



# Downtown Overbrook Beautification Plan

**May 26, 2025**

*In cooperation with*

*Washburn University's Public Administration Program*

*American Urban and Metropolitan Planning (HN 302)*

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## Community Profile

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### History

Overbrook, Kansas is a small agricultural community in Osage County, which was established in 1886 and incorporated in 1948. Its history is deeply intertwined with the Santa Fe Trail, which played a pivotal role in its development, as evidenced by numerous historical markers and the city's annual Santa Fe Trail Festival. Overbrook's identity is also shaped by its ties to the railroad, which spurred its growth, and the Landon Nature Trail, which connects it to broader regional history. Today, the city celebrates its heritage through community events, historical preservation, and landmarks. With a population of just over 1,000, Overbrook remains a close-knit community that proudly honors its past while maintaining a vibrant present.

### Quick Demographics

2010				2020			
Population	Households	Median Age	Median Income	Population	Households	Median Age	Median Income
1,058	411	41.7	\$49,000	1,005	414	47.2	\$50,288

### Community Assets

Key community assets and destinations include:

- Downtown Overbrook/Maple Street
- Friesen Fishing Lake
- Jones Park
- Landon Nature Trail (Maple St Trailhead)
- Overbrook City Pool
- Overbrook Farmers Market
- Overbrook Library
- Overbrook Osage County Fairgrounds
- Santa Fe Trail Festival

### Land Use and Zoning

Overbrook is predominantly made up of single-family residential land uses throughout the city with Downtown Overbrook comprising the majority of commercial business land uses. Other concentrations of land uses occur at Hwy 56 and Maple (commercial), south of downtown and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street (industrial), and northeast edge of town (public use/open space). Only a few parcels included multi-family residential uses which occur adjacent to downtown and within an old school building adjacent to Jones Park.

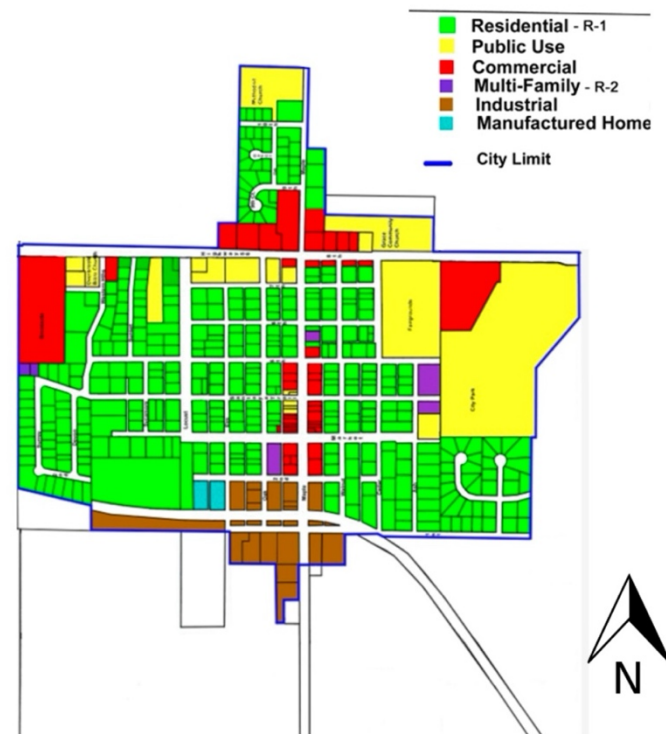


Figure 1 - Overbrook Zoning Map

Zoning districts closely follow existing land uses with a notable exception being commercially zoned land in the 400 block of Maple Street north of City Hall which is under residential use.

### **Downtown Study Area and Existing Conditions**

The downtown study area encompasses the 300 block of Maple Street bounded by Sante Fe Trail Street and Market Street. The block length is 300 feet with lot depth ranging from approximately 137 feet on the west side to 142 feet on the east side.

