



This plan defines Downtown as the area analogous to the Main Street Overlay District. (see Figure 27) The area includes the Downtown Historic District. Downtown is defined by its very large number of historic structures as well as overall architectural vernacular.

However, the downtown area also presents numerous challenges. Numerous historic structures are unutilized, vacant, and/or in various states of disrepair. Some structures have issue with access to adequate infrastructure for repurposing, and some even have

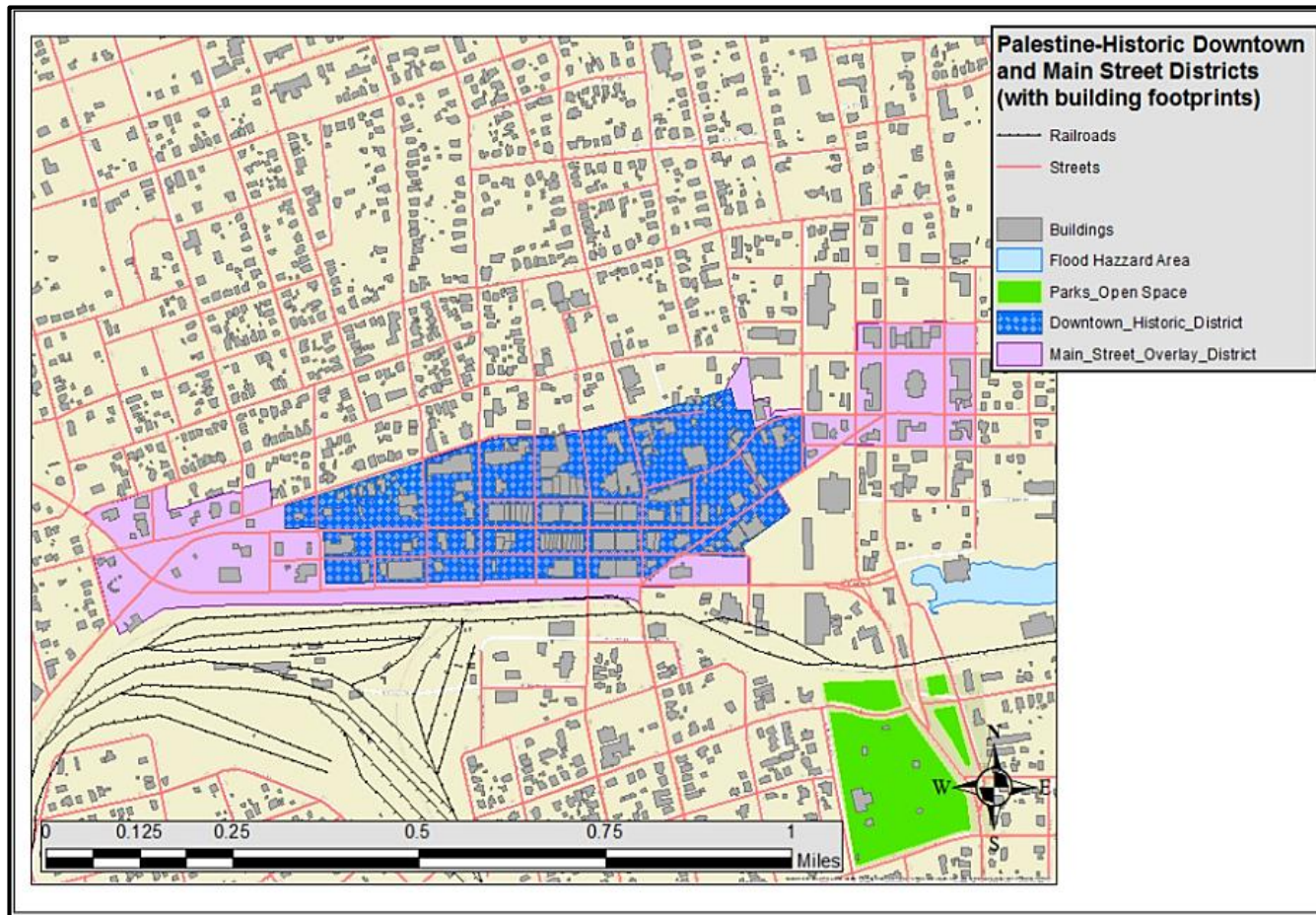


FIGURE 29: DOWNTOWN MAP

problems with resident bat colonies living in wall and ceiling voids. These challenges are reflected in community input: citizens describe downtown as “tired”, “deteriorated” and “inactive”.

