A. The Public Consensus

The charrette master plan attempts to synthesize the major themes and desires expressed during the public involvement process with the realities of the site. It presents a specific redevelopment vision, not with the intent of prescribing a literal solution, but to act a guideline for future decision making. Using the master plan as a reference will allow future development proposals to be evaluated in light of how they help to advance the overall vision. It also provides guidance as to the public policies and actions that will be necessary to implement the plan.

The results of the public input, as summarized in the previous chapter, tended to focus around three broad themes:

1. There is a need for greater connectivity, both within the study area, as well as how it relates to the rest of Georgetown on a regional basis. This is one of the major highway intersections in Georgetown, and the traffic volume with recent growth has rendered it close to dysfunctional. Specific aspects of solving the connectivity problem include:
   a. Creating a north-south connection through the site, more or less parallel to the frontage road, but allowing two-way traffic, as well as a calmer and more pedestrian-friendly alternative to the high speed access road.
   b. Creating an additional crossing point at Interstate 35, specifically at Northwest Boulevard. Currently, Williams Drive is a traffic bottleneck for traffic trying to get to or across the Interstate from the northwest area of the city. An additional crossing point would provide an alternative route to help distribute the traffic. It also could serve as a key link in a planned route to connect to FM 971 and eventually to State Highway 130.
   c. Changing the configuration of the Williams Drive / I-35 intersection to create a southbound right turn lane onto the access road from Williams Drive.
   d. Adding a signalized intersection on Williams Drive to facilitate turning movements into and out of the study area. The most likely spot for this would be at Morris Drive, although this would be contingent upon a reconfiguration of the McCoy Elementary School site to allow northbound traffic at that point.
   e. Adding (or moving) a southbound exit ramp from I-35 to come in closer to the Northwest Boulevard intersection. The current ramp is several miles to the north, so that the highway traffic cannot see the study area, and then decide to exit.

2. The study area needs a better mix of uses. The uses currently there, particularly on the access road, are highway-oriented uses, like motels, gas stations, and fast food restaurants that rely heavily on drive-by traffic for their business. They have been hurt by the change in access road configuration, but it was generally recognized that this area may be ready to transition from a highway strip to a more mixed-use urbanized area, not necessarily responding to the highway. Some of the ideas included:
   a. Making the district a destination. This means creating a concentration of interrelated uses that provide for a range of activities to occur.
   b. Recognize that, in fact, the highway-oriented uses were no longer appropriate, and could be accommodated elsewhere with better access to the highway.
   c. Include some higher density residential in the mix. The essence of a mixed use area is that it allows for opportunities to live, work, and play within the same area.
   d. Retail should also be part of the mix, but a more pedestrian and sidewalk friendly type of retail that does well on a “Gateway Boulevard” kind of shopping environment.
e. A focus on restaurant, entertainment, and leisure activities, so that this becomes a pleasant place to spend time (and money.)
f. Office uses should be encouraged. The Georgetown office market is still immature, but will likely grow as certain small professional businesses grow tired of commuting to the current employment centers.
g. Consider a better use for the school property. GISD is already planning to convert the existing Elementary School to other uses, such as administrative uses, that are better suited to the changing nature of the area. Although not officially part of the originally defined study area, the school site is a key parcel in resolving many of the other difficulties facing the area.
h. The bluff overlooking the river on the southern edge of the study area is an opportunity to introduce certain uses that could derive value from the view, such as upscale, higher density residential and a destination restaurant.

3. Be sensitive to the context and the natural environment. This implies:
   a. Providing appropriate transitions and buffers for adjacent residential uses.
   b. Providing a buffer against the noise and visual impact of Interstate 35. This would probably take the form of a continuous landscape buffer.
   c. Providing a public promenade along the river bluff along the south edge of the study area. This could also be a link to the existing park and trail system down in the river valley.
   d. In general, all of the new streets and development should be well landscaped and shaded with regular tree plantings.
   e. Add a landscaped median along Williams Drive.

B. Connectivity and Access

These overall themes are summarized in the concept diagram (figure 4.1,) and a conjectural redevelopment scenario is illustrated in figure 4.2. This depicts the eventual build-out of the study area in accordance with the public preferences.

![Figure 4.1. The concept diagram.](Image)

The connectivity issues have the largest impact on the existing fabric of the area. In particular, the addition of a new north south connector means adding a new street alignment, significantly impacting several properties.
Figure 4.2. The redevelopment master plan.
After studying several alternatives, it was determined that the “best” alignment, i.e., the one with the best balance of overall configuration with ease and availability of property, was to begin at Williams Drive and Morris Street, traverse through the existing school site to cross Park Lane at the vacant lot behind the La Quinta, and then proceed northward through the large vacant tract at the north end of the study area to tee into Northwest Boulevard. Although it has a major impact on the school property, it has relatively little impact on other properties. Assuming that the school property could be redeveloped with this alignment in mind, it would allow for this new street segment to be established in the early phases of redevelopment, thereby setting the stage for future projects.

