunities for additional transit stops within the neighborhood and increased frequency of buses along key routes.



A shaded bus stop with waste receptacles on Linda Drive.



STREET-SCAPES



This plan topic focuses on the tangible portions of the streetscape—how to build, maintain, and improve streetscapes so they support all users. The streetscape is the public right-of-way, including streets, sidewalks, utility lines, and other spaces which are publicly owned and maintained. Blanco Gardens’ full street and utility networks are displayed in Figure 3.2: Utilities.

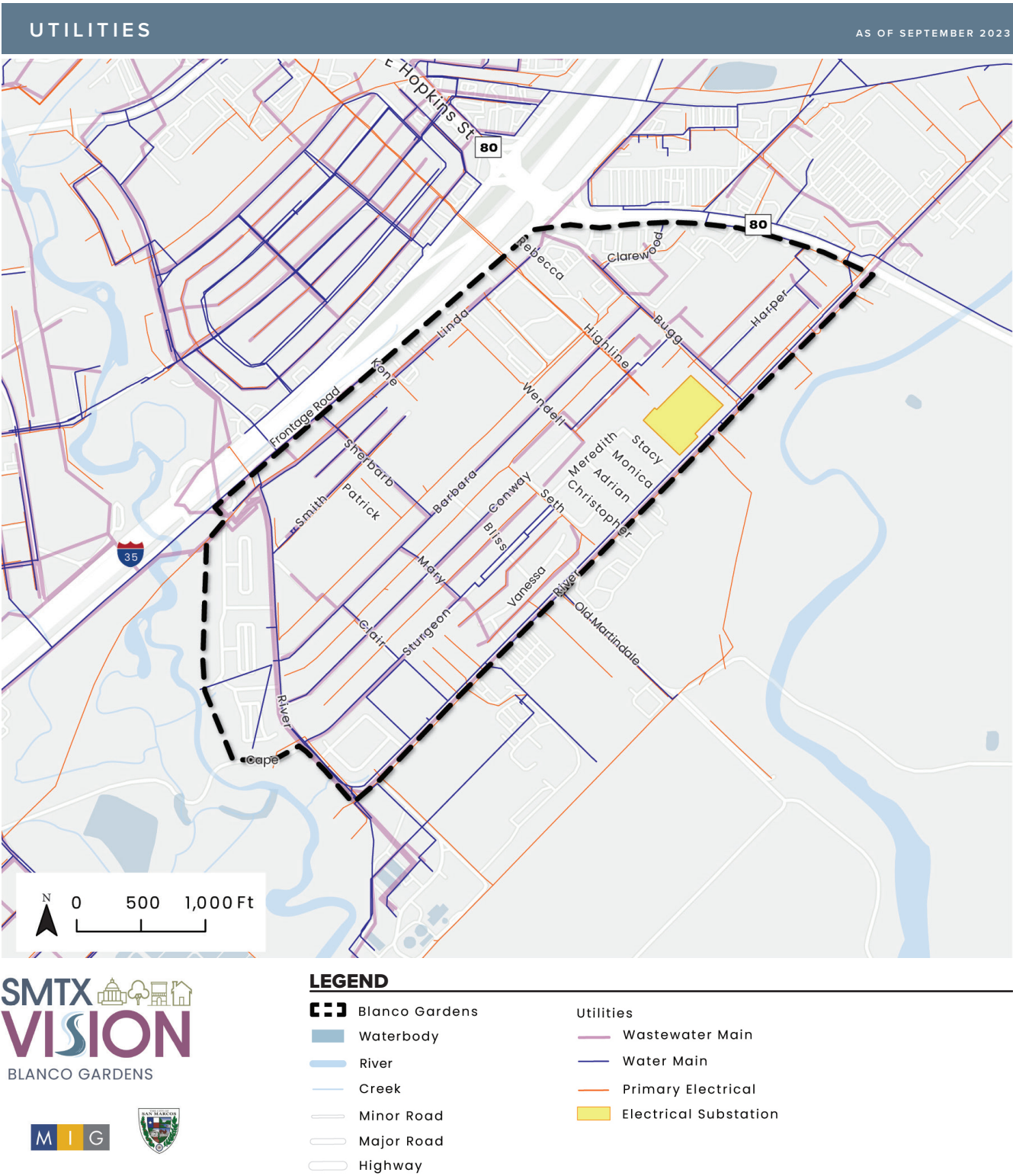
Streetscapes are an essential part of the built environment because all people use them each time they travel. The condition of the streetscape can have a positive or negative impact on a person’s travel experience. Neighborhood focal points such as gateways, major intersections, and trailheads are among the most important portions of streetscapes. Blanco Gardens contains unique streetscape features including alley-accessed properties and attractive tree-lined streets like Barbara Drive.

Common streetscape concerns include safety, maintenance, hazard mitigation, and upgrades to improve the travel experience. While ownership of streetscape elements usually means the City is responsible for correcting streetscape issues, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) or the County may be the responsible entity based on the streets they own.



Intersection of Conway Drive and Clair Drive.

Figure 3.2



STREETSCAPES

1. NEIGHBORHOOD GATEWAYS AND SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

The busiest observed vehicular and pedestrian entries to the Plan Area include:

- River Road / Cape Road intersection
- SH-80 / IH-35 intersection
- River Road / IH-35 intersection

Most people enter the Plan Area using one of these gateways. IH-35 at the southern edge of Blanco Gardens is undergoing major changes, including relocation and construction of exit and entrance ramps, bridge and underpass reconstruction, and repaving. These areas should be considered for installation of neighborhood gateways at different scales so that they serve as a visual indicator for drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The neighborhood can be branded with placemaking elements that are integrated with the local streetscape so that residents and visitors have a sense of Blanco Garden's unique character.

Recommendations:

ST 1.1: Consider identifying gateways into Blanco Gardens using signage, lighting, art, amenities, and other visual indicators which reflect the character of Blanco Gardens.

ST 1.2: Consider safety improvements at high-traffic intersections and other areas where incidents between pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers are most likely, including the vicinity of Stokes Park along Cape Road.

There are a variety of methods that can be implemented in Blanco Gardens to improve safety for non-vehicular users in the neighborhood. This includes adding raised crosswalks, additional lighting, pedestrian refuge areas such as bulb-outs, signage, and specific pavement markings which indicate a pedestrian crossing.



High-traffic intersection at Clarewood Drive and Bugg Lane.

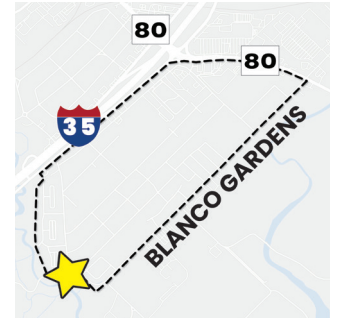
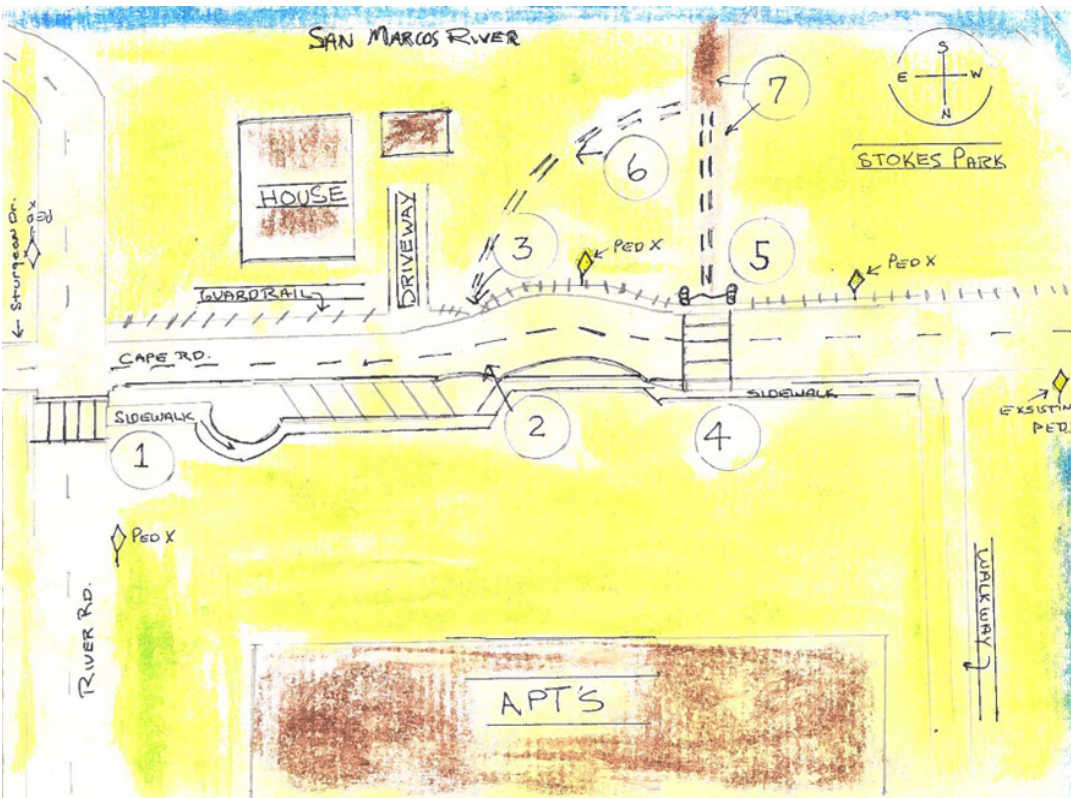


Painted crosswalk in Victoria, TX.

Figure 3.3 provides an example of incremental improvements to the intersection of Cape Road and River Road on the southwestern edge of the Plan Area. This intersection is targeted in the plan due to the significant community comments related to the importance of this intersection for neighborhood park users and the concerns with safety when crossing the roadways to enter the park.

In the figure below, locations 1 and 4 indicate the enhanced crosswalks that could be installed, while locations 2 and 3 indicate where pedestrians find natural paths to cross the street but are not protected from vehicular traffic. Locations 5 and 6 mark unpaved paths that lead from each pedestrian crossing to location 7 - the entrance to J.J. Stokes Park. This sketch can be used as inspiration for potential improvements to this intersection alongside a traffic study.

Figure 3.3. Sketch of potential pedestrian safety improvements to Cape Road near River Road. Courtesy of Michael Vernon, Blanco Gardens Neighborhood Area Plan Steering Committee Member.



- 1 Enhanced crosswalk
- 2 Unprotected pedestrian crossing
- 3 Unprotected pedestrian crossing
- 4 Enhanced crosswalk
- 5 Break in guardrail marking entrance to J.J. Stokes Park
- 6 Manmade path from unprotected crossing to park entrance
- 7 Unpaved entrance to J.J. Stokes Park

STREETSCAPES

Many residents and community members voiced concerns about the lack of lighting features in Blanco Gardens. This missing infrastructure creates dark pockets of the neighborhood that are either dimly lit or have no lighting at all, which poses safety concerns for those navigating neighborhood streets or alleys. Identifying and installing additional light fixtures will reduce dark spots along neighborhood streets and create an additional sense of safety. The intersection of River Rd and Bugg Ln was specifically identified as a dark pocket in need of additional lighting and safety features.

Additionally, the light fixtures that are provided in the neighborhood are usually mounted high on utility poles and don't contribute to a positive pedestrian experience. Pedestrian-scale lighting can help create an additional sense of safety along the streetscape and encourages travelers to use neighborhood streets. Oftentimes pedestrian-scale light fixtures use materials and designs that are specific to that neighborhood, which helps to create a sense of place and enhance neighborhood character.

Recommendations:

ST 1.3: Conduct a neighborhood lighting survey on a recurring basis to identify areas that are dimly lit and in need of additional lighting or replacement of existing light fixtures.

ST 1.4: Encourage additional streetlights and/or pedestrian-oriented lights in areas that are dimly lit or lack lighting infrastructure. These light fixtures should be compatible with neighborhood character and work to create a unique brand for Blanco Gardens. The fixtures chosen for installation should be considerate of potential light trespass onto existing homes and overall light pollution. Methods to mitigate this include compliance with International Dark Sky guidelines and/or strategic placing of light fixtures.



Pedestrian-scale street light on River Road installed in the summer of 2024. The wide lampshade directs light downward, which is a standard of the International Dark Sky guidelines.

During the planning process, Area Plan Steering Committee members raised concerns about increases in crime throughout the neighborhood, specifically related to theft and the presence of people experiencing homelessness. While the scope of the Area Plan does not capture efforts by the San Marcos Police Department to address these concerns, it offers cross-functional strategies to support public safety holistically. It is important to document these conversations within the plan to help support efforts in other departments.

Recommendation:

ST 1.5: Hold regular meetings between community members, the San Marcos Police Department, and other City departments engaged in supporting public safety initiatives to discuss neighborhood concerns and statistics related to crime.



Community members and staff of the San Marcos Police Department during a quarterly Blanco Gardens Public Safety Meeting.

STREETSCAPES

2. RIGHT-OF-WAY AND INTERSECTIONS

The City can promote greater safety for all users by focusing on additional traffic-calming features such as speed humps, narrowing or reconfigurations of selected streets, and minor modifications to the right-of-way. In addition, some blocks may be candidates for more comprehensive changes.

An example is located on the 1000 and 1100 blocks of Barbara Drive. This area includes two circular spaces where the street becomes significantly wider, as shown in Figure 3.4. This feature was created when two cul-de-sacs were connected, resulting in an inappropriately wide street that encourages high speeds and adds more paved surface in this flood-prone neighborhood.

Because the widest portions of the pavement are 34 feet wide on this block, there is ample opportunity for transformation while retaining the needed travel lanes and on-street parking. Figure 3.5 indicates how this stretch of Barbara Drive would appear with those treatments applied.

Recommendations

ST 2.1: Identify wide sections of neighborhood streets—such as 1000-1100 Barbara Drive—where travel lanes can be narrowed, and/or sidewalk and traffic calming features can be added. Use low-impact development (LID) in these areas to minimize paved surfaces and rely more on natural spaces.

ST 2.2: Introduce incremental traffic calming measures such as colorful sidewalks, bulb outs, crosswalks, medians, and signage along key streets and intersections to slow car speeds.

ST 2.3: Study effective location of speed humps along Barbara Drive, Sherbarb Street, Conway Drive, and



Barbara Drive where former cul-de-sacs were connected, but not narrowed.

Barbara Drive: Existing



Figure 3.4. Current conditions of the 1000 and 1100 blocks of Barbara Drive.



Barbara Drive: Conceptual Design

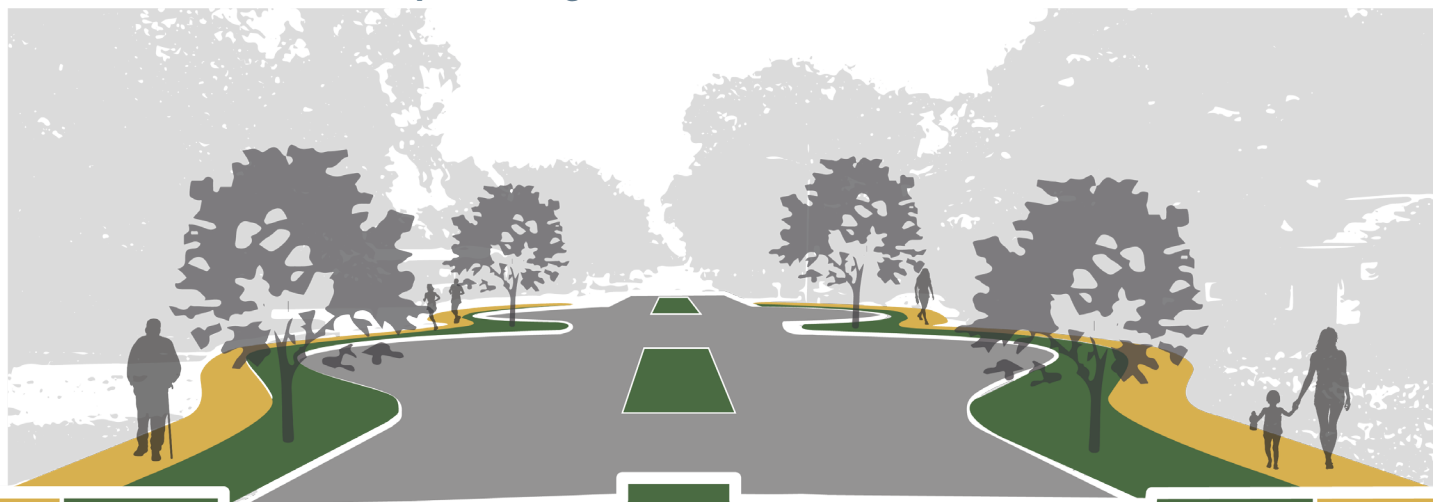


Figure 3.5. Proposed improvements to Barbara Drive. Center-landscaped medians and a sidewalk on the east side of the street have been added. On-street parking is maintained on the both sides of the street.

STREETSCAPES

3. MAINTENANCE

The City’s Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) will govern large streetscape replacements or upgrades, but smaller projects and regular maintenance can be completed through the core service delivery of the City. The ongoing street maintenance program managed by the Public Works Department’s Streets Division has been generally praised by community members during the Plan process and should continue to be used to proactively maintain the streetscapes within Blanco Gardens.

The tree canopy within the public right-of-way and parks is a valuable component of public space in the Plan Area. In addition to providing shade to mitigate heat, residents expressed that the large tree canopy throughout the neighborhood is a key part of the area’s character. In particular, the large tree canopy adjacent to the San Marcos River is an important ecological resource that should be preserved.

Recommendations

ST 3.1: Evaluate the upkeep and maintenance of existing City-owned streets for overgrown vegetation, and coordinate with TxDOT on portions of streets under their jurisdiction within the Plan Area.

ST 3.2: Create a tree resource guide for residents that identifies historically well-growing trees in the neighborhood and/or additional native tree species that contribute to the large tree canopy. This guide can be used as a resource for residents who want to plant trees and/or need to replace trees which are in poor condition.

ST 3.3: Provide educational and financial support programs for residents regarding tree health and maintenance. Explore grants which can be used to support residents and/or fund trees which can be installed by the City in the neighborhood.

ST 3.4: Seek Keep San Marcos Beautiful “Adopt-a-Spot” sponsors to assist in cleaning and beautifying streets in the neighborhood.

ST 3.5 Partner with the City’s Neighborhood Enhancement Division to promote the Home Equipment Lending Program (HELP), which allows San Marcos residents to access home improvement equipment. Such equipment includes power washers, tree trimming saws, curb painting kits, and fence staining kits.



Cracked asphalt along Highline Drive.



Thick tree canopy provides shade along Barbara Drive.

4. OTHER UPGRADES

When streetscape elements reach the end of their useful lives and must be replaced, the City may consider using materials that are more resilient and that create a unique sense of place within the plan area. Examples include brick-paved or painted crosswalks, porous pavements, and works of public art. These will provide new benefits to the Plan Area, and may be an opportunity to add permanent traffic-calming measures as well.

Landscaping is the primary resilient feature of neighborhood streetscapes. New landscaping can be considered if it is regionally native or adaptive, appropriate for soils, matches the Plan Area's aesthetic desired by residents, contributes to water conservation goals, or provides ecological function for wildlife, pollinators, water retention, and rainwater infiltration.

Recommendations

ST 4.1: Explore the use of materials that provide a sense of place to Blanco Gardens when streetscape elements are due for replacement. Examples include brickpaved or painted crosswalks, porous pavements, and works of public art.

ST 4.2: Explore the use of landscaping elements that are native, water-saving, and/or provide ecological functions when due for replacement.

ST 4.2: Explore the use of permeable concrete and other materials for new sidewalk construction in order to reduce impervious cover within the neighborhood and floodplain.



A xeriscaped front yard on Smith Lane.

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES



This section covers public spaces and amenities, which include a variety of existing and potential amenities such as parks, trails, playgrounds, athletic fields and indoor recreation facilities, libraries, government offices, and community centers as well as other spaces dedicated to public use. It was discussed during the plan process that dark sky initiatives were a priority in the neighborhood to restore the nighttime environment and protect the neighborhood from the effects of light pollution⁵, specifically in parks. This section notes Blanco Gardens' current inventory of public space and amenities and identifies improvements which may be needed. It also highlights gaps that the City may address by adding new facilities or spaces.



Conway Park, featuring shaded playgrounds, a basketball court, picnic tables, and a skate area.

1. EXISTING PUBLIC SPACES

Conway Park is a small park with a playground, covered picnic area, half-basketball court, and small skate park. It is located at the intersection of Sturgeon Drive and Bliss Lane across the street from the K.A.D. Korner Store, which is a central location for community programming. On the outer edges of the Plan Area are several open spaces and city-owned properties. Cape's Camp and J.J. Stokes Park are located southwest of the Plan Area, but are essential open space amenities for the Neighborhood. A large shared use path is located alongside Cape's Camp which can be used to access J.J. Stokes Park to the south. It also further extends north of the Plan Area underneath IH-35 and connects to the William & Eleanor Crook River Park adjacent to the Rio Vista Neighborhood (see Figure 3.6). J.J. Stokes Park is a popular space in San Marcos that attracts visitors as well as local residents. Many travel there without driving due to the proximity of adjacent neighborhoods. Thompson's Island is owned by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and, while not owned by the City, provides a public amenity to the neighborhood and the City at large.

Informal public spaces include recreation areas along the Blanco River, and children sometimes play in low-traffic areas, like alleys, or on neighborhood streets. The use of streets for recreation suggests a high demand for park space.



Conway Park



Stokes Park entrance at Cape Road.

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

Figure 3.6



Recommendations

PSA 1.1: Continue to maintain the existing park and trail facilities in Blanco Gardens for regular use. Assess whether their usage may require more frequent cleaning and maintenance, or installation of new amenities that reflect the needs of the residents (e.g., exercise stations, enhanced lighting, picnic areas). Incorporate best practices from the Dark Skies Initiative when possible.

PSA 1.2: Ensure alignment of the City’s Capital Improvement Plan with other park improvement projects, amenities, and programming with neighborhood priorities—including a complete sidewalk network, amenity-rich parks, and a large tree canopy—and allow residents’ feedback to inform the design process.

PSA 1.3: Conduct a neighborhood outreach event specific to Conway Park, which would aim to determine potential enhancements or safety improvements to the park based on community feedback.



Sidewalks along Barbara Drive.

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

2. PARK ACCESS AND POTENTIAL NEW PUBLIC SPACES

About three-quarters of Blanco Gardens residences are within a 10-minute walk of a city park, the ideal distance for promoting regular outdoor recreation and active transportation⁶. However, there remains room for improvement with one in four households living farther away. To consider new park sites, the strongest candidates are currently vacant lots or underutilized public areas in the northern part of Blanco Gardens.

Acquiring land and creating a permanent park is expensive and the ongoing maintenance required would need to be evaluated by staff. With this in mind, the first step could be to assess if resident use would justify the investment of a new park. The City can achieve this with a temporary “pop-up” park.

Recommendations

PSA 2.1: Evaluate a location to pilot a temporary pop-up park in the northern part of Blanco Gardens. The pop-up park could be installed in a variety of locations: within excess asphalt on a larger road in the neighborhood, within excess right-of-way that is adjacent to a street in a grassy area, or on un-used surplus land on a publicly-owned lot. The pilot site can be minimally programmed with local art, seating, shade, and other low-cost attractive elements that visually activate the space.

PSA 2.2: Advertise the new pilot park to the neighborhood and measure visitation and usage for at least six months. If demand justifies it, consider funding and operational options to turn the pop-up into a permanent mini-park in the northern portion of the Plan Area.

The San Marcos Design Manual offers guidance on designing a parklet. The guidelines can be merged with other ideas for a small park that reflects the Blanco Gardens neighborhood character.



Privately-owned vacant land along River Road.



Large vacant parcel near the center of the neighborhood.



CASE STUDY

POP-UP PLAYGROUND *Santa Fe, NM*

Pop-Up Playground is a free annual family-oriented event that allows kids of all ages to build “the ultimate fort city” using recycled materials like logs, pallets, boxes, rope, branches, dirt, and fabric, most of which are donated.

The event is staffed by volunteers who introduce children to themes of risk and freedom in a supervised setting.

Pop-Up Playground has occurred annually since 2015 and has been hosted at both private and city-owned locations, although since 2018 it has taken place at a city-owned park. It is planned through partnerships between a variety of private, nonprofit, and public organizations, as well as area businesses and residents.



Children build forts, wheelbarrows, and play kitchens using logs, pinecones, mud, pallets, stumps, fabric, wooden spools, and other materials at Santa Fe Railyard’s annual Pop-Up Playground events.

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

3. HAZARDS AND NUISANCES

Nuisances are external factors that negatively impact quality of life, and may include dust or dirt, odors, noise, and more. By contrast, hazards not only impact quality of life but are potential threats to health and safety. This section discusses three categories of known nuisances and hazards in Blanco Gardens—flooding, odors and waste, and extreme heat—with a focus on eliminating or mitigating the threat of hazards and nuisances to Plan Area residents, workers, and visitors.

There are three areas of focus within the Hazards and Nuisances section:

1. Flood Prevention and Mitigation
2. Odor Control and Waste Management
3. Extreme Heat



Thompson Island Dam.

3.1. FLOOD PREVENTION AND MITIGATION

Flooding is a serious hazard for Blanco Gardens. During the historic 2015 flooding events in San Marcos, the life and safety of Blanco Gardens residents were at risk and considerable property damage occurred. The City has taken multiple steps to remediate the damage and mitigate the hazards of flooding. The Existing Conditions Analysis in Appendix A lists the flood prevention and mitigation projects underway. In addition, new homes are required by the City Code of Ordinances to have raised foundations. To further minimize the risk of flooding, infrastructure improvements to both public and private property are needed.

Two categories of infrastructure are important to this effort. “Gray” infrastructure includes retention ponds, drains, gutters, pipe networks, floodwalls, berms, and other structural barriers to manage stormwater. Those that already exist are displayed in Figure 3.7: Existing Stormwater Infrastructure. “Green” infrastructure includes natural plantings and structures that mimic them, including bioswales, green roofs, and permeable pavements⁷.

The City’s Engineering Department has designed and installed components of new infrastructure in recent projects on public property. Private property owners should be encouraged to install green infrastructure to promote flood mitigation and water quality. The City can recommend installation of components that allow better stormwater capture and help mitigate flooding to residents who are interested in making these improvements.

Recommendations

PSA 3.1.1: Continue to conduct public outreach to inform Blanco Gardens households and businesses of new infrastructure projects and policy changes that will contribute to flood mitigation and prevention.

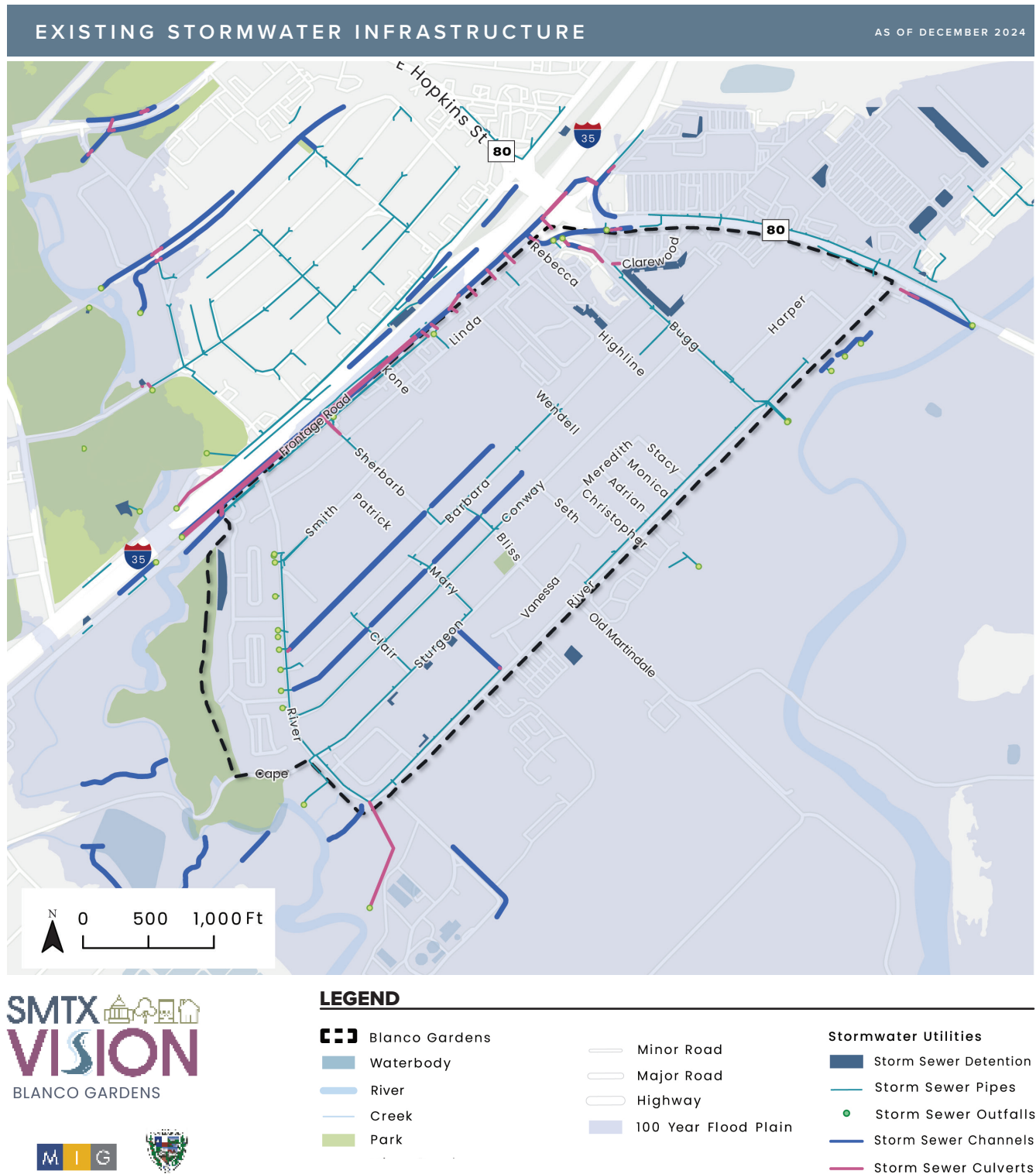
PSA 3.1.2: Provide incentives to residents and business owners to install “green” infrastructure elements on their private properties that maximize stormwater capture and reduce the impacts of impervious surfaces. The most effective examples include rain gardens and bioswales in yards and open spaces, and ribbon driveways rather than fully paved concrete slabs.

