

**CULTIVATING A SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LANDSCAPES:
THE REDESIGN OF DOWNTOWN PROSPER, TEXAS**

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

CULTIVATING A SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LANDSCAPES: THE REDESIGN OF DOWNTOWN PROSPER, TX

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Many rural Texas towns are being enveloped by urban sprawl. Former small, rural towns with tightly-knit communities and storied historic places are being replaced by mass residential and retail developments. These enveloped communities are often besieged by an uninviting appearance of monotony; their unique identities are often lost in the expansion. Their rich, shared community experiences are diminished (Andres & Plater-Zyberk, 1992).

This master's design thesis explores the concept of sense of place through the lens of experiential landscapes. This study seeks to identify design attributes that contribute to the creation of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) in Texas. The findings of this study are then applied to the redesign of a rural Texas downtown that is currently being enveloped by urban sprawl. This study seeks to illustrate the importance of planning for, designing and creating experiential landscapes for the benefit of small-town Texas communities.

A multimethod approach was used to develop this thesis (Deming & Swaffield, 2011). Literature was reviewed to understand the characteristics of sense of place to better recognize how it can be revealed through landscape architecture. Within the scope of sense of place, the

concept of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) was explored and is the basis for this study.

This research also benefited from primary data collection methods and case study methods (Francis, 1999) in order to study and document the elements of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) for the design of downtown Prosper, Texas. While in-depth interviews (de Wit, 2013) were held with 17 current Prosper residents to better understand the wants and needs of the community, with regard to experiential landscapes.

Three case studies examined the design attributes of significant experiential landscapes in Texas. The interview data was analyzed and synthesized using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2019) to reveal design and program elements contributing to experiential landscapes. The findings from the literature review, case studies and interview research were used to inform the redesign of downtown Prosper, TX.

The findings illustrated that the experiential landscape framework can be an effective preliminary tool to structure a community dialogue regarding the sense of identity, evaluate existing landscapes, and to initiate a design program that may inform a small-town downtown design. This framework serves as a basis for creating community places and can be modified over time, through both experience and additional research, to design experiential landscapes that better capture the sense of identity in towns that are pressured by the growth of their metropolitan region.

In conclusion, this master's design thesis illustrates that creating experiential landscapes in rapidly growing Texas towns can reinforce the sense of identity and produce a more resilient community.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Highways are modern rivers. Produced goods travel from port to port and life burgeons along these asphalt arteries. In Texas of years past, railroads delivered building and farm staples from station to station, and many of today's towns and cities around these ports. When cars took to roads, the world quickly expanded, and our daily boundaries extended. Today in North Texas, major highways and tollways stretch from the heart of Dallas in every direction, toward small Texas towns. These highways are feats of engineering that provide small-town residents' access to new jobs, art and culture, and increased shopping and dining options. Highways allow travel in both directions, and people migrate away from the city center in search of cheaper housing, better schools, more greenspace, and smaller communities. Unfortunately, the rapidly changing landscapes of these enveloped communities are often besieged by an uninviting appearance of monotony (Peiser, 2001). The vast open land that existed between each town has been converted to roads and retail. A town's borders are no longer recognizable. The community lacks an identity. The once- expansive views are now a vista of cars fronting big-box stores, with sidewalks devoid of any people.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Rural Texas towns consist of vast swathes of land growing cotton, corn or wheat. Many of these towns consist of a post office, town hall, cotton gin, diner, gas station, and local church. This assemblage of buildings, erected over time, often hold much of the town's history. The downtown shops supplied all the necessities that the farm could not, and everyone knew their neighbor. Shopkeepers, farmers, ranchers and residents came together to help one another in

times of need. They worked toward a common good – surviving a drought, tending the ill, or celebrating at annual festivals. For generations, they have known and cared for the land and their town, depending on it for their survival. This common care of the land and support for one another created a deep attachment to the town and its people.

Highways linking these rural towns greatly determine the location of the state's most populous city suburbs. People leave the city seeking more home for their dollar. Many seek a slower pace of life or better public schools for their children. They may seek the nostalgia of small-town U.S.A. Once they settle however, they may find that this smaller town does not meet their needs. The lone diner and corner store cannot support the growing population, and with no connection to the place or the people who built it, the new residents spend their dollars in a city that can. Town leaders and planners struggle to build infrastructure ahead of the growth, often before the tax base can financially support it. An Economic Development Council is formed to lure new businesses that will support the expansion. The big-box stores and chain restaurants arrive to provide the familiar to the unfamiliar. These stores commonly settle in a strip mall, fronted with a vast amount of parking. Farmland is sold and transformed into massive residential communities. Town leaders are rarely required to retain any semblance of the existing landscape. Native flora and fauna are lost, natural and historic landmarks are removed (Hirschhorn, 2001).

The landscape of these small towns becomes bland and interchangeable. The generations of attachment to the places are loosened as the unique local character and history erodes. The identity of the towns is lost in the expansion. The richness of shared community experiences is often diminished.

Humans are social beings. The belonging and support that a community provides is critical for people to thrive (Gilbert, 2019). Researchers are studying the reasons for societies mental health declines and finding that contributors include the weakening of a social safety net, economic inequality, and an increased sense of isolation among Americans (Stack, 2018; Vance, 2018). While some sources argue that technology decreases loneliness, the reliance on social media to combat loneliness stunts the ability to engage in off-line connection. (Beaton, 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic has increased opportunities to work from home. However, work-places may have been the main source of human engagement. For Americans, the most common mode of transportation is the automobile, and the majority of Americans travel alone (Tomer, 2017). We drive to retrieve our goods, and the transaction at the local grocer may be one's only human interaction.

This study shows the importance of experiential public places to the individuals that constitute a community. Landscape architects can use the lessons acquired from the design and planning research to help cultivate a resilient society through meaningful and experiential landscapes. Landscape architects can create places that shape our identity – places that encourage us to be present and to take note of our neighbors.

1.3 RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to understand and assess the design attributes that contribute to sense of place, through the lens of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) in Texas. The findings are used to create an experiential place in a rapidly growing Texas town enveloped by sprawl. The study focuses on Prosper, TX, located approximately 35 miles north of Dallas. At the intersection of two major highways, Prosper is a small north Texas town that has grown more than 200 percent since 2010. (World Population Review, 2021).

Interviews are performed with current Prosper residents. These interviews are used to better understand how Prosper residents perceive the town's identity. The interviews also assess the existing attributes of the town and inquire about design elements related to experiential landscapes. This investigation strives to reveal elements that inspire a design that imparts meaning over time and meets the needs of the Prosper community as it relates to experiential landscapes.

Using data from the case studies of existing experiential places in Texas, as well as the information gained from Prosper residents, this design thesis reimagine Prosper's historic downtown. The case studies disclose which design elements aid in creating a sense of place, and which elements further aid creating an experiential landscape in Texas. This study seeks to create an experiential landscape for those that inhabit it. It strives to reveal, through design, the town's character, both past and present. It further endeavors to create a public place where people can connect with one another and with nature while meeting the needs of Prosper's growing community.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research poses the following questions with regard to experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) in Texas;

1. How can sense of place, through the experiential landscape framework, be cultivated within the context of Prosper, Texas.
2. What are the design elements associated with creating experiential landscapes in Texas?

3. How can these design attributes be applied to create an experiential landscape in downtown Prosper?

1.5 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

EXPERIENTIAL LANDSCAPE

An experiential landscape is human-focused, designed to encourage person-to-person engagement as well as human engagement with the outdoor environment they use. Experiential landscapes seek to meet the needs of the community and encourage locality. (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007).

MEANINGFUL PLACE

A place's meaning may be different among people, based on their everyday experience of the site. It may change over time based on patterns of use (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007). It may have value for some and none for others.

A study of festivals found that one's meaningful experience was not largely attributed to the physical design of the festival, but from the shared experiences with friends and family that occurred in specific spaces. (Chick et al., 2007).

PLACE ATTACHMENT

Place attachment is an emotional bond that a person establishes with a place from either personal experience and/or imagined experience through books, movies or art. (Semken et al., 2009; Relph, 1976; Williams & Stewart, 1998). Attachment to a place ranges on a scale from

no sense of place, to a sense of belonging, to attachment to the place and ultimately to the willingness to sacrifice yourself for a place (Shamai, 1991). Simone Weil notes that the need for roots in a place you can recognize as yours and ours, is “perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. These roots, she claims, derive from our active participation in the life of our community (Weil, 1952). Strong roots give us confidence to forge ahead in life.

Customs, myths and rituals strengthen the attachment to place when they are significant to a people’s belief system and less so when the community ceases to believe and participate (Relph, 1976). Additionally, it has been determined that the length of time lived in one place increases place attachment. However, it is primarily strengthened from the relationships made with people in that place (Relph, 1976).

PLACE IDENTITY

Humanistic geographer Edward Relph describes place identity as the “persistent sameness and unity” which allows a place to be “differentiated from others” (Relph 1976, p. 4). According to Kevin Lynch, identity further serves as a basis for its recognition (Lynch, 1960). Place identity also may be defined as its “imageability.” A place has high imageability when distinct elements within a place, or the combined elements of a place, capture a person’s attention. (Ewing, 2013). Identity or imageability can be achieved through multiple methods. The architecture of the buildings within a place and/or the materials used can provide identifiable characteristics of place. Landmarks also can create imageability. Landmarks can help individuals orient themselves within a place, while also reinforcing the place identity. Landmarks can be large and seen from a great distance or smaller, on a more pedestrian scale. They can be naturally formed or manufactured.

“Place identity refers to how people living in a place take up that place, their world; how they unself-consciously and self-consciously accept and recognize that place as part of their personal and communal identity” (Seamon 2012, p. 13).

PLACE MAKING

Place making is the act of creating an experiential place as described above, rather than merely the construction of a physical product (Jordaan, Puren & Roos, 2008). Placemaking is community-based, aimed at creating public places that maximize the shared value to the community (Project for Public Spaces, 2007). Placemaking is people focused and under continuous assessment and improvement, as noted in Figure 1.1.

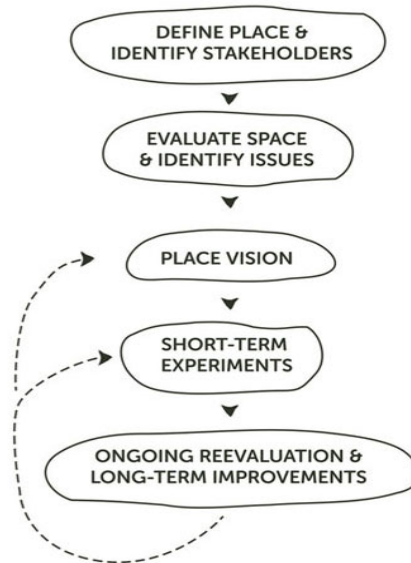


Figure 1.1 The Placemaking Process (Image from Project for Public Spaces)

SENSE OF PLACE

Sense of place, as defined in this study, is more complex than a geographical location on a map. It is a blending of history, cultures, values, ideals, and memories expressed through a landscape. Place can influence the way we dress, speak, and relate to one another. As people inhabit, work and make meaning of a site, or place, they also are making meaning of their own lives (Dickinson, 1995).

According to geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, a space becomes a place once we actively experience it and endow it with value (Tuan, 1977). As an explorer experiences the unknown, our own senses engage as one experiences a place. We see, smell, hear, touch and taste. Our minds apply thoughts and emotions to these senses, and this is our experience of a place (Tuan, 1977).

1.6 METHODOLOGY

A multimethod research approach was used to develop this thesis (Deming & Swaffield, 2011). Literature was reviewed to understand the characteristics of sense of place in order to better recognize how it can be revealed through landscape architecture. Within the scope of sense of place, the concept of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) was explored and is the basis for this study.

This study also benefited from primary data collection methods. Case study methods (Francis, 1999) were utilized in order to study and document the elements of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) for the design of downtown Prosper, Texas. Three case studies were performed to examine the design attributes of significant experiential landscapes in

Texas. Thwaites and Simkins Experiential Landscape Framework was used to evaluate these experiential Texas landscapes.

In-depth interviews (de Wit, 2013) were held with 17 current Prosper residents to better understand the wants and needs of the community with regard to experiential landscapes. This data was audio recorded, transcribed, analyzed and finally synthesized using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2019) to retrieve both themes and programmatic elements contributing to experiential landscapes. Knowledge gained from various data sources later informed the design process for downtown Prosper, Texas.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS

The study focuses on preserving and enhancing the qualities of a small Texas town facing tremendous expansion. This study explores experiential landscapes in Texas in order to understand and apply the lessons learned to the downtown of this growing community.

It utilizes scientific methods to understand, assess, and offer design solutions to contribute to its sense of identity through landscape architecture research procedures and methods.

Limitations include unrecognized assumptions on the part of the researcher and/or of those interviewed for the study. Sense of identity and experiential landscapes, are explored through the eyes of the residents, as well as the researcher. The study is limited by the size of the interview pool and any lack of representation of all groups affected by the outcome of the study. Limited time at each case-study site may prevent the observation of activities that would inform the research further. The ongoing pandemic may have affected the expectations from public spaces in regard to the quantity and type of human interaction that took place at the case-study

sites. Due to limited time and resources, the study was limited to data collection procedures and analysis that were attainable by a single researcher.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this master's design thesis is to study sense of place through experiential landscapes to inform the design of downtown Prosper, a rural Texas undergoing significant growth from urban sprawl.

Chapter one focuses on the introduction of the problem, purpose, research questions and overall study procedures. The significance of this study to landscape architecture and the limitations of this study are briefly addressed. Chapter two focuses on the literature review and the value experiential landscapes can make to a community. Chapter three focuses on research methods and introduces the research design used for this study. This chapter provides a synopsis of the case study locations, study population, and describes the data collection, and data analysis methods. Chapter four focuses on analysis and findings from the three case studies as well as the conclusions from the resident interviews. Chapter five focuses on the design of historic downtown Prosper, Texas. Chapter six focuses on conclusions derived from this study as well as potential for future research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Texas is a state of mind. Texas is an obsession. Above all, Texas is a nation in every sense of the word." – John Steinbeck
(Steinbeck, 1962)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Place has been explored in the schools of architecture, history, philosophy, psychology, sociology and geography, and the findings influence and shape the world in which we live. It is the setting in which our favorite characters exist, the frame in which our history is told, and the *mise-en-scène* of our memories. Place-making is often organic and develops over a period of time based on the cultures that inhabit the space. Place-making may also be intentional, by a government or group of individuals (Lew, 2016). It may be intended to preserve a site or place identity, or to revitalize a community – or both. As urban sprawl envelopes small Texas towns, the identities of these communities may be lost in the expansion. This chapter explores sense of place as an exercise in understanding an effective approach to place making and preserving identity.

2.2 WHAT IS SENSE OF PLACE?

Sense of place has been continuously studied in the fields of landscape architecture, geography, and phenomenology. However, it remains an ambiguous concept. It is difficult to define and is open to many interpretations. Following are features first noted by F. Lukermann in 1964 and then analyzed by Edward Relph in “Place and Placelessness.” According to Lukermann, place possesses six major components (Lukermann, 1964; Relph, 1976):

Location. The literal location of the site and the relationship and connection to locations outside the site, though location alone is not sufficient to create a sense of place (Shamai, 1991).

Identity. This is a distinctiveness derived from the physical forms, natural environment and the culture within a location. Unique features such as climate, topography and native flora and fauna combined with the history, traditions and symbols of the site and its inhabitants create a recognizable identity. Much of the urban sprawl in Texas results in monotonous landscapes with no recognizable boundaries between former rural towns (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1 Chain stores and similar storefronts at Gates of Prosper development

Circulation. The order of spatial interactions within a place and the connection to locations outside the place. It is essential that a person is able to have a sense of familiarity with where they are in relation to what is around them (Lynch, 1960). The ability to progress beyond the familiar through choices, discovery and mental stimulation contributes to place experience (Kaplan, 1998).

