

# Choices

## Appendix 3A: CHARACTER & DESIGN

### Community Character – More Than Just Land Use

Community character is a system for evaluating those features of individual sites and developments that collectively contribute to the “look and feel” of neighborhoods, districts, and the entire community. The components that determine the real compatibility and quality of development include factors other than land use, such as the amount of preserved open space and vegetation, the extent of imperviousness (structures and paved or “hard” surfaces), the orientation of buildings and parking areas, and the relationship of buildings (scale and bulk) to the site. Aesthetic enhancements such as the design of buildings, landscaping and screening, sign control, and site amenities also contribute to enhanced community character. This approach allows the formulation of standards to achieve the desired character in newly-developing areas, redevelopment and infill areas, and areas where a more rural atmosphere is desired for the long term.

The community character approach can be applied to the typical range of land use types. Examples include:

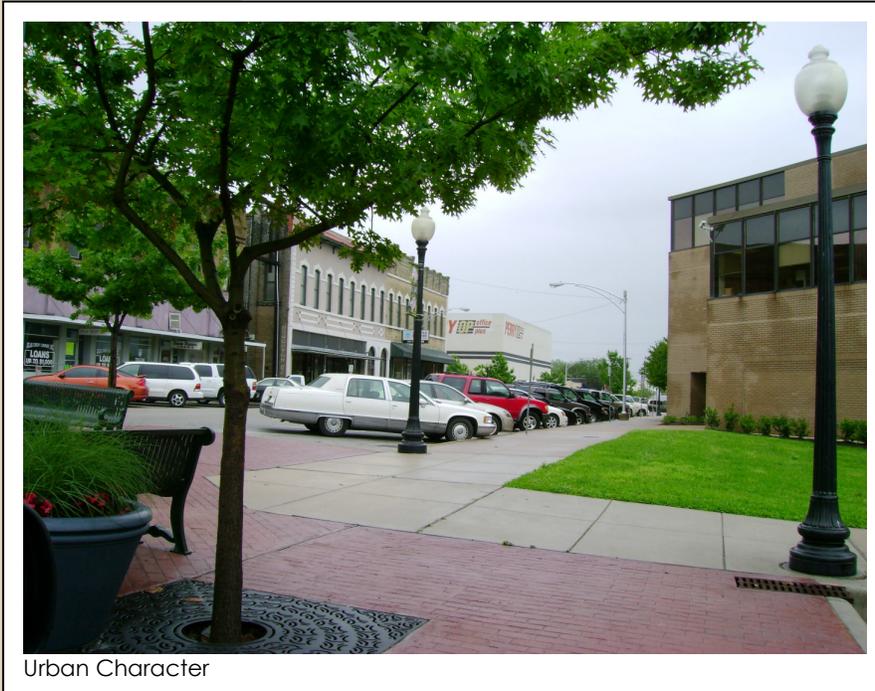
- a single-family home situated on a relatively large lot, with many mature trees and substantial separation from neighboring homes, versus a single-family bungalow on a small, narrow lot with rear-alley access and minimal yard space or vegetation;
- a master-planned business park in a campus-like setting versus an office building on a site dominated by surface parking;
- “storefront” shops and small cafes in a walkable, “neighborhood commercial” setting versus “big box” stores and associated pad-site restaurants and retailers in a large-scale shopping center dominated by surface parking, with minimal landscaping;
- an urban pocket park in a Central Business District versus a natural preserve on the outskirts of the city;
- a manufacturing facility that is on a large site accented by mature trees and extensive landscaping versus an intensive industrial operation, with extensive outdoor activity and unscreened equipment and storage; or
- a public library or community center that is designed to be compatible with the surrounding residential neighborhood versus a municipal public works

maintenance and storage site that is as intensive as most private industrial sites in the community.

The pattern and nature of existing land use and development in Temple was explored using the community character approach. The following section describes the range of community character types and their functions.

### Urban Character

Urban areas are historically the center of commerce, government, culture and entertainment in a community. The features that contribute to an urban character similar to that found in Downtown Temple are the proximity of uses to the public ways, with little or



no building setbacks, and a strong pedestrian orientation at the sidewalk level. An urban center is designed with an intensity of use to draw people into close contact, where congestion and personal encounters are both expected and essential for a vibrant community center.

Urban spaces are “architectural,” meaning that they are enclosed by buildings. The width of a downtown street in relation to the height of abutting structures is essential for creating an “urban” environment. This environment is formed in sections of Downtown where a two-story building face abuts a moderately wide pedestrian

pathway (sidewalk) and a roadway narrowed by on street parking. An example in Temple includes Main Street between Avenue A and Calhoun Street.

