



COMMUNITY PLANNING ASSISTANCE TEAMS

Celebrating Downtown Taft

Downtown Taft, California

Final Report | March 2019

■ The American Planning Association provides leadership in the development of vital communities for all by advocating excellence in planning, promoting education and resident empowerment, and providing our members with the tools and support necessary to ethically meet the challenges of growth and change.

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For more information on the Community Planning Assistance Teams program: planning.org/cpat

This report and other information on the Taft CPAT project is available at: planning.org/communityassistance/teams/taft

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Cover image: *The historic Fox Theater in downtown Taft is a prominent feature on Center Street with its classic marquee and lights.*

Photo by Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA

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The Purpose of the CPAT Program

The purpose of the Community Planning Assistance Teams program is to serve communities facing limited resources by helping them address planning issues such as social equity and affordability, economic development, sustainability, consensus building, and urban design, among others. By pairing expert urban planning professionals from around the country with residents and other stakeholders from local communities, the program seeks to foster education, engagement, and empowerment. As part of each team's goals, a community develops a vision that promotes a safe, ecologically sustainable, economically vibrant, and healthy environment.

APA staff works with the community, key stakeholders, and the host organization(s) to assemble a team of planners with the specific expertise needed for the project. The team meets on-site for three to five days, during which time a series of site visits, focused discussions, and analyses are performed. On the final day, the team reports its results back to the community. A more detailed report is issued to the community at a later date.

Guiding Values

APA's professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), is responsible for the CPAT program. Addressing issues of social equity in planning and development is a priority of APA and AICP. The CPAT program is part of a broader APA Community Assistance Program, which was created to express the value of social equity through service to communities in need across the United States.

Community assistance is built into the professional role of a planner. One principle of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct states that certified planners shall aspire to "seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration." Another principle is that certified planners should aspire to "contribute time and effort to groups lacking in adequate planning resources and to voluntary professional activities."

Program Background

In recognition of the key role urban and regional planners play in shaping vibrant, sustainable, and equitable communities, the APA Board of Directors established the Community Planning Team initiative in 1995. This initiative resulted in a pro bono effort to assist an economically struggling African American community in the East Market District of Greensboro, North Carolina. APA has continued to develop a pro bono planning program that provides assistance to communities in need.

In 2005, program efforts were increased after Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast region to include a number of initiatives, including planning assistance team projects in the affected cities of Henderson Point, Mississippi, and Mandeville, Slidell, and New Orleans in Louisiana. Another Gulf Coast recovery project included the Dutch Dialogues, which brought American planners together with Dutch experts to transform the way that Louisiana relates to and manages its water resources.

AICP broadened the scope of the CPAT program with its 2009 project in Buzzard Point, a neighborhood in Southwest Washington, D.C. Completed projects since the program's official relaunch in 2011, including Matthews, North Carolina; Story County, Iowa; Unalaska, Alaska; La Feria, Texas; Lyons, Colorado; Brooklyn/Baybrook, Baltimore; Germantown, Philadelphia; and others are all important landmarks in the development of the CPAT program as a continued effort. That list now includes the Yarborough neighborhood of Belize City, Belize, which marks the first international project for the CPAT program. CPAT is an integrated part of APA's service, outreach, and professional practice activities. More information about the CPAT program, including community proposal forms, an online volunteer form, and full downloadable reports from past projects, is available at: planning.org/cpat.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The city of Taft submitted a successful project proposal to APA's Community Planning Assistance Teams (CPAT) program in March 2018. The proposal requested assistance from CPAT on an assessment of Downtown Taft and a revitalization strategy ahead of city consideration on determining the need for a new *Downtown Specific Plan*.

APA selected Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA, to serve as the team leader of the volunteer team. Race and APA Programs Manager, Ryan Scherzinger, AICP, conducted a brief preliminary visit to Taft in June 2018 to tour the city and meet with city staff and area stakeholders. Following that visit, they recruited three other volunteer professionals to join the team: Susan Harden, FAICP, LEED AO, CNU-A; Ed Starkie; and Matthew Taecker, AICP, AIA. The full team visited Taft in September 2018 to engage with the community, collect and review data, and explore revitalization strategies for downtown Taft with a focus on the Center Street corridor. This final report is the culmination of the volunteer CPAT team's work.

The final report begins with a brief description of the team's process and some introductory city history, followed by an overview of the existing plans for Downtown Taft. Several plans and policy documents mention downtown, including the *Taft General Plan*. Recent economic development initiatives, including a successful workshop in 2015, also generated some new energy and ideas, one resulting in a new city branding and wayfinding signage program that reflects the historic-based vision for downtown. The *Downtown Specific Plan* is a strong policy foundation but lacks the inspiration needed to drive change. The regulatory document contains no visualizations, mentions no opportunity sites, isn't rooted in current economic realities or the existing physical condition of downtown, and doesn't express the city's aspirations or vision for Downtown Taft.

Recommendations are divided into three sections: 1) Opportunities for Success; 2) Framework for Investment; and 3) Action Plan. Section One looks at the market context of

Taft, changing demographics and projections, and associated implications. Growth is occurring in the region and Taft can capture its proportional share with the right strategy. Taft needs new residents, particularly young people, to secure its future. Strategies include increasing the diversity of housing, taking steps to recruit and retain businesses, investing in placemaking that helps businesses thrive, and bolstering human capital to increase capacity for downtown programming and events. A proactive approach is key to any and all strategies.

Section Two describes a framework that builds on strengths and capitalizes on existing opportunities to achieve the vision for downtown. Many programmatic opportunities already exist. The Downtown Merchants Association should expand and formalize its organization to manage downtown more effectively with the city as an active partner. Also included are identified opportunities and representative ideas to transform spaces, many of which could be accomplished at little cost.

Opportunity sites in Taft offer the ability to attract more people, increase economic activity, and restore vitality to downtown. The framework identifies focus areas demonstrating where types of development, with some flexibility, should concentrate, including new residential growth. This approach considers Taft's strongest possibilities of economic growth, quality of life for residents, mobility and circulation, and other urban design elements. In addition, three catalyst projects in conceptual illustrative detail help explain and visualize the transformative impact such projects could have on the downtown.

Section Three provides an action plan that sequences efforts and responsibilities. The current *Downtown Specific Plan* is passive; what is recommended here, however, represents a shift to a proactive public-private approach. The action plan identifies administrative, regulatory, development, and financial actions in three phases, including a table to reference all implementation actions. A list of potential funding sources completes the report.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The city of Taft submitted a successful project proposal to APA's CPAT program in March 2018. The proposal requested assistance from CPAT on an assessment of downtown Taft and a revitalization strategy ahead of city consideration on determining the need for a new downtown specific plan.

Brief History

Surrounded by beautiful golden hills in the San Joaquin Valley of California, Taft is a small town (just under 10,000 people) with roots dating back to the area's initial oil boom. Most major oil companies had a presence in Taft at some point. Standard Oil (Chevron today) established their corporate headquarters in the northwest part of the area. Their operation grew and peaked in the 1960s, as did the city with new residential and commercial development and growth that continued throughout the 1970s and into the 1990s. The Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads, in tandem with the oil industry, impacted the physical formation of Taft. Southern Pacific laid out the site for the town and by the 1920s, the form of downtown Taft already looked much like it does today.

Common to many cities and towns, the arrival of new strip retail development during the mid- to late-20th century eventually began to erode some of the economic vitality of Taft's downtown. Residents now primarily shop at big-box-anchored shopping centers on the periphery and the downtown lost the vibrancy it once had as Taft's cultural and economic heart.

The entrepreneurial spirit in Taft, however, is still present in downtown along Center Street and adjacent streets. The iconic Fox Theater, several restaurants and quaint shops, and a few other businesses provide life to downtown, but there's a lack of continuity. The downtown fabric is broken. A significant number of vacant buildings, many in a state of disrepair and others inactive with uses ill-suited for downtown, all work to depreciate the area and detract from the unified sense of place one would expect and hope for the downtown to hold. The most recent economic recession only added to those growing challenges.

CPAT Process

Following the acceptance of Taft's CPAT proposal, APA selected Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA, who agreed to serve as



Figure 1: CPAT study area focuses on the Center Street corridor of downtown Taft and includes the immediate surrounding areas. (Source: Google Earth, modified by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP)



Figure 2: The CPAT team met with residents and other stakeholders on multiple occasions throughout the visit to discuss downtown. (Source: Ryan Scherzinger, AICP, and Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA)

the volunteer team leader for the project. Race and APA programs manager, Ryan Scherzinger, AICP, conducted a preliminary site visit to Taft on June 11, 2018. They met with city staff, including the director of Taft’s planning and development services department, Mark Staples, who served as the primary liaison throughout the project, and with the city manager, Craig Jones. During their tour of the city, they also engaged in discussions with downtown business owners, chamber of commerce leaders, and had ad hoc conversations with residents.

Following the site visit, Race and Scherzinger recruited three additional team members with expertise in urban design, community engagement, market analysis, placemaking, architecture, and urban planning. The team members were Susan Harden, FAICP, LEED, AP, CNU-A; Ed Starkie; and Matthew Taecker, AICP, AIA (see Appendix A for more on each of the team members).

The full CPAT team visited Taft from September 8–13, 2018. The week-long visit included walking tours of the city; drop-ins to local businesses; focus groups; meetings with

city staff, local leaders, and citizens; and independent team work sessions to analyze data, develop and refine ideas, and create accompanying graphic illustrations. It ended with a final public presentation and workshop on the last evening to vet recommendations and generate more ideas and energy within the community. Following the September visit to Taft, the team worked remotely with APA staff to complete the final report.

Existing Plans for Downtown

Several policies, strategies, and regulations reflect the city’s efforts to address the needs of downtown. The *Taft General Plan* (adopted in 2010, amended in 2017), Taft Zoning Ordinance (comprehensive update in 2008, amended in 2010), Economic Development Strategy (adopted August 2013 for the Greater Taft Economic Development Authority), and a well-attended economic development workshop in July 2015 all recognized the importance of downtown and offered goals, minimal design standards, land-use designations, a tourism strategy, a target industry analysis, and de-

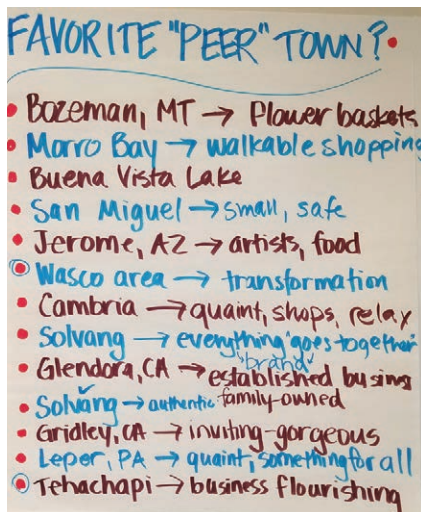


Figure 3: During a public workshop, Taft residents shared examples of “peer cities” and ideas for their vision of downtown Taft. (Source: Ryan Scherzinger, AICP)



Figure 4: The city recently rebranded (logo on left) with a look that embraces its history and represents the established vision for Downtown Taft. (Source: City of Taft)

velopment recommendations. The 2015 workshop also led to a new logo and wayfinding signage program (approved by the City Council in April 2017) that illustrates the history, heritage, and desired image for downtown.

The *Downtown Specific Plan* (adopted in 1994, amended in 1999) clearly provides a strong policy foundation. The policy document takes a “downtown first” stance with related best practices such as the stated need to:

- Reduce internal competition with other districts in Taft;
- Reflect downtown’s unique role as the economic, social, and cultural center; and
- Redevelop underutilized sites on the edge of downtown with uses that support downtown’s businesses, not compete with them.

The *Downtown Specific Plan* helps establish downtown as a core zone with street-oriented uses and a mixed use district with parking. The *Taft General Plan* includes supportive references to the *Downtown Specific Plan*. Below are two example statements from the *General Plan*.

“Promote a vibrant, healthy, active downtown by providing safe multi-family and mixed-use housing with a harmonious mix of uses and transportation options available.”

“The City will create a vibrant, active, healthy downtown which will remain the “heart” of the community.”

While the *Downtown Specific Plan* offers solid policies, the document is not visionary or inspiring. The text-only document gives no visualizations to bring concepts and ideas to life. It is largely a regulatory document that does not convey the contemporary realities and aspirations of Taft. There is little understanding of the current economic realities and physical conditions downtown. Furthermore, the plan does not address any specific sites or opportunities to focus attention and resources toward.

Efforts to address the current downtown challenges will require a new approach to regulations. A new approach should:

- Develop regulations reflecting new market demand and development feasibility context.
- Include contemporary planning principles for central districts, e.g., lifestyle, demographics, social purpose, etc.
- Add more provisions for adaptive reuse.

