

First Courthouse Neighborhood Plan Concept

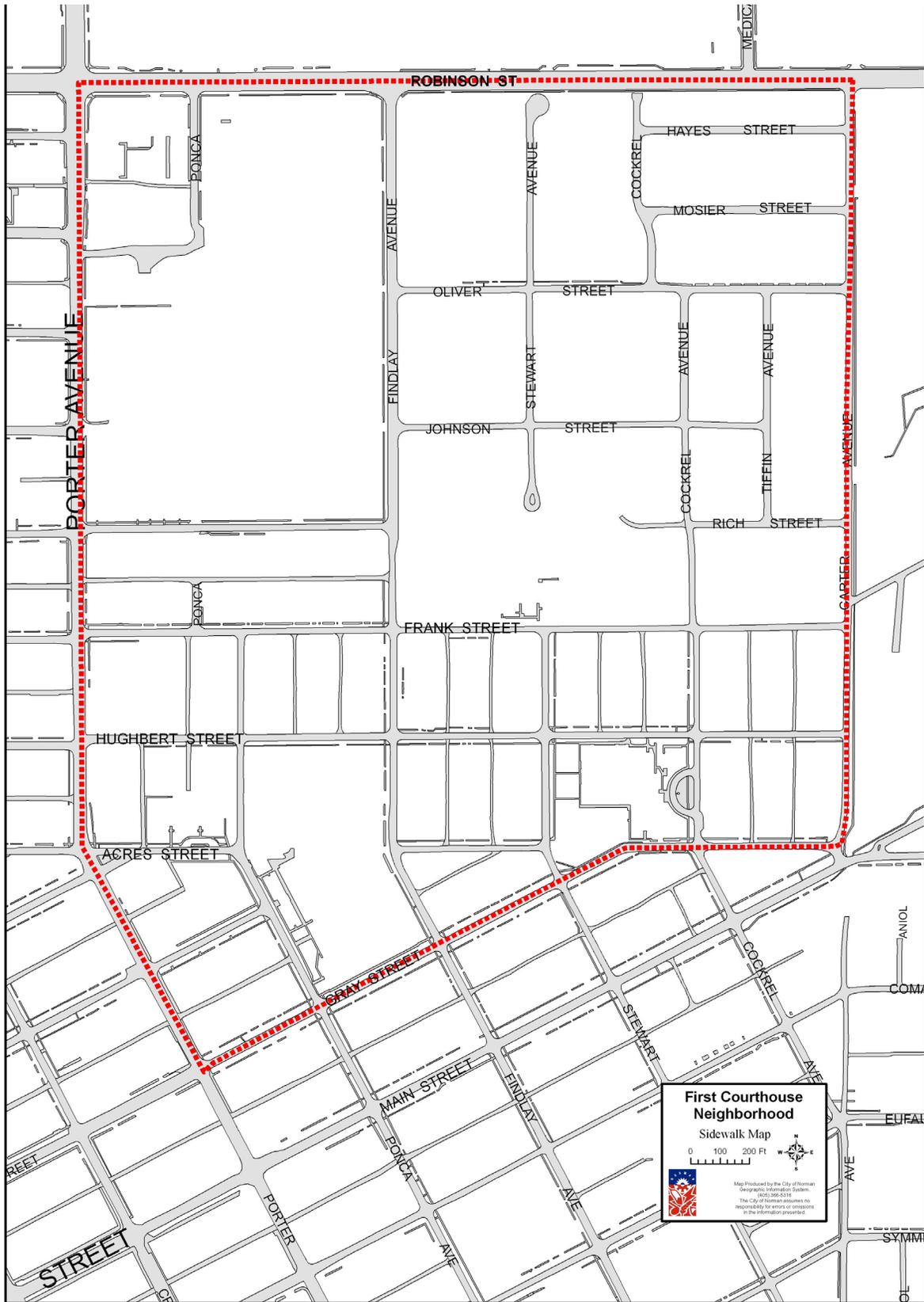


**Content Developed by First Courthouse Neighborhood
Residents and City of Norman Revitalization Staff**

CONCEPT DRAFT

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DRAFT CONCEPT

First Courthouse Neighborhood Plan Concept: Strengthen What We Have

Working with resident-generated goals, data from a physical survey of the neighborhood, and other current City plans, the City of Norman planning team has developed this Neighborhood Plan Concept as a framework to implement specific improvements in the First Courthouse Neighborhood.

