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LAREDO, TEXAS

REGIONAL/URBAN DESIGN ASSISTANCE TEAM



R/UDAT

The Urban Planning and Design Committee of the American Institute of Architects has been sending Urban Design Assistance Teams to various American cities since 1967.

The Laredo Team is the 53rd such team to be invited into a specific area to deal with environmental and urban problems which range in scale from a region to a small town, and in type from recreational areas to public policy and implementation methods.

The teams respond to the problems as described by the local AIA Chapters and their sponsors from the community leadership.

Each Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team is specially selected to include professionals experienced in the particular problems of the area under study. Members are not compensated for their service and agree not to accept commissions for work resulting from their recommendations.

The Team acquaints itself with the community and its people...develops its analysis from a fresh perspective...offers its recommendations...and presents a new approach for planning and action.

The Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team expresses its gratification to the Mayor and City Council of Laredo, to the County Judge and members of the Board of County Commissioners of Webb County, and to the Laredo Chamber of Commerce for their invitation to the team and for their splendid hospitality during our brief stay.



INTRODUCTION

Laredo is at a critical juncture in its physical and economic growth. The fundamental decisions as to the future of the city must be made. The past two years have seen shifts in land uses and location of major development, while at the same time the city's downtown economic base has been declining and its neighborhood neglected.

It is easy to point out the problem areas—the abandonment of the downtown section by some of its long-time businesses, the vacant Plaza Hotel, congestion at the bridge heads, parking difficulties and congestion throughout the key downtown retail areas, the shift of some major businesses to outlying areas and the large numbers of unpaved streets throughout Laredo. Manifestations of this kind can trigger further deliterious effects for the city.

On the other hand, Laredo is unlike most other American cities. It has a Spanish and Mexican culture, in addition to its American heritage. The city is integrated, bi-lingual and bi-cultural. Economically, it does well enough - its downtown streets are still crowded with shoppers seeking goods and services and it has not suffered the syndrome of downtown decline which has pervaded other American cities.

Strong counter measures, however, are necessary in Laredo. The city need not decline due to sub-urban competition. Its streets need not become vacant and its buildings boarded up. The city possesses many positive attributes—its historical diversity and strong civic pride and common sense

are more than a match for its problems. R/UDAT strongly believes that if Laredo can agree on a definite development strategy, the future of the city can be brilliant.

It is in this context that the City of Laredo and Webb County have underwritten the R/UDAT TEAM efforts to undertake an urban revitalization study with its primary emphasis on the downtown area. The intent of the study is to formulate a development framework focusing upon what we felt were the main R/UDAT areas of importance:

- Land use issues
- Design issues
- Problems of parking and traffic
- The complex of issues relating to travel across the two international bridges
- The riverfront - its problems and unused potential
- Zacate Creek as an open space and development site
- The in-town barrios
- The Gateway concept and IH-35
- Historic preservation and building reuse
- The institutional structure of the city

WHAT IS LAREDO?

- Laredo is a city of in excess of 80,000 people located in Webb County, Texas on the United States - Mexican border.
- Laredo is a junction of one interstate, three United States, and one state highway.
- Laredo is the closest and most convenient U.S. point for access to the principal cities of the Mexican interior and, conversely, the closest and most convenient U.S. point for the Mexican citizens of those areas to trade in the United States.
- Laredo was founded in 1755 and recalls its Spanish-Mexican heritage (86 percent of the population has an Hispanic surname), as well as the flavor of the old west, provided by Fort McIntosh, within the city's boundaries.
- Laredo is a major transportation center. It is served by three railway lines, 14 transcontinental truck companies, 5 bus companies and 3 scheduled air carriers. In 1976, 3.8 million vehicles and 11.4 million pedestrians crossed the U.S. border into Mexico at Laredo.
- Laredo has most of the qualities which have attracted U.S. industry to the "Sun-belt"; nevertheless, its unemployment rate is estimated at 14% and the problem worsens in winter months when migrant workers return to Laredo.



- Laredo demographical characteristics show the city to be younger, have a higher birthrate, and growing faster than the state and nation as a whole.
- Further, Laredo has an unacceptable housing picture:
 - the vacancy rate for rental units is 1/2%
 - the vacancy rate for single family dwellings is 1 1/2%
 - almost half (47%) of the city's housing is substandard
 - there is a waiting list for 672 units of low income housing totaling 1500
 - there is a waiting list for 423 units of Section 8 leased housing totaling 1100
 - the pressure for housing due to influx of oil and gas development personnel has increased housing difficulties.

THE TWIN CITIES

- Laredo is part of the metropolitan area including Nuevo Laredo, which has a 1975 estimated population of 200,000. Thus, the area comprising "Los Dos Laredos" has approximately 300,000 people.
- The economic bases of the two communities are dissimilar, but their economic relationships are symbiotic, i.e., one city must be healthy for the other to enjoy prosperity.
- Americans go to Nuevo Laredo for tourism and often use Laredo as a departure point; on the other hand, the citizens of Nuevo Laredo

come to Laredo mostly to trade.

A race track, scheduled to open in Nuevo Laredo within a year, will increase the numbers of Americans crossing the border. There may be insufficient U.S. Customs and Immigration facilities and lodging on either side of the border to accommodate these travelers and little planning has been done with regard to the impact they will cause.

Conversations by R/UDAT members and members of the Nuevo Laredo commercial groups indicate difficulties in Nuevo Laredo similar to those faced by Laredo - RE: Insufficient parking, a desire to close off major market streets, reduction of congestion by running a two-city bus loop and use of more U.S. Customs officials at peak times, and the need to expand the economy by increasing and diversifying the economic base.

ECONOMIC BASE

Laredo is a growing center for tourism, exporting, importing, transportation, and warehousing. The community's economic base includes the manufacturing of clothing, electronic goods, brick, and the production of petroleum, natural gas, and many other products. It is further a trade center for a large agricultural area. Several of the key economic indicators of the city are:

- o A significant portion of the estimated \$68 million tourist dollars generated within Webb County are captured within the city of Laredo.
- o Since 1973, import trade has increased by 69 percent while exporting of goods has increased by 88 percent.
- o Between 1973 and 1977, local bank deposits have increased by 102% while assets held by local savings and loan associations have increased by 185% during the same period.
- o The value of building permits between 1973 and 1977 increased by 97%.

RETAIL SALES

Until recently, most of Laredo's retail sales occurred in the central business district (CBD), but some of the business has shifted to the nearby River Drive Mall (1978) and the Mall del Norte (1977). Accordingly, an issue is raised as the effect of additional malls on the economic health of the city in a pattern to other central business districts which have lost trade to new outlying malls.

Retail sales in Laredo have increased 90% from 1973 to 1977.

The devaluation of the peso in 1976 (from 12.5 to between 20-25 to the dollar) caused a recession in Laredo and the loss of between 750-800 jobs and reduction in hours of 3,000 members of the 6100 member retail sales force. This has led to an issue whether the city's economy should be so dependent on one industry.

One percent of the five percent state sales tax is rebated to the city. In 1977, this amounted to over 3.77 million dollars.

Relatively small number of owners hold the downtown area; yet this area produced 311 million dollars in retail sales in 1976, the highest per capita value of any city in the nation. This area pays about 60% of the tax revenue of the city (e.g. property taxes, sales taxes, bridge revenues, and parking meters). Some landowners are absentee and there is a perception by much of the citizenry that the downtown area has taken much from the city but has given back little. There is no CBD Merchants Association.

In addition, the medical and dental facilities of the city are used much by Mexican citizens.

STREETS OF GOLD

The "Streets of Laredo" are not made of gold, nor in many instances of asphalt, but in many areas are made of dirt and mud. The proportion of unpaved streets (60%) is one of the highest in the country. It would cost 22 million dollars to bring the roads in the city up to an acceptable construction standard. The city's total annual budget, however, is 11 million dollars.

The reason for this neglect of capital improvements is often given as the previous city administration which was replaced in April, 1978. The new city administration is faced with a downtown area which has brought the city most of its revenues, but is now facing decline while the city is attempting to respond to the needs of neighborhoods for basic city services. In addition, the Laredo Air Force Base, closed in 1973 brought 30 million dollars into the city's economy.

The city also faces a loss of CBD business to newer shopping malls. The CBD still services most of the auto traffic, but some auto traffic is now going to the other malls and the increasing mobility of Mexicans raises the prospect that they may by-pass Laredo altogether. The fears of such loss have caused concerns among CBD merchants and demands for city action at the same time that the city residents are demanding increased services.

R/UDAT was told that Laredo has been "planned to death". The wealth of plans and studies of Laredo confirms this statement. The city 1964 Comprehensive Plan has gone the way of other

plans, gathering dust on a shelf and nothing more, and the city does not have a zoning ordinance to protect the investments of its merchants and residents.

In addition to paving, the city faces several other pressing community development problems.

- The city's 1970 census shows that 54.6% of its occupied housing stock is twenty years old or older, compared to 38.4% in Texas as a whole.
- Suburban commercial development such as the Mall del Norte is having a negative impact on the revenues of the Laredo Independent School District which serves the vast majority of Laredo children.
- Laredo will have reached its water rights capacity by 1985 and has no assured source of additional water for new growth.
- The Laredo sewage treatment plant is almost at capacity and like the water facilities, is under the jurisdiction of an independent agency which is not coordinated with the city decisions for growth management.
- On the other hand, Laredo has a number of assets, with which to meet these problems:
 - Property taxes in Laredo are low, even for Texas;
 - The city can make use of extensive urban development powers;
 - The city's bonding capacity is virtually unused (only 4 million dollars of 26 million dollars is currently outstanding).

SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES

- 1.) Increase Laredo's Economic Base
- 2.) Expansion of the City's Tax Base
- 3.) Enhancement of Physical Environment
- 4.) Rehabilitation and Preservation of the Barrios
- 5.) Exploitation of the Environmental, Recreational, and Economic Potential Offered by Laredo's Location on the Rio Grande and its Proximity to Mexico
- 6.) Creation of a Public-Private Partnership to Undertake Development Projects
- 7.) Increase Pride and Identity in the City

TRAFFIC & PARKING ISSUES

A tourism study several years ago in Laredo pointed out that 56% of the people responding mentioned traffic congestion as the most serious problem in the downtown area. Various people providing input to this study have indicated severe parking problems. Others have stated that the bridges and trucks are the problem. Some have speculated that the new I-35 connection and customs facilities will materially help, while others are worried about the detrimental impacts of these facilities.

While Laredo's problems are somewhat unique because of the international border crossings, its traffic and parking problems are not totally unlike those in many other cities. They are problems which have been addressed and successfully dealt with through a variety of traffic engineering and sound planning measures, plus an appropriate amount of public works dollars and implementation efforts.

Specifically, the problems which have been cited in Laredo - other than those connected with the bridges - include:

- Congestion caused by narrow streets.
- Competition between vehicles and pedestrians for the minimal street space available.
- Some confusion with the one-way traffic patterns, particularly where streets change to and from one-way.

- Traffic signal timing problems.
- Trucks moving between the international bridge-head and the warehouse areas.
- Railroad crossing congestion east of the central business district.
- Parking supply and location deficiencies.
- Overuse of local streets adjacent to the CBD by downtown-oriented traffic.
- Desire for more transit usage.
- Growing need for more capacity at the two inter-city bus depots.
- Illegal van-type buses congregating near the bridge-head.

There is some scarcity of sound or consistent data - of parking supply and demand data, for instance - but nevertheless some analysis has been made as follows:

Important streets leading to the downtown and their relative volumes are shown in Figure 1. While there are other streets being used, these other streets only carry enough traffic to harm the various neighborhoods adjacent to the CBD without contributing materially to CBD accessibility.

Figure 2 shows relative traffic volumes on streets actually in the central area. Despite comments on congestion, some street volumes are quite low. In general, the street system seems to be carrying traffic at or just slightly below its capacity.

The results of a parking occupancy check (conducted between 11:00 a.m. and noon on Saturday, December 2,

1978) and the general arrangement of retail land use, is shown in Figure 3. The illustration portrays about 2,500 cars parked, with the total space available seeming to be about 60% occupied. This would then calculate to a number of approximately 3,500 spaces as being representative of the available close-in (within 400 feet of actual destination) space. Recognizing how many people walk to stores in Laredo, usual parking ratios of 4 to 5 spaces per thousand square feet might be reduced in this downtown to 2 spaces per thousand. If one assumes 2½ million square feet of retail, this would seem to indicate a demand of approximately 5,000 spaces - or a shortage of 1,500 spaces or so. (There clearly needs to be a more precise analysis of parking supply and demand in downtown Laredo.)