The recommendations that follow provide an updated, visual, and proactive approach to realizing a new vision for downtown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Section 1: Opportunities for Success

Taft has key assets that can contribute to the downtown's success. It has a committed group of property owners, merchants, and leaders; is in a growing region with a diversifying economic base; and provides affordable and competitively priced properties accessible to start-ups.

Taft has a story to tell. As one of America's original oil towns, its history is visible and tangible. Taft attracted generations of hardworking people from the country's heartland. They settled and stayed in Taft—and they formed a community that welcomes newcomers. Taft is also a place that has very low costs for merchants and businesses to establish themselves and grow. These assets all intersect in downtown Taft.

1.1 Building on Taft's Rich History

Taft is an energy city in California's San Joaquin Valley. Taft's story is one that reflects the history of Kern County and California's oil and gas industry. Originally called Moron (before the word as we define it today was coined in 1910 by psychologist Henry H. Goddard), the city was ultimately named for President William Howard Taft, the 27th president of the United States (1909–1913). Incorporated in 1910, Taft was built around a railroad that served the oilfields.

The Kern County town straddles California's top producing Midway-Sunset oil field. It has a history of oilfield workers and wranglers that values family life and the city's institutions. In its heyday, many of the major oil companies operated in and around Taft including Shell, Texaco, Mobil, Gulf, and ARCO. Standard Oil Company of California made

Taft its operational headquarters. The company employed 6,000 residents and maintained a sprawling district of machine shops, derrick construction facilities, truck fleets, and bunkhouses. In 1960, the company moved its finance department to Concord, California, and closed its machine shop operations in 1980. The railroad is also gone and was recently converted into a pedestrian/bicycle trail. The artifacts from the company oil town can be seen at the West Kern Oil Museum in Taft.

Taft celebrates its history as an oil town. Every five years since 1930, Taft has hosted the Oildorado Festival. The city owns 43 acres along the former railroad tracks, which is also where a local landmark, the Taft Oil Worker Monument, is located.

1.2 Market Context

The market for Taft is much larger than what many might expect. Market data reveals there is plenty of spending for retail. The problem is that it goes to places other than Taft. Multiple opportunities exist in Taft to attract people ready to invest and capture more of the available market.

Customers often think in minutes versus miles. To gain an understanding of that spatially, Figure 1.2 illustrates the driving times from Taft divided into 10-, 30-, and 60-minute intervals. Retail sales and demand reveal that the 10- and 30-minute drive market-capture areas change very little from a quick five-minute drive in town. This finding indicates that market support extends beyond those drive-time

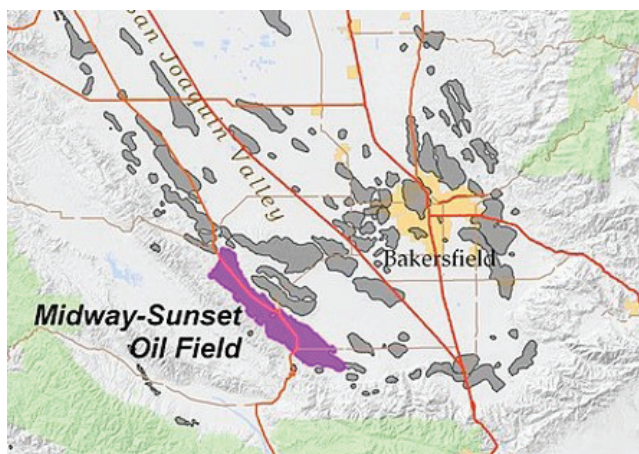
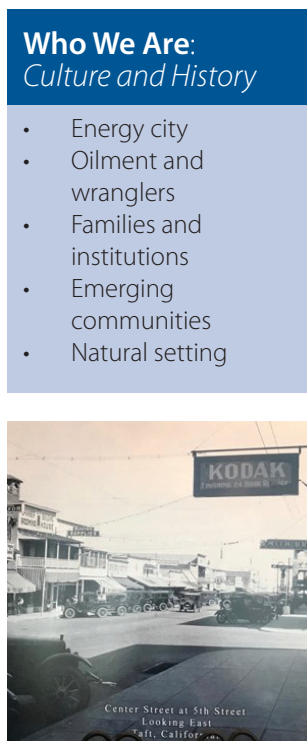


Figure 1.1: Cultural traditions and regional setting. (Source: Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA)

Market Area

- The market area extends to 60 minute drive
- 10 minute has little change
- 30 minute shows little change
- Majority of change between 30 and 60 minute drive
- Rental housing shows a decrease regionally of over 3,000 units
- Demand for new units regionally is almost 9,500 units by 2023

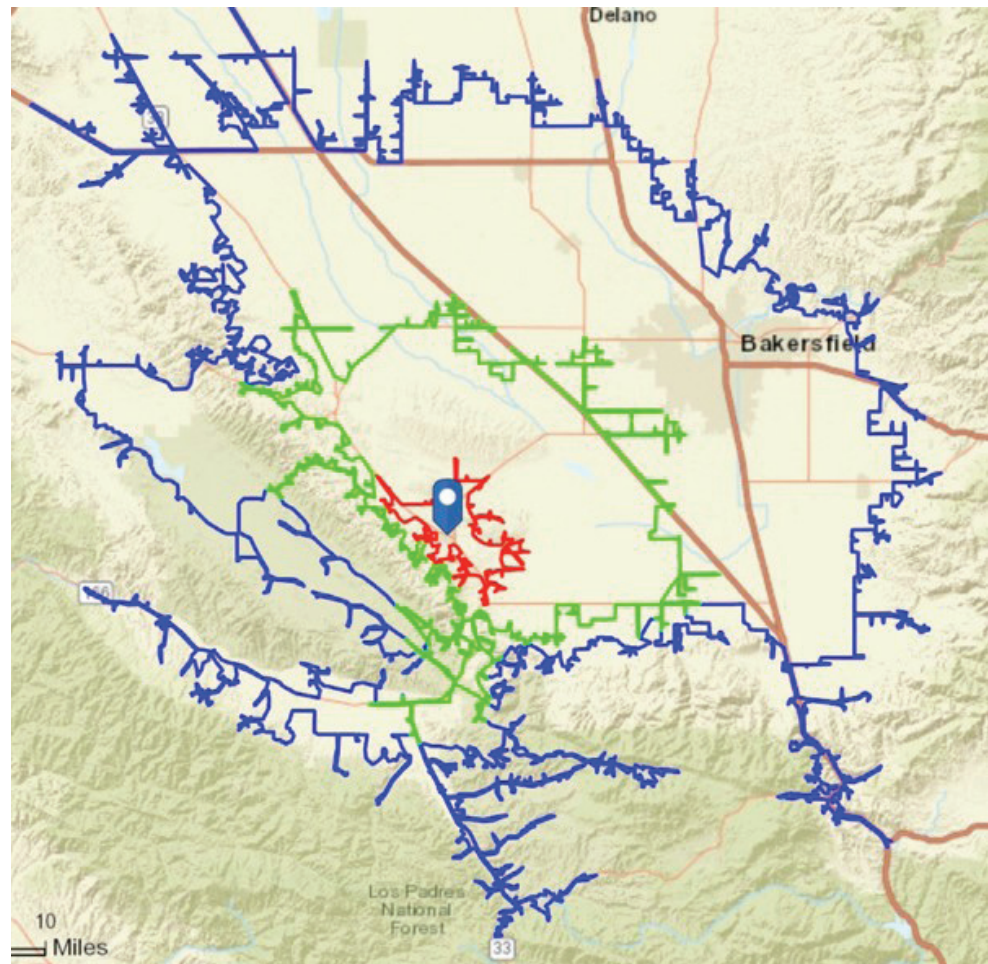


Figure 1.2: Market area. (Source: Esri ArcGIS Business Analyst)

boundaries. Most of the change is between the 30- to 60-minute drive areas.

Located at the southwest edge of Kern County, Taft's market area stretches to 60 minutes, just to the east of Bakersfield. The most dynamic part of the market is happening between the 30- and 60-minute drive times.

Who We Are: Taft Demographics

To understand the potential for revitalizing downtown, the table on page 14 shows change in demographic characteristics from 2010 to 2023. The population of Taft is shown as rebounding slightly from a loss between 2010 and 2018.

Who We Are: Taft Household Change

Figure 1.3 shows change in the number of households from 2018 to 2023 by their age and income. All positive change is in households with incomes more than \$50,000 per year. There is no growth in households under 25 years of age, and minor growth in the 25–34 range.

This data suggests that the status quo, if nothing proactive takes place, will result in steady decline as cohorts age and are not replaced by younger households.

For the wider area included in Figure 1.2 showing drive times, however, households are expected to increase by

almost 9,500, raising the possibility, under the right conditions, to capture some of that regional growth.

City Needs

Projections based on the data demonstrate clearly that Taft needs a life cycle of housing. There's a need for apartments and houses for 18- to 35-year-olds who are leaving Taft; assisted living for seniors; downtown-oriented multifamily housing for millennials (born 1980 to 1999); and "move-up" housing that matches the income of the 25 to 35 age cohort.

There's an immediate need for quality multifamily rentals to recover local and regional losses. There's also potential for condominiums for empty nesters and for moderate- and low-income ownership multifamily. A mix and range of housing will maintain a diverse employee base for the future.

Attracting New Taft Residents

Taft currently has a minimal local market for change, but increasing the diversity of housing types can provide housing for Taft youth and senior residents. Young households are critical for the future. Repurposing downtown as an entertainment and experience-oriented place has begun but must be accelerated by pursuing the retail gaps. Gain-

Table 1.1: Population Growth

	2010	2018	2023	Change 2018–23
Population	13,445	12,957	13,433	476
Households	3,534	3,499	3,640	141
Families	2,503	2,458	2,549	91
Non-Family Households	1,031	1,041	1,091	50
Average Household Size	2.93	3.07	3.08	0.01
Owner-Occupied Housing Units	1,990	1,899	2,140	241
Renter-Occupied Housing Units	1,544	1,600	1,500	(100)
Median Age	33.4	33.3	34.2	0.9

Source: ESRI Business Information Services. The data is based upon the Census place boundary from 2010 with projections.

ing commuters as residents can bootstrap the market for the city. Continuing to add lifestyle amenities in and around downtown will increase the ability to attract more residents, and programming downtown for more festivals and events is critical to building momentum in that direction.

Development Minuses

Current perceptions of downtown and the state of buildings and public realm are not universally positive. Some owners fail to maintain or lease their buildings, leaving gaps and eyesores in the fabric of downtown. Low economic utility in downtown is problematic for new businesses because there is not enough variety of products to draw foot traffic. Lack of diverse housing reduces the city’s appeal to potential new residents and inhibits efforts to assist low-income or homeless people gain housing. Current

leasing rates also reflect low auto and foot traffic, too low for any new construction.

Development Pluses

While the minuses enumerated above may seem daunting, local **demand is not an issue for retail**, and local land pricing is low enough to offer an opportunity. Existing buildings offer opportunities for adaptive reuse with a genuine authenticity, which is an attractive asset. In addition, the existing infrastructure for a walkable entertainment district is excellent. Moreover, household growth in Kern County is projected around 300,000 by 2050.

Taft’s Fair Share of Regional Growth

The region’s population is growing, and Taft has not been gaining its share of that growth. Proportional capture of the

Taft Age By Income: Projected Change 2018 to 2023

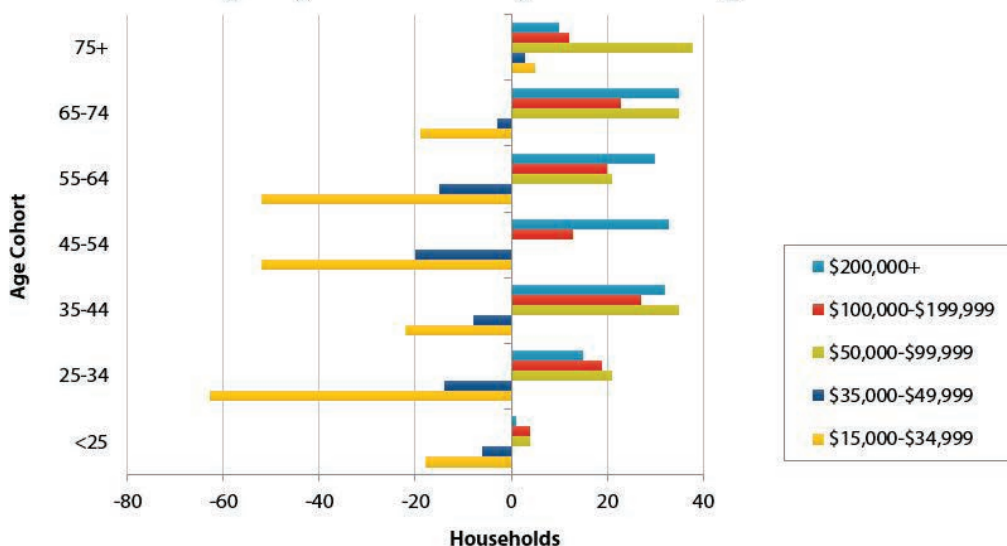


Figure 1.3: Little to no growth in the younger age cohorts suggests a steady decline; Taft must gain its share of the household growth occurring in the region. (Source: Esri ArcGIS Business Analyst)

projected growth would **double population by 2050**. Attracting a significant number of those new prospective residents requires proactive plans, community commitment, and a flexible plan for implementation.