Localization. A place is a part of another larger place. Understanding one's place within a larger context contributes to place identity and attachment (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007).

Evolution. A place is a mark in time. Time moves forward and a culture evolves, new elements rise, old elements disappear, and a new place emerges.

Meaning. This is the sum experience of all of the above, including everything that occupies or inhabits the site. Though persons may attribute a similar meaning to a site, meaning is an individualistic interpretation due to varied psychologies, behaviors, cultures, histories and beliefs. These individual interpretations of an experience make it difficult to try to create meaning with physical forms that impart any significance. Over time however, and through shared experiences of a place, people connect and give meaning to a place that can be passed down to future generations (Woods, 2009).

Relph, in his book *Place and Placelessness*, breaks sense of place into three parts: Place includes the physical setting, the activities and events that occur there, and the meaning attained through an individual or a group's experience of a place (Relph, 1976).

The physical setting may determine the activities that occur there. The human activity of enjoying a meal with a friend, telling stories by an open fire or playing in a creek. The activities that occur there may not mean humans doing, but seeing, hearing or feeling (Alexander, 1979) Place is experienced through all of our human senses: sight, smell, touch, taste and sounds (Shamai, 1991). A frog jumping into a pond, though not a human activity, it affects the one seeing, it is an experience (Alexander, 1979). Experiences create meaning.

Places are not merely the products of physical forms in the landscape (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007). "Towns may die for all sorts of reasons, but expressive vitality depends on how a place engages the imagination. A place is dead if the physique does not support the work of the imagination, if the mind cannot engage with the experience located there, or if the local energy fails to evoke ideas, images, or feelings" (Walter, 1988, p. 204).

Another discovery purported to aid in the creation of place is the language about that place. Tuan posits that a place's resiliency is dependent on the way people talk about it (Tuan, 1980). Prior to Yelp reviews, humans used word-of-mouth, and this aided in the creation of place. How people feel about a place and then express those feelings through language can determine the success or failure of that place. Today it is easy to get the word out through social media, t-shirts, or bumper stickers such as "Keep Austin Weird." These messages can reinforce the sense of place and create a more resilient community.

As stated previously, sense of place is the setting, the activities that occur there and the meaning realized. The meaning is the experience of the setting and events that occur there. While this design thesis seeks to preserve and enhance place identity, it further seeks to enrich the human experience of place.

2.3 WHAT IS AN EXPERIENTIAL LANDSCAPE?

Experience is the "modes through which a person knows his world" (Tuan, 1975, p. 151). It is using our active (sight and sounds) and our passive (taste, smell, and touch) senses to make meaning of a place that evokes feeling (Tuan, 1975).

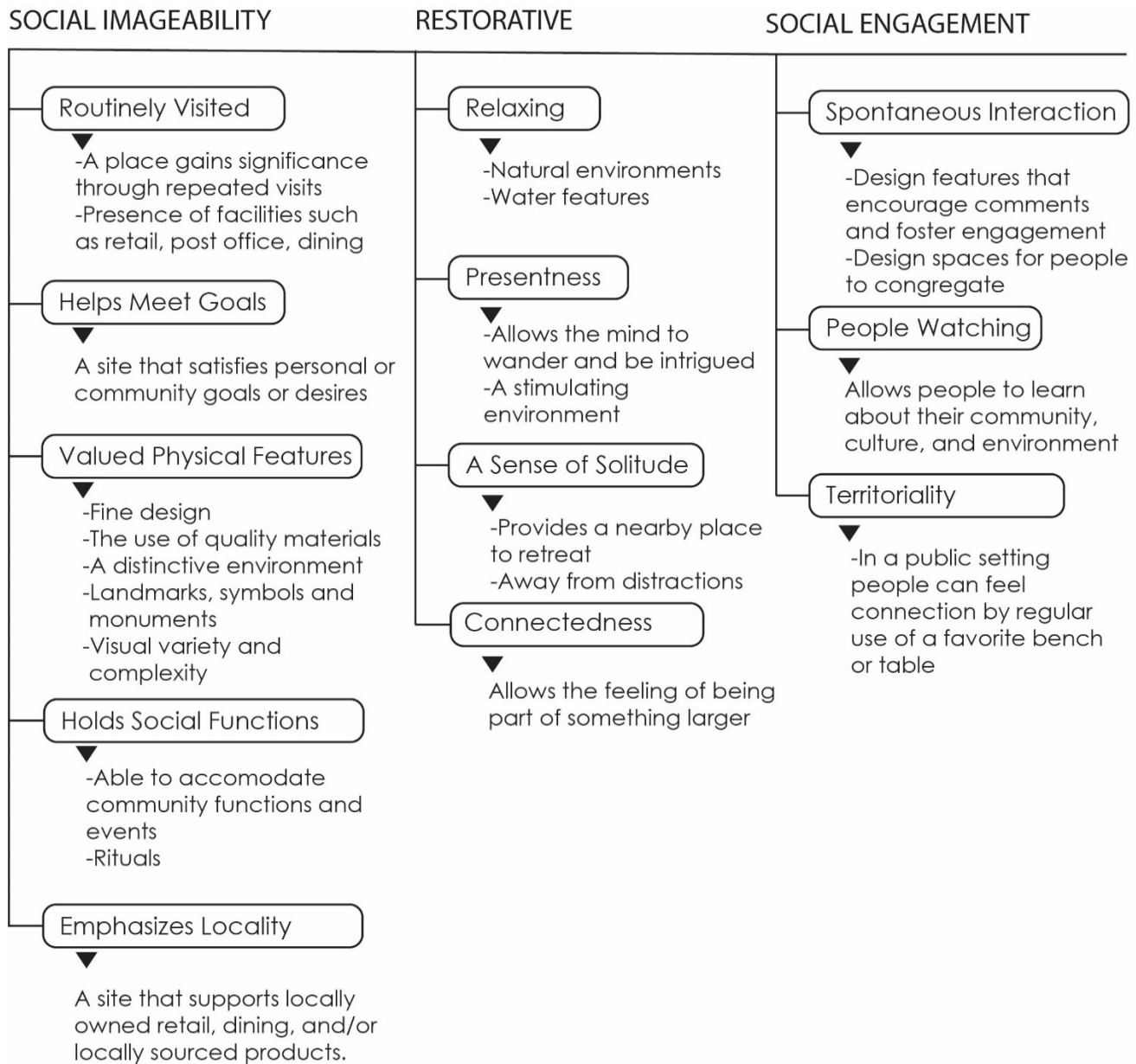
In *Experiential Landscape: Approach to People, Place and Space*, the author defines experiential landscapes as a human-centered approach to design that encourages person-to-person engagement as well as a person's engagement with the outdoor environment they use (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007). With emphasis on locality, the philosophy is based on discovering and seeking to meet the wants and needs of the community (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007). It promotes connectedness that puts human experience at the center of creating and understanding place (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007). An experiential place maintains a holistic view of the

human-environment relationship that links human behavior with the settings in which it occurs (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007).

2.4 HOW DO WE CREATE A PLACE WITH EXPERIENCE IN MIND?

Authors Thwaites and Simkins, identify three themes for creating experiential landscapes: social imageability (Stokols, 1981, as cited in Thwaites & Simkins, 2007); the ability of places to offer restorative opportunities (Kaplan, Kaplan, and Ryan, 1998 as cited in Thwaites & Simkins, 2007); and social engagement (Altman, 1975; Martin, 1997, as cited in Thwaites & Simkins, 2007). See Table 2.1 which illustrates the elements of three themes.

Table 2.1 Experiential Landscape Table (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) modified to include locality



These themes offer a humanistic approach to sense of place by seeking primarily to meet the needs of the community through experiential design. It is these themes that are used to analyze the case studies. These themes also are used to establish the basis for interview questions and site observations. These themes are the design foundation that ultimately shapes the reimagination of downtown Prosper.

2.5 CONTRIBUTION OF SENSE OF PLACE TO A COMMUNITY

Design and planning literature typically highlights three major contributions that experiential landscapes can make to a community, though it is possible that many more exist. These are; economic, sense of identity, and environmental. Pursuing further research to account for all the contributions that these places make to a community would be a worthwhile future endeavor.

2.5.1 ECONOMIC

Studies indicate that recent revitalization efforts towards Texas downtown spaces have had a variety of positive outcomes including economic benefits to the revitalized space as well as community-wide economic advancement (Ozdil, 2006). These economic gains can be measured in some of the following ways:

- **Increased Tourism.** Experiential places can increase tourism, which brings more income to the community that stays in the community. A place identity that is unique and offers an experience that cannot be found in other places draws visitors. For decades, the Alamo, located in San Antonio, TX, was the most-visited place in Texas. In 2019, it saw nearly 1.8 million visitors (Texas General Land Office). The Market at Magnolia Silos in Waco, Texas, opened in 2015. Chip and Joanna Gaines, known for their popular cable show “Fixer Upper,” embarked on a project to create a small shopping and food-truck

entertainment space in downtown Waco. They created a distinct space at a long-abandoned historic site. The space they produced is instantly recognizable to millions of Americans. People come from world-wide to visit the silos. It is quite remarkable, the extent that visitors engage with one another in conversation at this place. The latest figures estimate that nearly 1.6 million people visited the Magnolia Silos in 2018 (Schechter, 2019).

- **Higher real estate values.** A recent study found that imageability in the street-level environment was determined to have the most statistically significant positive association with nearby property values (Hamidi et al., 2020).
- **Increased tax base for better schools.** An increase in visitors results in increased tax dollars being spent in the town.
- **Creation of jobs and more local small businesses.** Small businesses generate 54 percent of all U.S sales, with small businesses accounting for 64 percent of all new jobs created in the U.S. Money spent at local businesses generates three times more prosperity for the local economy (Small Business Administration, 2012); 68 percent of the money spent at local small businesses stays local, as compared to 43 percent spent at chain retailers. Nearly 70 percent of Americans prefer to support local retailers according to a 2018 survey (G1ve, 2018).
- **Increased Community Investment.** Local ownership often results in an increased investment in local youth sports teams, community-organized events and other local small businesses.
- **Resiliency.** Quality development with valued architectural design and the use of fine materials create places more suitable for adaptive re-use.

2.5.2 SENSE OF IDENTITY AND WELL BEING

Attributable to the unceasing interaction between society and the urban environment, the alterations we make to our cities will change our society as well (Rykwert, 2000). Places are essential in fulfilling the biological, social, psychological and cultural needs of a human and they therefore are significant in the development of one's self-identity (Proshansky et al., 1983).

In 2017, scientists at the University of Surrey and the National Trust sought to prove the physical and emotional benefits of place. In one study, the scientists recorded brain scans of participants. The researchers provided images of meaningful vs. common places to the participants and observed that images of meaningful places resulted in a heightened response in the amygdala and the medial prefrontal cortex (Hunt, 2017). This physical and emotional reaction to meaningful places helps us to definitively understand our deeply rooted connection to place. Additionally, this informative report found:

- 86 percent of survey respondents describe their meaningful place as being a part of them.
- 79 percent want to share their connection to the meaningful site with others.
- 64 percent agree that their special place evokes the feeling of calm. Place supports our personal well-being, increasing feelings of nostalgia, security and survival.
- 79 percent of respondents report a strong desire to visit their meaningful place, especially among the ages of 35 to 54.
- 58 percent claim the meaningful place shaped who they are (National Trust, 2017).

Furthermore, research has found that an individual's sense of meaning, purpose, and belonging has a positive impact on an individual's health and well-being (Haslam et al., 2009).

A study of 884 participants in Sweden revealed a positive association between well-being and bonding with their personal and collective favorite places (Knez et al., 2020).

Community engagement is “the active, voluntary involvement of individuals and groups in changing problematic conditions in communities and influencing the policies and programs that affect the quality of their lives and the lives of other residents” (Ohmer, 2007, p. 109).

Sense of place has been found to aid in building community engagement through an increase in school and community partnerships (Bauch, 2000). Among many variables, the ones most likely to increase community engagement are sense of community and place identity (Talo, 2017).

Subsequently, it has been found that teens volunteering within a community increase their place attachment, improve their sense of identity and are less likely to engage in deviant behaviors (Feinberg, 2005).

Today, people are increasingly following job opportunities, and the ties to extended family and place are no longer as strong. Finding new connections in new places is imperative to a person’s mental health. Research shows that interventions should be made to increase a person’s sense of belonging in order to combat depression and suicidal ideation among adults (McLaren et al., 2007). One area that is of particular interest to this researcher is connecting people among all generations. There is much to be learned from those who have lived long and full lives. Our seniors are tremendously valuable to society. Their knowledge and their history are illuminating and enlightening. In this fast-paced society of social media, our youth have much to teach our seniors, as well. Creating places for connection and bonding among all generations is an aspiration for this design thesis.

2.5.3 ENVIRONMENT

Urban expansion can result in the reduction of green spaces. Communities that invest in green spaces improve their environment in the following ways:

- **Cleaner Air.** Dedicated green spaces with shade trees can help reduce dust and smoke from exhaust. Plants and trees improve the air quality by absorbing carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide and carbon monoxide and emitting oxygen (Traverso, 2020).
- **Noise Reduction.** The addition of trees has been proven to reduce traffic noise in urban settings. This has led to suggestions for treed medians in largely urban communities (Onder & Kocbeker, 2012), and can aid in creating more restorative settings.
- **Improving Thermal Comfort.** Trees provide shade and improve the microclimate for pedestrians. This may have an economic benefit as well. Shade may encourage visitors to enjoy the dining patios for longer periods of time during the day. Building shade can also reduce the energy expended to keep local businesses cool.
- **Increasing Biodiversity.** Green spaces encourage biodiversity. While increasing habitats is beneficial for birds and pollinators it may also have benefits to humans. One study shows that greenspace users may be able to perceive species richness and that perception has a measurable benefit to physical and psychological health (Shwartz et al., 2014).
- **Encourage people to be more environmentally responsible.** Witnessing the multiple benefits that green spaces provide to a community may encourage visitors to be more environmentally responsible in their own lives.

2.6 SUMMARY

Sense of place and experiential landscapes are interwoven concepts that are beneficial to the livelihood of small towns in growing metropolitan areas. Understanding these concepts can inform the design and planning of landscapes that can preserve and strengthen communities. Experiential landscapes offer tangible benefits that may create a more resilient society. Aside from the economic advantage, especially in times of crisis, meaningful places that convey a community identity can have a positive impact on a community and individual's well-being. Experiential landscapes further seek to create places that encourage human engagement and engagement with nature. Greenspaces offer numerous benefits to the environment and visiting community. Designing for connection increases the ability to physically and emotionally restore residents of a community through design. The following chapter reviews the study procedures and methods to document attributes informing experiential landscapes and guide the design and planning of downtown Prosper, Texas.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A multimethod approach was used to develop this thesis (Deming & Swaffield, 2011). The literature aided in understanding the characteristics of sense of place in order to better recognize how it can be revealed through landscape architecture. Within the scope of sense of place, the concept of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) was explored and is the basis for this study. This study benefited from primary data collection methods and case study methods (Francis, 1999), in order to study and document the elements of experiential landscapes (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) for the design of downtown Prosper, Texas. While in-depth interviews (de Wit, 2013) were held to better understand the wants and needs of the community with regard to experiential landscapes. The findings from the literature review, case studies and interviews were used to inform the redesign of downtown Prosper, TX.