The Plan Concept, perhaps best summarized as “Strengthen What We Have,” identifies six long-term goals for the First Courthouse Neighborhood. On the following pages, each goal is articulated and accompanied by specific objectives. If implemented, these measures will be very helpful in preserving and protecting First Courthouse’s many assets and will also effectively reverse negative trends in the neighborhood.

GOAL 1: Strengthen Neighborhood Edges

Mark clear boundaries that separate Porter Avenue commercial land uses from adjacent residential areas in First Courthouse. A mutually respected edge is critical for peaceful coexistence between commercial and residential land uses.

GOAL 2: Protect History, Character and Sense of Place

Protect the neighborhood’s physical environment that includes blocks of houses and other buildings, the pattern of sidewalks, streets and trees, and proximity to neighborhood goods and services.

GOAL 3: Strengthen Zoning Protections

Support zoning changes that reflect 2025 Plan Land Use Plan recommendations, preserve the single-family residential character of First Courthouse Neighborhood, and promote the peaceful co-existence of adjacent land uses.

GOAL 4: Improve Traffic and Circulation at Key Locations

Calm traffic and improve safety along key streets and at busy intersections. Improve pedestrian access throughout the neighborhood but particularly across Porter Avenue.

GOAL 5: Upgrade Neighborhood Infrastructure

Make meaningful infrastructure improvements that enhance the neighborhood’s quality of life.

GOAL 6: Enhance Appearance and Quality of Life

Encourage participation in programs that beautify the neighborhood, enhance individual property values, and build a sense of connection between neighbors.



Simple brick columns with minimal landscaping can create a very effective neighborhood entryway.

GOAL 1: Strengthen Neighborhood Edges

Mark clear boundaries that separate Porter Avenue commercial land uses from adjacent residential areas in First Courthouse. A mutually respected edge is critical for peaceful coexistence between commercial and residential land uses. These goals are closely correlated with the Porter Avenue Corridor Plan goal to protect neighborhoods.

1. Develop neighborhood gateways that formalize entry into First Courthouse at the following locations:

- Findlay Avenue at Oliver
- Carter Avenue north of roundabout
- Carter Avenue south of Robinson
- Gray Street west of roundabout
- East Frank at PCZOD line

2. Strengthen neighborhood identity through meaningful placemaking activities.

- Develop a high quality neighborhood identification graphic package that includes a logo and signage
- Plant appropriate species of trees in rights-of-way to create or sustain the urban tree canopy
- Expand historic lighting scheme to other parts of the neighborhood
- Revitalize Frances Cate Park to become a meaningful open space
- Develop interpretive signage for Frances Cate Park, First Courthouse Neighborhood, and historic landmarks in the neighborhood.

3. Monitor proposals that expand commercial zoning along Porter Avenue to ensure that developers fulfill obligations for residential buffering per the Porter Corridor Zoning Overlay District (PCZOD).



Neighborhood gateways are both symbolic and functional points of entry.

What is Placemaking?

According to authors and urban planners Al Zelinka and Susan Jackson Harden in a book entitled *Placemaking on a Budget*, "placemaking refers to the process of adding value and meaning to the public realm through community-based revitalization projects rooted in local values, history, culture and natural environment."

Urbanist Phillip Langdon writes "placemaking has become a necessary activity as a response to the 20th Century's creation of an impermanent, standardized built environment at odds with community pride and loyalty. Yet the stubborn fact remains: human beings need places that matter to us, places in our cities, towns and neighborhoods that we can point to and inhabit with pride."

Examples of Placemaking

Successful placemaking takes many different forms from the installation of public art to activities on private property that help create a distinctive neighborhood identity.

- Public art in parks or other gathering places in the public realm
- Attractive lighting designs
- Creation of neighborhood gateways
- Decorative sidewalk treatments
- Tree planting in public ROW
- Decorative bus stops or shelters
- Corridor landscaping
- Neighborhood identification signage on posts or light poles
- Interpretive historical signage for parks, schools, buildings, or natural features
- Park revitalization projects, e.g., stream bank restoration, seating areas, tree planting, lighting, decorative fencing, and interpretive signage, engaging play equipment.