PSA 3.1.3: Continue to inform residents and business owners of upcoming CIP and other projects. Include specific information on expected timing; impacts to traffic circulation, access, and utility services; and benefits that Blanco Gardens will enjoy upon completion.

PSA 3.1.4: If lots within the neighborhood become for sale, the City should consider purchasing land in key locations for flood mitigation and public amenities, or inclusion into a potential land bank (see BFD 2.2).

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

Figure 3.7



3.2. ODOR CONTROL AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

Blanco Gardens residents have reported strong odors from the Wastewater Treatment Plant as an intermittent nuisance. Some residents noted this has diminished their quality of life, including being unable to enjoy outdoor activities and keeping their children from using yard space. The City is aware of these concerns and is working to address them. During the public process, the community brought up concerns with trash and waste in the public right-of-way and in public parks.

Recommendation:

PSA 3.2.1: Partner with neighborhood residents to explore what nuisances are occurring, what the City can do to mitigate these issues, and strategies to address neighborhood concerns regarding odor.

PSA 3.2.2: Evaluate key areas with high volumes of trash within the public right-of-way and/or parks and explore additional ways to support litter removal and prevention such as additional Hot Spot Clean Ups, Adopt-a-Spot (see also ST 3.4), added recycle and trash bins, or other methods.



The City of San Marcos' Wastewater Treatment Facility.

PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

3.3. EXTREME HEAT

The climate of Central Texas has long included hot and humid weather throughout much of the spring, summer, and fall. This poses the greatest health hazard to people that spend large amounts of time outside, whether for work, while bicycling, walking, or while waiting for transit. Another group that may encounter health problems are people without adequate indoor cooling, especially vulnerable populations like seniors, people with disabilities, and young children.

Several options exist to mitigate these issues. Adding to the tree canopy throughout the neighborhood—especially on City-owned land—provides more shade and reduces the ambient outdoor temperature compared to unshaded areas⁸. During engagement events, residents also expressed that more trees provide generally pleasant surroundings.

Recommendations:

PSA 3.3.1: Add features that mitigate exposure to heat while people are in public outdoor spaces. These can include shade structures in parks, shelters at bus stops, awnings at public building entrances, and additional native shade trees along streets.

PSA 3.3.2: Continue to work with the City Urban Forester to add or replace trees and provide maximum shade where people congregate outdoors. Consider planting additional trees within Conway Park which is currently lacking in mature, native trees. In addition, prioritize new tree plantings along the trail adjacent to Cape’s Camp to provide shade for trail users and expand the tree canopy adjacent to the river.



Tree canopy along Sturgeon Drive.



Shaded bus stop.



HOUSING



The housing market in and around San Marcos is active, but several challenges exist that can be addressed through potential solutions to encourage quality and affordable homes that promote stability and good health. This section addresses the highest priority challenges.

Housing is an essential part of Blanco Gardens, with over 80% of the Plan Area devoted to residential uses. The cost of housing is the largest portion of most households' budgets, and a home is important to residents' success or challenges as the provider of shelter and stability. The City of San Marcos has limited ability to control the housing market, as most of the Plan Area's housing stock is privately owned.

This section assumes that 1) any new housing in Blanco Gardens will be constructed by private property owners; 2) new housing will use the full capacity that zoning regulations allow (height, setbacks, etc.); and 3) limited amounts of new housing will be proposed over the next 20 years.

The primary housing goals of the Plan's recommendations are ensuring that current residents can remain living in Blanco Gardens, and that quality, attainable homes exist when they are ready to move.

There are four areas of focus within the Housing section:

1. **Neighborhood Context**
2. **Market-Based Homes**
3. **Subsidized Homes**
4. **Ownership**
5. **Resiliency of Existing Homes**



A new single-family home constructed through the City Community Development Block Grant program.

1. NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Blanco Gardens' current housing stock includes 1,698 residential units, among them 78% renter-occupied and 22% owner-occupied homes.⁹ The neighborhood is stable and mostly built out, with 4,483 residents and modest population growth occurring over time¹⁰.

Most new homes constructed in Blanco Gardens have been in response to market demand, while several more were constructed by the City as replacement homes through the Community Development Block Grant - Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) programs.

Another asset is the stability of Blanco Gardens. The average age of housing in one of Blanco Gardens' Census block groups is 27 years, indicating a stable neighborhood where people have put down roots.

Blanco Gardens' housing market displays several ongoing challenges. The first is a limited supply of homes, especially at lower price points. Smaller households have become increasingly common as San Marcos includes more people aging in place (defined on the next page) and more first time homebuyers. At the same time, fewer homes are affordable to low- and moderate-income families than at any point since 2000¹¹.



Single family homes found in the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood.

HOUSING

It was discussed with the Area Plan Steering Committee that smaller, affordable homes are desired for infill projects within the neighborhood. This housing should not only match the existing character and average lot coverage of other homes in the neighborhood but should reflect the need for more affordable housing prices.

“Aging in Place” was also discussed during the Area Plan process as being important to the neighborhood. Aging in place has several definitions. This Area Plan uses the phrase as promoting the ability of people to remain in their homes—where they are financially stable and socially connected—rather than needing to move out. Pressures that may necessitate moving out of the neighborhood as residents age include significant home and yard maintenance, inaccessible features like steps, or rising home costs that become unaffordable, especially property taxes, maintenance, and utility costs¹². If these are solved, aging in place contributes positively to neighborhood outcomes of stability and social connectedness, meaning the benefit extends beyond an individual household to all of Blanco Gardens.

A challenge in Blanco Gardens that was expressed by residents directly is the construction of new homes in the Plan Area that are not physically compatible with older housing stock. The height, lot coverage, orientation, architectural style, or more than one of these factors of recently built homes were identified by residents as being out of character, despite following building and development codes and receiving necessary City permits. See the Neighborhood Character Study in Appendix B for recommended physical elements that will help new and renovated homes fit with the Plan Area’s existing fabric.

Recommendations

HSG 1.1: Continue to implement selected recommendations from the City-drafted 2019 San Marcos Strategic Housing Action Plan (SHAP), and seek adoption from City Council as appropriate. Prioritize early adoption of the SHAP's recommendations that prevent displacement and promote the construction of more affordable housing types.

HSG 1.2: Continue City-led actions, such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs, that will add context-appropriate homes to Blanco Gardens. Programs should focus on smaller for-sale and rental homes to better match local housing demand.

HSG 1.3: Evaluate methods and tools that would remove barriers to building smaller home units to meet the evolving demographics of households that live in the Plan Area or would like to move there, including homes with accessible features. See the next subsection for details on unit types that would fit best in Blanco Gardens.



Apartments on River Road.



Multifamily homes on Linda Drive.

HOUSING

2. MARKET-BASED HOMES

While there are limits to tools that local governments in Texas can use to solve housing market issues, this section details directly actionable steps for San Marcos.

The draft Strategic Housing Action Plan (SHAP) indicates a high share of home sales in San Marcos at the lower end of the cost spectrum (i.e., home prices below \$200,000 before closing costs) are townhomes, condominiums, and other attached housing types¹³. The principal advantages of these homes are shorter construction and preparation times before they enter the market, and greatly reduced construction costs. Smaller housing types such as these can help new buyers find homes within their budgets in Blanco Gardens. Other housing products which are similar in scale and cost are modular homes.

Recommendations

HSG 2.1: Evaluate potential barriers in the Development Code to building modular or industrialized homes. The City should encourage proposed modular homes fit with the existing character of Blanco Gardens through the use of an overlay district with associated Single Family Design Guidelines. Appendix B provides guidance on appropriate designs and structure orientations.

CASE STUDY

MiCASiTA **South Texas**

South Texas has experienced recent success in adding smaller—and thus more attainable—housing types from modular construction. **MiCASiTA** is a project begun by the non-profit Come Dream, Come Build (“cdcb”) in Cameron County, Texas to build modular homes ranging from 576 to 1,400 square feet¹⁴. The initial pilot owners for these properties were families who had lost their homes in natural disasters and needed new places to live on a faster timeline than a full-scale rebuild. MiCASiTA has since expanded to serve all

families seeking an affordable ownership product, and works in Louisiana and Mississippi in addition to Texas¹⁵.

Cdcb reduces costs and construction time by using several pre-chosen floor plans and producing most of the home’s components in a central facility, then transporting the home to its site for final assembly and finishings. Homeowners may add modular “blocks” to expand their homes in the future as their finances allow. As of May 2022, MiCASiTA can produce a home for \$58,000, not including the cost of land.



One “block” of a MiCASiTA modular home under construction. This component can become a 576-square foot standalone home, or multiple blocks can be combined to form a larger structure.



3. SUBSIDIZED HOMES

The C. M. Allen Homes are the largest subsidized community in San Marcos, providing 100 affordable duplexes in Blanco Gardens since their construction between 1965 and 1971¹⁶. Operated by the San Marcos Housing Authority (SMHA), this community has been a housing asset for decades.

Due to their age, the C. M. Allen Homes may require significant renovations to remain occupiable and in good condition in the future. Basic replacements of appliances and systems will be needed, and additional upgrades to promote energy efficiency and healthy indoor air would contribute positively to residents' health.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) offers free technical assistance to public housing authorities and local governments on preserving and improving public housing programs¹⁷. Submitting a detailed online request to HUD can help determine these needs and connect SMHA to lenders that can provide guidance on planning for future renovations and needed capital.

The subsidized housing stock of San Marcos is limited. Beyond the C. M. Allen Homes, SMHA operates 189 other units elsewhere in San Marcos, and has distributed 245 Section 8 vouchers¹⁸. Together these properties meet significant affordable demand, but additional need for homes for low- and moderate-income residents remains, and affordability was discussed by the community during the Area Plan process.

Recommendations:

HSG 3.1: Collaborate with the San Marcos Housing Authority to better understand and document the C. M. Allen Homes' long-term physical needs. To remain in good condition for the next 20 years and beyond, this may include both small upgrades—new landscaping, energy-efficient appliances, and windows—and more significant renovations.

HSG 3.2: When the long-term needs of the C. M. Allen Homes are known, collaborate with SMHA on a request for federally provided technical assistance. The request should detail the C.M. Allen Homes' role in providing quality housing to low- and moderate-income residents, and in contributing to the stability of Blanco Gardens.

HOUSING

4. OWNERSHIP

About 22% of Blanco Gardens homes are owner-occupied¹⁹. The stability and long tenure of these residents are assets for the Plan Area. This section provides options to encourage their continued ability to live in their community.

Owner-occupied homes in the Plan Area that are relatively affordable include units with modest mortgage obligations and those owned outright. These homes may have been occupied for many years by a single owner or are smaller home types at attainable price points for households at or below the area median income²⁰. Homeowners throughout Texas express a strong desire to remain in their homes as they age, and contribute positively to the stability of blocks and neighborhoods as they do²¹. For these reasons, the City should continue to promote homeowners to stay in place and keep their homes in good condition.

Home builders may express interest in scattered-site development when parcels in the Plan Area become available, especially for the relatively profitable larger properties and for-sale homes. The City can prepare for this by maintaining a small catalog of model housing types that fit well with the style, massing, and physical character of existing San Marcos neighborhoods, and meet current zoning regulations. The case study on the next page provides an example from a similar-sized community.

Recommendation:

HSG 4.1: Consider starting a catalog of pre-approved home plans that meet Development Code requirements and are compatible with the neighborhood character identified by residents. This example palette of homes could be used for vacant lots where a property owner is interested in building a home.



Single family homes and duplexes found throughout the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood.

CASE STUDY

MODEL HOME PLANS

South Bend, IN

The City of South Bend, Indiana recognized an acute need to increase the supply of affordable housing types, to meet burgeoning local demand for moderately priced homes. South Bend is a college town in northern Indiana, with a population of 103,453, home to the University of Notre Dame, and within commuting distance of the Chicago area²². With these demographic similarities, South Bend experiences similar housing market constraints as San Marcos.

To respond to this need, the combined City-County government has developed a catalog of ready-made building plan sets for homes of types and sizes in demand. These types are accessory dwelling units, two-, three-, and four-bedroom single-family homes, duplex, and a six-unit apartment building (known as a “sixplex”)²³. The plans are even offered free of charge. The City’s intent in providing this catalog is to lower the costs of design and planning and deliver new homes that align with existing neighborhood character, giving an opening for smaller and local homebuilders to competitively work in South Bend. The catalog also saves time in plan review steps as they already comply with the local zoning code and other regulations.



SOUTH BEND NEIGHBORHOOD INFILL

Pre-approved, ready-to build housing

A page from the South Bend, Indiana pre-approved home catalog.

HOUSING

5. RESILIENCY OF EXISTING HOMES

Another threat to the existing housing stock is natural disaster. Several strategies may be offered to Blanco Gardens homeowners to protect their homes, which focus on retrofitting or renovating their existing homes²⁴. The three retrofit strategies that will provide the most benefits are:

- **Relocate key equipment (heating and cooling units, water heaters) above the Base Flood Elevation.**
- **Conduct floodproofing by using flood-resistant materials on lowest levels of the home below Base Flood Elevation.**
- **Install other sustainable and resilient building elements (exterior roofing, siding, and other materials; energy-efficient appliances).**

Construction of new homes and renovations with resilient building materials will cut down on long-term maintenance and replacement costs to homeowners in future years. The best examples of these materials include siding, roofing, and landscaping. This is not required by the San Marcos Development Code or Building Codes, and is instead an optional best practice that will lengthen the useful life of home materials. See Appendix A for recommendations on building materials that fit well in Blanco Gardens.

Recommendations

HSG 5.1: Consider expanding existing home improvement or home rehabilitation incentives to owners. To be most effective in Blanco Gardens, the program should consider age-in-place modifications and flood resilience upgrades as eligible uses for program funds. These modifications can include replacing inaccessible features like steps with ramps, the addition of grab bars in bathtubs/showers (for age-in-place), and moving HVAC units off of the lowest floors (flood resilience). This may supplement homebuyer or homeowner assistance programs funded by the federal Community Development Block Grant.

HSG 5.2: Promote the use of resilient building materials for new homes and renovations. Because these are not regulated in San Marcos' current Development Code, recommended materials are advisory and can be promoted for their potential cost savings and longevity.

HSG 5.3: Provide incentives for property owners to incorporate green infrastructure features into new and existing homes. These features could include rainwater cisterns, rain gardens, and permeable pavers, among others.




Section **3** Subcont
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BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



Blanco Gardens is integrated with the local economy of San Marcos and the Central Texas region; however, some unique aspects of the Plan Area exist. After a broad overview of the business environment and the workforce in Blanco Gardens today, the subsections in this topic discuss how to retain what exists in Blanco Gardens while also promoting what does not exist and/or is desired in the future. Appendix B – Existing Conditions Analysis provides an overview of the currently operating businesses in Blanco Gardens.



One of many small businesses in the Neighborhood.

1. EXISTING BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND WORKFORCE

The extent and diversity of businesses within Blanco Gardens today are an important community asset. This section covers how to retain the businesses already in the community.

A robust workforce is also part of the community. Most workers living in Blanco Gardens commute out from the neighborhood for work. About 25% have a one-way commute of 30 minutes or more, a similar proportion to workers in Hays County²⁵. Bringing more jobs to Blanco Gardens offers the possibility of reducing commute times for workers by adding employment options closer to home.

Recommendation:

BIZ 1.1: Communicate the business and employment opportunities and needs within and adjacent to the Plan Area to the Greater San Marcos Partnership, Chamber of Commerce, and City of San Marcos Economic Development Division to help promote low vacancy rates of existing retail spaces and/or commercial buildings.



Cuevas Produce.



K.A.D. Korner Store.



Spincity Washateria.

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A common issue raised during engagement events was ensuring businesses remain good neighbors that fit within Blanco Gardens' existing residential fabric and community.

Improved access to existing businesses was discussed with the steering committee as being a key way to address this issue. Some residents reported trouble reaching businesses without driving there, especially if crossing a busy street is needed. Moreover, most business entrances are optimized for drivers, meaning they face parking lots and access roads and are positioned to face away from the neighborhood. Walking, cycling, and bus-riding customers may have to go all the way around a commercial building or strip mall for access, even if they live nearby.

Recommendation:

BIZ 1.2: Encourage business owners to orient an entrance for restaurant and retail storefronts toward the neighborhood, rather than solely toward SH-80 and IH-35. For existing commercial buildings where this is not practical, encourage wayfinding or inviting paths that prioritize customers arriving from within the neighborhood. Encourage/require the addition of bicycle racks at entrances.

CASE STUDY

CENTRAL CORRIDOR BUSINESS RESOURCES COLLABORATIVE *Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN*

A key link between the adjacent cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota is the east-west University Avenue, known as the Central Corridor²⁶. In the mid-2000s, a light rail transit line and reconfiguration of the avenue were approved to improve local transportation options and reduce congestion. Multiple business owners along University Ave. expressed concern about whether their establishments could survive the disruption of the planned four-year construction timeline. In response to this and other challenges in the neighborhood, a group of foundations began the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative²⁷.

The Collaborative offered several initiatives over a ten-year period before, during, and after construction to drive local businesses' success. The simplest were "Open For

Business" marketing campaigns that highlighted one University Avenue business each week during heavy construction phases²⁸. The spotlight provided needed exposure and revenues during access disruptions, especially for restaurants that depended on breakfast and lunchtime traffic. Other programs included small Ready for Rail grants and loans to fund improvements, coordinated information about construction stages and timing, and training for business owners to adapt their operations for physical changes like losing on-street parking and street-facing loading zones.²⁹

A second challenge has been coexisting with recent construction projects in the Plan Area, from flood infrastructure installation to local street resurfacing and IH-35 construction. While the benefits of this work will be welcome, mitigation efforts are needed to retain customers and prevent business loss.

Recommendation:

BIZ 1.3: Develop a plan to support local businesses in the event of another construction or infrastructure project planned for Blanco Gardens. Ensure physical access for customers is clear and well-signed, and participate in marketing efforts to ensure the public knows they remain open.

BIZ 1.4: As part of such a business support plan, consider a public marketing campaign to highlight and attract more customers to businesses impacted by construction at their doorsteps. This may be designed as a collaboration with the Greater San Marcos Partnership or San Marcos Chamber of Commerce. The case study of the Central Corridor Business Resources Collaborative in Minneapolis and St. Paul on page 68 provides a model.



A view of University Avenue in St. Paul, MN nearing the end of construction.

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

2. SPURRING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This subsection covers how to encourage desired commercial uses that are not yet present and ensure they fit well with the neighborhood. Blanco Gardens enjoys nearby access to commercial and retail services along SH-80. However, there remains demand among Plan Area residents for additional businesses, especially for more walkable destinations. Grocery stores, coffee shops, restaurants, and services such as doctor's and dentist's offices were the most requested business types, each of which could be appropriate within the existing land use mix of the Plan Area.

Recommendations:

BIZ 2.1: Assess the unmet local demand in and surrounding Blanco Gardens for commonly requested business types. If robust demand exists, encourage entrepreneurs or interested prospective businesses looking to open in San Marcos to explore opening these businesses in the commercially zoned areas of Blanco Gardens, particularly vacant structures along IH-35, Linda Drive, and on the edge of the neighborhood.

BIZ 2.2: Periodically catalog existing vacant commercial space within the Plan Area to determine what type, size, and locations exist.

BIZ 2.3: Focus business growth on key corridors and blocks within the neighborhood, such as along Linda Drive.

BIZ 2.4: Discourage heavy industrial distribution, storage, or other uses which create significant truck traffic, noise, or air pollution in and around the neighborhood.

BIZ 2.5: Support requests for mixed-use or live-work building types in existing commercial areas in the neighborhood to provide residential units alongside commercial uses. This helps support both business and housing needs identified by residents.



Pizza Hut located in shopping center.



Empty storefront in shopping center.



Shopping center in the northern corner of the neighborhood.

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 Blanco Gardens.

Blanco Gardens is a primarily residential neighborhood. Almost all lots are dedicated to single-family homes or apartment buildings. Together these comprise the Plan Area's predominant land use, with limited areas zoned for open space, commercial, civic/institutional and utility-dedicated uses within the Plan Area's perimeter. Figure 3.8 details the parcel-level land uses within Blanco Gardens.

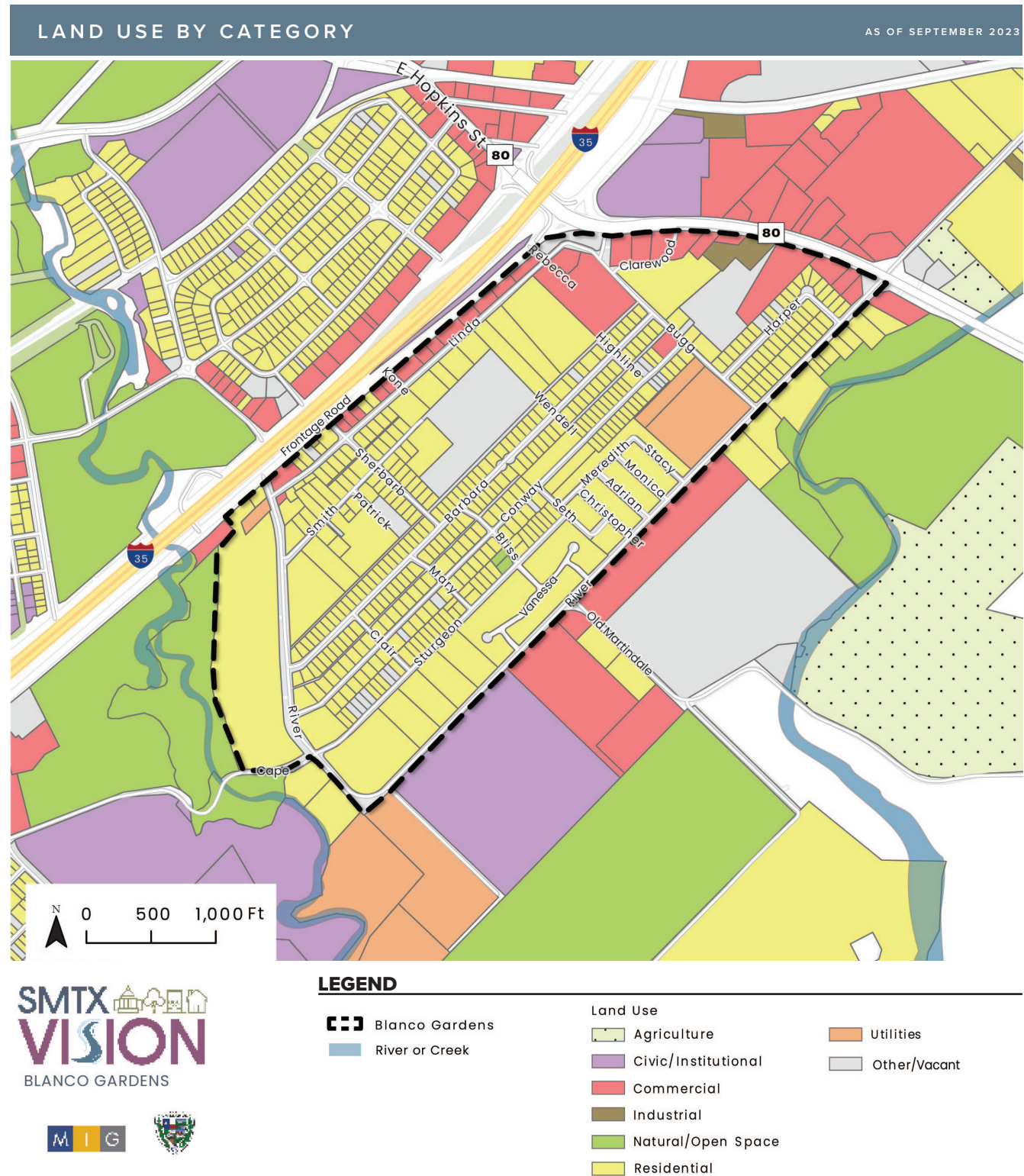
Much of the buildable land within Blanco Gardens is already occupied with existing homes, businesses, and public facilities. New development will largely rely on infill development of vacant or empty lots. In keeping with the guiding principle not to contribute to displacement, occupied homes and operating businesses are not candidates for redevelopment. Instead, adding new buildings to the Plan Area should only be encouraged on vacant and undeveloped sites, as the following subsection details.



Construction in the Neighborhood.

BUILDING FORM & DEVELOPMENT

Figure 3.8





1. PUBLIC FACILITIES

The City of San Marcos owns several properties adjacent to the plan boundary on the south side of River Road. New public facilities proposed on these lots should take into consideration the needs of the community with regards to the look and feel of new structures, their purpose and ability to serve the residents, and opportunities to enhance recreation and open space on City lots.

Another possible use for undeveloped sites is to transform them into public park space, as mentioned in the Public Spaces & Amenities section on page 49. In short, these would remain open spaces so the neighborhood context does not change, but also offer recreation space for all.

Recommendations:

BFD 1.1: Identify vacant or underutilized properties in the Plan Area that do not house residents and business owners. This [data mapping tool](#) offered by the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy's Center for Geospatial Solutions, for example, can supplement a local data and site analysis³⁰.

BFD 1.2: Consider any vacant sites that are unlikely to be developed due to environmental or other reasons as future parks or recreational spaces.

BUILDING FORM & DEVELOPMENT

2. PRIVATE PROPERTIES

Adding new buildings to vacant spaces within existing neighborhoods like Blanco Gardens offers advantages over building on greenfield sites at the periphery of San Marcos. Necessary utility connections, curbs, gutters, and other street infrastructure are already in place, leading to cost savings and could help an owner move more quickly on their desired vision for their property. The Plan Area is mostly built out, but several vacant sites remain. These include: a large lot accessed from the dead end that marks the northern end of Smith Lane, selected lots on the 1200 block of Conway Drive, and selected lots on the 600 and 700 blocks of Sturgeon Drive. These could be developed in a way that is compatible with existing development. All of these properties are currently zoned single-family or multi-family.

Recommendations:

BFD 2.1: Consider and support “gentle density” for new housing on small existing lots with diverse housing types such as attached homes, duplexes, and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that aligns with the Neighborhood Character Study. Recommend development types that are desired by Blanco Gardens residents that fit with existing physical character (including massing, height, orientation, and style).

BFD 2.2: Explore partnerships to create a Community Land Trust (CLT), land bank, or a similar model that facilitates transforming vacant lots in the Plan Area into new homes or other productive land uses.

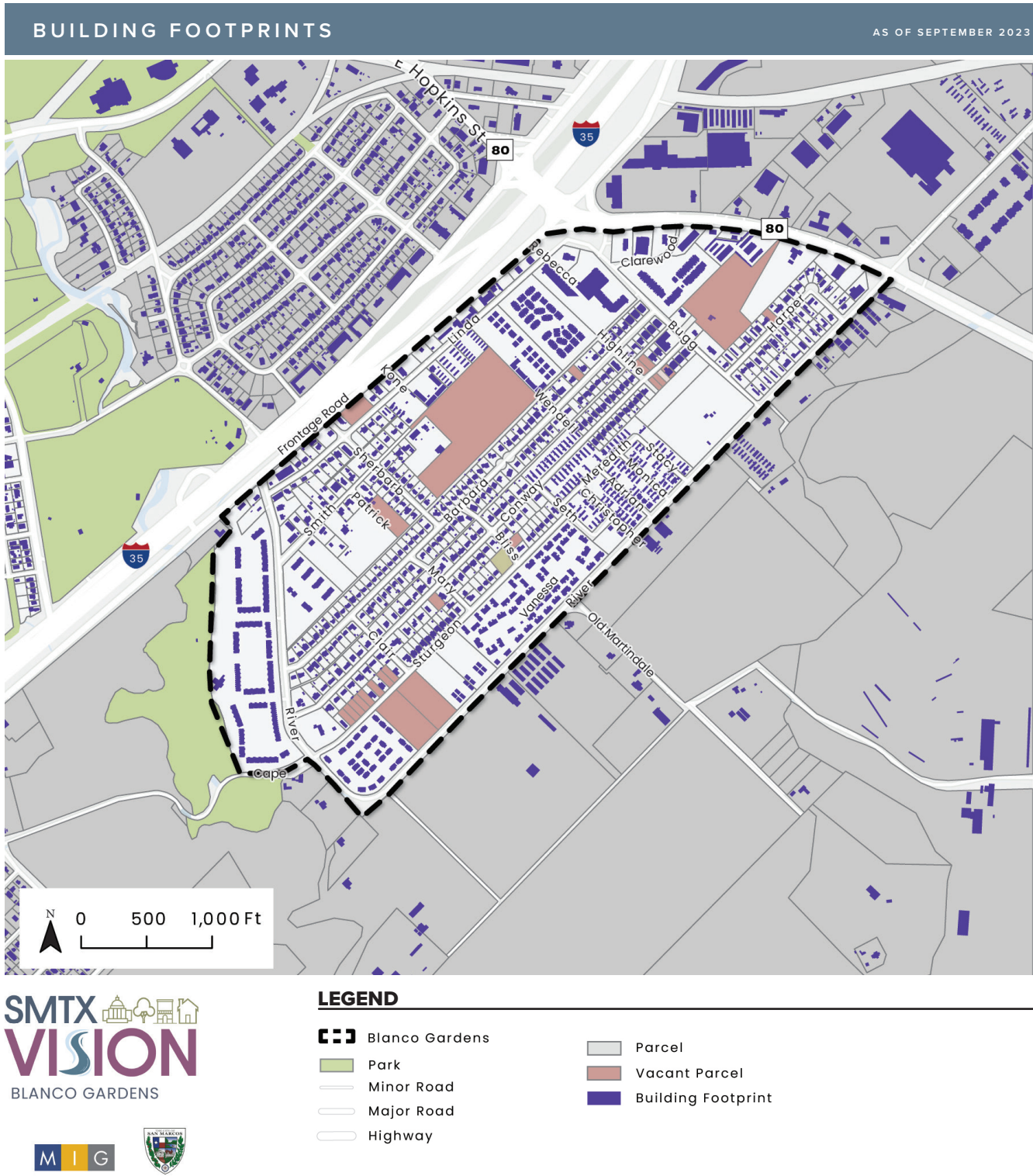
BFD 2.3: Encourage cluster-style development on large, vacant infill lots to support “gentle density” and preserve open space.