Indeed, this new alignment would form the backbone of the redevelopment scheme, becoming the mixed-use “Gateway Boulevard” at the center of the area. The proposed connection at Morris Street would isolate a parcel at the southern end of the school site, which is proposed to become a major civic open space to anchor the new mixed-use district at the intersection of Williams Drive and the new Gateway Boulevard. New, valuable frontage is created on all sides of this square, also creating a formal, civic location for the school district’s administrative offices. Due to the existing conditions, Gateway Boulevard takes a somewhat meandering, though still reasonably direct route northward. This will give the street a more intriguing and quirky character, while also helping to calm traffic. The street is proposed to be a slow speed, two-lane divided section, with on-street parallel parking lanes on both sides, an advantageous configuration for a mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly street.

Several streets connect to Gateway Boulevard, breaking the study area into a series of “city blocks.” For the most part, these are the existing streets that tee into the service road. One new street segment is proposed near the north end. These new blocks are more pedestrian friendly in scale, and provide a network for the distribution of vehicular traffic as well. While traffic can move along the new Gateway Boulevard, and park there as well, an internal system of alleys will do most of the work of managing vehicular circulation, providing access to most of the parking. This system runs parallel to Gateway Boulevard and the service road, and intersects several cross connections to both.

Another goal of the new roadway network and block structure is to minimize the driveway cuts from the access road. This would greatly improve traffic flow on the access road, and help to internalize the local traffic movements. It would also clean up the access road edge and improve the landscape buffer potential along that edge. Removing the majority of the driveway cuts would also provide some incentive for TxDOT to support some of the other highway related improvements, such as the new I-35 crossing.

The second major intervention in the exiting street network is the addition of a new crossover at Northwest Boulevard and I-35. This allows for another crossing point of I-35, facilitating traffic movement between the developing areas on the northwest side of town and the roadway network on the east side of I-35. In particular, the crossover, which traverses an existing right-of-way east of I-35, has the potential of connecting to FM 971, which, in turn, leads northeast out of town and intersects with the planned State Highway 130. The crossover also connects southward to Austin Avenue, providing access to downtown Georgetown. The effect of the new crossover on the roadway system is illustrated in figure 4.3.

The bridge over I-35 itself presents a design opportunity to improve on the conventional highway overpass with a signature structure that would be a literal “gateway,” signifying a true sense of arrival (figure 4.4.) Indeed, this location is more than simply a gateway into Georgetown; it is really an arrival point into the entire Central Texas metropolitan area. The suspension design of the proposed bridge structure has some pragmatic aspects as well, in order to minimize the overall depth of the roadway span, and thereby shorten the approach ramps on either side.
C. Development Typologies and Uses

The build-out scenario depicted in Figure 4.2 represents a mixed-use urban village concept. The overall layout demonstrates several broad principles characteristic of such types of development:

- A network of interconnected streets defining relatively small blocks. This establishes a pedestrian-friendly scale to the overall area and breaks it down into more manageable units.

- A clear hierarchy of streets, distinguishing between the mixed-use, pedestrian oriented Gateway Boulevard, to quieter, more residential streets, to car oriented highways, to narrower vehicular access lanes.

- Placement of the primary building elements close to the street, particularly to Gateway Boulevard, which relies on direct...
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interaction between the sidewalk and the ground floor uses to create pedestrian interest.

- Placement of the primary parking areas at the interior of the blocks, typically behind the buildings. Some of the parking, primarily short-term convenience parking, is located as parallel parking on the mixed-use streets.

- An emphasis on the quality of the pedestrian amenities, including tree-lined streets, wide sidewalks, contrasting paver crosswalks, and on-street parking to buffer pedestrian activity from moving traffic.

- A mix of uses, with taller, mixed use buildings along the principal roads, transitioning to less dense, more residential uses as one approaches the existing residential neighborhoods.

- De-emphasis of the access road as a local street, and internalizing most of the activity to slower, more pedestrian-friendly streets.

- A series of public open spaces designed to provide some relief to the denser development forms and to provide organizational and visual focal points for pedestrian activity.

The heart of the redevelopment proposal is the new Gateway Boulevard, beginning at Williams Drive and Morris Street and meandering northward to connect to Northwest Boulevard. Two significant public plazas are located along Gateway Boulevard, one at the Williams Drive intersection, and one near the northern end. The plaza on Williams Drive opens up a vista into the heart of the redevelopment area, while also creating valuable frontage on all sides for more significant, anchor uses. Figure 4.5 depicts an illustrative view over this new plaza.

Gateway Boulevard will be lined with a range of different buildings and uses. The new plaza at Williams Drive is well suited for larger, more public buildings, while areas closer to the existing neighborhoods could accommodate more urban housing typologies such as townhomes. The northern end, currently vacant land, presents the opportunity to establish the character of Gateway Boulevard early on, with new development flanking both sides. The buildings on either side will be mixed use buildings, placed right at the edge of the sidewalk, with retail uses at the ground level, and a combination of office and residential uses above. These buildings will be in the three to four story range, with the parking placed behind the principal building face, usually at the interior of the block. Figure 4.6 depict a view down Gateway Boulevard, showing all of the elements of a successful, pedestrian friendly streetscape.
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Figure 4.6. A view down Gateway Boulevard.

