

**SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF THE
HARLINGEN CITY COMMISSION &
PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION**

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2025, AT 5:30 P.M.
CITY HALL TOWN HALL (2nd FLOOR)
118 E. TYLER AVENUE
HARLINGEN, TEXAS 78550**

This is not a Meeting of the Harlingen Elective Commission; however, a quorum of the City Commission may be present. Other City Board members may also be present.

1) Call Meeting to Order

- a) Invocation – Commissioner Frank Morales
- b) Pledge of Allegiance
- c) Welcome Citizens

2) Conflict of Interest:

“Under State Law a conflict of interest exists if an advisory board member or certain members of that person’s family has a qualifying financial interest in an agenda item. Members with a conflict of interest cannot participate in the discussion nor vote on the agenda item. Are there any known conflicts of interest to disclose at this time?” **(City Attorney).**

3) Citizen Communication: *At this time, the public is invited to address the Board and speak on any matter not specifically listed for public hearing elsewhere on this agenda. Please note that the Board members may not respond to comments or deliberate on topics addressed.*

4) Presentation by Freese & Nichols, Inc. on the proposed Comprehensive, Downtown, and Parks Plans to be considered for adoption by the Planning and Zoning Commission.

5) Public Hearings: *At this time, the Board will invite members of the public who have filled out the Public Hearing and the Citizen Communication Form to address each item listed in this section. Please limit your comments to the topic of that public hearing. If more than one public hearing is being held, you will be allowed to speak during each topic, provided you have filled out the Public Hearing and Citizen Communication Form for the appropriate topic. If you are signed up for two (2) or more Public Hearings, you will be limited to 5 minutes for all topics.*

- a) Public hearing to consider the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan, and Parks Plan, pursuant to Chapter 213 of the Texas Local Government Code.

6) Action Items: The Board will discuss, consider, and take any action deemed necessary on items listed in this section, including the adoption of a resolution or an ordinance.

- a) Consideration and possible action to adopt an ordinance on first reading approving and adopting the Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan, and Parks Plan, to serve as the official plans of the City of Harlingen in accordance with Chapter 213 of the Texas Local Government Code.

7) Adjournment

The City of Harlingen Planning and Zoning Commission reserves the right to convene into Executive Session at any time during the meeting regarding any agenda item in compliance with the Texas Open Meetings Act, Chapter 551 Government Code.

POSTED the 7th day of November 2025, at 4:00 p.m. and to remain posted continuously for at least 72 hours preceding the scheduled time of said meeting.



Ana Hernandez, AICP, CNU-A, CPM
Planning & Development Director/
Special Projects Director

**AGENDA ITEM
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Meeting Date: **November 13, 2025**

Agenda Item:

Consideration and possible action to adopt an ordinance on first reading approving and adopting the Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan, and Parks Plan, to serve as the official plans for the City of Harlingen in accordance with Chapter 213 of the Texas Local Government Code. Attachment (*Planning and Development Department*).

Prepared By (Print Name): Ana Hernandez, AICP, CNU-A
Title: Planning and Development Director/
Special Projects Director

Signature: *Ana Hernandez*

Brief Summary:

The City of Harlingen selected Freese and Nichols, Inc to develop the city's new comprehensive plan on June 19, 2024 (RFQ No. 2024-09). At the request of the City Commission, Freese and Nichols, Inc. was asked to also develop the parks and downtown master plans. In early September 2024, the city kicked off this project, and it has been underway for over 12 months.

Freese and Nichols has now completed these three core planning documents designed to guide growth and development over the next 25 years: the *Harlingen Horizon – A City on the Rise* Comprehensive Plan, the Parks, Recreation, Open Space & Trails (PROST) Plan, and the Downtown Plan. Together, these plans provide a coordinated framework for land use, infrastructure, housing, transportation, parks and recreation, and downtown revitalization, aligning city investments, policies, and private development with community priorities.

A Steering Committee of city staff, elected officials, and community representatives worked closely with the consultant team to ensure alignment and accountability throughout the planning process. Public engagement was central to this effort, utilizing online mapping tools, surveys, workshops, and open houses. This engagement allowed residents to provide input that directly shaped priorities across all three plans.

Key themes emerging from public input highlighted Harlingen's strengths, including a strong sense of community, family-friendly character, and quality of life. Opportunities identified by the community include expanding retail and business development, improving connectivity and infrastructure, and enhancing parks and trail systems. For downtown, residents emphasized revitalized public spaces, improved building facades, shaded walkways, and stronger pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.

These plans provide the City Commission with a long-term roadmap to guide decisions, investments, and policies. They support proactive planning, ensure alignment across departments, and provide mechanisms to track progress and update priorities over time. Adoption of the plans will formalize guidance for development and investment decisions, enabling the city to achieve the community's vision for growth, quality of life, and downtown vitality.

The Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Commission are requested to review the final plan documents and consider adoption, thereby establishing a clear framework for strategic decisions and city initiatives in the years ahead, pursuant to Section 213 of the Texas Local Government Code.

Funding (if applicable):

Are funds specifically designated in the current budget for the full amount for this purpose? ☐ Yes ☐ No*

*If no, specify source of funding and amount requested:

Finance Director's approval:

☐

Yes

☐

No

☒

N/A

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends approval of the final drafts of the Comprehensive, Downtown, and Parks Plans.

City Manager's approval:

☒

Yes

☐

No

☐

N/A

Comments:

City Attorney's approval:

☒

Yes

☐

No

☐

N/A

ORDINANCE NO. 2025 - _____

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF HARLINGEN, TEXAS, CALLING A PUBLIC HEARING TO BE HELD JOINTLY BY THE CITY COMMISSION AND THE PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION REGARDING THE ADOPTION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE, DOWNTOWN, AND PARKS PLANS TO BECOME EFFECTIVE UPON THEIR PASSAGE AND APPROVAL.

WHEREAS, the City Commission of the City of Harlingen retained a professional planning consultant to assist in the preparation of a new Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan and Parks Plan for the City; and

WHEREAS, the City Commission appointed a Plans Steering Committee (PSC) to guide the recommendations made by the planning consultant for the Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan, and Parks Plan; and

WHEREAS, community meetings and online tools were held throughout the planning process to allow for public engagement and feedback on the Plan content; and

WHEREAS, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board received briefings on the draft Plans in September 2025; and

WHEREAS, the drafts of the Plans were made public on October 10, 2025, in which the community was provided the opportunity to review and provide comments on the draft plan, and those comments were provided as part of the backup for this meeting; and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF HARLINGEN, TEXAS:

SECTION 1: That the Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Plan, and the Parks and Recreation Plan, including all chapters and maps, which are attached hereto and incorporated herein for all purposes, is hereby adopted by the City Commission as a guide and public policy.

SECTION 2: That these Plans are intended to constitute the Comprehensive Plan or Master Plan of the City of Harlingen, Texas, for all matters relating to long-range guidance relative to zoning and land use decisions, land subdivision, thoroughfare construction, park and recreation planning, and growth management as authorized by Chapter 213 of the Texas Local Government Code.

SECTION 3: That it is hereby officially found and determined that the meeting at which this Ordinance is passed was properly noticed and open to the public as required by law.

SECTION 4: That this Ordinance shall become effective on and after its passage and approval.

PASSED and APPROVED on first reading this _____ day of _____, 2025.

PASSED, APPROVED AND ADOPTED on second and final reading this _____ day of _____ 2025.

Norma Sepulveda, Mayor

Mayra Herrera, City Secretary

MEMORANDUM



Innovative approaches
Practical results
Outstanding service

1251 Sadler Drive, Bldg. 1; Suite 1150 + San Marcos, Texas 78666 + 512-213-3200 + FAX 817-735-7491

www.freese.com

TO: Ana Hernandez, Planning and Development Director, City of Harlingen

FROM: Caitlin Admire, Project Manager, Freese & Nichols Inc

SUBJECT: Public Comment on the Draft City Plans

DATE: 11/3/2025

PROJECT: Harlingen City Plans (Comprehensive Plan, Parks Plan and Downtown Plan)

The public draft of the plans were made available online from October 10, 2025 to October 29, 2025. The simple survey allowed participants to download and review the full drafts of the plans then provide their overall support for the plans on a scale of 1-5 and then provide any written comments or feedback they had related to the plans.

Screenshots from the posting on the project website on 10/10/2025:

Get Involved

[Open](#) [Embed](#)

Leave Feedback on the Draft Plan!

The full drafts of the Harlingen Horizon – A City on the Rise Comprehensive Plan, the Harlingen Downtown Plan, and the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan (PROST Plan) are now available for public review and comment. Please download the PDFs provided under “Draft Plans” below and let us know what you think! Public comment will be open through the month of October 2025 with anticipated adoption meetings in November.

On a scale of 1 to 5, how supportive are you of the direction this plan is setting for the future of Harlingen?

Not Supportive

Neutral

Very Supportive

Reset

Feedback will be shared with City Council for consideration prior to adoption of the plan.

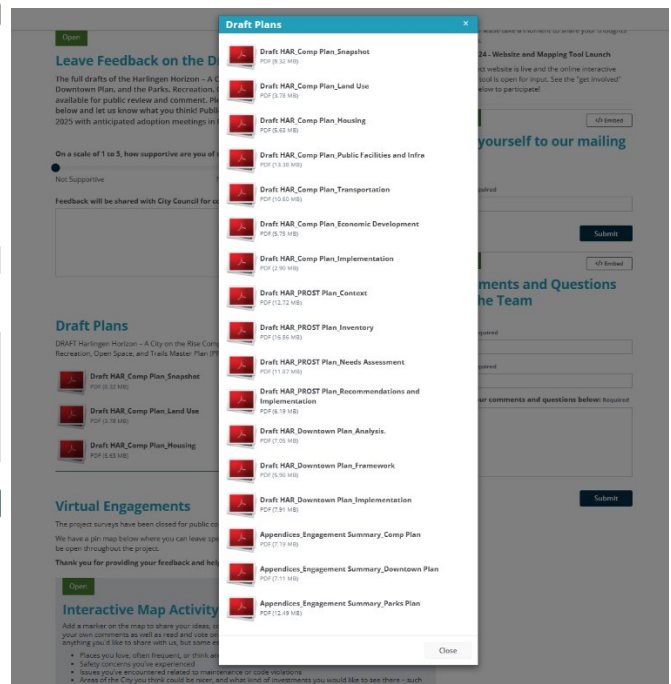
Submit

Draft Plans

DRAFT Harlingen Horizon – A City on the Rise Comprehensive Plan, the Downtown Harlingen Plan, and the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan (PROST Plan)



Draft HAR_Comp_Plan_Snapshot
PDF (8.32 MB)

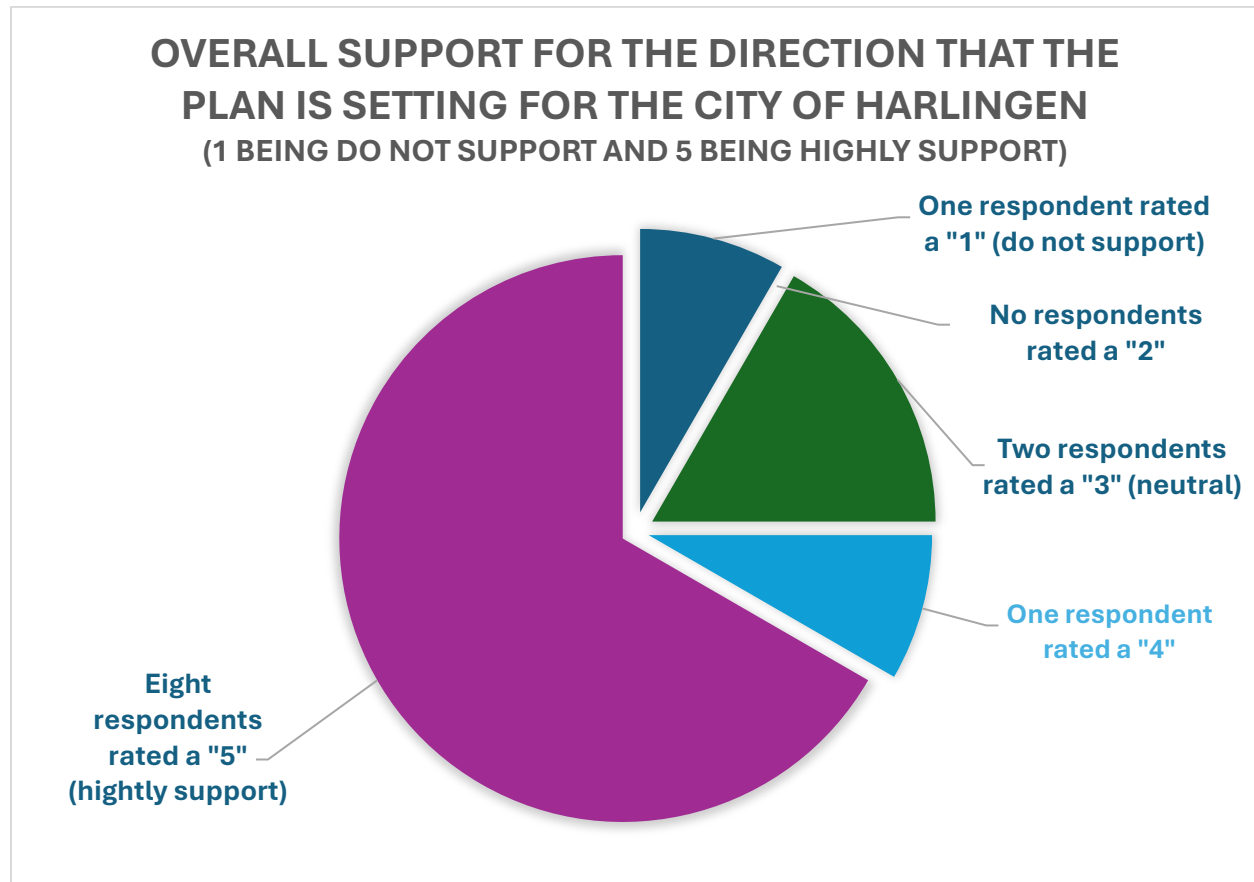


Screenshot from the City's Facebook post asking for input on the draft plans, showing good reach of and interaction with the post:



Feedback from the online comment period is provided below.

Overall, 9 out of 12 respondents (or 75%) showed support for the Plans.



Written comments as they were received.

Comment #1	I think we need more trees and sidewalks all around. We have crazy summers the trees would provide nice shade. More people would want to be out and actually enjoy shopping.
Comment #2	I am NOT in support of additional affordable housing. There are plenty of new developments that offer a wide range of affordability in our city. In fact these developments are being built all over our city in various locations. NOT in favor of the walking trail being extended to pass by neighborhoods. I believe it will increase crime rates and exposure to the homeowners.
Comment #3	I believe what our city needs is clean up. Trash is everywhere and affects the quality of drainage during a flood-likely storm; how outsiders see Harlingen, as a dump and ghetto or prime, pristine location; insect, varmint, and disease control; as well as the safety for children. When trash is lying everywhere throughout the city, any project to upgrade our city is a joke. Just look around. Look at all the debris, and tell me monies to add another park or other amenities is a wise investment. We must start and/or go back to the basics of beautifying our great city. Examples of trash eye sores are everywhere. Just look at the areas around shopping conglomerates like Home Depot, the Valle

	Vista Mall area, the many exit ramps and side lanes of the expressways. Please, let's clean up our city. Let's make what we already have beautiful again instead of taking on a reputation as a ghetto/trashed community. This attention to all the waste that is accumulating on our streets, vacant properties, and the like, must become a priority if property values are destined to rise and the draw of many to our city is to become a reality instead of just a hopeful dream, even after millions of expansion dollars are invested. I see no remedy in any of these plans to the ongoing accumulation of trash throughout Harlingen. I love Harlingen, and I remember past awards and accolades for having a beautiful city, but now I am embarrassed to call Harlingen my home amid all the scuttle buck throughout the Rio Grande Valley (and beyond) of the once beautiful city becoming a Valley Ghetto. Not the image that we want for our city, or is it?
Comment #4	Foundational issues need to be prioritized with incremental movement toward aspirational goals. Foundational issues include street maintenance, drainage and flood mitigation, lighting, and general upkeep. Relative to other Texas cities, there are a significant number of unsightly areas simply due to litter, lack of landscaping maintenance and dilapidated buildings. Our industry seeks to attract professionals who are accustomed to a higher level of environmental pride. It is difficult to tour them around the city and they most often chose to live in better developed and better maintained towns unfortunately. It makes recruitment difficult in an already challenging area - we seek to attract top talent from across the US to Harlingen. There seems to be an increasing presence of homelessness. Something innovative and attractive needs to be done with the mall.
Comment #5	Soy residente de la CD de Harlingen, eh visto con tristeza que la ciudad está perdiendo crecimiento, en comparación por ejemplo con Weslaco, que hoy en día cuenta con numerosas plazas comerciales, lo que se traduce en dinero circulante para la ciudad en cuanto a tasas y demás beneficios que ayudan a la economía de Harlingen, por lo que hago un llamado a las autoridades para que se busquen nuevas inversiones, bueno ya no más car wash creo que ya son suficientes para esta ciudad, sería muy atractivo contar con algún parque acuático que los turistas que van de paso para llegar a la Isla del padre se queden a disfrutar aquí. (I am a resident of Harlingen, and I have sadly observed that the city is losing growth, especially compared to Weslaco, for example, which now boasts numerous shopping centers. This translates into increased revenue for the city in terms of taxes and other benefits that contribute to Harlingen's economy. Therefore, I urge the authorities to seek new investments. No more car washes; I think we already have enough of those. It would be very attractive to have a water park that would encourage tourists passing through on their way to South Padre Island to stay and enjoy themselves here.)

Comment #6	This was a well-laid out plan that was detailed and easy to understand. Everyone has different areas of preference but the initiatives to create an art incubator and enhance eco-tourism would bring huge draws for the city and elevate it's standing in the RGV. The area that is developing the most (loop 499/Briggs Coleman/Lee Means) really needs sidewalk accessibility to be "walkable" for residents to connect on both sides of the loop. At the moment, I would not recommend creating new parks; rather, we need to reinvest and continue to improve the existing parks/playgrounds. HEB Tennis Center especially can expand and Pendleton Park can get more TLC on it's pea gravel track (change to paved). The city needs to upgrade Victor Park tennis courts asap. Harlingen *could be* the tennis epicenter of the RGV and attract more tournaments and support the already thriving and growing tennis community. I am also a Harlingen-based mosaic artist (Mighty Mosaics) who would welcome the opportunity to create murals or points of interest in the city. We have painted murals but mosaics are long-lasting and unique.
Comment #7	There are more people from different areas of the U.S. relocating to Harlingen, due to the affordable cost of living, retirement, or being hired at a new job. I believe it is important to continue to make positive changes to the city for all to enjoy. Harlingen was once the lead city, years ago, until a stagnant mayor prevented progress. Fine dining, shopping, and entertainment is unfortunately found in Brownsville or McAllen. The city needs to catch up, to these other cities, our tax dollars should stay in our boundary. The plan for the future of Harlingen's very enticing for the public to embellish. Follow through, is key for the great citizens of Harlingen to believe. Fruition is a must.
Comment #8	Fix the drainage issues first
Comment #9	I don't know where to comment SO here you go Ask businesses along the expressway that line the entrance to Harlingen if they would donate space to have a WELCOME TO HARLINGEN mural like sign. Example-Valco warehouse and New car dealerships Harlingen badly lacks identifying to motorists where they are at and what they are passing up
Comment #10	That type of plan is not needed in this city. Get more grocery stores, better entertainment venues and stores that people will actually shop at. Every store here is so over crowded and long lines.
Comment #11	Fix all the streets they're in horrible condition.
Comment #12	Fix streets and drainage!!!
Comment #13	Paint the lines on Wilson where it meets the expressway going west.
Comment #14	I am very supportive! However, the city needs a better parks director, so many things are taking forever to happen and from what I am told by city workers and mid level mgmt, it's all cause the director doesn't know how to be a director and manage things. I genuinely worry about city parks projects especially those where Harlingen relies on state and federal funding.



Harlingen Horizon – A City on the Rise



HARLINGEN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Acknowledgments

City Commission

- Norma Sepulveda, Mayor
- Ford Kinsley, Commissioner - District 1
- Daniel Nemecio Lopez, Commissioner - District 2
- Michael Mezmar, Commissioner - District 3
- Frank Morales, Commissioner - District 4
- Rene Perez, Commissioner - District 5

Planning and Zoning Commission

- Nicholas P. Consiglio, Chair
- Carlos A. Sanchez, P.E., Co-Chair
- Olga Vanessa Cantu
- Wandy E. Cruz-Velazquez
- Raul L. Flores
- Sergio Perez
- Luis Villarreal

Consultant Team

- 
- Chance Sparks, FAICP, CNU-A
 - Caitlin Admire, AICP, LEED ND, ENV SP
 - Lahari Peluri
 - Seth Pilger, AICP-C
 - Christopher Wesseln, AICP-C
 - Fred Lopez, FAICP, CTP, CNU-A
 - Samuel Schulte
 - Travis James, MBA

Plan Steering Committee

- Norma Sepulveda, Mayor
- Ford Kinsley, Commissioner - District 1
- Daniel Nemecio Lopez, Commission - District 2
- Luis Villarreal, Planning and Zoning Commission
- Sergio Perez, Planning and Zoning Commission
- Adele Clinton-Solis, Parks and Recreation Board
- Diana Esparza, Parks and Recreation Board
- Lars Keim, Downtown Advisory Board
- John Percy, Downtown Advisory Board

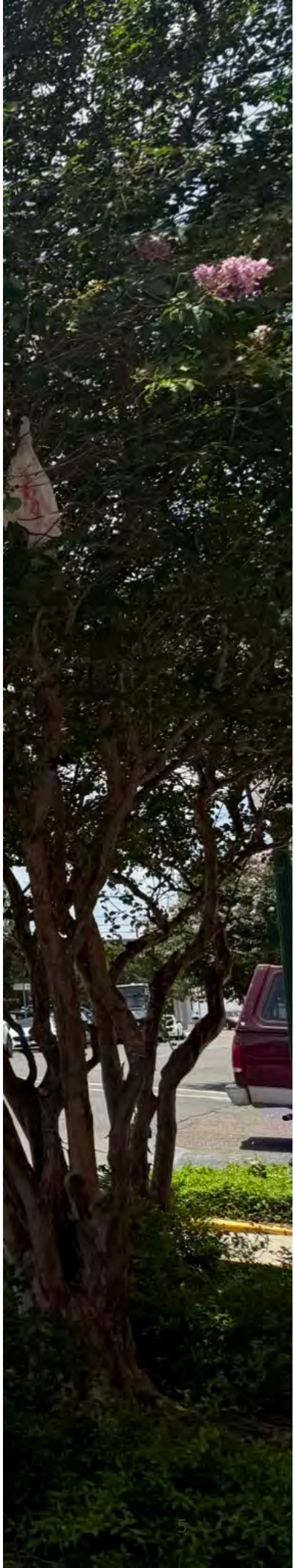
City Staff

- Gabriel Gonzalez, City Manager
- Dr. Josh Ramirez, Assistant City Manager
- Oscar Garcia, Assistant City Manager
- Ana Hernandez, AICP, Planning and Development Director
- Joel Olivo, Assistant Planning and Development Director
- Soledad Nunez, CNU-A, City Planner
- Daniel Diaz, Director of Parks and Recreation
- Juan Mendiola III, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation
- Alexis Riojas, Downtown Director
- Roberto Hernandez, City Engineer



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HARLINGEN CONVENTION CENTER

CHAPTER

1

Community Snapshot

Planning Harlingen's Future



Introduction

The Harlingen Comprehensive Plan is a strategic framework designed to guide growth and development over the next 25 years. It serves as a decision-making tool for city officials, ensuring that policies reflect the community's needs and aspirations. The Plan covers key areas such as land use, infrastructure, economic development and public facilities, helping shape a sustainable and vibrant future for the City. Additionally, the Plan integrates its recommendations with area hazard mitigation plans to enhance community resilience and safety. The Harlingen Comprehensive Plan was developed and funded as part of the Resilient Communities Program (RCP) sponsored by the Texas General Land Office (GLO).

What is the Comprehensive Plan?

A city's comprehensive plan can be defined as a long-range planning tool that is intended to be used by City staff, decision-makers and residents to guide the growth and physical development of a community for long periods of time. The state of Texas has established laws with regard to the way in which incorporated communities can ensure the health, safety and welfare of their residents through a comprehensive plan.

Importance of Comprehensive Planning

- To engage local residents in the decision-making process and achieve consensus on the future vision for Harlingen and its ongoing development needs
- To ensure public facilities can accommodate future growth and development
- To foster coordination between public and private investment sectors
- To minimize potential conflicts between land uses
- To ensure the long-term protection and enhancement of the community's visual image and appearance

Legal Basis for Planning

Chapter 211 of the Texas Local Government Code permits municipalities to implement zoning regulations, while Chapter 212 authorizes the governing body of a community to oversee subdivision development within City limits, with regulations varying based on the community's population. It's crucial to understand that a comprehensive plan is not a zoning ordinance; instead, it serves as a tool to guide future development, infrastructure and land-use decisions. However, the comprehensive plan does provide a foundation for zoning decisions, as outlined in Chapter 211 of the Texas Local Government Code.

In Texas, cities are not mandated by the state government to create or maintain a comprehensive master plan, unlike some other states. Nevertheless, Section 213 of the Texas Local Government Code allows a community's governing body to adopt a plan aimed at promoting sound development decisions and enhancing public health, safety and welfare. Texas cities have the flexibility to define the content and structure of the plan, resulting in a long-term blueprint tailored to the unique needs and capacities of each community.

How to Use this Plan

- 1 The Comprehensive Plan is a strategic tool, not a zoning ordinance, designed to guide future policy and development decisions for the City.
- 2 It serves as a reference for daily decisions, such as evaluating zoning requests, purchasing land and planning infrastructure or public facilities.
- 3 For developers and investors, the Plan outlines broad concepts and policies that promote growth aligned with the community's vision.
- 4 The Plan is dynamic, adapting to changes in political, economic, physical, technological and social circumstances, as well as unforeseen challenges.
- 5 Regular reviews keep the Plan aligned with the community's changing needs and priorities.

A Brief History of Harlingen

Early Harlingen

Before the arrival of European settlers, the Rio Grande Valley was inhabited by several indigenous tribes, including the Coahuiltecan and Carrizo-Comecrudo people. Under Spanish colonialism the region became part of various land grants with land ownership eventually shifting between Spanish, Mexican and American rule. Harlingen’s modern history began in 1904 when Lon C. Hill, a visionary entrepreneur, established the townsite at what was then called “Six Shooter Junction”, naming it after Harlingen, a city in the Netherlands. Hill aimed to create an agricultural hub, capitalizing on the fertile soils and irrigation potential of the Rio Grande Valley. In 1910, the City of Harlingen was officially incorporated into Cameron County with a population of 1,126 people.

Agriculture & Irrigation

Harlingen’s growth surged in the early 20th century with the creation of Harlingen Irrigation District in 1914, which transformed the arid land into fertile farmland. The area became a major producer of crops like citrus, cotton, vegetables and sugarcane, attracting settlers and migrant workers. The construction of railroads facilitated trade and the shipment of agricultural products, cementing Harlingen’s role as a regional economic center.

Harlingen Airforce Base

During World War II, Harlingen gained national significance with the establishment of the Harlingen Army Airfield in 1941, later renamed Harlingen Air Force Base. The base was a major training site for bomber crews and contributed to the city’s population growth and economic development. The base closed in 1962 resulting in a significant population loss for the City; its facilities were repurposed for civilian use as the Rio Grande Valley International Airport.

Modern Development

The City of Harlingen continued to expand throughout the second half of the 20th century, diversifying its economy with healthcare, education and manufacturing. The City became known for its affordable living and central location, which attracted retirees and businesses. Harlingen is also recognized for its medical institutions, including the Valley Baptist Medical Center and UT Health RVG.

Cultural Heritage

Harlingen’s culture reflects its proximity to Mexico, with a vibrant blend of Anglo and Hispanic traditions. In 1994 the Free Trade International Bridge opened approximately 11 miles south of Harlingen further cementing the city’s cultural and economic ties with Mexico.

Events like the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival and the Harlingen Art Night highlight the City’s natural beauty and artistic community. Murals and public art across the City celebrate its diverse history and people. Today, Harlingen remains a vital part of the Rio Grande Valley, balancing its historical roots with modern growth while preserving its unique identity.



Lon C. Hill Building, 1908
Source: MyRGV

Population Demographics

Population Trends

The City of Harlingen has experienced consistent population growth since the early 1900s, with only one decade of negative growth. The upward trend is projected to continue, as evidenced by a 10.8% increase in population over the past decade. A growing population benefits city government by leading to increased economic opportunities, greater tax revenue and enhanced community services.

Harlingen boasts a relatively young demographic, with a median age of 33.2 years compared to the statewide median of 35.5 years. Notably, nearly a quarter of its residents are 14 years old or younger, indicating a vibrant and youthful community. Such a youthful population can be advantageous for a city, often leading to a more dynamic workforce, innovative ideas and a thriving future economy.

Population Estimate and Projection

As of 2023, Harlingen’s estimated population is approximately 72,000 residents. Based on regional growth projections from the Texas Water Development Board, the population is expected to grow to approximately 85,400 by 2030, 97,400 by 2040 and 111,000 by 2050, reflecting a 2.5% compound annual growth rate (CAGR). This population study provides a current estimate and future projection to guide long-range planning and infrastructure investment decisions.

Figure 1. Harlingen Historic Population

Year	Population	% Change
1910	1,126	-
1920	1,784	+ 58.4%
1930	12,124	+ 579.6%
1940	13,306	+ 9.7%
1950	23,229	+ 74.6%
1960	41,207	+ 77.4%
1970	33,504	- 18.7%
1980	43,543	+ 30%
1990	48,735	+ 11.9%
2000	57,564	+ 18.1%
2010	64,849	+ 12.7%
2020	71,829	+10.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census



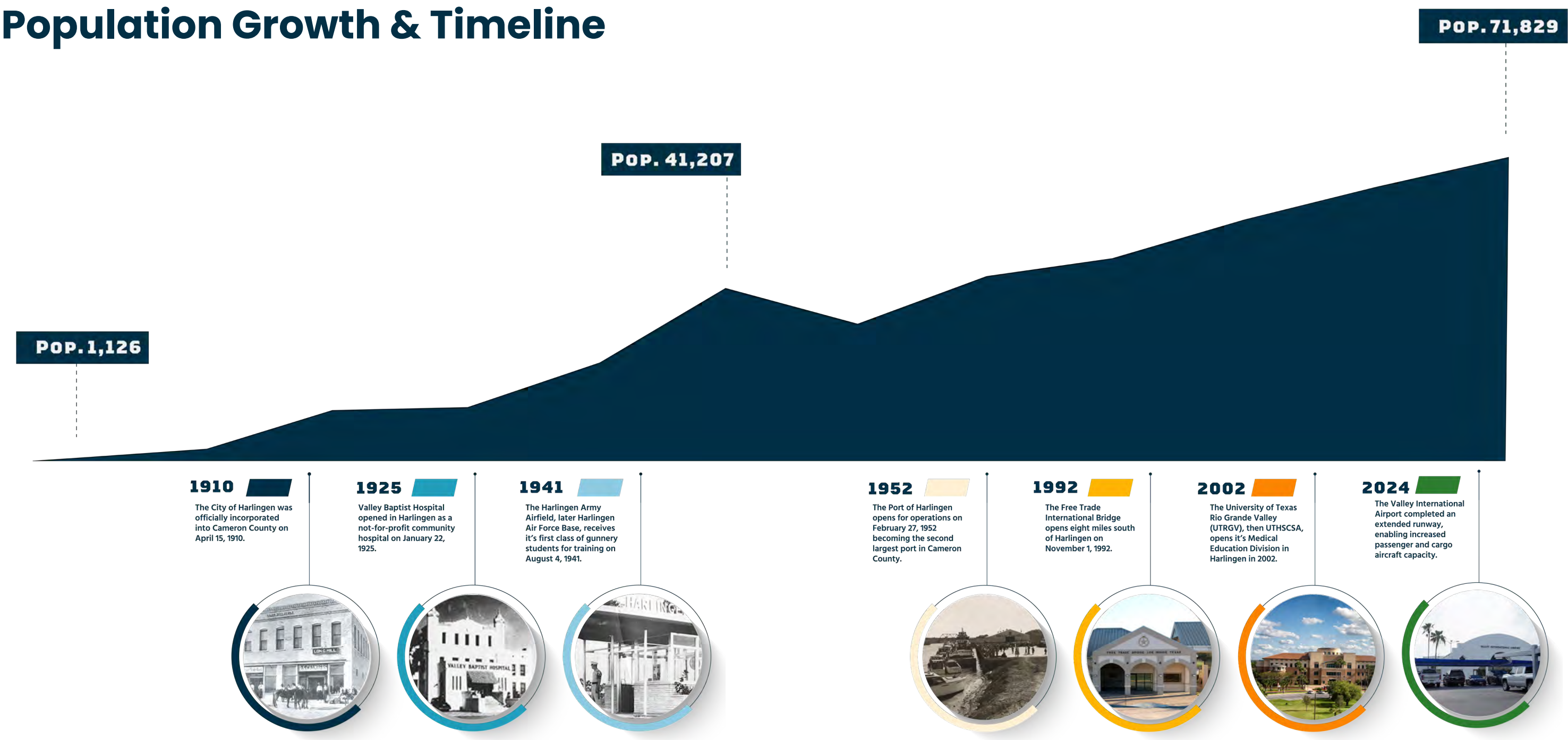
Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Figure 2. Age Comparisons

	Harlingen	Cameron County	Texas
Median Age	33.2	32.4	35.5
Children 14 and Under	24.3%	23.9%	20.8%
Young Adults (20-24)	5.3%	7.6%	6.9%
Mid-Career (35-54)	21.8%	23.4%	26.3%
Senior (65 and Over)	15.9%	14.8%	13.2%

Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Population Growth & Timeline



1 MyRGV. (2018). The Rise and Demise of Harlingen Historical Preservation Society. MyRGV. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <https://myrgv.com/uncategorized/2018/04/15/the-rise-and-demise-of-harlingen-historical-preservation-society/>

2 Valley Baptist Health System. (n.d.). Valley Baptist History. Valley Baptist Health System. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <https://www.valleybaptist.net/about/our-history>

3 Valley International Airport. (n.d.). History of VIA. Valley International Airport. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <https://flythevalley.com/history/>

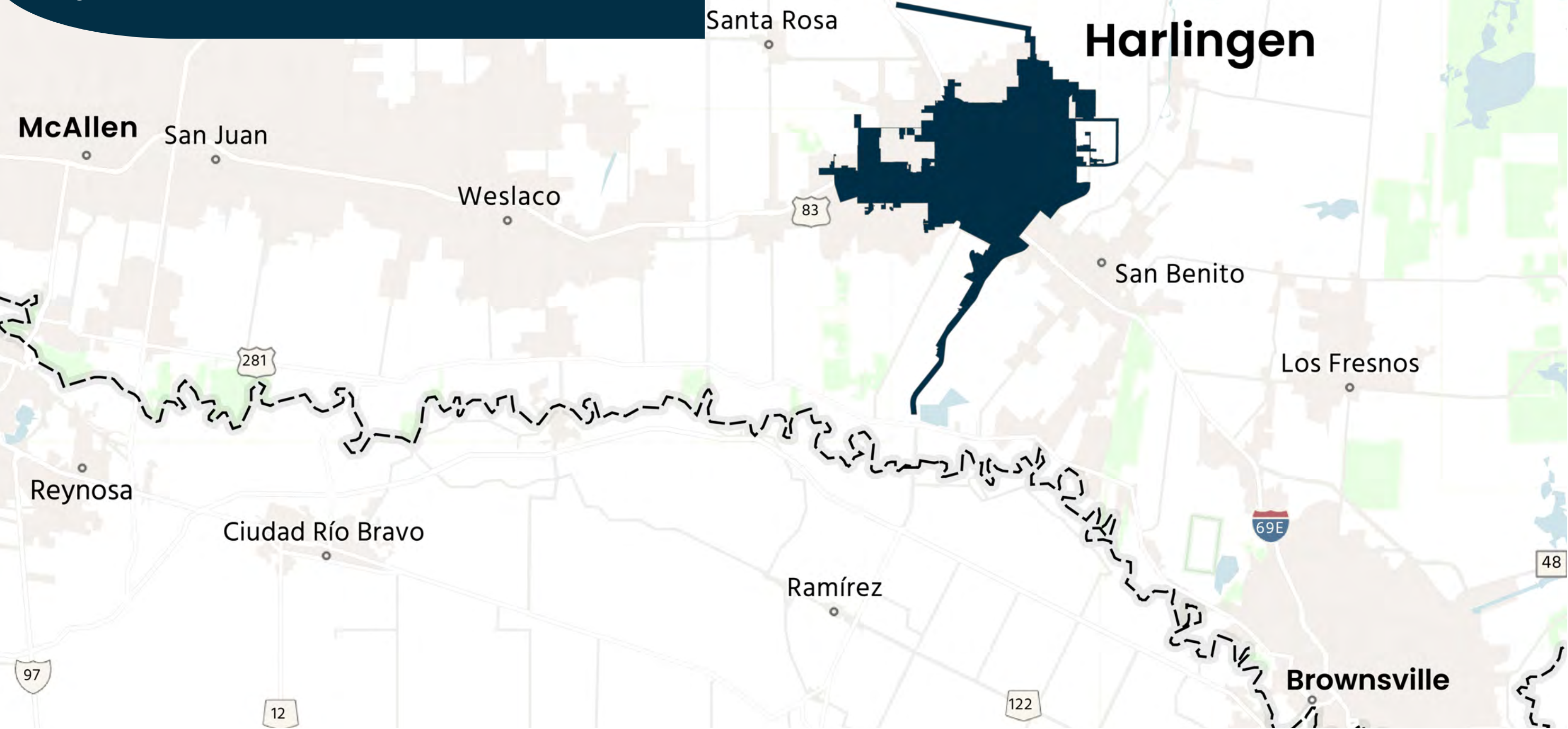
4 Port of Harlingen Authority. (n.d.). Celebrating 70 Years in Operation. Port of Harlingen Authority. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <https://portofharlingen.com/70th-anniversary/>

5 Cameron County International Bridge System. (n.d.). Free Trade Bridge. Cameron County International Bridge System. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <https://www.ccibstx.us/bridges/free-trade-bridge>

6 The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. (n.d.). UTRGV Harlingen Clinical Education Site. Locations. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from <https://www.utrgv.edu/about/locations/index.htm>

Regional Context

The City of Harlingen is in Cameron County in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley, approximately 30 miles west of Brownsville and 40 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. Harlingen is strategically positioned along U.S. Highways 77 and 83, which connect it to major regional hubs. The City is located between Brownsville and McAllen, making Harlingen a critical nexus for the region’s commerce, transportation and cultural exchange.

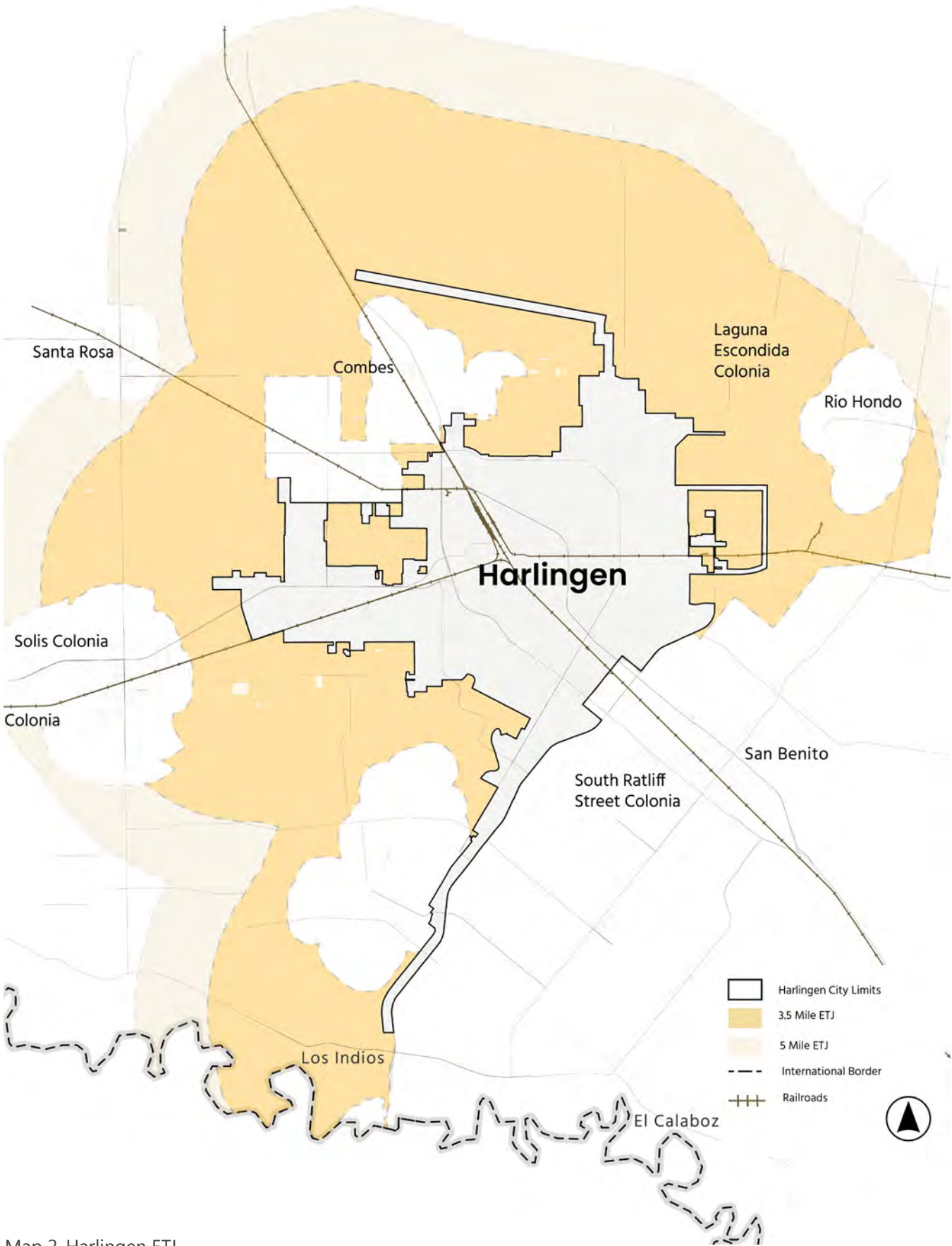


Map 1. Harlingen Regional Context

What is an ETJ?

In Texas, an ETJ (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) is the area just outside a city's boundaries where the city can regulate certain aspects of land use and development to manage growth in areas that may be annexed. While cities can't enforce full regulations in the ETJ, they often apply subdivision and infrastructure standards to promote orderly development near city limits.

Harlingen has both a 3.5-mile and a 5-mile ETJ. Cities with populations between 25,000 and 50,000 have a 3.5-mile ETJ, while those with more than 50,000 residents can extend theirs up to 5 miles, allowing for greater influence over development just beyond city limits.



Map 2. Harlingen ETJ

Community Engagement

Community Engagement Approach



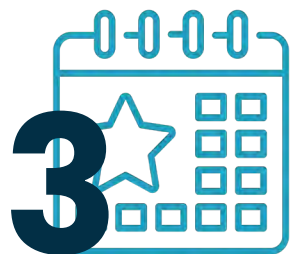
The comprehensive planning process for Harlingen was built on a foundation of meaningful community engagement. The approach combined both in-person and online tools to ensure broad participation, with a focus on reaching diverse voices across the city. Engagement was designed to be accessible, bilingual, and inclusive, so that residents, businesses, community groups, and institutions could all play a role in shaping the plan. This input directly informed the vision, priorities, and recommendations that guide the Comprehensive Plan.

The planning team integrates quantitative data and research, like the information discussed earlier in this chapter, with the lived experiences and needs of residents shared throughout the process. This qualitative input from community members shapes the community vision, which then informs the guiding principles and, ultimately, the Plan recommendations.



Plans Steering Committee (PSC) Meetings

The PSC consists of dedicated community members who volunteered their time to collaborate with the planning team throughout the process. Their involvement ensured that a diverse range of perspectives was considered and integrated into the Plan recommendations.



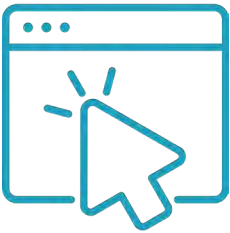
Public Outreach Events

The planning team organized three community outreach events throughout the process, varying in time, location and format to engage different segments of the community. These events included a community open house to introduce the project and receive initial feedback on the community’s vision for the Plan. Additionally, materials from these in-person engagements were made available online through the project website.



Stakeholder Conversations

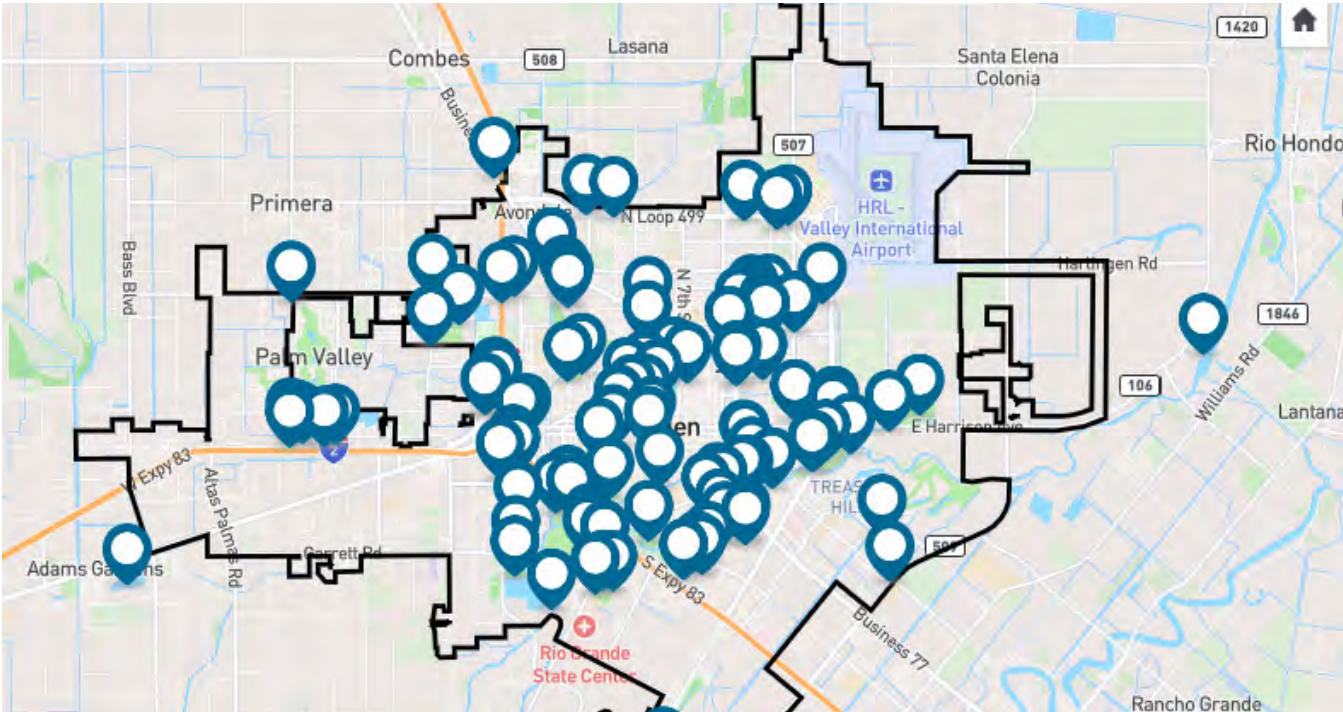
The planning team facilitated focused discussions with various community stakeholders, each representing unique needs or perspectives. These sessions included meetings with both forward-thinking community leaders and technical experts across different fields. Stakeholders engaged in the planning process included: non-profits and community groups, small business owners, real-estate developers and representatives from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.



Virtual Engagement

In addition to in-person events, the planning team conducted an online survey, virtual engagement sessions and a project website to gather broader community input. These digital tools provided residents with flexible opportunities to access information, share feedback and contribute to the planning process.

A summary of engagement efforts throughout the comprehensive planning process can be found in the Appendix A.



Online Engagement- Interactive Map Activity



Public Open House #1, November 18, 2024



Public Open House #2, February 24, 2025

Current Conditions

Harlingen is Growing

Harlingen is witnessing steady population growth, which brings opportunities for economic development and community vitality. However, this growth underscores the need to balance new residential neighborhoods with retail development to sustain a thriving local economy.



Housing Market Dynamics

Harlingen faces challenges in providing a variety of housing options. With an increasing need for luxury and affordable homes, the City’s housing market must adapt to changing middle-class expectations. Addressing absentee ownership and underutilized vacant properties remains critical to unlocking development potential.



Workforce Retention and Educational Barriers

Educational attainment remains a barrier to attracting higher-paying jobs and industries such as technology. Many workers commute outside Harlingen for employment, highlighting the need for localized workforce development and investment in education to meet employer needs and retain talent.



Strong Sense of Community with Opportunities for Growth

Harlingen is known for its close-knit community, with cultural events and festivals reinforcing its local identity. However, strategic efforts to capitalize on available vacant land, expand retail opportunities and align new developments with community needs, such as placemaking and creating a desirable sense of place, are crucial to ensuring sustainable growth.



Transportation and Connectivity

Infrastructure barriers like railroads present challenges to connectivity within the City. Enhancing transportation networks, including overpasses and improved wayfinding, can address community mobility concerns and foster better access to amenities like parks and retail.



Natural Assets and Placemaking

Harlingen’s parks, trails and proximity to the Arroyo Colorado offer unique opportunities for eco-tourism and community identity. Leveraging these strengths to create a string of parks or cooling nodes can make Harlingen a desirable destination. These efforts would reinforce its position as a city with a vibrant and connected outdoor lifestyle.



Previous Planning Efforts



One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan (2016)

The One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan establishes a strategic framework for the growth and development of Harlingen. It emphasizes the creation of a vibrant and sustainable community within both the City and its Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). This Plan update replaces the 2016 plan, ensuring a renewed vision that reflects current community needs and priorities. Developed through community engagement and stakeholder participation, the Plan outlines five key areas:

- Improving economic development and creating job opportunities
- Expanding neighborhoods and diversifying housing options
- Developing transportation systems and connectivity
- Expanding Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces
- Encouraging Environmental Sustainability and Resilience



Trails Master Plan (2010)

The Plan calls for expanding Harlingen’s trail network to improve connectivity and recreation throughout the City and ETJ. The Plan identifies critical areas to be developed through public participation and stakeholder input. The focus areas of the Plan include:

- Expanding trails and access points
- Enhancing connections between parks and neighborhood areas
- Improving safety and accessibility
- Promoting health and wellbeing through recreational activities
- Preserving natural areas and scenic corridors.



Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2016)

The Plan outlines a vision for improving parks and recreation areas in the City and ETJ and identifies priorities for the Harlingen Park System based on community engagement and stakeholder feedback. Key priorities include:

- Securing land for the development of new parks and open areas
- Enhancing and maintaining current facilities
- Broadening the scope of recreational activities and programs
- Creating multi-use trails
- Enhancing accessibility and inclusive parks



Cameron County Hazard Mitigation Action Plan (2021)

The Cameron County Hazard Mitigation Action Plan outlines strategies to decrease the impacts of natural disasters and increase resilience in Harlingen and the broader county. Developed through community engagement and stakeholder participation, the Plan highlights key areas:

- Improving flood risks through infrastructure improvements.
- Promoting public education on hazard mitigation.
- Strengthening building codes and land use regulations.



RGVMPO Bicycle Plan (2019)

The RGVMPO Bicycle Plan outlines a strategy for increasing the number of bike lanes across the Rio Grande Valley, including downtown Harlingen and its ETJ, to encourage safe and accessible cycling. Developed with input from the community and stakeholders, the Plan highlights key areas:

- Expanding bike lanes along key corridors like Tyler and Harrison Avenues to improve connectivity.
- Enhancing safety with intersection upgrades and bike-friendly infrastructure in high-traffic areas.
- Developing multi-use trails linking Hugh Ramsey Nature Park to Arroyo Park for recreation and eco-tourism.



RGVMPO 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2020)

RGVMPO's 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan outlines proposed long-range transportation investments in the Rio Grande Valley, including Harlingen. In the Plan, current trends are identified, progress over the previous three years is outlined, future projects are explored and project funding is addressed. The 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan highlights key goals:

- Creating and maintaining an efficient multimodal transportation system.
- Upgrading U.S. Highway 77/I-69E to improve traffic flow and regional connectivity.
- Expanding Valley Metro services to enhance public transit access in Harlingen.
- Developing bike lanes and pedestrian paths to support sustainable transportation options.



RGVMPO Transit Development Plan (2020)

RGVMPO's Transportation Improvement Plan (2020) provides a roadmap to improve public transportation throughout the Rio Grande Valley, including Harlingen. Developed via community engagement and stakeholders, the Plan highlights key areas:

- Expanding Valley Metro routes to better serve Harlingen neighborhoods and key destinations.
- Increasing service frequency on routes connecting Harlingen to nearby regional hubs like Brownsville and McAllen.
- Upgrading transit stops and facilities in Harlingen to improve passenger safety and comfort.



RGVMPO Active Transportation Plan (2020)

The RGVMPO Active Transportation Plan (2020) provides a strategic plan to improve walking, biking, and other transportation options in the Rio Grande Valley, including Harlingen. Developed with community input and stakeholder participation, the Plan highlights key areas:

- Extending the Arroyo Colorado Trail to connect neighborhoods and parks, enhancing recreation and mobility in Harlingen.
- Adding bike lanes in downtown Harlingen to improve safety and promote active transportation.
- Creating safer pedestrian routes near schools to encourage walking and biking for students.



Drainage Master Plan (2008)

The City of Harlingen's 2008 Drainage Master Plan provided a citywide evaluation of drainage infrastructure and identified improvements to reduce flooding and enhance stormwater management. The plan established priority projects, cost estimates, and strategies to address localized flooding issues. It also set the foundation for future drainage studies, including the HUC10 watershed analysis.

- Evaluating system-wide drainage capacity and deficiencies.
- Recommending priority channel and pipe upgrades.
- Identifying opportunities for regional detention facilities.
- Establishing a long-term framework for reducing flood risks.



HSB MPO Bicycle & Pedestrian Master Plan (2021)

The Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan builds on earlier regional bicycle planning efforts and provides a more recent, comprehensive strategy to expand safe and accessible active transportation. The plan identifies key corridors, safety priorities, and infrastructure improvements to support both cyclists and pedestrians across the region.

- Expanding on-street and off-street bicycle facilities to improve connectivity.
- Enhancing pedestrian safety at high-traffic intersections and corridors.
- Linking neighborhoods to schools, parks, and employment centers through multi-use trails.
- Promoting active transportation as a tool for health, equity, and economic development.



Physical and Regulatory Features

Natural Features

The City of Harlingen lies almost 30 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The terrain is relatively flat with gentle slopes along the City’s canals and waterways. The Arroyo Colorado watershed flows through the City to Laguna Madre, serving as a shipping route and natural drainage system that protects low-lying areas from flooding.

The Rio Grande Valley’s fertile ground is a mixture of sandy loams and clay rich soils supporting a variety of crops from corn to citrus trees. These soil types play a significant role in determining the area’s natural vegetation, water absorption and overall landscape management. Sandy loams are more permeable, allowing for efficient drainage and supporting a variety of native plants, while clay-rich soils in some areas tend to retain water, limiting infiltration and increasing surface runoff after rainfall.

Harlingen’s parks and open spaces offer year-round opportunities for outdoor recreation while also providing a habitat for local wildlife including whitetail deer, javelinas, and hundreds of bird species. Located in the Central Fly Zone, where over 50% of birds migrate both in the spring and fall, the City is popular among bird watchers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Constructed Features

Harlingen’s urban landscape is defined by a blend of residential, commercial and recreational constructed elements. The City is primarily comprised of single-family homes with neighborhoods radiating along the key thoroughfares of U.S. Highway 77 and State Highway 107. New multi-family developments have been introduced in various parts of the City but particularly along Ed Carey Drive and Loop 499. Harlingen’s primary commercial hubs offering shopping, dining and services are located along these primary thoroughfares. These roads provide essential connectivity throughout Harlingen and link the City to neighboring communities in the Rio Grande Valley region.

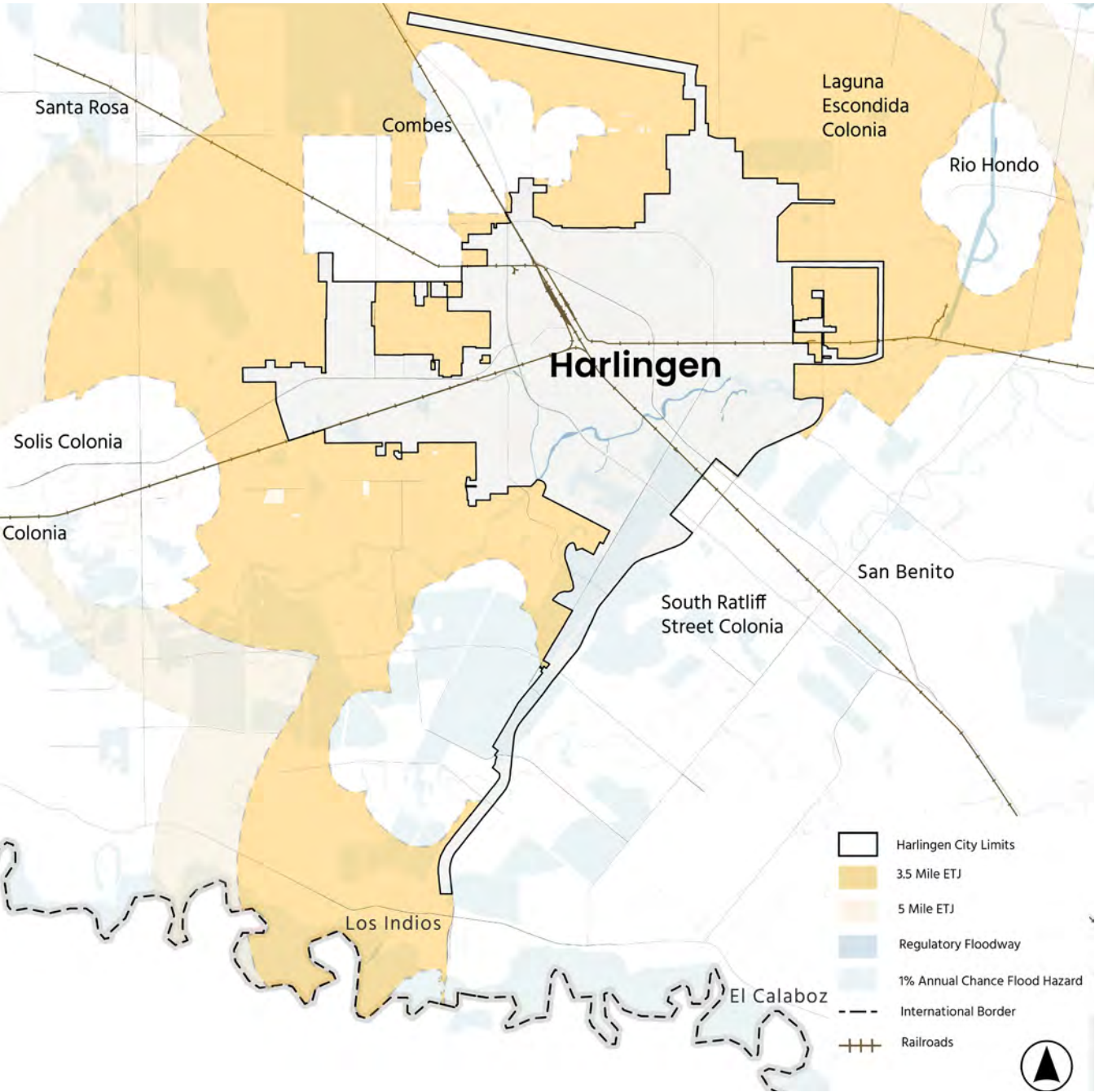
Harlingen’s key public amenities, like Pendleton Park and the Harlingen Public Library, are centrally located, making them easily accessible for residents. The City has also invested in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, incorporating sidewalks, shared-use paths and bike lanes along Ed Carey Drive and Tyler Avenue. These enhancements reflect Harlingen’s commitment to walkability and safe, accessible routes for cyclists and pedestrians.

Notable infrastructure projects include upgrades to the City’s stormwater drainage system, particularly in flood-prone neighborhoods in close proximity to the Arroyo Colorado. These projects, in collaboration with the Texas Water Development Board and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, reflect Harlingen’s efforts to build robust infrastructure that supports future growth while safeguarding residents from water-related challenges. Additionally, Harlingen serves a key node in the Rio Grande Valley’s freight network, with tracks operated by Union Pacific and Rio Grande Valley Switching Company transecting the City. These railroads support local industry and connect Harlingen to major national and international markets.

Jurisdictional Features

Harlingen, Texas, spans approximately 40 square miles and is supported by a range of essential services and infrastructure designed to meet the needs of its residents. The City ensures public safety through over 100 first responders operating across eight fire stations managed by the Harlingen Fire Department.

Water, wastewater, and stormwater services are provided by the Harlingen WaterWorks System (HWW), a municipally managed utility board, ensuring reliable and efficient utility operations throughout the City. Education is a cornerstone of the community, with the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) offering a variety of elementary, middle, and high schools, along with specialized academies to support the educational needs of young residents.



Map 3. Physical Features

Integrating Resilience Across Plan

Resilience is built into every part of this Comprehensive Plan. Each chapter, including Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Infrastructure, and Transportation. It includes strategies to help Harlingen prepare for, respond to, and recover from future challenges. This approach ensures that everyday decisions strengthen the city’s long-term safety, sustainability, and prosperity.

What is Resilience?

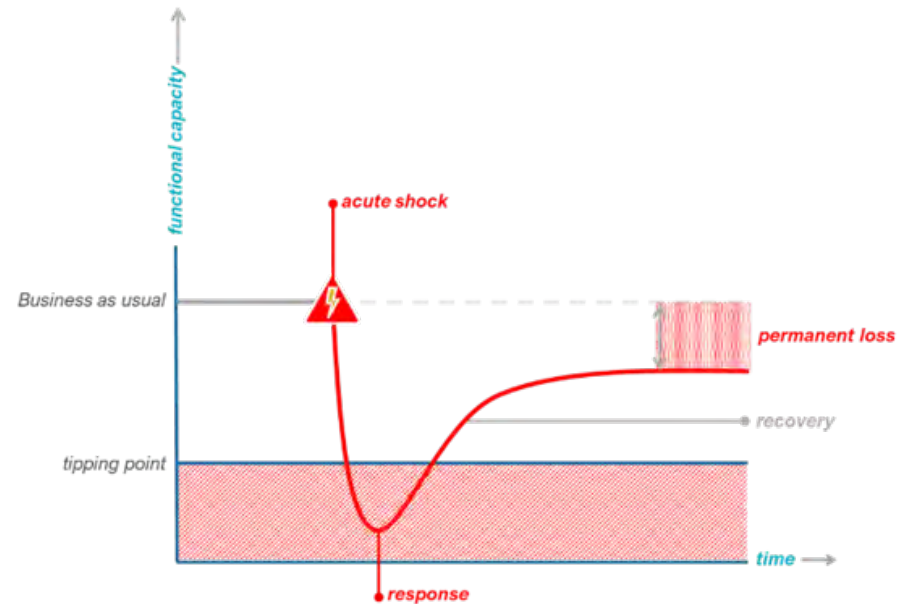
Resilience is defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as the capacity to anticipate and prepare for potential threats and hazards, adjust to evolving conditions and withstand and quickly recover from disruptions. In planning, resilience considers both sudden shocks, like extreme weather events, and ongoing stressors, such as prolonged water shortages, which a community may face. It also involves identifying the potential social, economic and environmental impacts of these challenges and exploring strategies for mitigation or adaptation to reduce their adverse effects.



Conventional Recovery Scenario

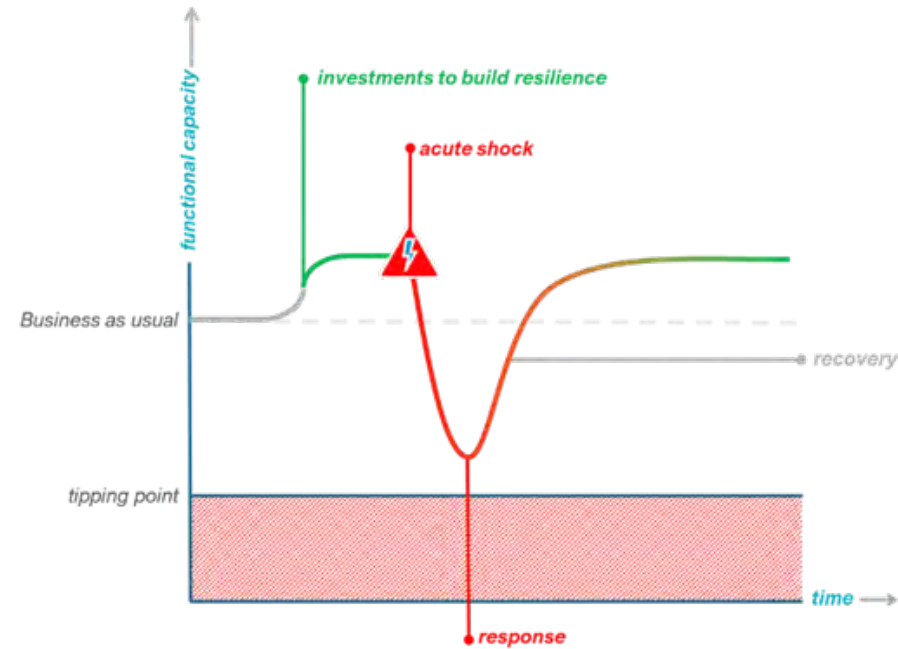
A community system will operate at a steady state (business as usual) until an impact event, such as an acute shock occurs or a long-term stressor finally reaches a breaking point. If the capacity or function of that system drops below a “tipping point”, the system or community will attempt to recover but will have experienced permanent losses.

Figure 3. What is resilience?
Adapted from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)



Resilient Recovery Scenario

Investment in resilience projects that improve the overall condition of systems and communities will increase baseline capacity and functional levels prior to an impact event. From this higher baseline, the same event may still require a period of recovery, but irreversible damage and permanent losses are minimized.



Resilience Dashboard

The resilience dashboard offers an overview of the current risk landscape affecting the City of Harlingen. This tool, along with other risk assessment data, should be integrated into the site planning and design stages for any public facility within the city to ensure a comprehensive consideration of potential risks.

Flooding

Flooding is the most significant and recurring hazard in Harlingen, affecting residents, businesses, and critical facilities more than any other risk. According to the Cameron County Hazard Mitigation Action Plan, between 1996 and 2019 the City experienced nine damaging floods, resulting in nearly \$221,000 in local property damage. Cameron County as a whole has faced more than seventy flood events during this time.

The 2025 HUC10 Drainage Study (Draft) highlights the city’s high vulnerability to flooding due to flat terrain, clay soils, rapid development, and aging stormwater systems. Nineteen critical public facilities are located in the floodplain, placing essential services such as health, safety, and disaster response at risk. Harlingen has experienced multiple severe flood events, including Hurricane Dolly in 2008, the June floods of 2018 and 2019, Hurricane Hanna in 2020, and the historic March 2025 flood. Future rainfall is projected to intensify by 10 to 20 percent by 2050, further increasing flood risk.

To strengthen resilience, the city must combine structural solutions with non structural strategies. Priority projects include expanding detention basins, upgrading storm sewers and pump stations, retrofitting resacas, and widening channels. Non structural measures include routine system maintenance, a real time flood warning system, and expanded use of green infrastructure such as rain gardens, permeable pavement, and street tree canopy. Together, these actions will improve safety, protect critical facilities, and support long term sustainable growth.



70+ floods since 1996



19 critical facilities in floodplain



\$221,000 damages (1996–2019)



Increasing rainfall intensity

Winter Storms

As indicated in the Cameron County HMAP, between 1996 and 2019 the county experienced 34 occurrences of winter storm watches, warnings, freezing rain, sleet or wind chill advisories. Most recently in February 2021, the City of Harlingen was subject to Winter Storm Uri which brought average temperatures in the high 20s to low 40s. Public facilities should be designed with high-quality insulation and energy-efficient heating systems to maintain indoor temperatures to serve as relief centers for residents facing hardships due to the extreme cold and winter storm. Additionally, ensuring backup power sources and well-sealed building envelopes can prevent heat loss and maintain operations during power outages.

Extreme Heat

As reported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, in 2023, the City of Harlingen experienced 55 days of extreme heat, defined as days with temperatures reaching 100 degrees or higher. From July 30 to August 20, the city endured 22 days of extreme heat, threatening children, the elderly, and those living in poverty.

Public buildings should be equipped with reliable cooling systems and be ready to serve as relief centers during heatwaves. These centers can provide water stations, shaded areas, and medical support for residents who need a safe place to recover from extreme conditions. Planting more

trees along streets and sidewalks can also increase shade, cool pavement, and create safer and more comfortable walking environments while helping to reduce the city’s overall heat risk.

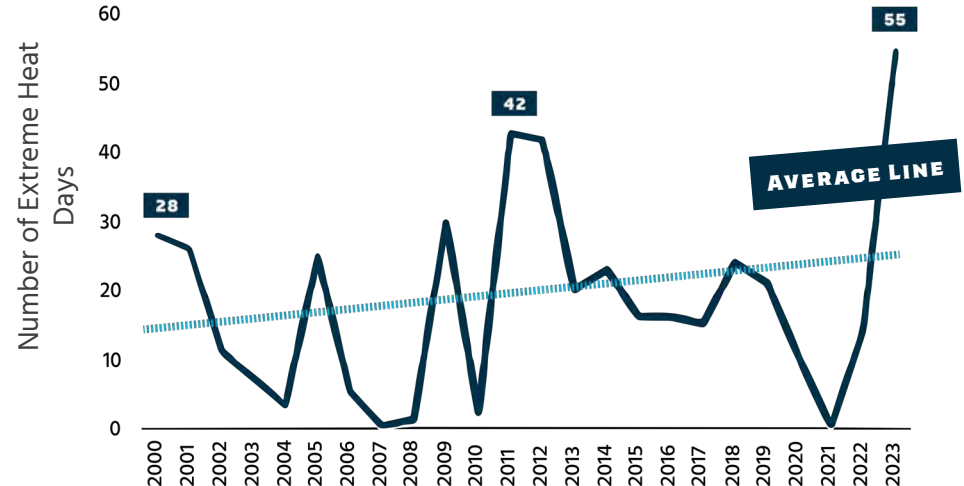
Wildfire

Between 2005 and 2015, Harlingen faced three wildfire events, with 23.3% of its population living in the high-risk Wildfire Urban Interface. Southwest Harlingen is rated moderate to high for wildfire threats. To protect public safety, key facilities should be placed for clear emergency access, surrounded by defensible space through vegetation management, and equipped with air filtration systems to reduce health risks from wildfire smoke

Tornado

According to the Cameron County HMAP, between 1953 and 2019, Cameron County, which includes the City of Harlingen, experienced 63 tornado events. The most recent tornado, an EF0, occurred in July 2019. Harlingen is situated in the FEMA Zone III Wind Zone, where tornado winds can reach up to 200 mph. There is a high likelihood of future tornado events occurring, particularly during the spring months. The 2,657 manufactured homes in Harlingen are especially vulnerable to the impacts from tornadoes. Public facilities should be constructed utilizing reinforced construction techniques and materials, as well as incorporating safe rooms designed to withstand high winds and flying debris prevalent during a tornado event.

Figure 4. Harlingen Historic Extreme Heat Days (>100 Degrees)



Source: NOAA

Resilience Themes Across the Plan



Building Connections Between Hazards and Strategies

The Resilience Dashboard identifies the major hazards that Harlingen faces, including flooding, extreme heat, winter storms, wildfires, and tornadoes. These risks do not exist in isolation. Each one directly shapes the way the City plans for land use, housing, infrastructure, transportation, parks, and economic development.

Hazards and Related Strategies

- **Flooding** – Guide growth away from floodplains, expand stormwater systems and green infrastructure, and design parks that also serve as detention.
- **Extreme Heat** – Promote weather-resilient housing, shaded transit amenities, and parks that expand tree canopy and cooling.
- **Winter Storms** – Improve infrastructure reliability, strengthen backup power and water systems, and encourage safe housing standards.
- **Wildfires** – Apply land use buffers in the Wildland/Urban Interface, manage natural resources, and enhance community safety.
- **Tornadoes** – Strengthen building codes, support resilient housing design, and provide safe public facilities.

By linking hazards to planning strategies, resilience becomes a guiding principle across the entire Comprehensive Plan, not a stand alone program.

Hazard	Land Use	Housing	Infrastructure and Utilities	Transportation	Economic Development
Flooding	Direct growth away from floodplains	Flood resilient housing	Drainage upgrades and green infrastructure	Elevate roadways and improve evacuation routes	Protect jobs and downtown
Extreme Heat	Encourage shaded development	Weather resilient housing	Tree canopy and reliable power	Shaded bus stops and cooling transit amenities	Shaded downtown for business and tourism
Winter Storms	Siting of critical facilities	Safe housing standards	Harden energy and water systems	Winter-proof transit and reliable emergency routes	Business continuity planning
Tornadoes	Safe siting standards	Wind resistant construction	Safe public facilities	Designated safe transit shelters	Protect key employers

Hazard–Strategy Crosswalk Table

How Resilience is Integrated

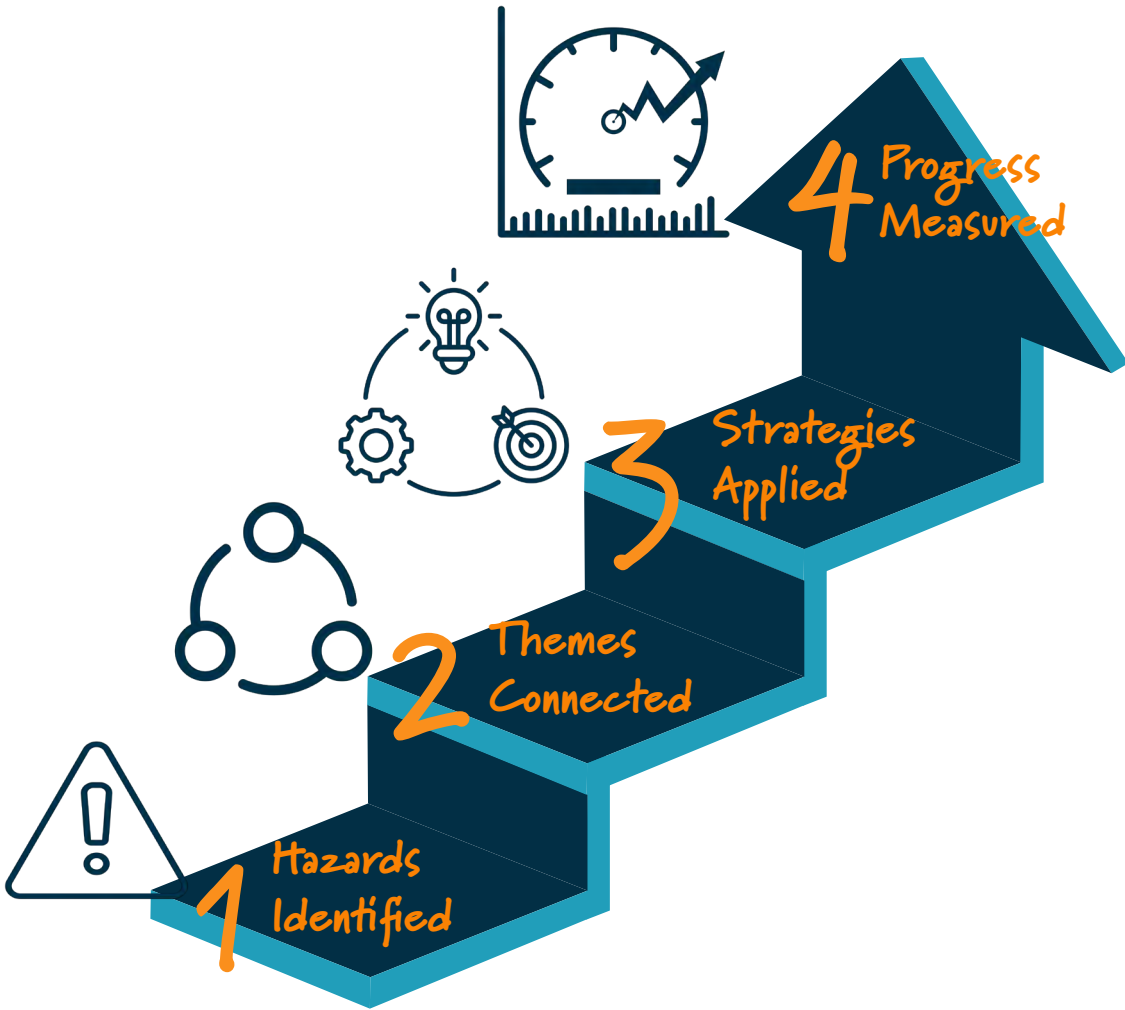
A Framework for Citywide Resilience

Resilience in this Comprehensive Plan is carried through four connected steps:

- **Hazards Identified:** The Resilience Dashboard defines the key risks facing Harlingen.
- **Themes Connected:** Each hazard is tied to planning areas, showing how risks influence land use, housing, infrastructure, transportation, parks, and economic development.
- **Strategies Applied:** Every topical chapter includes a Resilience Connection page, linking hazards to specific strategies such as green infrastructure, housing diversity, or energy efficiency.
- **Progress Measured:** The Implementation Matrix tracks how resilience strategies are put into action, ensuring progress is tangible and measurable.

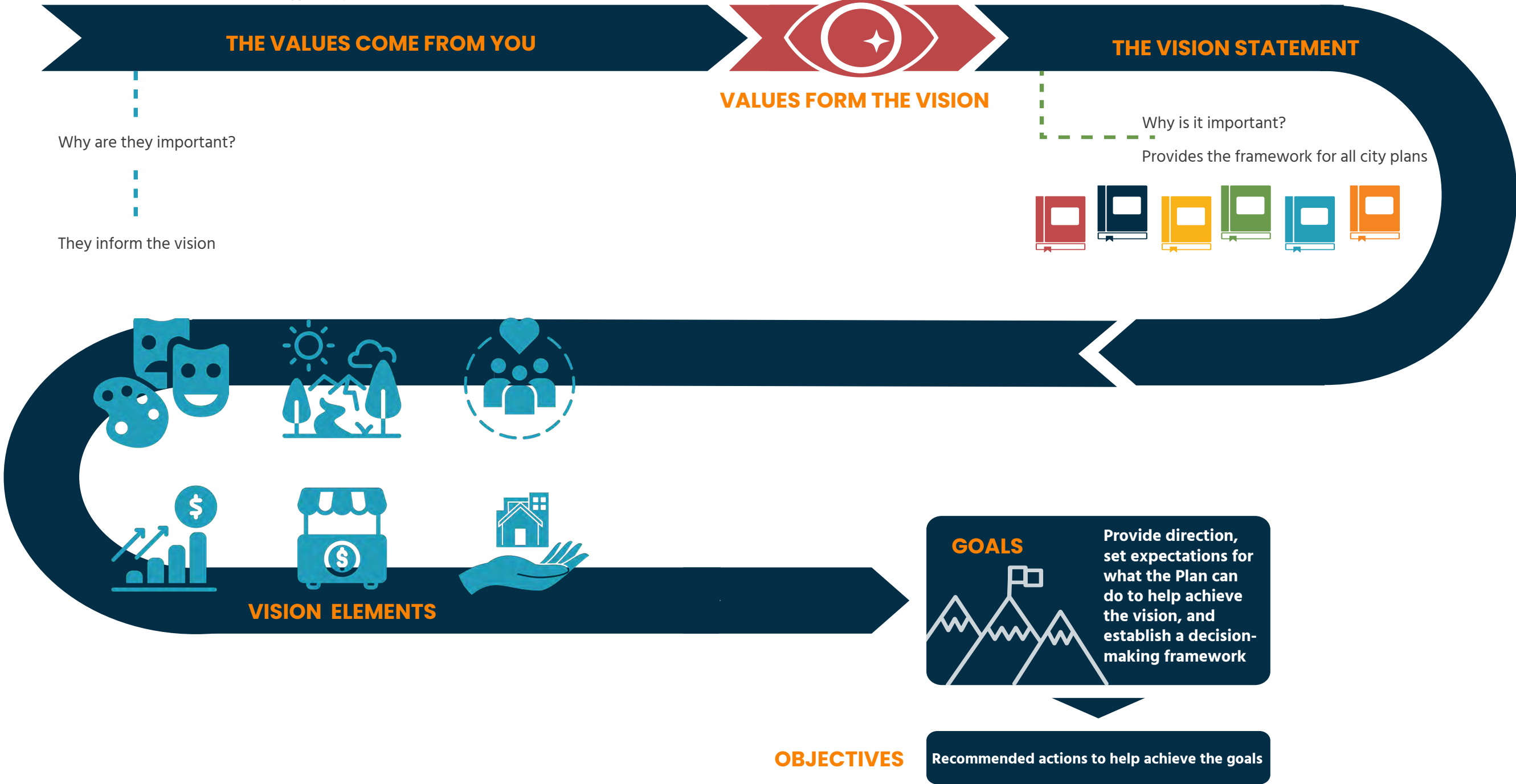
This framework ensures that resilience is woven throughout the Comprehensive Plan. Each decision, whether about land use, infrastructure, housing, or economic development, strengthens Harlingen’s ability to prepare for, withstand, and recover from shocks and stresses.

