



# *Scenic* Houston

Reimagining streets as places



**Heather Houston**

Executive Director

**Annamarie Saavedra**

Director of Development



Our philosophy

“THE IMAGE OF A GREAT CITY  
STEMS LARGELY FROM THE  
QUALITY OF ITS PUBLIC REALM.”

CY PAUMIER



# History

- Established in 1966 as Billboards Limited to fight billboard blight
- First-ever City of Houston sign ordinance passed in 1980 banning construction of new billboards
- 10,000 billboards in 1980 have been reduced to a little over 1,300 today
- Since then, we have fought many more signage issues and served as council to many government agencies





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# Today's Scenic Houston

For far too long, roadway portals have been designed and constructed to move cars, with little attention to other modes of travel or visual character. The result of this pragmatic mindset are cities riddled with unattractive travel way corridors. With roadways representing more than 80 percent of a city's public realm, Scenic Houston, through its Streetscape Enhancement Initiative and Scenic City Certification Program, is working with cities to improve the scenic character of these vital, high-impact public spaces.







# STREETSCAPE ENHANCEMENT INITIATIVE

Through our Streetscape Enhancement Initiative, we work with stakeholders to transform everyday travel way corridors into hubs of activity that support the daily needs of people who rely on access to transit, physical activity, and social mobility.



*Scenic* Houston



# STREETSCAPE RESOURCE GUIDE



- **Supports** optimal planning design and construction using municipal standards
- **Considers** all users during the planning, design and construction phase
- **Illustrates** enhanced design standards
- **Depicts** unintended consequences that can result from lack of cohesive planning
- **Encourages** continued growth and economic development in the region



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**The Streetscape Resource Guide**

*This Guide is  
organized in four  
sections. Each  
section is color  
coded for ease of  
cross reference.*



PEDESTRIAN REALM



TRAVELWAY REALM



SHARED REALM



CROSS SECTIONS AND DETAILS



# Design Goals

- Enhance connectivity
- Promote walking
- Maximize social capital
- Activate streets economically
- Improve scenic character



**PEDESTRIAN REALM**





Washington Avenue near Henderson Street

## PEDESTRIAN REALM: Example of poor planning



Consolidation of signs would avoid unnecessary sign clutter

Sign pole obstruction blocks pedestrian or wheeled access



Shared pedestrian and vehicular lighting

Defined crosswalks for safety and mobility

## PEDESTRIAN REALM: Example of good planning

Pedestrian site amenities

Uninterrupted pedestrian sidewalk







## Design Goals

- Improve pedestrian safety
- Provide accessibility
- Account for cyclists (when appropriate)
- Ensure proper drainage
- Improve scenic character