Based on all of the above, plus recognition of the the elements of the plan, the street system shown in Figure 4 is suggested. The role of each of the streets indicated is as follows:

- Washington - westbound arterial across the north edge of downtown.
- Victoria - eastbound arterial across the north edge of downtown.
- Houston - presently heavily used as access from the east; will grow due to cutting off Iturbide by the new U. S. Customs plaza.
- Matamoros - eastbound companion to Houston.
- Farragut - last exit to downtown from southbound I-35 before new bridge; similarly first exit for northbound traffic from new bridge.
- Hidalgo - companion to Farragut.

Lincoln - little traffic use; not important.

Iturbide - under revised street system, becomes first westbound route available for northbound traffic from old bridge.

Grant - first eastbound route available for northbound traffic from old bridge.

Zaragoza - redesigned to function as pedestrian facility with service replaced by Water Street and cloverleaf loops.

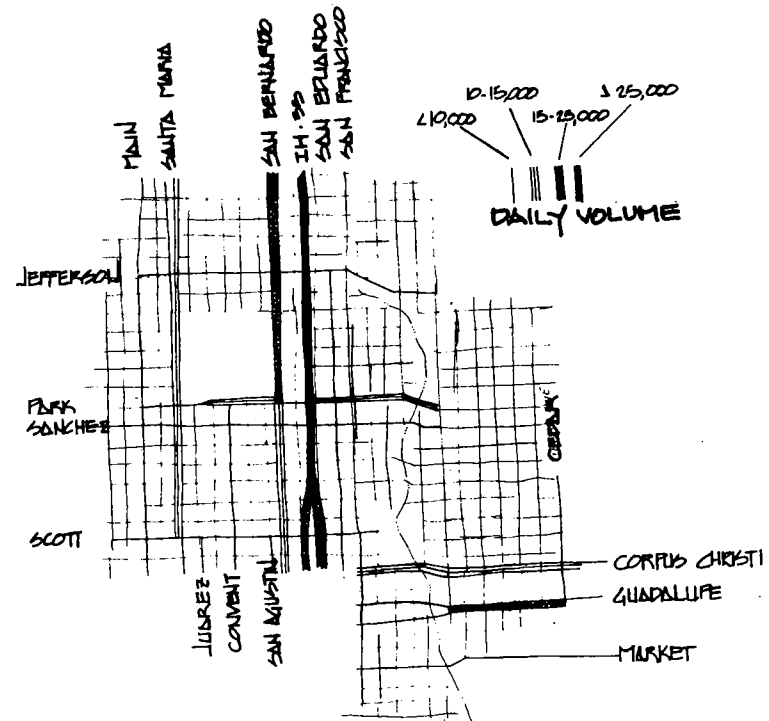


FIG. 1, C.B.D. APPROACH STREETS

New river route - access to river development,
possible interim use by trucks.

Santa Maria - heavy arterial north of CBD.

Juarez - lightly used but important as a recir-
culator.

Salinas - southbound access to old bridge.

Convent - northbound discharge from old bridge.

Flores - secondary southbound access to old bridge.

Saint Augustin - northbound companion to Flores.

San Bernardo - heavy arterial north of CBD.

Santa Ursula - southbound frontage road and
southbound I-35.

San Dario - northbound I-35 and northbound frontage
road.

Several other aspects are indicated on Figure 4.
Where traffic directions have been changed from existing
conditions these are noted. Also, the desirability
of sealing off adjacent neighborhoods from the intru-
sion of downtown traffic is symbiotically suggested.
Finally, important pedestrian improvements such as the
reuse of Zaragoza and the narrowing of Convent from
four lanes to three lanes or from two wide lanes to
two somewhat narrower lanes is also indicated. The
accompanying photo suggests the importance of more
sidewalk space along Convent.

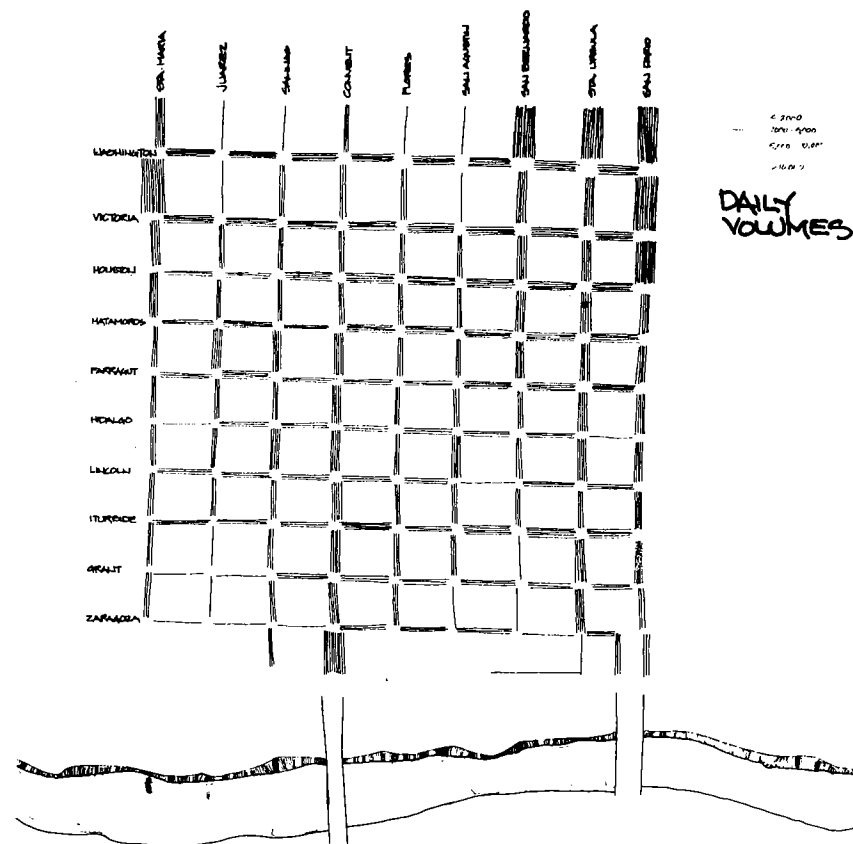


FIGURE 2. CBD TRAFFIC FLOW

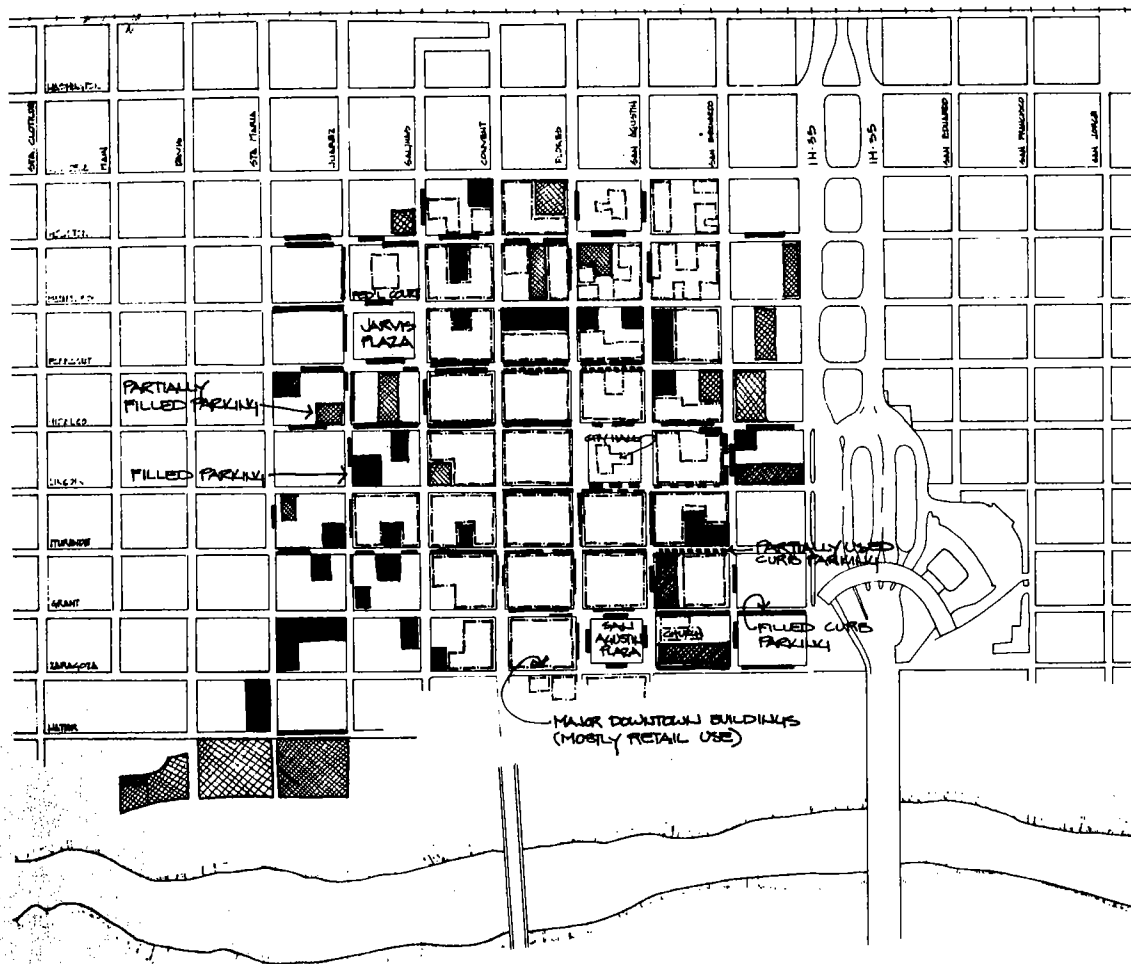


FIG. 3, INTENSITY OF PARKING

Special mention should be made of truck movements between the warehouse areas northwest of the CBD and I-35. Two streets - possibly Scott and Jefferson - should be widened to provide an efficient east-west link between these areas of truck concentration and the Interstate highway. Ultimately a river by-pass might be desirable but in any event such east-west improvements should still be made to properly channel the trucks to I-35.

Parking suggestions include the creation of five block-square parking ramps located as shown in Figure 4. Each of these structures would be three stories high and would contain approximately 400 spaces. The ground floor might be used for retail so as to minimize "dead frontage." These five facilities need to be located sufficiently close (400 feet or so) to core area retail as to be acceptable to shoppers. Possible financing and rate structure for these facilities is

discussed elsewhere. Also regarding parking, some on-street parking needs to be removed to allow more street area to be devoted to pedestrians. Finally, parking turn-over at curbs needs to be increased by ticketing for overtime parking as well as for meter violations.

Three suggestions are made regarding transit:

The possibility of a consolidated transportation center near I-35 for inter-city buses should be explored.

A possible central terminal for city transit vehicles should be considered (this is apparently about to be studied by the transit operator).

The operation of the "Super Looper" buses should be closely watched in that there is considerable question about the usefulness of such shuttle transit in downtown areas.



COLVEST STREET

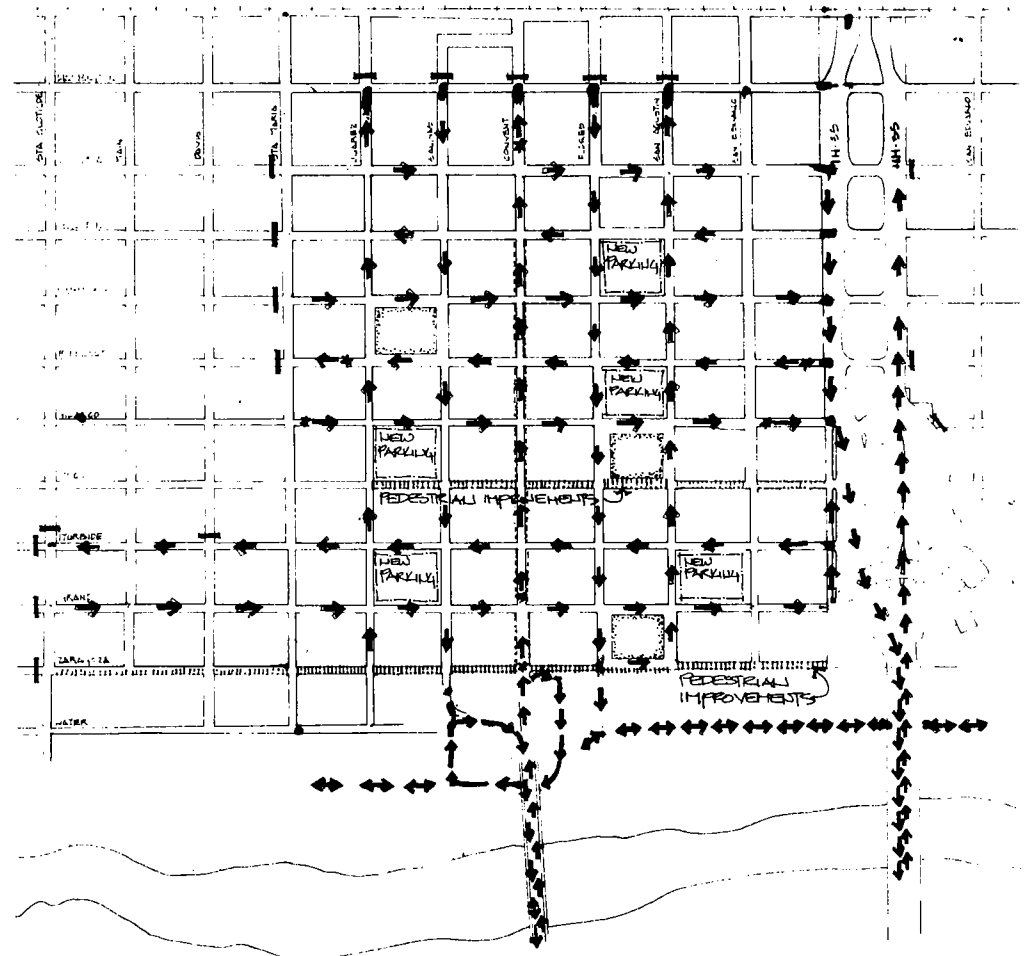


FIG. 4, SUGGESTED STREET AND PARKING PLAN

BRIDGE ISSUES & SUGGESTIONS

Issues range from not enough Customs people to the need for a third bridge (with several alternate locations for such a facility being mentioned). Characterization of daily bridge flows is shown in Figure 5, while Figure 6 (although containing some highly speculative numbers) indicates some of the international characteristics of annual travel across the river.