How Resilience is Integrated Across the Plan



How Community Values Shape the Plan

Community values identified by residents form the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. These values shape the vision, which provides the framework for city planning. The vision is then carried forward into goals and objectives that guide specific actions and strategies.



Community Values

A City that Celebrates Culture and Arts

Harlingen residents highly value the City’s cultural diversity and artistic expression. There is a strong desire to promote community events, public art installations and cultural programs that reflect the City’s rich heritage. This vision emphasizes fostering a sense of pride and belonging through vibrant cultural opportunities.

“Cultural events and festivals are a cornerstone of what makes Harlingen unique.”

A Thriving Local Economy with Job Opportunities

Residents expressed the need for more local, high-paying jobs and support for small businesses. Enhancing workforce opportunities and attracting diverse industries are key to fostering economic prosperity and retaining talent in Harlingen.

“We need more opportunities for high-wage jobs in Harlingen to support families and encourage young professionals to stay.”

A Hub for Eco-Tourism

Survey respondents emphasized the importance of preserving Harlingen’s natural assets while enhancing eco-tourism opportunities. Expanding trails, parks and wildlife areas will strengthen the City’s identity as an outdoor recreation destination.

“The Arroyo trails and natural spaces are incredible assets that should be expanded.”

Diverse Housing Options for All

There is a strong call for a variety of housing types to meet the needs of all residents, from affordable starter homes to upscale developments. Providing inclusive housing options will ensure that Harlingen remains welcoming to families, seniors and young professionals alike.

“We need affordable housing options that work for families and young people starting out.”

Mobility and Connectivity

Improving transportation options, from walkability to bike paths and public transit, is a major priority for the community. Creating safe and accessible connections throughout the City will enhance quality of life and reduce reliance on personal vehicles.

“It’s important to have better sidewalks and bike lanes to make it easier for people to get around safely.”

Vibrant Public Spaces and Recreation

Expanding parks, playgrounds and gathering spaces emerged as a critical value for residents. Harlingen’s public spaces should be welcoming, inclusive and provide opportunities for families to enjoy leisure activities close to home.

“Parks and public spaces are key to making Harlingen a great place to live.”



STRENGTHS

A community survey was conducted from October 30th, 2024, to January 23rd, 2025, receiving feedback from 166 respondents. The insights gathered through this survey were instrumental in establishing the community values, guiding principles and overall vision of the Harlingen Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, the survey enabled the identification of strengths and opportunities, helping to shape a comprehensive and forward-looking plan for the City.

Affordability

The City offers a lower cost of living, making it appealing to families, retirees and young professionals. This affordability allows residents to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without the high expenses found in other Texas regions.



Accessibility

Harlingen enjoys a prime location at the center of the Rio Grande Valley, offering significant strategic advantages. Its proximity to the Mexican border facilitates international trade and cultural exchange. The Harlingen International Airport and the Port of Harlingen also enhance the region's local connectivity and economic trade. This strategic positioning makes Harlingen a vital hub for the Rio Grande Valley.

Recreational Assets

The City provides 612 acres of parkland and recreational facilities for residents, along with 25.5 miles of trails. These parks, trails and the Arroyo Colorado contribute in creating a distinctive identity for Harlingen which stands out among the Rio Grande Valley.



Sense of Community

Harlingen is known for its welcoming, small-city feel that fosters strong community bonds. Local events and gatherings such as the Lighting of the Arroyo create opportunities for local connection.

Educational Opportunities

Harlingen offers a variety of educational opportunities for residents close and nearby, including the Texas State Technical College (TSTC), which offers specialized technical training and degrees, as well as the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), which has its School of Medicine in Harlingen. While these institutions provide excellent educational resources and opportunities, there is a growing need for expanded higher education outreach and workforce training programs to better support local career pathways and economic growth.



OPPORTUNITIES

Vacant Property Development

Utilize underused areas, such as the land near Bass Pro Shops, the Valle Vista Mall and downtown's warehouse district, for economic and residential growth. This economic growth should include an expansion of shopping, dining and entertainment enterprises.

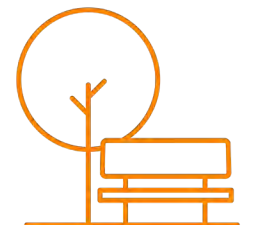


Eco-Tourism Expansion

Capitalize on the Arroyo Colorado, trails and parks to position Harlingen as a destination for eco-tourism. Attract birding enthusiasts and outdoor adventurers by enhancing accessibility and promoting nature-based activities. Develop guided tours, events and unique experiences to further showcase the City's natural assets.

Placemaking Initiatives

Create a unique sense of place in Harlingen through public art, trails into downtown and revitalized public spaces to foster greater opportunities for community interaction and connection.



Retail and Dining Growth

Focus on attracting higher-quality retail, sit-down restaurants, entertainment establishments and innovative shopping experiences to meet the changing expectations of residents, as well as to attract residents from neighboring cities.

Infrastructure Improvements

Address the railroad barrier and expand multimodal transit options, including sidewalks, bike paths and public transportation. In addition to mobility improvements, prioritize enhancements to drainage and flood prevention infrastructure, as these were major community concerns. Additionally, expand street lighting improvements to enhance safety, particularly in parks and downtown areas, ensuring a well-lit and secure environment for residents.



Community Vision Statement

Harlingen will emerge as a dynamic hub for culture and arts, fostering economic growth and eco-tourism while embracing its rich heritage and natural assets. With diverse housing options, enhanced mobility, and connectivity, Harlingen will cultivate a thriving local economy, offering an exceptional quality of life and opportunities for all residents.

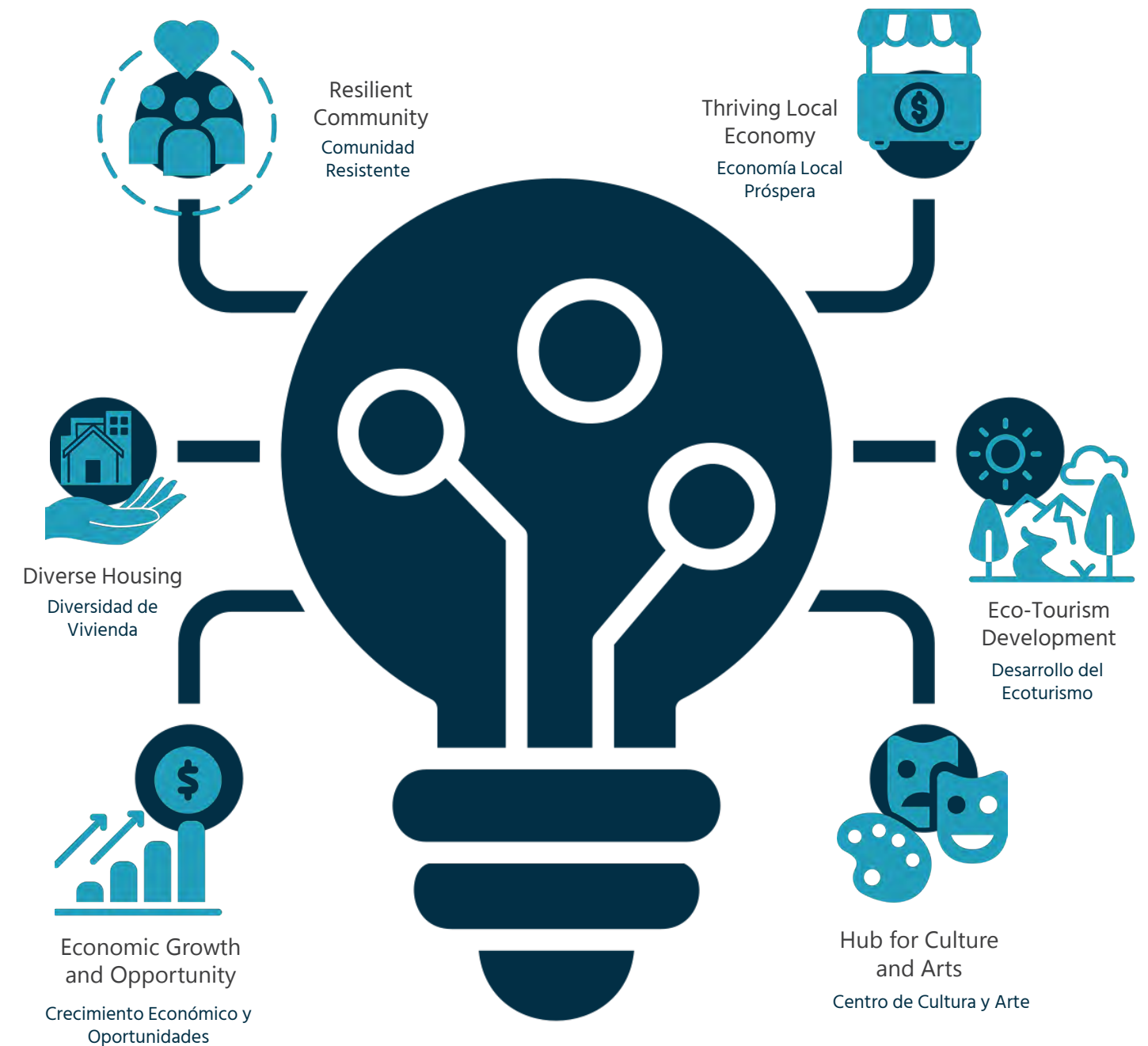
Declaración de visión comunitaria

Harlingen se consolidará como un centro dinámico para la cultura y las artes, impulsando el crecimiento económico y el ecoturismo, a la vez que valoriza su rico patrimonio y recursos naturales. Con diversas opciones de vivienda, mayor movilidad y conectividad, Harlingen impulsará una economía local próspera, ofreciendo una calidad de vida excepcional y oportunidades para todos los residentes.

Vision Elements

Your vision for Harlingen

Community input shaped six key “vision elements” that form the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. These elements guide the plan’s goals and ensure Harlingen’s growth reflects community priorities and long-term aspirations.



Vision Elements



Resilient Community



Diverse Housing



Economic Growth and Opportunity



Thriving Local Economy



Eco-Tourism Development



Hub for Culture and Arts

Goals

In 2050

Harlingen aspires to foster a resilient community that supports its people through inclusivity, safety and robust support systems.

In 2050

Harlingen will offer diverse housing options to accommodate all income levels, life stages and family types.

In 2050

Harlingen will focus on creating opportunities for economic growth that benefit all residents and future generations.

In 2050

Harlingen will develop a thriving local economy that attracts businesses, jobs and investment while supporting small businesses.

In 2050

Harlingen will embrace eco-tourism by enhancing its natural assets and promoting sustainable tourism opportunities.

In 2050

Harlingen will become a vibrant hub for cultural and artistic expression, celebrating diversity and creativity.

Objectives

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Expand programs and facilities for youth, families, and seniors to ensure well-being across generations.
- Implement strategies for long-term resilience to economic and climate-related challenges.
- Increase the availability of affordable housing for low- and middle-income families.
- Encourage development of “missing middle” housing such as townhomes, duplexes and small-lot single-family homes.
- Desire for luxury housing to attract professionals and boost economic growth.
- Provide resources and initiatives to address poverty and affordable housing.
- Provide rental assistance and homeownership programs.
- Promote mixed-use developments that include residential options for all income levels.
- Align housing strategies with transit-oriented development to enhance connectivity.
- Expand infrastructure for industrial and tech-focused industries.
- Promote workforce development initiatives tailored to local industries.
- Establish partnerships to provide higher education and technical training opportunities.
- Encourage investment in underutilized areas such as downtown and vacant properties.
- Provide financial incentives for small businesses and local entrepreneurs.
- Expand access to public transportation to connect people to job centers.
- Establish incubators and grants to foster small business growth and entrepreneurship.
- Attract diverse industries to create high-paying jobs for residents.
- Develop vibrant commercial nodes with retail, dining and entertainment.
- Expand mixed-use developments to integrate business, housing and public spaces.
- Promote tourism through cultural, historical and eco-tourism attractions.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.
- Expand and enhance the Arroyo Colorado trail system for recreational activities and active transportation.
- Protect and restore local ecosystems to promote biodiversity.
- Develop new parks and green spaces to attract visitors and support outdoor activities.
- Create eco-tourism programs such as birdwatching and kayaking.
- Partner with local organizations to host eco-friendly festivals and events.
- Promote Harlingen as a destination for sustainable travel through targeted marketing.
- Install interpretive signage in parks and natural areas to educate visitors.
- Invest in public art installations, including murals and sculptures, in key areas like downtown.
- Develop venues for live performances, including theaters and outdoor amphitheaters.
- Support local artists through funding, workshops and gallery spaces.
- Create an art incubator program to nurture emerging artists and creative professionals.
- Leverage Harlingen’s cultural diversity to promote inclusive cultural events.
- Incorporate cultural elements into urban design, including streetscapes and public spaces.



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HARLINGEN
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CHAPTER

2

Land Use and Development

Vision Elements



Resilient Community



Diverse Housing



Economic Growth and Opportunity

Goals

In 2050

Harlingen aspires to foster a resilient community that supports its people through inclusivity, safety and robust support systems.

In 2050

Harlingen will offer diverse housing options to accommodate all income levels, life stages and family types.

In 2050

Harlingen will focus on creating opportunities for economic growth that benefit all residents and future generations.

Objectives

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Expand programs and facilities for youth, families, and seniors to ensure well-being across generations.
- Implement strategies for long-term resilience to economic and climate-related challenges.
- Increase the availability of affordable housing for low- and middle-income families.
- Encourage development of “missing middle” housing such as townhomes, duplexes and small-lot single-family homes.
- Increase the supply of luxury housing for high-income families.
- Incentivize the rehabilitation of vacant and underutilized housing.
- Provide rental assistance and homeownership programs.
- Promote mixed-use developments that include residential options for all income levels.
- Align housing strategies with transit-oriented development to enhance connectivity.
- Expand infrastructure for industrial and tech-focused industries.
- Encourage investment in underutilized areas such as downtown and vacant properties.
- Expand mixed-use developments to integrate business, housing and public spaces.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.



Harlingen Land Use Policies

Harlingen’s land use policies guide how the City grows in a way that is balanced, inclusive and future-ready. These policies support reinvestment in existing neighborhoods, expansion of housing and job opportunities and protection of natural resources. The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) helps coordinate where and how different types of development should occur. Together, these tools shape a more connected, equitable and resilient Harlingen.



Sustainable Growth & Development

Promote a balanced mix of land uses that support economic growth, job creation and housing diversity. Encourage redevelopment of underutilized areas while preserving Harlingen’s unique character and identity.



Connected & Inclusive Communities

Enhance accessibility and connectivity by prioritizing mixed-use developments, complete streets and well-integrated public spaces. Ensure that land use decisions foster walkability, transportation options and proximity to essential services.



Resilient & Adaptive Land Use Planning

Incorporate sustainable practices, green infrastructure and disaster resilience strategies into future land use decisions. Support developments that minimize environmental impact and enhance Harlingen’s long-term livability.



Equitable and Strategic Growth

Support land use decisions that reduce disparities in access to amenities, services and opportunities across neighborhoods. Encourage investment in historically underserved areas by prioritizing public facilities, quality housing and infrastructure improvement

What We’ve Heard So Far...

“We need more opportunities for high-wage jobs in Harlingen to support families and encourage young professionals to stay.”

“Affordable housing options are essential for making Harlingen a place where everyone can thrive.”

“Supporting small businesses and creating more local shopping options will help strengthen our community.”

“Public transportation options are lacking, making it hard for people without cars to get to work or school.”

“Better infrastructure, like roads and streetlights, is essential for safety and future development”

“We need more diverse housing choices, including single-family homes, townhomes, and apartments.”

“Sidewalks and bike lanes are critical for ensuring pedestrian safety and promoting alternative modes of transportation.”

“We must focus on developing areas closer to the city core before expanding outward.”

“Affordable housing options are crucial for retaining families and younger residents in Harlingen.”

Key Takeaways:

- Residents want improved public spaces, infrastructure and parks.
- Economic development and job creation are top community priorities.
- Affordable and inclusive housing options are urgently needed.
- Transportation access and mobility remain key challenges.
- There is strong support for protecting and enhancing natural resources.
- Investment in cultural initiatives and community identity is important.
- Residents value equity in access to amenities across all neighborhoods.
- Future planning should focus on attracting and retaining young professionals and families.

Land Use & Resilience Connection

The incorporation of resilience into land use and growth planning involves thoughtfully integrating City development and leveraging growth in a resilient manner to steer responsible development.



Natural Resource Management

Managing natural resources and preserving open spaces with new developments enhances ecological resilience. By prioritizing these considerations, the City can continue to advance environmental resiliency.



Historic Preservation

Preserving historic sites enhances cultural resilience by supporting community pride and fostering economic diversification through thoughtful development initiatives that harness existing assets.



Mixed-Use Development

Fostering a diverse and integrated community fabric supports a blend of residential, commercial and recreational spaces, creating an environment where residents can access their daily needs, support local businesses, and experience environmental amenities.



Green Infrastructure

Integrating green infrastructure into land use planning incorporates urban design elements that fortify buildings and infrastructure for resilience against environmental challenges.



Housing Diversity

Planning diverse housing options, such as affordable housing developments and enhanced building standards, boosts social resilience, promotes housing stability, equitable access and community well-being.



Smart Growth

Implementing smart growth principles in land use planning enhances resilience by optimizing resources, improving transportation efficiency, reducing environmental impacts and ensuring that growth occurs in a resilient manner.

Existing Land Use

Analyzing existing land use is a critical step in comprehensive planning, as it provides insight into the distribution of residential, commercial, agricultural and industrial spaces within the City. Agriculture historically dominates Harlingen’s landscape, with 5,773 acres (26%) of the City limits currently dedicated to agricultural uses, increasing to 91,832 acres (68%) when including the ETJ. This highlights the City’s strong ties to its agricultural roots, which continue to shape its economy and land use patterns.

The second largest land use category within the City limits is low-density residential, accounting for 5,621 acres (25%), reflecting Harlingen’s focus on single-family neighborhoods. When expanded to include the ETJ, low-density residential uses occupy 15,338 acres (11%), highlighting opportunities for suburban growth and development in surrounding areas.

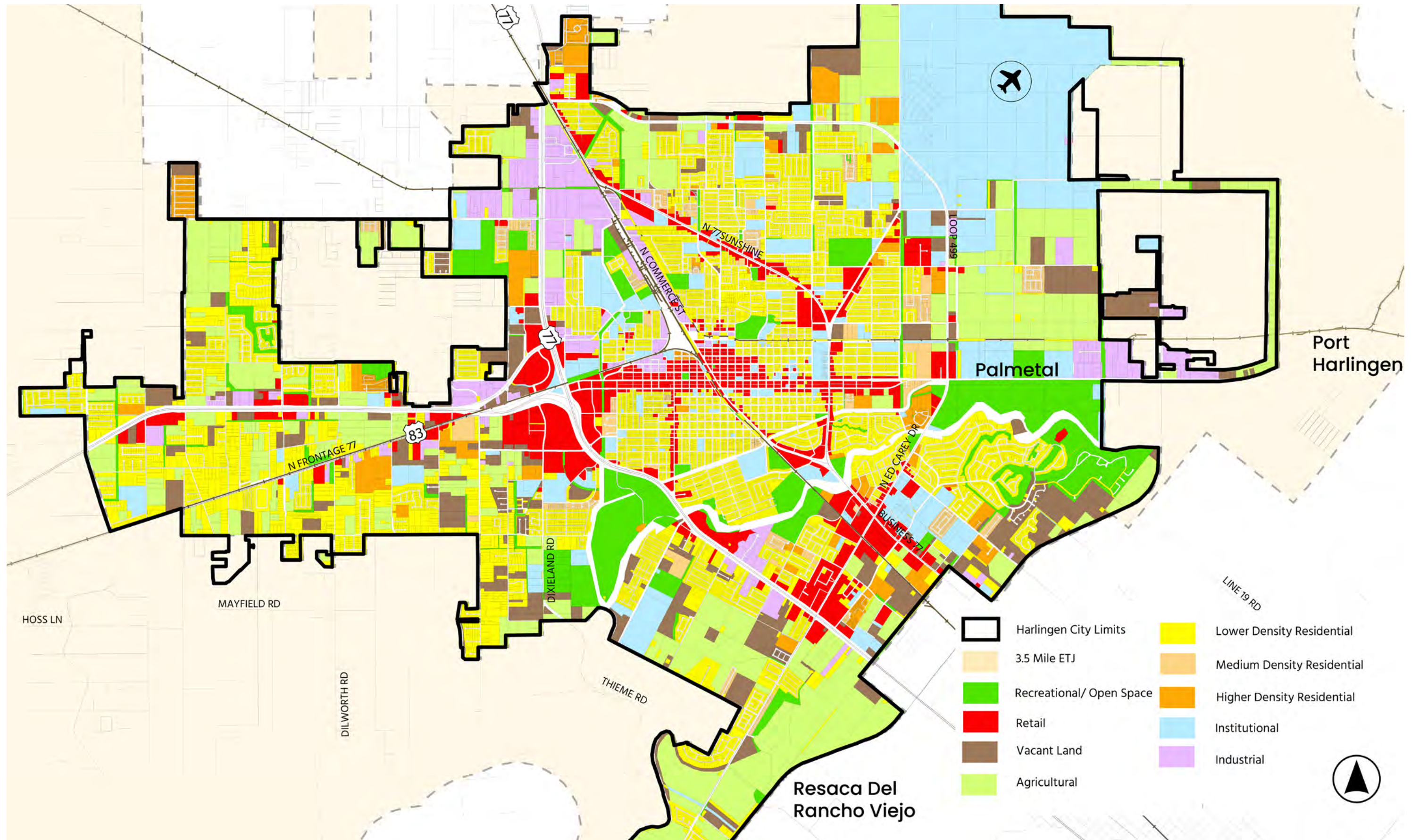
Other significant land uses include institutional and public spaces (15% of City limits), commercial uses (7% of City limits), and vacant or undeveloped land (8% of City limits). These categories reveal opportunities for future development, such as enhancing commercial corridors or utilizing vacant lands for housing or mixed-use projects to support the growing population.

High-density residential and medium-density residential areas are limited within the City, comprising 3% and 2% of City limits, respectively. Industrial uses account for 5% of City limits, with significant potential for expansion to attract industries and boost economic growth.

Harlingen’s land use distribution demonstrates its agricultural legacy while highlighting areas for strategic growth in residential, commercial and industrial sectors. By leveraging its existing land use patterns, the City can ensure sustainable development and balanced growth for its community (See Map 4 for existing land use).

Existing Land Use	City Limits (acres)	City Limits (%)	City Limits + ETJ (acres)	City Limits + ETJ (%)
Agriculture	5,773	26%	91,832	68%
Low Density Residential	5,621	25%	15,338	11%
Institutional/Public	3,397	15%	8,435	6%
Vacant/Undeveloped	1,871	8%	7,992	6%
Open Space	1,852	8%	6,276	5%
Commercial	1,573	7%	1,823	1%
Industrial	1,038	5%	1,586	1%
High Density Residential	712	3%	822	1%
Medium Density Residential	404	2%	524	0%





Map 4. Harlingen Existing Land Use

Population Growth

Insights for Harlingen’s Future Development

Analyzing growth patterns in local cities within Texas provides valuable insights when comparing them to the City of Harlingen. This comparative study helps in understanding the broader regional trends, economic dynamics and social factors that may influence Harlingen’s development. By examining the trajectories of regional cities, Harlingen can also gain valuable insights that will aid in proactively planning and accommodating new growth, ensuring the community is equipped to handle increased population demands, infrastructure needs and economic opportunities effectively. Growth comparisons were selected based on similar relative location to large metros and similar economic pressures to Harlingen. Most of these cities have already seen their first cycle of significant recent growth, which makes them valuable case studies for how the future of Harlingen may look.

Regional Growth Comparison Table

Here is a comparison of Harlingen and nearby Texas cities based on area, population and 20-year Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR). Data is derived from available sources and approximations:

Figure 6. Regional Growth Comparisons

Texas Cities	City Limits Area (Square Miles)	2000 Population	2010 Population	2020 Population	20-Year CAGR
Harlingen	41.0	57,564	64,849	71,485	1.12%
Brownsville	81.5	139,722	175,023	186,738	1.40%
McAllen	62.3	106,414	129,877	142,210	1.46%
Edinburg	44.0	48,465	77,100	101,170	3.20%
Weslaco	13.1	26,935	35,670	41,868	2.24%

Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data, Decennial Census

Growth Rate Scenarios

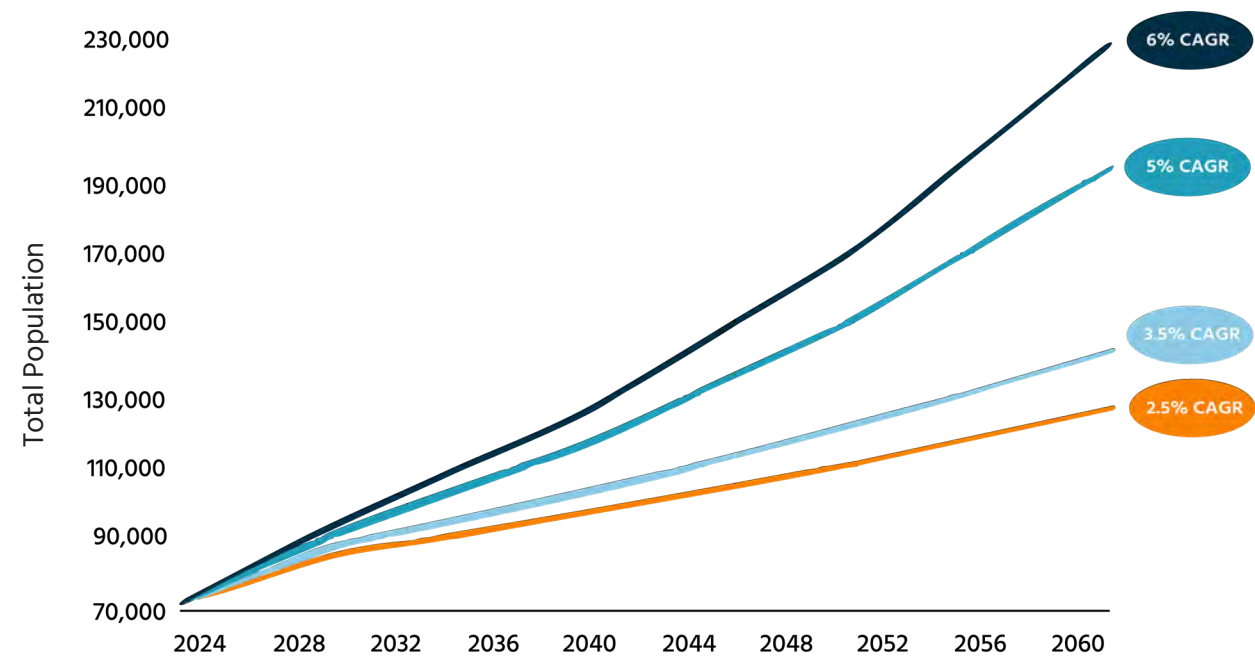
In recent decades, Harlingen’s population has grown steadily at just over 1% annually. However, the evolving economic dynamics of the Rio Grande Valley region indicate the potential for higher growth rates. With its strategic location, economic opportunities and ongoing urban development, annual growth rates between 2.5% and 6% are achievable. The following scenarios illustrate how Harlingen’s population might grow if such trends continue through 2060:

Figure 7. Harlingen Growth Scenarios

Year	2.5% CAGR	3.5% CAGR	5% CAGR	6% CAGR
2024	72,273	72,273	72,273	72,273
2030	85,436	88,347	91,482	94,673
2040	97,430	103,561	117,354	126,847
2050	111,072	121,452	150,709	170,242
2060	126,598	142,397	193,564	228,176

Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Figure 8. Harlingen Growth Scenarios Line Graph



Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is a foundational tool that guides how Harlingen will grow and evolve over time. It provides a long-term vision for where different land uses such as housing, retail, employment centers, parks and community facilities should be located. The FLUM helps the City organize growth in a way that reflects community values, supports economic opportunity, enhances quality of life and promotes sustainable development.

Serving as a blueprint for the future, the FLUM helps Harlingen make informed decisions about zoning changes, infrastructure investments, development approvals and capital improvements. It brings clarity and predictability to residents, developers and civic leaders by showing where various types of growth and change are expected to occur. It is not a zoning map, but it shapes future zoning decisions and guides day-to-day land use planning (See Map 5 for future land use).

The FLUM is especially useful when:

- Evaluating new development proposals.
- Coordinating infrastructure and transportation improvements.
- Planning for parks, schools and public services.
- Aligning growth with available utilities and natural features.
- Making updates to zoning and development regulations.

Importantly, the FLUM also helps the City manage growth and change, whether addressing future development on the west side, strengthening older neighborhoods or revitalizing underutilized corridors in the central City.

The FLUM answers key questions for Harlingen’s future:

- What types of housing, commercial, and recreational spaces will Harlingen need as it grows?
- How do we plan for economic development while protecting community character?
- How can land use policy support equity, sustainability and quality of life across all neighborhoods?

The map is grounded in community values and was created through extensive input from residents, stakeholders and City leadership. It serves as a living document that evolves with the needs and aspirations of Harlingen.

Trade-offs & Considerations



Westside Investments & Facilities

- West Harlingen has long been underserved in terms of parks, recreation and public facilities. Prioritizing land for these uses may reduce the amount of land available for commercial or residential development, but helps advance equity and quality of life.
- Community centers and healthcare access points on the Westside may require subsidies or partnerships, but they serve essential roles in closing service gaps.



Healthcare & Retaining Medical Professionals

- As Harlingen positions itself as a regional healthcare hub, retaining and attracting medical professionals is critical. Land use decisions should support housing, schools and amenities that appeal to healthcare workers.
- A strong population base with access to insurance and nearby services also helps retain healthcare infrastructure.



Luxury & Market-Rate Housing

- To grow the tax base and attract diverse residents, there is increasing interest in expanding higher-end housing. However, doing so must be balanced with the need for affordable and workforce housing across the City.
- Larger homes on the City’s fringe may increase land consumption and strain infrastructure unless paired with smart planning.



Parks and Open Space

- Investing in high-quality parks boosts livability and health outcomes but may reduce land available for revenue-generating uses like retail or housing.
- Harlingen’s year-round outdoor climate creates a strong case for integrating green space within new neighborhoods and redevelopment areas.



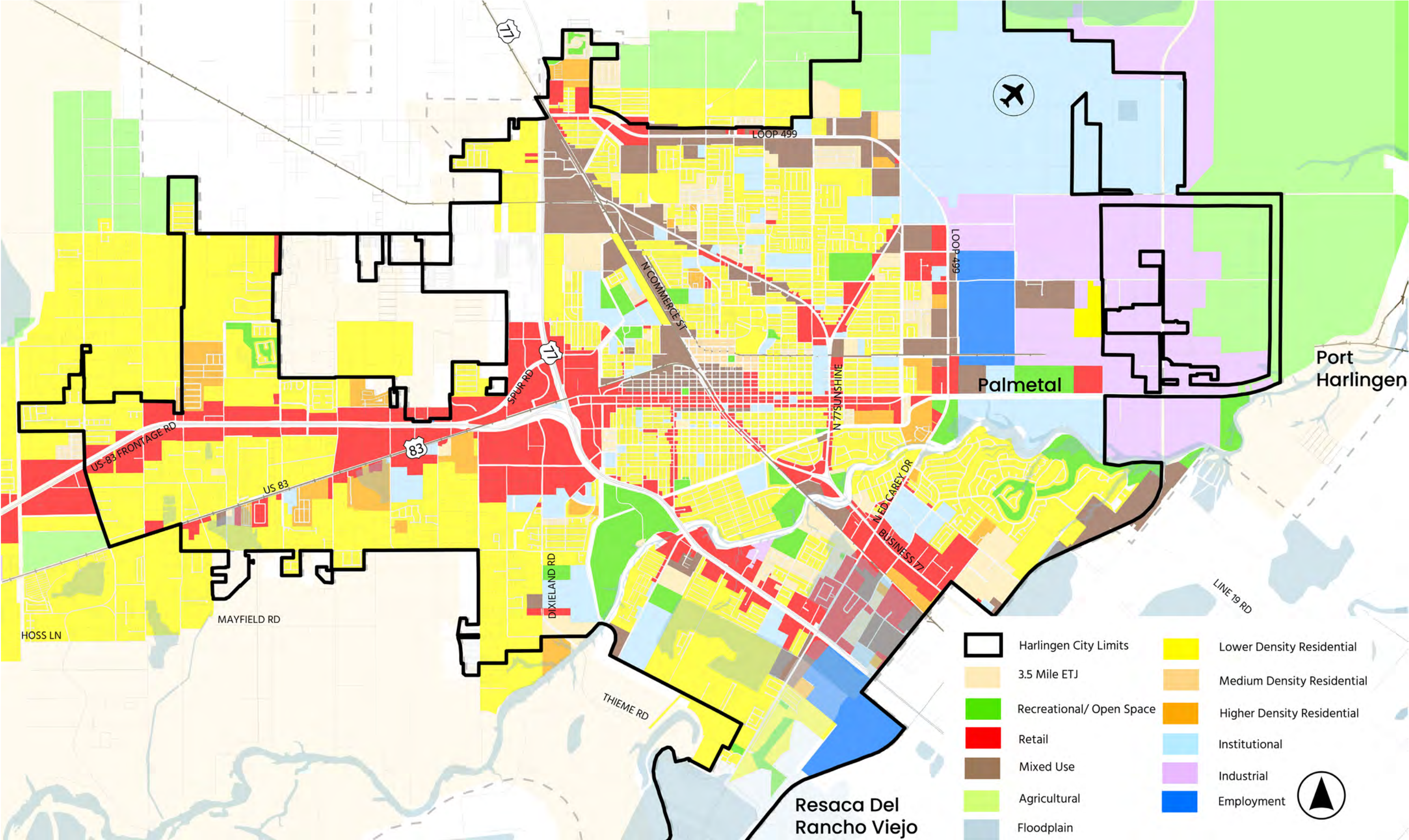
Economic Development & Commercial Corridors

- Attracting new businesses may require strategic land banking or incentives, which could delay other types of development.
- Repositioning aging corridors for mixed-use may require upfront investments, but it creates long-term value and vibrancy.



Transportation & Connectivity

- Harlingen’s spread-out development can create traffic congestion and auto-dependence. Compact, mixed-use areas with walkability and transit options can reduce vehicle miles traveled.
- Gridded streets and multi-modal infrastructure improve resilience and reduce the cost of long-term maintenance.



Map 5. Harlingen Future Land Use

Future Land Use Categories

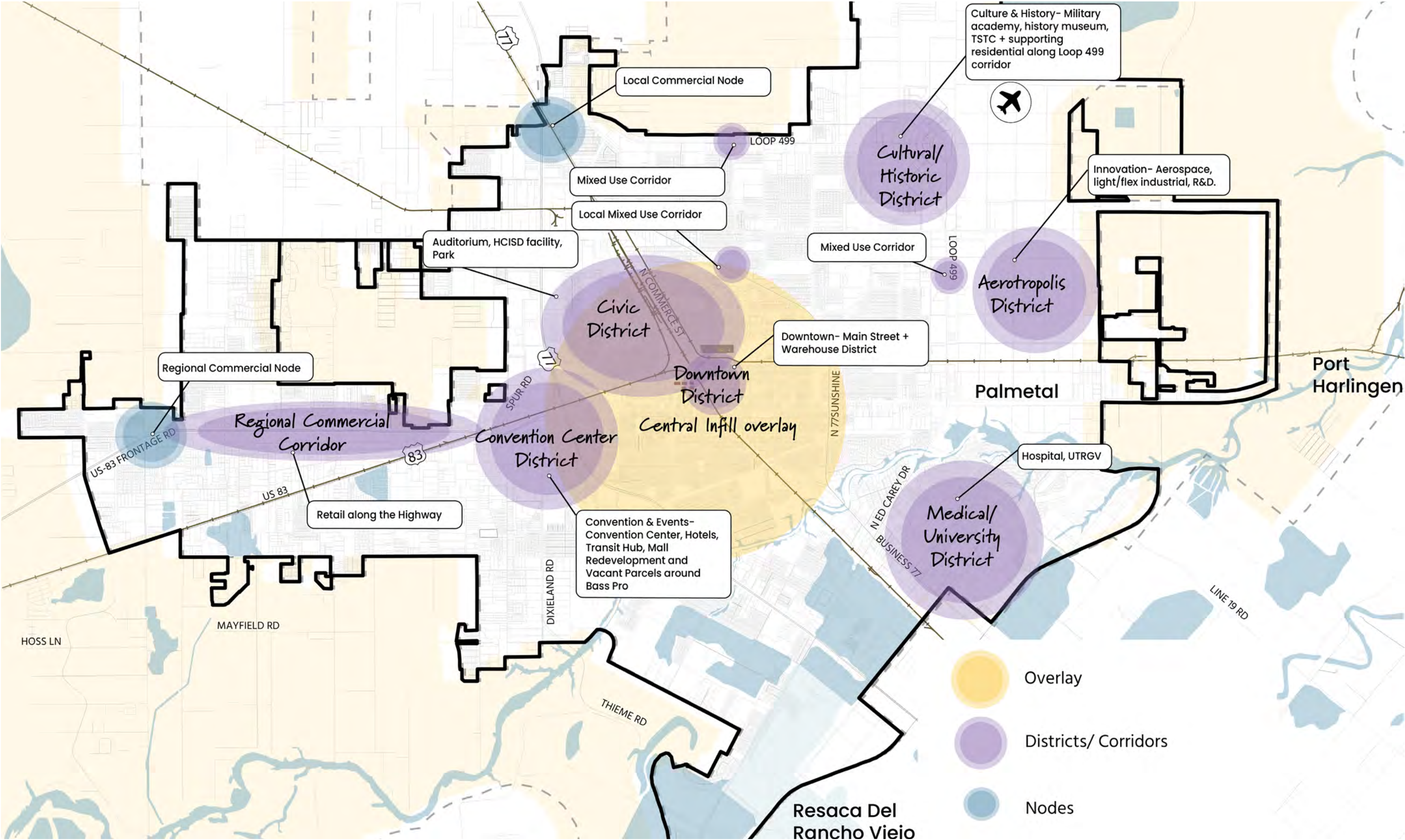
Future Land Use Categories define the intended character, scale and mix of uses for different areas of Harlingen. They guide zoning and development to ensure growth aligns with the City’s vision and priorities. These categories provide a framework for making consistent, community-focused land use decisions.

Land Use Type		Description	Image
	Agricultural	Primarily consists of traditional agriculture, focusing on the cultivation of crops, as well as the raising of livestock. This is also inclusive of complementary uses that support agriculture, such as large-lot single-family housing, barns or stables, and landscape nurseries.	
	Low Density Residential	Low-Density Residential consists of single-family housing with one dwelling unit per lot, detached from any other dwelling units and designed to be occupied by one family. This housing is typically individually owned and may be built singularly or within larger planned neighborhoods. These areas maintain a lower density, intensity and scale, aligning with traditional uniform single-family home environments.	
	Medium Density Residential	Medium-Density Residential includes a variety of housing options, including townhomes and duplexes, in a traditional neighborhood pattern. Duplexes have two attached units per lot, whereas townhomes have one unit per lot but with multiple units that share walls along a street frontage. These areas offer convenient access to small-scale neighborhood serving uses in select locations accessible without a car.	

Land Use Type		Description	Image
	High Density Residential	High-Density Residential involves housing types with numerous dwelling units, designed to be occupied by multiple families in a single building or structure, such as an apartment or condo building. This land-use type may include ancillary uses such as parking structures and leasing offices and should be incorporated in close proximity to select commercial corridors.	
	Mixed-Use	Mixed-use spaces incorporate multi-family residential uses with non-residential land uses, integrating housing with employment and retail. Mixed-use may come in a variety of scales. Neighborhood scale is generally 1-2 stories with locally-serving businesses. Neighborhood scale mixed-use is best at small nodes within residential areas where it’s accessible via multi-modal options. Community scale mixed use may have taller buildings with apartments over retail or more intense uses such as regionally serving businesses that attract users from across the community. Mixed-use spaces may be implemented horizontally or vertically along primary corridors including Commerce, 77/Sunshine Strip, and Loop 499.	
	Retail	Retail involves businesses and establishments that primarily sell commodities or goods, or who provide services to consumers. These establishments can be local or regional in scale, ranging from big box stores along major vehicular thoroughfares, to local neighborhood serving businesses. Examples include restaurants, grocery stores, beauty salons and shopping centers..	

Land Use Type		Description	Image
	Employment	Employment includes all types of professional and administrative service office uses, as well as light industrial and tech/R&D. These uses are commonly found along major thoroughfares to connect to regional markets. Due to the commuters they generate, they are a primary generator of peak traffic..	
	Recreation/ Open Space	Open space and recreation consist of public parkland, open space and/or recreational areas. This land use type includes active and passive recreation, such as public sports fields or courts, swimming pools, walking trails and pavilions. It does not include privately owned parks and open spaces.	
	Institutional	Institutional includes public-serving facilities such as schools, churches, public buildings, libraries, cemeteries and some medical facilities. This land use type may also include support facilities for these uses, such as storage lots.	
	Industrial	Allows for a range of industrial activities, including both light and heavy industry, warehousing, and distribution. Light industrial uses are typically enclosed and low-impact, such as clean manufacturing, assembly, and flex space. Heavy industrial uses, which may generate noise, odor, dust, vibration, or outdoor storage, are directed to designated areas with highway or rail access and must be sufficiently buffered from residential and commercial uses.	





Map 6. Special Districts/ Nodes

Creation of Districts

To support targeted growth, Harlingen has identified distinct districts that reflect unique community roles and development potential. These districts help guide land use, infrastructure and investment strategies (See Map 6 for Special Districts/ Nodes).



Downtown District

The heart of Harlingen, this district includes historic Main Street, the Arts District and key civic buildings. With a strong foundation of local businesses and iconic architecture, the district is primed for walkable redevelopment, upper-floor housing, public events and adaptive reuse. Reinforcing downtown’s identity as a vibrant hub for commerce, culture and community life is central to this district’s future.



Civic District

This district is anchored by City Hall, parks and public service facilities such as schools, libraries and community centers. It serves as the institutional backbone of Harlingen, providing space for education, governance and civic engagement. Future efforts will focus on public realm improvements, housing located near civic services, and better physical connections between civic destinations and surrounding neighborhoods.



Convention Center District

A regional destination for entertainment, tourism and events, this district centers around the Harlingen Convention Center and surrounding commercial areas, including revitalizing the mall site. The vision includes a mix of hospitality, retail and office uses, supported by quality public spaces and enhanced access from I-69. This area also has potential to evolve into a major mixed-use employment center with strong regional visibility.



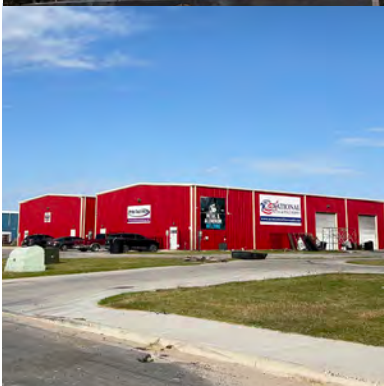
Regional Commercial Corridor

This district includes highway-adjacent retail hubs that serve both Harlingen and the surrounding region. It features large-format stores, restaurants and service uses that support the local economy. Future improvements will focus on reinvestment, connectivity and visual enhancements. There is also potential for more walkable, mixed-use redevelopment over time.



Cultural District

This district links Harlingen’s cultural and educational anchors, such as the Harlingen Arts & Heritage Museum, TSTC campus, the Marine Military Academy and several public schools. It emphasizes storytelling, public art, heritage tourism and identity-driven placemaking. This corridor supports creative businesses, student housing and programming that celebrates Harlingen’s diverse history and talent.



Aerotropolis District

With access to the Valley International Airport and nearby industrial parks, this district is positioned for long-term growth in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, logistics and workforce training. Future development will focus on employment centers, regional infrastructure and innovation-oriented land uses. Strategic branding of the Aerotropolis as an innovation corridor can help Harlingen attract forward-looking industries and position the district as a regional hub for business campuses that benefit from airport adjacency.



Medical District

Anchored by Valley Baptist Medical Center and surrounding health facilities, this district plays a critical role in Harlingen’s economy and community well-being. Supporting uses include clinics, research, health-tech businesses and housing creating a medical district that is attractive to medical professionals and welcoming to the community. The district promotes walkability, transit access and placemaking that reflects Harlingen’s role as a regional medical hub.

Over time, the Medical District can evolve into Harlingen’s Innovation District- a hub for medical research, health-tech entrepreneurship and resilient design practices. By fostering partnerships between Valley Baptist, local universities and the private sector, the district can serve as a laboratory for healthcare innovation while enhancing Harlingen’s regional competitiveness.

District Development Dashboards

Development Dashboards are a tool that provides staff, appointed officials and elected representatives with comprehensive information related to the application of the future land use model and the districts to development proposals within the City. The components of each dashboard are described in the following section. These dashboards and their elements are meant to be used as guidance and display intent, not strict rules.

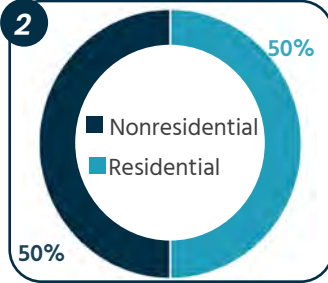
The Development Dashboards serve as a framework for the envisioned future of each City district. They provide direction on the types of development and features that may be suitable within that area.

1. District Description

Each dashboard includes the district title and a description of the district’s primary purpose, character and intended future conditions. Purpose statements should be used when considering land use decisions, such as the appropriateness of a rezoning case. Character statements should be used when evaluating the building form of a proposal or updates to the development code.

1

Example District



3

Residential Density/
Intensity/Scale



5

Project Type & Appropriateness	Compatibility Considerations
SFD	● ● ● ●
SFD + ADU	● ● ● ●
SFA	● ● ● ○
Small Multi-Family	● ● ● ○
Large Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ● ○
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ● ● ●
Retail	● ● ● ○
Office	● ● ● ●
Industrial	○ ○ ○ ○

2. Development Ratio

The development ratio dial provides guidance on the overall target mix of residential to non-residential development types envisioned for the areas within the district. This is not intended to be a hard number but rather a general rule of thumb.

3. Density, Intensity & Scale

The recommended density, intensity (i.e. lot coverage) and scale for development in each district are located beneath the purpose statement. Density is represented by dwelling units per acre (DUA) and should be referenced when considering land use decisions with new or redeveloped housing components. Intensity and scale should be considered based on a proposal’s relationship to nearby residences and structures. For example, if immediately adjacent to a neighborhood, consideration may be given to limiting the scale of non-residential structures. Scale may be referenced in stories, with one story being approximately 12 to 14 feet high.

4. Visual Representation

Each dashboard includes images depicting examples of the intended character within each district. Local examples are used when available. These photos are not all-encompassing and may not illustrate all appropriate attributes. The representations, however, should be referenced when considering the built form of development inquiries.

5. Project Type & Appropriateness Table

The appropriateness table features ten common project types that illustrate compatible uses within each district. A description of each project type is provided below. Appropriateness ranges are given for each project type on a scale of zero to four markers. Where there is no marker, it means that project type should be prohibited within the district, while four markers mean that project type should likely be allowed by right within the district. Where additional considerations related to the application of a project type are necessary, clarification is provided in the last column. Notably, parks and public facilities are considered appropriate in all districts, regardless of marker designation.

Single-Family Detached (SFD)

Detached dwelling units on separate lots. These homes are typically individually owned and may be built singularly or within larger neighborhood developments.

SFD + Additional Dwelling Unit (ADU)

A detached dwelling unit with a secondary unit on the same property. These ADUs are smaller than the primary unit and can take many forms, including garage apartments, granny flats or backyard casitas. ADUs allow for the provision of housing without drastically changing neighborhood character.

Single-Family Attached (SFA)

Residential dwellings that are connected by a shared wall, such as duplexes or townhomes. Units may be on an individual or shared lot and are higher density than detached single-family homes, but are similar in character and style.

Small Multi-Family (8-12 Units)

Multiple units contained within a single building, with units usually stacked on top of each other, with 8-12 units per lot. Usually the individual units are for rent (apartments), but may be for sale (condos). Multi-family development is the densest type of residential development and may include ancillary uses like parking structures and leasing offices.

Large Multi-Family (12+ Units)

Similar to small multifamily but with 12+ units per lot and may include multiple buildings on the lot, creating a complex.

Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale

Both residential, office, retail and/or other uses contained within a single building or development. These uses may be horizontal or vertical mixed-use. In vertical mixed-use, the ground floor is encouraged to be food and beverage or pedestrian-oriented retail and services, to encourage foot traffic and activity. The residential may be for rent or for sale in a condo regime. Neighborhood scale denotes density, intensity and scale are lower and more compatible with nearby residential neighborhood land uses.

Mixed-Use, Community Scale

Similar to mixed-use, neighborhood scale above but with somewhat higher density, intensity and scale. This project type should act as a community wide draw and attract residents outside of nearby neighborhoods.

Retail

Shops, restaurants, professional services and entertainment uses that can be local or regional scale, depending on their service areas. Locally scaled retail is suitable for small businesses and appropriate for infill projects within existing neighborhoods. Regional scale includes big box stores typically located along major thoroughfares.

Office

Professional and medical offices, including hospitals, that support various employment uses.

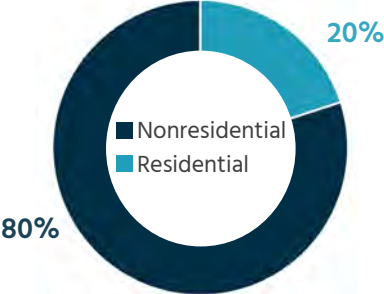
Industrial

Industrial includes both light and general manufacturing uses. Light industrial activities do not generate significant nuisances and are contained indoors. Heavier industrial uses, which may involve outdoor storage, higher truck traffic, and potential nuisances, are directed to designated areas with appropriate buffering and infrastructure.



Downtown District

The historic heart of the City, Downtown Harlingen features a vibrant Main Street lined with shops and restaurants as well as some warehousing. Plans for redevelopment in this district are laid out in Harlingen’s Downtown Plan.



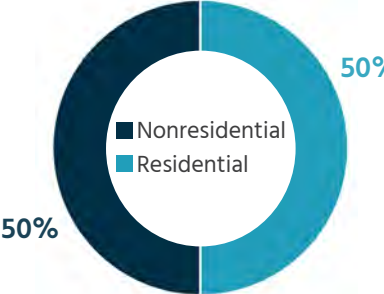
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
10 to 75 units per acre	Medium, High in some circumstances	1 to 9 Stories Low to Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	● ○ ○ ○	Not considered compatible, as the intent is to provide higher-density housing and activity centers with retail.
SFD + ADU	● ○ ○ ○	
SFA	● ● ● ○	Residential developments can be compatible, provided that they are appropriately located in horizontal or vertical mixed-use areas close to the downtown core.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ● ●	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ○ ○	This is the ideal form of development within the Downtown District, including activity centers, retail, services and diverse housing options; design should emphasize the pedestrian experience.
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ● ● ●	
Retail	● ● ● ●	Most appropriate in the downtown core or major corridors.
Office	● ● ● ○	Most appropriate on upper floors of mixed use buildings with active ground floor uses.
Industrial	● ○ ○ ○	Flex and light industrial that supports the goals of downtown, such as maker spaces and studios.



Civic District

A predominately residential area that consists of single family and small-scale multifamily housing, local serving retail and civic facilities including City Hall, Harlingen Municipal Auditorium and Lon C Hill Park.



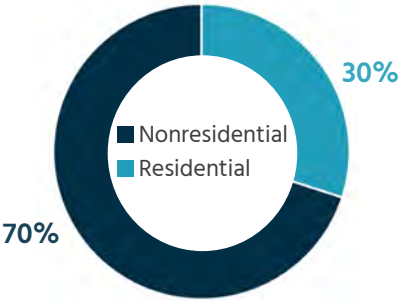
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
3 to 22 units per acre	Low	1 to 4 Stories Low/Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	● ● ● ●	Appropriate in low-density residential areas.
SFD + ADU	● ● ● ●	
SFA	● ● ● ○	Appropriate in medium-density residential and mixed-use areas with close proximity to civic amenities.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ● ○	Most appropriate in northeast node of the District.
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ○ ○ ○	
Retail	● ● ● ○	Neighborhood-serving retail and entertainment is most appropriate in mixed use areas and along District corridors.
Office	● ● ○ ○	Most appropriate in existing space reserved for civic uses.
Industrial	● ○ ○ ○	All industrial project types should be located along the eastern corridor of the District.



Convention District

Located at the intersection of highways US-77 and US-83, this district is a central hub for retail, events and entertainment that attracts local residents and visitors from out of town. Additionally, this district includes a variety of residential areas ranging from low-to high-density.



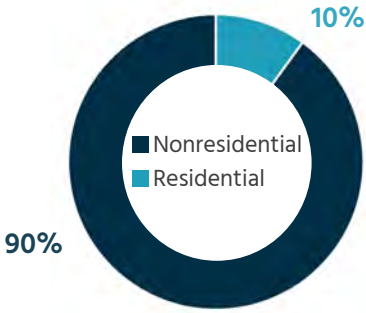
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
10 to 40 units per acre	Medium, High in some circumstances	1 to 9 Stories Low to Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFD + ADU	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFA	● ● ○ ○	Most appropriate in medium-density residential areas.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	Appropriate in high-density residential areas.
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	○ ○ ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ● ● ●	Appropriate within the district core and along major corridors. Should account for local as well as community-wide draw to this project type.
Retail	● ● ● ●	Appropriate overall. Retail developments should be regional in the size and scale.
Office	● ● ● ●	Appropriate if located within a mixed-use development or along major corridors.
Industrial	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate for limited light industrial development.



Regional Commercial Corridor

A regional hub that serves as the western gateway along US-83. This districts features commercial land uses along the highway as well neighborhoods comprised of single-family homes.



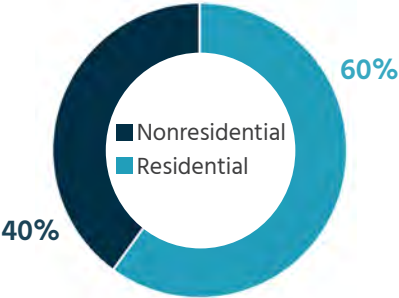
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
10 to 40 units per acre	Medium	1 to 4 Stories Low/Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFD + ADU	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFA	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate along northern perimeter of district to support transition to adjacent, lower density residential areas.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ● ○	May be appropriate if set-back from major roadways. Should focus on the retail and services for nearby neighborhoods.
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ○ ○ ○	
Retail	● ● ● ●	Appropriate overall, with a regional retail size and scale.
Office	● ● ● ●	Appropriate overall.
Industrial	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate if integrated within larger, regional commercial developments.



Cultural District

This district provides a hub for the City’s culture and heritage while serving as a gateway for those arriving through the Valley International Airport. Supporting residential uses can be found along Loop 499 in addition to arts and historical institutions.



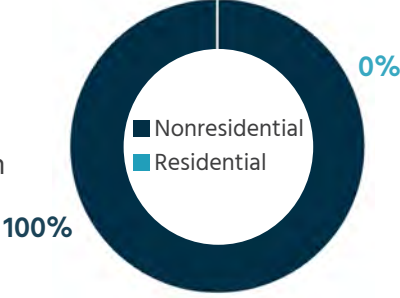
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
4 to 22 units per acre	Low to Medium	1 to 4 Stories Low/Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	● ● ● ●	Appropriate in low-density residential areas.
SFD + ADU	● ● ● ●	
SFA	● ● ● ○	Appropriate to support transition to adjacent, lower density residential areas.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	Most appropriate in high-density residential and mixed-use areas with close proximity to schools and employment centers.
Large Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ● ○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ○ ○ ○	
Retail	● ● ● ○	Appropriate in mixed-use areas and along major corridors.
Office	● ● ● ○	Appropriate along major corridors and near the Valley International Airport.
Industrial	● ● ● ○	



Aerotropolis District

The Aerotropolis District, located south of Valley International Airport, is largely undeveloped aside from one neighborhood. Future development will target light industrial uses compatible with airport operations, including research and development, aerospace, logistics, and flex industrial. Heavy industrial uses that generate noise, odor, dust, or require outdoor storage are not appropriate in this district and are directed to other industrial areas in Harlingen.



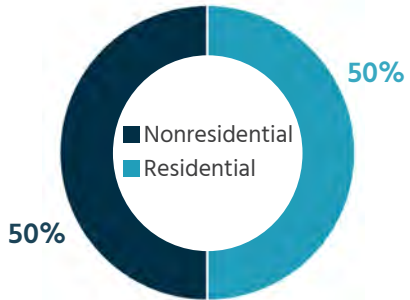
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
0 units per acre	Medium	1 to 2 Stories Low-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	○ ○ ○ ○	Not considered appropriate, as this district can contain uses and businesses that may be considered a nuisance to residents.
SFD + ADU	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFA	○ ○ ○ ○	
Small Multi-Family	○ ○ ○ ○	
Large Multi-Family	○ ○ ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	○ ○ ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	○ ○ ○ ○	
Retail	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate with increased emphasis on the service industry and office employment. These project types serve to boost attractiveness of office developments.
Office	● ● ● ●	Appropriate in employment and industrial areas
Industrial	● ● ● ●	Appropriate overall, with high quality design standards.



Medical District

Centered around the City’s healthcare institutions, this district includes a variety of housing options and supporting retail along local corridors.



Residential Density		Intensity	Scale
18 to 40 units per acre		Medium, High in some circumstances	1 to 9 Stories Low to Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	● ● ○ ○	
SFD + ADU	● ● ○ ○	
SFA	● ● ● ○	Appropriate in medium and high-density residential areas. Should be located in close proximity to schools and employment centers.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ● ●	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ● ● ●	Appropriate within the district core and along major corridors. Should account for local as well as community-wide draw to this project type and design should emphasize the pedestrian experience.
Retail	● ● ● ●	Regional-scale retail is appropriate along major corridors. Local-scale retail should be concentrated within the district core, with nearby pedestrian access.
Office	● ● ● ●	Appropriate in mixed-use and employment areas.
Industrial	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate for light industrial such as research and development, medical and flex industrial uses.



Urban Design Best Practices for Harlingen

Urban design is about shaping the everyday spaces where people live, work and gather. For Harlingen, good design means more than just aesthetics it’s about comfort, safety, connectivity and creating a sense of pride in the City. These best practices reflect what we heard from the community and provide a roadmap for how public spaces, streets and development can support a more vibrant, resilient and inclusive Harlingen.



Prioritize the Public Realm

The public realm, including sidewalks, parks, streetscapes and plazas, plays a major role in shaping community life. Investments in wider sidewalks, street trees, shaded bus stops, solar lighting and benches can make Harlingen more walkable, welcoming and safe for all residents. Feedback from the community emphasized a desire for better lighting, accessible walkways and more comfortable places to gather, especially in Downtown and on the Westside.

- Install solar lighting in parks, alleys and along sidewalks for added safety.
- Provide benches, shade, trash cans and water fountains in gathering areas.
- Activate underused public spaces with events, art and temporary installations.
- Improve sidewalks near schools, parks and high-traffic streets.
- Focus on pedestrian-friendly design in Westside neighborhoods and Downtown.



Beautify Gateways and Corridors

Major roads and entry points into Harlingen shape how residents and visitors experience the City. Improvements such as native landscaping, public art, attractive signage and lighting enhance community pride and attract investment. Corridors like Commerce Street were frequently mentioned as needing visual upgrades and better maintenance.

- Add trees, planting strips and native flowers along major streets.
- Install coordinated signage and directional markers that reflect Harlingen’s identity.
- Use lighting and public art to highlight key gateways into the City.
- Improve building facades and remove visual clutter in commercial areas.
- Maintain clean and consistent streetscapes across key corridors.



Make Downtown a Destination

Downtown Harlingen is full of charm and history. It has the potential to become a more vibrant and active place for shopping, dining, events and daily life. Design strategies should focus on walkability, lighting and bringing more housing and activity into the area. Residents want Downtown to feel safe, well-lit and alive with culture.

- Encourage apartments or lofts above existing storefronts.
- Transform alleys into public gathering spaces with lighting and greenery.
- Expand outdoor events and evening programming like concerts and markets.
- Improve sidewalk conditions and pedestrian crossings on Jackson Street.
- Offer support for businesses to refresh storefronts and activate the ground floor.



Design for Connectivity

Getting around safely and comfortably is a top priority in Harlingen. Whether by foot, bike or bus, residents want streets and trails that connect neighborhoods to parks, schools and jobs. Streets should serve all users, not just drivers.

- Fill sidewalk gaps near schools, parks and civic buildings.
- Build more bike lanes and connect them to existing trails.
- Add safe crossings at busy intersections and along major roads.
- Ensure sidewalks and trails are accessible for everyone, including those with disabilities.
- Extend and connect the Arroyo trail to more parts of the City.



Elevate Westside Neighborhoods

Equity in design means focusing investment where it is needed most. Harlingen’s Westside has been identified as an area with unmet needs. Improving infrastructure and public spaces here can support long-term growth and well-being for all residents.

- Build parks, trails and plazas in underserved Westside areas.
- Upgrade lighting, sidewalks and drainage systems.
- Develop community centers, youth facilities and local services.
- Improve access to jobs, schools and transit in Westside neighborhoods.
- Use public art and placemaking to celebrate neighborhood pride.



Celebrate Harlingen’s Identity

Design can help tell Harlingen’s story and reflect its rich culture and heritage. From public art to historic buildings and signage, the City’s unique character can be expressed in creative and authentic ways.

- Use murals and cultural installations that reflect Harlingen’s people and history.
- Preserve historic buildings and encourage adaptive reuse.
- Highlight the City’s bicultural roots in signage, materials and public spaces.
- Support local artists and makers through public art programs.
- Incorporate color, texture and materials that are unique to the Rio Grande Valley.



Create Resilient and Climate-Friendly Design

With frequent flooding and extreme heat, Harlingen must build with the future in mind. Green design strategies can reduce risks, save resources and make neighborhoods more livable.

- Plant trees and add shaded areas in parks and along streets.
- Use drought-resistant landscaping and rain gardens to manage stormwater.
- Encourage permeable paving for sidewalks and parking areas.
- Design for passive cooling through shade, ventilation and orientation.
- Use building and street materials that reduce heat and reflect sunlight.



CHAPTER

3

COMPLETE
COMMUNITIES

Vision Elements



Resilient Community



Diverse Housing



Economic Growth
and Opportunity

Goals

In 2050

Harlingen aspires to foster a resilient community that supports its people through inclusivity, safety and robust support systems.

In 2050

Harlingen will offer diverse housing options to accommodate all income levels, life stages and family types.

In 2050

Harlingen will focus on creating opportunities for economic growth that benefit all residents and future generations.

Objectives

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Provide resources and initiatives to address poverty and affordable housing.
- Increase the availability of affordable housing for low- and middle-income families.
- Encourage development of “missing middle” housing such as townhomes, duplexes and small-lot single-family homes.
- Desire for luxury housing to attract professionals and boost economic growth.
- Incentive the rehabilitation of vacant and underutilized housing.
- Provide rental assistance and homeownership programs.
- Promote mixed-use developments that include residential options for all income levels.
- Align housing strategies with transit-oriented development to enhance connectivity.
- Encourage investment in underutilized areas such as downtown and vacant properties.
- Expand mixed-use developments to integrate business, housing and public spaces.



Housing Policies

Ensuring high-quality housing options is essential for fostering a resilient and thriving community. These housing policies aim to promote affordability, inclusivity, connectivity and well-being, guiding future development to support Harlingen’s diverse population and long-term growth. By prioritizing walkability, mixed-use development and access to essential amenities, the City can create neighborhoods that enhance quality of life and economic opportunity for all residents.



Diverse & Inclusive Housing Options

Encourage a variety of housing types that cater to all income levels, life stages and family sizes. Promote mixed-use developments that integrate residential spaces with jobs, retail and services.



Walkable & Connected Neighborhoods

Enhance pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, expand public transit and create vibrant streetscapes. Prioritize developments that reduce car dependency and improve access to essential amenities.



Strong Sense of Place & Community

Support policies that promote high-quality public spaces, parks and gathering areas. Encourage development patterns that foster social interaction, local identity and long-term neighborhood resilience.



Health & Wellness Policy

Incorporating health and wellness policies into the Housing Chapter ensures that residential developments promote safe, walkable neighborhoods, access to parks and green spaces and high-quality housing conditions. Prioritizing equitable access to healthcare facilities, active transportation options and environmental sustainability will enhance overall community well-being.

What We’ve Heard So Far...

“We need more affordable housing options for families just starting out.”

“The city should encourage development of mixed-use housing to attract young professionals.”

“Downsizing options for older residents would help keep them in the community.”

“Affordable housing is critical for service industry workers and blue-collar employees.”

“Single-family starter homes are in high demand; we should focus on providing more of these.”

“Small-lot single-family homes and townhomes could address the gap in the ‘missing middle’ housing.”

“The lack of housing diversity is a barrier to attracting diverse populations to the city.”

“Investing in subsidized affordable housing would make Harlingen more accessible for everyone.”

“Developers should incorporate higher-end luxury housing to attract executives and high-income workers.”

Key Takeaways:

- Strong demand for affordable starter homes for families and workforce housing for service industry employees.
- Need for downsizing options for older residents to help them remain in the community.
- Interest in “missing middle” housing, such as small-lot single-family homes and townhomes, to bridge affordability gaps.
- Desire for higher-end housing to attract professionals and boost economic growth.
- Emphasis on investments in subsidized affordable housing to improve accessibility for all income levels.
- Concern that lack of housing diversity may hinder population growth and economic opportunities in Harlingen.

Housing & Resilience Connection

Incorporating housing resilience into growth planning entails strategically aligning city development with a focus on fostering resilient housing solutions. This approach leverages growth to promote responsible housing development practices and supporting community needs.



Policy/Finance

Establishing policies and financial structures that support housing development and maintenance contribute to community resilience by promoting stability and adaptability in response to challenges.



Neighborhood Infrastructure

The physical infrastructure of a community, including transportation, utilities and public spaces, enhances resilience by providing essential services and facilitates connectivity and accessibility during disruption.



Housing Stock

The physical condition and design of housing units directly impacts resilience by determining their ability to withstand environmental stressors and meet evolving resident needs.



People and Social Capital

Strong social networks and community relationships enhance resilience through support, information sharing and coordinated responses, fostering community cohesion and reducing vulnerability.



Environmental Resilience

Integrating design principles into housing development minimizes environmental impact, conserves resources and enhances the long term ecological resilience of communities, promoting adaptability to environmental changes.



Equity Resilience

Equity in access to resources, opportunities and decision-making processes fosters social cohesion, reduces disparities and promotes inclusive development strategies that support the well-being of all residents.



Diverse & Inclusive Housing Options

Housing Stock & Supply

Harlingen’s housing landscape reflects a diverse mix of household types, with 37% of households including children and 29.4% with seniors. The City’s average household size is 2.76 people, highlighting the need for flexible housing options to accommodate families, seniors and individuals living alone.

The City’s housing stock is primarily single-family detached homes, making up 60% of all units, with multi-family housing at 31% and manufactured or other housing types at 7%. While 56.5% of homes are owner-occupied and 43.5% renter-occupied, affordability remains a challenge for many residents. A wider variety of housing types, including townhomes and duplexes, could address these challenges by offering more attainable options and supporting diverse household compositions.

Housing affordability is a critical issue, with median monthly costs at \$910 and a median mortgage value of \$215,000. The majority of households (28.7%) spend \$500-\$799 monthly on housing. Introducing “missing middle” housing options, such as duplexes and small-scale apartments, could provide cost-effective alternatives for families and individuals while maintaining the City’s character. Expanding

these options can help attract young professionals, retain retirees and meet the needs of multi-generational families.

Recent housing permit trends reveal growth, with 178 single-family home permits and 148 apartment unit permits issued in 2024. This recovery reflects efforts to address housing shortages, but strategic planning is necessary to ensure future developments align with affordability and accessibility goals. Additional focus on mixed-use developments could also bring jobs and amenities closer to residents, further reducing overall household costs.

To support its growing population, Harlingen must diversify its housing options by increasing affordable rentals, expanding homeownership opportunities and promoting missing middle housing. These efforts will ensure a vibrant and sustainable community that meets the needs of current and future residents.

Figure 9. New Single-Family Homes in 2024

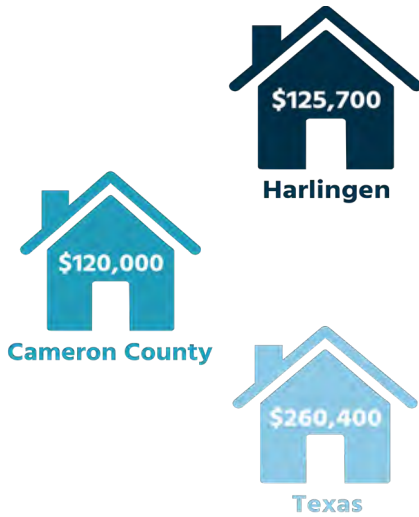


Source: City of Harlingen Planning & Development

Figure 10. New Multi-Family Units in 2024

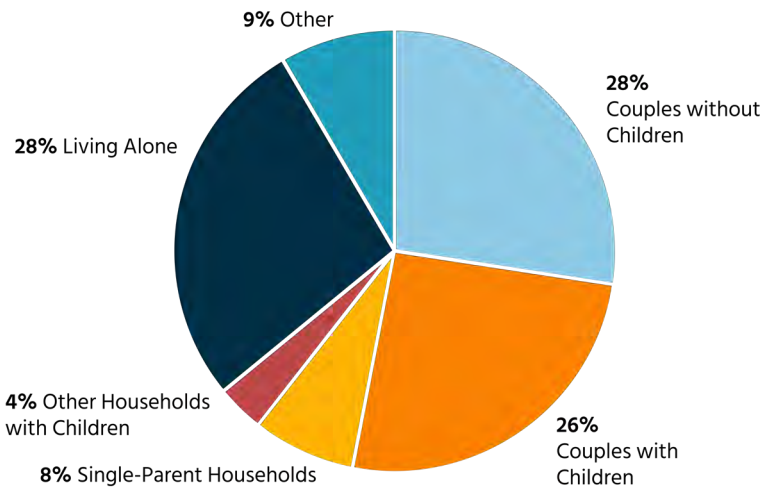


Figure 11. Median Home Value



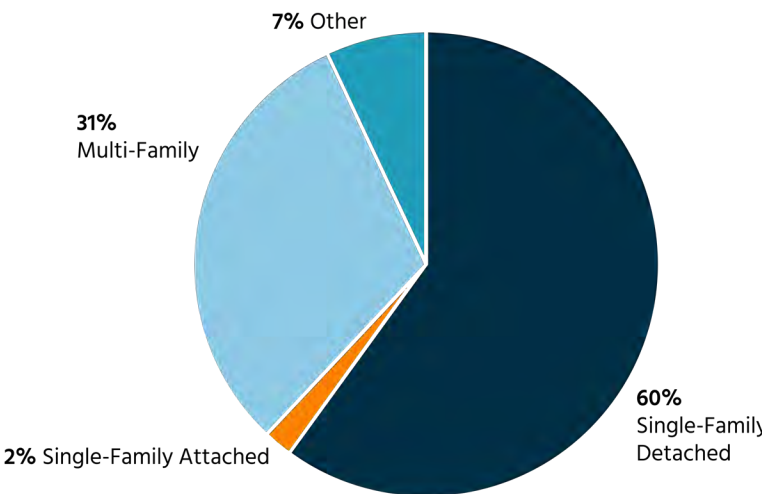
Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 12. Existing Household Makeup



Source: 2018 - 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 13. Existing Housing Mix



Source: 2018 - 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Housing Estimate and 10-Year Projection

This housing study provides both the composition of the existing housing stock, including the total number of units, and a projection for the number of housing units needed ten (10) years into the future.

As of 2023, Harlingen has approximately 27,000 housing units, consisting of 60% single-family homes, 31% multifamily and 7% manufactured or other types.

Based on the projected population growth of 82,500 residents by 2035 and an average household size of 2.7, Harlingen will need an estimated 3,900 additional housing units to meet future housing demand.

Housing Affordability

Harlingen’s housing affordability presents challenges and opportunities, as revealed by recent statistics from the H+T Index. With a median household income of \$38,758 and an average household size of 3.36 people, housing affordability is a key concern for many residents. Housing costs in Harlingen represent 29% of household income on average.

Highlights

- 34.8% of households spend 24-30% of their income on housing costs.
- 20.9% spend 30-36% of their income, marking the threshold for housing cost burden.
- Nearly 24% fall into the 36-44% range, indicating a substantial portion of residents are facing high housing expenses.
- A small fraction, 2.7%, experience extreme housing cost burdens, spending more than 44% of their income on housing.

Recommendations

- Increase Affordable Housing Supply
- Support Rental Assistance Programs
- Promote Mixed-Income Development

Housing + Transportation Affordability

The H+T Index, which combines housing and transportation costs, provides a clearer view of affordability. Nationally, only 26% of neighborhoods are affordable when transportation costs are included, compared to 55% under the traditional 30% housing-cost benchmark. In Harlingen, households spend an average of 61% of their income on housing and transportation, 29% on housing and 32% on transportation, far exceeding the recommended 45% threshold. Transportation costs, the second-largest expense after housing, are driven by Harlingen’s reliance on personal vehicles, long commute distances and limited access to nearby jobs and services, leading to higher fuel, insurance and maintenance expenses.

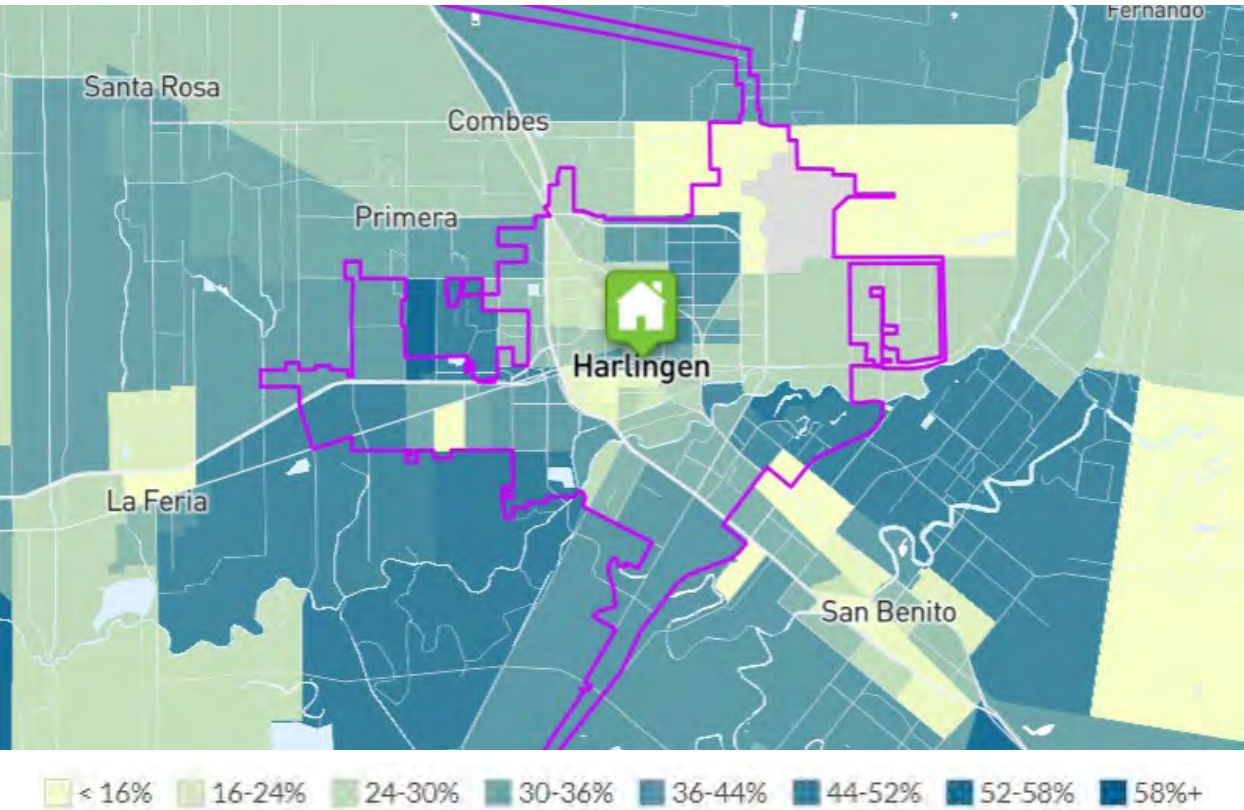
Highlights

- Harlingen’s urban and suburban areas have the highest concentration of households spending 54-66% and 66-78% of their income on housing and transportation.
- Nearly 29% of the population spends 66-78% of their income on these combined costs.
- A significant portion, 47% of the population, spends between 54-66%, highlighting how transportation costs strain overall affordability.

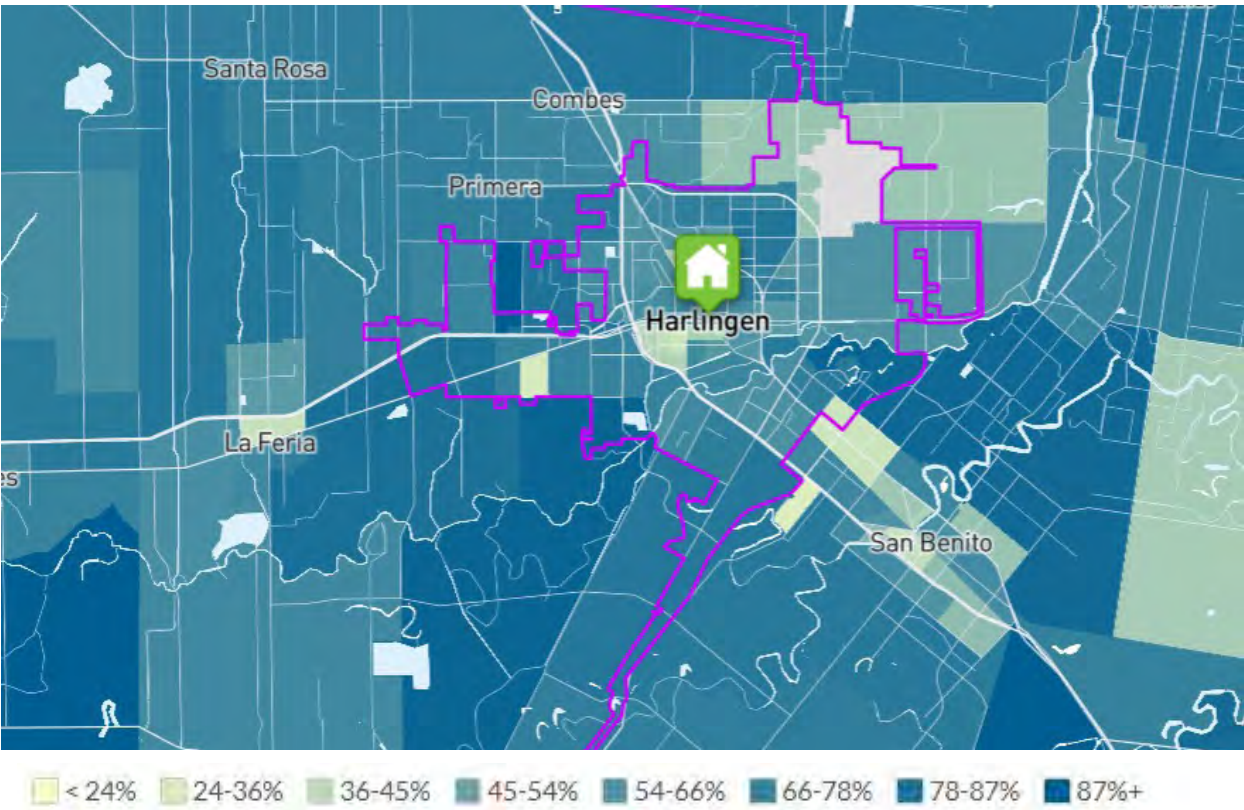
Recommendations

- Expanding public transportation options and promoting walkability to reduce car dependency.
- Encouraging mixed-use developments to bring jobs and services closer to residential areas, lowering transportation costs.
- Implementing policies that ensure housing remains affordable while addressing the broader cost burdens

Map 7. H+T Index Map - Housing Costs as % of Income



Map 8. H+T Index Map - Housing + Transportation Costs as % of Income



Identification of Future Housing and Diversification Needs in Harlingen

As Harlingen continues to grow and evolve, ensuring a diverse and resilient housing market will be critical for long-term sustainability and affordability. The City’s housing needs must align with changing demographics, economic development goals and infrastructure investments, ensuring that all residents whether young professionals, families or retirees, have access to suitable housing. To build a future-ready housing market, the City must prioritize a balanced mix of housing types, strategic investments in revitalization and policies that enhance affordability and resilience.

Future Housing Needs and Diversification Strategies



Expanding Missing Middle Housing

Harlingen’s current housing stock is predominantly single-family detached homes, making up 60% of all housing units, while multi-family units account for 31%. To address affordability challenges and changing household preferences, the City must promote “missing middle” housing including townhomes, duplexes and small-scale multi-family developments to bridge the gap between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. These housing types:

- Provide more attainable homeownership options for young families and first-time buyers.
- Support density and walkability in key areas, reducing car dependency.
- Encourage diverse neighborhood compositions that accommodate families and single professionals.



Affordable and Workforce Housing for Economic Sustainability

With a median household income of \$38,758 and nearly 24% of residents facing high housing costs (spending 36-44% of their income on housing), affordability remains a significant issue. The City must expand housing options that cater to essential workforce members, including service industry employees, healthcare workers and teachers. This can be achieved through:

- Incentives for developers to build affordable housing, particularly near employment hubs and transit corridors.
- Partnerships with local employers to support workforce housing initiatives.
- Rental assistance programs and first-time homebuyer support to help residents achieve housing stability.



