

SPECIFIC BUILDING USES

The distribution of specific building uses in Downtown Laredo responds directly to the shifts and evolution of Border economics. As a consequence building typologies are constantly having to adjust to shifting patterns of use. The study reveals an unhealthy downtown that's been debilitated by global economics, violence across the border, and increasing competition by emerging border cities. These forces are rapidly changing Downtown dynamics, specifically Building Use patterns. The unbalanced distribution of specific uses is a reflection of downtown's health, and becomes apparent throughout the Specific Use Inventory.

Arts&Entertainment, Religious, Hospitality, and Residential uses, all components of a vibrant center, are virtually inexistent in Downtown. Laredo will need to increase its residential base and increase its entertainment venues to create a livable downtown. Today buildings used for entertainment contribute 1% percent to the total building area downtown, further hampering the tourism industry as visitors look for entertainment in the north.

In turn, Downtown Laredo's long lasting position as a Wholesale center has imprinted a heavy pattern of Storage and Warehouse use that is recorded by the inventory. Houses and commercial buildings in downtown were adapted to support storage and warehouse need. High vacancy levels reflected in the inventory reveal the pressures from local and global economics on downtown commerce.

The Government district exerts an additional level of influence, creating a demand for legal and professional services, that generate a ring of office and institutional uses around the district.

The total area of buildings in the focus area is 3,529,803 SF.

Specific building uses were inventoried in the focus area in the following categories:

RETAIL

general retail
grocery store
gas station
duty free
pawn shop
mall
fabrics
furniture
home store
bookstore
art
jewelry
purses
perfumes
clothing
shoe store
sports
toys
medical
beauty supplies
electronics
automotive repairs

FOOD & DRINKING SERVICES

bar
fast food
restaurant-limited service
restaurant- full service

OFFICE

finance
legal
general office
medical
bank
tax
money exchange
photography
plasma services
shelter

HOSPITALITY

hotel
motel

ENTERTAINMENT

reception hall
theater

GOVERNMENT

fire station
courthouse
jail
office
GSA
county
state
police department
postal office

RELIGION

assembly
church
office

INSTITUTIONAL

school
arts center
boys club
community center
convention and visitors
bureau
daycare- adults
daycare- children
office
museum
university
shelter