### Auto-Urban Character

In many communities that were shaped by the automobile era over the last century, this character type can account for nearly all existing commercial and industrial areas. It is most commonly associated with automobile-oriented retail “strip” centers and smaller commercial sites strung along major roadways. Fast food restaurants, gas stations, shopping centers of varying sizes, and “big box” retailers are the dominant commercial images of an auto-urban character. Higher-density residential uses such as attached and multiple-family housing, manufactured home communities, recreational vehicle “parks,” and site-built homes on small lots also have this character due to their density, limited open space, relative amount of impervious surface devoted to buildings and parking lots, and increased building enclosure.

The primary difference in urban and auto-urban characters is the role of the automobile in its site design. Rather than buildings oriented to the street, as in an urban setting like that found in Downtown Temple, auto-urban environments are characterized by buildings surrounded by parking lots with limited allowance for landscape surfaces.

Although the development intensity of auto-urban areas is usually less than that found within an urban setting, this is commonly due to parcel size, lower land values and design preference as opposed to development regulations. Auto-urban uses require a significant amount of space for high levels of automobile-related activity, particularly large surface parking lots and service and loading areas, with multiple points of site ingress/egress. As a result, buildings are constructed at the back of the site nearest neighboring uses and away from their roadway frontage. This outcome is even more predictable in communities with typical commercial zoning in which a minimum versus maximum front yard setback is established. Auto-urban uses also have a greater reliance on site access, thereby adding to the number of driveways along the public street. The result is expansive parking areas that dominate the front setback and, thus, the character of the development and the overall visual scene.

The primary focus on accommodating the automobile, as is typical of much contemporary development, is a primary determinant in the character of an auto-urban environment. Auto-urban uses, with very few exceptions, consume more land for on-site circulation, parking and other vehicular use areas than is covered by buildings, which commonly exceeds a two-to-one ratio. This type of development design demands large sites and proximity to a high-volume arterial roadway, which diminishes the importance of architecture and results in reduced open space and very often the elimination of natural site features.

**Auto-Urban Commercial**

Auto-urban development is the dominant character pattern in Temple. Examples of auto-urban commercial can be found along I-35, H.K. Dodgen Loop, 31st Street, and along Adams and Central avenues.



**Auto-Urban Residential – Multi-Family**

Examples of auto-urban residential, multi-family, include the apartment complexes located along Chadel Street and Village Way.

**Auto-Urban – Single-Family**

Auto-urban residential, single-family, can be found throughout the city and is the dominant residential development pattern of many of the older established neighborhoods as well as newer ones. A local example is the Western Hills neighborhood.

**Suburban Character**

This community character type is very different from the urban and auto-urban types. The distinguishing factors of a suburban character are increased open space – both on individual sites and cumulatively throughout a residential subdivision or other developed areas – and the preservation or installation of vegetation within and between developments, which helps to create a more even balance between building mass and “green mass.” Rather than creating a sense of enclosure by buildings, as in an urban environment, trees and vegetation form a very different sense of enclosure. Therefore, open space and vegetative cover are essential elements in creating a suburban environment.

The physical distinction between a suburban and urban (or auto-urban) character is the level of use intensiveness or magnitude of activity affecting adjacent uses. Suburban environments are sought as relief from more intensive urban settings, thereby leading to the popularity of contemporary neighborhoods characterized by larger lots, privacy fences, and open areas.



Suburban areas are normally quite different from traditional neighborhoods due to their curvilinear and less interconnected street patterns; contemporary “box-like” housing styles that result from volume building; an identical building envelope on each lot formed by consistent front, side and rear yard setbacks; and a relative lack of vegetation depending on the original site conditions and degree of preservation effort during development. Enhancing the suburban character of such areas may require varying lot sizes, housing styles and setbacks within

each neighborhood; integrating more open space throughout the development; and requiring the use of native vegetation along streets and on each lot to increase the vegetative cover.

All too often, the open space that contributes to the suburban character of a neighborhood is on abutting land that is not yet developed, as are the open vistas that are still intact. The natural open space and views of the landscape are “borrowed” from the adjoining land. Consequently, as additional development eventually occurs adjacent to these existing neighborhoods, the character will also change, leading to disappointed and dissatisfied homeowners who feel they have lost some value and enjoyment in their own property.

When there are no or minimal land development regulations to ensure compatible adjacent uses, the magnitude of character change may vary greatly depending upon the use type developed next door.

This is an important consideration in the design of new subdivisions – and for the protection and sustainability of neighborhoods and residential property values – in terms of whether such developments rely on adjacent land or incorporate permanent open space to sustain their original character. One means of achieving this character so desired by suburban and rural residents is clustered development, which maintains an equal or higher overall development density while preserving permanent open space.

