CODE ASSESSMENT

City of Belton, MO

Unified Development Code Update

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Prepared For

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Introduction

How does this document fit into Belton's Unified Development Code update?

Belton's Unified Development Code update is driven by the recently adopted *Belton 2050* Comprehensive Plan. This document, with the Development Pattern Analysis, is intended to inform community engagement and discussion about the Belton community's Unified Development Code (UDC) priorities. The Code Assessment is structured around four Guiding Principles, drawn from goals outlined in the *Belton 2050* Comprehensive Plan. These Guiding Principles are Public Space, Mixed-use Development, Housing & Neighborhoods, and Multimodal Network.

The Code Assessment document, with the Development Pattern Analysis, provides a common starting point for community engagement conversations. Each section within the Code Assessment centers around one of the four Guiding Principles outlined above, and includes 1) A brief introduction for each Guiding Principle, 2) How the Guiding Principle ties in with the goals outlined in *Belton 2050*, 3) An overview of how Belton's current code addresses the Guiding Principles, and 4) Suggested community conversation starters.

In addition to these analyses, this project's community engagement will include interviews with frequent users of the city's current code from the design and development community to further inform topics for discussion during the process.

Main street with mixed-use and civic spaces in Belton, MO.

Industrial context along Interstate 49 in Belton, MO.

High-priority themes found throughout this Code Assessment.

The Key Findings highlighted on the following page have been identified as high-priority through an assessment of the city's current code due to their impact to public spaces, context-based development, housing diversity and multimodal connectivity within Belton, and the very processes by which the code is applied. Addressing these themes, and the additional themes identified in each chapter of this assessment, will remain a priority moving into the next phase of the Unified Development Code update.

Key Findings

Public Space

An open space and street typology approach can allow better fits for different types of places and integrate public realm design to support different development patterns.

▶ There are no streetscape design standards in the development code, and the deferral to the design and construction standards leaves important public realm design issues open or unmet.

▶ The open space dedication requirement is high, but counts a wide range of public, common, or private spaces.

▶ The code lacks design standards for different types of open spaces or considerations for different open space needs in various contexts.

▶ The standards value all open space the same - i.e. valuing quantity of space without considering the context, design, or function of different types of spaces.

▶ Street trees appear appropriately promoted within the overall landscape design; however, without specific streetscape design standards, execution of these requirements will be challenging.

▶ Landscape design is based primarily on buffers and screens (separating things) and do not have a focus of more intentionally creating or complimenting different types of spaces.

Mixed-Use Development

An approach to permitted uses based more on the scale, form, and format of uses and a more direct, but flexible, approach to design standards can better support a wider variety of places, including walkable and mixed-use places.

▶ Some districts promote a mix of uses (Old Town Belton, North Scott overlay, and Neighborhood Commercial); however, some development and design standards could undermine compact, walkable development patterns, and others are too lenient on key attributes of walkable places.

▶ Several non-residential districts default to large-scale, automobile-oriented formats and standards and do not consider viable alternatives for more neighborhood-supportive forms or formats.

▶ The range of permitted uses among districts appear appropriate; however, specific distinctions of uses based on scale and format can better support distinct places and allow the types and categories to be more general and flexible.

▶ Parking standards need more flexibility based on context, specific uses, patterns, or formats.

▶ Design standards are present for all districts and address the appropriate topics; however, some are too vague, some need more guided flexibility for intended outcomes, and others need more context-specific variations.

Housing & Neighborhoods

A comprehensive "building type" approach to housing can leverage the generally permissive residential standards, promote greater compatibility among a wider range of housing types, and emphasize important neighborhood design attributes.

▶ Residential districts tend to allow a broad range of housing options and are not overly restrictive.

▶ Development standards are too generic, missing nuanced standards that can draw important distinctions between different housing types and better mix a range of compatible housing options.

▶ Important neighborhood design standards are lacking.

▶ Many neighborhood standards - streets, blocks, and lot access - are heavily car-oriented and could prevent more compact, walkable neighborhood patterns.

▶ The R-2 and R-3 districts are most permissive to a variety of neighborhood-scaled housing, but the development standards do not specify any particular scale or format nor ensure compatibility if housing types are mixed.