Downsizing Options

Approximately 29.4% of Harlingen’s households include seniors, yet the City lacks a significant number of downsizing-friendly homes for aging residents who wish to remain in the community. Addressing this need requires:

- Age-friendly housing design, including accessible units with universal design principles.
- More single-story townhomes and smaller lot homes to provide easier maintenance options for seniors.
- Senior-focused mixed-use developments that integrate housing with healthcare, retail and recreational opportunities.



Luxury Housing to Attract Professionals

While workforce housing is essential, Harlingen must also diversify its higher-end housing market to attract professionals, business leaders and remote workers who are relocating due to Texas’ favorable business climate. Expanding luxury housing options can:

- Strengthen economic growth by retaining and attracting higher-income residents.
- Support local businesses and amenities by increasing demand for high-end retail, dining and services.
- Enhance Harlingen’s appeal as a business-friendly city, complementing ongoing economic development efforts.



Mixed-Use and Transit-Oriented Development

Housing should be integrated with commercial and transit opportunities to reduce long-term transportation costs for residents. Currently, Harlingen households spend an average of 32% of their income on transportation, reflecting the need for better connectivity. Future planning should:

- Encourage residential growth near retail centers and employment districts to reduce commuting burdens.
- Promote mixed-use development in areas like Downtown Harlingen to create a vibrant, walkable urban core.
- Enhance transit infrastructure to connect residential areas with major job hubs, education centers and healthcare facilities.

Key Neighborhood & Housing Strategies for Harlingen

To address Harlingen’s evolving housing needs and ensure long-term community resilience, the City should expand existing efforts and introduce new initiatives that promote affordability, inclusivity, sustainability and neighborhood vibrancy. These programs should prioritize revitalizing older areas, supporting homeownership, expanding housing variety and enhancing livability in all neighborhoods.



Infill Development and Adaptive Reuse

- Revitalize vacant lots and buildings, to support compact mixed use housing near existing infrastructure.

Housing Rehabilitation and Homeownership Support

- Expand repair grants and first time homebuyer programs to preserve aging homes and help more families build equity.

Sustainable and Resilient Housing Solutions

- Encourage storm resistant and energy efficient homes while integrating green infrastructure to reduce flooding and long term costs.

Neighborhood Revitalization and Placemaking

- Invest in community led improvements, beautification projects and preservation efforts to strengthen neighborhood identity and livability.



Walkable & Connected Neighborhoods

Evaluating Neighborhood Completeness in Harlingen

A walkable and connected neighborhood is one where residents can conveniently access essential daily needs such as grocery stores, restaurants, schools, parks, healthcare and employment centers without relying heavily on a car. These neighborhoods enhance quality of life, improve public health and support local businesses by fostering vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environments.

In Harlingen, neighborhood completeness varies depending on proximity to commercial centers, transportation infrastructure and residential density. While areas like Downtown Harlingen and parts of the Arroyo Colorado Corridor offer relatively strong walkability, much of the City remains auto-dependent, with limited transit options and fragmented pedestrian and bike infrastructure. Evaluating Harlingen's existing walkability and connectivity helps identify areas for improvement and shapes future development that supports a more accessible, livable and resilient community. Recent housing permit trends reveal growth, with 178 single-family home permits and 148 apartment unit permits issued in 2024. This recovery reflects efforts to address housing shortages, but strategic planning is necessary to ensure future developments align with affordability and accessibility goals. Additional focus on mixed-use developments could also bring jobs and amenities closer to residents, further reducing overall household costs.

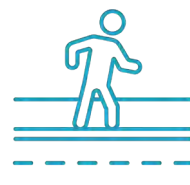
Gaps and Challenges in Walkability



High Car Dependency



Public Transit Limitations



Lack of Safe Walking and Biking Routes



Service Gaps in a few Areas

To support its growing population, Harlingen must diversify its housing options by increasing affordable rentals, expanding homeownership opportunities and promoting missing middle housing. These efforts will ensure a vibrant and sustainable community that meets the needs of current and future residents.

Strengths in Walkability and Connectivity

Downtown and Commercial Corridors

Downtown Harlingen, particularly along Jackson Street and Commerce Street, offers a mix of shops, restaurants, and local businesses within walking distance of residential areas. Areas near Valle Vista Mall and the Bass Pro Shops corridor also function as regional retail hubs, though pedestrian access and safety features in these areas are limited.

Parks and Recreational Access

The Arroyo Colorado Trail System and City Parks provide key recreational assets and pedestrian pathways, supporting health and mobility. However, sidewalk gaps in surrounding neighborhoods limit full accessibility to these destinations.

Emerging Mixed-Use Areas

Some locations especially near schools, retail corridors, and major intersections show potential for compact, mixed-use development. Zoning adjustments and infrastructure investment may be needed to encourage this form of growth.

Key Strategies to Enhance Neighborhood Completeness

Improving walkability and access in Harlingen requires a targeted, place-based approach. These strategies focus on expanding everyday connections, improving public spaces and reducing car dependency. Together, they support the creation of safe, vibrant and inclusive neighborhoods.



Strengthen Neighborhood Connectivity

- Fill sidewalk gaps, improve bike and trail networks and enhance pedestrian safety through better lighting and crossings.

Support Mixed Use and Walkable Development

- Encourage grocery stores, clinics and services within neighborhoods and focus new growth near transit and high-activity areas.

Enhance Public Transit Access

- Expand Valley Metro service, introduce flexible microtransit options and upgrade bus stops for safety, comfort and accessibility.

Activate Public Spaces and Streetscapes

- Invest in downtown events, pocket parks, shaded sidewalks and public art to create more inviting, people-friendly places.





Strong Sense of Place & Community



Defining Harlingen's Identity

Harlingen is known for its welcoming atmosphere, cultural heritage and strong sense of community. The City's character is shaped by its historic downtown, public spaces and community-driven events that bring residents together. Strengthening these elements through thoughtful design, preservation and engagement can enhance local pride, foster social connections and support long-term community resilience.



Community Assets & Opportunities

- Harlingen's historic downtown, public murals and cultural landmarks celebrate local heritage and provide gathering spaces for residents.
- Community events such as Market Days, Winter Texan celebrations and local parades foster engagement, tourism and economic activity.
- Beautification projects, public art and well-maintained streetscapes enhance neighborhood identity, civic pride and overall livability.



Challenges and Gaps

- Public spaces and gathering areas are limited in certain neighborhoods, reducing opportunities for community interaction.
- Inconsistent streetscape improvements and a lack of cohesive design standards impact the overall visual appeal of key corridors.
- Walkability and accessibility need enhancement in certain areas to create safer and more inviting public spaces.

Key Community Needs



Vibrant Public Spaces

- Improving parks, plazas and gathering areas will create more opportunities for social interaction and cultural expression.

Historic and Cultural Preservation

- Protecting and revitalizing historic sites and landmarks will strengthen Harlingen's identity.

Neighborhood Beautification

- Investing in landscaping, public art and streetscape enhancements will improve the visual appeal and character of local areas.

Local Events and Community Engagement

- Supporting festivals, farmer's markets and neighborhood initiatives will strengthen social connection.

Safe and Walkable Streets

- Enhancing sidewalks, lighting and pedestrian-friendly design will create a more inviting and connected city for residents and visitors.





Health & Wellness Policy

Evaluating Health & Wellness in Harlingen

Harlingen has the potential to become a more resilient, equitable and vibrant community by making health and wellness a central focus of housing and neighborhood planning. The City benefits from a strong healthcare network, including Valley Baptist Medical Center, Harlingen Medical Center and the UTRGV School of Medicine, which provide essential medical care, specialized treatments and professional training. Parks, trails and recreational facilities further support active lifestyles, fostering physical and mental well-being for residents of all ages. Investments in walkability, mixed-use development and access to fresh, nutritious food contribute to a healthier and more connected community. By continuing to enhance healthcare accessibility, expand wellness initiatives and integrate health-conscious planning strategies, Harlingen can create an environment where all residents have the resources to lead healthier lives.

Current Health Indicators and Access

- Harlingen's average life expectancy is around 77 years, which falls slightly below the state's average. This highlights the need for targeted health initiatives and improvements in environmental factors that contribute to well-being. Chronic illnesses such as obesity and diabetes are common in the community, with a greater impact on older adults and lower-income households.
- The City has a well-established healthcare network that includes Valley Baptist Medical Center, Harlingen Medical Center and the UTRGV School of Medicine, ensuring access to essential medical care and professional training. However, some neighborhoods, particularly in West Harlingen, face challenges in accessing preventative healthcare, fresh food options and spaces for physical activity.

Community Needs to Improve Health and Wellness

Improving health and wellness in Harlingen requires a focus on accessible healthcare, nutritious food options, active living infrastructure and safe housing. Addressing these key areas will help create a healthier and more resilient community.



Walkable and Active Neighborhoods

- Investing in sidewalks, trails, parks and bike infrastructure will promote physical activity and improve overall well-being.

Safe and Healthy Housing

- Addressing code enforcement, overcrowding and aging homes will help reduce health risks related to poor living conditions.

Health Education and Wellness Programs

- Promoting initiatives focused on nutrition, chronic disease prevention and senior wellness will support long-term community health.

Access to Fresh, Affordable Food

- Encouraging grocery stores, farmers markets and community gardens will help address food insecurity in underserved areas.





CHAPTER

4

PUBLIC FACILITIES &
INFRASTRUCTURE

Vision Elements



Resilient Community



Diverse Housing



Economic Growth and Opportunity

Goals

In 2050

Harlingen aspires to foster a resilient community that supports its people through inclusivity, safety and robust support systems.

In 2050

Harlingen will offer diverse housing options to accommodate all income levels, life stages and family types.

In 2050

Harlingen will focus on creating opportunities for economic growth that benefit all residents and future generations.

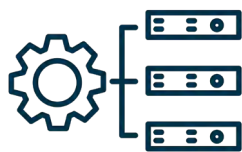
Objectives

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Implement strategies for long-term resilience to economic and climate-related challenges.
- Expand infrastructure for industrial and tech-focused industries.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.



Public Facilities & Infrastructure Policies

As Harlingen continues to grow, investing in reliable, modern and resilient infrastructure is essential to maintaining a high quality of life and supporting long-term economic growth. Public facilities and utilities such as drainage systems, parks, libraries and civic buildings shape how residents interact with their city each day. These policies reflect what the community has shared as most important: safe and well-maintained infrastructure, accessible and welcoming public spaces, and a forward-looking approach that prepares Harlingen for future needs.



Strengthen & Maintain Essential Infrastructure

Ensure reliable water, sewer, drainage and transportation systems that meet current needs while supporting future growth and sustainability.



Expand & Modernize Public Facilities

Invest in parks, recreation centers, libraries and emergency services to enhance accessibility, promote inclusivity and improve overall community well-being.



Enhance Mobility & Connectivity Through Infrastructure

Invest in pedestrian and bike infrastructure, sidewalk networks and roadway upgrades to support safe, accessible and multi-modal transportation options citywide.



Build Resilient & Sustainable Infrastructure

Incorporate green infrastructure, renewable energy and climate-adaptive solutions to improve long-term reliability, efficiency and environmental sustainability.

What We've Heard So Far...

"We need improved drainage infrastructure to prevent flooding in neighborhoods and business areas."

"Updating water and sewer systems should be a priority as the city grows to ensure reliable services."

"We'd like to see safer options for walking and biking throughout the city and connections to parks."

"Consider investing in public safety facilities, like new fire stations, to keep up with the city's expansion."

"Funding should be allocated for improving the animal shelter and related services."

"City Hall needs to be expanded or replaced with a more functional building to handle growing city needs."

"Better roadway infrastructure and sidewalks are essential for ensuring safe mobility for residents."

"Efforts to improve water conservation and replace deteriorating utilities are necessary before they become environmental issues."

"Investment in beautifying public spaces and connecting areas with trails would make the city more livable."

Key Takeaways:

- Drainage improvements are a major priority, especially in neighborhoods and business areas that experience flooding.
- Water and sewer systems need upgrades to keep up with growth and maintain reliable service.
- Many residents want safer and more connected routes for walking and biking across Harlingen.
- Public safety services like fire stations and emergency response need more investment as the City expands.
- City Hall is seen as outdated and in need of expansion or replacement to meet future needs.
- Residents value clean and well-maintained public spaces, with support for beautification and trail connections.

Public Facilities/Infrastructure & Resilience Connection

Enhancing resilience in public facilities and infrastructure planning involves aligning development to strengthen the resilience of essential services and infrastructure. This leads to public facilities and infrastructure are capable of meeting the community’s evolving needs effectively.

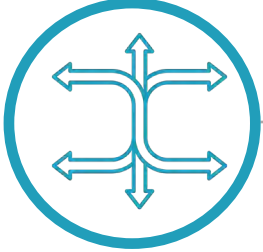


Public Facilities/Infrastructure



Redundancy

Harlingen’s infrastructure network should maintain redundancy in critical facilities to ensure that natural or man-made shocks and stressors do not hinder essential services.



Flexibility

Public facilities in Harlingen should be designed to adapt to a variety of community functions, enabling easy repurposing for future needs.



Risk Mitigation

Harlingen’s public facilities and infrastructure should be designed to withstand major hazards while providing relief from community stressors.



Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure enhances resilience by managing stormwater, reducing heat and supporting sustainable urban development.



Maintenance

A plan for continuous and proactive maintenance of public facilities and infrastructure should be included in all development decisions.



Public Involvement

A resilient Harlingen requires active engagement with educated and prepared residents to foster a robust community partnership.

Public Facilities & Services

Public and community facilities play a pivotal role in fostering Harlingen’s growth and development. These include essential public safety infrastructures such as police and fire stations, alongside community hubs like City Hall, libraries, parks and recreation centers. To meet the evolving needs of its residents, local authorities must strategically plan for facility development, ensuring critical services and quality-of-life amenities keep pace with the City’s expansion. Partnerships with institutions like the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) and other local organizations are vital in addressing shared challenges and maximizing community development opportunities.

Harlingen exemplifies this collaborative approach through its city-funded fire department, which operates multiple stations to ensure fire safety, and its efficient EMS services for rapid medical response. By investing in modern infrastructure and maintaining strong relationships with external organizations, the City prioritizes accessible and inclusive resources for its residents. Through strategic planning and collaboration, Harlingen remains a vibrant, resilient community poised to adapt to the needs of its growing population.

Harlingen City Hall

Harlingen City Hall, located at 118 E. Tyler Avenue, serves as the central administrative hub for the City. Built in 1950, the facility oversees local governance, public records and community planning. As Harlingen grows, City Hall remains a vital space for civic engagement, hosting commission meetings, public hearings and key administrative operations.

Harlingen Public Library

The Harlingen Public Library, located at 410 76 Drive is a modern facility that has been serving the community since 1993. It provides a wide array of resources, including books, internet access, educational programs and public meeting spaces. The library is a cornerstone for lifelong learning and community engagement for residents of all ages.

Harlingen Fire Department

The Harlingen Fire Department operates multiple stations, including Fire Station #1 at 1212 N. 1st Street and Fire Station #2 at 601 S. 77 Sunshine Strip. Established to serve a growing population, these stations are equipped with advanced firefighting tools and staffed by trained personnel. The department is dedicated to fire safety, emergency response and disaster preparedness across the City.

Harlingen Police Department

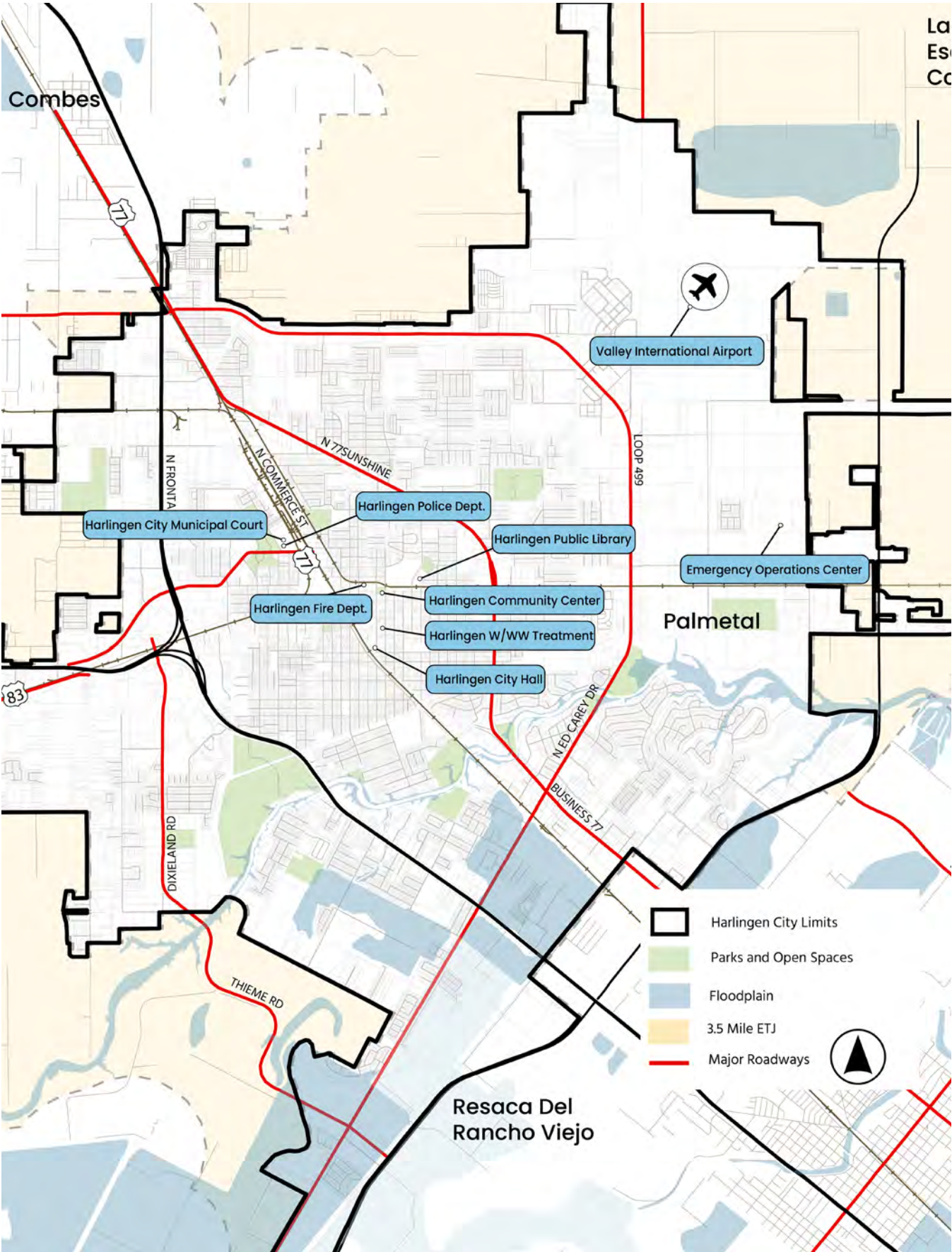
The Harlingen Police Department, located at 1018 Fair Park Boulevard, provides law enforcement services and ensures public safety for over 71,500 residents. With a history spanning over 100 years, the department is committed to crime prevention, community engagement and maintaining peace through patrol operations and investigative services. The headquarters also supports emergency communications and operational teams to enhance public safety across the City.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

Harlingen EMS, based at 1422 Morgan Boulevard, has been serving the community since 1979, providing emergency medical care and hospital transport. Staffed by skilled paramedics and equipped with advanced life-support ambulances, EMS plays a crucial role in responding to critical situations and strengthening the City’s healthcare network.

Valley International Airport

Located at 3002 Heritage Way, Valley International Airport spans 2,400 acres and features an 9,400-foot-long runway (18R/36L) which serves over 1,200,000 passengers annually, supporting commercial travel and cargo services. The airport is a vital economic engine for Harlingen, boosting regional trade and tourism.



Map 9. Harlingen Public Facilities and Services

Facility & Community Resilience

Harlingen’s location in South Texas makes it vulnerable to multiple environmental hazards, including flooding, extreme heat, hurricanes and potential wildfire exposure. As the City modernizes its infrastructure, resilience must be a core principle to ensure critical services remain operational, residents stay safe and City resources are protected. To achieve this, Harlingen should prioritize redundancy, flexibility, risk mitigation, green infrastructure and maintenance in its resilient infrastructure approach. Redundancy ensures that critical systems like electricity, water and communication networks have backups such as generators, multiple water sources and redundant IT systems. This is especially important in flood prone areas where a single failure can disrupt citywide operations. Flexibility allows public buildings to serve multiple purposes under different conditions. For example, libraries and recreation centers can function as cooling centers or emergency shelters, with modular layouts and emergency supply storage, enhancing adaptability. Risk mitigation focuses on constructing infrastructure that addresses hazards such as floods, heat, tornadoes and wildfire by using elevated structures, wind resistant materials and power resilient designs, particularly in vulnerable areas like the Arroyo Colorado. Green infrastructure incorporates nature based solutions like bioswales, rain gardens, tree plantings and permeable paving to reduce environmental risks while improving stormwater management and public space quality. Finally, maintenance and planning are essential to long term resilience, requiring ongoing inspections and repairs for critical systems, as well as capital improvement planning to ensure infrastructure continues to function safely and efficiently.

Facilities and Services Recommendations

As Harlingen plans for the next 20 years of growth, it is important to assess the condition, location and availability of City facilities and supporting infrastructure. While many services are valued, feedback from residents and the community highlights gaps in coverage, aging infrastructure and unequal access. These issues are especially prevalent in areas experiencing rapid growth or those that have historically been underserved. The considerations below outline key facility and infrastructure priorities to support a resilient, inclusive and future-ready Harlingen.



Electrical Substation

An electrical substation was identified as a top concern, especially in areas near the Port of Harlingen. As Harlingen continues to expand its industrial base, reliable power will be vital to support manufacturing, logistics and port-related development. Additional substations or upgrades to existing systems will be necessary to meet future demand.



Broadband Easement Expansion

Limited access to high-speed internet, particularly in West Harlingen, creates challenges for education, remote work and economic growth. To address these issues, the City should focus on establishing broadband easements and collaborating with providers to achieve universal access, prioritizing low-income and outlying neighborhoods.



Improvements in West Harlingen

West Harlingen has faced consistent neglect, with insufficient investment in parks, lighting, sidewalks and digital infrastructure. Future improvements should focus on equitable facility distribution, including park upgrades, recreational courts and expanded trails along Business Highway 83. These efforts will create a more inclusive and well-resourced community.



Stormwater and Drainage Infrastructure

Flooding is one of the most frequently reported challenges in Harlingen, especially near schools and major roadways. Enhancing drainage systems, particularly on 13th Street, is crucial for improving public safety, safeguarding property and building resilience to the growing impacts of extreme weather conditions. This upgrade would address immediate concerns while preparing the City for future challenges.



Sidewalk and Trail Connectivity

Several areas in the City such as Ed Carey Drive, 13th Street and the Harlingen High School area lack continuous sidewalk infrastructure. Expanding sidewalks and building out a citywide network of off-street multi-use trails will improve safety and encourage active transportation.



Indoor Recreation Center

An indoor recreation center is essential to support wellness and recreational needs for all age groups. It would offer versatile spaces, modern amenities and foster community engagement while enhancing economic development.



Public Safety Facilities (North Harlingen)

Concerns about crime and public safety were especially high in North Harlingen. A new police substation or shared emergency services center could help improve response times and increase police visibility. These investments should be paired with expanded street lighting and community outreach efforts.



Public Facilities Best Practices

As Harlingen grows and evolves, its public facilities must keep pace with the needs of a diverse, resilient and connected community. Facilities such as libraries, police and fire stations, recreation centers and city service buildings are not just operational assets, they are places where residents engage with the government, access essential services and build community identity. By applying best practices in facility planning, design and maintenance, Harlingen can ensure its public spaces serve current needs while remaining adaptable to the future. The following best practices offer guidance to align infrastructure investments with long-term goals for equity, safety, sustainability and quality of life.



Strategic Location and Equitable Access

Public facilities should be located to serve all areas of Harlingen equitably, especially neighborhoods that have historically lacked access to civic services and amenities. For example, West Harlingen has fewer public-facing facilities and amenities despite growing residential needs. Site selection should consider walkability, transit access, population growth trends and community input. The goal is to ensure that all residents regardless of where they live can access key services like libraries, parks, health centers and public safety buildings without significant travel barriers.



Flexible Design for Multi-Use Programming

Modern public buildings should be designed to accommodate a wide variety of uses, including community events, educational programs, emergency sheltering and recreation. Facilities like recreation centers, libraries and even fire stations can benefit from modular layouts, operable partitions and multi-purpose rooms that support both daily use and emergency operations. This flexibility not only maximizes the value of city investments, but also enables facilities to adapt to changing community needs over time.



Safety Through Design and Community Integration

Incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles into public facility design helps improve safety and community confidence. Well-lit paths, clear lines of sight, active frontages and secure access points reduce opportunities for crime while encouraging positive activity around facilities. Co-locating public safety buildings such as police substations near parks, schools or transit stops can reinforce safety in high-traffic public areas while building trust through community presence.



Resilience and Redundancy in Infrastructure

Nature-based solutions should be incorporated into public spaces to reduce flood risk and urban heat. This includes bioswales, rain gardens, tree plantings and permeable paving around civic buildings, parks and streets. These strategies not only manage stormwater and cool the environment but also create more attractive and usable spaces for the public.



Green Infrastructure and Environmental Performance

Public buildings and sites should integrate nature-based design solutions to manage stormwater, reduce urban heat and create welcoming environments. Features such as bioswales, rain gardens, shade trees, reflective materials and permeable pavement can be incorporated into civic plazas, parking areas, walkways and park-adjacent facilities. These elements not only support Harlingen’s environmental goals, but also enhance the visual appeal and comfort of public spaces.



Accessibility and Universal Design Principles

All public facilities must prioritize universal accessibility, going beyond minimum ADA requirements to ensure all users can move freely and comfortably. Design considerations should include wide pathways, tactile guidance surfaces, accessible restrooms, shaded seating areas and multilingual signage. As the City’s population ages and diversifies, universal design will be key to making civic spaces inclusive for people of all abilities, ages and backgrounds.



Planning and Preventive Maintenance

Sustainable public facilities require long-term investment not only in construction, but also in ongoing maintenance and renewal. Cities should develop and follow asset management plans that schedule routine inspections of HVAC systems, roofing, electrical, plumbing and other critical components. Preventive maintenance reduces emergency repairs, extends building lifespans and ensures public safety and functionality. Facilities budgets should include both capital renewal and operating costs to support year-round upkeep.



Community Partnerships and Co-Located Services

Cities can expand access to services by forming strategic partnerships with school districts, nonprofits, healthcare providers and regional agencies. For instance, a library branch could be co-located with a workforce training center, or a senior health center.



Water & Wastewater Systems

Existing Systems

The City of Harlingen’s water system includes a network of pipes ranging from 6 to 30 inches in diameter, two water treatment plants (Downtown Water Treatment Plant and MFR Water Treatment Plant) and several pump stations and elevated storage tanks. The system provides clean and reliable water to more than 36,000 connections across the City. The water comes from surface water sources, and the system is designed to meet the needs of residents, businesses and industries. With projected population growth, the system is being evaluated for additional storage and pumping capacity to ensure long-term reliability and regulatory compliance.

The wastewater system consists of pipes ranging from 6 to 36 inches in diameter, a wastewater treatment plant (Harrison Wastewater Treatment Plant) and 61 lift stations. This system handles

wastewater from over 32,000 connections, processing average daily flows and managing peak flows during wet weather events. Planned upgrades focus on reducing inflow and infiltration and expanding treatment capacity to handle future peak wet weather events effectively.

Both the water and wastewater systems are maintained to meet current needs and are being upgraded to prepare for future growth. Harlingen Waterworks System (HWWS), the public water and wastewater utility for the City of Harlingen, most recently updated their Water and Wastewater Master Plan in March 2022. The improvements outlined in the plan aim to enhance system resilience, sustainability and efficiency, ensuring Harlingen’s infrastructure can support its expanding population and economic development.

Historical Water Demands and Wastewater Flows

Harlingen’s historical water demands and wastewater flows provide insight into the system’s operational performance and help project future needs. The water demands average 1.49 MGD (Million Gallons per Day), with peak flows reaching up to 2.55 MGD. Wastewater flows average 1.04 MGD, with peak wet weather events significantly increasing flow rates.

Figure 14. Harlingen Historical Water Demands

Year	Connections	Avg. Daily Demand (MGD)	Avg. Daily Demand (Gallons/Connection/Day)	Max. Day Demand (MGD)	2Max. Day to Avg. Day Peaking Factor
2018	4,828	1.54	319	2.26	1.47
2019	4,910	1.49	303	2.14	1.44
2020	4,963	1.52	306	2.20	1.45
2021	5,094	1.30	255	2.55	1.96
2022	5,210	1.49	286	2.17	1.46
2023	5,333	1.60	299	2.45	1.53
Average	-	1.49	295	-	1.55
Max	-	-	319	2.55	1.96

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 15. Harlingen Historical Wastewater Demands

Year	Connections	Avg. Annual Daily Flow (MGD)	Avg. Annual Daily Flow (Gallons/Connection/Day)	Peak Wet Weather Flow (MGD)	Wet Weather Peaking Factor
2018	4,615	1.03	223	4.31	4.18
2019	4,678	1.01	216	2.94	2.91
2020	4,714	1.02	216	3.70	3.63
2021	4,814	1.11	231	4.48	4.04
2022	4,896	1.04	212	2.38	3.25
2023	4,983	1.06	213	4.48	4.04
Average	-	1.04	219	-	3.60
Max	-	-	231	4.48	4.18

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)



Harlingen Waterworks System Water Filtration Plant, 2024

Water Demand and Wastewater Flow Projections

Water Demand and Wastewater Flow Projections for Harlingen

The City of Harlingen is anticipated to experience steady growth over the next few decades. To prepare for this, water and wastewater demand projections were developed using growth scenarios outlined in the master plan. These scenarios include projected compound annual growth rates (CAGR) of 2.5%, 5% and 6%. The projections are based on the current number of water and wastewater connections and estimated population increases.

Water Connections

Water demand projections were calculated by considering average daily water use, peak daily demand and peak hour demand. The average day rate reflects the daily amount of water used per connection and is key to estimating overall system needs. Maximum day demand identifies the highest water use day in a year and is critical for sizing treatment and storage facilities. Peak hour demand accounts for the largest one-hour use period and helps design pumping and transmission systems. Harlingen water system must be designed to handle these fluctuations efficiently. As the City grows, meeting both peak hour demands and maintaining a uniform and reliable water supply will require careful planning, including investments in system storage and transmission mains.

Wastewater Connections

Harlingen’s water system is projected to grow steadily over the next decade, with increasing connections and rising demands. The system must handle higher average daily use, peak day demands and peak hour demands as population and development expand. Upgrades to water treatment plants, storage tanks and distribution lines will be essential to meet future needs. Ensuring reliable service will require strategic investments in system redundancy and capacity expansion. These improvements will help maintain compliance and ensure sustainability for Harlingen’s growth.

Figure 16. Harlingen Water Connections

Year	2.5% Growth Rate	5% Growth Rate	6% Growth Rate
2024	36,985	38,012	38,400
2029	41,761	44,126	45,300
2034	47,118	51,236	52,890

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 17. Harlingen Wastewater Connections

Year	2.5% Growth Rate	5% Growth Rate	6% Growth Rate
2024	33,200	34,200	34,600
2029	37,500	39,800	40,500
2034	42,300	46,200	47,300

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 18. Harlingen Water System Design Criteria

Criteria	Value
Average Day Demand per Connection	310
Maximum Day to Average Day Peaking Factor	1.65
Peak Hour to Maximum Day Peaking Factor	2.00

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 19. Harlingen Wastewater System Design Criteria

Criteria	Value
Average Day Flow per Connection	225
Peak 2-hour to Average Day Peaking Factor	4.00

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 20. Harlingen Projected Water Demands

Connections	Average Day Demand (MGD)	Maximum Day Demand (MGD)	Peak Hour Demand (MGD)
2.5% Growth Rate			
2020	13.89	23.26	46.52
2025	14.98	25.11	50.23
2030	16.16	27.13	54.25
2040	18.83	31.71	63.41
5% Growth Rate			
2020	13.89	23.26	46.52
2025	14.98	25.11	50.23
2030	16.16	27.13	54.25
2040	18.83	31.71	63.41
6% Growth Rate			
2020	13.89	23.26	46.52
2025	14.98	25.11	50.23
2030	16.16	27.13	54.25
2040	18.83	31.71	63.41

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

The table above illustrates Harlingen’s projected water demands through 2040 based on varying growth scenarios. As connections increase, so do daily, maximum day and peak hour demands. These projections are essential for planning upgrades to the City’s water treatment capacity, elevated storage and distribution systems to ensure reliable service and regulatory compliance as the community grows.

Figure 21. Harlingen Projected Wastewater Demands

Connections	Average Annual Daily Flow (MGD)	Peak Wet Weather Flow (MGD)
2.5% Growth Rate		
2020	5.97	23.88
2025	6.76	27.04
2030	7.65	30.60
2040	9.72	38.88
5% Growth Rate		
2020	5.97	23.88
2025	7.62	30.48
2030	9.72	38.88
2040	12.41	49.64
6% Growth Rate		
2020	5.97	23.88
2025	7.98	31.92
2030	10.68	42.72
2040	14.29	57.16

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Water and Wastewater System Improvements

To meet future growth and ensure reliable service, the City of Harlingen must invest in targeted improvements to its water and wastewater infrastructure.

For the water system, key priorities include expanding treatment plant capacity, constructing additional elevated storage (such as the proposed Camelot tank) and replacing aging asbestos-cement pipelines. Improvements to high-service pumps and system redundancy, especially in areas like the Arroyo Colorado crossings are critical to maintaining pressure and reliability.

For the wastewater system, upgrades are needed at the Harrison Wastewater Treatment Plant to handle projected flows. Reducing inflow and infiltration, deepening lift station wet wells and upsizing pumps and force mains will help manage peak wet weather events and support continued development in growing areas of the City. These improvements will ensure that Harlingen’s utility systems are capable, resilient and aligned with the City’s long-term vision for growth and sustainability.

Utility Service Best Practices

As Harlingen plans for the next 20 years of growth, upgrading and managing utility services will be vital to supporting a high quality of life, attracting economic investment and enhancing community resilience. Public feedback has emphasized widespread concerns with aging infrastructure, energy reliability, flood risks, broadband access and stormwater drainage, particularly in West Harlingen and low-income neighborhoods. Best practices in utility planning emphasize integration, equity, sustainability and proactive maintenance. The following strategies reflect a tailored approach to utility service planning in Harlingen that is responsive to local challenges and aligned with modern infrastructure trends.

Plan Utilities with Equity and Growth in Mind



Utility infrastructure should be equitably distributed and responsive to both existing underserved areas and future development corridors. Areas like West Harlingen need focused utility upgrades, while growth near the port and major corridors must be supported with strategic investments. Coordinated planning across City Departments will ensure that utilities grow alongside housing, industry, and transportation improvements.

Embrace the One Water Approach



Harlingen should adopt a One Water approach managing all water resources holistically to maximize efficiency, improve resilience and reduce costs. By integrating drinking water, stormwater and wastewater systems, the City can explore options like rainwater harvesting, greywater reuse and green stormwater infrastructure. One Water supports long-term sustainability while preparing the City for drought and flooding challenges.

Implement Water Auditing for Efficiency and Accountability



Water auditing is a critical step toward understanding and managing Harlingen’s water system performance. Regular audits help identify system losses (leaks, theft, or unmetered use), reduce non-revenue water and guide conservation efforts. Harlingen can adopt auditing standards provided by the Texas Water Development Board to assess both systemwide efficiency and water use in municipal facilities. Water audits also provide data that can inform targeted upgrades and community education programs.

Strengthen Utility Resilience

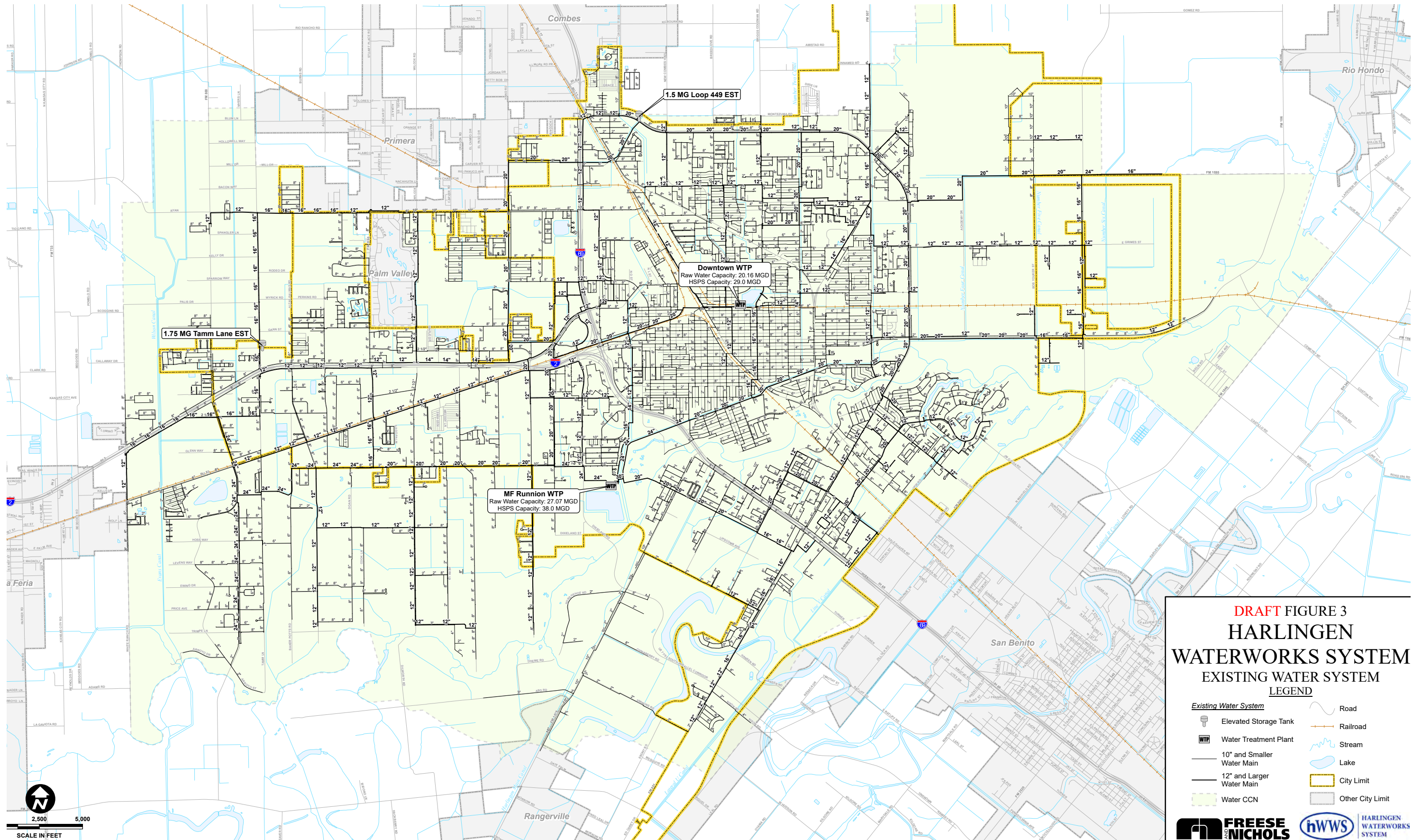


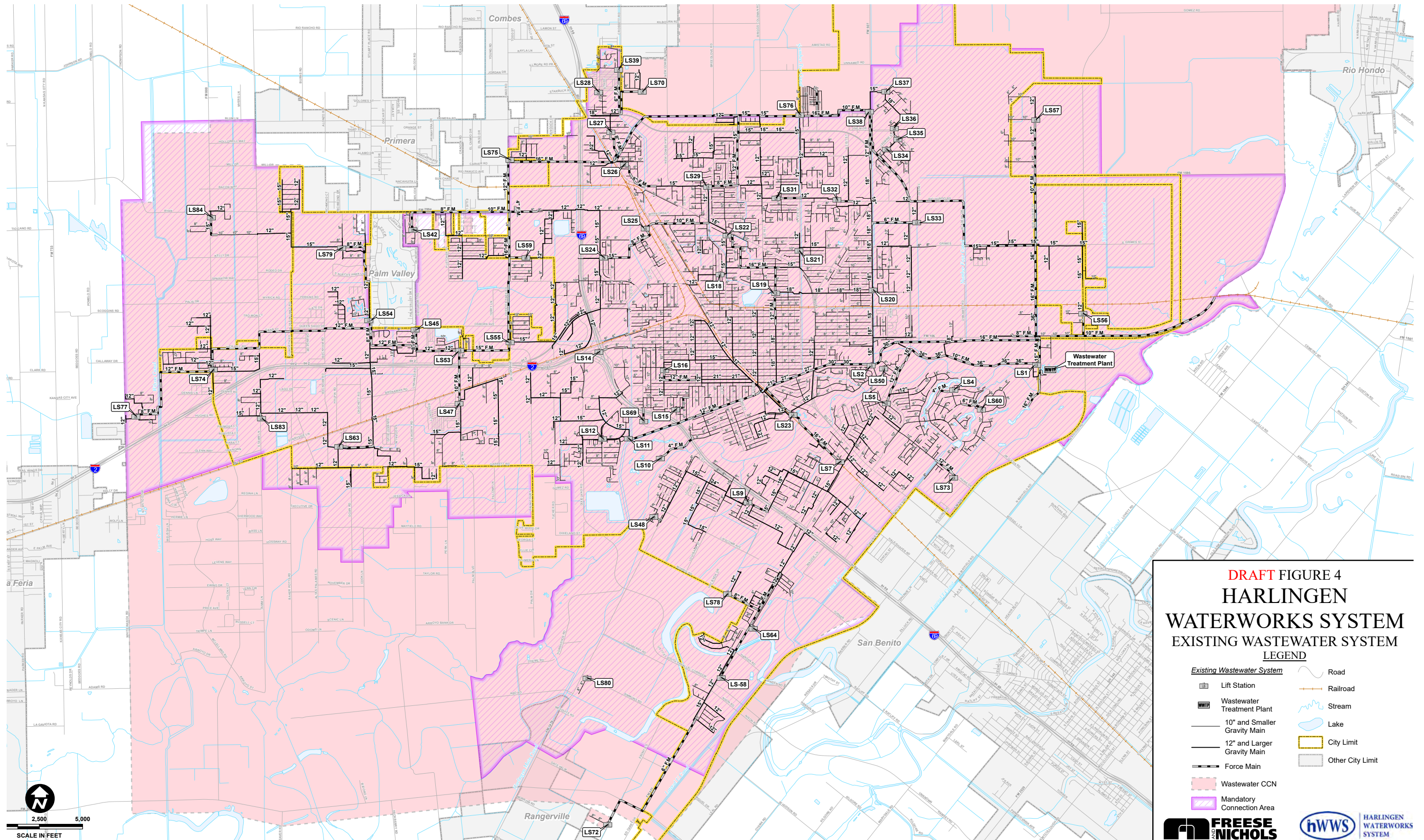
Utilities must be able to withstand climate shocks and continue functioning during emergencies. This includes upgrading pump stations, wastewater systems and substations with backup power, elevated designs and redundancies. Infrastructure in flood-prone areas should be reinforced or relocated. Resilient utilities are critical for ensuring safety, economic continuity and rapid recovery.

Modernize Energy Infrastructure



As industrial activity expands near the Port and other areas, the City should work with energy providers to install new substations and upgrade grid capacity. Harlingen can also encourage distributed generation, such as solar panels on municipal buildings to improve resilience and reduce energy costs.





Drainage & Flood Management

Flooding is one of Harlingen’s most persistent infrastructure challenges. The City lies within the Arroyo Colorado watershed, a critical drainage corridor that ultimately connects to Laguna Madre. Recent analysis through the HUC10 Drainage Report provides a detailed, basin-level understanding of current drainage conditions, recurring flooding hotspots and recommended improvements.

A resilient approach to drainage management requires both structural solutions that increase system capacity, and non-structural strategies that reduce long-term risk and integrate natural systems. Together, these actions support community safety, economic stability and sustainable growth.



Structural Solutions

- Detention Basins - Expand regional detention capacity to slow stormwater runoff and reduce peak flooding in low-lying neighborhoods.
- Pump Stations - Upgrade and expand pump infrastructure in flood-prone areas to provide timely relief during heavy storm events.
- Channel Improvements - Continue channel widening, deepening, and maintenance projects, in collaboration with TWDB and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to increase conveyance efficiency along the Arroyo Colorado and tributaries.



Non-Structural Strategies

- Green Infrastructure - Incorporate rain gardens, bioswales, permeable paving and urban tree canopies into streets, parks and redevelopment projects to reduce runoff at the source.
- Zoning and Development Standards - Update zoning overlays and subdivision regulations to limit impervious coverage in sensitive drainage areas, and promote low-impact development practices.
- Asset Management- Establish a drainage asset inventory and maintenance program to monitor aging infrastructure, and prioritize repair and reinvestment.
- Stormwater Master Planning - Regularly update drainage and stormwater master plans to reflect growth patterns, climate projections and evolving community needs.



CHAPTER

5

TRANSPORTATION

Paul Cano
ARCHITECT

Vision Elements Related to Transportation

Goals

In 2050
Harlingen aspires to foster a resilient community that supports its people through inclusivity, safety and robust support systems.

In 2050
Harlingen will offer diverse housing options to accommodate all income levels, life stages and family types.

In 2050
Harlingen will focus on creating opportunities for economic growth that benefit all residents and future generations.

In 2050
Harlingen will develop a thriving local economy that attracts businesses, jobs and investment while supporting small businesses.

In 2050
Harlingen will embrace eco-tourism by enhancing its natural assets and promoting sustainable tourism opportunities.

Objectives

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Align housing strategies with transit-oriented development to enhance connectivity.
- Expand infrastructure for industrial and tech-focused industries.
- Encourage investment in underutilized areas such as downtown and vacant properties.
- Expand access to public transportation to connect people to job centers.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.
- Expand and enhance the Arroyo Colorado trail system for recreational activities and active transportation.



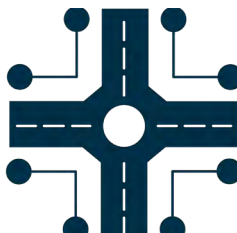
Transportation Policies

As Harlingen grows and changes, transportation facilities will be carefully designed and coordinated to achieve the goals of this plan. That means creating new streets and redeveloping existing streets using well-proven best practice design standards and guidelines that enhance the safety, affordability, and comfort for all users. By expanding transportation options, Harlingen is investing in its quality of life, cost-of-living, local economy, and long-term resilience.



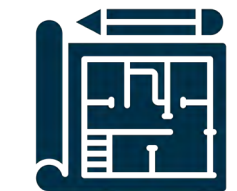
Enhance Transportation Systems for Safety and Community Health

Promote a safe, connected, and pedestrian-friendly street network by designing streets that calm traffic, separate vehicles from non-automotive users, and reduce conflicts through thoughtful layout and access management. Emphasize a finer-grained network of streets over excessive roadway widening to enhance safety, mobility, and community character.



Support Multimodal Transportation

Promote an accessible and connected multimodal transportation network that integrates walking, bicycling, and transit options. Expand and enhance infrastructure to link neighborhoods with key destinations, support regional mobility, and leverage funding opportunities to maximize investment impact and community benefit.



Promote Network Connectivity that Makes it Easy to Get Around

Harlingen has a strong street grid and like most cities, development within the past half century has been less connected. Moving forward, the City will refocus its transportation work to enhance connectivity, limit block sizes and expand the route options available to all modes of transportation.



Invest in Transit for Wider Access and Usability

Prioritize transit investments to ensure all residents in Harlingen are able to get around in an affordable and timely manner.



Invest in Well-Planned Freight Corridors

Promote a safe and efficient freight transportation system that supports economic activity while minimizing conflicts with residential and retail areas. Coordinate with regional partners to identify appropriate freight corridors, enhance connectivity to industrial areas, and reduce safety and environmental impacts on surrounding communities.

What We've Heard So Far...

"Better infrastructure, like roads and streetlights, is essential for safety and future development."

"Ramsey sidewalk trail is a good example – need connectivity to Ramsey."

"Public transportation options are lacking, making it hard for people without cars to get to work or school."

"Sidewalks and bike lanes are critical for ensuring pedestrian safety and promoting alternative modes of transportation."

"Activate alleys throughout the city."

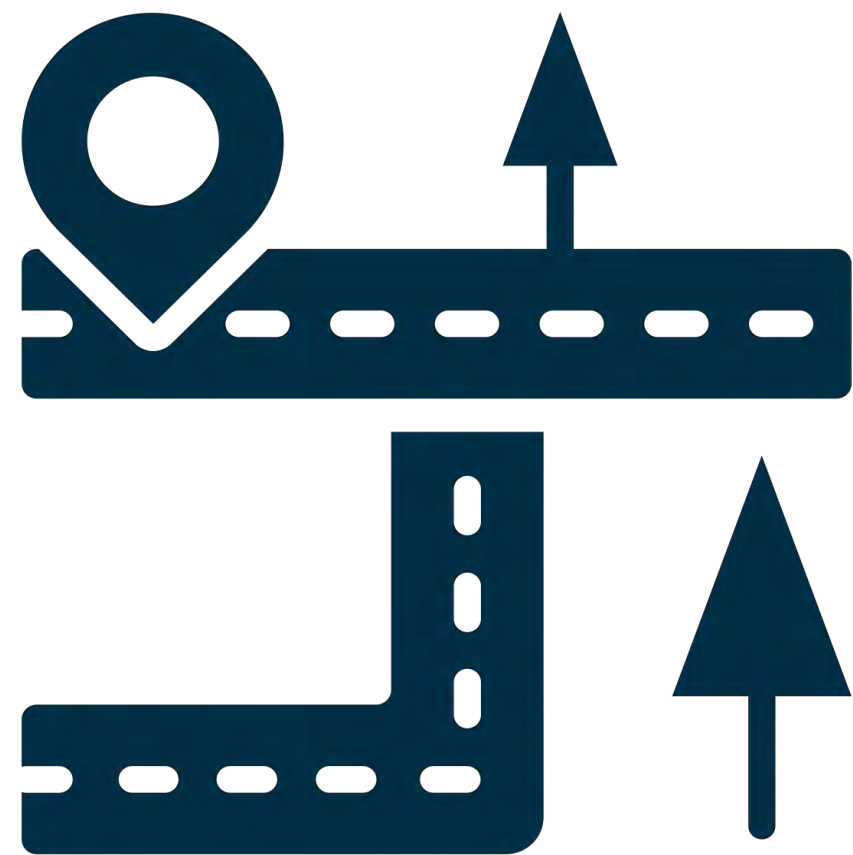
"Lots of intersections need pedestrian-friendly improvements."

Key Takeaways:

- Residents want more options for how they get around the City.
- Reducing traffic accidents and creating great streets are top community goals.
- Transit, sidewalks and multi-use paths are seen as the most important investments for the future.
- Transportation safety is the most critical issue facing Harlingen.
- Expanding transportation choices is essential to meet current and future needs.

Transportation & Resilience Connection

The incorporation of resilience into transportation planning involves thoughtfully integrating City street construction, transit investments, and capital improvements in a way that incorporates long term resilience.

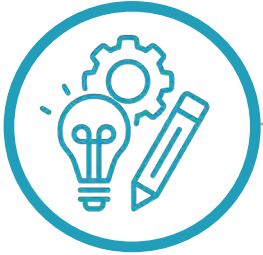


Transportation Resilience



Stormwater Management

Managing stormwater throughout the public right-of-way is a key opportunity. By prioritizing these considerations, the City can continue to advance environmental resiliency.



High Quality Design

Preserving historic sites enhances cultural resilience by supporting community pride and fostering economic diversification through thoughtful development initiatives that harness existing assets.



Connected Street Networks

Fostering a compact network of streets helps to support land use goals of an integrated community fabric with a variety of uses.



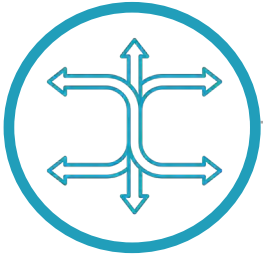
Green Infrastructure

Integrating green infrastructure into transportation planning incorporates design elements that support sustainability and climate resilience.



Neighborhood Streets

Planning great neighborhood streets that enhance safety and slow traffic boosts social resilience, promotes stability, equitable access and community well-being.



Extending a Sustainable Street Pattern

Implementing smart growth principles in transportation planning enhances resilience by optimizing resources, improving transportation efficiency, reducing environmental impacts and ensuring that growth occurs in a resilient manner.

Existing Transportation Conditions

Introduction

Crucial to developing a socially and economically vibrant Harlingen is the quality of its transportation system. This chapter highlights opportunities to meet the transportation needs of Harlingen’s residents and visitors by expanding transportation options, enhancing access throughout the region, and creating a healthy, safe, and fiscally-sound transportation network for people and industry.

Getting Around in Harlingen

Transportation networks have always been an important component of life in Harlingen. As in most cities, approximately one third of all the city’s land use consists of street rights-of-way. Harlingen flourished from its early access to the railroad. Increasingly, Harlingen residents, visitors, and industries have access to local and regional roadway systems, transit service, air travel, and bikeway opportunities.

The city’s location at the intersection of I-2 and I-69E creates a strategic central location for the distribution of services throughout the Rio Grand Valley. The Port of Harlingen and Valley International Airport provide key aviation and shipping options. With the Los Indios International Free Trade Bridge, Harlingen also has a border crossing with transit. Mexico’s Trans-Pacific Highway provides gateway routes for shipping.

Nationwide market trends indicate that residents across the U.S. increasingly want to live where they can reach places using their preferred choice of travel, whether on a bike, walking, driving, or taking transit. People are demanding more freedom and choice in how they get around Harlingen. Demands are increasing for transportation infrastructure that add additional safe and affordable mobility options throughout the community.

17.3 minutes

Average daily commute time for Harlingen workers

1.8

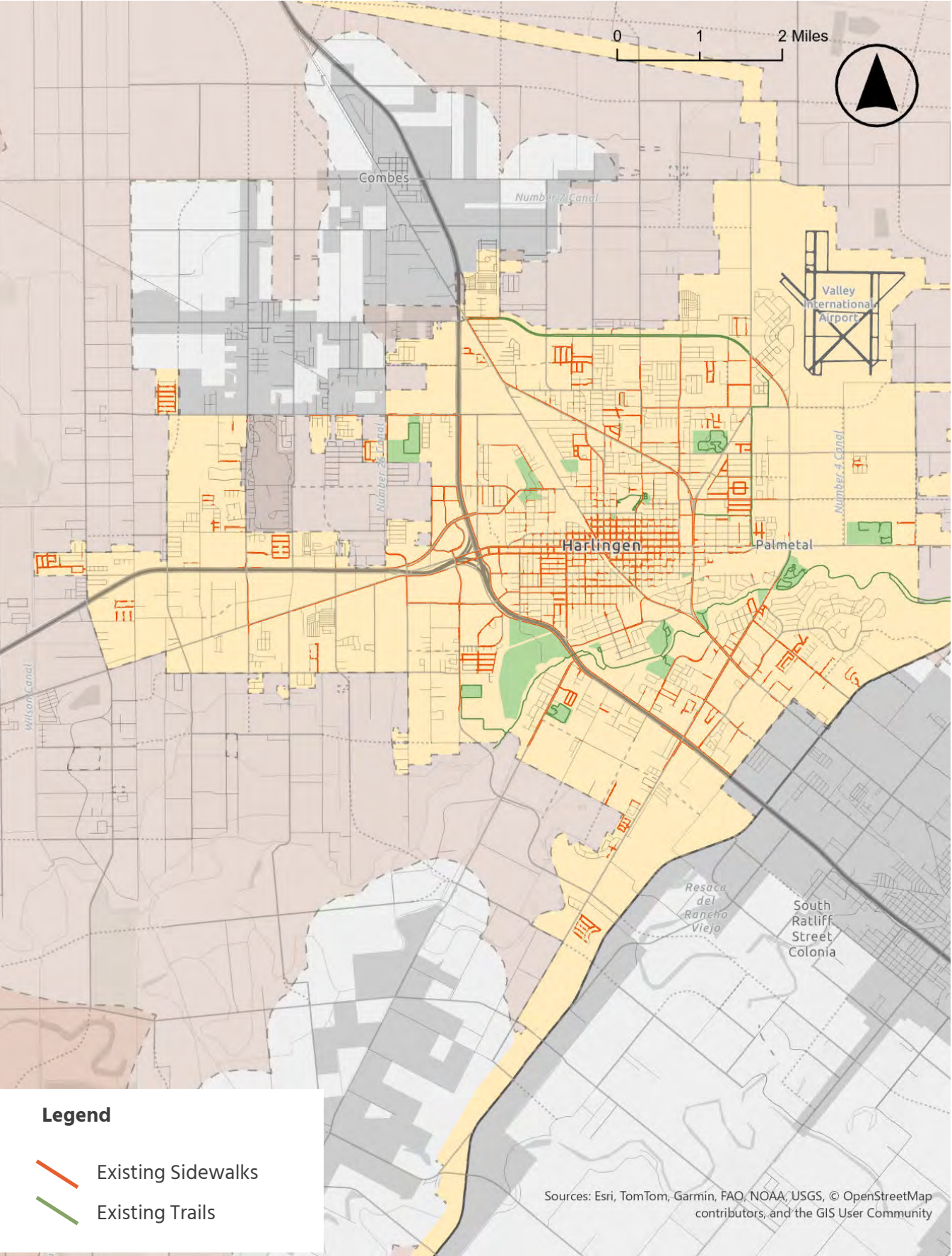
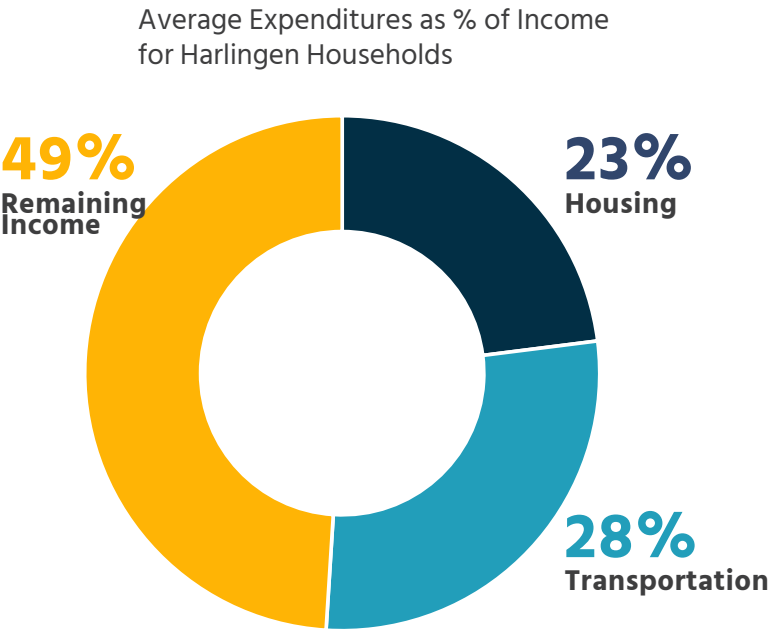
Average number of cars per Harlingen household

17,686

Average miles driven each year by Harlingen households

\$13,444

Amount Harlingen households spend on transportation each year



Map 12. Existing Sidewalks and Trails



Transportation and Public Health

Health, transportation, and exercise are strongly correlated. Many communities along the U.S. - Mexico Border suffer from chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes. The County's population has higher rates of physical inactivity (45%) and obesity (47%) compared to the State of Texas (36% and 35%, respectively). These risk factors increase the likelihood of developing health problems, such as heart disease and stroke.

Studies shows that better integrating pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit facilities into roadway design helps address public health in the community. Roadways with easily accessible and low stress pedestrian and bicycle facilities provide residents with options for safe utilitarian exercise that, along with other actions, can improve public

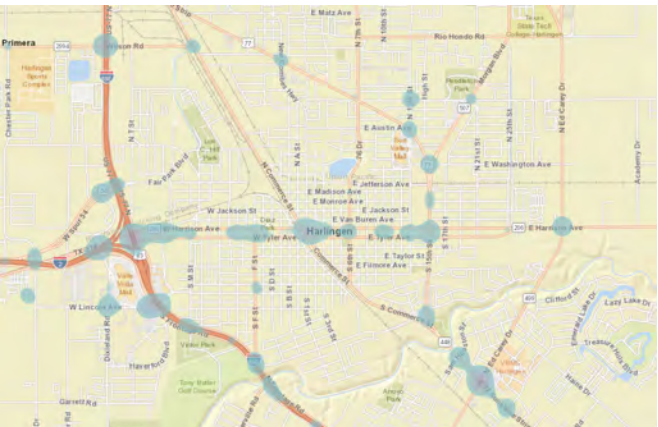
health outcomes. Traffic collisions represent a common cause of death and injury in Harlingen, with 37 people dying on the city's streets in 2023.

Roadway design standards that reduce vehicular speeds, provide buffers between vehicles and nonmotorized users. Separate pedestrian and bicycle facilities from travel lanes can promote a safe and comfortable environment for active transportation.

37
Number of people who died in car crashes in Harlingen in 2023 (35 people were killed in 2022)



Information from the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Active Tourism Plan



Traffic collision hot spots from Rio Grand Valley MPO

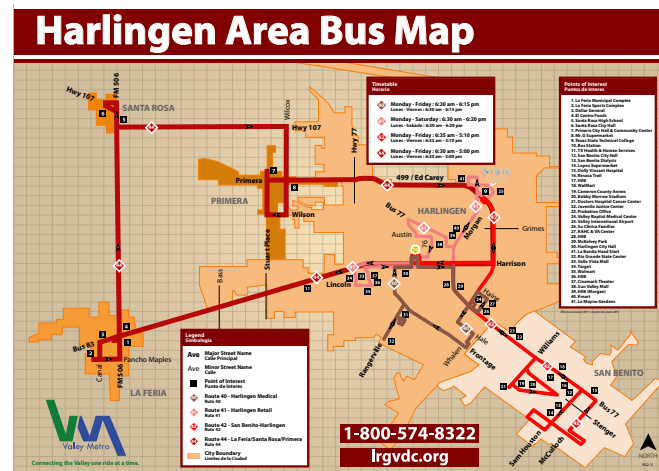
Complete Streets

Complete Streets design makes roadways safer and more functional for all travelers, including drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. For Harlingen, this approach provides a framework for upgrading corridors that carry both local and regional traffic while also connecting homes, schools, shopping areas, and community destinations. Typical features include continuous sidewalks, protected or designated bicycle space, clearly marked crosswalks, pedestrian-scale lighting, and shade from street trees. Together, these elements make streets easier to navigate for people of all ages and abilities, improve safety, and create a more inviting environment that supports health and local commerce.

One corridor that shows the need for this approach is the segment of Dixieland Road extending from the I-2 frontage road south to Lincoln Avenue. This stretch is a busy connector that links neighborhoods with retail and services but does not provide consistent pedestrian and bicycle accommodations. Targeted improvements should focus on closing sidewalk gaps, introducing high-visibility crossings at key intersections, and adding lighting and shade to make walking more comfortable during the day and evening. By applying Complete Streets principles here, the City can strengthen everyday access for residents, demonstrate the value of context-sensitive design, and establish a practical example to guide similar upgrades on other corridors across Harlingen.

The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council provides public transportation in Harlingen and the Rio Grande Valley through its transit department, Valley Metro, which connects Cameron County, Brownsville, Harlingen, La Feria, La Paloma, Olmito, Port Isabel, Primera, San Benito, and Santa Rosa. Within the city, the Harlingen Medical and Harlingen Retail routes serve local travel needs, while other routes connect residents to surrounding communities.

Because fixed-route service is limited to two lines, large portions of Harlingen are not directly served, especially along north-south corridors and in Downtown, where civic destinations such as City Hall are farther from existing stops. The 2021 Regional Public Transportation Coordination Plan documented this concern, with residents specifically asking for more bus stops in central Harlingen to improve access to key destinations. While the



Enhancing Harlingen's transit and walkability strengthens its regional role while improving daily life. Reliable routes, safe sidewalks, and better connections make transit a smart choice for residents and future growth.

The map displays Harlingen, Texas, with a proposed transit network. Key features include:

- Legend:**
 - Blue line: -- Potential Corridor
 - Orange circle: -- Potential Stop Area
- Corridors:**
 - North-South Corridor:** Runs along N Expressway 77, N Loop 499, and N Commerce St.
 - East-West Corridor:** Runs along E Harrison Ave, E Madison Ave, and E Monroe Ave.
 - Diagonal Corridor:** Runs from the southwest towards the northeast, passing through the city center.
- Potential Stop Areas:**
 - Valley Metro Harlingen Terminal (at the intersection of N Expressway 77 and E Harrison Ave).
 - Valley International Airport TSTC (near N Loop 499 and E Vinson Ave).
 - Downtown Harlingen City Hall (at the intersection of E Harrison Ave and N Commerce St).
 - Medical/University District (near N Loop 499 and E Harrison Ave).
- Geographic Labels:**
 - Roads:** N Expressway 77, N Loop 499, N Commerce St, E Harrison Ave, E Madison Ave, E Monroe Ave, W Harrison Ave, W Filmore Ave, W Lincoln Ave, S D St, S B St, S 3rd St, S 7th St, N 7th St, N 21st St, N 25th St, Morgan Blvd, Dixieland Rd, Spur 54, S M St, S Expressway 83, S 77th St, S 79th St, S 81st St, S 83rd St, S 85th St, S 87th St, S 89th St, S 91st St, S 93rd St, S 95th St, S 97th St, S 99th St, S 101st St, S 103rd St, S 105th St, S 107th St, S 109th St, S 111th St, S 113th St, S 115th St, S 117th St, S 119th St, S 121st St, S 123rd St, S 125th St, S 127th St, S 129th St, S 131st St, S 133rd St, S 135th St, S 137th St, S 139th St, S 141st St, S 143rd St, S 145th St, S 147th St, S 149th St, S 151st St, S 153rd St, S 155th St, S 157th St, S 159th St, S 161st St, S 163rd St, S 165th St, S 167th St, S 169th St, S 171st St, S 173rd St, S 175th St, S 177th St, S 179th St, S 181st St, S 183rd St, S 185th St, S 187th St, S 189th St, S 191st St, S 193rd St, S 195th St, S 197th St, S 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The above conceptual network illustrates how Bus Rapid Transit could link Harlingen's key destinations, including the Valley Metro Harlingen Terminal, Downtown near City Hall, Valley International Airport and Texas State Technical College, the proposed medical/ university district, and a northern mixed-use corridor. These locations support regional connectivity, access to civic and commercial areas, links to education and air travel, service to growing

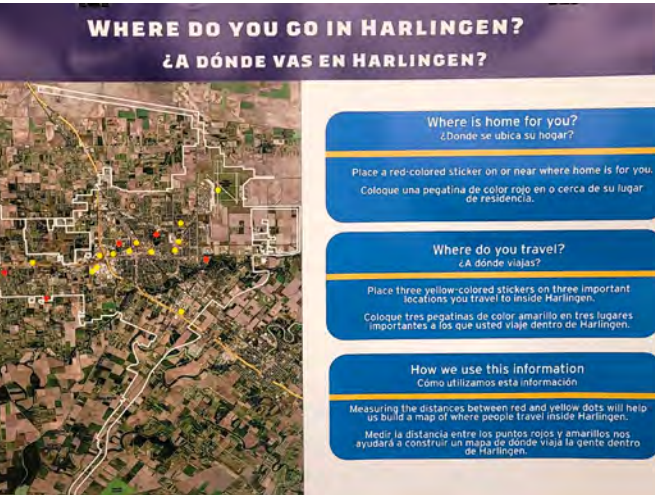
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Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) apply technology to improve the safety and efficiency of transportation networks without requiring major new roadway construction. By linking signals, monitoring traffic in real time, and providing better information to travelers, ITS helps cities make more effective use of their existing infrastructure. The result is reduced congestion, improved travel reliability, and safer conditions for drivers, pedestrians, and transit users.

Harlingen already manages nearly 90 traffic signals and a similar number of school zone flashers, giving the City a solid base for future ITS improvements. Modernizing signal controllers would allow intersections to be connected and managed as coordinated systems rather than as isolated units. Fiber-optic communications are a critical element, providing the backbone that enables signals to “talk” to each other and to centralized software. With these upgrades, the City could implement timing plans that reflect daily traffic patterns, seasonal variations, and special events, improving flow on major corridors while still prioritizing safety.

Monitoring and detection systems represent another important component. Closed-circuit cameras at key intersections can help staff quickly identify crashes, stalled vehicles, or flooding, reducing response times. Vehicle detection technologies such as radar or video sensors provide real-time data on traffic volumes and turning movements, allowing adjustments to be made before congestion builds.



Public input on transportation at February 24th 2025 Community Open House

At school zones and high-use pedestrian areas, upgraded flashers, countdown timers, and accessible push buttons enhance visibility and safety while supporting compliance with state and federal standards.

Traveler information is a further dimension of ITS that can directly benefit Harlingen residents. Dynamic message signs along arterial approaches can provide updates on construction, detours, or emergency conditions. These tools are especially useful during weather events or regional incidents when timely information helps drivers choose safer routes. Over time, data from ITS devices can also feed into online platforms, giving the public greater access to information about travel times and system performance.

Because Harlingen’s streets are part of a larger regional network, coordination is central to any ITS strategy. The Texas Department of Transportation manages the state highways that carry much of the city’s through-traffic, the Rio Grande Valley MPO allocates funding and sets regional priorities, and the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (CCRMA) advances projects that cross city boundaries. Aligning ITS investments with these agencies ensures compatibility, opens access to funding, and strengthens connections to the broader Valley transportation system. With targeted upgrades in signals, communications, monitoring, and traveler information, Harlingen can position itself to capture the benefits of ITS and create a safer, more reliable network for all users.



Interjurisdictional Planning

Harlingen must plan closely with its local and regional partners. The Rio Grande Valley MPO is a federally funded program that addresses the mobility goals of the communities within the urbanized area of the Rio Grande Valley. The Rio Grande Valley MPO works with cities within the region, transit providers, and the Texas Department of Transportation to plan for the future

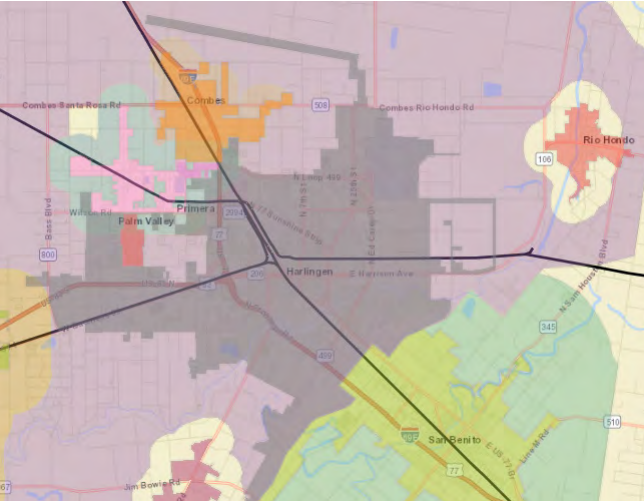
Congestion

With continued growth in the Rio Grande Valley, traffic congestion continues to increase on arterial roadways, particularly along commercial corridors or near commercial centers. Recent improvement projects have been constructed by the Texas Department of Transportation to address

Rail Infrastructure

Harlingen is served by two Class I railroads: Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and the Rio Valley Switching Company (RVSC). The UPRR’s Harlingen Subdivision runs north-south through downtown, while the Brownsville Subdivision extends east-west, serving the Port of Harlingen and industrial parks. Historically, the presence of multiple at-grade crossings, particularly near the downtown switching yard, has caused traffic delays and safety concerns. To address these issues, the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority is implementing the Harlingen Rail Improvements Project, which involves

Rail Infrastructure in Harlingen



transportation needs of this metropolitan area. The Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority is an independent government agency created in 2004 to finance, acquire, design, construct, operate, maintain, expand or extend transportation projects in the region. Continuing to coordinate with the Rio Grande Valley MPO, adjacent and nearby municipalities, and Hidalgo and the surrounding counties is key to building a successful transportation system in Harlingen and the region.

congestion on I-2. Strategies to address traffic congestion should include a multimodal approach with continued improvements to arterial roadways that include pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit enhancements that promote additional options for travel.

relocating and realigning approximately 1.7 miles of track, eliminating seven at-grade crossings, and constructing one new crossing. This project aims to streamline rail operations, reduce congestion, and improve safety by connecting the Harlingen and Brownsville subdivisions and straightening two curves. Additionally, the relocation of the switching yard to Olmito has already alleviated some downtown congestion by moving switching operations out of the city center. These initiatives are part of a broader effort to modernize Harlingen’s rail infrastructure and support the region’s growing trade and transportation needs.



Harlingen Rail Improvements Project

Freight

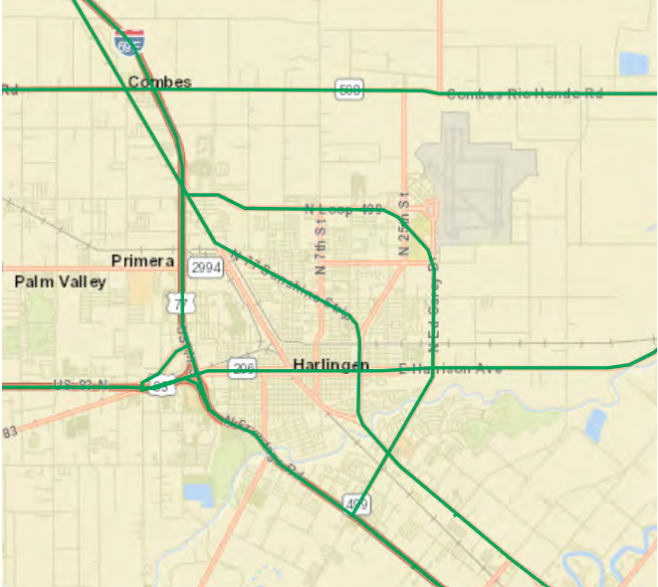
Freight transportation is an essential part of urban transportation networks. The Rio Grande Valley’s multimodal freight network supported more than \$22 billion in exports and \$31 billion in imports in 2019, as well, as \$37.4 billion in gross regional product (GRP). Approximately 1,000,000 trucks and 100,000 railcars entered the Rio Grande Valley from Mexico, representing a 23% increase of inbound trucks and a 10% increase of inbound trains since 2010. The Rio Grande Valley Freight and Trade Transportation Plan identifies freight and trade activity, opportunities, challenges, and strategies for the region. It identifies how freight and trade needs and opportunities impact the local, regional, and statewide transportation network and economic competitiveness. It identifies strategies for enhancing freight mobility, safety, connectivity, and other factors within the region.

Since 2017, the Port of Harlingen has experienced a 235% increase in tonnage, growing from 990,000 tons to consistently handling 3.2 million tons annually. Over the same period, commercial traffic surged by 671%. The port now generates approximately \$1.79 billion in economic activity each year.

Municipalities around the US are exploring innovative ways of providing adequate freight transportation without jeopardizing street safety and air quality, including providing suitable

infrastructure along freight truck routes, ensuring that truck routes avoid neighborhoods and sensitive areas, and providing access to major roadway systems. The Rio Grande Valley is the only location in Texas with truck, rail, maritime, air, pipeline, and space activity.

The Texas Department of Transportation conducted a Regional Freight and Trade Transportation Plan in 2020. The plan addresses the binational and multimodal freight challenges and opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley.



Rio Grande Valley Freight Corridors

Free Trade Bridge

Cameron County owns and operates three international bridges that span the Mexico–United States border.

The Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios is an international border crossing located eight miles south of Harlingen and San Benito. Cameron County owns and operates the bridge; however the cities of Harlingen and San Benito each receive 25% of the net revenues. The bridge facilities are located on a 127 acre tract of land. The Autopista provides direct access to the highly industrial area of Monterrey, Mexico.



Air Travel

The City of Harlingen owns the Valley International Airport, the largest airport in the Rio Grande Valley serving 1,200,000 passengers annually as of 2024. It is operated by a nine-member airport board appointed by the Mayor. Valley International Airport in Harlingen, Texas, is undergoing significant upgrades to enhance its capacity and operational efficiency. The airport recently completed a \$32 million runway extension, lengthening Runway 17R/35L from 8,301 feet to 9,400 feet, making it the longest runway south of Austin. This expansion allows cargo jets to operate at 75% of their maximum takeoff weight, up from 48%, thereby accommodating larger aircraft and increasing cargo

capacity. Additionally, the airport has implemented advanced Category II instrument landing systems to improve safety and reduce flight delays during inclement weather. A new air traffic control tower, funded by a \$4.5 million FAA grant, is under construction to replace the outdated 65-foot tower built in 1971. This 120-foot tower is expected to be completed within two years. Other enhancements include the installation of a \$3 million fiber optic circuit for improved data transmission and the addition of covered parking, increasing capacity to about 800 spaces. These developments position Valley International Airport as a modern and efficient hub for both passenger and cargo services in the Rio Grande Valley.



Paying for Infrastructure

Harlingen should continue collaborating with regional communities, stakeholders, and the Texas Department of Transportation on capital plan strategies, including development and maintenance of a well connected network of sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and shared-use paths and trails that are accessible for all ages and abilities.

Development exactions and impact fees are among a variety of key strategies for construction of roadways that include pedestrian and bicycle options.

Additionally, the City of Harlingen should collaborate with the Rio Grande Valley MPO and the Texas Department of Transportation in a strategic approach to leveraging federal funding for roadway enhancements, bicycle lane construction, and trail development.

Multimodal Infrastructure

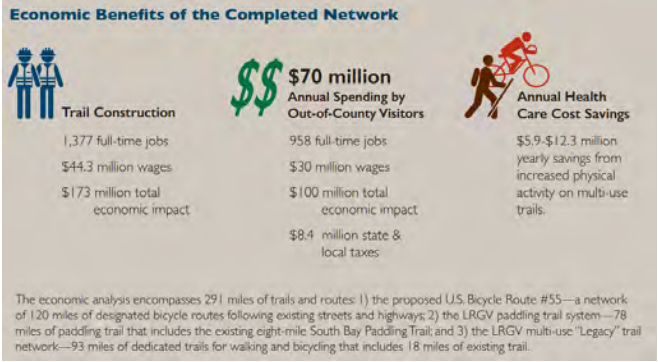
Multimodal infrastructure includes the infrastructure for transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists, in addition to automobiles. This infrastructure includes storefront space, public sidewalks, street trees, utility space, and areas for seating, bike lanes, curb and gutter, on-street parking. The dimensions and design of streets have a major impact on the comfort and safety of traveling along Harlingen’s streets using multiple modes.

Harlingen has several arterials and local streets with sidewalks. Still, most streets lack this basic amenity, making it difficult and sometimes dangerous for residents to walk places. The existence of physical barriers between people and vehicles significantly increases the safety and usability of streets.

Street trees are a vital element of city infrastructure. They clean the air, filter stormwater, improve human physical and mental health, reduce impacts of heat island effect, and promote walkability by providing shade to pedestrians. Furthermore, when planted between the curb and the sidewalk, they provide a barrier between people and moving vehicles. Many studies measuring the net financial impact of trees show that despite maintenance costs, they can be fiscally and economically positive investments.

When planted appropriately, street trees reduce long term road maintenance infrastructure costs by providing shade that prolongs the life of the pavement. Shaded streets can save up to 60 percent of repaving costs.