Specific problems include:

- Inadequate number of Customs lanes or operators.
- Mixing of high volume of pedestrians, autos and trucks on the old bridge.
- Hours of operation on the new bridge.
- Hours of operation of Mexican Customs.
- Insufficient truck storage area.
- General growth in both auto and truck traffic.
- Growth specifically due to the new race track.
- Better access and operation at both U. S. and Mexican bridge heads.
- Re-routing of certain components of the traffic stream from the old bridge to more fully utilize the new bridge.

In addition to the above list of specific problems, there is a need for a complete and systematic analysis of operations of both bridges, on both sides of the river. One gets a distinct impression of the expedient, add-on nature of improvements to existing operations. Because of the extremely complex and multi-jurisdictional operations, it is understandable that operators (Laredo Bridge Authority, U. S. Customs, U. S. General Services Administration, Mexican Customs, and Mexican bridge operators) need

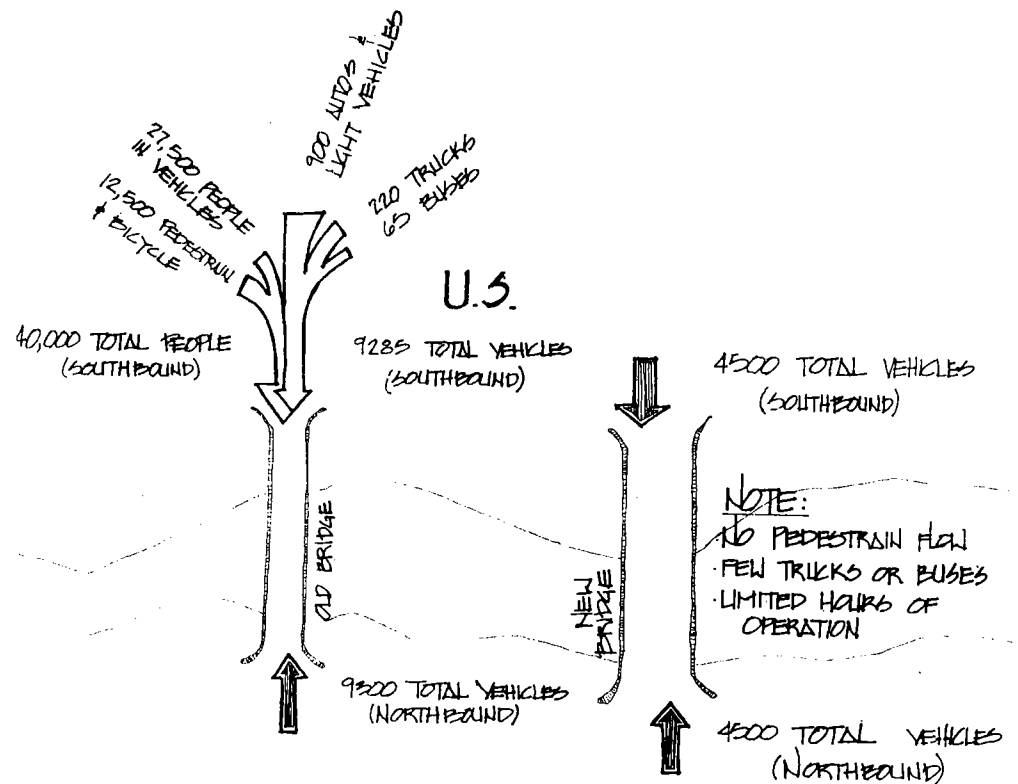
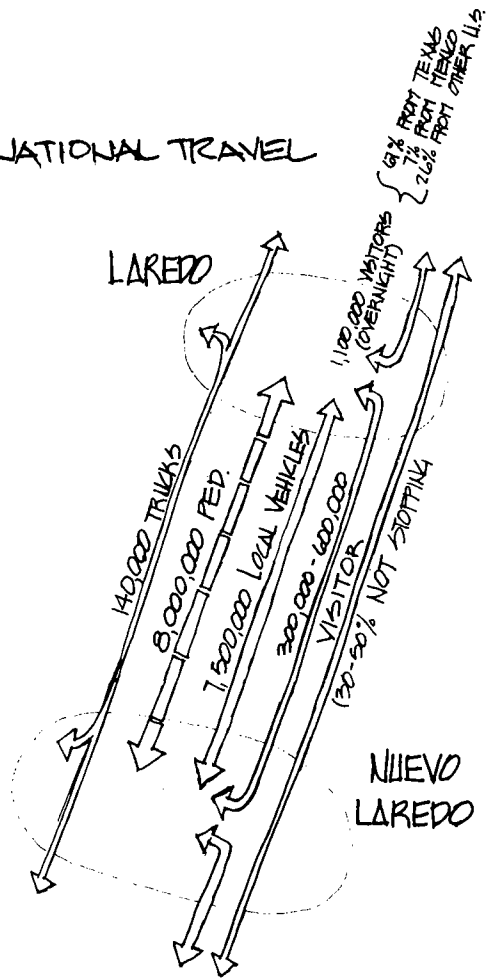


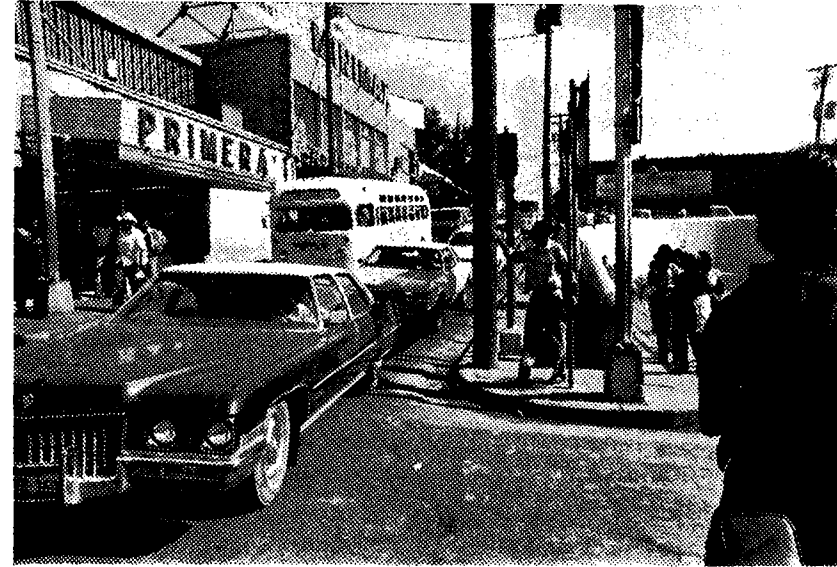
FIG. 5, DAILY BRIDGE TRAFFIC

FIG. 6 INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL



to have the benefit of a fresh objective and systematic review of problems and possible solutions. With that caveat in mind, recommendations are nevertheless made as follows:

The need for a third bridge needs consideration. A likely candidate for such a third bridge might be a truck-only bridge, immediately east of the railroad bridge. To this end, as piggy-back service grows in the U. S. (presently doing so at a rate of about 10% a year), it may be that more cargo will move between the U. S. and Mexico in the same fashion, thus relieving the truck burden from the road system.



ZARAGOZA STREET

As soon as the new U. S. Customs facilities and the I-35 connection are complete, all trucks and buses should be relocated to the new bridge. Even in advance of this, empty trucks might be so relocated.

The new bridge should be revised immediately so as to allow three lanes through customs, and pressure should be exerted to obtain more customs officers to man both bridges. (The direct relationship between downtown Laredo's financial well-being and smoother border crossings cannot be overstated!)

Bridge-head street organization (at the old bridge) should be revised as shown on the circulation plan. As indicated in the accompanying photo, the traffic operations in the vicinity of Zaragoza and Convent leave much to be desired. Key elements of the recommendations are a clover-leaf type operation via new roadways, one-way northbound operation of Convent, and a pedestrian underpass as indicated.

DOWNTOWN STRATEGIES

A downtown revitalization plan is not "designed" or "created"; it is worked out, calculated, negotiated and financed. There is a common misunderstanding that downtown planning is exclusively a design art, a piece of visual creativity, and a project generated solely from aesthetic skill.

But a "downtown area" is a complex system of parking spaces, streets, land uses, buildings, loading facilities, pedestrian areas, utilities, that elusive quality of ambiance. Each factor must be addressed as part of the planning process. Moreover, "downtown" is a state of opinions, attitudes, investments, cash flows, competitions, precedents, initiatives and simple politics. There are no quick, simple, or magic solutions; there are no rabbits to pull out of hats; there are no "free" handouts (Federal, State or City) to resolve all the problems of revitalizing the downtown area.

The preparation of a comprehensive downtown development plan requires patience, initiative, public and private leadership, and money. Additionally, it requires a gradually-created singularity of purpose between the city government, local businesses, bankers, and property owners. To come to life, the plan must have community support and most likely joint public-private financing of the effort.

Any strategy for revitalizing downtown must include:

- Providing the assurance to those not immediately benefited by the plan (i.e. the residents of the various barrios) that they will

benefit in the long run and that the priority of the downtown area does not ignore their legitimate needs upon its implementation.

Preservation of the economic integrity of the city by prohibiting rival uses both in Laredo and Webb County, if those uses would sap the strength of the downtown area and prevent its recovery.

- A plan which includes the following components:

1. Street directions, improvements and maintenance;
2. Parking supply, location, charges (if any), operations and maintenance, additions to supply, assignments and priorities;
3. On and off street loading facilities, including movements, times, and maintenance of areas;
4. Improvements to buildings by additions, demolitions, remodeling and maintenance;
5. Pedestrian areas, routes, and facilities;
6. The streetscape, i.e., the special signing of building and streets, and street furniture;
7. Priority scheduling, costing, financing, and implementation of the above;
8. Formation of the strong, representative and united CBD merchants association, providing for organization, dues, and hiring of a full-time executive director;

8. Formation of the strong, representative and united CBD merchants association, providing for organization, dues, and hiring of a full-time executive director;
9. Using the CBD merchants association to provide assistance to its constituents - the businesses and property owners (e.g. tenant identification, store layouts, allocation of stores, financing assistance, etc.);
10. Agreement by city and merchants associations on CBD plans and adoption of a plan of financing, and getting the first project "off the ground";
11. Use of private incentives for reinvestment in downtown (tax relief, preferential property tax assessment for improved properties, low interest loans for remodeling and marketing improvements, etc.);
12. Possible use of a local assessment district as a means of financing high capital cost projects (e.g. parking structures) and charging benefited property owners;
13. Creating, scheduling, managing, and financing of downtown activities;
14. Day to day management of the downtown area (e.g. store hours, opening evenings, security, etc.)

All this seems to be a pretty tall order, but any large scale business demands this attention to detail. A shopping center is a carefully designed machine for efficient service delivery and maximum profits and utilizes all available technology for promotion, marketing, management, and financing that machine. The needs of Laredo are unique, but those interested in its revitalization know that the downtown is generally subject to the same market forces which make or break any large commercial retail operation, whether downtown areas or malls.

MARKET EVALUATION

While the team recognizes that the Laredo downtown business district has several positive characteristics and should remain a vibrant "people-oriented" environment for the city and region, the area has suffered in recent years, both physically and functionally, to a point where affirmative private and public actions are necessary to restore the economic potentials of the area. Accordingly, this section of the report will describe the existing and potential market environment and may serve as background material to justify establishing a physical improvement and development plan for this vital part of the city. Given the abbreviated time frame for this planning initiative, we have principally evaluated the retail and tourist or visitor market segments.