1.3 Opportunities for Early Investment

Taft will need to rebuild its connection to the regional market through strategic programming, recruitment, and investment. This section provides an overview of contemporary approaches to initiating reinvestment strategies, which is further elaborated on in Section 3 with the action plan.

Strategic Programming

Contemporary downtown revitalization programs begin with building on their human capital, i.e., the businesses and downtown stakeholders that are committed to success. These are the people that will expand the downtown's capacity to sponsor, promote, and manage events that attract people and reestablish the brand and experiences. Taft's Oildorado event is a local example of a community-focused celebration that mirrors efforts the most successful central districts apply routinely. It requires a team approach with a common goal. Downtown organizations typically focus on:

- Managing the calendar of events
- Building on traditional and authentic events and creating positive experiences
- Advocating for public services and investments that enhance the downtown experience

Recruitment

Every organization and business district needs to be refreshed with new, energetic members who expand the brand and commercial offerings. And, as in any market-driven district, merchants will leave and new ones will replace them, reflecting new demands for goods, services, and experiences. This intergenerational diversity strengthens a downtown by integrating experience and new energy. Mentoring can run both directions. This, for example, occurred during the CPAT workshops with the downtown business community. New businesses shared with established business owners how to improve their internet presence.

Recruitment and retention of businesses requires a wider range of actions beyond getting leases signed. These may include:

- Initiating a proactive effort to match buildings and locations with new tenants and retaining existing ones needing more space for expansion
- Identifying a downtown ombudsman to assist in recruiting, assisting businesses, and getting approvals
- Providing technical and financial assistance for building owners for adaptive reuse and new development

Investment in Placemaking

Downtowns people enjoy visiting benefit from public-private partnerships that coordinate investments in capital projects, maintenance, and safety. Public investments in capital projects should reinforce the environmental objectives for a storefront shopping and entertainment district. The last refresh for Center Street was in the 1980s. Although Downtown Taft is still relatively well kept, most downtowns are periodically updated to improve the experience of visitors and workers.

Development of places along Center Street and adjacent areas will require coordinated reinvestment in infrastructure and private property. Early investment can build on low-hanging fruit, i.e., locations where the advantages and attributes required for success already exist. Section 2 identifies specific downtown opportunities for early placemaking investments.

Capital projects must be supported with reliable maintenance and security services. Small towns with traditional Main Street downtowns use a variety of organizational models to plan and coordinate urban services that reflect their special needs. Section 3 includes further discussion of potential models for Taft.

Section 2: Framework for Investment

Center Street is the center of Taft. It is the traditional economic, social, and cultural hub. It is an authentic place and visually represents Taft's history and aspirations. The rediscovery of downtown Taft is largely due to the efforts of a core group of property owners and businesses. Success will depend on efforts to create and maintain an active calendar, investment in small-scale, image-enhancing projects, and enhancing downtown's position in the city and, more broadly, promoting western Kern County as a place to go. Catalyst projects pursued with institutional and private-sector partners can spur additional private investment. Ultimately, the former railroad property owned by the city can be positioned to complement downtown's specialty retail and entertainment with housing and commercial services.

2.1 Programming

For a full selection of illustrations that provide visual examples of the programming opportunities discussed in section 2.1, see Appendix C.

Strategies for a successful Downtown Taft should build on its authenticity. Some of the existing traditional and newer businesses reflect new trends in retailing, dining, and entertainment. Overall activation strategies for downtown can match buildings, outdoor spaces, and event planning with these businesses to celebrate Taft's traditions and history.

Business Clusters on Center Street

A rough analysis of the businesses along Center Street highlights four key clusters: food, arts, automobiles, and professional office. Fully embracing these four clusters can open doors for significant growth, particularly with targeted programming around the business type.

Based on the businesses in downtown, the CPAT team worked with merchants to define the opportunities for four types of uses including foodies, artisans, automotive-related uses, and professional offices.

Food

Food is already an important element of the downtown business mix, but there is the potential for significant growth in this sector in the downtown. New restaurants should be encouraged, along with recruitment of specialty food stores and services. In addition to infilling vacant storefronts with these types of businesses, downtown must also celebrate food and attract foodies through special events and markets such as a "Taste of Taft," "Restaurant Nights," "Wine Walk," etc.

Artisan

The artisan cluster includes theater, clothing, crafts, antiques, furniture, candles, gifts, flowers/plants, and similar business types. As one of the strongest and most preva-



Figure 2.1: The existing businesses along Center Street can be categorized into six general categories. (Source: Google Maps, modified by CPAT.)

lent clusters along Center Street, there is a real opportunity to program and promote downtown as a “hub” for artisans and makers. Eye-catching storefront window displays within this cluster are extremely important in attracting downtown shoppers. Existing businesses should work together to cross-sell and promote one another through in-store efforts, joint sales, and social media. Also, as with the food industry, downtown events that celebrate arts, crafts, and culture can help expand and grow clientele. Such events may include: antique shows, craft shows, music festivals, movie/film festivals, “Art in the Alleys,” chalk festivals, and other creative possibilities.

Auto Culture

Center Street’s core is anchored by auto-oriented businesses and services. The automotive culture has long been a part of Taft’s history and the related businesses, signs, and structures are evident throughout downtown. Existing events such as “Cruise Night” and car shows go a long way to promote and highlight this part of its unique culture. However, there is still opportunity to more intentionally integrate an industrial and automotive culture into Downtown Taft—businesses with windows or garages that front sidewalks can create interesting displays (old cars, motorcycles, industry, etc.) that celebrate an industrial and automobile culture and can also educate visitors. Rather than try to “hide” the automotive and industrial uses downtown, they should be included as key contributors. Consider linking the artisans and auto-industrial culture by recruiting industrial artists—welders, metal sculptors, woodworkers, glassblowers, etc.—and locating them in unused garages and industrial-like buildings.

Professional Office

The professional office cluster includes insurance, book-keeping, real estate, health care, and others. These businesses play an important role in job creation, entrepreneurship, and increasing foot traffic downtown throughout the day. While they are not selling items in the retail sense, these business and property owners have an important responsibility to maintain attractive, clean storefronts that contribute to the overall ambience of downtown. To further foster an entrepreneurial spirit, downtown should look at opening or recruiting a coworking space to foster small start-ups and young professionals who may not be able to afford (or may not need) a complete office space. Currently, the Center Street core has a significant number of professional offices. While new professional offices are not discouraged, new businesses of this type should be encouraged to open in vacant spaces in other parts of the downtown if possible.

Recruiting Talent and Startups

Just as in any team-building effort, downtown needs to field a team of seasoned veterans and newcomers. Downtown needs to retain and grow strong performers and recruit new ones. This could include providing start-up funding, provid-

ing coworking or affordable shared work spaces, or helping businesses market their goods and services.

Organization

The Main Street America approach to economic development is one of the most successful in the country and is built around four distinct components: economic vitality, design, promotion, and organization. This approach would be of great benefit to Taft, bringing together business and property owners, local chamber and city staff, and Taft residents to focus on the health and management of downtown.



Figure 2.2: The Main Street approach includes four “transformation strategies” that help guide a revitalization program’s work. (Source: Main Street America)

Organizational Capacity

By leveraging the capacities of business and property owners, chambers, city and county staff, artisans, residents, etc., downtown Taft can be more effective at recruitment, promotion, management, and mentorship. Joint promotions, advertising, bulk purchasing, and more should also be considered. An annual calendar that tracks events, promotions, and marketing efforts would be a useful tool to guide the organization of downtown.

District Management

The Downtown Merchants Association should be expanded, strengthened, and formalized to serve as the organization to manage downtown.

It should also include property owners and residents as well as merchants. Including residents in event planning and other activities can relieve the burden on downtown business owners and increase participation and ownership in events.

The city should also consider appointing a staff person to serve as a liaison to the downtown in an

Managing Downtown

- Strengthen and formalize Downtown Merchants Association
- Establish a Business Improvement District
- Implement a Clean and Safe Program
- Add potted plants and other beautification elements
- Create and maintain an annual calendar
- Promote and market events
- Engage residents in event planning committees
- Appoint city staff as downtown liaison

effort to develop a stronger connection and improve responsiveness.

Downtown Merchants

The city and merchants association should explore establishing a business improvement district that could implement a “clean and safe” program (to address homeless issues, trash, and perceived safety concerns), fund potted plants or hanging baskets, improve signage, and address many more issues and ideas as they emerge.

Retail Practice

Existing and new businesses must try to subscribe to “retail practice 101” guidelines. This is particularly important when it comes to business hours. Consistent and reliable hours are central to building and maintaining a strong customer base. Additionally, being open on the weekends and at least one night a week are equally essential to being perceived as a vibrant downtown rather than a collection of “hobby businesses.”

Retail Practice 101

- Business hours must be consistent and perceived as reliable. Convenience is for the customer, not the owner.
- Prime shopping is on the weekend. To not be open is a market loss of 40 percent.
- Weekday shopping is heaviest from 5 to 7 p.m.
- No obscure glass. The interior must be visible with sight lines to back of shop.
- Glass should be cleaned weekly, door and trim painted monthly

2.2 Authentic Taft

Downtown is the heart of Taft and should be the primary place to celebrate all that is unique and authentic to the community. Downtown Taft has the potential to reinforce an identity through the retail mix and programming (discussed in section 2.1), events, and placemaking efforts.

Identity

When asked what was “uniquely Taft,” stakeholders provided the following characteristics, words, and places as a starting point:

- Oil & drip gas
- Smell of \$\$
- History & stories
- Original architecture
- Oil Workers Monument
- Fort
- WWII Field
- Museum
- Fox Theater (haunted?)
- Brothels!
- Sunsets
- Friendly
- Spiritual
- Family
- Safe
- Cruise nights/cars
- Location
- Events
- Films & videos



Figure 2.3: The West Kern Oil Museum in Taft tells the story of oil in the region. Oildorado is a 10-day event that occurs every five years and celebrates that history and culture. (Source: Konrad Summers and Taft Oildorado Days)

Other unique features of Taft's identify include the many forms of recreation offered in and around the city, including hiking, dirt biking, biking, and skydiving. All of these elements should be considered during promotion, marketing, physical improvements, and redevelopment. These are attributes to capitalize on and to share with residents and visitors.

Events

As noted earlier, organizing events downtown is a great way to build community, increase visitors and foot traffic, and reinforce an authentic identity. Events focused on arts, food, and auto culture capitalize on the current business clusters, but are not the only types of events that can create a draw and improve downtown vitality. Events suggested by stakeholders include:

- Taste of Taft
- Restaurant nights
- Day of the Dead
- Wine Walk
- Chunkin Punkins
- Christmas–Santa
- Bike and running races
- Art in the Alleys
- Chalk Festival
- Oildorado “Light”
- Vintage trailers
- Music
- Movies/Hollywood
- Antique show

This list represents just the tip of the iceberg. Events can be combined and should be collaborative in their execution. Scheduling events regularly and promoting them broadly will help create a strong downtown following.

Places

Many opportunities exist to enhance the physical environment, create locations to gather, and build the overall sense of place. Some of these improvements are potentially inexpensive, temporary, “pop-up” ideas that can transform a space, while others could be permanent improvements that increase use and aesthetics. Several ideas are highlighted in Appendix. D.

2.3 Community and Downtown Framework

The overall strategy for downtown Taft seeks to attract new residents and provides a contemporary, walkable central district. This section proposes an overall framework of land uses, transportation systems, and design features. It considers the future “fabric” of central Taft. Like a quilt, the future of downtown should weave together economic, social, and cultural experiences to create a dynamic and livable city.

21st Century Fabric

Downtown Taft contains a variety of uses. Center Street has commercial uses from 2nd Street to 10th Street, but the kind and continuity of commercial use varies considerably. In the early 20th century, Taft's booming economy once supported seven blocks of continuous “Main Street.”

A small number of storefronts contain more typical retail shops, restaurants, and food service. However, professional offices, fast food, auto repair, and contractors' sup-



Figure 2.4: Holding events downtown will help build its sense of place and create more economic activity. (Source: Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA)



Opportunity Sites

- Center Street renovation and infill sites
- Downtown infill sites
- Railroad lands
- Medical Center area

Figure 2.5: Numerous opportunity sites are available in downtown Taft. (Source: CPAT)

plies also fill buildings along Center Street. Several buildings have sat vacant for years, and many buildings have been torn down and replaced by auto sale lots, vacant lots, and parking lots.

