

# Norman Signage and Wayfinding Plan

**Prepared for the City of Norman, Norman Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Norman Chamber of Commerce**

**September 2013**



# Acknowledgements

## **Partners**

City of Norman  
Norman Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Norman Chamber of Commerce

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Shawn O’Leary – City of Norman  
David Riesland – City of Norman  
John Woods – Norman Chamber of Commerce

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Roger Brown – Norman Public Schools  
Courteney Gill – Sooner Mall  
Jana Moring – Norman Public Arts Board  
Michael Palermo – Downtown Merchants  
Paula Price – Norman Regional Health System  
Andy Reiger – The Norman Transcript  
Mike Moorman – The University of Oklahoma  
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Jeff Stewart – Campus Corner Merchants  
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Don Wood – Norman Economic Development Coalition  
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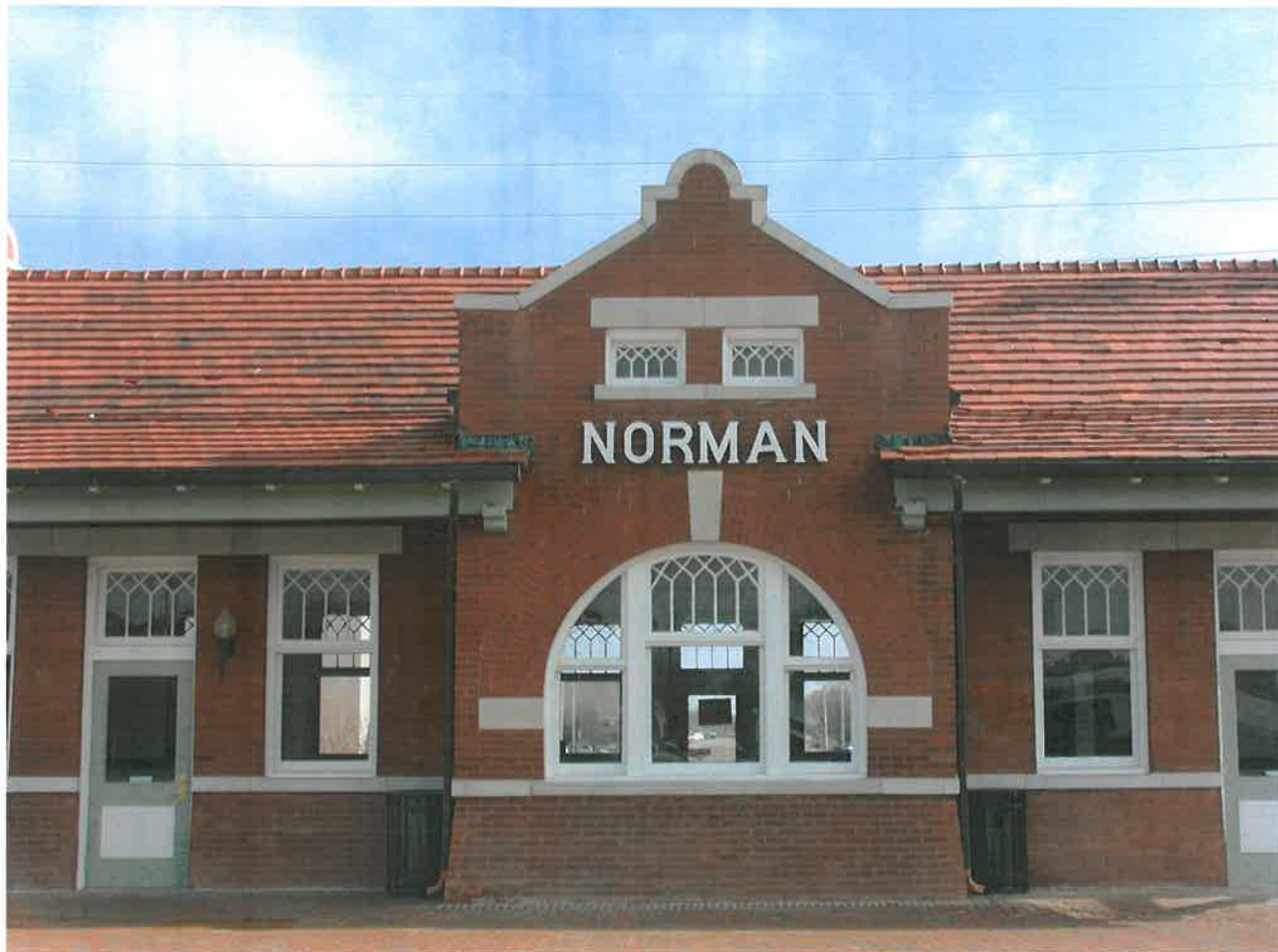
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## Project Introduction

The City of Norman (City), Norman Convention and Visitors' Bureau (NCVB) and the Norman Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) share an interest in helping citizens and visitors find their way to retail districts, entertainment venues, and cultural attractions. Visitors from out of town are often in Norman for a single purpose. Connecting these visitors with Norman's abundance of destinations provides the opportunity to generate more tourism dollars.