## TRAVELWAY REALM: Example of poor planning



No refuge area makes street crossing difficult and unsafe for pedestrians





TRAVELWAY REALM:  
Example of good planning



Safe refuge within medians to provide pedestrian safety

Defined pedestrian walks through vehicular drive lanes

Drainage gutters away from pedestrian walks and vehicular intersection





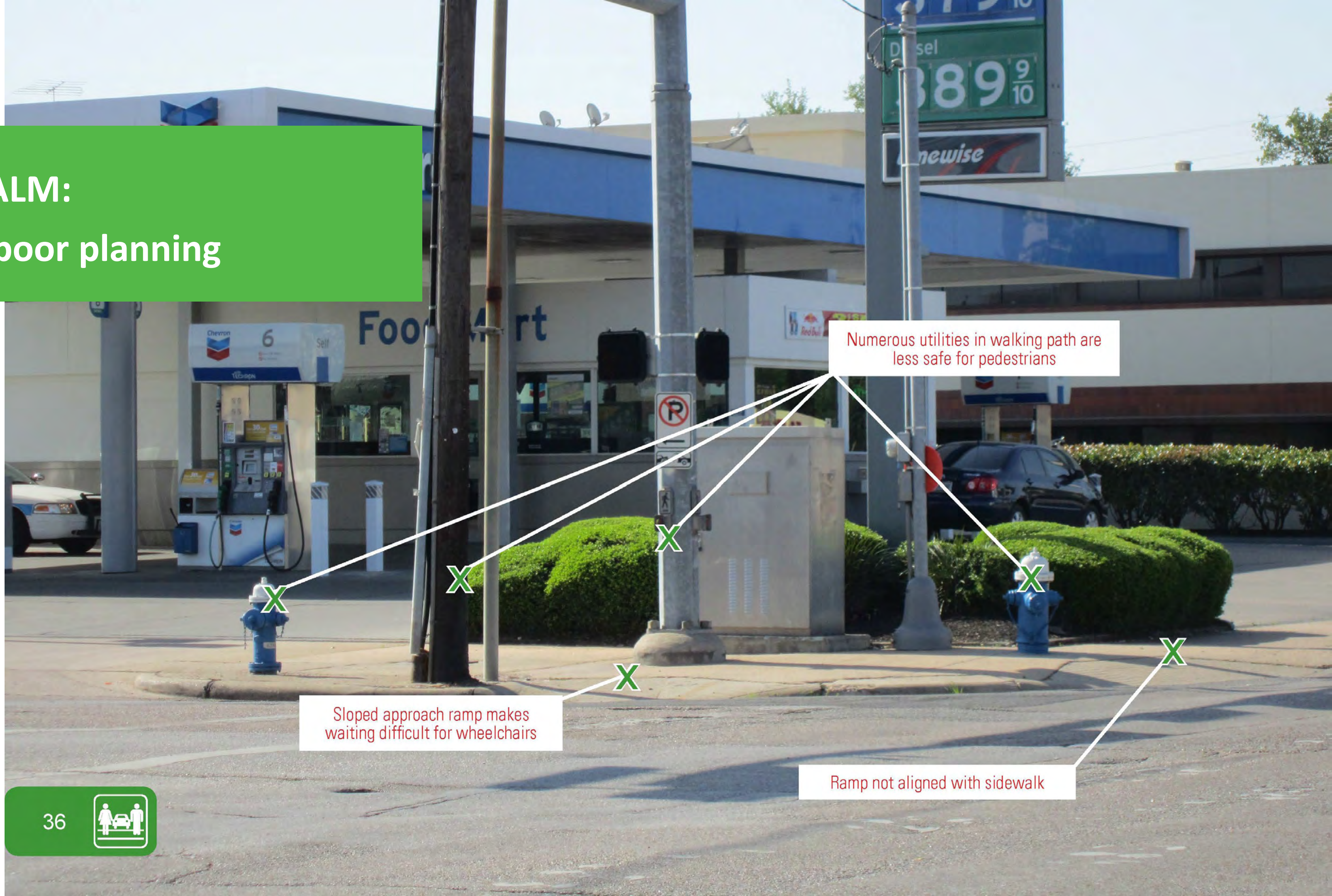
## Design Goals

- Ensure adequate lighting
- Improve pedestrian buffers
- Provide ADA compliance
- Minimize poles and signage
- Improve visual character