The Cara Cara Trails network highlights how these principles can be put into practice at a regional



Information from the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Active Tourism Plan

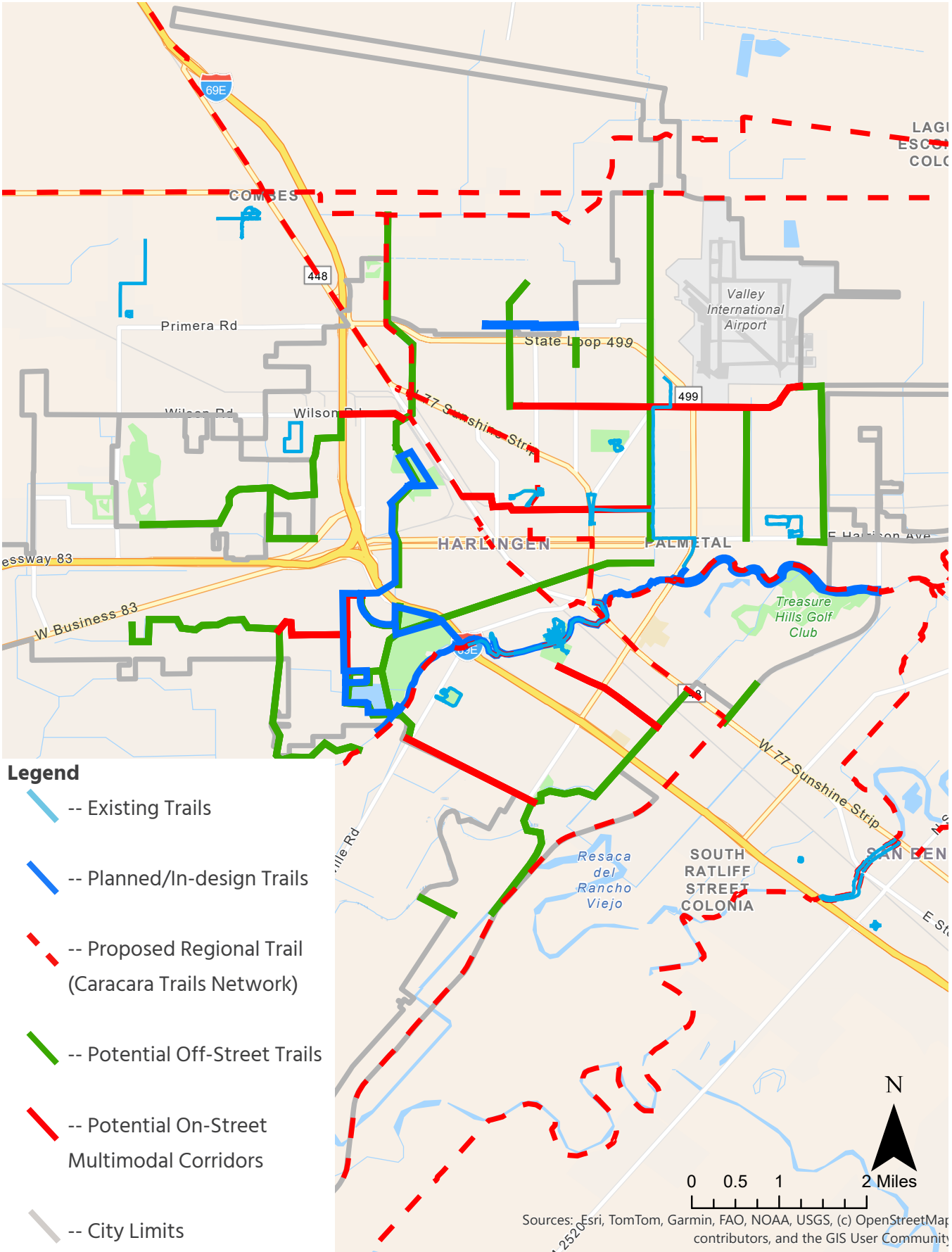
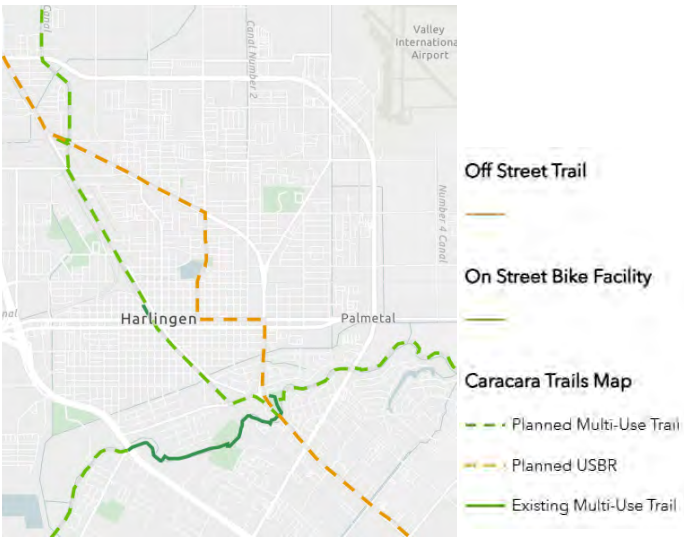
scale. In Harlingen, the Arroyo Colorado segment is envisioned as a continuous corridor for walking and biking that connects neighborhoods, parks, and commercial areas.

To maximize its value as part of the city’s multimodal system, this trail should be directly linked with Harlingen’s sidewalks and transit stops. Such integration would create a safe, separated route that supports walking, biking, and transit access, expanding travel options for residents.

As the Arroyo Colorado trail segment develops, it also provides a model for integrating natural features into the city’s transportation system. Much like street trees, trails along waterways improve health outcomes, promote recreation, and create safer spaces for nonmotorized travel. When tied to the street grid, they become part of a larger network that reduces barriers between modes, supports economic activity in nearby corridors, and makes Harlingen’s multimodal system more cohesive and resilient.

Investments in sidewalks, street trees, and regional trail connections like the Cara Cara network show how multimodal infrastructure enhances daily mobility and long-term quality of life. These elements support each other by improving safety, expanding access, encouraging healthier travel choices, and reinforcing Harlingen’s role in a larger regional system, resulting in a more complete and resilient transportation network that benefits residents, visitors, and businesses.

Cara Cara Trails Network



Future Thoroughfare Plan

Harlingen is part of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization, a federally funded program that works with Rio Grande Valley communities and the Texas Department of Transportation to plan for the region’s transportation needs. The Rio Grande Valley MPO also serves as a structure of committees and organizations that creates collaborative partnerships.

The Harlingen Future Thoroughfare Plan depicts where roadway extensions or new roadways are needed to accommodate the City’s anticipated growth. The Plan represents the thoroughfare network for the City of Harlingen. The City should work with the Rio Grande Valley MPO to update the region’s thoroughfare Plan for consistency with the City’s street design principles.

Street Design Principles

The Future Thoroughfare Plan should follow four key principles:

- Design elements encourage safe multimodal transportation options within the functional classification roadway hierarchy scheme.
- Street Context Areas enhance the vital connection between land use and transportation.
- Interconnectivity accommodates vehicular traffic, slow traffic in appropriate places to enhance safety, provide more travel routes, and promote more safe and comfortable travel options. Local streets and alleys are another critical element of connectivity.
- A balanced ratio of street right-of-way components, including vehicular movement space (travel lanes, turning lanes, etc.) and roadside space (sidewalks, street trees, bicycle lanes, etc.)
- New infrastructure designs, amenities, and proportions seek to meaningfully and realistically expand safe and comfortable travel choices.

Using the Future Thoroughfare Plan

The placement of proposed thoroughfares on the Plan represents the general location of existing and proposed arterials. As growth continues, new development may warrant the identification and development of thoroughfares that are not depicted on the Future Thoroughfare Plan.

While the Plan guides the general location of future roads, the spacing of thoroughfares is dictated through the spacing described in the Street Design Guidelines below. Where proposed as a thoroughfare, future development may need additional roadways not indicated in the map in accordance with the desired spacing.

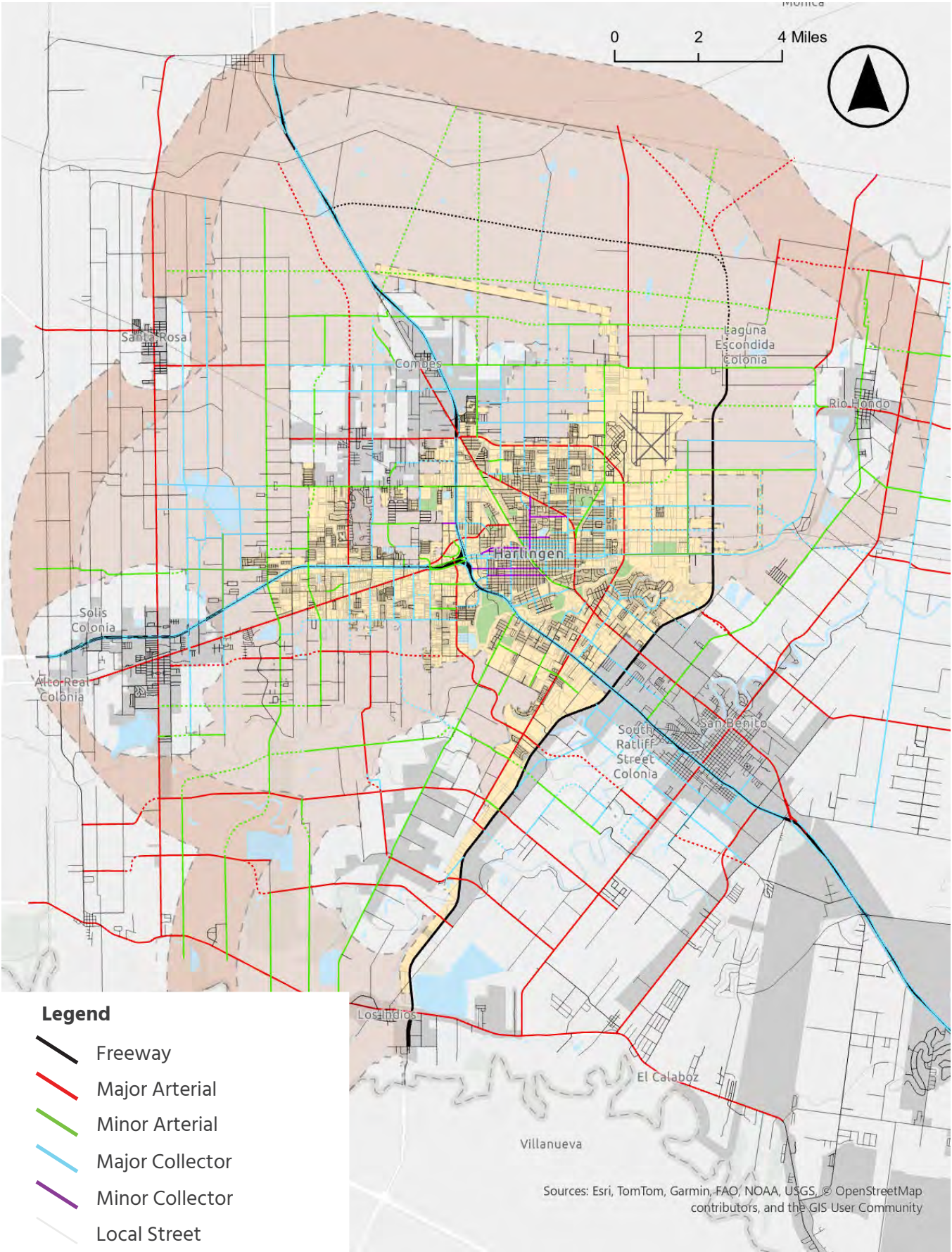
Future local streets are not shown on the Future Thoroughfare Plan. In addition to the Street Types tables, the City requires new local streets and street improvements in accordance with its zoning and subdivision regulations, plans, and any other standards and agreements.

Relationship with other Transportation Plans

When the City of Harlingen enacts updates and changes to its Thoroughfare Plan, those updates are shared with the Rio Grande Valley MPO.

Changing and amending the Plan

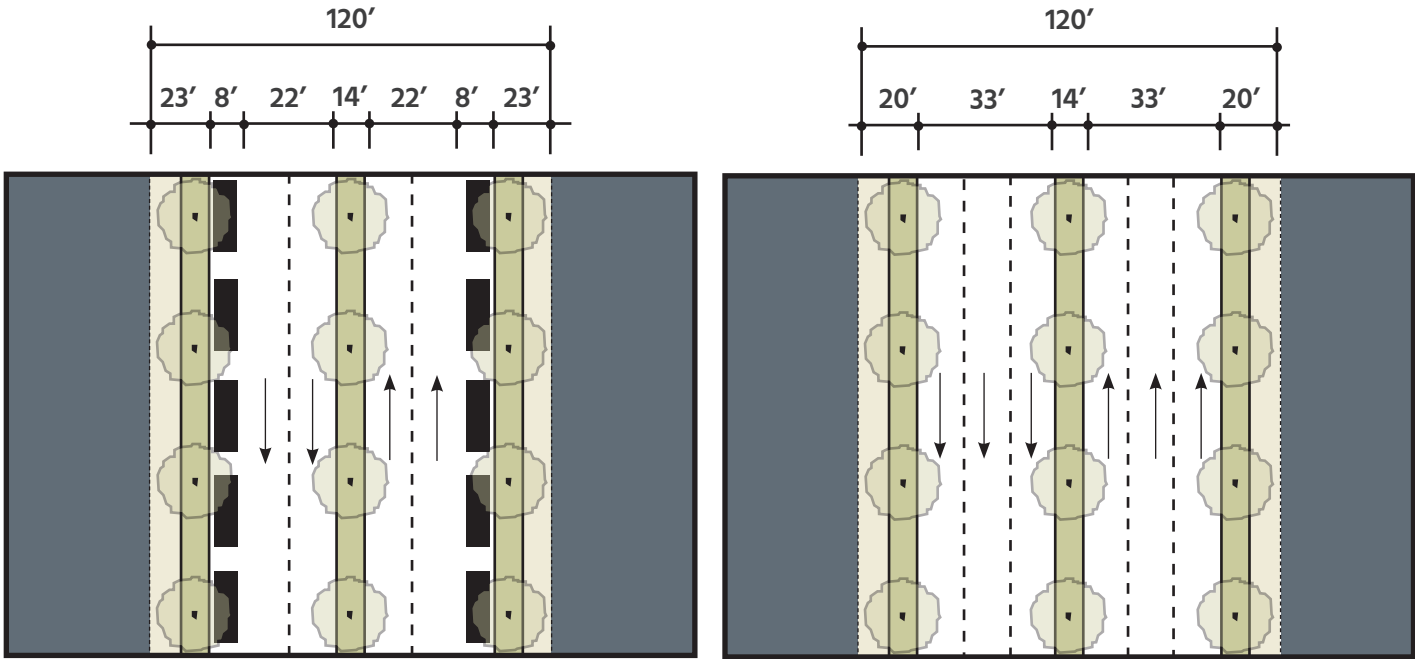
As circumstances change and development and redevelopment occurs, there may be instances where the City seeks to make an amendment to the Future Thoroughfare Plan. Similar to amendments to the Future Land Use Map, proposed map amendments to the Future Thoroughfare Plan should be approved by City Council subject to coordination with the Rio Grande Valley MPO.



Map 15. Future Thoroughfare Plan

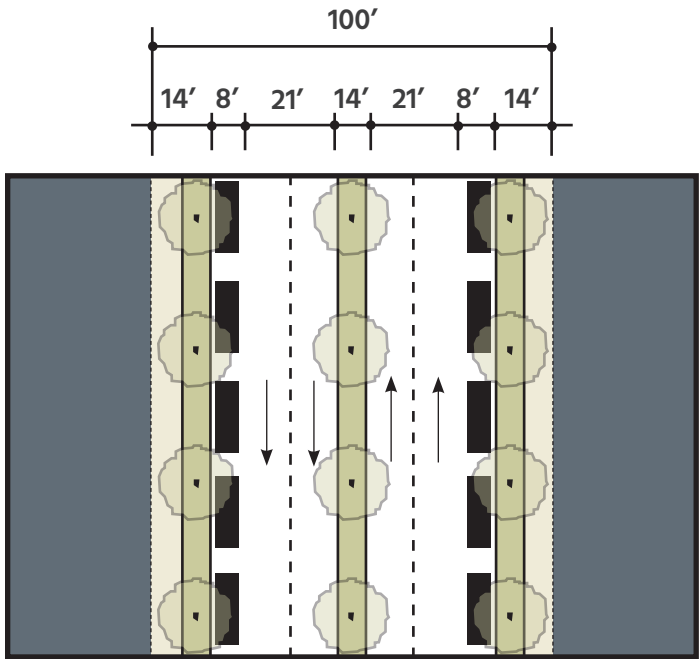
Street Cross-Sections

Major Arterial 120'



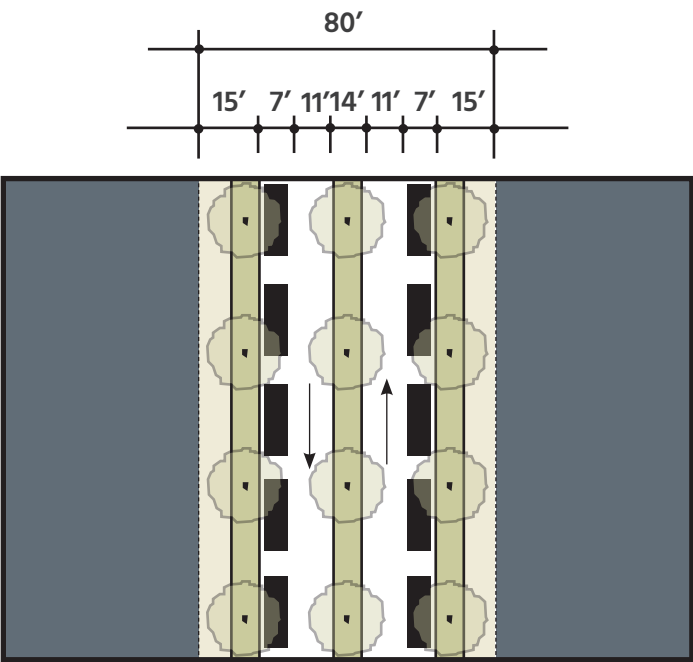
Road Type	Major Arterial 1	Major Arterial 2
Right-of-Way Width	120 feet	120 feet
Design Speed	35 MPH	35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	4 lanes	6 lanes
Lane Width	10.5-11 feet	10.5-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel	None
Median / Turn lane	8-14 feet	8-14 feet
Curb Radius	15-25 feet	15-30 feet
Walkway Type	6-20 foot Sidewalk/Multi-use Path	6-15 foot Sidewalk/Multi-use Path
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway	Tree well or parkway

Minor Arterial 100'



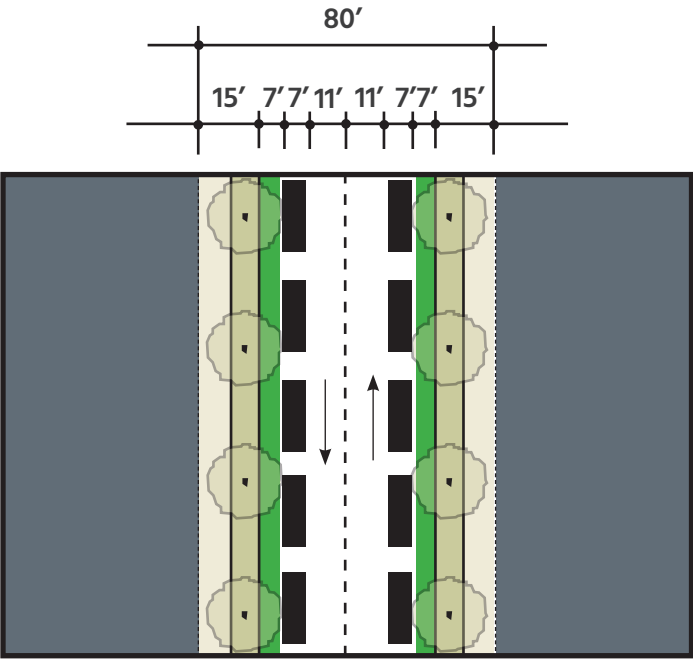
Right-of-Way Width	100 feet
Design Speed	35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	4 lanes
Lane Width	10-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	8-14 feet
Curb Radius	10-20 feet
Walkway Type	6-14 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway

Major Collector 80'



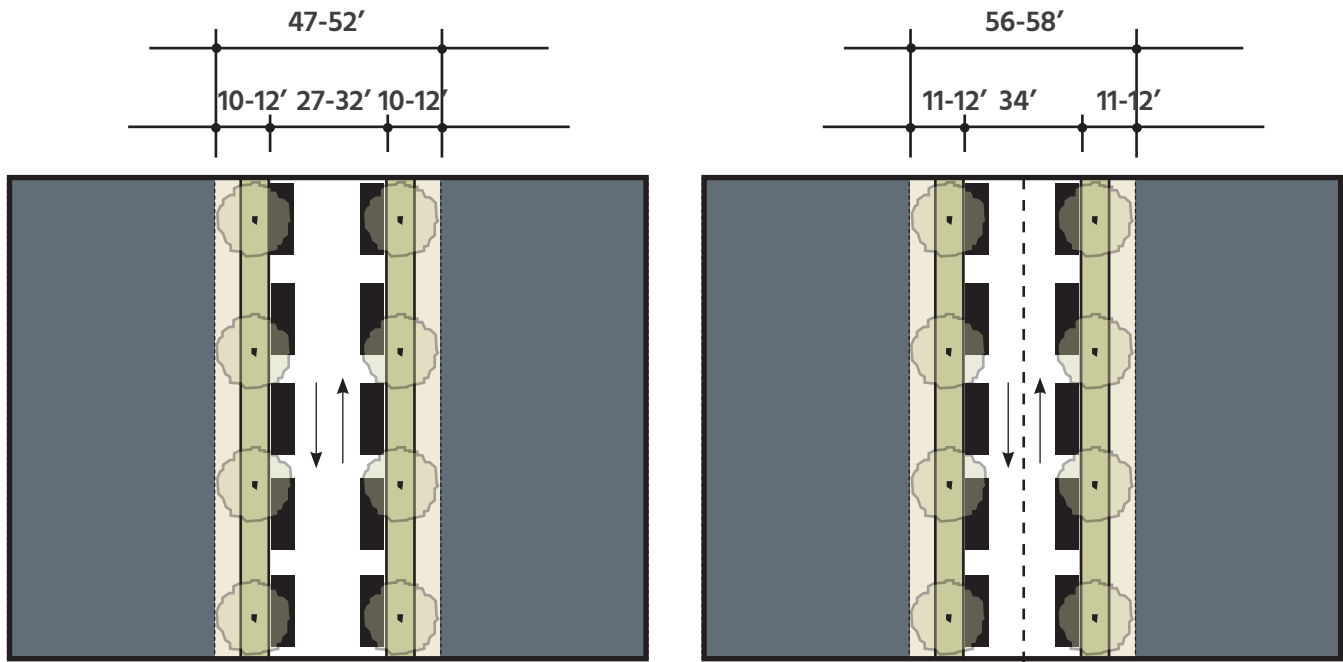
Right-of-Way Width	80 feet
Design Speed	30-35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	2 lanes
Lane Width	10-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	8-14 feet
Curb Radius	10-20 feet
Walkway Type	6-15 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway

Minor Collector 80'



Right-of-Way Width	80 feet
Design Speed	35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	2 lanes
Lane Width	10-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	8-15 feet
Curb Radius	10-20 feet
Walkway Type	6-15 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway

Local 40'–56'



	Residential Local	Commercial Local
Right-of-Way Width	47-52 feet	56 feet
Design Speed	15 MPH	15 MPH
Traffic Lanes	n/a	n/a
Lane Width	n/a	n/a
Parking Lanes	Parallel	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	None	None
Curb Radius	5-15 feet	5-15 feet
Walkway Type	5-7 foot Sidewalk	6-8 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter	4-5 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes
Bike Facility	Shared	Shared
Street Trees	Parkway	Tree well or parkway

Street Design Guidelines

These Guidelines are intended to be used on existing thoroughfares that due to existing conditions, right-of-way widths, or other factors require more design flexibility than that provided in the cross-sections.

Harlingen’s Thoroughfare Plan determines the location and character of future thoroughfares. It also considers improvements or expansions to existing streets and the location of future roadways based on anticipated and planned growth patterns.

Traditionally, Thoroughfare Plans in many communities have classified different types of roadways based solely on function. The Harlingen Future Thoroughfare Plan emphasizes the design of streets based on the context of the intended surrounding built environment. Thus, this Plan emphasizes the integral connection between the public and private realms, improving the link between buildings and streets.

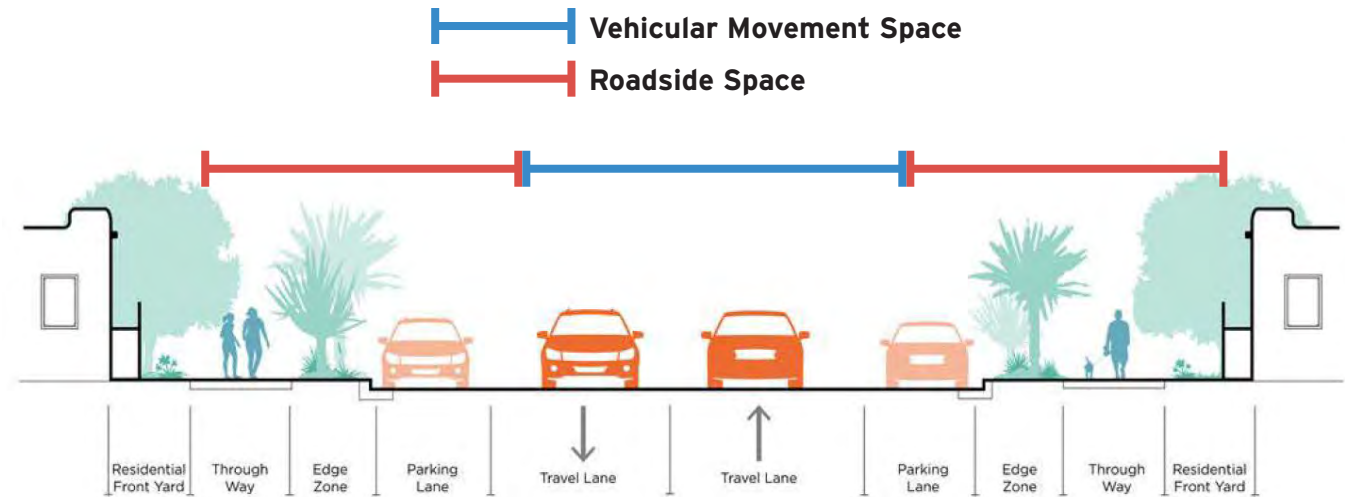
Street Context Areas

Street Context Areas distinguish different street designs applied based upon existing or planned transition to an intended development pattern. The Street Context Areas include:

- Context Area 1 - Urban
- Context Area 2 - Suburban
- Context Area 3 - Rural

Street Right-of-way Ratios

This plan considers a balanced ratio of Street Right-of-Way Components, including vehicular movement space (travel lanes, turning lanes, etc.) and roadside space (sidewalks, street trees, bicycle lanes, etc.) is a key principle of Harlingen's Future Thoroughfare Plan.



Context Area 1 Urban

Streets in Context Area 1 should be designed to provide safe and comfortable transportation options to pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit-riders. The proportion of the public street rights-of-way width dedicated to non-vehicular transportation infrastructure should equal a minimum 50 percent of the total width.

Future Land Use Categories

- Downtown
- Local Commercial
- Single Family Residential (near downtown)



Context Area 1 - Street Design Guidelines

Street Component	Arterial	Collector	Local
Street Characteristics			
Desired Spacing	0.5 - 1 mile	660 - 2,000 feet	Up to 660 feet
Community Relationship	Defines neighborhood and district edges	Provides access across neighborhoods	Defines neighborhood experience
Design Speed	35 MPH	25-35 MPH	15-25 MPH
Traffic Volumes	7,000 - 27,000	1,100 - 6,300	80 - 700
Street Design Elements			
Number of Travel Lanes	4	2	1 - 2
Lane width	10.5 ft (11 ft outer lane)	10.5 - 11 ft	9 ft
Medians	Where widths permit	Limited	Limited
On-Street Parking	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sidewalk	10 - 20 ft	8 - 15 ft	6 ft
Bike Facility	Physically protected	Protected or separated	On-street
Street Trees	Tree well	Parkway or tree well	Parkway
Medians	Optional	Minimally used	Discouraged
Rear alleys	Encouraged	Encouraged	Encouraged

Context Area 1 Street Retrofit Opportunities

- Widen existing sidewalks, fill gaps, and add sidewalks in priority locations
- Add shade trees abutting the curb every 30 ft
- Street right-of-way widths should be divided equally between roadside space and vehicular movement space with 50% of the width allocated for roadside space
- Consider space within the public right-of-way for public gathering and dining space in and around activity areas
- Frame walkable streets with buildings; first floors should have transparent windows and multiple entrances

- Convert diagonal parking to parallel parking
- Move solid waste and utilities underground and to rear alleys
- Consider above-curb improvements like bike lanes, restaurant seating, bicycle parking, and public art
- Enhance street connectivity with small block sizes
- Locate off-street parking behind buildings
- Make intersections safer for pedestrians

Context Area 2 Suburban

Streets in Context Area 2 are generally designed primarily for automobile use within existing automobile-oriented land use contexts. There are opportunities for short and long-term retrofits to enhance safety along these corridors and at intersections.

The proportion of the right-of-way width dedicated to non-vehicular transportation infrastructure should equal a minimum 30 percent of the total width.



Future Land Use Categories

- Regional Commercial
- Multi-Family Residential
- Single-Family Residential (outside downtown)
- Heavy Industrial
- Light Industrial



Context Area 2 - Street Design Guidelines

Street Component	Arterial	Collector	Local
Street Characteristics			
Desired Spacing	One mile	800 - 3,000 feet	Up to 800 feet
Community Relationship	Defines neighborhood and district edges	Provides access across neighborhoods	Defines neighborhood experience
Design Speed	35 MPH	25-35 MPH	15-25 MPH
Traffic Volumes	10,000 - 50,000	1,000 - 15,000	80 - 700
Street Design Elements			
Number of Travel Lanes	4	2	1 - 2
Lane width	11 ft (12 ft outer lane)	11.5 ft	9 - 10 ft
Medians	Encouraged, With trees	Where widths permit	Limited
On-Street Parking	Parallel in retrofit	Parallel	Parallel
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sidewalk	5 - 12 ft	5 - 12 ft	5 - 6 ft
Bike Facility	Multi-use path	Multi-use path	On-street, shared
Street Trees	Parkway or tree well	Parkway or tree well	Parkway
Medians	Optional	Minimally used	Discouraged
Rear alleys	Consider in retrofits	Consider in retrofits	Where feasible

Context Area 2 Street Retrofit Opportunities

- Enhance intersection designs and street crossings to improve bike, pedestrian, and driver safety
- Slow traffic, narrow lanes and street widths, and enhance non-auto infrastructure around schools and other activity centers
- Street right-of-way widths should provide at least 30% of the width allocated for non-automobile space
- Incorporate hike-bike trails where feasible
- Plant street trees adjacent to the curb in priority areas
- Enhance street and trail connectivity
- Intersection curb radii of 5 - 15%

Context Area 3 Agricultural

Streets in Context Area 3 are located in rural areas with existing open space, farmland, and rural neighborhoods. Roads generally do not have curb and gutter. These represent areas that may eventually transition in the future, however minimal roadway improvements are expected in these areas. Where feasible, there may be opportunities for trails or road shoulders that can accommodate cyclists and joggers. Where future development pressures encroach on these areas, use the street cross-sections or design guidelines for Context Area 1.

Future Land Use Categories

- Agricultural
- Open Space



Context Area 3 - Street Design Guidelines

Street Component	Arterial	Collector	Local
Street Characteristics			
Desired Spacing	One mile	660 - 2,000 feet	Up to 660 feet
Community Relationship	Defines edge of large land tracts	Defines edge of large land tracts	Provides residential access
Design Speed	35 - 55 MPH	25 - 45 MPH	15 - 25 MPH
Traffic Volumes	300 - 3,000	300 - 3,000	15 - 400
Street Design Elements			
Number of Travel Lanes	2	2	1 - 2
Lane width	12 ft	12 ft	9 - 11 ft
Medians	Where widths permit	Limited	Limited
On-Street Parking	None	None	Allowed
Curb & Gutter	None	None	None
Sidewalk	5 - 8 ft	5 - 8 ft	6 ft
Bike Facility	Trail, shoulder	Trail, shoulder	On-street
Street Trees	Gateways	Gateways	Where desired
Medians	None	None	None
Rear alleys	None	None	None

Type 3 Street Retrofit Opportunities

- Street rights of way should include shoulders and/or adjacent trails to accommodate multiple modes of travel
- Include stormwater swales where appropriate
- Plant trees and other types of landscaping in targeted locations and at key gateways

CHAPTER

6

ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT

Economic Policies



Strengthen Local Business & Entrepreneurship

Support small businesses, startups and local industries by providing financial incentives, workforce training and business support services.



Leverage Assets to Drive Sustainable Growth

Promote strategic development that enhances Harlingen’s unique character, including downtown revitalization, tourism and infrastructure investments.



Foster a Resilient & Diverse Economy

Encourage economic diversification by attracting industries in healthcare, technology and advanced manufacturing that will help attract and support ancillary services such as retail.

What We’ve Heard So Far...

“We need more job opportunities within the city, especially higher-wage jobs.”

“Support local businesses and entrepreneurs so we can keep money in Harlingen.”

“Rising rent and inflation are making it hard for small businesses to survive.”

“Attracting new industries and employers will help retain young professionals.”

“Downtown Harlingen has so much potential let’s make it a real destination.”

“The city should invest in workforce training programs to match local job needs.”

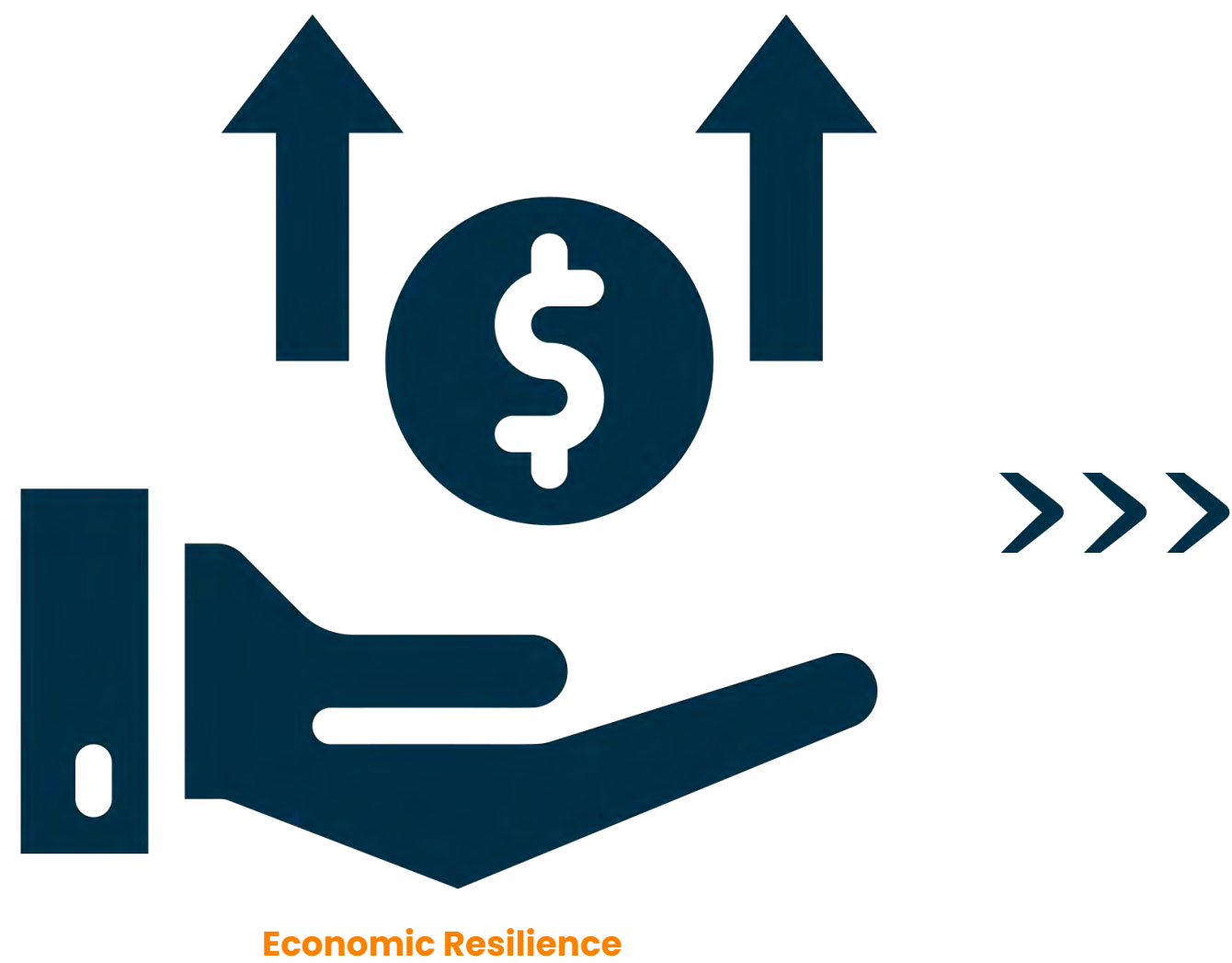
“Promoting Harlingen’s cultural and eco-tourism opportunities will bring more visitors and revenue.”

“A strong bi-national economy will help Harlingen thrive—we need to support cross-border trade.”

“Affordable spaces for start-ups and micro-businesses will help grow Harlingen’s economy.”

Economics & Resilience Connection

Incorporating housing resilience into growth planning entails strategically aligning city development with a focus on fostering diverse housing solutions. This approach leverages growth to promote responsible housing development practices and supporting community needs.



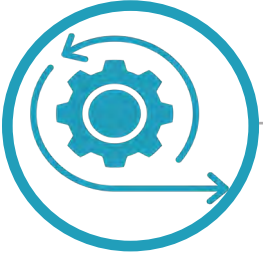
Education

Expanding access to quality education, vocational training and workforce development programs will equip Harlingen residents with the skills needed for stable, well-paying jobs, fostering long-term economic resilience.



Mobility

Limited transportation options make it difficult for residents without personal vehicles to access jobs, education and essential services. Enhancing public transit and walkability will improve economic opportunities for all.



Recovery

Harlingen’s small businesses and lower-income communities face challenges in rebuilding after natural disasters. Faster access to funding, disaster preparedness plans and resilient infrastructure will support long-term recovery.



Risk Disparities

Many low-income households and small businesses in Harlingen are at risk of being located in flood-prone or underinvested areas. Strategic planning and investment in infrastructure can help mitigate these disparities and protect economic assets.



Health Disparities

Limited access to healthcare and wellness services can strain household finances, making it harder for families to recover from economic shocks. Strengthening health infrastructure will improve community resilience.



Human Capital

Investing in Harlingen’s workforce, entrepreneurship programs and small business support will drive economic growth, encourage innovation and strengthen the City’s ability to adapt to future disruptions.

Background Information

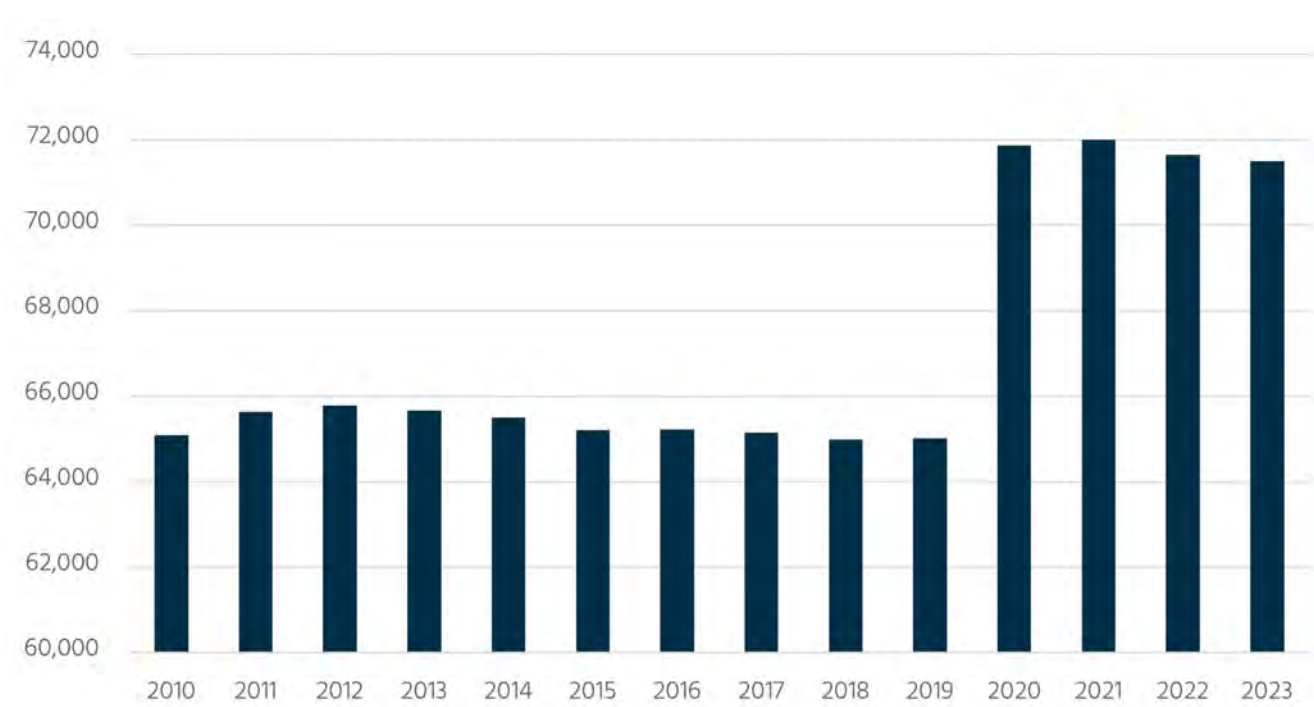
As Harlingen works to broaden its economy and strengthen its employment base, the City is well positioned for growth. Recent demographic shifts, including a rising regional population and local expansion at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine, create new opportunities for business recruitment and retention. Building on these trends, the socioeconomic analysis evaluates demographic and economic conditions in Harlingen and Cameron County, providing insights that can guide the City in building long-term economic resilience and sustainability.

Demographic & Economic Profile

The City of Harlingen is the 2nd most populous city in Cameron County. Since 2010, the City’s population has increased by 9.8 percent, adding more than 6,400 new residents. The 2023 population estimate for Harlingen is 71,510 residents. The City has consistently represented 17 percent of Cameron County’s overall population. As a point of reference, Cameron County’s population expanded by 4.7 percent over this period. Harlingen’s population growth is above the City of Brownsville, but well behind the state overall.

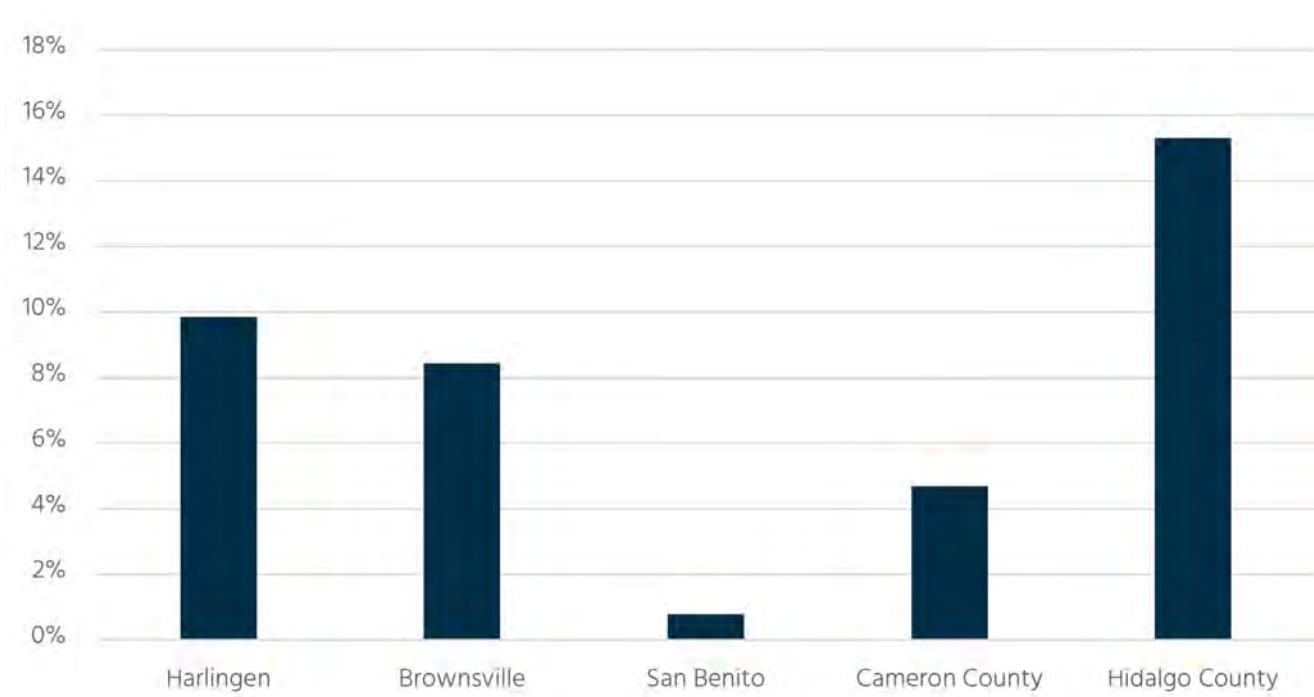
Over the next 10 years, the Texas Water Development Board projects the Harlingen Water User Group area will add just 5,000 residents. If trends hold, this translates into 2,500 new City residents. In the short term, Harlingen should continue to grow at a compound annual growth rate of less than 1 percent per year. This will create demand for local goods and services, but might not create enough excess labor supply to recruit a large employer. To remain competitive, Harlingen will also need to focus on workforce development and training, ensuring that residents have the skills necessary to attract and support new industries.

Figure 22. Harlingen Population Growth



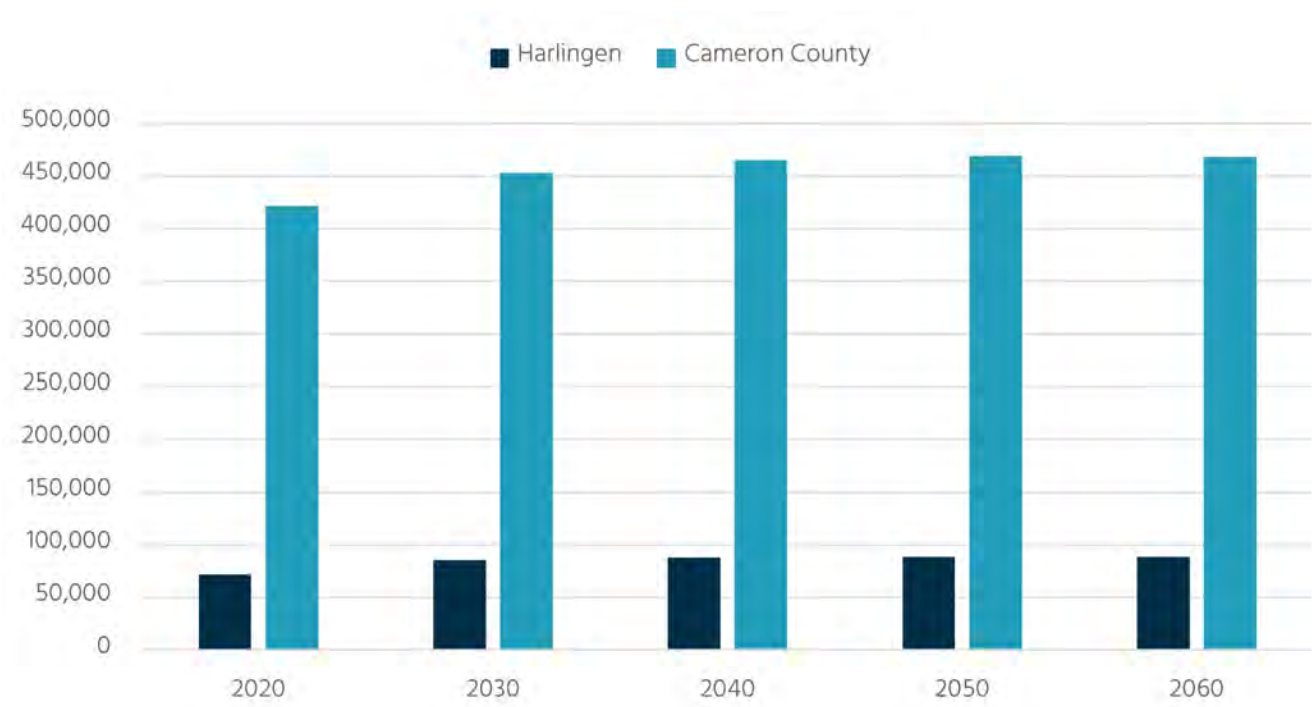
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 23. Regional Population Growth (2010 to 2023)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 24. Regional Population Forecast (2020 to 2060)



Source: Texas Water Development Board

Harlingen-Based Employment

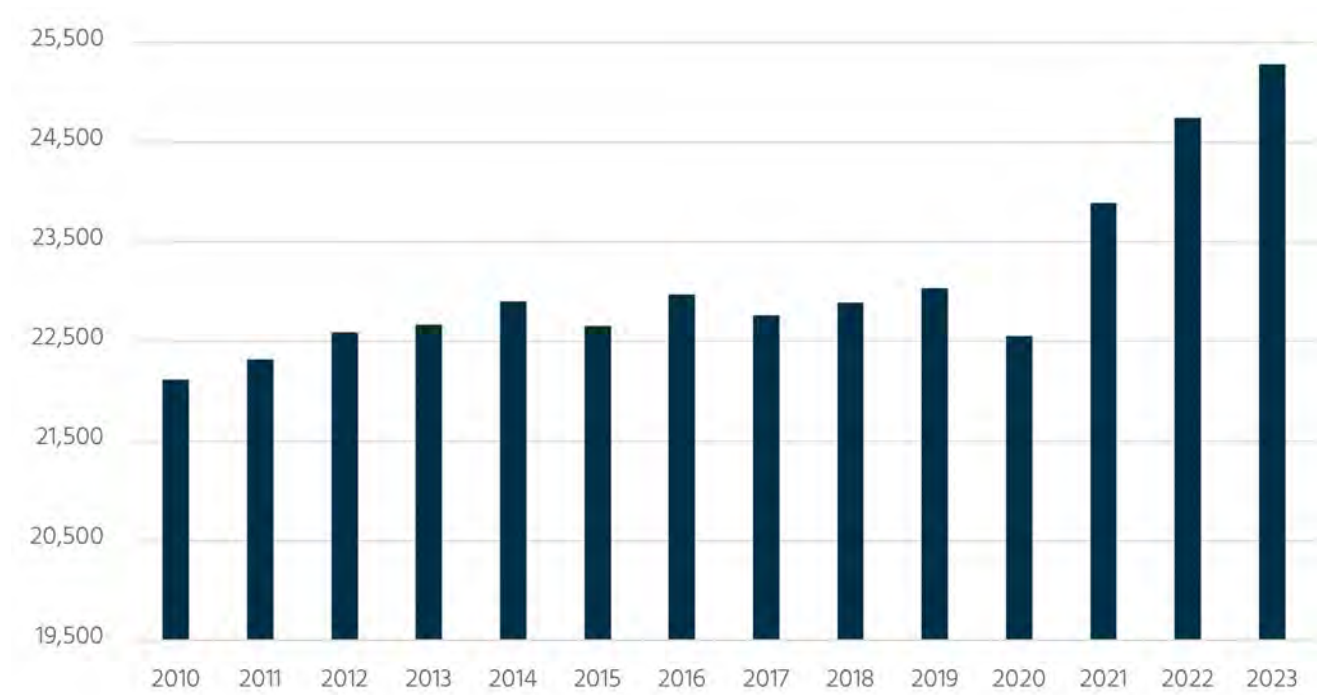
Total employment at businesses located within Harlingen has expanded over the past decade. In 2022, there were approximately 41,811 jobs at Harlingen-based employers. Between 2010 and 2022, companies within the City added 2,400 new jobs, a growth rate of 6.2 percent. Since 2010, job growth has lagged behind the pace of overall population growth.

Based on a review of Cameron County establishment startup and exit datasets, businesses do not appear to face unique challenges in the Harlingen area. About the same percentage of establishments open and close in Cameron County as elsewhere in the state, indicating the region has a favorable businesses climate compared to other places in Texas. Given the limited labor

force, promoting small business start-ups and entrepreneurship presents an opportunity to attract small firms to the area and diversify employment opportunities.

A location quotient (LQ) is an analytical measure that compares a region’s industrial specialization to that of the United States. It is calculated by dividing an industry’s share of total regional employment divided by the industry’s share of national employment. Using employment data from ESRI, Harlingen’s LQ was computed. Results show relatively strong concentrations in Health Care & Social Assistance, Accommodation and Food Services, Retail Trade and Utilities.

Figure 25. Employed Harlingen Residents



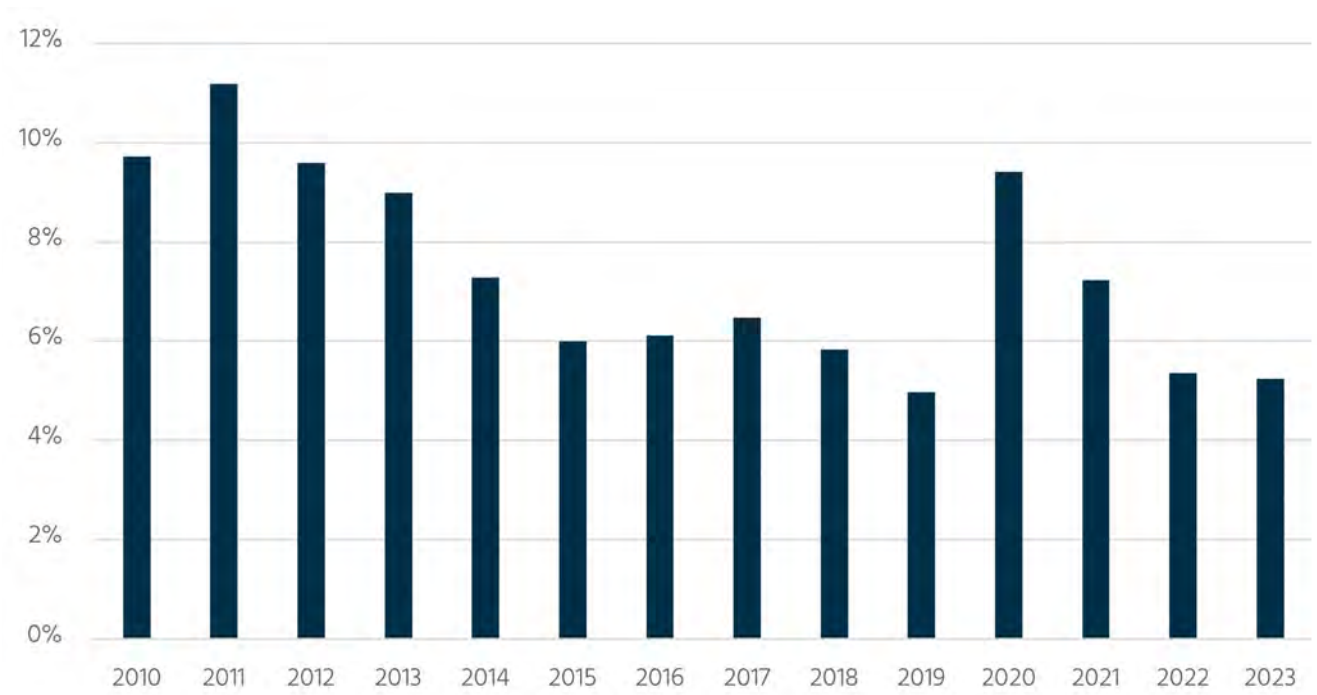
Source: Texas Workforce Commission

Labor Force Participation

The number of Harlingen residents in the labor force has increased over the past decade but at a slower pace than population growth. In 2023, the Texas Workforce Commission reported that 31,150 Harlingen residents were in the labor force. The City’s unemployment rate for 2023 was 5.2 percent, significantly below the peak of 11.2 percent in 2011. Given the large number of Harlingen residents under 14 years of age or over 65 years of age, only 58.0 percent of the population is categorized as in the labor force, well below statewide labor force participation rate of 64.7 percent. However, the younger demographic does represent long-term labor supply that might be drawn into the labor market if the right employment opportunities and training existed.

Another metric used to evaluate the health of a labor market is the share of local jobs held by residents. This can be evaluated using two statistics: 1) the % of Harlingen residents who work in the city and 2) the % of overall jobs in the city held by Harlingen residents. In 2023, 65.5 percent of Harlingen residents indicated they worked at a job within their place of residence. This implies about 10,000 residents commute outside the city each day for work. Based on data from the US Census Bureau LEHD program, 73.1 percent of employees at Harlingen-based businesses (or 30,000 workers) commute to the city each day for work. This indicates Harlingen-based businesses can draw upon a regional labor market without overly relying on existing residents.

Figure 26. Unemployment Rate for Harlingen Residents



Source: Texas Workforce Commission

Figure 27. Employment Levels by Business Establishment Location (2022)

NAICS	Description	Harlingen	Cameron County	State of Texas
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	168	531	58,872
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	45	99	192,735
22	Utilities	221	754	85,217
23	Construction	1,127	3,983	808,876
31-33	Manufacturing	580	7,178	924,909
42	Wholesale Trade	925	3,161	629,103
44-45	Retail Trade	4,808	16,644	1,381,623
48-49	Transportation and Warehousing	1,165	4,739	634,074
51	Information	994	1,392	233,968
52	Finance and Insurance	1,003	2,968	608,776
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	527	1,704	244,840
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	892	4,105	986,665
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	31	652	171,279
56	Administrative and Support Services	3,865	9,778	902,896
61	Educational Services	3,788	17,377	1,283,229
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	15,018	42,816	1,737,154
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	337	1,358	167,005
72	Accommodation and Food Services	3,899	14,543	1,191,187
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	914	2,701	353,921
92	Public Administration	1,504	5,528	395,704
Total		41,811	142,011	12,992,033

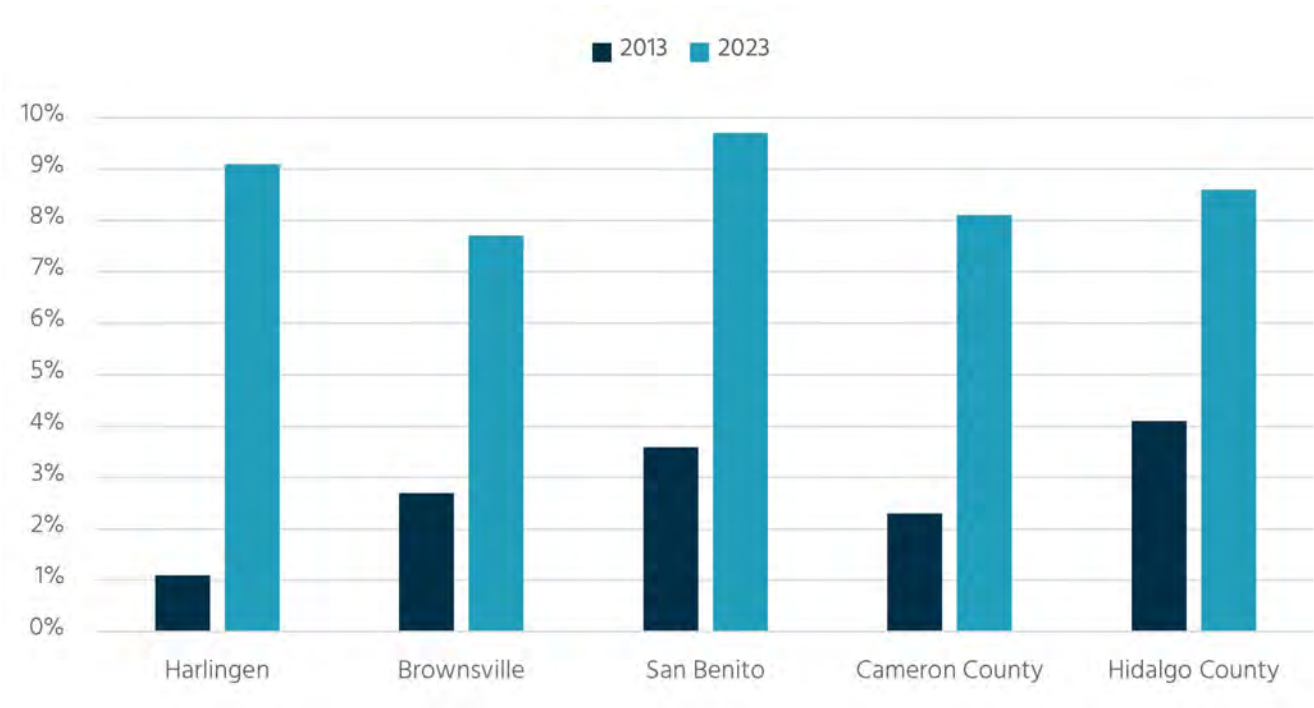
Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

Where Residents Work

Based on full-time employment data for workers over the age of 16, nearly one third of Harlingen residents work in the Educational Services and Health Care and Social Assistance sector. This is not surprising given the City is home to several large hospitals as well as Texas State Technical College. The region is below the statewide average for high paying industries such as professional services, finance, and manufacturing.

For 2023, 9.1 percent of Harlingen residents worked from home. This is much higher than the 2013 figure of 1.1 percent. This is a larger percentage than the averages for Brownsville and Cameron County. Remote or work-from-home jobs tend to be professional services jobs that pay high wages. However, more and more companies are asking employees to return to the office a few days a week. While many smaller and rural communities across the country attracted remote workers during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this trend appears to be reversing.

Figure 28. Percent of People Who Worked from Home (2013 and 2023)

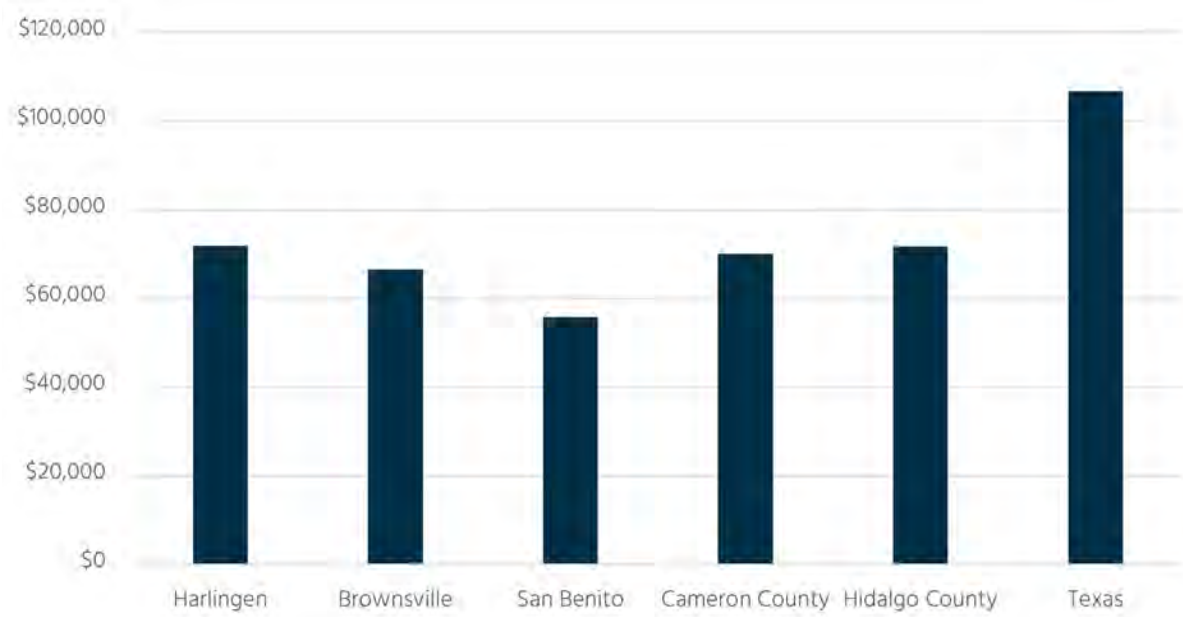


Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Wages & Income

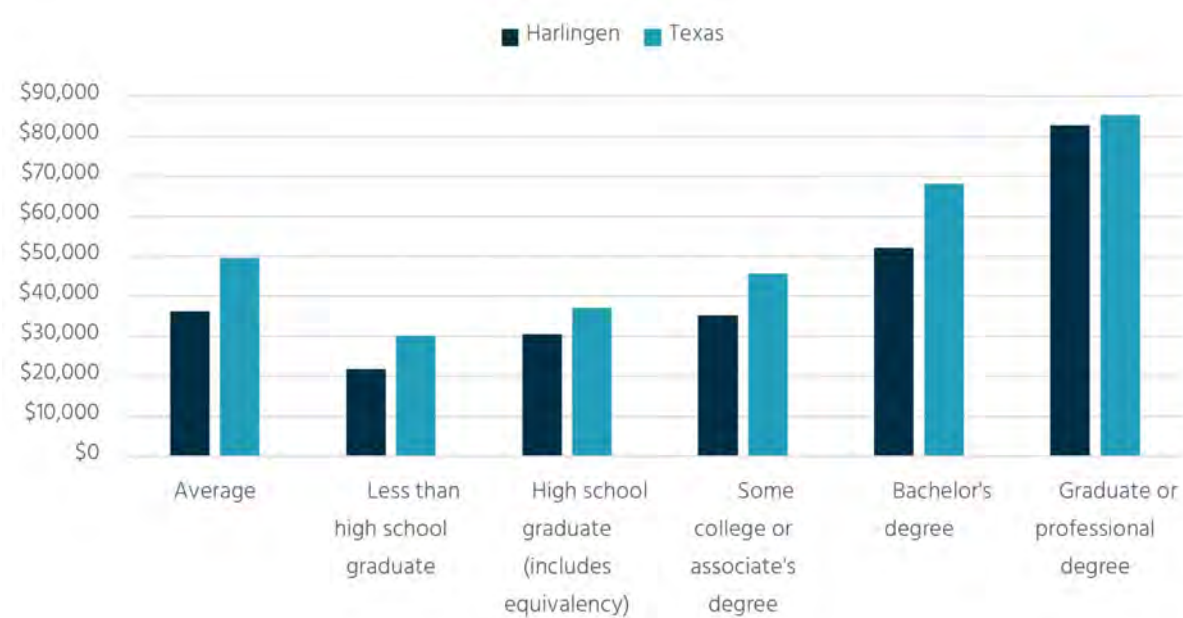
Similar to other communities near the Texas-Mexico border, Harlingen’s wage and income levels are below the statewide averages. It is not projected that the City’s wage and income levels will reach parity with the statewide figures. In 2023, Harlingen’s median household income was \$55,891 versus \$76,292 for the State of Texas. The City’s per capita income was \$26,217 versus \$39,446 for the State of Texas during this same period.

Figure 29. Average Household Income (2023 ACS 5-Year Estimate)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Figure 30. Median Earnings by Educational Attainment (2023 5-Year Estimate)

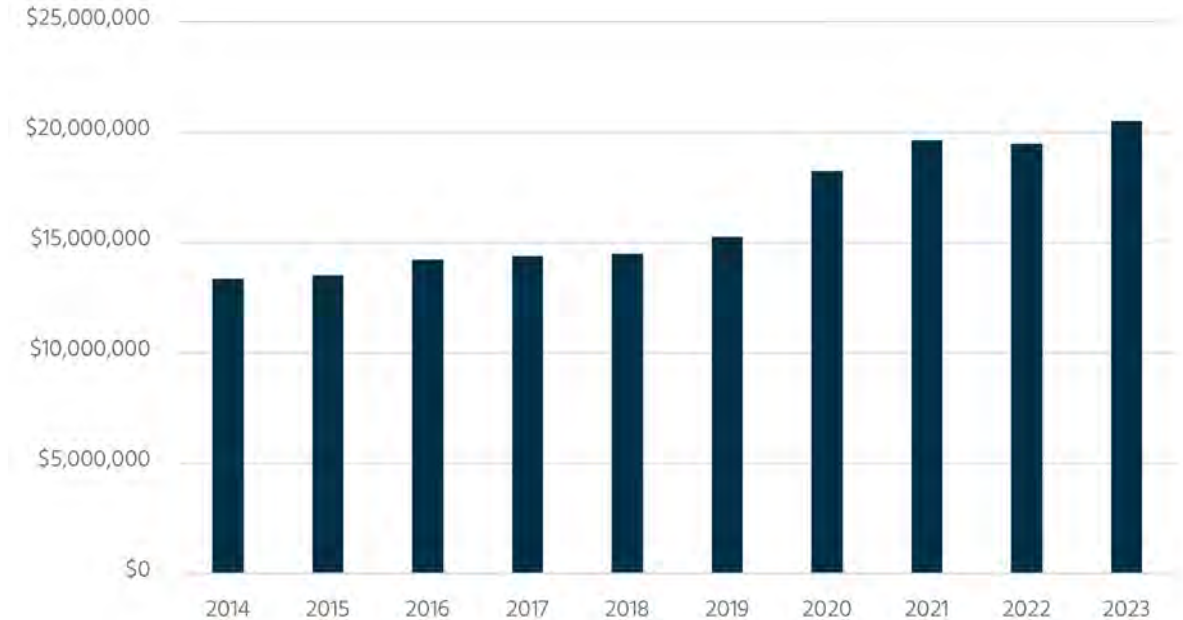


Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Tax Revenue

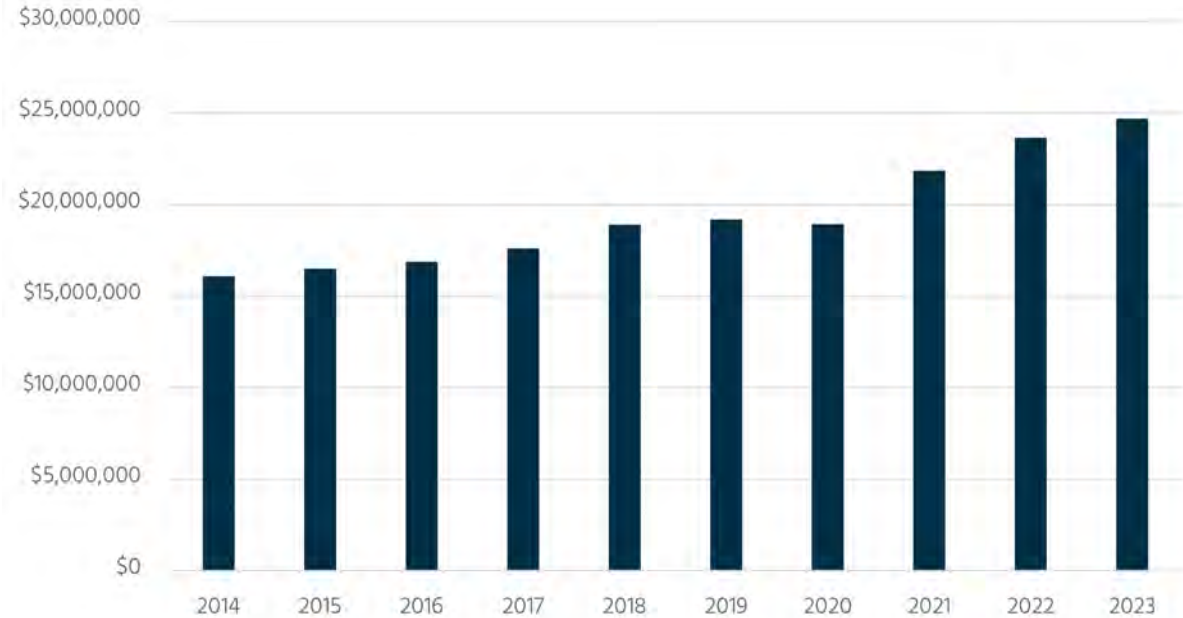
Over the past decade, Harlingen’s property tax revenue has increased by more than 53 percent. In FY 2023, general fund property tax revenue was \$20.5 million. Sales tax revenue has also been growing in the City. For FY 2023, sales tax collections were \$24.7 million. Between FY 2014 and FY 2023, sales tax revenue increased by 53.3 percent. For FY 2023, hotel occupancy tax revenue was \$1.8 million.

Figure 31. Harlingen Property Tax Revenue



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Figure 32. Harlingen Sales Tax Revenue



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Visitor Activity

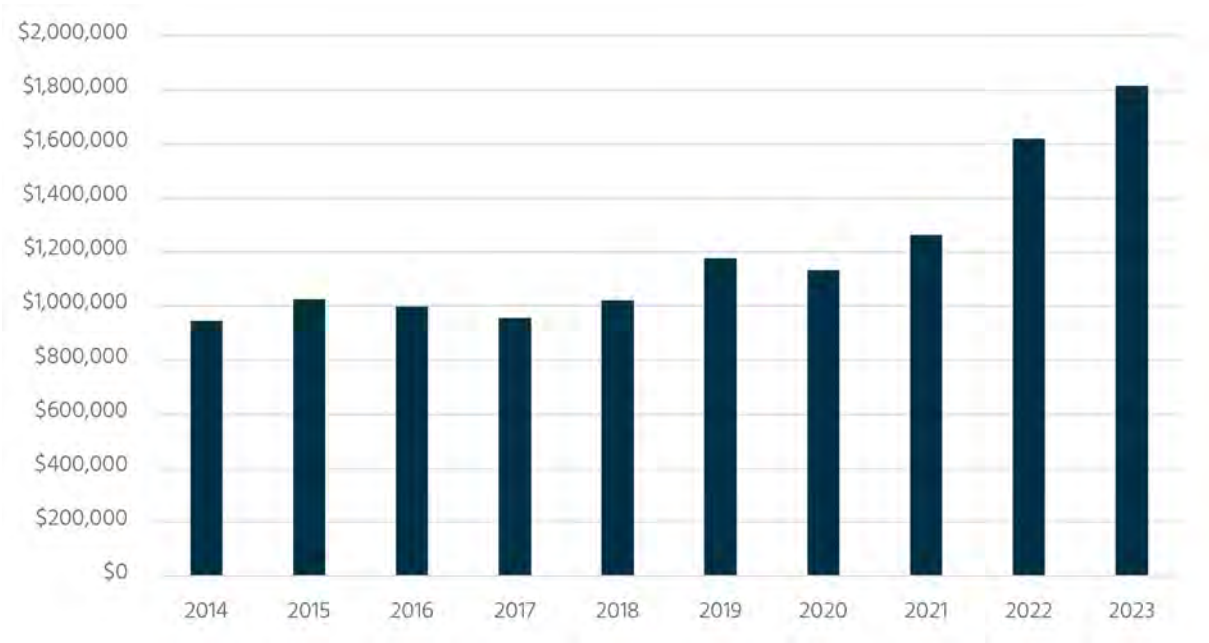
Visitor activity plays an important role in the Harlingen economy. According to the Governor’s Economic Development & Tourism Department, tourism spending supports over 1,450 local jobs, \$43.3 million in direct earnings and \$6.1 million in local tax receipts. Direct tourism spending supports roughly 3.5 percent of all jobs in Harlingen. Much of this tourism spending is linked to “Winter Texans” and the Valley International Airport. To capture the full economic potential of tourism activity, Harlingen should focus on developing unique destinations and experiences that keep people in Harlingen for multiple days. Hosting special events and festivals are also important to encourage overnight stays in local hotels, which can significantly increase visitor spending and maximize local economic impact.

Figure 33. Tourism Activity in Harlingen

Year	Total Direct Travel Spending	Total Direct Earnings	Total Direct Employment	Local Visitor Tax Receipts
2010	\$122,795,996	\$22,679,420	1,060	\$2,850,996
2011	\$127,435,232	\$23,027,168	1,050	\$2,806,900
2012	\$136,331,414	\$24,586,617	1,100	\$3,019,241
2013	\$131,988,267	\$24,464,024	1,090	\$3,045,129
2014	\$134,296,946	\$25,605,441	1,110	\$3,199,946
2015	\$136,586,706	\$28,494,959	1,220	\$3,403,583
2016	\$137,528,446	\$29,260,094	1,270	\$3,475,091
2017	\$135,845,806	\$29,580,724	1,270	\$3,609,367
2018	\$139,383,274	\$29,283,631	1,220	\$3,842,102
2019	\$153,477,012	\$33,986,453	1,390	\$4,402,326
2020	\$133,497,501	\$30,010,888	1,140	\$4,198,740
2021	\$179,181,855	\$35,696,139	1,330	\$6,039,640
2022	\$196,144,838	\$39,832,193	1,410	\$5,992,039
2023	\$198,094,307	\$43,258,482	1,480	\$6,064,637

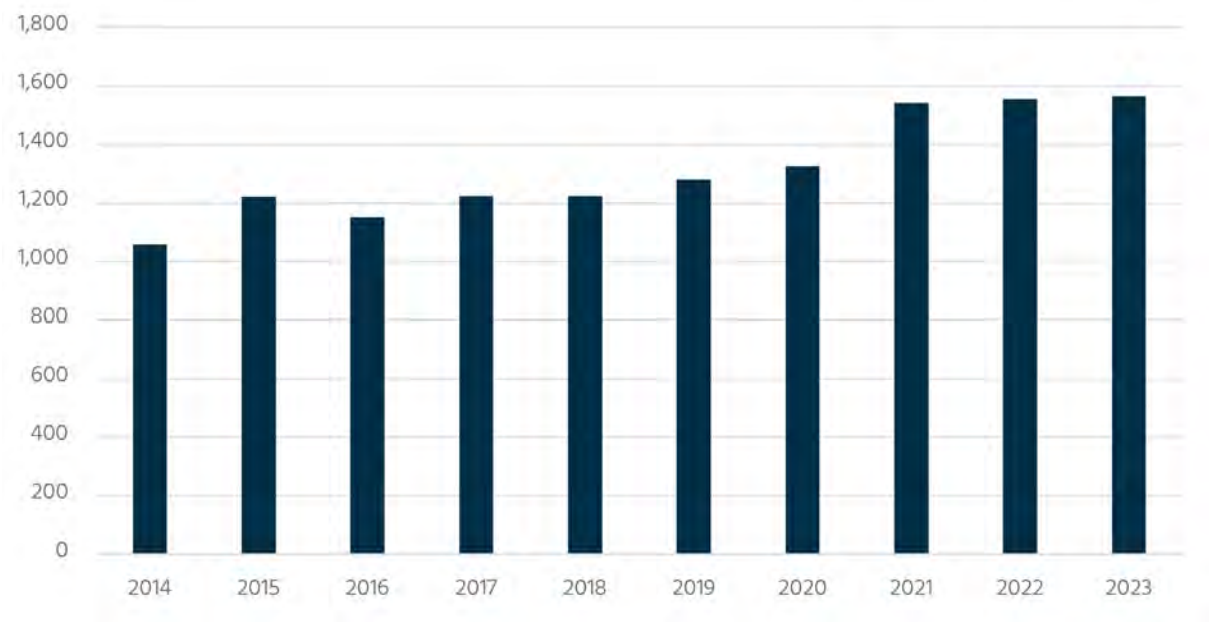
Source: State of Texas, Office of the Governor, Economic Development & Tourism

Figure 34. Harlingen Hotel Occupancy Tax Collections



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Figure 35. Number of Available Rooms in Harlingen



Source: Source Strategies

Future Demand

Based on a forecast from Moody’s Analytics, Cameron County businesses are projected to add 21,700 employees by 2033. A large percentage of these jobs will be in Harlingen. The Education & Health Services sector, for example, is forecasted to add over 9,400 jobs. The Professional & Business Services sector is expected to generate 2,200 jobs. A retail demand forecast from ESRI projects strong consumer demand for restaurants, entertainment and shopping in Harlingen. Taken together, the future for the City is bright but consistent with past growth trends. If Harlingen wants to change its future trajectory, the City will need to develop a bold plan that leverages the resources of all its economic development partners.

Figure 36. Cameron County Employment Forecast

Description	2023	2033	Change	% Change
Natural Resources & Mining	120	80	-40	-33.3%
Construction	3,790	4,330	540	14.2%
Manufacturing	7,510	8,100	590	7.9%
Wholesale Trade	3,260	3,490	230	7.1%
Retail Trade	17,650	18,630	980	5.6%
Transportation, Warehousing, & Utilities	5,100	5,600	500	9.8%
Information	1,480	1,560	80	5.4%
Financial Activities	5,330	5,920	590	11.1%
Professional & Business Services	17,060	19,280	2,220	13.0%
Education & Health Services	48,660	58,140	9,480	19.5%
Leisure & Hospitality	18,500	20,780	2,280	12.3%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	3,580	4,050	470	13.1%
Government	28,880	32,690	3,810	13.2%
Total	160,800	182,570	21,770	13.5%

Source: Moody’s Analytics

Figure 37. Harlingen Retail Demand Outlook for Key Sectors

Description	2024	2029	Projected Growth
Apparel and Services	\$42,964,466	\$50,818,266	\$7,853,800
Entertainment & Recreation	\$66,946,731	\$79,274,020	\$12,327,289
Food	\$201,126,792	\$238,034,381	\$36,907,589
Food at Home	\$128,370,425	\$151,934,452	\$23,564,027
Food Away from Home	\$72,756,367	\$86,099,929	\$13,343,562
Health			
Nonprescription Drugs	\$3,282,830	\$3,890,120	\$607,290
Prescription Drugs	\$7,238,822	\$8,579,100	\$1,340,278
Eyeglasses and Contact Lenses	\$1,961,071	\$2,322,583	\$361,512
Household Furnishings and Equipment			
Household Textiles	\$2,447,898	\$2,895,864	\$447,966
Furniture	\$16,547,388	\$19,594,729	\$3,047,341
Rugs	\$629,082	\$744,966	\$115,884
Major Appliances	\$10,688,425	\$12,663,526	\$1,975,101
Housewares	\$1,846,379	\$2,186,334	\$339,955
Luggage	\$313,745	\$371,321	\$57,576
Telephones and Accessories	\$2,026,137	\$2,399,375	\$373,238

Source: ESRI

Economic Development Best Practices

To support a thriving local economy, Harlingen must take proactive steps to differentiate itself, attract investment and create the right conditions for sustainable growth. The following best practices reflect feedback from stakeholders, economic trends across the Rio Grande Valley and the unique assets and challenges present in Harlingen. Together, these strategies aim to strengthen the City’s competitive position, enhance quality of life and ensure long-term economic resilience.



Develop a brand for Harlingen that differentiates the City from other communities in the Rio Grande Valley

Economic development in the Rio Grande Valley is competitive. There are numerous well-funded Type A and Type B EDCs actively recruiting and incentivizing projects in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties. Despite its strategic location and the Valley International Airport, Harlingen has not developed a unique brand or identity for the community. What is it that Harlingen offers or provides that cannot be found in another city? Harlingen should craft a marketing campaign that differentiates the City from its neighbors. Harlingen should create marketing materials for target audiences that clearly articulate the value proposition available to each.



Proactively support the redevelopment of Valle Vista Mall

Once a thriving regional destination and sales tax generator, Valle Vista Mall has been struggling for years. With the rise of ecommerce, malls across the country have had to reinvent themselves. The 60 acre site has significant constraints due to the complex ownership structure of occupied spaces and existing use restrictions. Harlingen will likely have to play a proactive role in the redevelopment of this site, including the use of incentives. All options should be explored as the community seeks the highest and best use of this site.