***Suburban Single-Family***

There are several suburban residential developments in Temple including some of the neighborhoods around Lake Belton and the subdivision surrounding the Wildflower Golf Course. Although lots sizes are smaller around the golf course than you would typically see in a suburban development, the presence of a significant amount of common open space and resulting character gives it a suburban feel.

***Suburban Commercial***

Examples of suburban commercial development in Temple include the southwest corner of Industrial Boulevard and the Loop and the Biosciences facility. Suburban commercial development can be characterized by extensive landscaping and/or open space. The architectural style of buildings, building materials, roof, signage and lighting also all contribute to a suburban character.

**Estate Character**

An estate character requires low-density development on larger properties (typically one acre or larger), thereby producing a visual openness. Through these larger lot sizes, open space and vegetation are intended to be the more dominate views, while the buildings are to be apparent, yet secondary to the landscape. Depending upon the size of the home and its percent of coverage and location on the lot, the estate character may resemble a larger version of the typical suburban character. To achieve an estate character, the design of such subdivisions must intentionally seek to imitate more rural areas through the use of rural street sections without sidewalks, vast open space throughout the development, the use of rural



Estate Character

fence types and/or hedgerows to divide properties, the preservation or planting of native vegetation along property boundaries, and generous building setbacks on all sides.

In Temple there are only two subdivisions characterized as Estate. Both are located in south Temple and have lot sizes greater than one acre. One example is Springwood Creek Estates, located along FM 93 in south Temple.

### **Rural Character**

This character class includes three types: countryside, agricultural and natural. Much of the area surrounding Temple is typical of a rural character given the prevailing agricultural landscape, with scattered homesteads and other development. Similar to the transition

from urban to suburban character, the visible distinction of rural character is the importance of the natural landscape, rather than buildings, as the dominant visual feature. Agricultural activities and undisturbed natural areas are the dominant land use rather than conventional suburban and estate residential developments.



Rural Character

### **Countryside**

This type of rural character includes sparse residential acreages, which are often in ex-urban areas beyond the city limits where the first signs of suburbanization are present. Examples of a countryside character may be seen in some outlying areas around Temple, where dwellings are on larger acreages. The common fate of such areas is eventual conversion to a suburban estate (more dense) character as additional acreages are developed in near proximity. Very low intensities (minimum five-acre lot size) are needed to preserve a countryside character, which can be achieved by vegetative screening and locating homes where they are less visible. This character type may be sustained through stringent limits on minimum lot sizes or permanent protection of prime agricultural land and open space. Examples in Temple include scattered residential development off of Hillard Road and off of Forrester and Boutwell roads.

### **Agricultural**

The character of this rural area type is defined by agricultural use, where homes are clearly accessory and secondary. Agriculture may also be a dominant land use in countryside areas, which accommodates a rural residential lifestyle while allowing agricultural use to continue. But in the more rural areas agricultural operations are intended as nearly the sole use. The landscape is accented by farmsteads, barns, fences lining farm fields and livestock areas, and a virtually unbroken horizon, all of which contribute to its rural character.

**Natural**

Natural areas are constrained for development due to features such as streams and floodplains, high water table, depth of bedrock, severe slopes, and densely vegetated areas. Examples of natural character in Temple include the Leon River, the fault line near Midway and Battle, and the green space in the Canyon Creek area.



Natural Character

**Other Land Use Types**

Four other land use types are common in most every community, including Temple. Three of these – Public / Institutional, Parks and Recreation, and Vacant – can potentially occur in any character category. The fourth type, Industrial, can be found in urban, auto-urban, and suburban settings, depending on the community. This is why, when examining existing development patterns, these four are treated more like traditional land use types than as distinctive character types of their own.

**Industrial**

Industrial activity includes both light and heavy uses with outdoor storage, display and work activities including office/warehouse, wholesale, product assembly and light and heavy manufacturing. Examples of industrial activity in Temple include the Wal-Mart distribution center located in the North Temple Industrial Park.

**Public / Institutional**

This category is comprised of public uses including schools, government buildings and semi-public uses such as churches, hospitals, cemeteries, community facilities, clubs/lodges and other places of assembly. Examples in Temple include the Scott & White Hospital and Temple College.

**Parks and Recreation**

Parks and Recreation includes public parks, outdoor recreation areas, and open spaces that are committed to public or private enjoyment. Examples in Temple include Lions Park and South Temple Community Park.

**Vacant**

The Vacant category is comprised of vacant and undeveloped land that is generally located within an urbanized area.

