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Community Character

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Current Conditions

The City of Amarillo has three distinctive development contexts: urban, suburban, and rural.

Urban area characteristics include density, activity, pedestrian-friendly streets where space is framed by buildings with minimal to zero setback, easy pedestrian access to businesses, reliance on vertical development, and on-street parking. Amarillo's urban type development is mostly found in the downtown area or along select major corridors.

Suburban areas around the city include characteristics such as irrigated lawns, landscaped or maintained turf expanses, single-family detached residential neighborhoods, wider streetscapes, and surface parking in most commercial developments. Commercial development within these areas tends to be auto-oriented.

Rural areas on the edge of Amarillo are wide open landscapes, with views infrequently interrupted by buildings. Rural areas in Amarillo typically include low density development and single-family, detached homes with ample privacy. Rural areas generally have high open space ratios and minimal building coverage.

Amarillo's identity and image directly correlates to the City's economic anchors and investment areas. A few notable areas in the city include the Harrington Regional Medical Center and the surrounding district, Amarillo's two airports, the downtown, Amarillo's college campuses, the Tri-State Fairground area, and the City's two interstate highway corridors with adjacent hospitality areas. Other corridors and nodes around the city, such as Soncy Road where shopping services are concentrated, are also points for economic activity.

Railroads and interstates/highways, including I-27, I-40, and the Historic Route 66, are an integral part of the community that have aided in connecting Amarillo to important destinations. Given that these major transportation routes run through the community, creating high visibility for incoming travelers, community image and character have always been a high priority for Amarillo. Large footprint commercial development and hospitality uses tend to be clustered along the interstate highways, which influences the identity of these major corridors and creates a pattern of dependence on interstates to reach commercial centers.

Objectives for Future Character

Community character encompasses physical design and relationships in the built environment that make a space feel comfortable, interesting, unique, accessible, and beautiful – or the opposite. The facets of community character are primarily directed and realized through land use regulations, design standards, and placemaking. These tools provide guidance for both public and private realm components of a place, including building placement and orientation, architectural details, transparency and ground-level variation, streetscapes, landscaping, lighting, signage, pedestrian infrastructure, and transitions between different land uses and building types or densities.

By intentionally and strategically utilizing these tools within the specific context of Amarillo's various districts and neighborhoods, the City can preserve areas with an established character that residents value, revitalize areas that have been neglected, mitigate incompatibilities, and clarify, elevate or reimagine areas that currently lack a specific identity or character.

The Community Character (CC) goals and recommendations in this chapter focus on these challenges and objectives. They expand upon the Complete Neighborhoods Scenario to provide more nuanced guidance for compatible and transitional relationships between adjacent Place Types as well as built form and design for private development and public spaces across different Place Types.



Compatibility, Adjacencies & Transitions Goals & Recommendations

CC Goal 1

Promote complete neighborhoods protected from, but connected to, nearby districts and corridors.

Perhaps the clearest theme heard throughout community engagement was the strong desire for more complete neighborhoods with daily needs and services nearby.

Recommendations

1. Update zoning code and development standards to introduce:
 - a. Overall compatibility and desired land use transitions.
 - b. Introduce Neighborhood Mixed Use Development as a way to smooth transitions between residential neighborhoods and heavy commercial or industrial areas.
 - c. Site development standards for transition areas such as parking location, building heights, landscaping, screening, and sidewalk connectivity.
 - d. Residential Zoning Districts that maintain and stabilize existing neighborhoods.
 - e. Integration of neighborhood amenities that are walkable from inside and outside of subdivisions.
 - f. Options to utilize drainage and retention areas as pedestrian connections internal and external to subdivisions.
 - g. Nodes of higher-density and amenity-rich development that provide recognizable concentrations of activity and improvements.
2. Promote the revitalization of historic commercial corridors and “main streets” and the introduction of new “main streets”, primarily through the Neighborhood Stabilization Strategy.
3. Transition auto-oriented commercial development at intersections into walkable, mixed-use places.

Transitional Buffers

Within Amarillo, there are several instances where single-family neighborhoods abut industrial uses. Having incompatible uses next to each other can often present undesirable conditions in the built environment. These areas present an opportunity to establish transition buffers, where higher density housing and mixed-use developments are between industrial and neighborhood residential areas.

The transitional buffer graphic shows how existing industrial properties could be retrofitted into innovation and community mixed-use type developments and how higher density housing can protect single-family homes from more intense uses. The introduction of these uses help create areas of activity that can be more easily accessed by adjacent neighborhoods.