The underused land along Center Street and in surrounding blocks is visible evidence of economic decline and disinvestment. There are far fewer people in downtown Taft than if these parcels were occupied by residents.

Vacant land formerly used for railroad-related uses is immediately south of downtown and offers an extraordinary opportunity for development—in a location where development will help populate downtown and increase economic activity.

We recommend that the railroad land be used primarily for residential development, for which there is economic

demand. In the longer term, if Taft captures its equal share of Kern County growth, it could double its current population to nearly 20,000 people. If Taft captures just the equal number of inbound commuters and attracts employers for more of the outbound commuters, the city could plan for 1,000 new units of housing. More than 600 of those units could be planned for in and adjacent to downtown in the former railroad lands. Residential development can create a 24-hour downtown and renew central Taft's identity. New commercial development would compete with downtown and other existing commercial space.

Capturing Growth

- 3,218 commuted into Taft daily in 2015
- 2,213 residents commuted out of Taft daily
- Families can spend +/- \$8,000 per year per car commuting

If Taft can capture commuters as residents, and recruit outbound commute employers, it can have demand for 1,000 units with no local demand necessary.

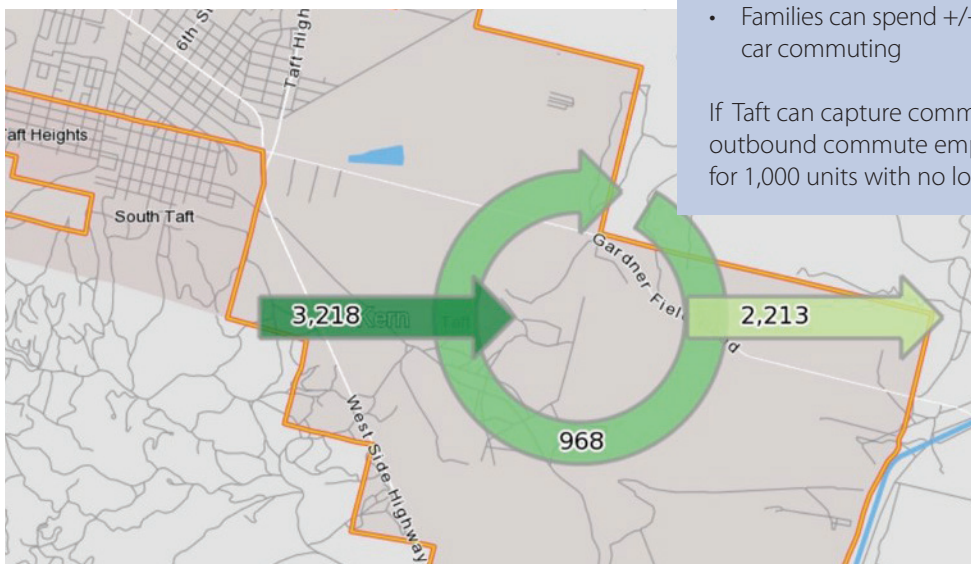


Figure 2.6: Attracting part of the growth occurring in the region is key to Taft's future. (Source: Esri ArcGIS Business Analyst)



Focus Areas

- Core area
- Medical center
- New residential neighborhood
- Transit center
- Neighborhood commercial

Figure 2.7: The identified focus areas work together to strengthen and provide new opportunities for growth. (Source: CPAT)

Residential development would do well. Amenities are there. Downtown Taft offers restaurants, shops, and the Fox Theatre. The railroad right-of-way has been converted to a trail and new parks have been created.

Focus Areas

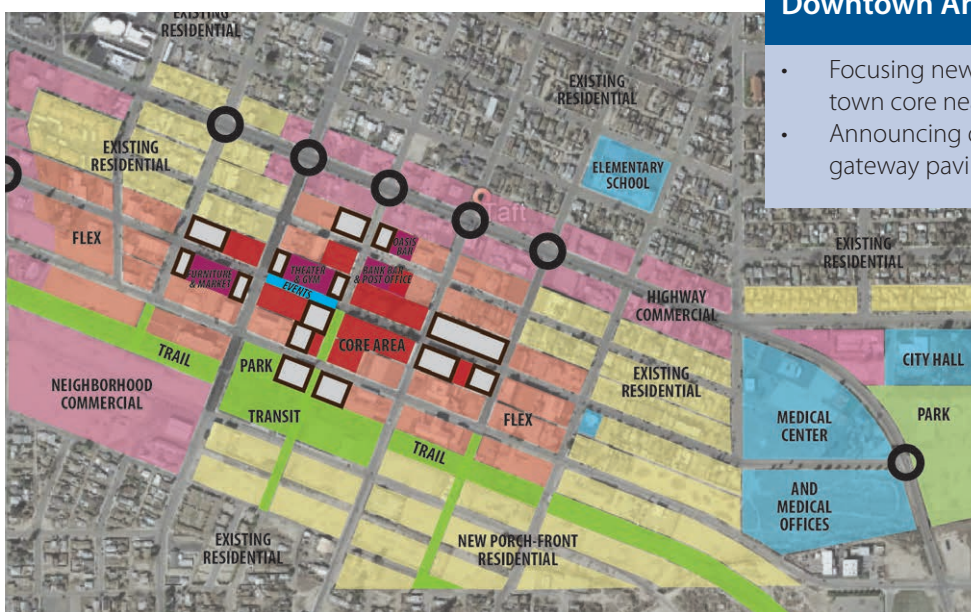
Downtown revitalization efforts should focus geographically on blocks with multiple commercial destinations. The amount of land available for commercial uses is too vast. Commercial space in downtown Taft was scaled for boomtown days and before Main Street retail needed to compete with modern shopping malls and the internet.

The CPAT team defined a core area that focuses efforts along Center Street between 4th Street and 7th Street and extended to 3rd Street with new development (see Figure 2.7). 5th Street presents a notable cross-axis that extends to

established destinations on North Street and extends south to the Taft Transit Center.

In the core area, Taft should strive to attract development on vacant lots, parking lots, and vacant buildings. Tenant recruitment and new uses should complement existing destinations and require storefront architecture. Revitalization of the core area will also rely on being able to find Center Street from Highway 33, such as with unique directional signs at multiple intersections (see Figure 2.8).

These same intersections separate downtown from residential neighborhoods, Taft College, and other educational uses to the north. Across Highway 33, pedestrian crossing distances should be reduced, using curb exten-



Downtown Anchors and Gateways

- Focusing new investment in the downtown core near and on Center Street
- Announcing downtown on state roads—gateway paving and signage

Figure 2.8: Gateway signage and other design elements, particularly on Highway 33, will help draw people downtown. (Source: CPAT)



Land Use

- Core area requires street-oriented uses.
- Flex areas allow a variety of ground floor uses—residential, office, etc.
- Taft should protect and expand downtown-adjacent housing.

Figure 2.9: Designated “flex areas” allow for more and different kinds of opportunities to help revitalize downtown. (Source: CPAT)

sions and pedestrian refuge areas. These features could also include landscaping to beautify this segment of Highway 33 and gateway to downtown Taft.

We have already noted promising opportunities associated with the railroad land, emphasizing residential development designed to be a walkable porch-front neighborhood with commercial uses accessible from well-traveled 10th Street.

The West Side Medical Center and potential for associated medical offices present a third promising area of focus and opportunity. While it may appear more ideal for medical professionals to locate offices closer to the center of downtown, it is more important to create a strong consolidated

medical center district. Health care is a promising field for employment growth. Additionally, Taft’s ability to attract older empty nesters and retirees will depend in part on its ability to offer health care services.

Flex Areas

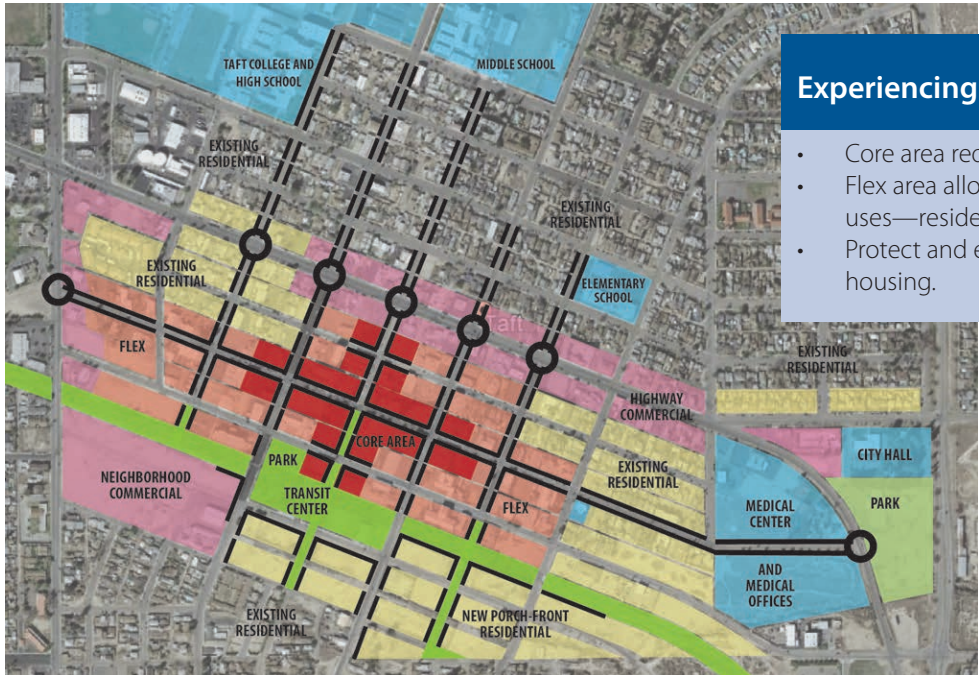
For a large part of downtown, change will need to remain opportunistic. These “flex areas” do not include the focus areas previously mentioned or established residential and highway commercial blocks. Flex areas might include auto dealers, housing, and industrial, as well as uses typically associated with a central business district.



Walking and Biking

- Street-oriented development
- Connecting streets between downtown districts and destinations
- Pedestrian amenities
- Walking from/to Transit Center

Figure 2.10: Creating a safe pedestrian and bicycle circulation network will better connect downtown to other parts of Taft. (Source: CPAT)



Experiencing Downtown

- Core area requires street-oriented uses
- Flex area allow a variety of ground floor uses—residential, office, etc.
- Protect and expand downtown-adjacent housing.

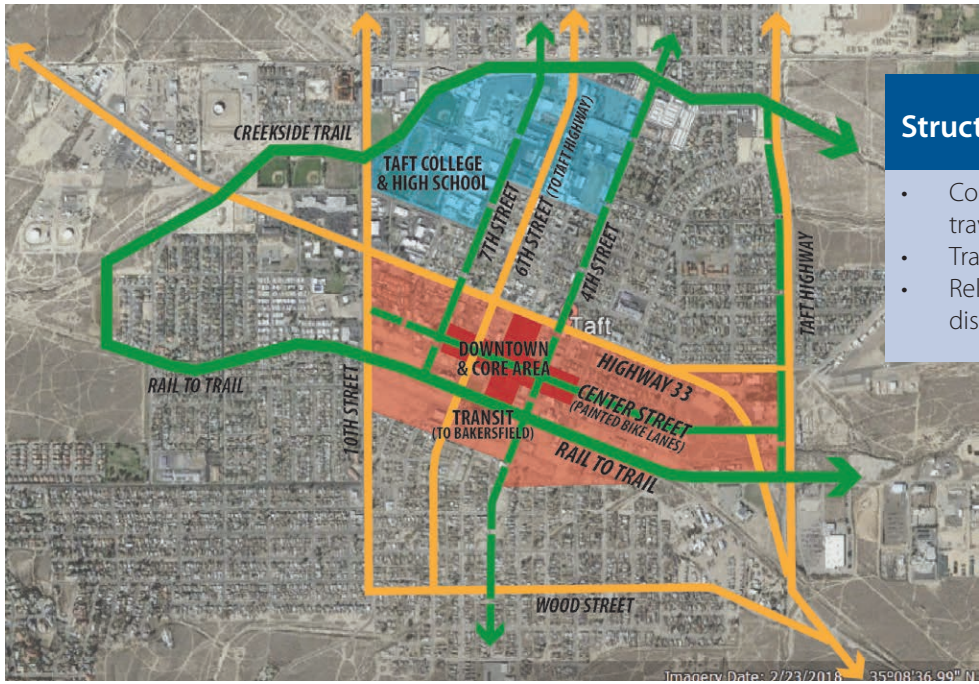
Figure 2.11: Organizing a solid, street-oriented downtown core with surrounding flex areas and supportive residential areas provides stronger economic opportunities for businesses, increases quality of life for Taft residents, and offers a better experience for visitors. (Source: CPAT)

Circulation and Building Fronts

Some streets are vital to pedestrian and bicycle circulation into and around downtown. Center Street, as a prime example, connects the core area to the medical center and can serve as a safer, traffic-calmed route to the east and west. Pedestrian and bicycle circulation are also important to connect the core area to Taft College and Taft High School, along with residential neighborhoods north of Highway 33 and south of the Rails to Trails route. Where pedestrian and bicycle routes must cross heavily traveled

streets, intersections should be designed for pedestrian and bicycle safety.