The development of a wayfinding program will make it easier for people to navigate Norman. Wayfinding encompasses the ways that people orient themselves in physical space and find their way from place to place. Wayfinding should be easy to grasp and should provide standardized signage, symbols, colors, and images to serve all visitors and tourists.

### Partnership and Goals

In December 2011, the City, NCVB and the Chamber formed a partnership to develop a city branding and wayfinding program for Norman. This initiative is an economic development tool, with the potential to increase visits to Norman destinations. With this objective in mind, the partnership set forth the following goals:

- Design an easily understood, user-friendly distinct navigational system guiding visitors to and from City destinations

- Promote tourist, historical, and cultural destinations, as well as support and assist the local retail market
- Build upon the City's existing identity and reflect in the wayfinding components and overall marketing
- Identify potential funding sources for future wayfinding implementation

The partners issued a request for proposal to interested design firms. The **Guernsey / Kolar Design** team was selected to lead the project. The scope of work for the project included identifying an overall vision and brand, conducting an audit and analysis, establishing criteria and destinations for inclusion, providing recommendations for signage types and placement, creating a 'kit of parts' of standard design elements, identifying potential funding sources, and compiling work products into a final report. The City facilitated the production of the plan and provided support to the consultant team.



# Approach

## Participants and Process

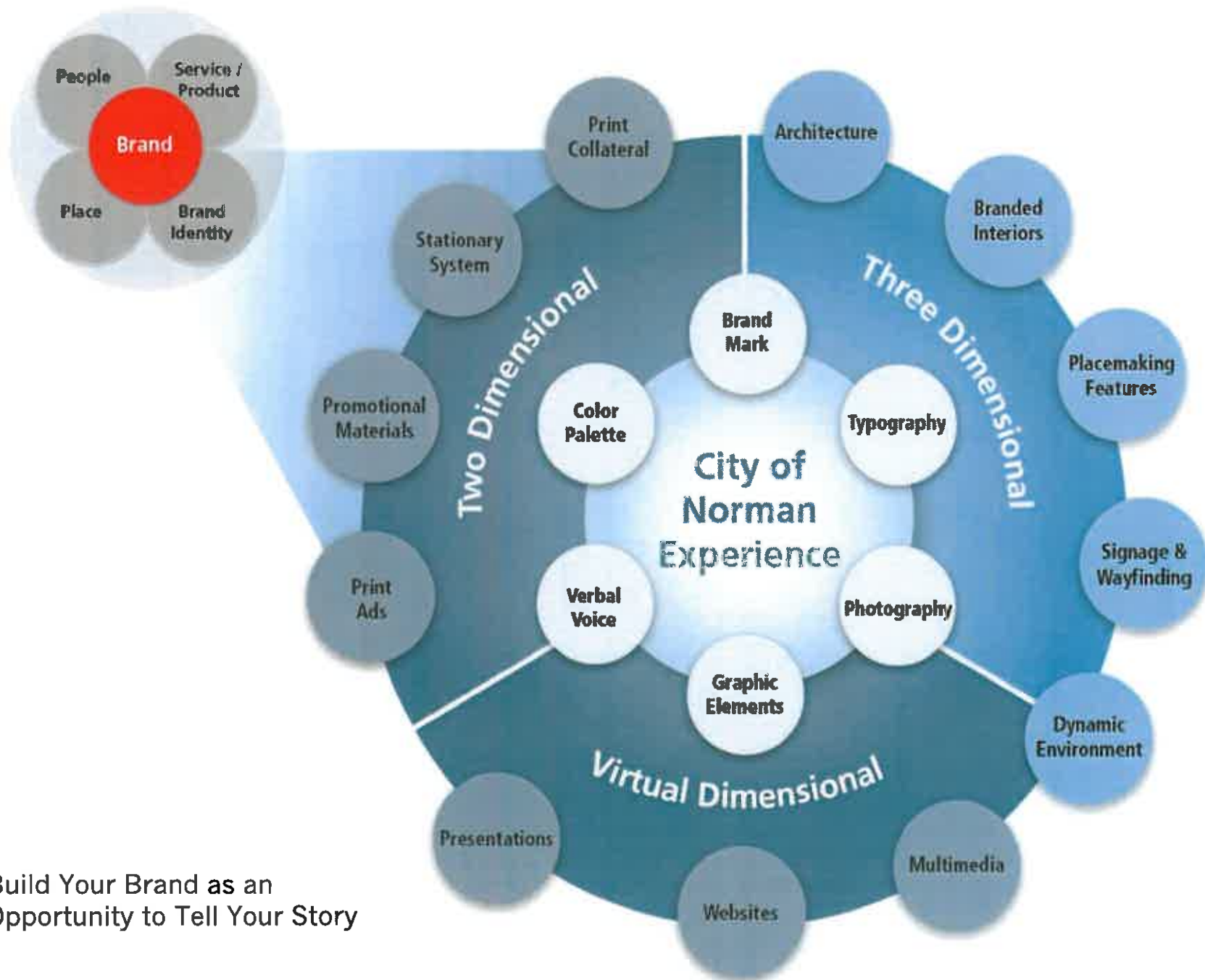
The Norman Signage and Wayfinding Plan must accurately reflect the personality and priorities of the community. In order to best accomplish this objective, the partners and the consultant team worked with a steering committee, a stakeholder committee, and held public open houses to gather input from the community.

