

Sulphur Springs, Texas

Population 15,868

Central Square of this county seat was a parking lot before planning started in 2007. “When you tell people you’re going to take away parking, you have to be able to look them in the eye,” says city manager Marc Maxwell. Sulphur Springs planned to slow down traffic and make sidewalks wider and streets narrower.



The day the sod went in on the central square, people started coming. They brought picnic baskets and watched while the square was transformed. Since 2012, downtown has become a destination. Turkey trots, 5K races, a marathon planned and executed in three days--all originating from the square. People have even gotten married on the streets downtown.

Friday is movie night, attracting 200-300 people. Kids play in the fountain and pizza delivery cars are a common sight. Saturdays feature a market with music, vendors, and food trucks. The square has become the center of social life.



Glass-enclosed Public Restroom

Sulphur Springs is home to an unusual tourist attraction: Glass-enclosed public toilets. The one-way mirror reflects outward to the square, allowing parents to take one child in while watching another play.

When the project started, most buildings downtown were vacant. Now the vibrant downtown boasts local shops and sidewalk cafes. People stop Maxwell on the street to tell him they are proud of their town now.



➤ If you don’t make that mental jump to having the streets available to all, you’ll make some errors. Moving cars is just one of many responsibilities.

➤ Find out about new urbanism and the Project for Public Spaces.

Thank you to and photos courtesy of Marc Maxwell and the City of Sulphur Springs