

# **Downtown Avondale Estates Guidelines for Downtown Development Plans**

The City of Avondale Estates currently owns an approximately four-acre tract of land that is largely vacant in its downtown. It is the desire of the Avondale Estates Board of Mayor and Commissioners (BOMC) that a plan be created for the development of new public and private uses on this property. In an effort to jump-start a discussion on possible designs for this property, the following document outlines the general development preferences of the BOMC.

From previous plans and public input, it has been decided that development plans for this property and for the larger surrounding area include the following: a development plan that is pedestrian-oriented, bikeable, and supports a mix of uses; a plan that unifies the City-owned property with the larger area through the use of cohesive streetscapes and an integrated street grid with fairly small blocks; and on-street parking, small hidden parking lots, and/or parking structures. Development plans would ideally not include big box retail or large supermarkets, drive-thrus, super-blocks or large surface parking lots.

At the BOMC Special Called Work Session on May 3, 2017, the BOMC decided on the following more specific guidelines to serve as a general roadmap when planning for the downtown development of the City-owned property.

## **Scale of Development**

While there are plans in place for larger apartment blocks in the surrounding downtown area, the BOMC agreed that private development on the City-owned property be of a lower scale, especially along North Avondale Road (with taller buildings possibly towards the back of the property).

## *Height*

The height of buildings at the front of the property should match the current scale along North Avondale Road with a mix of one and two-story buildings and a variety of roof levels. Second floor space could include outdoor roof decks or be designated for office space. The two following photographs give an idea of the desired building scale.



### *Fine-grained development pattern*

The word 'granular' is used to describe something that is made up of smaller elements, and 'granularity' is how small or large those elements are. If the elements are small, it's called it 'fine-grained', and if the elements are large it's called 'coarse-grained'. In development, coarse-grained development refers to blocks dominated by larger structures with relatively little variation in scale and architecture. Fine-grained development refers to blocks that are (or appear to be) divided into smaller units for the development of individual buildings with variation in materials, architectural details, floor heights, and building heights.

The BOMC is seeking fine-grained development plans for the City-owned property.



Coarse-grained development



Fine-grained development

## **USES AND PROPERTY TYPES**

The BOMC would like development plans for the City-owned property to include both private and public uses. All plans should create development that is not only economically viable for the City-owned property but is part of an overall plan for the larger downtown area between North Avondale Road and the railroad tracks to the north. The BOMC welcomes innovative ideas for flexible use of small spaces including designing buildings for multiple uses and streets for multiple purposes.

### **Desirable private uses on the City-owned property**

The BOMC desires to include a variety of private uses that will work together to create activity and a viable business community. Development plans should include space for some or all of the following uses: restaurants/dining, destination retail, art, and local-serving office.

#### *Restaurants/Dining*

Even as brick-and-mortar retail establishments suffer from competition with internet shopping, the dining category continues to grow. Based on this market reality, the BOMC feels food service establishments should serve as a commercial anchor for new development. This could include chef-driven restaurants that serve as a destination, a food truck park, or some type of “food hall.” This could also include breweries, distilleries, and/or brew pubs.



#### *Destination Retail*

The BOMC would like to see a curated group of destination retailers that would draw customers from outside of the community. This should include non-chain retailers (or small, local chain retailers) with unique goods and services offered in an environment that creates an experience for the customer. To be successful,

destination retail will require unique architecture and should be integrated with active public spaces and food service anchors.



#### *Arts District*

Development of the City-owned property should build on the existing momentum of the Rail Arts District and should include a mix of space for galleries, public art, artist lofts, public exhibition spaces for visual art, or performance venues.

#### *Small-Scale Office*

Local-serving office tenants are those who provide a service to residents in the surrounding community. While space for this type of office use is not required in the potential development plans, it could be located in retail spaces or in dedicated second floor space. In addition, an office incubator space serving the entrepreneurial community would be an appropriate and desired use.

#### **Undesirable private uses on the City-owned property**

Because of the limited amount of City-owned land available for development, the BOMC prefers that development plans for this property not include residential or large-scale office uses. However, it is expected that there will be a great deal of residential development in the surrounding area, and this should be taken into consideration when planning for the City-owned property. In addition, larger office buildings would be acceptable in the surrounding area if there is sufficient market demand.

## **Desirable public uses on the City-owned property**

The BOMC would like development plans to include public uses that would not likely occur in private developments. This should include significant public space and possibly civic buildings. Plans should include open and inclusive places for gathering which foster community spirit and accommodate people from multiple age groups and abilities.

### *Public Space/Green Space*

Development plans should include some type of passive greenspace. This space should be integrated with and related to the surrounding streets, alleys, sidewalks, and retail/restaurant buildings to create and encourage activity.





In addition to some type of passive green space, development plans could include smaller public spaces such as a promenade through the private development and/or a series of smaller public spaces that work together as a whole. The following photos depict some of the ways that the public space could be integrated with private development and/or utilize other public infrastructure such as streets and sidewalks to create additional gathering space during events.