Multimodal Network

Context-based connectivity and street design typologies are necessary approaches to emphasize public realm design as a crucial economic development strategy and to implement key distinctions in character and development patterns of the places identified in the plan.

▶ There are no streetscape design standards in the development code, and the deferral to the design and construction standards leaves important complete streets, context-appropriate design, and multimodal transportation issues open or unmet.

▶ The connectivity standards are generic and very lenient, and the deferral to the design and construction standards misses an opportunity to implement distinct development patterns in different contexts.

▶ Generic, city-wide sidewalk standards need to be integrated into streetscape standards for different types of streets and implement different sidewalk standards based on specific contexts.

▶ There are no standards for bicycle facilities integrated into streetscape design, so bicycle requirements would only be recreational through the trail requirements.

01.

Public Space

Introduction

A key component of placemaking and neighborhood design is public space. A literal interpretation of "public space" is property owned and managed by the city or other government agencies. However, public space should be considered more broadly to focus on community design and capitalize on the benefits and opportunities to leverage investments to support places and neighborhoods in Belton.

Public space defined broadly includes:

▶ Street networks and streetscape design.

▶ Public parks and trail systems.

▶ Common areas controlled by groups of property owners.

▶ Elements of private development that relate to these spaces including lot frontages, private open spaces, and connecting pathways.

The "public realm" is the spaces between buildings that shape our perception and experiences in our community. When these spaces are contemplated and designed as an interconnected system, they become a powerful platform for creating distinct places, supporting livable neighborhoods, and improving the quality and image of the city.

Conventional development codes have focused exclusively on private development and relegated "open space" design to buffers and aesthetic landscape elements. This ignores the crucial role that public realm design plays in setting the stage for private investment.

Belton Comprehensive Plan 2050: Key Themes

Three of the key themes of *Belton 2050* directly impact the design of public space: Community Identity, Community Aesthetics, and Parks and Recreation. These themes reflect a desire to strengthen the character and investment in the city through quality design of public spaces. The Guiding Principles of the plan emphasize these themes through the goals and strategies of the sub-area plans. Specific examples include:

▶ A new civic space / gathering space as a focal point of Old Town.

▶ A focus on streetscape design as a key improvement in neighborhoods and mixed-use areas and general "city beautification."

▶ Expanding trail networks and access to a wide variety of parks, open spaces, and gathering places.

Expansive community park with an abundance of public amenities in Belton, MO.

What does Belton's development code currently require?

▶ The development code does not include any street or streetscape design standards and has a general reference to the design and construction standards. The design and construction standards are based solely on the "functional classification" of streets (car-oriented and prioritizing traffic interests) and lack any meaningful streetscape design standards.

▶ Several sections have standards for street trees or trees per increment of frontage with good standards; however, it is not consistent throughout the code. Further, these standards are not directly coordinated with street design standards.

▶ There is some evidence of encouraging active and engaging lot frontages through front setback exceptions for entrance features and social spaces; however, it is not prioritized and there are not specific designs or criteria to promote more intentional relationships between streetscapes and building / lot frontage.

▶ Many standards emphasize buffers and separation from street frontages, assuming car-oriented and hostile streetscape designs that need to be mitigated.

▶ The subdivision regulations require park dedication and include reference to trails;

▶ The dedication requirement (20 acres per 1,000 people) is high, however private and common spaces can contribute to it.

▶ The requirement treats all space as equal, neglecting the benefit of smaller or more formal open spaces.

▶ Other types of open space (beyond just trails and parks) that may have smaller areas but large impacts are not considered.


Small scale pocket park within Belton's historic neighborhood.

▶ Stormwater runoff plans do require a landscape plan to promote more designs that serve as amenities; however, the use of these areas for dual functions is not stressed.

▶ Most site design / landscape standards are geared towards buffering and separating anticipated negative impacts, and do not promote design of specific sites as an extension of the "public realm" (i·e· frontages, gathering spaces, internal paths, or passages).

Community Discussion Starters

1 Streetscapes. How can streetscape design contribute to and amplify open space systems?

2 Trail Systems. How are trail systems best integrated into development patterns as an extension of street networks, and what scale of development is most appropriate for trail dedication?

3 Open Space Systems.

  ▶ What types of open spaces are appropriate in different contexts (mixed-use or neighborhood centers, residential neighborhoods, commercial corridors)?