Defining characteristics of the block include:

#### **Street Infrastructure\***

- Street right-of-way width = 100 feet
- Travel lane west side = 15 feet; Travel lane east side = 20 feet
- Angled parking width = 20 feet both sides
- Sidewalk widths of 10 feet on west side (note: 6' and 4' sections split elevation for roughly 125' of library frontage).
- Sidewalk widths of 8-10 feet on east side.
- ADA ramps are lacking on most corners.
- A recent ADA ramp is installed mid-block in front of 315 W. Maple on the west side
- 2.5' curbs and gutters on each side round out street width dimensions.
- Amenities within the right-of-way:
  - Cobra-head streetlights (2 each side of street) at 25–30-foot height with banner accommodations. Pole locations are within the “pedestrian zone” 5 foot from building fronts effectively narrowing the sidewalk width by one foot while creating another obstacle in the middle of the 10-foot sidewalk.
  - Landscaping is primarily limited to unpainted flowerpots spaced evenly against storefronts on both sides of street. Exceptions include a well-manicured strip of grass, mulched plantings, and trees in front of the library as well as some landscaping in front of the Post Office.
  - No planted shading exists for morning or afternoon sun.
  - A variety of bench style seating exists (east – 4, west – 7)
  - Trash cans, decorative or otherwise, were not observed.

*\*Measurements are approximate*



**Figure 2 - Maple Street study area**



**Figure 3 - Library landscaping**



## Buildings – West Side

- Pre-World War II buildings form a one-story street wall with no setback from the sidewalk. They have traditional form being narrow in width and deeper in length. The notable exception is the recently expanded Overbrook Library with similar form but contemporary materials and a partially recessed frontage (see photo).
- Most still contain the original frame of their storefront window openings but are altered/covered to accommodate more contemporary entries and windows.
- Brick is the predominant building façade material.
- Awnings, a historical feature of downtown, are not present.
- There are no curb cuts or driveways for cars creating a solid pedestrian-friendly character. Auxiliary parking and delivery access is off the alley.
- All buildings have consistently placed wall signage in the transom area above the entries. Only two buildings have projection signs which was Overbrook's predominant historical pedestrian-friendly sign character.



Figure 4 - Maple Street - west side elevations (2020s vs 1950s)

### Buildings – East Side

- While buildings exhibit a more auto-oriented contemporary character than the west side, similarities in form are exemplified by single-story elevations, no setbacks from the sidewalk, and parking behind the buildings.
- Massing of the buildings are squarer closer to a 1:1 length/width ratio.
- Brick, albeit in different colors, are the predominant building façade material.
- Awnings are not present.
- There are three (3) driveway curb cuts off Maple Street creating more pedestrian-vehicle conflicts. Customer parking and delivery access is accessed from the driveways as well as the alley at the rear of the lot.
- Wall signage is prevalent with the notable exception being a pole sign for First Security Bank on the sidewalk which narrows the pedestrian clear zone considerably.
- All land is developed except a vacant lot at the northeast corner of Maple/Santa Fe Trail.

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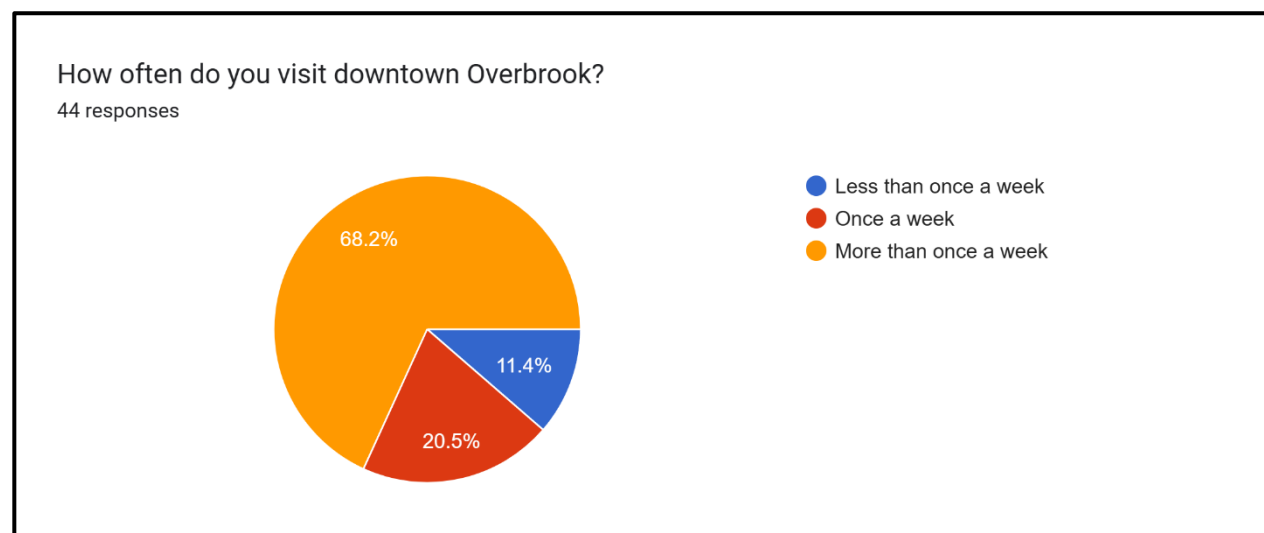
## Community Input