BFD 2.4: 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).

BFD 2.5: Encourage or require neighborhood-oriented design attributes on new or renovated structures, such as sidewalks, front doors which face the neighborhood, and other pedestrian design features which fit the neighborhood’s physical character.

BFD 2.6: Coordinate with the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update to implement strategies relevant to infill development in the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood to mitigate flooding and other natural hazards.

Figure 3.9



4 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.

This action plan outlines steps the City of San Marcos (COSM) 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.

Table 4.1

ACTION PLAN

PLAN TOPIC: HISTORY, ARTS, & CULTURE

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

PLAN TOPIC: GETTING AROUND

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders/ 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
Priority Connections	Install signage or other wayfinding measures to designate a “walking loop trail” along key streets throughout the neighborhood. Potential priority streets could include River Road, Bugg Lane, Linda Drive, and Barbara Drive.	COSM	COSM, Existing & Future Residents
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 & Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers
Transit	Improve existing bus stops to provide shelters, lighting, and transit information such as bus routes/times and recommended stops. Increase the frequency of monitoring the condition of bus stops, benches, and shelters to ensure they remain usable.	COSM	COSM, CARTS

Table 4.1 (continued)

ACTION PLAN

PLAN TOPIC: STREETSCAPES

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders/ 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 Cape Rd at Stokes Park. Evaluate locations throughout the neighborhood that are dimly lit or lack lighting infrastructure and may be candidates for additional streetlights and/or pedestrian-oriented lights.	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/TxDOT	COSM, Existing & Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers
Maintenance	Evaluate the upkeep and maintenance of existing streets and City property for overgrown vegetation, and coordinate with TxDOT on portions of streets under their jurisdiction within the Plan Area. Identify streets eligible for “Adopt-a-Spot” Program.	COSM, Existing & Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers & Business Owners	COSM, TxDOT; Existing & Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers & Business Owners, Nonprofit & 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.	COSM	COSM, Existing & Future Residents

PLAN TOPIC: PUBLIC SPACES & AMENITIES

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders/ Partners
Existing Public Spaces	Continue to maintain the existing park and trail facilities in Blanco Gardens for regular use and assess frequency of cleaning and maintenance.	COSM	COSM, Property Owners/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 Blanco Gardens.	COSM	COSM, Existing & Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers
Hazards and Nuisances	Develop public outreach campaign/strategy to inform Blanco Gardens households and businesses of new gray infrastructure projects and policy changes that will contribute to flood mitigation and prevention. Evaluate key areas with high volumes of trash within the public right-of-way and/or parks and explore additional ways to support litter removal and prevention. Inventory existing tree canopy in the neighborhood to evaluate existing conditions and where tree canopy could be expanded. Work with the City Urban Forester to determine strategies to require appropriate tree species and their location in the neighborhood.	COSM	COSM, Existing & Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers & Business Owners

Table 4.1 (continued)

ACTION PLAN

PLAN TOPIC: HOUSING

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders/ Partners
Neighborhood Context	Update and adopt a Housing Action Plan	COSM	COSM, Existing & Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers
Market-based Homes	Evaluate potential barriers in the Development Code to the construction of smaller housing types.	COSM; Property Owners/Managers	COSM, Builders, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners
Subsidized Homes	Collaborate with the San Marcos Housing Authority to better understand and document the C. M. Allen Homes' long-term physical needs.	COSM; San Marcos Housing Authority	COSM, Builders, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers
Ownership	Research and evaluate cities that have developed a program which provides a catalog of pre-approved home plans.	COSM, Builders, Property Owners/Managers	COSM, Builders, Existing and Future Residents, Property Owners/Managers
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/Managers

PLAN TOPIC: BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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

Table 4.1 (continued)

ACTION PLAN

PLAN TOPIC: BUILDING FORM & DEVELOPMENT

Strategy	Short-Term Action Items	Driver	Potential Leaders/ 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/ 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/Managers; Builders	COSM, Builders and Development Community, Existing and Future residents, Property Owners/Managers

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Table 4.2 includes a variety of funding/tools identifies 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.

Table 4.2

FINANCING TOOLS

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
Getting Around	Promoting Resilient Operations for Transformative, Efficient, and Cost-saving Transportation Program (PROTECT)	U.S. Department of Transportation	Grant	Varies	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
Bike, pedestrian, and other transit projects that increase the resilience of surface transportation infrastructure from the impacts of flooding, wildfires, extreme weather events, and other natural disasters.	Complete requirements for each annual cycle announced in the spring.	Annual cycle; Submit full application on grants.gov .	https://www.transportation.gov/rural/grant-toolkit/promoting-resilient-operations-transformative-efficient-and-cost-saving

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
Public Spaces & Amenities	National Fish Passage Program	U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service	Grant	Up to \$36,000,000	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		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/sites/default/files/2023-01/IIJA%2040552%20EECBG%20Program%20EECS%20Template%20for%20Local%20Governments.pdf	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/
Applicant must partner with a Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office to either remove existing barriers to fish passage or provide an alternative route for fish to use.	See Application instructions at https://www.fws.gov/service/us-fish-and-wildlife-service-seeks-project-applications-36-million-fish-passage-funding	Apply online by early December; annual cycle.	https://www.fws.gov/page/national-fish-passage-programs-bipartisan-infrastructure-law-2024-funding-opportunity-guidance

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 Blanco Gardens 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 Blanco Gardens. 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. To maintain the Area Plan's focus on equity, the City may also solicit feedback from possible future residents, to understand how the Plan Area can continue to accommodate new residents and the types of households that express interest in living there.

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 Blanco Gardens' 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 neighborhood.

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 neighborhood³¹. 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. Specially focused groups may contribute to topical efforts, such as the San Marcos Art League for adding more public art to the Plan Area or the Great Springs Project for connecting Blanco Gardens to the larger trail system.

OTHER UNITS OF GOVERNMENT

Capital Area Rural Transportation System

(CARTS): The City should continue enhancing this partnership to advance transit solutions. Technical assistance can be offered by external transit industry experts to better understand the local demand and which transit solutions are the best fit.

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. HUD also offers technical assistance to recapitalize and preserve public housing units, which may be needed for the C.M. Allen Homes³².

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT): This state entity is a key stakeholder in the neighborhood due to the presence of IH-35 and SH-80. The City and TxDOT must coordinate particularly on roadway and intersection improvements to achieve many of the recommendations in this plan.



A new single-family home with an accessibility ramp constructed through the City's Community Development Block Grant program.

5

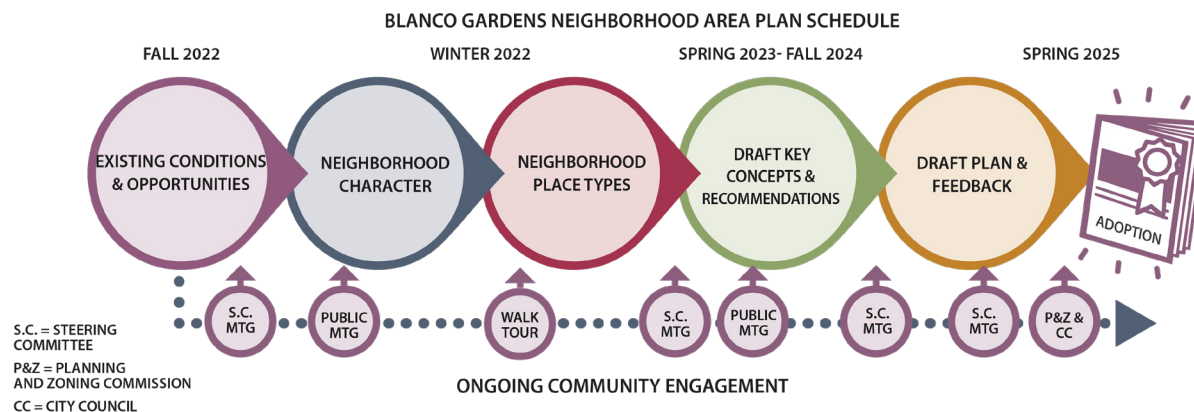
CONCLUSION

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The City completed a multiyear 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 Blanco Gardens neighborhood and the needs of the residents, property owners, and stakeholders. This plan recommends actions which attempt to strike a balance between achieving the dual aims of 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 Blanco Gardens.

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 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.

ENDNOTES

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SMTX VISION



SAN MARCOS **BLANCO** **GARDENS** **AREA PLAN**

APPENDICES



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**SAN MARCOS
BLANCO
GARDENS
NEIGHBORHOOD
EXISTING
CONDITIONS
(AS OF 2022)**







SAN MARCOS

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN

SMTX  VISION

M I G



“

We have two incredibly beautiful rivers with very unique ecosystems. Community connections are really important and I notice them here; knowing people your whole life and being open are assets of our neighborhood.”

-Blanco Gardens resident

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INTRODUCTION



Conway Park.

The City of San Marcos adopted its Comprehensive Plan in October 2024. Known as Vision SMTX, the Comprehensive Plan’s goal is to build on the past to guide the growth of the City for the next 20 to 30 years. It is based on community input and feedback, and includes the community’s vision for a variety of areas that will influence growth in the years ahead. This Neighborhood Plan complements the efforts of the Vision SMTX Comprehensive Plan.

Purpose of This Document

Carrying out the Vision SMTX goals in Blanco Gardens requires a deeper dive into the neighborhood's assets and needs. The Existing Conditions Report begins this process with a detailed snapshot of Blanco Gardens in its current form. This document begins with a demographic snapshot of Blanco Gardens, including what's here and how long it's been here, from the built environment and government services to natural features. The analysis also details where residents live, what they value and contribute, and known assets and challenges. The analysis concludes by addressing workers and business owners, with an overview of the local economy and business environment.

The planning team used this analysis to understand what the community values, wants, and needs based on its current conditions. The result is a future-focused document on how to effectively enhance and add assets, and resolve constraints.

Timeframe

The Neighborhood Area Plan process was approved by City Council on August 2, 2022, and the Blanco Gardens Area Plan kicked off the same month. The Existing Conditions Report was the first portion of the Area Plan, and served as a baseline and foundation for the full plan.

The City of San Marcos previously committed to completing the Neighborhood Character Study component. As a long-desired product by community members, the Neighborhood Character Study will partially rely on the information detailed in the Existing Conditions Report.

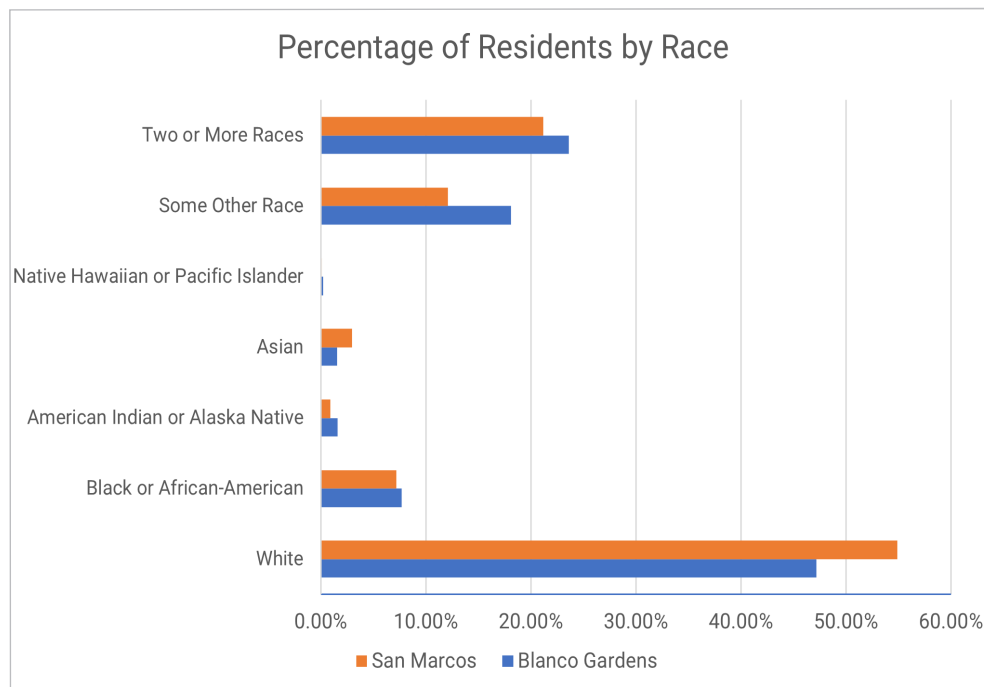
CONTEXT

Area Description

Blanco Gardens encompasses 296 acres on the south side of the City of San Marcos, entirely within Hays County. The area has about 4,500 residents, or 6.5% of the total City population of 68,578¹. Blanco Gardens is bound by Interstate 35 on the north, River Road on the south, State Highway 80 on the east, and the San Marcos River, Cape Road, and another portion of River Road on the west. The neighborhood includes areas with medium-density multifamily, low-density single-family homes, and multiple commercial, retail, and recreational uses.

Demographic Snapshot

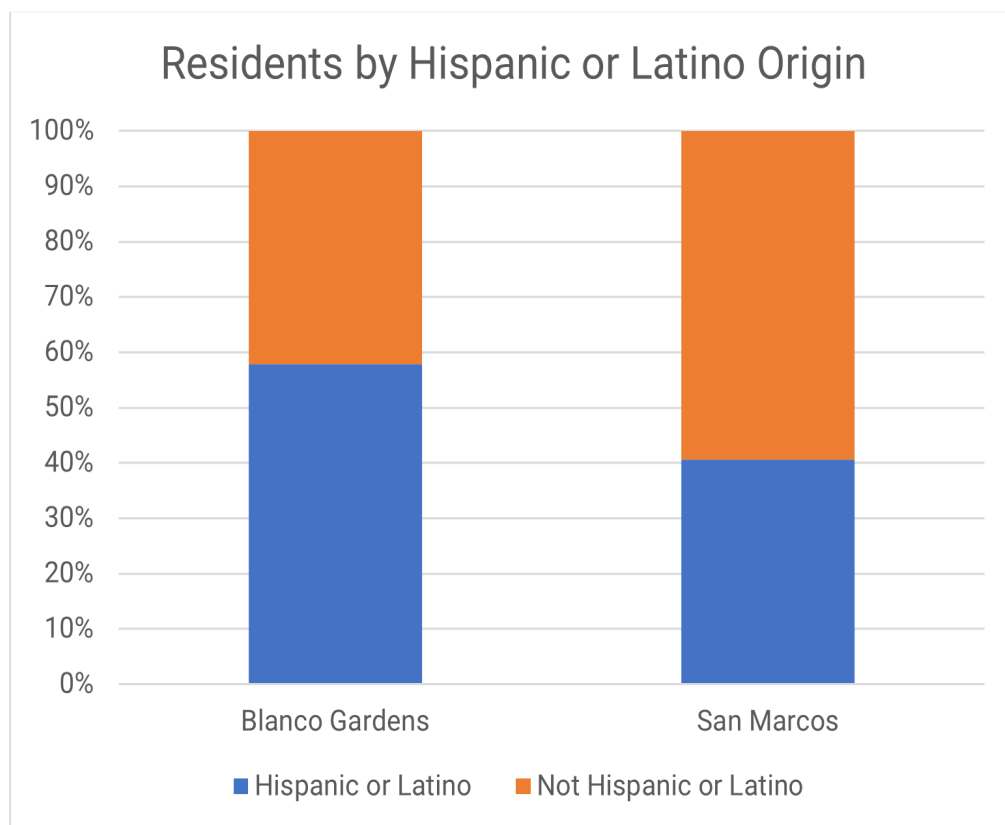
Blanco Gardens has an estimated population of 4,483 according to the U.S. Census. However, the actual population is likely higher due to the undercounting of students. Texas State University students who live in the neighborhood during



Source: 2020 Decennial Census and Five-Year American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau.

the academic year may be counted at their permanent addresses. The neighborhood population is approximately 47.1% male and 52.9% female¹. Blanco Gardens is also a racially diverse neighborhood, with a significant presence of Hispanic or Latino/a ethnic heritage. This totals almost 58% of Blanco Gardens residents of any race, above the citywide average of 41%¹. The charts in this section provide comparisons in more detail.

There is relatively more diversity of ages in Blanco Gardens than citywide, and notably more seniors. About 27.5% of Blanco Gardens residents speak at least some Spanish and 1.5% speak another language, with the remaining 71% speaking English only¹. Income in the neighborhood is similar to the rest of San Marcos, with 48.9% of Blanco Gardens households earn less than the median citywide household income of \$42,030¹. There are fewer households at either end of the income spectrum than in the rest of the City (i.e., fewer with annual incomes more than \$100,000 and less than \$25,000), indicating Blanco Gardens is a middle-income neighborhood.



Source: 2020 Decennial Census and Five-Year American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau.

AREA PROFILE

Existing Land Use and Forms

Land uses in Blanco Gardens are primarily residential, with some commercial and retail uses along arterial streets. Residences include one-story detached single-family homes, manufactured homes, and garden-style apartment complexes. Businesses are either standalone in one- and two-story structures or connected in strip-style retail centers. Most face the IH-35 Frontage Road, River Road, Bugg Lane, and SH-80.

Institutions and Services

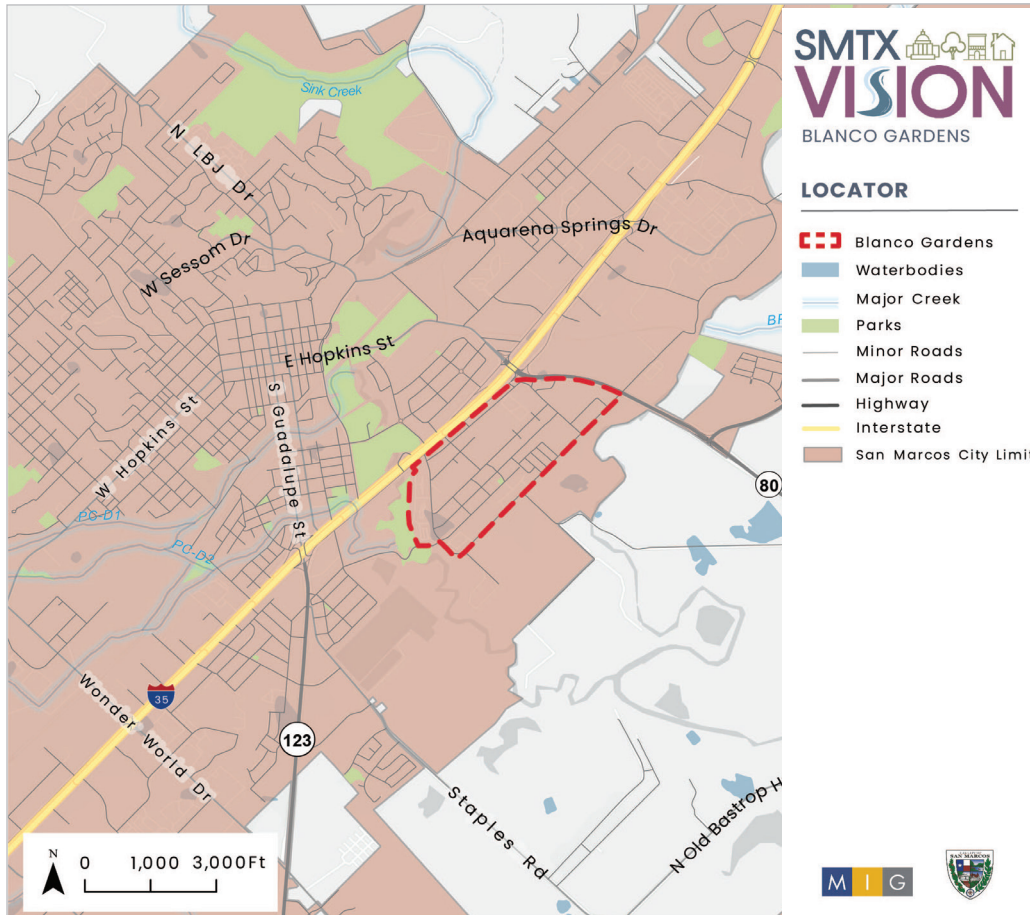
There are no schools within the neighborhood boundary, although several are nearby. Public school students are in the attendance zone of Mendez Elementary School and Goodnight Middle School—both located south of Blanco Gardens—and San Marcos High School. For most municipal needs requiring in-person services, residents travel Downtown as there are no City offices in Blanco Gardens except those supporting the utility facilities and the animal shelter. Two federal services with local presence are the Social Security Administration office and the US Post Office, both in the San Marcos Place shopping center on Bugg Lane.

There are no houses of worship, health care facilities, or higher education campuses in the neighborhood. However, significant numbers of Texas State University students live in Blanco Gardens and commute to the TXST campus.

Zoning

Much of the neighborhood is zoned for either multifamily uses at a maximum density of 12 or 24 units per gross acre (designations MF-12 and MF-24) or for single-family residential (SF-6). The exceptions are the parcels facing IH-35 and SH-80, which are zoned for General Commercial, as well as the areas housing the animal shelter, wastewater treatment plant, and future household waste center, which are zoned for public uses. Blanco Gardens is not within a historic overlay, historic district, or tax increment reinvestment zone. The only special overlay designated by the City within Blanco Gardens is the environmental overlay covering southern portions of the neighborhood; otherwise, regular zoning and municipal regulations apply. More information on this topic is provided in the Neighborhood Character Study.

BLANCO GARDENS CONTEXT MAP



Built Environment and Housing

Initial development in Blanco Gardens generally occurred in the areas closer to downtown and IH-35, spreading later to the south and east. Limited infill development has been constructed on available parcels, as well as additions to homes and commercial buildings where there is available lot space.

Single-family homes in Blanco Gardens are mainly one-story detached structures built in a vernacular style. Apartment buildings have been designed as mostly two- or three-story structures in garden arrangements. Most residential structures are built with timber frames and lined with brick or wood-sided exteriors, similar to the common structures in nearby San Marcos neighborhoods with the exception of downtown. There are no designated historic structures or historic properties within the neighborhood area, but several are located adjacent to the Plan Area boundary.

There are approximately 1,700 residences in the area, of which 1,574 are occupied and 124 are vacant¹. Approximately 22% of Blanco Gardens households are occupied by homeowners and the remainder by renters. In the northern portion of Blanco Gardens, homeowners have spent a median time of 27 years in their current homes, and a median time of 6 years in the southern portion². Renters in all parts of the neighborhood spend a median of 4 years in their homes.

With large areas of the neighborhood zoned for multifamily uses, Blanco Gardens hosts multiple apartment complexes and has two mobile home parks. Tenants include a mix of students, families, young adults, and seniors. There are additional small and large apartment complexes, as well as a third mobile home park across River Road adjacent to the neighborhood boundary. The majority of area residents live in these privately operated apartment complexes and mobile home parks.

The neighborhood also hosts a number of affordable housing units, which are operated by the San Marcos Housing Authority (SMHA). Some housing choice voucher holders also live in privately owned rentals within the neighborhood. Residents in the C. M. Allen Homes and those with vouchers are typically more stable than other renters and typically have little turnover. Because of their infrequent moves and the relative scarcity of affordable rentals, SMHA has a lengthy waiting list for residents seeking affordable homes.



Intersection at Clarewood Drive and Bugg Lane.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC WORKS

Planned Projects

Ongoing capital improvement projects recently completed in Blanco Gardens include construction of Conway Park, utility replacement and repaving on Barbara Drive, and utility relocation and widening of the IH-35 Frontage Road³. Projects in progress or planned in the next decade in and around the neighborhood include:

- a Household Hazardous Waste Facility on Animal Shelter Road.
- Wastewater Master Plan: The City is working on an update to its wastewater master plan to set out short, medium, and long term projects to address wastewater infrastructure needs.
- San Marcos River Restoration project: a Federal partnership to complete restoration measures along the San Marcos River.
- Highway 80 Utility Project: Utility improvements to Highway 80 along Old Martindale Road to construct a new lift station, force main, and water main.
- Linda Drive Improvements: Replacement of approximately 3,200 feet of sewer main from the City's main lift station off River Road along Linda Drive and improvements to allow for future conversion of electric overhead to underground within the Blanco Gardens neighborhood.
- Blanco Riverine Flood Mitigation Project: including a berm, floodwall, and diversion channel to protect Blanco Gardens from flood events⁴. The \$20.4 million project, funded by federal and state grants, began in 2022 and is scheduled for completion in 2024.
- Blanco Gardens Drainage Improvements: related drainage improvements to complement the Flood Mitigation Project, funded by the City and including new storm sewers and inlets⁵.
- Addition of new storm sewer systems along Conway Drive, Barbara Drive, and River Road.

- Flood Emergency Warning System: installation of rain and stream gauges along the San Marcos River as part of an early flood warning system.
- Mobility IH-35: continued IH-35 improvements, including relocation and construction of exit and entrance ramps, bridge, and underpass reconstruction, undertaken by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)⁶.
- Install concrete channels within the alleyways parallel to Barbara Drive and Conway Drive to connect to stormwater pipes in River Road.
- Replace adjacent outdated Water and Wastewater Infrastructure.
- Regrade and crown a portion of River Road.
- Repave areas of major underground utility upgrades.
- New diversion channel along River Road at Animal Shelter Road.
- Moving neighborhood overhead electric and telecom lines to underground conduit for higher reliability, and resistance to outages during storm events.

This list is subject to change depending on priorities determined by the City Council, available funding, the priorities of non-city entities, and other factors.



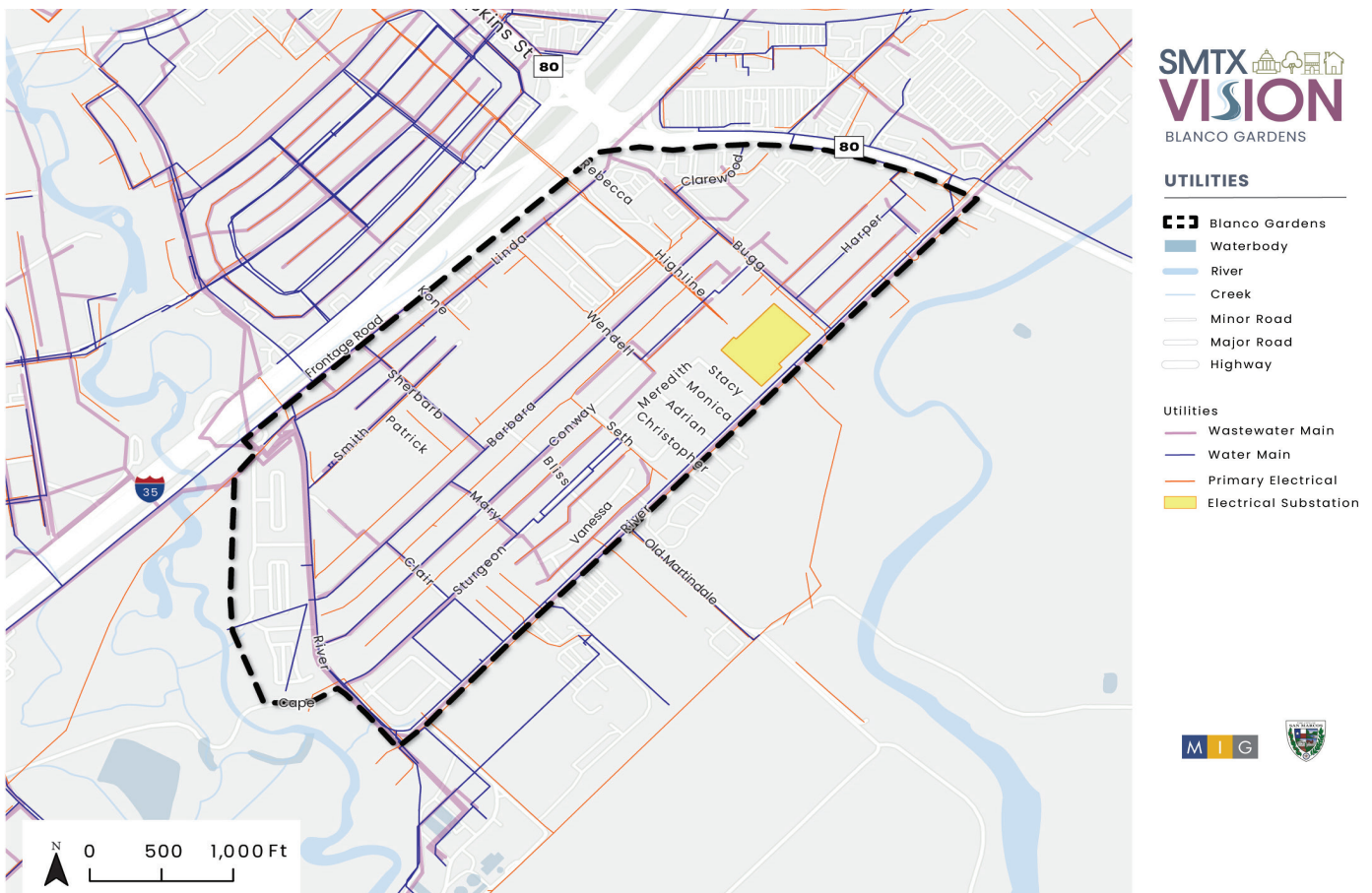
Streetscape features near the intersection of River Rd and Cape Rd.