  ▶ How should private or common open spaces contribute to a broader range of open spaces in a variety of contexts?

4 Landscape Design. How can landscape design contribute to placemaking, neighborhood design, and the general image of the city?

5 Open Space Dedication. How is the dedication and / or fee in lieu of dedication approach in the current code working, and are there other options or opportunities that should contribute to this requirement?
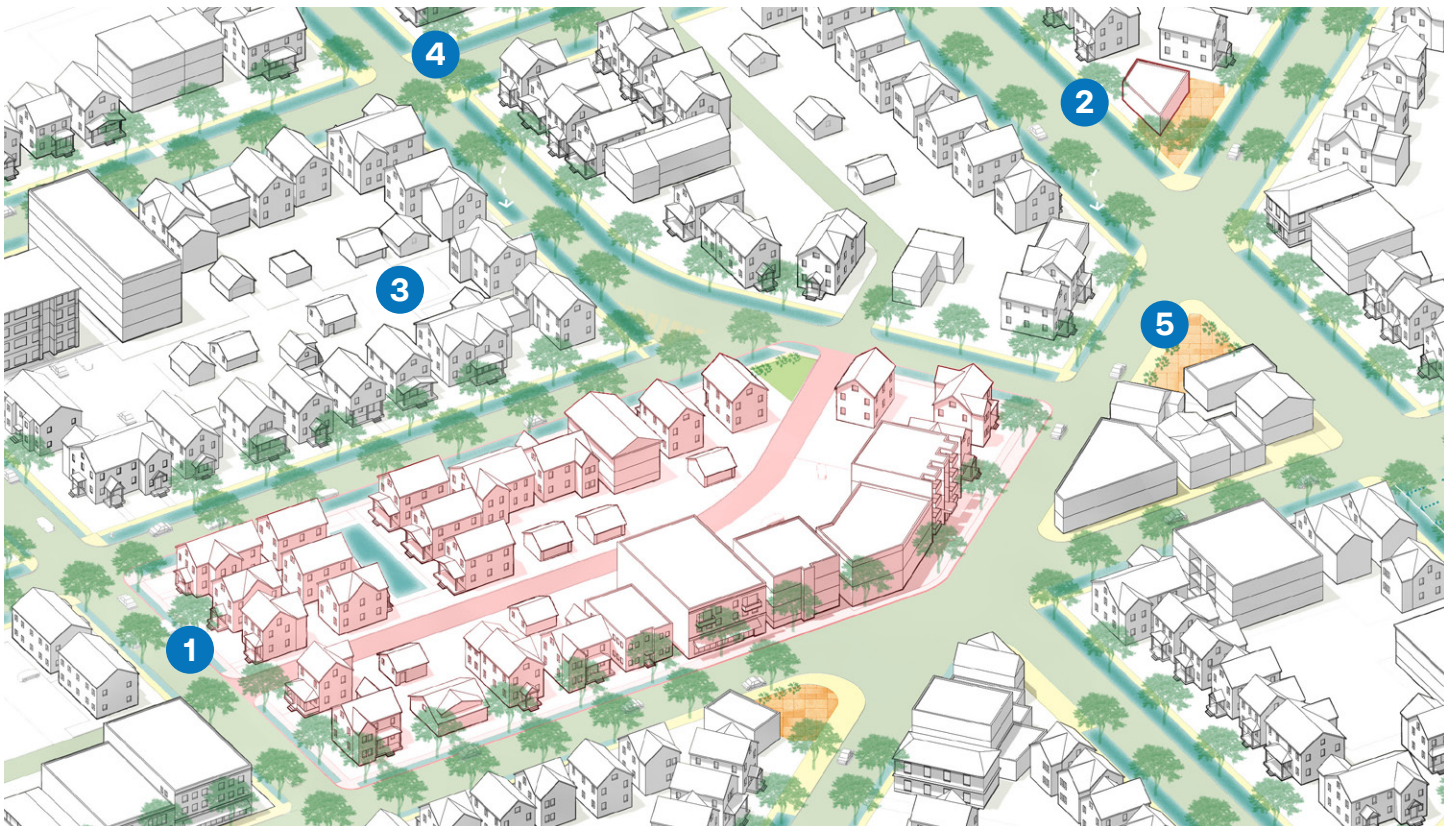
Conceptual illustration of public space within a historic neighborhood.