The steering committee, formed by representatives of the project partners, provided guidance to the consultant team on a monthly basis to guide the work product. The Stakeholder Committee broadened the range of participation by including representatives from various entities in the community. Members helped inform the process by participating in an online survey and meeting with the team at two points in the process to offer input and guidance. Additional coordination via email and telephone took place to resolve specific issues.

## Building a Brand

The information gathered by involving the community generated many responses and opinions about Norman's defining characteristics. Developing a consensus and conveying it in a meaningful and consistent way tells the story of Norman. This process is referred to as Branding.





Build Your Brand as an  
Opportunity to Tell Your Story

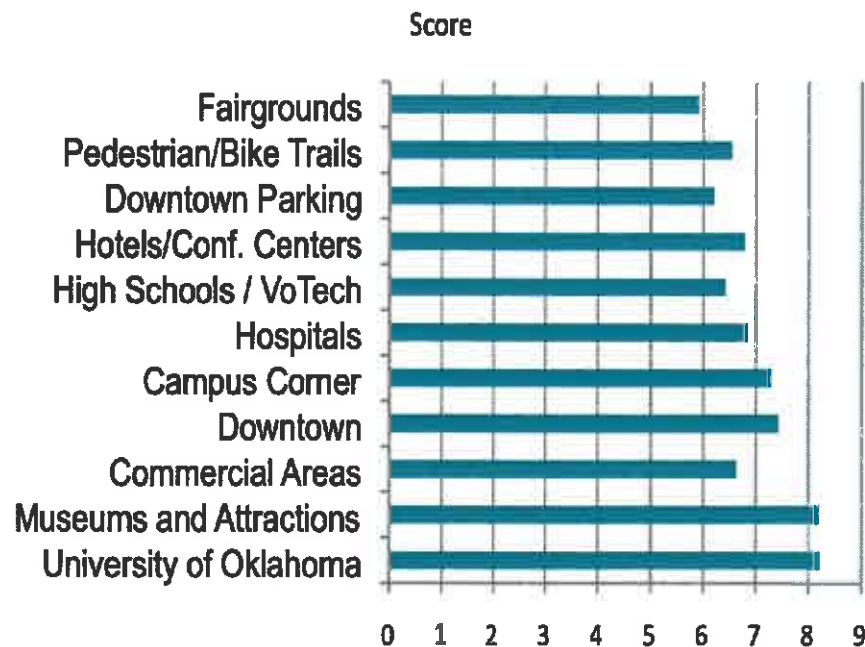


The Signage and Wayfinding Plan began the first steps of addressing Branding by analyzing the logos and color schemes in use throughout the community. Given the broad goals of the Signage and Wayfinding Plan, the effort moved forward once consensus was reached regarding the key elements of the Norman brand.

The Signage and Wayfinding effort is one component of the overall brand that will help define and reinforce the image, character, and experience of Norman. It helps to convey Norman's sense of place, the personality of its citizens, and the unique history and heritage of the community. The branding effort is an ongoing public relations opportunity for the community.

## Stakeholder Survey – Sample Questions and Responses

What destinations/points of interest are most important?



When you think of the community of Norman, what characteristics are most important?

- Arts and Cultural Experiences
- Sense of Community
- Friendly Citizens
- Variety of Opportunities and Activities
  - Shopping
  - Dining
  - Recreation
  - Festivals
  - Cultural events
- Quality of the Community
- Quality of our Residents
- Good Schools
- The University of Oklahoma
  - Students
  - Events
  - University atmosphere

# Analysis

## Priorities

Identifying the characteristics of Norman to celebrate in the brand and incorporate into the wayfinding system was the team's first task. An online survey provided initial comments from the Stakeholder Committee. The goal of the survey was to determine what destinations are viewed as the most important and to learn what characteristics set Norman apart from other cities.