The pedestrian experience is vital along downtown streets. The quality of pedestrian experience depends largely on how buildings face the street. Streets lined by frequent entrances and generous windows feel safer and more inviting than streets lined by blank walls and parking lots. Some land-use areas may remain more auto-oriented, such as areas outside of the core area and railroad land neighborhood. Nevertheless, certain streets should have



Structure and Wayfinding

- Community structure and travel experience
- Trail and bikeway system
- Relationships between districts

Figure 2.12: Circulation around Taft should focus on connections to downtown and accommodate all modes of transportation. (Source: CPAT)

enough building front along them to maintain an inviting feeling. Public open spaces should be lined by building fronts as well.

Wayfinding and Graphic Identity

Downtown trails and streets are part of a citywide circulation network, which can connect major destinations and offer recreation opportunities to bike, jog, visit parks, and be in nature. The wayfinding strategies that enhance the definition and access of downtown reinforce the city's aspirations for its overall form and structure. This includes the overall road network and direction and informational signage and graphic identity.

Auto circulation, as it extends from downtown, suggests key locations where wayfinding signage can intercept motorists and guide them to Taft's downtown. The location and visibility of signage, landscaping, and gateway development defines downtown as a destination and center. It also frames the boundaries, edges, and central places. For

example, it can provide an experience of traveling through, rather than past, downtown (see Appendix D).

The city has invested in a wayfinding and graphic identity design. The signage captures the history of Taft as an oil town merging sophisticated graphics with its industrial heritage. The CPAT team had access to the graphic boards, but weren't able to speak with the consultants who prepared the wayfinding plan. The city and downtown stakeholders should review the proposal for consistency with the CPAT recommendations.

Catalyst Projects

The overall revitalization approach for downtown Taft builds on programming and pop-up placemaking projects with strategic capital investments. These investments are intended to serve as catalyst projects that enhance market interest in downtown and maintain its primacy as Taft's central place.



Figure 2.13: Three catalyst projects on Center Street described by the team offer ideas that may help spark interest and investment in downtown. (Source: CPAT)

Recommendations

Theater event block | Programming

- Central—the middle of Taft
- Busy—fully programmed
- Flexible—accommodates various events

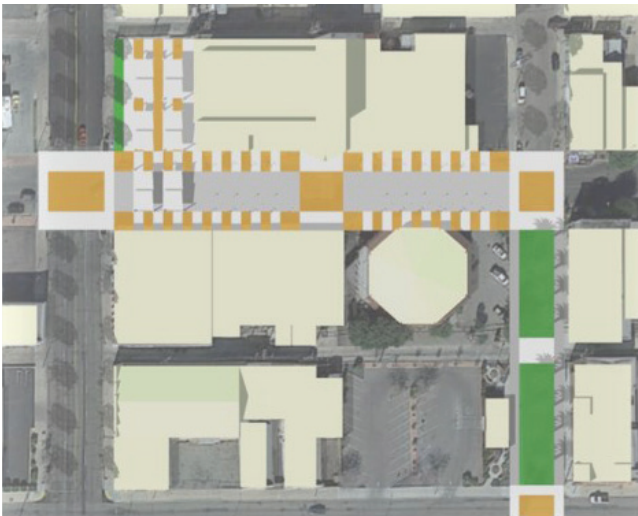
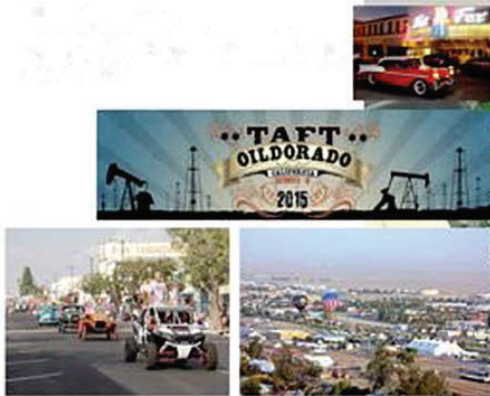


Figure 2.14: The Fox Theater block is a clear choice for an early catalyst project. Different configurations could accommodate various types of events. Over time, and as the popularity of different events increases, new infrastructure and amenities could be added such as power, shade structures, and new lighting. (Source: CPAT)



The catalyst project strategy assumes:

- Catalyst projects build on the best places and anchors in downtown.
- Projects are clustered on Center Street and will expect to be synergistic.
- The projects will require external funding partners, both local and newly recruited partners.
- The projects will lay the groundwork for continued expansion of downtown with uses that complement rather than compete with downtown.

Three Catalyst Projects

The CPAT team identified three potential catalyst projects for downtown. The projects are clustered on Center Street between 6th Street and 4th Street and are expected to add foot traffic and draw visitors and residents. These include an event block on the 400 block of Center Street, reinvestment in an adaptive reuse project for the historic Krekeler building on the 300 block of Center Street, and a new infill housing project on the 300 block of Center Street.

Theater Event Block

The Fox Theater is downtown's most visible anchor attraction. Envisioned as an early catalyst project, the 400 block of Center Street is to be transformed into a flexible and intensely programmed venue. Initially, the block can be programmed as a temporarily closed street. Over time, the block would add infrastructure (power, water, lighting, shade structures, and signage) that support a flexible and comfortable urban event space. The concept sketch

illustrates a street redesigned as a plaza with street trees, landscaping, and shade structures (see Figure 2.14).

The Theater Event Block will be central to downtown, busy, and adaptive. As a managed access street, it will be fully programmed and designed to accommodate a variety of events. Events might include:

- *Market Day*—The farmers market would fill Center Street with market stalls and food trucks.
- *Taste of Taft*—The Taste of Taft event can be expanded and include more prepared food tents and booths, cooking demonstrations by local chefs and restaurants, a beer garden, and picnic area.
- *Concerts*—The Theater Block could be the venue for evening concerts or festivals. A stage and seating could be set up on Center Street and the Fox Theater can also become the indoor stage.
- *Auto Culture*—The Theater Block could become the anchor for an expanded cruise night event with food, music, and film festivals in the Fox Theater.
- *All the Above*—The programming can mix and match, on a schedule or as special one-time events, these types of activities. Most importantly, it is always busy and drawing residents and visitors to the center of downtown.

The Historic Krekeler Block

The 300 block of Center Street has two types of opportunities. The south side of the block has three two-story brick buildings: the 1920 Krekeler Building and Hotel (with the painted "Taft Hardware" sign), a former department store, and a commercial building sandwiched between them—

Taft Hardware block

- Taft College housing and classrooms
- Tax credit project—mix of renovation and new development across the street
- Entry level, phased loft project

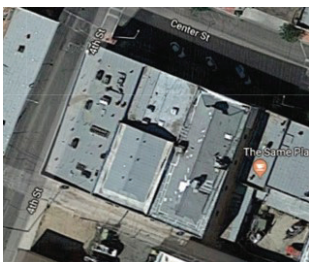


Figure 2.15: The historic Krekeler Building (with "Taft Hardware" painted sign) and the two adjacent historic buildings, is a key opportunity site for a downtown catalyst project. (Source: CPAT)



Figure 2.16: Entering into a partnership with the important local institution, Taft College, could transform the Krekeler block into a positive community space and help activate downtown. (Source: CPAT)

reportedly with a meeting or dance hall on the second floor. This historic block is completely vacant (see Figure 2.15). The Krekeler Building was recently purchased. These buildings have a lot of history and presence. This catalyst assumes their preservation and adaptive reuse.

Krekeler Block Concept 1: Taft College Center for Independent Living

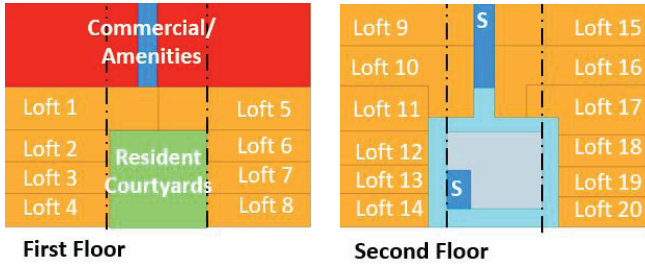
The first catalyst project concept for the historic buildings requires a public-institutional partnership with the city and Taft College (see Figure 2.16). The illustrated catalyst project includes the three historic two-story buildings located at 4th and Center Streets. The concept drawings explore an opportunity to transform the block into a Center for Independent Living extending the capacity for one of the college’s high-demand programs that emphasizes development of life skills. The project would:

- Introduce off-campus living and classroom opportunity
- Offer evening classes and public lectures drawing more people to downtown
- Provide access to state funding and/or a public-private partnership funding approach

The illustrated concept shows 20 apartments and 7,500 square feet of classrooms and community space. The college has the ability to finance projects.

Krekeler Block Concept 2: Market-Rate Loft Project

The second illustrated concept assumes the historic block will be renovated into a market-rate loft project (see Figure 2.17). This can be a phased effort renovating individual buildings or one combined project (as illustrated). Developing it as one project allows reconfiguration of the upper floors for exterior wall windows and shared stairs and elevator. The combined projects approach could include 24 1,000-square-foot loft units and 7,500 square feet of ground floor commercial space. Individual projects would likely include a mix of commercial, live-work units, and apartments as building codes and configuration constrain each individual building. This program might include 12 larger 2,000-square-foot live-work units and 12,000 square feet of studio commercial space. In Taft’s rent-sensitive market, this approach is dependent on the financial capability, professional experience, and marketing skill of the private developer/owners.



Second Level Lofts
Ground Floor Commercial
Resident Courtyard
Ground Floor Lofts

Market-Rate Loft Project

- 20 units
- 2,000-square-foot ground-floor courtyard
- 6,000-square-foot shared workspace
- Renovation of Taft Hardware into affordable lofts
- Stacked flats
- Stoop units on Center Street
- Surface parking



Figure 2.17: Another possibility for the Krekeler block is a larger project that could transform the entire block by adding market-rate flats and ground-floor retail, as well as affordable units with federal tax credits and state or regional funding. (Source: CPAT)

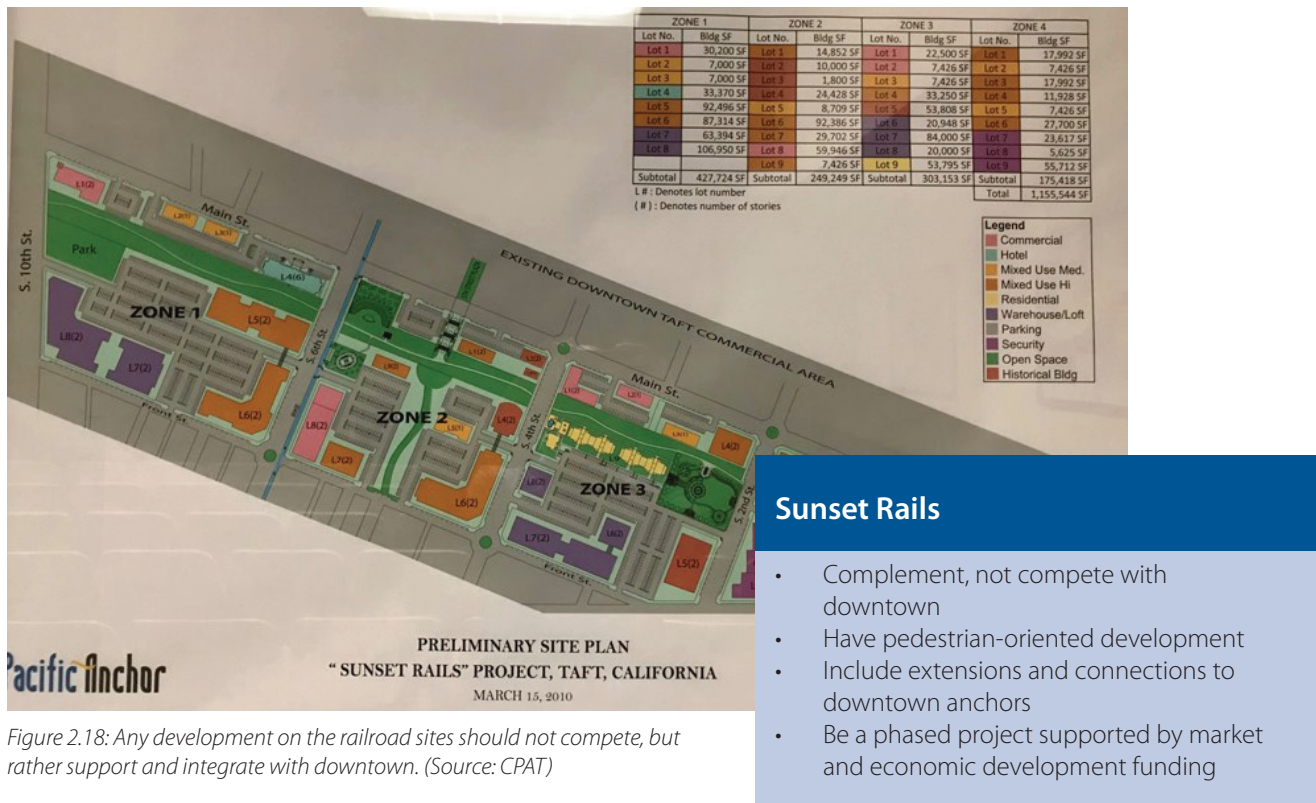


Figure 2.18: Any development on the railroad sites should not compete, but rather support and integrate with downtown. (Source: CPAT)

Center Street Housing

The 300 block of Center Street would be redeveloped as a new downtown residential address. This concept assumes the north side of the block is redeveloped with new apartments and the buildings on the south side are renovated as affordable rental units as part of the larger project that includes new construction. This project would be positioned to compete for federal tax credits, and state or regional affordable housing funding. This approach would require capable private sector for-profit or nonprofit partners (see Figure 2.17).