Extend infrastructure along key corridors to drive growth

Harlingen stakeholders identified basic infrastructure as a major impediment to the type of growth the community would like to attract. Water, sewer, transportation and drainage issues were identified as issues throughout the City. The opportunity for Harlingen as it considers fiscal sustainability is to use its financial resources and incentives to strategically guide growth geographically (ex. special districts). In addition, this would assist in creating more sites that are shovel ready for development.



Commit long-term financial resources to Downtown

Harlingen’s authentic downtown is important to the community. However, other cities in the Rio Grande Valley also have thriving downtowns too. Harlingen will need to make long-term strategic financial investments to keep pace with neighboring cities. Without long-term dedicated financial resources, it will be challenging to implement strategic planning initiatives. The existing public improvement district (PID) provides some financial resources to pay for limited grant programs, but additional financial resources should be identified.



Facilitate the development of planned neighborhoods with high-quality amenities

Limited housing options were identified as a major impediment to attracting higher-income professionals (ex. medical sector, college faculty and business professionals) to live and work in Harlingen. While housing affordability is a real issue, long-term fiscal sustainability is linked to a diversity of jobs, housing options and quality of life. Ultimately, the real estate market will indicate what is appropriate for Harlingen long-term based on supply and demand. However, it is likely Harlingen will have to participate. One potential option is exploring the use of Type B Economic Development funding, which could help support downtown improvements and strategic initiatives.



CHAPTER

7

Implementation

Implementation Policies



Translate the Vision into Actionable Steps

Harlingen will implement the Plan through clearly defined projects, programs and partnerships that reflect community priorities. These include zoning updates, infrastructure improvements, housing initiatives and mobility enhancements that bring the vision to life.



Build a System for Measuring Progress

The City will establish performance indicators and reporting tools to track progress toward key goals. Annual updates and five-year plan reviews will ensure transparency, accountability and adaptability.



Commit to Equitable and Lasting Change

Implementation efforts will prioritize long-term outcomes that serve all residents, particularly those in underserved neighborhoods. The Plan will be used to address historic gaps in infrastructure, housing and services.



Integrate the Plan into Daily Operations

Harlingen will embed the Comprehensive Plan into development review, budgeting, capital planning and staff training. A designated implementation lead or team will help coordinate actions across departments.

Maintaining a Comprehensive Plan

Harlingen’s Comprehensive Plan is designed to be a living document responsive to the community’s evolving needs, economic shifts, growth patterns and public input. The Plan reflects a shared vision shaped by residents and stakeholders, and its success depends on regular maintenance, implementation and evaluation.

To remain relevant, the Plan must be used in daily decisions and periodically revisited to respond to new challenges and opportunities. This Section outlines how the City will maintain the Plan and ensure its effective use over time.



Annual Progress Reporting

Each year, City staff coordinated by the Planning & Development Department should prepare a brief Implementation Progress Report. This report will evaluate actions completed, progress made on key goals and highlight any areas requiring additional attention. The report should be shared with City Commission and the public to maintain transparency and support accountability.



Five-Year Plan Review

At least every five years, the City of Harlingen will conduct a formal review of the Comprehensive Plan. This process should include:

- Feedback from City departments, boards and commissions.
- Input from the public and community partners.
- Evaluation of performance metrics established in the Implementation Matrix.

The goal is to determine whether updates are needed and which recommendations should be re-prioritized. A full rewrite may be considered every 15–20 years, depending on the pace of change in the community.

Proactive and Responsive Implementation

Implementation tools fall into two categories: proactive and responsive. Together, these approaches ensure that the Plan remains a relevant and useful guide for future growth.

Proactive Tools

Zoning and Land Use Updates

The Future Land Use Plan establishes the foundation for future zoning decisions. Zoning code updates should reflect the Plan’s goals by supporting mixed-use development, diverse housing types, infill opportunities and walkable neighborhoods.

Capital Improvement Programming

Public investments, particularly in drainage, streets and public facilities, should align with the Plan’s land use priorities and equity goals. Infrastructure should be prioritized in areas of need such as West Harlingen.

Incentive Programs

Tools such as density bonuses, tax abatements and public-private partnerships can help implement targeted goals, especially for affordable housing, downtown redevelopment and green infrastructure projects.

Regional Partnerships

Harlingen should continue to coordinate with Valley Metro, TxDOT, Cameron County and the Port of Harlingen to align infrastructure, transportation and economic development goals.

Responsive Tools

Development Review Process

The City will continue to apply the Comprehensive Plan during zoning and plat review processes, using the Plan to guide decisions on compatibility, intensity and infrastructure needs.

Amendment Procedures

As priorities evolve or unexpected conditions arise, the Plan should be amended to reflect new community input. Any amendments should follow a clear process that includes public notice, staff analysis and the recommendation of the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Community Engagement

Engagement is not a one time event. Continued outreach, including bilingual engagement, pop ups and digital platforms, will allow the Plan to remain grounded in community voices. Feedback loops should be used to adjust strategies over time.

Education and Training

Ongoing education for City staff, boards and elected officials is essential to ensure the successful implementation of the Comprehensive Plan. Staff members, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Commission should participate in regular training workshops. These workshops should clarify each group’s role in supporting the Plan’s implementation and ensure consistent interpretation and application of its goals.

Training sessions may include a focused review of responsibilities, a walkthrough of the Plan’s chapters with an emphasis on relevant actions and hands-on exercises such as mock meetings or scenario discussions. Workshops should also include time for questions and interactive dialogue to ensure alignment and build internal ownership of the Plan. These trainings will help create a shared understanding and keep Harlingen’s team coordinated and confident in applying the Plan’s recommendations.

Organization of Recommendations

Each recommendation in the Comprehensive Plan is directly tied to Harlingen’s vision and guiding principles. The structure of the Plan follows a clear and logical progression from community values to goals to targeted actions. This ensures that every recommendation can be traced back to the broader priorities of the City and the input gathered from the community.

Recommendations are grouped by topical chapter, such as land use, transportation and housing. Within each chapter, the recommendations align with the specific goals established for that theme. These goals were informed by community feedback and reflect the most pressing opportunities and needs identified throughout the planning process. The structure ensures that plan users can understand the “why” behind each recommendation and how it fits within the City’s long-term vision.



Implementation Matrix

The following pages present a matrix of action items designed to move Harlingen toward achieving the vision and goals of this Comprehensive Plan.

The matrix includes the following elements:



Action No.: Provides an identification number for each action.



Action Description: Summarizes the recommended project, program or initiative that will help achieve the City’s priorities.

Responsible Entity: Identifies the primary department, organization or partner responsible for leading implementation. Many actions will require coordination across departments or partnerships with outside agencies, but each action should have a clear lead entity to ensure accountability. Responsible parties may change over time if another organization is better suited to carry the action forward.



Metrics & Targets: Defines how progress will be measured. These indicators will help the City track the success of the Plan’s implementation, such as project completions, participation numbers or policy adoptions. Tracking results will help determine whether Harlingen is moving toward its goals, and can reveal when strategies need to be adjusted. Metrics can be updated if better performance indicators are identified.



Timing: Sets an estimated timeline for initiating or completing each action:

Short: Within 3 years

Medium: 3–6 years

Long: 7–10+ years

Ongoing: Continuous or recurring effort

#	Action Description	Responsible Entity	Metrics & Targets	Timing
Land Use				
LU-1	Update the zoning ordinance to reflect the Future Land Use Map and new district types.	Planning Department	New zoning code adopted and used in development review	Short-Term
LU-2	Identify and map key redevelopment sites citywide (such as underutilized commercial parcels along major corridors, vacant properties in and around Downtown, underused sites in the Medical District, and aging retail centers with large parking lots suitable for infill)	Planning, GIS, MIS	Redevelopment opportunity map completed and shared	Short-Term
LU-3	Develop infill and redevelopment design guidelines to ensure contextual fit.	Planning	Guidelines adopted and applied in project reviews	Short-Term
LU-4	Encourage mixed-use and infill development along corridors and Downtown Harlingen.	Planning, Developers	Number of infill/mixed-use permits issued	Medium-Term
LU-5	Conduct a small area plan for the Medical District.	Planning, Local Health Systems	Plan adopted and applied in zoning reviews	Medium-Term
LU-6	Establish overlay zones along key corridors to support walkable, human-scaled development (for example, Jackson Street, Harrison Avenue, Commerce Street, US 77 frontage roads)	Planning Department	Overlay zoning districts adopted and applied	Medium-Term
LU-7	Integrate hazard mitigation and green infrastructure into land use policy.	Planning, Engineering	New policies included in zoning and subdivision code	Medium-Term
LU-8	Update neighborhood zoning to support reinvestment and compatible infill.	Planning Department	Zoning updates adopted in 2 or more neighborhoods	Medium-Term
LU-9	Prepare planning studies for key opportunity sites identified in the FLUM.	Planning, Consultants	Studies completed and linked to implementation actions	Medium-Term

#	Action Description	Responsible Entity	Metrics & Targets	Timing
LU-10	Align land use and transportation priorities to support future transit investment, focusing on corridors identified in coordination with the MPO and Valley Metro long-range transit planning.	Planning, MPO	Number of corridors identified for future transit-supportive development	Medium-Term
Housing				
HO-1	Promote missing middle housing types such as duplexes, townhomes and fourplexes through zoning updates.	Planning Department	Number of missing middle units permitted	Short-Term
HO-2	Expand homeownership through first-time buyer programs and down payment assistance.	Community Development Department	Number of households assisted annually	Short-Term
HO-3	Allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in single-family districts.	Planning Department	ADU ordinance adopted and used in permits	Short-Term
HO-4	Identify City-owned parcels suitable for housing development.	Community, Development Special Projects, City Manager's Office	Number of city parcels prepared or disposed for housing	Short-Term
HO-5	Develop a housing toolkit that outlines incentives for workforce and senior housing.	Planning, EDC, Community Development Department	Toolkit completed and distributed	Medium-Term
HO-6	Encourage infill housing in priority neighborhoods with infrastructure access.	Planning, Developers	Infill housing permits issued	Medium-Term
HO-7	Promote housing near employment centers and public transit.	Planning	Number of new units within half-mile of job/transit	Medium-Term
HO-8	Incorporate housing strategies into small area or corridor plans.	Planning Department	Number of plans including housing strategies	Medium-Term
HO-9	Support affordable housing programs through partnerships with housing authorities and nonprofits.	Housing Authority, Nonprofits	Number of new affordable units created	Ongoing

#	Action Description	Responsible Entity	Metrics & Targets	Timing
HO-10	Monitor housing affordability trends and update strategies every 5 years.	Planning, Housing Authority, Community Development Department	Affordability reports completed and shared	Ongoing
Economic Development				
ED-1	Establish a small business incentive fund and technical support program.	HEDC, Chamber of Commerce	Program launched; businesses supported	Short-Term
ED-2	Promote Harlingen as a regional logistics hub.	HEDC, Harlingen Port, Valley International Airport	Logistics marketing materials published	Short-Term
ED-3	Establish branding and marketing strategies to recruit businesses.	HEDC, CVB	Brand strategy adopted	Short-Term
ED-4	Conduct an economic opportunity audit to identify redevelopment areas.	HEDC, Planning	Audit completed and presented to Commission	Short-Term
ED-5	Prepare shovel-ready sites with zoning and utilities to attract industry.	HEDC, Utilities, Developers	Number of acres ready for development	Medium-Term
ED-6	Create a reuse and redevelopment plan for Valle Vista Mall.	City Manager, HEDC	Plan adopted; implementation initiated	Medium-Term
ED-7	Attract target industries by leveraging regional workforce and assets.	HEDC	Business attraction targets met	Medium-Term
ED-8	Create pathways for youth entrepreneurship and training.	EDC, ISD, TSTC	Number of students participating in programs	Medium-Term
ED-9	Support expansion of medical and educational employers in growth zones.	HEDC, Institutions	Number of new jobs in priority sectors	Long-Term
ED-10	Revitalize downtown storefronts through incentive grants and events.	Main Street, Downtown Partners, HEDC	Storefronts improved annually	Ongoing

#	Action Description	Responsible Entity	Metrics & Targets	Timing
Transportation & Mobility				
TM-1	Implement a Complete Streets policy to guide future capital projects.	Planning, Engineering	Policy adopted and referenced	Short-Term
TM-2	Install shaded bus stops and amenities at key locations.	Public Works, Valley Metro	Number of upgraded transit stops	Short-Term
TM-3	Enhance wayfinding signage for bicyclists and pedestrians.	Planning, Public Works, Engineering	Wayfinding system installed	Short-Term
TM-4	Prioritize safe routes to schools for active transportation improvements.	Engineering Public Works, HCISDs	Number of projects near schools completed	Short-Term
TM-5	Improve intersections with high crash rates using safety audits.	Engineering	Number of intersections redesigned	Medium-Term
TM-6	Coordinate with Valley Metro to increase frequency and coverage of transit.	Planning, Valley Metro	Transit ridership increases	Medium-Term
TM-7	Promote micro-mobility options in Downtown Harlingen and high-traffic areas.	Planning, Private Partners	Launch of shared mobility services	Medium-Term
TM-8	Evaluate transportation equity and gaps in low-income areas.	Planning, MPO	Equity analysis completed	Medium-Term
TM-9	Expand sidewalk and trail connections citywide.	Public Works, MPO	Miles of new sidewalk or trail constructed	Ongoing
TM-10	Pursue federal and state grants for multimodal improvements.	Public Works, City Manager	Special Projects	Ongoing
TM-11	Implement intersection improvements through a phased roundabout program at key corridors and gateways to improve safety, reduce congestion, and enhance downtown access.	Planning, Engineering, TxDOT, MPO	Number of roundabouts constructed; crash reductions	Medium-Term
TM-12	Expand the city's active transportation network by adding protected bike lanes, ADA-compliant sidewalks, and safe crossings that connect neighborhoods to parks, schools, and the Downtown Transit Center.	Planning, Public Works, MPO, Valley Metro	Miles of new bike/ped infrastructure completed	Medium-Term

#	Action Description	Responsible Entity	Metrics & Targets	Timing
TM-13	Develop a shared parking strategy for Downtown and key corridors.	Planning, Engineering	Parking plan adopted	Medium-Term
TM-14	Study Bus Rapid Transit and express bus route options.	Planning, Valley Metro, MPO	Transit study completed	Long-Term
TM-15	Identify freight corridors and reduce conflicts near neighborhoods.	Engineering, MPO	Freight routes mapped	Ongoing
Infrastructure & Utilities				
IU-1	Prepare an infrastructure asset management plan.	Engineering, Finance	Plan adopted and used in CIP	Short-Term
IU-2	Improve street lighting and public safety infrastructure.	Public Works, Police	Number of lighting upgrades	Short-Term
IU-3	Replace aging water and sewer lines in priority areas.	HWWS	Feet of pipe replaced annually	Short-Term
IU-4	Implement advanced metering infrastructure for water conservation.	HWWS	Meters installed and tracked	Short-Term
IU-5	Expand broadband access in underserved neighborhoods.	MIS, Utilities, HWWS, Providers	Percentage of area with access	Medium-Term
IU-6	Coordinate infrastructure upgrades with street reconstruction plans.	Engineering, Public Works	Joint projects completed	Medium-Term
IU-7	Integrate sustainability and energy efficiency into City facilities.	Special Projects, Public Works, Public Buildings	Number of retrofits completed	Medium-Term
IU-8	Upgrade drainage systems in flood-prone neighborhoods.	Engineering, Public Works	Projects completed in targeted zones	Medium-Term
IU-9	Harden infrastructure against extreme weather events.	Engineering, Emergency Mgmt	Number of facilities upgraded	Long-Term
IU-9	Develop redundancy plans for water and energy utilities.	HWWS, Harlingen Fire Department	Resilience strategies adopted	Long-Term
IU-10	Modernize city infrastructure with smart LED streetlighting, adaptive traffic signals, and green stormwater features to enhance safety, efficiency, and sustainability.	PPublic Works, Engineering, AEP Texas	% of lights converted; number of smart corridors	Medium-Term

#	Action Description	Responsible Entity	Metrics & Targets	Timing
Public Safety & Vitality				
PS-1	Enhance public lighting, crosswalk, and alleyway design citywide to improve safety (CPTED strategies).	Police, Public Works, Planning	Number of lighting/ crosswalk upgrades completed	Short-Term
PS-2	Assign dedicated public safety presence in Downtown Harlingen and other growth districts to support vitality.	Police Department	Officers assigned to designated zones	Medium-Term
PS-3	Expand use of public cameras and real-time monitoring in high-activity areas.	Police, IT	Number of cameras installed and monitored	Medium-Term
PS-4	Support public events and cultural activities as tools to increase safety, community pride and overnight stays.	CVB, EDC, Downtown Partners	Number of annual events; hotel occupancy rates	Ongoing
PS-5	Install vandal-resistant, accessible public restrooms in key districts.	Public Works, Downtown Partners	Restrooms installed and maintained	Long-Term
PS-6	Develop and monitor a “Smart & Green Harlingen” framework aligning transportation, parks, energy, and sustainability priorities across city departments.	Planning, City Manager’s Office	Framework adopted and updated annually	Long-Term
Drainage & Flood Management				
DFM-1	Pilot green infrastructure in flood-prone areas.	Planning, Engineering, Parks	Number of pilots completed	Short-Term
DFM-2	Revise zoning to support drainage-sensitive design.	Planning Department	Zoning code amendments adopted	Short-Term
DFM-3	Create drainage asset inventory and maintenance program.	Engineering, HWW, Public Works	Annual targets met	Short-Term
DFM-4	Update drainage master plan every 10 years.	Planning, Engineering, HWW	Plan adopted and used in reviews	Medium-Term



HARLINGEN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

IMPLEMENTATION

Funding Mechanisms



Successful implementation of the Comprehensive Plan will require strategic use of multiple funding sources, including local revenues, state and federal grants, public-private partnerships and special district financing. By diversifying funding streams, the City can advance priority projects while maintaining financial flexibility.

Local Funding Sources

- General Fund Allocations – Annual City budget appropriations for priority Comprehensive Plan actions such as sidewalk repairs, small area planning and downtown streetscape projects.
- Capital Improvement Program (CIP) – Multi-year budgeting tool for major infrastructure investments like drainage upgrades, roadway expansions and utility improvements.
- Certificates of Obligation / General Obligation Bonds – Debt financing for large-scale public projects such as parks, public facilities or water and sewer upgrades.
- Utility and Service Fees – Targeted rate adjustments for water, sewer or stormwater services to support infrastructure maintenance and expansion.
- Impact Fees – Fees on new development to help cover the cost of growth-related infrastructure like roads, water, sewer and drainage facilities.
- Increase Street Maintenance Fee – Dedicated funding mechanism collected from utility customers to provide ongoing resources for roadway repair and rehabilitation.



State and Federal Funding Programs

- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) – Funding for roadway improvements, safety projects and multimodal transportation initiatives.
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Grants – Outdoor Recreation Grants, Small Community Grants and Urban Outdoor Recreation Grants for park acquisition and development.
- Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) – Funding for water and wastewater system improvements, flood mitigation projects and conservation programs.
- Texas General Land Office (GLO) – Community Development Block Grant-Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) and disaster recovery funding for resilient infrastructure and flood control.
- Federal Transit Administration (FTA) – Grants for public transit system expansion, bus stop amenities and mobility improvements.
- U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) – Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance grants for infrastructure tied to job creation.



Public-Private Partnerships (P3)

- Collaborations with private developers for mixed-use, downtown and corridor redevelopment projects.
- Shared investment in infrastructure upgrades to serve new commercial or industrial developments.
- Joint-use agreements with institutions (such as TSTC, UTRGV or local ISDs) for shared facilities or workforce training centers.



Special District Financing Tools

- Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ) – Captures future increases in property tax revenue to reinvest in public improvements within the district (e.g., Downtown Harlingen).
- Public Improvement Districts (PID) – Allows property owners to self-assess for enhancements like landscaping, lighting and marketing in specific areas.
- Municipal Management Districts (MMD) – Supports public safety, infrastructure and economic development initiatives in targeted zones.



Philanthropic, Institutional, and Nonprofit Support

- Grants and contributions from local foundations, universities and nonprofits for cultural, environmental and educational projects.
- Sponsorship programs for public art, park amenities and events.



Developer Contributions and In-Kind Support

- Dedication of land for parks, trails or public facilities.
- Construction of infrastructure as part of development agreements.
- In-kind services for design, construction or maintenance of public improvements.



APPENDIX

A

Comprehensive Plan Engagement Summary

Steering Committee Meetings

The Plans Steering Committee (PSC) plays a pivotal role in the development of the Comprehensive Plan, as well as the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) and Downtown Plans. The PSC works to ensure City staff and consultants are in close alignment with the community's needs and vision, as gathered during various opportunities for public input and feedback. The PSC not only provides guidance but also shapes the general vision for the plan, offering insights into effective community engagement strategies. By leveraging their expertise and taking into account public input, the PSC is integral to both the process and development of plan recommendations. Apart from the consultants and City staff who form the "primary" project team, the PSC members are the individuals most closely involved in the process.

The following members were appointed to the Plans Steering Committee (PSC):

- City of Harlingen Mayor Norma Sepulveda
- City Commission: Ford Kinsley (District 1) and Daniel Lopez (District 2)
- Planning and Zoning Commission: Luis Villarreal and Sergio Perez
- Parks and Recreation Board: Adele Clinton-Solis and Diana Esparza
- Downtown Advisory Board: Lars Keim and John Percy

The Steering Committee conducted three meetings at Harlingen City Hall during the process, which were open for public observation. Each session reviewed the progress of each plan, public input received and requested feedback on draft deliverables to lay the groundwork for future recommendations. The meetings centered on the following topics:

- Kickoff and Data Analysis
- Public Engagement Plan
- Community Feedback
- Vision and Goals
- Draft Deliverables
- Plan Implementation



PSC Meeting (November 19, 2024)

Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholder discussions help the consultant team and City staff gain a deeper understanding of various topics and contexts within Harlingen. These conversations can provide expert insights on specific subjects or address the needs of particular resident groups. Through initial discussions and analysis, the project team identified key topics and recurring themes of importance. Stakeholder conversations were conducted as group meetings either online or in person at Harlingen City Hall.

There were 10 stakeholder conversations during the plan’s development. These conversations occurred concurrently while developing the Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails (PROST) Plan and the Downtown Plan. The stakeholder groups engaged during the process provided general guidance and a deeper understanding of community needs while also providing technical feedback for specific recommendations. These stakeholder groups included:

- Non-Profits and Community Groups
- Small Business Owners (x2)
- Real Estate and Development
- The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV)
- Downtown Business Owners
- Youth Organizations
- Medical Sector



Non-Profit and Community Groups Stakeholder Discussion

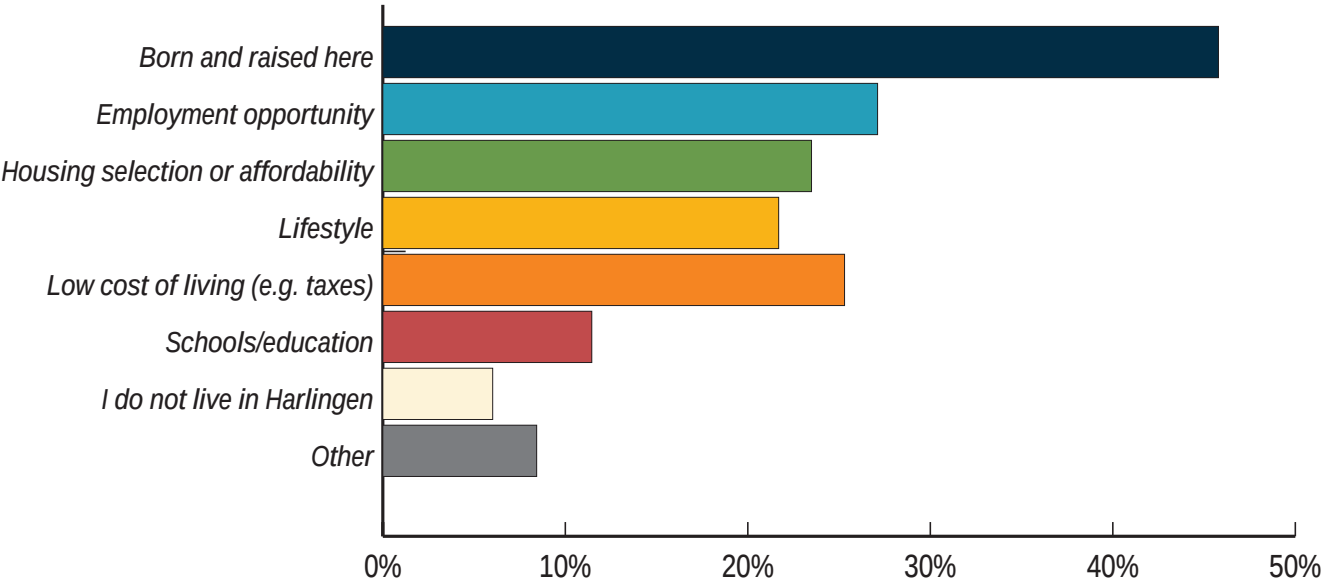


Real Estate and Development Stakeholder Discussion

Comprehensive Plan Community Survey Responses

From October 30, 2024, to February 8, 2025, an online community survey was hosted on the Harlingen project website. Open to all, the survey featured translation tools to accommodate multiple languages and was accessible on both desktop and mobile devices. Outreach efforts to promote participation in the online survey included distributing flyers, promoting the survey on the local news and sharing information through the City’s social media platforms. The survey received 166 responses while it was available to the public, and below is a summary of the public feedback received. This survey, as well as insights from public engagement events and stakeholder groups, provided the project team with essential baseline data and community priorities to guide the project’s development.

Question 1. What is your primary reason for choosing to live in Harlingen?



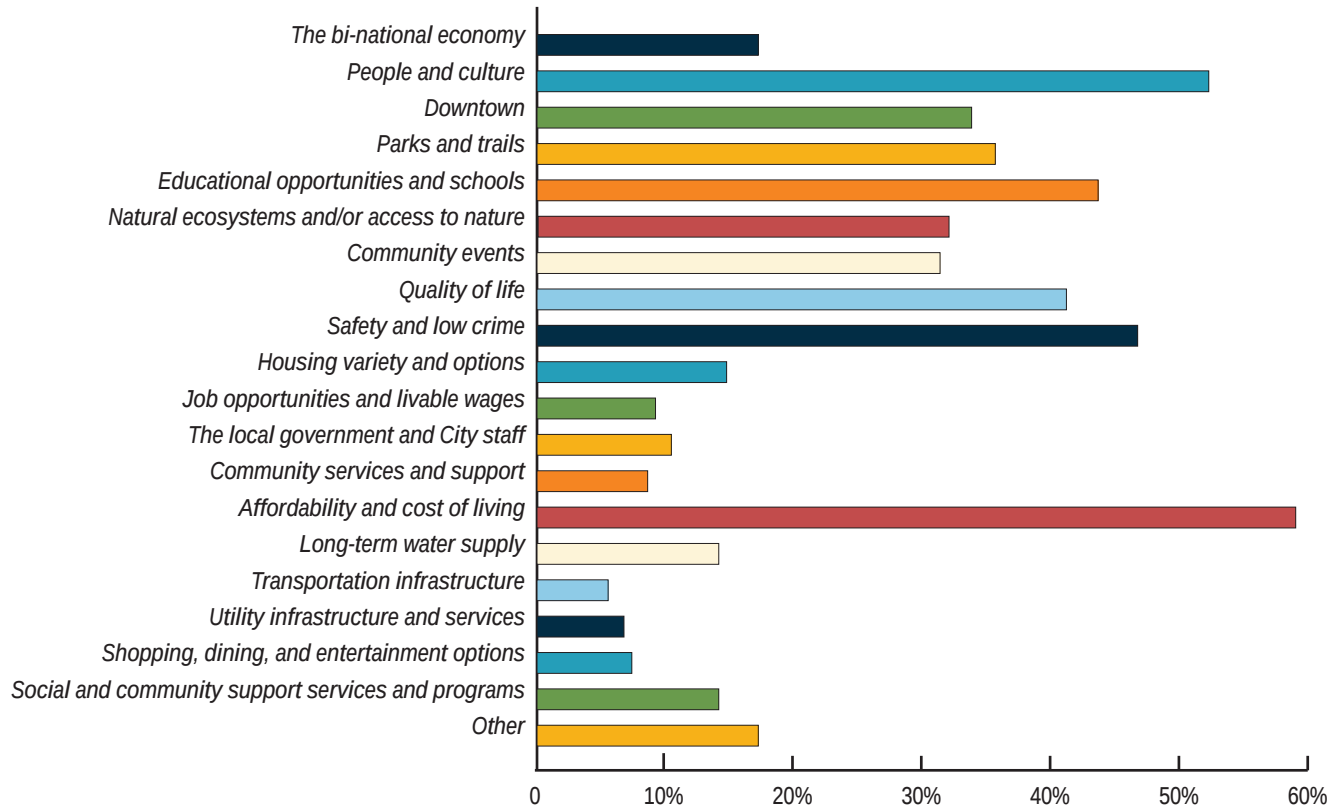
The main reason respondents gave for living in Harlingen is that they were born and raised here (45.78%); however, many were drawn to the City for economic reasons such as employment opportunities (27.11%), the low cost of living (25.3%), and affordable housing selection (23.49%).

Question 2. In the future, I want Harlingen to:



When asked what they want to see from Harlingen in the future, most responses related to the local economy. The primary response was that the City should be known for its great shopping, dining, and entertainment (16.27%). Respondents also want Harlingen to be a community with high-paying jobs (13.86%) and a place of economic activity (10.24%).

Question 3. In your opinion, what are Harlingen’s greatest strengths? What differentiates it from any other city?

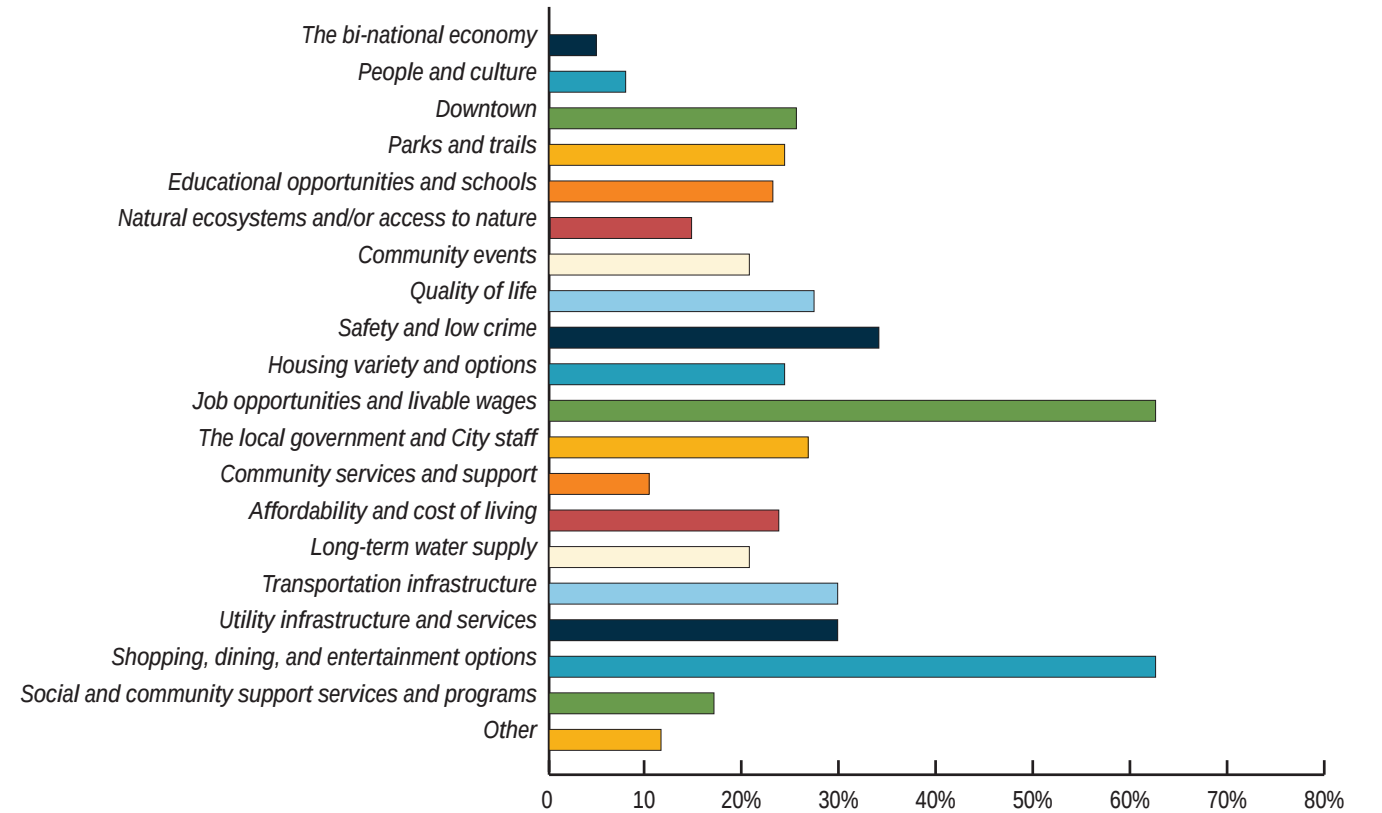


For most respondents, Harlingen’s greatest strength is its affordability and low cost of living (58.9%). Harlingen’s people and culture distinguish it from other cities (52.15%). Other strengths that set Harlingen apart include the City’s educational opportunities (43.56%), public safety (46.63%), and quality of life (41.1%)

Question 4. If you would like to provide additional thoughts or clarifications on Harlingen's strengths, please provide those here.



Question 5. In your opinion, what are Harlingen's most critical issues?

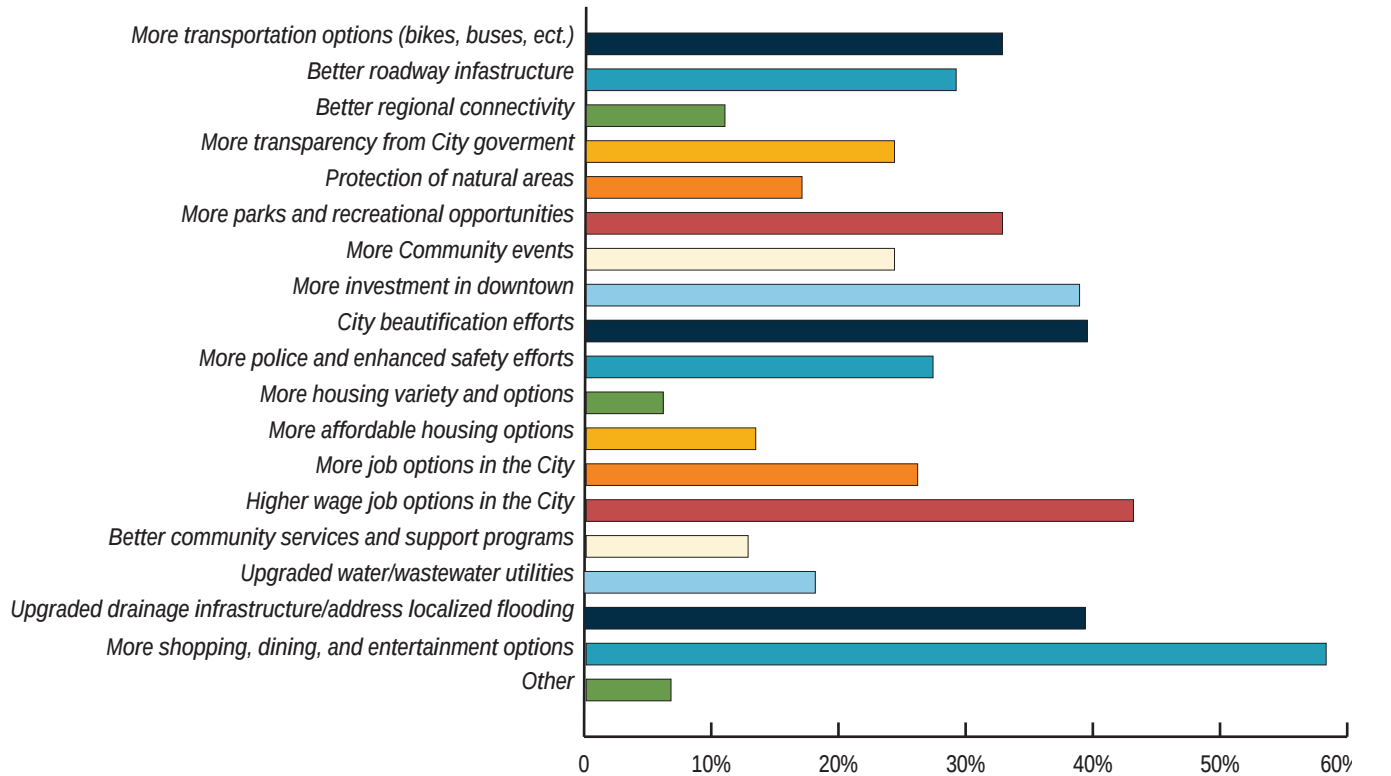


According to respondents, the most critical issues facing the City of Harlingen are job opportunities and livable wages and shopping, dining, and entertainment options; 62.42% of respondents chose both options. In comparison, things like the binational economy, people and culture, community services, and social support programs are among the least pressing issues.

Question 6. If you would like to provide additional thoughts or clarifications on Harlingen’s critical issues, please provide those here.

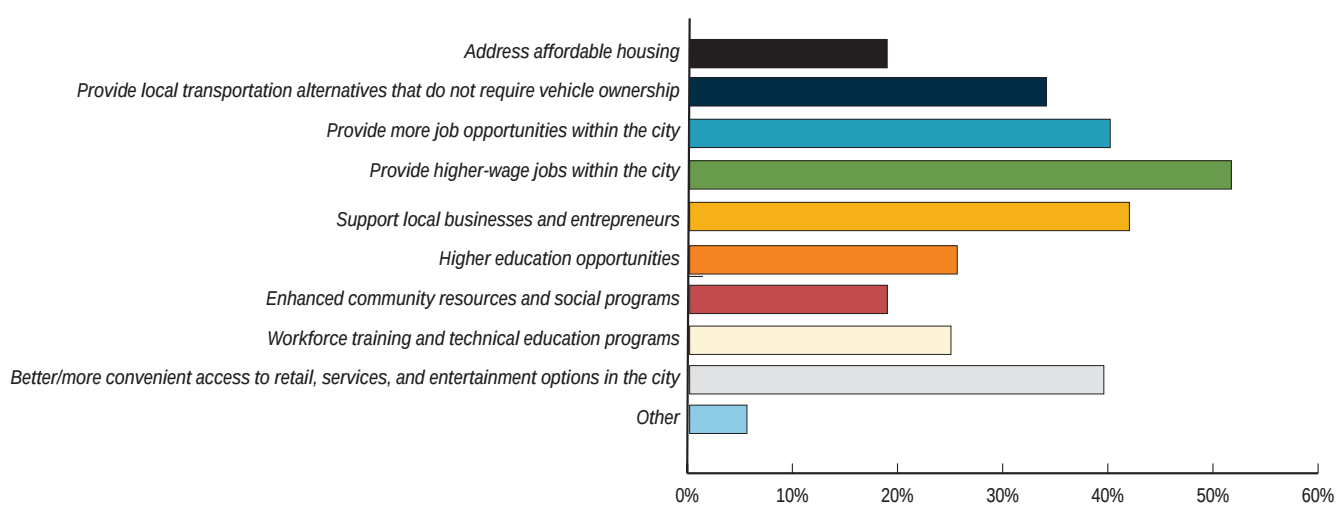


Question 7. What about Harlingen would you like to see change or improve?



More than half of respondents (58.18%) want to see more shopping, dining, and entertainment options in Harlingen. The second most significant change identified by respondents is higher-wage job options in the City (43.03%). Other improvements identified by respondents include City beautification efforts (39.39%), upgraded drainage infrastructure to address local flooding (39.39%), and more investment in downtown (38.79%).

Question 8. In your opinion, what strategies would be most helpful in supporting all Harlingen residents to thrive and prosper in our community?

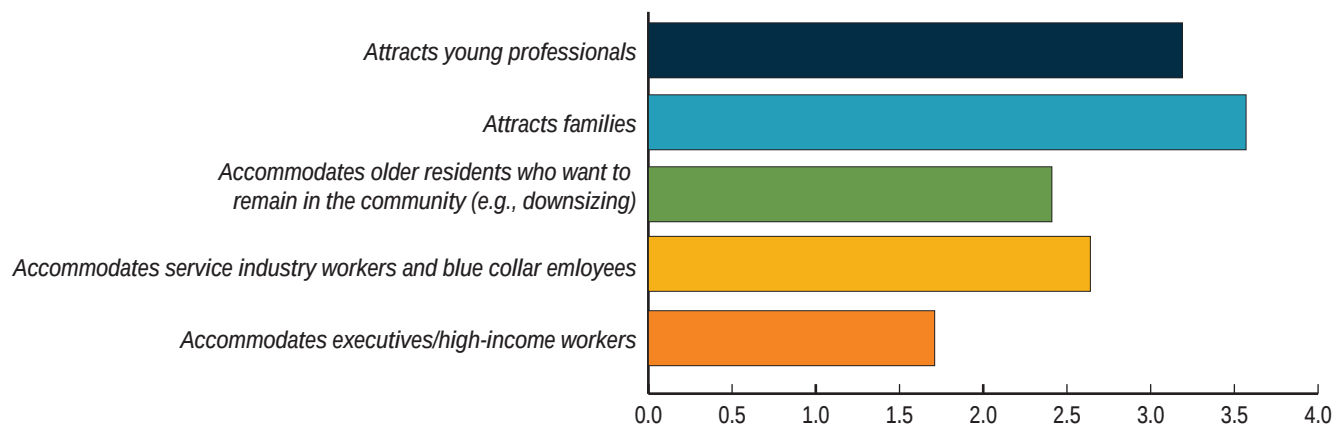


For over half of respondents, the best strategy to support Harlingen residents is to provide higher-paying jobs (51.52%). This is followed by supporting local businesses and entrepreneurs (41.82%), providing more job opportunities (40%), and providing more convenient access to retail, services, and entertainment options in the City (39.39%). Initiatives to boost the local economy will help the whole community prosper.

Question 9. If you could do one big thing to make Harlingen the best place it could be, what would that be?

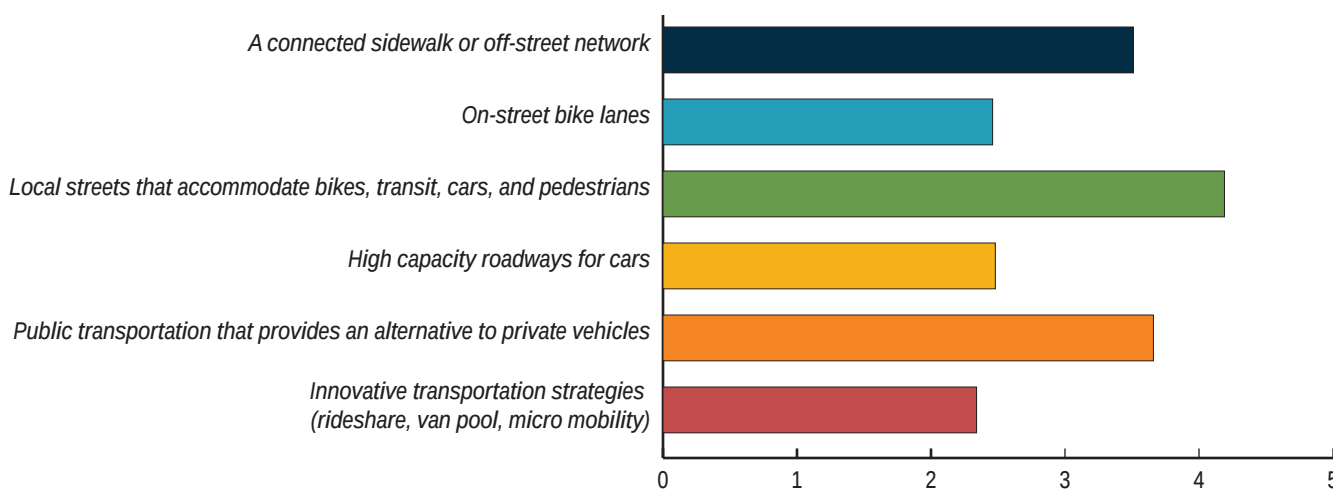


Question 10. In the future, Harlingen should focus on housing that:



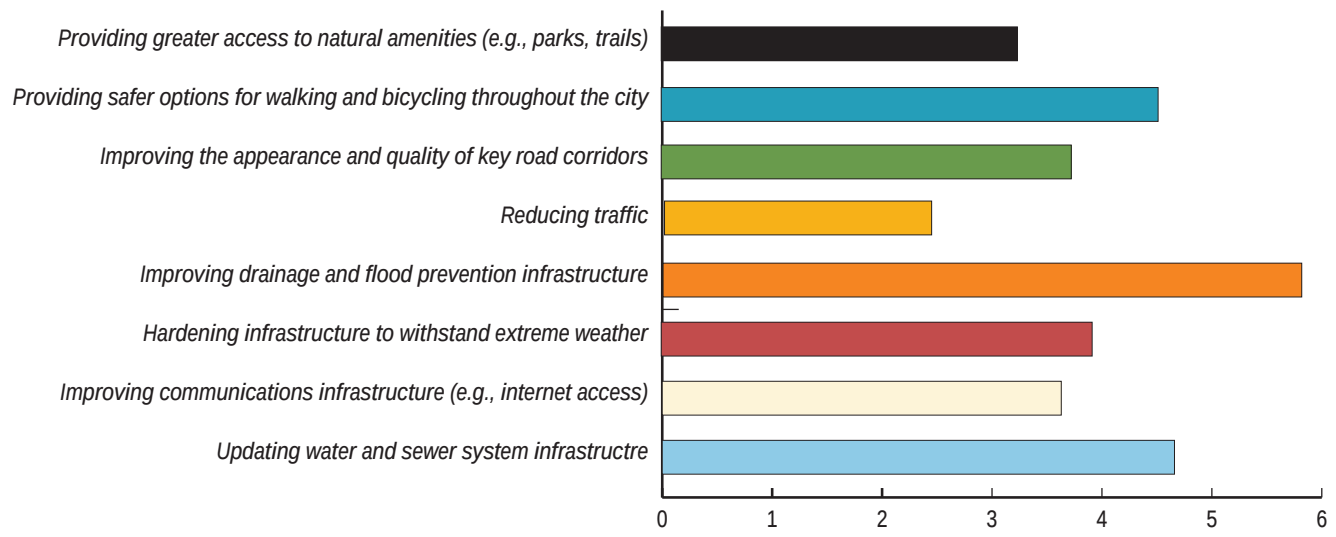
Respondents want Harlingen to focus on housing that attracts families and young professionals. At the same time, the City should ensure that affordable housing is available to accommodate older residents looking to downsize and residents working in the service industry or blue-collar jobs.

Question 11. In the future, residents should be connected to destinations within the City through:



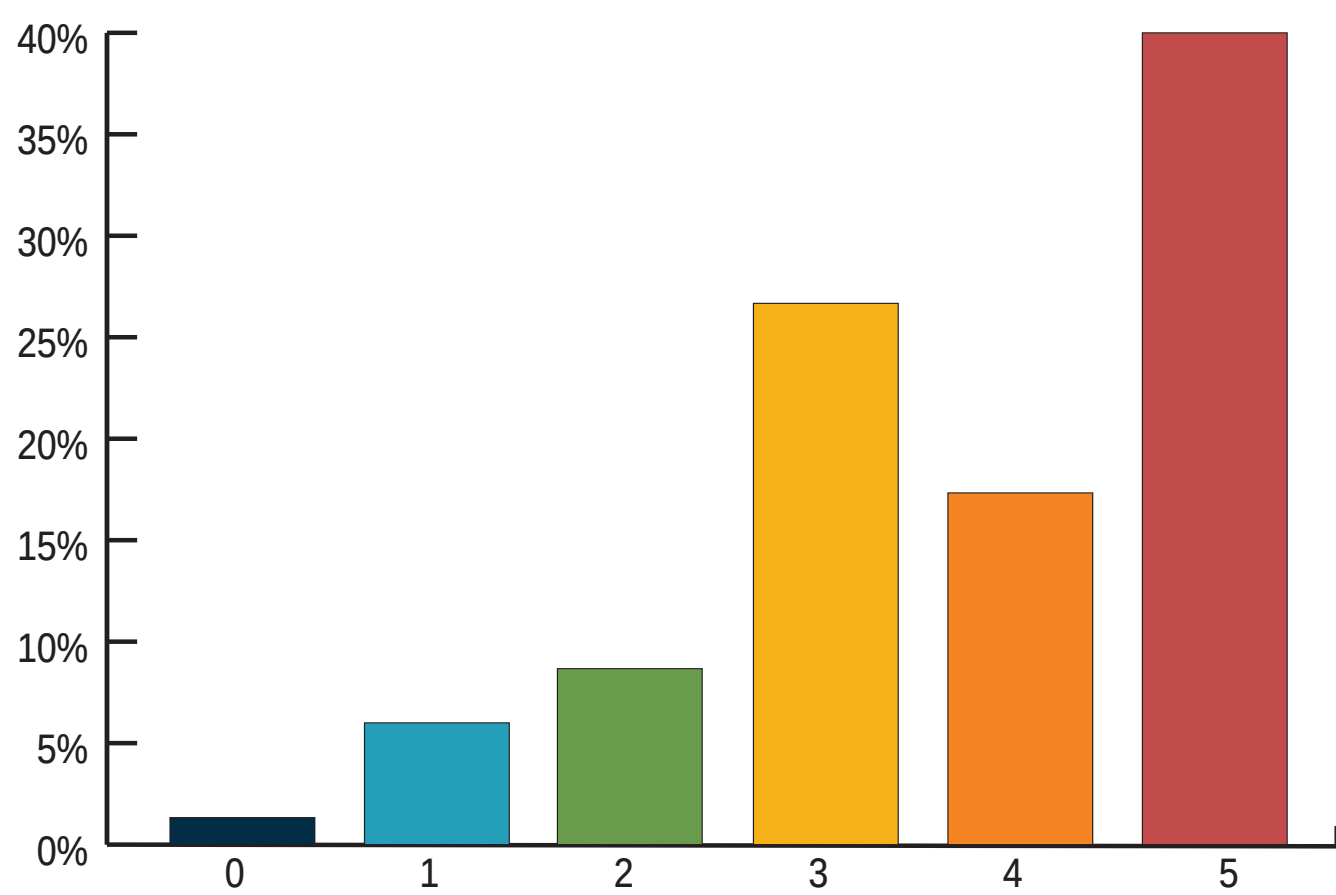
The primary way respondents wish to be connected to destinations in Harlingen is through local streets that accommodate bikes, transit, cars, and pedestrians, followed closely by public transportation that provides an alternative to private vehicles. These responses indicate a desire for improved multi-modal transportation within the City of Harlingen.

Question 12. Infrastructure investments the City should focus on:



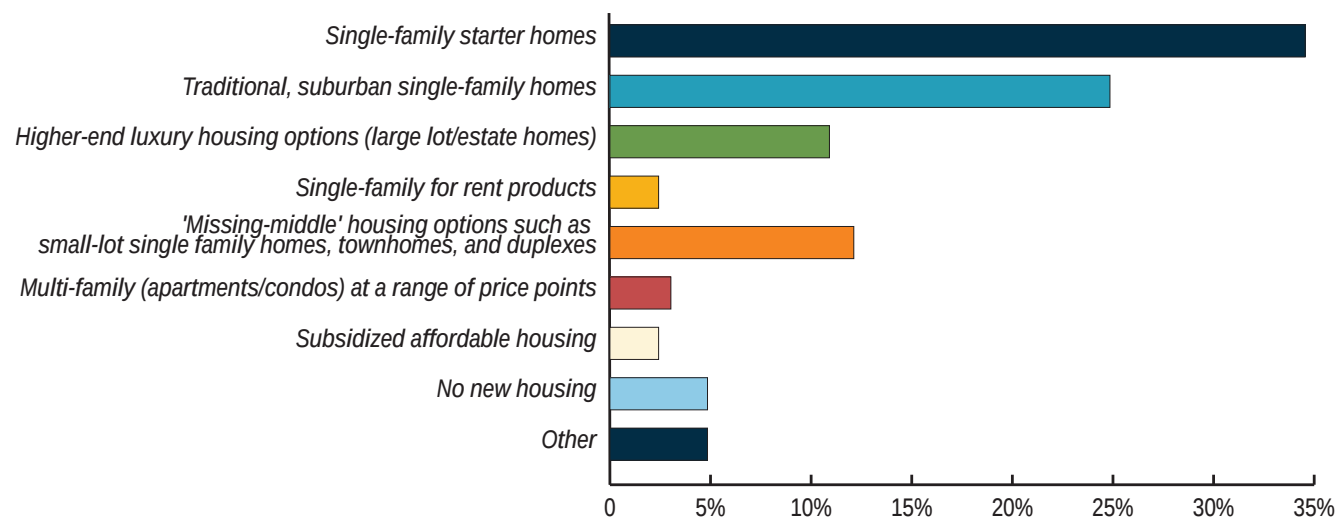
Most of the infrastructure investments identified by respondents are related to the City’s water and wastewater management or transportation system. The top priorities are improving drainage and flood prevention infrastructure and updating water and sewer system infrastructure. Additionally, the City should focus on providing safer options for walking and bicycling throughout the City.

Question 13. How supportive are you of bringing more residential land-uses (e.g., housing, apartments) to Harlingen?



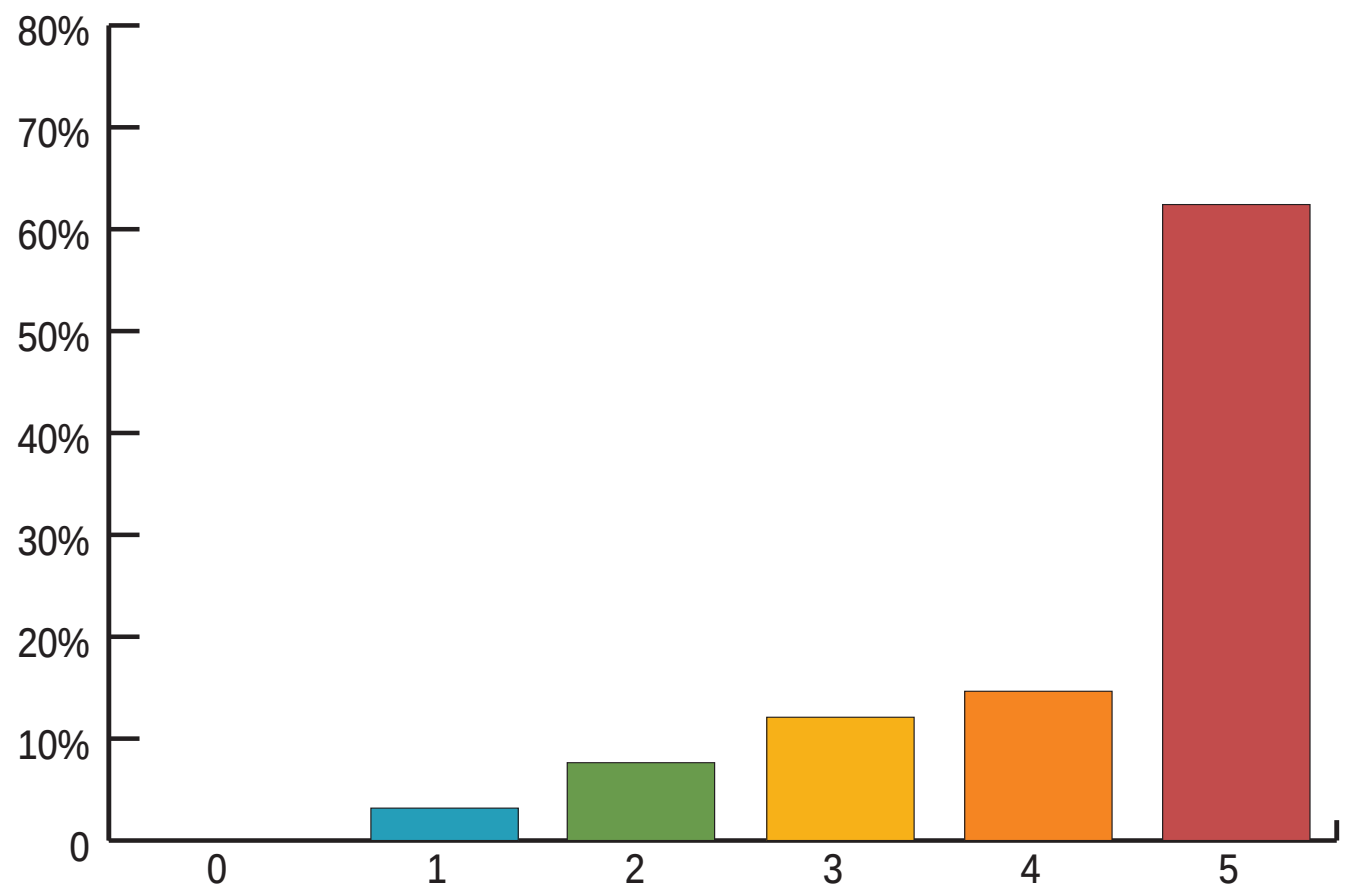
Respondents generally support bringing more residential land use to Harlingen. On a scale of 0-5, the average level of support among respondents is 3.73, with the largest percentage offering 5/5 or 100% approval.

Question 14. I would support more of the following housing options in Harlingen:



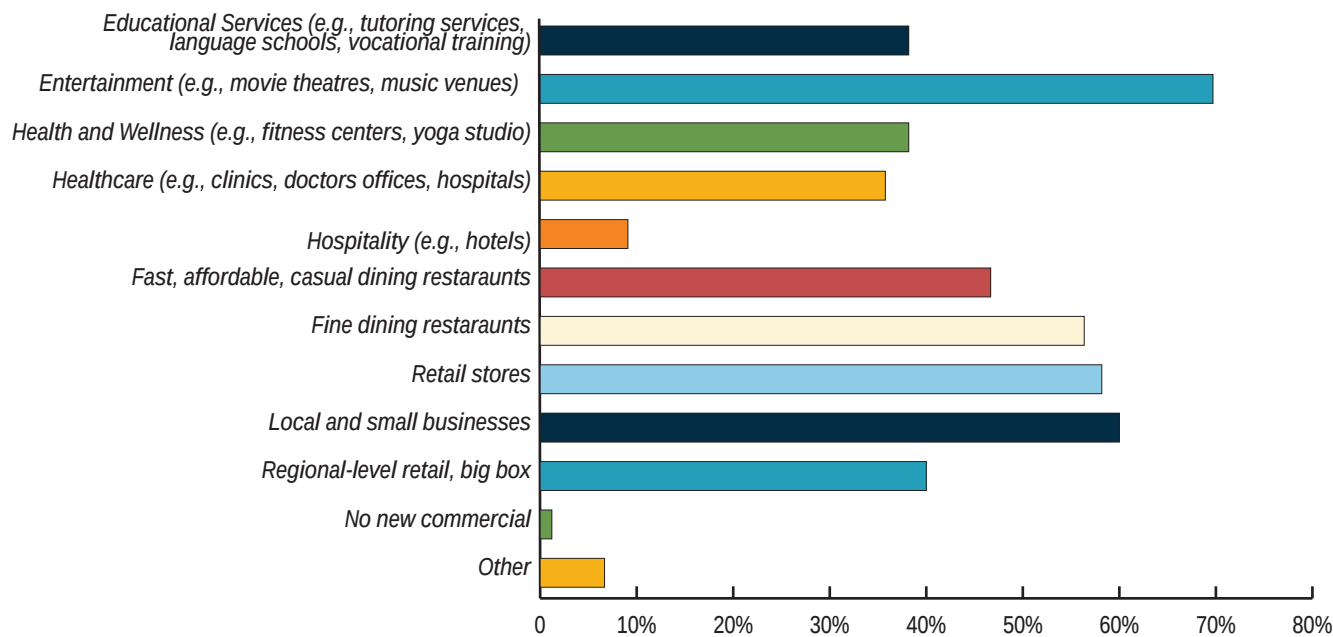
The primary forms of housing respondents want to see in Harlingen are affordable single-family starter homes (34.55%) and suburban single-family houses (24.85%). There is some support for “missing middle” housing types. However, traditional homeownership appears to be a big priority in the community. This is reflected in the lack of support for single-family rentals, multi-family apartments, and subsidized housing.

Question 15. How supportive are you of bringing more commercial land-uses (e.g., shops, restaurants, offices) in Harlingen?



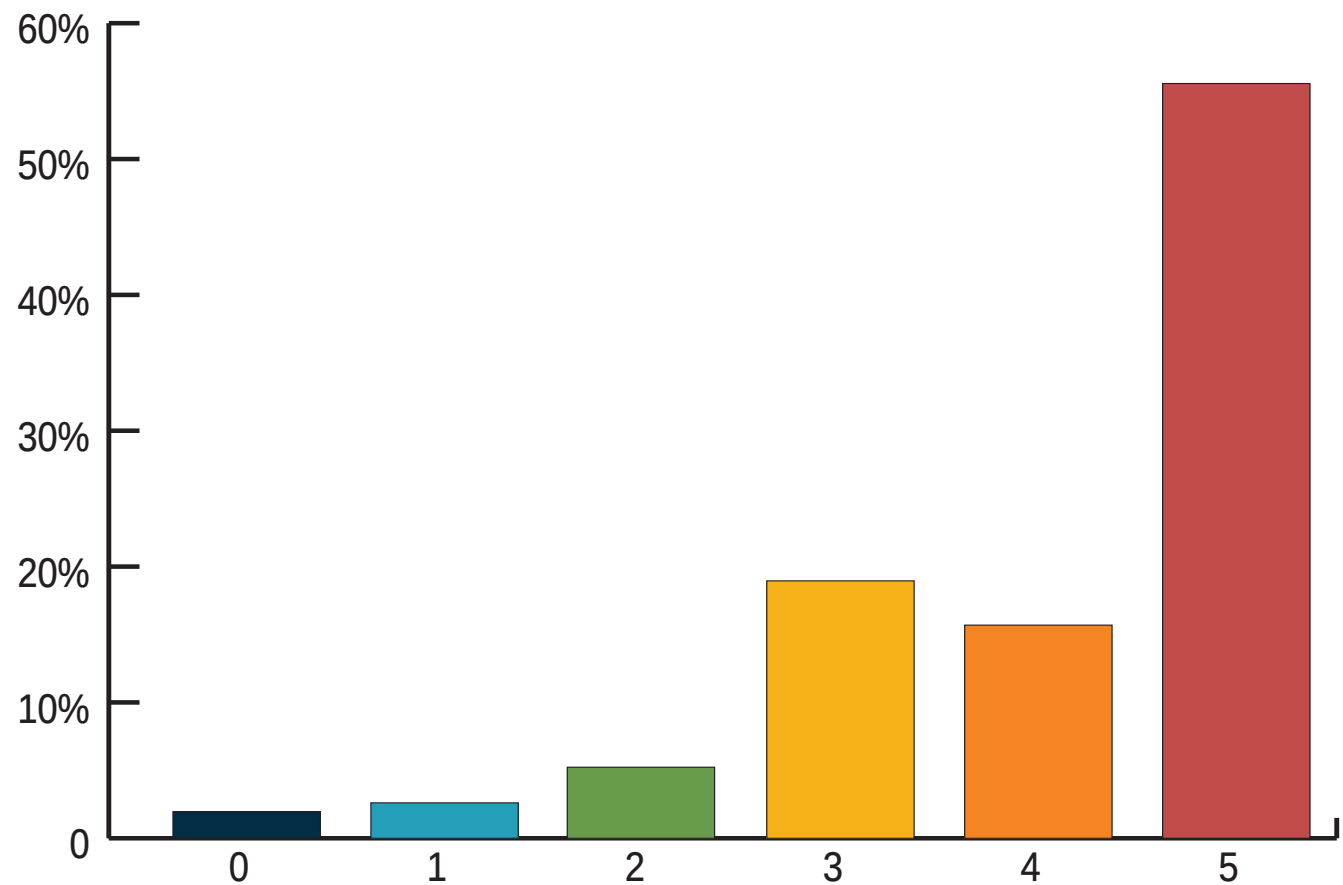
The overwhelming majority of respondents support more commercial land uses in Harlingen. On a scale of 0-5, the average level of support is 4.25, with more than half of the respondents giving their full support.

Question 16. What commercial businesses would you like to see more of in Harlingen?



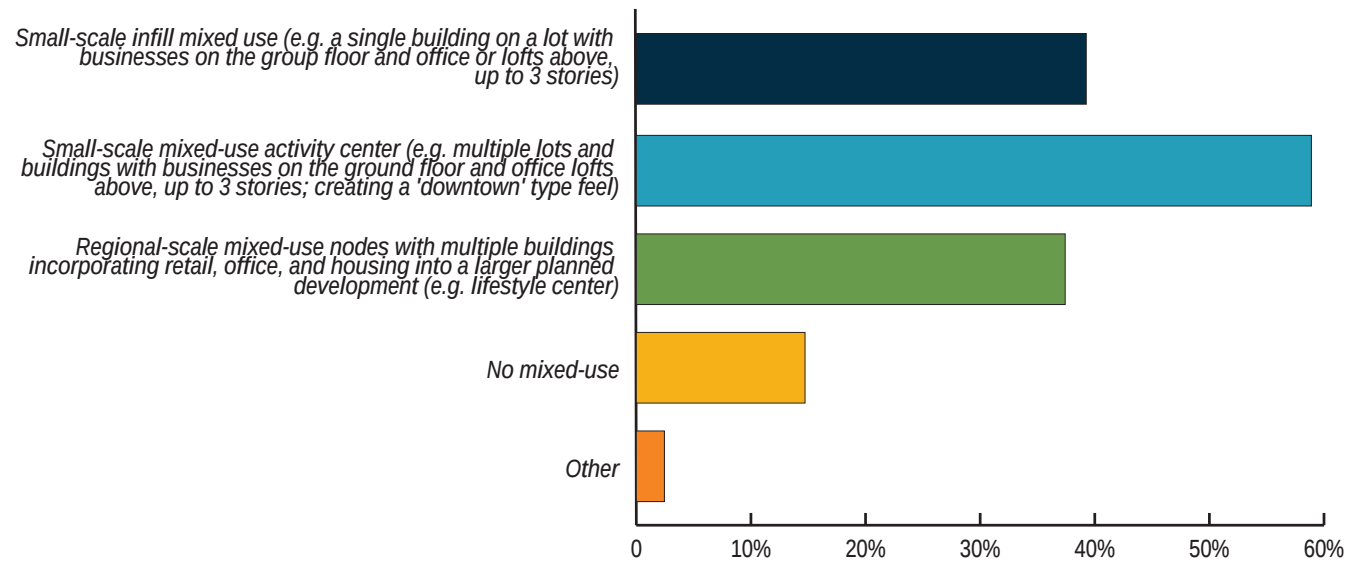
When asked what kind of businesses Harlingen needs more of, most respondents answered entertainment (69.7%). More than half of respondents also chose local and small businesses (60%), retail stores (58.18%), and fine dining restaurants (56.36%). Only two respondents said they do not want to see any new commercial businesses in Harlingen.

Question 17. How supportive are you of bringing more mixed-use developments (e.g., areas where residential, commercial and recreational uses are combined) to Harlingen?



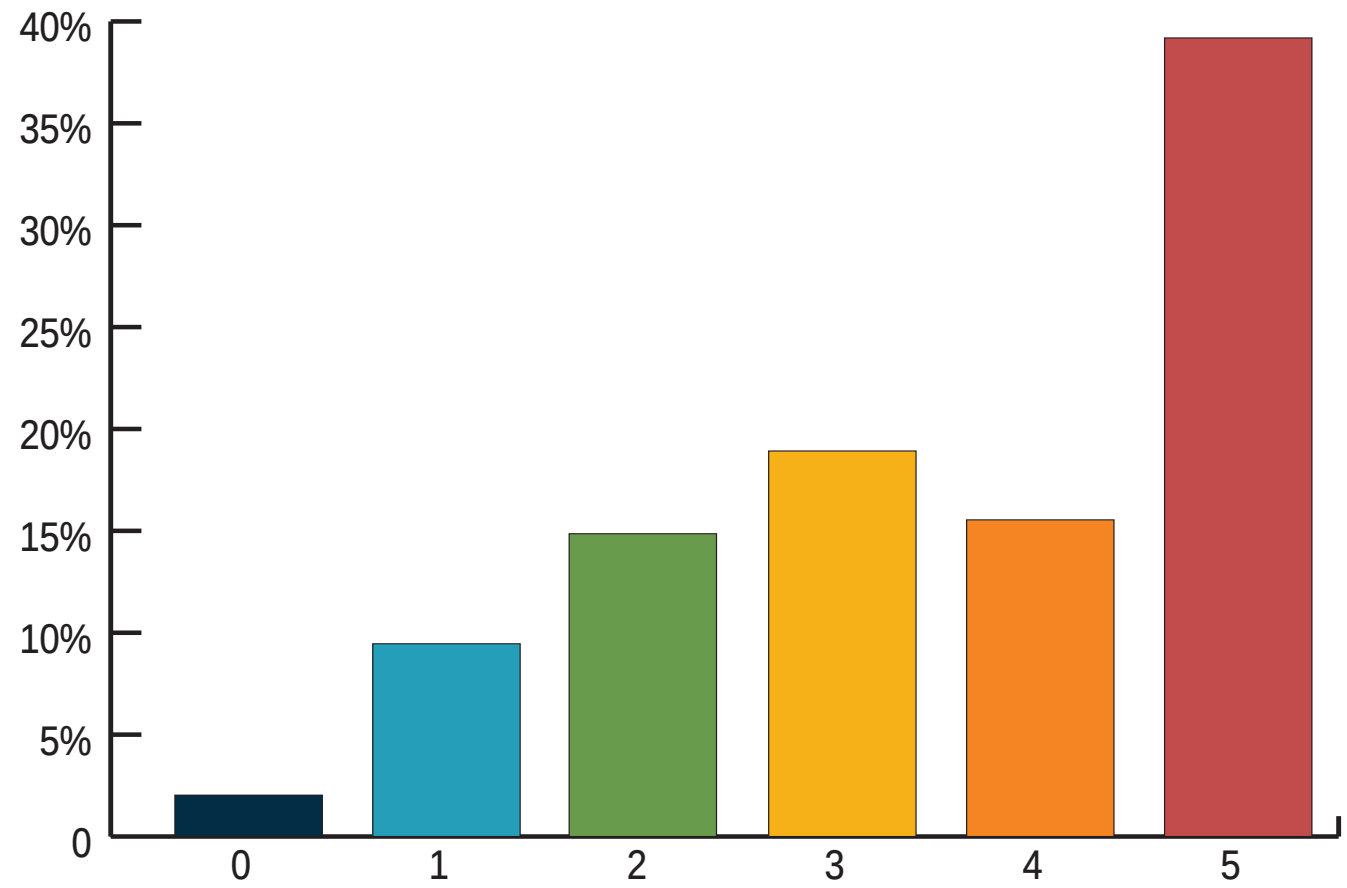
Respondents are generally supportive of bringing more mixed-use developments to Harlingen. On a scale of 0-5, the average level of support is 4.10, with a little more than half of respondents giving their full support.

Question 18. What types of mixed-use development would you like to see in Harlingen?



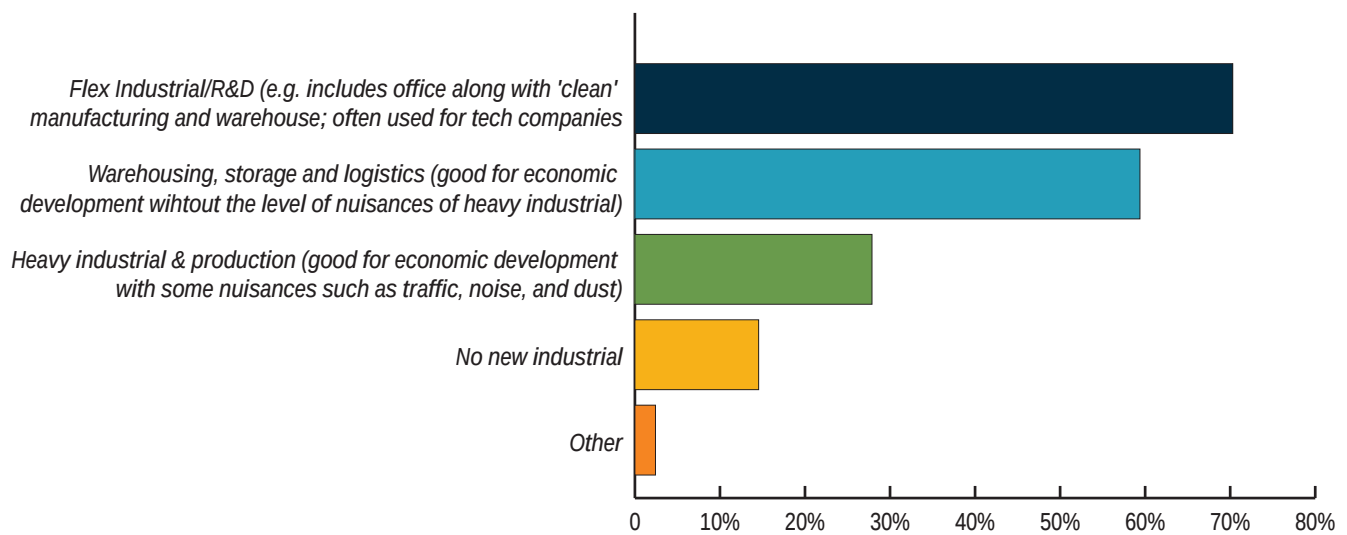
Small-scale mixed-use developments received the most support among respondents, primarily in the form of mixed-use activity centers (58.9%) or infill projects (39.26%). There was also some support for regional-scale mixed-use nodes, while almost 15% of respondents opposed mixed-use altogether.

Question 19. How supportive are you of bringing more industrial land-uses (e.g., factories, warehousing) to Harlingen?



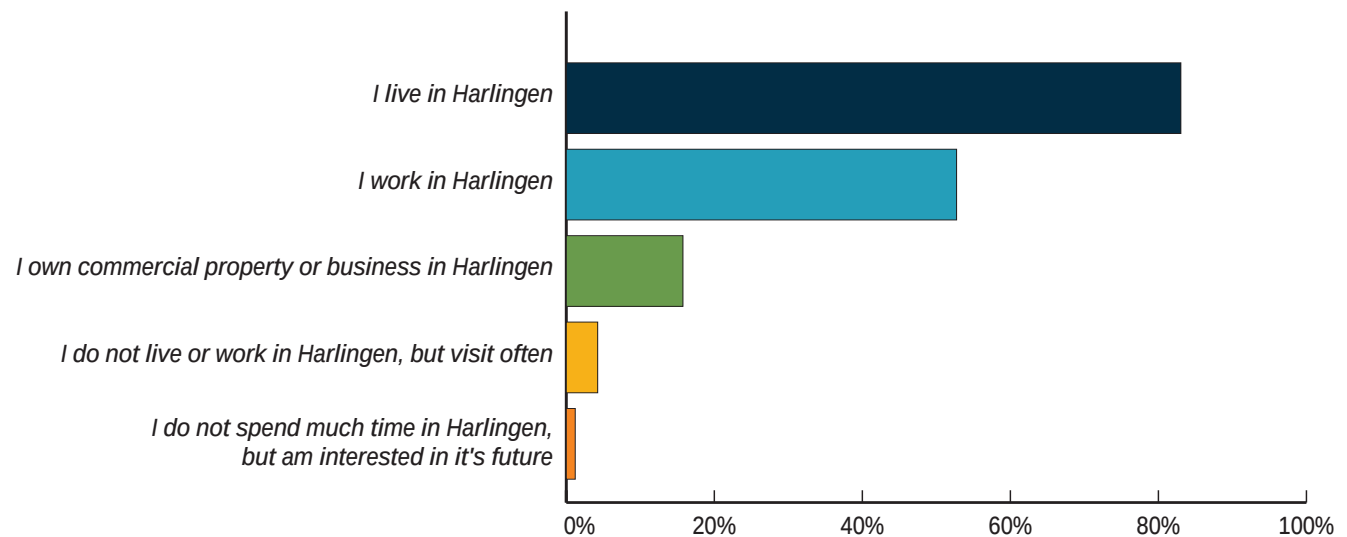
Support for industrial land-uses in Harlingen was mixed but leaned more in favor of it. On a scale of 0-5, the average level of support is 3.54; however, 5/5 or 100% support still received the largest percentage of responses.

Question 20. What types of industrial development would you like to see more of in Harlingen?



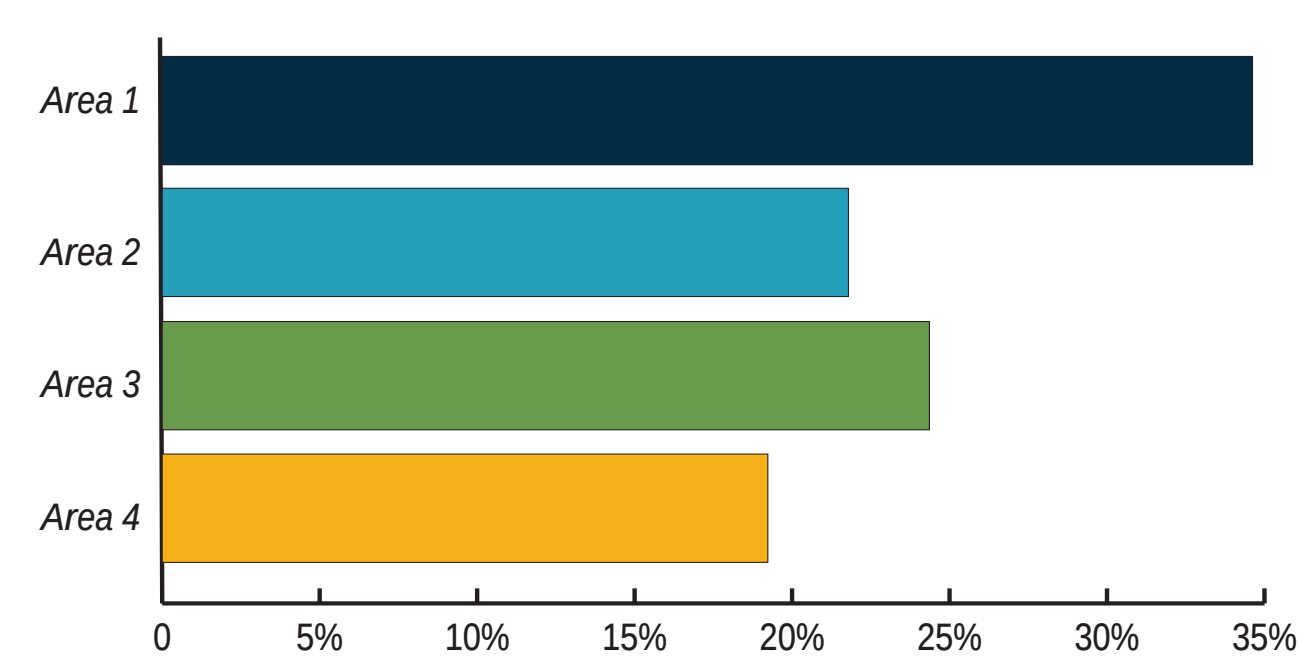
Respondents showed a preference for light industrial uses like flex industrial and R&D (70.3%) and warehousing, storage, and logistics (59.39%). Over a quarter of respondents support some heavy industrial uses despite the associated nuisances, while nearly 15% do not support any new industrial.

Question 21. Which of the below describes you?



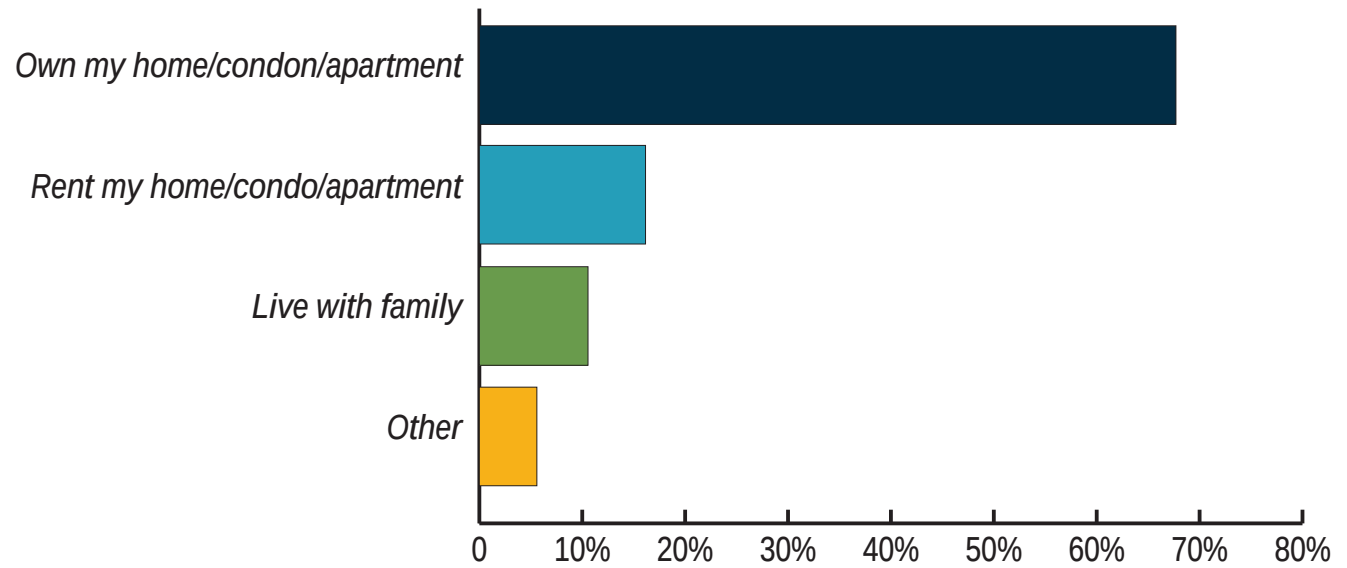
Most respondents live in Harlingen (83.03%), followed closely by those who work in the City (52.73%). More than 15% of respondents own a commercial property or business in the City.