The individuals surveyed shared many of the same priorities. Sample questions and responses are shown at left. The complete survey results are included as Appendix A.

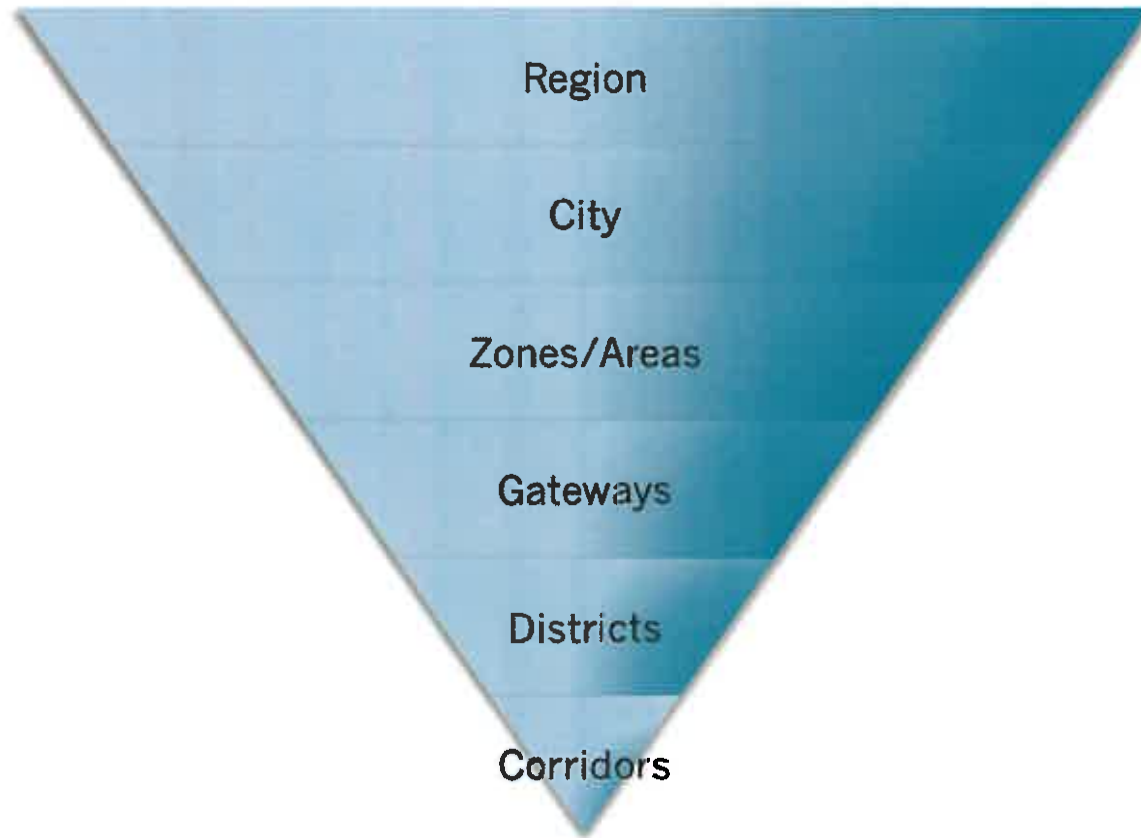
## Existing Conditions

An audit of existing conditions was conducted to provide a sense of the elements currently used to brand the community. A list of all signage not in compliance with the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) was provided. The City of Norman previously utilized distinct street signs incorporating the city logo and red backgrounds, which are not in compliance with current MUTCD standards. The City is in the process of transitioning to panels utilizing a standard green background with the city logo at the end of the sign.

In addition to reviewing the audit, the team visited numerous sites throughout the community to encounter existing directional signage. Brand strategies used by the City, the NCVB, and the Chamber were also gathered.

## Hierarchy of Considerations

Visitors to new communities can be introduced to a hierarchy of information in order to provide an understanding of the community. Norman as a whole can be chunked down into large zones, then more specific districts, with neighborhoods and corridors within the districts. Individual destinations are called out within the districts, including public parking. Detailed information for pedestrians completes the system.



## Zones

Norman was settled during the Oklahoma Land Run of 1889. Main Street was developed as the commercial core of town, adjacent to the Santa Fe Railroad. The University of Oklahoma, founded in 1890, anchored the southern edge of town. The areas adjacent to Main Street and OU are home to many neighborhoods, and form the core of Norman.