Railyard Sites

The city owns 37 acres along the former railroad tracks and oil company machine shop operations. A plan was presented to the city by a private developer in 2010. The plan by Pacific Anchor was called Sunset Rails and proposed a mixed use project in four "zones." The project has not been implemented (Figure 2.18).

Railroad Site Development Program

The CPAT team recommends that the railroad land be repositioned for housing development that supports downtown revitalization and does not introduce land uses that would compete with downtown. If Taft gains population at a rate proportional with Kern County growth, there could be the demand for approximately 600 downtown units by 2040. About 38.2 acres of land along the former railroad line could be susceptible to development over the next 20 to 30 years,

depending on market conditions. The table in Figure 2.19 summarizes the types of units that could be planned for.

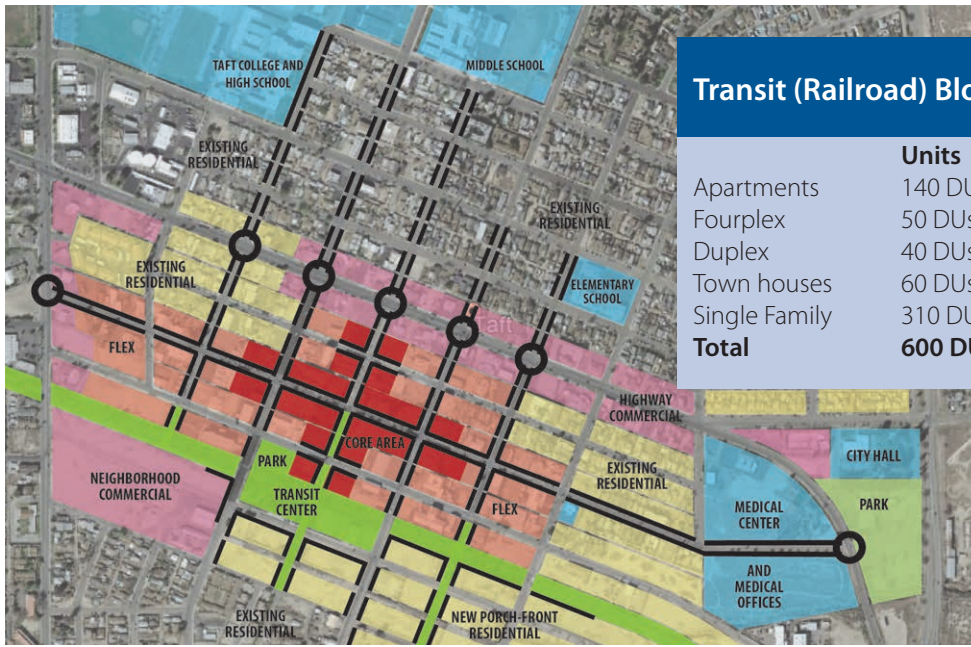
Land-Use Plan Concept

The properties near the former railroad can take advantage of better regional access by their proximity to the Taft Transit Center and locally via the rail to trail bikeway. A revitalized downtown with events and restaurants makes this location more desirable. The Taft Oil Worker Monument Park and new hotel are also pluses (see Figure 2.20).

Land-Use Mix

The land-use concept concentrates apartments near the transit center and includes small lot single-family and privately owned town houses, duplexes, and fourplex units along Main Street and Front Street. A 12-acre site on the west side of the district would be developed with community-serving commercial uses including a new grocery store. Some of the former industrial buildings can be adaptively reused for local start-ups and ancillary support uses for downtown.

The planning of the former railroad blocks should create four addresses. These include a higher density transit center neighborhood with apartments for downtown employees and regional commuters (see Figure 2.21); Main Street flex uses with "urban format" housing such as live-work and loft units; a new single-family and town house neighborhood along Front Street in the southeast area; and a commercial services district with access and visibility from North 10th Street on the west side of the site.



Transit (Railroad) Blocks Program			
	Units	Density	Acres
Apartments	140 DUs	50 du/a	2.8 acres
Fourplex	50 DUs	15 du/a	3.3 acres
Duplex	40 DUs	12 du/a	3.3 acres
Town houses	60 DUs	20 du/a	3.0 acres
Single Family	310 DUs	12 du/a	25.8 acres
Total	600 DUs		38.2 acres

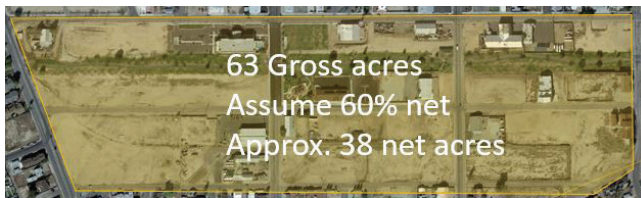


Figure 2.19: The 38.2 acres of land along the former railroad line could support 600 dwelling units over the next 20 to 30 years depending on market conditions. (Source: CPAT)

Urban Design Features

The railroad blocks should be designed as an extension of downtown (see Figure 2.22). As with the former industrial uses, an overall goal should be to make this area ancillary to downtown's role as the cultural center of Taft. Here are several guiding principles that reinforce this overall goal:

- **Building a Pedestrian-Oriented District.** The former railroad lands should be developed as walkable and

connected neighborhoods. This means that *all* residential development should be oriented toward the street with front doors, porches, and lobbies facing public streets. Parking should be accessed from alleys or side streets. Commercial development should also be oriented toward the street rather than parking.

- **Transit Center as Regional Connection.** The Transit Center should become a gateway connector to the region, providing access to inbound and outbound

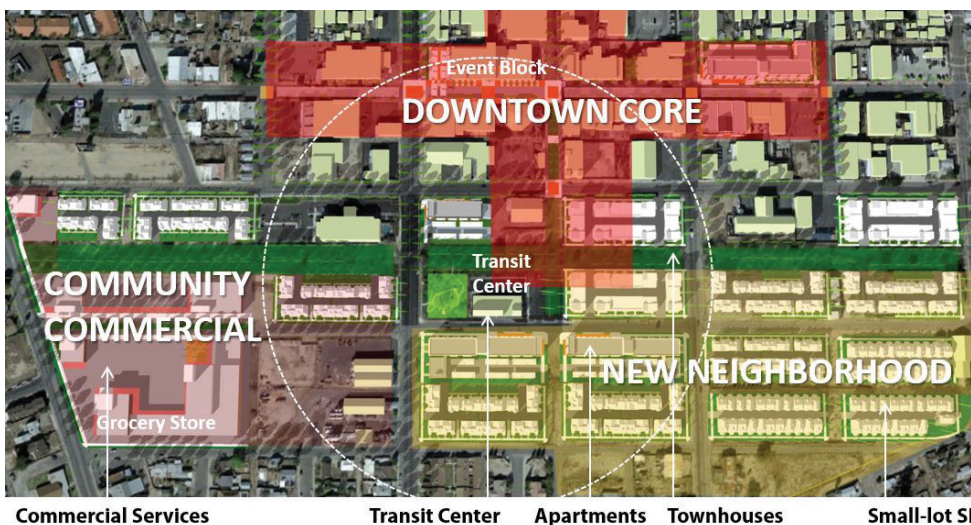


Figure 2.20: Amenities like the downtown core, the transit center, rail to trail, and Oilworkers Monument offer an attractive location for a new neighborhood in the railroad lands. (Source: CPAT)



Commercial Services Transit Center Apartments Townhouses Small-lot SF

Figure 2.21: Higher density multifamily housing development should focus around the transit center for downtown employees and regional commuters, new single-family housing and town homes in the southeast area, and commercial services on the wet side. (Source: CPAT)

commuters. It should be a focal point, along with the Taft Oil Workers Monument, for a district with higher density housing.

- **5th Street as Pedestrian Connector.** 5th Street should be designed as an important pedestrian connection to the “downtown event block” and commercial area. This can include added investments

in streetscaping (shade trees, landscaped setbacks, wayfinding signage, and decorative paving) and an emphasis on street-oriented development.

- **6th Street as Auto Connector.** 6th Street connects the primary use areas of central Taft from the high school and college institutional areas on the north, downtown in the middle, the railroad blocks, and

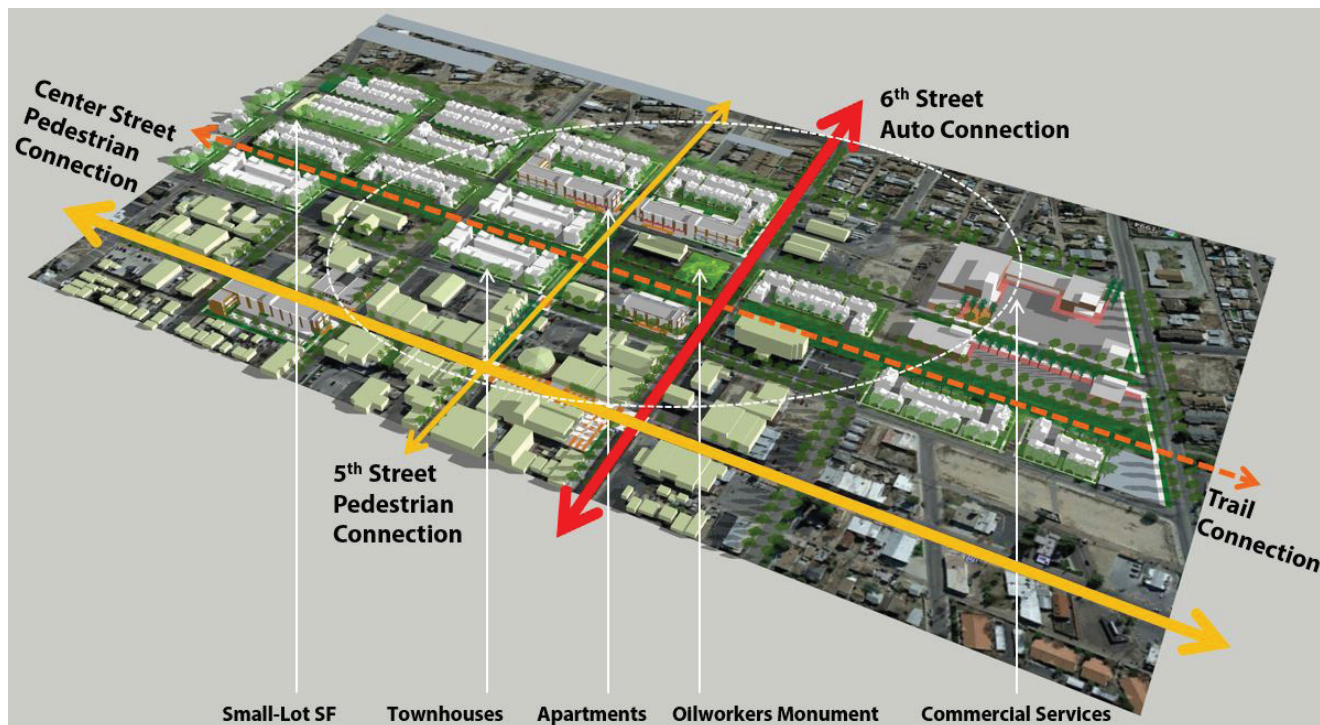


Figure 2.22: The railroad lands should be an extension of downtown and carefully connect pedestrians, bicyclists, and auto traffic, as well as celebrate open spaces and Taft’s cultural history. (Source: CPAT)

established north side and south side neighborhoods. 6th street should be treated as a “civic street.” That is, it should include wayfinding signage, be a priority street for streetscape enhancements, and emphasize high-quality private development.