## Urban Design Checklist

The following list of urban design factors was compiled for educational and discussion purposes during the Community Design Workshops held in support of this plan element. The wide-ranging nature of this list was intended to illustrate the many and varied features and elements that can influence a community's image and design quality. Therefore, it also suggested the need for Temple to set priorities as to where it should focus its efforts and resources in working to beautify the community.

### Overall

- Special places
- Community landmarks
- "Edges"
  - Abutting cities
- "Nodes"
- Natural corridors (rivers, creeks, linear greenways)
- Vistas
- Image
  - First and lasting impressions ("front door")

### Corridors

- Land use
  - Compatibility (residential and/or schools along arterials)
  - Character and performance standards
  - Outdoor storage, merchandise display/sales
  - Minimum commercial standards (paved parking area, permanent building)
- Site development
  - Setbacks
  - Building orientation
  - Parking location, setback (and encroachments into public rights-of-way)
  - Open space
  - Fences
  - Lighting
  - Amenities (e.g., outdoor seating, pedestrian pathways)
- Landscaping (private sites, public spaces)
  - Location and extent on private sites (frontage and entry drives, parking lots, building base)
  - Screening and buffering
  - Tree preservation
  - Maintenance
- Signs (on-site, off-site)
  - Size and height
  - Location/setback
  - Number
  - Lighting and effects
  - Temporary
  - Maintenance
  - Abandoned

- Lighting (private sites, public spaces)
  - Directional to avoid glare toward roadways, adjacent properties
  - Lighting design (hardware, lighting type)
  - Accent lighting (entrance focus, pedestrian focus, landscape and/or tree canopy lighting)
  - “Night sky” protection
- Roadway design
  - Cross section (width, sidewalks/trails, bike lanes, green space)
  - Surface (and maintenance)
  - Bridge design
  - Drainage infrastructure
  - Bike/pedestrian accommodation and safety
  - Transit stop location, design (pull-outs, shelter, seating), signage
- Access management
  - Number of driveways
  - Driveway design
  - Acceleration/deceleration lanes
  - Cross access
  - Median (control of turning movements)
- Streetscape (public space)
  - Roadway design (median)
  - Landscaping
  - Use of pavers or other surface variation (intersections, sidewalks, crosswalks, etc.)
  - Lighting
  - Traffic signal design
  - Signage design (traffic control signs, street signs)
  - Overhead utilities
  - Street furniture (benches, trash receptacles, newspaper vending machines)
  - Banners
  - Amenities (fountains, public art)
- Wayfinding
  - Location
  - Design, visibility

#### ***High-Profile Locations***

- “Gateways” (community entries)
  - At/beyond city limits
  - Internal
- Key intersections

#### ***Neighborhoods and Districts***

- Identity/entries
- Edges
  - Protection (land use and character compatibility, screening/buffering)
  - Fencing
  - Perimeter image

- Street design
  - Cross section
  - Surface (and maintenance)
  - Parking (on-street, off-street, alleys)
  - Traffic calming features
  - Block size/length
- Non-auto circulation
  - Sidewalks
  - Bike lanes
  - Off-street trails
- Land use
  - Mixed use (only via Planned Development?)
  - Coordinated school/parking siting
  - Master-planned development (incorporation of mixed housing types, school site, commercial reserve, public open space)
  - Institutional sites/campuses
- Lot size
  - On-site well and/or septic vs. centralized water/sewer
  - Character implications (urban, suburban, estate, rural)
  - Sprawl and growth management implications
  - Cluster development, conservation design
- Amenities
  - Public open space
  - Tree preservation
  - Creek corridors, other water features
- Connectivity
  - Adjacent neighborhoods, retail/office
  - Schools, parks
- Design features
  - Alleys
  - Overhead utilities
  - Drainage infrastructure (amenity design of on-site detention)
  - Building height/mass, setbacks
  - Residential garage location
  - “Anti-monotony” provisions (required variation in house styles/design)
  - “Canyon effect” along streets framed by perimeter fencing
- Redevelopment considerations
  - Compatible infill
  - Historic integrity
  - “Teardowns” (“McMansion” phenomenon)
  - Blight clearance, vacant properties/blocks

**Building Design**

- Façade materials
  - Permitted
  - Multiple materials
  - Front only, side and/or rear treatment
- Variation in building elevations (horizontal, vertical)
- Enhanced building entrances

- Architectural detail
  - Use of color, texture or minor projections/recesses to vary façade
  - Canopies/awnings over windows
  - Covered walkways, arcades
  - Variation in roof line elevation
- Government sites, buildings, facilities