After World War II, development in Norman began to spread away from the core area. The construction of Interstate 35 in the 1950s spurred development to the west, along with a new commercial corridor along the highway. Residential and commercial development also occurred to the east addition, spurred by proximity to Tinker Air Force Base and the creation of Lake Thunderbird in the 1960s.

The wayfinding system will focus on three main zones:

- Central Norman: the core of the community; includes Downtown Norman, the University of Oklahoma, Campus Corner, City Hall, Cleveland County Courthouse, Norman Regional Hospital, numerous historic structures, and many distinct neighborhoods.
- East Norman: the area the east of 12<sup>th</sup> Avenue East; includes a commercial corridor along 12<sup>th</sup> Ave., residential neighborhoods and large lot developments, Lake Thunderbird State Park, and various businesses.
- West Norman: the area west of Interstate 35. West Norman is primarily residential development, but also includes the Norman HealthPlex, Sooner Mall, and active commercial areas along both 36<sup>th</sup> Avenue West and I-35.





## Gateways

The visitor experience at entry points to Norman varies greatly. Arterial roads are marked with signage recognizing various aspects of the community; however, there is not a consistent treatment. A standard Welcome to Norman message and removal of multiple signs is recommended, and will contribute to the branding effort.

Distinct entry points to Norman provide an opportunity to differentiate Norman from other communities and showcase the unique attributes of the community. The city lies at the boundary between the cross-timbers forest and the central plains prairies. Its heritage includes Native American culture and Land Run settlers. The University of Oklahoma provides over one hundred years of tradition as well as continuous innovation and discovery.

The major gateways to Norman along I-35 were studied by the City and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT). Custom-designed elements will enhance the freeway interchanges and depict elements of Norman's history and culture. The wayfinding system design will echo these design elements to reinforce the design concepts and provide continuity.

## Districts

Identifying specific districts within the zones is a challenge. Downtown Norman is a distinct district, as is the University of Oklahoma. University North Park and Porter Avenue are both associated with specific plans, and several neighborhoods are designated as historic. The Wayfinding Plan focuses on districts that are currently recognized by the community as a whole.



Thematic Gateway Elements Developed for I-35 by  
ODOT, the City of Norman, and the ODOT Consultant

## Destinations

Norman offers a multitude of interesting attractions and destinations. The wayfinding system will be a valuable economic development tool, and must reflect the destinations of greatest interest to tourists and visitors. Increased traffic and awareness of multiple destinations will help travelers reach their destinations, and will build traffic to other points of interest.

Guiding visitors to specific destinations is the most basic and overarching goal for the signage and wayfinding initiative. The initiative is envisioned as an overarching system, with a family of sign types. The initial phase of implementation is geared toward guiding tourists from outside the region to major destinations. Future phases of implementation will focus on placemaking efforts to define districts and guide travelers to explore districts and corridors.

The Steering Committee, Stakeholder Committee, and the Consultant Team developed a master list of potential destinations to be included in the wayfinding system. The master list was first evaluated based upon whether the destinations met ODOT criteria for highway signage. The majority of potential destinations met ODOT criteria, therefore the team developed additional criteria for inclusion in Norman's program.

The wayfinding system cannot accommodate all destinations and businesses that would like to be a part of the system. It is necessary to prioritize potential destinations in an equitable manner. The following selection criteria were developed to provide an equitable method to consider inclusion of a destination.