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On March 7, 2025, the City of Overbrook staff and select community members came together with the student team from Washburn University to discuss the Overbrook Downtown Beautification project trajectory. This included questions about how citizens utilize/access downtown, features they most want to keep or change, and what they want to see in 20+ years.

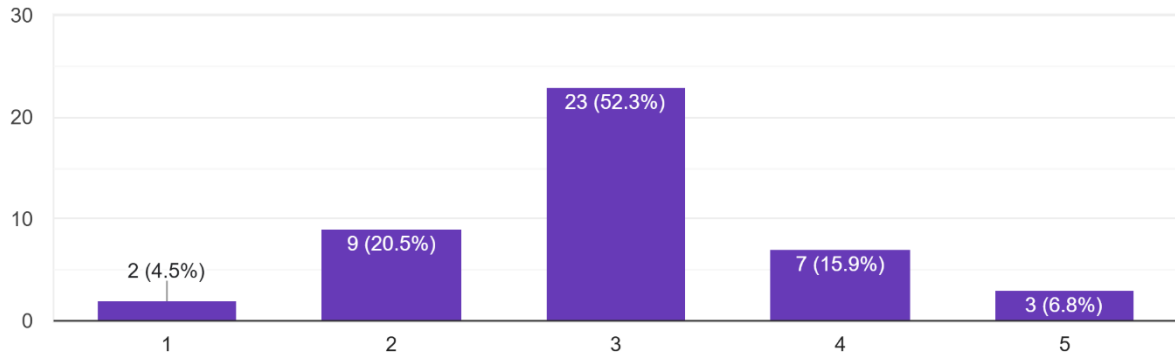
An online survey was distributed to the residents of Overbrook via the City's Facebook page through the end of March 2025. A total of 44 responses were received. Three charts from the survey are displayed below. Full results and open-ended answers are found in the Appendix.

The survey participants were overwhelmingly familiar with downtown as nearly 90% visited downtown at least once a week. The visual appeal of downtown was deemed to be decidedly middling with over half (52.3%) of the respondents rating it as “average”. Based on feedback from both residents and city leadership, priority improvements included art, diverse business options, managing the speed of traffic, and creation of a community gathering place.



