

Urban Image



SECTION 14 – URBAN IMAGE

Introduction

The following section is a critical analysis of the visual image of the City of Navasota, as conducted by the Texas Target Cities Team. This team consisted of students with degrees in architecture, urban planning, and landscape architecture. Over a period of two months, the team compiled a visual survey of the City's gateways and its Downtown as a whole. The team met with citizens in a public participation meeting and a public design workshop. The workshop was specifically intended to seek public opinion about the revitalization of Downtown Navasota. The observations contained in this document reflect both the opinions of team members and the general feelings of the citizens of Navasota.

The visual image of a city is believed to correspond directly with the quality of life of its citizens. People who live in attractive, well-planned communities generally feel better about their community. Specific issues of concern are urban gateways, occurrences of urban blight, general streetscape, downtown parking demands, and underutilized resources.

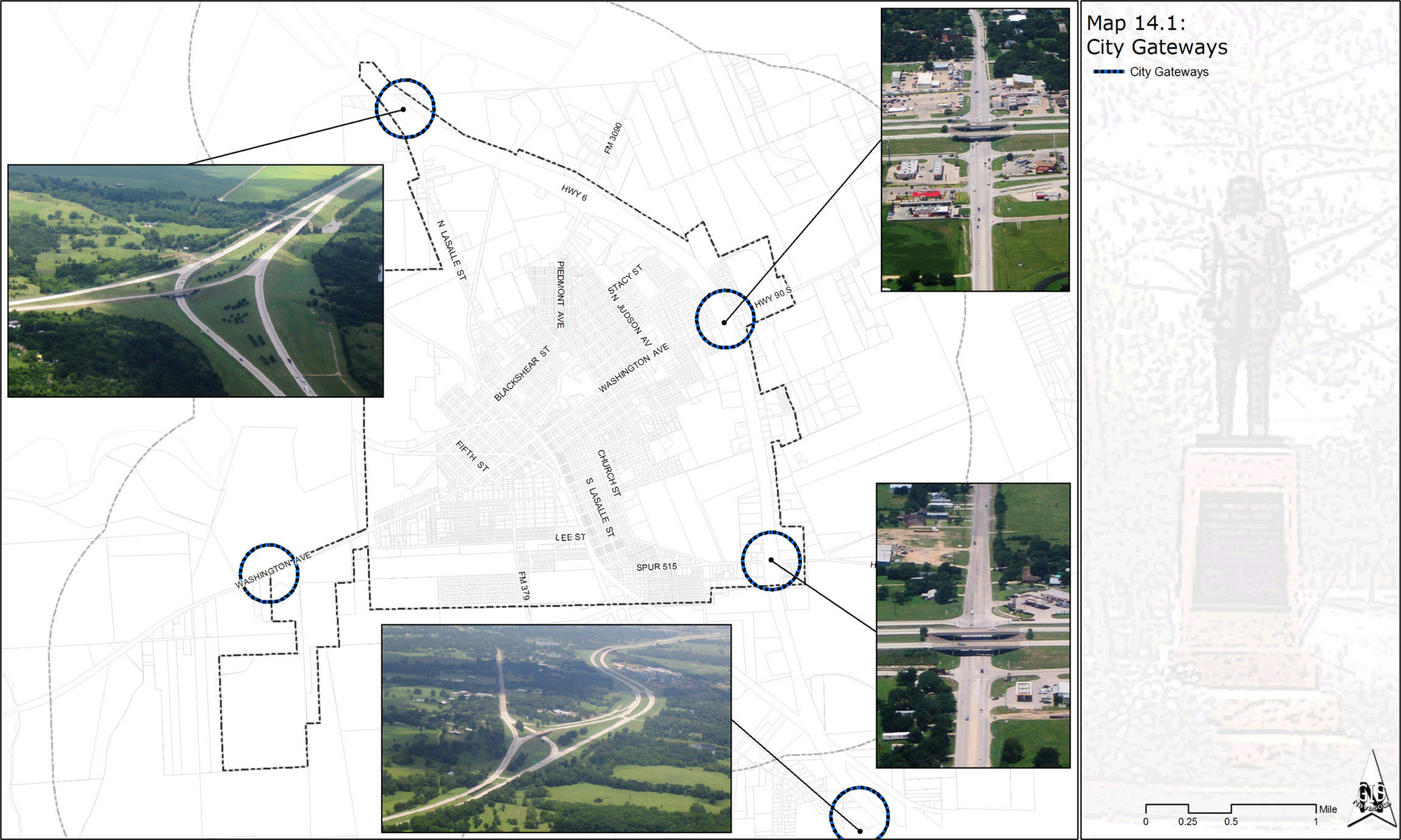
Gateways

A gateway serves as a marker or landmark that announces the entrance into a community. Typically, gateways are defined with landscaping, signage, flags, or even statues. When gateways are well-designed and properly placed, they can foster a sense of civic identity and pride. During the public participation meeting, several citizens noted their concern with the appearance of gateways leading into both the City of Navasota as a whole, and the area identified as Downtown Navasota.

City Gateways

A total of five gateways have been identified in Navasota (Map 14.1). They include:

1. The intersection of North LaSalle Street and State Highway 6
2. The intersection of Washington Avenue and State Highway 6.



3. The intersection of State Highway 105 and State Highway 6.
4. The intersection of State Highway 6 and South LaSalle.
5. The western extent of the City at State Highway 105 West (Washington Avenue).

Downtown Gateways:

In addition to the primary gateways, Downtown gateways were also identified. Generally, citizens who were surveyed liked the “boulevard” feel of East Washington Avenue, with its landscaped medians and the LaSalle statue serving as a gateway marker (Map 14.2).



Landscape Median on East Washington Avenue

These Downtown gateways include:

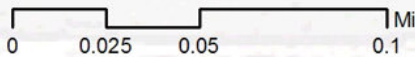
1. The intersection of LaSalle Street and Church Street.