02.

Mixed Use

Introduction

Mixing uses helps strengthen cities in several ways:

▶ It contributes to "placemaking" with vibrant destinations where multiple activities occur.

▶ It improves municipal fiscal health by producing more with a city's two main resources - land and infrastructure.

▶ It allows for more efficient development patterns in terms of transportation and energy consumption.

▶ It promotes resiliency where tenants, buildings, sites, and places can transition between many uses over time and through cycles of investment rather than designing large areas for a single program.

Planning and designing for "mixed-use" considers various types of places with distinctions in scale, development pattern, and intensity rather than just uses. Additionally, mixing uses requires attention to the integration, proximity, and transitions of mutually supporting uses through block- and area-scale planning. Placing greater emphasis on physical patterns and form can allow greater flexibility in mixing uses - both in the immediate sense and over time.

Conventional development codes have relied on uses (sometimes exclusively) to promote compatibility, based on the concept that similar uses equate to compatibility. Not only does this erode the benefits from better mixes and integration of mutually supporting uses, but it also ignores how design can contribute far more to compatibility than simply grouping similar uses.

Belton Comprehensive Plan 2050: Key Themes

The *Belton 2050* plan promotes mixed uses primarily through the sub-area plans, where mixes of land uses and transitions to complimentary uses can be identified at finer grain. Rather than a broad land use policy, these area plans are designed to create distinct places - each with unique block structures, open space systems, public realm design and scale and mix of uses. This is done not only as a "placemaking" strategy but also as an economic development strategy. Further, significant components of the plan are designated specifically for a more-intentional mix of different uses, including:

▶ Downtown Mixed-Use

▶ Mixed-Use

▶ Neighborhood Commercial

▶ Regional Commercial

▶ Business Park

The North Scott sub-area plan and the Old Town Belton sub-area plan promote the greatest extent and degree of mixed-use development - North Scott promotes a diverse corridor reinvestment strategy, and Old Town Belton strengthens the historic core of Belton and surrounding neighborhoods but also has significant large-scale mixed uses on the northern edges.

A variety of uses, including residential and non-residential, blend in a mixed-use downtown environment.

What does Belton's development code currently require?

Small-scale mixed-use context in Belton, MO.

▶ Non-residential standards (other than downtown) promote large-scale commercial development and assume automobile-oriented patterns and design.

▶ Downtown district development standards are appropriate to compact, walkable patterns but may have some loopholes where inappropriate scales or patterns could be permitted (i·e· lack of maximums on lot sizes, setbacks, etc.)

▶ The categories break some uses into scales that are too blunt (i·e· large retail 100K+; small < 100K), and more refined categories are needed to promote different mixed-use contexts.

▶ Downtown design standards (and generally applicable design standards) address many of the appropriate topics for walkable, urban environments, but simplified and more specific standards with flexible criteria and review processes should be considered.

▶ The North Scott overlay intends a mixed-use environment, but the development and design standards are geared to conventional, automobile-oriented patterns (i·e· large-scale, setback, buffers, etc.) and will impede many mixed-use formats, patterns, and designs.

▶ Parking requirements and, particularly, downtown requirements do not have the necessary flexibility to promote walkable patterns or multi-modal (particularly bicycle) transportation patterns.

▶ Many of the access and circulation standards (driveway radii, sight distances, internal circulation) prioritize car movement and higher speeds and will directly conflict with designing compact, walkable places.

▶ There are no standards, criteria, or review processes that specifically target infill development or adaptive reuse of existing buildings

# Community Discussion Starters

1 Design & Community Character.

 ▶ What elements of design and community character are important to Belton's variety of contexts? How would these elements differ in vehicle-oriented contexts vs. more walkable contexts?

 ▶ How could design standards begin to differentiate between different types of development?

2 Mix of Uses.

 ▶ How and where could residential uses begin to be incorporated into non-residential areas?

 ▶ What non-residential uses are supportive of residential uses, and could be strategically located near or within residential areas?

3 Scale & Format of Design. How does the scale and format of uses differ between different contexts - even when the specific uses are the same or similar?