This chapter details the research design, study population and location, and data collection methods. This study was carried out in a five-step process including: literature review, case studies, interviews, passive site observations and synthesis.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design of this study involved systematic documentation and assessment of primary and secondary data to inform design process. The literature review informed the parameters for the case studies, interview questions and the design proposal. The case studies were performed to evaluate existing experiential sites in Texas. These sites were selected in order to analyze the effectiveness of design interventions with respect to the themes revealed in the literature review. Interviews were administered to Prosper residents to gain information relating to the themes selected as design parameters. Observations took place to further understand the selected design site and to strengthen the inventory and analysis portion of the study. Figure 3.1 outlines the research design for this Master's Design Thesis.

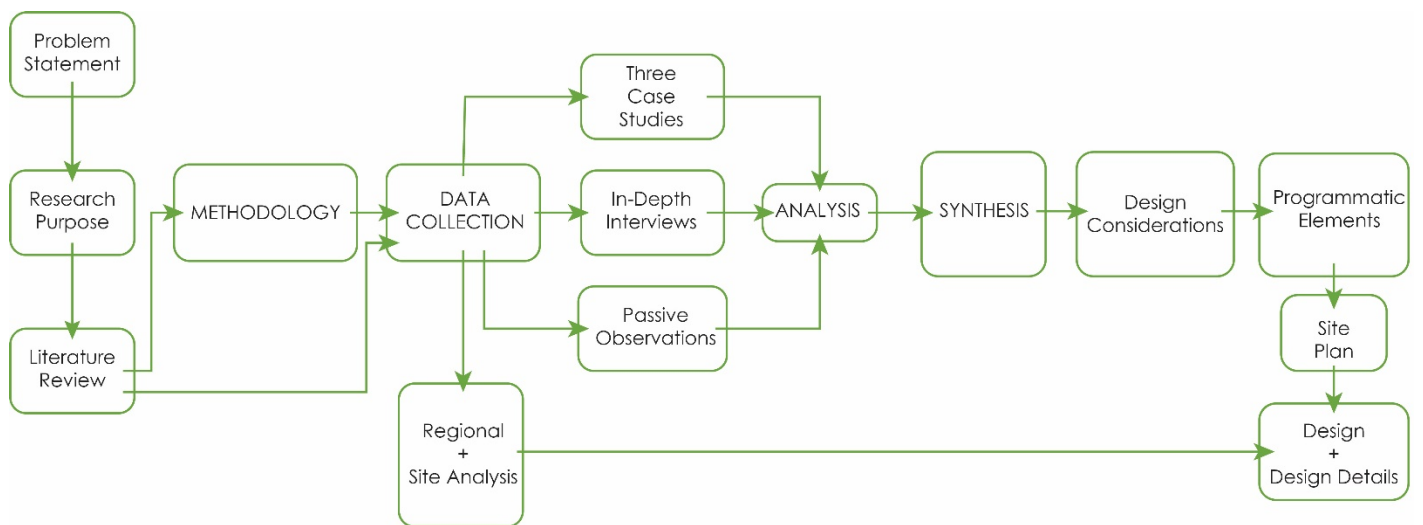


Figure 3.1 Research Design

3.3 STUDY POPULATION AND LOCATION

Prosper is an affluent suburban town with 29,137 residents (World Population Review, 2021) and home to more than 100 businesses (Town of Prosper, 2020). As a town, Prosper's mission is family focused. The town is committed to small-town ideals and to providing a good quality of life. (Town of Prosper, 2020). The Prosper Independent School District is rated A+ and is ranked the 14th best among 1,019 School Districts in Texas (Niche website, 2020). PISD has approximately 19,500 students and is projected to have 45,000 students in the year 2030. The Town's leaders work closely alongside Prosper ISD, with Mayor Ray Smith and Superintendent Dr. Holly Ferguson jointly delivering the "State of the Community" address (Prosper Press, 2021).

Prosper encompasses 27 square miles and is 32 miles from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, which is ranked 11th largest in the world, fourth largest in the United States and home to American Airlines (Shine, 2017). It is 28 miles from Dallas Love Field Airport, the home base for Southwest Airlines, and 20 minutes from two private airports.

Prosper is 35 miles north of downtown Dallas. The Dallas North Tollway runs north and south and provides the most direct access from Dallas to Prosper. The tollway currently ends in Prosper. However, it eventually will extend another 30 miles north, to Sherman, Texas.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

3.4.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

This study reviewed literature to better understand the attributes of place, as it has been studied for quite some time and still remains challenging to comprehensively define. One thing that became clear through the literature review is that place is extensively tied to human

connection: people connecting with one another or nature, or both. In searching for human connection through design, the design philosophy of Thwaites and Simkins experiential landscapes was discovered. Themes were revealed and were used as the basis for analysis and to inform the design of a human-centric sense of place. The study also sought to review the importance of place to a community. This was an interesting and enlightening endeavor that may not have been necessary for this work. However, understanding the benefits of experiential landscapes, to an individual and a community, may direct our intentions and resources toward creating these vital places.

3.4.2 CASE STUDIES

Case studies were conducted on three Texas places: Historic Downtown McKinney Cultural District, Magnolia Market at the Silos, and Watters Creek. These sites were selected through convenience sampling due to their noted attributes as places with unique identity and/or sense of place. Each site was evaluated for its observed success in creating an experiential sense of place based on social imageability, restorative opportunities, and social engagement, as shown in Table 2.1.

The Historic Downtown McKinney Cultural District in Texas is a bustling downtown approximately 10 miles from Prosper. Twenty years ago, downtown McKinney was a somewhat desolate square on the verge of revitalization. McKinney is like Prosper in that major highways bisect it. In 2017, Money magazine rated McKinney the #1 Best Place to Live in America (Cowles, 2014).

Magnolia Market at the Silos in Waco, Texas has become one of the most popular places to visit in Texas. Although the creators are famous for their HGTV show, the place they created

is unique, and further study is warranted. One of the most interesting things about the site is the spontaneous human engagement witnessed by the researcher.

The final case study, Watters Creek in Allen Texas, is a popular mixed-use development just north of the city of Dallas. These studies were performed to observe and analyze lessons or principles that can advance the understanding of experiential places in Texas. (Figure 3.2) The studies were intended to identify and understand the elements that contribute to each site's sense of place and to further evaluate each case study on the criteria outlined in Table 2.1.

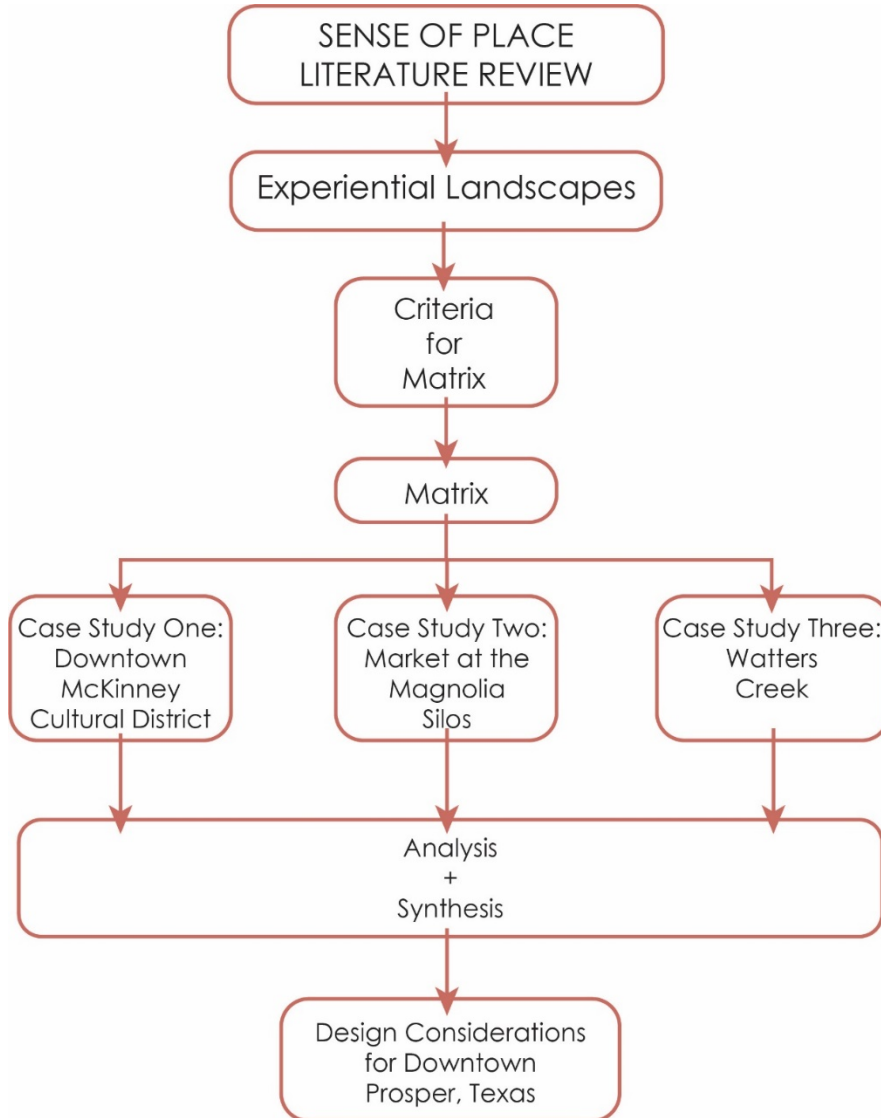


Figure 3.2 Case Study Process

3.4.3 INTERVIEWS

The primary goal of this study is to identify design elements that could contribute to an experiential sense of place in Texas and apply them to historic downtown Prosper, Texas. Semistructured interviews were performed with current Prosper residents. The interview included profile questions as well as in-depth, open-ended questions and additional optional

questions (Figure 3.3). The interview findings were used to better understand the thoughts and desires of the current population. Guidance for interviewing for sense of place was drawn from an article by Cary W. de Wit (de Wit, 2013). A casual dialogue with residents, allowed room for discussion and produced rich data.

This study was approved for human subject research by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research on human subjects at the University of Texas at Arlington in Arlington, Texas. Interview questions were reviewed to ensure protection of the study participant's rights. Upon approval from the IRB (see Appendix A), interview participants were contacted personally. Convenience and snowball sampling method was used to identify interview participants. This technique was excellent for finding a large source of interested interview candidates, however this technique did not capture the diversity in candidates that the researcher had intended. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. This allowed the researcher to fully listen and consider the sentiment alongside the dialogue. The interview participants' identities were protected and remain anonymous.

The person-to-person, open-ended questions were formulated from the experiential landscape framework. (Table 2.1) The interview was designed to:

- Understand what experiences and features Prosper resident's value within the town and in downtown Prosper.
- Understand what changes could be made to better meet their needs.
- Identify what features would improve their experience in downtown Prosper.

An introduction to the study was followed by the interview questions (Figure 3.3)

An additional interview was given to a Prosper resident who has an extensive personal knowledge of the town's history. This interview was performed to gain additional insight into the people, places and industry of Prosper's past.

Nicole Simonini Interview Questions 2/5/2021

CULTIVATING A SENSE OF PLACE THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LANDSCAPES:

THE REDESIGN OF DOWNTOWN PROSPER, TEXAS

Primary Questions:

Section 1 – Profile Questions

1. What is your age? (optional)
2. Which gender do you identify most with? (optional)
3. What best represents your racial or ethnic heritage? (optional)
4. How would you describe your household income level? Low, Medium, High (optional)
5. How long have you lived in Prosper?
6. Why did you choose to live in Prosper?
7. Have you ever been in downtown Prosper?

Section 2 – In-depth Questions

1. How would you describe the Town of Prosper? And downtown Prosper?
2. What kind of experiences do you value the most in the Town of Prosper? And in downtown Prosper?
3. What do you think are Prosper's most notable physical features or landmarks that contribute to the identity of the town of Prosper? And in downtown Prosper?
4. Why do you visit downtown Prosper? List as many reasons as you can think of.
5. What physical features would add to your experience in downtown Prosper?
6. In your view, what would enhance the image of downtown Prosper?
7. In your view, what would make one feel peaceful and present in downtown Prosper?
8. In your view, what would encourage social interaction in downtown Prosper?
9. Are there other things you would like to share regarding downtown Prosper today?

Section 3 – Additional Questions

1. Does the Town of Prosper represent you well? If not, please describe what could represent you better?
2. What Prosper community or area events do you or would you like to have in Prosper?
3. When you are outside in a public space or local park what do you like to do?
4. If you had a friend visiting and you wanted to show them 3 places in Texas that you like to go, where would take them? Why?
5. What are some of your personal goals?
6. Describe how the town of Prosper could be better suited to your lifestyle or the lifestyle you want?
7. Describe how downtown Prosper could be better suited to your lifestyle or the lifestyle you want?

1

Figure 3.3 Interview Questions

3.4.4 PASSIVE SITE OBSERVATIONS

The researcher benefited from passive observation techniques both as part of the case studies as well as part of the site inventory and analysis for the study site. For the site analysis the researcher observed activities from several locations within downtown Prosper. The observations took place over several days, on both weekdays and weekends, during work hours and in the early evening. These observations took place to better understand how the existing site is being used. Each observation session lasted approximately 30 minutes. The observations aided in understanding pedestrian views, circulation patterns as well as understanding the existing parking accommodations. The observations also aided in understanding walkability, bikeability, and user preferences on the site.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

Case studies use site documentation and observation to examine a project for the purpose of informing future practices (Francis, 1999). The case studies were observed for sense of place components as well as programmatic and design elements. The data was analyzed according to the criteria outlined in the experiential landscape framework (Table 2.1). Each case study was examined individually and then compared and contrasted to one another in order to draw any additional conclusions that would lead to design decisions (Figure 3.4). The audio interviews were transcribed, and the results were reviewed for common themes, using thematic analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2019), relating to social imageability, restoration and social engagement (Figure 3.5).

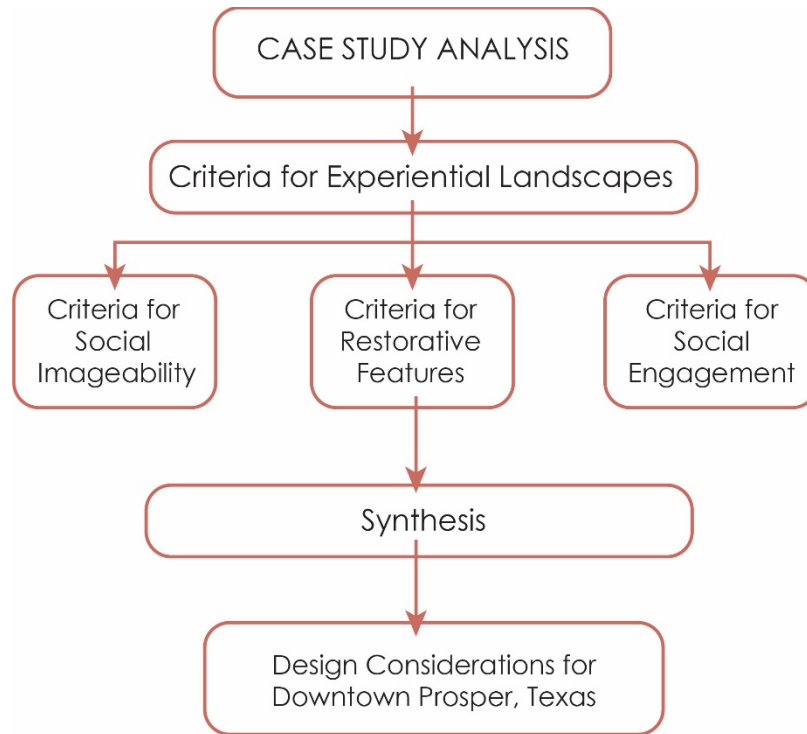


Figure 3.4 Case Study Analysis

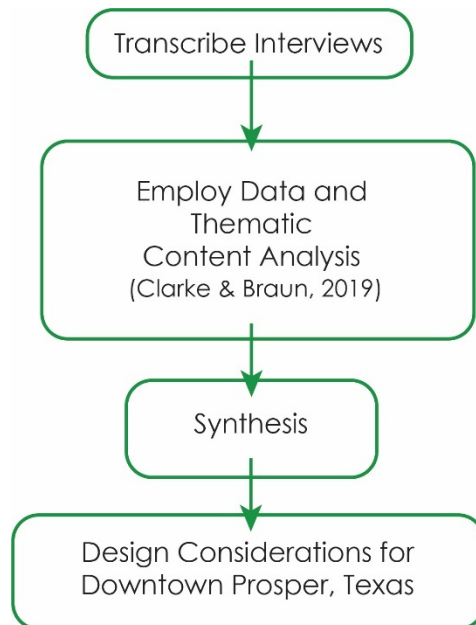


Figure 3.5 Interview Analysis

3.6 BIAS, ERROR AND LIMITATIONS

The methodology was limited by the length of time of the study. The Covid-19 pandemic may have affected human engagement observed at the site. The research was limited by the study of only three sites, and possibly by the types of sites selected. The interview data was limited by the use of convenience and snowball sampling methods. These methods resulted in limited diversity among participants in age and race. The researcher sought to be impartial throughout the study process and has taken preventive measures throughout the study to avoid potential human bias and error.