2. The intersection of Washington Avenue and 10th Street.
3. The intersection of LaSalle Street and Holland Street.
4. The intersection of LaSalle Street and Brule Drive.

Citizens expressed a dislike for the western gateway along Washington Avenue. One citizen in particular noted the need for an additional statue to mark the western entrance into Downtown. Citizens also offered criticism regarding the north-south gateways along LaSalle Street. Currently, there are many automotive uses and open automobile storage facilities along LaSalle Street. Citizens also expressed an interest in establishing stricter design standards and sign controls.



Map 14.2:
Downtown Gateways

 Downtown



Urban Blight

Urban blight can be defined as the deterioration of urban fabric. Evidence of urban blight may include abandoned buildings, abnormally high vacancy rates, dilapidated structures, litter and debris, or undeveloped property with unkempt, overgrown lawns.

Overall, Navasota's urban fabric is in relatively good condition, though some structures are currently underutilized. Storage remains the primary use for the upper stories in most buildings in the Downtown. Opportunities exist for the establishment of loft living in the upper stories of buildings, allowing for a more dynamic mix of land uses along Washington Avenue. Navasota's historic commercial buildings are the downtown area's most marketable assets. Vacant buildings and open storage of vehicles and machinery are the primary sources of blight confronting travelers driving through Navasota. On the positive side, trash receptacles have been placed throughout the Downtown, resulting in a largely litter free environment along Washington Avenue, LaSalle Street, and Farquar Street.



Underutilized Structures in Navasota

Streetscape



Navasota Streetscape

Streetscape may be defined as the visual experience resulting from the combination of elements such as streets and sidewalks, lighting, street furniture, landscaping, and signage. The streetscape is one of the most visible reflections of the vitality of an area. The Downtown streetscape consists

of façades, walkways, street furniture, utility lines, and planters. Each of these elements has an impact on pedestrians and their sense of place within Downtown. Existing walkways provide pedestrians with access to local shops and businesses. Access across intersections, however, can be difficult at times due to the length pedestrians must travel, as well as American Disabilities Act accessibility issues.