4 Infill & Adaptive Reuse. What barriers are discouraging infill and adaptive reuse currently?
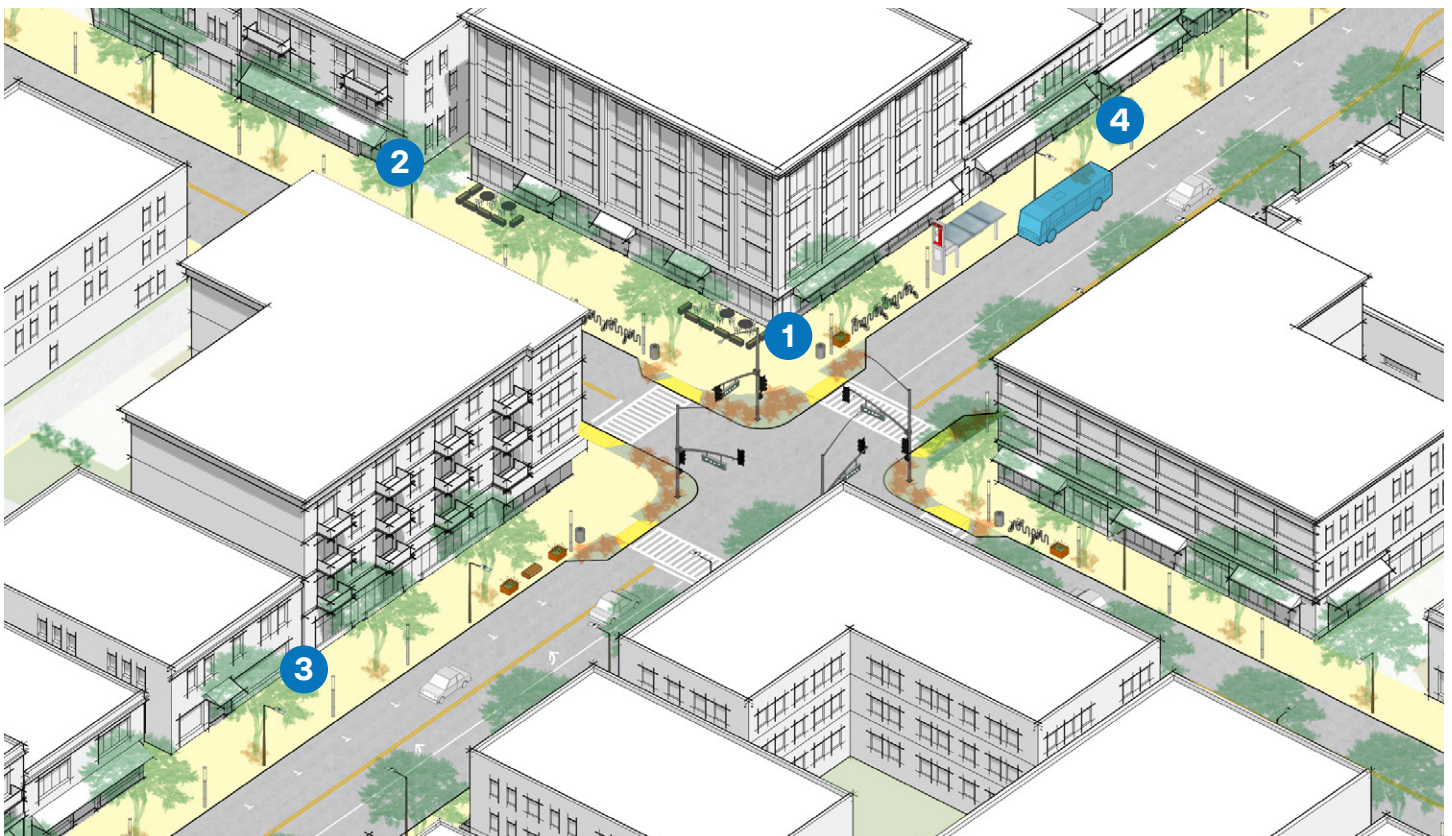
Conceptual illustration of a variety of housing types integrated into an urban neighborhood.

03.