Retail Trade Characteristics

Retail trade in the City of Laredo, and specifically in the downtown study area, is unique for cities of comparable size in the United States. The symbiotic interdependencies which exist between Laredo and its Mexican neighbor provides a significant market base upon which to capitalize. To understand better the market area parameters, we have evaluated existing retail sales data, surveyed 30 retail merchants in the downtown study area and at the Mall del Norte, and prepared a comprehensive inventory of retail establishments in the downtown.

According to retail statistics prepared by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, retail sales in Laredo during the period 1971 to 1977, have increased by 102 percent, from \$200 to \$405 million by 1977. The total estimated retail sales figures for 1978 will be \$470 million. Except for the initial negative impact resulting from the peso devaluation between the fourth quarter of 1976 and the second quarter of 1977, the retail sales generated in Laredo have far exceeded cities of comparable size and socio-economic characteristics throughout the nation. An important element which is not truly reflected in the statistics provided by the state, is the substantial importing of retail expenditures from Mexico. While the U.S. dollar and the Mexican peso exchange rates have remained reasonably stable, the consumer price index in Mexico greatly exceeds that found in the United States. Accordingly, retail goods which are sold in Laredo have become more attractive to the Mexican consumer.

Recognizing the opportunities to capitalize upon an extensive market base in recent years, several major suburban shopping centers have been built along Interstate 35. Most notable of these facilities is the Mall del Norte which includes approximately 685,000 square feet of retail selling area with parking for 4,500 cars (more than the total parking inventory of the downtown). Market orientation for this major facility is estimated at 50 percent from Mexico. It can be anticipated that unless a well coordinated revitalization plan is effectuated in the downtown, suburban retail competition is likely to capture an increasing share of trade area dollars.

DOWNTOWN LAREDO RETAILING

Downtown Laredo is similar to many older business districts throughout the country that have been adversely affected by the more mobile society that has turned increasingly to the new shopping centers developed in recent years. Community and regional shopping centers are capturing a greater share of the local resident's expenditures for comparison shopping items. The availability of ample parking and the wide variety of retail establishments have combined to create potentially serious future problems for shopping and business districts such as downtown Laredo.

Retail Mix - To better understand the distribution and relationships of retail uses in the downtown area, the R/UDAT team categorized the retail establishments in the 10-square-block study area by major retail categories. As shown by the data in Table I, the mix of uses has been grouped into general establishment categories. The first five categories are considered "comparison" retail establishments, or stores involving discretionary shopping regarding price, selection, and quality. The next category includes restaurants and bars. The next five categories include "convenience" retail establishments. Lastly, the entertainment category includes only one movie theater.

It should be understood that the percentage distribution shown in Table I identifies the number of establishments in each category but does not indicate the gross space distribution or volume of trade. In terms of total leaseable retail space, the R/UDAT team estimates that there is approximately 2.7 to 3 million square feet of occupied space in the downtown study area.

TABLE I

DOWNTOWN RETAIL MIX OF USES

Establishment Type Percent
Distribution

COMPARISON GOODS

General Merchandise	13.3%
Apparel	30.8
Furniture and Home Furnishings	1.7
Appliance, Television, and Radio	8.6
Miscellaneous Retail	
Novelty/Gift	15.4
Jewelry	5.4
Sporting Goods	2.1
Fabric Shops	2.4
Florist	.4

Total Miscellaneous Retail 25.7

TOTAL COMPARISON GOODS 80.1%

RESTAURANTS

Fast Food	3.4
Sit Down	6.5
Bars	2.1
Total Restaurants	12.0

CONVENIENCE GOODS

Food Markets	3.1
Drug and Proprietary	2.1
Building Materials, Hardware, and Garden Supplies	1.0

Liquor	.7
Auto Supplies	.7

TOTAL CONVENIENCE GOODS 7.5

ENTERTAINMENT	.4
TOTAL ALL CATEGORIES	<u>100.0%</u>

* Including River Drive Mall

TOURISM

Tourism is one of the major components of the Laredo economy. The greatest attraction in Laredo is Nuevo Laredo, a place where Americans can sample the excitement and color of Mexico close to their own country. Frequently, Americans will stay in Laredo and make trips across the border.

Nuevo Laredo is scheduled to open a multi-million dollar horse and dog racing track by January, 1980. In addition, the Mexican National Fund for the Development of Tourism has offered a \$23 million dollar loan to the entrepreneurs for the construction of exposition halls, a convention center, bars, restaurants, and nightclubs near the track.

Also, bull fighting is scheduled to return to Nuevo Laredo with the construction of a new Plaza de Toros. Investors are negotiating for land to build the new bull ring in the vicinity of the race track.

Laredo also attracts thousands of visitors in February with its week-long celebration of George Washington's Birthday. Laredo is the only American city to honor the first president in this manner. The festivities include a colonial ball, a noche mexicana, events honoring international celebrities, and a float parade.

Webb County, in which Laredo is located, is the natural habitat for the white-tail deer, javelina feral hogs, bobcats, dove, rabbits, bass and catfish. This variety of wildlife brings thousands of hunters and fishermen into the region each year.

At present, the Laredo Hotel-Motel tax of 3% is imposed in Laredo and yielded 200,000 dollars in 1977, a figure already exceeded in 1978.

These funds are used for promotion of tourism for the area. An indication of the growth in the tourist sector is seen by the 360% increase in this tax since 1972, assisted also by a recent increase in the tax rate to 4%. While the magnitude of the tourist-visitor flow is significant, the market capture and ultimate retention for longer stays in the city is less than desirable.

A 1975 tourist survey indicated that only 47% of the tourists passing through the border point at Laredo spent one or more nights lodging in the city. In fact, the average length of stay in Laredo is 1.3 days, a figure the city has been attempting to increase, due to the amount of tourist dollars that can be generated by longer stays.

A primary economic development objective of this planning initiative is to provide the city with a direction upon which to maximize the economic potentials of this important local industry. Increased competition for travel dollars necessitates the addition of travel related facilities, attractions and events which will enable Laredo to function more as a "destination" city.

MARKETING & MANAGEMENT

The hiring of a competent full-time CBD merchants association director and the strength of the association itself are absolutely necessary for the survival of the downtown area. For both have a marketing and management function which characterize similar operations elsewhere, such as:

1. Advising tenants on building rehabilitation financing, marketing, etc. and general problem solving on specific issues including public and private projects and downtown area issues;
2. Coordination with the city and tenants on development activities and general operations (e.g. parking, traffic, signs, garbage collection, assessment and taxation policies, police and fire services, public improvements and the like).
3. Acting as a central channel of information and communication along all interested parties responding to all inquiries regarding downtown (e.g. from citizens, businesses, developers, investors, potential leases, and vacant store owners);

4. Promotion of downtown activities and events.

This function cannot be performed by a city planner nor by the Chamber of Commerce Director for their respective responsibilities extend further than the downtown. What is required is a specific organization created solely for the downtown and staffed by a full-time development or operations coordinator. If Laredo is serious about revitalizing its downtown, such a commitment must be made. The annual \$40,000 to \$60,000 expense to operate such an organization is a small price to pay for that multi-million dollar capital investment and major tax generator called downtown Laredo.

STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

The following comments reflect the R/UDAT team's perceptions of retail activity in downtown Laredo.

Strengths- Business Productivity-Sales data provided by merchants indicate that overall annual retail sales exceed \$100 per square foot with many businesses generating in excess of \$250 per square foot. These figures are considerably higher than revenues generated in most downtown business districts.

- Mix of Uses-Aside from the previously noted deficiencies in the restaurant and entertainment categories which would attract both local residents and tourists, the downtown currently has a reasonably healthy mix of stores.
- Low Vacancy Rate-Vacancies in the downtown represent less than 5 percent of the total retail stock. This is a healthy sign, but could change with the increased competition of suburban malls.
- Business Longevity-The majority of retailers surveyed indicate that they have been in business for more than ten years. Established patronage and personalized service is a by-product of this situation.

- Mexican Market Support-As previously indicated, the Mexican retail and wholesale markets are extensive. However, the dependency upon this foreign market could become dangerous if further monetary imbalance occurs between the two nations.

Weaknesses-Deterioration of Properties-Many property owners have not improved their real estate. Accordingly, a number of properties have fallen into physical decay.

- Parking Problem-Whether real or perceived, parking is an important problem which needs to be remedied.
- Inability to Capture the Domestic Tourist Trade-Responsive to the concentration of Mexican specialty retail goods and the "conventional" retail nature of downtown businesses, the area is not adequately penetrating the domestic tourist market.
- High Rent Structure-Rents exceed those found in the suburban malls. Downtown properties typically rent from \$7-\$9 per square foot.
- Lack of Evening Activities - The area is void of evening activities which would attract people into the heart of the city.

As shown by the data in Table I, in the downtown, comparison goods represent approximately 80 percent of the total stores. As further indicated in the table, two major retail uses in the downtown are apparel and novelty and gift stores.

Based upon our inspection of properties and the retail mix evaluation, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The downtown is "anchored" by several viable department and junior department stores.
- 30 percent of retail uses are in the gift or novelty and women's apparel categories.
- There is a lack of quality, sit down restaurants.
- Entertainment functions and attractions are seriously lacking.

DOWNTOWN MARKET PARAMETERS

Interviews with selected merchants and property owners provided the basis for identifying the downtown market segments. Generally, approximately 60% of downtown retail trade is derived from Mexico with the residual 40% coming primarily from Laredo residents with tourists accounting for less than 10% of this residual market.

The Mexican market is further segmented into three sub-markets, namely:

- Wholesale Buyers (Chiveras)-who are purchasing multiple retail items for distribution within Mexico.
- Single Purpose Shoppers-who are buying primarily for their own use.
- High Priced Specialty Retail Purchasers-who will travel from Mexico City or other areas of the country for specialty retail items.

Our discussions with local merchants further reveal that approximately 40 percent of the Mexican retail trade in the downtown is devoted to wholesale activity, with an additional 40 percent accounted for by single purpose buyers, and the remaining 20 percent by high priced specialty retail purchasers. With regard to the local American market, it is evident that the suburban shopping centers are slowly eroding into what should be a primary market for the downtown.

RETAIL POTENTIALS

While it is difficult to quantify with any degree of precision the market demand for specific uses, the opportunity for additional retail expansion in Laredo's downtown will be guided by two alternative conditions within the area. These conditions generally express levels of public and private actions which can affect future demand for retail uses in the study area. The general conditions are as follows:

Condition 1: The downtown area remains in basically a status quo condition without physical alterations to the streetscape, traffic patterns, parking or provision for other significant improvements that would be required to make the study area both attractive and convenient to patrons.

If a comprehensive revitalization or community action plan is not established, the likely increase in competition within the U.S. and Mexican market areas over the next five to ten years will continue to absorb an increasing share of the study's retail trade. Similarly, further deterioration of the physical appearance of the area will likely continue.

Condition 2: This alternative condition represents a general physical improvement to the study area and the implementation of a community action plan oriented to capitalizing on existing and potential assets. It is assumed that, under this condition, programs will be implemented to create "activity generating" facilities and attractive public areas to induce extended lengths of stay in the area by both local residents, Mexicans, and tourists. Condition 2 represents actions in the study area which will make the area both convenient and attractive for shoppers and thus maximize retail patronage.

Assuming condition 2 is effectuated, downtown merchants can expect increased business productivity with the addition of complimentary and compatible new retail and restaurant uses in vacant stores. This finding is predicated upon the city establishing a policy to limit future suburban shopping center development and re-direct the focus of retailing to the downtown.

CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT

Striving for a continued viability of the downtown district is a major concern to the study team as well as it should be to the citizens of Laredo and visitors of the downtown district.

A decaying downtown is one of the most expensive and demoralizing factors a city can face; not only does the merchant suffer tremendously but the erosion of a tax base places a burden on every citizen of the community.

One objective which became apparent from our study was to preserve the downtown and to achieve a greater base of usability of that area for future generations. The addition of new uses to diversify and extend the hours of downtown activity has been of major consideration.