WHOLESALE

wholesale

STORAGE & WAREHOUSE

ropas usadas
warehouse
storage

TRANSPORTATION

bus maintenance
train station
bus station
port of entry
parking garage

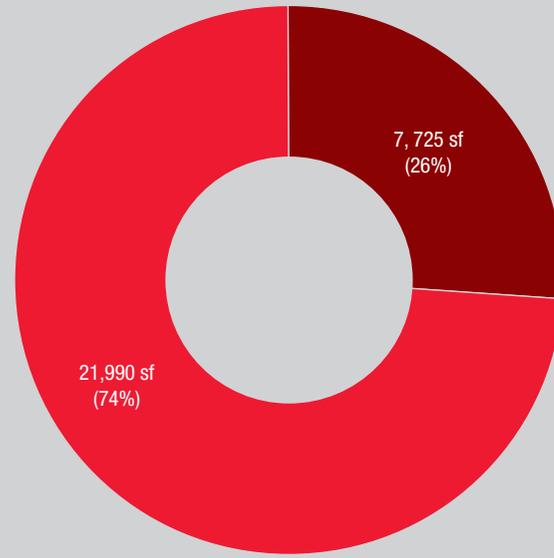
RESIDENTIAL

single family
multifamily
multifamily/high-rise



Entertainment

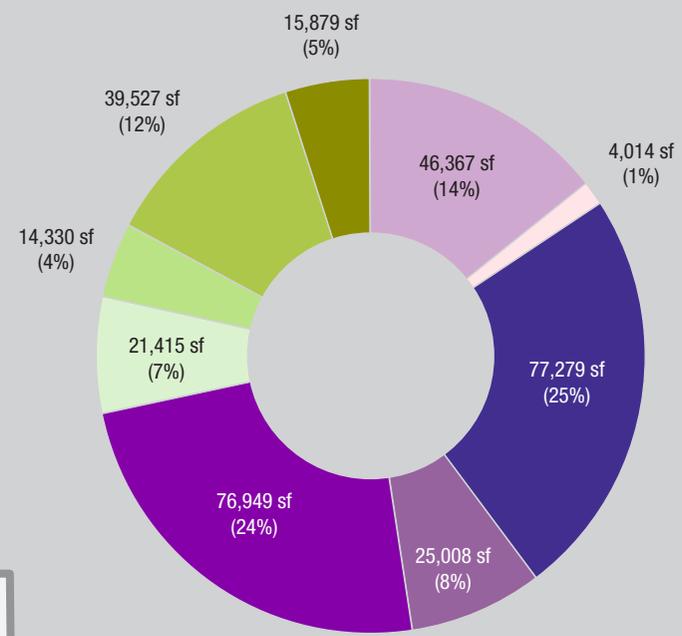
29,716 sf



- RECEPTION HALL ■
- (VACANT) THEATER ■

Government

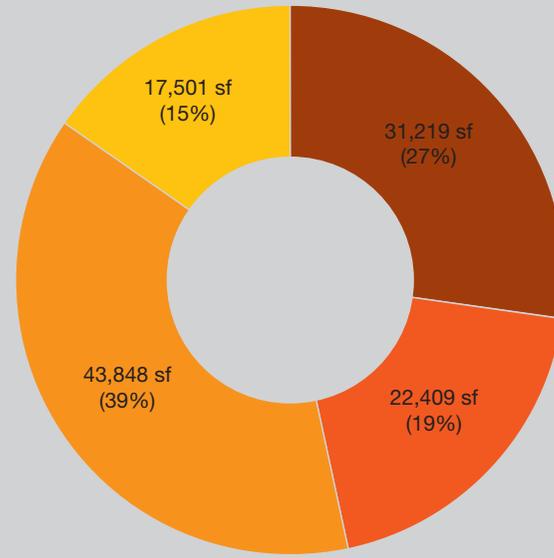
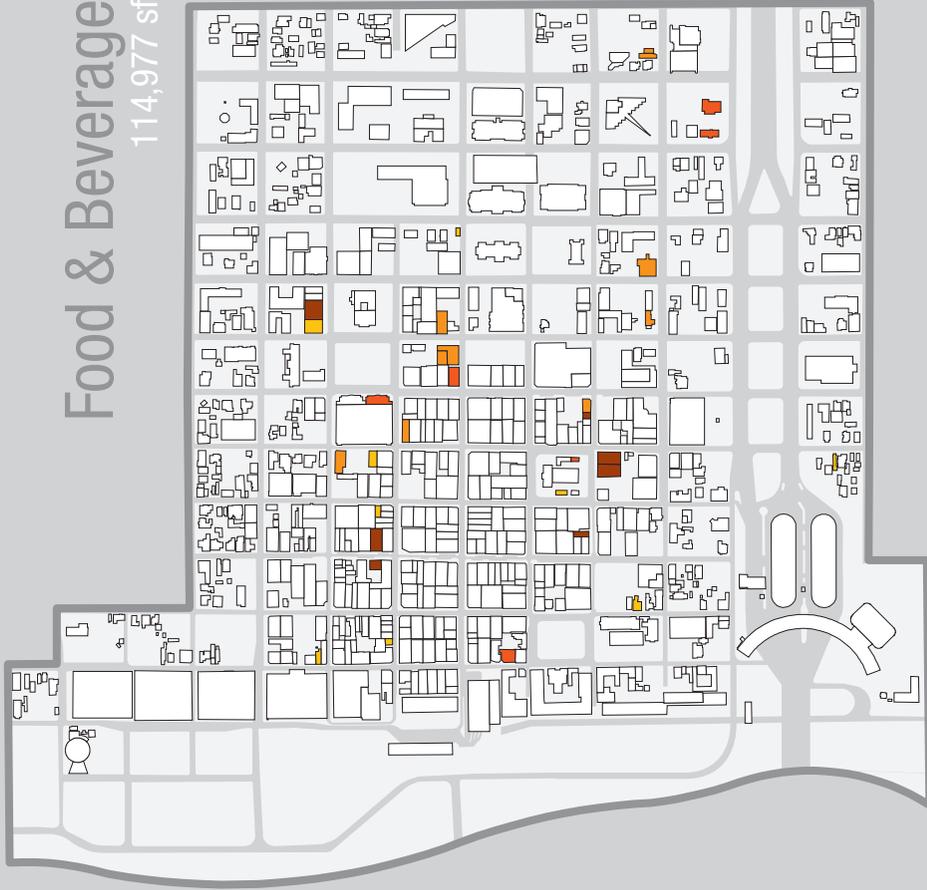
320,769 sf



- COURTHOUSE ■
- FIRE STATION ■
- GSA ■
- JAIL ■
- OFFICE ■
- OFFICE - COUNTY ■
- OFFICE - STATE ■
- POLICE DEPARTMENT ■
- POST OFFICE ■

