



SECTION 9: EXISTING CIVIC IMAGE

Gateways

Importance of Gateways

In urban design terminology a "gateway" is an area within the community which serves as a focal point for visitors and residents entering or leaving a city. A gateway may be something very specific such as a "welcome sign" which is designed to convey the community's character, including enhanced landscaping and streetscaping. However, gateways can use less tangible measures to identify the City as an unique place. Through City funding and development regulations a gateway "district" can be established in which increased aesthetic and land use controls are utilized to express the message "Welcome to our City." In the following sections a SWOT analysis will explore the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats for each gateway into Whitehouse.

Northern Gateway (Tyler)

The principal gateway into the City of Whitehouse has been State Highway 110 since the thoroughfare was constructed. According to TxDOT traffic counts, over 18,000 vehicles enter or exit Whitehouse through this gateway on a daily basis, as of 2004. Functionally and figuratively, this gateway is the first impression most visitors have of Whitehouse.

Strengths

State Highway 110 is a high traffic volume facility. Many Tyler residents strongly associate Whitehouse and Lake Tyler with this thoroughfare. This association creates an inherent branding opportunity for the community.

Weaknesses

Environmental concerns and a short-term lack of land use controls north of the current City Limits could potentially hinder the effectiveness of this gateway.



Image 9.1: The painted "Whitehouse" sign is located outside of both the Whitehouse City Limits and ETJ. Un-regulated signage and buildings have created what many participants referred to as "eye sores" within other areas of the Northern Gateway, a trend which will continue without annexation by the City of Tyler.

Drainage concerns on both the east and west side of State Highway 110 will also limit urban development south of the northern City Limits. While bucolic natural settings can be considered an asset, the City's inability to allow for continuous high-quality urban development from the

gateway to the City's central area may limit the community's draw for travelers on Loop 49.

The City Limits and ETJ positions are fixed in this area due to expansion of Tyler's jurisdiction after recent annexations. Although Whitehouse cannot grow north, the City of Tyler has made no recent annexation moves to the south along State Highway 110, with the most recent expansion occurring during the mid-1980s.

***"The ETJ is locked [in the northwest]. It better be defined pretty quickly because what you've got is what you'll get."
- Russell Rischard***

Opportunities

The impending construction of Loop 49 and/or the "East Texas Hourglass Conceptual Corridor" will bring large numbers of new commuters to the edge of Whitehouse. The Tyler Area Metropolitan Planning Organization's 2030 Plan estimates that the loop will carry over 20,000 vehicles on a daily basis even

***"[The Hill Creek basin along 110 is] a major watershed into our drinking water and it is important that we try to protect it."
- Debbie Shafer***

before the eastern connection between State Highway 110 and Interstate 20 is completed. If the hourglass corridor is constructed as planned this will further increase the potential market for retail within Whitehouse.



The environmental concerns precluding development in some portions of the Northern Gateway could also be considered an opportunity rather than a weakness. If properly handled, the area could be preserved in its natural setting as an asset. If the urban development of Whitehouse and Tyler eventually merge, this preservation may itself communicate the community's connection with nature. While the retention of this natural resource is a distinct possibility, unless the City chooses to purchase the land, development could still occur since requiring private landowners to provide "open space" is not legally enforceable.

Threats

"[Plantation South] is the only attractive thing we have coming in from the north side... don't we want a green belt, a gateway to be the first thing people see when they come into town?"

- Joni Burdett

As a result of the jurisdiction limitations, the potential is very real for unregulated commercial development to occur just north of the City's northern gateway. Whitehouse cannot control land use in the area and Tyler has made no

attempts to annex the land and enforce its own controls. Infrastructure availability and Tyler's subdivision regulations can impact the scope and intensity of this development; however, no land use limitations can be expected in the near future.

In practice, land use in the area has developed both to the City's advantage and against it. Plantation South is an extremely attractive office site.



Image 9.2: Plantation South, a campus style office park consisting of four buildings is located just north of the City Limits, and offers a verity of office and retail service businesses. The site is very attractive despite the lack of land use controls.

Strongly associated with Whitehouse, this site and the painted "Whitehouse" sign



both lie outside of the City Limits and ETJ (Image 9.1, Image 9.2). In stark contrast some development north of the City Limits clearly lacks the high-quality impression the City will want to convey to outside visitors.