GOAL 2: Protect Character and Sense of Place

Protect the neighborhood's physical environment that includes blocks of houses, sidewalk patterns, tree-lined streets, and the proximity of neighborhood goods, services and institutions.

- 1. Undertake neighborhood placemaking activities (see sidebar) that strengthen the neighborhood's edges, strengthen identity, and create public spaces that attract people.**
- 2. Revitalize Frances Cate Park to make it an attractive, inviting "living room" for the entire neighborhood.**
- 3. Work through the City's Neighborwoods Program to distribute and plant appropriate tree species in rights-of-way to sustain or create the urban tree canopy.**
 - Create a neighborhood tree-tenders support program to help nurture newly-planted trees and teach property owners how to take care of them.
 - Develop a Friends of Frances Cate Park program to invest neighbors in the park's condition and to maintain the health of new plantings in the park.
- 4. Work with the City of Norman to create home improvement grants for property owners to be used for painting and exterior repair.**
 - Use improvement programs to preserve and enhance neighborhood character and historic building design
- 5. Use attractive sidewalk treatments to link the neighborhood with the Porter Avenue Corridor and Downtown.**

What is the Porter Corridor Zoning Overlay District?

During the Porter Avenue Corridor planning process, the Zoning Overlay District was identified as a regulatory tool that could be effective in achieving a desired balance between commercial and residential land uses in the corridor.

City Council adopted the Porter Corridor Zoning Overlay District (PCZOD) thereby establishing a commercial limit line. The PCZOD requires businesses that expand to this line build an opaque masonry wall and 10-foot landscaped buffer at the property line that will provide a separation between residential and commercial activities.

What Are the Requirements of the Porter Corridor Zoning Overlay District (PCZOD)?

- Establishes a Commercial Limit Line
- Requires that commercial land uses expanding to the limit line must have 10-foot wide landscape buffer and 4-foot high masonry wall, increasing to 6-foot high adjacent to neighbor's backyard
- Requires parking lots to have downcast lighting on poles no higher than 20 feet



The PCZOD will buffer transitions between commercial and residential land uses to better protect houses from negative impacts of commercial activity.

GOAL 3: Strengthen Zoning Protections

Support zoning changes that reflect Norman 2025 Land Use Plan recommendations and which preserve the residential character of First Courthouse Neighborhood by promoting the peaceful co-existence of neighboring land uses.

- 1. Support downzoning parts of the neighborhood to R-1 if property owners in the area desire to do so.**
 - City staff can make a presentation to educate residents about the process required to downzone property.
- 2. Support applications for commercial or institutional rezoning only when complies with the Commercial Limit line of the Porter Avenue Corridor Plan, including off-street parking lots.**



To safely cross busy streets, pedestrians must rely on drivers stopping at crosswalks.

GOAL 4. Improve Traffic and Circulation at Key Locations

Reduce speeds and improve safety along busy road segments and intersections. Improve pedestrian access throughout the neighborhood but particularly along and across Porter Avenue.

1. Address speeding and cut-through traffic problems along Carter and Findlay Avenues.

- Increase police monitoring in these known speeding areas.
- Request the City Traffic Engineer undertake a study of areas with persistent speeding problems to determine if traffic calming measures are required.

2. Make pedestrian improvements at the Acres and Porter intersection a community priority.

- Work with Norman Public School officials to get a crossing guard stationed at this busy intersection.
- Improve sidewalk connections along Acres Street linking Longfellow Middle School, Porter Avenue, Updegraff Park, Legacy Trail and Andrews Park.
- Request the City of Norman to fund a detailed traffic analysis of the Porter Avenue Corridor to determine the best options for future traffic flow along Porter Avenue, including the best options for safe crossing at the intersection of Acres & Porter.

3. Use CDBG funding to improve walkability in the neighborhood.

- Use the sidewalk survey from this document to establish priority sidewalk projects.
- Use School Sidewalk funds from Public Works Department to address sidewalk deficiencies near Jefferson Elementary School and along routes to Longfellow Elementary on the east side of Porter Avenue.

4. Improve sidewalks along and across Porter Avenue.

- Use the *Porter Corridor Public Streetscape Design* to begin improving sidewalks that serve the neighborhood on the east side of Porter.
- Consider using CDBG funds to leverage private sector improvements to commercial facades along Porter Avenue.
- Make landscaping improvements along Porter Avenue that connect with gateways into the neighborhood.

