

## ABSTRACT

### The Revitalization of Elm Street

Alexandra M. Mosser

Director: Marlene M. Reed, Ph.D.

East Waco is a region of the City of Waco characterized by a somewhat rough history and a generally run-down atmosphere. Many Baylor students would be familiar with the area because of Lula Jane's, a popular bakery in the heart of East Waco located on one of the central roads, Elm Street. This project is an extension of a class project done by the 2014-2015 Baylor B.E.S.T. class, a group of twenty-eight highly motivated upperclassmen from various disciplines within Hankamer School of Business at Baylor University. In this project, the group researched, planned, and ultimately constructed a potential revitalization plan for the East Waco area, an area that financially lags behind other areas in Waco. This extension outlines in detail the research done, presents the final project and gives follow-up information on related happenings in East Waco that have occurred since the project was presented to parties involved in the future of business ventures in East Waco in December 2014.

APPROVED BY DIRECTOR OF HONORS THESIS:

---

Dr. Marlene M. Reed, Department of Entrepreneurship

APPROVED BY THE HONORS PROGRAM:

---

Dr. Andrew Wisely, Director

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

THE REVITALIZATION OF ELM STREET

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Baylor University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Honors Program

By

Alexandra Mosser

Waco, Texas

May 2015

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures .....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Chapter Two: Research Methodology .....	12
Chapter Three: Findings .....	26
Chapter Four: Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations.....	41
Bibliography .....	50

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Far Zoom of East Waco.....	3
Figure 2: Close Zoom of East Waco.....	3
Figure 3: Map of East Riverside Neighborhood Association.....	35
Figure 4: Possible layout of a container home.....	37

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without my adviser, Dr. Marlene Reed. I am thankful for her guidance, excellent feedback and leadership in the B.E.S.T. class. Additionally, this thesis would not have been possible without the work of the 2014-2015 B.E.S.T. class and the members of the Waco community who helped us conduct research and learn about East Waco. I thankful for each member's input and for the opportunity to learn about the community we have all loved being a part of for the past four years.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

Waco, Texas is a growing, vibrant community of just under 125,000 people in the heart of Texas, according to the latest official census (United States, 2014). Located in McLennan County on Interstate 35 between the bustling Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and the Texas state capitol in Austin, Waco is home to Cameron Park, Baylor University, the Dr. Pepper Museum, the Brazos River and other various attractions. Waco encompasses a relatively large geographic area and can be broken down into various areas. The area in focus for this project is the northeast area of the city, referred to as East Waco.

The Business Excellence and Scholarship Team (B.E.S.T.) is a group of twenty-eight highly motivated students from various academic disciplines within Hankamer School of Business at Baylor University. The B.E.S.T. class is led by Dr. Marlene M. Reed, Senior Lecturer and Entrepreneur in Residence at Baylor University, who has been frequently published and has extensive experience in business case analysis and economics. In addition to developing business case analysis skills and learning about urban economics, the 2014-2015 B.E.S.T. class undertook the project of applying the lessons, skills and theories learned in class lectures to developing a plan to revitalize the East Waco community. The class was divided into small groups of four students each in order to focus on the various facets of improving the East Waco community and to create a master plan that incorporated all areas needed for thorough revitalization in the area. At

the beginning of the project, the plan was for each of the seven groups to create an all-encompassing revitalization plan that would compete to be the best revitalization plan for the area; but as the class did more research, the project evolved and each group was charged with a different aspect of the revitalization effort. This evolved plan called for each team's highly researched area of focus to be combined with the other groups' components at the end of the project to form one comprehensive plan for revitalization in East Waco.

### *The East Waco Area*

The project focused on a specific area of East Waco that is just north of the Baylor campus, on the other side of Interstate 35 and across the Brazos River. Before beginning the project, one of the main goals was to geographically define the exact location of this area. The Elm Street area, as it will be referred to in this paper, is bound on the southwest side by Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, on the northwest by Waco Drive, on the northeast by Clifton Street, and on the southwest by Elm Street. The area is outlined in bold lines in the following maps. Elm Street lies in the heart of the East Waco area. The Brazos River geographically separates the area from the rest of Waco. The Elm Street area is simply a more specific reference to the area in East Waco directly surrounding Elm Street.