Eastern Gateway (Lake Tyler)

The City's eastern gateway is much more difficult to define. With Tyler to the north, the natural Northern Gateway will be located on the thoroughfare connecting the two communities. Unlike this clear-cut case, most visitors traveling from the east come from either Lake Tyler or unincorporated Smith County, south of the lake. The quality and intensity of future land development surrounding the lake will also impact how the water body is associated with Whitehouse.

Strengths

The location and size of Lake Tyler and Lake Tyler East funnels commuters originating from a large area of unincorporated Smith County through Whitehouse. This traffic should only increase as development within the area progresses. The existence of commercial and park development within this gateway area, which is funded and maintained by the City of Tyler, also benefits the community. Continued interest by Tyler in this portion of the lake can provide many benefits to Whitehouse through cooperative projects.

Weaknesses

TxDOT traffic counts reveal that, as of 2004, just under 4,000 vehicles traveled on FM 346 southeast of the City Limits on a daily basis. Total commuter traffic into the City through



Image 9.3: Industrial development near single-family homes and in a high profile location near the eastern gateway

this gateway is the community's lowest even though traffic counts increase dramatically within the City Limits. The City's only significant industrial



development is also located near the gateway, possibly complicating efforts to create an aesthetically pleasing corridor (Image 9.3).

Opportunities

Whether the gateway welcomes travelers from southeastern Smith County or



Image 9.4: High-end homes located on lake-front property within the ETJ of Whitehouse

serves to unify the community with Lake Tyler remains to be seen. However, the lake is a potentially valuable commodity for the City. National attention has recently been focused on the lake thanks to a television program concerning a high scale housing development. Related high-end residential development may also provide a market for retail sales within Whitehouse, which could not

otherwise be supported through local purchasing power alone. The City may be able to capture this market through commercial development accessible to boat traffic as well as through trips generated by lake residents commuting to Tyler by way of Whitehouse. This

opportunity would require a partnership with the City of Tyler in order to increase the economic and recreational opportunities of the lake. Although some commercial activities are currently located on the waterfront, significant

"If somebody came in and said 'well why don't I build a really nice resort type facility that would have something along the lines of a bed-and-breakfast concept with restaurants and shops,' you could see that happening in a marina type concept... that's not a long shot... it's very real because most developers look at lakeside development as very profitable."
- Mark Sweeney

opportunities remain to create a truly unique entertainment, retail, and residential district capable of drawing customers by car and boat from throughout the region (Image 9.4).



Threats

While potential coordination with the City of Tyler may provide significant opportunities, the potential lack of this participation would constitute an equally powerful threat. The unique commercial and residential district which will be discussed at length in this document cannot come to fruition without cooperation between the two Cities.

Efficient transportation is also threatened by the lake. Eastern bypass traffic around the City's core is impaired by both low elevation and the lake itself. These limitations could impair both lake development and efficient travel throughout Whitehouse.

Southern Gateway (Troup/Lake Columbia)

Just as in the north, the City's natural southern gateway would be located on State Highway 110. Daily traffic on the southern portion of this thoroughfare approaches an average of 10,000 vehicles.

Strengths

Unlike the northern portion of the City, much of the City's southern side remains undeveloped. Although the terrain does include some rolling hills and low points, the overall effect is aesthetically pleasing in its current state (Image 9.5). In most cases, recent building projects have been impacted by Zoning and Subdivision Regulations resulting in some continuity of urban design. Jurisdictional limitations on



Image 9.5: Rolling hills and attractive stands of trees contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the southern gateway.

annexation and growth from neighboring municipalities is also absent in the area.



Weaknesses

Although Whitehouse has the ability to annex significant quantities of land in and around the southern gateway, Certificate of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) rights may severely limit urban development potential. The Walnut Grove and Southern Utilities Water Districts hold rights to provide water within much of this region of unincorporated land. At present, it is not known whether these Districts have sufficient capacity for the high intensity urban growth possible with municipal water systems. Although the Districts could increase capacity, at present the water demands for commercial development and fire protection may or may not be met in the area.