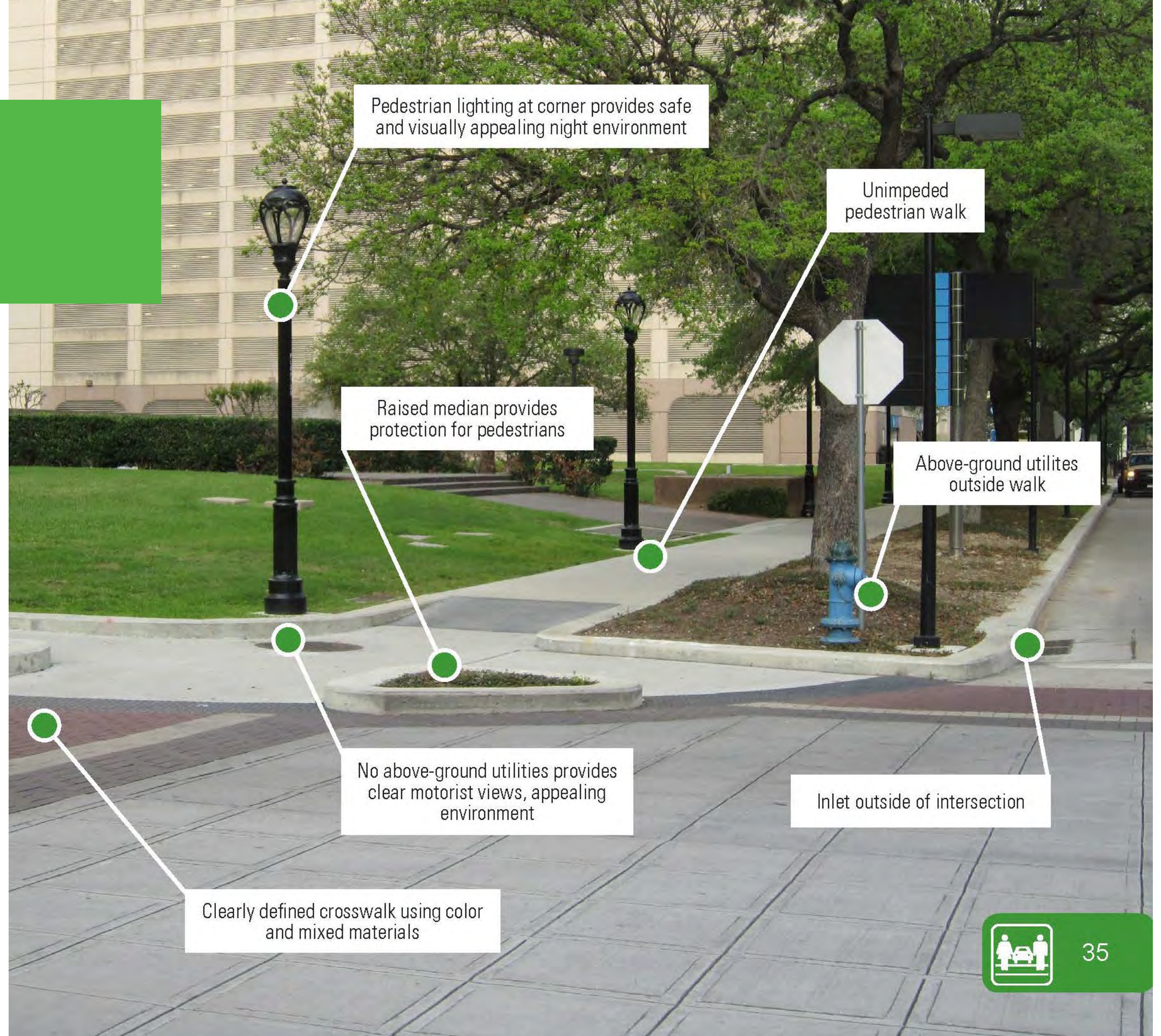


## SHARED REALM: Example of poor planning





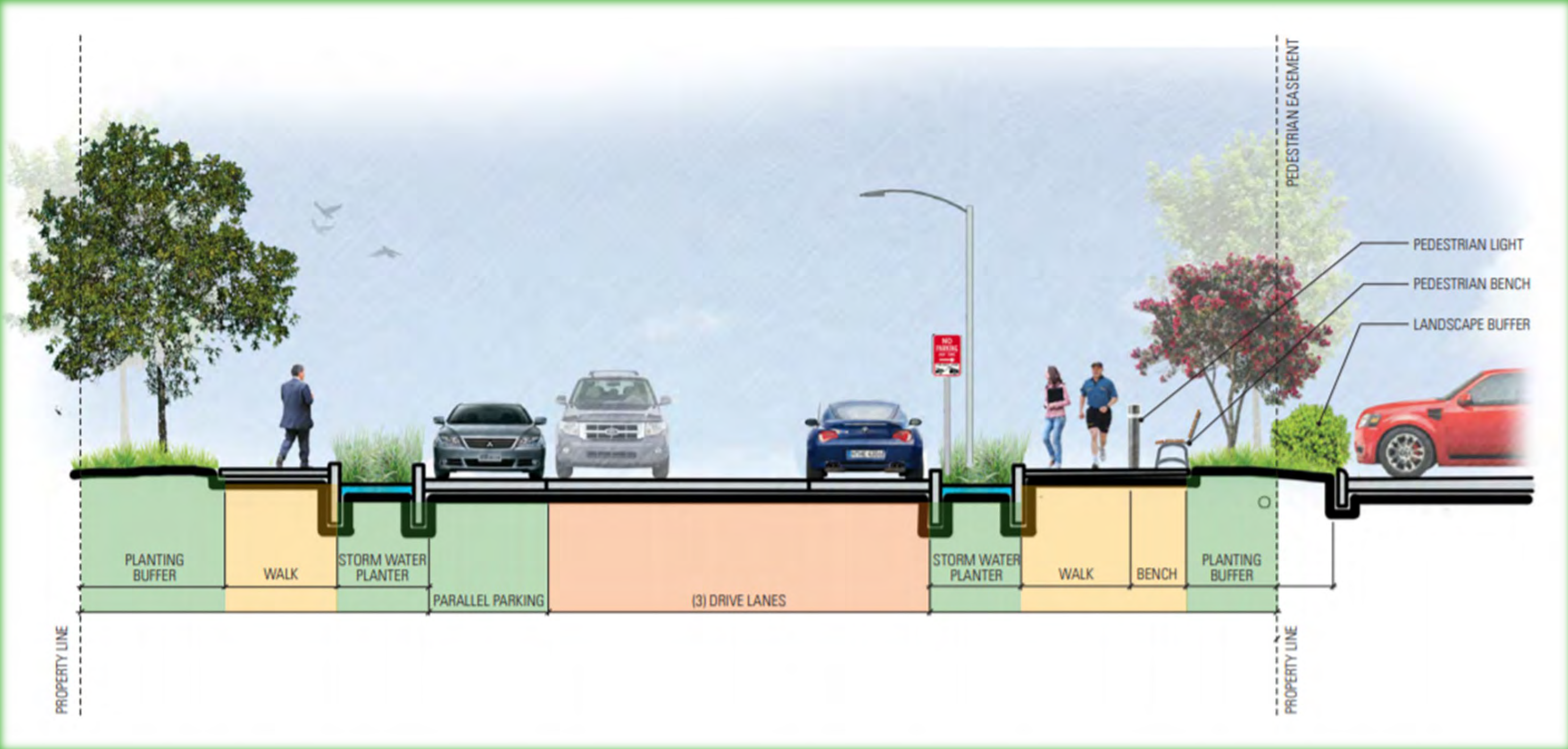
## SHARED REALM: Example of good planning







# CROSS SECTIONS & DETAILS





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# APPLICATION

## USERS OF THIS GUIDE WILL BE ABLE TO:

- **LEARN** sound principles and guidelines that govern streetscape development
- **ACCESS** recommendations for improvements to current Right-of-Way (ROW) design standards across pedestrian, travel way and shared streetscape realms
- **RECOMMEND** cross-section sketches of various ROW widths
- **SEE** an array of photos that clearly illustrate results when the recommended enhancements are in place
- **UTILIZE** the information and illustrations in this Guide to advocate for the best street improvements possible





# CHECKLIST

- **PEDESTRIAN**
  - Landscaping, Pedestrian Access and Amenities
  - Lighting
  - Utilities
  - Drainage
  - Signage
  - Transit
  - Path to Street / Sidewalk Connections
  - Bike Facilities
- **SHARED REALM**
  - Underground Utilities
  - Intersections
  - Shared Curb Cuts
  - Sustainability
- **TRAVELWAY REALM**
  - On-street Parking
  - Medians
  - Bicycle Travel way