Housing & Neighborhoods

Introduction

Quality neighborhoods with a diverse range of housing options (either within neighborhoods and / or between different neighborhoods) contributes to a healthy housing stock and market. To respond to constantly changing housing markets and demographics, "diversification" is the best strategy for any city. This means diversification of locations and context; diversification of sizes; diversification of building types; diversification of age and condition; and diversification of price points and amenities. This allows a city to respond to the broadest range possible, specifically allowing people to remain in the community, or even in the same neighborhood, through changes in their housing needs. In addition, and particularly when mixing housing options at the block or neighborhood scale, following a few simple neighborhood design rules can promote sustained investment in existing and emerging neighborhoods:

▶ Slow and comfortable neighborhood streets.

▶ Interesting and human-scale frontages.

▶ Compatible scales and forms of building types and subtle transitions in building types at the block or neighborhood scale.

▶ Connections to focal points, gathering places, or destinations.

These design strategies help cities deliver on the calling for unique characteristics, quality design, and livable neighborhoods.

Conventional development codes often boil housing down to a math equation - whether an abstract density calculation or a formulaic lot and building coverage standard - and assume similar numeric results equal to compatibility. This ignores the role that 3-dimensional form and patterns play in achieving compatibility and the effect that quality design can have on the character of neighborhoods.

Belton Comprehensive Plan 2050: Key Themes

Housing is a major policy in the *Belton 2050* plan - both in terms of providing quality, attainable housing for a broad range of people as well as improving the design and character of a diverse range of neighborhoods throughout Belton. Specific policies, goals, and strategies in the plan include:

▶ Neighborhood identity - strengthen unique neighborhood design components (See Public Space section of this document) for existing and emerging neighborhoods.

▶ Increase housing diversity and supply - and particularly a focus on "missing middle" (small-scale, multi-unit) housing options that elevate standards for scale and form over density.

▶ Housing for all ages and incomes - including a variety of small format housing options, and different patterns and arrangements of various housing types.

▶ Promote context-sensitive infill housing.

▶ Consider "form-based codes" to implement neighborhood design and residential development goals.

Small-lot housing is one strategy for increasing housing supply, and can be attractive to a variety of incomes and lifestyles.

What does Belton's development code currently require?

A neighborhood in Belton, MO.

▶ ADUs are permitted broadly; however, some standards appear too generous or lenient (size and generic scale / design standards) and others may be limiting (i.e. parking, setbacks / accessory building standards, and limiting to only detached houses).

▶ The R-1, R-1A, and R-1B districts present few distinctions in design / development or use standards other than lot size.

▶ The R-2 and R-3 districts allow a wide range of housing but lack any specific scale and form standards. They are best suited for adding a variety of "missing middle" housing types that the standards currently do not account for.

▶ Many missing middle housing types are not clearly enabled by dimension standards - particularly attached units that are individually owned (side-by-side duplexes, row houses, courtyard patterns, etc.)

▶ "Multi-family" is not restricted by "density" (which is positive), but it lacks crucial scale, pattern, and form standards essential to determining what context different products are appropriate for. This will drive most multi-family development into large scale "complexes" that are difficult to fit into neighborhoods or mix with other housing types.

▶ Minimum unit square footage requirements are questionable and could present problems - legally, policy, and physically.

▶ There is no clear path for small-lot detached housing (3K to 6K lots), whether to reflect historic patterns, for new mixed-density, walkable patterns, or for specific infill projects like courtyard development. (Planned applications appear procedurally difficult, and expectations from development / design standards are not clear).

▶ Parking standards need more nuance to different types of housing and neighborhood patterns.

▶ No significant neighborhood design standards - particularly regarding frontages, which can be important in districts that will mix housing types or in neighborhoods that exhibit a particular character, scale, or pattern, such as near downtown neighborhoods.

▶ Similar to commercial, residential access / driveway standards are too car-oriented, and they either have loopholes or specifically prevent access types and patterns that are common to walkable neighborhoods.

▶ Standards that limit residential fronting on arterial or collector streets are damaging to neighborhood design and forces expensive streets with no development value. It is better, for arterial and collector street designs and neighborhood network planning, to design and build streets that are acceptable to front on and consider a variety of access strategies.

Community Discussion Starters

1 Housing Options. What variety of housing types is appropriate in Belton? Would this variety differ by context, neighborhood, or district, and if so, in what ways?

2 Mixed-Use Housing. Where and how could residential uses be incorporated into non-residential districts to increase the variety of available housing in Belton?

3 Missing Middle Housing. Where and how could a range of small-scale, multi-unit housing be expanded to provide more housing options for Belton residents?