3.7 DESIGN PROCESS

The design process in this Master's Design thesis involved typical design development steps including region, town, and site inventory and analysis, programming, concept diagrams for downtown, a schematic master plan and design details for historic downtown Prosper, Texas.

The findings from the literature review, case studies, interviews and observations were used to develop a design proposal for downtown Prosper. The schematic master plan was shaped by the programmatic and design elements revealed in the case studies to have potential for creating experiential design in Texas. Observations were critical to understanding how current residents use the site and helped to identify patterns for improved usage. The interviews helped to clarify the ways in which Prosper residents may seek to use and find value in the downtown area.

3.8 SUMMARY

Chapter three explains the methods employed to gather and analyze data used to inform the design of downtown Prosper. The literature review provided the foundation for experiential landscapes as well as their value to a community experiencing rapid growth. The case studies were performed to observe and analyze lessons or principles that can advance the understanding of experiential places in Texas and inform the design of downtown Prosper. The interviews revealed the valued experiences in Prosper, aiding in the understanding of the identity of the community of Prosper. The interviews were also helpful in understanding the wants and needs for historic downtown Prosper. This chapter illustrated how each method was used in relation to the experiential landscape framework (Table 2.1).

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter primarily discusses findings of the case studies and analysis of the interview data. The purpose of the case studies is to evaluate and present the site observations as they pertain to the experiential landscape framework identified during the literature review. The objective of which is to identify which features correspond well with the characteristics noted in the experiential landscape framework (Table 2.1) and to identify areas or features that could be improved to create a more experiential landscape at the site. The analysis of three separate private and semi-public outdoor spaces allowed for a good contrast in features that might be considered imageable, restorative, or socially engaging as shown in Table 2.1.

Seventeen semistructured interviews were conducted with Prosper residents to gain insight into the current identity of Prosper, Texas and the residents' perception of valued features and experiences. Insights emerged through identifying themes in the data, which were used to redesign Prosper's historic downtown. Lastly, a more in-depth interview with a Prosper historian offered insight into the places, people and industry of Prosper's past. This interview was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the town's past in order to create an authentic experience.

4.2 LITERATURE FINDINGS APPLICABLE TO DESIGN

The experiential landscape framework (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007) discovered through the literature review, is a constructive model for creating a meaningful downtown in Prosper, Texas. During the design process, focusing on the three major criteria of social imageability, restorative opportunities, and social engagement produces a distinct and valued outdoor place for

Prosper residents. The experiential landscape framework brings together the essential aspects of successful outdoor places. The table provides straightforward, attainable components that can be reproduced, yet still create an experiential sense of place. A strong focus on social imageability helps form Prosper's changing identity and strengthen the community. The restorative and social engagement features may support and fortify the Prosper residents, again creating a more resilient community.

4.3 CASE STUDY ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter provides the findings from the case studies for experiential landscapes in Texas. The evaluation criteria are based on the discoveries from the literature review. The data provides results from the on-site documentation of three case studies selected for their variation with regard to outdoor public/semipublic spaces. A design matrix was created to evaluate each case study based on the criteria collected from literature. See Figure 4.19. This data was analyzed and used to inform the plan for downtown Prosper, Texas.

4.3.1 HISTORIC DOWNTOWN MCKINNEY CULTURAL DISTRICT

Historic downtown McKinney, Texas was established in 1848. It features a common Texas downtown configuration with a central courthouse on a square surrounded by retail and dining. The original courthouse was designed in the style of the French Second Empire in 1875. It was renovated in 1927 and restored in a neoclassical style. It was vacated in 1979 and repurposed as a performing arts center in 2005 (McKinneyTexas.org , 2021).

After many years of appearing dated and half-vacant, at the turn of the 21st century, the square began to be revitalized (Jeffords, 2016). Downtown McKinney is a nationally recognized

participant in the Main Street America Program, a subsidiary of the National Trust for Historic Preservation (Ozdil, 2008). The square is now home to more than 120 eclectic shops including art galleries and boutiques, plus staples such as butchers and cobblers (Cowles, 2014). It offers more than 20 restaurants including small diners, pubs and upscale farm-to-table eateries. The Historic Downtown McKinney Cultural District is the identity of the city and its main attraction (McKinneyTexas.org , 2021). The popularity of the historic downtown has fueled expansion in all directions, including the new location of the locally famous Tupps Brewery to the east.

McKinney, Texas has experienced significant growth in the last 20 years, with a population that has grown more than 64 percent since the 2010 census.

Downtown McKinney hosts several annual events. The most popular include: Krewe of Barkus, a pet parade that draws an estimated 5,000 attendants to the area (Festival.net, 2021); Arts in Bloom, which features more than 120 juried artists (McKinneyTexas.org , 2012); Oktoberfest, where the downtown is transformed into a 14-block beer garden and features traditional German fashion, dancing and activities for all ages (Everfest.com, 2021) ; and Home for the Holidays, a season-long event with pop-up markets by local artists, carousel rides, and a Christmas village (McKinneyTexas.org , 2021).



Figure 4.1 Downtown McKinney. From left, Oktoberfest (SOURCE: Brandondoesdallas.com), Home for the Holidays (SOURCE: Starlocalmedia.com).

The Experiential Landscape of Historic Downtown McKinney

Social Imageability

Downtown McKinney features numerous boutiques and eateries. It does not have an anchor store that would necessitate routine visits to the downtown area. However, a local may find the local eating and drinking establishments to be a quaint third place. Downtown McKinney does attract numerous visitors, but the percentage of locals who frequent the downtown McKinney area on a regular basis is unknown.

McKinney’s motto is “Unique by Nature.” According to its website, the elements that make McKinney unique are its tree-lined streets, diverse neighborhoods, exceptional schools, strong businesses, vibrant downtown, and sense of community (McKinneyTexas.org , 2021).

McKinney is proud of its uniqueness, and it is evident in the downtown cultural district. One of the first things detected was the distinctive signage for each merchant, (Figures 4.2 and 4.3). The buildings have identifiable architectural details. Some buildings have rich colors, and many retailers have large storefront windows with custom awnings to further showcase their brand. The buildings are primarily brick and feel authentic. As a whole, the architecture creates considerable visual variety. Sidewalks in front of the retailers are wide, with enhanced paving, and allow for spacious patio seating in some areas.

Today, the most notable landmark is the old courthouse at the center of the square. The new Tupps Brewery, currently under construction, may soon be a rival.

From the many successful events that downtown McKinney hosts, it is clearly able to accommodate large community functions, aided by the ability to shut down streets and divert traffic. However, there is no good central gathering place. While the square with the central courthouse is a favored downtown configuration in Texas, the courthouse blocks the views around the square. As one walks the square, however, it could be that the sense of wonder that awaits around each corner creates this favored design.

The socially imageable feature that downtown McKinney does have in spades is locality. Most residents want to keep these businesses alive because these are their neighbors helping to maintain McKinney's uniqueness and to strengthen their community. These retailers may also tailor their products to the wants of the local community vs., a chain store that provides the same products nationwide.



Figure 4.2 Downtown McKinney. From left, unique signage, historical buildings.



Figure 4.3 Downtown McKinney. From left, storefront, featured local cuttings in a store.

Restorative

Downtown McKinney feels somewhat restorative to the researcher although it does not have any water features or natural planting beds in the square. It does have large planters full of seasonal flowers at each corner, and these planters are a part of the identity of downtown McKinney. The numerous architectural details create a stimulating environment. The quaint historical buildings generate nostalgia, which feels restorative. There is a nearby place to retreat outside of the square, however, it does not feel a part of the site.

Social Engagement

There was no spontaneous human engagement witnessed while on site. The patios offer a good place to sit and people-watch. The local dining establishments also offer the opportunity to feel territorial through a favored restaurant or table. Although, both of these scenarios are likely to cost money and may prohibit visitors from engaging in these social behaviors.



Figure 4.4 Downtown McKinney Cultural District Square, March 2021

4.3.2 MAGNOLIA MARKET AT THE SILOS, WACO, TEXAS



Figure 4.5 Magnolia Market rendering (Magnolia, 2021)

Waco, Texas is home to the late governor Ann Richards, Dr Pepper and Chip and Joanna Gaineses Magnolia Market at the Silos. The Gaineses wildly popular cable TV home-improvement show, “Fixer Upper,” captured the nation’s heart in 2013. While filming “Fixer Upper,” Joanna Gaines set her sights on two 120-foot-tall, abandoned silos in downtown Waco (Homestratosphere, 2021). The Gaineses purchased the silos and the surrounding two blocks and sought to create a destination that would improve the local economy and revitalize the downtown area (Homestratosphere, 2021). Two years after their HGTV debut, the Gaineses opened the Magnolia Market at the Silos. The Market included the converted grain barn, the Silos Baking Co., the full garden at the Seed Supply shop, food trucks and a large lawn for visitors to play. Each attraction featured the Gaineses signature style. Magnolia Market was an

immediate success. Every week, the market received an estimated 30,000 visitors from worldwide (Shoulberg, 2021).

On a first visit years ago, this researcher witnessed numerous accounts of spontaneous human engagement. Stand still at the silos and someone will strike up a conversation. What inspires this human connection? Could it be the tiniest possibility that there would be a Chip sighting? Was it Joanna's refined yet comforting aesthetic? Did this dog-friendly place make the people friendly? This case study also intended to find the answer.

The market had experienced an expansion since the last visit. A Wiffle Ball field had been installed. Visitors joined in the fun, with dads pitching to a line of kids hoping to hit it out of the park. The ball stands were filled with onlookers, and the large, concession stand sold all of the ballpark favorites, as well as Magnolia brand water. A few yards away stood a new, old church. The Gaineses purchased a historic Waco church that was built in 1894 but had been abandoned for the past 30 years. The church was moved to the silos, renovated on site and opened to visitors. It stands at the head of an open lawn, and its distinct architecture can be viewed from the street (Figure 4.6).

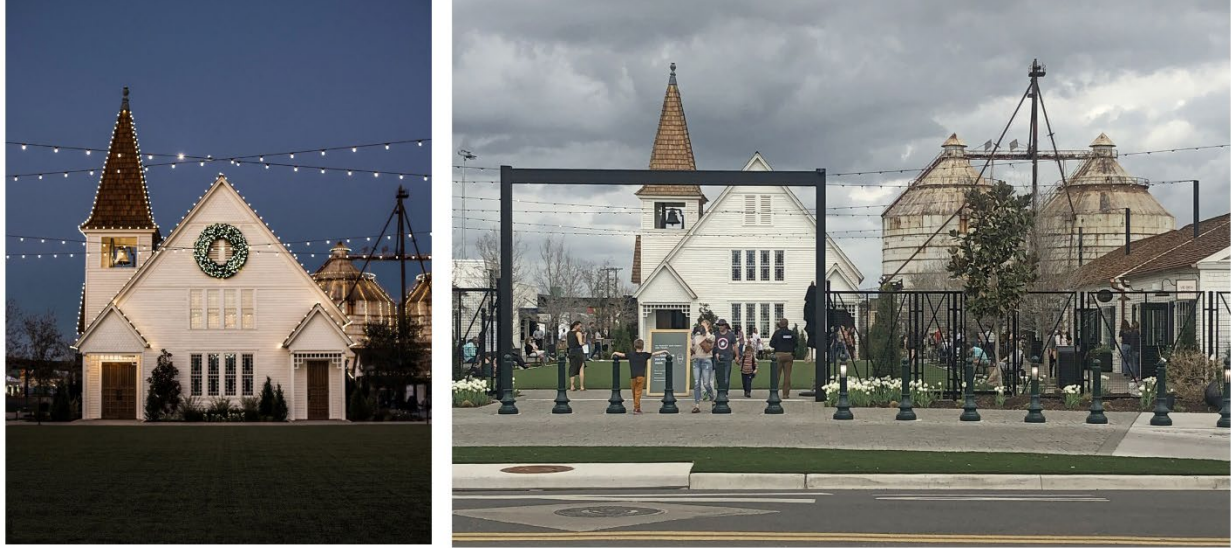


Figure 4.6 Historic church that was relocated to Magnolia Market. (SOURCE for left photo: D Magazine)

Single-story boutiques with white wood siding line the lawn by the church with festoon lights creating a historic and festive feel. Standing out among all the white structures is the deep forest green of the Magnolia Press Coffee Co. (Figure 4.7), a café with vintage signage that begs to be photographed – and people do! Pinterest is populated with photos of cheery visitors proclaiming to the world that they were once in Waco, Texas.



Figure 4.7 Magnolia Press Coffee Co. front and back.

The Experiential Landscape of Magnolia Market

Social Imageability

There is no grocer or post office for Waco residents to visit at the Silos. There are food trucks for a casual lunch, and due to the incredible success of the silos, the surrounding downtown area is being slowly revitalized. There are way-finding signs and maps within the site. Signs proclaiming the area to be the “Silo District” were spotted outside the Magnolia Market. A trolley now runs on a 15-minute route through downtown Waco. There are many indicators of why this might be the friendliest place in Texas, and a stranger from Pennsylvania helped to possibly solve the puzzle.

While trying to snag a seat near the food trucks, this researcher was offered a spot at a Pennsylvania family’s table. It was this family’s final day of a two-week stay in Waco. Two weeks in Waco! They knew more about Waco than this born and bred Texan, and they told me all about it. It was an enlightening conversation. I pondered aloud what made this place so

social. The mom declared, “Well, everyone here is on vacation!” Eureka! Folks here are in a different state of mind. It was clear though from our conversation, that what made Magnolia Market special to this family was also one of the elements of experiential landscapes: locality.

“For nearly half a century, the mill bolstered Waco’s economy through its support of local farmers, provision of jobs, and international commerce. Today, the adaptive reuse and preservation efforts of the Gaines family ensure that the mill will retain this role at the heart of the city’s economic development for many years to come” (Sawyer, 2021).

The Gaineses often feature local artisans on “Fixer Upper,” and that trend is continued at the market. Magnolia Market designs, prints and distributes a small booklet called “A Waco Passport.” (Figure 4.7). This passport features maps and the staff’s favorite places to shop, play, and dine around Waco. It features the shops of local artisans, local amusements and local restaurateurs. The last page of the passport discloses the Magnolia manifesto. It is a wonderful and attainable ideal: restoration of the soul, friendship, kindness, courage and unearthing beauty. Creating, with these intentions, may also be the key to the uniqueness of this place.