Utilities

The City of San Marcos provides water, wastewater, and electricity services to the Plan Area, and CenterPoint Energy provides natural gas service. A cluster of service facilities for utilities and municipal operations are located in eastern Blanco Gardens and just beyond:

- Since 1950, the Lower Colorado River Authority Transmission Services Corporation (LCRA) has operated an electric substation on River Road, between Bugg Lane and Stacy Lane, which covers 8.28 acres.
- The Animal Shelter is located on the south side of Animal Shelter Road.
- The San Marcos Municipal Wastewater Treatment Facility is located on the south side of Animal Shelter Road, just outside the Blanco Gardens area. This facility is 20 acres, and has been in operation since 2002.
- The San Marcos Water Treatment Plant, the San Marcos Regional Airport, and a TxDOT maintenance facility and motor pool are sited just north and east of the neighborhood.

UTILITIES



Blanco Gardens' street network was primarily built between the 1960s and 1980s. Most streets are classified as local, except the major arterial SH-80, the minor arterial River Road, and the IH-35 freeway. Traffic counts conducted by the City showed SH-80 east of IH-35 as one of the busiest areas in San Marcos, with 37,300 daily vehicles. Occasional congestion occurs on entrance ramps to IH-35 and on its frontage roads, but rarely backs up into the neighborhood.

The Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS) operates Bus Line 4 through the neighborhood, starting at the downtown transit center and continuing north through Blanco Gardens to the Wal-Mart shopping center north of Highway 80 (see reference map). Eight stops are distributed through Blanco Gardens. Buses operate every 30 minutes, from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, but not on weekends or holidays. Texas State University operates the Bobcat Shuttle service, which does not stop directly in the neighborhood, but several shuttle lines run nearby on the IH-35 Frontage Road.

SMTX VISION
BLANCO GARDENS

TRANSPORTATION

Legend:

- Blanco Gardens
- Waterbody
- Major Creek
- Park
- Minor Road
- Major Road
- Highway
- Interstate
- Transportation
- Texas State Tram Route
- CART Bus Route
- Bike Facilities
- Sidewalk
- TMP Greenway
- CART Bus Stop

Map Labels: Skins St, 80, 35, Rebecca, Clarewood, Bugg, Harper, Highline, Wendell, Mereditin, Stacy, Monica, Adrian, Christopher, Seth, Conway, Barbara, Mary, Vanessa, River, Old Martindale, Clair, Sturgeon, Smith, Patrick, Sherbarb, Frontage Road, 35, Cape.

Scale: 0 500 1,000 Ft

North Arrow: N

Few crashes occur in Blanco Gardens relative to the rest of San Marcos. Still, because the City set a goal to reduce injury and fatality rates from all crash types, meeting that goal may impact the neighborhood's transportation system. Those impacts include engineering and design guidelines that favor narrower streets and raised, highly visible pedestrian crossings, signing streets for lower auto speeds, and greater enforcement of speed limits.

Connections to Adjacent Areas

Crossing IH-35 is necessary for all travelers to reach Downtown and other parts of west San Marcos. A bike and pedestrian path is currently under construction next to the San Marcos River and will provide a connection under IH-35. A connection to the adjacent neighborhood to the south occurs via Cape Road, which does not have sidewalks or bicycle facilities. River Road and IH-35 Frontage Road connect Blanco Gardens to neighborhoods north of the plan area. These neighborhoods are easier to reach without a car because of good sidewalk coverage and few barriers. The CARTS #4 bus also connects Blanco Gardens directly to the neighborhoods north of the plan area.

Circulation within most of Blanco Gardens is open and well-connected. However, some older apartment complexes only have one entrance and exit whether for drivers, cyclists, or pedestrians. Additionally, there are several dead-end streets in the center of the neighborhood.

Maintenance and Operations

Aside from the major capital projects listed above, replacement and maintenance of assets in Blanco Gardens is governed by the City's Capital Improvement Plan, five-year street maintenance plan, and sidewalk maintenance and infill plan. These documents indicate that Blanco Gardens can expect ongoing investment to keep these assets in good condition.

NATURAL FEATURES AND ENVIRONMENT

The San Marcos River forms a natural boundary at the western edge of the neighborhood, and the Blanco River runs just beyond the northern and eastern extents of Blanco Gardens. A short trail runs north-to-south along the San Marcos River, behind the Redpoint Apartments. This trail has three direct access points: from the IH-35 Frontage Rd., from Cape Rd. near Stokes Park, and behind the Redpoint Apartments.

The J. J. Stokes Park/Cape's Camp complex and the smaller Conway Park are the only public parks in the neighborhood⁷. The Rio Vista, William & Eleanor Crook, and Ramon Lucio Parks are nearby, but they are challenging to reach as they are on the opposite side of IH-35. About three-quarters of Blanco Gardens residences are within a 10-minute walk of one of these areas⁸, the ideal distance for promoting regular outdoor recreation and active transportation.

Residents living north of Bugg Lane are the farthest from parks and open spaces. To the north of the neighborhood some access points to the Blanco River exist, but these are informal and not well-marked, making it unclear what is publicly accessible. These areas are not regularly maintained, do not have playgrounds, athletic fields, or any other facilities, and may be subject to regular flooding.

Topography and Natural Hazards

Blanco Gardens is at an average of 570 feet above sea level, with rolling terrain typical of the city and surrounding region. Because most of the neighborhood has been developed, there are no abrupt terrain changes or slopes preventing development, as demonstrated in the Natural Features map. The major natural threat, however, is the impact of floods.

NATURAL FEATURES



Two major flooding events occurred in San Marcos in 2015, one in May and another in November. Blanco Gardens is within the federally defined 100-year floodplain and was heavily impacted by both events. Significant repairs to public infrastructure was required.

To mitigate future flooding events of this scale and larger, the City is undertaking the Blanco Riverine Flood Mitigation Project, as noted in the Infrastructure and Public Works section above. The project is designed to protect Blanco Gardens from inundation of up to three feet in future flooding events, and to allow any encroaching floodwaters to recede more quickly.

Environmental Considerations

Blanco Gardens' air and water quality are routinely rated as good. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and US Environmental Protection Agency assess air quality from a Staples Road site near Blanco Gardens⁹. There have been no reports of exceptional concentrations of ozone or fine particulates in the last year. Concentrations are measured on a scale of 0 to 300 parts per million (ppm), with 100ppm being the threshold where negative health impacts begin. The average ozone level in 2022 in San Marcos was 31 ppm, and the highest level was 96 ppm¹⁰.

Existing tree canopy cover ranges from 23.2% in the southern end of Blanco Gardens to 29% on the northern end, just above the 22% average for all of San Marcos¹¹. There is more tree coverage in the single-family areas and closer to the riverbank than in areas of Blanco Gardens with apartments and commercial uses.



Entrance to Stokes Park.

ECONOMY AND BUSINESS

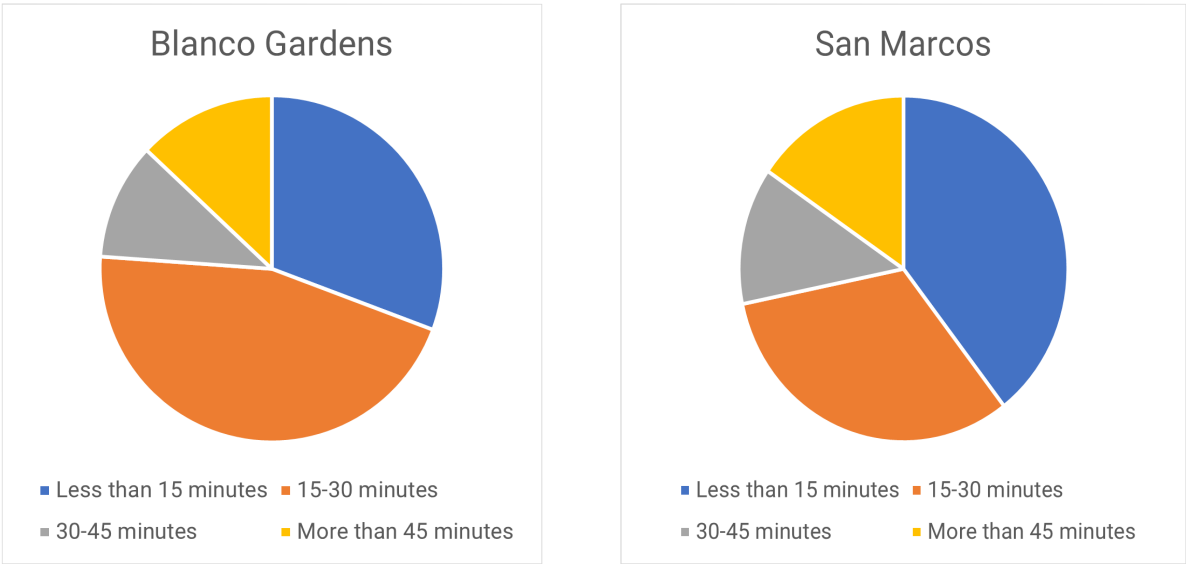
Business Community

Private businesses operating in Blanco Gardens include 29 retail and restaurant establishments, one daycare center, one industrial facility, and one hotel, most of these facing IH-35 or SH-80 and serving customers arriving by car. These, along with the government facilities and the LCRA substation mentioned above, comprise the business establishments located in the neighborhood.

The most common jobs in Blanco Gardens include retail, food service, and a handful of industrial and office positions, as well as leasing, management, and maintenance roles for the local apartment and mobile home complexes.

Workers

Because such a small proportion of jobs in the San Marcos area are within Blanco Gardens, almost all employed residents work elsewhere. Commute times to work for area residents are about the same as those of workers throughout San Marcos. Almost 50% of Blanco Gardens commuters have one-way commutes of 15 to 30 minutes, as demonstrated by the following charts. Most commuters travel using their own personal vehicle, with others utilizing public transit, carpools, walking, or biking to and from their jobs.



Source: 2020 Decennial Census and Five-Year American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau.

The extent of Blanco Gardens residents working from home either some or all of the time is unknown. However, most home-based jobs will require broadband internet service, defined by a consistent minimum of 25 megabites per second (mbps) download and 3 mbps upload speeds. Residents throughout the neighborhood can subscribe to cable broadband internet access offered by a variety of providers, such as Spectrum/Charter Communications and Astound/Grande Communications, that meets the service definition of broadband.

High-speed internet service is also an increasingly necessary service for business owners, and K-12 and college students participating in remote instruction and completing online assignments. Resident demand for home high-speed internet for recreation, communication, and other purposes is high, indicating that broadband service is a crucial asset.



Shopping center at the intersection of Clarewood Dr and SH-80.

INFORMAL AND INTANGIBLE IDENTITY

How Do Residents See Blanco Gardens?

Blanco Gardens' significant Hispanic population informs the local culture of the area, as does the common use of everyday Spanish. About 27.5% of residents speak at least some Spanish, and several businesses conduct their regular operations in both English and Spanish.

The K.A.D. Korner Store's community gathering place and the calendar of Housing Authority sponsored events at the C.M. Allen Homes also contribute to the cultural identity of the area. Residents of the C. M. Allen Homes maintain a sense of place and pride, in part because the low turnover of the community has allowed many residents to live here for years and even decades. The K.A.D. Korner Store offers a variety of after school programs and is in close proximity to Conway Park, the only City-owned park within the Neighborhood.

How Do Others See Blanco Gardens?

Other residents and visitors tend to associate the neighborhood with its major landmarks, including the San Marcos River and surrounding open spaces, the commercial areas that serve the broader community, and IH-35. There is also a tendency to associate the full neighborhood with the portions they know. For example, students may think of the student housing in the area when asked about Blanco Gardens, while families and people not associated with the University may think of the single-family areas they know well.

CONCLUSION



What's Working Well

Blanco Gardens enjoys a diverse population, a strong connection to natural and open spaces, clean air and water, developed infrastructure, and access to nearby jobs and schools. These qualities should be preserved and improved further when possible.



What Needs Improvement

The natural threat of flooding is being addressed with the Mitigation Project but is still a major concern, as is the aging of infrastructure. With mostly renters living in Blanco Gardens, residents move often and the neighborhood identity is not clearly defined. Building and marketing a clear brand for Blanco Gardens would fill a gap in its identity.



Aligning with the Vision SMTX Effort

The Vision SMTX process calls for aligning the Blanco Gardens Area Plan with other area plans. The Downtown, Dunbar, Heritage, and East Village Area Plans are being developed at the same time to allow complementary efforts. Future Area Plans will build on the Blanco Gardens effort.



Bringing It All Together

Where adjacent neighborhoods identify a shared issue, the Area Plan will provide appropriate, context-specific recommendations to achieve both neighborhood's goals. Where other areas identify citywide problems that also affect Blanco Gardens, Vision SMTX will recommend solutions that benefit all residents, regardless of their neighborhood.

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SMTX
VISION

**SAN MARCOS
BLANCO
GARDENS
NEIGHBORHOOD
CHARACTER
STUDY**



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1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Neighborhood Character Study is a crucial portion of the Neighborhood Area Plan because physical character helps create a neighborhood's experience. Factors ranging from buildings' height and massing to their relationship with natural spaces all contribute to an area's character. Thus, it is crucial to understand a neighborhood's character to effectively plan its future.

Data was gathered to better understand and document factors contributing to the neighborhood's character, such as lot size and coverage, architectural style, building massing and orientation, and more. The methodology is included further on in this section. Section 2 of the Study provides a description of quantitative metrics as well as qualitative factors that are difficult to express in numbers. This is done to better communicate the components of Blanco Gardens' physical character. In the final section, the study recommends how City regulations can be adopted or refined to ensure the neighborhood's character is respected and maintained.

The Neighborhood Character Study results were shared with the Blanco Gardens Steering Committee, which was formed to guide this Neighborhood Area Plan. Recommendations resulting from this study are included in the Neighborhood Area Plan.

NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY

The area that is Blanco Gardens today has long enjoyed abundant fresh water from natural springs and rivers, supporting human habitation and farming activity. When San Marcos was originally founded as a City, in 1844, it retained a small, rural character until the establishment of railroad lines in 1880 and the Southwest Texas State Normal School (predecessor of Texas State University) in 1903 yielded faster growth. As the community expanded from those modest origins and its physical footprint in what is today downtown, streets were laid out and neighborhoods began forming to the south and east. Blanco Gardens was situated in this area and had a larger population by the late 1960s.

The construction of IH-35 in the early 1970s provided a crucial transportation corridor for

the region. However, the freeway split Blanco Gardens from the older parts of San Marcos.

When the federal public housing program was created through the Federal Housing Act of 1937, states were allowed to pass enabling legislation to give local governments the authority to build affordable housing. Texas was among the earliest states to do so, and the San Marcos Housing Authority was founded in 1950 to meet this need locally. The C.M. Allen Homes were built in Blanco Gardens in 1965, adding 100 duplexes to the local housing stock that remain in place today. The K.A.D. Korner Store was also created as part of this initiative, and serves as a community center and resource hub for Blanco Gardens.



Single-story home with carport on Barbara Drive.



K.A.D. Korner Store.

Two major floods impacted San Marcos in the last decade, with ongoing impacts. The first, was in May of 2015 and the next occurred just six months later in November 2015. With most of the neighborhood within the federally defined 100-year floodplain, Blanco Gardens was heavily impacted by both events, requiring significant repairs to public infrastructure and private property. Residents living south of River Road reported the most serious impacts, and the average damage to residential properties was over \$80,000.

To mitigate future flooding events, the City is undertaking the Blanco Riverine Flood Mitigation Project, as noted in the Infrastructure and Public Works section of the plan. The project is designed to protect Blanco Gardens from inundation of up to three feet in future flooding events, and to allow any encroaching floodwaters to recede more quickly.



River Road looking west.

ROLE OF NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER



Single-family home with front porch on Conway Drive.



Minimal-traditional style home with gabled roof on River Road.



Two-story apartment building with carport along River Road.

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.

MEASURING NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Quantitative Metrics

Quantitative metrics are characteristics that are currently or often regulated by City Development Codes and are reviewed when new development or changes to existing structures occurs. City staff collected data on these metrics for each property within the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood Area Plan boundary in December 2022. A variety of methods were utilized, including a tablet app to take observations in the field, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to measure distances and collect existing data, and written descriptions. The following quantitative data was collected:

- Lot Size
- Front and Side Setbacks
- Lot Coverage
- Building Height
- Building Entry Orientation
- Parking/Garage Orientation
- Unit Type (e.g., single-family, duplex, triplex, etc.)
- Zoning District
- Parks and Public Spaces
- Streetscape Planting

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 December 2022 to complete all measurements in this section. This was supplemented by comments offered at the first Community Workshop in November 2022, and some existing City plans, such as the 2020 Sidewalk Survey.

- Architectural Style
- Building Materials
- Roof Form
- Landscaping
- Natural Features
- Upkeep of Public Spaces
- Landmarks/Destinations
- Public Art

2

CHARACTER PROFILE

This section contains the results of the character study for the Blanco Gardens 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 each element. This section also includes an inventory of photos to showcase existing development patterns and supplemental maps to provide additional context.

DEMOGRAPHICS

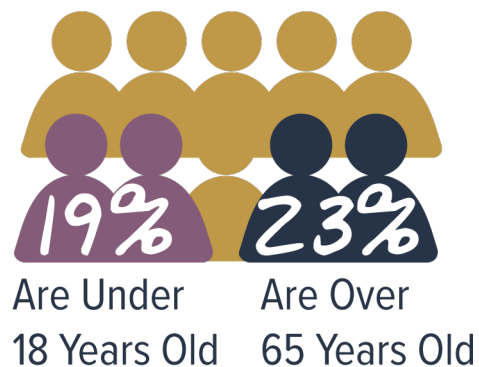
The Role of People in Neighborhood Character

Neighborhood character is heavily influenced by the people who live and work in the area. This includes residents of the Blanco Gardens neighborhood, as well as commuters, business owners, 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 how people impact homes and businesses.

Demographic Snapshot

The Blanco Gardens area has about 4,483 residents, who identify as 55% White, 8% Black or African American, 21% of two or more races, and 16% of another race. About 57% identify as having Hispanic or Latino origin, among the highest in San Marcos. Age distribution shows about 19% of residents are under age 18, 23% are 65 years and over, and the remaining 58% of residents are in between those groups.

Almost half of area households earn below the citywide median household income of \$42,000, and there are fewer households at either end of the income spectrum than in the rest of the City (i.e., with annual incomes more than \$100,000 and less than \$25,000), indicating Blanco Gardens is a more solidly middle-income neighborhood. Area residents also have about the average educational attainment for San Marcos, with about 24% of adults holding a bachelor's degree or higher, and 91% of neighborhood adults have at least a high school diploma, vs. 93% citywide.



Source: 2017-2021 Five Year American Community Survey. U.S. Census Bureau.

AREA PLAN BOUNDARY



BASEMAP

- Blanco Gardens
- Waterbody
- River
- Creek
- Park
- Minor Road
- Major Road
- Highway
- Interstate



OVERALL DEVELOPMENT PATTERN



Signage and playground equipment at Conway Park.



Hike and bike trail at Cape's Camp along the San Marcos River.



Riverfront path and amenities near Stokes Park.

Prevalent Zoning Districts

Almost 1/3 of the Blanco Gardens area – 32.7% – is zoned as a Single-Family district, and a nearly identical proportion – 32.8% – as Multi-Family Residential. The latter is comprised of 10.4% MF-12, allowing up to twelve multifamily units per acre, and 22.4% MF-24, allowing up to 24 units per acre. Other common zoning districts include mobile home/manufactured home (12.5%), general commercial (6.7%), public/institutional (4.52%), mixed-use (3.6%), and heavy commercial (3%). The remaining 4.2% includes a combination of community commercial, duplex, future development, and townhome zoning districts.

Parks

The Blanco Gardens Neighborhood includes one park, Conway Park, which is approximately 0.42 acres and includes a playscape, basketball half court, skateboard arena, and picnic area.

The variety of amenities offered here are well maintained; however, frequent vandalism has been identified as a topic of concern for this space in the Parks Master Plan.

J. J. Stokes Park and Cape's Camp are adjacent to but not included within the neighborhood boundary.

Vacant Land

Twenty-one tracts in the neighborhood area are vacant, totaling 28.5 acres.

Public Spaces

There are few public spaces located within the Blanco Gardens neighborhood, with Conway Park being the only City-owned space in the neighborhood. Community members have expressed that they often treat the streetscape as a public amenity. For example, while walking along Barbara Drive or Conway Drive, residents often stop to chat with others they pass by or see along the way.



A large vacant lot.



Hike and Bike trail entrance.



The San Marcos River.

LOT PATTERN

Lot Size

The median lot size is 0.263 acres (11,456 square feet). The average lot size is 77.9 acres, however this statistic is skewed by several large parcels. See the Development Pattern map on page 146 for the location of large vs. typical parcels in Blanco Gardens.

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 average front setback for the Blanco Gardens neighborhood is 29.38 feet. Some blocks feature uniform or nearly uniform front setbacks from the street, providing a consistent visual character across blocks, while others vary due to different architectural styles, natural topography, and other factors. See the photos to the right for typical front setbacks in this area.

The side setback is the distance between the side property line and the side of a structure. The average side setback in the Blanco Gardens neighborhood is 15.73 feet.



Single-family home on a corner lot on Barbara Drive.



Single-family homes at Sherbarb Street and Barbara Drive.



Row of single-family homes along Barbara Drive.

Building Footprint

A building footprint is the total square footage of a building. The Development Pattern Map on the following page shows a map of building footprints within the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood.

Lot Coverage

Lot coverage is the portion of a lot that is covered by a building footprint. The average coverage of lots in the neighborhood is 29.7%. This value may be skewed due to large vacant parcels in the neighborhood.

Alleys

A series of paved and unpaved alleys run behind Barbara Drive and Conway Drive, but are not found elsewhere in the neighborhood. As such, most lots back up directly to other lots, with wooden or metal fences typically separating them.



Unpaved alley.



Mobile homes at River Road Mobile Home Court.



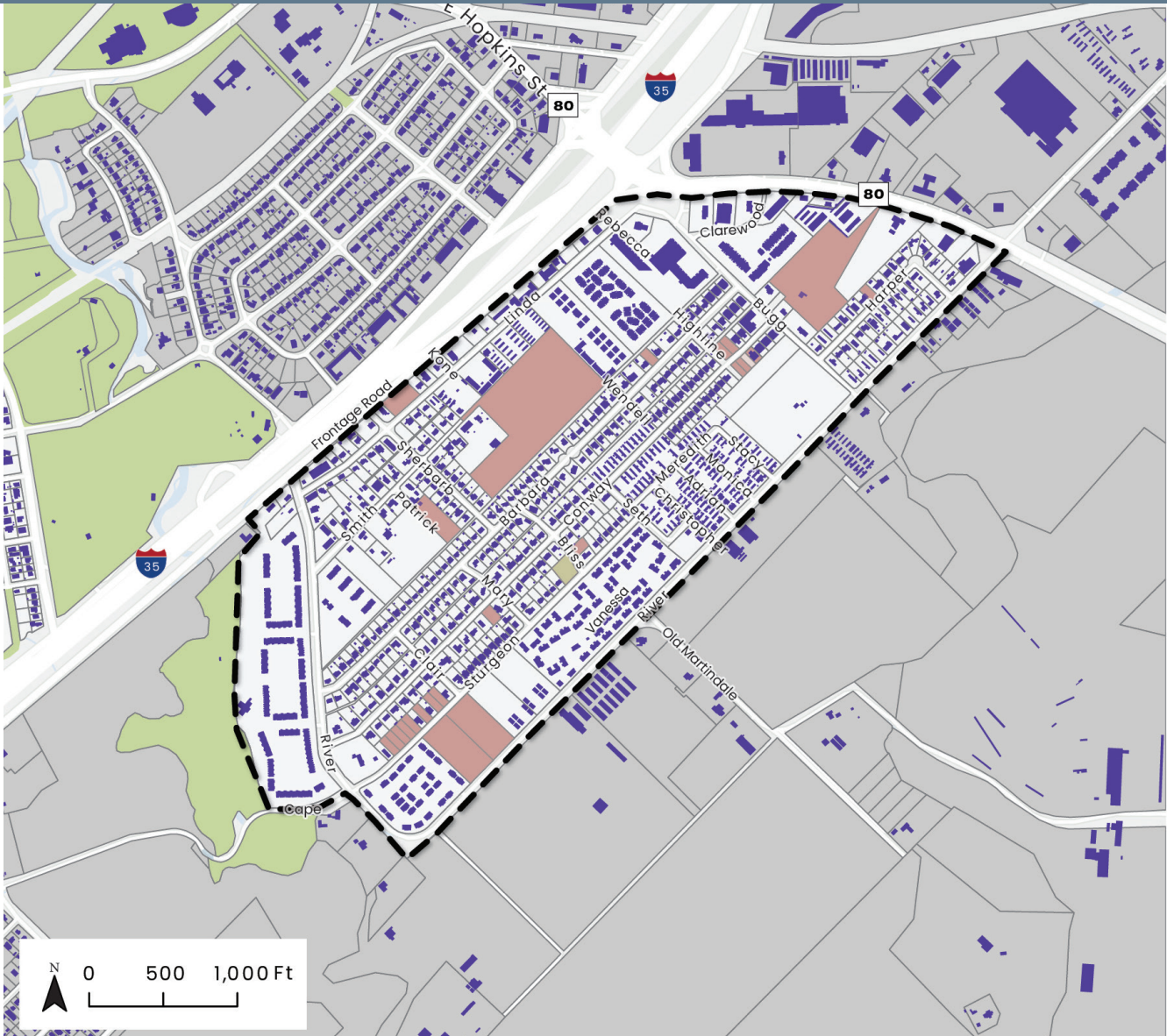
Multi-family homes with deep setbacks.



Row of multi-family apartments along River Road.

DEVELOPMENT PATTERN MAP

AS OF SEPTEMBER 2023



LEGEND

- Blanco Gardens
- Park
- Minor Road
- Major Road
- Highway

- Parcel
- Vacant Parcel
- Building Footprint

BUILDING LAYOUT

Entry Orientation

Entry orientation describes whether the entry point to the structure (primary doorway) faces the front, side, or rear of the property. Half of all residences within the neighborhood - 51% - include a front facing entrance, while 47% include a side-facing entrance. All multi-family/apartment housing types include parking lot facing entrances.

Parking Orientation & Type

Parking orientation describes whether the vehicular access to the lot is from the front, rear, or side of the lot. 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. Twenty-one percent of lots utilize a carport, 25% of lots have an attached garage, and 2% have a detached garage. The remainder of lots in the area utilize uncovered surface driveways.

Among lots with a garage, 83% are accessed from the front, 10% are accessed from the side, and the remaining lots have a rear orientation, such as being accessed from an alley.

HOUSING

Unit Type

There are a variety of residential unit types in the Blanco Gardens neighborhood, including single-family units, manufactured homes, duplexes, accessory dwelling units, and multifamily unit types. Sixty-two percent of residential units are in large multifamily complexes (defined as more than 20 units), with another 3% in small or medium multifamily properties (5-20 units). Seventeen percent of units are single-family homes, and 12.5% are manufactured homes. Finally, another 2% of units are duplexes, and 3.5% are accessory dwelling units that are adjacent or connected to single family homes.



Single-family home with side-facing entryway.

BUILDING MASSING

Height

Eighty-six percent of buildings in the area are one-story, 9% are two-story, and 3% are three stories. There are no buildings with four or more stories. Maximum height regulations in the City's Development Code help ensure that uncharacteristically tall structures are not constructed; however, some homes located in the floodplain appear taller due to the requirement that they be elevated to mitigate flood risk.



One-story single-family home with recessed entry.



Recently constructed two-story home on Sturgeon Drive.



One-story commercial strip area along State Highway-80 with vacant storefront.



Three-story apartment buildings on River Road.



Two-story apartment buildings along River Road.

STYLE AND APPEARANCE

Architectural Style

Architectural style is defined as “a definite type of architecture, distinguished by special characteristics of structure and ornament.” Minimal Traditional is the most prevalent style in Blanco Gardens, representing 73% of structures. The next most common were classified as New Traditional (9%) and Ranch (7%). The remaining 11% were of no or undetermined style. The modern two-story homes along Sturgeon Drive are a stark contrast with the minimal traditional character found throughout most of the neighborhood. Additionally, multi-story apartment homes, including the Redpoint Apartments along River Rd and Clarewood Apartments near State Highway 80, break from the average one-story building height most common in Blanco Gardens.

Building Materials

About 40% of exterior siding material in Blanco Gardens consists of a variety of modern materials, primarily vinyl siding. Other materials used include wood (29%) and brick (21%).

Roof Forms

Roof form represents the style of roof on residential structures including gabled, hipped, flat, mansard, asymmetrical, and pyramidal. Fifty-one percent of structures within Blanco

Gardens have flat roofs, with almost all of them being in the manufactured home building type. The majority of other single-family homes have pitched roofs. Pitched roofs can be either gabled or hipped roofs. Gabled roofs were the most common roof type in the neighborhood and only about 4% of structures have hipped roofs. The majority of roofing materials for single-family homes are shingles (91%) and metal (9%).



Manufactured home with flat roof on River Road.



Single-family home with gabled roof along Sturgeon Drive.

Landscaping

Landscaping refers to the vegetation (trees, grass, and other plants) on private property or the streetscape (the area between the public sidewalk and the street). Most private yards have traditional grass lawns, with a minority using lush vegetation or xeriscaping. The common areas of apartment buildings incorporate similar vegetation, with some mature trees. Streetscape landscaping includes variable tree canopies, with the largest tree canopy on Barbara Drive and only a sparse presence on Sturgeon Drive. The commercial areas facing IH-35 and Highway 80 have mixed landscaping, including some mature trees. With many aging street trees, replacement would be needed to maintain the canopy and its shade benefits over the long term.

Conway Park contains adequate ground landscaping and seven small trees. These trees are younger than others throughout the neighborhood and will take some time to provide adequate shade to park users.



Lush vegetation in front of a single-family home on Barbara Drive.



Single-family home along Smith Lane with xeriscaped yard.



Tree cover and minimal landscaping along Barbara Drive.

LANDMARKS AND DESTINATIONS

Upkeep and Maintenance

Public spaces in Blanco Gardens are generally in good condition. The variety of amenities within these spaces are well maintained, but vandalism and litter was identified as a concern.