Opportunities

***"Everything south of us is growing... and it has to come this way."
- Darrell Crymes***

If infrastructure concerns can be addressed, considerable opportunities for growth and development could be realized. Travel resulting from population growth in both Tyler and southern Smith County will likely coordinate to benefit Whitehouse and improve the importance of the southern gateway. Even though Lake Columbia will be located beyond the jurisdiction of Whitehouse, the southern gateway will likely be the last (or first) area of intense commercial activities encountered by visitors and residents traveling to and from the lake. Increased commercial activity is also possible due to the planned transportation improvements near the gateway.

***"As you come down Highway 110, closer to the future Lake Columbia site, you have greater potential for some type of gateway retail development occurring, that would be supported by the traffic generated by Lake Columbia."
- Mark Sweeney***

Threats

The main threat facing the southern gateway is that infrastructure limitations will adversely impact the quality and type of land development which will inevitably result from increased vehicular traffic on State Highway 110. It is unlikely that



the City can justify annexing land if provisions for adequate water supply cannot be secured. Whitehouse has historically used revenue from the sale of water and sewer service in order to partly defray the high service demands (and relatively low tax revenues) of single-family homes. Annexing land without the ability to sell water will be costly unless the anticipated development will have a higher tax valuation than



Image 9.6: Unregulated commercial and residential development fronting on State Highway 110 South includes some well-regarded businesses, which are found in buildings frequently identified as eyesores by citizen participants.

typical single-family homes. Without annexation the gateway will suffer from the same potential unregulated land development facing property north of the City. Existing commercial activities in the area exhibit the same hodgepodge pattern observed north of the City Limits. In some cases residential homes are located next to light industrial or automotive related businesses.

Western Gateway (US 69)

Although Tyler is not actively annexing land to its south along State Highway 110, the City is rapidly expanding along the US 69 corridor. Paluxy Drive (FM 756) is another corridor within the City of Tyler that is undergoing rapid development and southerly growth. As of 2004, 8,000 vehicles entered into the City of Whitehouse from this area by way of FM 346.

Strengths

A gateway site is naturally provided by the convergence of two State funded highways. Rhones Quarter Road (FM 2964) intersects FM 346 just west of the current City Limits. Transportation capacity already exists in order to take advantage of potential gateway improvements.

"West of town has viability [for commercial development] especially with the widening of Paluxy and [construction of] Loop 49."

- Russell Rischard



Weaknesses

At present, land west of the City is underdeveloped. Unlike the City's northern, eastern, and western gateways, residential traffic dominates travel in the area.

Opportunities

The US 69/Paluxy Drive corridor is Tyler's fastest growing area. FM 346, which eventually becomes Main Street, is well-positioned as an east/west corridor south of Loop 49 to benefit from this growth. Though significant increases in traffic counts may be years away, the opportunity to capture sales tax revenue from residents of this area is promising.



Image 9.7: The WISD school zone extends throughout the entire ETJ and deep into incorporated Tyler. This area includes several up-scale residential neighborhoods which enhances the potential commercial market of Whitehouse.

Thanks to school district boundaries, many residents of these growth areas will travel into Whitehouse on a daily basis until the School District begins building campus facilities within the City of Tyler.

Threats

Despite the fact that land within the area does not show the intense development of other gateways, a lack of a clear land use pattern and rapid development beyond the City Limits has resulted in an odd and sometimes incompatible mix of land uses. Ambiguity in jurisdictional boundaries between the Cities of Whitehouse and Tyler may also



Image 9.8: The unregulated commercial and residential development fronting on FM 346 west of the City Limits includes single-family, multi-family, manufactured homes, retail, and self storage located adjacent to each other.

impair timely annexation and regulation of this land.



Community Symbology

"Symbology" is a cartography term for drawings used to represent an individual geographic feature among many others on a map. In much the same way every community must associate itself with symbols which uniquely identify it among other municipalities in a region.



Image 9.9: This possible logo for Loop 49 uses the identifiable "Tyler Rose," a strong local example of marketable symbology.

A strong local example of community symbology is the Tyler Rose. Despite the fact that rose production occurs throughout the region, the City of Tyler has effectively utilized the symbol to represent one of its core values. Through successful marketing the rose symbol is identified with Tyler throughout the State and even nationally to a limited degree. A symbol which is strongly identified with

the community and easily used can be a valuable tool. Such a symbol could not only be incorporated into City logos, letterheads, and marketing material, but could also be more subtly used to influence structural aesthetics within the built environment (Image 9.9).