Food & Beverage

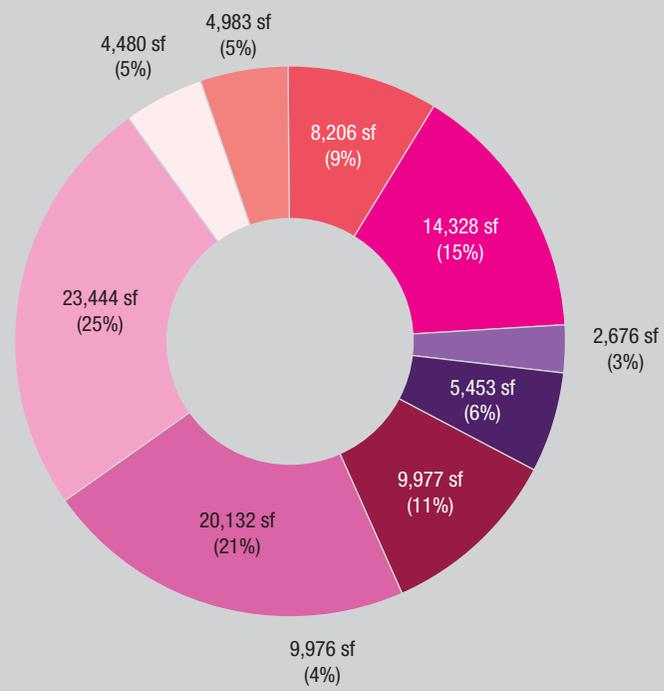
114,977 sf



- BAR
- RESTAURANT- FAST FOOD
- RESTAURANT- FULL SERVICE
- RESTAURANT- LIMITED SERVICE

Institutional

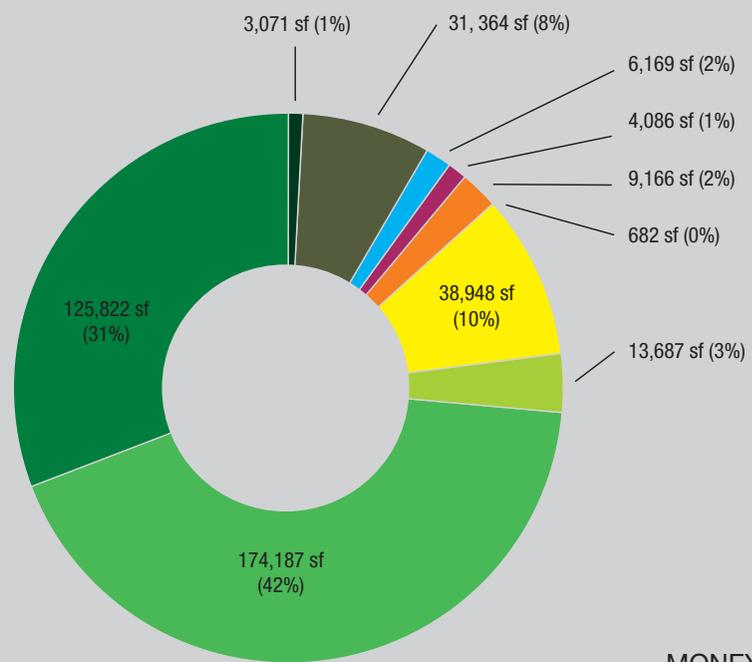
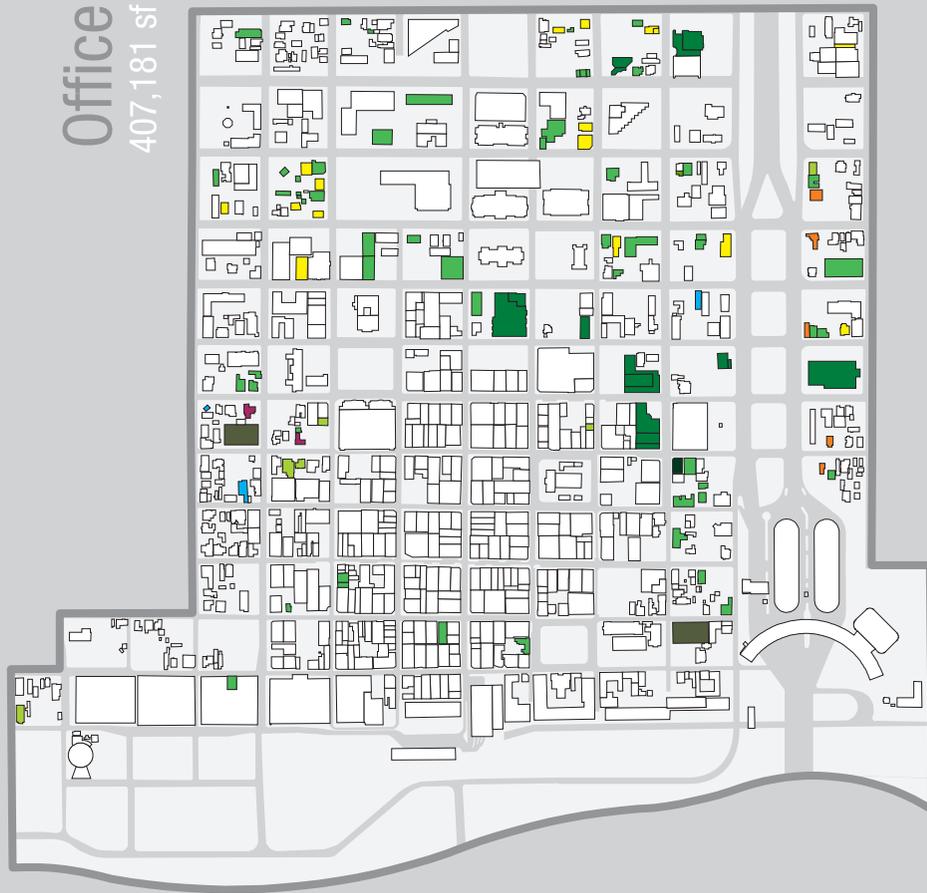
93,678 sf



- ARTS CENTER
- COMMUNITY CENTER
- CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU
- DAYCARE- ADULT
- MUSEUM
- OFFICE
- SCHOOL
- SHELTER
- UNIVERSITY