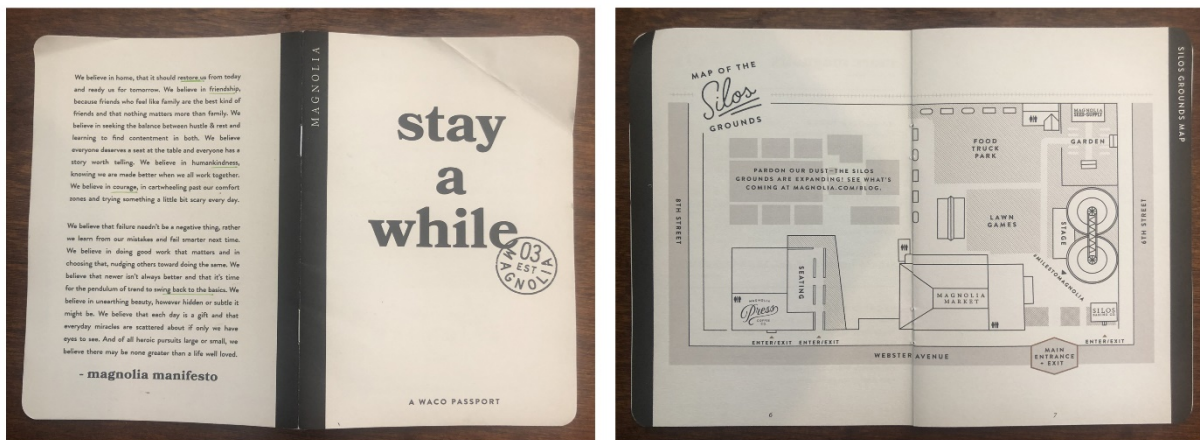


Figure 4.8 Magnolia Market’s Waco Passport

The extensive use of white, black and green creates an incredibly imageable site. The silos are the largest landmark, but the signage alone is highly recognizable. The buildings are made of brick and painted siding. The shade structures are black iron, with black-and-white awnings in some locations. The hardscape is almost exclusively high-end pavers. The turf is synthetic, and people appear to enjoy resting and playing on the surface. The turf and pavers laid in a diamond pattern near two of the entrances are highly imageable and can be seen from outside the site. The design details, mix of materials, and something new at every turn create visual variety and complexity.

The Gaineses built a large stage in front of the silos. Live music events are held on the site, as well as the annual fall Silobration. The latter hosts artisans from nationwide, and features live entertainment, food trucks and varied amusements. Magnolia Market also hosts local farmer's markets, which are likely to draw more of the locals to the area.



Figure 4.9 Magnolia Market. From left, west/main entrance, silo stage.

Restorative

Magnolia Market appears to be mostly bustle. There are two board-formed concrete fountains that add almost nothing to the site (Figure 4.9). There is no seating near the fountains, and no one interacted with them or near them. They also were not running at the time of this study. There is an area that one might find restorative on a quiet day, and that would be the raised gardens near the Seed and Supply shop. The gardens feature herbs, bulbs, and blooming annuals. In the garden are furniture and a tepee made of grapevines that could provide a sense of solitude among all of the activity. Another restorative feature, for this observer, is the seasonal displays (Figure 4.10). These displays are simple, striking and stimulating. Lastly, a large fireplace with outdoor sofas near the coffee cafe and may create restorative moments in the evenings.



Figure 4.10 From left, fountain, Seed Shop.



Figure 4.11 From left, fireplace, seasonal display (SOURCE: Cutertudor.com).

Social Engagement

There is spontaneous engagement on the benches, the steps to the stage, among dog walkers and dog lovers. Engagement occurred while searching for a place to sit, waiting in line at the Press, and standing outside the church. Children engaged on the open lawn and while playing Wiffle Ball. A large “Toy Box” offers lawn toys for guests, with the only request being to put them away when they are done. There was so much engagement, that I jokingly thought there might be something in the Magnolia brand water. A future study, through interviews with site visitors, would be interesting.

Ample seating allows for people-watching and territoriality. However, the environment is and feels like a destination. A local may prefer to go where more locals go.



Figure 4.12 Magnolia Market at the Silos, March 2021



Figure 4.13 Magnolia Market at the Silos, March 2021



Figure 4.14 Downtown Waco Trolley Map

4.3.3 WATTERS CREEK, ALLEN, TEXAS

Watters Creek is a mixed-use retail and dining space with a village feel located in Allen, Texas. Allen is located off U.S. Highway 75 and is approximately 20 miles north of Dallas, Texas. Allen’s population has doubled in the past 20 years, reaching 108,706 in 2020 (Allen EDC, 2020). The Watters Creek project comprises 52 acres with approximately 70 stores, most geared towards women (Bennett Benner Partners, 2021). The development serves as a town center to the master-planned Montgomery Farms residential community (Cooper Smith Agency,

2008). The master plan, as well of some of the building architecture was designed by Bennet Benner Partners (Bennett Benner Partners, 2021). TBG provided site planning and landscape architectural services (TBG Partners, 2021), integrating a natural flood plain into the design and creating a creek corridor through the site (Cooper Smith Agency, 2008). The site was designed with women in mind and focused on creating a space that revitalizes, inspires and invokes a sense of discovery (Cooper Smith Agency, 2008). The site feels exciting, with varied elevations and a meandering street pattern. It includes a centrally located large open greenspace with a natural looking creek that runs through the site. A multilevel playscape sits within the tall trees, adjacent to the open greenspace, and over the creek. Several dining options surround the greenspace, each offering patio dining with views of the open green, creek and playground. Outside the island of greenspace and dining are two five-story buildings with retail on the lower level and office space or residential lofts above.

The green space feels restorative due in large part to the large natural creek and landscaping. Most views from the greenspace consist of tall buildings and dining patios. It feels comfortably enclosed, although the highway noise is ever present. Parking garages surround the site. The identity of the site is not apparent from the highway. Driving at normal speed along the major highway that abuts the site, one might never know the jewel that exists inside.

Watters Creek was the first Texas retail site certified by the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) system (Watters Creek, 2021). Sustainability is sought through:

- Building vertically, not horizontally, in their retail space and the parking garages.
- Using well water for the creek and irrigation of the site.
- Using reflective rooftop materials.

- Saving trees on the site, bringing in mature trees saved from other sites and planting more than 500 new trees.
- Incorporating recycled building materials and offering on-site recycling services for visitors.
- Offering refillable-water-bottle fountains for visitors,

The site also offers electric vehicle charging stations and free sitewide wi-fi (Watters Creek, 2021)

The Experiential Landscape of Watters Creek

Social Imageability

Watters Creek is anchored by a midsize grocer, Market Street, and a craft store, Michaels, offering reasons to routinely visit this shopping center. Approximately 70 other retailers are on the site. All shopping and dining appear to be chain restaurants, with possibly one local, small diner. Menchies Frozen Yogurt was the most popular food sited on the central greenspace. While the lawn appears to be a very social site, a sense of community may be lessened by the lack of local businesses.

The physical features and the siting of the retailers are exceptionally identifiable. The central island of greenspace and restaurants features walkable alleys with festoon lighting and a large, centrally located stone fireplace. The fireplace is made with recycled materials and is located within the alleys, offering refuge from the open space. Stone, in numerous patterns, and stucco are commonly used throughout the site. The colors are mainly variations of beige, with pops of color coming from individual retailers. Each retailer promotes its unique image through building materials and design, signage, seating, lighting, awnings, and umbrellas. Each rooftop

also is distinct, with very little visible roofing material. Some are high-end Spanish tile roofs while others are flat roofs, each with unique flourishes and varying heights. The rooftops in the central dining island are outlined with white lights, which highlight the roofline variations. Most of the walkways are concrete, Six to eight feet wide with intermittent enhanced paving such as Pavestone or natural stone. The custom playscape is distinctive and placed over the creek and among the trees with a large slide that opens to the greenspace (Figure 4.14). The most distinctive landmark is the centrally located natural creek corridor.

Visual variety and complexity is achieved through the architectural features as well as the unusual street pattern and the organic landscape design. Variety also is accomplished through art that is featured throughout the site. Bronze horses and ducks, whimsical rabbits and pigs can be found around almost every corner. Interesting graffiti art walls provide fun and identifiable photo opportunities, although they actually are large printed canvases that feel inauthentic.



Figure 4.15 Watters Creek. From left, custom playground, bronze art.

The open lawn is artificial turf, and it accommodates the most popular event of the site: live music. The site also hosts pet adoptions, kids’ events, seasonal professional photography sessions, bar crawls, food drives and many holiday affairs.

Restorative

The natural creek corridor that runs through the site begins with a sizable man-made pond. The pond funnels to a creek lined with large stone boulders. Several short waterfalls were fashioned along the creek and create a stimulating landscape. This was observed to be the most popular attraction for children. Although signs discouraged climbing on rocks, many children and adults sat on the boulders along the creek. Dogs occasionally walked in the creek water. The water was murky, and no children were observed entering the water. Many groups were

witnessed sitting on the artificial lawn near the creek. Boulders, benches, steps, retaining walls and the open lawn provide numerous options for public seating (Figure 4.15).

A sense of solitude might be achieved on a quiet day or in the early morning. Within the enclosed space there are boulders or a bench where one could retreat. However, one probably not feel isolated.

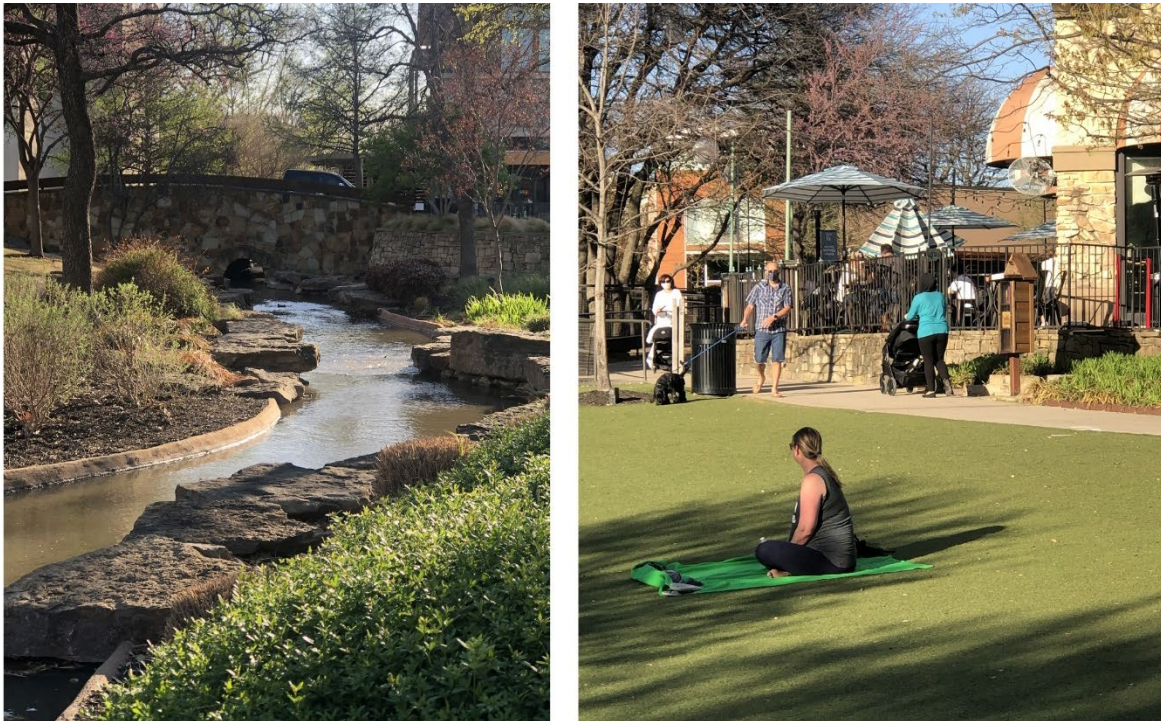


Figure 4.16 Watters Creek. From left, creek corridor, open lawn.

Social Engagement

The creek was the biggest draw for both children and adults. Some engagement was observed among the children along the creek (Figure 4.16). Several instances of spontaneous engagement was witnessed among dog walkers.

The dining patios provide an excellent spot to people-watch. Dogs are allowed on them, and the patios additionally were a source of human engagement. This day of observation

presented an Indian wedding photo shoot near the creek, groups of children of various ethnicities and ages engaging with the boulders and water, couples talking on the lawn, babies crawling on the lawn and many people enjoying frozen yogurt.

Dining spaces also provide opportunities for territoriality. Remote workers taking advantage of the free wi-fi and fine scenery appeared to be regulars with the staff. Locals may have a favorite spot to regularly sit and dine. Concertgoers may enjoy a specific spot on the the open lawn.



Figure 4.17 Watters Creek. From left, open lawn near creek, spontaneous engagement on lawn.



Figure 4.18 Watters Creek building typology, design details, March 2021



Figure 4.19 Waters Creek plan and directory (Watters Creek, 2012)

4.3.4 CASE STUDY EVALUATION

The case study data was captured and logged for each site. For example, each type of activity observed at each site was recorded. A matrix based on the experiential landscape framework was created to evaluate the data findings. The findings were analyzed by contrasting and comparing the recorded site data and are shown in Table 4.19.

Table 4.1 Case Study Evaluation

EVALUATION CRITERIA FOR EXPERIENTIAL LANDSCAPES	CS 1 DOWNTOWN MCKINNEY	CS 2 MAGNOLIA MARKET	CS 3 WATERS CREEK	NOTES
Presence of Routinely Visited Places				CS-2 is a destination. CS-3 has larger anchor stores.
Variety of Daily Activities Observed on Site				CS-2 has the most programmatic elements. Significant activity was observed on open lawns.
Valued Physical Features <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fine Design • Quality Materials • Visual Variety and Complexity 				Good architecture and design details, enhanced paving, stimulating branding
Able to Accomodate Community Functions				
Emphasizes Locality				Top points go to CS-1. CS-2 promotes the town but is limited within the site, although it is local.
Relaxing Environment or Features				The creek corridor in CS-3 calms the space. The historical buildings in CS-1 create feelings of nostalgia.
Stimulating Environment or Features				CS-2 features something interesting to see at every turn.
Provides a Place for Solitude and Reflection				
Creates a Feeling of Connection				CS-1 creates a feeling of connection to the past and the community. CS-2 adds a high degree of engagement.
Fosters Spontaneous Engagement				The feeling of being off of work may increase sociability. The presence of dogs is a significant factor.
Features Multiple Areas for Observation of the Site				Other than patio dining establishments, CS-1 did not offer many places to sit and observe.
Offers Opportunities for Territoriality				All sites offered places to sit without paying as well as a place or table to claim as one's own.

4.4 RESIDENT INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The interview process was rich with revelations and data. The interviews were a vital part of understanding the Prosper identity and the wants and needs of the community. Seventeen semistructured interviews were performed with Prosper residents and transcribed over the course of a month. In order to provide anonymity respondents were coded. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 73 years old with a median age of 50. The participants' residency in Prosper ranged from two to 29 years with the average being 14 years. The parents interviewed value the Prosper schools. The school district leaders are well-respected, and the schools, as well as the school events, are central to the lives of many Prosper residents. The Friday night football games are a valued experience for many families. A semiretired resident stated that he looked forward to going to see the high school plays again, when the pandemic ends.

Eight out of 17 participants wished Prosper had a traditional downtown square. The popularity of the downtown square configuration would be another interesting study. One participant claims that it could be the hottest day of the summer in Texas, and yet it would always feel cooler on a square. Perhaps it is the shade that the central courthouse provides. It is possible that the popularity may be due to the loop one would make while strolling, its being continuous without having to go back the way you came. Another possibility is the sense of anticipation as the shops are slowly revealed around each corner, or it may simply be nostalgia.