The overall quality of sidewalks in Blanco Gardens is good, but gaps in the system – coupled with instances of cracking or uplift – provides room for improvement. Much of the neighborhood has sidewalk infrastructure on only one side of the street. Barbara Drive and Sturgeon Drive are both examples of this. Some streets in the neighborhood have no sidewalks at all, such as Smith Lane and Conway Drive. These instances where the sidewalk is missing make ADA access and pedestrian connectivity challenging.

Landmarks/Destinations

Participants of community engagement events identified Conway Park as a notable destination within the neighborhood. Destinations that were indicated just outside of the neighborhood boundary include Stokes Park/Thompson's Island and Cape's Camp. Thompson's Island features the only historic marker near the neighborhood.

Other major landmarks include Cuevas Produce, the retail and restaurant areas along Highway 80 and IH-35 Frontage Road, and the

Animal Shelter. While the areas along these major highways offer a variety of commercial destinations, community feedback indicated that connectivity improvements are necessary to make these areas more accessible.



Paved path and picnic area at Conway Park.



Cuevas Produce – a family-owned local business – on Linda Drive.

Public Art

The visible public art in Blanco Gardens includes a series of painted mailboxes along Barbara Drive and a mural on the wall separating Raising Cane's from the Clarewood Drive right of way. These all appear to be in good condition, though vandalism and deterioration are possible future concerns. There are ample opportunities to add more public art to Blanco Gardens, with multiple fences and retaining walls facing streets and alleys, as well as open spaces at intersections.



Mural along Clarewood Drive behind Raising Cane's restaurant.



One example of mailbox art found along Barbara Drive.

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3

**TAKEAWAYS,
TOOLS &
RECOMMENDATIONS**

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 several key ways for alterations to new or existing structures to be compatible with the overall character of the neighborhood.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INFILL AND DEVELOPMENT

Much of the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood is comprised of private properties, and the majority of contributions to neighborhood character will be undertaken by individual property owners. Change is constant, and maintaining Blanco Gardens' publicly owned spaces will be crucial to high-quality neighborhood character going forward.

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 City Ordinances. The recommendations in this section are intended to comply with these regulatory tools, however, updates to the Development Code or other regulatory tools may be needed.

Recommendations

- **Lot Size:** Based on the Character Profile, the majority of lots within the neighborhood are long and narrow. This means that existing lots have relatively small lot widths, and the size of the lots are relatively small. Collections of small lots on multiple blocks help contribute to the neighborhood's density. Density is the number of units per acre. It is recommended that this small lot size be preserved to maintain existing character, and any subdivision of larger lots into smaller lots should aim to match this smaller lot size.
- **Infill:** Based on the Character Profile, there are 21 vacant parcels owned by private property owners within Blanco Gardens. The majority of the neighborhood is residential and residential uses should be encouraged on these lots. However, infill development on these vacant parcels could take the form of mixed-use – which could provide a variety of residential, retail, and commercial uses. Existing small lots looking to redevelop could provide different kinds of residential uses such as single-family homes, duplexes, or

townhomes, depending on their location. Single Family-6 and Neighborhood Density District zoning districts would be appropriate to accommodate these housing types. This blended mix of residential uses would match the character of certain areas of the neighborhood and promote “gentle” density. The addition of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) in accordance with the Development Code would also be compatible with existing character as there is already an established presence of ADUs in the neighborhood. It is recommended that infill development consider the guidelines included in the following pages to ensure compatibility.

- **Commercial Buildings:** Based on the Character Profile, the majority of commercial uses in the neighborhood occur on the IH-35 Frontage Road and Highway 80 with some scattered uses along River Road. New commercial uses proposed should be designed to match the residential character and design of existing structures and consider the guidelines included in the following pages to ensure architectural compatibility.



Curve Apartments on River Road, displaying recent exterior improvements and new fencing.



Open lot with taco truck on Linda Drive.

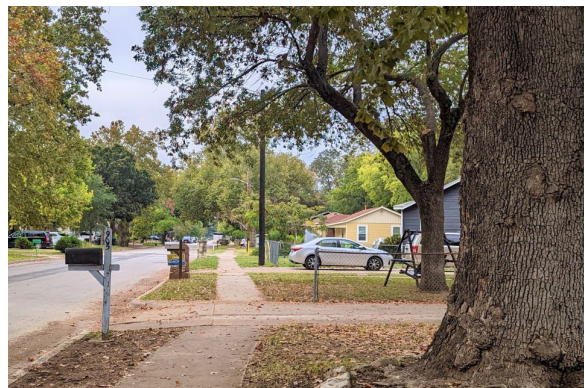
- Public Spaces/Environmental Considerations:** Maintaining Blanco Gardens' publicly owned spaces will be crucial to high-quality neighborhood character going forward. This includes preserving the existing public art installations while encouraging new installations throughout the neighborhood. Fences and retaining walls, as well as utility boxes, can be painted. Another possibility is to locate sculptures at prominent street corners where sufficient space exists, for example, at the corner of Bugg Lane and Clarewood Drive. The pieces would need to be weather-resistant and not block the right-of-way or view of drivers, cyclists, or pedestrians. As more flood prevention and mitigation projects are completed in Blanco Gardens, development will best fit with the neighborhood if maximized to handle stormwater. Replacing street trees as they reach the end of their useful life or are damaged and keeping up ground landscaping will be important, as will filling gaps in the tree canopy. When ground landscaping requires replacement, the City should use native plants, resilient and xeriscaped features, and porous ground cover to ensure less watering is needed.



Intersection of Bugg Lane and Clarewood Drive with potential for art installations or landscaping.



Single-story home on Sturgeon Drive, raised to meet floodplain development requirements.



Sidewalk along Barbara Drive, separated from vehicle lanes by a landscaped buffer.

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RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES

Five Scenarios

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, five scenarios have been developed as a “testing ground” for ways that infill development or redevelopment can be designed to meet the existing physical character of the Blanco Gardens neighborhood. Each scenario illustrates how altering one of the following five building elements achieves different results. Graphic icons indicate which of the five are altered in that respective scenario:

Each scenario also includes an example of an existing home in the neighborhood that incorporates the respective building elements.

For simplicity, the five scenarios illustrate changes to a detached single-family unit within a Single Family-6 (SF-6) zoning district in San Marcos. However, the scenarios that follow may be applied to other building types with sufficient lot size when infill or redevelopment occurs.

Finally, the illustrations assume that all other Development Code requirements are met.



Height



Setbacks



Lot Coverage

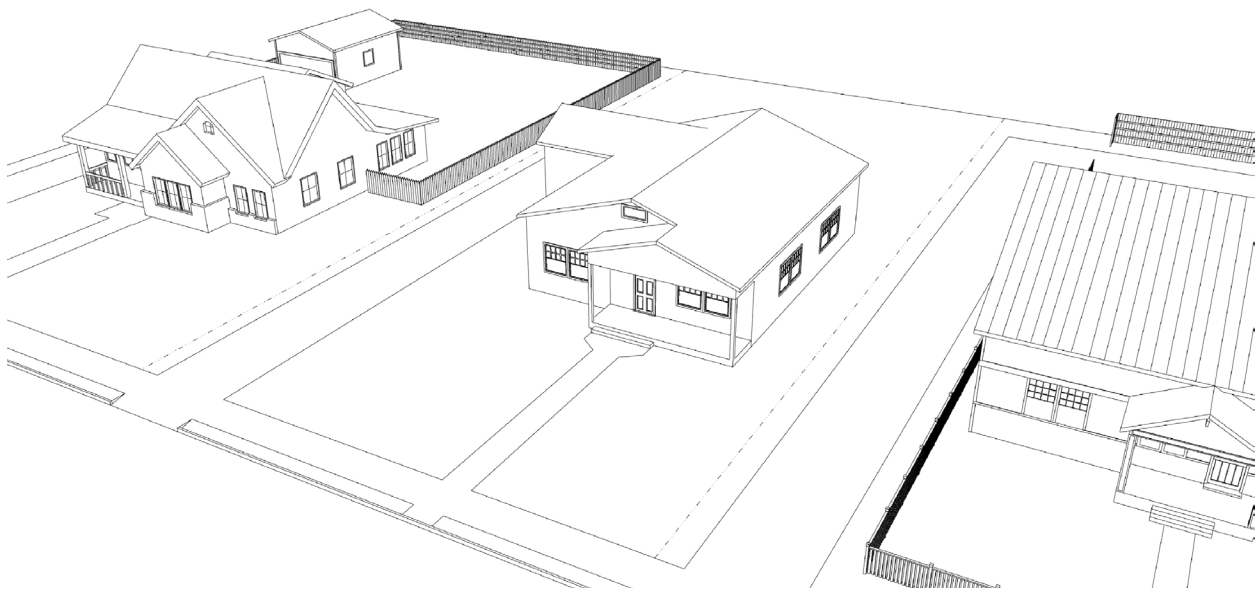


Massing

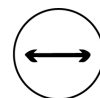


Impervious Cover

Existing House



Height



Setbacks

Lot
Coverage

Massing

Impervious
Cover

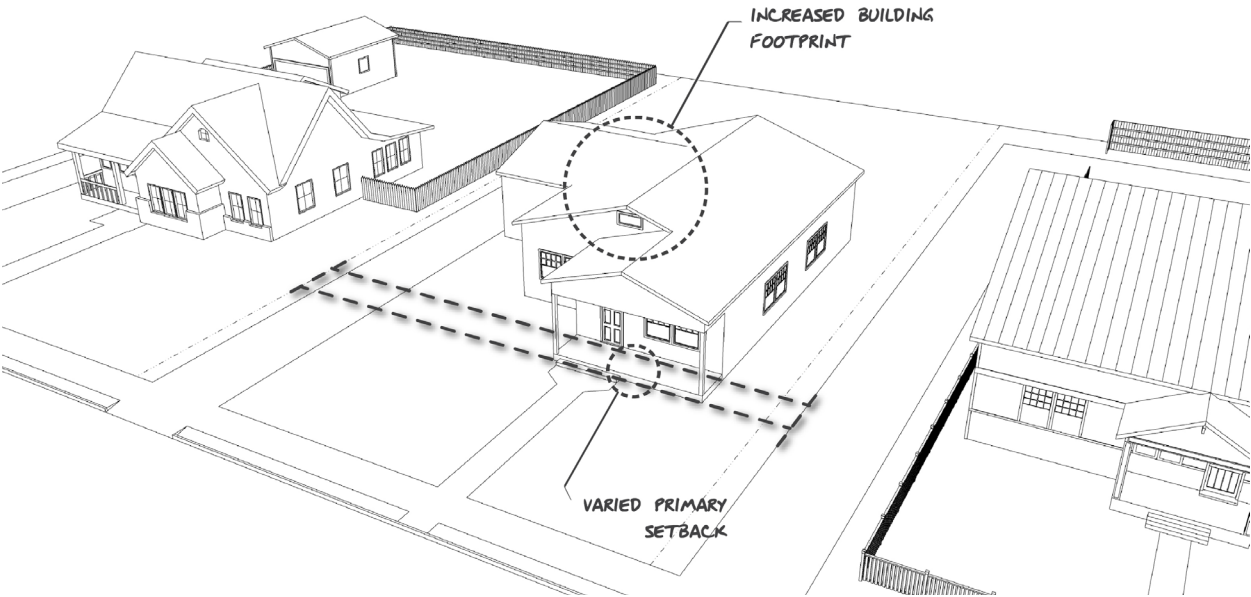
This illustration is of a typical existing single-family detached house on an average-sized lot, which represents many of the existing homes within Blanco Gardens.

Some existing duplexes in the neighborhood have a similar orientation and appearance, while the duplexes in the C. M. Allen Homes feature a broader street frontage with both units oriented toward the street. The landscaping for this home includes the traditional grass lawn found within the neighborhood, as seen in the photo at right.

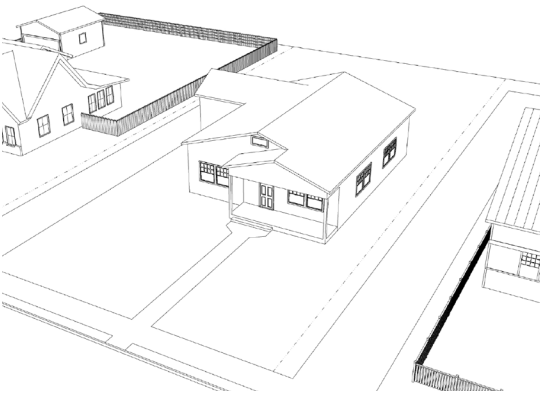


Typical single-family detached home in Blanco Gardens.

Scenario 1: Front Facades



Existing House for Reference



-  Height
-  Setbacks
-  Lot Coverage
-  Massing
-  Impervious Cover



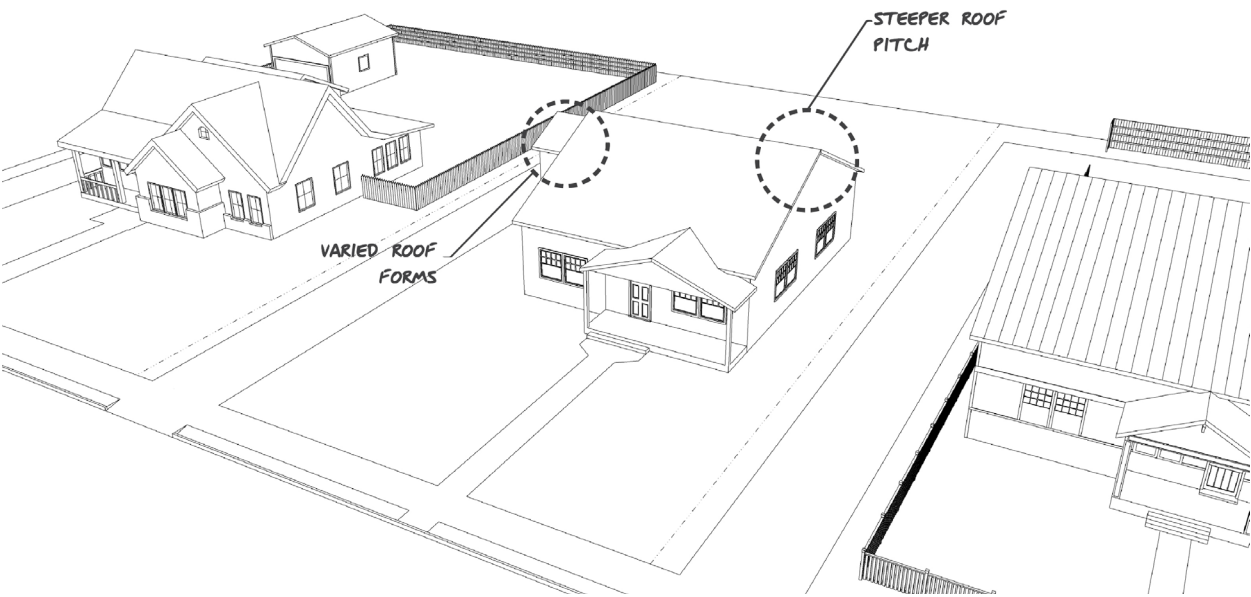
House on Barbara Drive.

This scenario demonstrates an addition to an existing structure. This type of redevelopment may be requested to accommodate a growing family or household and could include adding a new room onto the house or increasing the size of an existing room. An addition might also be requested if a property owner has appropriate zoning to convert an existing home into a duplex to accommodate two households. This Scenario provides an example of how an addition on the front of the home can complement the character of the neighborhood.

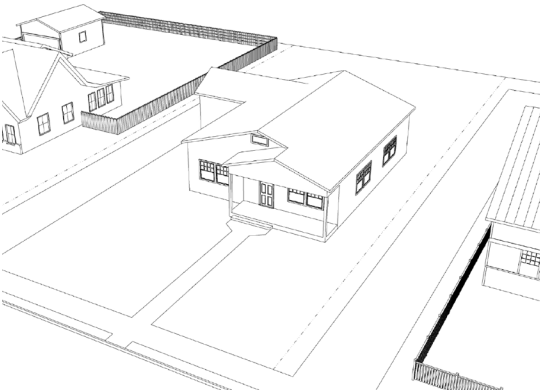
A few key guidelines include:

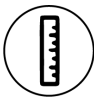
- The front facade of the structure is now closer to the street reducing the front setback but remaining within the average setback of the surrounding homes.
- The home maintains its existing side and rear setbacks.
- The roof line and roof type is maintained.
- A front porch is maintained or is added to match the character of surrounding front facades.

Scenario 2: Varied Roof Form



Existing House for Reference



-  Height
-  Setbacks
-  Lot Coverage
-  Massing
-  Impervious Cover



House on Conway Drive.

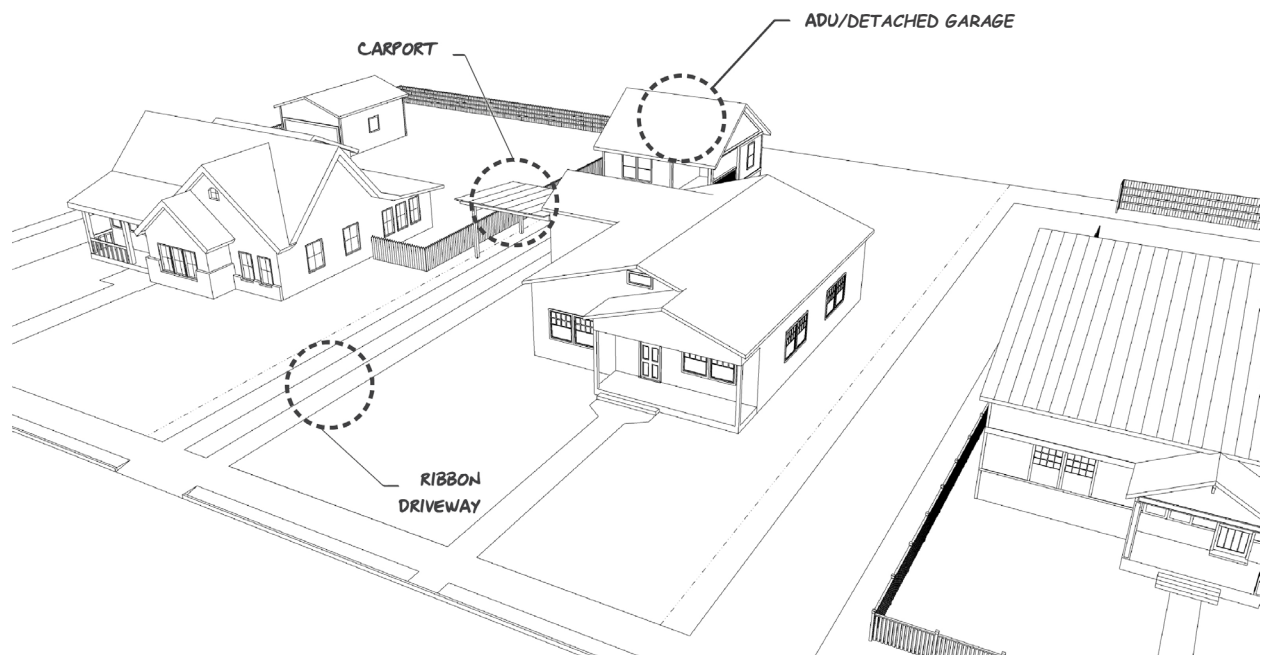
This Scenario demonstrates changes to a roof pitch. This type of improvement may be requested when a roof is being replaced due to disrepair, or if a property owner desires to have additional square footage in the home and is proposing to create a partial second story or loft. This type of roof pitch may also be an attribute of infill development.

This Scenario provides an example of how a varied roof pitch can fit in with the character of the neighborhood.

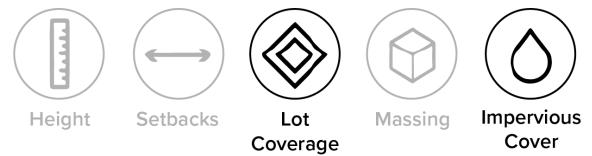
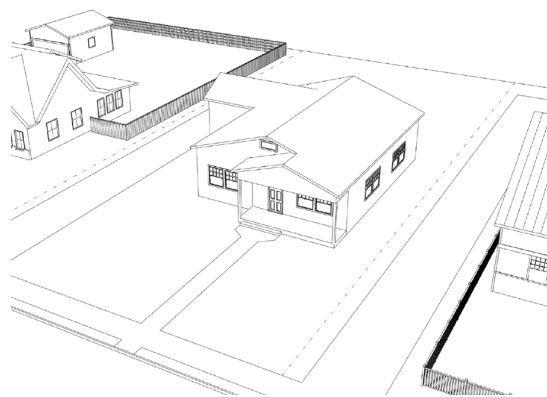
A few key guidelines include:

- The front setback is similar to surrounding homes.
- The home maintains its existing side and rear setbacks.
- The roof type is maintained and is a pitched roof similar to surrounding homes.
- A front porch is maintained or is added to match the character of surrounding front facades.
- The building mass matches the surrounding homes.
- There is no change to lot coverage.

Scenario 3: Varied Parking Orientation/Accessory Structure



Existing House for Reference





House on Barbara Drive.

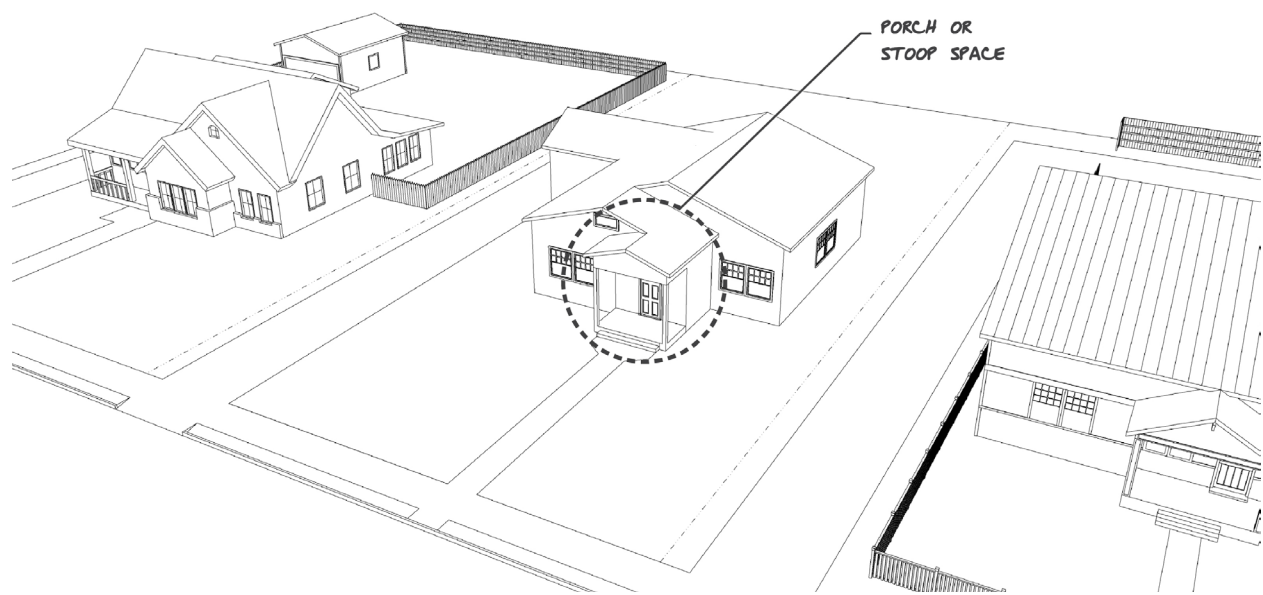
This Scenario demonstrates a ribbon driveway with a carport and the addition of an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) or detached garage. This type of improvement may be requested when a property owner desires to construct a new accessory structure, ADU, or wants to provide a covered vehicle parking space. The carport or structure may also be proposed to the rear of the lot as an addition to the existing house.

This Scenario provides an example of how a driveway, carport, and accessory structure can fit in with the character of the neighborhood.

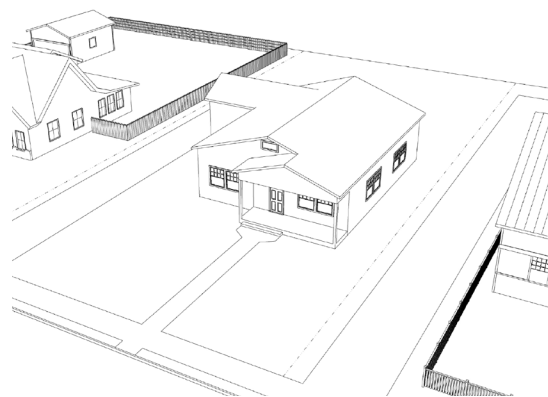
A few key guidelines include:

- No changes occur to the front facade of the existing structure.
- The home maintains its existing side setback.
- Decreases impervious cover on the lot with a “ribbon driveway”, which provides additional landscaping.
- The driveway extends into the back yard in order to meet the parking requirements for the house and the ADU, if proposed.
- The accessory structure is constructed at the rear of the lot.

Scenario 4: Front-Facing Entrance and Porch



Existing House for Reference



Height



Setbacks



Lot Coverage



Massing



Impervious Cover



House on Conway Drive.

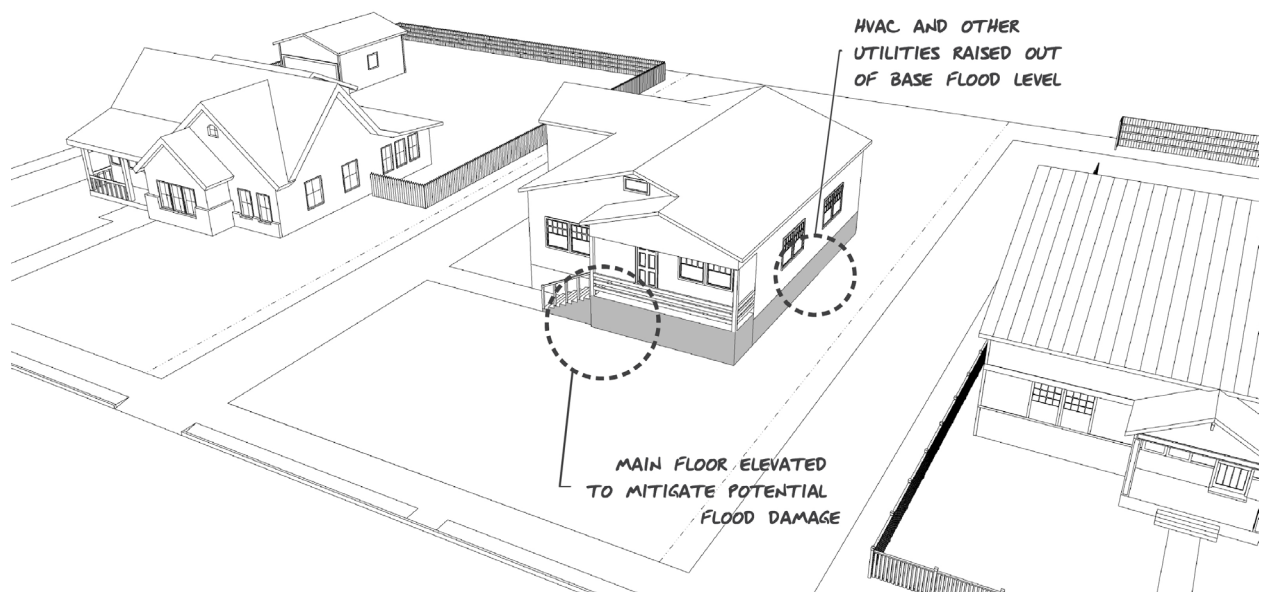
This Scenario demonstrates how new home construction can use a front porch or stoop to create visual interest in the front facade while providing additional usable space within the building footprint.

This Scenario provides an example of how a front porch or stoop can be used to help new homes fit in with the existing character of the surrounding homes.

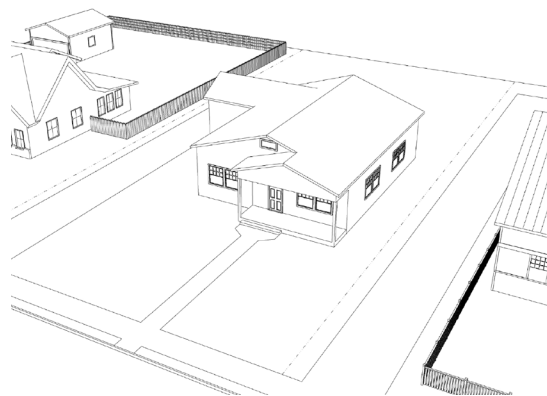
Key guidelines include:

- The porch or stoop is positioned along the front facade.
- The porch or stoop provides a covered entry to the home that faces the street.
- The porch or stoop extends out from the structure into the setback rather than being inset into the facade.
- The roof type is maintained and is a pitched roof similar to surrounding homes.
- The building mass matches that of the surrounding homes.

Scenario 5: Varied Height



Existing House for Reference



Height



Setbacks



Lot Coverage



Massing



Impervious Cover



Raised house on Barbara Drive

This Scenario demonstrates raising the main level of a structure to meet the City's height requirement for developments within a floodplain. This type of improvement is required for all new construction that occurs within a designated floodplain in the City. The foundation of a structure must be raised out of the flood level to mitigate flood damage, and is usually accomplished by putting the house on stilts.

This Scenario provides an example of how a change in building height can meet the floodplain development requirements while also matching the existing character of the surrounding single-story homes. A few key guidelines include:

- The main floor of the home is elevated but remains a single story to match the surrounding neighborhood character. Stairs and/or a ramp is provided to access the entrance of the home.
- The home maintains its existing side and rear setbacks.
- The roof line and roof type are unchanged.
- HVAC and other home systems are raised above the base flood level.
- There is no change to lot coverage.

4

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Architectural Style

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

Minimal Traditional

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.

New Traditional

Contemporary style that borrows historical architectural details.

Ranch

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 façade (faces front, side, or rear); a large picture window generally present; asymmetrical façade.

Vernacular

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.

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 incorporates stepbacks.

Building Materials

The physical materials used to construct a structure.

Density

The number of dwelling units per acre.

Entry Orientation

Location of the main entry point to the structure (primary doorway).