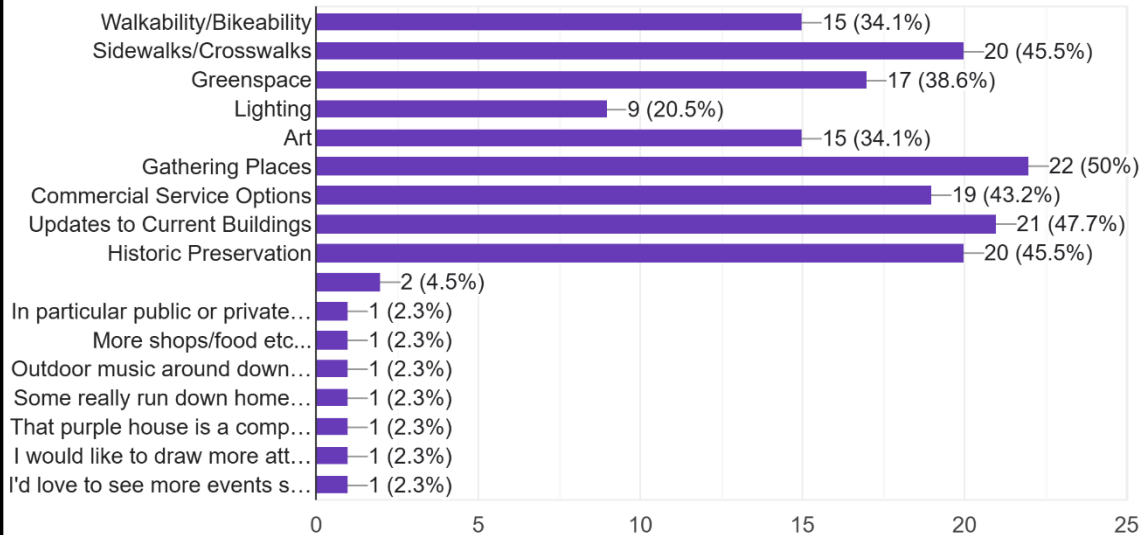
### Rate the visual appeal of downtown Overbrook.

44 responses



### What would you like to improve about downtown Overbrook? (Check all that apply)

44 responses



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## Beautification Plan Alternatives

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Two (2) alternative design approaches are recommended for the Downtown Beautification Plan to serve as a potential menu of choices that the City can fluidly choose from depending on priorities, funding availability, and timing. They are based on input obtained during two meetings with Overbrook City leaders and the March 2025 citywide citizens survey as illustrated in the following word cloud.



### Goals

Key goals of a beautification plan typically focus on enhancing the community's aesthetic appeal, preserving its historical and cultural identity, and fostering economic and social vitality. This includes improving streetscapes and amenities, prioritizing a safe pedestrian-friendly environment, calming traffic speeds, cleaning up vacant or underutilized spaces, and incorporating gateway designs to create a welcoming downtown environment. The plan aims to attract new businesses, support local entrepreneurship, and promote downtown as a destination by accentuating its unique community assets.

Key excerpts of the Comprehensive Plan that give further policy direction to downtown beautification efforts include:

- Clean up empty storefronts and enhancing the overall appearance of downtown.
- Protect our community's heritage and historic places.
- Encourage the responsible use of downtown buildings and streetscapes.
- Enact appropriate measures and development standards that will ensure these assets are available to future generations of residents and visitors.
- Create attractive and welcoming gateways into the city. These gateways include design elements that capture our small-town atmosphere.
- Developed modern community amenities, which have facilitated economic development and increased community pride.



## Alternative #1 – Bare Bones

This alternative emphasizes the most cost-efficient approach causing the least disruption of the built environment. It is geared towards gaining smaller “wins” early-on in the implementation phase to build momentum for more significant improvements down the road.

- A “Bare Bones” plan is minimalistic and accentuates the established character.
- Simple Ideas that will keep downtown character intact while opening the door for change
- The focus: pedestrian crossings, art installations, and façade restorations

### Pedestrian Crossings

Starting with safety first, an initial “bare bones” approach should focus on installation of pedestrian crossings. Three potential points in the study area are shown in the illustration. There are not any crosswalks within the 300 block of Maple currently. The speed of truck traffic through downtown is a major deterrent to the quality of life for downtown patrons and walkability. The crossings would meet three objectives: 1) facilitate safer pedestrian flow with higher visibility, 2) act as a traffic calming feature, and 3) incorporate aesthetic appeal through art or distinctive materials.

For safest visibility, it is recommended that a **rectangular flashing beacon (RFB)** be installed with the installation of painted crosswalks, and curb extensions with ADA accessible ramps on either side of the street. A pair of RFBs are not inexpensive costing upwards of \$40,000 designed and installed.

Secondarily or in combination with RFBs, a **speed table** could be added to further deter dangerous rates of speed through downtown particularly truck traffic accessing the industrial-ag businesses south of downtown. In bare bones fashion, a less permanent rubberized speed table could be installed without a crosswalk to gauge effectiveness and support prior to a permanent install.