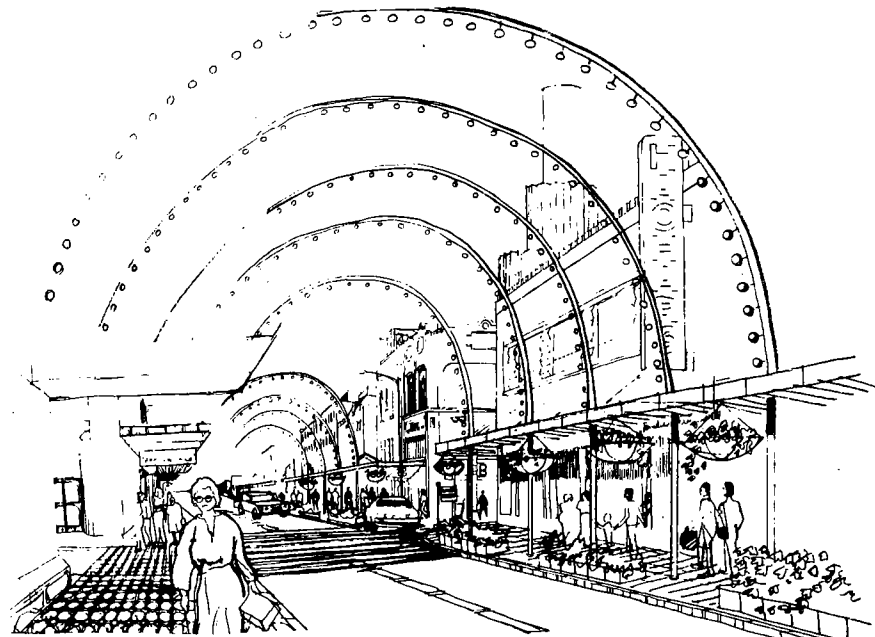
We have made suggestions in each area of concern: Firstly, consideration as to the existing buildings and users. Traffic has received great study in order to solve the future problems to be created by the completion of IH-35 and full use of the second bridge. The circulation within the existing traffic patterns has been revised to serve the existing commercial uses more adequately and to expedite traffic in this area in the future.

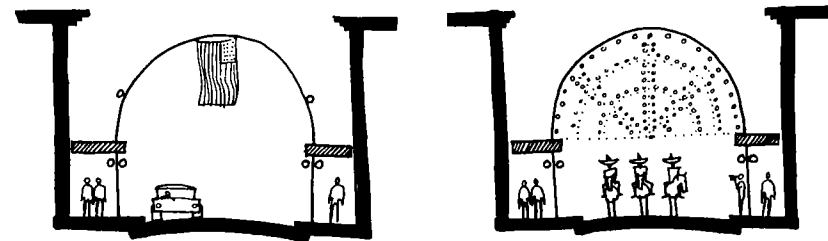
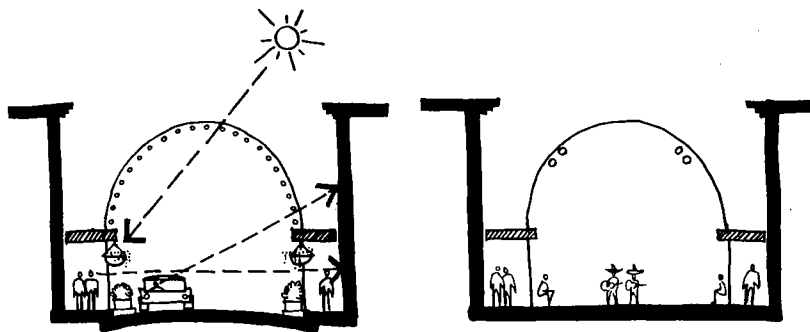
Parking has been expanded to serve present automotive needs as well as future anticipated uses more adequately. All possible efforts should be made to acquire additional properties for surface parking as well as future parking structures as needs require. The future of CBD retail is linked

to the ability to provide adjacent parking which is presently provided by all enclosed shopping malls.

The pedestrian has been provided not only with better access to stores and offices, but also with stimulation of the shopping experience by new pedestrian "Paseos" or walks to generate more buying traffic and civic events. Most parking areas which have been designated for the convenience of the shopper serve the downtown employer and employees as well.

New concepts have been designated to provide further uses of downtown spaces: a "Mercado" area that will attract the outsider as well as the local resident, and a river view which has been retained for the use of the visitor as well as the local shopper, who may well use the area both during the normal working day and on Sundays, and days of celebration. "Paseo Zaragoza" will be a walking experience not only for the patrons of the Mall but for hotels along the





paseo. At the opposite end, adjacent to IH-35, would be the proposed civic center, which may well function as a government mall in the future. *This area provides a direct tie to the CBD and San Augustin Plaza both for day and night-time functions.

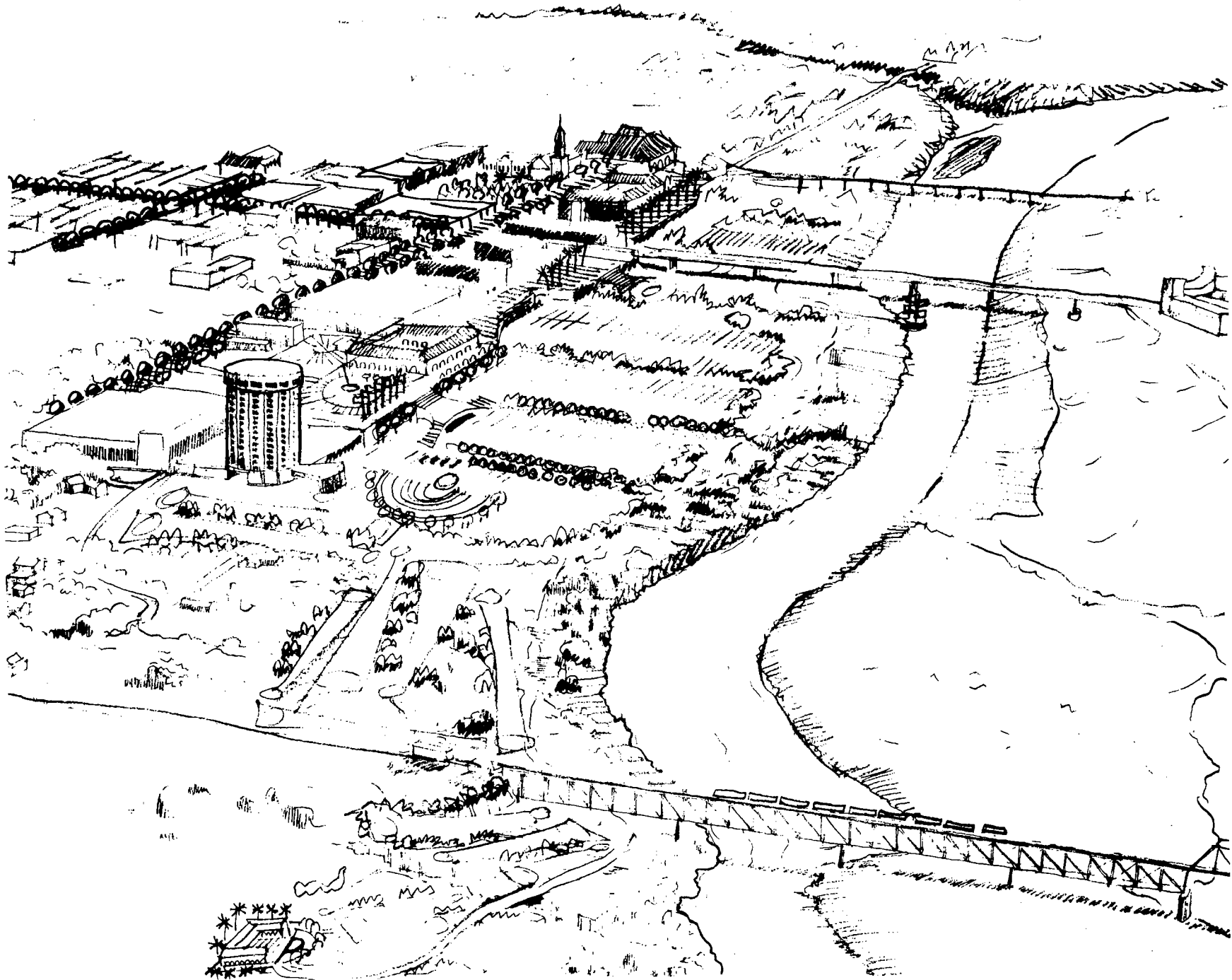
Materials such as floor tiles, planting areas, benches, landscaping should all be considered for their aesthetic quality, durability, and ease of maintenance. Local manpower should be considered in the application of these materials.

A strong design feature, such as the arch, should link the existing buildings allowing owner individuality, yet creating consistency of design.

We propose a new bus terminal location for the convenience of the travelers as well as improving the circulation of traffic.

It is with these adjustments and additions that the study may extend and accelerate the number of users of the downtown central business district.

* The existing civic center complex is viewed as playing a continuing and developing role in the educational system, to be used for academic functions such as graduations, and perhaps as the hub of a sports activity centering on the Border Olympics.



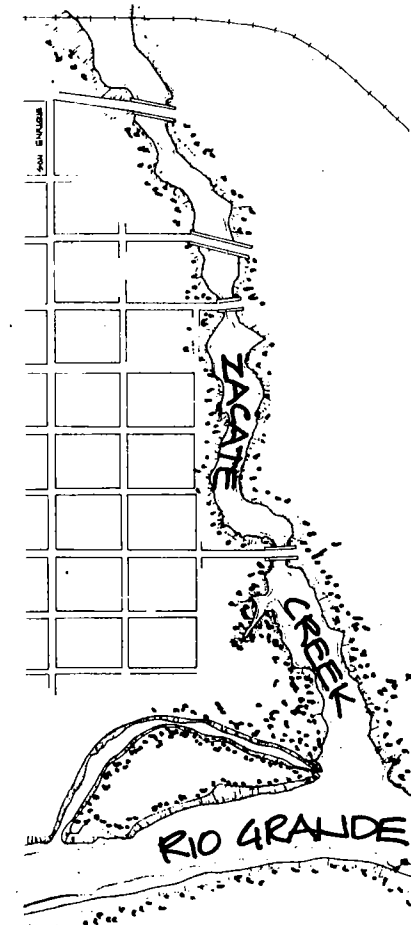
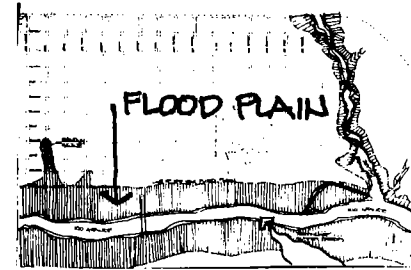
RIVERFRONT

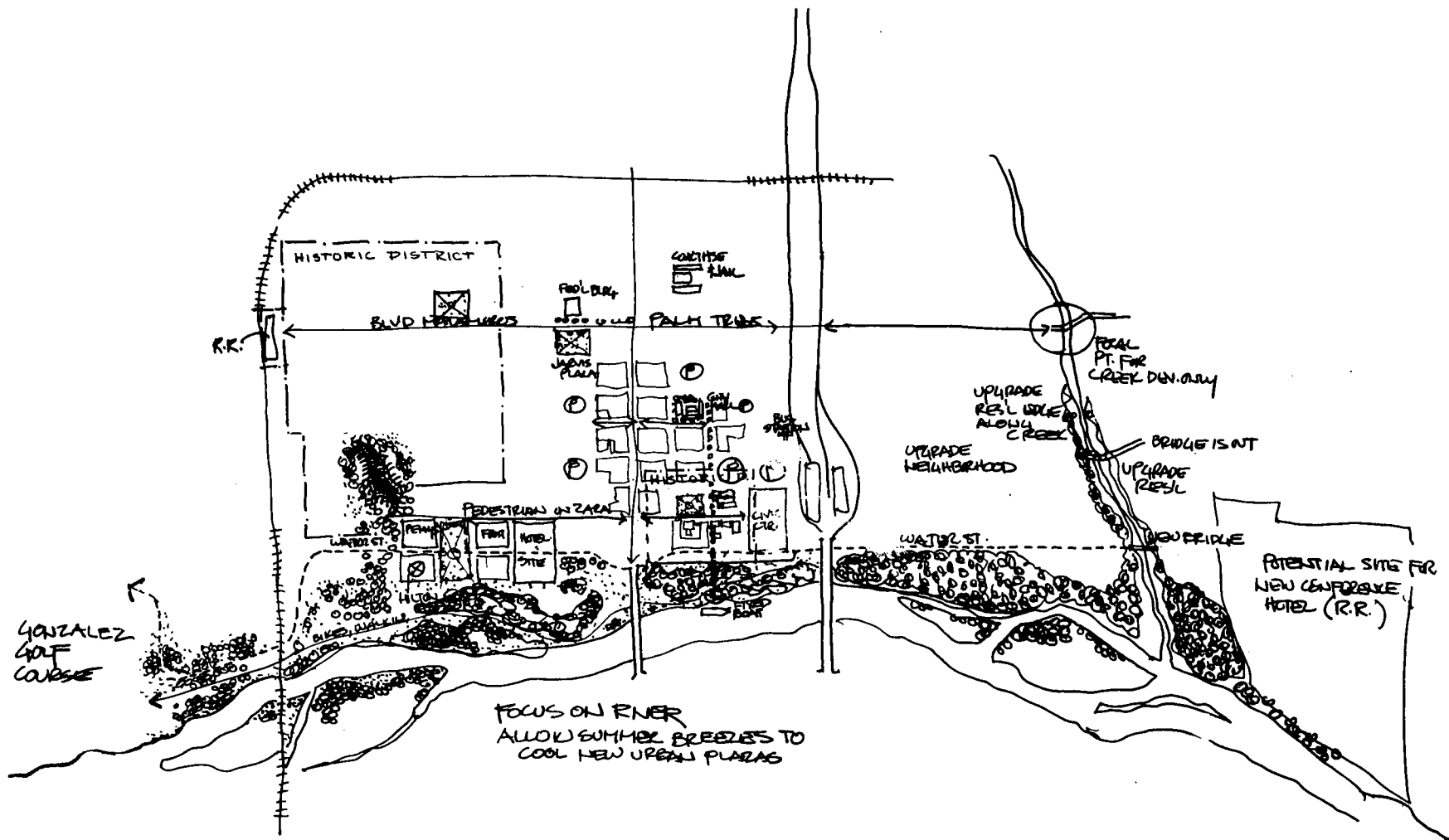
OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS

The overall framework of the riverfront development lies in re-establishing the Rio Grande as an integral part of the city. Open space connections to the downtown and adjacent barrios would allow city access to a large untapped river park system. Furthermore, it would greatly improve the city's visual image and identity and embellish Laredo's great asset: The Rio Grande. The park system's edge would respond to its surroundings, varying from Zacate Creek's passive appearance to downtown's more formal frontage. The proposal also allows future connections for the areas east of Zacate Creek and those west of the railroad bridge.