6.2 Streetscape Resource Guide Design Checklist: a tool to guide stakeholder engagement

		Yes	No	Comments
2.0 PEDESTRIAN REALM	<b>1. Landscaping, Pedestrian Access, Walkways and Amenities</b>			
	1.1	Encourage walkability		
	1.2	Plan for pedestrian volume and activity		
	1.3	Use a pedestrian easement to increase pedestrian realm		
	1.4	Coordinate pedestrian paths <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan for transit access</li><li>• Plan for access to retail</li></ul>		
	1.5	Create an enhanced sense of community		
	1.6	Provide landscaping and street trees to <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supply shade</li><li>• Screen unsightly views</li><li>• Reduce stormwater runoff</li></ul>		
	<b>2. Lighting</b>			
	2.1	Provide appropriate light fixtures placement and spacing for pedestrian walkways and seating <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve visibility</li><li>• Increase the sense of personal safety</li><li>• Enhance streetscape character</li><li>• Coordinate with existing and proposed street trees to ensure continuous illumination</li><li>• Direct all lights to pedestrian areas to prevent light pollution</li></ul>		
	2.2	Allow for street amenities such as benches, shelters, and trash receptacles to create a more inviting sense of place		
	2.3	Improve safety		
	<b>3. Utilities</b>			
	3.1	Focus on above-ground utilities during the planning and early design phase of projects		
	3.2	Minimize the number of above-ground utilities where possible		
	3.3	Align utilities with street lights and street signs for aesthetic appeal		
	3.4	Place above-ground utilities in landscaped areas out of pedestrian pathways		
	3.5	Verify correct utility placement during construction		
	3.6	Design for long-term maintenance of both underground and above-ground utilities		





[www.sceniccitycertification.org](http://www.sceniccitycertification.org)



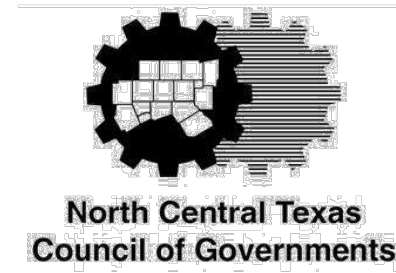
**The Scenic City Certification Program** supports Texas cities by providing a proven, highly-regarded tool for assessment, evaluation, and recognition of infrastructure standards.





# PROGRAM PARTNERS

The Scenic City Certification Program was developed through a partnership of 19 statewide organizations that, together, comprise the Scenic City Program Council.





# EVALUATION

- Streetscape enhancements
- Parks, trails and open spaces
- Lighting standards
- Design integrity
- Landscaping and screening
- Sign control
- Litter and graffiti prohibition
- Utility and cable line programs
- Unique municipal features
- Special Programs



Houston area  
certified cities

16

83

certified cities  
across Texas



more than

5,000

sample  
ordinances  
collected





## CERTIFIED HOUSTON AREA CITIES

### PLATINUM

Friendswood  
Missouri City  
Richmond

### GOLD

League City  
Pearland  
Sealy  
Sugar Land

### SILVER

El Campo  
Houston  
Webster  
West University Place

### BRONZE

Nassau Bay  
Beaumont

### RECOGNIZED

Dayton  
Magnolia  
Seabrook



PROUD TO BE  
A Certified *Scenic* City



# Assessment & Certification Requirements

Certification **NOT** required to participate in assessment.

## CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS:

- landscaping/tree planting program
- on-premise sign regulations
- prohibition of new billboards

## CERTIFICATION LEVELS:

Platinum  
Gold  
Silver  
Bronze  
Recognized

## POINTS BASED EVALUATION

Earn points for what you do well.



# Application Process

## Application

- Application period January – March
- Phone orientation required

## Evaluation

- Detailed assessment of ordinance language
- Appeal process

## Certification

- Final scores released by end of July
- Statewide PR

## Celebration

- Awards reception, in conjunction with TML Conf.
- Statewide PR, customized media kits to each city







## BENEFITS & BEYOND

5-year certification

Opportunity to rank-up

Assessment = Roadmap

Municipal ordinance library

Expert, affordable third-party evaluation

Basis for continual review



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# Scenic Houston



## WEBSITE

[www.scenichouston.org](http://www.scenichouston.org)



## EMAIL

[heather@scenichouston.org](mailto:heather@scenichouston.org)

[annamarie@scenichouston.org](mailto:annamarie@scenichouston.org)



## CONTACT NUMBER

713-629-0481

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