65 percent of the participants mentioned their desire for a central gathering space. This was proposed for various purposes: to mill around, to let kids play, to lie down or dance on a lawn during a concert, as a place for the high school band to play, to throw down a blanket and have a picnic, to watch a movie.

Mostly, Prosper residents need a reason to go downtown. Many want diverse eating and drinking establishments, and they do not want chain restaurants. They want places to stroll and shop that feel authentic and historical. Most residents would walk to such a place, and they wish for hike and bike trails throughout the town. They would like these trails to be as experiential as the destination, with large trees and landscaping.

Social imageability in downtown Prosper. In-depth questions five and six sought to understand the physical features and the image that Prosper residents wanted for their downtown. As open-ended questions, the answers varied greatly, however themes did emerge. Prosper residents want a family friendly place to gather with diverse dining choices. They want to stroll. They want a natural green space that is heavily treed with natural landscaping. They are looking for historical architecture with unique storefronts that house wine tastings, bookstores, coffeeshops. They desire a walkable space with places to gather for dancing and small community events.

Restorative elements in downtown Prosper. The most broad response to question seven was to “create nostalgia”. The majority of residents want large trees with benches to relax, drink coffee, and look at views of colorful, natural landscapes. 40 percent of respondents wanted to view or listen to the sound of water. In the evening, white lights in the trees and beautiful sunsets were mentioned as restorative.

Social engagement in downtown Prosper. Residents felt that repeated engagement might occur with a farmer’s market. Encouraging dogs in the downtown area, whether walking on a trail, eating on a patio or visiting a nearby dog park would make the downtown more engaging. Patio dining and cafes with opportunities to people watch was desired. Broadcasting

music was mentioned, however those participants who mentioned it also agreed that finding music that pleases everyone would be difficult. Hosting events like live music on the lawn was very popular, as well as art shows. The teen participants mentioned preferring events that were cool, with targeted marketing to teens for dancing and movies on the lawn – as long as the event did not also appeal to their parents.

For small events, one resident suggested having teenagers work for tips by using golf carts to shuttle visitors from parking lots to their destination. This would possibly encourage multi-generational engagement.

The resident interviews revealed how passionate people can be about their places. Many residents thought they would have nothing to offer in an interview, but after contemplation most realized they had many ideas and became excited about the possibilities. Generally, people found the interview process to be very enjoyable. It became clear that most Prosper residents really like their hometown.

Each of the audio interviews were transcribed, and the results were reviewed for common themes relating to social imageability, restorative elements and social engagement as shown in Table 4.20.

Table 4.2 Interview Themes

PROSPER	DOWNTOWN PROSPER	VALUED EXPERIENCES IN PROSPER	LANDMARKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great Schools • Community Focused • Losing its Small-Town Feel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run-down • Very Little to Offer • Haphazard Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor Family-Friendly Events • School Events • Eating/Drinking • Being outdoors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hike/Bike Trails 2. Youth Sports 3. Patio Dining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Silos • Water Towers • Railroad • The Gin
DOWNTOWN WANTS	RESTORATIVE FEATURES	SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT	ADDITIONAL NOTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Square • Central Gathering Place • Places to Shop/Stroll • Dining Choices (No Chains) • Quality Architectural Buildings • Connection to Trails • Large Trees and Colorful Landscaping with / Lighting at Night 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Lawn with Large Trees • Natural Water Feature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Music • Encourage Dogs in Downtown • Farmer's Market (to encourage repeat engagement) • Small Community-Wide Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wooded Trails • Less Reliance on Cars • Use Golf Carts Around Town • Willing to Walk Miles for Experiential Place • Wants all of Prosper to Feel More Connected

4.5 PROSPER HISTORIAN INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In order to better understand Prosper's identity prior to the latest population boom, the researcher sought an in-depth interview with a long-term resident and historian of Prosper. When the resident moved to Prosper nearly 60 years ago, the population was approximately 300 people. As we drove through historic Prosper, we discussed the families that lived here and the businesses that made up downtown Prosper. At one point in the past, there were three small grocers in Prosper and no restaurants. There was a domino hall. According to the interviewee, for many years this is how Prosper residents wanted it to remain. They preferred to drive to Frisco or Plano for a meal and to keep Prosper the small town that it was.

It became evident that this was a farming community, and not much more than farming happened here. There was an annual Halloween festival with a cake walk. Mahard's Egg Farm was the biggest employer. It closed down two years ago. Although the interviewee claimed there were no meaningful places in Prosper, it became evident that all of Prosper is meaningful to him. The resident said that change and growth have brought no real value to this town, and his biggest fear is that Prosper will become like Frisco, and Plano before that.

The interview revealed that Prosper was a very small community and farming was the identity. The local school events provided most of the community-wide social engagements. Men gathered to restore over a game of dominos in downtown, though then it was just called town. It seems Prosper was a town where everyone knew everybody.

4.6 TOWN OF PROSPER ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.6.1 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF PROSPER



Figure 4.22 Downtown Prosper View from Broadway (SOURCE: James Nelms)

Prosper encompasses 27 square miles and is 32 miles from Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport, which is ranked 11th largest in the world, fourth largest in the United States and home to American Airlines (Shine, 2017). It is 28 miles from Dallas Love Field Airport, the home base for Southwest Airlines, and 20 minutes from two private airports. (Figure 4.22)

Prosper is 35 miles north of downtown Dallas. The Dallas North Tollway runs north and south and provides the most direct access from Dallas to Prosper. The tollway currently ends in Prosper. However, it eventually will extend another 30 miles north, to Sherman, Texas.

Preston Road is the next largest thoroughfare, slicing through residential neighborhoods as well as shopping and dining districts from Dallas northward through Prosper. While Preston

Road is designated as highway 289, its heavy traffic necessitates slower speeds ranging from 30 to 55 miles per hour from Dallas through Prosper. Preston is the most traveled road through Prosper, with speeds of 55 miles per hour through the town's center. The Texas Department of Transportation seeks to keep the road at the highest possible speed, using speed studies to determine the highest allowable miles per hour.

U.S. Highway 380 runs east and west and marks the southern border of Prosper. It extends 10 miles east to McKinney, Texas and U.S. Interstate 75 and westward 22 miles to Denton, Texas and Interstate 35. Access to these major roads in north Texas greatly determines the growth of North Texas towns.

Prosper begins at the northern border of Frisco, Texas. Frisco has experienced explosive growth in the past 20 years. It continues to add to an already notable portfolio of sports stadiums, company headquarters and entertainment venues. As a result, Prosper has gained thousands of new families seeking new housing and good schools. In 2010, Prosper's population was 9,400, Preston road was two lanes, and there was no grocery store. In 2021 Prosper's population is estimated to be 29,137, and it supports several major grocery stores as well as several new dining and shopping centers (Worldpopulationreview, 2021).

Celina, Texas borders Prosper on the north. Celina is approximately 78 square miles in size, which gives Celina the second largest geographic footprint in Collin County. Celina has been called metropolitan Dallas/Fort Worth's next big "boomtown," with the "location, room and attitude to explode" (Brown, 2016). Prosper's location between Frisco and Celina is likely to result in Prosper becoming an extension of these two major metropolitan areas with no evident

borders other than highways. Prosper's centrally located historic downtown provides an opportunity to preserve and promote a notable identity and to strengthen community bonds.

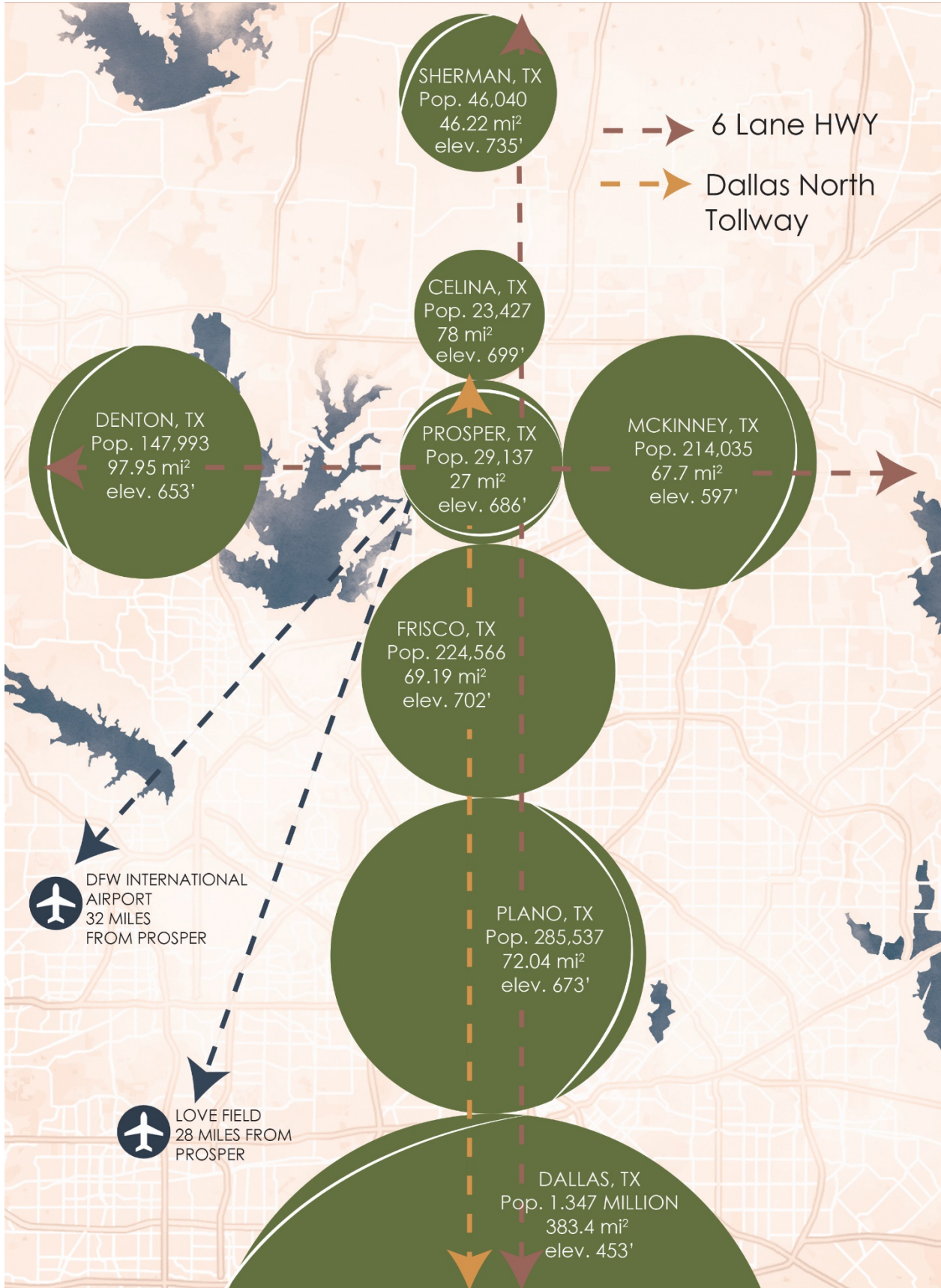


Figure 4.23 Prosper Regional Map, March 2021 (worldpopulationreview.com, 2021)

4.6.2 HISTORY OF PROSPER

The Town of Prosper originally encompassed two settlements called Richland and Rock Hill. Early settlers arrived around 1846. In 1902, the settlements joined to become Prosper. There already was a Richland in Texas, so a resident, Mr. T. C. Slaughter, suggested the name Prosper. Prosper was a farming community where cotton and grains were key crops (Rankin, 1953).

In 1901 the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad began operating in North Texas. Prosper became a central stop between Dallas, Texas and Sherman, Texas and the population neared 500 people. Businesses, churches and people moved to Prosper and settled on the east side of the railroad track (Gilliland, 1946). During the Great Depression, the population fell to 271 (Minor, 2021). For 49 years, from 1914 to 1963, banker U.N. Clary was the mayor of Prosper. He was a graduate of Prosper's Class of 1900. In 1953, an article about Prosper was featured in the Dallas News. In it, Mr. Clary was asked, "Where lies the future of your town?" (Rankin, 1953). He replied, "The future of our community will be just about like our past. This community furnishes 3,000 to 4,000 bales of cotton each year to the world, 75,000 bushels of wheat, thousands of dollars' worth of dairy products and above all, it furnishes boys and girls who go to the cities and other places and contribute to their development. I don't care whether this town ever grows or not as long as we can contribute to the feeding and clothing of the world and our boys and girls go out and do their part in life. There are probably more former Prosper people living in Dallas than there are residents in Prosper," he said. "I regret that they have to leave Prosper to find their opportunities, but I don't think they'll ever be sorry about having come from Prosper." The article closes with the author writing, "A visitor gets the impression that as

long as Prosper and other towns like it continue to exist everything is going to be all right” (Rankin, 1953).

4.6.3 PRESENT DAY PROSPER

Prosper today is an affluent suburban town and home to more than 100 businesses. (Town of Prosper, 2021). While it may no longer exist primarily to help feed and clothe the nation, it still does produce boys and girls who contribute to the world. The Prosper Independent School District is rated A+ and is ranked the 14th best among 1,019 School Districts in Texas (Niche website, 2020). The Town’s leaders work closely alongside Prosper ISD, with Mayor Ray Smith and Superintendent Dr. Holly Ferguson jointly delivering the “State of the Community” address (Prosper Press, 2021). Mayor Ray Smith believes in being fit, and each year Prosper residents are asked to participate in a community fitness challenge. In 2021, as a part of the fitness initiative, residents were encouraged to explore Prosper’s hike and bike trails.

As a town, Prosper’s mission is family-focused. The town is committed to small-town ideals and to providing a good quality of life. (Town of Prosper, 2021).

Town of Prosper hosts an annual Christmas Festival. Additionally, each Christmas season an anonymous person or group of people drapes silver tinsel garland around a random eastern red cedar located along the undeveloped portions of Preston Road. It’s a tradition that Prosper residents look forward to seeing each year. Prosper’s wild red cedars are becoming increasingly scarce, last year’s tree was bulldozed the following January.

Prosper boasts several neighborhood pocket-parks, as well as a two larger community parks. Frontier Park is Prosper’s most-frequented park. It features a sports complex for

community soccer, baseball and softball games. The park offers a large, covered pavilion, batting cages, playground, outdoor exercise equipment and hike and bike trails. Town Lake Park is on Prosper's eastern boundary and offers a 27-acre pond for fishing, kayaking and canoeing (Town of Prosper, 2021).

Along Highway 380 at Preston Road, the large shopping center called Gates of Prosper is nearing completion. The North Dallas Tollway is rapidly extending north toward Celina. Real estate values are rising. The town is expanding and filling in.