Office

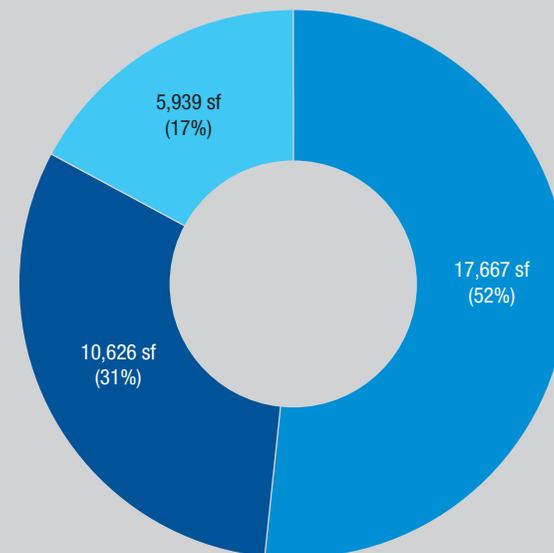
407,181 sf



- BANK
- OFFICE
- FINANCE
- LEGAL
- MEDICAL
- MONEY EXCHANGE
- TAXES
- PHOTOGRAPHY
- PLASMA SERVICES
- SHELTER

Religious

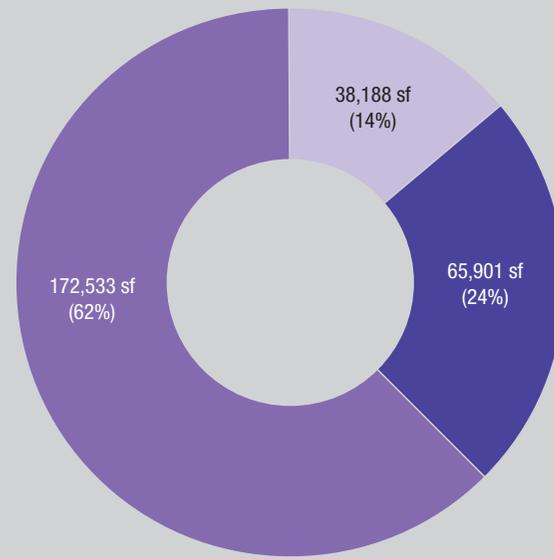
34,232 sf



- ASSEMBLY
- CHURCH
- OFFICE

Storage & Warehouse

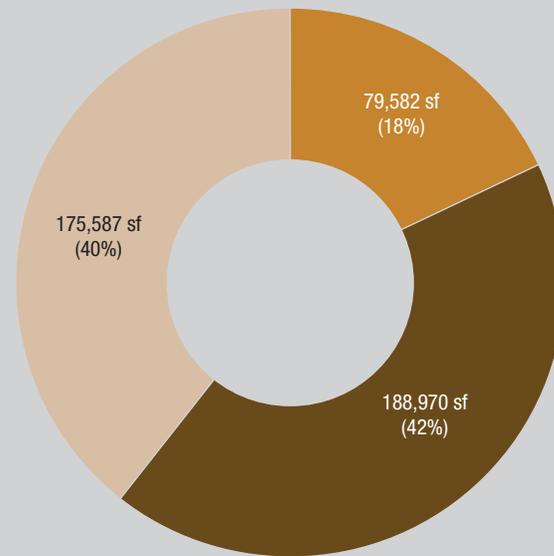
276,623 sf



- ROPAS USADAS
- WAREHOUSE
- STORAGE

Transportation

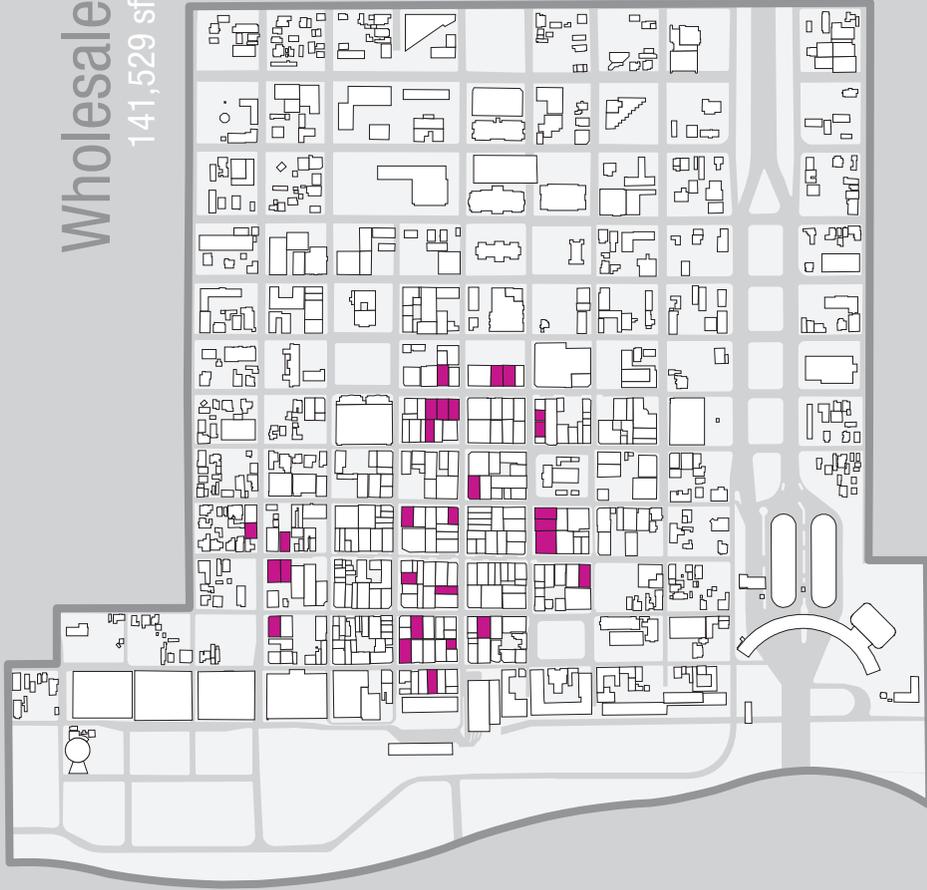
444,139 sf



- BUS STATION
- PORT OF ENTRY

Wholesale

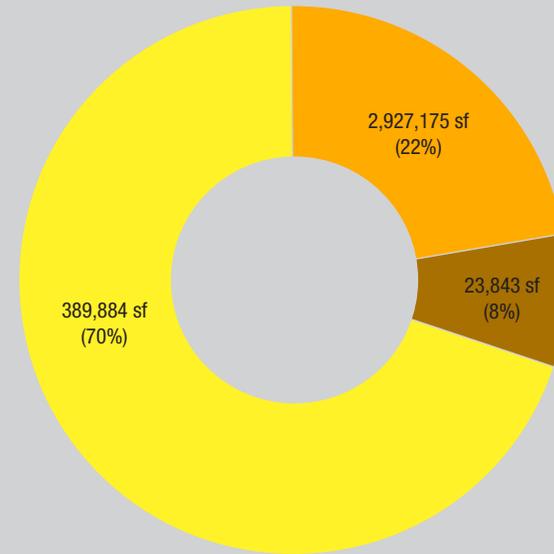
141,529 sf



WHOLESALE 

Residential

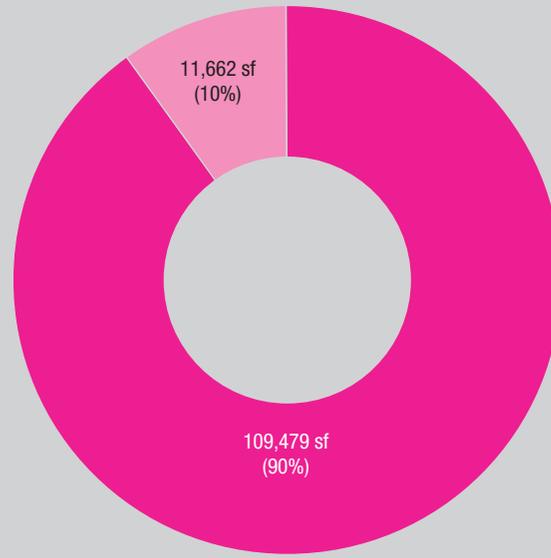
308,922 sf



SINGLE FAMILY 
MULTI FAMILY 