Works Progress Administration (WPA) Rock Work

After the loss of several commercial structures from the Main Street (FM 346) widening project, many people view the rock gym and wall (Image 9.10) surrounding Brown Elementary as the two most important historic structures within Whitehouse. These structures benefit from high visibility thanks to their location at the intersection of the community's primary thoroughfares. TxDOT traffic counts indicate that over 23,000



Image 9.10: WPA rock wall surrounding Brown Elementary

vehicles passed by the structures on a daily basis during 2004, a volume which has likely grown in subsequent years.



The rock patterns are recognizable and unique owing in large part to their historic origins. During public involvement, no other symbols of the community were more discussed than the rock work comprising these two structures. Many public involvement participants supported the idea of converting the rock gym for use as a



Image 9.11: WPA rock gym on the Brown Elementary campus

convention center if the School District redevelops the Brown Elementary site as a part of the envisioned Town Center (Image 9.11). While modern additions, such as the planter boxes in front of the old WPA wall would detract from the



Image 9.12: Whitehouse monument sign constructed from salvaged WPA rock from an old school building formally on the Brown Elementary campus

structure's historical integrity based on national preservation standards, the community has clearly embraced the rock as a key architectural component. The Whitehouse monument sign is an excellent example of reusing the historical rock from other demolished structures to further solidify this community symbol (Image 9.12).

YesterYear

Although the YesterYear Festival does not represent a physical symbol, it is a recognizable celebration of the community's heritage. The annual celebration provides for a branding opportunity to involve citizens from surrounding communities in the City's history.



Image 9.13: Horse-drawn wagons are frequently part of the annual Whitehouse YesterYear celebration (photograph of the 1984 parade).

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In addition to encouraging more attendance by the public, the organizers and City could jointly benefit from the establishment of a tangible symbol associated for YesterYear. The Tyler Rose is once again a good example of this concept. The rose is easily adaptable for use in marketing of not only the City of Tyler, but the Rose Festival and Rose Garden as well.



Image 9.14: Street performances of life in the "Old West" are frequently a part of the Whitehouse YesterYear celebration (photograph taken during the 1997 festival).

Another local example is the "Brick Streets" Historic District in Tyler (Image 9.15, right). A similar symbol of YesterYear would make marketing of the festival more



Image 9.15: Tyler, Texas maintains several branding themes for districts within the City. One of them is the "Brick Streets District" which uses the physical characteristics of the District to strengthen overall branding (right). College Station, Texas has done an effective job of establishing strong symbology for the Wolf Pen Creek District. Street art, street signage, and various streetscaping elements within the District have been adorned with images of the wolf or its paw print (top).



effective and allow for coordinated efforts between festival organizers and the City. Such a symbol could also be incorporated into the design elements of the Town Center. Wolf Pen Creek

in College Station, Texas is branded using the inherent symbology of its name. The District is identified through themed public art and a variety of signage types (Image 9.15, top).



Agricultural Heritage



Image 9.16: The Whitehouse community was economically self-sufficient for much of its history with an agricultural based economy. Tomato sheds such as the one pictured here were established as the first processing point for local crops during the early 20th-century.

For most of its early history, residents of Whitehouse were self-sufficient economically. The community grew and produced several agricultural products with tomatoes being the most significant. Cotton and roses were also grown at various times in the community's history. As

commuting to and from Tyler became quicker and cheaper, Whitehouse gradually lost its agricultural economy and commercial independence. Even with automobiles growing in popularity, until the depression era, when government subsidies discouraged farm production, the community retained much of its agricultural vitality. While agriculture remains viable within the community the most recognizable agricultural product to most citizens are roses. Because roses are so strongly associated with Tyler, a strong community association would be difficult to establish. Tomatoes are currently strongly associated with Jacksonville, Texas. As a result, any association between Whitehouse and a particular agricultural product may be difficult to establish for potential tourists throughout the East Texas region. However, the heritage of agriculture, farming culture, or the railroad should not be ignored as possible community symbols.



Image 9.17: Many crops were produced within the Whitehouse community prior to the post-World War II era including tomatoes and cotton.