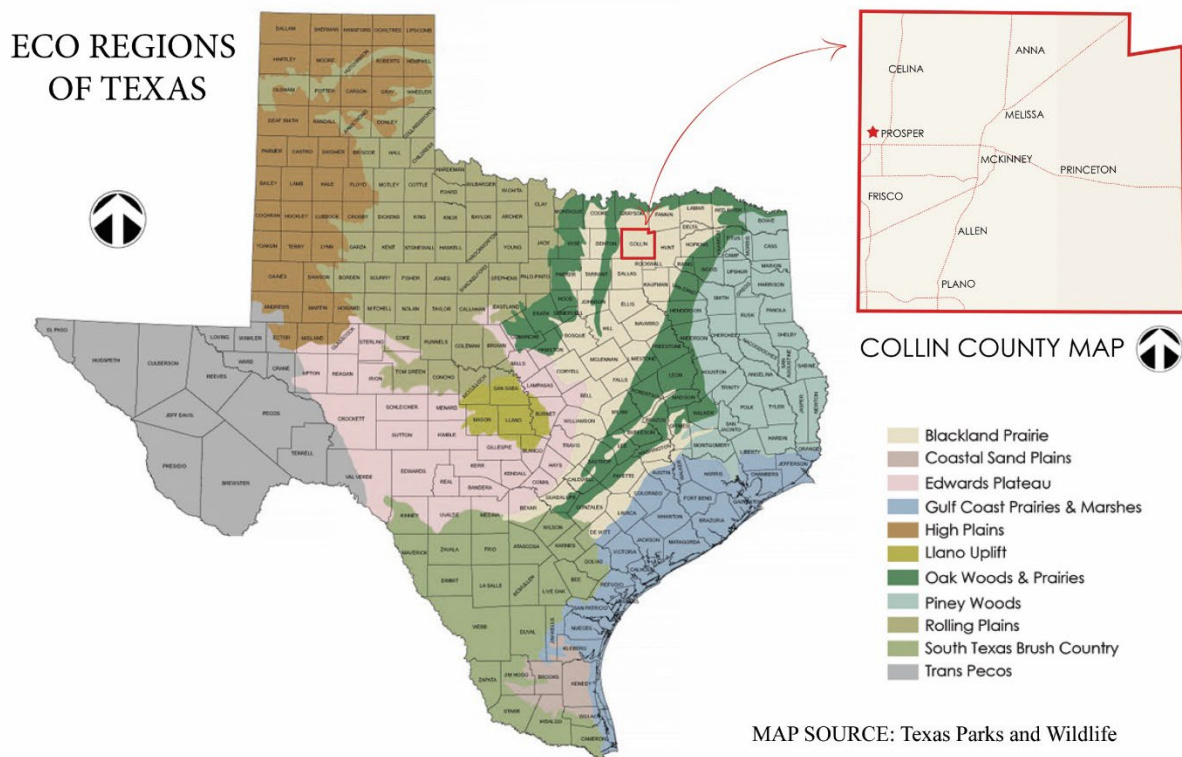


Figure 4.24 Eco Regions of Texas



Figure 4.25 Prosper Boundary Map. Red Star denotes historic downtown.

4.7 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

As stated earlier, this study benefited from literature review, semistructured interviews, case studies, and a review of the town of Prosper’s past and current conditions. The interviews and case studies led to the following insights that are used to inform an experiential landscape in downtown Prosper, Texas:

- For social imageability, marketing and place identity is enormously important. Distinctive store branding adds significantly to the visual variety and complexity of a site. Residents want buildings with historical architecture.

- Walking trails are a substitute for a routinely visited place such as a local grocer and can help meet the goals of the current Prosper community.
- Most of the activities occurred on the synthetic open lawns at the case study sites.
- Dogs are a good source for spontaneous engagement.
- Only two of the three sites had restorative qualities such as water features and extensive landscaping. Restorative landscapes may also include stimulating design features such as unique architectural details and art, as well as white lights at night that add a valued ambience.
- Allow for social engagement opportunities that do not cost money to participate.
- Feeling relaxed and stress free may lead to more spontaneous engagement. Seek to include programmatic elements that reduce stress, such as walking trails and restorative features.
- Support local values like families and schools to meet the community needs and goals.
- Create with intention

4.8 SUMMARY

While the knowledge gained through interview and the study of downtown Prosper reveal some of the critical elements of experiential landscapes in Prosper observing and comparing the case studies help determine the broader qualities associated with such locations and what to look for in order to inform the overall design concept and programmatic elements. The interview process also allowed the researcher to continuously contemplate on unexpected but critical

findings that can inform the past, current and future identity of the town of Prosper. The emotion revealed when interviewers recall a special place reinforces the desire to create an experiential landscape in downtown Prosper. This multi-method approach that combined primary and secondary data collection methods provided some of the critical findings that informs the design in the following chapter. critical lessons that be of continual benefit to the researcher.

CHAPTER 5: DESIGN

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter documents the site inventory and analysis of Prosper and presents the suggested design direction for downtown Prosper, Texas. This design process follows the typical design development process including region, town, site inventory and analysis, programming, concept plan, schematic master plan and design details for historic downtown Prosper, Texas. Repeated reflection on the literature review, interview and case study findings led to the design and programmatic elements presented in this chapter.

5.2 SITE INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Downtown Prosper is approximately 83 acres and includes the town hall, industrial buildings, residential houses, apartments, a trailer park and some retail and dining. The historic downtown retail space is currently about 4 blocks with a mix of building styles from many eras. A few, good-quality historical buildings are being used as a diner, a bar and a lawn-care company. The buildings on Broadway, the main street through downtown, are single story. There are auto sites in worn condition and a large storage facility with multiple metal buildings that would be better suited to a more industrial space. There are residences along North Main street. Therefore, extra care needs to be given to how the redesign of downtown would affect these neighbors.

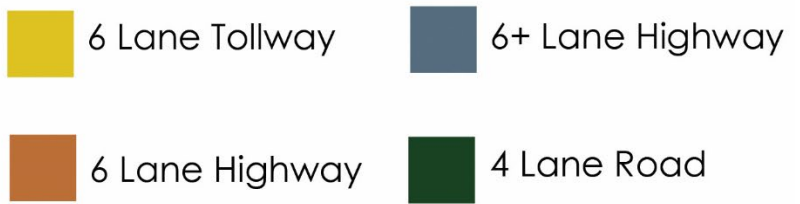
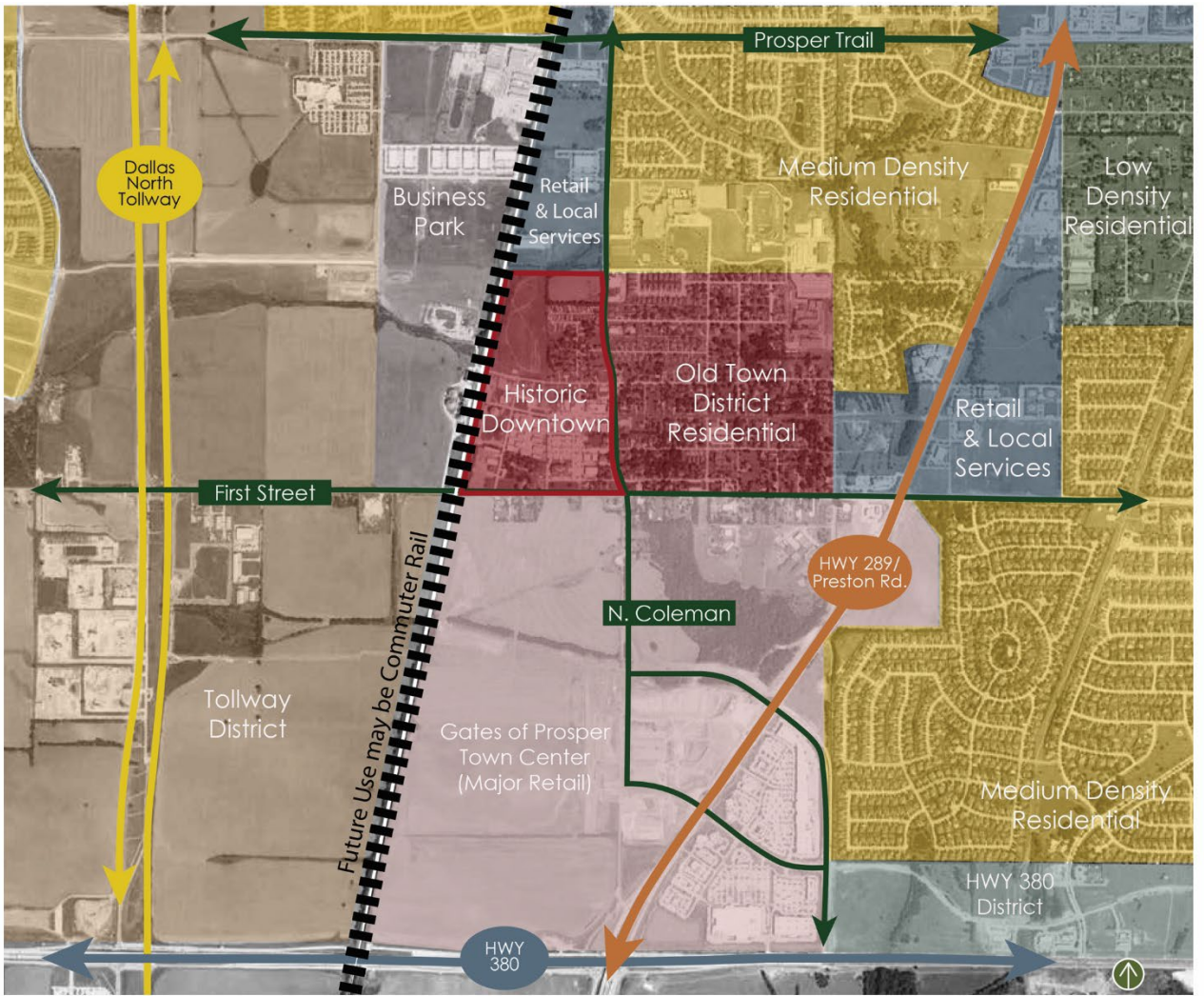


Figure 5.1 Prosper Future Land Use Map



Figure 5.2 Downtown Prosper Inventory Map

5.3 SITE OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS

Downtown Prosper has less than five quality historic buildings. These buildings are red brick with the original architectural accents. Other building styles include warehouse type metal siding structures or painted brick structures in a mid-century style. There are some small businesses such as a florist, indoor plant store, trucker cap and clothing boutique as well as auto

garages and metal storage buildings. There were no walkers or cyclists observed in the downtown over the course of seven visits, except from the car to the business. The sidewalks are disconnected and there is very little reason to stroll the shops. Downtown Prosper has a solid small-town Texas feel that can be further developed. The businesses appear to be supportive of one another, with the local diner coffee cups marketing these businesses. Overall, the downtown feels unplanned and undeveloped with no structure to the street patterns.

The new Town Hall sits at the southern border of the historic downtown. Completed within the last 3 years, some of the residents that commented on Town Hall during the interview process referred to it as pretentious. It is much nicer than the rest of downtown, however it is fitting with the more recent construction in Prosper. The recently installed Town Hall parking is used for government business during the day and can serve as parking for downtown visitors during the evening. The town hall parking lot has good access to the historic downtown space. A regular passing train is noisy, but also nostalgic. The historic downtown is centrally located within Prosper and is ideal for connecting diffuse areas of Prosper via trails. Existing historical buildings can serve as a design guide for developers. Although the downtown space is disjointed, it has the potential to become an experiential place that meets the needs of Prosper residents while preserving the roots of the community.

The site observation and analysis concluded that the town should capitalize on the views of the silos and ensure their preservation. The silos were the most mentioned landmark in the resident interviews. The views of the sun setting behind the silos serve as a daily reminder of what the town was and what it still wants to be today: a resilient Texas community.

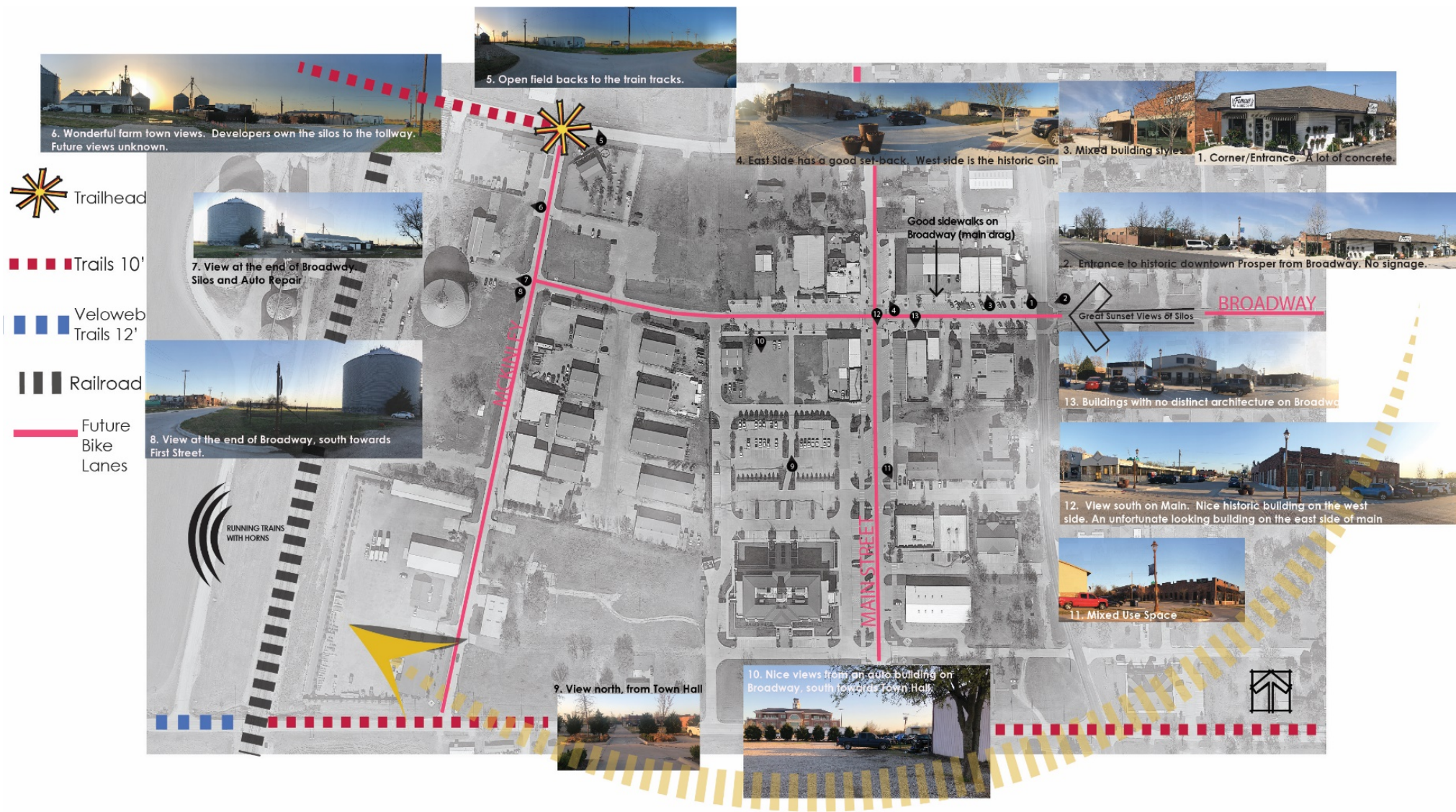


Figure 5.3 Downtown Prosper Site Analysis

5.4 DESIGN CONCEPT AND IDEAS

The design concept for downtown Prosper is shaped by the study findings regarding experiential landscapes. The concept plan for the central space of historic downtown Prosper seeks to show the overall programmatic and design ideas resulting from the findings from the case studies and resident interviews.

- Expand the historical building space along Broadway by incorporating new brick structures that equal the existing historically significant structures in quality and appeal. Renovate specific existing structures to match the historical building typology on Broadway.
- Create a central gathering space with open lawn for social engagement and small community events.
- Add a custom playscape that reflects and reinforces the identity of Prosper.
- Design a central water feature to provide restorative opportunities for visitors.
- Integrate several focal points to reinforce the town identity.
- Provide space for different outdoor dining experiences: a beer garden, rooftop dining, patio dining with different views from within the site.
- Construct a Farmer's Market pavilion that encourages social engagement and reinforces the town identity while also providing a site for community events.
- Reserve new residential space to support the increased retail and dining.
- Create trail access to, and through, the downtown from east and west Prosper.
- Provide a near-by dog park to encourage dog walkers in the downtown space.