MULTI FAMILY - HIGH RISE 

Hospitality

121,141 sf



HOTEL 

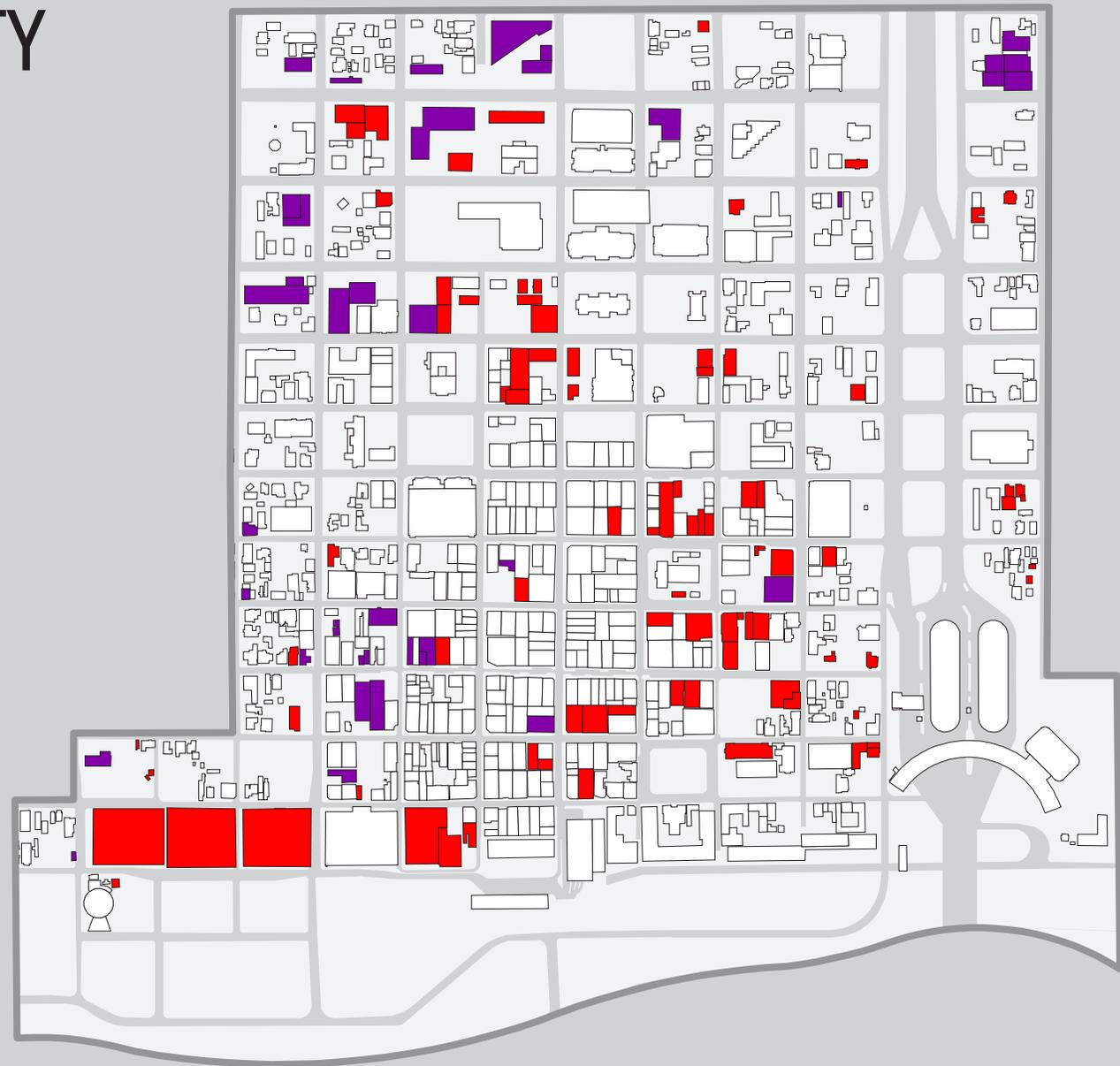
MOTEL 

EXISTING CAPACITY

GROUND LEVEL (824,935 SF)

■ STORAGE & WAREHOUSE (253,884 SF)

■ VACANT (571,051 SF)



Vacant shops are more symptomatic than the cause of economic conditions in Downtown but do in themselves detract from a general sense of vitality. Reoccupation of vacant ground floor shops and stores is therefore both a goal for and evidence of improving Downtown's economy. Storage and Warehouse uses are also declining in Downtown as new industrial facilities are added in outlying industrial zones. Their combined total area is 824,935 SF, about 22% of the 3,687,202 SF of ground floor area in the Central Business District.

The vacant Riverside Mall is a substantial portion of the vacant area, about 180,000 SF at its ground floor, and so if discounted the sum of vacant, storage and warehouse area is 644,935 SF (17.5%). Reoccupation of vacant and soon to be vacant properties is the expected result as Downtown rebounds, but is predicated on a resumption of previous demands in retail/leisure markets. A goal of Downtown capturing 10% of local growth in retail/leisure demand would mean that existing vacant space could be reduced by about 50% in 10 years and by 2030 to less than 10%.