What is Walkability?

A walkable neighborhood is a place where people live within walking distance to most places they want to visit, whether it is school, work, grocery stores, parks, churches, banks, retail shops, or drug stores, and where people choose to walk to access these goods and services instead of drive their cars.

A walkable neighborhood has sidewalks or clear pedestrian zones linking major destinations in and around the area. A walkable community is made up of a collection of walkable neighborhoods.

In a walkable neighborhood, people choose walking or biking before they choose to take a 2,000-pound vehicle to buy a one-pound loaf of bread!

Walkability In First Courthouse Neighborhood:

- Wherever feasible, install sidewalks where there are missing segments throughout the neighborhood.
- Using *Porter Corridor Public Streetscape Design*, install new or replace existing sidewalks along Porter Avenue.
- Using *Porter Corridor Public Streetscape Design*, install landscaping improvements along Porter Avenue that make sidewalk environment more attractive to walkers.
- Install accessibility ramps throughout the neighborhood wherever they are missing or inadequate.



Bishop Creek's condition of flowing through Cate Park is poor and an eyesore. Stream restoration would improve park aesthetics and help mitigate downstream flooding.

GOAL 5. Upgrade Physical and Civic Infrastructure

Make meaningful infrastructure improvements to enhance neighborhood quality of life.

1. Improve drainage throughout the neighborhood by installing curbs and gutters where appropriate or by other means where curbs and gutters are not feasible.

- Use physical survey data from this report to identify specific locations where improved drainage is needed. Determine if there are drainage structures nearby that can be utilized to address the problem.
- Use data from this survey to verify the type and location of existing drainage structures in the neighborhood.
- In problem areas where there are no drainage structures in place, identify if there are other realistic techniques that could improve the drainage situation.

2. Revitalize Frances Cate Park to become inviting and meaningful open space for the neighborhood, with opportunities for both active and passive recreation.

3. Improve sidewalk connections throughout First Courthouse linking the neighborhood with Jefferson Elementary School, Longfellow Middle School, the Porter Avenue Corridor and Downtown Norman.

4. Establish a plan to install pedestrian-scale lighting plan along key sidewalks in the neighborhood.

5. Eliminate alley trash collection as a means to reduce sanitation truck damage to alleys and improve sanitation department operating efficiency.

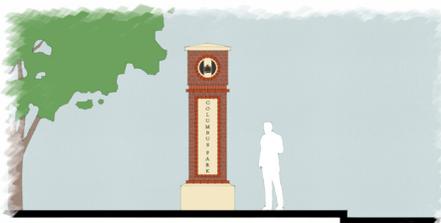
6. Initiate sidewalk and landscaping improvements along the east side of Porter Avenue which conform to the *Porter Avenue Corridor Design for Public Streetscape*.

7. Install neighborhood gateway monuments at major points of entry to the neighborhood:

- Findlay Avenue at Oliver
- Carter Avenue north of roundabout
- Carter Avenue south of Robinson
- Gray Street west of roundabout
- East Frank at PCZOD line



Sidewalks linking neighborhood destinations are vital to getting people around the neighborhood without having to use a car.



Gateways not only mark neighborhood boundaries, they also help enhance a neighborhood's sense of place.



Well-maintained houses convey to all that people care about the health and safety of the neighborhood.

GOAL 6. Enhance Appearance and Quality of Life

Foster participation in programs that beautify the neighborhood, enhance individual property values, and build a sense of connection between neighbors. Effective implementation of this goal will require a public-private partnership with some tasks undertaken by the City, some undertaken by the City and the neighborhood together, and some initiated by neighborhood residents themselves.

1. Work to reactivate First Courthouse’s Neighborhood Association as an important symbol of social investment and revitalization.

City-Led Tasks

- Establish neighborhood leadership training programs (e.g. Neighborhood Alliance’s Neighborhood Leaders for Today) that sustain the organization and successfully implement ongoing revitalization activities.