THE CREEK

The Zacate Creek offers a great potential for a passive open space connection inland from the Rio Grande. Adjacent uses should reinforce this goal and be primarily residential. The one exception is at Washington and Matamoros streets, where a small scale commercial center including restaurants would give focus to the Zacate Paseo along the creek. The mouth of the creek and its islands should be strongly considered as a conservation area that might allow the extension of Water street, via a new bridge, access to the about-to-be-vacated railroad yards. The railroad yards position on the river and creek make it an ideal location for quality housing.





OPEN SPACE SYSTEM.



SAN AUGUSTIN AND PASEO DEL MERCADO

We propose a market promenade parallel to the Paseo Zaragoza, that would directly overlook the river-front and adjoin the La Posada Hotel and the adjoining historic district. One focal point of the two pedestrian ways would be the new Civic Center, located adjacent to the IH 35. The downtown center would be adjacent to the San Augustin Historic District, on the promenade, and enjoy good access and visibility from the highway. Most importantly, it gives identity to the downtown and helps create a larger market for restaurants, hotels, and special retail uses on the promenade. A possible connection, linking up the visitors center adjacent to San Augustin's Church by way of the Rio Grande Museum and promenade to the park, could culminate with a fixed restaurant boat in the Rio Grande, perhaps a Spanish galleon.

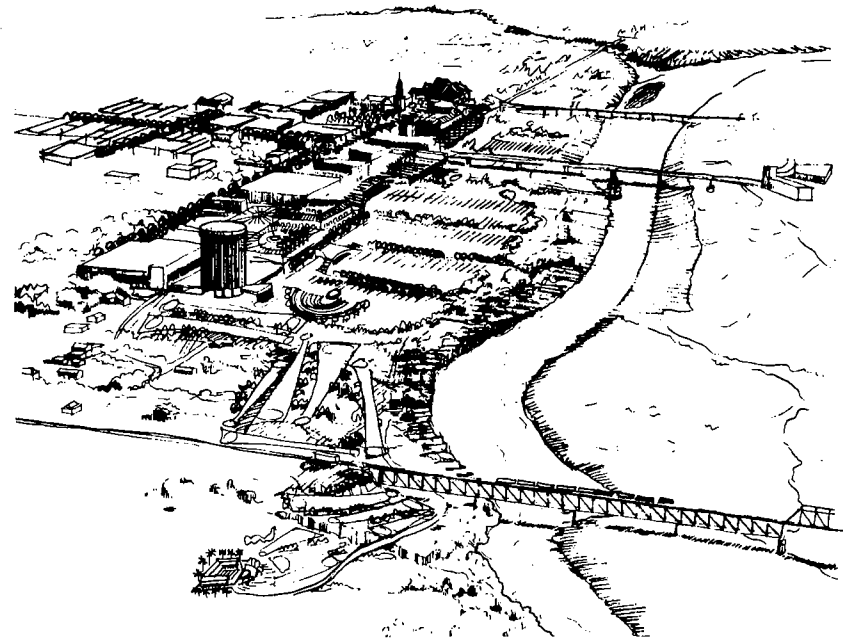
RIVERMALL/HILTON AREA

This broader section of the river's open space could accept a higher density of use on its banks. Furthermore, the newer development along Zaragoza and Water streets cannot alone make a civic attraction and an architectural statement strong enough for the Rio Grande. The R/UDAT believes there is the need to build 500 additional Class "A" hotel rooms to serve Americans who will come into the area because of the new race track in Mexico. The new rooms should be served by conference facilities and strategically

located relative to other activities in downtown .

The proposed site for the new hotel is between Bridge #1 and the River Drive Mall. This location not only reinforces the existing hotels and shopping uses, but also allows the creation of the Plaza del Rio, overlooking the river. The new hotel-conference center and plaza would be built out to Ventura street. Parking underneath the plaza and hotel would be served by Water Street. To the west of the Hilton, a natural open space line would connect the proposed historic district to the river.

In the future, Water street could be continued under the railroad bridge giving direct river front access to the College and Fort McIntosh. Equally important, the possibility of redeveloping the concrete and gravel yards could be realized sooner.



ZACATE CREEK

Zacate Creek has two aspects of importance to the downtown and adjacent barrios. It is unique in being the only natural greenway extending up through the city, linking the more northerly residential sections directly with the Rio Grande open space system. It has the potential along its length for a diverse natural environment which in addition to providing animal habitat could also accommodate paths for walking, jogging, and bicycling. In this respect it should be viewed as part of an overall conservation strategy presently lacking in Laredo. A Corps of Engineers project is in preliminary stage of development and it addresses this open space aspect of the Creek area.

The rehabilitation of existing residences in the Creek area should be encouraged through grants, low interest loans, manpower training, rehabilitation clinics and a well informed public relations person who can encourage the owners and tenants to participate in a project which will enhance their living conditions as well as protect their barrio from further deterioration. The upgrading of these areas and buildings could certainly attract new residents into this section, thereby distributing the costs of maintenance and giving a better visual image to the community.

Another aspect of the Creek deals with the development of the land adjoining this conservation ribbon. These areas can accommodate a number of interrelated active uses such as housing, recreation, and possibly a conference center and/or hotel facilities along with ancillary uses such as shops and boutiques.



The Tex-Mex Railroad is planning to relocate its marshalling yards which are currently located next to the Zacate Creek to a new site outside of the city.

The city is under order to upgrade its sewage treatment plant and will relocate the facility from the mouth of the Creek. With the relocation of the railroad yards and the sewage plant, a substantial area along the Creek conservation ribbon will be available for development. The absence of heavy traffic combined with a pleasant natural environment makes this area suitable for a variety of activities.

The site might be a dramatic location for a hotel-conference center. Alternatively, the area might be developed with a mix of townhouses, apartments and condominiums all which would have views of the river and good proximity to downtown.

The total quality of the creek area will depend on a careful interplay of the open space design, the more intensive development on either side of it, and the quality of each.

undergrounding of utilities) would be "assessed back" to property owners in proportion by which they are benefited. The city should provide, by ordinance, for an alternative of repayment in installments and could also sell bonds to pay a portion of those outstanding debts.

One other suggestion is appropriate. The city should amend its present ordinance which requires 100% approval from landowners to pick up the costs of street improvements. In this way, one landowner can now effectively veto the improvements of the street. This must be changed.

The paving of the Barrio streets should be coordinated with a program of Housing Inspection, Code Enforcement and Housing Rehabilitation. Recently the city adopted a building code and a housing code. The city will need a systematic but reasonable time schedule for residents to bring their homes into compliance. One-way to encourage housing code compliance is inspect them when the paving program is implemented, so that all improvements are done in the same time frame.

The city can use some of its Federal Community Development Block Grant Funds to assist low-income owners with Housing Rehabilitation cost. The Community Development Agency should enhance its program providing counseling, technical assistance, and general advice to the low- and moderate income homeowners so the neighborhood program can make slow but continuous progress. If the Barrios develop a sense of pride, the city will not have to resort to legal enforcement of the various codes. But in those cases where owners will not reasonably comply the city will have to enforce the codes for the protection of the entire community.

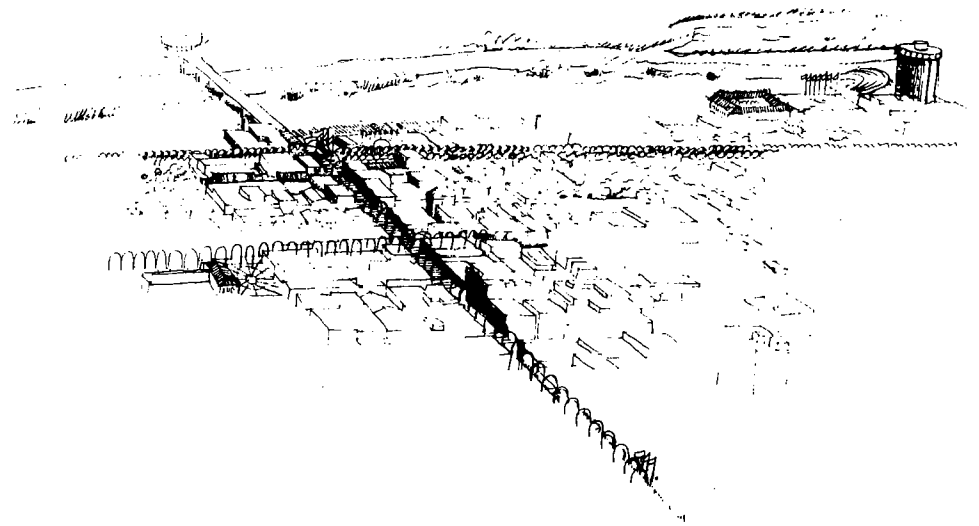


GATEWAY

The approaches to any point of interest inevitably tend to set the tone of response for the visitor. Unfortunately many American cities have sorely neglected this aspect, and are introduced through miles of unsightly strip development and derelict land use. Laredo is no exception with its IH-35 corridor. As one step in making the corridor more pleasant to those bound for downtown, steps should be taken to clean up marginal properties and beautify the corridor edges by tree planting.

Whether arriving by air, car or train, the Laredo visitor should be greeted by a well designed graphic information system that would not only be directional, but remembered as a "logo" after the visitor has left.

One of the main purposes of the information system would be to guide the visitor to a downtown interpretive center where one could gain an understanding of the culture and history of the region from media shows, exhibits and displays. After having experienced the show at the interpretive center the visitor would be within an easy walk of the city's tourist attractions.



URBAN DEV. AUTHORITY

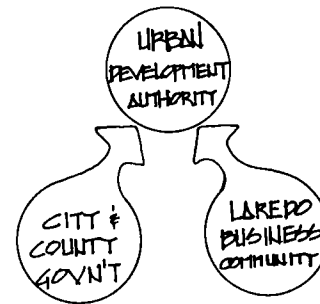
R/UDAT feels that the catalyst for change in Laredo is an active Urban Development Authority (UDA), which will be an implementing force to carry out the policy of the city set forth in its Comprehensive Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan must be adopted by the City Council by ordinance and be regarded as a constitution for all future actions by the city relating to the use of land. If one or more of its policies become outdated, the plan shall be changed, rather than ignored. Upon this point hinges the integrity of a growth strategy for Laredo.

The Comprehensive Plan is city policy; it remains for an implementing agency to carry out that policy. Those actions range from acquisition of land, demolition or rehabilitation of buildings, sales or lease of property, proposed closure of streets, the seeking of grants, and the like. Because of the multifarious nature of its work, these tasks are best carried out by an appointed body subject to control of the Mayor and City Council.

We propose a separate UDA appointed as follows:

1. Three members appointed by the Mayor and City Council from a list of at least 10 citizens of Laredo submitted by the Laredo Chamber of Commerce;
2. The Mayor of Laredo, or his or her delegate;
3. A member of the City Council chosen by the Council with another member chosen as an alternate;



4. The Webb County Judge or member of the Webb County Board of County Commissioners chosen as an alternate;
5. A citizen of Laredo who is in none of the above eligible categories, chosen by the Mayor and City Council.

Obviously, the above is one suggestion as to how the UDA might look and the Mayor and Council may choose other forms of organizations.

Members would serve for terms of four years and would be removable at the pleasure of the Mayor and Council. They will receive necessary expenses only. In October of each year, the Mayor and Council would give the UDA a work program for the following year and the UDA would report to the Mayor and Council twice a year. The Mayor and Council would have authority to change priorities and directions in the work plan so long as the change can conform to the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, the city should adopt a capital improvement program for five year periods so that sensible phasing of improvements is provided.