- **Bike Trails and Open Spaces as Key Organizing Features.** The old railroad bed has been converted to a popular bike and walking trail. It acts as a linear green and events venue adjacent to downtown. The Taft Oil Workers Monument and contiguous park space can provide a focus for the railroad blocks. The 5th Street greenway should also be extended to intersect with the bike trail.
- **Cultural and Industrial Heritage.** The railroad blocks symbolized Taft as an energy city. Maintaining some of the existing industrial buildings and repurposing them for commercial and residential uses can connect the future and past providing a visible reminder of Taft’s history.

IMPLEMENTATION

Section 3: Action Plan

The CPAT implementation recommendations can be characterized as administrative, regulatory, and financial actions. Administrative actions include follow-up technical studies, partnership-making activities, and staff work. Regulatory actions include policy and zoning activities. Financial actions include grant writing, attracting commercial financing, and obtaining public funding for targeted projects. These activities are assumed to support a three-stage implementation plan that builds upon maintaining and growing downtown's relevance through programming and event planning. This will help lay the groundwork for recruiting new merchants and businesses and attracting partners and financing for catalyst projects.

3.1 Phasing and Priorities

CPAT complements the planning recommendations with a set of phased implementation recommendations including the sequence of efforts and responsibilities. The Action Plan tracks the overall philosophy aims to increase the ownership and use of downtown by Taft residents and visitors. The Action Plan recognizes implementation as an evolutionary process to recenter the community around Center Street, identify new tenants, and attract investment partners.

The existing *Downtown Specific Plan* is a *passive* document. The CPAT recommends making a shift toward a proactive public-private approach to implementing plans for downtown. The Action Plan identifies administrative, regulatory, development, and financial actions in three phases (Figure 3.1).

3.2 Administrative/Organizational

Administrative tasks are characterized as organizing, programming, and technical study actions.

Organizing. Downtown merchants and property owners should convene three new committees or one com-

mittee that address three key organizational tasks. These include events planning and management, recruitment and retention of targeted businesses, and mentoring. Organizing is an important initial task and should be initiated in Phase 1 and be an ongoing activity.

Programming. Downtown programming is an important first investment in time and funding to support the traditional social, cultural, and economic center of the community. Merchants and property owners should prepare and manage a calendar for annual, monthly, and daily/weekly events.

Technical Studies. Technical studies include economic, marketing, and cost estimates for infrastructure and design services. These activities are needed early to provide an initial budget for downtown programs and projects. The city should take the lead on these tasks with input from merchants and property owners and downtown committees.

3.3 Regulatory

Regulatory tasks are identified as land-use, transportation, and urban design actions. These should be included early in the process as an update to the *Downtown Specific Plan*.

Land Use. Taft should take the lead in updating the *Downtown Specific Plan* land-use designations and related zoning and financing plan. The land-use element should have a stronger focus on phased implementation of development and supporting infrastructure. The *Taft General Plan* should be updated to reflect new policies.

Transportation. One of the CPAT team's key recommendations is to better connect downtown to the rest of the community by planning and implementing a pedestrian and bicycle loop. This requires preparation of a detailed plan, cost estimates, financing plan, and implementation schedule. The city should take the lead.

Urban Design. The *Downtown Specific Plan* needs to have a greater focus on the quality of the types of places it will implement. The city should initiate an effort to create a

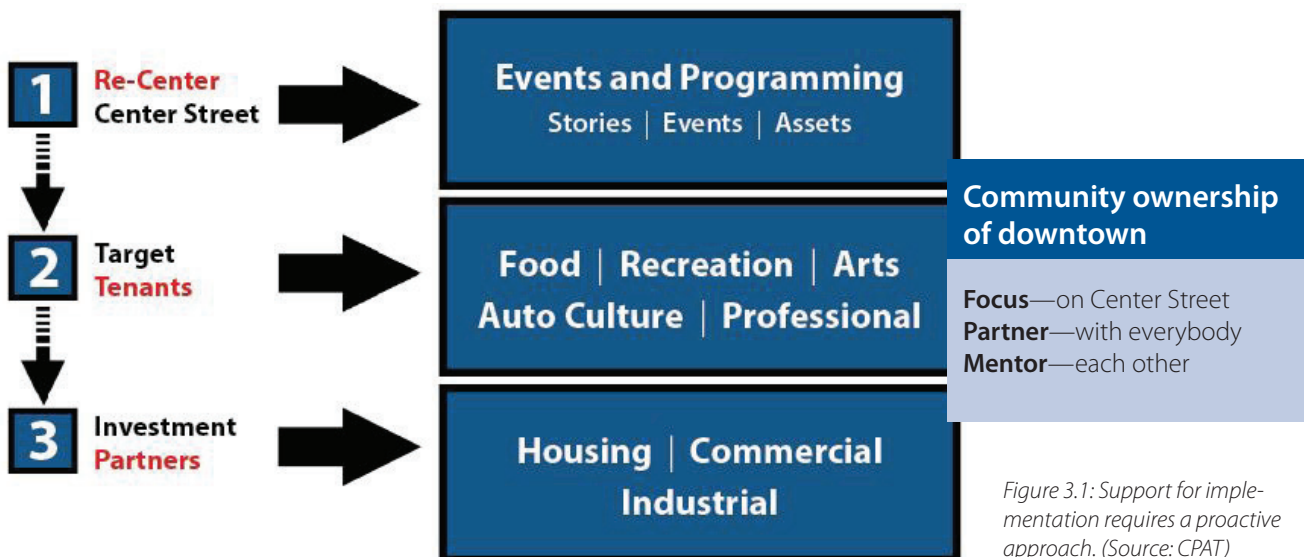


Figure 3.1: Support for implementation requires a proactive approach. (Source: CPAT)

set of design guidelines for downtown as an overlay to the plan area or include them in the plan update.

3.4 Development

Development tasks are characterized as infrastructure and development projects identified in the CPAT recommendations. These projects are catalysts intended to spur additional private-sector investment. They are strategic in their placement and sequencing.

Center Street Events Block. The Center Street Events Block can be a phased development but is intended to be programmed and used early in the revitalization process. The development of infrastructure that supports music and market events, such as power and water, can be developed earlier and other aesthetic improvements in paving, streetscaping, and canopy systems can be added incrementally as funding permits.

Krekeler Block. The Krekeler Block can be developed as a private affordable loft housing project or with an institutional partner such as Taft College. This project should provide a ground-floor attraction and residences on Center Street. Initial efforts should be made to work with property owners and potential partners to design and implement the three buildings in the block as a phased project.

Center Street Housing. The CPAT team recommends pursuing workforce housing on Center Street. The site illustrated in Section 2 includes several properties and should be large enough to develop a feasible urban rental project. This catalyst project will likely require funding support through grants to make it feasible.

Wayfinding and Streetscaping. The city and downtown partners have been studying a wayfinding and signage system for Taft. Section 2 of the CPAT report has additional recommendations for downtown gateways, connection streets, and pedestrian and bicycle loops. A streetscape plan and implementation schedule should be prepared so that these improvements can be coordinated and phased.

Railroad Lands. The railroad lands owned by the city can be leveraged to attract new investment to support

the development of a downtown-adjacent neighborhood. The CPAT team recommendations include housing types that meet a variety of needs. The diversity of housing types (single family, town house, apartment flats, and condominiums) reduces internal competition of a mono-type project. If you create a project with all the same unit types, you are competing with yourself. Projects that address a variety of market opportunities broaden their opportunity to absorb units faster.

The phasing should emphasize walking connections to downtown and adjacency to the Taft Transit Center. This area requires long-term thinking with near-term infrastructure and marketing of initial catalyst projects.

3.5 Financial

Financial tasks include grant writing, management funding, infrastructure finance, and financing of private development.

Grant Writing. The city and downtown committees should immediately start scanning opportunities for grant funding of technical studies and infrastructure projects. In addition, the city and downtown committees may need to seek funding that builds their staff capacity, reflecting the types of activities required to plan, design, finance, implement, and manage downtown.

Management. One of the most critical capacities for a revitalization process is funding ongoing maintenance and security. This can be accomplished by relying on the city to increase expenditures in downtown services complemented by downtown committee sweat equity or creation of an assessment district such as a Property-Based Business Improvement District. Regardless, successful downtowns make improvement and management plans and find ways to fund and manage their implementation.

Infrastructure. Downtown Taft has the advantage over greenfield development locations of having existing infrastructure to build on. However, adding the qualitative and functional improvements will still be a significant cost of redeveloping infill sites and new blocks on the railroad lands. This can run \$3 million to \$4 million per block and

Table 3.1 IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

TASK	Action	RESPONSIBILITY	PHASE
ADMINISTRATIVE	Organizing, programming, and technical studies		Phase 1—year 1 Phase 2—year 2-5 Phase 3—year 6-10+
Organizing	Form events committee Form recruitment and retention committee Mentoring	Downtown merchants and property owners, City of Taft, Chamber of Commerce	Phase 1, ongoing
Programming	Annual events Regular monthly events Daily and weekly events	Downtown committees and community partners	Phase 1, ongoing
Technical Studies	Market and merchandizing studies to inform recruitment Capital improvements design and cost estimates	City of Taft and downtown committees	Phase 1, Phase 2

Table 3.1 IMPLEMENTATION ACTIONS

TASK	Action	RESPONSIBILITY	PHASE
REGULATORY	Land-use planning policy and zoning, transportation and parking improvements, and urban design concepts and related guidelines		Phase 1–year 1 Phase 2–year 2-5 Phase 3–year 6-10+
Land Use	Update <i>Specific Plan</i> policies and related zoning and financing plan	City of Taft	Phase 1
Transportation	Update 2015 <i>Taft Transportation Development Plan</i> , Implement bike and pedestrian loop system	City of Taft	Phase 1
Urban Design	Prepare design guidelines complementing land-use plan	City of Taft	Phase 1, Phase 2
DEVELOPMENT	Private and public projects including street and open space projects, renovation projects, infill housing, and new development on the railroad lands		Phase 1–year 1 Phase 2–year 2-5 Phase 3–year 6-10+
Center Street Events	Initial programming assessment and infrastructure plan Phase 1 landscape, power, and water Phase 2 paving and canopy system	City of Taft Downtown merchants and property owners	Phase 1, Phase 2
Krekeler Block	Phase 1–Initial program and design development with institutional and private sector partners Phase 2–Project construction	City of Taft, Taft College, private partners	Phase 1, Phase 2
Center Street Events	Phase 1–Initial program and design development with private-sector partners Phase 2–Project construction	City of Taft and private partners	Phase 1, Phase 2
Wayfinding, streets	Phase 1–Initial signage projects Phase 2–Signage projects and streetscape improvements for pedestrian and bikeway loop system	City of Taft	Phase 1, Phase 2
Railroad Lands	Phase 1–Development plan and related infrastructure for early phases Phase 2–Developer RFP and initial development projects Phase 3–Ongoing development of new neighborhoods	City of Taft and private partners	Phase 1, Phase 2, Phase 3
FINANCIAL			Phase 1–year 1 Phase 2–year 2-5 Phase 3–year 6-10+
Grant Writing	Grant writing for technical studies and infrastructure	City of Taft, downtown merchants and property owners	Phase 1
Management	Downtown management/business plan and revenue strategies	Downtown merchants and property owners, City of Taft	Phase 1, ongoing
Infrastructure	Street, utility, and streetscape projects funding	City of Taft, downtown merchants and property owners	Phase 1, ongoing
Development	Privately financed projects and gap financing by public partners	Private sector developers and City of Taft	Phase 1, ongoing

is a significant cost that early catalyst projects may not be able to carry. This may require grants, loans, or other ways of deferring, underwriting, or paying for street, utility, and streetscape infrastructure.

Financing Development. Private development will need to pursue traditional commercial loans, possible in

concert with seeking grant financing support from the city or other agencies. For example, affordable housing developers may have a dozen or more sources of funding for a project. They specialize in pulling together multiple sources to make projects work. If the city prepares requests for proposals for the railroad lands, they should seek partners

that are capable of raising commercial and public funding. Often, cities and agencies help fill the gap to make projects feasible. Section 3.6 provides a “starter list” of potential funding sources the city can pursue to contribute infrastructure, land costs, and direct contributions that contribute to the financial feasibility of projects that meet downtown revitalization objectives.

