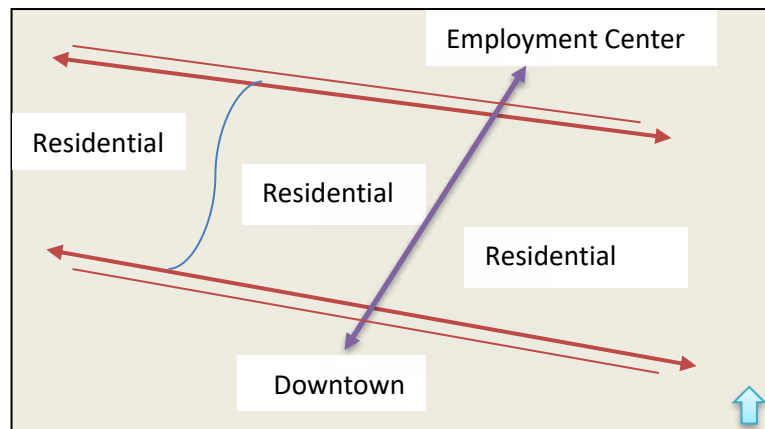


## Streets frame the town; the “main drag” establishes its character.

**Vision.** Cities are defined in part by their roadways. Most small cities and towns have a framework of four to six important streets that support mobility throughout the community. The quality and functionality of this road network will define the city for the next century.

While the network with its aesthetics, reach and functionality is important, the “main drag” is where the action is. Everyone in town knows this road or street. As the most important and most recognized street in town, its importance needs to be acknowledged. The town’s most important street needs to be protected and enhanced as the primary visual asset of the community.

**For example...** Pick a hypothetical: a small town with growth prospects that has a road network of four city-wide roads, two north south, **two east west**. For the sake of this example, each roadway is characterized as follows:



**The east west roads** are pretty well defined for the future. They are state highways that bound the town. They have four lanes; one has a median. Their capacity is fixed. One can expect that they will receive operational improvements over the years. They are part of the regional highway system. The task for the city is to make them as safe and efficient as possible with intersection improvements, sidewalks and crosswalks, street trees, sign controls and traffic signals where appropriate.

**The western most north south road** is clearly residential in character. It has two lanes with new subdivision development on both sides for the entire length. This part of town has rolling hills, large trees and a low-density atmosphere reinforced by a low-density residential land use designation. It traverses the city from north to south connecting to the two east west arterial mentioned above. It clearly needs to retain its residential character.

- Improvements from a two-lane rural road to a three lane residential collector will be required. Better yet, expansion to two lanes with a median and ample left turn lanes create a unique character in this residential area.
- Beautification and safety improvements can be programmed each year. Ample right-of-way usually exists and no additional property is needed with the possible exception at key intersections.
- Some neighborhood commercial uses will be necessary along this 5- to 6-mile-long roadway. The commercial and service businesses should only have access on a side street with no driveways on the main road.
- Street lights at strategic points, commercial signs and entrance signs should be minimized.
- Sidewalks are optional, nice but not necessary for the full length of this quasi-rural road.
- Swale drainage with few unfenced, strategically located, aesthetically designed stormwater ponds will make for a scenic drive.
- Classification and regulation of this roadway as a “scenic drive” will give the right impression to developers and city residents.

## Strategic Choices for the “Spine” Road.

The eastern most north south road is the most important road in the city; the spine that connects everything. In fact, it may be the most important piece of infrastructure of any type. The quality and functionality of this central “spine” road will be an incredibly important determinant of the city’s future unity by connecting north and south activity centers through the middle residential belt of the town. Ugliness and dysfunction should not be an option and should not be left to chance.



Without doubt, this currently two-laned road will need to have four lanes. Not next year or in five years; but perhaps in ten years and for sure in twenty years. Therefore, it is a fact that this road will be a four-lane road running down the spine of the city, connecting its important parts and being the most visible piece of infrastructure in the city. So, what’s important is to accept the unavoidable outcome and consider the strategic choices. This highly visible, highly important roadway can be easy or hard to construct, functional or dysfunctional once widened, beautiful or ugly to look at.

- **Make Construction Easy or Hard:** If the right-of-way has been secured, property acquisition will not be a problem. If adjacent development has been properly set back in anticipation of the road widening, the construction of the expanded road will be easier and cheaper; and more accommodating to adjacent homes and other uses.

- **Make the Results Functional or Dysfunctional:** If the expanded roadway is conceptually designed early, plans can be made at a leisurely pace for intersections, utilities, landscaping and sidewalks.
- **Act or Wait: Time is not your friend.** If these commitment-type details are put off until the road is ready to be built, opportunities will be lost. Functional and safety aspects will probably needlessly suffer. Early design and right-of-way reservation through purchase or regulation is critical.
- **Create a Beautiful Boulevard or an Ugly Strip:** Beautiful roads are city assets, they don't just happen. They are planned in advance of need. They are designed to take advantage of views, trees, driveways, topography and other natural features. Strategically located stormwater ponds will enhance the aesthetics. Consider the difference of the major roadway running the entire length of the town between its two activity centers as an asset to the town or an eyesore requiring constant apology.

**The importance of beauty.** Beauty is often not required by residents beforehand; in fact, spending money on aesthetics is usually criticized; however, beauty is almost always appreciated afterwards. A beautiful street enhances community pride. Presenting a lovely face to new businesses and employees has a significant economic development benefit as businesses are retained and recruited. Property values are enhanced. Big, important roads can be visually pleasing. **Beauty matters.**

## What to do now.

The “spine” road will define the city for decades. Since the expansion is in the future, the time is now to commit to the expansion process to make the inevitable improvement easy and less expensive than it will be if procrastination takes hold. The project should be easy to construct as a functional and safe asset of the city. With forethought, it will also be a visual asset that defines the character of the town. **Things to do now:**

1. **Design the section,** determine right-of-way needs for the expansion as an early first step. Everyone knows that the road will eventually need expansion, why wait to get started? Make the section as strong as possible with a median, two through lanes, ample right turn lanes, with urban curbs and gutters. Have stormwater ponds strategically located and designed as visual amenities. Anticipate street light locations with sign and access controls.



## Greenfield Urbanism

- 2. Amend the comprehensive plan** to locate future land uses along the street in a logical manner. Strip centers, random driveways and sloppy signs should not be vision-consistent.
- 3. Obtain the right-of-way** well before it is needed. Once the right-of-way needs have been determined, obtain or reserve the property now.
- 4. Work with road-building agencies** such as the state department of transportation to control the right-of-way, maybe even fund its advanced acquisition.
- 5. Prepare a beautification plan** that can be implemented over time to plan the growth of trees, the location of utilities and the preservation of natural and historic features.



**Leverage this central city street to establish the city’s identity and commitment to quality. Act early. The “main drag” must be beautiful.**