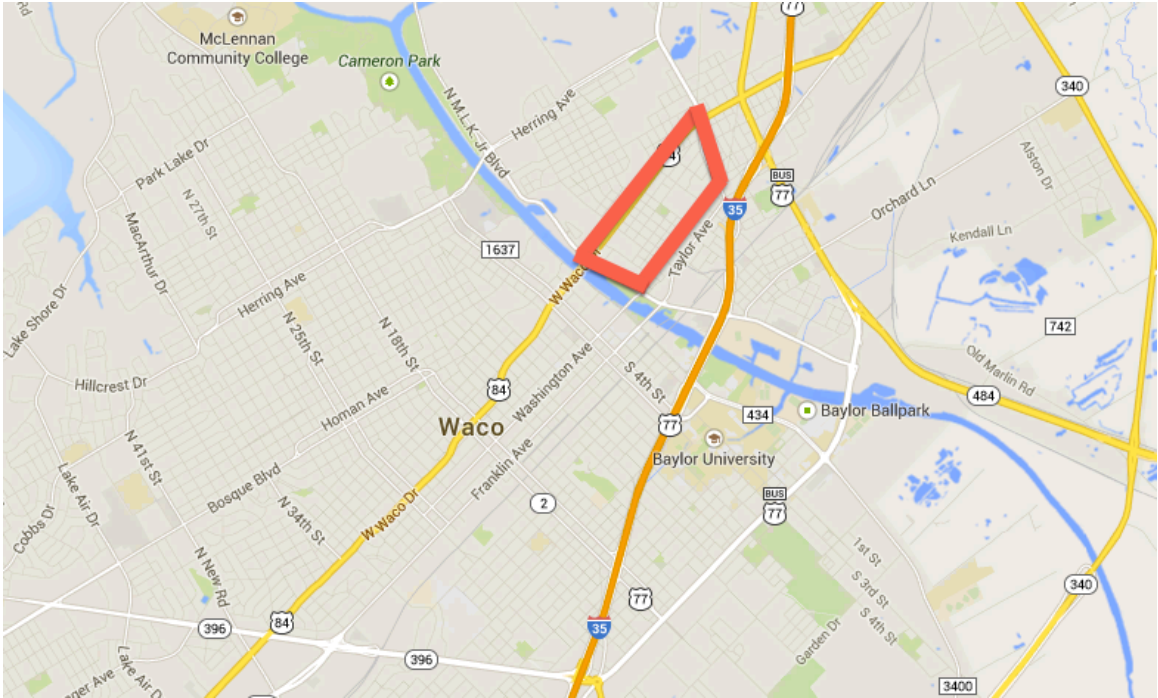


Figure 1: Far Zoom of East Waco – Elm Street area denoted by bold lines

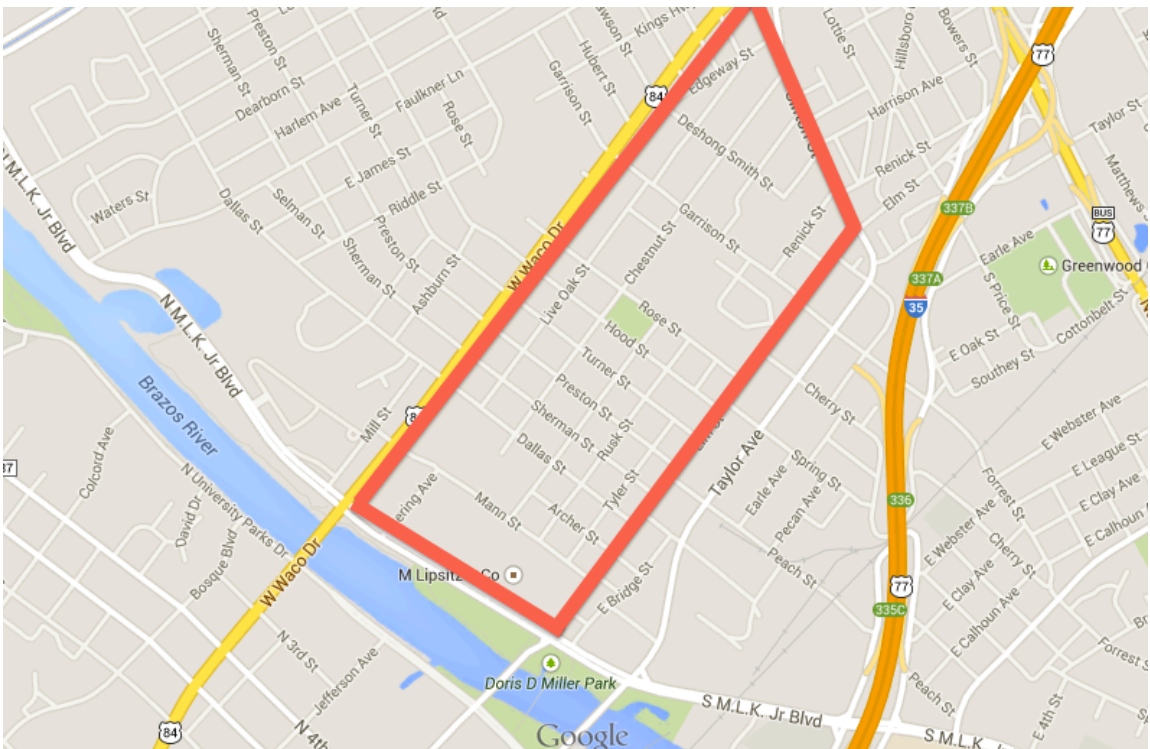


Figure 2: Close zoom of East Waco – Elm Street area denoted by bold lines

### *What is Revitalization?*

Revitalization seems to be an all-encompassing term. While there were no specific monetary, numerical or time-specific goals associated with the B.E.S.T. class's revitalization plan project in the Elm Street area, there were some general goals that the revitalization plan hoped to achieve. First of all, revitalizing the Elm Street area intended to encourage a change in the perception of the East Waco area. Although the perception of the area had recently been improving up, the general perception of the area in focus was not positive at the time of the project. Due to its patch of rough history, many saw East Waco as an area to avoid due to its perceived lack of safety, especially after daylight. Revitalization sought to continue to rid the Waco community of this mindset and to replace the reputation of the Elm Street area with an inviting and vibrant atmosphere that encouraged visitation instead of encouraging avoidance.

As the perception of East Waco continues to improve, it will hopefully appear to be a more attractive place to plant new businesses that will bring economic growth to the area and increase the traffic in the area as well. As will be discussed further in the paper, Lula Jane's coffee shop and bakery has set up a valuable model of exactly how a business can be successful in this area. Lula Jane's has brought significant traffic into the Elm Street area and could perhaps be the first of many new and unique businesses to draw visitors into the Elm Street area. Not only does Lula Jane's appeal to people outside of the East Waco area, but it has also been successful in attracting customers directly from East Waco, thus creating a space in which East Waco and non-East Waco people interact in a comfortable business environment, which is important considering the perceptions and diversity that exist between East Waco and the rest of Waco.

Christopher Leinberger published a research report in 2005 entitled *Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization* in which he gave detailed specifics on what is needed achieve revitalization in a downtown area. In his discussion on revitalization, Leinberger discussed the importance of “walkable urbanism,” or the ability of a city to provide a safe, interesting and inviting center of activity and business through which people will willingly walk. Leinberger (2005) asserted that “fostering such walkable urbanism is the key to the revival of any struggling downtown” (p. 2). Currently East Waco would not be considered to have very high “walkable urbanism” due not only to the perception that it is generally an unsafe area, but also because there is simply not enough existing business in the area that people would consider it a need to walk through the area. Additionally, the run-down buildings and infrastructure create far from an inviting atmosphere for potential pedestrians.

In his report, Leinberger (2005) identified the following twelve steps in the general process of revitalization: capturing the vision for revitalization by gauging the intentions for the project; developing a strategic plan involving character, housing, retail, public infrastructure, employment and the like; forging a healthy private and public partnership; making the right thing easy by making sure legal restrictions on revitalization are reasonable and not outdated; establishing business improvement districts and other non-profits, creating a catalytic development company that will “engage in varying activities in the development process;” creating an urban entertainment district including performing arts centers, movie theaters, restaurants, festival grounds and night clubs; developing a rental housing market; pioneering an affordability strategy that focuses heavily on housing prices; focusing on for-sale housing

that will likely house an older, more-established group than will rental housing; developing a local-serving retail strategy; and re-creating a strong office market (p. 4-20). Leinberger's steps provided a useful springboard for the class for thinking about the developing plan for revitalization in the East Waco area.

### *Brief History of East Waco*

In order to understand the current situation in East Waco, it is important to be familiar with the rich history of the area. A recent issue of *Waco Heritage & History* published by the Historic Waco Foundation focuses on the community of East Waco and includes a detailed account of its history.

Using the Brazos River as a major geographical divisor, East Waco is primarily home to working class citizens, many of which are minorities. In contrast, the western part of Waco is generally home to more prosperity. This split in the population has occurred partly because of the railroad industry that used to be a major part of Waco. The railroad companies would build their repair shops on the east side of the Brazos, thus triggering the development of neighborhoods of working class citizens around their shops. Additionally, it has generally been more difficult in the past for people to get land titles in East Waco due to various shady land dealings that occurred in the 1800s (Arnold, 2012).

The construction of Waco Drive did nothing to help Elm Street either, as the new Waco Drive drew traffic away from Elm Street in the heart of East Waco. This lack of traffic caused business in the area to diminish, and diminished business eventually led to cheaper land. The majority of business activity moved to the western side of the Brazos

River and the eastern side of the river saw seriously stunted growth. Businesses that did exist in East Waco were primarily focused on industrial activities and manufacturing. Examples of such businesses included the General Tire Company and an old locomotive plant established in the area by Katy Railroad (Davis, 2012), both of which no longer exist in East Waco. The tornado that hit Waco in 1953 harmed many businesses in Waco, especially in East Waco. (Arnold, 2012) East Waco also lacked substantial resources to completely take care of damages.

Flooding of the Brazos River presented another problem for East Waco. The western banks of the Brazos were at a higher elevation than the lower banks; and whenever the river would flood, East Waco would see destructive flooding, whereas the higher banks would protect western Waco. No one can pinpoint exactly which specific event caused the demise of business activity in the East Waco area, but a combination of the flooding problems, the destruction from the 1953 tornado and the way that Waco Drive drew traffic away from Elm Street all seem to come together to create a recipe for hardship for East Waco.

During the second half of the twentieth century, East Waco was home to a large number of bars and businesses that were part of a drug trafficking network. Businesses would conduct their advertised business in the front of the store while providing an avenue for drug dealing in the back of the store. Prostitution was also prevalent in the area. (Grayson, 2014) It was specifically during this time that East Waco developed its reputation for being unsafe. Many people who lived in Waco during this time still associate the area with shady activity, and my peers who grew up in Waco in the late 1990s and early 2000s remember their parents telling them that East Waco was off limits

because of its rough reputation. However, with the recent growth of Baylor University and the new students that Baylor and other universities in the Waco area bring in each year, East Waco has an opportunity to use these fresh faces to overcome its past reputation and generate business with people who either don't know or don't remember its shady past.

### *Research Reports focused on Waco, Texas*

Several groups have conducted extensive research on the Waco economy in recent years. While most of this research does not directly focus on the East Waco area, the figures and analysis of the Waco economy provided by these reports were still valuable in constructing a revitalization plan for the Elm Street area. Two reports that were used for their research are the Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City of Waco, Texas, published by the W.E. Upjohn Institute and ImagineWaco: A Plan for a Greater Downtown, published by Fregonese Associates.

### *The Upjohn Report*

On May 16, 2014, a team of seven people representing the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research published the Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City of Waco, Texas. The Upjohn Report focused specifically on investigating the economic landscape in Waco and the future of economic development in the city. The recommendation of this report suggested on “reducing poverty, increasing labor force participation, and increasing area income.” The Upjohn Report cited Waco’s strategic location on Interstate 35 between Dallas and Austin and its valuable accessibility to

Baylor University, McLennan Community College and Texas State Technical College as two important factors that indicate Waco's potential for economic growth (Erickcek, 2014, p. 1). Waco's strategic location gives it a prime opportunity to function as a central distribution and supply center, and the diversity of the higher education institutions provide local opportunities for residents to better prepare for their jobs.

Based on interviews and research, the Upjohn analysts developed a list of seven recommendations for the city of Waco to implement to encourage economic growth. The list is as follows: implement an employer-driven workplace readiness skills training program, develop target industry career fairs, extend the activities of the employer consortium to include shared training needs, bring jobs to people, improve the city's current economic development services, develop an education pathway especially for African Americans to successfully enter and complete college, and design and implement system improvements to ensure all children are ready for kindergarten (Erickcek, 2014, p. 60-70). These recommendations also took into consideration other practices being tried around the nation in communities similar to Waco.

