

# Theme 1: Emphasis on the Public Realm

Every place a person visits leaves an impression – sometimes referred to as its “sense of place” – that gives it a distinct identity and reputation. Factors influencing sense of place may include street network, size and scale of buildings, number and quality of public spaces, connections between destinations, streetscape, lighting, landscaping, and art. The comprehensive plan recognizes sense of place as a strong influencer for promoting transformational change in specific areas of Garner, especially in terms of investments in the “public realm” that may leverage other public and private investments throughout the planning area.

Market activity and private investments in some of Garner’s identified activity centers may transform them into more urban places. Town leaders also recognize major investments in the spaces around, between, and within buildings are needed to keep pace with development. Thinking about a more complete and more consistent public realm, and coordinating investments in the public spaces and transportation corridors that primarily make up the public realm, offers the opportunity to synchronize projects that reinforce a common vision and work together to make great spaces for the community. The ability to create walkable environments through investments in the public realm can also influence travel behavior and nearby land uses and development densities.

Coordinating investments in the public realm – whether by public or private interests – has the potential to significantly influence the form and function of Garner’s planning area, and create a sense of place for pedestrians and the community. Establishing a framework for investing in the public realm starts with the recommendations presented in the comprehensive plan and continues with new rules and requirements in the town’s Unified Development Ordinance or capital projects in the town’s Capital Improvements Plan. It should also include coordinated private investments within and adjacent to the public realm. The context of buildings, their uses, and interactions near the public realm (especially within the first thirty feet of a building) will also be important for instilling a distinct identity and sense of place for a street or activity center.

The recommendations that follow under the topic of public realm will help unify the natural and built environments in the town’s planning area. They emphasize a comprehensive and connected brand for the town that will create a unique sense of place and community pride for living and working in Garner. More specific concepts and recommendations for some elements of the public realm are also covered in the themes that follow public realm in Chapter 3.



**Prepare a public realm master plan for specific neighborhoods, parks, districts, or corridors in town with partnerships from the private sector and other public organizations.**

Prepare public realm master plans for specific areas in town that each define a common design vision, unifying design treatments, programmed public investments, and expectations for private investment within and adjacent to a public realm. Town officials should use each public realm master plan to program capital projects, coordinate planned activities, and administer requirements for a development application within or adjacent to the public realm identified in the specific master plan.

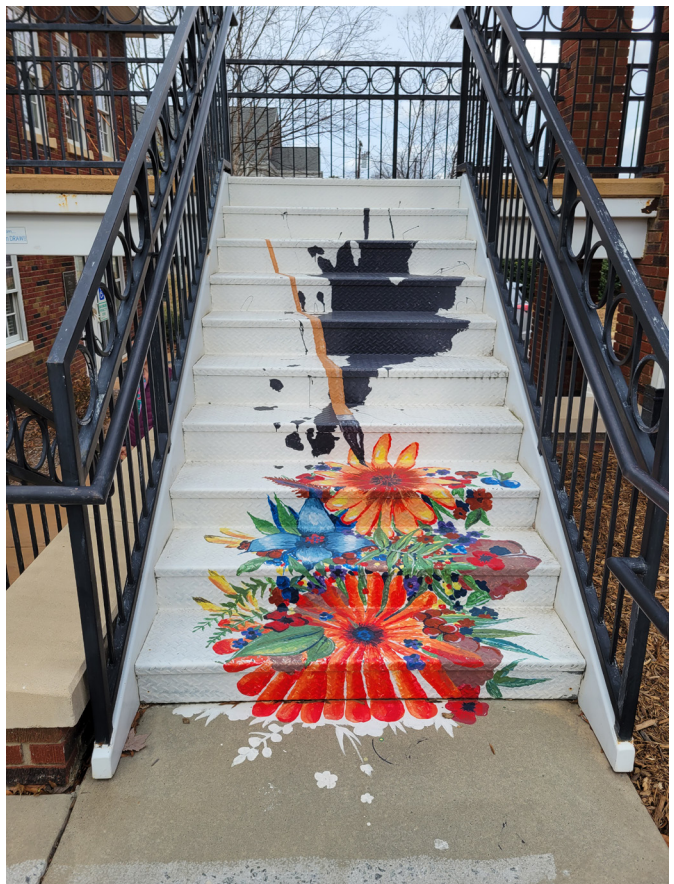
**A public realm master plan prepared for a specific neighborhood, park, district, or corridor in town should tie into the larger green infrastructure network.**

Individual public realm master plans created for the town should consider connections to a larger, or longer, framework of open space, greenways, or parks advocated for in the comprehensive plan. Portions of the town-wide green infrastructure network should be preserved (or constructed) by developers if-when-where it crosses private property.