In order to activate public spaces, development plans for the City-owned property could include private uses within a public greenspace. The following photo is of a private restaurant located within a public park, for example.



The public space(s) should be flexible and include areas appropriate for both small-scale programming and larger events.



### **Possible Civic Buildings**

The BOMC is interested in exploring the possibility of including civic buildings in the development plan. This could include uses such as a new City Hall, a community arts center, or an Avondale Estates history museum. In addition, it was mentioned that the former credit union building on North Avondale Road could be renovated for use as a community arts center that might include space for an art gallery, classrooms, performance space, and/or a community meeting room.

**BOMC Special Called Work Session**  
**May 3, 2017**  
**Written Public Comments**

The town green should have a central gathering place and OF COURSE have perimeter trees, promenades, etc. and engage surrounding retail and restaurants, etc. Restaurant anchor is important – residents now spend more time eating out than buying groceries, millennials spend more on eating out than on stuff. But how to attract a really great restaurant? Need somewhere great in public realm for it to be located. Check out the FINE restaurant at the end of Bryant Park. High density in parts of our downtown can be tempered by quality public space (and enough of it) – will give Avondale a distinct, competitive character.

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Arts -- very important, but in four acres would rather see a few galleries and perhaps a concert/play venue. Arts district with studios as now – maybe we want to ensure this area stays by building or buying studios there and/or publicly subsidizing. Many cities have their galleries and studios in one area and have artist studio nights or days – Asheville, Portland, OR, etc. (can get a map and visit different studios – easy to walk when all in one area; restaurants, etc. can be there, too.)

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Two-acre green space and trees on all sides  
Connected to promenade and trees  
Connected to streets with trees  
Restaurant as anchor  
Caution against too much retail  
Flexible space

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“Scale” and “Grain” – Agree 110% with the BOMC’s preference on this. If David B. has not had a chance to review the Architectural Review Board’s guidelines and zoning, I think it might help to expedite these kinds of discussions. Start from what City/community has already expressed/decided and ask is it still valid. Rather than start as if all is a blank slate.

“Public Space” – Agree that the Suwanee example would be terrible as an anchor space (+/- 6-8 acres with permanent amphitheater). I don’t think anyone wants that. Could perhaps go elsewhere in town but even that is dubious. But FYI, two acres is not by any means a “big” or “huge” park. It is actually a very small park.

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1. Arts and civic space are key – become a cultural destination!

2. Long-term ownership of as much of the downtown as possible to provide security, revenue streams, and creative control for the future (and foster good development).
  3. Pedestrian zone, not empty green park. Character of City should be maintained by integrating park into the City.
  4. Arts does not equal only visual arts.
  5. Walkable, livable, bikeable, public spaces.
  6. Winding streets, beautiful landscaping that respects the topography and is sustainable and walkable.
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Four acres:

Flexible uses with integrated uses and spaces. Large trees/promenade, food spaces, water feature.

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Combine uses for a richer experience

- Consider that office/shared incubator space can serve many artists including:
  - Composers
  - Visual digital artists
  - Artist makerspace serving sculptors with 3D printers
  - Graphic artists
  - Engineering & Arts & Computers are becoming more integrated
  - Digital musicians
- Consider that loft space could overlap with incubator space.
- The front porch of the East Lake City Hall acts as the performance space
- Use boulevards to connect with the park to allow street extensions of festival space like the main street of Columbus.
- Make the event space open directly into the park such as the tavern on the central square of Atlantic Station – it could host performances.
- Consider connecting the park across North Avondale and thru the hedge with a major pedestrian crossing.
- Consider placing the park across Washington so that it is not a direct shot.
- Consider pedestrian (narrow – with stairs) connectors which wind through the block in the middle.
- Consider roadside rain gardens as green space and storm water control – see Atlanta guidelines in the Proctor Creek drainage area.
- Yes – one to two stories
- Yes – incubator space
- Some retail is good – restaurant; don't forget galleries to support the artists
- Yes – strongly yes to public art
- Yes – City Hall/Annex
- Residential two to three stories in front – taller in back – consider an elevation limit in lieu of a height limit
- Consider English Tudor only on North Avondale as at Helen, GA

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Thank you for putting together a hopeful plan of action last night. I'm pleased about the idea of using the Process Map to help guide us through this maze we call downtown development. Last night's meeting with you and David Burt was most encouraging -- even exciting!

I didn't leave my written response to you last night, as I had to scoot out a bit early from the meeting.

Here is what I would like to leave for you and David:

Professionals and planners have heard Richard Dagenhart's philosophy over and over, but I'm still a big fan of what he believes. To reiterate:

Begin by understanding where we are: we are in a quaint, tree-lined, English-Tudor type of community. We have this down pat!

Subdivide first, buildings and land used come later, including the town green.

Design streets first -- the FRAMEWORK which will establish a high-quality public realm.