### *The ImagineWaco Plan*

"ImagineWaco: A Plan for Greater Downtown" is another published report about revitalizing Waco, although this report focused specifically on downtown Waco which does not include the Elm Street area. However, the report still provides some useful insights into the Waco community that will be useful in developing a plan for revitalizing the East Waco area. The report began by noting the renewed interest in the downtown area in Waco, which has never been as hustling and bustling as it was before the 1953

tornado. The ImagineWaco plan sought to bring life back to the downtown area that is reminiscent of the area before the tornado. Specifically, the plan drafted goals for Waco over the next twenty to forty years.

While the plan is not focused on the Elm Street area, it does offer several insights into the area and connects the area with the greater plan for downtown Waco. The plan stated: “East Waco is vibrant and is centered on a revitalized Elm Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard and a waterfront that has come alive” (Fregonese, 2011). The ImagineWaco plan called for activity on both sides of the Brazos River, not just the west bank where most activity and business is currently centered. It proposed greater usage of the suspension bridge in linking the two areas and called for increased public transportation to make a more seamless linkage between the two areas while increasing accessibility.

ImagineWaco conducted workshops in the community in which participants were able to voice their hopes and dreams for the Waco community. Various participants mentioned that they wanted to see redevelopment in the East Waco area. “While west Waco will remain the core business center, east Waco will be alive with historical, cultural and arts facilities, farmers market, art shows, mixed-use housing and retail and restaurant destinations” (Fregonese, 2011). This matched well with the visions for the area already encountered.

The plan gathered that the first step to revitalization in the East Waco area was to make a destination out of the riverfront area. Specifically the area around the suspension bridge on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard should serve as a sort of gateway into the East Waco area, and revitalization should be focused in this specific area first. Once into



revitalizing the interior area of East Waco, focus should be maintained on keeping with the historic tradition of the area and not taking away from the “main street feel” that already exists there. The plan also made the important observation that growth must occur on both sides of the river—in the downtown area and in the Elm Street area simultaneously because “the two sides of the river are synergistic and build on each other” (Fregonese, 2011). Ultimately, the ImagineWaco plan offered great insight and inspiration not only for Waco as a whole or solely for the East Waco area, but also for linking the two areas which seems to be an integral key to success in revitalizing the Elm Street area.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Research Methodology

#### *Introduction*

To begin the class project, Dr. Reed invited various key players in the revitalization efforts in the Elm Street area to come speak to the class and share their dreams and goals for the area as well as discuss their general theories on revitalization. Of the four people who spoke to the class two—Megan Henderson and Chris McGowan—are employed by the city of Waco and two—Dr. Nancy Grayson and Sam Brown—are involved in business ventures in the East Waco area. Megan, Chris and Sam came to the Baylor campus to speak to the class, and the class actually visited Dr. Nancy Grayson in her business directly on Elm Street to hear her speak.

#### *Presentation to B.E.S.T. Class: Megan Henderson*

Megan Henderson is the Executive Director of the Waco Downtown Development Corporation, a local Waco non-profit organization. Megan presented her perceptions of the problems and solutions associated with the Elm Street area to the B.E.S.T. class on September 2, 2014. Megan's office is strategically located right on Elm Street, giving her a unique perspective on revitalizing the area.

Megan's thoughts on revitalization focused on the fact that the people who currently inhabit the Elm Street area need to be the primary people benefitting from new business ventures in the area. While bringing in other people to profit from new business

ventures in the Elm Street area might also be beneficial, business plans that bring profit to the people living in the area would ultimately bring more effective benefits, as this would directly stimulate economic activity in the area. For example, this area is commonly referred to as a food desert—an area where it is difficult to obtain affordable and nutritiously balanced groceries. To meet this need, some sort of supermarket or food store could possibly be a beneficial addition to the revitalization plan. Megan also presented other business ideas to meet the current needs in the area, including the need for childcare and the need for financial loans (Henderson, Sept. 2014).

Megan expressed the opinion that the Elm Street area already has a spirit and a personality that it is trying to express; therefore, an entirely new revitalization vision would not be needed, but rather a vision that capitalizes on what already exists in the area would be ultimately more valuable. Megan envisioned the Elm Street area becoming some sort of arts district with art galleries lining the streets, murals covering the walls and aesthetically pleasing storefronts and landscaping meeting visitors. Apparently at least one person had already expressed interest in opening an art gallery in the area, and Megan thought that could be a potentially successful route to revitalization (Henderson, Sept. 2014).

Megan did present one major obstacle that would have to be considered and overcome during the revitalization of the Elm Street area: as business ideas are implanted in the area and the area begins to prosper, property taxes will increase. However, the people living in this area may not be able to reconcile their personal finances with the increasing property taxes and might be effectively forced out of the area. Megan referred

to this phenomenon as gentrification, and she saw it as a major blockade to possible progress in revitalization (Henderson, Sept. 2014).

*Presentation to B.E.S.T. Class: Chris McGowan*

Chris McGowan, the Director of Urban Development at the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce, presented to the B.E.S.T. class after Megan, on September 4, 2014. Like Megan, Chris encouraged using the resources already in the Elm Street area to develop a revitalization plan that built on the strengths that already existed in East Waco. He thought it was important that any proposed revitalization plan include a way to combine serving both the people in the Elm Street area as well as visitors to the area. Chris noted that he had seen some important changes in Waco over the past years that have encouraged him in thinking that revitalization in the Elm Street area could indeed be successful. Some of these changes were more Waco people in the downtown area whereas people in Waco used to be discouraged from going downtown, there are more restaurants in Waco (to which he gives credit to Chuy's as being one of the first restaurants to come into Waco and experience success), and that the Waco area is just beginning to believe in itself more. Chris said that he believed that these phenomena are indicators that the time is ripe for revitalization (McGowan, 2014).

Chris noted that much basic infrastructure is missing in the Elm Street area, and perhaps this could be a good place to start with revitalization as infrastructure truly provides a solid skeleton for any part of a city. Also, the lack of infrastructure could be viewed as an opportunity and not solely as a detriment to the area. According to Chris, a creative revitalization plan could, for example, develop an infrastructure strategy that was

incredibly environmentally friendly. In Chris's eyes, improving the infrastructure was another opportunity to creatively draw visitors to the Elm Street area. Chris also noted that not only was there a lot of open land and empty space in the area, but land and space were cheap in the area, and a successful revitalization plan would creatively take advantage of those opportunities. Chris also discussed the process of gentrification that Megan touched on, but he felt strongly that gentrification would not be as difficult of an obstacle to overcome as the local government would most likely work with the residents in the area in making the property taxes fair and affordable since this would be in the best interests of both the city and the Elm Street area residents (McGowan, 2014).

*Presentations to B.E.S.T. Class: Dr. Nancy Grayson*

On September 11, 2014 the B.E.S.T. class traveled to the Elm Street area, directly on Elm Street to meet with Dr. Nancy Grayson, who owns a successful restaurant and bakery in the area called Lula Jane's. Lula Jane's is not Dr. Grayson's first successful business venture in the East Waco area—in 1998 she led the opening of Rapoport Academy, which is located on Elm Street. Dr. Grayson opened Rapoport Academy Public School specifically to meet the needs of students in the economically depressed area of East Waco who were continually failing to meet educational standards. Dr. Grayson understood the community and its specific needs well and was involved of all facets of developing and managing the school. Rapoport Academy grew quickly and successfully and still successfully operates today even though Dr. Grayson has moved on from such an important role in the school (Grayson, 2014).

Having experienced such success with Rapoport Academy, just one of her many projects in East Waco, Dr. Grayson provided the class with yet another unique view on revitalization in the Elm Street area. Not only does Dr. Grayson have an incredibly accurate view of just how business works in East Waco as she successfully conducts business in the area every single day, but she also knows the people in East Waco in an intimate way as she serves them food, holds conversations with them in her restaurant and goes through daily life with them on Elm Street. Dr. Grayson is an extremely valuable resource to learning about the behaviors and mindsets of the people who live in the Elm Street area—the people who the revitalization plan should primarily impact. For example, Dr. Grayson described how many local East Waco people were extremely hesitant to visit Lula Jane's upon its opening. However, Dr. Grayson was not discouraged. She continued to run Lula Jane's and eventually a few locals began to visit her restaurant. Dr. Grayson earned their trust and eventually their friendship.

Lula Jane's is a popular destination in Waco for Baylor students and Waco businesspeople alike, and Dr. Grayson cites that 95% of her customers come in from outside the East Waco area. However, the five percent of customers who come into Lula Jane's from inside the East Waco area is notable and important in adding to Dr. Grayson's success as a business owner in the Elm Street area. Lula Jane's has succeeded in doing what Megan and especially Chris thought was so important—providing for the needs of the community of East Waco while also serving customers in the greater Waco area (Grayson, 2014).