Neighborhood - City Partnerships

- Hold a Neighborhood Association Relaunch event with a facilitated discussion about neighbor expectations of the group’s purpose and goals.
- Educate property owners about neighborhood expectations for property maintenance and to work with Code Enforcement to ensure that proactive enforcement practices are consistent.
- Make meaningful recommendations for future CDBG projects in the neighborhood.
- Participate in discussions about future redevelopment efforts as part of Porter Corridor revitalization, especially as an advocate for preservation of neighborhood affordability and design character.
- Establish an electronic neighborhood newsletter that comes out at least twice a year.
- Create an email database to facilitate more effective communication among neighbors.



GOAL 6, continued

Neighborhood-Led Tasks

- Use the association to monitor issues that affect the neighborhood, to be an effective communication tool, to educate residents about property maintenance expectations, and to provide a mechanism that builds connection between neighbors.
- Organize regular neighborhood social gatherings that allow neighbors to get acquainted and share information (e.g. potluck suppers, ice cream socials, neighborhood picnics, etc.)
- Use Neighborhood Association and email to distribute information about various City of Norman programs that can benefit property owners.
- Initiate a needs assessment of neighborhood residents who may require various kinds of assistance to maintain and improve their property.

2. **Maintain First Courthouse’s historic tree canopy by planting new trees and replacing diseased or dying trees.**

Neighborhood-City Partnerships

- Work as a Neighborhood Association with the City’s Neighborwoods Program to distribute and plant appropriate tree species in rights-of-way.
- Hold a Tree Planting Day as part of the Neighborwoods Program, the City’s urban reforestation program for planting street trees in rights-of-way.
- Working through the Neighborhood Association, create a neighborhood tree-tenders support program to help nurture newly-planted trees and to teach property owners how to take care of them.

3. **Develop a Friends of Frances Cate Park program to invest neighbors in the park’s condition and to maintain the health of new plantings in the park.**

Neighborhood-City Partnership

- Hold a information-gathering meeting with other “Friends Of Park” groups in the City followed by an organizational meeting to outline mission, strategies and next steps.
- Plan an annual neighborhood event (e.g. ice cream social) to be held at Cate Park or Jefferson or Longfellow Schools.



Neighborhood leadership training sessions are an effective way to bolster participation and overall effectiveness of neighborhood associations.

GOAL 6, continued

4. Work with the administration of Jefferson Elementary School and neighborhood churches to build stronger relationships that help support the neighborhood.

Neighborhood-City Partnership

- Consider making Jefferson Elementary the regular meeting place for the Neighborhood Association.
- Encourage residents to use the school playground and fields as neighborhood open space and play space.
- Work with the school and other resources to develop continuing education opportunities (hobbies, academics, etc.) that can be held at school facilities.

Neighborhood-Led Task

- Approach the churches about working with the Neighborhood Association to undertake home improvement projects for elderly or handicapped neighborhood residents.



Neighborhood identification signs are effective placemaking tools and help reinforce a sense of place.

First Courthouse Short-Term Implementation Strategy

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<u>PROJECT</u>	<u>COST ESTIMATE</u>	<u>FUNDING SOURCES</u>
1. Install gateway monuments at entry points into the neighborhood: Frank Street Oliver at Findlay Avenue Carter south of Robinson	\$10,000-\$30,000	CDBG (funding in hand)
2. Proceed with Cate Park Revitalization project, beginning with	\$150,000-\$200,000	CDBG
3. Help convene and facilitate Friends-of-Cate Park organizational meeting	\$200	Staff and volunteer time
4. Hold Neighborhood Association Relaunch event, including election of neighborhood officers and gathering email addresses for database	\$200	Staff and volunteer time
5. Facilitate development of electronic First Courthouse Neighborhood Newsletter	No cost	Staff and volunteer time
6. Create neighborhood email database	No cost	Staff and volunteer time
7. Develop neighborhood identification graphics package to include neighborhood logo, signage, and letterhead	\$2,500 +/-	CDBG
8. Install neighborhood identification signage throughout neighborhood	\$10,000 +/-	CDBG
9. Work with City Staff to develop home improvement grant program for property maintenance of owner occupied, low/mod income housing; fund program	\$40,000	CDBG
10. Install missing sidewalk segments and accessibility ramps where missing	\$20,000	Capital Fund Neighborhood Improvement, CDBG,
11. Eliminate alley trash collection wherever feasible, working with neighbors to find alternatives	No cost	
12. Install a block of Porter Avenue Streetscape	\$170,000	Capital Fund Neighborhood Improvement, CDBG