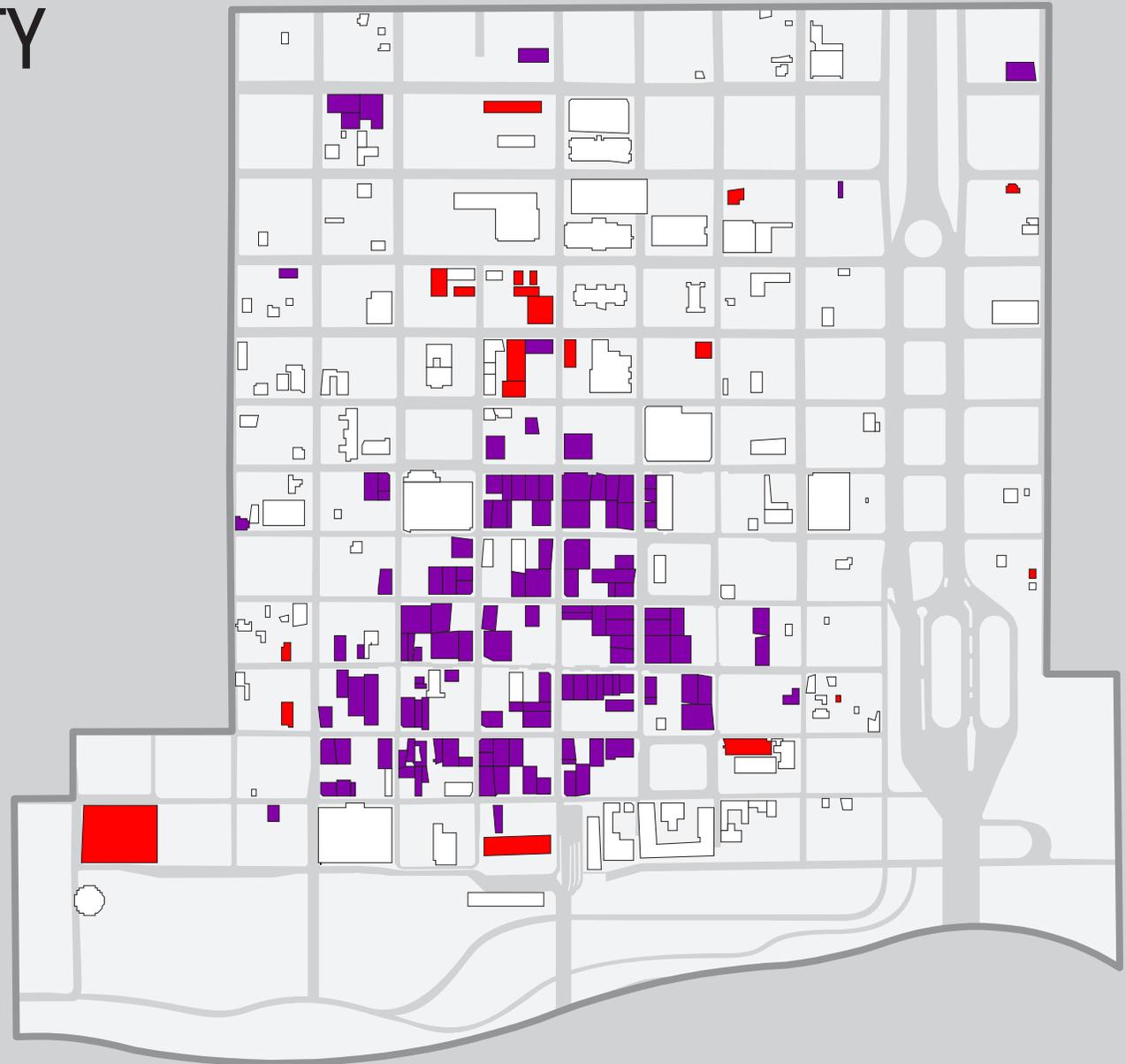
This is a conservative scenario that precludes Riverside Mall vacant area, excludes retail/leisure reuse of storage/warehouse uses, and assumes that supply is entirely driven by local growth demands. This scenario also infers that Downtown revitalization will be a slow process and makes no assumptions as to the character and value of merchandising activity. Refilling vacant ground floor space more quickly would require a greater capture of local growth and/or regional market demand. This would be a more ambitious scenario of created demand and the basis for making Downtown a more desirable destination.

EXISTING CAPACITY

2ND LEVEL (832,164 SF)

■ STORAGE AND WAREHOUSE (575,568 SF)

■ VACANT (256,596 SF)



Most of Downtown's commercial multi-story buildings were constructed before WWII and designed for ground floor merchandising with office, residential and storage uses on the upper floors. Upper floor areas have since been utilized more for wholesale uses, retail storage, or are vacant. In the past decade market changes have negatively impacted wholesale practices in Downtown and their economic viability. Wholesalers are downsizing, transitioning to retail, creating hybrid operations, or moving out. Retailers use upper floors for storage often inefficiently as there are few demands for that space.

As a result, upper floor utilization is likely to diminish and the economic performance of

these properties likely to degrade relative to lease income and tax revenues. Empty space, wherever it is, is an economic burden for those whose interests are invested, and if not maintained is a blight to Downtown. Future demand for upper floor area will depend on recreating these floors as desirable spaces for office, residential, hospitality, entertainment, and other non-retail activities.

The CBD contains around 90% of Downtown's upper floor area with nearly two million square feet occurring at the second floor level. The combined area of second floor wholesale, storage and vacant space is 832,164 SF and represents a latent capacity for redevelopment.

Back office and storage use is expected to continue in second and upper floors over the more valuable ground floor commercial use, but on average is typically 25% of total retail area. Given that traditional wholesale operations decline and back office/storage area for retail and hybrid wholesale is more efficiently deployed, second floor capacity could be 400,000 to 600,000 SF for redevelopment.

INFILL CAPACITY

■ INFILL DEVELOPMENT (2,332,304 SF)



Emerging cities typically dismantle their aging urban centers and build ever and taller buildings over time. Laredo had until the past several decades followed this pattern until outward development effectively arrested Downtown's physical growth. Reoccupation of existing vacant and underutilized building capacity is the foundation of Downtown revitalization and essential for the retention and conservation of historic buildings. This could restore the intensity of use Downtown had throughout the first half of the 20th century, but reoccupation of Downtown's existing capacity cannot restore its past singular predominance – Downtown now and in the future will have to compete with other city and regional centers.