Question 22. Which area of Harlingen do you live?



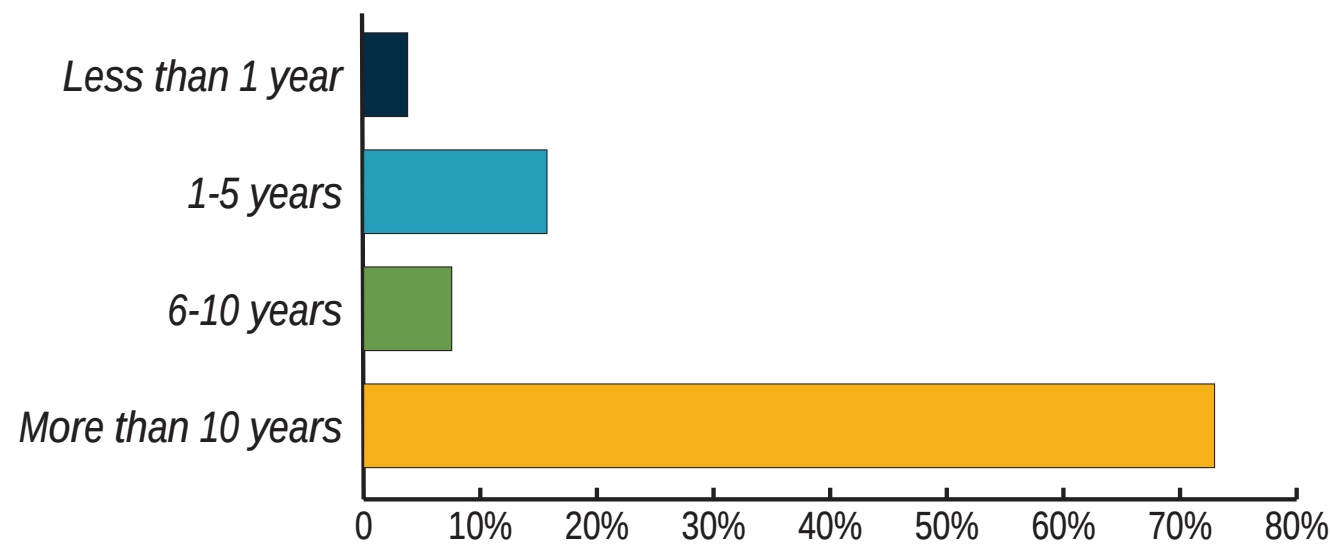
Respondents were provided with a map of Harlingen divided into four areas and then asked which area they lived in. Most respondents live in Area 1 (34.62%), which includes downtown and the surrounding areas. It is followed by Area 3 to the south (24.36%), Area 2 to the northeast (21.79%), and Area 4 to the west (19.23%).

Question 23. If you live in Harlingen, what best describes your living situation?



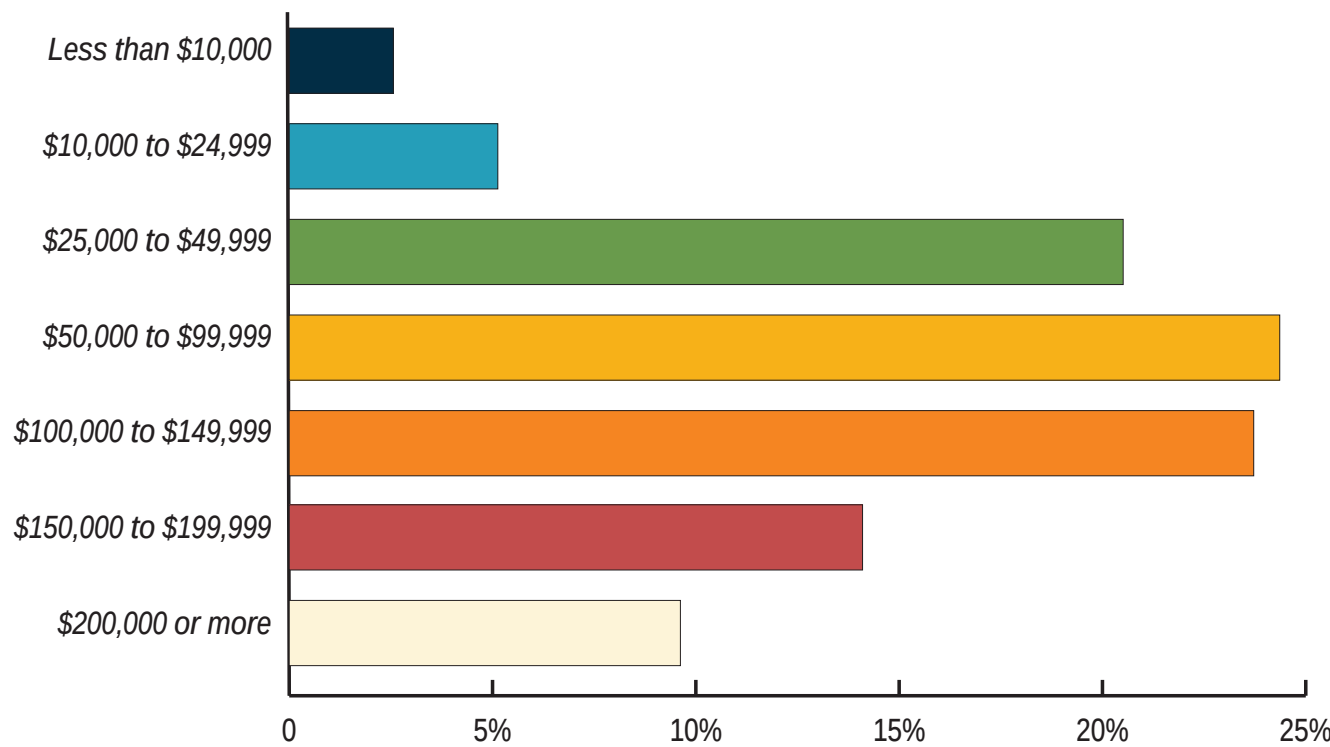
Most respondents living in Harlingen own their own home, with nearly 70% indicating such. This is followed by respondents who rent (16.15%) and those who live with family (10.56%).

Question 24. If you live in Harlingen, how many years have you lived here?



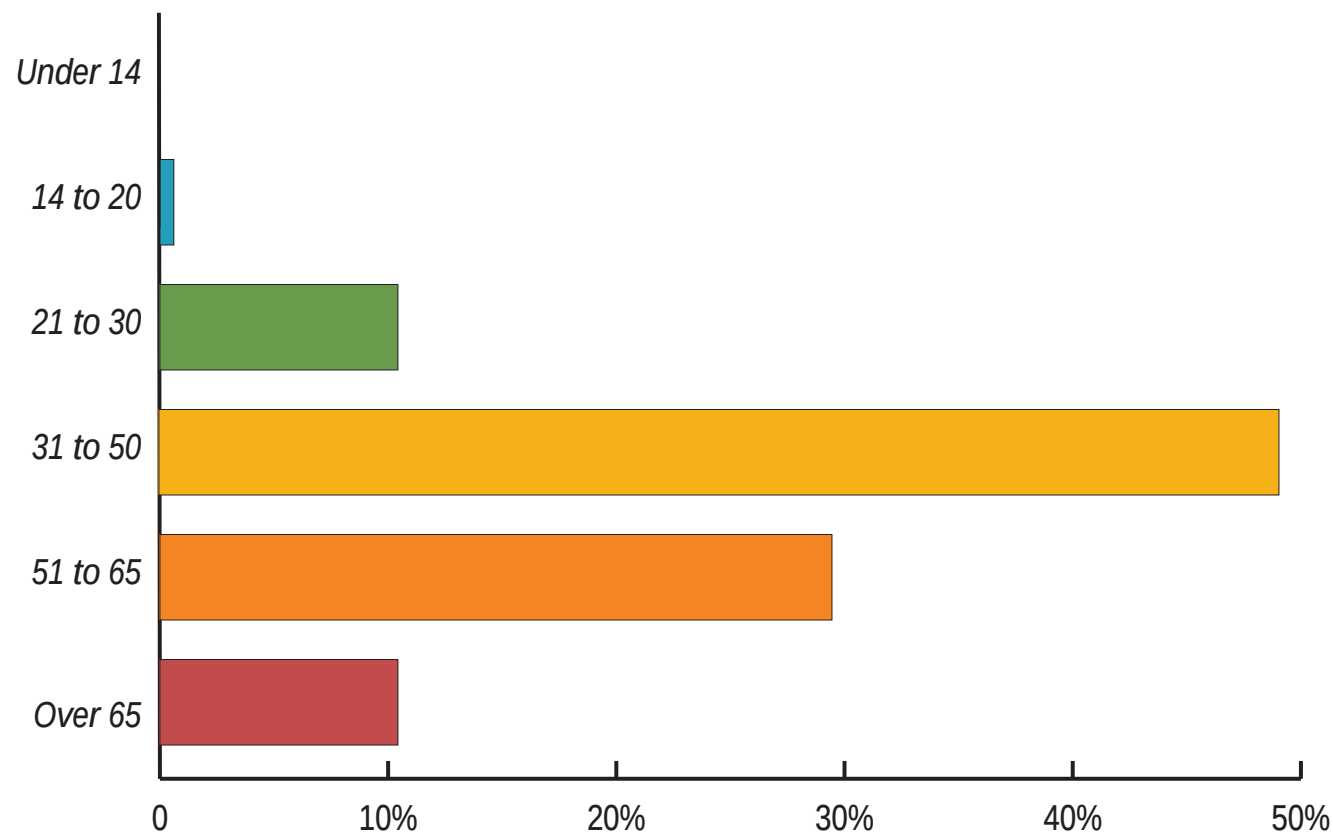
More than 70% of respondents have lived in Harlingen for over 10 years. Far behind at nearly 16%, the second largest group consists of those who have lived in Harlingen between 1 to 5 years, followed by those who’ve lived in the City for 6 to 10 years at approximately 8%. Less than 4% of respondents have lived in Harlingen for under a year.

Question 25. What is your household income in the last 12 months?



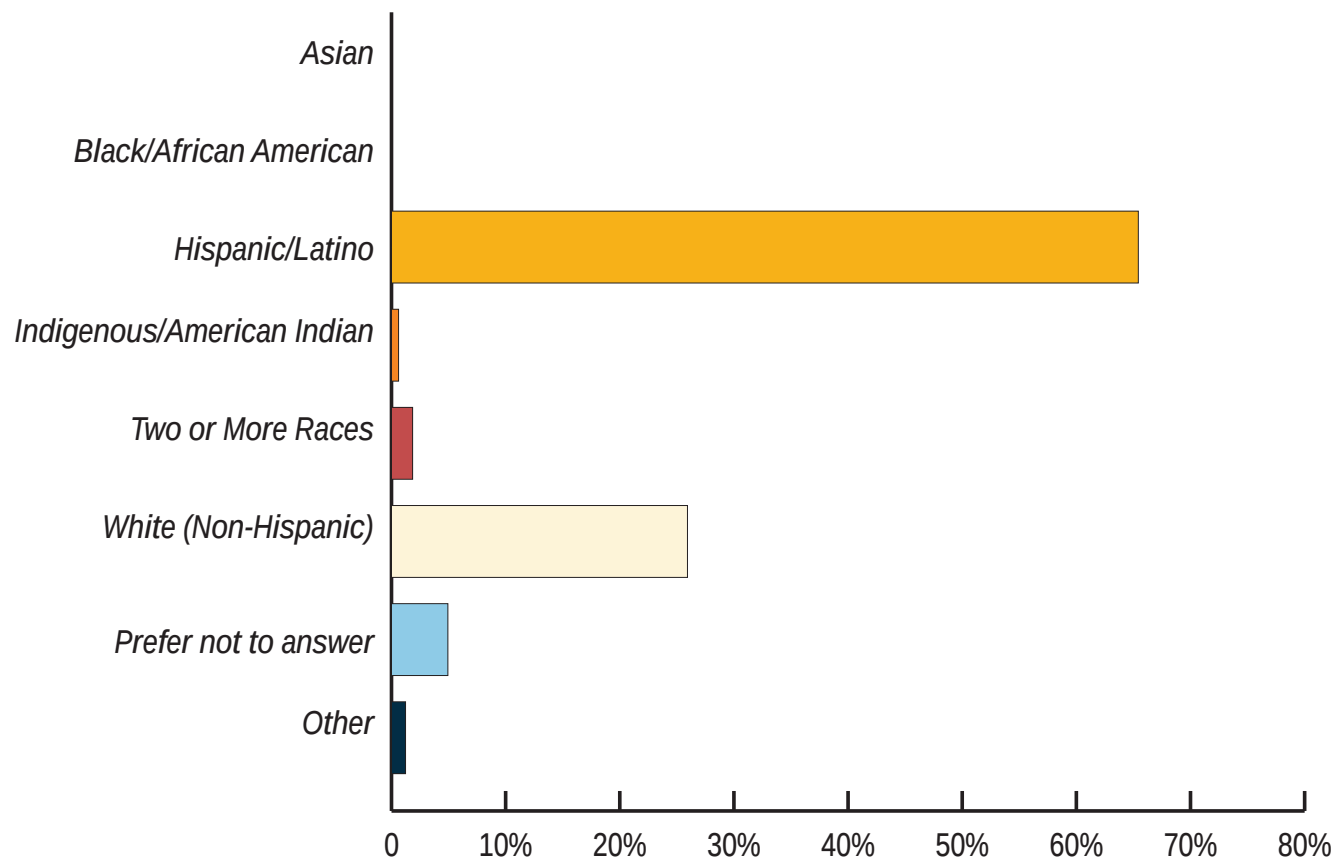
Most respondents report an annual household income between \$50,000 and \$99,900 (24.36%), which seems in line with Harlingen’s median household income of \$55,891, as reported on the American Community Survey (5-Years Estimates) 2019-2023. Survey results may skew towards higher incomes, with nearly half of respondents earning more than six figures. In comparison, less than 30% of total respondents report an annual household income under \$50,000.

Question 26. What is your age?



Most of the respondents who participated in the survey were middle-aged and older adults. Almost half of all respondents were 31 to 50 years old (49.08%), followed by those between 51 and 65 years old (29.45%). Participation was lowest among those under twenty (0.61%), while the same number of young adults between 21 and 30 years old and seniors over 65 responded to the survey (10.43%).

Question 27. What best describes your race/ethnicity?



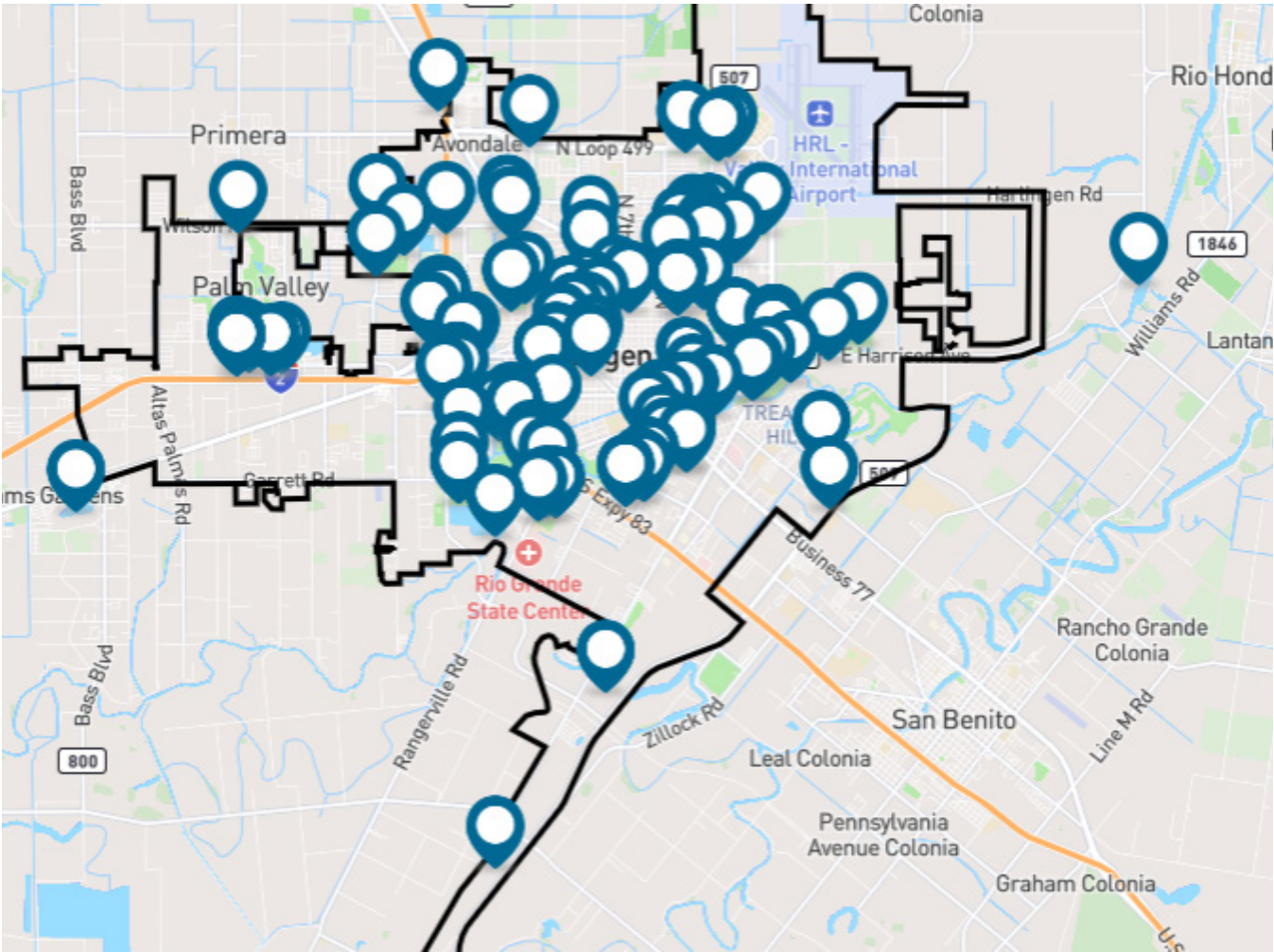
Most respondents identify as Hispanic or Latino (65.43%), followed by a quarter identifying as White only (25.93%). Nearly 5% of respondents refused to recognize their race, and none of the respondents described their race as Asian or Black/African American.

Online Pin Mapping Tool

The primary mechanism for greater virtual engagement for this plan was an online mapping activity where participants could leave georeferenced comments on a map of Harlingen. Website visitors could read and vote on others’ comments to express agreement or disagreement. This feature helped the project team identify the comments that were most relevant and helpful for developing recommendations. Key themes that emerged from the online map comments included:

- There is need for improved road maintenance, sidewalk construction and upgraded traffic management, including the incorporation of roundabouts and speed bumps.
- Improved safety through enhanced lighting in public parking lots and parks, along with increased enforcement patrols.
- There is a desire for improved community amenities such as updated playgrounds, the incorporation of greater greenery along significant corridors, shaded trails and an indoor amphitheater or recreational space.
- Addressing homelessness by creating supportive housing, relocating services and incorporating greater community resources to address the population.

The online mapping activity opened after the project launched in October 2024 and was available for continuous participation throughout most of the project process.



Screenshot of the Online Pin Mapping Tool

Public Engagement #1

On November 18, 2024 at 6pm at the Harlingen Community Center the planning team held its first community engagement event. The meeting was hosted by the City of Harlingen and facilitated by Freese & Nichols, the City's consultant. 55 participants signed in on the meeting sign in sheets. Advertisements were made via the City's communication channels, social media, and the project website. Advertisements and all meeting materials were made available in both English and Spanish. w

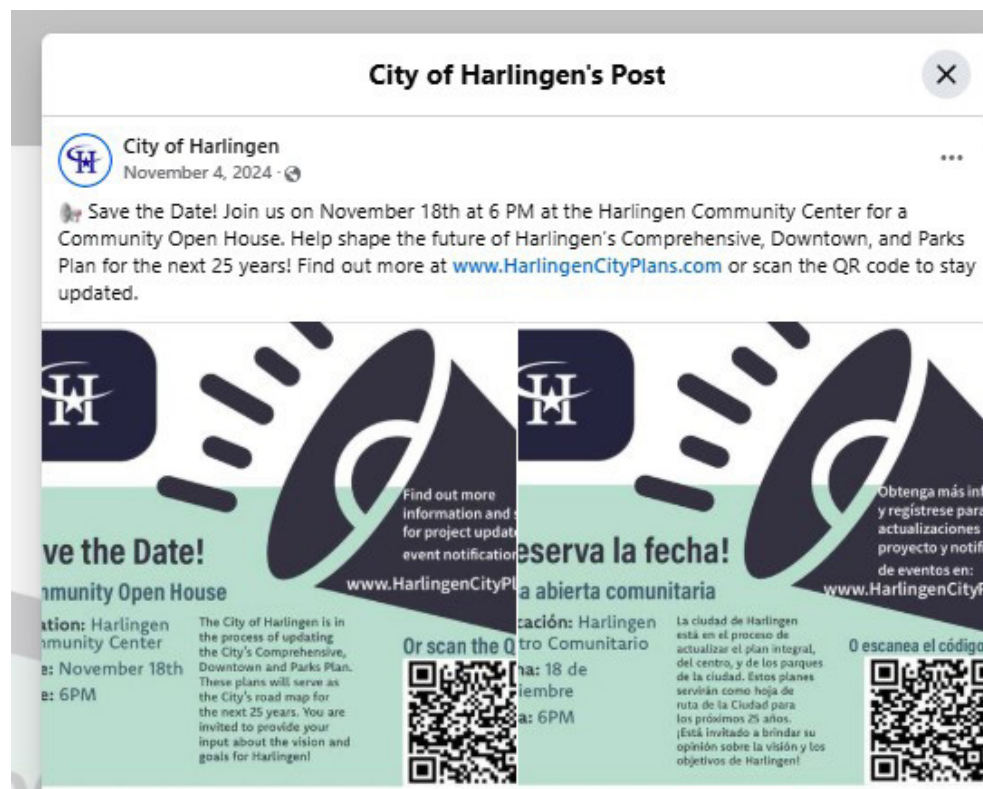
The purpose of this event was to educate the community on the upcoming process, how to get and stay involved and to gather initial feedback on their values, priorities and goals for the community, prior to the consultant team or City attempting to identify a set of goals and objectives. The evening began with a formal presentation by the consultant team, followed by an open house with interactive stations and one on one conversations with the participants. City staff were also in attendance and available to talk with residents.

The meeting agenda included:

- Overview of the Process
- Project Schedule
- Project Scope
- Next Steps
- Open House Activities (Interactive Stations)

The interactive stations topics included:

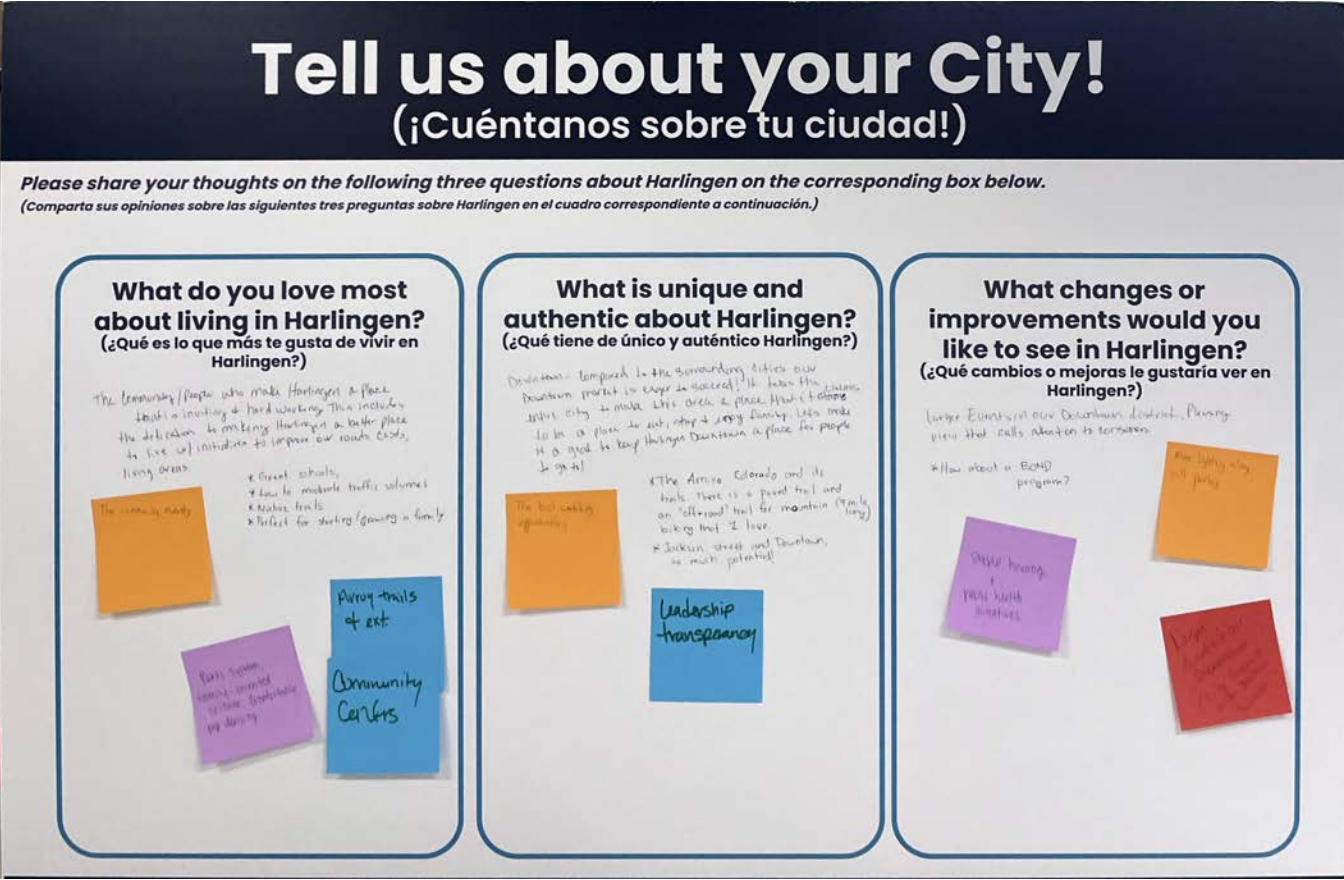
- Project and Website Information
- Community Insights, Aspirations and Goals
- Land Use and Development
- Transportation and Mobility
- Infrastructure and Public Facilities
- Shocks and Stressors



A screen capture of the meeting advertisement on the City's Facebook page.



Images from the public meetings in November 2024. Top row: welcome table with informational boards and participant sign in. Middle row: the presentation done by the consultant team. Bottom row: the interactive stations and one-on-one conversations.



When given the opportunity to tell us about the City of Harlingen, respondents expressed a deep appreciation for the community, its leadership, and public amenities including the community center and the City’s parks and trails. The Downtown, particularly along Jackson Street, was identified as an area of investment, with many opportunities for new businesses and events.

Tell us About your City

Responses

What do you love most about living in Harlingen?

- The community/people who make Harlingen a place that is inviting + hard working. This includes the dedication to making Harlingen a better place to live w/ initiatives to improve our roads, costs, and living areas.
- Great schools, low to moderate traffic, nature trails, perfect for starting/growing a family
- The community events
- Parks system, family-oriented culture, comfortable pop density
- Arroyo trails + ext.
- Community centers

What is unique and authentic about Harlingen?

- Downtown – Compared to the surrounding cities our Downtown market is eager to succeed! It takes the entire City to make this area a place that it claims to be – a place to eat, shop + enjoy family. Let’s make it a goal to keep Harlingen Downtown a place for people to go!
- Arroyo Colorado and its trails. There is a paved trail and an “off-road” trail for mountain biking (9 miles long) that I love
- Jackson Street has so much potential
- The birdwatching opportunities
- Leadership transparency

What improvements would you like to see in Harlingen?

- Larger events in our Downtown
- How about a BOND program?
- Stable housing + public health initiatives
- More lighting along parks

Community Goals

(Metas comunitarias)

What are your goals for each of the topics below?
(¿Cuáles son sus objetivos para cada uno de los temas siguientes?)

GOAL 1

Economic Growth (Crecimiento económico)

For small business
for good business

GOAL 2

Transportation (Transporte)

More pedestrian friendly facilities
Lighting, citywide, lots of residential subdivisions need it
Lots of intersections need pedestrian friendly improvements

GOAL 3

Community Character and Identity (Carácter e identidad de la comunidad)

GOAL 4

Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Open Space (Parques, recreación, senderos y espacios abiertos)

More lighting along trails, need to be well lit
I would like for Harlingen to have more bicycle lanes
A bicycle network would be awesome!
Rec Center for the youth
Public Health

Community Goals

(Metas comunitarias)

What are your goals for each of the topics below?
(¿Cuáles son sus objetivos para cada uno de los temas siguientes?)

GOAL 5

Housing and Neighborhoods (Vivienda y Vecindario)

Revitalize vacant housing

GOAL 6

Civic Facilities and Buildings (Instalaciones y edificios cívicos)

Rec Center
Multi-use courts for basketball, fast soccer or soccer or pickleball
New City Hall

GOAL 7

Education (Educación)

More outreach to communities about "Keep Harlingen beautiful"
Invest in Harlingen education programs, trade schools and degree offerings
More outreach to communities about "keeping harlingen beautiful"

GOAL 8

Public Safety (Seguridad Pública)

Improve public awareness about public safety
Streets with lighting
Street lights (sustainable)
Incorporate behavioral health response in public safety/police

Harlingen’s community goals focus on improving the City’s infrastructure as well as community well-being. Activity is a key theme throughout the responses, with improved pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, and new recreational facilities being a priority for many respondents.

Community Goals

Responses

Goal 1: Economic Growth

- More outreach programs for small businesses

Goal 2: Transportation

- More pedestrian-friendly facilities
- Lighting citywide, lots of residential subdivisions need it
- Lots of intersections need pedestrian-friendly improvements

Goal 3: Community Character and Identity

- N/A

Goal 4: Parks, Recreation, Trails, and Open Space

- More lighting along trails around the Arroyo
- I would like for Harlingen to have more bicycle lanes – A bicycle network would be awesome.
- Rec Center for the Youth
- Public health

Goal 5: Housing and Neighborhoods

- Revitalize vacant housing

Goal 6: Civic Facilities and Buildings

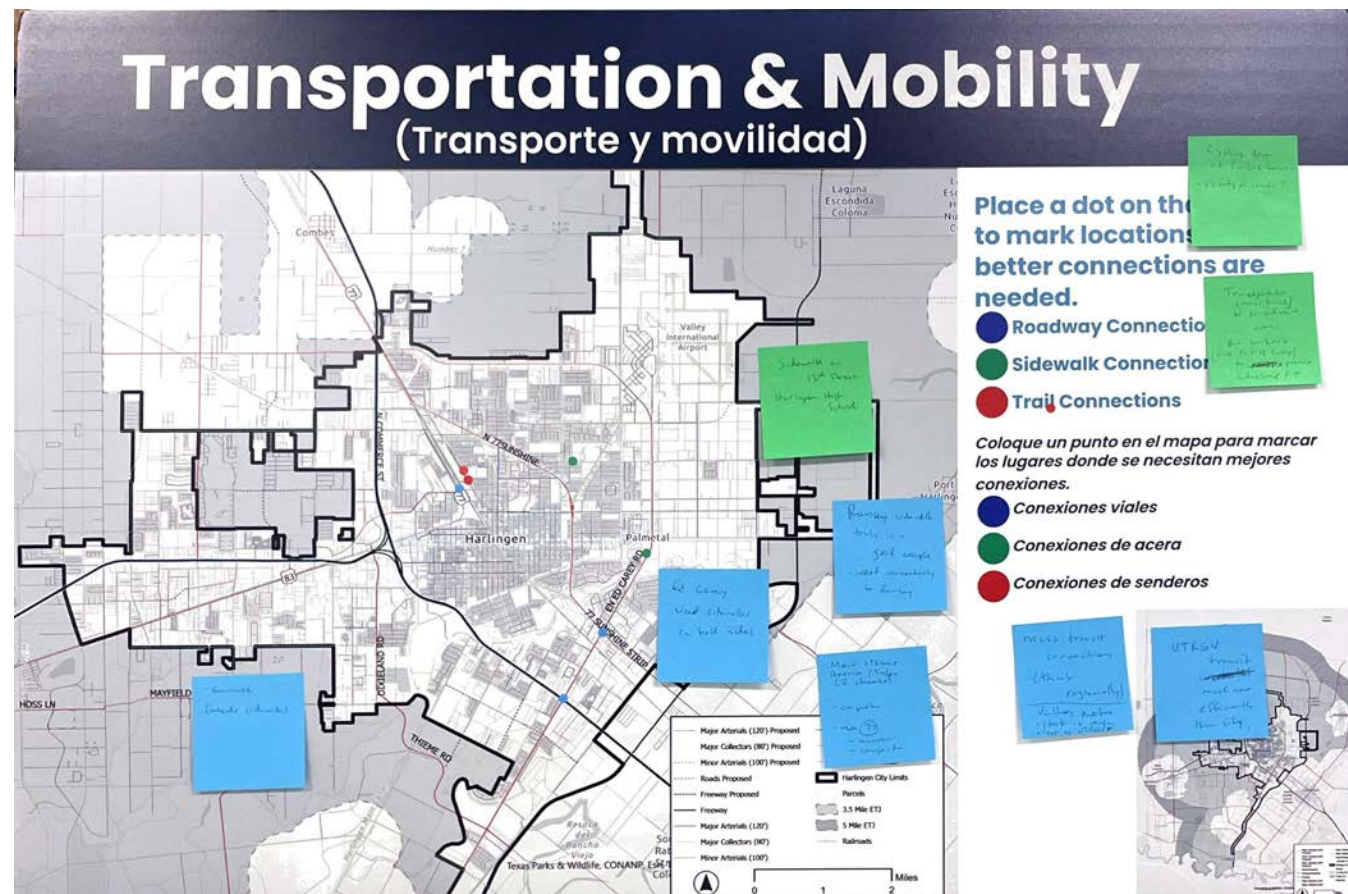
- Rec Center
- Multi-use courts for basketball, fast soccer or soccer or pickleball

Goal 7: Education

- Invest in Harlingen education programs, trade schools and degree offerings
- More outreach to communities about “keeping harlingen beautiful”

Goal 8: Public Safety

- Sidewalks and lighting
- Increase police awareness on the Northside of town
- Streetlights (sustainable)
- Incorporate behavioral health response in public safety/police

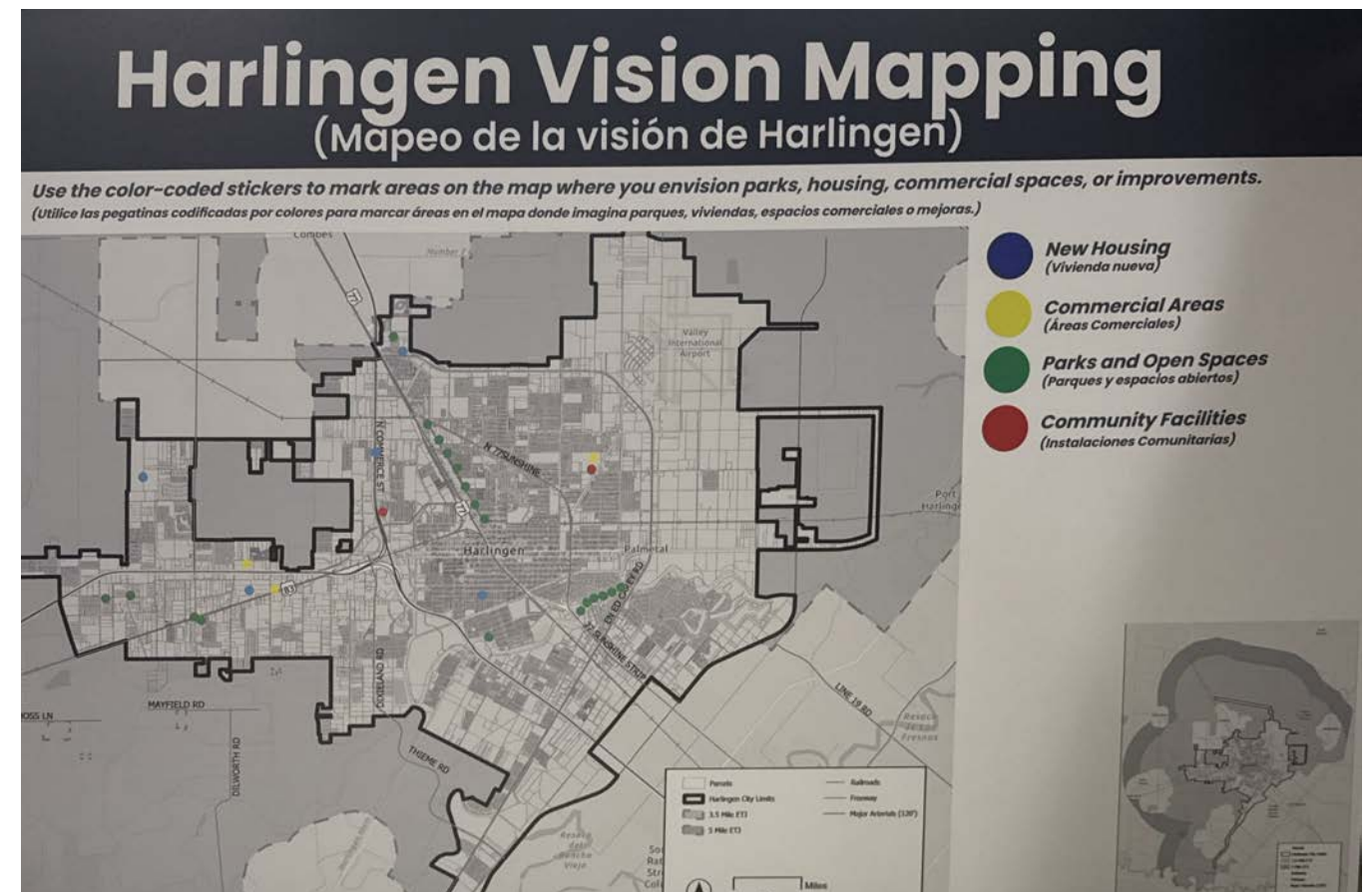


Improving connectivity is a major priority for Harlingen residents. This includes adding pedestrian infrastructure like sidewalks along busy roads and expanding access to public transportation both within the City of Harlingen and regionally. Additionally, trail connections were suggested at Vestal Park.

Transportation & Mobility

Responses

- Garrett (needs sidewalks)
- Sidewalks on 13th Street near Harlingen High School
- Ed Carey needs sidewalks on both sides
- Ramsey sidewalk trail is a good example – need connectivity to Ramsey
- Main Street Harissa/Tyler (2 streets)
 - Congestion
- Mass transit connections (think regionally) Valley Metro
 - Look at routes, look at UTRGV
- UTRGV transit is much more efficient than the City
- Cycling done at later hours – safety on roads?
- Transportation (mass board) N to individual areas.
- Bus workers (and Port of Entry) to promote industry park



Residents were asked to visualize what they wanted to see in Harlingen by using color coded stickers to mark where the City should develop parks and open space, new housing, and community facilities. Several spots were identified for parks and open space along Sam Houston St. and North Commerce St. The intersections at N T St. and Jefferson St. and Morgan Blvd and Grimes Ave. were suggested as locations for new community facilities. Housing is needed throughout the City, primarily along major thoroughfares.

Harlingen Vision Mapping

Responses

Parks and Open Space

- Between Highway 77 and N 77 Sunshine
- Along Sam Houston St, north of Sunshine strip

New Housing

- Scattered throughout the City, primarily along major thoroughfares

Community Facilities

- N T St-Jefferson St Intersection
- Morgan Blvd-Grimes Ave



Residents expressed a strong preference for mixed-use developments that integrate residential, retail, and office spaces to create vibrant, multifunctional communities. Respondents reflect interest in spaces that promote walkability, leisure, and social interaction, such as walking trails, boutique retail, and restaurants. While single-family homes maintain some appeal, the focus is on diverse, inclusive development with an emphasis on accessibility and a balance between urban amenities and open green spaces.

Tell Us About Development

Responses

Residential Types

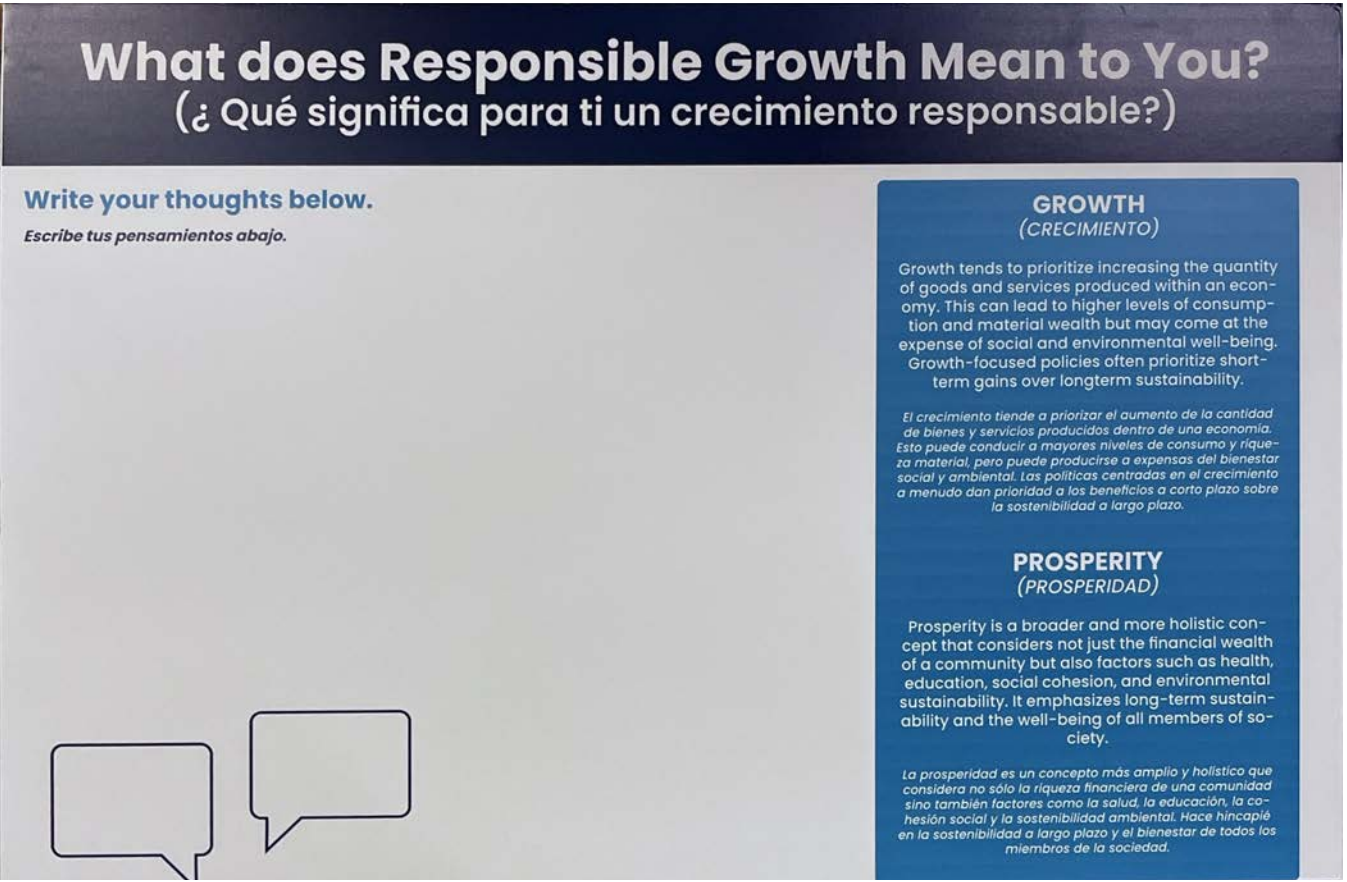
- Single-Family: 3
- Townhomes & Duplexes: 1
- Mid-Rise Multifamily: 0
- Mixed-Use Residential: 6

Parks and Open Spaces

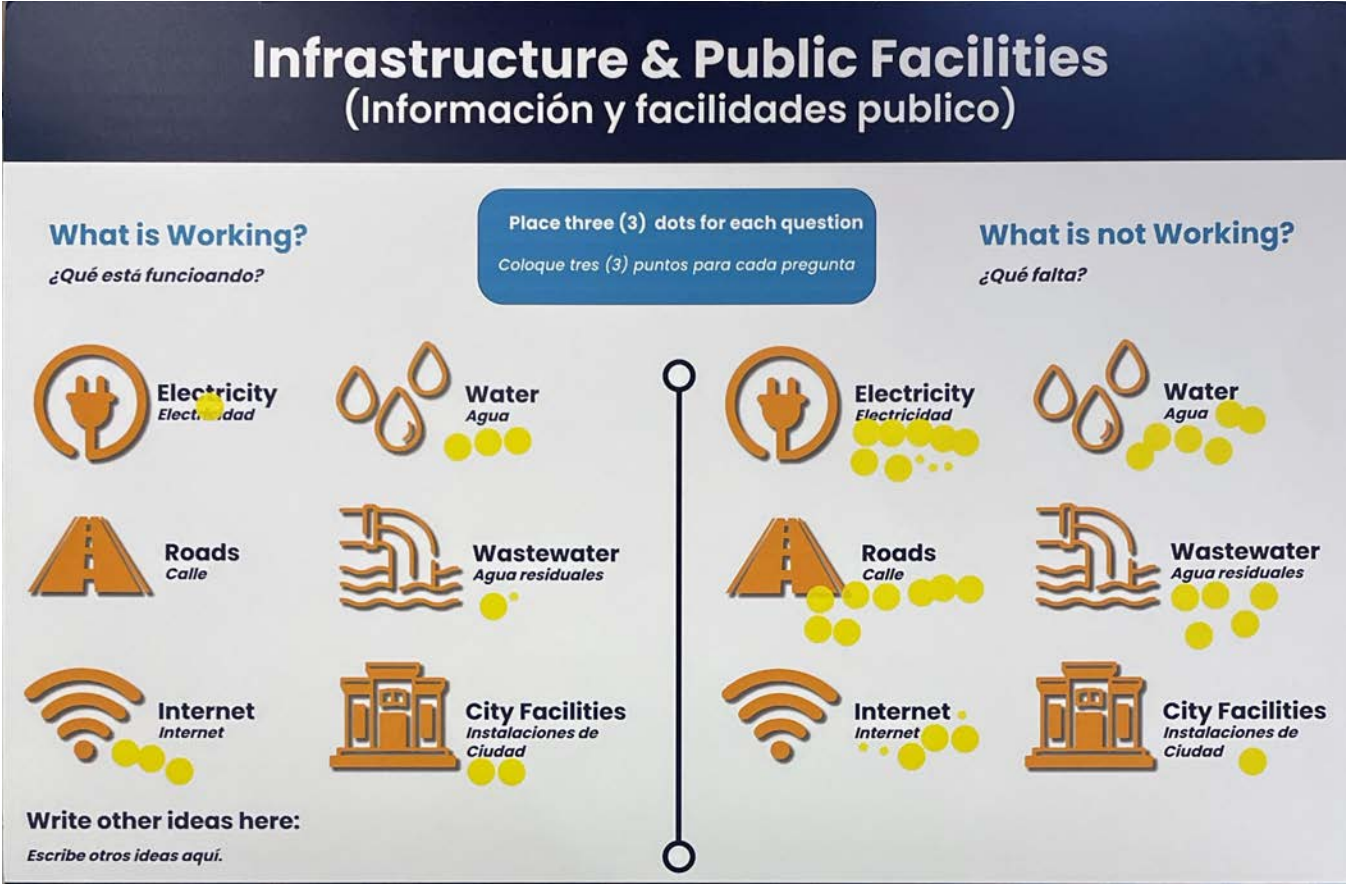
- Pocket Parks: 2
- Walking Trails: 4
- Recreational Spaces: 3
- Neighborhood Parks: 2

Commercial Types

- General Offices: 0
- Boutique Retail: 5
- Restaurants: 4
- Mixed-Use Office/Retail: 6



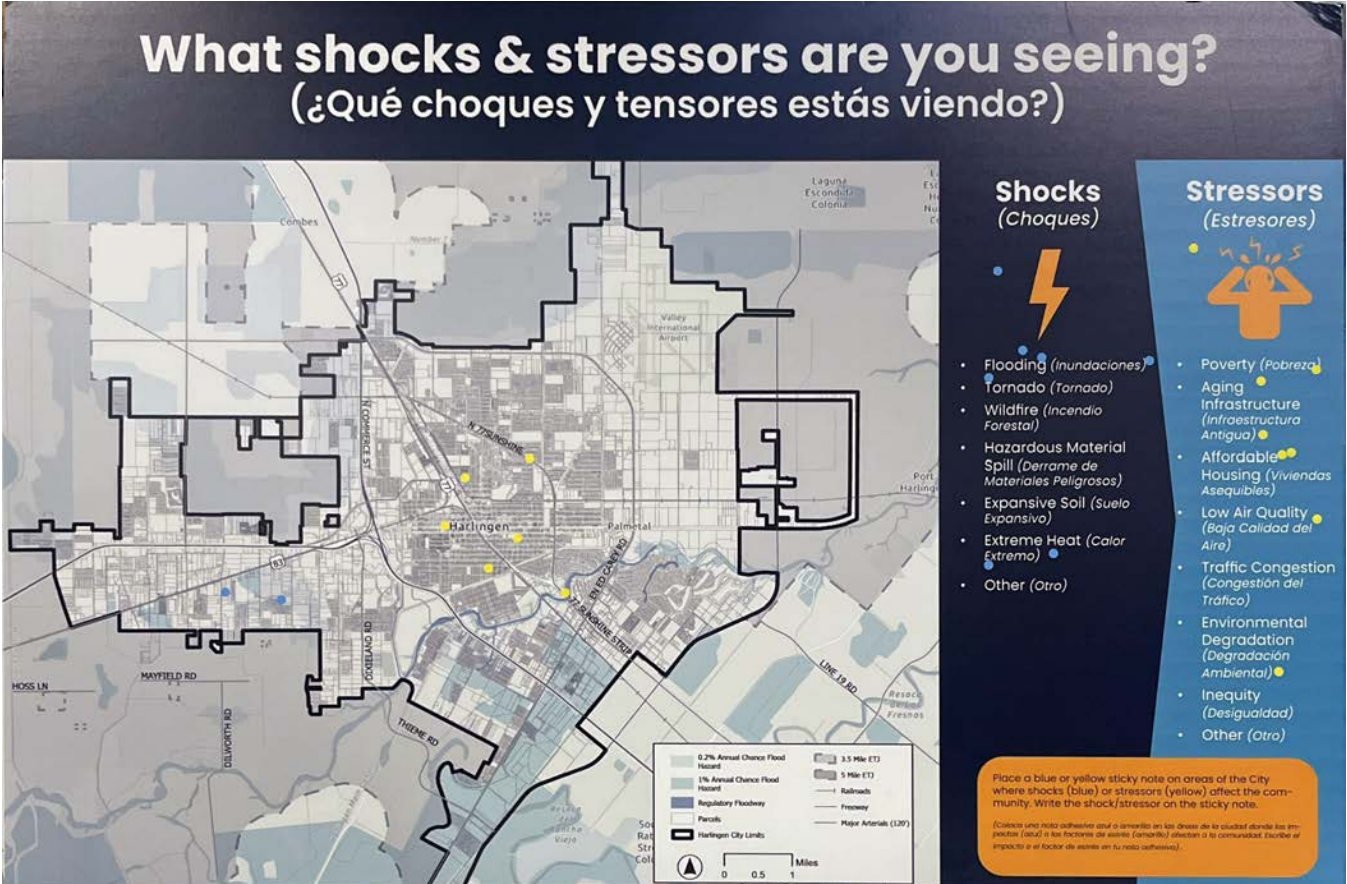
No one responded to this board.



When assessing the state of infrastructure and public facilities, residents were asked to identify both strengths and areas needing improvement within the City. Only one piece of infrastructure, city facilities, was answered as “working” more than “not working.” Electricity emerged as the top priority for improvement, followed by roads, internet, water, and wastewater.

WHAT IS WORKING?	# OF DOTS
Electricity	1
Water	3
Roads	0
Waste Water	2
Internet	3
City Facilities	2

WHAT IS NOT WORKING?	# OF DOTS
Electricity	10
Water	6
Roads	8
Waste Water	5
Internet	6
City Facilities	1



Flooding is the most prevalent shock that the City experiences followed by extreme heat. Many of the stressors identified by participants are associated with the City of Harlingen’s low socio-economic demographics including poverty and affordable housing. These issues highlight the challenges the city faces in terms of resilience and long-term sustainability.

What shocks & stressors are you seeing?

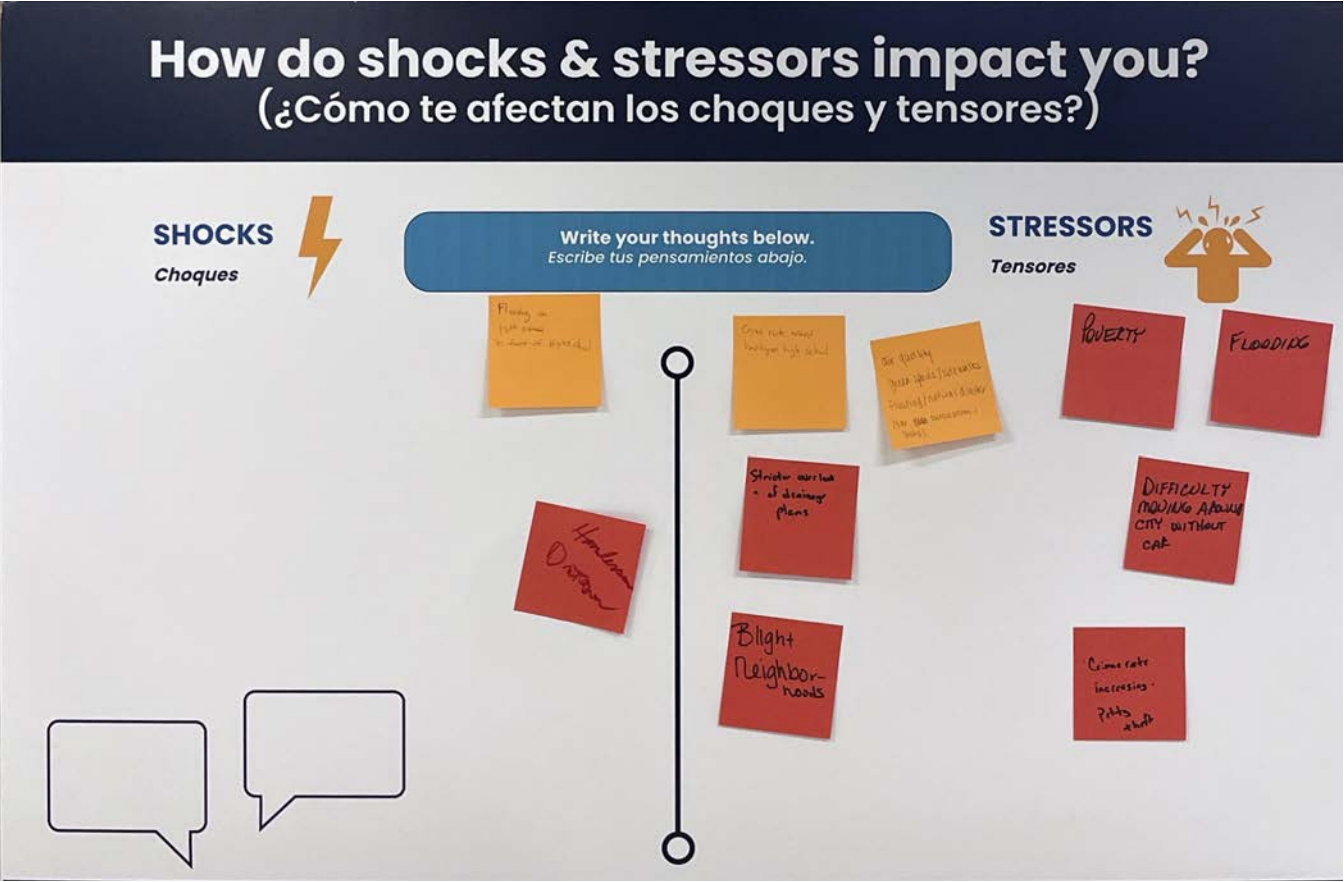
Responses

Shocks

- Flooding (4)
- Extreme Heat (2)

Stressors

- Poverty (2)
- Aging Infrastructure (1)
- Affordable Housing (2)
- Low Air Quality (1)
- Environmental Degradation (1)



Participants further discussed shocks and stressors affecting the City, detailing specific concerns impacting them directly. These include flooding, petty crime, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure, particularly for residents who don't have a car. These interconnected shocks and stressors strain resilience and quality of life, emphasizing the need for comprehensive, long-term solutions.

How do shocks & stressors impact you?

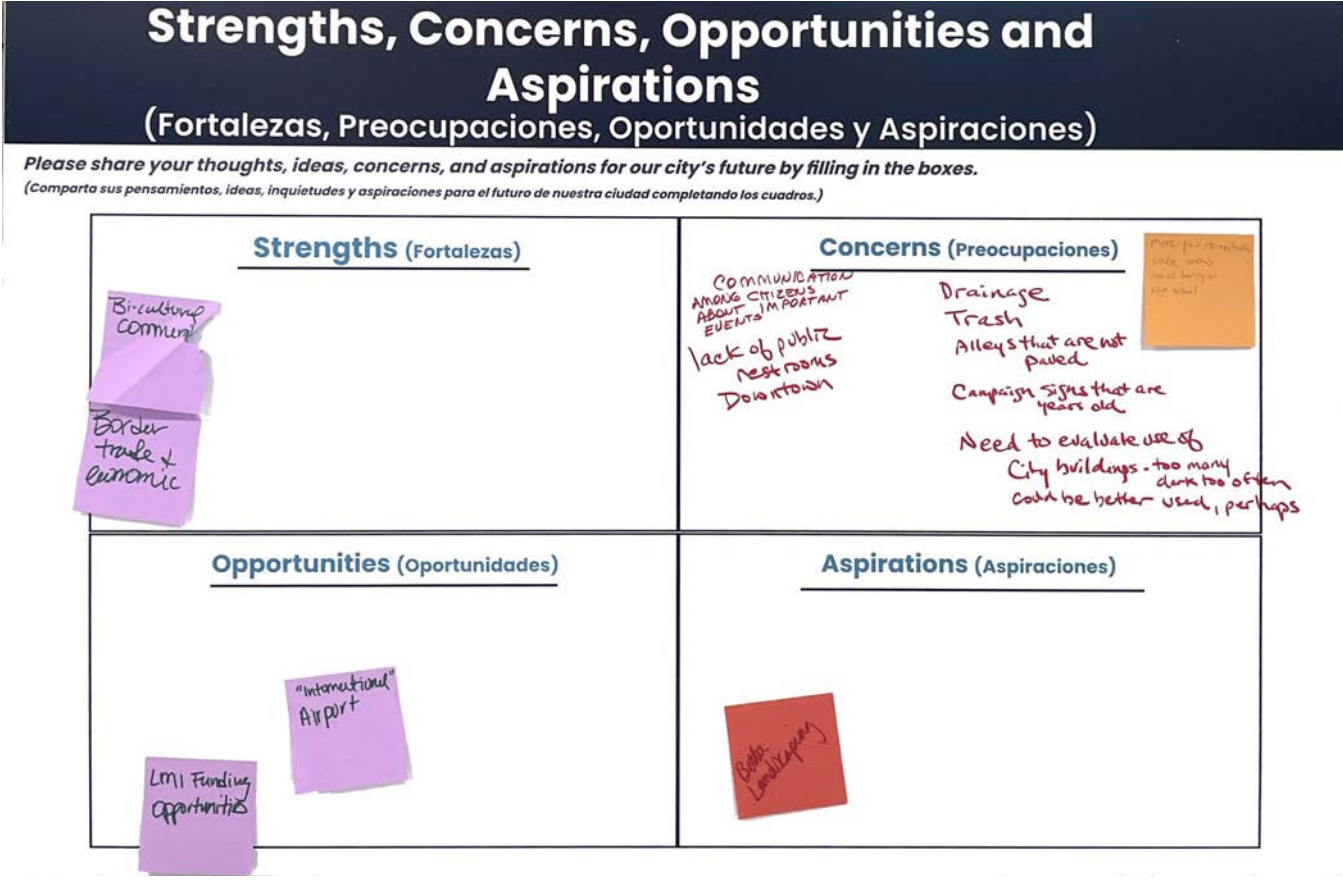
Responses

Shocks

- Flooding on 13th street by front of Harlingen High School
- Homelessness Downtown

Stressors

- Crime rate around Harlingen High School
- Stricter overlook of drainage plans
- Poverty
- Flooding
- Difficulty moving around City without car
- Blight neighborhoods
- Crime rate increasing, petty theft
- Air quality, green spaces/sidewalks flooding, national disasters, low socioeconomic status



The City of Harlingen's greatest strength is its bi-cultural heritage and trade across the border. Participants raised concerns about communication between the City and residents as well as infrastructure issues like trash, drainage, and underutilized city buildings. Opportunities lie in leveraging the international airport and funding for low- to moderate-income initiatives, while aspirations focus on enhancing public spaces through improved landscaping. Overall, the responses reflect a desire to address practical challenges while capitalizing on unique assets to foster growth and beautification.

Strengths, Concerns, Opportunities, and Aspirations

Responses

Strengths

- Bi-Cultural Commerce
- Border Trade + Economic

Concerns

- Communication among citizens about important events
- Lack of public restrooms in Downtown
- Drainage, trash, alleys that are not paved, campaign signs that are years old
- Need to evaluate use of City buildings – too many dark too often could be better used,

perhaps

Opportunities

- "International" Airport
- LMI Funding opportunities

Aspirations

- Better Landscaping

Public Engagement #2

On February 24, 2025 at 6pm at the Harlingen Community Center the planning team held its second community engagement event. The meeting was hosted by the City of Harlingen and facilitated by Freese & Nichols, the City’s consultant. 21 participants signed in on the meeting sign in sheets. Advertisements were made via the City’s communication channels, social media, and the project website. Advertisements and all meeting materials were made available in both English and Spanish.

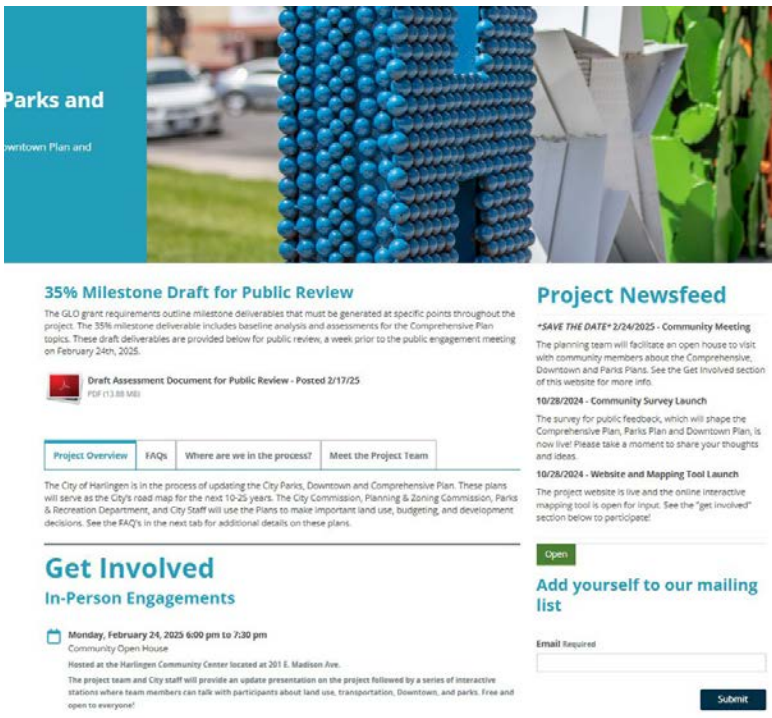
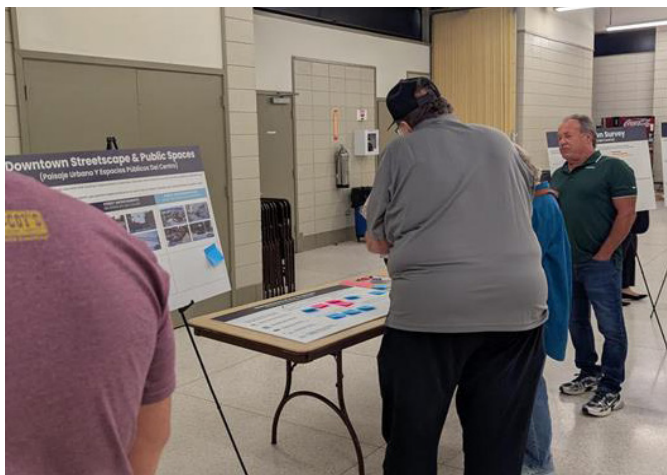
The purpose of this event was to present and discuss the baseline assessments, review draft goals and objectives, and gather feedback on additional comprehensive plan topics that would help generate future recommendations. The evening began with a formal presentation by the consultant team, followed by an open house with interactive stations and one on one conversations with the participants. City staff were also in attendance and available to talk with residents.

The meeting agenda included:

- Project and Process Overview
- Review of Community Feedback
- Key Takeaways from Assessments
- Next Steps
- Open House Activities (Interactive Stations)

The interactive stations topics included:

- Project and Website Information
- Overview of Public Feedback Received
- Draft Vision and Goals
- Resilience and Baseline Assessments (Land Use, Housing, Transportation, Infrastructure, and Economics)
- Land Use, Transportation, Downtown and Parks Feedback



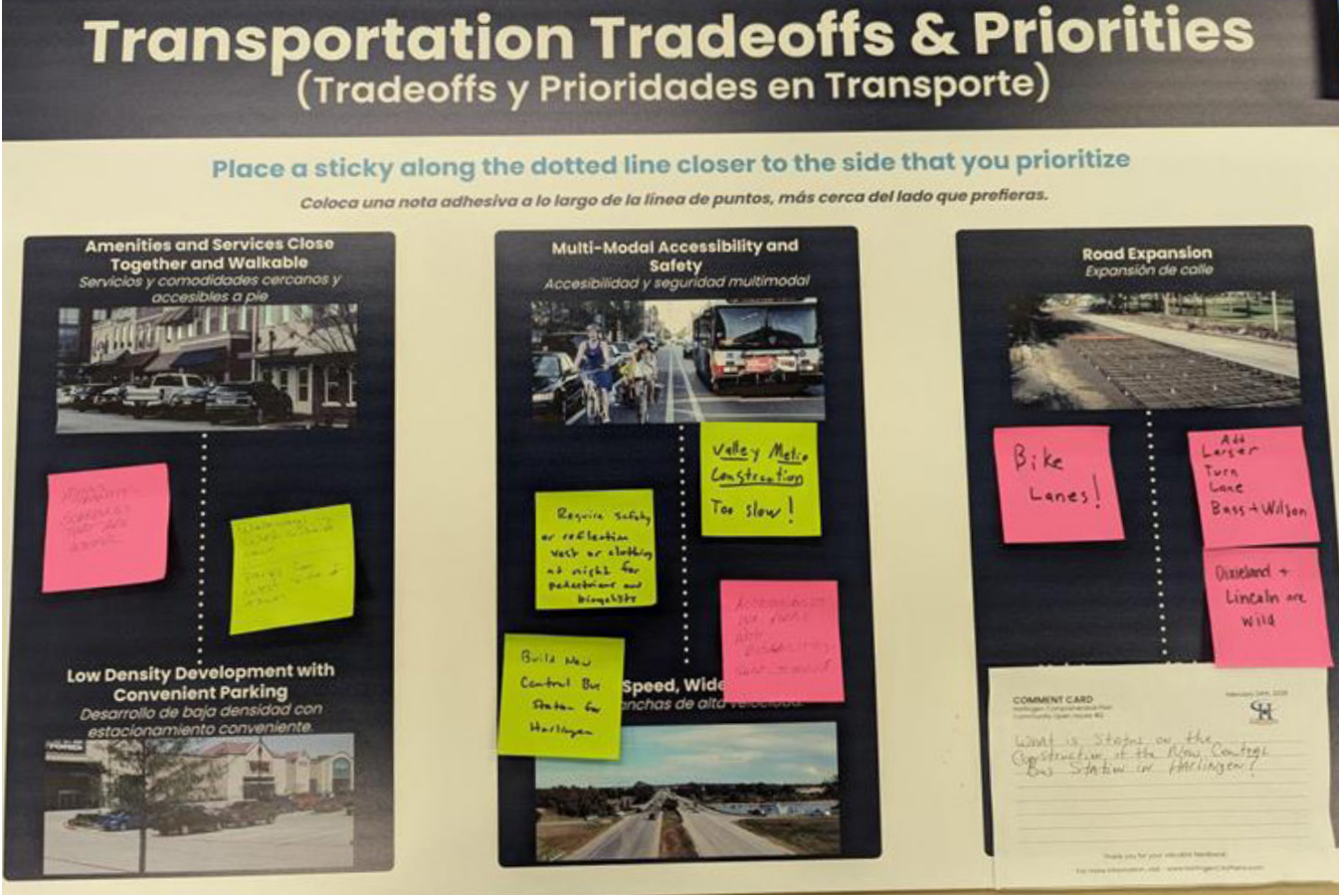
A screen capture of the meeting advertisement on the City’s Facebook page and the meeting information on the project website. Additionally, this shows the 35% milestone document made publicly available on the project website a week prior to the meeting.

Images from the public meetings in February 2025. Top row: the presentation done by the consultant team. Middle and bottom rows: the interactive stations and one-on-one conversations.



Only one person responded to the Land-Use Trade Offs board. Their preferred scenario involves low taxes and high services in exchange for more density.

TRADEOFF	# OF DOTS
Low Taxes + High Services = More Density	1
Low Taxes + Low Density = Service Cuts	0
Low Density + High Services = High Taxes	0



Participants expressed a strong interest in multi-modal transportation. Priorities include enhanced safety measures for cyclists and pedestrians through complete streets with bike lanes and sidewalks as well as improved Mass transit. There is support for the new central bus station, although construction has been slow, and participants hope that Valley Metro will improve its bus schedule and have better accessibility for those with disabilities.

Transportation Tradeoffs & Priorities

Responses

- Amenities and Services Close Together and Walkability OR Low Density Development with Convenient Parking

 - Mass Transit- Sidewalks that are useful
 - Walkways and Parks in Westside of Harlingen
- Multi-Modal Accessibility and Safety OR High Speed, Wide Streets

 - Valley Metro construction too slow!
 - Require safety or reflective vest or clothing at night pedestrians and bicyclists
 - Build new central bus station for Harlingen
 - Accessible for people with disabilities – good
- schedule

Road Expansion OR Maintenance of Existing Roads

 - Bike lanes!
 - Add laser turn lane Bass + Wilson
 - Dixieland + Lincoln are wild
- Comment Card

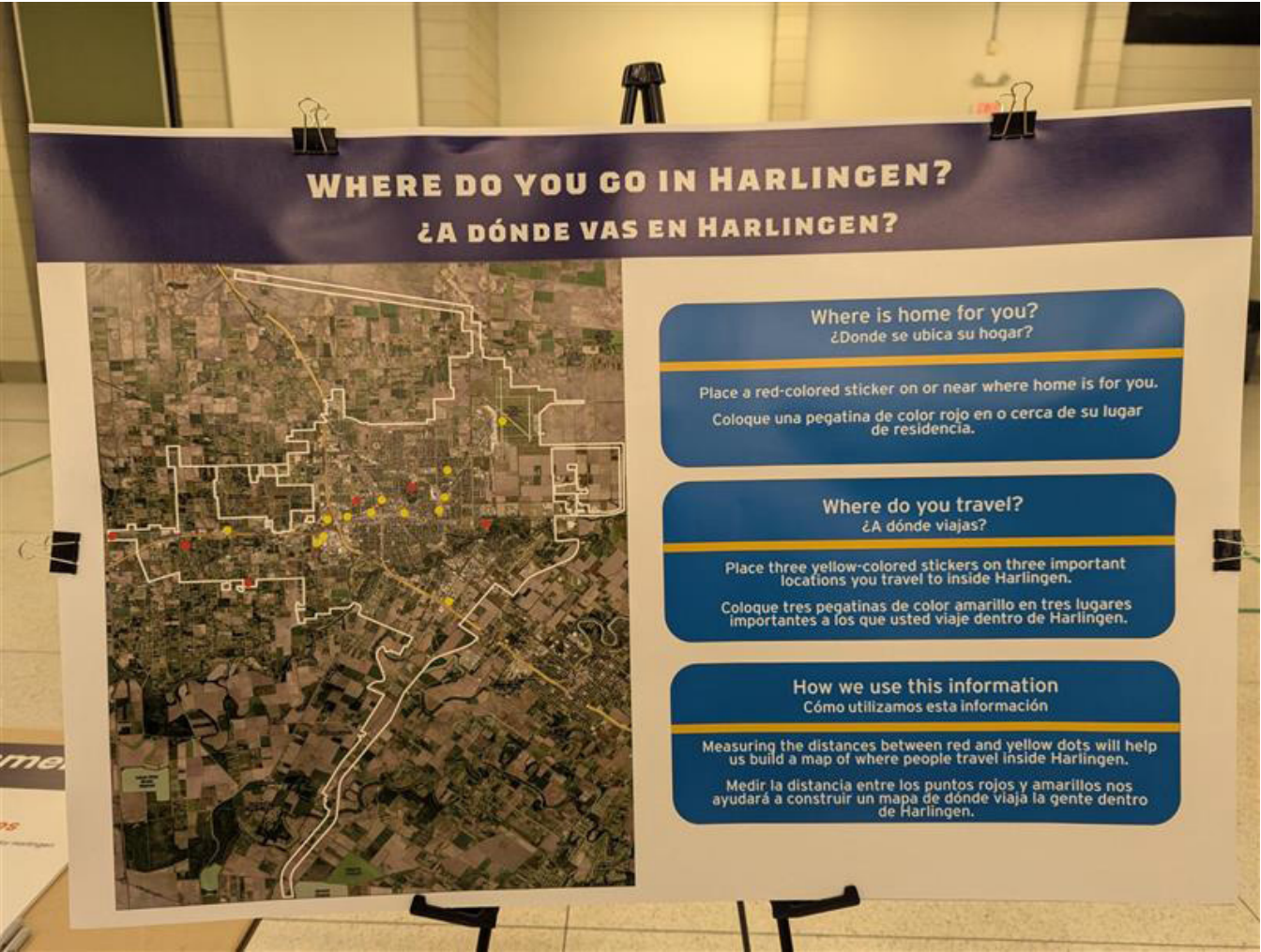
 - What is the status on the construction of new central bus station in Harlingen?

Responses

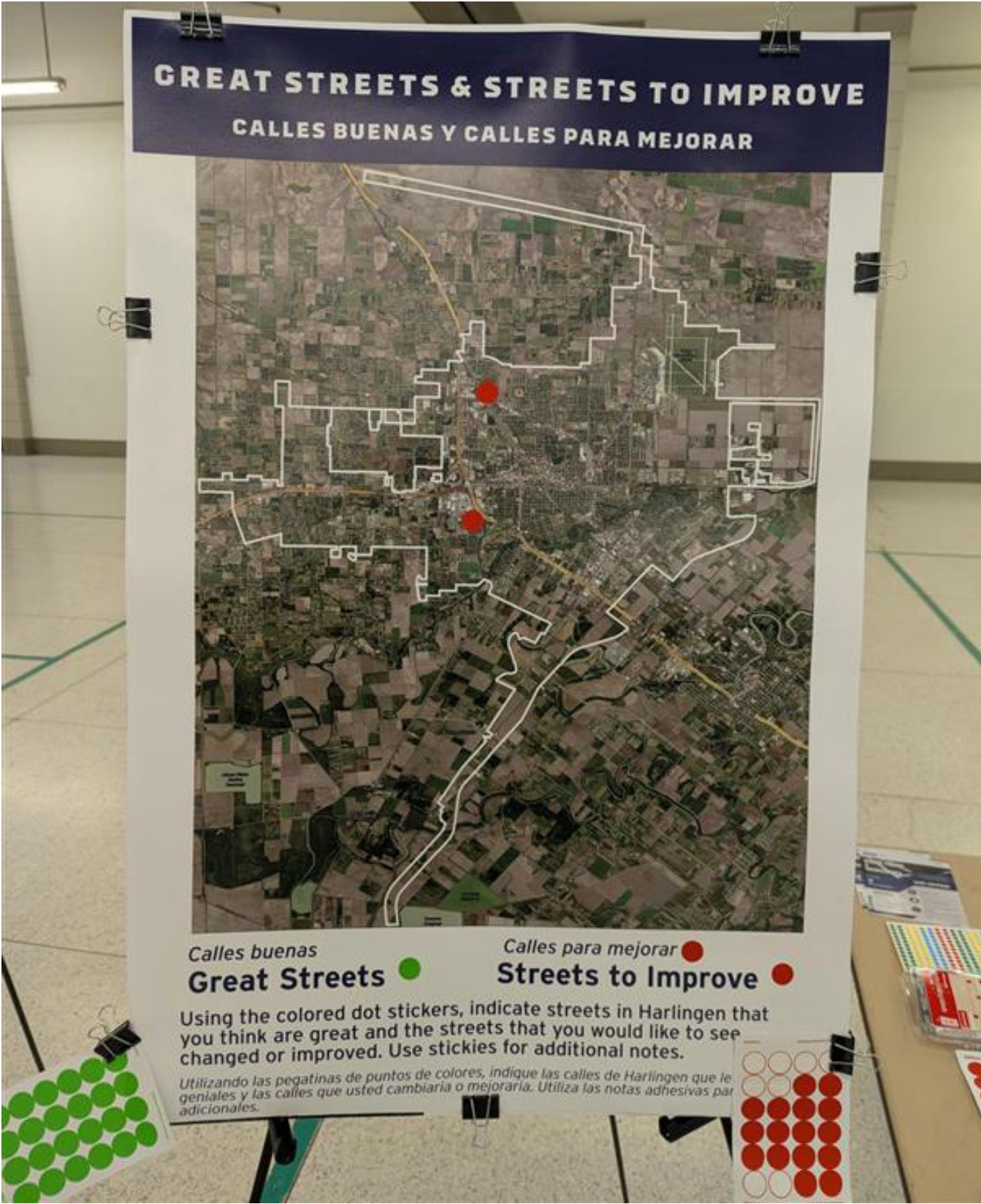
HOW DO YOU CURRENTLY GET THERE?	MODE OF TRANSPORTATION			
DESTINATION	Drive	Walk	Bike	Bus
Work	2	0	1	1
Shopping & Groceries	2	0	1	1
Schools	1	0	1	1
Parks & Trails	1	0	0	1

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET THERE?	MODE OF TRANSPORTATION			
DESTINATION	Drive	Walk	Bike	Bus
Work	3	0	0	1
Shopping & Groceries	3	0	1	1
Schools	1	0	0	1
Parks & Trails	2	1	1	1

Responses represent the individual preferences of the participants. Driving is the most popular mode of transportation to all destinations both currently and hypothetically. There is some interest in walking or biking to Harlingen's parks as well as general bus use.



Participants at the engagement event live throughout the City of Harlingen. They primarily travel to destinations along major thoroughfares such as Highway 83 and Commerce St.



Two streets were identified as needing improvements: N Commerce St and what appears to be Haverford Blvd.

What's Your Vision for Downtown Harlingen? (¿Cuál es su visión para el centro de Harlingen?)

What's one word to describe your ideal Downtown?
¿Cuál es una palabra para describir tu centro ideal?

DIVERSE
Favorite Gathering Place
Populated
ALL-INCLUSIVE

Responses indicate a desire for a vibrant and lively Downtown where people of all ages and abilities can gather.

What's Your Vision for Downtown Harlingen?

Responses

What's one word to describe your ideal Downtown?

- Diverse
- Favorite Gathering Place
- Populated
- All-Inclusive

Downtown Key Themes (Temas Clave Del Centro)

What are your thoughts on Downtown Harlingen?
¿Qué piensas del Centro de Harlingen?

Example Input Themes
Ejemplos de temas de opinion

-  **Shade, Trees, & Outdoor Seating /**
Sombra, árboles y asientos externos
-  **Redevelop historic buildings /**
Remodelar edificios históricos
-  **Dining & Entertainment /**
Restaurantes y Entretenimiento
-  **Connectivity & Safety /**
Conectividad y seguridad
-  **Develop vacant & underutilized properties /**
Desarrollar propiedades vacantes y subutilizadas

What are Downtown's greatest assets? What are your favorite places?
¿Cuáles son los mayores activos del centro? ¿Cuáles son tus lugares favoritos?

Small town flavor
Market days
Small town feel
NOT BARS

What features or elements are missing in Downtown?
¿Qué características o elementos faltan en Downtown?

Better Lighting
Markets
Community events
Police presence
Nighttime events
More evening events

What opportunities are there to attract more use to Downtown?
¿Qué oportunidades hay para atraer más uso al centro de la ciudad?

Evening activities
Close bars at La Placita

If you could only change one thing in Downtown, what would it be?
Si solo pudieras cambiar una cosa en el centro, ¿cuál sería?

Entertainment
Close bars at La Placita

Residents love Downtown Harlingen's small town feel and community events like Market Days. There is a desire to enhance the area's nightlife with more events taking place during the evening as well as better lighting to improve safety at night.