Dr. Grayson recounted a bit of history of the area before she delved into her specific hopes of revitalization efforts. She described the Elm Street area as being on the

lower banks of the Brazos River, in juxtaposition to the bustling business core of downtown Waco being on the upper banks. Whenever the Brazos River would flood, the lower banks suffered the damage, effectively making the upper banks the safer and more appealing place to live and work. According to Dr. Grayson, after the last major flood, all of the people with resources permanently moved to the upper banks, leaving all of the people without resources in East Waco. Dr. Grayson also noted that the 1970s to the early 2000s was a time when drugs, prostitution and bars were extremely commonplace in the Elm Street area, thus giving the area that bad reputation it struggles to shake off today (Grayson, 2014).

Dr. Grayson was full of encouragement for the continued revitalization of the Elm Street area; and Lula Jane's provided not only a great model for revitalization plans, but it also seemed to be a spark in East Waco that has perhaps ignited the initiative for further revitalization of the area. If anything, Lula Jane's now provides a model that can assure other business owners that success is indeed possible in the Elm Street area. Dr. Grayson encouraged the class to seek creativity in the revitalization plan—she expressed the hope that East Waco could provide businesses and opportunities that were not already available in other parts of Waco (Grayson, 2014).

#### *Presentations to B.E.S.T. Class: Sam Brown*

Perhaps one of the most important and most informative presentations the B.E.S.T. class saw was given by Sam Brown, who, along with his sister, Kathy, owns most of the land along Elm Street, thus making him perhaps the key player in the revitalization process. The class didn't know much about Sam or his dreams for the area

before he came to speak to our class, and hearing from him was an important part of our research. Sam and Kathy had acquired the land they owned on Elm Street after the death of their father, who had died unexpectedly fairly recently (Brown, 2014).

Understandably, Sam communicated to the class that his ultimate goal for the Elm Street area was to preserve the dreams of success that his father had for the area, and he assured us that Kathy felt similarly. Thus, they were hesitant to sell any of their individual properties on Elm Street, fearing that selling off the property without a master plan would not be the best way to ensure the success of the area as a whole. Sam hadn't been incredibly impressed by any comprehensive plans for the area that had been presented thus far, claiming that none of them had provided enough details for him to feel certain that they would be successful. Sam's concern for lack of detail in previous plans was of great help to our class in determining how to go about forming our own plan for revitalization. As will be outlined in the next section, the class was restructured so that it could provide a plan with sufficient detail (Brown, 2014).

### *Restructuring the Class and Other Observations*

After the meetings with various parties involved in East Waco, it became apparent to the B.E.S.T. class and Dr. Reed that dividing the class into groups and expecting each group to develop an all-encompassing revitalization plan for the area would not be possible or even a worthwhile endeavor. After coming to this conclusion, Dr. Reed orchestrated the re-division of the class into groups that would each focus on a component of the revitalization plan. Therefore, at the end of the semester when the class presented its findings to the East Waco community leaders and various Baylor faculty



members, the class would be presenting one detailed plan for revitalization for the area instead of multiple brief plans and ideas for revitalization. This switched the focus of the class from inspiring competition between groups to inspiring a need to work together and develop plans that not only provided needed details on each group's focus but also worked well with and complemented the plans developed by each other group in the class. This structure seemed to fit the project much better as each group would have more time and capability to really deeply investigate its specific focus. The class figured that more detail and less vague planning information would better benefit the individuals working for revitalization in the Elm Street area as these people had already seen many vague revitalization plans for the area. The teams formed from this decision focused on the areas such as infrastructure, residential development, commercial development, acquiring funding and the like.

Another obstacle that the groups gradually discovered was that none of the key players in East Waco (Megan, Chris, Sam, and Dr. Grayson) were completely willing and open minded to listen to each other's opinions. All of these people had the same ultimate goal—to see the revitalization of the Elm Street area, but all of them had extremely different opinions on the best way to reach that goal. It seemed to the class that each key player was so concerned with achieving revitalization in their own way that they had failed to listen to one another and familiarize themselves with everyone else's dreams for East Waco. Also, many people had failed to recognize that Sam and his sister were the ultimate playmakers in the revitalization process as they actually owned the majority of the property; and, therefore, had the final say on who could buy the property or how it could be used.

For Sam and his sister, revitalization in the Elm Street area was not just something that they wanted to see happen because of the benefits it could bring the Waco community, but it was also the fulfillment of their late father's dream for the area. Of course Sam and Kathy wanted to make smart business decisions regarding revitalization and bring in businesses that would be profitable, but the decisions were also somewhat emotional as they were so closely linked to the legacy of their father. Therefore, Sam really wanted to see an overall plan for the area before he committed to giving up some of the land he owned. So far none of the plans for the area had satisfied Sam's dreams, and so no major actions had been taken toward revitalization (Brown, 2014).

On the other hand, Megan firmly believed that revitalization would begin with improving just one building, which would trigger a sort of domino effect for improving other buildings and thus bringing businesses to the area. Megan believed that Todd's Flowers on the 500 block of Elm Street would make a great candidate for being one of the first businesses to improve the outside of his store through façade restoration, for which businesses could receive grants to cover the costs. Todd's Flowers is part of a strip of several businesses, most of which no longer actually operate out of the building. Megan believed if Todd cleaned up the outside of his business, the rest of the strip would be cleaned up as well and this would be a great first step on Elm Street to encourage other businesses to do the same. Todd's Flowers was the leading domino in Megan's domino theory of revitalization (Henderson, Sept. 2014).

Despite their major differences, Megan and Sam did agree on one facet of the revitalization plan: they both agreed that the theater building that Sam owned would also be a good building with which to start the revitalization process. Sam had expressed

interest in selling this building to a potential buyer who was considering opening a furniture shop in the building, and Megan agreed that this would be a good use for the building (Brown, 2014). Megan seemed to be able to see the theater building also playing the role of the leading domino in the revitalization process if the outside of it were cleaned up (Henderson, Sept. 2014). Taking all of this into account, our class agreed that our plan for revitalization should take into account the early restoration and usage of this theater building.

Perhaps one of the most useful observations our class made was that, as a class, we would have an extremely unique opportunity to talk about revitalization in the Elm Street area with all of these key players sitting in one room. Our research showed that these people rarely, if at all, met as a group to talk about their dreams and plans for the area when this might be the most beneficial thing they could actually do. By not communicating with each other and not listening to each other, they were actually all holding themselves—and each other—back from accomplishing what they all really wanted to accomplish—the revitalization of the Elm Street area. Therefore, our class decided that our presentation must somehow convey to all of these key players the importance of their coordination and communication with each other. Each of them needed to recognize that Sam ultimately holds the power in the Elm Street area, and our class felt like it was in a strategic position to convey this message. The class decided that perhaps it might also be beneficial for Sam to share his dreams for the Elm Street area with the people gathered at our presentation so that anyone who had not already heard Sam's aspirations for the area might have a chance to do so.

As Dr. Reed pointed out to the class, many instances in history have shown that students have often been the ones to instigate many important societal changes; and she encouraged the class to take advantage as its unique position as students. No one was paying the class to do research on revitalization, and the class truly was a third party that would not be directly affected by whatever decisions were made for East Waco. Therefore, the class was in a strategic position to offer truly unbiased observations and advice to a group of people, each of whom was directly involved and would be directly affected by any progress made in the Elm Street area.

Another major obstacle the class discovered was more theoretically based. It seemed that each key player differed in his or her view on the general process of revitalization. Some thought that the beautification of Elm Street needed to happen before businesses would come into the area while others were of the opposite opinion that businesses needed to come into the area before beautification would be possible. To the class, this seemed like a variation of the infamous chicken and egg problem—which came first: business development or beautification? With differing theories on this, it was difficult to determine if beautification such as improving infrastructure and the facades of buildings should be recommended before bringing in new businesses to the area or vice versa.

### *Main Street Project and Funding*

I was selected, along with three other students to be part of the group focusing on the Main Street Project and funding for the revitalization project. Our group determined our goals for the project: First, we needed to understand exactly what the Main Street

Project was and how it was currently being used in East Waco. Next, we needed determine the most effective ways to fund revitalization on Elm Street, whether that be through public funding or private investment.

The Texas Historical Commission named Waco, Texas as a “Texas Main Street City” on October 23, 2013, which qualified the city to receive professional historic preservation assistance (Smith, J.B., 2013). While this designation will not directly provide Waco with funds for revitalization, the Texas Historical Commission will become directly involved in the revitalization efforts, both in downtown Waco and in the Elm Street area. Basically, Waco will be able to make use of a valuable consulting team at no cost. These consulting services can include architectural renderings, which could cost large sums of money to produce otherwise (Smith, J.B., 2013).