3.6 Potential Funding Sources

Public sources of funding for grants and loans provide an opportunity to pull together resources to implement public improvements and underwrite private-sector projects. The following list of potential sources is an initial scan of regional, state, and federal programs organized by infrastructure, transportation, community development, workforce/affordable housing, and historic preservation. The city will need to invest resources in pursuing external funding to support the downtown’s public and private improvements. This list can be expanded and more directly attached to specific projects.

Potential funding sources for infrastructure:

- California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank (IBank): Infrastructure State Revolving Fund (ISRF) Program (http://ibank.ca.gov/infrastructure_loans.htm)
Deadline: Continuous
Amount: \$50,000 to \$25 million or more (with IBank Board approval)
- California Statewide Communities Development Authority: Statewide Community Infrastructure Program (SCIP) (<http://cscda.org/Apply-Online/Statewide-Community-Infrastructure-Program>)
Deadline: Continuous
Amount: Varies. Financing is for low interest, tax-exempt bonds.
Eligibility: Public agencies
- USDA Rural Development: Community Facilities Grants & Loans (<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/CA-CFPrograms.html>)
Deadline: Continuous
Amount: Varies by population and income (typically no larger than \$30,000)
Match: Varies by population and income (60%–80%)
Eligibility: Towns with populations up to 20,000

Potential funding for transportation projects:

- California Department of Transportation: Transportation Development Act (<http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/MassTrans/State-TDA.html>)
- KERN COG: RTP Funding (<http://www.kerncog.org/category/docs/rtp>)

Potential funding for community development:

- Federal Community Block Grant Programs (<https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/cdbg-entitlement>)
- California Community Block Grant Programs (<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/active-funding/cdbg/cdbg-cd.shtml>)

Potential funding for affordable/workforce housing:

- California Housing and Community Development (<http://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-funding/index.shtml>)

Potential funding sources for historic preservation:

- Private Foundations (http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=22174)
- Historic Revitalization Subgrant Program (HRSP) (<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=municipal%20transportation>)
Department of the Interior/National Park Service
Deadline: March 30, 2019
Amount: \$100,000–750,000

Appendices

Appendix A: Meet the Team



Bruce Race, PhD, FAICP, FAIA | Team Leader

Bruce Race is the principal and founder of RACESTUDIO and is responsible for all aspects of project planning, design, and delivery. Since founding RACESTUDIO in Berkeley, California, in 1994, his projects have received 32 design and planning awards including national awards from APA, the American Institute of Architects, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Association of Environmental Professionals, Local Government Commission, and Society for College and University Planning. In 2015, Race joined the Gerald D. Hines School of Architecture as director of the University of Houston's newly created Center for Sustainability and Resilience. Race was on the founding board of directors for the Great Valley Center, an organization that strives to enhance the economic, social, and environmental well-being of California's Central Valley.



Susan Harden, FAICP, LEED AP, CNU-A | Team Member

Susan Harden is an independent planning consultant specializing in community engagement and revitalization. She is also an adjunct faculty member in University of California-Irvine's Urban Planning and Public Policy department, where she teaches a graduate practicum focused on healthy neighborhoods. She is also on the NeighborWorks America Training Institute faculty, where she teaches courses focused on community revitalization, engagement, mobility, and place. She is the coauthor of a PAS report entitled *Placemaking on a Budget*. Harden also serves on the board of directors for Jamboree Housing, an affordable housing provider. As an educator, author, and presenter, she is committed to empowering communities to create positive and meaningful change.



Ed Starkie | Team Member

Ed Starkie is a principal at Urban Advisors based in Portland, Oregon. Starkie has experience in real estate that includes moving complex projects from conception and feasibility analysis to financing and development strategies. A particular career focus has been the economic structure of vital urban places, of downtowns and neighborhoods that are pedestrian and transit-oriented environments. Starkie is a financial advisor for private and public development who brings a unique, pragmatic approach that results in projects that are feasible, profitable, and contribute to community livability. He also has also served on the faculty of the University of Oregon Urban Architecture Program and team-teaches urban design at the Portland State University Nohad Toulon School of Urban Planning.



Matthew Taecker, AICP, AIA | Team Member

Matt Taecker provides a range of urban planning and design services through his firm, Taecker Planning & Design. He has directed and managed hundreds of projects and led dozens of community-focused planning efforts. His work emphasizes livable places, environmental sustainability, and paths to implementation, with a particular focus on the revitalization of downtowns and aging corridors. Taecker is also managing principal for Corridor Planning, which focuses on the integration of transportation, land use, and urban design. He also lectures extensively in the United States and internationally, and has taught urban design at Sonoma State University, University of Southern California, and University of California, Davis and Berkeley.



Ryan Scherzinger, AICP | APA Project Manager

Ryan Scherzinger is programs manager for APA's professional practice department and is based in Chicago. He manages and has worked extensively on the Community Planning Assistance Teams program, providing direct technical assistance to communities around the country and abroad with multidisciplinary teams of experts. He has managed myriad programs and special projects for APA for over 10 years, including community workshops, case studies, federal grants, symposia and lecture series, study tours, international events, allied outreach and coalitions, and interactive public exhibits. He holds a master's degree in public anthropology from American University.

Appendix B: Picture Gallery



*Picturesque foothills serve as a beautiful backdrop to Taft. Many car companies have filmed commercials with their latest vehicles moving through the unique San Joaquin Valley landscape. Beyond commercials, many movies have shot on location in Taft over the years, including *The Best of Times* (1986) with Robin Williams and Kurt Russell, which is about Taft and features the iconic Fox Theater on Center Street; *Thelma and Louise* (1991); and *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* (2014), among many others. Photo by Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA*



The oil boom was largely responsible for Taft's founding. Historical accounts claim that more than 7,000 wooden oil derricks dotted the landscape around Taft at one time. Atop the Midway Sunset Oilfield, Taft was surrounded by oil companies. Lasting 18 months and releasing nine million barrels of oil, the Lakeview Gusher in 1910 is still on record as the largest oil spill in the United States. Oil continued to play a major part of Taft's history throughout the 20th century. Many of those affected during the Dust Bowl years flocked west to work in the oil fields as well as the large agricultural industry in the San Joaquin Valley. Photo courtesy City of Taft.



During the September visit, the team met with residents and stakeholders in the Oildorado Room of the new Taft Transit Center. Team member Susan Harden, FAICP, LEED AP, CNU-A, facilitated the first public workshop. Community members shared their visions for downtown and new ideas, and discussed challenges to overcome. The team also discussed ideas with community members again following their final presentation on the last evening of their visit. Team leader Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA is seen below leading part of that discussion. Photos by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP





The Rails to Trails in Taft is popular with residents. Pictured at left is the trail looking west from 6th Street. Although relatively short in distance now, there are hopes to expand the trail in the future. The trail complements downtown well since it is just a little over one block from Center Street. Just after the CPAT visit, the city awarded a bid for a path that will connect the trail with 5th Street Park (pictured below), a green space between Main and Center Streets. Photos by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP





The Taft CPAT members walked downtown many times throughout their visit, often talking to business owners or others they ran into. On the last night of their visit, they stopped for a team photo on Center Street in front of the beautiful Fox Theater marquee. From left: Ryan Scherzinger, AICP; Ed Starkie; Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA; Susan Harden, FAICP, LEED AP, CNU-A; and Matthew Taecker, AICP, AIA. Photo by a friendly Taft resident.

Appendix C: Visual Examples of Programmatic Opportunities in Downtown Taft Supplemental Illustration

BUSINESS CLUSTERS

- FOOD
- ARTISAN
- AUTO CULTURE
- PROFESSIONAL OFFICE



Programmatic Opportunities

FOOD

- Regional and local assets
- Restaurants
- Markets
- Events



Programmatic Opportunities

ARTISANS

Artists and crafts

Furniture

Florists

Gifts

Clothing

Antiques

Other



Programmatic Opportunities

AUTO CULTURE

Cruise Night

Car Show

Hotrod and custom shops

Auto service and body repair

Motorcycles

Industrial

Other



Programmatic Opportunities

PROFESSIONALS

Healthcare professionals

Real estate

Insurance

Business consultants

Engineers

Other



Recommendations

RECRUITING START-UPS & UNIQUE TALENT



Paris, TX

Co-working space



DISTRICT MANAGEMENT

- Strengthen & formalize Downtown Merchants Association
- Establish a Business Improvement District
 - Implement a Clean & Safe Program
 - Potted plants+
- Annual calendar – events, promotions, marketing efforts
- Engage residents in event planning committees
- Appoint City Staff as Downtown liaison



Credit: Taft Chamber of Commerce



RECREATION



IDENTITY

RETAIL PRACTICE 101

As leading rules for Main Streets consider these five points

1. Hours of opening must **be consistent to be perceived as reliable**
2. **Prime shopping is on the weekend—to not open is a market loss of 40%**
3. Weekday shopping is **heaviest from 5 pm to 7 pm.**
4. **No obscure glass**—interior must be visible, see through to back of shop
5. **Glass cleaned weekly**, door and trim paint touched up monthly

Convenience is for the customer, **not the owner**



Appendix D

PUBLIC SPACES



Fertile Earth Nursery



Example - Albany, CA

Fertile Earth Nursery could add outdoor seating. They might also consider partnering strategically with a neighbor business and serving coffee during select hours to increase activity on the street. (Photos by Bruce Race, PHD, FAICP, FAIA)

PUBLIC SPACES



Existing underused lot



Transformation idea!



Existing underused lot



Transformation idea!

Shown above are just a couple of ways to consider creating a more vibrant space. Dull or underused spaces can be transformed in many creative ways. The community can try different temporary ideas through an interactive process, which gives the community the chance to experience ideas and offer feedback for additional refining of ideas they like. Artists, schools, and civic groups could have a competition of ideas for a space. Finding ways to activate and create a more inviting and interesting space is a good opportunity to involve the community. Ideas don't need to be expensive to be effective. Temporary ideas may lead to more permanent ones once the support of the community is realized.

PUBLIC SPACES



Underused Parking Lot



Georgetown Neighborhood - Seattle



An underused parking lot can serve many functions. Above shows a vintage trailer and a food pop-up store. Temporary businesses can add some excitement to the downtown and fill otherwise unused space. New life brings people downtown. Allowing entrepreneurs to test ideas with the community may also lead to new brick and mortar businesses.

PUBLIC SPACES



Underused Spaces



Pop-up Gardens & Produce Sales

Pop-up gardens and fresh produce for sale could enliven a vacant space and help attract people downtown.

PUBLIC SPACES

Main Street—existing connection, 5th Street Plaze, between Downtown & Rails to Trails



Using Paint To Highlight Link



Creative uses of paint on streets helps draw attention. Art gives visual interest and helps link spaces. This kind of treatment could help link the rail trail with downtown, for example. In addition to making the connection more clear, it may also help slow vehicle traffic and create a safer environment for pedestrians and bicyclists. The art could draw on some of Taft's history, highlight the beauty of the surrounding landscape, reference some of the movies filmed in Taft, or many other possibilities.

PLACEMAKING



Blank Garages



**CELEBRATING TAFT THROUGH ART
... MOVIES & FILM**

PLACEMAKING



Blank Doors & Windows



CELEBRATING TAFT THROUGH ART . . . STORYTELLING

PLACEMAKING



PLACEMAKING



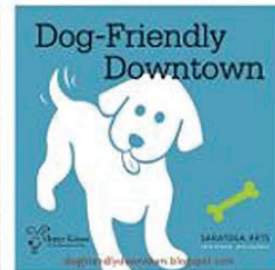
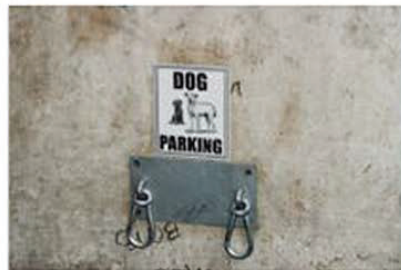
CELEBRATING TAFT THROUGH ART
... OIL INDUSTRY



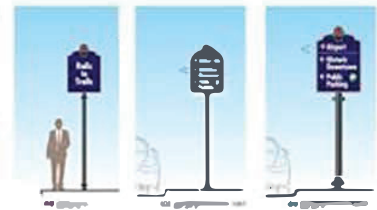
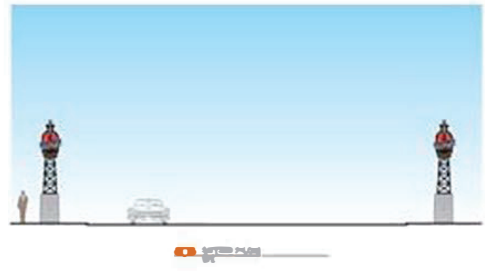
PLACEMAKING



RECREATION



Wayfinding





American Planning Association

Creating Great Communities for All

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