Downtown Key Themes

Responses

What are Downtown's greatest assets? What are your favorite places?

- The small town flavor
- Market Days are awesome
- Small town feel
- NOT bars

What opportunities are there to attract more use to Downtown?

- Community Awareness/Communication
- Evening Activities
- Lower taxes on buildings

What features or elements are missing from Downtown?

- Better Lighting
- Lighting, markets, community events
- Lighting, police presence, nighttime events
- More evening events

If you could only change one thing in Downtown, what would it be?

- Entertainment
- Close bars at La Placita



Participants identified several types of land uses they wish to see in Downtown Harlingen including mixed-use residential, restaurants, and bars.

Downtown Land Uses & Development

Responses

Residential Types

- Mixed-Use w/ Residential

Commercial Types

- Restaurant
- Restaurants and Bars
- Boutique Retail

Other

- Live, eat, have a small park Downtown, already prime for it



Lighting was identified as the primary sidewalk improvement needed in Downtown Harlingen with a preference for solar lighting. Commerce Street was identified for potential street improvements. Strategies like alley activation can be used to enhance public gathering spaces.

Downtown Streetscape & Public Spaces

Responses

Sidewalk Improvements

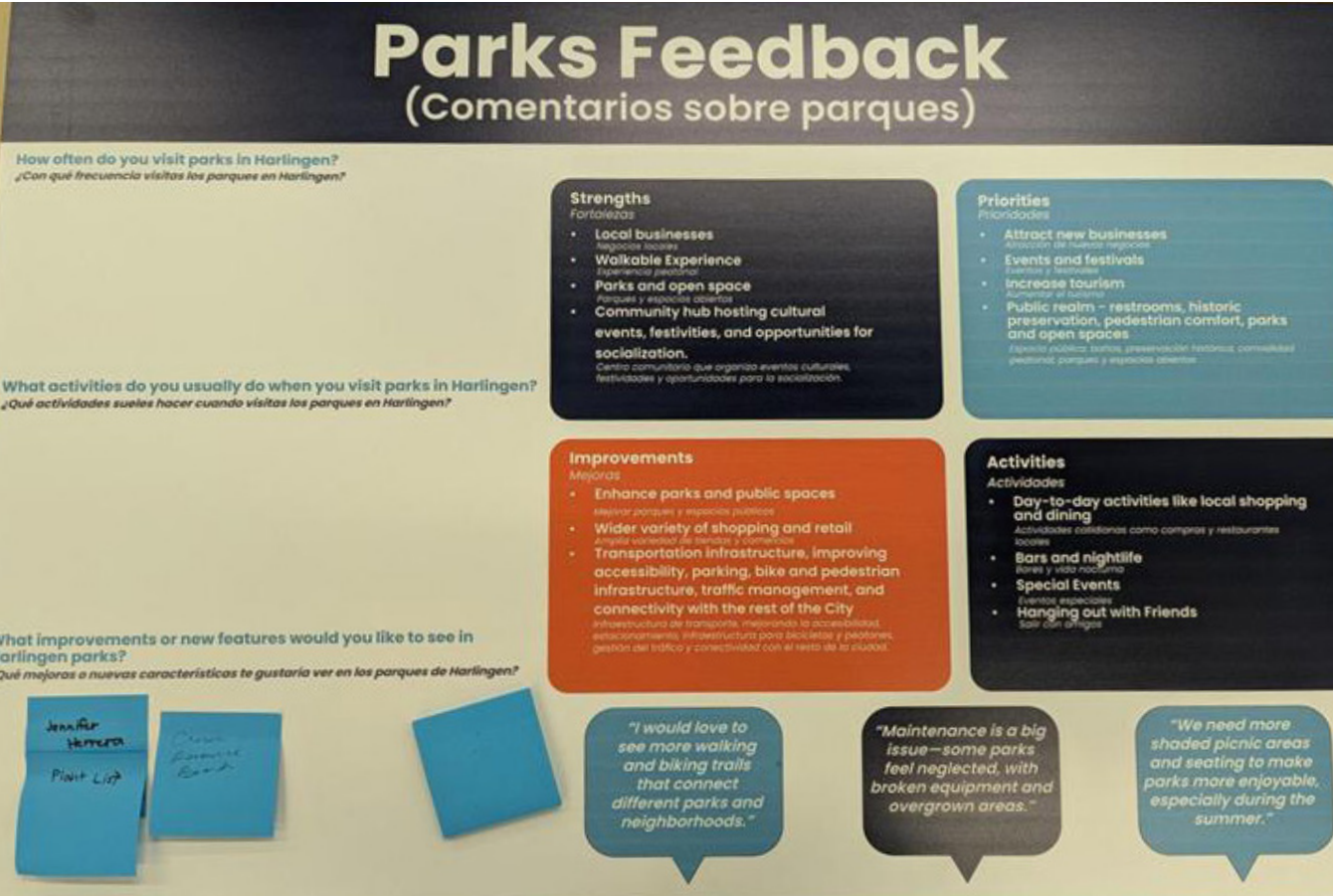
- Safer Lighting
- Solar Lighting

Street Improvements

- Commerce Street

Public Gathering Spaces

- Alley Activation
- White with stadium as a concert venue



Parks Feedback

Responses

How often do you visit parks in Harlingen?

- N/A

What activities do you usually do when you visit parks in Harlingen?

- N/A

What improvements or new features would you like to see in Harlingen Parks?

- Plant List - Jennifer Herrera
- Cannot read



Two responses were left on the “Park Experience” engagement board. Guitierrez Park was identified as needing improvements. Although there is not a park labeled on the map, a dot was placed close to Highway 83 on the Westside of Harlingen, indicating where the participants would love to see new amenities.



Bass Blvd to Alto Palmas Rd are used to access parks on the Westside of Harlingen, although one participant pointed out that the Westside is cut off on the map.



The top amenity needed in Harlingen’s park system are trails for walking a bicycling. Other amenities like a sports courts, picnic pavilions, and restrooms are missing from some of the city’s parks.

What is Missing in Your Parks?

Responses

WHAT TYPES OF PARK AMENITIES ARE MOST NEEDED IN HARLINGEN?	# OF DOTS
Playgrounds	0
Picnic Pavilion	1
Sports Courts	1
Water Features	0
Community Gardens	0
Walking & Biking Trails	3
Athletic Field	0
Shade Equipment	0
Support Facilities (trash cans, benches, etc.)	0
Restrooms	1

Public Engagement #3

On June 3, 2025 at 6pm at the Casa de Amistad the planning team held its third community engagement event. The meeting was hosted by the City of Harlingen and facilitated by Freese & Nichols, the City's consultant. 14 participants signed in on the meeting sign in sheets. Advertisements were made via the City's communication channels, social media, and the project website. Advertisements and all meeting materials were made available in both English and Spanish.

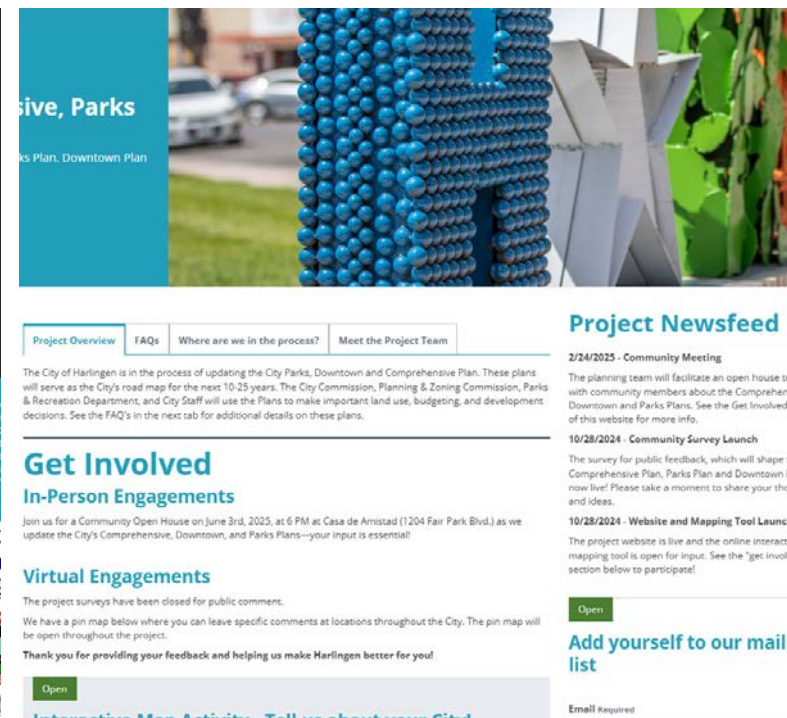
The purpose of this event was to present and discuss Comprehensive Plan recommendations and to generate additional thoroughfare map feedback. The evening began with a formal presentation by the consultant team, followed by an open house with interactive stations and one on one conversations with the participants. City staff were also in attendance and available to talk with residents.

The meeting agenda included:

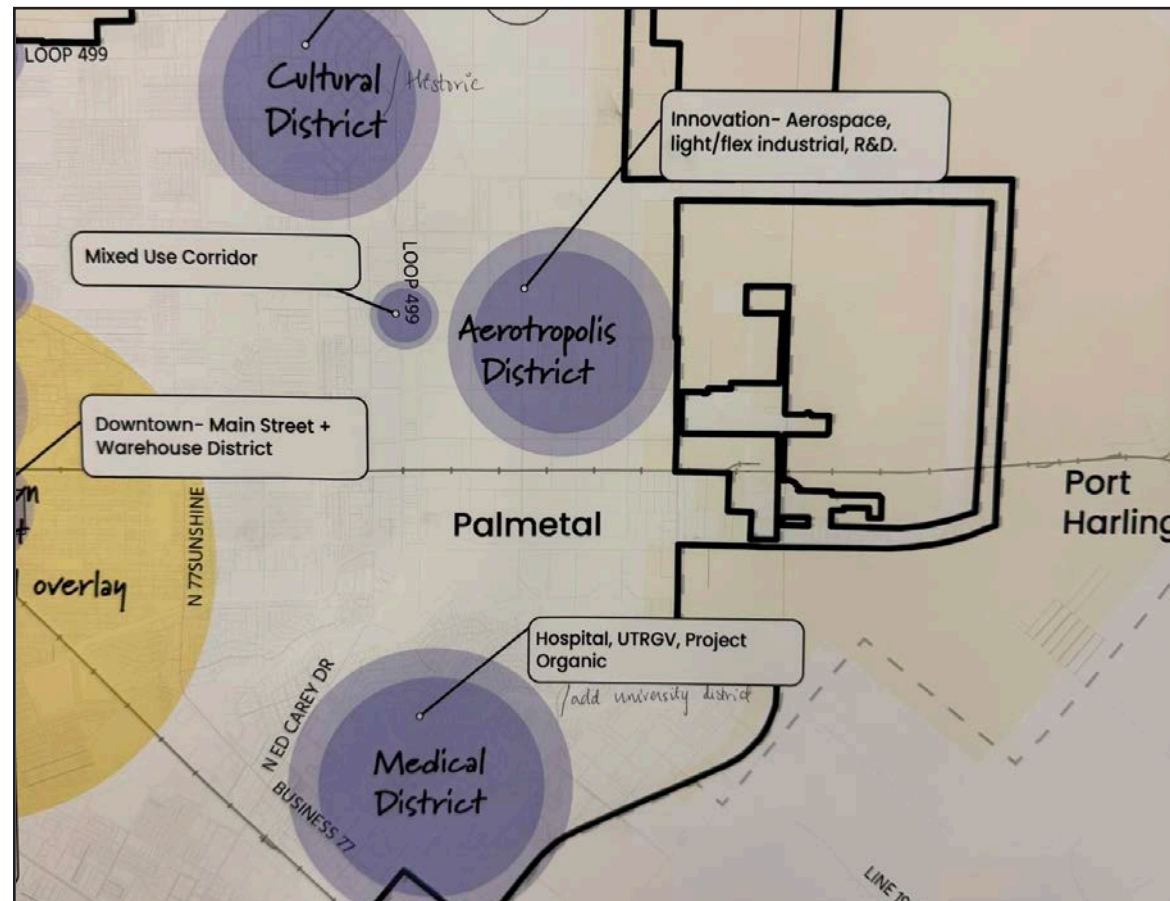
- Project and Process Overview
- Review of Community Feedback
- Key Takeaways from Assessments
- Next Steps
- Open House Activities (Interactive Stations)

The interactive stations topics included:

- Project and Website Information
- Draft Vision and Goals
- Plan Recommendations (Land Use, Housing, Infrastructure, and Economics)
- Transportation Feedback
- Downtown and Parks Plan Feedback



Images from the public meetings in June 2025. Top row: the presentation done by the consultant team. Middle and bottom rows: the interactive stations and one-on-one conversations.



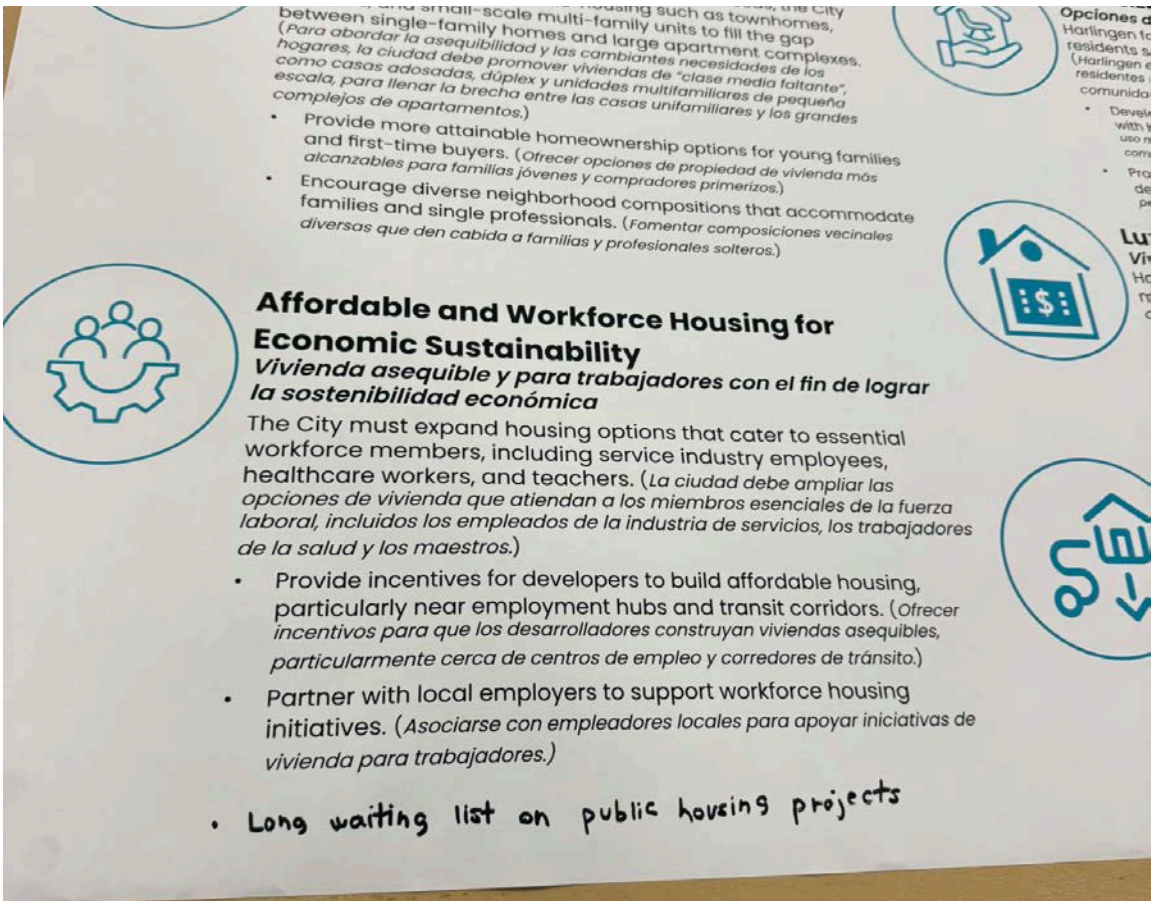
Responses indicate a desire to rename the Cultural District to the Cultural Historic District as well as to rename the Medical District to the Medical University District.

Land Use Districts

Responses

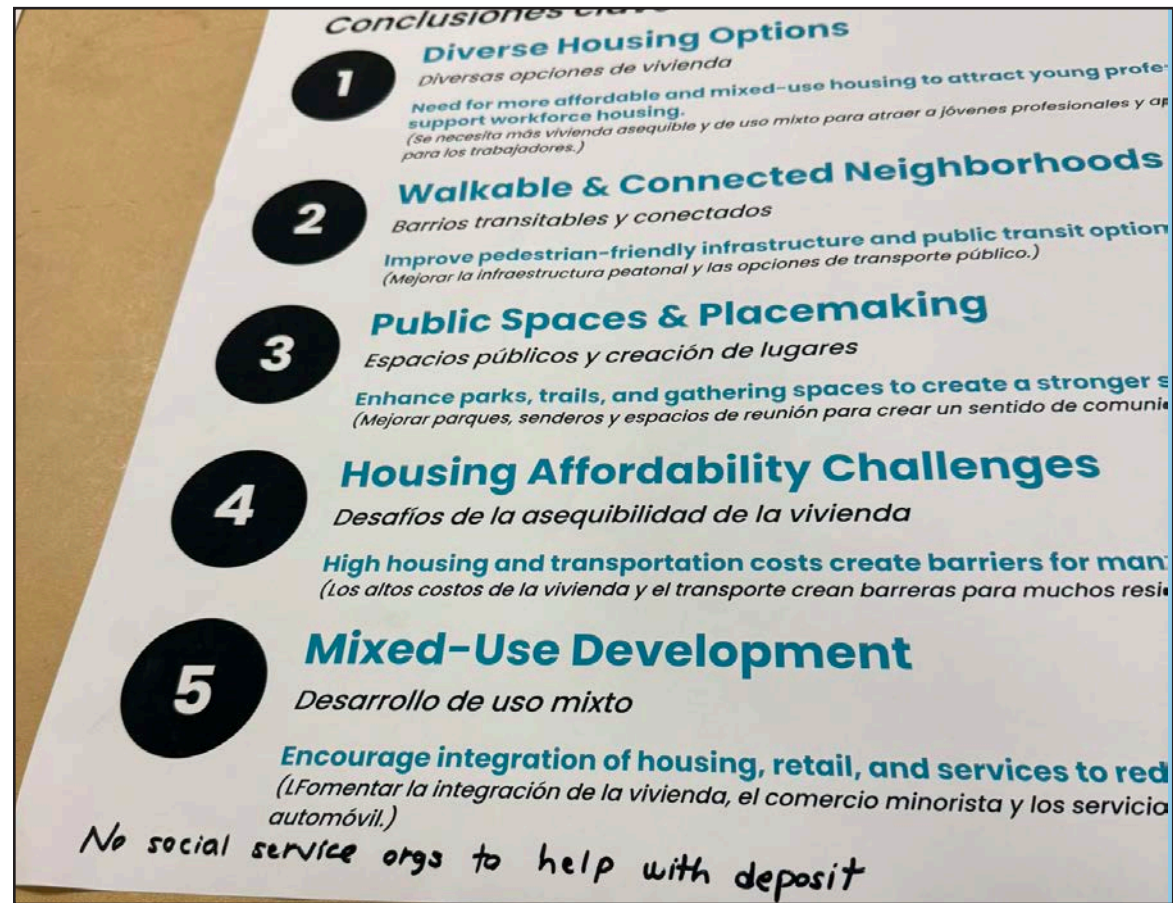
Cultural Historic District

Medical University District



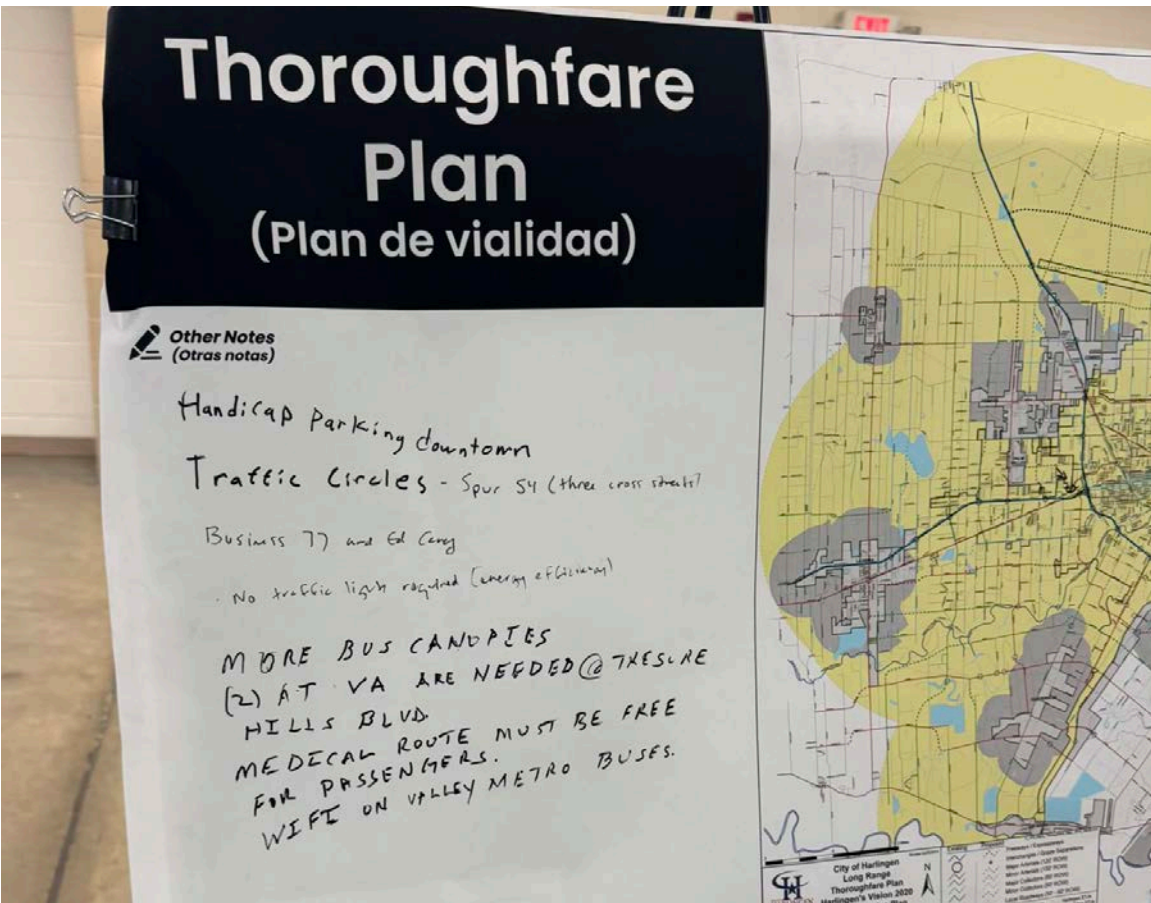
A response was received indicating that strategies need to be developed by the City to address the long waiting list for public housing projects in Harlingen.

Housing Needs and Strategies



A response was received indicating that the City needs to develop social service organizations to help with owner/rental housing deposit assistance.

Housing Assessment

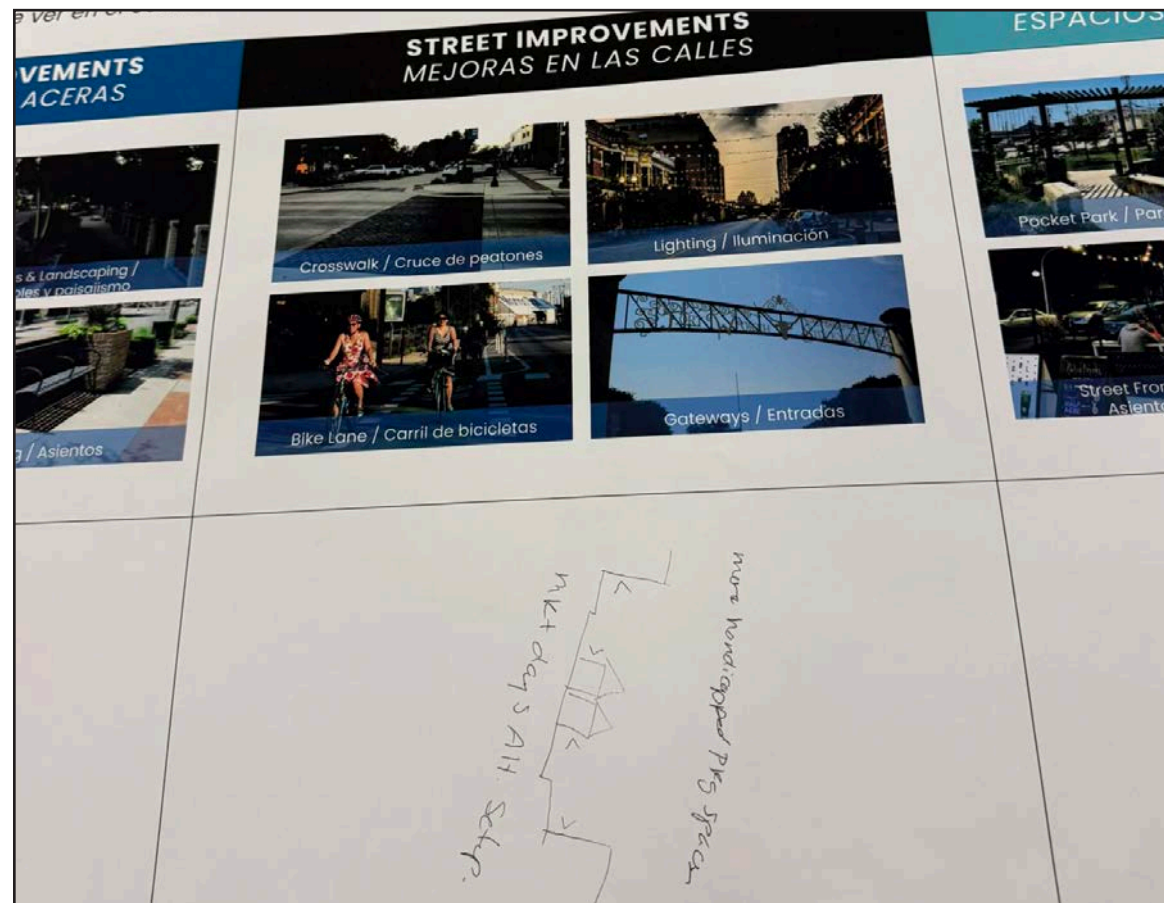


Participants identified the need to supply additional handicapped parking in Downtown Harlingen, utilize traffic circles around the City and develop additional bus shade canopies specifically on stops at Treasure Hills Blvd.

Thoroughfare Plan

Responses

- Handicap parking downtown
- Traffic circles - Spur 54 (three cross streets)
- Business 77 and Ed Carey - No traffic light required (energy efficiency)
- More bus canopies - (2) at VA are needed at Treasure Hills Blvd
- Medical route must be free for passengers
- Wifi on Valley Metro Buses

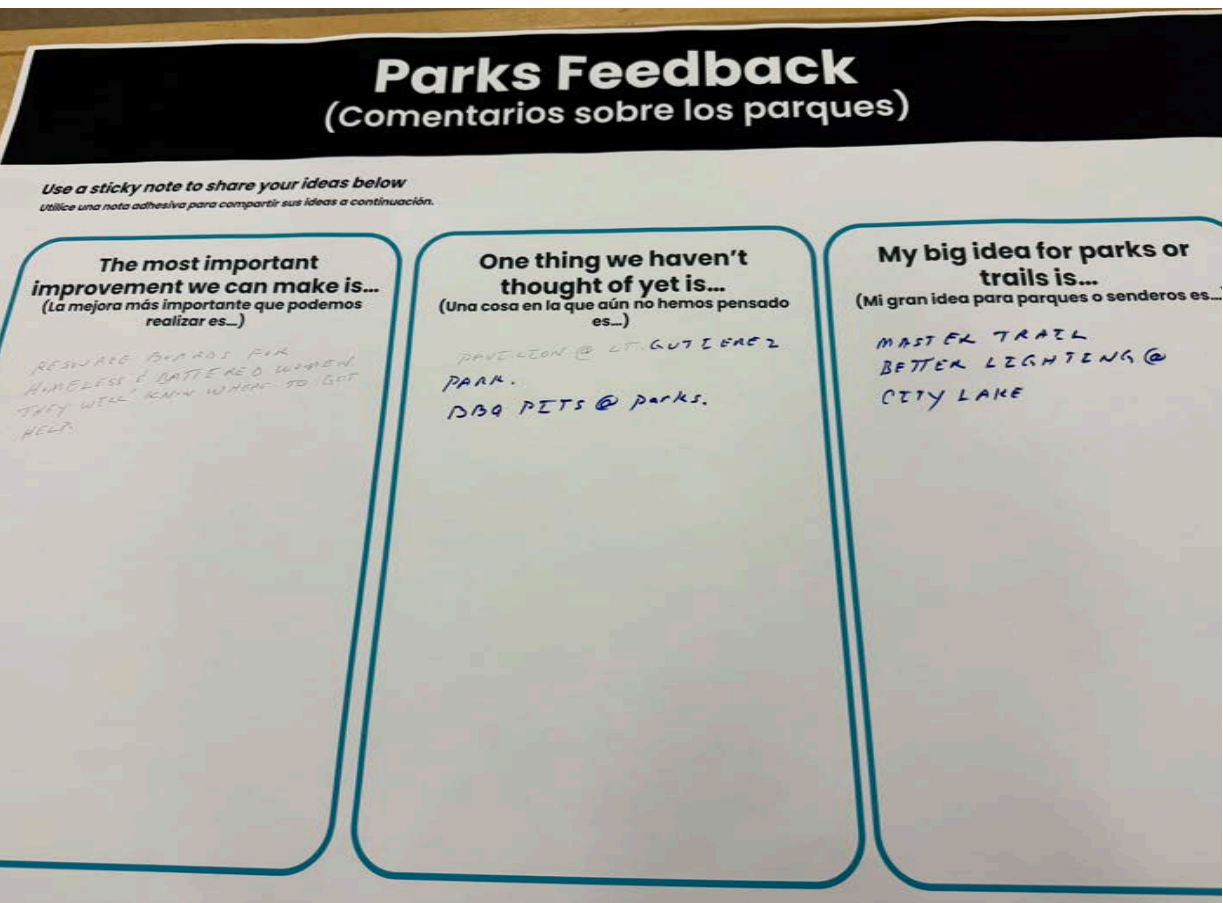


Participants indicated an alternative Market Days vendor set-up to better highlight existing businesses as well as the need for more handicapped parking.

Downtown Streetscape & Public Spaces

Responses

- More handicapped parking spaces
- Alternative Market Days set-up

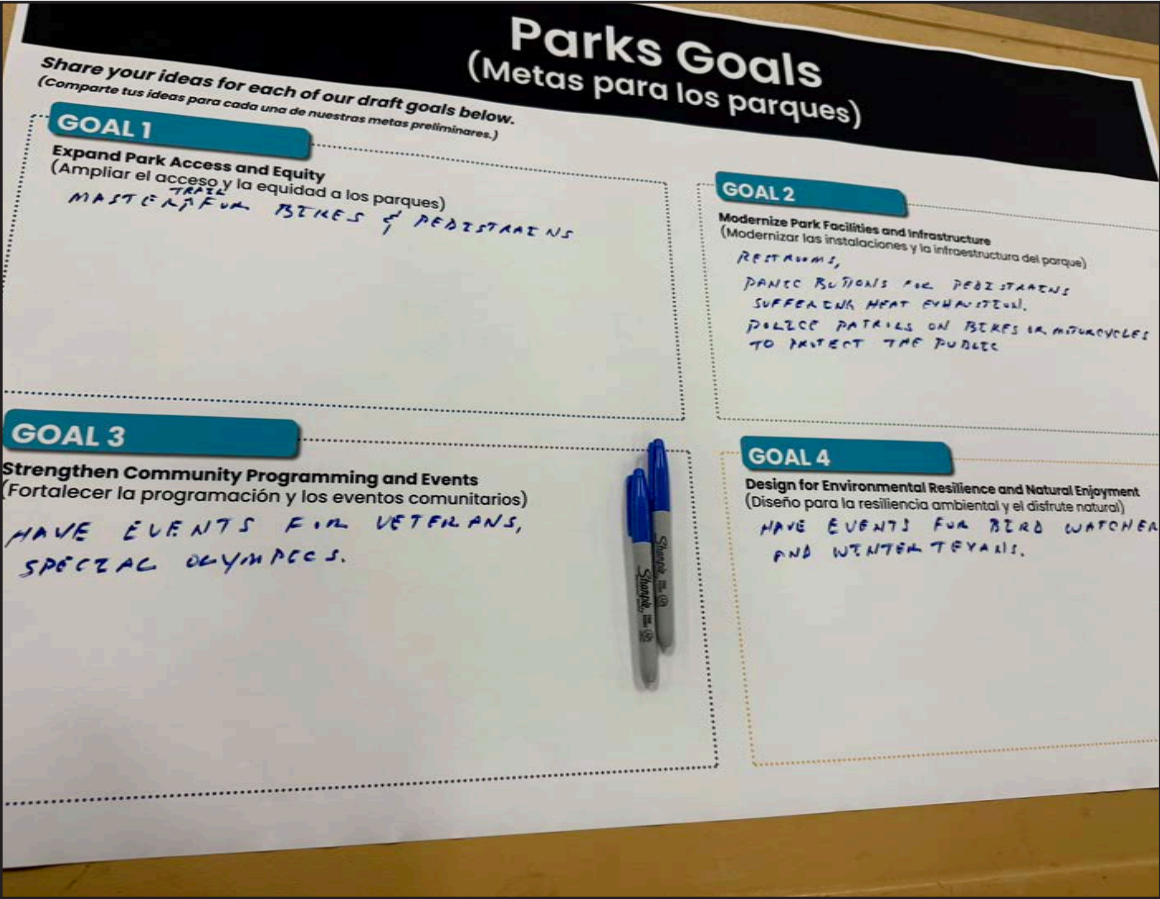


Responses included the need for an improved pavilion at Gutierrez Park, more BBQ pits across all parks, the development of a Master Trail Plan, and the improvement of lighting at Lake Harlingen.

Parks Feedback

Responses

- The most important improvement we can make is....
- Resource boards for homeless and battered women, they will know where to get help.
- One thing we haven't thought of yet is....
- Pavilion at Gutierrez Park
 - BBQ pits at parks
- My big idea for parks or trails is....
- Master Trail Plan
 - Better lighting at Lake Harlingen



Goals identified by event participants include the development of trails able to accommodate both bikes and pedestrians, the construction of additional restrooms and the deployment of bike-based police patrols within the City’s Park systems.

Parks Goals

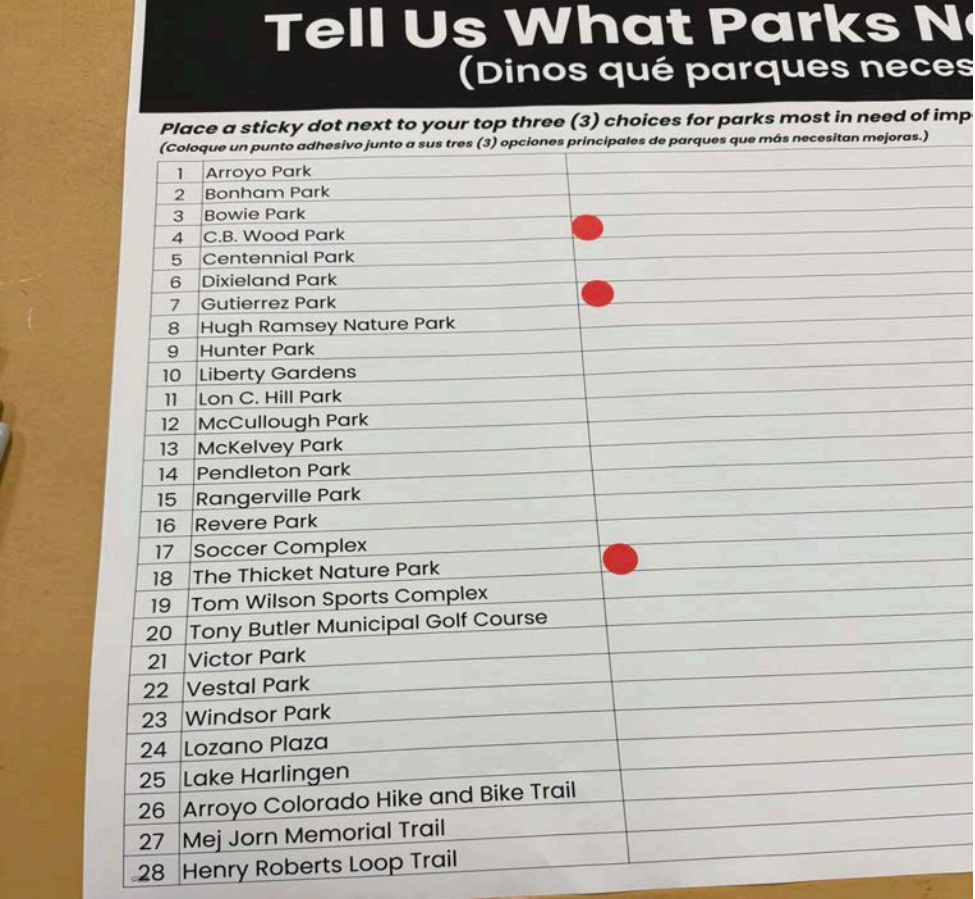
Responses

- Goal 1
- Master Trail for bikes and pedestrians

- Goal 2
- Restrooms, panic buttons for pedestrians suffering heat exhaustion.
 - Police patrols on bikes or motorcycles to protect the public.

- Goal 3
- Have events for veterans and host Special Olympics.

- Goal 4
- Have events for bird watchers and winter Texans.

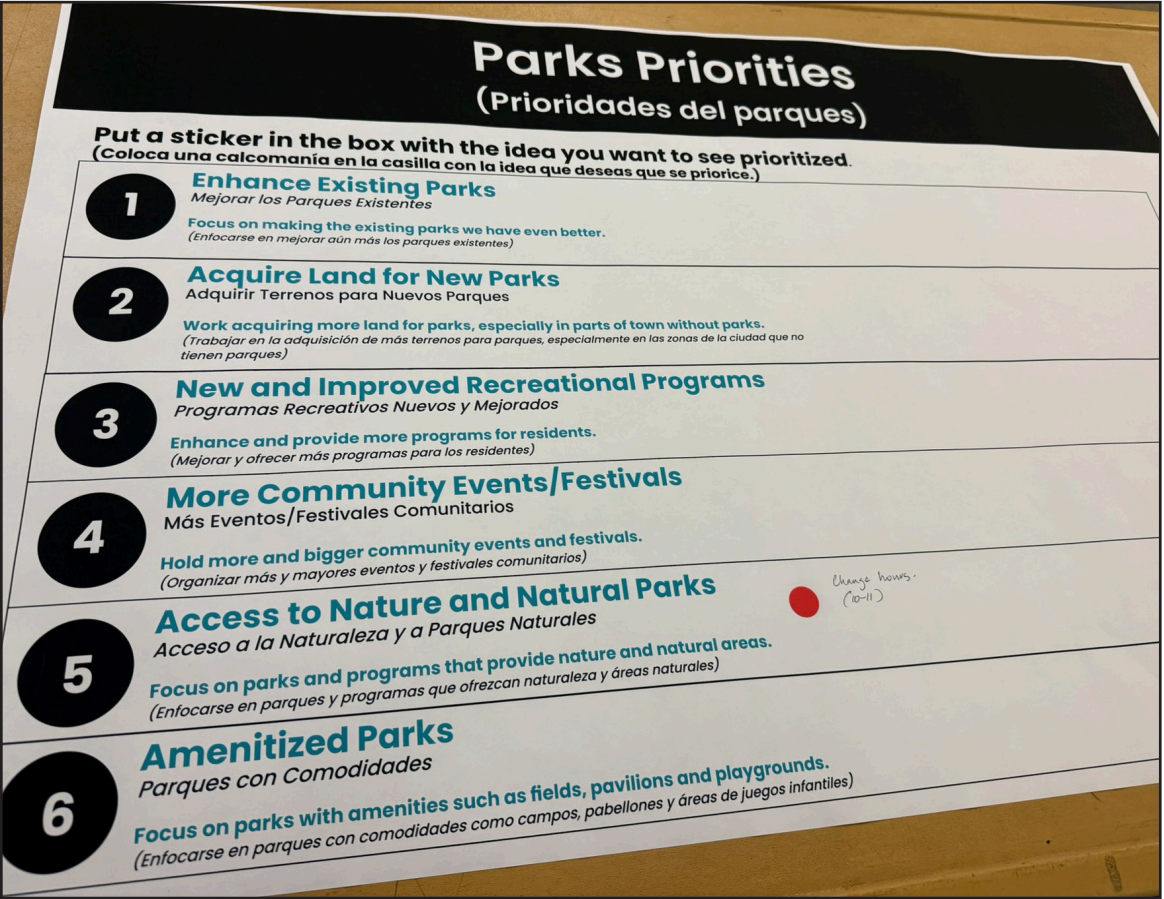


Parks identified as most need of improvement include: C.B. Wood Park, Gutierrez Park and the Thicket Nature Park.

Tell Us What Parks Need Attention

Responses

- C.B. Wood Park: 1 Dot
- Gutierrez Park: 1 Dot
- The Thicket Nature Park: 1 Dot



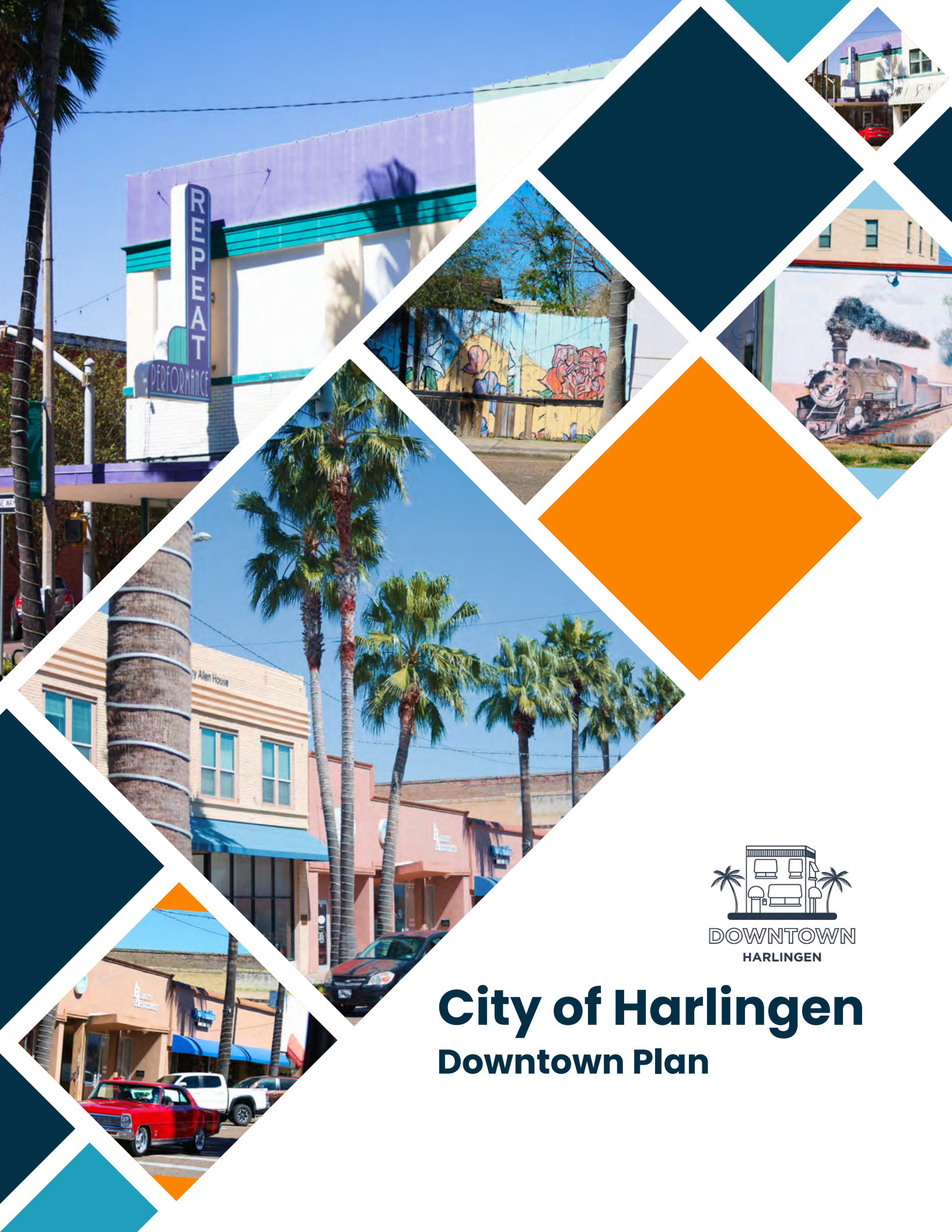
A response identified a need to update the hours for access to nature parks in Harlingen to 10AM to 11PM.

Parks Priorities

Responses

Access to Nature and Natural Parks

- Change Hours (10AM to 11PM)



City of Harlingen

Downtown Plan



Acknowledgments

City Commission

- Norma Sepulveda, Mayor
- Ford Kinsley, Commissioner - District 1
- Daniel Nemecio Lopez, Commissioner - District 2
- Michael Mezmar, Commissioner - District 3
- Frank Morales, Commissioner - District 4
- Rene Perez, Commissioner - District 5

Planning and Zoning Commission

- Nicholas P. Consiglio, Chair
- Carlos A. Sanchez, P.E., Co-Chair
- Olga Vanessa Cantu
- Wandy E. Cruz-Velazquez
- Raul L. Flores
- Sergio Perez
- Luis Villarreal

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- Lahari Peluri
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- Christopher Wesseln, AICP-C
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- Samuel Schulte
- Travis James, MBA



Plan Steering Committee

- Norma Sepulveda, Mayor
- Ford Kinsley, Commissioner - District 1
- Daniel Nemecio Lopez, Commission - District 2
- Luis Villarreal, Planning and Zoning Commission
- Sergio Perez, Planning and Zoning Commission
- Adele Clinton-Solis, Parks and Recreation Board
- Diana Esparza, Parks and Recreation Board
- Lars Keim, Downtown Advisory Board
- John Percy, Downtown Advisory Board

City Staff

- Gabriel Gonzalez, City Manager
- Dr. Josh Ramirez, Assistant City Manager
- Oscar Garcia, Assistant City Manager
- Ana Hernandez, AICP, Planning and Development Director
- Joel Olivo, Assistant Planning and Development Director
- Soledad Nunez, CNU-A, City Planner
- Daniel Diaz, Director of Parks and Recreation
- Juan Mendiola III, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation
- Alexis Riojas, Downtown Director
- Roberto Hernandez, City Engineer



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CHAPTER

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DOWNTOWN ANALYSIS

Downtown Plan

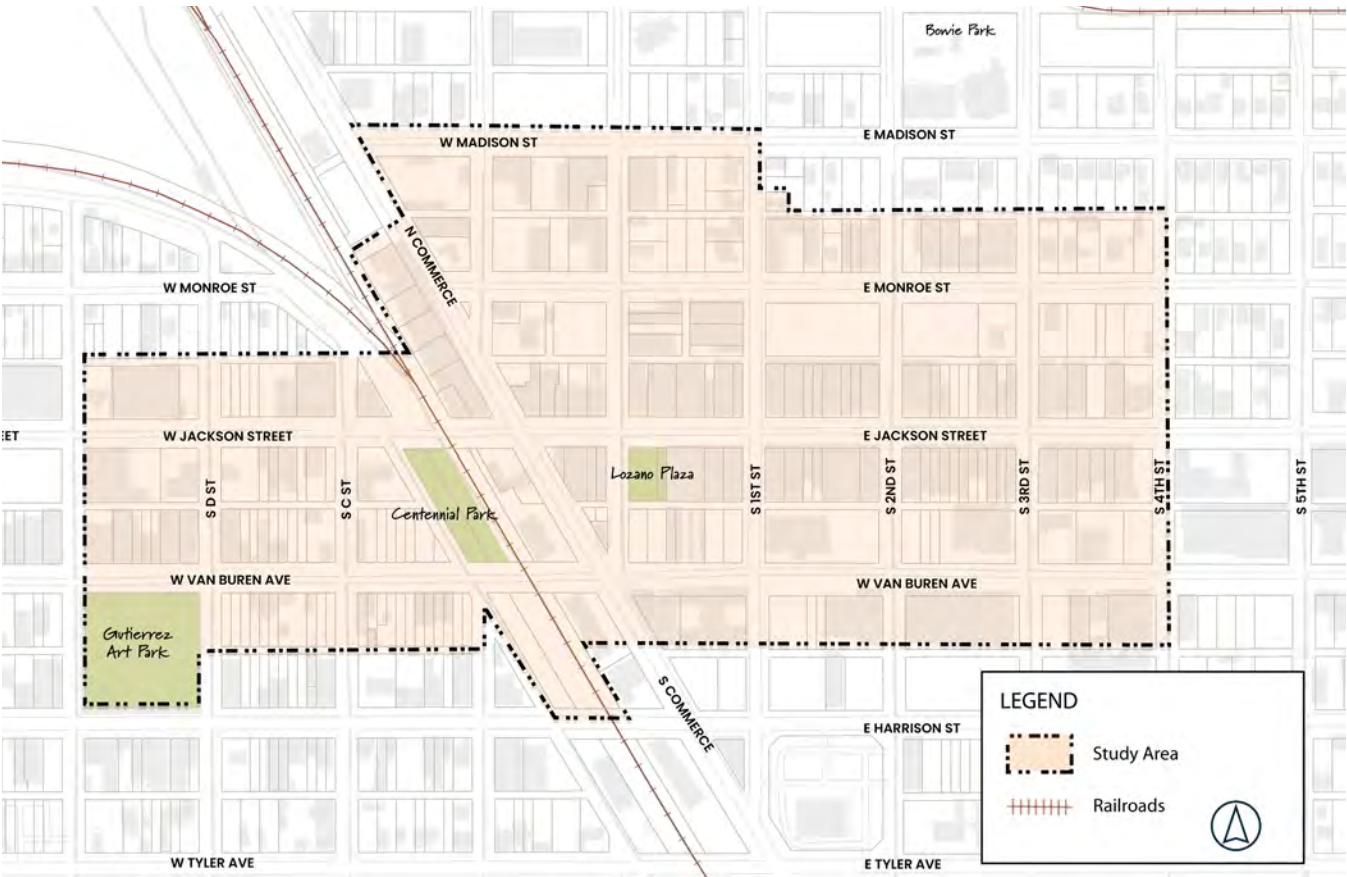
About the Plan

The Harlingen Downtown Plan outlines a strategic vision and framework for the future development of downtown. It guides streetscapes, public spaces and branding strategies to enhance the area’s identity and functionality. This Plan aims to create a vibrant, economically thriving downtown that fosters business growth, community engagement and a strong sense of place while preserving Harlingen’s unique character.

Study Area

The study area is defined by the Downtown boundary, which encompasses the historic and commercial core of Downtown Harlingen. This area serves as a center for civic, retail and cultural activities, surrounded by residential neighborhoods and public spaces. Defining this boundary is essential to directing revitalization efforts, guiding infrastructure improvements and enhancing economic opportunities in the heart of the City.

While the primary focus is Downtown Harlingen, some recommendations will extend beyond this boundary to improve connectivity, wayfinding and accessibility. These efforts will link downtown with key destinations, including major thoroughfares, public parks and transit corridors, ensuring stronger regional integration and multimodal accessibility.



Map 1. Study Area

Points of Interest

- 1 Lake Harlingen
- 2 Bowie Park
- 3 Casa Del Sol
- 4 Harlingen Community Center
- 5 Post Office
- 6 Harlingen City Hall
- 7 Gutierrez Park
- 8 Lazano Plaza
- 9 Baxter Lofts
- 10 Centennial Park
- 11 Downtown Harlingen Office

Downtown Harlingen is home to a diverse mix of civic, cultural, recreational and residential destinations that help define its unique character. These key points of interest include public parks, community facilities, historic landmarks and emerging residential anchors, each contributing to the vibrancy and accessibility of the district. Whether it’s gathering at Centennial Park, enjoying nature at Lake Harlingen, accessing services at City Hall or living downtown at Baxter Lofts, these sites represent the social and functional heart of the community. The map below highlights eleven significant locations that support everyday activity and long-term investment in Downtown Harlingen.



Map 2. Points of Interest

Introduction & Analysis

The Evolution of Downtown Harlingen



Early Growth (1900s–1930s)

Early growth driven by the St. Louis, Brownsville and Mexico Railway, iconic 1920s landmarks and the Harlingen Air Force Base, established Downtown as a hub for trade, agriculture and commerce.



Downtown Harlingen in the 1920s¹



Mid-Century Decline (1970s–1990s)

The shift to suburban retail, loss of passenger rail and the rise of Valle Vista Mall in the 1980s led to business closures and reduced foot traffic in Downtown.



Baxter Building Construction (1926)²



Cultural Resilience

Despite the decline, Downtown preserved key historic structures and remained a meaningful community gathering space.



Revitalization (2000s–Today)

Main Street Harlingen, the Downtown Improvement District, events and public art has brought new energy to Downtown, blending history with fresh vibrancy and community gathering spaces.



Downtown Harlingen Market Days (2024)³



Today & Beyond

Downtown Harlingen continues evolving as the City’s vibrant urban core, balancing preservation with progress.

Population Demographics

Population Trends

The City of Harlingen has experienced consistent population growth since the early 1900s, with only one decade of negative growth. The upward trend is projected to continue, as evidenced by a 10.8% increase in population since 2020. A growing population benefits city government by leading to increased economic opportunities, greater tax revenue and enhanced community services.

Harlingen boasts a relatively young demographic, with a median age of 33.2 years compared to the statewide median of 35.5 years. Notably, nearly a quarter of its residents are 14 years old or younger, indicating a vibrant and youthful community. Such a youthful population can be advantageous for a city, often leading to a more dynamic workforce, innovative ideas and a thriving future economy.

Figure 1. Harlingen Historic Population

Year	Population	% Change
1910	1,126	-
1920	1,784	+ 58.4%
1930	12,124	+ 579.6%
1940	13,306	+ 9.7%
1950	23,229	+ 74.6%
1960	41,207	+ 77.4%
1970	33,504	- 18.7%
1980	43,543	+ 30%
1990	48,735	+ 11.9%
2000	57,564	+ 18.1%
2010	64,849	+ 12.7%
2020	71,829	+10.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census

Figure 2. Age Comparisons

	Harlingen	Cameron County	Texas
Median Age	33.2	32.4	35.5
Children 14 and Under	24.3%	23.9%	20.8%
Young Adults (20-24)	5.3%	7.6%	6.9%
Mid-Career (35-54)	21.8%	23.4%	26.3%
Senior (65 and Over)	15.9%	14.8%	13.2%

Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Population Projections

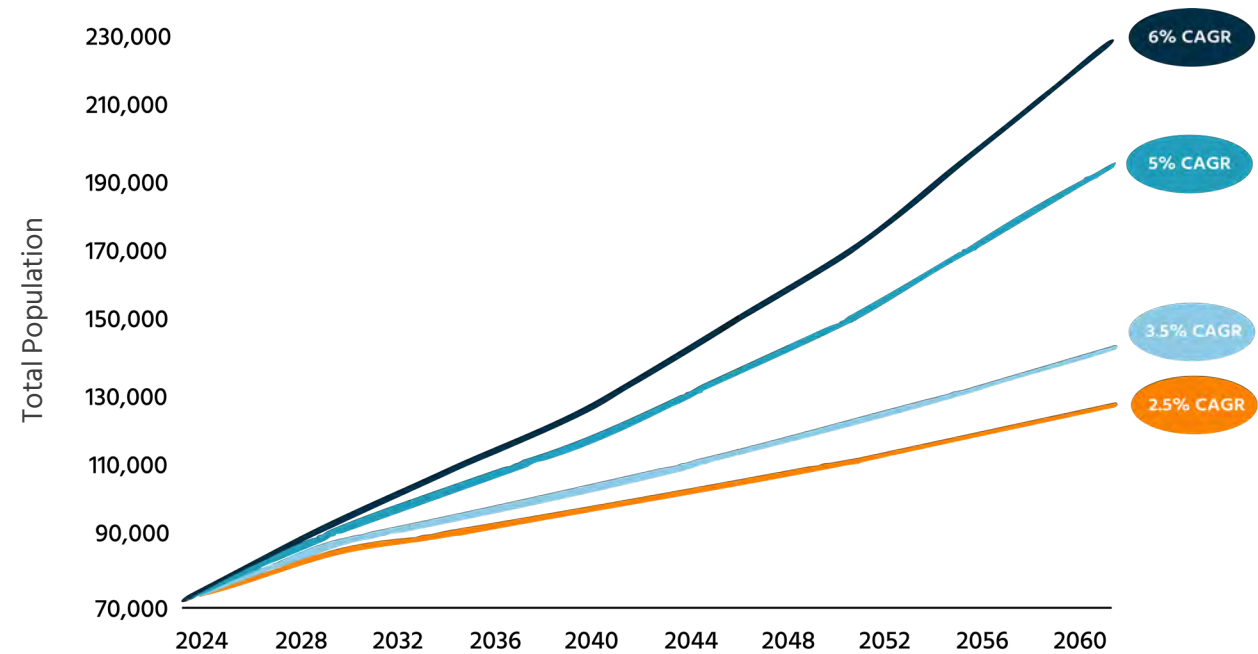
In recent decades, Harlingen’s population has grown steadily at just over 1% annually. However, the evolving economic dynamics of the Rio Grande Valley region indicate the potential for higher growth rates. With its strategic location, economic opportunities and ongoing urban development, annual growth rates between 2.5% and 6% are achievable. The following scenarios illustrate how Harlingen’s population might grow if such trends continue through 2060:

Figure 3. Harlingen Growth Scenarios

Year	2.5% CAGR	3.5% CAGR	5% CAGR	6% CAGR
2024	72,273	72,273	72,273	72,273
2030	85,436	88,347	91,482	94,673
2040	97,430	103,561	117,354	126,847
2050	111,072	121,452	150,709	170,242
2060	126,598	142,397	193,564	228,176

Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Figure 4. Harlingen Growth Scenarios Line Graph

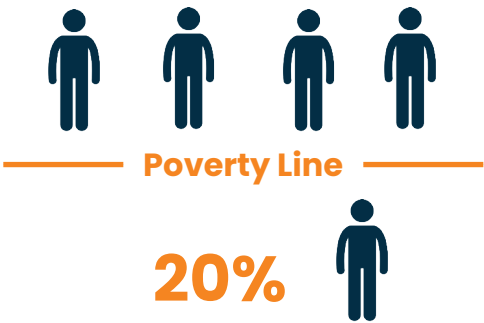


Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Income & Poverty

Income and poverty rates are key indicators of the spending power of a city’s residents. The amount of disposable income that residents have can effect retail sales, dining and entertainment, particularly in the Downtown. According to the 2023 American Community Survey, the City of Harlingen has a mean household income of \$50,367 with 20% of families living beneath the poverty line.

Lower-income households are more likely to prioritize essential goods and services over discretionary spending, potentially limiting the growth of businesses that rely on higher consumer spending. However, understanding these economic factors can help policymakers and business owners tailor their strategies, such as offering more affordable retail options, creating job opportunities and attracting outside visitors with higher spending power to boost downtown economic activity.

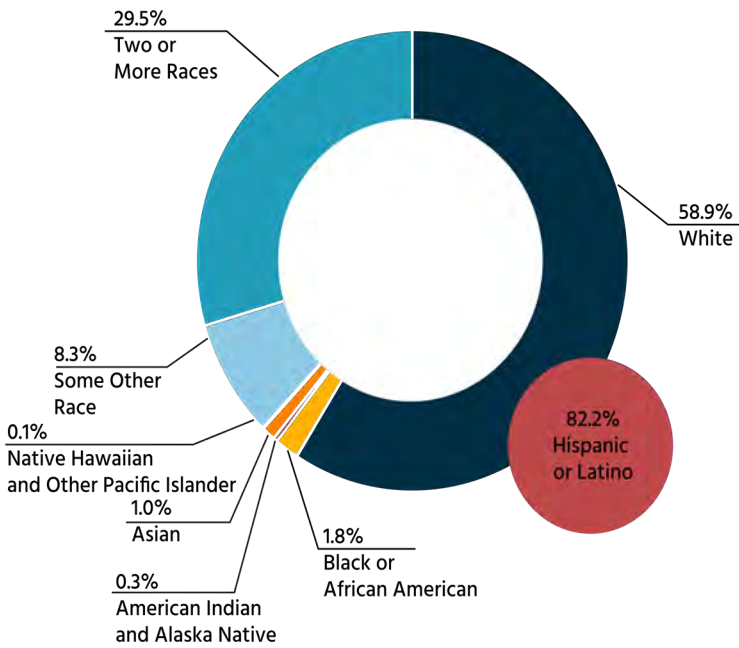


1 in 5 families in Harlingen live below the poverty line (2023 American Community Survey)

Race and Ethnicity

The City of Harlingen has a rich cultural heritage with approximately 82% of residents identifying as ethnically Hispanic or Latino. Downtown revitalization efforts should leverage the City’s unique cultural identity to attract locals and tourists alike while fostering economic and community pride. Notably, Harlingen has a large Spanish speaking population, so it is important to accommodate them through bilingual signage and programming in Spanish as well as English. By embracing the linguistic and cultural diversity of its residents, the Downtown area can provide an inclusive environment. Celebrating local traditions, cuisine and art while ensuring accessibility through bilingual initiatives will not only strengthen community engagement, but also enhance the area’s appeal to visitors. These efforts will help drive economic growth, support local businesses and solidify downtown Harlingen as a vibrant hub that reflects the rich heritage of its people.

Figure 5. Race and Ethnicity



Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Previous Planning Efforts

Harlingen Downtown Revitalization Plan

Previous local and regional planning efforts have shaped the vision for Downtown Harlingen. These efforts provide a foundation for this Plan by addressing economic development, mobility, public spaces and historic preservation. This Section highlights key past initiatives relevant to the revitalization of downtown.

The Harlingen Downtown Revitalization Plan guides strategic improvements to enhance economic vitality, walkability and identity while preserving historic character, supporting local businesses and strengthening Downtown as a regional destination. Key priorities outlined in the plan included:

- Streetscape Enhancements: Improving sidewalks, lighting and landscaping to create a pedestrian-friendly environment.
- Historic Preservation: Encouraging the adaptive reuse of historic buildings while maintaining the district’s unique architectural character.
- Public Space Improvements: Activating downtown plazas, parks and gathering spaces to foster community engagement.
- Economic Development Strategies: Supporting small businesses, retail growth and mixed-use development to attract new investment.
- Mobility & Accessibility: Enhancing multimodal transportation, including pedestrian and bicycle connections, to improve downtown access.
- Placemaking & Branding: Establishing wayfinding signage, public art installations and downtown marketing campaigns to strengthen identity.

Alignment with Comprehensive and Park Plans

The Downtown Plan builds on and aligns with Harlingen’s Comprehensive Plan and Parks Master Plan. While the Comprehensive Plan guides long-term growth and land use citywide, the Downtown Plan focuses on implementing those goals in the urban core. The Parks Plan complements both by identifying open space and connectivity improvements that support a more walkable, livable downtown. Together, these plans ensure coordinated investment across the City.

Policy and Regulatory Framework

Downtown Harlingen’s development is guided by a robust policy framework that promotes economic growth, preserves historic character and enhances urban design. These policies and regulations ensure the district remains a vibrant, safe and accessible hub for businesses, residents and visitors.

Building and Fire Regulations

Harlingen follows the International Building Code (IBC) and International Fire Code (IFC) to ensure all construction and renovations meet modern safety standards. These codes support adaptive reuse while preserving historic structures and enhancing resilience.

Zoning and Land Use Regulations

The City’s zoning supports a walkable, mixed-use downtown, with districts like Downtown Core, General Commercial and Mixed-Use Transition. The Subdivision Ordinance promotes orderly development, while the Planning & Zoning Commission helps ensure growth aligns with the area’s character.

Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) and Incentives

The Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) funds key improvements, such as utility upgrades and façade restorations to attract private investment. Incentives like preservation grants further support property owners committed to revitalization.

Historic Preservation Efforts

Harlingen is a designated Texas Main Street City, with downtown revitalization efforts led by Main Street Harlingen and supported by the Downtown Improvement District. These programs focus on restoring historic buildings, enhancing public spaces and promoting local businesses, with design guidelines in place to preserve the area’s historic character.

Economic Development Initiatives

Beyond the TIRZ, the City uses grants to support downtown infrastructure, business recruitment and beautification. The Harlingen Economic Development Corporation (EDC) works to attract and retain investment in the area.

Comprehensive Planning

Harlingen’s ongoing Comprehensive Plan update prioritizes downtown revitalization. Through public input and long-term strategies, the Plan focuses on improving land use, transportation, housing and public amenities to strengthen downtown’s role as a regional hub.

Parking Policies

Special downtown regulations remove off-street parking requirements for reuse of existing buildings or similarly sized new ones. This encourages adaptive reuse and supports a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Overlay District and Design Standards

Harlingen’s Downtown Overlay District introduces additional design guidance to preserve character and enhance walkability.

Downtown Zoning Districts

Downtown Harlingen is shaped by a combination of base zoning districts that work together to support a walkable, vibrant and historically rooted urban center.

The base zoning districts in the downtown area include categories such as General Retail, Central Business and Commercial, which allow for a flexible mix of uses such as retail, dining, office space and residential development. This zoning mix encourages active street life and supports reinvestment in existing buildings.

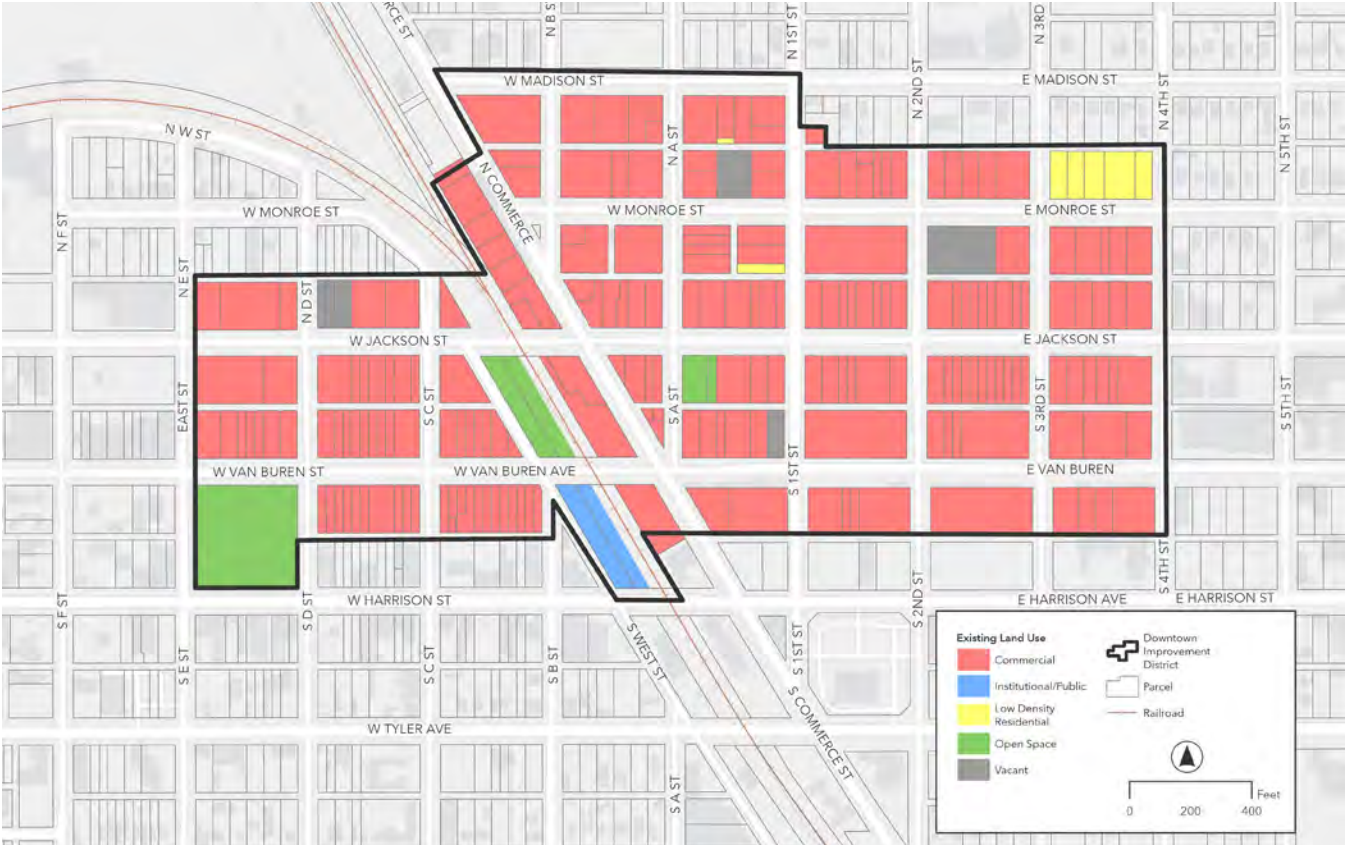
Design criteria ensure new development and renovations contribute to a cohesive and pedestrian-friendly environment. These standards address:

- Building placement and setbacks to support active streetscape.
- Facade transparency and entrance orientation for walkability.
- Signage regulations that respect the historic character.
- Compatibility with surrounding context, particularly for infill projects.

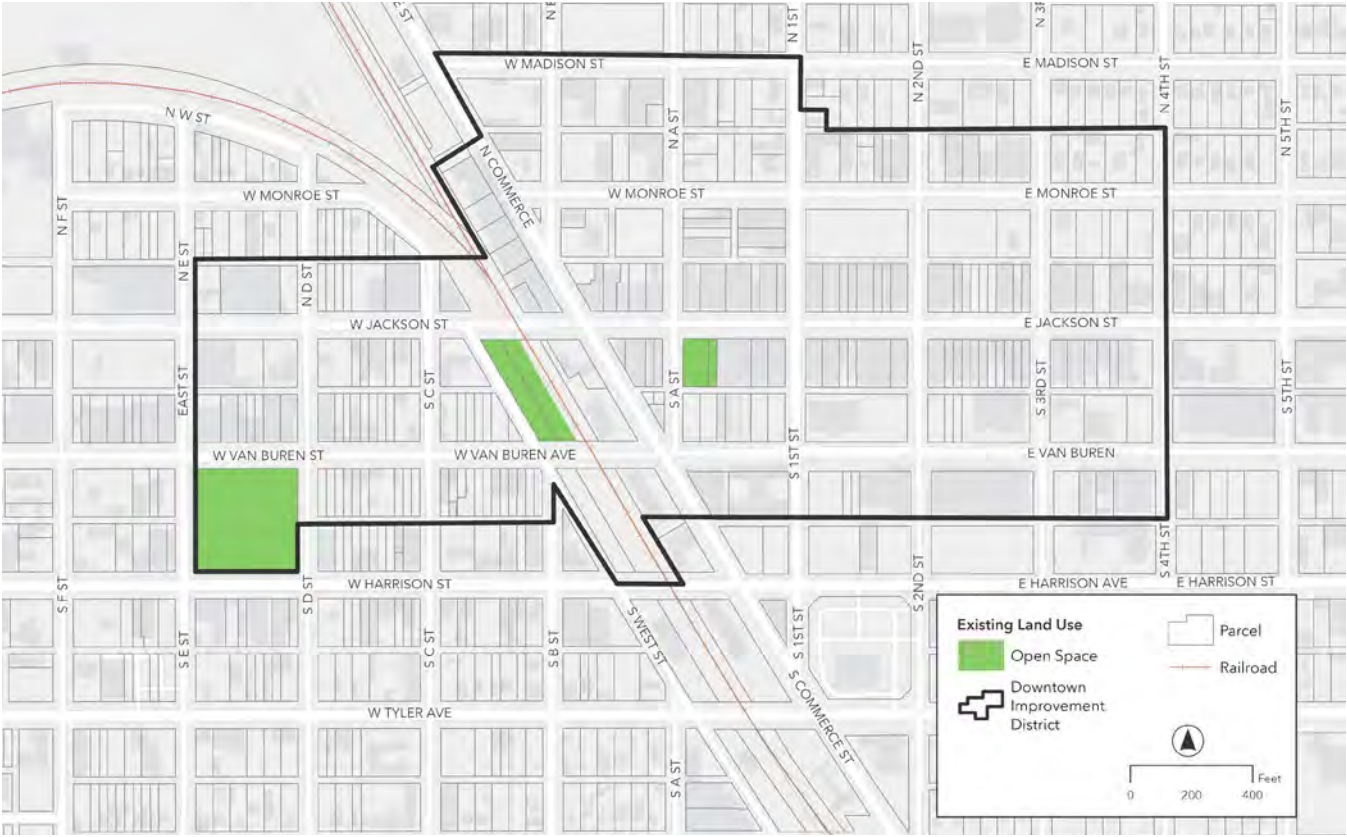
The zoning framework also promotes historic preservation and adaptive reuse, helping to retain the unique identity of Harlingen’s historic core.

Downtown Existing Land Use

The existing land use pattern within the Downtown is predominantly commercial, concentrated along key corridors such as Commerce, Jackson, and Van Buren Streets. Institutional and public uses occupy strategic sites near the rail corridor, complemented by open spaces and low-density residential areas that transition toward surrounding neighborhoods. Vacant parcels scattered throughout downtown present opportunities for infill and redevelopment, reinforcing the district’s potential for a more vibrant and mixed-use environment.



Map 3. Existing Land Use Map

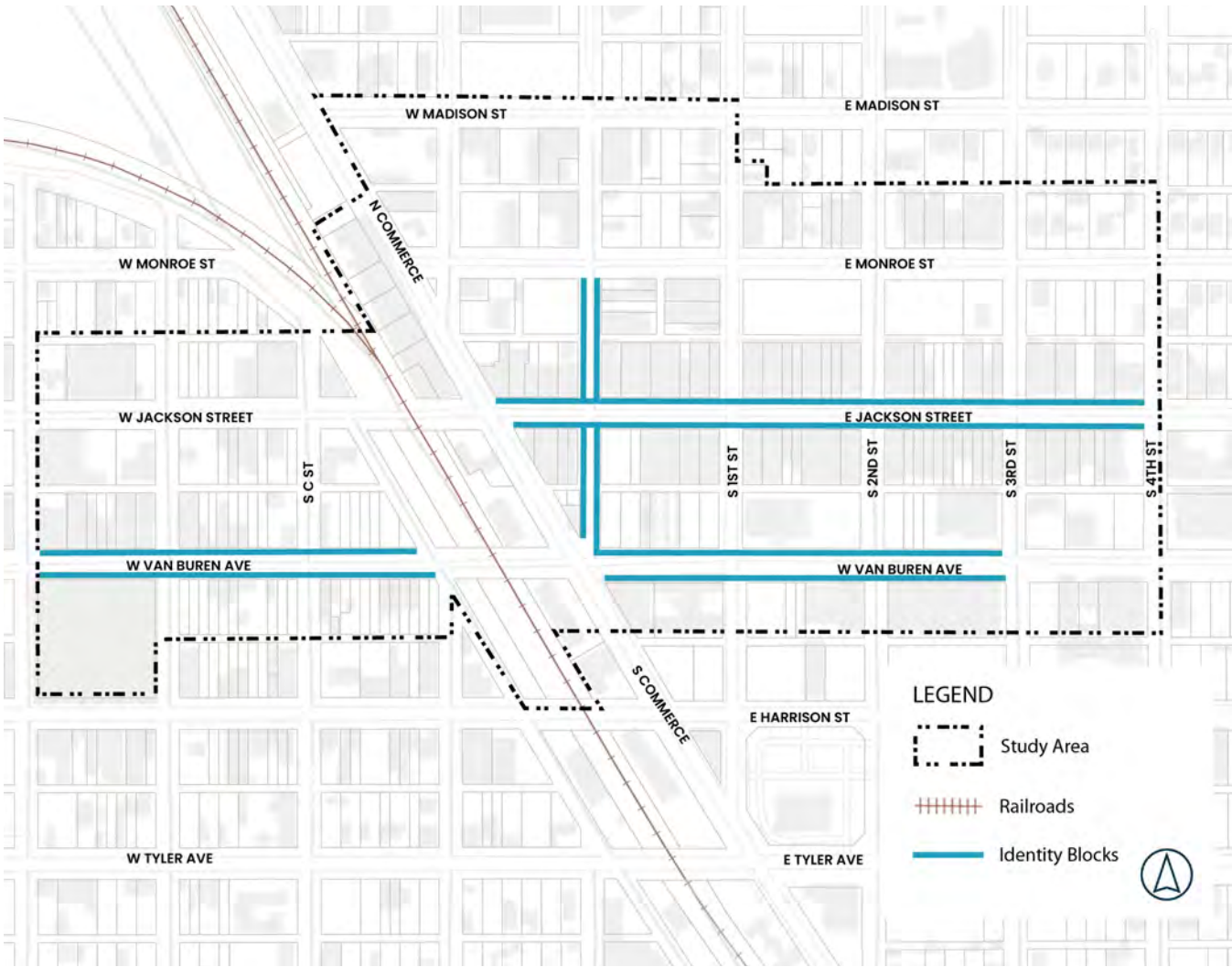


Map 4. Downtown Open Space Map

Identity Blocks

The areas identified in blue are blocks with the strongest existing identity and investment based on current conditions in Harlingen. Identity relates to an area’s character, look, feel and activity level. Among the blocks in the study area, the following generally attract the highest number of visitors. The largest portion of identity blocks are located along the primary thoroughfares connecting Downtown Harlingen, including Jackson Street and Van Buren Avenue. There is also increasing investment in the west side of Downtown along Van Buren Avenue.

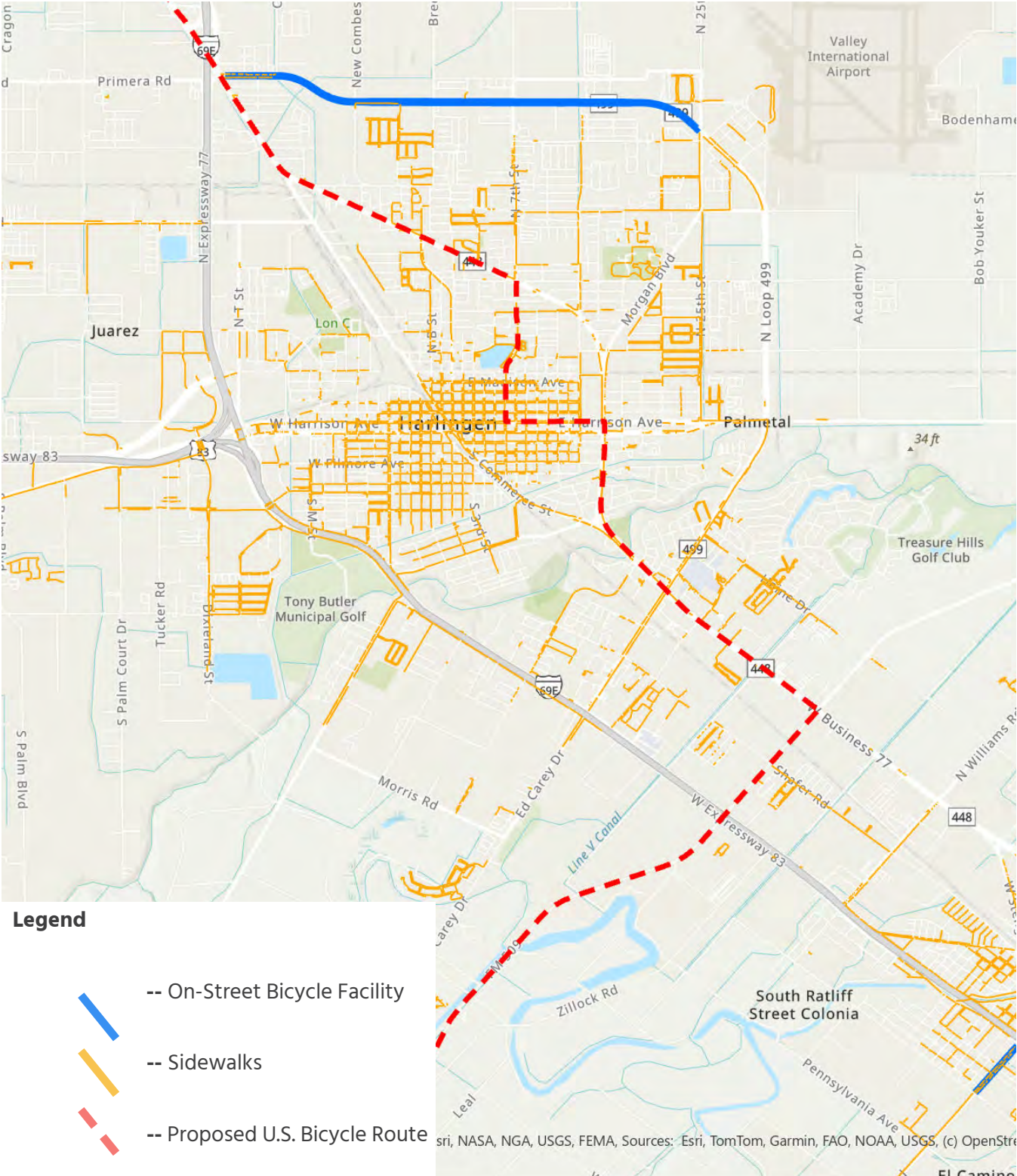
- Identity Blocks include:
- Jackson Street between N Commerce Street to S 4th Street.
 - A Street between W Van Buren Avenue and E Monroe Street.
 - W Van Buren Avenue between A Street and S 3rd Street.
 - W Van Buren Avenue between S West Street and S E Street.