As the Executive Director of the Waco Downtown Development Corporation, Megan Henderson heavily pursued the Main Street designation for Waco in hopes of using these valuable consulting services. Now that Waco has been deemed such a community, Megan has been able to work with people from the Texas Historical Commission on the revitalization of the Elm Street area. This is precisely what the Main Street Project is. Megan’s main goal for utilizing the Main Street Project was to preserve the buildings that already existed on Main Street in order to preserve the architectural character of East Waco. Megan also noted that the Main Street designation might be key in getting grants for revitalization and possibly attracting private investment (Henderson, Sept. 2014).

In September of 2014, officials from the Texas Historical Commission spent several days in Waco, visiting both downtown Waco and the area around Elm Street.

Officials reported that they were impressed with what already existed in Waco, but “that some building renovations in recent years lack pedestrian appeal and historic integrity” (Smith, J.B., Sept. 2014). Some recommendations from these officials for the Elm Street area included “lowering the bar for getting existing façade improvement grants for historic buildings” and “creating a ‘family-friendly plaza’ as a gateway to the Elm Street corridor” (Smith, J.B., Sept. 2014). Specifically, the officials recommended that the minimum amount for the façade projects be lowered to \$250 to make small-scale projects possible. Although the official worked primarily with Megan, they also worked with Sam and his sister, providing direction on which buildings would make strategic destinations for possible business owners.

Our group met with Megan at her office at the Downtown Development Corporation on Elm Street on November 14, 2014. Because she had had direct involvement with the officials from the Texas Historical Commission and was located in the heart of East Waco, right on Elm Street, our group decided to set up a meeting with Megan over anyone else involved in revitalization. Megan quickly caught our group up on the progress that had been made with the Main Street Project thus far, and she gave us her opinion on how to best attract funding for the revitalization efforts in the area. Megan firmly believed that public funding was needed to attract private funding—essentially that beautification would come before increased business; and that as public funds flowed into the area, private investment would surely follow. She emphatically agreed with the Texas Historical Commission officials that the minimum amount for programs such as façade improvement should be lowered, as the current qualifications for these programs were simply not reasonable, therefore making such programs unavailable.

Megan also mentioned various private business activities that could positively impact the public improvement process. For example, the private sector could participate in the façade improvement program by Lowe's or Home Depot deciding to donate paint and painting supplies to the program and by banks agreeing to do loans specifically in keeping with the goals of revitalization in the Elm Street area (Henderson, Nov. 2014)

## CHAPTER THREE

### Findings

#### *Introduction*

On December 4, 2014, the B.E.S.T. class presented its findings and recommendations to a group of individuals involved with the revitalization process on Elm Street. In attendance were Megan Henderson from the Waco Downtown Development Corporation; Chris McGowan from the Greater Waco Chamber of Commerce; Dr. Nancy Grayson from Lula Jane's on Elm Street; Dr. Terry Maness, the Dean of Hankamer School of Business; Wilbert Austin, Sr. from the Waco City Council; and Sam Brown and Cathy Turner, the major landowners on Elm Street. Divided into its respective groups, the class presented its findings in the following topics: Main Street Project and Funding; Infrastructure Development; Community Engagement, Social Capital and Public Relations; Residential Development; and Commercial Development. A group also presented on similar revitalization projects recently completed in Dallas and Austin, but those findings will be addressed in the final chapter. The following sections summarize the findings presented by the various groups.

#### *Main Street Project and Funding*

To begin, there were several general obstacles found to be standing in the way of revitalization efforts as a whole on Elm Street, not just specifically related to the Main Street Project and Funding. The general negative perception of East Waco, the need for a collaborative effort among involved parties, and the clash between the theories of



beginning funding with private investment or public funding first were all identified as major obstacles to overcome in the revitalization process.

The presentation then proceeded to outline the Main Street Project. The Main Street Project includes 89 communities across the state of Texas, and \$2.9 billion has been reinvested in these communities since 1981 (Texas Main Streets, n.d.). In Waco, the Main Street Project focuses on both downtown Waco and the East Waco area. Once a community is selected to be a part of the Main Street Project, a team of officials from the Texas Historical Commission visits the community and develops a report including observations and preliminary recommendations. The Texas Historical Commission also gave recommendations on different types of public funding that could be used for specific projects in East Waco.

Our group then outlined different funding strategies that could be applied to Elm Street. First, funding for revitalization could potentially be obtained through the use of the benefits of Elm Street's designation as a Public Improvement District, commonly known as a "PID." On a simple scale, this distinction allows the city of Waco to recognize the area as an area that needs improvement, and many areas in Texas in need of revitalization in many cities have this designation. The designation of "PID" potentially provides the area with benefits funded through specific city assessments that would provide assistance with improvement projects, especially those related to infrastructure. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) funds provide another option for public funding in East Waco, which is currently part of TIF Zone 1 in Waco. Essentially, property owners in TIF zones agree to pay an extra TIF tax that is then used for a specific improvement

project in that zone. Although applying for TIF funds is somewhat of a tedious process, the work that could be done with these funds is substantial.

Another viable way to obtain public funding is through façade grants. Property owners in East Waco can receive up to \$15,000 or fifty percent of the cost of their project to improve the façade of their buildings. Buildings that are more visible can be eligible to receive additional funding. The Texas Historical Commission also recommended the “Vanilla Shell Program,” which encompasses an initiative to focus on just improving the outsides of buildings on Elm Street as a way to attract potential new businesses to the area.

Another way to use public investment to attract private investors to East Waco is through tax incentives. Through the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program, a twenty percent income tax credit is available for the rehabilitation of historic buildings and a ten percent credit for the rehabilitation of non-historic buildings. However, rehabilitated buildings must meet certain criteria to receive these tax credits; and not all of the buildings on Elm Street are listed in the National Register of Historical Places, one criterion for receiving the tax credits. Listing a building in this register introduces various regulations on the building, so determining whether or not to list a building should be carefully evaluated. Also, to receive tax credits, at least \$5000 worth of rehabilitation work must be done on the building. Certain buildings on Elm Street do not require this much work, so funds for rehabilitation work of these buildings should come from other sources.

Rent subsidies are another way to attract private investment to East Waco. Building space on Elm Street is already comparably cheap, and subsidizing this rent for a

pre-determined time period would further attract investors to the area. Subsidies, given either by the building owner or by the city of Waco would allow business owners to minimize expenses while starting their businesses and feeling out the finances of their operations. Several restructuring projects could also be undertaken in East Waco to positively affect the financial atmosphere. For example, if the city of Waco revisited its tax abatement policy and changed it so that smaller vacated buildings benefitted from the polity more than newer larger buildings, East Waco could potentially benefit. The Main Street Project has also recommended that banks in the Waco area become committed to positively affecting the financial atmosphere in East Waco by offering low-interest loans or loan guarantee programs. The Program also recommends that the minimum amount to receive grant money in the Façade Grant Program be lowered so that buildings with less work needed can still be improved.

Ultimately, the group concluded that public funding provides an excellent catalyst for private investment. As for public funding, the group highly recommended continuing to secure the use of TIF funds and to push for the restructuring of the tax abatement policy. The group also recommended that certain buildings on Elm Street be listed in the National Register of Historical Places. Obtaining this recognition for strategic buildings on Elm Street would allow financial benefits for some revitalization, but would save all of Elm Street from being under the stricter regulations that accompany the recognition. Essentially, strategically located buildings on Elm Street should be improved using some of these recommended public funding strategies, and these strategic buildings improved with public funds will act as the springboard for bringing in private investment to continue revitalizing the area (Business Excellence Scholarship Team, 2014).

### *Infrastructure Development*

The next issue in East Waco the group addressed was infrastructure. The infrastructure group identified three main areas in which infrastructure related projects should be focused: transportation, lighting, and water quality.