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 and privately owned spaces.

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 and site features, including the main structure and accessory structures.

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 structures, 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.

Parks

Publicly or privately 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 proposes to remodel or add onto an existing structure.

Roof Form

The style of roof on residential structures. Common roof forms include:

Asymmetrical

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.

Flat

Roof design which is completely, or almost, level.

Gabled

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

Gambrel

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

Hipped

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

Mansard

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.

Pyramidal

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

Roof Pitch

Slope of a roof.

Setback

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, near curbs, sidewalks, or in medians.

Tree Canopy

The overhead cover provided by tree branches.

Unit Type

The residential building 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, 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 determines the types of uses and buildings that can occupy each lot within its jurisdiction; zoning is typically employed to protect less intensive areas (residential or institutional uses like schools) from more intensive job centers and commercial uses.

CHARACTER METRICS

Blanco Gardens Neighborhood - Quantitative Metrics

Metric	Quantitative Metrics						
	Average & Median Lot Size (sq ft)	Average Front Setback (ft)	Average Side Setback (ft)	Average Lot Coverage (%)	Building Height in number of stories (%)	Building Entry Orientation	
						Front-Facing Entrance (%)	Side-Facing Entrance (%)
Metric Defined	Size of a lot.	Front Setback is the distance between the front of a structure and the front property line.	Side Setback is the distance between both sides of a structure and the side property lines.	Total impervious cover on a lot.	Number of stories on a structure.	Building Entry Orientation describes whether the entrance is on the front, side, or rear of the structure.	
Data Source	City of San Marcos GIS Parcel Data.	Digitized setback using Aerial Imagery .	Digitized setback using Aerial Imagery.	City of San Marcos Impervious Cover by Parcel Data (Impervious %). Data was created for the City using 2017 Aerial Imagery with 2019 Parcel Data by Sanborn.	City of San Marcos GIS Building Footprint Data which indicates the number of stories. Validated using Google Street View and in-person field data.	Collected as part of in-person field data.	
Blanco Gardens	Average: 77.9 (acres); Median: 0.263 (acres)	29.38 (ft)	15.73	29.70%	One-story (86%) Two-story (9%) Three-story (3%)	Single-Family Residential: 51.2%	Residential: 48.8%
Notes					While most buildings are only a single story, they seem much taller due to requirements for raising to build in the floodplain.		There are some homes that make up a portion of the total.

Entry Orientation			Parking Orientation & Type					
Front-Facing Entrance (%)	Parking Lot Facing Entrance (Apartments) (%)	Rear-Facing Entrance (%)	Attached Garage (%)	Detached Garage (%)	Carport (%)	No Garage (%)	Front-Loaded Garage (%)	Side-Loaded Garage (%)
The entry point to the structure (primary doorway) faces the structure or faces an off-street parking lot.			Parking orientation describes whether the vehicular access to the lot is from the front or side of the lot. The Parking Type describes whether the lot includes a garage, carport, or neither and whether it is attached or detached from the primary structure.					
Field data collection (Housing Character Data).			Collected as part of in-person field data collection (Housing Character Data).					
Single-Family Residential: 3.7% Mobile Home: 43.6%	1%	0%	25%	2%	21%	49%	83%	10%
Mobile manufactured housing typology makes up a significant portion of this category.	All multi-family/apartment housing typologies have parking lot facing entrances.							

CHARACTER METRICS

Blanco Gardens Neighborhood - Quantitative Metrics

Metric	Buidling Unit Type							
	Single-Family Home (%)	Duplex (%)	Triplex/Quadplex (%)	Townhome (%)	Number of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)	Small Multi-Family (5-9 units) (%)	Medium Multi-Family (10-20 units) (%)	Large Multi-Fam units) (%)
Metric Defined	The type of residential unit.							
Data Source	City of San Marcos GIS Building Footprint Data. Validated using Google Street View and in-person field data.							
Blanco Gardens	17%	2%	0.00%	0.00%	10 accessory dwelling units (3.5% of all residential units)	0.90%	1.40%	62%
Notes	Another large typology not listed in the table includes Manufactured Home (12.5%).							

	Zoning Districts							
ity (20+	Single Family District (%)	Townhouse Residential (%)	Duplex (%)	Public/ Institutional (%)	Community Commercial District (%)	General Commercial Disrict (%)	Multi Family Residential 12 (%)	Multi Family Residential 24 (%)
	The designated zoning district on the property.							
	City of San Marcos GIS Zoning Data.							
	32.66%	0.36%	1.09%	4.52%	2.20%	6.66%	10.36%	22.45%

CHARACTER METRICS

Blanco Gardens Neighborhood - Quantitative Metrics

Metric	Zoning Districts				Other Land Uses				
	Manufactured Home (%)	Office Professional (%)	Light Industrial (%)	Character District (any) (%)	Total Number of Parks	Size of Parks (acres)	Total Number of Vacant Tracts	Vacant Tracts (acres)	Number of Public Spaces
Metric Defined					Publically dedicated parks.	Total acreage of all parks.	Lots that have do not have a building.	Total acreage of all vacant tracts.	Churches, Health/Institution, Education, Parks.
Data Source					City of San Marcos GIS City Parks Data.	City of San Marcos GIS City Parks Data.	City of San Marcos GIS Parcel Data. Validated using Aerial Imagery.	City of San Marcos GIS Parcel Data. Validated using Aerial Imagery.	In-person field data.
Blanco Gardens	7.68%	0%	0%	0%	1	0.42	21	28.5 acres	2
Notes				Others not listed in the table include manufactured home (4.80%), heavy commercial (3.03%), and mixed use (3.56%)	Conway Park is within the neighborhood, but J. J. Stokes Park and Cape's Camp are adjacent to the area plan boundary.				KAD Korner Store as an after-school education center; Conway Park in boundary while Stokes Park and Cape's Camp abut the area plan boundary.

CHARACTER METRICS

Blanco Gardens Neighborhood - Qualitative Metrics

Metric	Qualitative Metrics (general descriptions and estimates)						
	Sidewalk Conditions (on average)					Architectural	
	Sidewalks (% of neighborhood)	Quality of Sidewalks	Width of Sidewalks (ft as a range)	Sidewalk Material	Sidewalk Offset from the Street (ft as a range)	Common Architectural Styles	Freq
Metric Defined	Percent of streets in neighborhood that include a sidewalk.	Observation of existing sidewalks in poor, fair, or good quality and missing, or gaps in sidewalk.	Measured width of existing sidewalks.	Material of existing sidewalks with the following options: concrete, brick, grass, permeable pavement, crushed granite, asphalt.	Distance between the street curb and the sidewalk.	Common Architectural Styles are a definite type of architecture, distinguished by special characteristics of structure and ornament. The following options were identified: Minimal Traditional, Craftsman, Ranch, Queen Anne, National Folk, New Traditional, Contemporary/Mid-Century Modern, Folk Victorian, Vernacular, Other.	De "Othe "Com
Metadata	City of San Marcos GIS Sidewalk Data.	City of San Marcos Sidewalk Assessment 2020 Data. Verified with in-person field data.	City of San Marcos GIS Sidewalk Data. Validated by Aerial Imagery and in-person field data.	High-level observation.	Manual measurement using Aerial Imagery.	Collected as part of in-person field data collection (Housing Character Data).	Colle pe col CI
Blanco Gardens	34.00%	Good	3ft - 6ft	concrete	0ft - 7ft	Minimal Traditional (73%), New Traditional (9%), Ranch (7%)	
Notes	The overall quality of sidewalk infrastructure is considered excellent, but gaps in the system – coupled with instances of cracking or uplift – provides room for improvement. Much of the neighborhood has sidewalk infrastructure on only one side of the street (for example, along Barbara Drive and Sturgeon Drive). Some streets in the neighborhood lack sidewalks entirely – such as Smith Lane and Conway Drive – and residents are forced to walk in the right-of-way.			The range of offset distances between the sidewalk and the right-of-way is between 0ft and 7ft. Most sidewalks have 0ft offset and are positioned directly adjacent to the road (seen on River Road, Sturgeon Drive, and Linda Drive). Barbara Drive has average offset of 5ft but this value decreases or increases in instances where there are existing trees (minimum offset of 4ft and maximum offset of 7ft). It is important to note that portions of the sidewalk along River Road have been replaced with asphalt due to the ongoing CIP projects along this thoroughfare. These areas will be restored to their original concrete condition once the improvement projects are completed.			The n hom Dr co min char throu n Add story (su Apar rive Apar 123 ave buil co b n

Style		Roof Form			Landscaping			
Frequency of "Out of Style" Buildings	Common Building Materials	Typical Roof Forms	Flat Roofs (estimated %)	Pitched Roofs (estimated %)	Presence of Yard Landscaping	Presence of Public Space Landscaping	Presence of Streetscape Landscaping	Presence of Street Trees
Description of the "Out of Style" category within Common Architectural Styles".	Identification of exterior siding material using the following options: Wood, Brick, Stone, Stucco.	The style of a roof on residential structures including gabled, hipped, flat, mansard, asymmetrical, and pyramidal.	Type of roof form that has no pitch.	Roofs which have a slope/pitch (not a flat roof).	Vegetation (trees, grass, and other plants) on private property.	Vegetation within public spaces (Churches, Health/Institution, Education, Parks).	Vegetation within the public right-of-way adjacent to a street or sidewalk.	Trees adjacent to a sidewalk or street, typically located within the streetscape.
Collected as part of in-person field data collection (Housing Character Data).	Collected as part of in-person field data collection (Housing Character Data).	Collected as part of in-person field data collection (Housing Character Data).			Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood using 3 categories: good, none, or spotty tree canopy. Also included input from public workshop and/or steering committee.
See Notes.	Other (primarily vinyl siding) (40%), Wood (29%), Brick (21%)	Gabled (50%) Hipped (4%) Asymmetrical (0.5%) Flat (51%)	51%	54%	Traditional grass lawns; some homes have lush vegetation or xeriscaping.	Conway Park has adequate landscaping.	Minimal to no landscaping.	Barbara Dr. has a full tree canopy. Conway Dr. & Smith Ln. have good coverage. Street trees are sparse along Sturgeon Dr.
Modern two-story homes along Sturgeon Drive are in stark contrast with the minimal traditional character that exists throughout most of the neighborhood. Additionally, multi-unit apartment homes such as Redwood Apartments along the Sturgeon and Clarewood Apartments near Hwy 101 provide a break from the average one-story building height that is common for most buildings in the neighborhood.		The majority of roofs used for single-family homes are shingles (91%) or metal (9%).	This category is comprised entirely of manufactured homes.	The majority of single-family homes have a pitched roof.		7 small trees exist within the park; however they are not large enough to provide shade in high-traffic areas of the park (basketball court & skate park).	Barbara Dr. is the only street where the sidewalk is set back from the street curb.	Residents are concerned that aging trees will be costly to replant/replace.

CHARACTER METRICS

Blanco Gardens Neighborhood - Qualitative Metrics

Metric	Public Spaces/Landmarks			Public Art		
	Quality of Public Spaces	Amenities in Public Spaces	Landmarks/ Destinations	Presence of Public Art	Types of Public Art	Upkeep of Public Art
Metric Defined	Description of maintenance level.	Description of existing amenities in a public spaces.	Description of landmarks or destinations within a public space.	Includes murals, sculptures, or other forms of visual art.	Includes murals, sculptures, or other forms of visual art.	Description of maintenance level.
Metadata	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from public workshop and/or steering committee.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from public workshop and/or steering committee.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood. Also included input from public workshop, steering committee, and/or Historic Resources Survey.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood.	Observation by walking and driving through the neighborhood to determine if art was damaged or in good shape.
Blanco Gardens	Quality of Conway Park is good.	Conway Park (playground with swings, mini skate park, basketball half court, covered picnic table, water fountain).	The San Marcos River, Barbara Drive, and Cuevas Produce were mentioned frequently.	Painted mailboxes (along Barbara Dr), mural (Clarewood Dr. next to Cane's Chicken).	Painted mailboxes and mural on Clarewood Drive.	Neighborhood art is in relatively good condition.
Notes	Variety of amenities are well maintained, however frequent vandalism has been identified as a topic of concern for this space in the Parks Master Plan.		Feedback from the workshop highlighted Stokes Park/Thompson's Island, which abuts the area plan. Additionally, there is a historic marker at Thompson's Island.			

SMTX VISION



APPENDIX C

SAN MARCOS BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



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COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Invitations for each engagement event were sent via postcard to all residential addresses in the plan area, via email to all who opted in for City notifications, and all events were advertised on the VisionSMTX website. Attendees included people who live and/or work in Blanco Gardens, and other interested community members.

Workshops were designed with the intention of gleaning feedback and input on the Neighborhood Area Plan from a broad swath of community members both in-person and online. The first was held on the evening of November 17, 2022, and garnered 422 comments. The second Community Workshop on the evening of April 27, 2023 yielded 258 comments. A Community Open House was hosted in tandem with a door-to-door outreach campaign on November 16, 2023, and 121 comments were collected.

Workshops included a presentation segment and an open house segment. Anecdotal feedback from workshop participants indicated that the meeting format was received well and an effective means for public engagement. Detailed summaries and photos of Community Workshops 1 and 2, as well as the Community Open House, are described in the following pages.

Community Workshop #1 Summary

The first Blanco Gardens Neighborhood Area Plan Community Workshop was held in person on November 17th, 2022 at the San Marcos Activity Center. Several interactive board displays were used to gauge comments and feedback from residents concerning several topic areas:

1. Neighborhood Amenities
2. Housing
3. Transportation & Connectivity
4. Destinations & Services
5. Neighborhood Character
6. “Tell Your Story”

The board displays were also available through a take-home toolkit and in a virtual workshop activity through Konveio. This provided an opportunity for those who could not attend the in-person event to participate in the workshop and provide feedback.



Overall, **50 citizens took part in the neighborhood workshop, with one participant engaging through a take-home toolkit and four participants engaging through the online workshop activity.** General trends and commonalities between the in-person workshop, take-home toolkit, and virtual workshop activity are summarized below.

Images of the workshop boards along with event photos can be found at the end of the summary.

1. Neighborhood Amenities

This station highlighted the current amenities within the neighborhood that are valued by residents and prompted discussions as to what neighborhood amenities residents would like to see in the future. When asked what neighborhood amenities are important to them, participants stated that **pedestrian and bicycle access across IH-35** was their top concern. **Access to parks** was also listed as a common concern, with Stokes Park and Cape’s Camp being specifically highlighted as parks of interest.

When asked what neighborhood amenities are missing in Blanco Gardens, participants expressed that **additional retail shops and restaurants** are needed. Access to parks was also highlighted through this question as a missing neighborhood amenity.

Looking to the future, participants identified **natural open spaces and trails** as the highest priority for Blanco Gardens. Specific comments were made concerning the preservation and re-establishment of native plants, along with enhancing the amenities available at Stokes Park. Another common answer included **parks & playgrounds**, with specific mention of additional trash collection areas at these spaces.



The table below highlights additional neighborhood amenities mentioned as a **high priority**.

	Total Votes
Natural Open Spaces & Trails	13
Parks & Playgrounds	10
Community Gardens	7
Formal & Informal Gathering Spaces	3
Community & Recreational Centers	2
Community / Neighborhood Events	2

2. Housing

This station asked participants to identify the existing housing types within the neighborhood and prompted discussions as to what housing types are missing or could be expanded. Participants stated that single-family housing types are the most important to Blanco Gardens because they reflect the style of home historically found in this neighborhood. Additionally, **low-income/affordable housing options** were also highlighted as an important need within the community.

Affordable housing options was also identified as a housing opportunity that is missing and should be expanded. Specific comments were made concerning affordable options for “working class families” and housing for seniors.

When asked what housing concerns are the highest priority for this area, the themes of **housing affordability** and **maintaining the single-family housing types** continued to be the top responses. Participants stated that maintaining the current neighborhood’s charm can be achieved through preserving and enhancing the single-family housing character present within the neighborhood.

The table to the right highlights additional housing concerns participants felt were of **highest priority** for the neighborhood.

Many additional comments from both the in-person workshop and virtual activity discussed their concerns with new multi-story housing being located adjacent to one-story homes, and the mismatch between the architectural styles of the two.

	Total Votes
Neighborhood Character	9
Housing Affordability	8
Housing Availability	4
Upkeep & Maintenance	1
Vacant Lots or Buildings	1
Other priorities not listed here	0

3. Transportation & Connectivity

This station encouraged participants to identify what modes of transportation they currently use to get around the neighborhood and prompted discussions as to what transportation options are missing or could be improved in the future. Participants identified **walking and vehicular travel** as the top modes of transportation currently used to get around Blanco Gardens. Many of the transportation and connectivity options that are missing from the neighborhood reflect the **need for additional safety measures for cyclists and pedestrians**. More specifically, these include traffic-calming measures – such as stop signs and speed bumps – and a hike & bike trail connecting Blanco Gardens to neighborhoods



across IH-35. Participants identified intersections along Barbara Drive and Conway Drive as those in need of traffic/speed control strategies, as well as the intersection of Sturgeon Drive, River Road, and Cape Road.

When asked what transportation and connectivity options are **highest priority** for the future,

participants highlighted **well-maintained streets** as their top priority. Comments within this related to additional safety measures for cyclists and pedestrians and reflect the safety concerns mentioned previously. Additional priority topics concerning transportation are highlighted in the table to the right.

	Total Votes
Well-Maintained Streets	8
Sidewalks	6
Off-Street Trails	6
Focus on Safety	6
Transit & Rideshares	5
Bike Facilities	3

4. Destinations & Services

This station encouraged participants to identify what destinations and services they currently visit in Blanco Gardens – for example restaurants, retail, jobs, etc. – and prompted discussions as to what destinations and services should be prioritized for the future and where they should be located. When asked what destinations and services they currently visit within Blanco Gardens, the majority of participants listed **Cuevas Produce**. The US Post Office and CVS Pharmacy were also common answers. Participants identified several destinations and services options that they would like to see in the future, including **additional restaurants – specifically coffee shops** – and other businesses where residents can relax, hang out, and visit with other members of the community. Specific examples mentioned include a **family or youth-oriented activity center** or a wellness center. A **grocery store** was also identified as a priority for the future. It should be noted that participants would like new businesses within the neighborhood to be locally owned.

The table below highlights additional **priority topics** concerning future destinations & services.

	Total Votes
Restaurants & Cafes	11
Grocery & Retail Stores	9
Personal Services	3
Healthcare & Education	2
Public Gathering Space	2
Government & Financial	0

Four **locations** were identified as areas appropriate for **new destinations and services**. Linda Drive – specifically where it intersects **River Road and Sherbarb Street** – could serve as hubs for commercial use. The intersections of **Bugg Lane and Barbara Drive/Conway Drive** were also identified as a location for a new activity center or space for after school programs.

5. Neighborhood Character

This station asked participants to share what characteristics contribute to or enhance the character of Blanco Gardens and encouraged participants to consider what characteristics detract from the existing neighborhood character. When asked what characteristics contribute to or **enhance the character** of Blanco Gardens, participants highlighted the existing **tree canopy** and **proximity to the San Marcos River** as their top responses. Additional comments specifically referenced the large sycamore trees on Barbara Drive as an asset to neighborhood character.

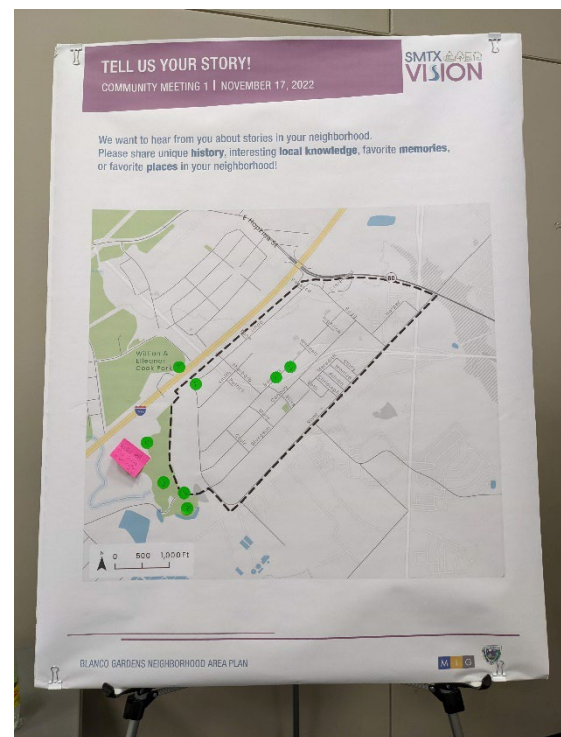
When asked what characteristics **detract from the character** of Blanco Gardens, an overwhelming majority of responses discussed how building height and a **mismatch between new and old housing types** creates structures that feel “out of place” within the neighborhood. This reflects comments given within the Housing topic of the workshop. Many comments related to this question highlighted how the architectural features of these homes – 2-story structures with a modern look – conflict with the architectural style of one-story, single-family homes commonly found within the neighborhood.

6. “Tell Your Story”

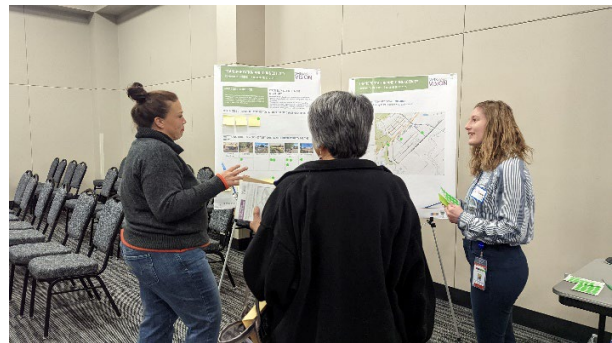
Participants were invited to **share unique history, interesting local knowledge, favorite memories, or favorite places within Blanco Gardens**. Each story highlighted a different natural asset that is found only in the Blanco Gardens neighborhood.

Two common locations mentioned within these stories was the **San Marcos River and the parks** that front it. Many stories described memories of hanging out by the River or at Cape’s Camp, and **walking along the multi-use path** that once connected Blanco Gardens to the neighborhoods east of IH-35. The existing **tree canopy** – especially along Barbara Drive – was also mentioned in many stories as a natural asset within the neighborhood.

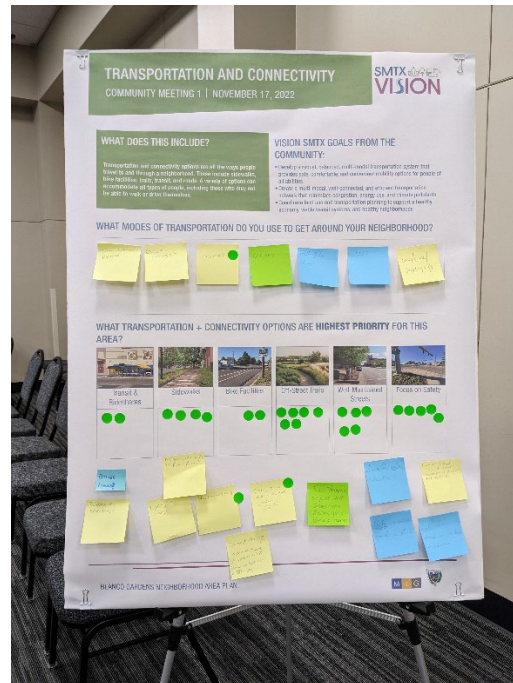
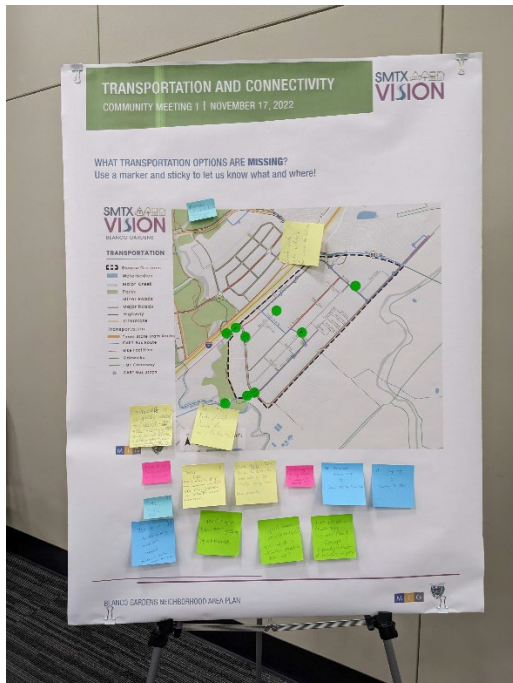
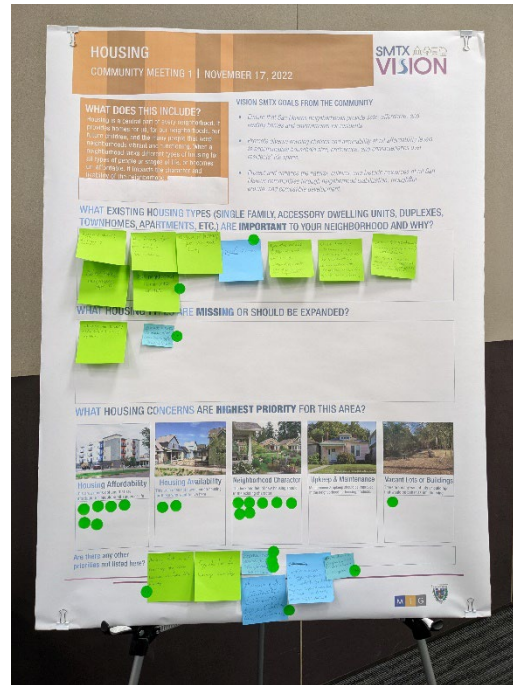
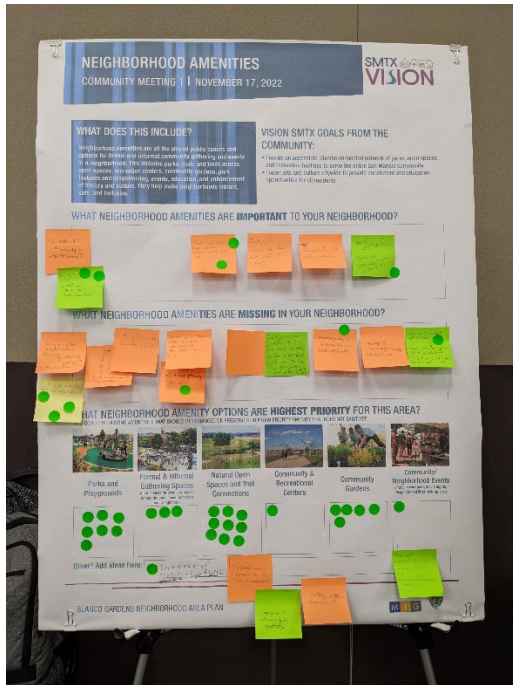
Participants shared memories of **Cuevas Produce**, as it is one of the only community-oriented businesses where residents can get fresh food. The store also serves as a community gathering place, with many stories discussing the **strong social cohesion** that exists between both tenured residents and newcomers to the area.



Event Photos



Workshop Boards



Workshop Boards (continued)

DESTINATIONS AND SERVICES
COMMUNITY MEETING 1 | NOVEMBER 17, 2022

SMITHSONIAN VISION

WHAT DESTINATIONS + SERVICES DO YOU CURRENTLY VISIT IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?
(RESTAURANTS, RETAIL SHOPS, DAY CARE, BARBER, SHOP, EMPLOYMENT, JOB, ETC.)

WHAT DESTINATION + SERVICES ARE MISSING THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

WHAT IS THE MOST IDEAL LOCATION FOR NEW NEIGHBORHOOD DESTINATIONS AND SERVICES? USE A MARKER AND STICKY TO LET US KNOW WHAT AND WHERE!

Map showing a neighborhood layout with a dashed line indicating a proposed route or boundary. A scale bar indicates 0 to 100 feet. A legend indicates 'Park' (green) and 'Water' (blue).

[illegible]

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

COMMUNITY MEETING 11 NOVEMBER 17, 2022

SMTC
VISION

WHAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER?

Neighborhoods are important because they weave a City together. "Neighborhood Character" is the look and feel of a place and every contributor to the uniqueness of its area. Neighborhood character is also the "physical places" where neighborhoods and people come together. These character factors are important every time to serve the needs and desires of the neighborhood. Sometimes it may also take a plan or vision for an area to attract or bring back or new neighborhood residents.

Characteristics of a neighborhood can often be seen or made notes in a map. Let us know what notes make your song remember!

SOME EXISTING CHARACTERISTICS

Many existing trees & trees-lined streets

Close to businesses

Neighborhood grocery store

Majority low-density housing types (single family homes) with a mix of multifamily & commercial (near 96 St, River Road, and Bigg Li)

Close proximity to bus routes & Bixbee Park

NEIGHBORHOOD SNAPSHOT

1904	Approximate # of units:	4-5'	Sidewalks
14	Zoned Districts	20-30'	Building Setbacks
33%	Zoned Single Family 6	93	Tree Score
33%	Zoned Multi-family	60-80'	Lot Widths
58	Walkways (Formal/Informal)		

REGULATORY LIMITS

Some characteristics of plots, properties, or buildings can be regulated by cities. However, private property owners also have specific rights to what they can or can't do on their property. Tools used for regulating or changing places in San Marcos include Texas Local Government Code, Zoning, the City Land Development Code, Design Guidelines, and Overlay such as Historic Districts.

CAN BE REGULATED

Existing Height
Building Style
Housing Use
Parking
Signage
Lot Size
Impervious Cover
Building Location
Units per acre
Density
Setbacks + Trees

CANNOT BE REGULATED

Building Color
Building Materials
Required Ownership or Rental units
Public Art
Neighborhood Affluence
Presence + who lives in a neighborhood
Aesthetics + party versus not party

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS CONTRIBUTE TO OR ENHANCE THE CHARACTER OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

WHAT CHARACTERISTICS DETRACT FROM THE CHARACTER OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOODS AREA P

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TELL US YOUR STORY!
COMMUNITY MEETING 1 | NOVEMBER 17, 2022

SMTX 
VISION

We want to hear from you about stories in your neighborhood.
Please share unique **history**, interesting **local knowledge**, favorite **memories**,
or favorite **places** in your neighborhood



A map of the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood Area Plan. The map shows a grid of streets including Walnut, Elm, Oak, and Birch. A dashed line outlines the neighborhood boundary. A pink square highlights the 'WALNUT & PINEWOOD CORNER' area. Green dots are placed along the Walnut and Elm streets. A scale bar at the bottom left indicates 0, 500, and 1,000 feet. A north arrow is also present.