Streetscaping and Development Aesthetics

In today's automotive era, the public's impression of any given community is most drastically formed by the view from a car window. Streetscaping elements

***"As we're looking at [land use], trails, and shopping centers... even though it looks pie-in-the-sky we have got to set the standards high or we will get... what we've always had."
- Debbie Shafer***

include a variety of characteristics ranging from the quality of the street to the design of building façades. By incorporating high design standards for roads and regulating the appearance of commercial structures the community can make a lasting impression on visitors and citizens alike.

Streetscaping

Because all major thoroughfares within the community are maintained by TxDOT, streetscaping standards within Whitehouse are similar to those found throughout Texas. One noteworthy contrast is the location of utility lines. Public comments during citizen participation focused on power and communication line location particularly on State Highway 110. Several participants felt that the power lines detracted from some otherwise attractive sites such as the shopping center anchored by Brookshire's Grocery Store. Unfortunately, the streetscaping design approved for Main Street (FM 346) does not include buried lines. Utility line location will not only impact aesthetics of the corridor directly, but will also influence the type of street trees which will be planted within the right-of-way. Crape Myrtles are planned since full canopy trees are not possible as their ultimate height will potentially threaten power line safety.

***"If we were to take the power lines down and move them... that would greatly improve the aesthetics of our City."
- David Sage***

Inconsistent installation of sidewalks or curb and gutter facilities were also frequently mentioned as aesthetic shortcomings within the community's urban design. Streetlight design and pavement type were also discussed.



Signage Control

Home rule cities are permitted under State statute to regulate many aspects of signage, both within the City Limits and, throughout the ETJ. Due to the nature of signage as advertising, the natural tendency for businesses is to build signs which are more numerous, taller, flashier, and more noticeable than their competitors' signs. With no City regulations in place, competition dictates this progression even if the business owners would otherwise be content with minimal signage.

***"It used to be that when you drove from Tyler to [Whitehouse] you had a nice scenic view... but now you have 'signage pollution...' [I think we should do what other cities have done] and have an ordinance that regulates that."
- David Williams***

Cities within Texas frequently regulate signage location, size, and numbers. Although case law is still evolving on the subject, some cities go so far as to regulate color and sign content. Billboards are also frequently regulated through the exclusion or limitation of off premise signage.

Sign regulation within Whitehouse remains a contentious issue following recent attempts to adopt such regulations into the Zoning Ordinance. At this time, Whitehouse does not regulate signs. In lacking this regulation, Whitehouse is in the minority among other home rule cities, many of which have at least limited regulations in place. Once constructed, signs often legally outlast even the commercial structures they were erected to support. For this reason, legacies of poorly implemented or unregulated signage linger within cities long after citizens demand improvements to the visual environment. Regulation of signage is also permitted within the ETJ.

Signage pollution is not as pronounced as in other communities lacking sign control thanks in large part to the fact that most development within the City has been local in nature. However, as more national franchises locate within the community, unregulated signage will without question become more pronounced and visually intrusive.



Landscaping Regulations

Unlike signage controls, the City of Whitehouse has recently passed a Zoning Ordinance amendment allowing for the regulation of landscaping on commercial sites. The effectiveness of this ordinance is yet to be fully realized as no major projects have been completed which fall under the provisions of these regulations.

"What do developers do now? Well it's hard and expensive to build around trees... so they mow down all the trees then plant new trees [around the new houses]. Is that an aesthetic that we want in this community?"

- Andy Irvine

Design Regulations

"You can't overburden the developer... we should let the whole economic situation grow together so that you don't kill the [development momentum]."

- Dale Moran

The regulation of built structures has a long history in Texas. While building regulations are common, the concept of regulating structure aesthetics is also becoming a regularly accepted practice by home rule cities. Levels of regulation vary broadly, just as significant variations exist between signage control in cities. A stated objective of the 1995 Comprehensive Plan was for Whitehouse to adopt design regulations for nonresidential structures. Implementation of this objective has been attempted, but objections from the private sector development community about the scope of such regulations have been raised. Most objections centered around the implementation of these regulations for residential development and specifics regarding façade material percentages. The newly adopted regulations dictate that 75% of all façades must be covered with masonry. The requirements apply only to commercially zoned buildings and not to multi-family or industrial development.