The three ped crossing locations should be considered in some combination either at 1) the north and south ends of the block, 2) stand-alone at mid-block, or 3) all three together as a package.



Figure 5 - speed tables

### Art Installations

Another low cost and early implementation approach to meeting the goals of the plan is through a variety of art installations in terms of wall murals, paintings, planters, benches, sidewalk materials, metal art, etc. that reflects Overbrook's creative and welcoming identity while showcasing pride in local entrepreneurial arts and crafts work. Potential eye-catching art will build on not "Overlooking Overbrook" and the city's iconic mural. Three-dimensional art pieces also invigorate public spaces. Examples of different treatments are shown in the pictures below.

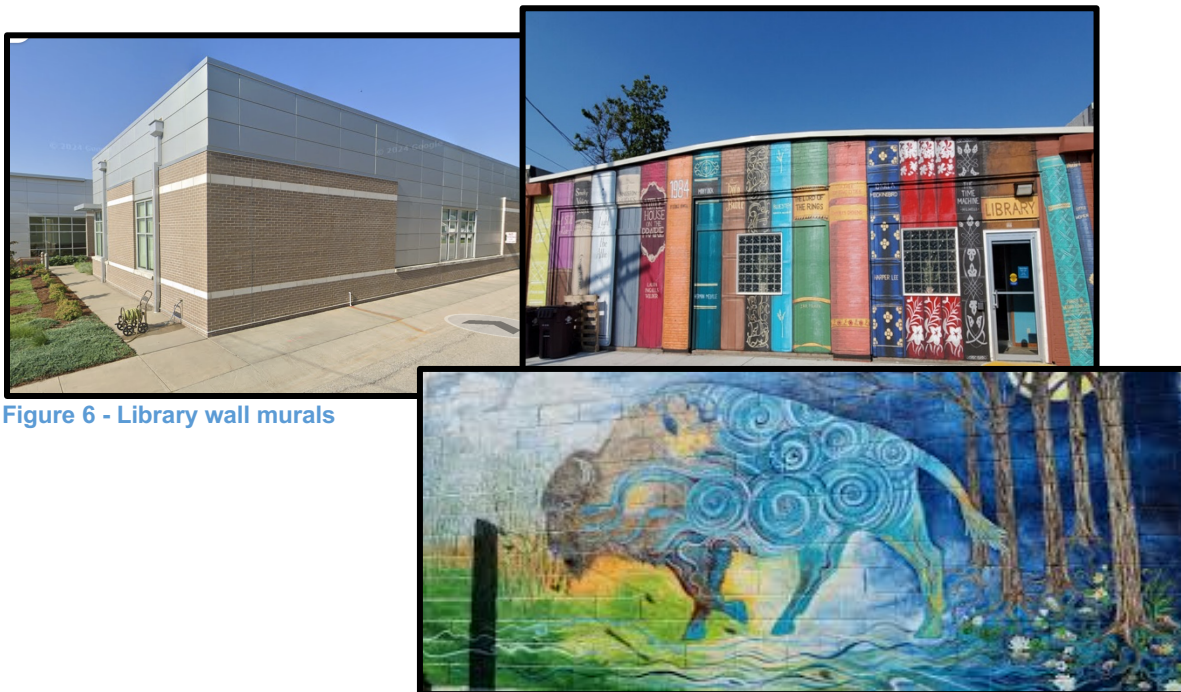


Figure 6 - Library wall murals





Figure 7 - metal art



Figure 8 - planters, benches, sidewalk art



In “bare bones” fashion, the large painted tree planters could serve a dual purpose as a way to introduce not only art but greenery with trees and/or native groundcovers prior any more permanent installations.

## Façade Restoration

Façade restoration programs fit perfectly within a cost-effective approach to downtown beautification as these typically use public dollars for matching grants that leverage private dollars. Because downtown's building fronts are essentially part of the public realm with zero setbacks, repairing and improving the front face of a building including windows, doors, decorative elements, signs, etc. elevates the image of downtown the most.

- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage** - Helps maintain architectural connections to the past while also enhancing curb-appeal.
- **Structural Integrity** - Address issues like cracking, crumbling, and water damage.
- **Energy Efficiency** - Repairing/Replacing damaged elements can improve the building insulation, reducing the energy consumption
- **Grants/Design Guidelines** – As part of a small matching grant program, adopt guidelines for consistency in the architectural details preserved and restored inherent to downtown. This should include awnings that are not back-lit or rounded.



Figure 9 – Carthage, MO downtown facade preservation

By increasing the focus on art and preservation, Overbrook remains a destination, not just a thoroughfare.



## Alternative #2 – Optimist

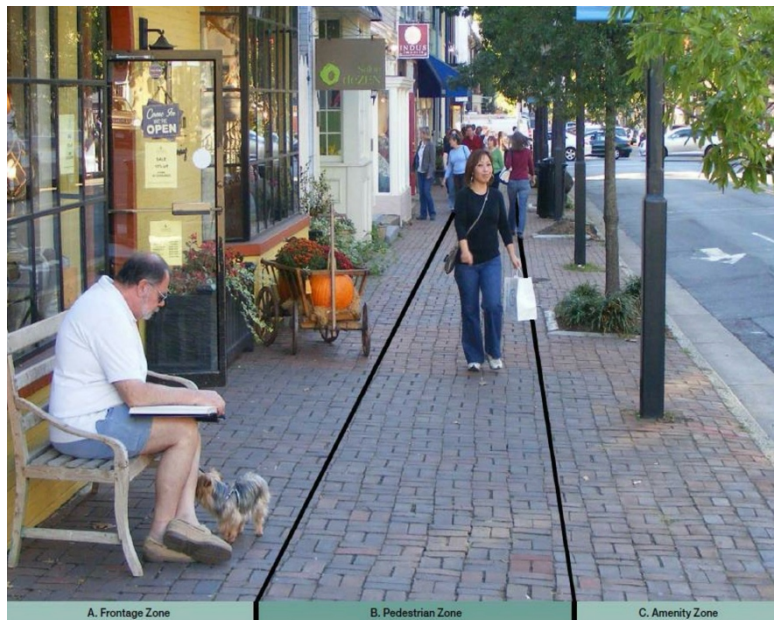
This alternative dreams bigger. The menu of choices is undeniably aspirational and aims to transform downtown Overbrook’s built environment for the next generation. It is a plan that takes it shot at an “optimal” future building off momentum from smaller “wins”.

- An “Optimist” plan is more of an ideal state of what change is possible while still grounded in best practices aligned with goals of the city.
- Much greater funding support is needed.
- The focus will be on expanded streetscapes, gateways, and a community gathering place that build off the “Bare Bones” alternative.

### Expanded Streetscapes

The current state of downtown’s streetscape is relatively untouched from its earliest development and begs for a major makeover to address not just aesthetics but safety. Several elements of the right-of-way streetscapes are worth deeper consideration to enhance walkability and appeal.

- **Sidewalk Zone** – A sidewalk zone is the surface between the building and the curb. A big question to ask is whether it is wide enough to adequately accommodate functional and beautification aspects. The current 6–10-foot width of the sidewalk zone compromises these needs for a “main street” street type which is recommended to be at least 14-15 feet. The sidewalk zone is further broken down into three sub-zones:
  - Frontage Zone – The area adjacent to buildings reserved for seating, retail displays/signs, door swings, awnings, etc. (min. 2- 3 feet)
  - Pedestrian Zone – The area for active travel to be clear of obstacles so pedestrians can pass by in pairs. (min. 5-6 feet)
  - Amenity Zone – The area between the curb and pedestrian zone reserved for streetlights, utilities, landscaping, trees, signs, trash cans, planters, etc. Some decorative pavement is typically applied in this zone. (min. 6)



- **Median** – One of the biggest drawbacks to evoking a small town “main street” atmosphere is the prevalence of semi-trucks on Maple Street accessing the agricultural co-op silos south of downtown. The wide-open design of Maple Street allows for a higher rate of speed through town and could be mitigated by narrowing the travel lanes with a landscaped median. Narrowing travel lanes from 15-20 feet to a minimum of 12 feet will give drivers a visual cue to slow down while also providing a safe refuge for pedestrians crossing the street. It’s advised to allow some breaks in the median for left turns to existing business driveways. The types of medians that could be considered include:

- Raised median planter - This median is similar in concept to the stone planter in front of City Hall and can accommodate low maintenance native vegetation and tall grasses. Trees are not necessarily recommended due to space limitations and truck interference.



