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Hutto designs downtown Master plan to improve streetscapes, design co-op site in Old Town

BY BETH WADE

The City of Hutto is taking advantage of a slowdown in development to plan its downtown area.

"In the economic times that we are currently faced with, staff have been focusing on long-range planning for the ultimate build out of the city," said Matthew Lewis, Hutto Community Development director. "This is the first time the city has had an opportunity to address the long-term goals of the community since the last explosion of growth in 2004."

City staff and planning consultants ERO International and Gateway Planning Group are working together on a master plan for Hutto's downtown. Dubbed the Old Town Hutto Master Plan,

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Downtown zoning

The master plan will break downtown into districts determined by density rather than use. This enables the city to have a variety of building types, housing, retail and commercial options in downtown, Hutto Community Development Director Matthew Lewis said.

OT-3 Traditional neighborhood Traditional residential neighborhood areas adjacent to the downtown core; buildings 1-2 stories

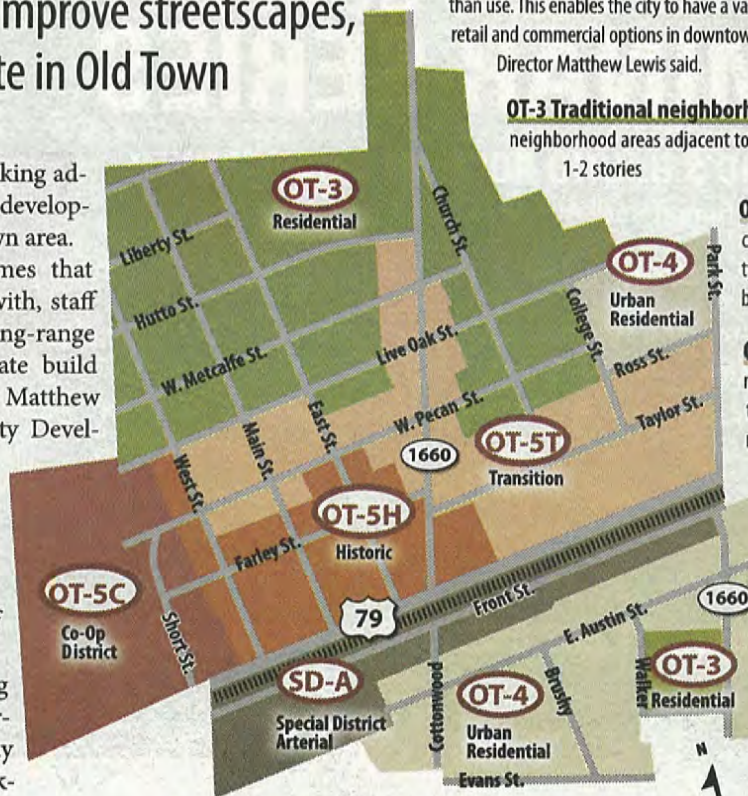
OT-4 Urban residential More compact, mixed-use neighborhoods typical of historic downtowns; buildings 2-3 stories

OT-5T Transition Mixed-use neighborhood to transition from the downtown core to adjoining residential neighborhoods; buildings 1-2 stories

OT-5H Historic Hutto's downtown core is a high density, mixed-use neighborhood with retail, offices and apartments; buildings 1-2 stories

OT-5C Co-op site Highest density and height with a variety of uses and civic buildings; buildings 3-5 stories

SD-A Arterial Special district of lower intensity commercial; buildings 1-2 stories



**Map and district standards are subject to change after public input is taken into consideration.*

Source: ERO International

Master plan

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the document examines downtown and focuses on growing outward while maintaining the area's historical elements and drawing out Hutto's truest potential, Lewis said.

Also known as Old Town, Hutto's downtown district includes the 1911 incorporated area, which expands from Evans Street north to Cottonwood Drive and east of FM 1660 west to include the co-op site.

Upon completion, the plan will be added to the City of Hutto SmartCode Overlay, which has unique codes and development guidelines. The SmartCode is being compiled with the Unified Development Code, which simplifies and streamlines all of the city's development guidelines and ordinances. A final draft of each is expected to be presented to the city council in early spring.

Park and walk

The idea is to create a pedestrian-friendly environment with a variety of housing, shopping and entertainment options, Lewis said.

"It is a quarter mile from the co-op to East Street, and that is nationally recognized as a comfortable walk," said Susan Daniels, ERO International director of operations. "So we are hoping to create a district where it can be walkable and desirable for people to come in, park once and do their visiting, shopping and eating."

The city owns the 18 acres of land on Short Street that was once the Hutto Co-op, which was purchased in 2003 and 2004. Plans for the site are being considered, although final recommendations have not been made, Lewis said. Some suggestions have included a mixed-use development with housing, retail, commercial and a municipal facility that could include a library and new city hall.

"The only area that doesn't have the infrastructure is the co-op site," Daniels said. "What we are trying to do is extend the city's grid: the size of blocks [and] the street network. It is already at a very nice scale, and we want to bring that over to

the co-op site as well."

Beyond a bustling daytime downtown district, the planning team hopes to create downtown traffic at all times, she said.

"We are trying to create a district that has a mix of uses so that you have a vitality, not just during business hours or on the weekends, but at all times," Daniels said. "If you have a lot of restaurants or retail, you need people downtown to help feed those businesses. If you get people living there, you get more people in who will use the services that are provided by the businesses in downtown."

Lewis said the new plan would encourage a diverse mix of housing stock, including townhomes and garden homes, which would provide options for people in all stages of life to live in the same area, if they choose.

Transportation

The plan includes improvements to the city's streetscapes, such as storm water drainage with curbs and gutters and a complete redesign of some street layouts with street parking and sidewalks, Daniels said.

A parking study showed that the city, with the use of parallel and angled street parking, could add approximately 1,400 parking spaces to the downtown area.

A slip street, similar to a frontage road, is proposed for the north side of Hwy. 79 to serve as a buffer between the highway and businesses. The street could feature on-street parking and would help ease traffic into the downtown area, Will Guerin, Hutto city planner, said. One proposed route would shift Hwy. 79 south and repurpose the existing roadway as the slip street.

Plans would require work with the Texas Department of Transportation, he said.

Before presenting the final master plan to the city council, Lewis said there could be more public meetings, but those dates have not been set.



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