**Develop a public arts program for specific areas within the town's public realm.**

A public arts program administered by town officials for specific areas in the public realm offers and opportunity to show off the community's creativity and appreciation for unique experiences. Similar communities in the United States have included sculptures, murals, memorials, digital media, and live performances in their public art programs. Rotating exhibits keep spaces interesting and encourage repeat visitors for an area.



**Emphasize the public realm as a unifying feature when contemplating new development and redevelopment projects.**

Public spaces in Garner should make a positive and consistent statement about the high-quality of life and positive experiences desired in the community. Private property along a street, park, or other (quasi) public space in town should include lighting, landscaping, signage, art, or other design features that complement a common vision for the larger district, destination, or corridor it is adjacent to or within. Design features that enhance aesthetics, increase the comfort and safety for users, and reinforce the human scale of places and spaces should be the priority for improvements targeted in or adjacent to the public realm.

Some corridors or destinations in town may have a public realm master plan to guide investments. In the absence of a specific plan, the goals for investments within and adjacent to the town's entire public realm include:

- Use elements of the public realm as organizing features for a neighborhood, district, or activity center.
- Emphasize consistent design features or treatments for a corridor or destination that create a common sense of place for users.
- Think of streets as linear parks with public spaces and activated private spaces (e.g., outdoor seating) located throughout the corridor.
- Increase minimum open space requirements for private property adjacent to the public realm in terms of size, shape, and location to activate spaces.
- Reimagine the definition of open space adjacent to the public realm to include, but not be limited to, plazas, outdoor seating, and pocket parks that activate spaces. The expanded definition of open space should create a vibrant public realm while recognizing the needs of private investment to make a project viable.



# Spotlight on: US 70 Bridges

## Work with Others to Program Design Treatments for the Bridges over US 70 that Project a Unique Identity and Sense of Place for Garner

US 70 was originally part of the Central Highway system that ran adjacent to downtown via Garner Road. Continued growth in the region and its demands for faster, more-direct vehicle connections between the mountains and the sea led to a bypass around downtown built in the 1950s. This is the present-day US 70 that extends through Garner. Today, large, suburban-scale businesses have become a dominating feature for long stretches of the highway as it runs through Garner — places that look like anywhere else in suburban USA.

The highway creates a physical, visual, and psychological divide in the community. Other communities in the United States are working with their local departments of transportation to stylize certain bridges and underpasses that accompany the highway. Most aesthetic improvements are programmed with other safety or capacity improvements identified for the bridges or underpasses.

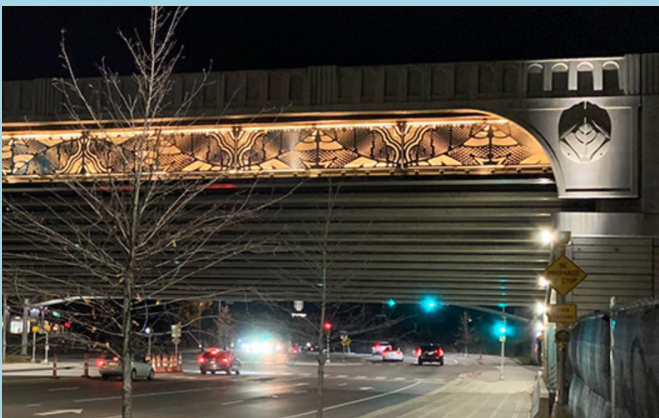
Recommended aesthetic improvements for bridges or underpasses on US 70 in Garner should consider unique colors, materials, shapes, lettering, art, or structures that say “I am in Garner” and welcome visitors traveling east or west between home, work, shopping, and entertainment destinations.



### Image and Source Credits:

Above: City of Mauldin, SC, Mauldin City Trail Bridge Over I-385, 2022  
([www.greenvillejournal.com](http://www.greenvillejournal.com))

Right: Image and Source Credit: The Villages Community, Connectivity Bridges and Tunnels, FL, 2023 ([www.thevillages.com](http://www.thevillages.com))



**Image and Source Credits:**

Top: CODAworx, Petersburg, VA  
Community Gateway, 2020  
([www.codaworx.com](http://www.codaworx.com))

Above, left: Vicki Scuri Siteworks,  
Capital Boulevard Bridges Raleigh,  
NC, 2021 ([www.vickiscuri.com](http://www.vickiscuri.com))

Above, right: : Wikipedia, Ybor City  
Entrance Signage, Tampa, FL, 2023  
([www.en.Wikipedia.org](http://www.en.Wikipedia.org))

Right: Dreamspider's Blog, NCDOT,  
town, and local artists beautify  
Asheville bridge, 2009  
([www.dreamspider.wordpress.com](http://www.dreamspider.wordpress.com))