4 Neighborhood Design & Character. What elements of neighborhood design & character are unique to Belton's history and neighborhoods that should be preserved, protected, or enhanced? What attributes should be emphasized in new neighborhoods and particularly those planned for a mix of housing types?

5 Accessory Dwelling Units. What design and context considerations are important for revisiting current standards for accessory dwelling units?

6 Small Format Housing. Are there other small housing formats the code should consider (courtyard housing, small lot standards, etc.)?
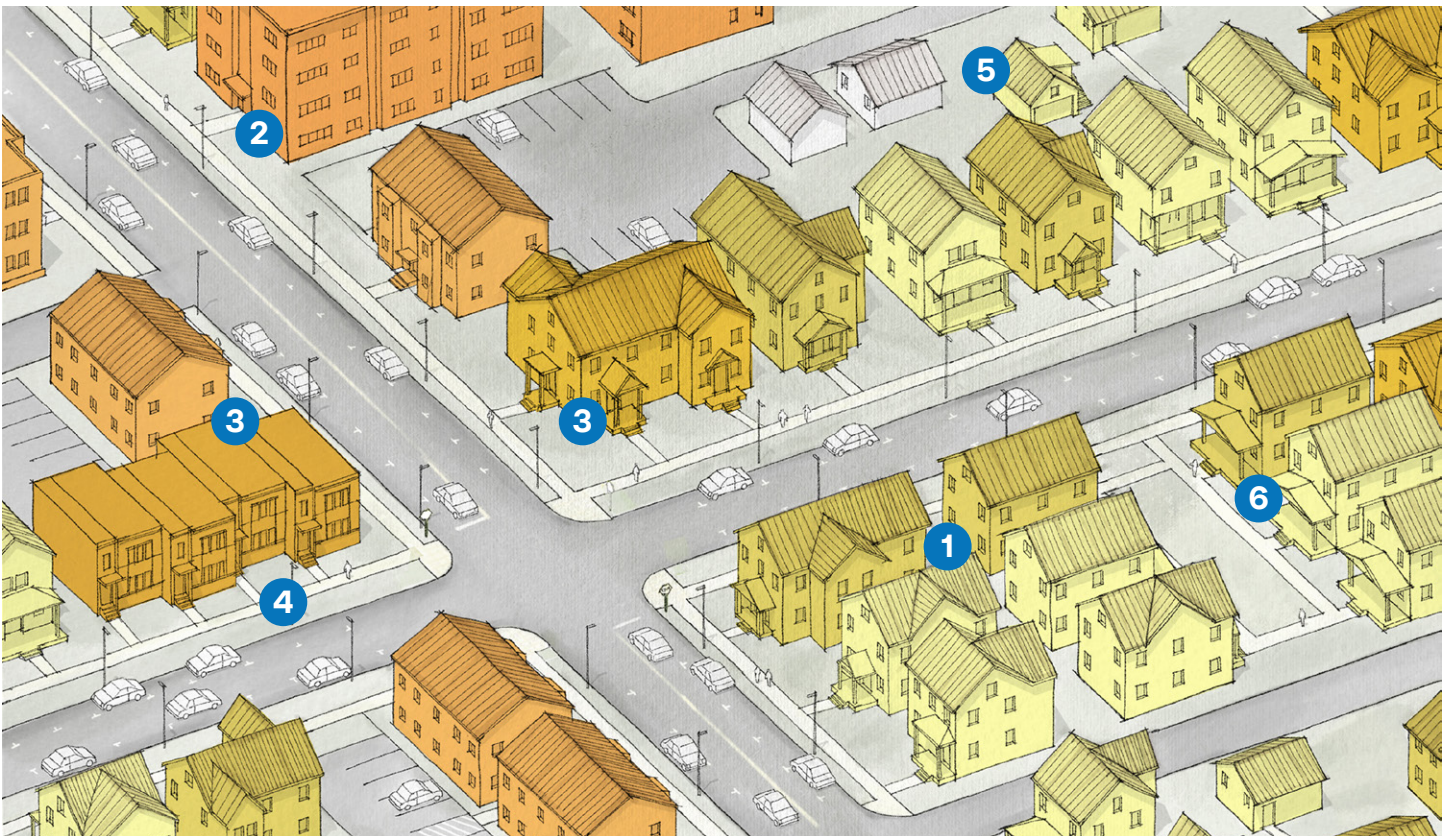
A graphic of a neighborhood that blends different types of housing through smart neighborhood design, providing a wide variety of housing options for all lifestyles.