- Decorative median – This is a curb-high median finished in decorative color, stone or stamped patterns. No landscaping is involved.
- Bio-swale median – This depressed median would serve stormwater drainage purposes with perforated linear curbing. Native vegetation and grasses that work best in drainage areas are recommended.

- **Curb Extensions** - With the increased size of sidewalks on Maple Street, there is more that can be accomplished regarding the safety of pedestrians. Crossings serve an important role encouraging active traveling within the



district but only if they are designed to prioritize the pedestrian over vehicles. To that end, the planning team recommends curb extensions on the corners of intersections that

reduce car/truck speeds, reduces the distance to cross the street making it less intimidating, and creates beautification spaces for trees, greenery, and raised planters that also can double as informal seating.

When all these elements are put together, several design alternatives emerge as shown in the illustrations below.

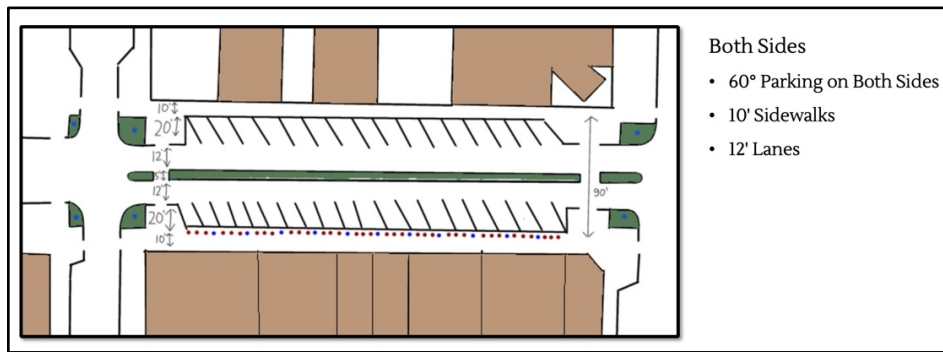


Figure 10 – Median at 5' with existing sidewalks and parking

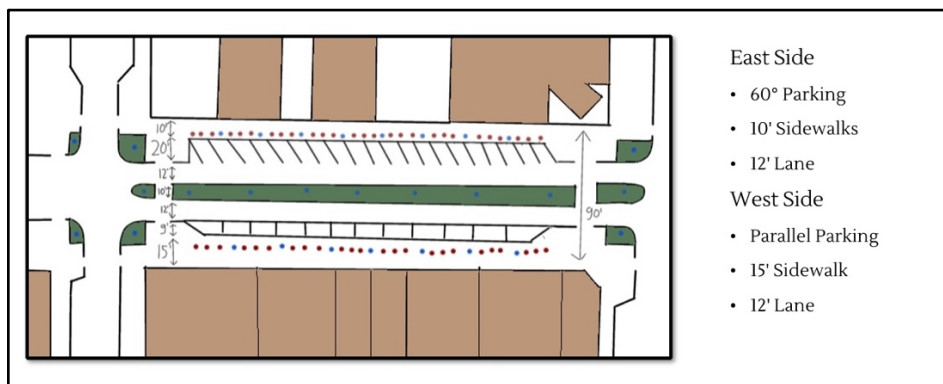


Figure 11 – Median at 10' with wider sidewalks and parallel parking

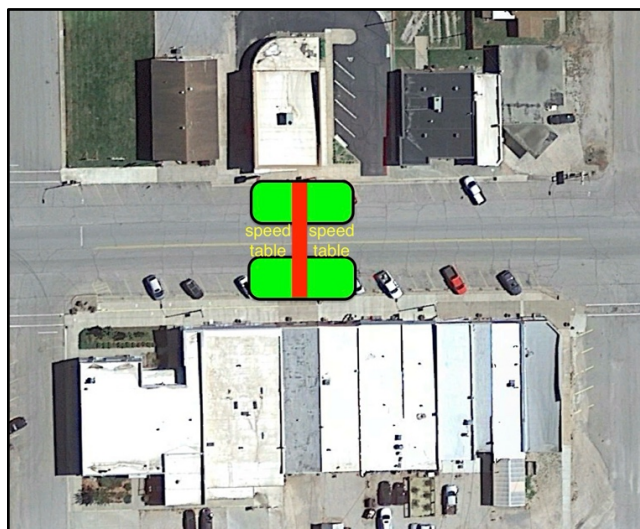


Figure 12 - Mid-block curb extensions w/ speed table



## Gateways

A gateway is a town's front door, or portal, to an important destination serving as a visitor's first impression. It can say a lot about the area. While it has navigational purposes, gateways for small towns today showcase the sense of pride and welcomeness residents have in their city.

It is recommended that a combination of signage and lighting be used to enhance Overbrook's gateways. Local signage establishes a physical boundary but also reinforces a sense of place, character, and overall improves visual appeal. Meanwhile properly scaled lighting adds to nighttime safety, extends commercial activity after dark, and highlights architectural features. Together, these elements ensure downtown is both accessible and memorable.

The planning team recommends the placement of a **City of Overbrook Welcome Sign** at the corner of Maple Street and Highway 56 as a navigational marker for downtown. This should be a distinctive monument style sign with landscaping at the base and uplighting to make visible at night. Elements could include the founding year, historic imagery, and/or city flag themes.

In addition, we also recommend a distinctive **Downtown Overbrook Sign** as an entry or portal for downtown. Locations for a monument style sign could include a future center median, curb extension space, or the "history museum" lot at Santa Fe Trail and Maple. The sign should be scaled appropriately based on one of these locations. Archway signs are more elaborate and expensive. But given the need to offer more cues to drivers to slow down as they enter downtown, it should be given greater consideration particularly if new curb extensions can accommodate.