OBJECTIVES OF THE UDA:

1. To monitor and encourage physical aspects of economic development in Laredo;
2. To assure coordination of the activities of public and private economic development agencies;
3. To organize and, if necessary, implement economic development projects;
4. To act as a development arm of the city to undertake public aspects of development projects (e.g., parking structures and improvements, utility relocations, pedestrian and traffic facilities, etc.) which will

attract business investment;

5. To assure re-housing or relocation of those displaced by UDA activities;
6. To have powers to assemble and acquire real property by any lawful means including purchase, exchange, gift or bequest, or eminent domain and to dispose of such property, also by any lawful means whatsoever;
7. To operate any facilities acquired or developed by it;
8. To finance such improvements by receipt of grant funds from other units of government, from fees, from the sale of revenue or general obligations bonds, special assessments, or any lawful means at its disposal.

R/UDAT expects that these powers would be used first in CBD as we view the vitality of the downtown area as the key to retaining the city's fiscal ability to deal with its many other problems, especially in its residential areas. In addition, the authority can use these same tools to protect and enhance neighborhoods once its base is assured.

R/UDAT feels that the UDA should have primary authority to the work of acquiring and developing land for parking facilities for the CBD, and could, for example, establish an assessment district on all benefitted downtown properties to retire any general obligation bonds issued. It could also acquire improved sites for parking, pedestrian facilities, street furniture, and landscaped areas, and could also develop such lands for convention facilities

and the like. It could also acquire land for resale to private developers for hotels or motels, open markets, or office buildings. Other activities of the UDA would be in the field of procuring UDAG grants and general urban design.

RELATIONSHIP WITH CITY PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION AND PLANNING DEPARTMENT:

R/UDAT feels that the development arm of the city should remain an agency separate and apart from the planning arm. In the first place, there is too much to be done in both areas to have a single person oversee both tasks. In the second place, Laredo needs an independent review, from a public interest stand point, for the work of all developers - public as well as private. The UDA should not be exempt from any regulations to which a private developer is subject.

The Planning and Zoning Commission and Planning Director should remain responsible to the Mayor and Council for the following:

1. Adoption and amendment of a Comprehensive Plan;
2. Administering a zoning ordinance;
3. Administering the housing, building, plumbing, electrical, subdivision, etc. regulations;
4. Providing for housing rehabilitation programs;
5. Coordinating planning aspects of traffic and parking regulations;
6. Proposal of a capital improvement program every five years and annual reviews and suggestions to fulfill

that program (e.g., the paving issue);

7. Administering a map street ordinance;
8. Reviewing and commenting on all proposed annexation to the city and being responsible for the establishment of an annexation policy in conjunction with Webb County;
9. Development of the city open space plan and programs;
10. Assuring coordination of UDA plans, policies and projects to the Comprehensive Plan of the city.

- The city must adopt a zoning ordinance which implements a growth policy established in its comprehensive plan, and the Mayor and City Council must have the guts to stick with that policy and not change it whenever any special interest demands.
- The city must adopt a subdivision ordinance which requires developers to bear their first share of the cost they impose on communities (e.g. extension of water and sewage mains, dedication and improvements of streets and sidewalks, and provision of open space).
- The city should adopt a map streets ordinance which shows its future right of way needs and provides the means for orderly acquisition.
- The city should adopt a capital improvement program to provide for an orderly means of extensions of services.

ADMINISTERING HISTORIC PRESERVATION

A local Historic Commission is required to carry out preservation policy and be responsible for its implementation. It should include an architect and local historian and work in association with the Laredo Historic Society.

ADMINISTERING OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

A local Conservation Commission is required to carry out policy relating to protection and enhancement of Laredo's open spaces, to deal with issues involving conservation and to develop an official conservation plan consonant with state laws.

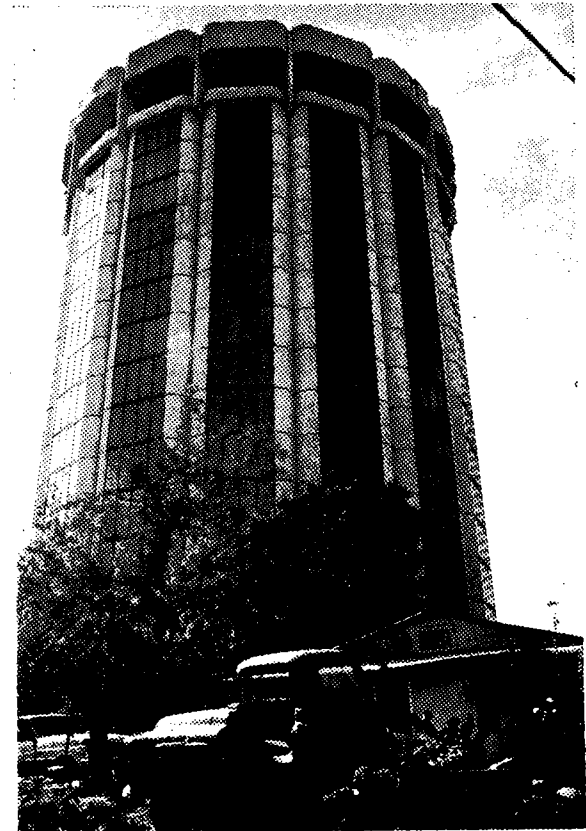
PROPERTY TAX COLLECTIONS

A major physical problem facing Laredo is the 85% property tax collection rate, which is alarmingly low. R/UDAT was given several reasons for this deplorable situation:

1. The Texas tradition which militates against foreclosure of a homestead. (Despite the fact that foreclosure for property taxes is an exception to a Texas Constitutional prohibition against such foreclosures, the tradition appears to prevail.)
2. The difficulty in locating landowners, especially if property has gone to heirs.
3. A fear of tossing the old and the poor onto the streets.
4. A generally inadequate collection system.

Each of those reasons must be overcome. Those citizens who pay their taxes faithfully have a right to expect that they will not be discriminated against by rewarding others not similarly inclined. There will always be difficulties, indeed inequities, in any tax system but the remedy lies with the legislature, not in failure to enforce the law.

R/UDAT is informed that neither the city nor Webb County is particularly active in this area. The city must protect the integrity of its own tax system by instructing the City Attorney to commence foreclosure procedures when necessary. We suggest that this may be done against those with lengthly



delinquencies first. As it is shown that the city "means business", a far lesser number of such suits would be necessary. This same duty to its citizens and taxpayers is owed by Webb County. This non-feasance of duty is potentially scandalous and should not continue.

Increasing the tax collection rate to 95% would provide approximately \$350,000 a year additional tax revenue for the city. These funds could be used to pay the debt service on bonds for capital improvements such as street paving.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

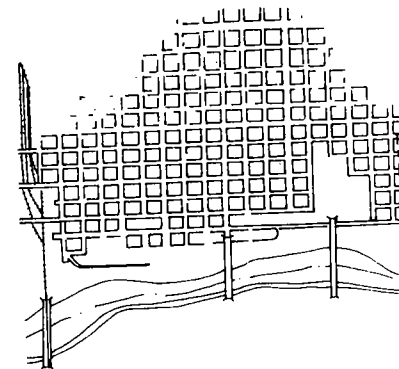
I. Introduction

Unlike most of the larger American cities that have radically altered the character of their downtown areas through successive public and private redevelopment efforts, Laredo has the good fortune to have suffered no major loss in this respect. Its historic grid of square blocks and enclosed plazas has a quality of human scale reminiscent of Savannah, Georgia and rare among inner urban areas.

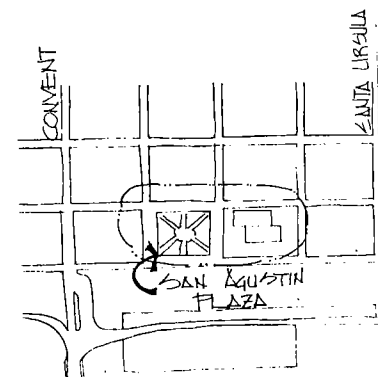
Thus, historic preservation can still be applied here both as a protection of important environmental and tourist assets, and as a development tool for generating additional space at low capital investment in and adjacent to the core area. This relates directly to the critical need to hold and bring back downtown economic activity bleeding out to the northern suburban residential and commercial centers.

Preservation in Laredo should be seen at a number of scales and modes of intervention:

- o Preservation of the downtown grid and street system, with emphasis on the basic 1 to 3 story scale so characteristic of the city as a whole. Probably this will require some zoning controls as regards building heights.
- o Enhancement of the existing Historic District.

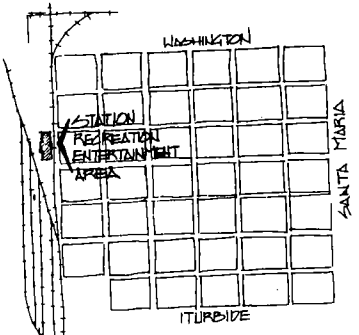


PRESERVATION OF ARID SYSTEM.



EXISTING HISTORIC DISTRICT

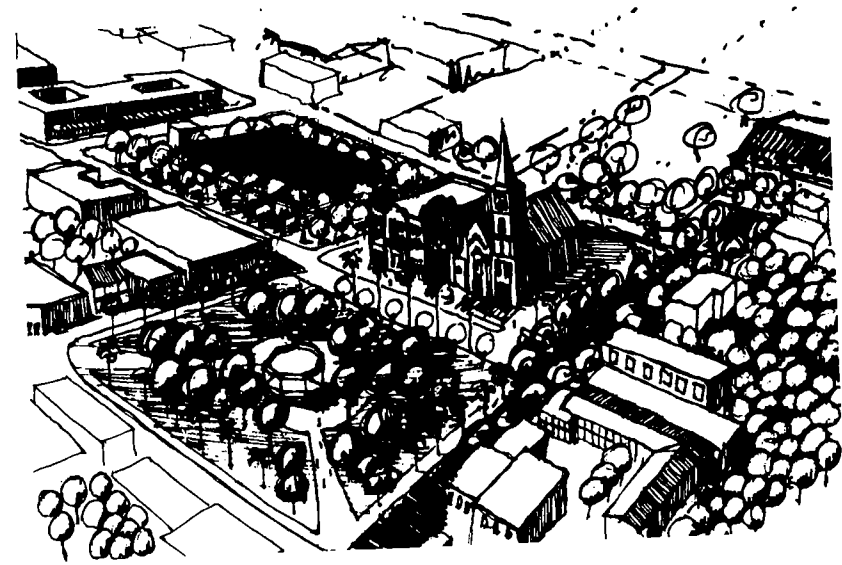
- o Creation of an additional, primarily, residential, historic district, including recreating of the image of the adjacent 19th Century station area. This area should be called The Old Town Depot District and protected by zoning and Design Review Regulations against incompatible alterations and uses.
- o Preservation of individual structures and artifacts of historic and architectural quality.



NEW HISTORIC DISTRICT

II. Specific Recommended Projects

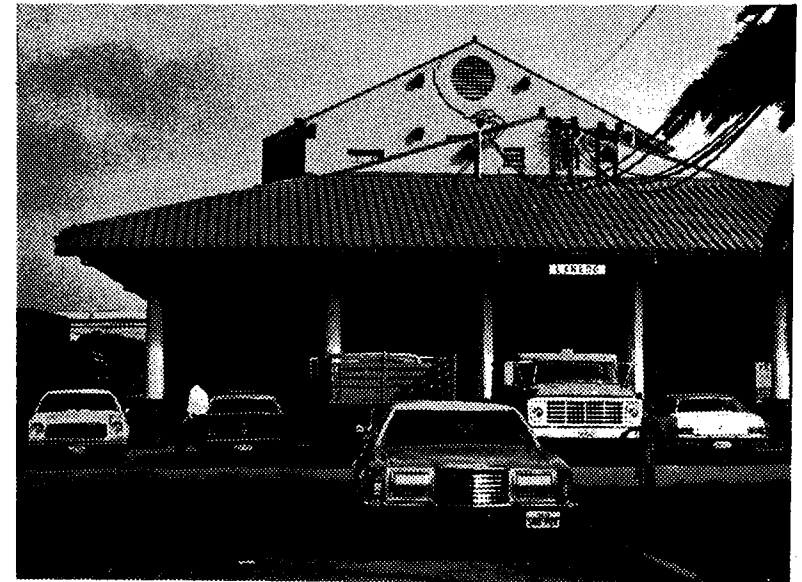
- o Enhance the San Augustin Historic District by such measures as:
 - + Linking it into a linear pedestrian system on at least two sides by closing Zaragoza and San Augustin to general vehicular traffic, limiting access for hotel guests only.
 - + Acquiring and reusing the vacant San Augustin School building primarily as a visitor interpretative center, with the added consideration of moving the Chamber of Commerce back downtown into this strategic location.
 - + Surveying other buildings along the north edge of the plaza for possible rehabilitation to fit more closely into a unifying historic and river related theme; especially the building with the superimposed balconies representing a period piece that should not be lost.