The potential for added capacity is useful as it keeps the door open for continued growth beyond existing constraints. It also enables the development of new buildings more responsive to contemporary needs. This is particularly

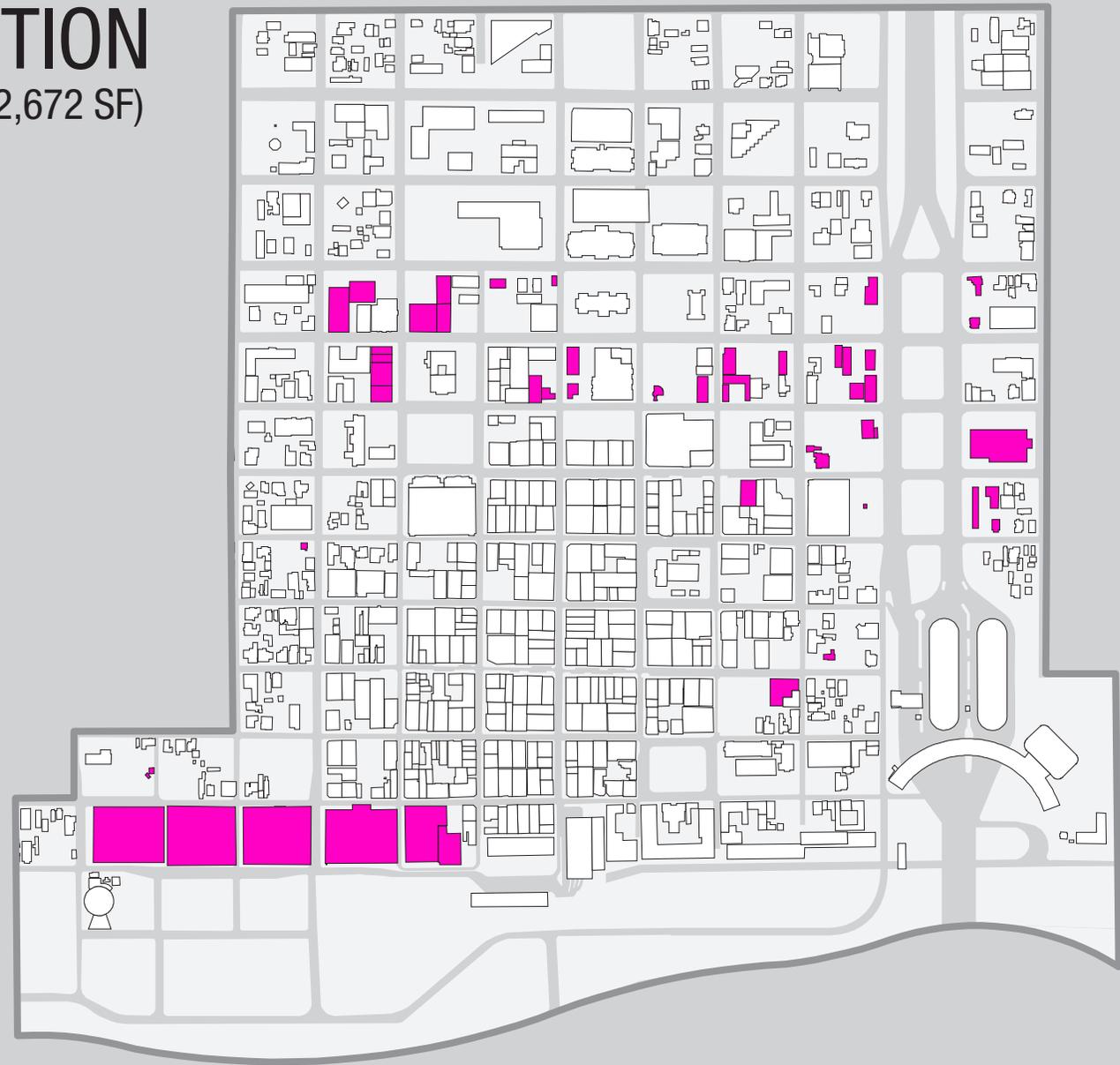
true for residential use where efficient floor configurations and integration of parking and access is more easily attainable and affordable than in renovation. Mixed-use infill development combining commercial office and retail/leisure on ground floors with upper floor residential is a vital urban building type that increases capacity and intensity.

Increasing the residential population of Downtown, especially in the CBD, is an important strategy that can fulfill a multitude of economic, security, cultural, and energy goals. New residential in the CBD is important as it would close the residential gap between St' Peter's/El Cuatro and El Azteca neighborhoods. Additional capacity

without diminishing the historic character of Downtown means that new infill development has a continuum of appropriate urban scale and architectural character. The modeling of infill development assumed a mix of 2, 3 and 4-story buildings with an average of one on-site structured parking space per dwelling unit. Redevelopment of the Riverside Mall site offers an extraordinary opportunity for Downtown living, but other underutilized properties along Houston, Victoria and Matamoros Streets provide great opportunity for infill development.

BUILDING DEMOLITION ASSOCIATED WITH DEMOLITION (492,672 SF)

■ REMOVED / RELOCATED



Infill development generally works within the restraints of existing building fabric but the gradual replacement of underutilized buildings is a normal part of the urban process. Based on the infill development model, half of the projected demolition would be the 240,000 SF Riverside Mall. Other properties consist of aging storage and warehouse buildings, regional bus terminals that could be consolidated in a future multimodal center, and select non-historic buildings along Santa Ursula and San Dario Avenues.

The demolition indicated represents a reasonable assumption that correlates with the infill development plan, but is entirely conjectural and in no way mandates future demolition of any particular building. Potential demolition relative to new public facilities is not depicted in this plan as the infill development component is to be primarily driven by the market and private investment.