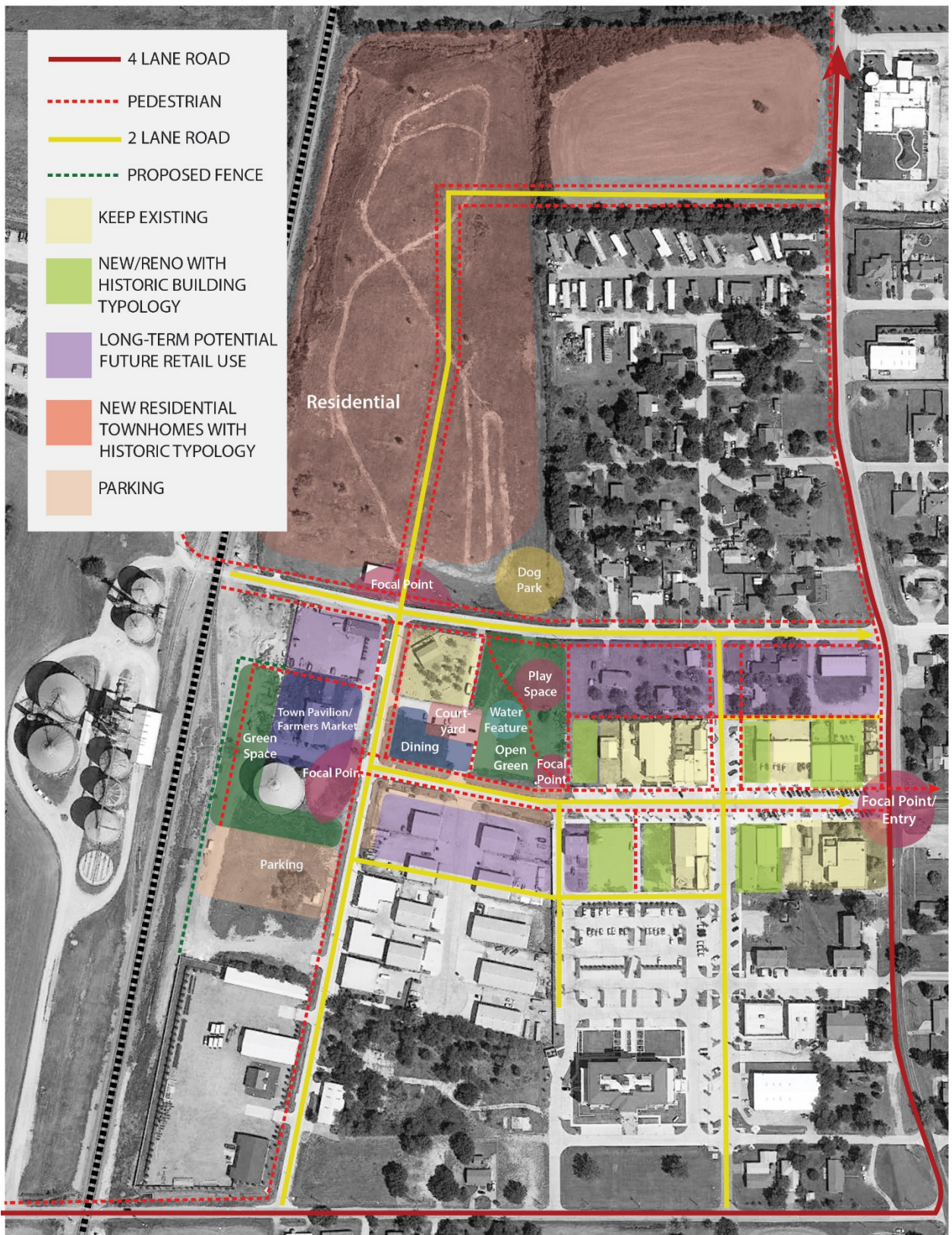


Figure 5.4 Downtown Prosper Concept Plan

5.4 DESIGN PROPOSAL

This design sought to preserve several of the elements that the resident interviews revealed as contributing to their identity of Prosper in a positive manner. The approach was to not go too large in scale and to keep the rural farm-town feel. The large silo is the grandest landmark and serves as the focal point as you enter downtown. This focal point is enhanced with a pavilion, lined with white lights, that is in keeping with Prosper's identity while serving as a farmer's market and a site for town events. A field of wildflowers surrounds the silos to add to the picturesque scene and encourage children to engage with nature. The road that currently abuts the silo, is now only auto-accessible for staging events at the pavilion. This paved path features a strip of wild grass at its center, reminiscent of an old farm truck path. The landscape is complete with rows of herbs, available for use by the local restaurants, and an old green truck. The truck bed can be used to hold signage for local events. Lastly, the silo itself is enhanced with a larger version of the more recent artwork by two local high school students, "small town, big heart".

A central gathering space of open lawn with restorative elements is a trail hub that connects all of Prosper, via walking or biking. The water feature is interactive, and people are encouraged to sit down and get their feet wet. The open lawn is amenable to the many desired activities residents stated in the interviews. The lawn also features a custom playscape centered around a silo tree house. The silo provides a canvas for a local artist to graffiti the names of elementary schools. This "canvas" creates a photo-op for local students.

The interviews revealed that many residents want diverse dining choices in the downtown space, while not attracting large chain restaurants. Small to medium size buildings open to an alley for patio dining with views of the central green space. To match the atmosphere of the

existing food truck park, a beer garden is suggested opposite the site. The beer garden was chosen for the often-used seating of long picnic tables to encourage engagement. Tables and firepits can be placed around the site, near the water feature to further encourage engagement.

A dog park is located between the new residential townhomes and the central green space, directly on the trail path. The dog park is sited near the open central gathering space to encourage dogs in the downtown area.

The central green space is located where the former Prosper Gin Company was established. Signage is located on the north and south entrance to “Gin Park”. Additional open green space, with a line of trees leads to the new town hall.

New buildings have been added and some renovated to a historic building typology based on Prosper’s few existing historical buildings. New buildings may feature rooftop dining to enjoy the sun setting behind the silos.

Nightfall brings a festive Texas atmosphere to downtown Prosper. Festoon lights illuminate the alley of patio dining spots. White lights in the trees of the central gathering space extend to the beer garden and beyond to the new pavilion.

The site can be easily cordoned off for larger downtown events. It can serve as the start of a 5K or the end of a parade. The windows can be painted for the holidays or to show the support for local students. Window painting can create nostalgia and offer another opportunity for creating and reinforcing identity in the downtown space. The opportunities to engage are endless and may begin with this experiential landscape.

5.4 DESIGN VISION



Figure 5.5 Downtown Prosper Master Plan

5.4 DESIGN DETAILS



Figure 5.6 Downtown Prosper Open Lawn



Figure 5.7 Downtown Prosper Gin Park Entrance



Figure 5.8 Downtown Prosper Beer Garden Entrance to Central Fountain



Figure 5.9 Downtown Prosper Interactive Fountain



Figure 5.10 Downtown Prosper Alley Entrance to Gin Park



Figure 5.11 Downtown Prosper Silo Playscape with Farm Animal Statues



Figure 5.12 Downtown Prosper Farmers Market

5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter sought to design a downtown public space that meets the needs and desires found through the resident interview process. This study looked at both successful and ineffective or absent attributes from the case studies based on the experiential landscape framework (Table 2.1) and designed this site based on the findings.

This design looks to the past as a foundation for place identity with the expectation of enriching that identity through experiential landscapes in the historic downtown of Prosper, Texas.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of studies support the claim that as people inhabit, work and make meaning of a site, or place, they are also making meaning of their own lives (Dickinson, 1995). Places can shape who their users become, and with that knowledge our public leaders must create and maintain places that encourage community so that when residents need support, it is found. Experiential landscapes can aid in creating strong communities, supporting local businesses, improving the local economy, and producing cleaner environments that restore us.

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. How can sense of place, through the experiential landscape framework, be cultivated within the context of Prosper, Texas?

Experiential landscapes are imageable landscapes that seek to meet the goals of a community while engaging persons with one another and restoring visitors through a connection with nature. The components of the experiential landscape framework served as an ideal basis for the redesign of downtown Prosper, Texas. The interview method was instrumental in revealing the identity of Prosper, both its past and its present. Structured questions designed to obtain the elements important to this community helped define and shape a distinct experiential landscape that supports meeting the physical and emotional needs of Prosper residents. The downtown is centrally located and ready to be revitalized, providing the ideal opportunity to create a local space focused on social engagement with restorative qualities.

2. What are the design elements associated with creating experiential landscapes in Texas?

The experiential landscape framework provided a critical framework for analyzing the case studies. The findings revealed which criteria was met as well as how it was achieved. Texans value the quality and significance of historical buildings and appreciate the visual complexity and variety of distinct signage. Open lawns are a good source of activity and engagement. Texans can spend their fall, winter and spring outdoors and they want to relax on a patio with the restorative ambience of white lights. They like dogs, and walking dogs on a trail or dogs on a patio were a good source for spontaneous engagement. Large shade trees and informal landscaping, as well as visually stimulating displays of signage or art offer restorative elements. Lastly, water features are a source for restoration and engagement.

3. How can these design attributes be applied to create an experiential landscape in downtown Prosper?

The scale of the master plan, the materials, the programmatic elements, all are dependent on the identity of the community and as a result each design will acquire its own distinct place identity. The study gave consideration to the experiential landscape elements identified in the case studies and applied those elements to the masterplan in a way that took into account the identity of Prosper, as well as the goals and desires of the community as revealed in the interview process. The identity of Prosper's farming roots is reinforced at focal points, through building typology, a farmer's market pavilion and distinct signage. The open spaces can accommodate the small community wide events that support public engagement. The additional buildings support

the desired dining and shopping boutiques. The circulation and siting allows for optimal people watching with unique views and experiences throughout the landscape.

6.3 FINAL THOUGHTS

After dedicating several months to this study and analyzing the knowledge gained through the interviews and case studies, I have come to understand the following:

- People are comforted when they feel connected to the past, through historic architecture or landmarks.
- Places that restore through nature can be the antidote to incessant activity and demanding vocations.
- Stimulating environments with visual variety and complexity can clear minds and arouse inspiration, resulting in a feeling of renewal.
- People love their dogs and other people's dogs. Dogs are the ideal ice-breaker and walking a dog can produce lifelong friendships.
- Prosper residents want to explore their community through trails, and they want to go somewhere, to do something with people. They want to eat, drink, learn, dance and rest with, or near, the people of their community.
- The residents of Prosper enjoy supporting the school activities, even when they do not have a student in the school system. The schools can help unite the community.
- Experiential landscapes can spur life-sustaining activities that strengthen individuals and communities.

It often requires time for places to become meaningful to the people that frequent them. However, in many cases the places we create do not near their fullest potential. Landscape architects can help create imageable places that reflect and connect a community.

The recommendation to be made for Prosper and similar Texas towns experiencing expansion is to acquire a master plan from a recognized landscape architecture firm, ideally one committed to creating experiential landscapes. A master plan should be developed as early as possible to ensure ideal siting of structures and circulation as it relates to experiential landscapes. The plan should be continually reviewed, and the site evaluated by the town and the landscape architecture firm at predetermined intervals. The final master plan should be adhered to as much as possible. Developers should share the same dedication to creating these unique landscapes. Maintaining and improving the site over time is equally vital to the design.

Designing human-focused places where community is strengthened through connection requires creating and staying true to this ideal. Those responsible for creating public places should be committed to the design of places that “restore us from today and ready us for tomorrow” (Magnolia Manifesto, page 16).

6.4 RELEVANCE TO LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Understanding the significant contribution that human connection with one another and with nature has on an individual’s well-being may encourage landscape architects to engage in human-centric design as outlined in the experiential landscape framework (Thwaites & Simkins, 2007). Further, understanding the significance that experiential landscapes have on a community should encourage landscape architects to partner with local community leaders. A landscape architect’s role may be to educate the community on the benefits of these landscapes as well as to encourage them to develop and sustain these places. A landscape architect’s expertise in

placemaking and developing green spaces, trails, streetscapes and connectivity make them ideally suited for this venture.

6.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research opportunities exist in further understanding and identifying human engagement in outdoor environments. What programmatic elements encourage a man, woman or child to engage in a public setting, and how does that differ by race, culture, age or gender? What programmatic elements encourage interaction across multiple generations? Further case study research identifying human engagement in outdoor environments would be enlightening and is likely to be a lifelong endeavor for this researcher. Further knowledge of the many contributions that experiential places make to a resident and a community would aid in advocating for the design and maintenance of such places.

APPENDIX A

University of Texas at Arlington IRB Requirement Documents



The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) **Informed Consent for Minimal Risk Studies with Adults**

My name is Nikki Simonini, and I am asking you to participate in a UT Arlington research study. This research study provides data for the Master's thesis titled, "Cultivating a Sense of Place Through Experiential Landscapes: The Redesign of Downtown Prosper." You can choose to participate in this research study if you are at least 18 years old and reside in Prosper, Texas.

Reasons why you might want to participate in this study include wanting to share your opinions about the type of downtown environment that would most appeal to you. Your decision about whether to participate is entirely up to you. If you decide not to be in the study, there will not be any punishment or penalty; whatever your choice, there will be no impact on any benefits or services that you would normally receive. Even if you choose to begin the study, you can also change your mind and quit at any time without any consequences.

If you decide to participate in this research study, the activity in the study is an interview. It should take about 30 minutes unless lengthened upon agreement. The interview will be recorded. Although, you may not experience any personal benefits from participating, the study activities are not expected to pose any additional risks beyond those that you would normally experience in your regular everyday life or during routine medical/psychological visit.

You will not be paid for completing this study.

The research team is committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a research subject. We may publish or present the results, but your name will not be used. While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records as described here and to the extent permitted by law. If you have questions about the study, you can contact me (Nikki Simonini) at (214)906-6071 or nicole.simonini@mavs.uta.edu. For questions about your rights or to report complaints, contact the UTA Research Office at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

You are indicating your voluntary agreement to participate by signing on the line below.

Signature: _____

Date: _____



The University of Texas at Arlington (UTA)
Informed Consent for Minimal Risk Studies with Adults

My name is Nikki Simonini, and I am asking you to participate in a UT Arlington research study. This research study provides data for the Master's thesis titled, "Cultivating a Sense of Place Through Experiential Landscapes: The Redesign of Downtown Prosper." You can choose to participate in this research study if you are at least 18 years old and reside in Prosper, Texas.

Reasons why you might want to participate in this study include wanting to share your opinions about the type of downtown environment that would most appeal to you. Your decision about whether to participate is entirely up to you. If you decide not to be in the study, there will not be any punishment or penalty; whatever your choice, there will be no impact on any benefits or services that you would normally receive. Even if you choose to begin the study, you can also change your mind and quit at any time without any consequences.

If you decide to participate in this research study, the activity in the study is an interview. It should take about 30 minutes unless lengthened upon agreement. The interview will be recorded. Although, you may not experience any personal benefits from participating, the study activities are not expected to pose any additional risks beyond those that you would normally experience in your regular everyday life or during routine medical/psychological visit.

You will not be paid for completing this study.

The research team is committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a research subject. We may publish or present the results, but your name will not be used. While absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, the research team will make every effort to protect the confidentiality of your records as described here and to the extent permitted by law. If you have questions about the study, you can contact me (Nikki Simonini) at (214)906-6071 or nicole.simonini@mavs.uta.edu. For questions about your rights or to report complaints, contact the UTA Research Office at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

You are indicating your voluntary agreement to participate by signing on the line below.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

IRB Approval Date: 03/04/2021
V. 2021-0375

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