- + Upgrading the entire landscaping of the square and taking measures to emphasize it as an essentially pedestrian retreat into the past.
- o Creation of a new residential Old Town Depot District in the general area bounded by Washington, Santa Maria, Iturbide and on its western edge including the railway station and the few remaining old associated buildings, with the following goals:
 - + Preservation of disappearing period mansions in open settings that could greatly enhance the quality of this deteriorating edge of downtown.
 - + By bringing back a fine older residential section here, providing a downtown anchor as a counter to lose the suburban area to the north, strengthening the downtown economy.
 - + Utilizing the surviving 19th century station and surrounding structures as a new tourist attraction by recreating a piece of Laredo history through shops and eating spots.

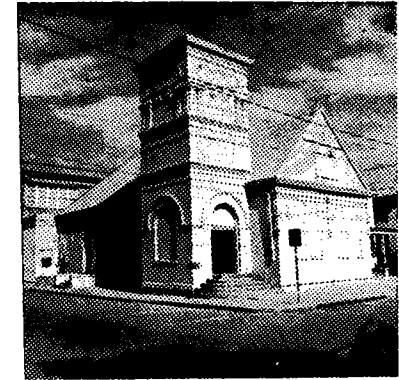
While such preservation steps would largely be the result of private investment, a number of federal funding and tax aids are available for such purposes.

- o Preservation of individual buildings. A survey of historic and re-use potential should be undertaken of downtown buildings to provide a pool of protected structures for rehabilitation. Aside from strengthening the city's historical image and protecting its scale against incompatible development, such reuse generally involves lower capital expenditure and higher quality



than alternative new construction. Examples are City Hall, the Court House, and the Plaza Hotel. Within a recycling strategy, the existing Court House and nearby Plaza Hotel could become elements of a government office center, providing expanded activity downtown. This contrasts with the weakening effect of loss of court functions to the outer areas of the city.

- o Introduction of supportive, consistently designed street furniture, lighting, etc. to emphasize Laredo's historic continuity and to link the various elements of the historic system.



III. Implementation Economics

Once an area has been declared a National Historic District, buildings within the district which make a contribution to the character of the area are eligible for certain tax benefits. Owners of these structures can depreciate the cost of all rehabilitation costs in a five (5) year period. Effectively, this tax law provision allows owners substantially to write off the cost of rehabilitation from their income tax. Therefore, there is a strong economic advantage to the re-use of existing buildings in historic districts.

In addition to the tax breaks for historic preservation, the Federal Government has several programs which provide matching grants to help owners pay for restoration of structures. In short, historic preservation has become good business.

Historic preservation in Laredo is a key element of image building and at the same time a relatively low cost strengthening of the downtown.



retail and housing markets. It becomes an important element in the general effort to upgrade its physical environment.

IV. Historic Commission

Such a wide ranging strategy of historic preservation will require the creation of a local Historic Commission mandated by the city to assist in implementation of the outlined framework in close collaboration with the private or public parties involved.



"The key to Laredo's future lies in a public-private partnership which will spur development."

JOHN P. CLARKE, AIA, AIP. Trenton, New Jersey. An architect, planner and development consultant, Clarke was the R/UDAT Team Chairman. A graduate of Cooper Union and Columbia University, Clarke has won several national awards for Urban Design Projects. He is a principal in the firm of Clarke and Travisano, and is the former director of the Department of Planning and Development in Trenton, New Jersey. Clarke is extensively involved with the New Trenton Corporation, a non-profit development organization, formed by the business community with representatives from city, county, and state governments which undertakes development projects to spur economic development within the New Jersey capital.



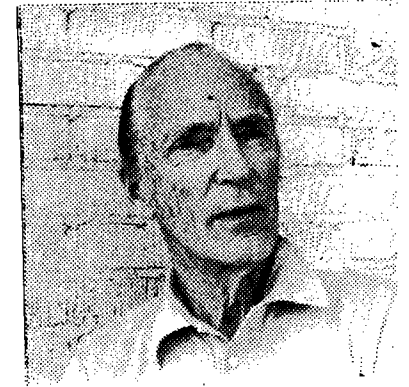
"Laredo's great promise lies in its rediscovery of the Rio Grande Valley, maximizing its environmental, recreational and economic potential."

DENNIS JAMES CARLONE, Architect and Urban Designer. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Carlone is Principal Instructor of Architecture and Urban Design in the Career Discovery Program at Harvard University, where he was also a visiting critic in Urban Design. Carlone has received design awards from the Harvard University Visual Arts Competition, and has published the East Cambridge Urban Design Study, and Lookout Court/Prospect Alley, Marblehead, Massachusetts. For the past three years, Carlone has been Project Urban Designer and Director of the East Cambridge Riverfront Plan, which recently received one of the largest Urban Development Action Grants per capita in the country. He has recently opened his own office in Cambridge, and is currently doing work at all scales of design.



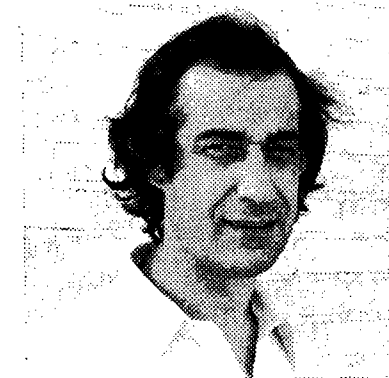
"While Laredo's downtown shares problems familiar from other U.S. cities, its inherited physical environment, its unique location and economic role all provide a solid base for implementation of carefully considered development strategies."

HERMANN HAVILAND FIELD, FAIA, AIP. Shirley, Massachusetts. Field is listed in Who's Who in America, Who's Who in Europe, and the Dictionary of International Biography, and is a member of the College of Fellows, American Institute of Architects. His major fields of interest include research and teaching in environmental planning, urban redevelopment, urban design; historic preservation; planning of urban health care, school and university facilities within a total community strategy; and environmental aspects of transportation design. Field has published extensively, and is currently professor emeritus of Political Science at Tufts University and until this fall directed its Graduate Program in Urban Social and Environmental Policy.



"Laredo has the history, the climate, and the romance to be a very special city".

GEOFFREY FREEMAN, AIA, ARIBA, New York. Freeman is the President of the New York office of Elbasai Logan Severin Freeman. He is an associate of the American Institute of Architects and of the Royal Institute of British Architects. Freeman has been the principal in charge of a number of large urban projects and was awarded a Design Fellowship by the National Endowment for the Arts in 1975 for the study of the reuse of historical buildings in the United States. His projects have often included large assembly uses in downtown locations. His representative projects include the "Uncle Sam Mall" a master plan for the development of a site to include shopping, civic space, parking, and landscaping in the Central Business District of Troy, New York.



"The economic potentials of Laredo's downtown will be maximized through a public and private commitment to revitalization which stresses the use of existing underutilized buildings and provides for balanced commercial, residential, and entertainment facilities and functions."

MELVIN A GAMZON, Boston Massachusetts. Gamzon is a senior associate and real estate economist in the Boston Office of Economics Research Associates. He is a specialist in the market and economics of downtown revitalization planning and tourist development. He has co-authored with the Urban Land Institute a book entitled, Adaptive Use: Development Economics, Process and Profiles which details the planning and development process of reusing and rehabilitating older structures. He is also a frequent speaker on the subject of urban economic revitalization planning and has lectured at Harvard University's School of Design. Gamzon has appeared in feature stories related to revitalization planning in the Wall Street Journal, Business Week, Housing Magazine, and The National Real Estate Investor.



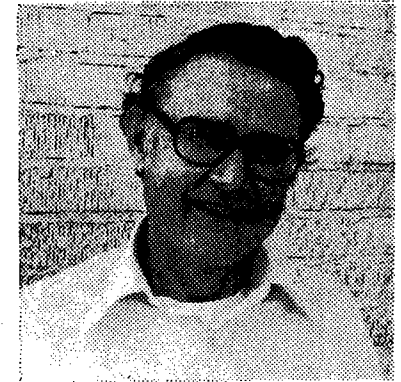
"The tremendous potential of Laredo located in the sunbelt and the variety of experience ranging all the way from international travel to hunting and fishing, and especially the L. S. U. School of International Trade could be a tremendous coup for Laredo."

BENNIE M. GONZALES, FAIA. Phoenix, Arizona.
Gonzales is a principal in his own firm, and his awards include top Design Honors in the Award programs of the Central Arizona Chapter/American Institute of Architects and an Honor Award at Western Mountain Regional Conference. Gonzales' work including the Nogales Library, the Hopi Cultural Center, and the Scottsdale Civic Center were featured in the April, 1975, Symposia. Harper's magazine termed the Scottsdale Civic Center "a pair of the most gratifying and under publicized civic buildings in America."
Gonzales is presently doing work in Arizona, California, New Mexico, Texas, Mexico and Saudi Arabia.



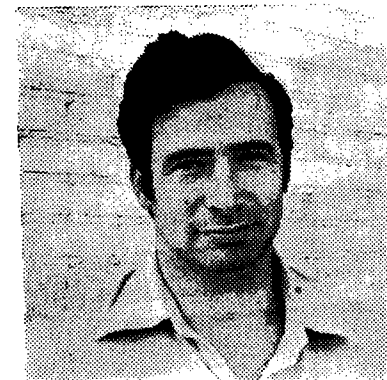
"While the whole problem does not hinge on the smooth flow of traffic and the solution to parking problems, nevertheless, any downtown is only as workable as its traffic and parking situation allows it to be; This workability is made even more significant in Laredo by the International Character of the Travel."

MICHAEL A. POWILLS, JR., P.E., Evanston, Illinois.
A professional engineer, Powills is Vice President and Principal Associate of Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc.. His major interests focus on the relationship between land-use, economics, and transportation. In addition, he is currently involved with development and application of new methods for mass transit. He is currently chairman of the Board of Directors of the Advanced Transit Association, a professional organization of persons interested in the development and application of new transportation technology. All of this work has evolved from extensive experience with street and highway planning, transit planning, circulation studies, parking studies, site plans, and other related highway developments.



"Laredo doesn't need another plan. It does need a policy adopted by elected officials who are committed to its implementation".

EDWARD J. SULLIVAN, B.A. Urban Studies, B.A. Political Science, M.A. History, L. L. M. Law, J. D. Law., Portland, Oregon. Sullivan is a practicing attorney and a member of the firm of O'Donnell, Rhoades, Gerber, and Sullivan. He is a member of the Oregon and Washington D. C. bars. He is an assistant adjunct professor at Portland State University. He has published extensively on land use planning. For five years, Sullivan was legal counsel to Washington County, Oregon, a suburban area of Portland, and for three years, he served as legal counsel to the governor of Oregon. He has just returned from a year's legal study in Great Britain.



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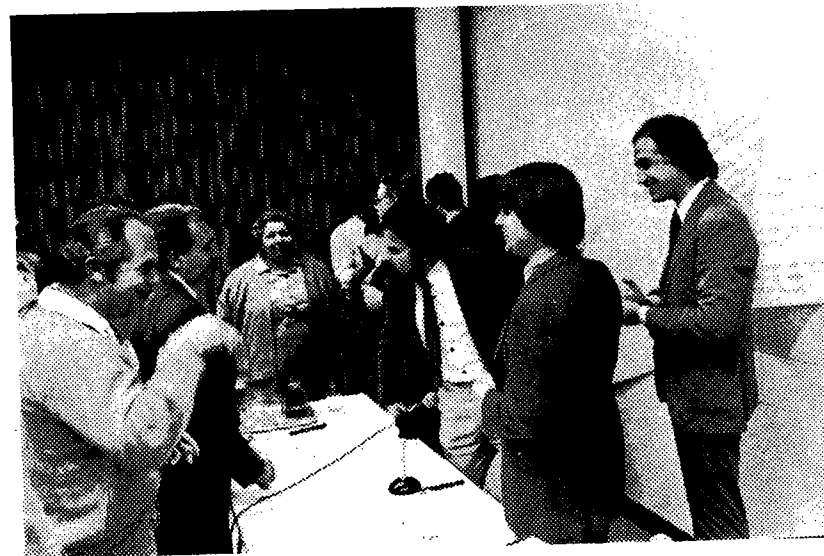
Dennis Nixon
Marion Bristow

TOWN MEETING

Tax Payers Organized for Public Service
Community Action Agency's Neighborhood Councils
Central Labor Council
LULAC'S
George Washington's Birthday Celebration
Nuevo Santander Museum

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Aldo Tatangelo
Vidal Cantu
Guillermo Benavides
Andres Ramos
Carlos Zuniga
Enrique Trevino
Judge Alberto Santos
Homero Mata
L.H. Guerra



The R/UDAT Team wishes to thank the following for the late hours kept in order to make the presentation possible.

Councilman and Mrs. Vidal Cantu, Jr.

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