As for improvements to lighting, the current concrete cast 25-30-foot-tall cobra head lights do not serve the aesthetic of downtown or the pedestrian realm very well. Their placement in the middle of the pedestrian zone is a hazard. It's possible to keep one each at the two intersections of Maple (Santa Fe Trail and Market), while upgrading the remainder of the block with decorative pedestrian-scaled lighting. These changes are advised in combination with sidewalk or curb extension improvements to allow for adequate spacing in the sidewalk zone. Overall, the symmetrical placement of pedestrian lighting improves visual appeal and safety of patrons first. Banner and flowerpot attachments can be added for further beautification.

### Community Gathering Space

Greenery and community gathering spaces ranked high in the public feedback process largely because downtown does not have either. Larger events rely on the closing of Maple Street, but the study area does not have capacity for smaller civic or family events. Such spaces are indispensable for fostering community cohesion, improving quality of life, and lead the way for casual and planned social interaction. Gathering spaces become anchors for downtown livability, encouraging longer visits and repeat patronage while supporting mental and physical well-being.

The planning team proposes two potential locations for community gathering spaces in downtown Overbrook: 1) next to the Health Clinic on the south end of Maple Street, and 2) on the vacant Historic Museum site north of the Post Office. Elements of either site could include the following:

- Art and landscaped greenery should be a central focus of the outdoor space for beautification purposes. A mural



Figure 13 – potential community gathering locations

- wall could be a backdrop for a stage, performances, fairs, graduation pictures, etc.
- A small, raised stage or even Overbrook's original town gazebo could be replicated to host a band, announcements, etc.
- A small shelter with picnic tables for family events.
- A downtown Overbrook gateway sign has potential on the museum lot.

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## Next Steps

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City leaders in tandem with the community should begin to carefully refine these ideas as needed for future project implementation and better prioritization.

This planning document is primarily for the ideation of community desires and engineering aspects will be necessary to move forward on most of the ideas within. Preliminary engineering design can provide cost and feasibility aspects to better inform the decision-makers of Overbrook.

This document can serve as an element of the city's Comprehensive Plan for policy purposes should that be considered in the future.