"What I have seen with the City Council is that they don't want to be so restrictive as to run off business... and that makes sense... it really does... but you have to have some backbone [to say that's not our vision]."

- Suzanne Loudamy



From a purely aesthetic standpoint, commercial structures within the City of Whitehouse built during the last 10 years have been constructed with a wide range of quality. Citizens speaking during public involvement regularly discussed the lack of quality aesthetics in many structures and complained of "metal buildings" dominating other building types.

***"Clean things up! No more metal buildings... a certain percentage of new construction must be brick and all business entrances should be paved with asphalt or concrete."
- Reno Moore***

Town Center

District Location

***"Access to Brown Elementary and the Junior High School is very difficult... we need to account for that in this Plan."
- Mark Sweeney***

The 1995 Comprehensive Plan initially discussed the idea of establishing a Town Center located within an area lying east of State Highway 110, north of Main Street, and west of Bascom Road. Though some citizens speaking during public involvement raised valid concerns about traffic congestion and the

inherent development limitations, most participants felt that the best location for the City's Town Center remains in this area despite the continued School District and municipal presence in the District. A consensus was also reached which identified land to the south of Main Street and several blocks west of State Highway 110 as also meeting the locational requirements for inclusion in Town Center planning.

Existing Conditions

The site identified in both the 1995 Plan and by public involvement for this project currently hosts a variety of land uses. The most prominent of the uses are government facilities including the City Hall complex and Brown Elementary. Also located on the Brown Elementary site are the old rock gym and wall which hold significant historical and symbolic value to the community. The City Park on



Main Street, Community Library, Volunteer Fire Department, and YMCA are also located within the District.

Most commercial development on Main Street (FM 346) has migrated to new locations on State Highway 110 in order to take advantage of the higher traffic volumes or as a result of the Main Street widening project. One notable exception to this migration is the CVS pharmacy which takes access to both Main Street and State Highway 110. The site was designed with a wide side setback in order to accommodate the eventual widening. Commercial development



Image 9.18: The Austin Bank complex and other Town Center commercial development along Horton Street

along State Highway 110 within the Town Center District includes a variety of businesses. Among these are administrative and professional uses such as Austin Bank (Image 9.18) and automotive related activities at Pro One.

Some residential structures within the District have been converted to commercial use. However, most of the homes located on Hearon Street are actively used in their residential capacity. Urban development types vary dramatically between structures within the District. High quality and historically significant construction on WISD facilities are joined by some remaining commercial and residential structures with historic value. By contrast, most new development, excluding the CVS store and additions to the Austin Bank complex, have consisted of metal façades. This includes the City's new municipal building which has some exposed metal on all sides.

Because so much of the District will be affected by the Main Street widening project, existing conditions for streetscaping are in flux. According to the planned Main Street (FM 346) design, six-foot wide sidewalks will be included on



both sides of the thoroughfare. State Highway 110 is not presently equipped with sidewalks throughout the entire District.

Constraints to Development

"[Focusing on just the original town site as a Town Center] doesn't stray very far from what Whitehouse has done ever since I've been here... and that's just wish. I guess what I would like to see this Committee do is decide if we're going to take an aggressive approach and take advantage of that new loop... we're still hooked on wishful thinking [by only focusing on the old town site]."

- Susan Shivers

The most critical limiting factor for redevelopment within the Town Center district will be the disposition of publicly owned land. Only seven landowners account for all properties within the

narrowly defined District of the 1995 Plan. The City of Whitehouse and the Whitehouse Independent School District are the majority owners. Most participants during public involvement felt that the long-term use of the Brown Elementary site as a school was both detrimental to the Town Center Vision and logistically inefficient for the School District.

Similarly, participants did not view the recent municipal building or YMCA as aesthetically consistent with the envisioned high-quality aesthetic and pedestrian friendly environment possible for the area. The way in which the City and School District

"This is a different game [than it was in 1995] because number one we have an area that's been virtually cleared out... all the old stuff is gone... we didn't have that in 1995... it is [now] a blank canvas and we have a chance to do something that is near the Original Town Center of the community. Number two we never put into place the ordinances that would implement the Town Center... we had it on paper [in 1995] but there was no ordinance behind it... that's why it never occurred."

- Mark Sweeney

handle future development and redevelopment of their current structures and property will factor strongly into the Town Center's overall success.