The areas to the north, between the new Gateway Boulevard and the existing residential neighborhoods, are intended to serve as buffer zones between the two differing types of development, while also providing an opportunity for a transitional, denser, and more urban form of housing. Townhomes and condominiums, which have not been built in any great quantity in Georgetown, are ideally suited for this type of environment, when they can be within walking distance of a pedestrian, mixed-use area. The types proposed here are rear-loaded, i.e., with car access from a rear lane, so that the front of the unit could face an attractive landscaped court. This concept is illustrated in figure 4.7.

The area south of Williams Drive currently suffers from poor access, mostly because of the difficulty of making a left turn off Williams Drive. The frontage road is actually quite accessible, but this only serves the uses fronting directly on the access road. The several streets that connect to Williams Drive are dead ends, terminating at the bluff overlooking the river. The area has a mix of uses, with commercial along Williams Drive and the frontage road, and a mix of commercial and residential in the interior. The area has been somewhat overlooked because of the access difficulties, but has great potential due to its strategic position on the bluff overlooking the river.

Figure 4.7. The townhome mews.

During the public workshop, several groups mentioned the possibility of locating upscale residential units overlooking the river. There was also a concern expressed however, for maintaining public access to the bluff and the view. The proposed design for this area accomplishes both objectives. It does so by connecting the street stubs with a new roadway running along the bluff. This connecting link also helps to
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alleviate the access difficulty to this part of the study area, since it allows for all traffic to make use of the proposed traffic signal at Morris Street. The street along the bluff ensures public access to the view, and would be enhanced by a parallel walking trail. This trail could meander along the bluff, have several areas for benches, and connect to the existing hike and bike trail in the river valley. The residential units would front on the north side of this roadway, with vehicle access from the back side. Figure 4.8 depicts a view of the proposed development along the ridge.

The plan also proposes a location along the bluff for a signature restaurant that could take advantage of the view, but also have high visibility from the highway. Since this location is so close to I-35, it was felt that the residential units should be kept a bit further west, leaving this site available. It work very well as a public site such as this, providing an anchor at the end of the bluff promenade at the point where the trail heads down into the river valley.

D. Context and Environment

The third area of emphasis for the public dealt with a need for sensitivity for the existing site, both in terms of respecting the existing uses as well as working in harmony with the natural environment. As described above, the redevelopment proposal accomplishes the following objectives:

- Provides an appropriate buffer against existing residential areas by placing residential units of somewhat higher density as a buffer between the existing neighborhood and the more commercial portions of the study area.

- Creates a landscaped buffer area along the I-35 access road. It also eliminates many of the existing driveway cuts along the access road, allowing for a more continuous buffer strip. This will make the highway trip more attractive as well as buffer the new development against the traffic noise.

- Takes advantage of the view and natural amenity of the river bluff with a public promenade that links to the existing city park system.

- Provides for several new public open spaces as focal point for the new mixed-use Gateway Boulevard development.

- Provides for all new streets in the project to be pleasant, tree lined streets with substantial pedestrian amenities.

- Provides a landscaped median along Williams Drive.
E. Phasing and Implementation

Ambitious and comprehensive redevelopment proposals such as this one take time to unfold. The total amount of development proposed here cannot be absorbed by the market all at once, and some parcels will take longer to assemble. The nature of this as an existing developed area also must recognize that certain uses will have to remain in operation and gradually turn over. Some businesses may wish to remain in the area, and, ideally, new space should be constructed for them to relocate before the existing location is redeveloped.

The project phasing plan proposed here is based on taking advantage of the large vacant area at the north of the study area to establish an initial focus of development. This could be accomplished while leaving the majority of the existing uses undisturbed, and would present an opportunity to establish the northern end of the Gateway Boulevard alignment. The new development here could accommodate many of the uses currently in other portions of the study area, allowing the current locations to be assembled for future phases of development.

The second phase involves the redevelopment of the school site. This, in conjunction with phase 1, would complete the alignment of the new north-south Gateway Boulevard. Since the school district is already planning to invest money in modifying the school campus, it is assumed that this phase could be completed early on.
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Several other aspects of the redevelopment plan are not contingent on other portions of the plan, and can occur more or less independently. The new crossing over I-35 at Northwest Boulevard, for example, is an important component of the overall scheme, and should proceed immediately. The area to the south of Williams Drive is relatively independent of the rest of the area, and can occur concurrently with other phases.
It is assumed that the two most heavily developed blocks, along the access road on the north side of Williams Drive, will be the most difficult to assemble, and will, consequently, not redevelop until the later stages of the process.

Figure 4.9. Progressive phases of redevelopment.