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN

Community Workshop #2 Summary

The second Blanco Gardens Neighborhood Area Plan Community Workshop was held in person on Thursday, April 27th, 2023 at the San Marcos Activity Center. Those in attendance were able to view progress made on draft recommendations for the plan and provide additional feedback regarding what could be improved or added.

These recommendations were presented at **7 stations**, each focusing on a different topic area, including:

1. **Arts, History, and Culture**
2. **Streetscapes**
3. **Public Spaces & Amenities**
4. **Housing**
5. **Building Form & Development**
6. **Business Community**
7. **Getting Around**



The station displays were also available through a take-home toolkit and through a virtual workshop activity with Konveio. This provided an opportunity for those who could not attend the in-person event to participate in the workshop and provide feedback.

Overall, **50 participants took part in the neighborhood workshop and 158 comments were generated through the in-person event**. No take-home toolkits or Konveio comments were received by staff. General trends and commonalities for each of the 7 stations are summarized below.

Images of the workshop boards along with event photos can be found at the end of the summary.

1. Art, History, and Culture

This station highlighted what we've heard so far concerning the need for additional historical and artistic features to help "tell the story" of Blanco Gardens. Suggestions included adding historical markers, public art, and other features which would honor the indigenous culture and history of San Marcos.

The **draft recommendations** presented during the workshop incorporated these suggestions and included the following:

- Identify visible sites that can be enhanced with public art or where interpretive materials can be installed that tell the story of the neighborhood.
- Find and engage local artists that can create works ranging from murals to sculpture for future use as public art to share the history of the neighborhood.
- Enhance existing trails and promote future trails on large properties owned by the City using signage, wayfinding, public art, and recreational amenities.
- Identify ways to tell underrepresented San Marcos stories, such as through the Texas Historical Commission's Undertold Stories Marker Program.



- Promote arts and culture programming that is family-friendly and representative of Blanco Gardens residents in existing parks, city facilities, or at neighborhood block parties.

These recommendations also prompted discussions as to what types of public art or events should be used to showcase historical and cultural places that are significant to Blanco Gardens. Many additional comments touched on how the **painted mailboxes** spread throughout the neighborhood add a personal touch of art and help to make the neighborhood unique. Additionally, **public murals** were commonly mentioned as a desire within the community and could be **placed at specific locations such as Conway Park, the wall along Cape Road, and Stokes Park**.

2. Streetscapes

This station highlighted what we've heard so far concerning connectivity and the need for additional streetscape features within the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood. Previous feedback expressed a desire for additional crossings along River Road and Highway 80 to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety, as well as the need for additional sidewalks to fill-in gaps in existing infrastructure. Many comments highlighted the sycamore trees along Barbara Drive as a major asset to the community and suggested that these trees be preserved and maintained going forward.

The **draft recommendations** presented during the workshop incorporated these suggestions and included the following:

- Identify wide streets where travel lanes can be narrowed or sidewalk space can be expanded.
- Provide educational and financial support programs for residents regarding tree health and maintenance.
- Create a tree palette of historically well-growing trees in the neighborhood or additional species that will contribute to the large tree canopy.
- Explore the use of "low-impact development" installations as methods for traffic calming such as rain gardens and landscape bulb-outs.
- Introduce incremental traffic calming measures such as colorful sidewalks, bulb-outs, crosswalks, medians, and signage to slow speeds.
- Ensure bus stops and the paths leading to them are clean and well-maintained.
- Seek Keep San Marcos Beautiful "Adopt-a-Spot" sponsors to assist in cleaning and beautifying key streets in the neighborhood.

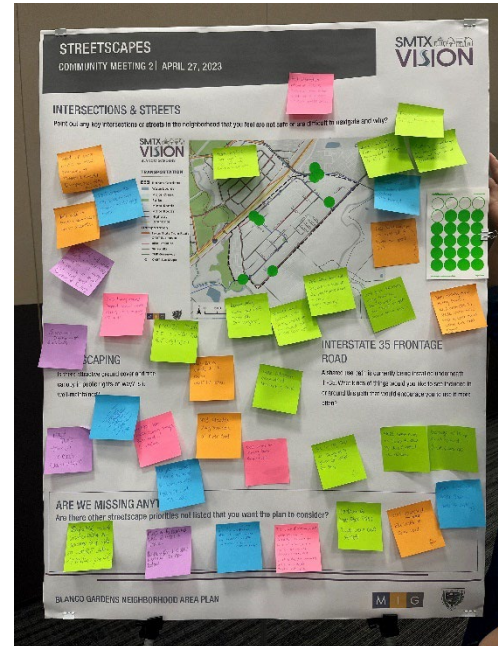
Comments generated at this station focused mostly on pedestrian and bicycle safety, and participants were able to highlight **key intersections** in the neighborhood where they felt additional **safety measures such as stop signs, speed bumps, and crosswalks** should be incorporated. These suggested locations included:

- Create a multi-use path along River Road for both cyclists and pedestrians.
- Install a permanent 4-way stop at the intersection of Cape Road and River Road.
- Install traffic calming features along River Road to deter speeding.

- Separate the sidewalk from the vehicle travel lane to increase pedestrian safety.

Another common topic was the need for an **expanded bicycle and pedestrian network**. Sidewalks and protected bike lanes were suggested along River Road connecting to Highway 80 and along Cape Road heading south to the Wallace Addition neighborhood.

Upkeep and maintenance of vegetation along the street was also mentioned at this station, and comments ranged from trimming overgrown vegetation to maintaining and **expanding the tree canopy** throughout the neighborhood. River Road was specifically identified as an area in need of additional tree coverage.



3. Public Spaces & Amenities

This station summarized what we’ve heard so far surrounding public spaces and amenities within Blanco Gardens, including the need for additional amenities within public parks and trails (benches, trash/recycling bins, etc.) and the importance of preserving natural open spaces within and adjacent to the neighborhood.

The **draft recommendations** proposed at this station incorporated these suggestions and included the following:

- Ensure that pedestrian crossings across River Road are safer and easier to cross to help residents reach Stokes Park, the riverfront, and trails.
- Better align the City’s Capital Improvement Plan and park improvement projects, amenities, and programming with neighborhood desired priorities and involve residents in the design process.
- Coordinate city park and floodplain projects for opportunities to provide trails that connect to surrounding areas and collaborate with other regional trail initiatives such as the Great Springs Trail.
- Ensure city parks, property, and facilities incorporate natural spaces and features such as trees for shade, native plants, seating, and are easily accessible by the neighborhood residents.
- Consider the installation of a designated “walking trail loop” using key streets and consider streetscape enhancement.

Participants at this station were encouraged to think about what additional amenities could be provided at both Stokes Park and Conway Park, and to consider movement to and through these spaces. Many comments discussed the lack of safe pedestrian pathways between public spaces – especially **connecting the neighborhood to the San Marcos River** – and requested that the temporary **stop sign at the intersection of Cape Road and River Road become permanent**. Others suggested more **areas designed for children**, such as a splash pad at Conway Park, in tandem with these safe pathways.



4. Housing

This station highlighted what we've heard to far regarding housing affordability, availability, and what types of housing should be encouraged in the neighborhood. Previously, many comments highlighted the desire for new housing developments to preserve the style unique to Blanco Gardens (single-story, minimal traditional style home with low pitched roof).

The **draft recommendations** proposed at this station incorporated these suggestions and included the following:

- Update, review, and adopt a Housing Action Plan to address housing needs in the neighborhood.
- Explore a city-operated Home Improvement Incentive Program to finance needed improvements and keep current homes livable and attractive.
- Encourage developers to consider diverse housing types desired by the neighborhood and align with the Neighborhood Character Study for currently vacant sites.
- Support housing types identified by the neighborhood including single-family, accessory dwelling units, live-work units, and smaller-scale multifamily in appropriate locations.
- Evaluate short term rentals in the neighborhood and strategies to reduce their impact.
- Promote local CDBG funded housing initiatives in the neighborhood, including the Housing Rehabilitation Repair Program to preserve existing housing stock.

Participants at this station expressed concerns regarding the affordability of the neighborhood and worry that current residents will be displaced due to rising housing costs. Comments also highlighted the need for **multi-generational housing**, where a **variety of housing options** are provided throughout the neighborhood to accommodate residents at all stages of life.

This station also provided an opportunity for participants to identify which housing types they would like to see more or less of and what spaces within the neighborhood would be able to accommodate them (see table). Overall, these comments seemed open to a variety of housing types, including small and medium multi-family, but suggested **that large multi-family complexes be avoided**.

	Total Votes
Single-Family Home	5
Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)	2
Duplex	2
Small Multi-Family	2
Medium Multi-Family	1
Large Multi-Family	0

5. Building Form and Development

This station highlighted what we've heard so far concerning the physical features of structures and sites within the neighborhood. This includes building height, materials, orientation, and massing, along with impervious ground cover. Previous feedback expressed the need for diverse housing types in the neighborhood but specified that new structures should be consistent with the typical housing size, mass, and style seen throughout Blanco Gardens.

The **draft recommendations** proposed at this station incorporated these suggestions and included the following:

- Support cluster-style development on vacant infill lots to preserve open space.



- To prevent demolition of existing structures which contribute to the neighborhood's character, requests for new development should be focused on infill of vacant lots or through rehabilitation of existing structures.
- 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).
- Consider "gentle density" for new housing to encourage more housing types such as townhomes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that align with the Neighborhood Character Study.
- Coordinate with the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update to implement strategies relevant to infill development in the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood to mitigate flooding and other natural hazards.
- Encourage or require neighborhood-oriented design attributes on new or renovated structures, such as sidewalks, front doors which face the neighborhood, and other pedestrian design features which fit the neighborhood's physical character.

These recommendations also prompted discussions as to what attributes of existing buildings stand out as being representative of the Blanco Gardens neighborhood and should be replicated on new structures in the future. Participants emphasized that **single-story structures with roofs that slope front to back across the lot** are the typical Blanco Gardens style and that these attributes should be used in new projects going forward. The large, vacant tract in the center of the neighborhood was identified as a potential site for new single-family housing built using the features listed above. Building types that reflect a **large building mass** – such as large multi-family complexes – **should be discouraged**.

6. Business Community

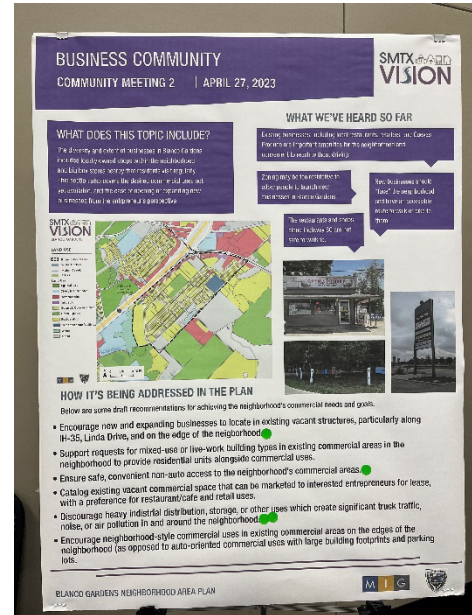
This station summarized what we've heard so far, including the need for additional local businesses and retailers within walking distance, and new building requirements that would have new businesses and structures "face" the neighborhood.

The **draft recommendations** proposed at this station incorporated these suggestions and included the following:

- Encourage new and expanding businesses to locate in existing vacant structures, particularly along IH-35, Linda Drive, and on the edge of the neighborhood.
- Support requests for mixed-use or live-work building types in existing commercial areas in the neighborhood to provide residential units alongside commercial uses.
- Ensure safe, convenient non-auto access to the neighborhood's commercial areas.
- Catalog existing vacant commercial space that can be marketed to interested entrepreneurs for lease, with a preference for restaurant/cafe and retail uses.
- Discourage heavy industrial distribution, storage, or other uses which create significant truck traffic, noise, or air pollution in and around the neighborhood.
- Encourage neighborhood-style commercial uses in existing commercial areas on the edges of the neighborhood (as opposed to auto-oriented commercial uses with large building footprints and parking lots).

Participants expressed support for several of these draft recommendations, with the most popular being to **discourage heavy industrial distribution, storage or other uses which create significant truck traffic, noise, or air pollution.**

Additional prompts at this station asked participants what types of businesses they would like to visit nearby and what physical features they would like to see on new commercial buildings and sites. Many comments highlighted the need for **ADA accessible sidewalks** along neighborhood streets and **pathways that connect these sidewalks to the front doors of businesses.** Participants also suggested that new businesses be located along River and could include **grocery stores, gas stations, and restaurants.**



7. Getting Around

This station presented what we've heard so far concerning mobility, accessibility, and connectivity and provided an opportunity for participants to provide additional input concerning these topics. Previously, many residents expressed a desire for maintenance of existing sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure while providing additional connections across IH-35 and Highway 80. Additionally, stop signs at key intersections within the neighborhood were also requested.

The **draft recommendations** proposed at this station incorporated these suggestions and included the following:

- Perform a safety study where crashes have occurred to confirm appropriate physical improvements at key intersections such as the addition of pedestrian crossings or stop signs.
- Expand less traditional transportation modes like scooters and bike shares to connect residents to surrounding areas.
- Evaluate safety and ease of using alternative modes of transportation.
- Improve existing bus stops to provide shelters and transit information such as bus routes/times and install additional stops if needed.
- Focus on potential projects to better connect the neighborhood to the Wallace Addition neighborhood and explore safe routes to nearby schools such as Goodnight Middle School and De Zavala Elementary.
- Evaluate pedestrian/bike connection under IH-35 for potential improvements (lighting, signage, etc.) after installation.

Additional feedback gathered during the workshop asked participants to comment on the accessibility of common destinations as well as barriers to connectivity between these destinations.

Participants highlighted that **additional bike lanes, sidewalks, and crosswalks** are necessary to promote active transportation throughout the neighborhood, especially along River Road and Highway 80. Additional safety features, such as **stop signs and speedbumps**, were mentioned as ways to deter speeding through the neighborhood. Comments at this station also noted that **street trees** should be

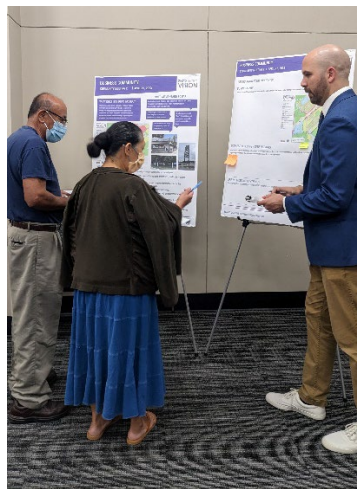


provided for future projects or improvements along roadways, as this will help provide shade and cooling.

Improved infrastructure and amenities for **bus stops** – including **better signage, seating**, and publicly available **time-tables** – were mentioned as well.

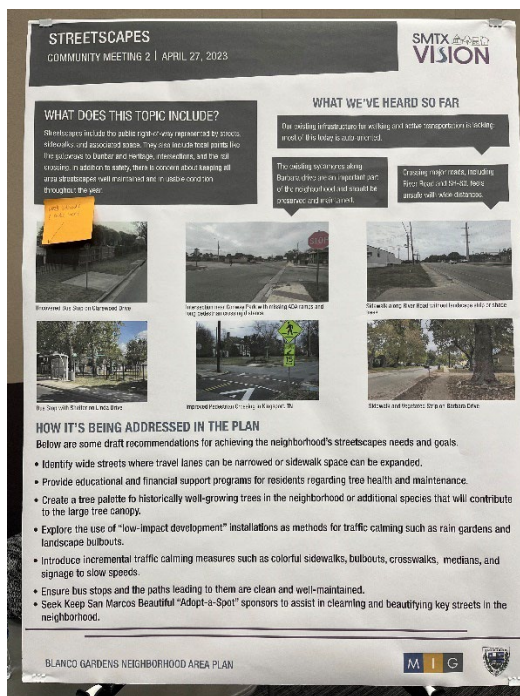
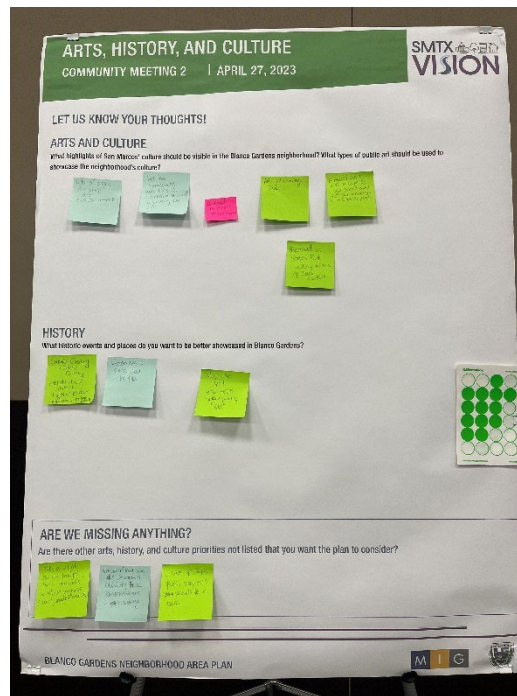
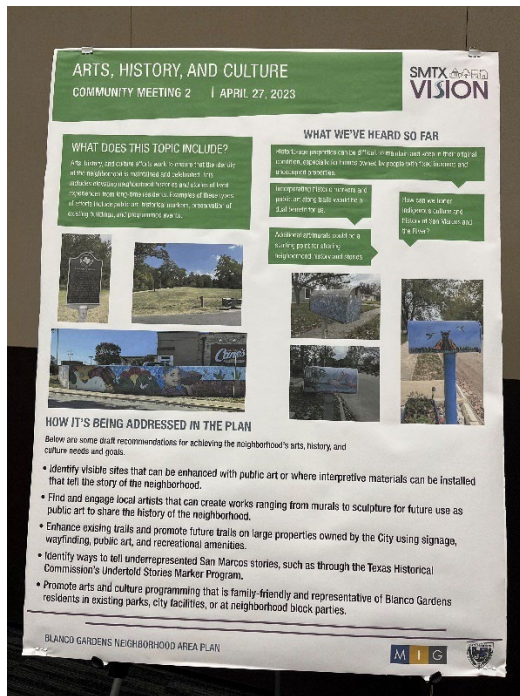
Ultimately, participants expressed that the network of pedestrian and bicycle paths should be expanded to connect the neighborhood with the rest of San Marcos. Example suggestions included a passage across IH-35 and a crosswalk at the intersection of Clarewood Drive and Highway 80.

Event Photos





Workshop Boards





Workshop Boards (continued)

PUBLIC SPACES AND AMENITIES

COMMUNITY MEETING 2 | APRIL 27, 2023

WHAT DOES THIS TOPIC INCLUDE?

Parks, trails, playgrounds, outdoor recreation facilities, as well as open spaces dedicated to public use. This could include libraries, community centers, and community gardens.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR

Our Capital Improvement Projects are underway by the City, but we also have a lot of community requests for more parks and open spaces.

Community requests for more parks and open spaces are being heard.

Community requests for more parks and open spaces are being heard.

Community requests for more parks and open spaces are being heard.

HOW IT'S BEING ADDRESSED IN THE PLAN

Below are some draft recommendations for achieving the neighborhood's public spaces & amenities needs and goals.

- Ensure that pedestrian crossings across River Road are safer and easier to cross to help residents reach Stokes Park, the riverfront, and trails.
- Better align the City's Capital Improvement Plan and park improvement projects, amenities, and programming with neighborhood desired priorities and involve residents in the design process.
- Coordinate city park and recreation projects for opportunities to provide trails that connect to surrounding areas and collaborate with other regional trail initiatives such as the Great Springs Trail.
- Ensure city parks, property, and facilities incorporate natural spaces and features such as trees for shade, native plants, seating, and are easily accessible by the neighborhood residents.
- Consider the installation of a designated "walking trail loop" using key streets and consider streetscape enhancement.

PUBLIC SPACES AND AMENITIES

COMMUNITY MEETING 2 | APRIL 27, 2023

LET US KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS!

OUTDOOR RECREATION

Are there specific, mentioned outdoor spaces (e.g. parks, trails for recreation)? Where do we need more of these?

PUBLIC SPACES

Are there adequate and accessible public spaces (e.g. community center, library)? What is missing & where?

CONWAY PARK

Do you have a vision for Conway Park? What type of improvements, amenities, or programming would you like to see?

STOKES PARK

Do you have a vision for Stokes Park? What type of improvements, amenities, or programming would you like to see?

ARE WE MISSING ANYTHING?

Are there other public spaces and amenities not listed that you want the plan to consider?

HOUSING

COMMUNITY MEETING 2 | APRIL 27, 2023

WHAT DOES THIS TOPIC INCLUDE?

Housing is a central part of the neighborhood. There are several types of housing types in the neighborhood including single-family, duplex, triplex, accessory dwelling units, and multi-family. The plan is to address the needs of the neighborhood and the surrounding areas.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR

Home ownership is a goal for many residents in the neighborhood. There are several types of housing types in the neighborhood including single-family, duplex, triplex, accessory dwelling units, and multi-family.

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Home ownership is a goal for many residents in the neighborhood. There are several types of housing types in the neighborhood including single-family, duplex, triplex, accessory dwelling units, and multi-family.

HOW IT'S BEING ADDRESSED IN THE PLAN

Below are some draft recommendations for achieving the neighborhood's housing needs and goals.

- Update, review, and adopt a Housing Action Plan to address housing needs in the neighborhood.
- Explore a city-operated Home Improvement Incentive Program to finance needed improvements and keep current homes livable and attractive.
- Encourage developers to consider diverse housing types desired by the neighborhood and align with the Neighborhood Character Study for currently vacant sites.
- Support housing types identified by the neighborhood including single-family, accessory dwelling units, live-work units, and smaller-scale multifamily in appropriate locations.
- Evaluate short-term rentals in the neighborhood and strategies to reduce their impact.
- Promote local CDBG-funded housing initiatives in the neighborhood, including the Housing Rehabilitation Repair Program to preserve existing housing stock.

HOUSING

COMMUNITY MEETING 2 | APRIL 27, 2023

LET US KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS!

AFFORDABILITY

Do you think you'll be able to afford to continue to live in your home or rent in the neighborhood? Why or why not?

AVAILABILITY

Is there a need for a variety of housing types (apartment, duplex, triplex, accessory dwelling unit, townhome, single-family house) for all who want to live here and continue to live here through various stages in life?

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

Does the look and feel of new housing fit the existing neighborhood? Describe what you think fits or does not.

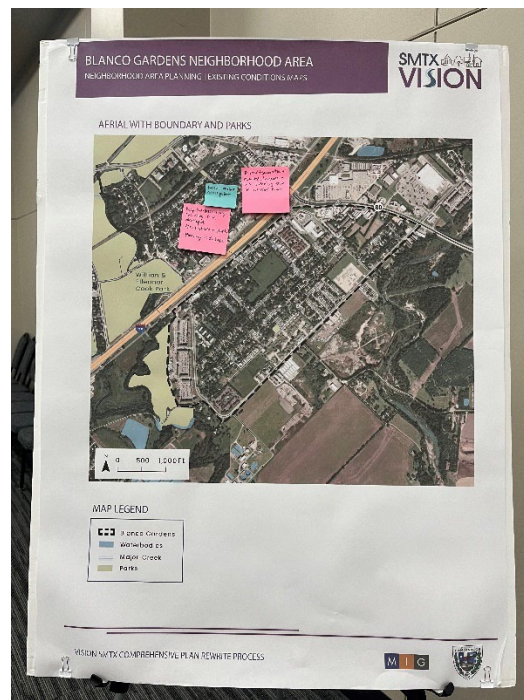
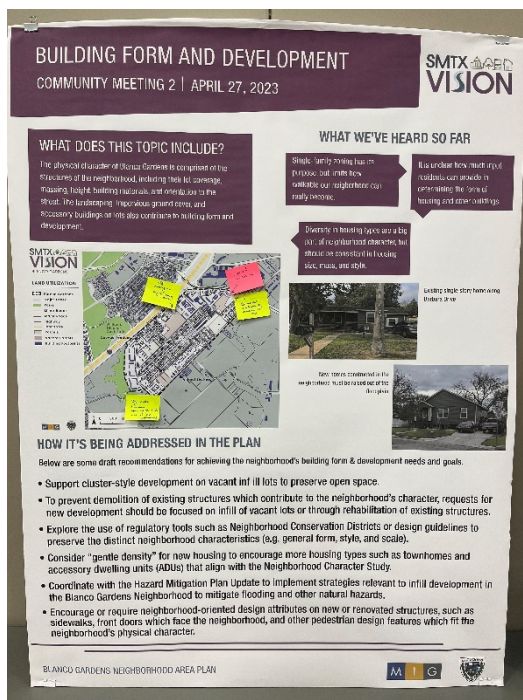
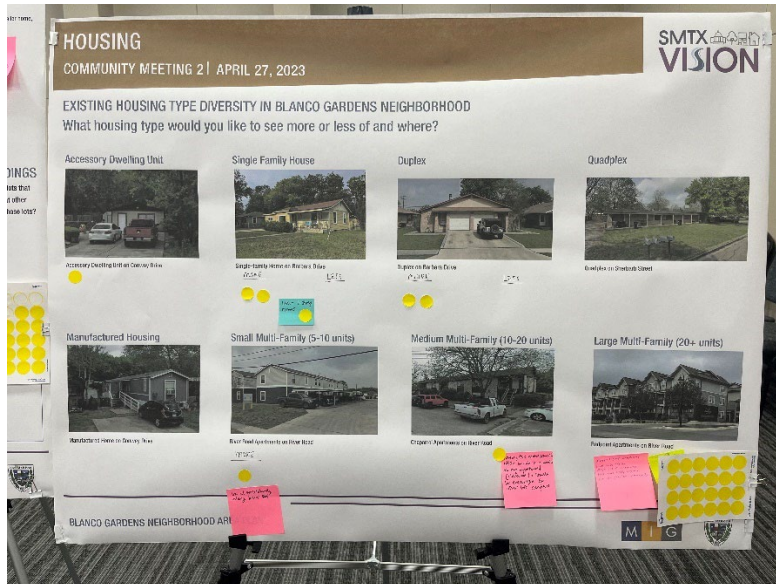
UPKEEP & MAINTENANCE

Are existing homes in good condition? If not, what resources would you like to see provided to homeowners or property managers to help?

VACANT LOTS OR BUILDINGS

Would you like to see new housing on lots that are vacant or have vacant buildings? What other uses would you like to see in these or other lots?

Workshop Boards (continued)



Workshop Boards (continued)

BUILDING FORM AND DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY MEETING 2 | April 27, 2023

SMTX VISION

LET US KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS!

EXISTING BUILDINGS
What existing buildings stand out as being representative of the Blanco Gardens neighborhood? What distinct features stand out that should be preserved?

NEW AND RENOVATED BUILDINGS
What attributes should be included on new or renovated buildings so that they fit in with the neighborhood? What should be avoided?

ARE WE MISSING ANYTHING?
Are there other considerations for building form and development not listed that you want the plan to consider?

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN

BUSINESS COMMUNITY
COMMUNITY MEETING 2 | APRIL 27, 2023

SMTX VISION

WHAT DOES THIS TOPIC INCLUDE?
The diversity and character of businesses in Blanco Gardens includes locally owned shops within the neighborhood and businesses that serve a wider region. The plan should encourage the development of new and existing businesses that are compatible with the existing neighborhood character and the needs of the neighborhood.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR
Encourage businesses including new restaurants, cafes, and fitness. Provide an opportunity for the neighborhood to be connected to the rest of the city.
Having easy access to the neighborhood to allow people to shop and visit.
The businesses and shops along Highway 90 are not safe to visit to.

HOW IT'S BEING ADDRESSED IN THE PLAN
Below are some draft recommendations for achieving the neighborhood's commercial needs and goals.

- Encourage new and expanding businesses to locate in existing vacant structures, particularly along IH-35, Linda Drive, and on the edge of the neighborhood.
- Support requests for mixed-use or live-work building types in existing commercial areas in the neighborhood to provide residential units alongside commercial uses.
- Ensure safe, convenient non-auto access to the neighborhood's commercial areas.
- Catalyze existing vacant commercial space that can be marketed to interested entrepreneurs for lease, with a preference for restaurant/cafe and retail uses.
- Discourage heavy industrial distribution, storage, or other uses which create significant truck traffic, noise, or air pollution in and around the neighborhood.
- Encourage neighborhood-style commercial uses in existing commercial areas on the edges of the neighborhood (as opposed to auto-oriented commercial uses with large building footprints and parking lots).

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN

BUSINESS COMMUNITY
COMMUNITY MEETING 2 | APRIL 27, 2023

SMTX VISION

LET US KNOW YOUR THOUGHTS!

BUSINESS MIX
Are the types of businesses you want to see (shops, services, restaurants, etc.) nearby? What would you like to see new businesses in your neighborhood?