Transportation was broken down into several components, the first of which was parking. If business activity is to increase on Elm Street, the current parking will not be sufficient and more parking will have to be added. Lula Jane's utilizes angled on-street parking in front its building, and Elm Street would do well to continue this style of parking throughout the street. Another component of transportation is bicycle lanes. It is estimated that adding these bicycle lanes to the area would cost around \$50,000, and the team concluded that this would be a worthy investment as bike lanes would potentially increase traffic to the area as Elm Street is a long walk but a short bike ride from many populated places in Waco including Baylor University and the downtown area. Elm Street would also do well to add transit lanes for buses. A final component of transportation is sidewalks. The sidewalks on Elm Street desperately need improvement, a project that is estimated to cost \$15 per square yard. Complete reconstruction of the sidewalk system, which includes improving the street, curb, gutter drainage system and waterline in addition to the sidewalks would cost around \$150 per square yard. Elm Street would do well to include connectivity to Austin Avenue potentially through the River Trail to their sidewalk system. With more business activity and growth springing up around the Brazos River, it would greatly benefit Elm Street to ensure its inclusion in the river area growth by connecting itself to the area with sidewalks. Additionally, as flooding has been an issue in the history of East Waco, the project engineers should take

care to ensure that new infrastructure and the infrastructure improvements can withstand or possibly even prevent flooding.

Another component of infrastructure to be addressed is lighting which was to be combined with “streetscaping” to contribute to a uniformly inviting atmosphere for the Elm Street area. A strong lighting system would also help combat the negative perception that East Waco still faces in parts of the Waco community. The “streetscaping” includes adding antique LED lighting poles, trees along the street and benches. The lighting poles are estimated to cost \$15,000 per pole, the trees are estimated to cost \$200 per tree, and the benches are estimated to cost \$500 per bench. Finally, the final component of infrastructure to be addressed is water quality which can be improved through reverse osmosis and water softening processes.

Infrastructure improvement is tricky because so many parties are involved in the process and affected by the outcomes. In East Waco, the parties that would need to be involved in infrastructure decisions include the City of Waco, any property owners or developers and any neighborhood associations. This need for a collaborative effort between parties is vital to the success of infrastructure projects, and is an example of why our group continued to advocate for a collaborative spirit between every party involved in the revitalization process. Infrastructure projects should be organized into a prioritized list that will allow projects to be done in logical phases. This organized and prioritized list will be especially important for funding these infrastructure projects. Involved parties should continue to seek public funding as previously outlined.

In conclusion, the key takeaways about the revitalization of infrastructure in East Waco include the importance of using infrastructure to connect East Waco to other areas

of Waco, including the Baylor campus and downtown Waco, the promotion of green, cost-efficient lighting and “streetscaping,” and the use of “streetscaping” and overall improvement of the sidewalk and street systems to create a uniform atmosphere that allows East Waco to grow into a Waco landmark destination (Business Excellence Scholarship Team, 2014).

### *Community Engagement, Social Capital and Community Awareness*

Currently, East Waco is a conglomeration of people and visitors, and this diversity will only continue to increase as new businesses and new visitors come into the area. Thus, it is extremely important that East Waco have a plan for relations within the East Waco community and with other parts of the Waco community. In order to be effective, communication must be organized which will allow the parties involved in revitalization to efficiently analyze their current needs and create strategies to motivate and involve East Waco residents as well as cultivate positivity and pride within the community. One of East Waco’s main challenges will be to assert itself as a key player in the activities of the Waco community, something that could potentially be difficult considering East Waco’s past.

This particular area of revitalization will involve awareness from many outside of East Waco. As previously mentioned, East Waco is a food desert and has a 30.1% poverty rate. “Almost 58,000 people in Waco live in USDA-declared food desert tracts, or about 46.5 percent of the total population (Smith, Cassie, 2015). Organizations such as My Brother’s Keeper and Acts Church have already become involved in combatting poverty in Waco through programs such as shelter services. Although located nearby in

downtown Waco, the Gospel Café offers meals to the hungry; and the World Hunger Relief Farm has sent its Veggie Van to East Waco to give residents a place to occasionally buy fresh vegetables. East Waco has also sparked pride within its own community through events such as Art on Elm and Lights on Elm. Also, there is a business resource center on Elm Street, but it would potentially have more of an impact on the area with more advertising and public relations. It would benefit East Waco to engage local churches and other nonprofit organizations in revitalization efforts. Churches and nonprofits also provide an excellent avenue for distributing information related to revitalization as churches and nonprofits are connected to locals and already have the trust of the local population. Overall, engaging the East Waco community in the revitalization efforts in East Waco will ultimately benefit the revitalization process as community members will take pride in their neighborhood and partake in the new businesses coming to the area.

One recommendation to foster community engagement and an entrepreneurial spirit in the area is to begin a business competition program in which prospective entrepreneurs can pitch their business ideas to a panel who will give feedback to the plans presented and either accept or defer the prospective business to begin operation on Elm Street. This is a rather involved project in that adequate funding must be acquired, a sufficient panel must be assembled and guidelines and criteria must be established. However, if successfully developed, this business plan competition could be an innovative way to foster participation from all areas of Waco in dreaming of ways to improve East Waco and ultimately bring the best of those dreams to reality. Another way to draw participation in East Waco from the Baylor population is for different parties

involved in revitalization to offer internships in their respective departments. Students would not necessarily have to be paid but would be able to learn about the Waco community and about community development in general and could potentially offer fresh perspectives to the involved parties as well (Business Excellence Scholarship Team, 2014).

### *Residential Development*

The next aspect of revitalization to be addressed is residential development. The residential market in East Waco has been stagnant for a while, especially since the steady decline that happened in the 1950s. With all the other revitalization projects attracting attention in the area; there are obviously limited resources available to devote to residential housing. However, East Waco has a rich history and architectural value and rent is comparably cheap in the area, so if an effective plan were to be developed, the residential areas in East Waco could be made quite attractive. The East Riverside Neighborhood Association occupies the East Waco area, and Elm Street and Interstate 35 run through the middle of the neighborhood.





Figure 3: Map of East Riverside Neighborhood Association

Currently, degradation is a major problem in the residential area of East Waco. This can be combatted by minimizing foreclosures through reducing mortgage principals through a combination of borrowers and creditors. Also, the residential areas should work to create community partnership events where residents come together for neighborhood workdays. These workdays would not only help improve the aesthetics of the neighborhood communities, but would also strengthen community relationships and instill a sense of proud ownership in the residents of East Waco. The leadership of the East Riverside Neighborhood Association should provide guidelines on projects to undertake and an overall goal to achieve so that the projects will be centralized, efficient, and productive.

As for revitalizing the appearance of the housing in the area, it is important to maintain the historic look that is so central to East Waco. When possible, this should be done through preserving original structures. When it is not possible to keep original

structures or when brand new buildings must be constructed, East Waco should add its own eclectic flair to the buildings and construct them in a cost efficient way such as dividing units to fit multiple families. The residential group concluded that the market should support both competitive and affordable rate housing and that more competitive housing should be marketed close to Elm Street and the Brazos River. Housing in other areas could be marketed more affordably.

The railroad holds a large piece of property in the southeast corner of East Waco, near Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and Interstate 35. If acquired, this property could provide an excellent transition between Elm Street, the new McLane Stadium area and downtown Waco. Potentially this area could be used for a mixture of both commercial and residential development.

An innovative idea for housing in East Waco is constructing container homes which are modern-looking, tiny one room houses with extremely efficient layouts. The construction of a 640-square foot container home including electricity, plumbing, lighting, finished floors insulation, shelving and paint is approximately \$50,000. Container homes come in customizable sizes and can be made to be very eco-friendly. For example, adding solar panels on the roof is simple and many container homes can even be made off-grid. Container homes can also be stacked or welded together, making it possible to make an entire community of container homes. These homes also come in fun colors and could add to the eclectic style of East Waco.



Figure 4: Possible layout of a container home

In conclusion, East Waco has great potential for residential development, especially because rent is so affordable in the area. There are many options for improving the residential areas that already exist as well as for constructing new residences in the area (Business Excellence Scholarship Team, 2014).

### *Commercial Development*

A potential plan for commercial development in East Waco can be divided into three phases: pre-infrastructure, infrastructure, and post-infrastructure.

The first phase, pre-infrastructure, focuses on giving East Waco a foundation to build upon. This phase seeks to make East Waco a destination in the Waco community that attracts a broad range of customers, including young professionals, families and college students. This phase includes several business ideas that would draw people into the area, thus drawing money into the area to be used to complete the necessary projects in the next phases.

The first idea is to create a destination eatery. The atmosphere would be complete with dark wood, gas lamps and murals covering the walls, showcasing the local art and culture. The restaurant would be complete with a large bar and space to accommodate large parties. The prospective entrepreneur for this restaurant is someone who is already experienced in the restaurant business and has a knack for foods like specialty pizza. The owner will “make the rounds” in the restaurant and will be skilled at bringing back repeat customers.