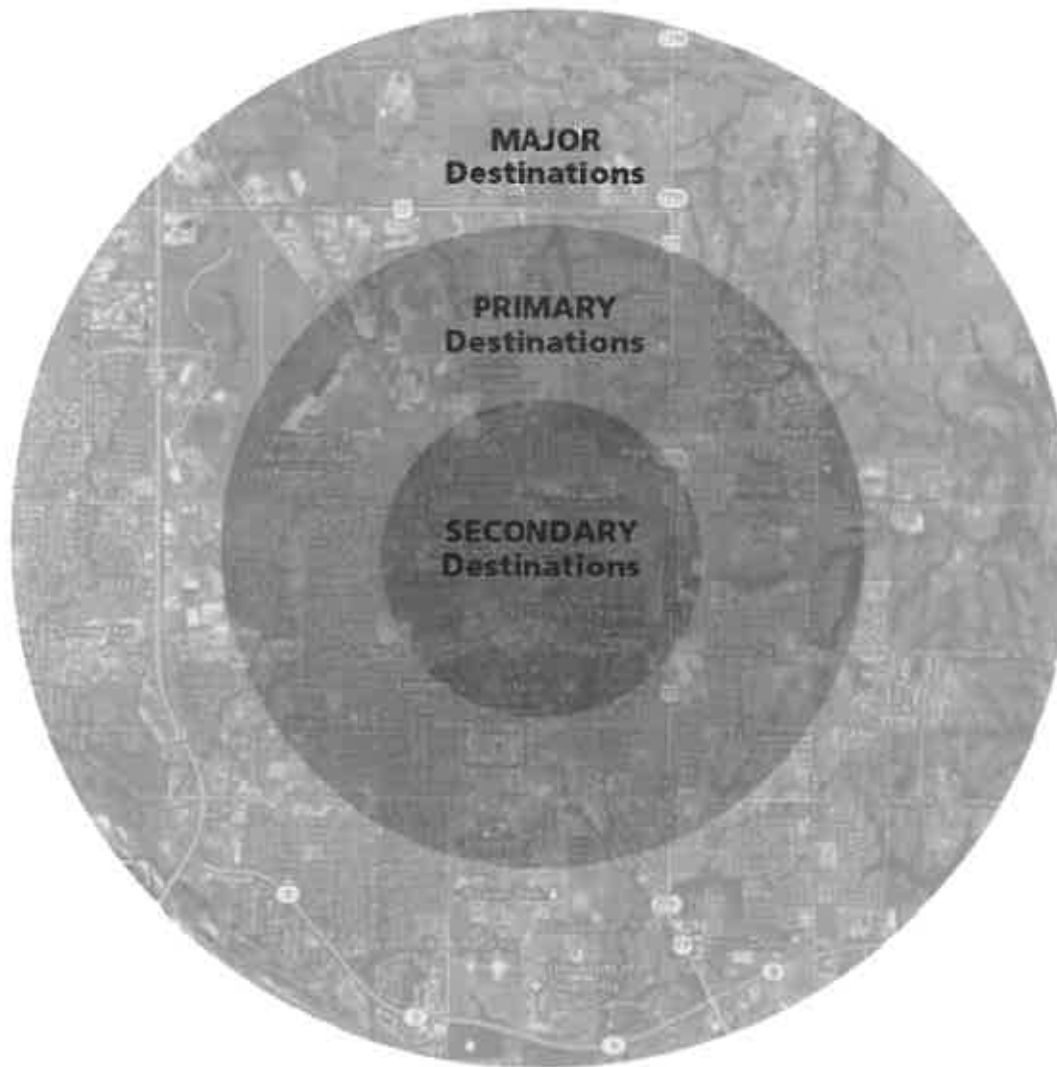
#### Selection Criteria:

- Publically owned
- Not-for-profit organization
- Educational institution serving over 400 attendees
- Providing services to the general public (with a capacity of over 200 visitors)
- Annual attendance (minimum 10,000)
- Regional significance
- Host to major events

Selection Criteria are further discussed in Appendix B, Selection Criteria. The results of applying the selection criteria are illustrated in Appendix C, Phase I Major and Primary Destinations and Appendix D, Destination Matrix. The City, NCVB, and Chamber collected attendance information. The partners also assisted by working with key stakeholders to discuss transitions from city signage to other wayfinding systems, particularly in the case of OU. Ongoing discussions will be crucial to successfully merge efforts by the City, the Chamber, and the CVB with other major entities within Norman.

The avoidance of installing excessive amounts of signage is an important consideration of the wayfinding initiative. In order to maintain consistency, the following entities will not be included in the signage program:

- Destinations that do not meet attendance requirements
- Private businesses
- Religious institutions



The wayfinding system is intended to expand over time. As this occurs, destinations that are not eligible on an individual basis may benefit from Norman's efforts to identify and develop distinct districts. The district branding and wayfinding will serve as an umbrella for multiple smaller destinations within the district.

The result of the evaluation and discussions was a breakdown of the destinations into major, primary, and secondary destinations.

**Major destinations** have the largest attendance figures and draw from a national and regional audience. Major destinations will be signed from I-35 and must also meet ODOT criteria.

**Primary Destinations** appear on primary streets leading from I-35 and draw from a regional audience.

**Secondary Destinations** appear on primary streets within a district or a corridor.

## Design Process

The design process synthesizes the information gathered in the previous steps, and develops thematic elements to represent Norman. Analyzing the attributes and priorities of the community, reviewing Norman's existing signage, and determining a general number of destinations were key steps in the development of the system design. Multiple options were developed by the design team and evaluated by the Steering Committee and the Stakeholder Committee.

Concept development focused on different aspects of Norman's identity. Preliminary designs were generated with themes related to the city flag, the NCVB brand, the ODOT enhancement themes, and branding and wayfinding materials used elsewhere in Central Oklahoma. In the end, stakeholders selected the 'Uniquely Norman' concept, which incorporates elements of each of the preliminary designs.

