The Gateway Zoning Guidelines

This appendix presents an outline of the general parameters of the proposed zoning regulations for the Williams Drive Gateway. The drafting of the actual ordinance language is beyond the scope of this study, but this summary will provide the City, as well as any potential development within the area, with guidelines as to the type of development permitted.

Until this re-zoning can be formally adopted, the City should declare a “zoning in progress” condition for any parcels within the area. This does not mean that development must be stopped altogether, but it should be deferred until such time as the new zoning regulations are in place. In the meantime, planning and design may proceed, using this outline as a guide. The City should also make available a special review process during this transition time to assist potential developers in understanding the objectives of the plan and of the type of development that will be expected.

Outline of the Regulations

A. Intent

The development within the Williams Drive Gateway area should include a lively mix of uses located within close proximity in a manner that is human scale, pedestrian friendly, de-emphasizes parking, and promotes an active street life.

B. Permitted Uses

A broad range of uses should be permitted, particularly residential uses, including types with relatively high densities, and mixed with other uses on the same premises. A wide range of commercial activities should be permitted, especially those that promote high degrees of public interaction, such as retail, entertainment, hospitality, etc. Mixing of different uses in close proximity is a specific goal. It is probably easier to identify specific prohibited uses rather than to enumerate the permitted ones.

Performance standards will be established to ensure compatibility between different uses. They will include such provisions as:

1. Limitations on noise generation, smells, and hours of operation for commercial uses in close proximity to residential uses.
2. Limitations on signage, visibility, and public access for businesses located in predominantly residential areas.
3. Limitations for auto-related uses that require screening of certain activities, conducting certain activities within enclosed bays, and maximum permissible noise levels.

C. Sub-Areas

Certain sub-areas will be defined to conform to different characters, and will have differing standards for such provisions as setbacks, building height, mix of uses, frontage standards, and parking requirements. Specific character areas will include:

1. The Main Street Corridor
2. The I-35 Access Road Edge
3. Residential Areas
4. Sunset Ridge
5. The GISD Property
D. Bulk Regulations

1. Density: Will be fairly high, on the order of 50 dwelling units to the acre. Density should be tied to an incentive mechanism that helps to defray the impacts of additional development. In principle, it could be structured as follows: establish a baseline density cap of, say, 25 du/ac, but allow individual developments to exceed that, up to a maximum of 50 du/ac. The additional density is awarded in exchange for other items of value to the redevelopment efforts. These might include public parking, public open space, streetscape enhancements, or simply cash payments into a redevelopment fund.

2. Lot Dimensions: Most uses should be permitted on fairly small lots, say, 5000 square feet, minimum, for commercial parcels, and 2500 square feet for residential parcels. Minimum width should be 25 feet for residential parcels.

3. Setbacks: Front and side setbacks should generally be zero feet, particularly in areas that wish to emphasize street level retail. Residential uses may set back between 10-15 feet; this should be limited to areas that are lower scale and predominantly residential in character. Such setbacks should establish a consistent façade placement, and be accompanied by specific provisions regulating the landscape quality within the setback.

Setbacks generally imply a minimum distance; a more appropriate approach for this area is a “build-to” line or zone, meaning that the building face must be placed at the prescribed distance or within the prescribed zone.

4. Height: Height should be greater along the I-35 access road, Williams Drive, and Sunset Ridge, and should diminish as it approaches the existing residential areas. Height should range from 3 stories adjacent to existing residential, to a maximum of 6 stories along the aforementioned streets.

E. Architectural Regulations

Building Style. This should be fairly permissive, allowing a range of styles and expression. There are several styles in the area that offer strong precedents and which should be encouraged. These include the traditional Texas vernacular style of metal roofs, wood siding, limestone walls, and simple massing. Also fairly prominent is the traditional commercial style of simple, planar buildings of brick or stone with prominent cornice lines and enhanced details around openings. A variety of other styles would also be compatible. Specific provisions should include:

1. Differentiating the street level of buildings by such means as a change in materials, bay rhythm or a cornice line below the upper floors.

2. A recognition of the human scale at the ground level with elements such as stoops, display windows, awnings, and planters.