The next idea is to create multi-level building with different for uses for each of the floors. The first floor will be used for an Italian restaurant serving large family-style portions. The next floor will be an event venue, creating an ideal space for large private parties. Currently there is a lack of such venues in East Waco, and this business could see high returns for a relatively low startup cost. The third level would be used as a rooftop wine bar where guests could go before or after dinner on the first level or just come in for a glass of wine. Dim string lighting and gas lamps would create a fun atmosphere and the rooftop level would offer a unique view of the Brazos River, McLane Stadium and Cameron Park. The prospective entrepreneur for this area is someone who would be willing to train employees, would be able to manage the business three distinct levels and has extensive restaurant management experience.

The third business idea for East Waco is a studio-style fitness business. Potentially this fitness business could offer barre-style workouts and other workouts such as yoga. The market for this business would be mothers and other females and potentially children for after-school classes. Perhaps this business could partner with Rapoport to offer the students at this school a new outlet to express themselves while also

providing great exposure for the fitness studio. The main room in the fitness studio would be complete with natural light and exposed pipe and elements. A successful fitness studio would also need an energetic fitness instructor who is also knowledgeable in marketing methods needed to attract customers.

A fourth business idea is a traditional barbershop. Ideally, this would be a destination location on Elm Street and would offer not only haircuts, but also facials, shaves, massages, shoe shining and refreshments. With used equipment, this business would have relatively low startup and operating costs. However, a special entrepreneur with a real passion for providing a service complete with a full experience would be needed for this business. If successful, people might travel to East Waco from all other parts of Waco just to have this traditional experience.

Finally, the fifth business idea for the pre-infrastructure phase is to start a fresh bread bakery. Lula Jane's already exists on Elm Street as a successful bakery, but this bakery would be different in that it focuses more on bread than pastries and baked goods. The bakery would also include a juice bar that would offer fresh produce in the food desert of East Waco. Also, Waco currently does not have a juice bar, so this location would potentially be a destination spot drawing people to East Waco. This bread bakery and juice bar would also have an altruistic aspect as all the unsold good could be donated to the needy in the community.

Next, in the second phase, the plan for infrastructure would be introduced into the commercial development plan. This hybrid approach of mixing commercial development and infrastructure development will help maximize profits in the area. Finally, in the third phase, developers can focus on more intensive commercial development. One of

the first additions to the area would be an office space building that would attract young professionals to work and potentially live in the area as well. These office spaces would have a modern vibe to continue the eclectic theme of East Waco. Office buildings could potentially also be layered buildings in that they would have office space on the bottom and lofts on the upper floors. Another business plan for the third phase is an antique bowling alley combined with a bar. Vintage décor and old-school scoring would create a fun atmosphere perfect for relaxing conversation. Another possible addition to East Waco would be a Buffalo Exchange store. At Buffalo Exchange stores, eighty percent of clothing and accessories at Buffalo Exchange stores are bought, sold and traded locally, making Buffalo Exchange a great community-focused addition to East Waco.

A major issue to be addressed in East Waco is the problem of the food desert. However, this problem cannot be most efficiently tackled by just building a grocery store. The food desert can be addressed in three phases: a mobile food market, a stationary farmers market and finally a traditional grocery store. This three-phase approach will also help address the lack of knowledge about health issues and healthy eating that is so common in food deserts like East Waco (Business Excellence Scholarship Team, 2014).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Discussion, Conclusion & Recommendations

#### *Introduction*

Although the B.E.S.T. class's involvement in the Elm Street Revitalization project concluded at the end of the fall 2014 semester, I have kept up with a few events that have happened in East Waco since the conclusion of our project. Progress in revitalization on Elm Street will expectedly be slow, but it is exciting to see hints of progress after learning so much about the Elm Street area. During the course of the class, part of the class researched other similar revitalization projects in Dallas and Austin. Researching these projects gave the class a good perspective on possible changes to expect in East Waco.

#### *Past Successful Revitalization Projects*

The Bishop Arts district in Dallas was the first example investigated as an area similar to East Waco in need of revitalization. The Bishop Arts district experienced economic and demographic downturn from 1960 to 1980 with the removal of its trolley stop coupled with the rise of the shopping mall and the relocation of anchor stores. One man realized what was happening in the Bishop Arts area and purchased a large parcel of land in an attempt to prevent further decline. In order to give the area a sense of safety, he offered free rent to the Police station and aspired to redevelop the area to achieve a thriving urban environment once again.

Bishop Arts underwent similar infrastructure changes to what has been proposed for East Waco: the sidewalks were widened to provide more walking area, the building height was limited to a maximum of two stories, a parking garage was established underground, and the area was connected to the DART public transportation system. For commercial development, there was a size limit set on retail shops in the area (450-1,000 square feet) in order to create a community of smaller shops including home décor shops, clothing boutiques and eclectic restaurants. Residential developers were encouraged to investigate the possibility of micro-apartments, similar to what was proposed for East Waco. To fund these projects, the Bishop Arts district expected to use TIF funds and grants from the city. TIF boundaries were expanded to make sure that Bishop Arts was included in the zoning. Today, Bishop Arts is a fun, eclectic, popular destination area of Dallas that is thriving due to organized revitalization efforts in the area, and seeing these results gives hope for the future of East Waco.

The second area that is comparable to East Waco is East Austin. A revitalization plan called the Central East Austin Master Plan was created in order to bring new life to existing business and bring new business activity into the East Austin area. Of the land designated for revitalization in this plan, fifty-seven percent of the land includes vacant land, deteriorated buildings and unoccupied structures. Areas where commercial development was intended had even higher percentages of this type of deterioration.

Three million dollars was invested into the following infrastructure projects in the area: upgrading water and sewage lines, creating accessible sidewalks, adding an alley for off-street parking, and adding handicap-accessible entries to buildings. Infrastructure efforts also intended to re-subdivide the area by eliminating property line encroachments.



Other projects included efforts to remove asbestos and lead-based paint from historic buildings and the completion of two community parking lots for small businesses in the area. To engage the community in the revitalization efforts, East Austin began a music event called SoulFest, an annual concert designed to bring jazz back to the area. Leaders also began to push forward African American Quality of Life initiatives and designated an African American Cultural District. An art wall and clock tower were built to reduce unwanted graffiti and promote cultural development in the area. Urdy Plaza and an arch to the East End were also constructed.

In the commercial development sphere, one of the first things developers did was purchase the East Room night club and shut it down in an attempt to reduce crime in the area. Developers built two new buildings and recruited small and minority-owned businesses to occupy the buildings. A major building also underwent rehabilitation. For residential development, ten historic homes were restored and eight new homes were built, all near the downtown area. Homes were constructed with a commitment to quality for all income levels; and structural improvements such as drainage systems, sidewalks, bathrooms, and HVAC units were improved. East Austin created a website devoted to informing web visitors on the progress of revitalization in the area. The website included a schedule of events, outline of main projects and updates for residents in the area.

Researching the revitalization efforts in Austin and Dallas and learning about the Bishop Arts and East Austin communities gave the B.E.S.T. class a concrete way to dream about the future of East Waco. Specifically, the class learned that Police presence to increase security is truly an important aspect of improving the environment in a community, that small retail stores are an affordable start-up option in these types of

communities, that art programs are beneficial in bringing in local artists and increasing foot traffic in an area, and that centralized public relations campaigns such as the East Austin revitalization website are important in bring the community together around community-wide revitalization projects (Business Excellence Scholarship Team, 2014).

### *The Veggie Van*

Perhaps one of the most exciting developments in East Waco is combating the food desert that exists in the area. This past January, the World Hunger Relief Farm in Waco introduced the Veggie Van to East Waco. The World Hunger Relief Farm is a Christian nonprofit group in Waco that is “committed to the alleviation of hunger” and also sells its fresh produce at the local Waco Downtown Farmers Market each Saturday (Smith, Cassie, 2015). Executives at the World Hunger Relief Farm have recognized the food desert in East Waco and have strategically placed the Veggie Van right on Elm Street next to St. Luke AME Church to provide an opportunity for the people of East Waco to be within walking distance of a place to buy fresh produce.

The World Hunger Relief Farm plans to have the Veggie Van in the same location every Wednesday from 3 to 6 p.m. According to the article in the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, “Ten to 15 bushels of green onions, turnips, kale, broccoli and other vegetables were displayed under a white tent beside the van” (Smith, Cassie, 2015). St. Luke AME Church has already said they plan on donating vegetables to the Veggie Van when possible, and the van seems to be well received thus far in the area. The Veggie Van will not only alleviate part of the food desert once a week, but also if the demand grows

strong enough, it could provide an opportunity for the Veggie Van to purchase fresh produce from other local farmers, further stimulating local businesses.