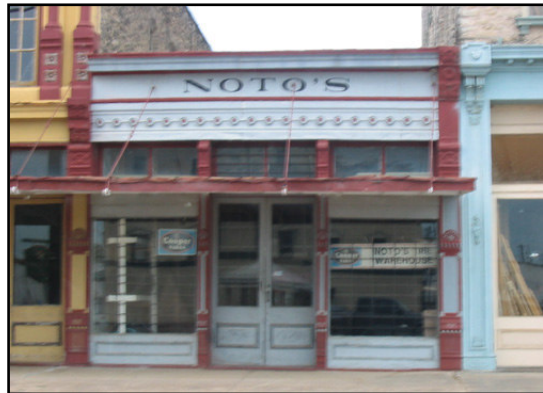
Trash receptacles and benches are adequate in number, but could incorporate historic themes to better complement the area. The existing planters in the area are adequate, but an infusion of additional plant material would significantly improve the overall look of the Downtown. The impact of overhead utility lines is minimal throughout Downtown.



Trash Receptacle

Signage

Signage is an important visual element of the built environment. Though signage is necessary to attract business, it must be used with restraint in order to protect the



Downtown Signage

overall visual appearance of an area. The signage in Navasota appears to be largely uncontrolled. The current signage is inconsistent, thematically incompatible, and presents a generally unflattering image of the City. During the public involvement process, some citizens felt a need for better signage regulation to provide consistency and harmony.

Parking

Downtown Navasota has three types of parking: parking lots, on-street diagonal parking, and on street parallel parking. The survey count of various types of parking revealed 627 parking spaces in and around Downtown Navasota. The number of spaces by each parking type is shown in Table 14.1:

Table 14.1: Spaces by Parking Type

Parking Type	Number of Spaces
Parking lots	288 spaces
On street diagonal parking	310 spaces
On street parallel parking	29 spaces

Merchants and customers have expressed a concern for parking scarcity in Downtown. The Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis for the proximity of parking spaces around Downtown shows 627 parking spaces within 800 linear feet of the focus area. Table 14.2 shows the available parking spaces within various distances from Downtown Navasota.



On Street Parking in Navasota

Table 14.2: Available Parking in and Around Downtown Navasota

Within a distance of	Number of spaces
100 ft	229 spaces
200 ft	378 spaces
400 ft	507 spaces
600 ft	567 spaces
800 ft	627 spaces

The Texas A&M University Team concluded that there is currently an adequate amount of parking in and around Downtown. The parking issue may be more of a parking management problem than an actual case of inadequate parking. During the public involvement process, some Downtown property owners indicated that businesses are allowing employees to park directly in front of the businesses rather than behind them. These property owners expressed concern for their employees'

safety, and indicated that they might be more willing to require that their employees park elsewhere, so long as more adequate lighting and a stronger police presence were provided after dark.

Some citizens were also concerned about the diagonal on-street parking along Washington Avenue. Washington Avenue is a four lane highway with a center turn lane and on-street parking. The process of backing out of these diagonal parking spaces conflicts with moving traffic, and creates congestion along Washington Avenue. However this activity also serves as an excellent traffic-calming device, ensuring slower speeds and a more comfortable pedestrian life.

Underutilized Resources

In addition to Navasota's vacant commercial structures, other underutilized resources in the City include vacant buildings and underutilized tracts of land. Unimproved property provides opportunities for infill projects. In the public participation meetings, citizens identified the need for more parks and green space in Downtown, extending beyond the railroad tracks into western Downtown Navasota. Citizens also expressed the need provide better connections to the hike/bike trail along Cedar Creek.



Vacant Structure in Navasota