CURRENT



FUTURE



CC Goal 2

Revitalize older neighborhoods and commercial corridors by promoting compatible infill development.

Amarilloans across the entire community expressed a strong desire to help facilitate revitalization of older residential and commercial areas.

Recommendations

1. Update city codes and development standards to:
 - a. Adjust hierarchical zoning to eliminate introduction of new residential in industrial and heavy commercial areas, and the reverse condition of the introduction of new industrial and heavy commercial in neighborhoods.
 - b. Establish/strengthen compatibility standards (e.g., height, hours of operation, parking) where more intense uses occur near established residential neighborhoods.
2. Implement an opt-in process in partnership with neighborhood organizations for zoning changes as part of the Neighborhood Stabilization Strategy.
3. Bolster and proactively advertise incentive programs that support residential and commercial rehabilitation.
4. Continue to develop and implement Neighborhood Plans to ensure that localized needs and circumstances are addressed.
5. Promote mixed use development and middle density housing along older auto-oriented commercial corridors.
6. Prioritize review for infill and revitalization projects.

CC Goal 3

Protect economic anchors and key employment areas.

While protection of existing neighborhoods was the community's top priority, Amarilloans also expressed a strong desire to ensure existing employment areas continue to be great places to maintain and grow businesses.

Recommendations

1. Update zoning code and development standards to:
 - a. Minimize residential encroachment into more traditional employment areas and areas with industrial and heavy commercial uses.
 - b. Facilitate innovation areas that intentionally allow and encourage a mix of lighter, creative employment uses, entertainment, services, and housing.
2. Maintain large areas to accommodate large format manufacturing and logistics as well as larger campus development (e.g., business headquarters, medical, and higher education uses).
3. Provide opportunities for missing middle and higher density neighborhoods near job centers and employment areas.
4. Incentivize small pockets of interspersed neighborhood-serving business development by marketing small business programs to neighborhoods.

Commercial Corridor & Arterial Infill

The revitalization of commercial corridors can create conditions that convert underutilized or vacant storefronts into areas that spur economic growth and can lead to thriving communities. As commercial corridors become well-established, they have the opportunity to provide a variety of retail options to residents, increase jobs in the community, add housing options, and improve physical surroundings through the use of public space.

The arterial infill graphics depict two options of development that could be introduced along major arterials. One option shows the preferred placement of commercial and retail uses. These are located closer to the major arterial with activated storefronts facing

both the road and parking area. Parking is tucked away behind the buildings creating an enhanced urban environment for both vehicles and pedestrians. An open space or stormwater retention area helps create a buffer between commercial use and the existing residential neighborhood.

Another option illustrates how higher density housing could be incorporated along major roads. High density multifamily development is located closest to the major road, granting it higher visibility and access. Medium density townhomes, located between the existing residential neighborhood and the higher density housing, serve as a transitional buffer and provide additional housing options.

FUTURE: Commercial





CURRENT



FUTURE: Residential



Identity & Design Goals & Recommendations

CC Goal 4

Promote community aesthetics and image.

Amarilloans reiterated desires expressed in the last Comprehensive Plan to beautify the community..

Recommendations

1. Create or update design guidelines and standards for:
 - a. Downtown
 - b. Route 66 corridor
 - c. Highway corridors
2. Update street design standards to require or promote buffered sidewalks, street trees, pedestrian lighting, furnishings, etc.
3. Develop a public-private partnership strategy for improving aesthetics of buildings and signage along highways.
4. Bolster programs for façade improvements.
5. Promote the use of design elements that help mitigate sound pollution along major corridors and highways.
6. Identify and enhance priority gateways and corridors (streetscape improvements, public art, lighting, signage, etc.).
7. Utilize signage, entry monuments, banners, etc. to promote and celebrate individual neighborhood identity and pride.
8. Conduct neighborhood character studies throughout the city and consider implementing neighborhood overlays to preserve unique neighborhood characteristics and ensure compatible development.

FUTURE: Setbacks & Entrances



FUTURE: Height & Columns



Entrances



Ground Floor Design & Flex Space

The following diagrams help illustrate design considerations for flexible ground floor spaces. The creation of flexible ground floors allows these spaces to be adapted to other uses throughout the lifespan of the building. Specifically, these diagrams show the possibility of converting residential ground floor units into commercial spaces once the market demand is sufficient to help support commercial retail development.

FUTURE: Awnings & Transparency



Columns



Design elements to consider when creating flexible ground floors include the following:

- At Grade Entrances
- Ground Floor Setbacks
- Ceiling Height
- Column Spacing
- Space for Awnings/ Projecting Features
- Opportunities for Rollup Windows