Make boundaries that join parts of the urban community together; not buffers that separate them (heard last night).

Design in increments: even when building in big chunks (heard last night).

Pay close attention to fronts and backs (heard last night).

My biggest wish is that the BOMC would be educated to the importance of developing an overall framework for our downtown. A well-designed framework will do much work for us.

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First you have a huge THANK YOU for setting up a coherent process and facilitating an excellent discussion. Below are my thoughts.

The history of Avondale's development and our adopted downtown plan are grounded on the provision of a robust public infrastructure. Places where children can play outdoors, tree-shaded sidewalks, and inviting parks that create many opportunities to meet neighbors and are key elements that make Avondale so special. Carrying these elements into our downtown is critical to realizing the vision adopted in the City's planning documents.

The City-owned four acres are a tremendous opportunity and should be leveraged to do things that are unlikely to happen as part of private development. The four acres can

enhance private development, but more important than that, we have a civic responsibility to create a quality neighborhood for our new residents. The City-owned property should be used to assure that our new citizens have the same opportunities as those of us that currently live here. I believe that in doing that, we not only fulfill our adopted vision for our downtown, we establish an economically sound foundation for our city.

Things that should be considered for the four acres:

1. As the city promotes the development of multi-family residential units, it has a responsibility to provide appropriate outdoor spaces. Our zoning does have open space requirements, but it is inadequate and never intended to create the public park land necessary to support a healthy neighborhood.

The CDC recommends that children be physically active at least 60 minutes every day. Very few are. Part of the reason is that it is hard for them to be really active on a daily basis when their parents have to drive them to appropriate places. It is particularly hard when they live in homes with no yard. If we are going to encourage development of multi-family residential units in our downtown, we have a civic responsibility to create such places. And creating them will never be easier than it is today. To look long term, the governing regulation for a potential downtown build-out is now the zoning density of 40 units/acre. There are 130 acres in the study area for the 2014 Downtown Master Plan. If one quarter of those acres are built to that density we would have 1,300 residential units and at 2.5 people per unit that would be 3,250 people.

As of April 2017, we know of approximately 600 units that exist, are under development, or likely to be built within the next five years (existing units 40, South City Partners 197, Avila probably close to 400).  $600 \times 2.5 = 1,500$  people. And those homes will not have the yards that are part of most of our homes today. Those future citizens will need a community lawn. A flexible space that allows running games such as catch, Frisbee, tag. My rule of thumb is that a lawn that supports such activity should have a minimum dimension of 150'.

And the magic is that a community lawn designed as part of a vibrant public space can perform many functions. It can host organized events such as festivals, concerts, and community wide meetings. Or less structured uses such as picnics, kite flying, cloud watching, people watching. Few public spaces are as flexible.

Such a space augmented with plazas and patios, places for food, and programmed activities is a must for the quality of life of the 1,500 to 3,250 people we plan to add to our community. Such places also spur the development of nearby business.

2. Creating a tree lined promenade around the edge results in multiple benefits.
  - A place for an inviting stroll, places to sit or people watch, and sites for art.
  - Provision of shade that acknowledges our climate.
  - Establishment of a clear edge so that public, private, service functions are not awkwardly mixed.

The promenade could link to a similar space along the north side of Avondale Road providing a strong pedestrian/bike connection to the Avondale MARTA station and East Decatur Greenway.

3. A civic or food service building overlooking patios, plazas, promenade, and lawn would help the synergistic mix. But should remain under the City's control and only be located along one edge.

#### Other thoughts:

We should not make everything we want to happen within the downtown happen on the four acres. We need to think of the four acres as a way to enhance other development within the downtown and then establish the regulations and incentives to make them happen. The four acres should not be considered in isolation, but within the context of how they impact the rest of our downtown.

1. Pedestrian-friendly streets that connect to and are enlivened by the four acres. We need to assure that they create attractive public places and encourage social interactions. Typologies are needed that establish pedestrian through ways (sidewalks that are clear of intrusions such as power poles, transformers, etc.). Places for small plazas, building setbacks that allow seating and planting along building fronts. Places that allow canopy trees to grow and cool the neighborhood. We also need a well thought out system for service delivery to businesses; including locations for dumpsters, condensers, utilities, transformers, and parking. To improve the downtown micro-climate canopy trees should be required as part of any surface parking (plans should include adequate space for mature trees and the installation of 3-4" caliber trees).
2. Retail and office space – I was delighted with the conversation about what this should look like. Its scale and grain are extremely important if downtown Avondale is to be as eclectic and special as the current residential area. I totally support the idea that we should encourage small-scale developments throughout downtown. Near the four acres, I like two- to three-story buildings with the opportunity to have rooftop patios (on two-story buildings), particularly those buildings that overlook the street and the public space. Instead of building these within the four acres we should create strategies (regulations, incentives, processes, and marketing) to encourage their development across the street and throughout downtown.

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3. Our Arts district is so cool. Again we need to develop strategies to protect it and not accept that it will evaporate.