### Elements of the Design

The design celebrates the collective strength of the community. The design process included various sources of inspiration, including:

- The sunburst and cog/gear of the current city logo and branding materials
- The architectural style of iconic structures in the community
- A subtle arch below the word Norman, similar to the NCVB and Chamber branding
- The existing use of iconography



- The themes, patterns, and textures of the I-35 enhancements

These elements were considered as various concepts were explored for the design. This process led to the final recommendations for the design

### Kit of Parts

The Kit of Parts translates the colors, type styles, iconography, typography, and patterns of the design inspiration into the components of the wayfinding system. The Kit of Parts provides the ingredients and the framework for the overall system, and is built to expand over time.

### Design Considerations

The wayfinding system will convey Norman's brand and identity as illustrated with the Kit of Parts. Other concerns guiding the design include:

- Durable materials
- Components that can be fabricated and installed using city staff and the city sign shop
- Standardization of components
- MUTCD regulations / color limitations
- Ease of maintenance

## Final Recommended Kit of Parts

### District Icons



City of Norman



University of Oklahoma

### Color Palette



ODOT Blue



ODOT Red

### Typography

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
1234567890

Frutiger

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
1234567890

Times New Roman

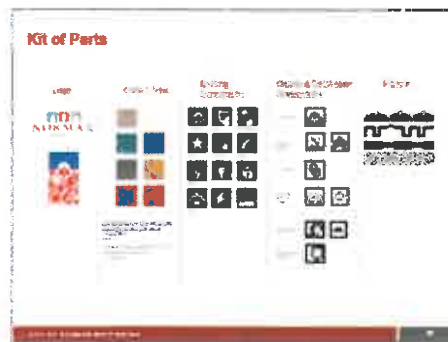
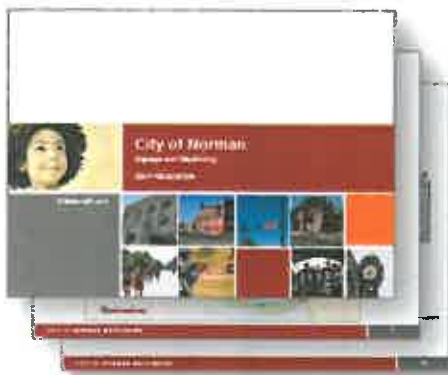
### Final Signtype



### Pattern



ODOT Prairie Grass





Vehicular Directional Sign

## Color

The wayfinding system serves a visual language to connect people with places. The addition of color reinforces the brand. The selection for the signage is the blue and red palette shown at right. As icons are developed and added to the system, additional colors may be utilized for the icon portion of the system.

Red and blue are standard colors available from the city's supplier of sign materials. The colors comply with standard MUTCD guidance, maintaining eligibility for funding from federal sources. The materials would be reflective vinyl on metal backer boards.

The majority of the initial phases of signage will be directional signage for vehicular traffic. The typical panel detail is shown at left.



Family of Sign Styles

### Family of Sign Styles

The various components of the Kit of Parts are combined to form the family of sign types. Once again, a hierarchy is in place to help convey information in a consistent manner. Vehicular directional signage directs visitors to major destinations and districts, transitions to specific signage within districts, and helps identify parking and transit options. Neighborhood level signage, specialty identifiers, and pedestrian directional signage complete the family.

As the initial City's overall Branding and Signage and Wayfinding program expands, additional products from the family of signs will be added. The continuity will help reinforce the message and convey a cohesive community.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Administration

Implementation of a signage and wayfinding program is a complex endeavor. Success will require the diligent application of standards, regular updates, and ongoing maintenance. An updated Memorandum of Understanding between the partners could be drafted and adopted to clarify roles and responsibilities going forward. The partners should consider two main recommendations:

1. Draft and adopt a standardized sign code to regulate public and private signage.
  - a. Enforce code violations and remove temporary signage
  - b. Provide clear standards for all signage within the Norman city limits
    1. Include guidelines related to how many words on sign
  - c. Facilitate standardization of messaging
  - d. Require permits and design review
2. Convene a standing committee with responsibility for reviewing signage applications and monitoring the expansion of the wayfinding system
  - a. Address emerging districts
  - b. Vetting proposed destinations
  - c. Maintain hierarchy of system
  - d. Review funding requests and allocate budget
  - e. Work with other entities that wish to partner and extend the system into new areas
  - f. Monitor maintenance and replacement needs



- g. Connect the signage and wayfinding efforts with ongoing city planning and development initiatives
- h. Work with interested groups to develop iconography for emerging districts, neighborhood-level signage
- i. Continue dialogue with OU and address transition from city signage to campus signage as seamlessly as possible

The overriding goal of the long-term program administration is for the community to build one voice together. The proposed sign code and signage committee will provide a standard approach to dealing with signage in Norman, and will assure continuity over time.