Throughout the community engagement process, citizens also indicated their pride in the historic downtown area, and their desire for the area to be enhanced and redeveloped as a true community heart. Citizens expressed the desire for the future downtown to be “exciting, interesting, busy, thriving”, and a “place of beauty.”

Some specific activities/developments receiving positive public comment include improving mobility and connectivity both to and within the downtown, better connecting downtown to the city’s other assets, and including residential uses. Citizens are seeking a wider variety of retail and commercial services, especially restaurants and entertainment. Overall, Palestine citizens seem to be seeking an active and vibrant downtown that reflects the rich heritage of the city, but will not be held prisoner to the past.

Previous planning efforts recognized the possibilities of Palestine’s historic downtown. As far back as 1969, comprehensive plans have suggested Palestine take measures to improve and strengthen its downtown in order to provide a competitive advantage compared to other nearby communities. The 1969 planning proposals were designed to improve the method of handling the shopper and the vehicle. This differentiation of street space included a proposed Pedestrian Mall – a three block section of Oak Street between Queen and Sycamore.



Figure 30: THROUGH EVENTS AND LOCATIONS LIKE A FARMERS' MARKET, DOWNTOWN CAN BECOME THE PUBLIC SQUARE FOR PALESTINE



FIGURE 31 PALESTINE'S DOWNTOWN WOULD BENEFIT FROM DOWNTOWN OPEN SPACE OR PLAZAS

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES

The implementation section of this plan includes numerous initiatives for revitalizing downtown. Key initiatives include the hiring of an outside firm to work with the citizens, elected officials, and organizations such as the Main Street Program and the Palestine Economic Development Corporation to develop a detailed downtown redevelopment plan as well the development of a downtown farmers market.

A downtown redevelopment plan should include:

- A market analysis for Palestine’s retail and commercial services.
- A retail sales leakage analysis.
- A complete infrastructure assessment including sewer, water, electric, natural gas, telephone/data lines, and wireless access.
- A suggested signage ordinance, including directional and way finding signage.
- A suggested streetscape design, including pedestrian amenities, façades, lighting, and pedestrian and auto circulation.
- An analysis of possible financial resources, including TIRZ/TIF financing, business associations, and PID organization.

Some of these initiatives have been undertaken previously by organizations like the Palestine Economic Development Corporation.

Whenever possible, previous efforts should be utilized in the ongoing planning efforts.

Another key initiative is the development of downtown public open space in the form of a “town square” to serve as the central gathering place for the community. This can be green space or a paved plaza. Other initiatives include coordination with a broader neighborhood initiative to mobilize resident and business owner resources to address issues such as litter, graffiti and code enforcement.



*Downtown goals and strategies for this comprehensive plan are derived from citizen input and baseline information. They are:*

**Goal D1: Enhance the vibrancy and economic vitality of downtown.**

**Strategies:**

**D1.1:** Undertake a complete downtown redevelopment plan to enhance the vibrancy of the downtown overlay district.

**D1.2:** Refine the current Downtown Overlay District Zoning Ordinance and the supporting Subdivision and Land Development Regulations to reflect the findings of strategy D1.1.

**D1.3:** Proceed with developing appropriate financing mechanisms, such as a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District to support capital investments in infrastructure for downtown redevelopment.

**D1.4:** Work with economic development organizations, local community groups, and business owners to address code compliance issues within downtown.

**D1.5:** Police coordination and long term problem solving with Code Enforcement to address issues such as graffiti, rubbish, weeds, vagrancy, panhandling, etc. that could detract from downtown.

**D1.6:** As part of an overall Capital Improvement Plan for the city, identify and prioritize issues with pedestrian accessibility and connectivity to and within downtown.

**Goal D2: Maintain and restore the historic fabric of downtown**

**Strategies:**

**D2.1:** Undertake a complete land use and condition inventory of the downtown.

**D2.2:** Undertake a study to identify appropriate possible reuse for historic downtown properties.

**Goal D3: Develop downtown as a community gathering place for events and celebrations.**

**Strategies:**

**D3.1:** Develop a downtown plaza/square to enhance aesthetics and provide a gathering place.

**D3.2:** Develop a year-round schedule of events, festivals, and performances to celebrate the community and attract visitors to downtown.