### *Progress with the Main Street Project*

Following the end of the B.E.S.T. class's involvement with the revitalization project, LaRaine DuPuy was chosen to join Megan Henderson at the Waco Downtown Development Corp. as the first Main Street Manager in Waco. DuPuy will lead historic preservation efforts, namely revitalization projects in East Waco. DuPuy will also work on development efforts in downtown Waco, on the other side of the river. "DuPuy will be Waco's liaison with state historic preservation officials with the Texas Main Street Cities program and will work with property owners on building restorations" (Smith, J.B., Dec. 2014). DuPuy has said that she sees the potential of East Waco and sees its importance to economic restoration of the city of Waco. She will also be in charge of overseeing the activities of the Public Improvement District (PID), which provides funding to development projects in East Waco. DuPuy has a history of positive involvement with development in the Waco area and has been well received by other members of the Waco community.

Adding DuPuy to the staff of the Downtown Development Corp. has given the B.E.S.T. class even more hope that progress in revitalization will be achieved in East Waco. Perhaps most importantly, since DuPuy will focus mainly on development efforts in East Waco, the people of East Waco can rest assured knowing they have a representative to voice their interests and lead their initiatives. It will be exciting to watch the progress that Megan Henderson, LaRaine DuPuy, the Texas Historical

Commission's Main Street Project and the Waco Downtown Development Corp make after all coming together and aligning their interests in the Elm Street area.

*Article on Historic Waco Structures*

On April 19, 2015, the *Waco Tribune-Herald* published an article giving details on various historical structures in Waco that needed to be noticed and cared for before it was too late and they were destroyed before someone realized their importance and their value. Two of the buildings the article listed are located on Elm Street: S.H. Clinton Farm Implements and Hardware located on the 600 block of Elm Street and Kestner's building located on the 500 block of Elm Street.

Clinton Farm Implements and Hardware is currently owned by Dr. Grayson and an artist named Dan Brook who bought the building together from the city of Waco in 2013 with the hopes of turning it into an art studio. These plans have since been abandoned and the two owners plan to sell the building in a sheriff's sale. Kestner's building is owned by Sam Brown. In the article Sam notes that the plans he has seen for revitalizing the Elm Street area have become significantly more high quality, and he has "no doubt that building [Kestner's] is going to be a cornerstone for the revival of Elm" (Smith, J. B., 2015).

*Follow-up with Megan Henderson*

Late in the spring semester, I contacted Megan Henderson in order to learn of further progress made by the Waco Downtown Development Corp. or through the Main Street Project. Megan was quick to speak positively of the hiring of LaRaine DuPuy to

oversee the progress of the Main Street Project and also informed me that the Waco Downtown Development Corp. also had an intern named Chanell who was part of the AmeriCorps VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America). Chanell has been specifically assigned to the Elm Street area as well one other neighborhood district in Waco. Chanell and LaRaine attended a week of training organized by the Main Street Project, and Megan noted that the Main Street Project team continues to be the guide used in making progress in revitalization in the area (M. Henderson, personal communication, March 26, 2015).

Next, Megan touched on several encouraging changes she had seen thus far in the revitalization progress. She used the disclaimer that the Main Street Project or any other one program was not necessarily responsible for these changes, but the Texas Historical Commission team of the Main Street Project had definitely helped in bringing change. Megan then identified five key changes in the area. First, LaRaine and Chanell had met with the North East Riverside Neighborhood Association to help the people of the neighborhood articulate what their role in revitalization might be through advocating and implementing projects on Elm Street. Secondly, two meetings involving people who owned property in the area and community members in East Waco who would potentially invest in property improvement or business ventures had occurred. Megan had secured some volunteer community members to broker property exchanges, she claimed that property owners were moving toward construction, and she also claimed that as a result of lobbying, the City would make public improvements on Elm Street that would make the area ripe for further development. Thirdly, Megan had worked with the TIF and PID to develop the river crossing area and increase pedestrian safety on Martin Luther King

Jr. Boulevard. Next, Megan and her team presented a proposal to the TIF to increase elements such lighting, sidewalks and plantings on the segment of Elm Street near the river crossing (Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard to Dallas Street). Finally, Megan noted that her group was continuing work with property owners to renovate and put tenants in open buildings and noted that there were active prospects for two buildings in the area (M. Henderson, personal communication, March 26, 2015).

In conclusion, Megan articulated her goals in going forward with the revitalization progress. She listed the following as goals going forward in the project:

“Our current goals are to implement public improvements at MLK, on Elm from MLK to Dallas, and on Elm from Clifton to Price; would like approval for each project in 2015 (projects would go for design after that, then funding to implement.), facilitate at least one building renovation to begin in 2015, facilitate building of at least 3 houses on Renick north of Garrison, facilitate at least one private property owner from East Waco to begin a project supported by our group, and support the neighborhood association in implementing one community-based improvement project (such as plantings, art etc.)” (M. Henderson, personal communication, March 26, 2015).

Overall, it was encouraging to hear from Megan and learn of progress being made in the Elm Street area.

### *Conclusion*

As time goes on, more groups are seizing opportunities in East Waco. Our class has heard rumors of someone planning residential development in terms very closely to what the class suggested for the area. We expect that as more people learn about the opportunities in the area, more people will be interested in helping to make progress on the revitalization efforts. I look forward to keeping up with news about different development projects in the area.

Overall, this project has been an incredible, eye-opening experience in which twenty-eight Baylor students were able to really step out into the community and learn the stories of some of our Waco neighbors. I enjoyed all aspects of the project: the history lessons I learned about East Waco, the opportunities that are present in the community, and the incredibly hard-working people who work in different ways to make the Waco community a better place. The Waco community, especially East Waco, is full of potential to grow into an even more vibrant and cultural community. Hints of vibrancy and culture are already present and abundant in some areas of Waco, and this will only increase with the work of groups and individuals committed to revitalization in the Elm Street area.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arnold, Watson. (Fall, 2012) "Don't Forget East Waco. It Has a History, Too." *Waco Heritage & History* Fall 2012: 1. Print.
- Brown, Sam (11 Sept. 2014). "East Waco Revitalization." Baylor University, Waco. Lecture.
- Business Excellence Scholarship Team (Fall 2015). The Revitalization of Elm Street. Unpublished report to the City of Waco Economic Development Corporation and Landowners. Baylor University, Hankamer School of Business.
- Davis, Donald B. (Fall 2012) "From the Director's Chair" *Waco Heritage & History* 1, 23. Print.
- Erickcek, George, Don Edgerly, Brian Pittelko, Claudette Robey, Bridget Timmeney, Dennis Burnside, and Jim Robey (October 2014). *Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City of Waco, Texas*. Rep. W.E. UpJohn Institute for Employment Research, 16 May 2014. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.
- Fregonese Associates (7 January 2011). *ImagineWaco: A Plan for Greater Downtown*. Rep. [www.imaginewaco.com](http://www.imaginewaco.com). 7 Jan. 2011. Web. 27 Oct. 2014.
- Grayson, Nancy (11 Sept. 2014). "East Waco Revitalization and Lula Jane's." Lula Jane's, Waco. Lecture.
- Henderson, Megan (2 Sept. 2014). "East Waco Revitalization." Baylor University, Waco. Lecture.
- Henderson, Megan (14 Nov. 2014) "Follow-up meeting regarding Main Street Project." Waco Downtown Development Corp., Waco. Lecture.
- Leinberger, Christopher B (March 2005). *Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization*. Rep. The Brookings Institution, March 2005. Web. 29 November 2014.
- McGowan, Chris (4 Sept. 2014). "East Waco Revitalization." Baylor University, Waco. Lecture.
- Smith, Cassie (14 Jan. 2015). "Veggie Van takes root in Waco." *Waco Tribune-Herald*: n. pag. Print.



- Smith, J. B. (24 Sept. 2014). "Downtown Waco Gets Expert Advice from Texas Main Street." *Waco Tribune-Herald*: n. pag. Print.
- Smith, J. B. (21 Dec. 2014). "Longtime civic leader tapped to fill new Waco Main Street position." *Waco Tribune-Herald*: n. pag. Print.
- Smith, J. B. (19 April 2015). "Slipping away: In search of Waco's most endangered historic buildings." *Waco Tribune-Herald*: n. pag. Print.
- Smith, J. B. (24 Oct. 2013) "Texas Main Street City Designation Could Help Downtown Waco, Elm Avenue." *Waco Tribune-Herald*: n. pag. Print.
- Texas Main Streets. (n.d). In *Texas Historical Commission*. Retrieved from <http://www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-main-street>
- United States (8 Jul. 2014). Census Bureau. State & County QuickFacts. "Waco (city), Texas." *United States Census 2010*. Washington: US Census Bureau. Web. 26 Oct. 2014. <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/4876000.html>