04.

Multimodal Network

Introduction

Transportation systems and street networks are a significant part of the public realm (See Public Space section of this document). Additionally, the connectivity and block structure significantly impact the type, scale, format, and transitions of land uses. The distinct places in Belton - both existing and planned - require distinct connectivity standards, block structures, street types, and streetscape designs. These attributes of multimodal networks will have a direct impact on the types of development the city can expect and on how people move about and experience different parts of the community. Ultimately, better coordination of investments for the public realm and transportation systems with the abutting property's applicable development standards can elevate context-appropriate placemaking policies.

Conventional development codes address street networks most directly through the subdivision standards and often prioritize automobile-oriented design and traffic management impacts. This tends to create a "one-size-fits" all public realm design that conflicts with more nuanced placemaking or neighborhood design, where streets must be envisioned as both public space and a means of access and mobility.

Belton Comprehensive Plan 2050: Key Themes

Connectivity and access are key themes and guiding principles of the *Belton 2050* plan. This recognizes the community's desire to manage and reduce traffic, improve safety, and also increase options for non-motorized transportation. Specific policies, goals, and strategies in the plan include.

▶ 15-Minute City - coordinating land use, placemaking, and street design investments to reduce travel times and increase travel options.

▶ Complete Streets - emphasizing walkable, human-scale streetscape design.

▶ Active transportation - in particular, increasing connectivity to support non-motorized transportation options.

▶ Improving bike infrastructure and trail networks for recreation and transportation.

▶ Prioritizing safety for all modes of travel / multi-modal transportation investments.

▶ Preparing a street master plan based on different contexts, design priorities, and placemaking policies in the plan.

A redesigned street connects neighborhoods to a town's commercial center by adding safe pedestrian, bike, and bus options.

What does Belton's development code currently require?

Existing street design in Belton, MO.

▶ The development code lacks the streetscape design standards essential for setting the context for different places identified in the comprehensive plan.

▶ The code includes a general reference to "construction standard specifications" for all infrastructure, which discounts the importance of transportation investments to development or the coordination of land use and transportation.

▶ The design and construction manual incorporates APWA and AASHTO street design standards, many of which work against Complete Streets, context-appropriate streets, and multi-modal policies. In general, the street standards prioritize traffic flow and capacity for all contexts based on functional classifications.

▶ Sidewalks are generally required on both sides of all streets (unless lots greater than 3 acres); however, specific sidewalk design standards are not well integrated with street types or streetscape design and have a generic city wide standard (5' minimum) that is inappropriate for many circumstances.

▶ Connectivity standards are too lenient and generic. Different block structure and connectivity standards should be applied for different development contexts. The standards in the street design manual are similar but actively discourage continuity of collector streets - a key attribute of improved connectivity and street networks.

▶ Deferral to the design and construction manual leaves important public realm design policies undermined or unmet and misses opportunities to better support different development contexts and abutting development.

▶ There are no standards for bicycle facilities integrated into streetscape design, so the only bicycle requirements would be recreational through the trail requirements.

Community Discussion Starters

1 Connectivity. How can the development patterns best address connectivity, recognizing the distinct development patterns in Belton (i.e. Consider Old Town, North Scott Corridor; downtown neighborhoods, and suburban neighborhoods)?

2 Complete Streets. How can Belton's streets be used to improve access and mobility for all modes of transportation (pedestrian, bicycle, micro-mobility devices, automobile, and transit)?

3 Streetscape Design.

▶ How could streetscape design standards create context-appropriate priorities for bicycle and pedestrian facilities?

▶ How could streetscape design standards increase and improve integration with surrounding neighborhoods and development contexts throughout different areas in Belton?

4 Street Trees.

▶ What opportunities are there for incorporating street trees into Belton's streetscapes to reduce urban heat and assist with stormwater management?

▶ What attributes of trees are important to consider (for example, regionally appropriate species, maintenance, appearance, placement, etc.)?

Graphic of a streetscape within a connected street network. The street's design balances transportation, parking, stormwater management, and social space.