3. Limited use of flat, undifferentiated surfaces such as curtain walls.

4. No reflective glass at the ground level, and sparing use elsewhere.

5. A required minimum amount of glazing or openings, with greater amounts required at the ground floor of commercial uses.

6. Encouraging the use of architectural features such as towers, balconies, arcades, etc.

Frontage. A key objective of these regulations is to control the quality of the building face addressing the pedestrian environment. While the build-to provisions ensure that the building addresses the sidewalk, it is
also important that the ground floor frontage is active and interesting
to pedestrians. Blank wall space is discouraged, and minimum amounts
of fenestration should be prescribed. Other devices such as fountains,
public art, innovative landscaping, etc. may be considered. Appropriate
use is important in achieving quality frontage, preferred are uses such as
retail or civic amenities generally open to the public. Display windows
may also be used, and should be encouraged even for uses that would
not ordinarily consider them. They can be leased to area merchants
and used to reinforce an area-wide theme.

Frontage may also be enhanced by the periodic occurrence of public
courtyards opening onto the sidewalk. Courtyard elevations should be
treated as street elevations in terms of fenestration, and the court space
itself should be used as an active public place, for example, as an
outdoor dining area. The introduction of courts should be limited to
something like 25 to 30 percent of the total façade length, and may be
tied to certain development bonuses such as an increase in density.

F. Parking Regulations

On-site parking should be placed in unobtrusive locations, generally
behind the principal building and at the interior of the block. Parking
garages, where abutting a public way, should have occupied space at the
ground level. Surface parking lots should be screened by landscaping
and should have a minimum number of landscape islands required.

Area-wide management of the parking is highly recommended.
Relaxing the parking requirement for individual parcels can be a
powerful development incentive, but must be supported by methods
for providing the required parking nearby. An effective parking
strategy for the area should include:

1. Providing curbside on-street parking in as many locations as
   possible, and allowing the abutting use to count that as part of
   its parking requirement.

2. Relaxed parking ratios for most uses, i.e. fewer required
   parking spaces for each unit of building area.

3. Shared parking provisions for mixed-use that take advantage of
   the differing peak demand times for each use, for example,
   office and residential. This would allow for fewer total parking
   spaces than the sum of what would be required for each use
   individually.

4. A payment in lieu of parking mechanism to shift the placement
   of parking and to facilitate consolidation into larger pools. The
   basic mechanism is to allow a “buy-down” of the parking
   requirement, particularly for smaller property owners, while
   large properties could get reimbursed for providing public
   parking in excess of their requirement.

G. Landscaping

Planting should be concentrated in areas where it can be of use, such as
courtyards and pocket parks. Street landscaping should reflect an
urban setting, with regularly spaced trees contained in clearly defined
zones, formalized planting beds used as accent elements, and hedges to
screen elements such as parking, loading areas, etc. Planting should
play a supporting role rather than a dominant one. Other elements in
addition to landscaping should be used to enhance the street
environment, and should be part of a consistent and coordinated
system including light poles, benches, waste receptacles, bicycle racks,
etc.
The regulation should prescribe a list of recommended plant species for various applications, such as shade canopies, screens, ground covers, etc.

H. Signage

In an active and dynamic urban environment such as the one sought here, signage should be allowed to play a more prominent role. Signage plays an important part in ensuring the viability of merchants, and in informing and entertaining the pedestrian. Besides the normal on-premises signage, typically including a sign band and perpendicular blade signs, other feature signs should be permitted. Elements such as theater marquees, wall paintings, banners, light bands, and monument signs are appropriate to lend a sense of vitality and excitement to an urban district. Other elements such as kiosks may also be used on the sidewalks, both for pedestrian wayfinding as well as for temporary advertising of sales, special events, etc. In a relatively permissive environment, it is easy to overdo signage to the point that no one element stands out amid the confusion, so the signage standards should be carefully regulated and orchestrated as part of a graphic master plan.

The signage standards described above apply to the more urban streets such as Main Street and Williams Drive. Signage should be more restricted and restrained in predominantly residential areas.