#### Funding Strategies

The foundation of the wayfinding system design was to create a system that provides high quality and style yet is affordable to install and maintain. The signage family utilizes standard components and readily available materials. The initial installation and ongoing maintenance costs will be manageable, and the City of Norman signage shop has the equipment and personnel to maintain the system. The City Sign Shop may also be able to assist with limited fabrication and installation.

Funding strategies for implementation include the following:

- City of Norman capital funds
- City of Norman general fund (ongoing replacement / maintenance)
- Sponsorship by private entities (for example, NCVB, Chamber, Downtowners) or private businesses/individuals

- A 'Pay to Play' type system could be adopted, requiring a certain match from entities listed on the signage, or an annual assessment. Funds could be split between initial installation cost and an ongoing maintenance fund.
  - Cincinnati's Uptown District is an example where every stakeholder is assessed an annual fee, allowing all signage to be replaced on a 20 year basis
  - City of Columbus is another example of a partnership
  - The signage committee, City, NCVB, and Chamber can negotiate agreements based upon information from peer cities and stakeholder input
- Explore potential grants
  - Federal Highway funds (likely Transportation Enhancement funding) administered through ODOT
  - CDBG funding
  - Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation
  - Oklahoma Arts Council

## Implementation

Phase I Implementation will focus on major and primary destinations. Signage along I-35 should be updated in conjunction with the current ODOT roadway improvements. Signage to primary destinations can be implemented over several years. Major and primary destinations for Phase I are outlined in Appendix C. A full list of destinations

developed as part of this plan is included in Appendix D. A preliminary proposed sign layout and an opinion of probable cost is provided as Appendix E, Phase I Implementation and Preliminary Cost Estimate.

The fabrication and installation of a pilot project will help refine the detailed design of the system components. The pilot project preliminary sign design and layout plan can be part of a design-bid approach, with detailed oversight from city project managers. Once shop drawings are accepted, the pilot project prototype signs should be fabricated and installed. The approved prototypes can serve as master templates. Proposed sign content and an opinion of probable cost is included as Appendix F, Pilot Project.

Detailed pricing for the overall proposed Phase I installation can be obtained from private companies as well as the city sign shop. Specialty components such as the icons will need to be contracted separately. A master inventory of signage text, locations, and date of installation should be maintained to assist with system maintenance and long-term budgeting.

### Dynamics of the System and Ongoing Community Development

The planning process included the review and consideration of various emerging districts throughout the community. The priorities of the plan dictated that only districts that are widely recognized now could be accommodated at this time. The system design and the flexibility of the kit of parts have capacity for the addition of new pictograms and iconography to facilitate the branding of individual districts and neighborhoods.

Districts or neighborhood groups can work together to create a unique icon, which will become recognizable in the broader context of the community. The icon can be plugged into the family of sign types to generate the appropriate materials. Opportunities to partner with environmental graphic design students at the University of Oklahoma and to showcase emerging community artists should be considered as a means to expand the iconography.

Ongoing dialogue with the University of Oklahoma is encouraged. This ongoing relationship can enhance the experience of visitors to the University by promoting the excellent shops, restaurants, and cultural experiences available throughout the community. The University is a major component of Norman's



Central Norman Neighborhoods

identity. Connecting people visiting Norman for business or pleasure to the attractions and resources of OU helps showcase the tremendous significance of Oklahoma's largest institution of higher education.

The numerous neighborhoods present in Central Norman are an example of the great potential to celebrate the diversity and character of the community. As neighborhood plans are updated and grassroots interest grows, Norman's diverse neighborhoods could be celebrated and included in an expanded wayfinding system. Collaboration between private groups and city staff from various departments could support this expansion of the system.

#### Conclusion – Ongoing Opportunities

The Signage and Wayfinding Plan will achieve the greatest impact when paired with community-wide efforts to portray a consistent brand for Norman. The partnership between the City, NCVB, and the Chamber provides a strong foundation for moving forward. The partner representatives involved in the plan have contributed strong ideas and support for the broader branding mission. Their leadership and advocacy can help broaden the outreach of the branding effort to connect with others in the community.

Partners can each revisit branding opportunities within their organizations, and encourage affiliated groups to do the same. Applications can include:

- Updated stationary and print collateral
- Unified promotional materials and advertisements
- Standardized presentation templates

- Common elements on websites
- Ongoing gateway and placemaking features
- Design references throughout the built environment
- Transit – bus stops and shelter designs / promoting brand

As the wayfinding system and proposed signage code are adopted and implemented, community building and outreach components can continue to be added. An example of longer term goals would be development of a standardized monument sign (possibly in several locations) to promote community events. Messaging would be approved and managed by the proposed signage committee.

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