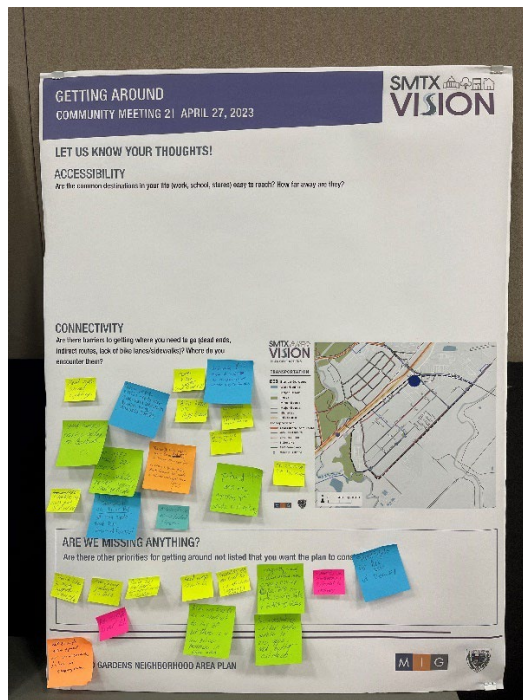
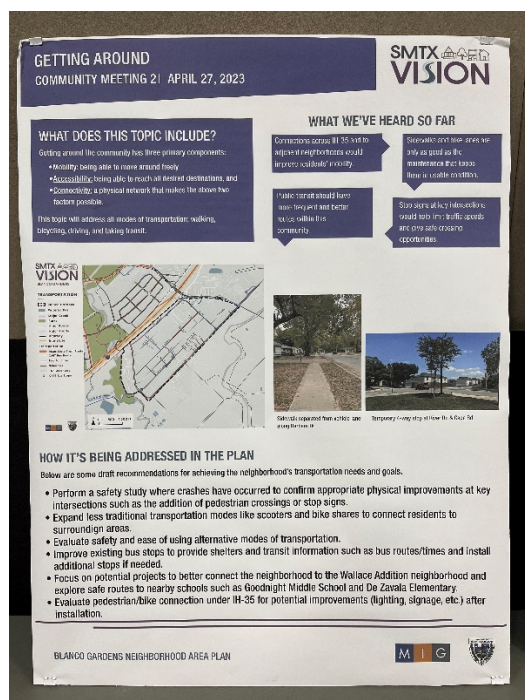
BUSINESS BUILDING / SITE DESIGNS
What kinds of physical building or site design attributes would you like to see on new commercial buildings (e.g., site shading, signage, pedestrian access, etc.)? Are there any existing buildings in the neighborhood that you would like to see replicated?

ARE WE MISSING ANYTHING?
Are there other business priorities not listed that you want the plan to consider?

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN



Workshop Boards (continued)



Community Open House Summary

A Community Open House was held in person on Thursday, November 16th, 2023 at the K.A.D. Korner Store to gather input on the Draft Blanco Gardens Neighborhood Area Plan. Before the event, staff conducted a door-to-door campaign to raise awareness about the Community Open House, provide information and tools for accessing the Draft Plan online, and answer questions that property owners had. Around 250 homes were reached during this door-to-door campaign.

Those who attended the in-person Open House were able to view the draft recommendations included in the plan and provide additional feedback regarding what could be improved or added.

These recommendations were presented at **7 stations**, each focusing on a different topic area, including:

1. **History, Arts, & Culture**
2. **Getting Around**
3. **Streetscapes**
4. **Public Spaces & Amenities**
5. **Housing**
6. **Business & Economic Development**
7. **Building Form & Development**



A summary of the draft recommendations was also available through a take-home toolkit, which included a QR code link to the online Draft Plan through Konveio. This QR code was also included on flyers distributed during the door-to-door campaign. This provided an opportunity for those who could not attend the in-person event to view the draft plan and provide additional feedback on the recommendations.

Over a dozen participants took part in the community open house and about 75 comments were generated through the in-person event. About 50 additional comments were provided on the Draft Plan during the public comment period, which was open from October 20th through November 27th, 2023.

General trends and commonalities for each of the 7 stations are summarized below. Images of the community open house boards along with event photos can be found in the document appendix.

1. History, Arts, & Culture

This station highlighted what we've heard so far concerning the need for additional historical and artistic features to help "tell the story" of Blanco Gardens. This included historic markers and signage on public trails, as well as additional public art incorporated throughout the neighborhood. This feedback was used to inform recommendations within the Draft Blanco Gardens Area Plan. The **draft recommendations** presented during the open house were a snapshot of the full list of recommendations provided in the draft plan for History, Arts, & Culture.



This snapshot of recommendations included the following:

- HAC 1.3: Establish partnerships between the City and any interested institutions such as Texas State University, El Centro Cultural de Hispano, Indigenous Cultures Institute, and the Council for Indigenous & Tejano Community to help share their history of the Plan Area and the broader history of San Marcos.
- HAC 2.2: Identify visible sites throughout the neighborhood that can be enhanced with public art or where interpretive materials can be installed that highlight the history, landmarks, and people of Blanco Gardens. Specifically, this could be included on existing city facilities, such as the Animal Shelter, in existing public parks, or could be “mini-murals” in strategic locations. Consider multiple mediums including murals and sculptures.
- HAC 3.1: Enhance the trail experience along the San Marcos River by adding signage, wayfinding, and public art at trailheads, trail intersections, neighborhood connections to trails, high-traffic areas, and points of interest.
- HAC 3.2: Provide bilingual signage in both English and Spanish for trail, wayfinding, and educational panels.

Comments received during the Open House expressed **support for HAC 2.2 and HAC 3.1**. Both recommendations discussed additional trail signage, public art installations, and markers at points of interest throughout the neighborhood. One comment suggested creating a name or “brand” for existing trails – such as the hike and bike trail behind Redpoint Apartments – to help establish a unique character for trails within the neighborhood. Additional feedback also suggested a neighborhood-wide paint your mailbox day, which could be incorporated into HAC 2.2.

Many comments also expressed **support for HAC 1.3**, and participants appreciated efforts to establish partnerships with local institutions such as Texas State University, El Centro Cultural de Hispano, Indigenous Cultures Institute, and the Council for Indigenous & Tejano Community.

2. Getting Around

This station highlighted what we’ve heard so far concerning mobility, accessibility, and connectivity to and through the neighborhood. Previous feedback expressed a desire for additional crossings along River Road and Highway 80 **to improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety**, as well as the need for **additional sidewalks** to fill-in gaps in existing infrastructure. This feedback was used to inform recommendations within the Draft Blanco Gardens Area Plan. The **draft recommendations** presented during the open house were a snapshot of the full list of recommendations provided in the draft plan for Getting Around.

This snapshot of recommendations included the following:

- GA 1.3: Continue to implement the City’s existing Sidewalk Gap Program and assess its success for improving the sidewalk network within the Plan Area, particularly in areas identified by residents as a priority street. If portions of the neighborhood are not recommended for sidewalks or if sidewalks would be infeasible, use traffic calming measures to make walking in the street safe for pedestrians, specifically children, elderly, and those with mobility impairments.



- GA 1.4: Perform studies to determine if Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons (PHB) and/or other traffic calming measures - such as roundabouts - are warranted at strategic locations to improve the safety and comfort of pedestrian and bicycle crossings.
- GA 2.1: Install signage or other wayfinding measures to designate a “walking loop trail” along key streets throughout the neighborhood and consider streetscape enhancements to promote the use of this trail for commuting to services as well as an active recreation/fitness route.
- GA 4.1: Improve existing bus stops to provide shelters and transit information such as bus routes/times and install additional stops if needed.

The most common comment received during the event discussed the **need for additional street lighting**, as certain areas of the neighborhood are dimly lit or not lit at all. To reflect this feedback in the plan, an **additional recommendation addressing these concerns** will be incorporated. This recommendation will encourage additional streetlights in areas that are dimly lit or lack lighting infrastructure in the streetscape. These light fixtures should be compatible with neighborhood character and work to create a unique brand for Blanco Gardens. The fixtures chosen for installation should comply with the International Dark Skies guidelines to limit the amount of light pollution within the neighborhood.

Other comments received were **in favor of GA 1.3**, which discusses the need for additional pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure throughout the neighborhood, especially connecting across IH-35 to adjacent neighborhoods and parks.

Another common theme among feedback was the need for **additional traffic calming measures** at key locations in the neighborhood. Several of these locations are mentioned in draft recommendation **GA 1.4**, but additional locations and traffic calming measures were proposed during the event. These suggested locations included:

- Speed humps on Barbara Drive and River Road
- Additional stop signs at cross streets
- Enhanced pedestrian crossing at the intersection of SH-80 and Clarewood Dr.

3. Streetscapes

This station summarized what we’ve heard so far concerning the need for additional streetscape features within Blanco Gardens. Previously, many residents expressed a desire for additional sidewalk and bicycle infrastructure while also providing connections across IH-35 and Highway 80. Another request was for stop signs to be installed at key intersections within the neighborhood. This feedback was used to inform recommendations within the Draft Blanco Gardens Area Plan. The **draft recommendations** presented during the open house were a snapshot of the full list of recommendations provided in the draft plan for Streetscapes.

This snapshot of recommendations included the following:

- ST 1.2: Consider safety improvements at high-traffic intersections and other areas where incidents between pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers are most likely, including the vicinity of Stokes Park along Cape Road.



- ST 2.2: Introduce incremental traffic calming measures such as colorful sidewalks, bulb outs, crosswalks, medians, and signage to slow car speeds.
- ST 2.3: Study effective location of speed humps along Barbara Drive and other applicable streets within the neighborhood, such as Sherbarb Street.
- ST 3.3: Provide educational and financial support programs for residents regarding tree health and maintenance. Explore grants which can be used to support residents and/or fund trees which can be installed by the City in the neighborhood.

Feedback received during the Open House **supported the majority of recommendations within this section**; however, **ST 2.1, ST 3.2, and ST 4.2 were specifically highlighted** as being “excellent”. These recommendations encourage native landscaping and tree plantings within the streetscape while also incorporating traffic-calming measures into the right-of-way.

Additional comments received at this station highlighted the need for more robust sidewalk infrastructure and additional street lighting. These comments were addressed in GA 1.3 as well as the new recommendations concerning additional street lighting.

4. Public Spaces & Amenities

This station highlighted what we’ve heard to far regarding existing parks and open space, as well as the desire for additional public spaces. Previous comments highlighted the desire for additional amenities – such as benches, trash/recycling bins, and dog waste stations – at existing parks and along trails. Comments also expressed the desire for additional native plants in these spaces, coupled with regular maintenance. This feedback was used to inform recommendations within the Draft Blanco Gardens Area Plan. The **draft recommendations** presented during the open house were a snapshot of the full list of recommendations provided in the draft plan for Public Spaces & Amenities.

This snapshot of recommendations included the following:

- PSA 1.1: Continue to maintain the existing park and trail facilities in Blanco Gardens for regular use. Assess whether their usage may require more frequent cleaning and maintenance, or installation of new amenities that reflect the needs of the residents (e.g., exercise stations, enhanced lighting, picnic areas). Incorporate best practices from the Dark Skies Initiative when possible.
- PSA 3.1.4: If lots within the neighborhood become for sale, the City should consider purchasing land in key locations for flood mitigation and public amenities.
- PSA 3.2.2: Evaluate key areas with high volumes of trash within the public right-of-way and/or parks and explore additional ways to support litter removal and prevention such as additional Hot Spot Clean Ups, Adopt-a-Spot, added recycle and trash bins, or other methods.
- PSA 3.3.2: Continue to work with the City arborist to add or replace trees and provide maximum shade where people congregate outdoors. Consider planting additional trees within Conway Park which is currently lacking in mature, native trees. In addition, prioritize new tree plantings along the trail adjacent to Cape’s Camp to provide shade for trail users and expand the tree canopy.



Comments in this section expressed specific **support for PSA 1.2, PSA 3.1.3, and PSA 3.3.2**. Each referred to improving parks and open space within the neighborhood and acquiring additional public parkland as a way to address flooding issues within the neighborhood. Several comments also discussed the need for native plants in these spaces and supported additional tree plantings to maintain and improve the tree canopy.

5. Housing

This station highlighted what we've heard to far regarding housing affordability, availability, and what types of housing should be encouraged in the neighborhood. Previously, many comments highlighted the desire for new housing developments to preserve the style unique to Blanco Gardens (single-story, minimal traditional style home with low pitched roof). This feedback was used to inform recommendations within the Draft Blanco Gardens Area Plan. The **draft recommendations** presented during the open house were a snapshot of the full list of recommendations provided in the draft plan for Housing.

This snapshot of recommendations included the following:

- HSG 1.2: Continue City-led actions, such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs, that will add context-appropriate homes to Blanco Gardens. Programs should focus on smaller for-sale and rental homes to better match local housing demand.
- HSG 2.1: Evaluate potential barriers in the Development Code to building modular or industrialized homes. The City should ensure that proposed modular homes fit with the existing character of Blanco Gardens through the use of an overlay district with associated Single Family Design Guidelines.
- HSG 4.1: Consider starting a catalog of pre-approved home plans that meet both Development Code requirements and are compatible with the neighborhood character identified by residents. This example palette of homes could be used for vacant lots where a property owner is interested in building a home.
- HSG 5.1: Consider expanding existing home improvement or home rehabilitation incentives to owners. To be most effective in Blanco Gardens, the program should consider age-in-place modifications and flood resilience upgrades as eligible uses for program funds.

Feedback at the Open House raised concerns for housing types that don't fit the character of the neighborhood. Specific comments stated that **residents would like to see a requirement that new homes match the scale of existing buildings in the neighborhood**. Recommendation **HSG 4.1** incorporates this feedback, but an additional overlay district – such as mentioned in BFD 3.4 – could act as a supplement to address this concern.

Additional **support** was received for **HSG 5.1 and HSG 5.3**. Both of these recommendations encourage homeowners to utilize flood-resilience in home modifications and discusses homeowner incentives for installing green infrastructure features.



6. Business & Economic Development

This station summarized what we've heard so far concerning economic development and business retention in the neighborhood. Previous feedback highlighted the need for additional local businesses and retailers within walking distance, and new building requirements that would have building entrances "face" the neighborhood. This feedback was used to inform recommendations within the Draft Blanco Gardens Area Plan. The **draft recommendations** presented during the open house were a snapshot of the full list of recommendations provided in the draft plan for Business & Economic Development.

This snapshot of recommendations included the following:

- BIZ 1.1: Communicate the business and employment opportunities and needs within and adjacent to the Plan Area to the Greater San Marcos Partnership to help promote low vacancy rates of existing retail spaces and/or commercial buildings.
- BIZ 1.2: Encourage business owners to orient an entrance for restaurant and retail storefronts toward the neighborhood, rather than solely toward SH-80 and IH-35. For existing commercial buildings where this is not practical, encourage wayfinding or inviting paths that prioritize customers arriving from within the neighborhood. Encourage/require the addition of bicycle racks at entrances.
- BIZ 1.3: Develop a plan to support local businesses in the event of another construction or infrastructure project planned for Blanco Gardens. Ensure physical access for customers is clear and well-signed, and participate in marketing efforts to ensure the public knows they remain open.
- BIZ 2.1: Assess the unmet local demand in and surrounding Blanco Gardens for commonly requested business types. If robust demand exists, encourage entrepreneurs or interested prospective businesses looking to open in San Marcos to explore opening these businesses in the commercially zoned areas of Blanco Gardens, particularly vacant structures along IH-35, Linda Drive, and on the edge of the neighborhood.

Participants expressed **support for BIZ 1.2**, which encourages businesses to orient an entrance towards the neighborhood, especially for businesses located along IH-35 Frontage Road.

A majority of comments were in **support of BIZ 2.1**, which recommends encouraging interested businesses to locate in Blanco Gardens. This feedback mentioned that specific encouragement should be given to local coffee shops and restaurants.

7. Building Form & Development

This station highlighted what we've heard so far concerning the physical features of structures and sites within the neighborhood. This includes building height, materials, orientation, and massing, along with impervious ground cover. Previous feedback also specified that new development should be consistent with the typical housing size, mass, and style seen throughout Blanco Gardens. This feedback was used to inform recommendations within the Draft Blanco Gardens Area Plan. The **draft recommendations** presented during the open house were a snapshot of the full list of recommendations provided in the draft plan for Building Form & Development.



This snapshot of recommendations included the following:

- BFD 2.2: Consider any vacant sites that are unlikely to be developed due to environmental or other reasons as future parks or recreational spaces.
- BFD 3.1: Consider and support “gentle density” for new housing to encourage strategic infill with diverse housing types such as townhomes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that aligns with the Neighborhood Character Study. Recommend development types that are desired by Blanco Gardens residents that fit with existing physical character (including massing, height, orientation, and style).
- BFD 3.4: 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).
- BFD 3.6: Coordinate with the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update to implement strategies relevant to infill development in the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood to mitigate flooding and other natural hazards.

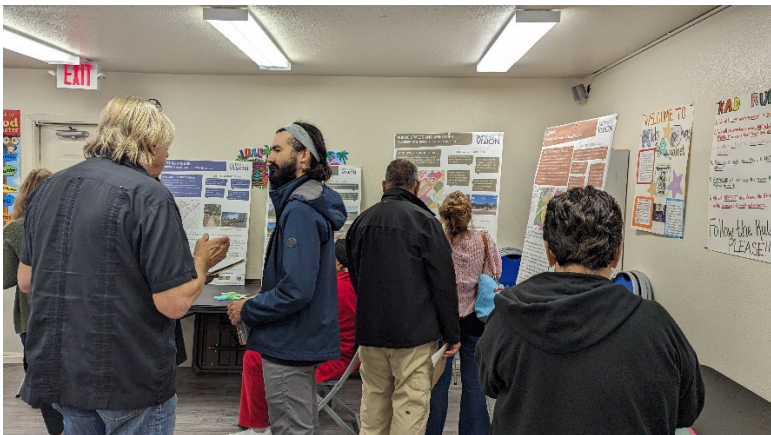
Many comments were in **support of BFD 2.2**, which recommends considering vacant sites that are unlikely to be developed as future parks or recreational spaces. This feedback is also incorporated into **PSA 3.1.4**, which specifically references future parks and open space.

Other comments expressed support for recommendations that **encouraged building features specific to neighborhood character**. For example, front doors that face the neighborhood, sidewalks, and consistent height and building style. These types of suggestions are included in **BFD 3.1 and BFD 3.5**, as well as in the Neighborhood Character Study in Appendix B of the Draft Plan.

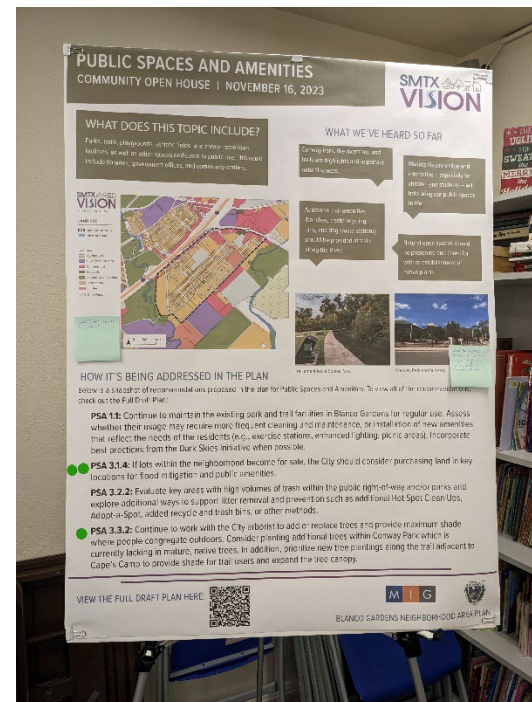
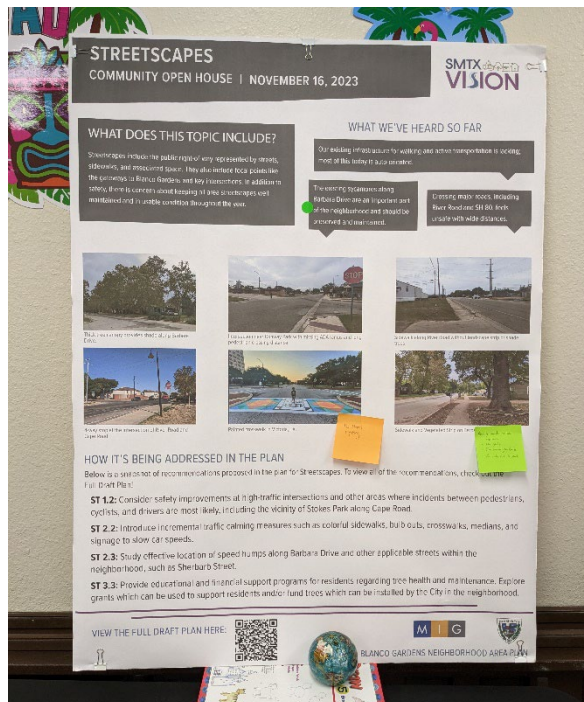
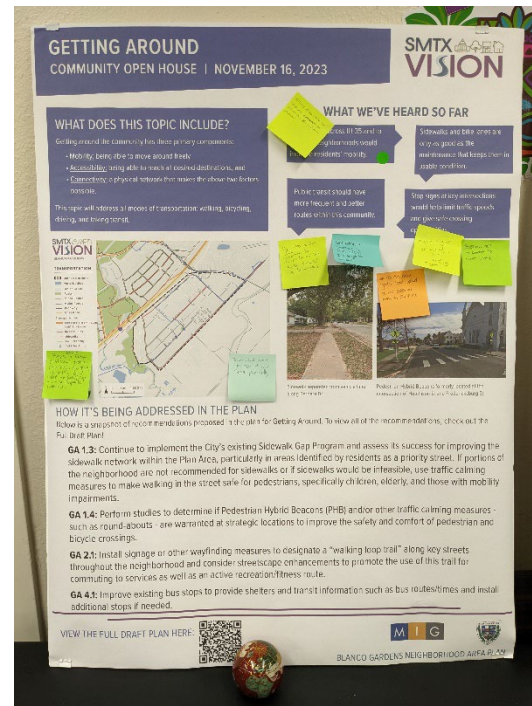
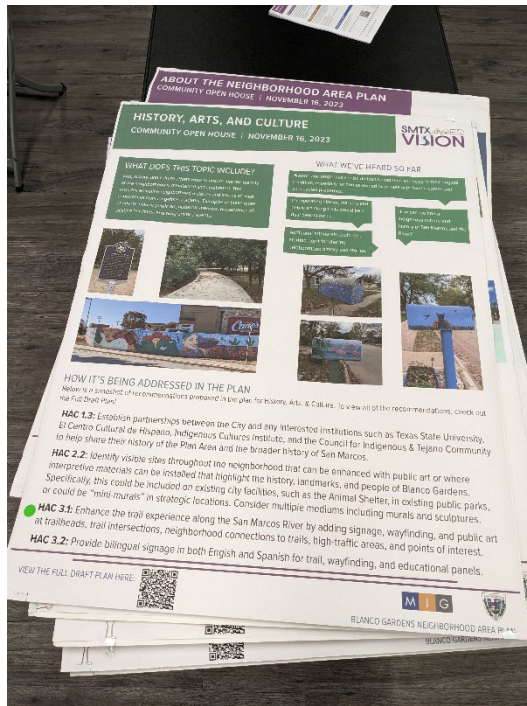
Door-to-Door Campaign Photos, Open House Event Photos & Workshop Boards



Open House Event Photos



Workshop Boards





Workshop Boards (continued)

HOUSING
COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE | NOVEMBER 16, 2023

WHAT DOES THIS TOPIC INCLUDE?
Housing is a critical part of the community. The City of San Marcos is committed to providing a variety of housing options to meet the needs of its residents. This includes affordable housing, senior housing, and housing for people with disabilities. The City is also committed to preserving historic housing and promoting sustainable housing practices.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR
The City should consider creating a housing trust fund to provide affordable housing. The City should also consider creating a senior housing program to provide housing for seniors. The City should also consider creating a program to provide housing for people with disabilities. The City should also consider creating a program to preserve historic housing. The City should also consider creating a program to promote sustainable housing practices.

HOW IT'S BEING ADDRESSED IN THE PLAN
Below is a snapshot of recommendations proposed in the plan for Housing. To view all of the recommendations, check out the Full Draft Plan.

HSG 1.2: Continue City-led actions, such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs, that will add and/or rehabilitate existing housing stock in the City. The City should also consider creating a program to provide housing for people with disabilities. The City should also consider creating a program to preserve historic housing. The City should also consider creating a program to promote sustainable housing practices.

HSG 2.5: Evaluate potential barriers in the Development Code to building modular or industrialized homes. The City should consider creating a program to provide housing for people with disabilities. The City should also consider creating a program to preserve historic housing. The City should also consider creating a program to promote sustainable housing practices.

HSG 4.1: Consider creating a catalog of pre-approved home plans that meet both Development Code requirements and are compatible with the neighborhood character identified by residents. This example palette of homes could be used for various lots where a property owner is interested in building a home.

HSG 5.5: Consider expanding existing home improvement or home rehabilitation incentives to owners. To be most effective in Blanco Gardens, the program should consider age-in-place modifications and flood resilience upgrades as eligible uses for program funds.

VIEW THE FULL DRAFT PLAN HERE

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN

BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE | NOVEMBER 16, 2023

WHAT DOES THIS TOPIC INCLUDE?
The diversity and nature of businesses in Blanco Gardens is a key factor in the neighborhood's character. The City is committed to supporting a variety of businesses, including small businesses, and promoting economic development. The City is also committed to supporting the growth of the neighborhood and creating jobs for its residents.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR
The City should consider creating a program to support small businesses. The City should also consider creating a program to promote economic development. The City should also consider creating a program to support the growth of the neighborhood. The City should also consider creating a program to create jobs for its residents.

HOW IT'S BEING ADDRESSED IN THE PLAN
Below is a snapshot of recommendations proposed in the plan for Business & Economic Development. To view all of the recommendations, check out the Full Draft Plan.

BIZ 1.2: Encourage business owners to create a business plan for their business. The City should also consider creating a program to support small businesses. The City should also consider creating a program to promote economic development. The City should also consider creating a program to support the growth of the neighborhood. The City should also consider creating a program to create jobs for its residents.

BIZ 1.3: Develop a plan to support local businesses in the event of another contribution or infrastructure project planned for Blanco Gardens. The City should also consider creating a program to support small businesses. The City should also consider creating a program to promote economic development. The City should also consider creating a program to support the growth of the neighborhood. The City should also consider creating a program to create jobs for its residents.

BIZ 2.1: Assess the current local economic development or business development program in the City of San Marcos to explore opportunities for future business in the community. The City should also consider creating a program to support small businesses. The City should also consider creating a program to promote economic development. The City should also consider creating a program to support the growth of the neighborhood. The City should also consider creating a program to create jobs for its residents.

VIEW THE FULL DRAFT PLAN HERE

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN

BUILDING FORM AND DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSE | NOVEMBER 16, 2023

WHAT DOES THIS TOPIC INCLUDE?
The physical character of Blanco Gardens is a key factor in the neighborhood's character. The City is committed to preserving the physical character of the neighborhood and promoting building form and development. The City is also committed to supporting the growth of the neighborhood and creating jobs for its residents.

WHAT WE'VE HEARD SO FAR
The City should consider creating a program to preserve the physical character of the neighborhood. The City should also consider creating a program to promote building form and development. The City should also consider creating a program to support the growth of the neighborhood. The City should also consider creating a program to create jobs for its residents.

HOW IT'S BEING ADDRESSED IN THE PLAN
Below is a snapshot of recommendations proposed in the plan for Building Form and Development. To view all of the recommendations, check out the Full Draft Plan.

BFD 2.2: Consider any vacant sites that are unlikely to be developed due to environmental or other reasons as future parks or recreational spaces.

BFD 3.1: Consider and support "gentle density" for new housing to encourage strategic infill with diverse housing types such as townhomes and accessory dwelling units (ADUs) that aligns with the Neighborhood Character Study. Recommend development types that are desired by Blanco Gardens residents that fit with existing physical character (including massing, height, orientation, and style).

BFD 3.4: 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).

BFD 3.6: Coordinate with the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update to implement strategies relevant to infill development in the Blanco Gardens Neighborhood to mitigate flooding and other natural hazards.

VIEW THE FULL DRAFT PLAN HERE

BLANCO GARDENS NEIGHBORHOOD AREA PLAN



INTERCEPTS AND WALKING TOURS

Additional informal events were held within the Plan Area boundary to provide plan information to residents and elicit feedback at other times of day and in the heart of the neighborhood. These events were a come-and-go information meeting at the K.A.D. Korner Store on November 18, 2022, a neighborhood walking tour on December 8, 2022, and an informal “coffee chat” at the K.A.D. Korner Store on April 28, 2023. Staff also attended the Quarterly Blanco Gardens Public Safety Meeting which was held on June 13, 2024.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Nine San Marcos residents and stakeholders from local organizations were invited to join an ad hoc steering committee to guide the development of this Area Plan. The committee met four times between November 2022 through December 2024 to discuss priorities for the Plan and offer the planning team guidance on where to focus.

The first meeting of the Steering Committee was held virtually on November 2, 2022. The plan team introduced the goals of the Area Plan, then members were asked to share the opportunities, assets, and issues that they encounter in Blanco Gardens, as well as what contributes to its unique character. The second meeting was held virtually on February 13, 2023, where members brainstormed recommendations for the plan’s seven topic areas. The Steering Committee met a third time on October 4, 2023 to hear a presentation of the draft area plan before it was made available for public review. The fourth meeting occurred on February 28, 2024 to discuss the results of the public comment period and offer an additional round of feedback. The fifth and final meeting was held on December 11, 2024 to express the Committee’s support of the final version of the Area Plan with a vote.



ONLINE

The Vision SMTX website that hosts the Comprehensive Plan is also in use for all Neighborhood Area Plans. The Blanco Gardens Area Plan has a dedicated webpage on the site with a virtual walking tour that mirrors the in-person walking tour route, materials from each of the Community Workshops for review and comment with the Konveio tool, and a StoryMap. This feature allowed community members to share their own neighborhood memories and suggestions.

SHARED EXPERIENCES

The Plan team asked the neighborhood for narrative stories that will illuminate Blanco Gardens' history and culture. This process captures neighborhood features that a traditional planning process may not uncover, including informal social interactions, modes of civic interaction, displays of local pride, sacred spaces, and respected elders and authority figures.

The dominant theme that residents shared was flood recovery, an acute challenge that has significantly impacted Blanco Gardens. The shared experiences reinforced the value of existing networks in the neighborhood. Some residents leaned on neighbors to begin to understand recovery resources, know-how for rebuilding (or relocation) and future flood prevention. Sharing what they know with neighbors has further strengthened Blanco Gardens' sense of community. The Sustainability and Hazard Mitigation section of this plan contains recommendations for recovery and prevention of a future flooding event informed by the Shared Experiences.

SMTX VISION