Map 5. Existing Strongest Identity Blocks

Existing Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure

Harlingen’s existing sidewalk and bike network provides key connections across the city, particularly around Downtown and major corridors. The proposed U.S. Bicycle Route will further enhance regional connectivity and active transportation options.



Map 6. Existing Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure

Public Input Summary

Plans Steering Committee

The Plans Steering Committee (PSC) plays a pivotal role in the development of the Downtown Plan. The PSC works to ensure City staff and consultants are in close alignment with the community’s needs and vision, as gathered during various opportunities for public input and feedback. The PSC not only provides guidance but also shapes the general vision for the plan, offering insights into effective community engagement strategies. The PSC served as a key bridge between the Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan and Parks Plan, ensuring alignment and integration across all three planning efforts. By leveraging their expertise and taking into account public input, the PSC is integral to both the process and development of plan recommendations. Apart from the consultants and City staff who form the “primary” project team, the PSC members are the individuals most closely involved in the process.

The Steering Committee conducted three meetings at Harlingen City Hall during the process, which were open for public observation. Each session reviewed the progress of the plan, public input received and requested feedback on draft deliverables to lay the groundwork for future recommendations. The meetings centered on the following topics:

- Kickoff and Data Analysis
- Public Engagement Plan
- Community Feedback
- Vision and Goals
- Draft Deliverables
- Plan Implementation



Plans Steering Committee Meeting

Stakeholder Meeting

As part of the Downtown planning process, a focused stakeholder listening session was held on February 24, 2025 to gather in-depth feedback from key user groups. Participants included local business owners in Downtown Harlingen along with members of the Downtown Advisory Board. The session provided an opportunity for these stakeholders to share firsthand experiences, challenges and priorities related to Downtown Harlingen.

Key Priorities Identified:

- Shops need extended business hours to stay open later, and more office space is required to attract businesses to Downtown.
- Increase the number of Downtown events and enhance security.
- Develop a dedicated district to boost nightlife and dining options.
- Encourage residential uses in Downtown to generate interest in local businesses and stores.

Key Concerns Raised:

- A common complaint is the lack of consistent store hours among shops.
- Downtown infrastructure has problems, specifically with clay pipes, sidewalks and curbs.
- The Fire District Overlay poses challenges for the Downtown District.
- Concerns about walkability and accessibility remain a barrier for some visitors in Downtown Harlingen, contributing to ongoing image challenges.

Public Engagement

As part of the broader Harlingen Comprehensive Plan engagement process, the first opportunity for public input on Downtown Harlingen took place on February 24, 2025, at the Harlingen Community Center. Hosted by the City and facilitated by Freese & Nichols, the open house invited community members to learn about the overall planning process and share their ideas. Among several topic areas, a dedicated station focused specifically on Downtown allowed attendees to provide input on downtown-related issues such as land use, transportation, housing, parks and public space.

Key Priorities Identified:

- Enhance the nighttime environment with more lighting, events and safety improvements.
- Attract more dining, retail and entertainment options that align with community interests.
- Improve walkability and pedestrian safety through upgraded sidewalks and streetscape enhancements.
- Increase awareness of downtown offerings and encourage more community-wide participation.

Key Concerns Raised:

- Many residents noted infrastructure issues, including outdated sidewalks and a lack of public restrooms.
- Safety concerns were common, with several requests for more lighting and increased law enforcement presence.
- Some participants felt downtown needs more inviting spaces and activities for families and young people. Accessibility for walking and biking remains a challenge, especially for those with mobility concerns.

Downtown Feedback

The following SWOT analysis reflects insights gathered through the Downtown Harlingen planning process, including community surveys, public open houses, the Plans Steering Committee and stakeholder meetings. Residents and stakeholders shared firsthand perspectives on Downtown’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.

STRENGTHS

Community Spirit & Identity

Harlingen’s people are proud of their small-town charm, cultural roots and family-oriented environment. Events like Market Days and Art Nights reflect strong community bonds and a desire to gather, connect and celebrate.



Mixed-Use & Redevelopment Potential

There’s growing interest in transforming Downtown’s upper floors into housing and promoting live-work-play spaces. Stakeholders and residents support mixed-use developments, boutique retail and adaptive reuse projects.

Social Gathering Spaces

Downtown Harlingen is a valued hub for meeting friends, attending events and engaging with neighbors. Its social role is central to how residents experience and enjoy the district.



Strong Desire for Activation & Investment

Residents are eager for improvements, calling for more dining, upgraded storefronts, safer lighting and family-friendly spaces. Community feedback shows strong momentum for revitalizing downtown.

Bi-Cultural Economic Gateway

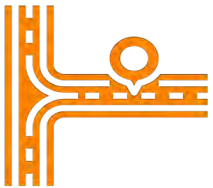
With strong international ties and border proximity, Harlingen benefits from cultural richness and economic potential tied to bi-national trade, tourism and commerce.



WEAKNESSES

Infrastructure Deficiencies

Sidewalks, curbs and drainage systems across Downtown are in poor condition, making walking difficult and deterring investment in upper-floor residential uses.



Lack of Evening Activity

Shops often close early, and many residents feel there aren’t enough restaurants, activities or events to keep Downtown lively and safe after dark.

Underutilized Second Floors

Fire safety codes and outdated infrastructure limit the ability to develop second-floor spaces, especially for residential or mixed-use purposes.



Limited Public Amenities

There are no consistent or accessible public restrooms, minimal shade or benches, and limited space for families or children, which reduces dwell time.

Lack of Consistent Business Hours

Downtown businesses do not follow regular or extended hours, making it difficult for visitors to plan shopping, dining or leisure around store availability.



OPPORTUNITIES

Second-Floor & Infill Activation

Vacant second floors and underutilized properties like the Madison Hotel and PNC Bank offer potential for new residential, office or creative spaces. Addressing fire code and infrastructure barriers could unlock major investment.



Strong Desire for Activation & Investment

Downtown Harlingen has strong public support for transformation, with clear demand for new experiences and improved aesthetics. Targeted investments can unlock economic vitality and year-round activity.

Placemaking & Public Realm Enhancements

Invest in alley activations, improved lighting (solar preferred) and beautification efforts along key corridors like Commerce Street and Van Buren. These improvements can elevate Downtown's experience and boost safety.



Mobility & Transit Improvements

Downtown lacks pedestrian infrastructure and a modern transit hub. Residents support the construction of a new central bus station, safer crossings, bike lanes and better Valley Metro connections.

Cultural & Nightlife Growth

The public is asking for more evening activities, diverse restaurants and entertainment options. Establishing a bar and restaurant district, and promoting night markets and seasonal events, can increase vibrancy and economic impact.



THREATS

Flooding and Climate Impacts

Frequent flooding, especially near schools and Downtown, combined with extreme heat, threatens infrastructure and discourages pedestrian activity.



Lack of Sustainable Funding

Losing PID funding, many downtown projects from maintenance to programming lack the consistent financial support needed to succeed.

Increasing Economic Vulnerability

Ongoing poverty, aging infrastructure and housing shortages pose risks to long-term Downtown vitality, particularly without targeted equity investments.





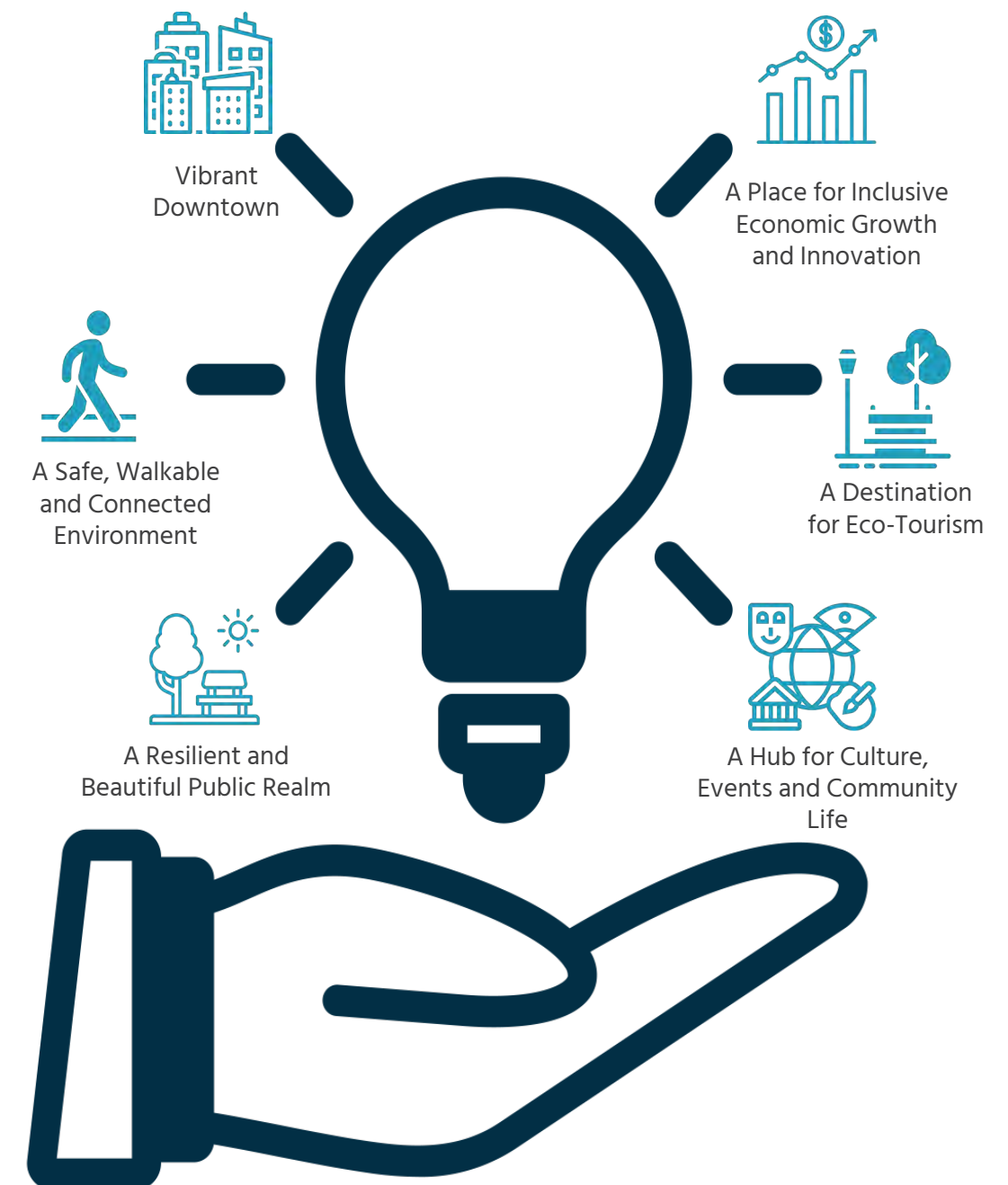
Community Vision Statement

Downtown Harlingen will be a vibrant, mixed-use center where people live, work and gather. Its walkable streets, safe connections and accessible transit will invite movement and exploration. Cultural events, local dining and community spaces will foster a lively and inclusive atmosphere. The Arroyo and surrounding trails will connect nature lovers to Harlingen's unique eco-identity. Downtown will be a welcoming and active place for everyone.

Vision Elements

Community vision for Harlingen

Members of the community helped planners identify six key “vision elements” that form the foundation of the Downtown Plan. These elements guide the plan’s goals, ensuring Harlingen’s growth aligns with community priorities and long-term aspirations.



Vision Elements



Vibrant Downtown



A Safe, Walkable and Connected Environment



A Resilient and Beautiful Public Realm



A Place for Inclusive Economic Growth and Innovation



A Destination for Eco-Tourism



A Hub for Culture, Events and Community Life

Goals

In 2025, Downtown Harlingen will be...

A lively district where housing, retail, dining and community life thrive together in a walkable, human-scaled environment.

A Downtown where everyone, regardless of age or ability, can move safely and comfortably on foot, bike or transit.

A place where Harlingen’s creativity and community spirit come alive through public art, festivals and shared experiences.

A Downtown that is clean, green, flood-resilient and visually inviting for everyday use and special occasions alike.

A gateway to the Arroyo, birding trails and the natural beauty that defines Harlingen’s sense of place.

A Downtown that welcomes investment and entrepreneurship while ensuring access for all residents and business types.

Objectives

- Promote mixed-use zoning that supports diverse housing and commercial uses.
- Convert vacant or underused properties, including second floors, into active spaces.
- Offer incentives for small businesses and creative startups to locate downtown.
- Establish consistent business hours to support evening and weekend activity.
- Encourage locally owned restaurants, boutiques and experiential retail.
- Attract anchor uses like co-working hubs or public markets to increase foot traffic.
- Build and maintain wide sidewalks, street trees and ADA-compliant crossings.
- Expand solar lighting and visibility features to improve nighttime safety.
- Complete bike lanes and shared paths that link Downtown to nearby parks and neighborhoods.
- Improve Valley Metro bus service and complete the new central station.
- Calm traffic with design interventions like curb bump-outs and crosswalk art.
- Prioritize pedestrian access to key destinations like parks, schools and civic buildings.
- Expand regular events like Market Days, Art Nights and seasonal festivals.
- Activate alleys, courtyards and underused plazas for pop-ups or performances.
- Encourage mural programs and local art installations across Downtown.
- Establish a bar and restaurant district with coordinated programming and safety.
- Create flexible public spaces that can host concerts, farmers markets or community gatherings.
- Upgrade outdated drainage and address flooding hot spots in the Downtown core.
- Enhance landscaping with native plants, trees and sustainable materials.
- Redevelop vacant lots into small plazas, pocket parks or community gardens.
- Maintain alleys, signage, trash areas and lighting to ensure cleanliness and safety.
- Use public art and street furnishings to enhance identity and comfort.
- Design new spaces to be flexible, durable and responsive to future needs.
- Improve signage, access and trailheads for the Arroyo Colorado trail system.
- Promote birdwatching, hiking and eco-tourism as part of Downtown identity.
- Host nature-centered events and interpretive programming in parks or along trails.
- Protect green corridors that connect Downtown to natural features.
- Encourage eco-friendly businesses such as bike rentals and outdoor gear shops.
- Incorporate native landscaping and stormwater features in new public spaces.
- Provide façade, signage and tenant improvement grants for small businesses.
- Use local government tools to incentivize private reinvestment.
- Attract a mix of businesses that serve diverse income levels and interests.
- Support underrepresented entrepreneurs through outreach and partnerships.
- Encourage redevelopment of vacant buildings into coworking or incubator spaces.
- Promote jobs and training tied to creative, tech and maker industries.



CHAPTER
2

DOWNTOWN
FRAMEWORK



Proposed Downtown Framework Plan

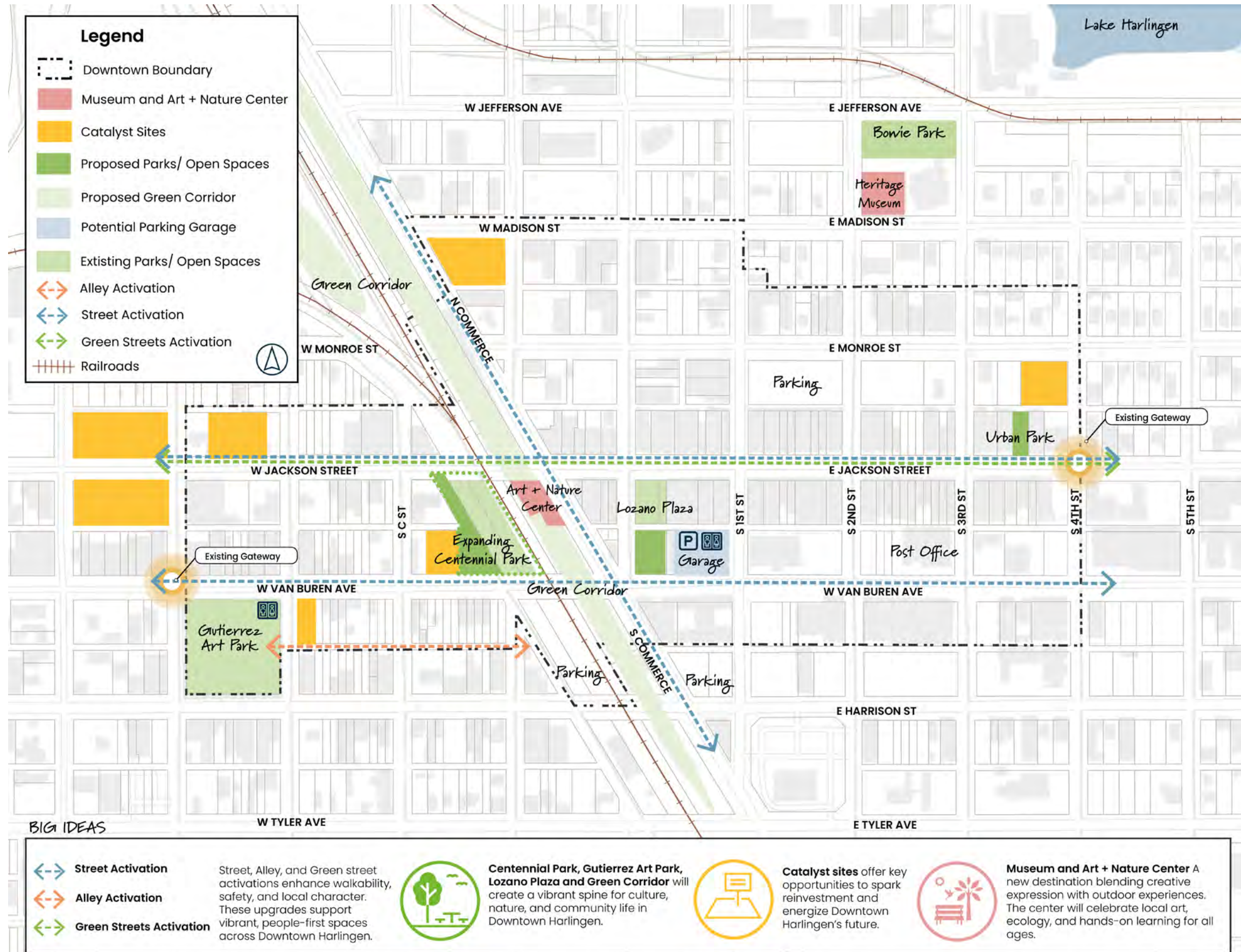
A framework plan for Downtown Harlingen consists of roadways, open spaces and other public realm elements that define and connect downtown development. These components form the fabric that holds the district together. The framework organizes key components into four categories: catalyst sites, character areas, open space and mobility. Within this framework, a series of development opportunities, ranging from new buildings to enhancements in the public realm have been identified to support future investment, strengthen connections and guide downtown growth.

- Catalyst Sites – Priority areas in Downtown Harlingen that are positioned for major redevelopment and investment, with the potential to become signature destinations.
- Character Areas – Distinct sub-areas within the downtown that reflect unique identities and assets, helping to guide tailored and strategic investment.
- Open Spaces – Parks, plazas and other public gathering places that provide venues for recreation, events and community interaction in the heart of Harlingen.
- Mobility – Enhancements to transportation infrastructure, including streets, sidewalks, bike facilities and wayfinding, that contribute significantly to the function and experience of Downtown Harlingen.

Together, these elements support a connected, accessible and walkable downtown. Strategic investment across these categories can enhance the local business environment, attract visitors and create a more vibrant and cohesive district that aligns with the guiding principles of the Harlingen Comprehensive Plan.

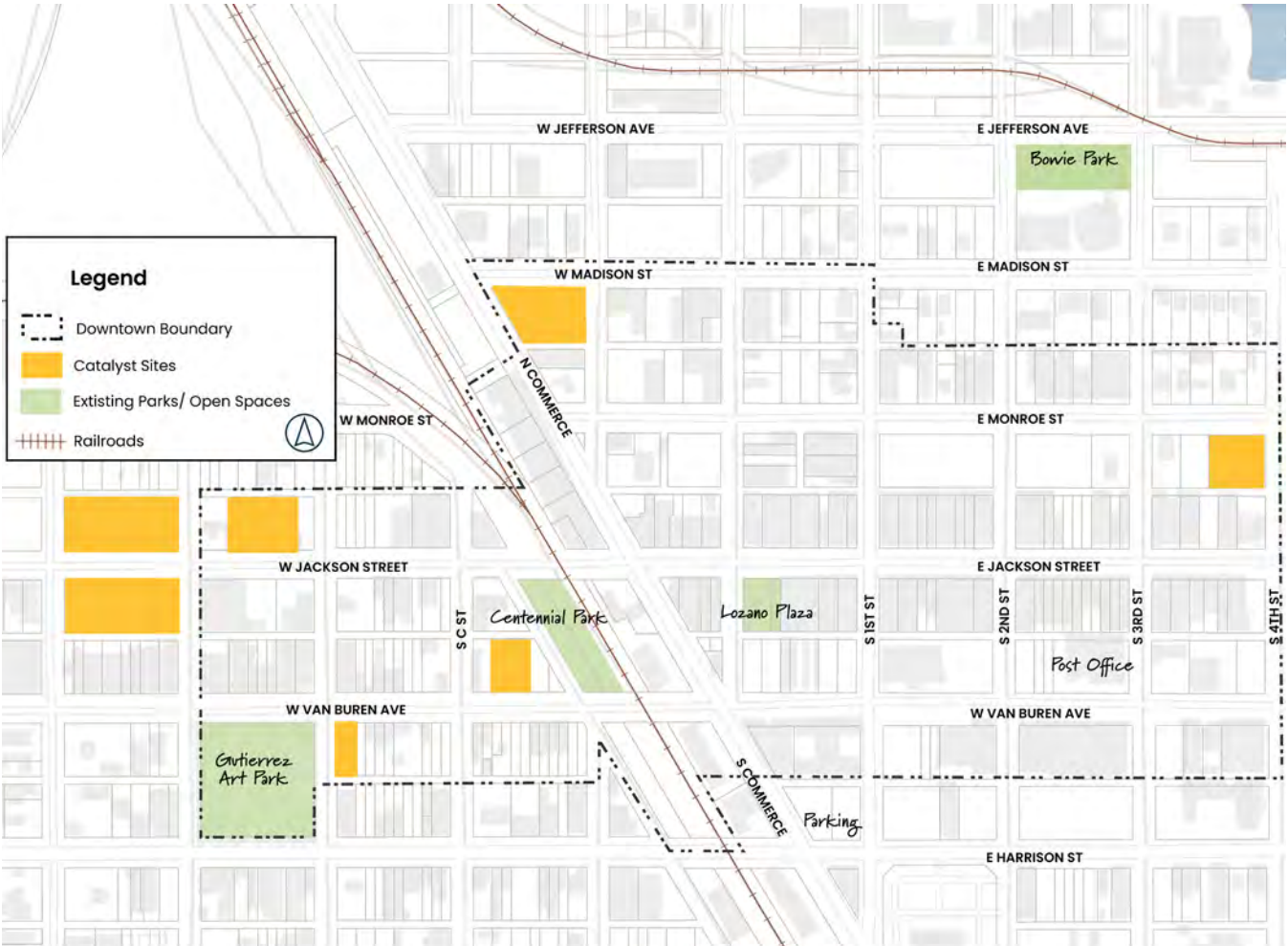
The Downtown Framework is shown on the following pages. It provides a closer look at each element of the framework.





Map 7. Downtown Overall Framework

Catalyst Sites



Map 8. Catalyst Sites

Catalyst sites are key opportunity areas that can significantly shape the future of Downtown Harlingen by attracting investment, promoting redevelopment and enhancing the public realm. These sites were identified based on visibility, location, ownership patterns and potential to support the community’s broader goals for downtown vitality, walkability and economic activity.

Catalyst sites are underutilized properties with strategic potential to advance housing, civic, cultural and public realm goals in Downtown Harlingen.

W Madison Street – Catalyst Site

Situated at a key gateway along the Green Corridor and adjacent to the historic Madison Hotel, this site presents a strong opportunity for mixed-use redevelopment. Its visibility and proximity to planned green space improvements make it well-suited for ground-floor commercial uses with upper-level housing or office space. Redeveloping this parcel could reinforce Downtown Harlingen’s northern edge, activate the corridor and introduce new energy near an iconic historic landmark.

E Monroe Street – Catalyst Site

Located at the corner of East Monroe Street and South 4th Street, this site offers a prime opportunity for mixed-use redevelopment. Currently serving as a surface parking lot, the property’s visibility and proximity to a proposed urban park position it as a natural catalyst for new investment. Redeveloping this site would create better connections between key downtown destinations, activate the streetcape and bring new life to the eastern edge of Downtown Harlingen.

Arts + Culture Hub – Catalyst Sites

Two vacant or underutilized blocks west of South Commerce Street present the opportunity to develop a dedicated arts district anchor, including studio spaces, maker hubs or creative incubators. This area already aligns with the broader Arts + Entertainment District and could be the site for new community-facing arts infrastructure. These blocks could also support event programming or affordable artist housing to help retain Harlingen’s creative talent.

Food and Family Activity Hub – Catalyst Sites

Located next to the Gutierrez Art Park and Centennial Park, these areas could become lively hubs for families and everyday parkgoers. Future development should consider incorporating public-facing elements such as a splash pad, updated playground equipment, a bandstand and space for food trucks or casual dining. Public art installations, enhanced lighting and increased policing would support safety and create a vibrant, welcoming environment that activates Van Buren Avenue and encourages more foot traffic along the corridor.



Open Space Framework



Map 9. Downtown Open Space Framework

Downtown Harlingen’s evolving open space network builds on a legacy of civic plazas, community parks and natural assets that have long anchored public life in the City. Existing destinations like Centennial Park, Lozano Plaza and Gutierrez Park provide critical recreational and cultural value, while underutilized parcels, vacant lots and public right-of-ways offer new opportunities to create a cohesive and vibrant open space system.

A proposed green corridor would serve as the backbone of this network, connecting Downtown’s cultural anchors, civic institutions and neighborhoods through a safe, shaded and walkable environment. This linear corridor would not only support active transportation and recreation, but also act as an urban habitat that supports bird migration and biodiversity in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. Native landscaping, integrated stormwater features and pollinator-friendly plantings would reinforce the corridor as both an ecological asset and a social connector.

Key Public Space Opportunities

Urban Park in the East Downtown Core

A new pocket park near 3rd Street and Monroe Avenue would introduce much-needed green space to a higher-density district with limited recreational amenities. Designed for flexibility, this park could host casual gatherings, small events and interactive public art while providing daily shade and comfort. This park would be located near the East Monroe Street catalyst site, which has been identified as a prime opportunity for mixed-use redevelopment.

Gutierrez Park

Gutierrez Park is envisioned as a vibrant Art Park featuring public art installations, a shaded modern playground, a splash pad, a restroom, a bandstand and improved safety through increased policing. The park should also support informal gathering spaces and family-oriented activities, strengthening its role as a neighborhood anchor. In addition to the improvements identified, Gutierrez Park should also see upgrades in site lighting, landscaping, signage and sidewalk infrastructure. Additional benches, a pavilion and long wheelchair-accessible picnic tables should be incorporated to support family-oriented gatherings and activities.

Lozano Plaza

Lozano Plaza could be enhanced as a key civic space with integrated restrooms and a small stage to support performances and community events. The plaza also has the potential to expand across the adjacent alley, creating a larger, more flexible gathering space that connects seamlessly with nearby amenities like the parking garage and trail network.

Museum and Art + Nature Center

The Museum and Art + Nature Center will serve as an interactive space that celebrates local art, ecology and culture through both indoor exhibits and outdoor learning. This unique destination blends creative expression with hands-on experiences and nature-based programming for all ages.

Restroom and Comfort Nodes

To encourage longer visits and improve user experience, comfort stations featuring restrooms, drinking fountains and shaded seating are recommended at key locations. Lozano Plaza and Gutierrez Park are ideal sites for these upgrades, supporting daily use and special events while enhancing accessibility and convenience along the green corridor.



Food Truck Plaza

Repurposing Existing

Continued use
for Market
Days

Multipurpose
field

Proposed Art +
Nature Center

Natural Habitat +
Rain Gardens

Artistic rendering of the vision for Centennial Park



Figure 6. Centennial Park Concept Sketch

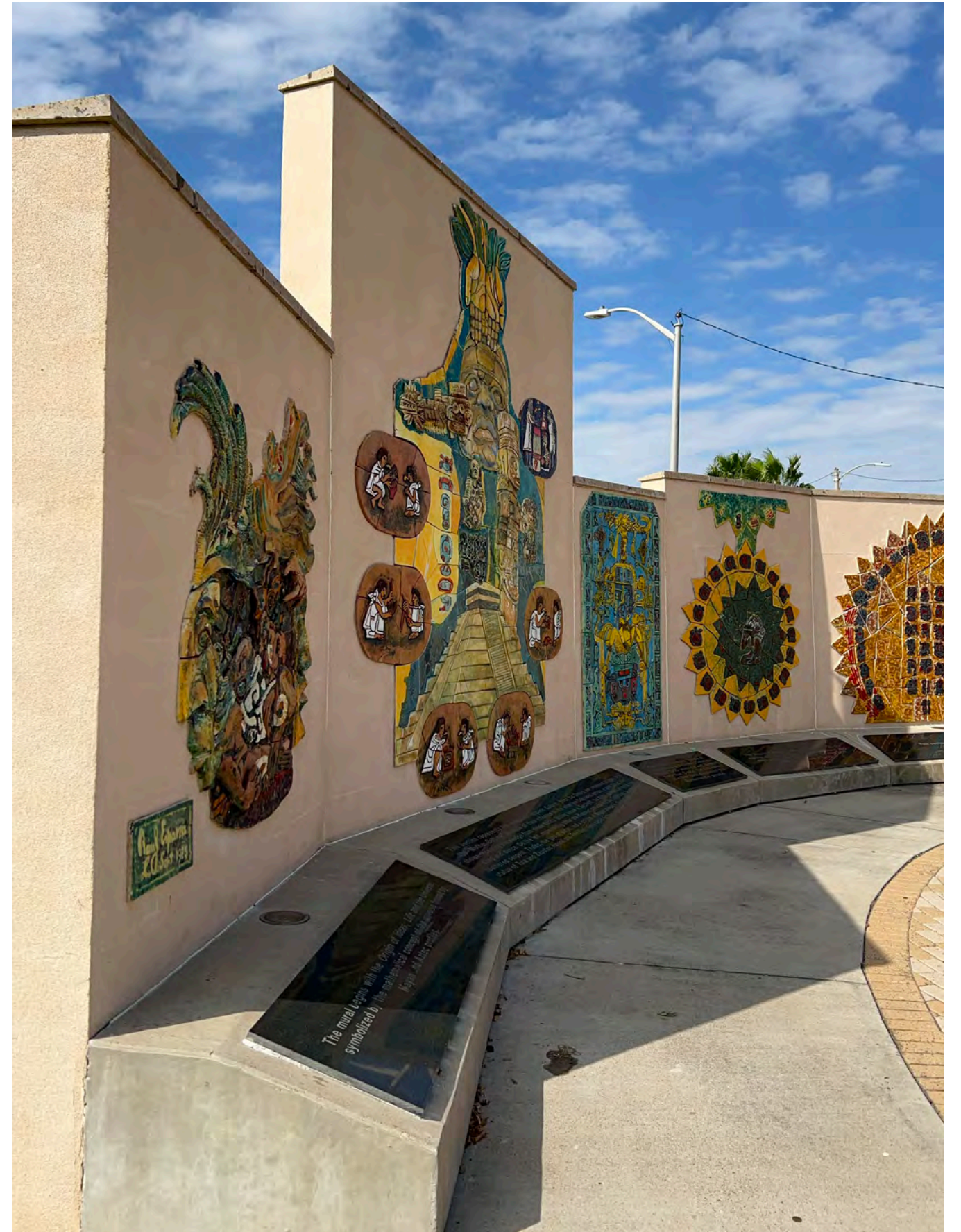
Centennial Park

Centennial Park should be expanded and enhanced with flexible event-ready infrastructure such as vendor zones and stage areas to host larger festivals, public gatherings and pop-up markets (see Figure 6). The park should also incorporate additional benches, tables, lighting and a small covered pavilion for community gatherings. Programming opportunities for Centennial Park should be coordinated with downtown business owners. The design and activation of the park should complement and build upon the catalyst site identified just to the west, creating a cohesive connection between these two key downtown destinations.

Connecting to Nature and the Arroyo

Opportunities also exist to expand Downtown's relationship with the Arroyo Colorado through the creation of a green corridor that links urban spaces with natural landscapes. Though physical access is limited today, future efforts should explore ways to connect the Downtown to the Arroyo through green spines, wayfinding and active transportation infrastructure. Proposed bike lanes along Commerce offer a key opportunity to enhance this corridor and support multimodal access to natural areas. These connections can build on Harlingen's identity as a nature-oriented city, known for birdwatching and ecological tourism.

By integrating parks, plazas and green corridors into the everyday fabric of Downtown, Harlingen can create an open space system that supports community health, ecological function and economic vitality, making public space a cornerstone of its downtown revitalization.





Mural Wall

Artistic rendering of the vision for Alley Activation

Lighting

Paved Pedestrian Path

Undeveloped Parcel Activation

Mobility Framework



Map 10. Downtown Mobility Framework

The Mobility Framework for Downtown Harlingen is centered on creating safe, vibrant and walkable streets that connect neighborhoods, civic destinations and public spaces through intentional design. Rather than prioritizing cars, this framework emphasizes street activation, re-imagining streets not just as corridors for movement, but as places where people linger, gather and interact.

Street activations, green corridors and alley enhancements are key strategies to establish a complete network for pedestrians and cyclists, making Downtown Harlingen easier to explore and more welcoming for everyday activity and special events alike.

Street Activation: Streets as Social Spaces

The core of the framework focuses on activating key east-west and north-south streets to connect Downtown’s destinations. Jackson Avenue and Van Buren Avenue are envisioned as vibrant east-west spines that link surrounding neighborhoods to major civic anchors such as Centennial Park, Gutierrez Park and City Hall. Meanwhile, North and South Commerce Street will serve as the primary north-south connector, tying together the Downtown Core, cultural destinations and future open spaces.

Along these corridors, targeted improvements can bring life to the street, including:

- Wider sidewalks, tree canopies and lighting for safety and shade.
- Seating, art installations and wayfinding to create an inviting pedestrian environment.
- Pop-up spaces for vendors, community events or food trucks.
- Integration of public art and storytelling that reflects Harlingen’s culture.

Street activation ensures that these corridors function not only for movement, but as active, flexible spaces that support daily use, social interaction and special events.

Green Streets: Connecting Nature and Neighborhoods

Green street opportunities include an east-west corridor along Jackson Street, offering a chance to integrate nature and sustainability into the mobility network. This corridor will feature:

- Native landscaping and shade trees for comfort and ecological value.
- Bioswales and permeable paving for stormwater management.
- Pollinator-friendly and bird-supportive planting, reinforcing Harlingen’s identity as part of a key migratory flyway.
- Walkable, shaded paths that link Downtown with nearby neighborhoods and open spaces.

Green streets serve as both transportation routes and green infrastructure, creating a calm, shaded alternative to high-traffic roads and enhancing quality of life for all users.

Alley Activation: Small-Scale, Big Impact

The alley between Harrison and Van Buren holds strong potential for activation and reuse, and can become a vibrant pedestrian path and economic incubator for small businesses, artists and vendors.

Alley activation strategies may include:

- Cafe seating, murals and string lighting to create welcoming walkable zones.
- Dual-frontage retail, where one side faces the street and the other activates the alley.
- Flexible spaces for pop-up markets, performances and seasonal events.
- Opportunities for art walks, night events and cultural programming.

By transforming underused spaces into active corridors, alleys become vital components of a layered, people-friendly downtown experience.

Two-Way Street Restoration: Improving Circulation and Access

Restoring downtown’s one-way streets to two-way circulation will improve navigation, reduce confusion, and create safer conditions for people walking or biking. Madison, Monroe, Jackson, and Van Buren currently move traffic efficiently but discourage direct access to businesses and make the grid less intuitive for visitors. Converting them to two-way streets will calm vehicle speeds, support storefront activity, and strengthen the overall street network. Specific improvements would include:

- Reconfiguring street markings and signals to safely accommodate two-way flow
- Enhancing intersections with pedestrian refuges and shorter crossings
- Supporting storefront visibility and easier access to businesses along each corridor
- Using conversion projects to incorporate lighting, shade, and bicycle facilities
- Making these streets two-way will create a more intuitive grid, strengthen business access, and provide opportunities to improve the pedestrian and bicycle environment.

Accessibility and Universal Design: A Downtown for All

A walkable downtown must be accessible to residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. Today, some sidewalks and crossings lack features that make movement easy for people with mobility challenges. Upgrading infrastructure through universal design will ensure that everyone can take part in downtown life, whether traveling by foot, wheelchair, or stroller. Priority actions would include:

- Upgrading curb ramps, tactile paving, and crosswalk timing for ADA compliance
- Ensuring continuous, unobstructed sidewalks with smooth and durable surfaces
- Adding shaded rest areas, benches, and water fountains along major routes
- Prioritizing accessibility improvements near civic buildings, transit stops, and public spaces

These upgrades will make downtown welcoming and convenient for everyone while setting a higher standard for safety and comfort.

Parking Solutions: Balancing Convenience and Access

Downtown has parking options, but many visitors perceive a shortage. A coordinated strategy can improve how parking is used while supporting walkability and business activity. Future approaches should balance convenience for drivers with the goal of keeping downtown safe and comfortable for people on foot. Potential measures include:

- Exploring pay parking to encourage turnover of prime spaces
- Evaluating the feasibility of a centrally located parking structure with ground-floor activation
- Improving signage and wayfinding to highlight available public parking areas
- Pairing parking strategies with enhanced pedestrian routes between lots and destinations

Managing parking effectively will improve convenience for visitors while reinforcing a pedestrian-oriented downtown.

Bicycle Network Enhancements: Strengthening Active Transportation

Bicycling offers a healthy and affordable way to move around downtown, but many connections remain incomplete or lack safe facilities. Downtown’s compact grid makes it well-suited for bike improvements that can increase access and reduce reliance on cars. Expanding the bicycle network will also support local businesses by bringing more people directly to storefronts. Steps to strengthen the network include:

- Adding protected bike lanes along corridors that link neighborhoods to downtown and the trail system
- Installing bike racks and repair stations at civic, cultural, and retail destinations
- Using signage and pavement markings to clearly indicate shared lanes and bike-priority routes
- Coordinating new lanes with two-way street restoration to ensure smooth circulation

Improved bicycle facilities will strengthen connectivity and encourage more residents and visitors to choose active transportation.

Transit Connections: Linking Downtown to the Network

Expanding transit access directly into downtown Harlingen offers an opportunity to better connect the city’s core with the broader Valley Metro network. While service currently runs nearby along Harrison and Tyler, and flex service is available, no fixed routes stop within the downtown grid itself. Establishing dedicated downtown stops would improve visibility for the system, expand mobility choices, and make transit a more reliable option for reaching businesses, civic spaces, and events. Improvements could include:

- Establishing dedicated Valley Metro stops within the downtown grid to provide direct service
- Extending existing routes or adjusting alignments so that at least one regular line serves the downtown core
- Adding branded stops downtown that are clearly visible, with signage and real-time arrival information
- Designing new stops with shade, seating, and ADA-compliant access to encourage regular use

Adding dedicated transit stops downtown will improve access, strengthen the regional network, and make transit a more convenient option for everyday trips.

Street Lighting and Safety: Creating a Welcoming Downtown

Lighting is essential to creating a safe, welcoming, and vibrant downtown environment. Well-designed illumination along sidewalks, alleys, and crossings can encourage evening activity and make the district feel more comfortable after dark. A coordinated lighting strategy can improve perceptions of safety while also showcasing downtown’s character through thoughtful design. Enhancements could include:

- Replacing outdated lighting with energy-efficient LED and solar fixtures.
- Prioritizing crosswalks, alleyways, and transit stops for targeted upgrades
- Integrating decorative fixtures that reflect downtown’s identity and heritage
- Coordinating lighting with public safety efforts in key gathering areas

Improved lighting will support nighttime activity, strengthen perceptions of safety, and make downtown more inviting after dark.

Jackson Avenue: Celebrating Harlingen’s Main Street

Jackson Avenue is the historic heart of Downtown Harlingen and has long been the center of community life and commerce. Its role as the city’s main street makes it both a place to arrive and a place to spend time. Future design options such as restoring two-way travel and improving conditions for walking, biking, and driving can reinforce Jackson’s identity while making access to businesses, civic spaces, and events more comfortable and intuitive. In this way, Jackson Avenue can serve as a model for how downtown streets balance mobility with the life of the city. Enhancements could include:

- Restoring two-way operation to simplify circulation, improve storefront access, and encourage safe vehicle speeds
- Improving walking conditions with wide sidewalks, frequent crossings, and shade to make the street comfortable and inviting
- Strengthening bicycle access with visible, low-stress connections that link riders to downtown destinations
- Ensuring Jackson is directly accessible from transit, with stops that are visible, shaded, and easy to reach on foot
- Maintaining parking that supports businesses while improving the experience of moving between cars, sidewalks, and storefronts
- Supporting public life through design choices that shape travel lanes, sidewalks, and planting areas so Jackson functions as a place for gathering as well as movement

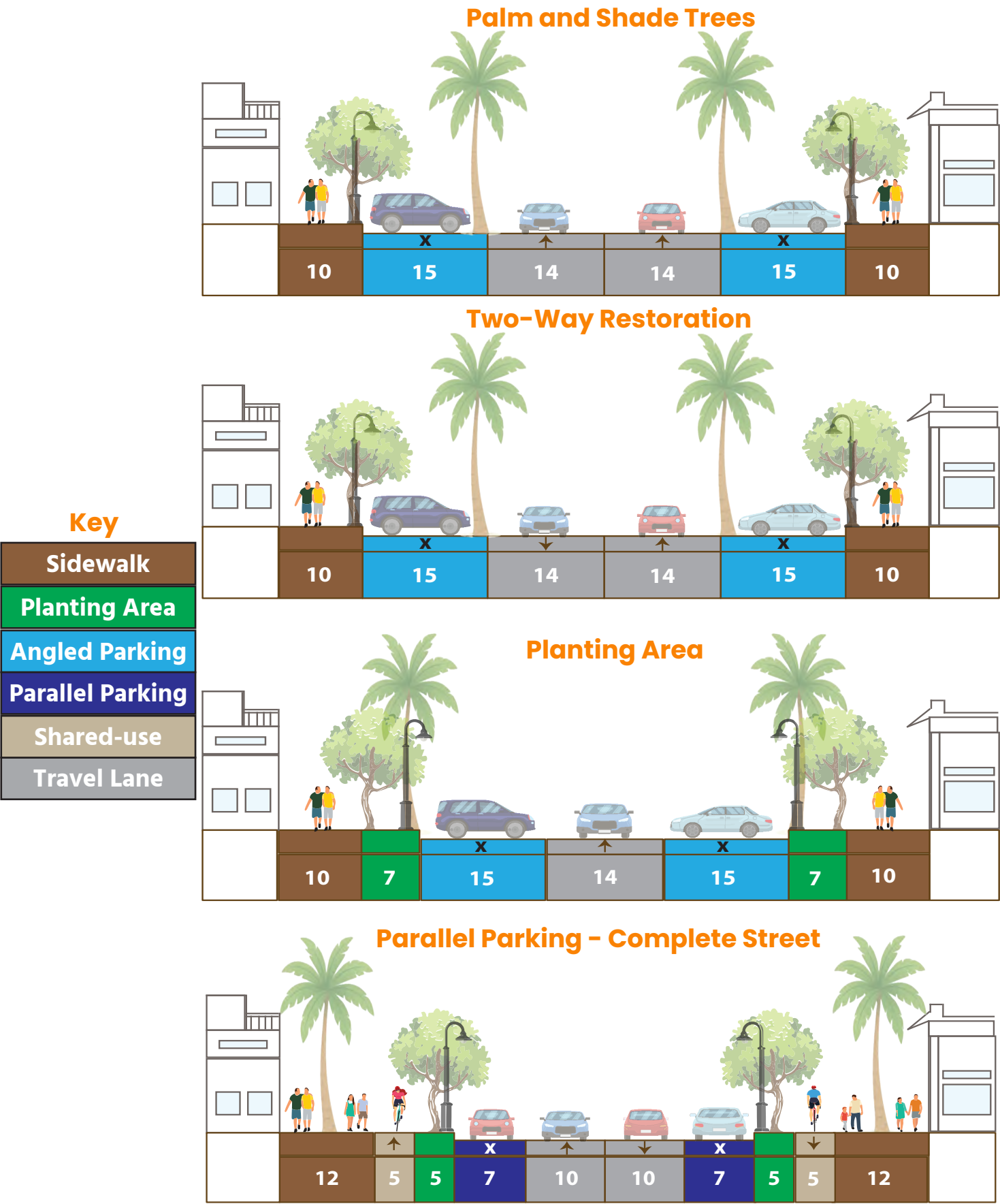
Together, these improvements would celebrate Jackson Avenue as Harlingen’s main street and demonstrate how mobility design can reinforce both access and downtown identity. The following cross-section options illustrate how these goals could take shape along the street.

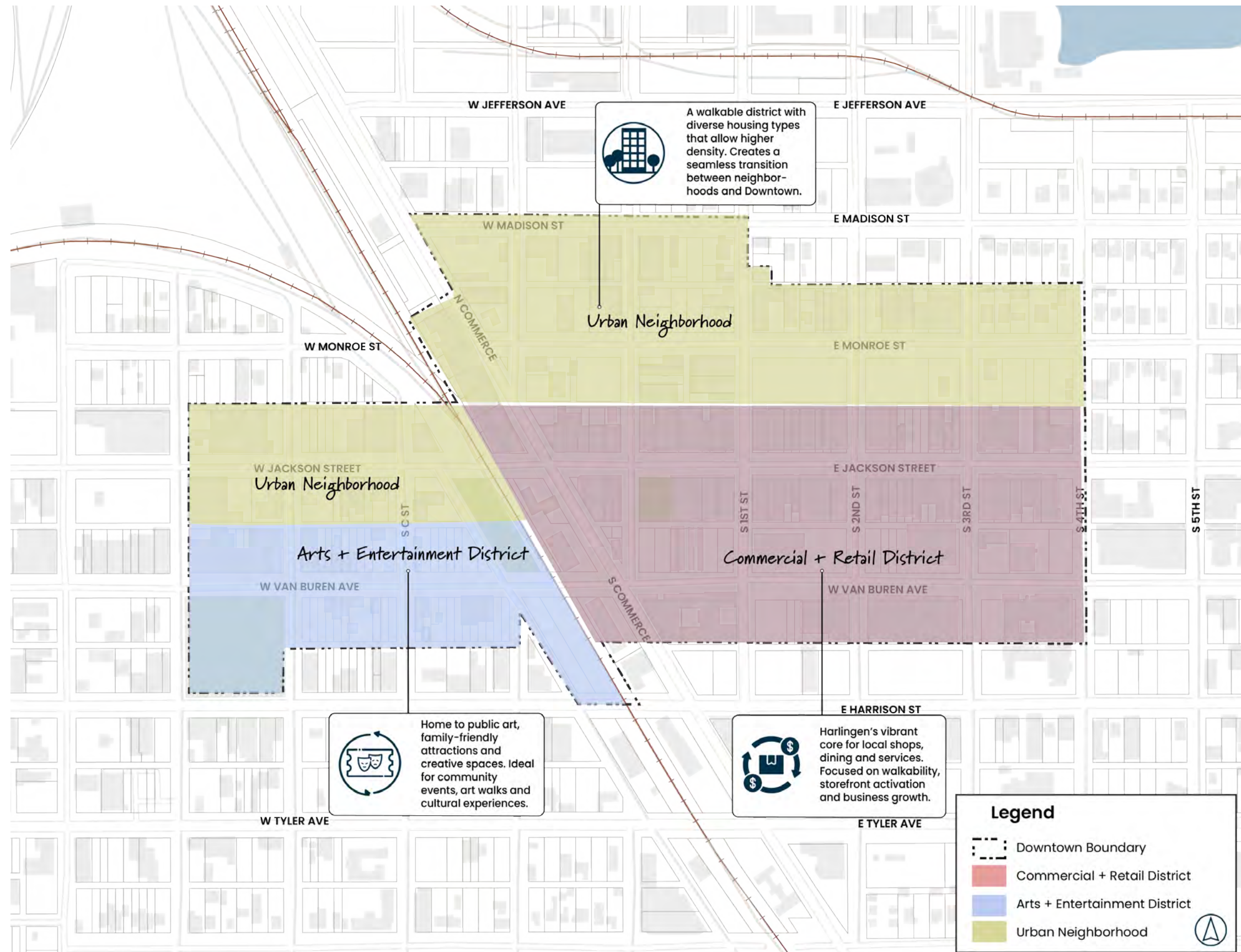
Jackson Avenue: Cross Section Options

The following cross sections illustrate different ways Jackson Avenue could be organized to celebrate its role as downtown’s main street. Each option explores how space can be balanced between vehicles, sidewalks, and planting areas to restore circulation and create a more welcoming environment for people.

- **Palm and Shade Trees:** Introducing small planting areas along the curb creates space to relocate palms and add shade trees. This begins to restore the comfort and identity of Jackson Street, making walking more enjoyable while keeping parking and travel lanes in place.
- **Two-Way Street Restoration:** With shade trees in place, this option also restores Jackson to two-way travel. The return to its historic circulation pattern makes the street easier to navigate, strengthens storefront access, and brings the balance between movement and public life closer to what a main street should be.
- **Planting Area Option:** This option builds on these improvements by reducing Jackson to a single one-way lane. The reclaimed space becomes a generous planting strip that can support large shade trees and space for pedestrian amenities. This approach celebrates Jackson as a place to walk, gather, and enjoy downtown while continuing to provide access for cars.
- **Parallel Parking and Complete Street:** This option replaces angled parking with parallel parking and expands sidewalks to create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. Both sides of the street incorporate a shared-use path, giving space for people walking and biking alongside storefronts. Existing palms remain in place, with new shade trees added in planting areas to enhance comfort and identity. The result is a complete street that supports walking, cycling, storefront activity, and vehicle access in balance.

Jackson Ave – Cross Section Options





Map 11. Downtown District Character Areas

Character Areas

Downtown Harlingen is made up of a diverse mix of places each with its own identity, opportunities and role in the community’s future. Instead of treating the downtown as a single unified zone, this Framework Plan recognizes that a more strategic approach is needed. By organizing Downtown Harlingen into distinct character areas, the City can guide public investment and private development in ways that reflect local context, maximize impact and build on existing momentum.

Each area contributes something different to the downtown experience from vibrant retail streets to arts-focused gathering spaces to walkable residential neighborhoods. These areas are not rigid zones, but flexible guides that reflect both existing conditions and future potential. By understanding the unique strengths and needs of each character area, Harlingen can create a more connected, accessible and inclusive downtown that supports long-term economic vitality and community pride.

Commercial + Retail District

The Commercial + Retail District forms the economic backbone of Downtown Harlingen. Centered along East Jackson and Van Buren, this area is home to a concentration of local businesses, restaurants, service providers and small shops that create a walkable, active environment. As Harlingen continues to grow, this district presents a key opportunity for infill development, facade improvements and sidewalk upgrades that enhance the customer experience and attract more foot traffic.

This area should serve as a model for how downtown can balance small business vitality with streetscape improvements, outdoor dining opportunities, public art and enhanced lighting. Strengthening storefront visibility and promoting mixed-use development will further support business retention and recruitment, while reinforcing this area as the heart of downtown life.

Arts + Entertainment District

Located just west of the Commercial + Retail District, the Arts + Entertainment District is a vibrant cultural area centered around Gutierrez Park and Van Buren Avenue. This district is envisioned as a family-oriented destination, featuring interactive public art, creative programming, performances and informal gathering spaces. Opportunities include a bandstand, splash pad, food truck plaza and enhanced lighting to support evening activity.

Building on Harlingen’s creative identity, this area celebrates art and expression through murals, sculptures and community-driven events. Future improvements should focus on activating public spaces, supporting artists through live-work housing or small studios, and enhancing connectivity with nearby neighborhoods and attractions.

Urban Neighborhood

The Urban Neighborhood district spans both north and west of Downtown and offers a variety of housing types from townhomes and duplexes to small multi-family developments that support increased residential density near the core. This walkable neighborhood creates a seamless transition from downtown’s commercial activity to surrounding residential areas, making it ideal for those seeking a more connected, urban lifestyle.

As demand for downtown living grows, the district is primed for infill housing, improved streetscapes and upgraded sidewalks and crossings. Enhancements like tree planting, wayfinding and neighborhood gateways can strengthen its identity. The Urban Neighborhood supports a diverse, mixed-income community and reinforces Harlingen’s downtown not only as a destination, but as a place to call home.

Commercial + Retail District Character Area

Key Points

- Harlingen’s core district for shopping, dining and small businesses.
- Anchored by Jackson Street, this area supports local entrepreneurship and business visibility.
- Focus on enhancing walkability, storefront activation, lighting and streetscape improvements.
- Significant opportunities for infill development and public realm upgrades.
- A high-priority investment area to support long-term economic growth.

Anticipated Uses

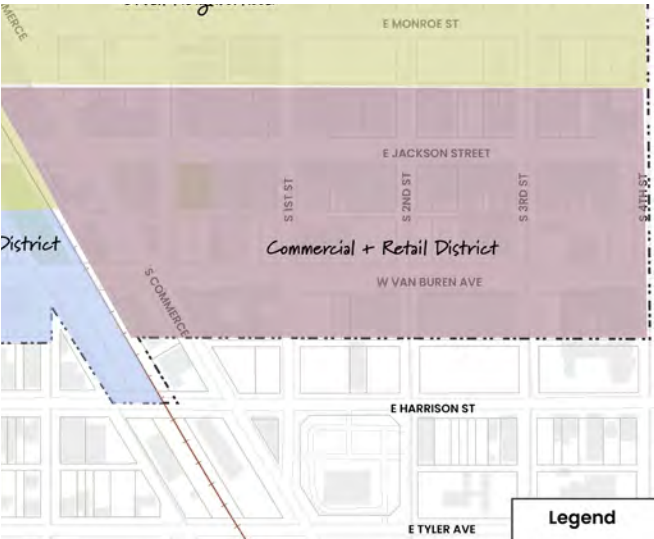
- Dining, retail and personal services.
- Office or co-working uses.
- Local boutiques, cafés and downtown events.
- Facade improvements, patios and pop-up spaces.

Scale

- 1–9 stories

Special Considerations

- Maintain historic storefront character where possible.
- Encourage adaptive reuse and small-scale infill.
- Enhance pedestrian crossings and slow traffic measures.
- Develop branding and wayfinding for the retail district.



Arts + Entertainment District Character Area

Key Points

- A creative district for arts, culture and public events.
- Home to art walks, murals, all-age attractions and event spaces.
- Focus on activating underutilized parcels and promoting cultural identity.
- Lighting, pedestrian comfort and evening activities are key enhancement areas.
- Builds on Harlingen’s legacy of arts and community engagement by integrating nearby public spaces like Gutierrez and Centennial Parks as anchors for cultural programming and events.

Anticipated Uses

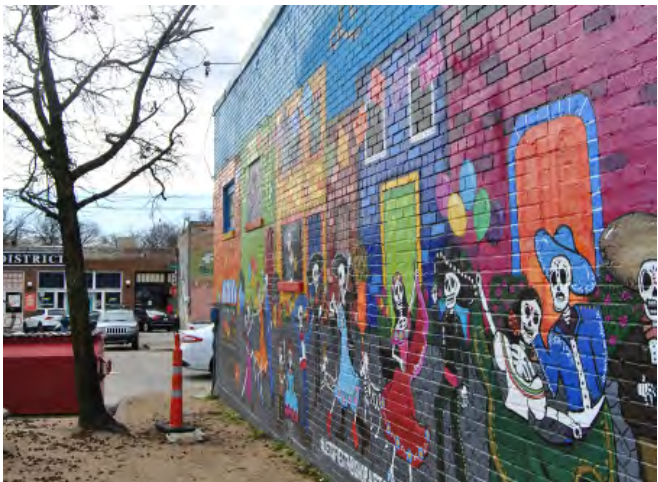
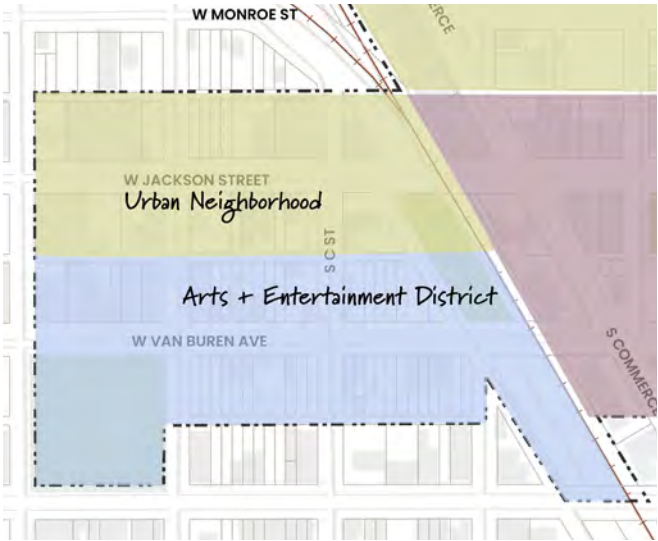
- Public art installations and performance venues.
- Flexible community gathering spaces.
- Artist studios, pop-up markets and galleries.
- All-age entertainment and dining.
- Live/work spaces for creatives.

Scale

- 1–2 stories with opportunity for outdoor placemaking.

Special Considerations

- Emphasize placemaking with seating, shade and lighting.
- Explore partnerships with local artists and organizations.
- Activate spaces through regular programming and community events.
- Improve connections to nearby neighborhoods.



Urban Neighborhood Character Area

Key Points

- A walkable residential area bridging nearby neighborhoods and the downtown core.
- Mix of duplexes, townhomes and higher-density housing options.
- Supports infill development to increase housing choice and affordability.
- Public improvements focused on walkability, safety and connectivity.
- Plays a key role in supporting a “living downtown”.

Anticipated Uses

- Vertical and horizontal mixed-use development.
- Neighborhood-scale retail or services.
- Live-work or cottage commercial formats.
- Parks, trails and passive open spaces.

Scale

- 1–5 stories

Special Considerations

- Prioritize safe pedestrian access and crossings.
- Strengthen physical connections to other Downtown Districts.
- Provide wayfinding and street lighting upgrades.
- Encourage housing variety through flexible zoning.



CHAPTER

3

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation

The Harlingen Downtown Plan presents a coordinated set of strategies to guide revitalization, enhance economic activity and improve the quality and character of the Downtown district. While Harlingen has already made important investments through facade improvements, streetscape enhancements and public events, this Plan focuses on addressing remaining challenges such as underutilized buildings, limited housing options, gaps in the pedestrian environment and the need for a more predictable funding structure. Recommendations are organized into four categories:

- Built Environment
- Operational and Programming
- Policy and Regulatory
- Economic Development and Finance

Successful implementation will require strong leadership, collaboration across public and private partners, and alignment of funding resources. Establishing a five-year funding strategy is a foundational recommendation, including consideration of a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone to reinvest future tax revenues back into Downtown improvements. Other early actions include launching a second-story and infill housing incentive program, supporting redevelopment of vacant or underused properties, improving walkability and shade, enhancing alleyways and public spaces, and expanding cultural and economic activity. These efforts will help create a vibrant and resilient Downtown that attracts businesses, supports residents and reflects Harlingen’s identity.

Implementation will occur over time and must remain adaptable to available funding, local priorities and opportunities that arise. Some actions can be initiated through temporary pilots or phased demonstration projects, while others will require long-term coordination and capital investment. The Implementation Chapter serves as a flexible management tool to support decision-making, prioritize short-and mid-term efforts and ensure progress toward Harlingen’s community vision for Downtown.



Incremental Approach

Many cities approach downtown revitalization through large, single-phase investments or wait for significant funding cycles before acting. While this can result in transformative outcomes, it often delays progress and introduces financial risk. The Harlingen Downtown Plan encourages a more flexible and adaptive strategy rooted in incremental implementation. Modest and cost-effective actions can build momentum, demonstrate visible change and create a foundation for long-term improvements.

Cities that delay action while waiting for major infrastructure or redevelopment projects may overlook opportunities to activate public space and engage the community. Harlingen can instead pursue phased implementation by testing ideas in real-world conditions before committing to permanent solutions. Temporary curb extensions using paint or cones, pilot bike lanes, parklets, pop-up retail and event-based street activations are examples of small-scale interventions that allow the City to assess community response and adjust accordingly.

While the Plan includes recommendations that require significant investment, these are not the starting point. The initial focus is on strategies that can be implemented quickly, expanded if successful or revised if needed. The City of Harlingen, supported by its active Main Street program, downtown business owners and community partners, is well positioned to lead this approach. Incremental implementation will allow the City to test concepts, build trust and guide future improvements with confidence.



Economic Development Strategies

The success of Downtown Harlingen will depend in large part on aligning financial tools with revitalization priorities. A strong policy and funding framework can enable public improvements, attract private investment and sustain ongoing programming and operations. The Plan identifies several economic development strategies to support implementation and long-term downtown growth.

A range of local tools and financing programs can be leveraged to advance key projects. These include:



Public Private Partnerships

Partnerships between the City and private entities can be effective in facilitating infill development, second-story housing conversions and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.



Grants and Matching Funds

Targeted funding programs can support building renovations, new business development, public art installations and other priority initiatives.



Facade and Signage Programs

Expanding the existing program managed through the Downtown Public Improvement District can help improve the visual quality of buildings, encourage investment and support small business retention.



Housing Incentives

Incentives are essential to support second-story and infill housing projects that require substantial code compliance upgrades. These programs can help address feasibility gaps for new downtown residential development.



Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)

The City should consider establishing a Downtown TIRZ to capture the incremental increase in property tax revenues within the District and reinvest those funds into downtown improvements. Revenues could support infrastructure, public spaces, housing incentives and other catalytic projects. Coordination with Cameron County is recommended to maximize the financial impact and ensure long-term sustainability.

Priority Recommendations

This Plan identifies a series of targeted actions to advance the vision and goals for Downtown Harlingen. While the full plan includes numerous recommendations, the following ten have been prioritized for their potential to deliver visible results and generate momentum in the near term. These actions address both catalytic projects and practical improvements, positioning the City to respond to community needs and leverage partnership opportunities as they arise.

The priority recommendations are not intended to limit other implementation efforts. Rather, they serve as a starting point for action, offering clear direction for City leadership, stakeholders and partners. Early progress on these initiatives will demonstrate the benefits of the Plan, strengthen public support and lay the foundation for continued investment in Downtown Harlingen’s revitalization.

1. Launch a Second Story Housing Incentive Program to encourage adaptive reuse of upper floors for residential use, especially along Jackson Street.
2. Establish a 5-Year Downtown Funding Strategy and TIRZ with Cameron County participation to finance catalytic projects.
3. Redesign Gutierrez Park and Activate Art Park Programming as a cultural and event hub.
4. Implement Key Sidewalk and Pedestrian Safety Improvements at identified high-traffic intersections.
5. Develop a Downtown Parking Management Strategy including potential meter revenue reinvestment.
6. Launch a Pilot Alley Activation between Harrison and Van Buren to test lighting, art and event use.
7. Create a Cultural Events Plan and Expand Evening Programming in partnership with Main Street Harlingen.
8. Install Comfort Stations at Lozano Plaza and Gutierrez Park to support events and daily visitors.
9. Attract Anchor Tenants such as a coworking hub or public market to increase daily foot traffic.
10. Strengthen the Main Street Façade Grant Program with matching City funds for greater participation.

10 Keys to Successful Downtown Implementation

- 1

Prioritize incremental progress
 - Use quick wins and small-scale pilots to show visible change.
 - Adapt, refine, and scale projects over time based on community feedback.
- 2

Build a flexible funding toolbox
 - Activate tools like TIRZ, grants and matching funds.
 - Combine public and private resources to fund catalytic projects.
- 3

Center the pedestrian experience
 - Invest in walkability, shade and safety.
 - Reduce barriers to mobility and enhance comfort for all users.
- 4

Remove redevelopment barriers
 - Provide technical and financial support for code upgrades.
 - Incentivize residential conversions and adaptive reuse of vacant spaces.
- 5

Activate space and grow demand
 - Use cultural programming, events and placemaking to draw people in.
 - Focus on activating underutilized areas like alleyways and side streets.
- 6

Lead with local commitment
 - Relocate or activate City services in Downtown.
 - Show investment through leadership presence and visible public projects.
- 7

Leverage what already works
 - Build on Main Street Harlingen’s momentum and community trust.
 - Connect Downtown to broader City assets like trails and cultural nodes.
- 8

Invest in public space transformation
 - Make parks, plazas and streets central to Downtown’s identity.
 - Design flexible, multi-use spaces that invite all ages and cultures.
- 9

Measure what matters
 - Track progress using metrics like housing units, event participation and business growth.
 - Share results regularly to maintain momentum and accountability.
- 10

Stay rooted in Harlingen’s identity
 - Highlight the City’s unique culture, history and binational character.
 - Adapt national best practices, but tailor solutions to reflect local values.

Implementation Plan

The Downtown Harlingen Plan includes a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at supporting revitalization, economic development, public space improvements and increased livability. To ensure these strategies are effectively executed, the implementation framework organizes each recommendation by category, estimated timeframe, lead entities and performance indicators. This structure allows the City and its partners to track progress, allocate resources and adapt over time as new opportunities and constraints arise.



Actions

Each recommendation in this Plan is tied to a specific goal and is designed to either advance progress on its own or serve as a catalyst for other improvements. Some actions focus on operational or programming changes that require minimal investment, while others involve regulatory updates, targeted incentives or larger-scale infrastructure and capital projects. This variety allows the City to pursue a balanced mix of short-term and long-term strategies.



Implementation Timeframe

To support sequencing and phasing, each action is categorized by the following timeframes:

- Short Term (1 to 3 years): Focuses on early wins, demonstration projects, pilot initiatives and actions that require limited investment or coordination.
- Mid Term (4 to 6 years): Includes moderate-cost projects, policy initiatives and infrastructure improvements requiring design and permitting.
- Long Term (7 years and beyond): Encompasses major capital projects, land use changes and broader system-wide initiatives.
- Ongoing: Refers to programs and strategies that require sustained effort, regular evaluation and consistent community engagement over time.



Key Entities

Implementation will involve coordination across public, private and nonprofit sectors. Key implementation partners include the City of Harlingen (Planning, Public Works, Parks, Finance), Harlingen Economic Development Corporation (EDC), Main Street Harlingen, Valley Metro, the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce, private developers, downtown business and property owners, and philanthropic or community-based organizations.



Incremental Steps

To mitigate risk and facilitate progress, the City should initiate major actions through pilot programs, temporary demonstrations or phased implementation. This strategy enables evaluation of feasibility, incorporation of public feedback and refinement of proposals prior to permanent adoption.

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Key Entities
Built Environment (Includes infrastructure, public spaces, urban design, housing, and streetscape improvements)			
BE-1	Second-story housing and infill incentive program.	Short-Term	City of Harlingen
BE-2	Set goal of new residential units in Downtown.	Short-Term	Planning Department
BE-3	Improve alley and side street lighting.	Short-Term	Public Works, Utilities Department
BE-4	Create small shade nodes with seating and fountains.	Short-Term	Parks Department, Public Works
BE-5	Launch temporary parklet program.	Short-Term	Planning, Main Street Harlingen
BE-6	Improve sidewalk and pedestrian safety.	Short-Term	Public Works, Planning Department
BE-7	Enhance pedestrian crossings at key intersections.	Short-Term	Public Works
BE-8	Redesign Gutierrez Park and activate programming as the cultural heart of Downtown Harlingen.	Short-Term	Parks Department
BE-9	Activate alley between Harrison and Van Buren including lighting and art.	Medium-Term	Planning Department
BE-10	Develop code-compliance support for housing conversions.	Medium-Term	Planning Department
BE-11	Install comprehensive wayfinding system across Downtown.	Medium-Term	Planning, Main Street Harlingen
BE-12	Improve street tree canopy in pedestrian corridors.	Medium-Term	Parks, Public Works
BE-13	Evaluate feasibility of Downtown stormwater features.	Medium-Term	Public Works, Engineering
BE-14	Install comfort stations at Lozano and Gutierrez Parks.	Medium-Term	Parks, Public Works
BE-15	Develop an urban pocket park near 3rd and Monroe designed as a flexible community space with shade, seating and public art.	Medium-Term	Parks, Planning
BE-16	Improve connectivity between parks and Arroyo trail.	Medium-Term	Parks, Planning

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Key Entities
Operational and Programming (Includes events, public engagement, business support, and activation strategies)			
OP-1	Upgrade trail pavement and add shade structures over exercise equipment.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen
OP-2	Develop cultural events and evening programming plan.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, Chamber of Commerce
OP-3	Promote consistent evening hours for Downtown businesses.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen
OP-4	Develop Downtown business recruitment toolkit.	Short-Term	EDC
OP-5	Pilot event-based programming in underutilized spaces (e.g. Art Park, lot activations).	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, City of Harlingen
OP-6	Launch pop-up business incubation pilot.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, Chamber of Commerce
OP-7	Improve Downtown gateways with art and landscaping.	Medium-Term	Planning, EDC
OP-8	Establish seasonal event series (e.g. outdoor movie nights, food festivals).	Medium-Term	Main Street Harlingen, Chamber, Nonprofit Partners
OP-9	Create Downtown volunteer program to support events and clean-up days.	Medium-Term	Main Street Harlingen
Policy and Regulatory (Includes zoning updates, regulatory tools, pilot testing, and management strategies)			
PR-1	Develop Downtown parking management strategy.	Medium-Term	City of Harlingen
PR-2	Explore shared parking agreements.	Medium-Term	City of Harlingen, Private Property Owners
PR-3	Coordinate with Valley Metro on central transit station.	Medium-Term	Planning, Valley Metro
PR-4	Incentivize adaptive reuse of vacant buildings.	Medium-Term	EDC, Planning

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Key Entities
Economic Development and Finance (Includes incentive programs, funding tools, public-private partnerships, and business support strategies)			
EC-1	Establish five-year Downtown funding strategy.	Short-Term	City Manager’s Office, EDC
EC-2	Establish Downtown TIRZ with County support.	Short-Term	City of Harlingen, Cameron County
EC-3	Strengthen facade grant program with city match.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, City of Harlingen
EC-4	Attract anchor tenants such as coworking or public market.	Medium-Term	EDC
Public Safety & Vitality			
PSV-1	Assign permanent officer presence in Downtown to build relationships with businesses and residents.	Short-Term	Police Department
PSV-2	Improve alleyway safety with enhanced lighting and CPTED design strategies.	Short-Term	Public Works, Police, Downtown Partners
PSV-3	Expand public camera network with real-time access for dispatch.	Medium-Term	Police Department, IT
PSV-4	Upgrade crosswalks and pedestrian safety features at key intersections.	Medium-Term	Public Works, Planning
PSV-5	Permit sidewalk beer gardens in designated downtown zones with security measures.	Medium-Term	Planning Department, Downtown Partners
PSV-6	Install public restrooms at strategic locations.	Medium-Term	Public Works, Downtown Partners
PSV-7	Support special events and festivals that increase overnight hotel stays and strengthen downtown vibrancy.	Ongoing	EDC, Main Street, Downtown Partners
PSV-8	Install or improve protected bicycle lanes throughout Downtown to enhance safe mobility.	Medium-Term	Planning Department, Public Works

Funding Mechanisms

Funding Tools

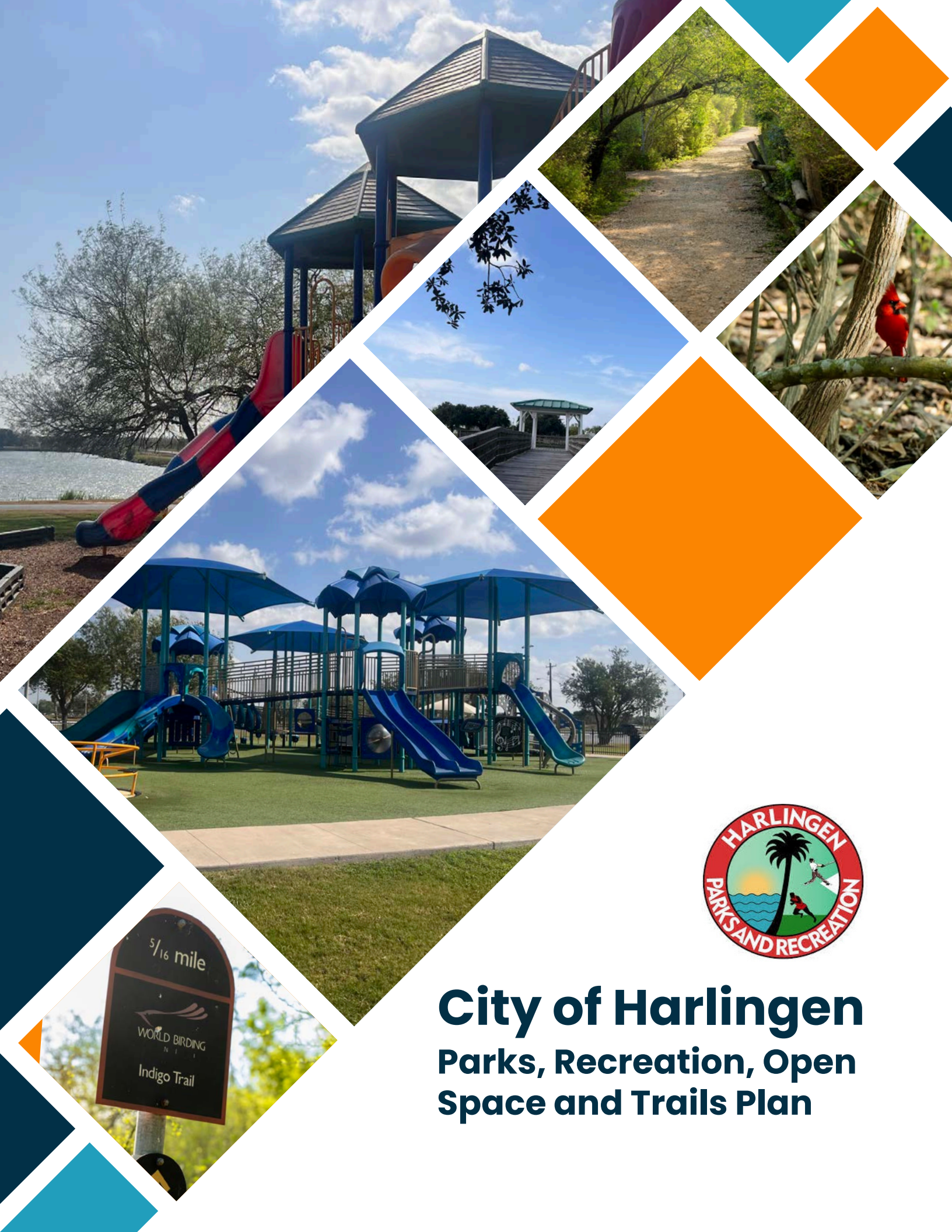
- Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) – Capture and reinvest future increases in property tax revenues generated within Downtown into infrastructure, public spaces and redevelopment projects. County participation will significantly increase revenue potential.
- Facade & Signage Improvement Programs – Continue and expand the Main Street grant program with City or EDC match to incentivize visible building upgrades.
- Special Purpose Districts – Explore opportunities to create targeted districts for cultural programming, parking management or tourism promotion.
- Impact Fees – Dedicate a portion of applicable fees from new development to Downtown infrastructure improvements.
- Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) – Allocate eligible HOT revenues to tourism-related Downtown improvements, events and marketing.
- Local, State, and Federal Grants – Aggressively pursue competitive grants for transportation, parks, resilience, housing and economic development (e.g., TxDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program, Texas Parks & Wildlife Local Park Grant, CDBG Downtown Revitalization, FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance).

Partnership Models

- Public–Private Partnerships (P3) – Formal agreements between the City and private developers to co-invest in infrastructure and redevelopment projects that meet shared goals.
- Public–Public Partnerships (PUP) – Collaborations with other public entities such as Cameron County or Valley Metro to deliver shared facilities, mobility projects or workforce housing.
- Anchor Institution Partnerships – Partner with hospitals, higher education or major employers to integrate Downtown into recruitment, retention and branding strategies.

State & Federal Grants

- TxDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program – Funds sidewalks, crosswalks, shared-use paths and bike facilities that improve safety and connectivity. Can link Downtown Harlingen to surrounding neighborhoods and the Arroyo trail.
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Local Park Grant Program – Provides matching funds for parkland acquisition, development and enhancements. Can support pocket parks, shade structures and recreation upgrades like those planned for Gutierrez Park.
- CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program – Supports sidewalk reconstruction, ADA access, lighting, drainage and façade restoration. Targets projects that increase economic activity and pedestrian comfort in the Downtown.
- FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance – Finances projects that reduce risks from flooding, extreme heat and severe storms. Eligible improvements include stormwater systems, shade features and resilient infrastructure.
- USDA Rural Development – Offers grants and low-interest loans for rural and small-city economic development. Can fund business incubation, building rehab and community facilities that boost downtown vitality.



City of Harlingen

Parks, Recreation, Open Space and Trails Plan



Acknowledgments

City Commission

- Norma Sepulveda, Mayor
- Ford Kinsley, Commissioner - District 1
- Daniel Nemecio Lopez, Commissioner - District 2
- Michael Mezmar, Commissioner - District 3
- Frank Morales, Commissioner - District 4
- Rene Perez, Commissioner - District 5

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CHAPTER

1

Community Context

Introduction

Purpose

Parks and recreation opportunities are crucial quality-of-life amenities for Harlingen residents. Development of a high-quality parks and recreation system doesn't happen overnight. Likewise, decisions about park amenities and recreational offerings should not happen in a vacuum. Rather, a cohesive vision for the community's parks and recreation system must be determined and then guidance provided toward incremental implementation over time. This Plan, in concert with the overall Comprehensive Plan, provides that guidance.

This Parks Master Plan:

- Identifies the implications of current community demographics and projected population growth as it relates to parks and recreation.
- Analyzes the current state of the City's parks, recreation and open spaces.
- Identifies parks and recreation deficiencies and needs.
- Establishes goals, objectives and recommendations for the next five to 10 years.
- Prioritizes improvements to the parks and recreation system.
- Aids the City in seeking funding opportunities.

This document should be used as a planning tool by City staff, elected and appointed officials, citizens and the private development community to understand community desires and move toward long-term community success. The Plan is intended to help coordinate local efforts for Harlingen and to work in conjunction with Cameron County, area school districts, local organizations and sports leagues.

Benefits of Parks

Access to quality parks and recreation is an important component of a high-quality community. Planning for a successful, equitable parks system ensures that all residents can experience these key benefits:



Overall Well-Being Benefits

- Contact with nature helps to improve overall well-being and quality of life.
- Recreation provides multi-generational opportunities for mental, physical, social and emotional stimulation.

Health Benefits

- Access to nature and recreation increases frequency of fitness and improves psychological health.
- Play provides crucial developmental opportunities for children.
- Physical activity helps to reduce obesity, depression and many other health problems.

Environmental Benefits

- Parkland helps to mitigate climate, air and water pollution impacts.
- Preserved open space protects vital habitat for plants and wildlife.
- Parks foster environmental stewardship in citizens.

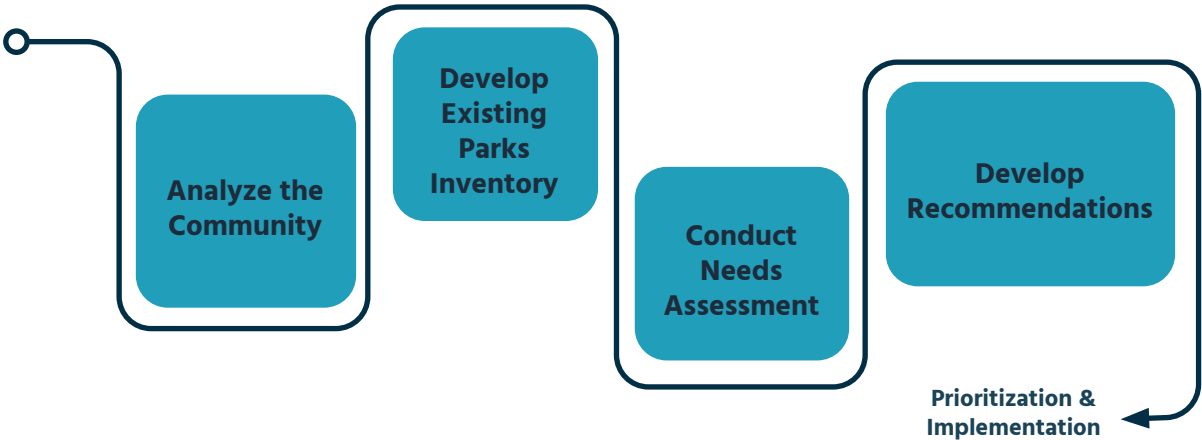
Economic Benefits

- Parkland increases property values within close proximity.
- Quality parks and recreation can attract new residents and businesses.
- Unique park and recreation amenities can encourage tourism and associated economic benefits.

Planning Process & Time Frame

In 2024, the City commissioned Freese and Nichols, Inc. to prepare a new Comprehensive Plan and Parks Master Plan. The Comprehensive Plan's engagement outcomes, vision and goals, and recommendations influence Harlingen's parks and recreation system and carry over heavily into this Parks Plan.

The Parks Plan follows a specific process to produce a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) compliant plan. Recommendations should be re-evaluated periodically to ensure they are still valid. TPWD master plan guidelines recommend updating the Plan every five years or before any new major developments occur that significantly change the parks and recreation needs of residents.

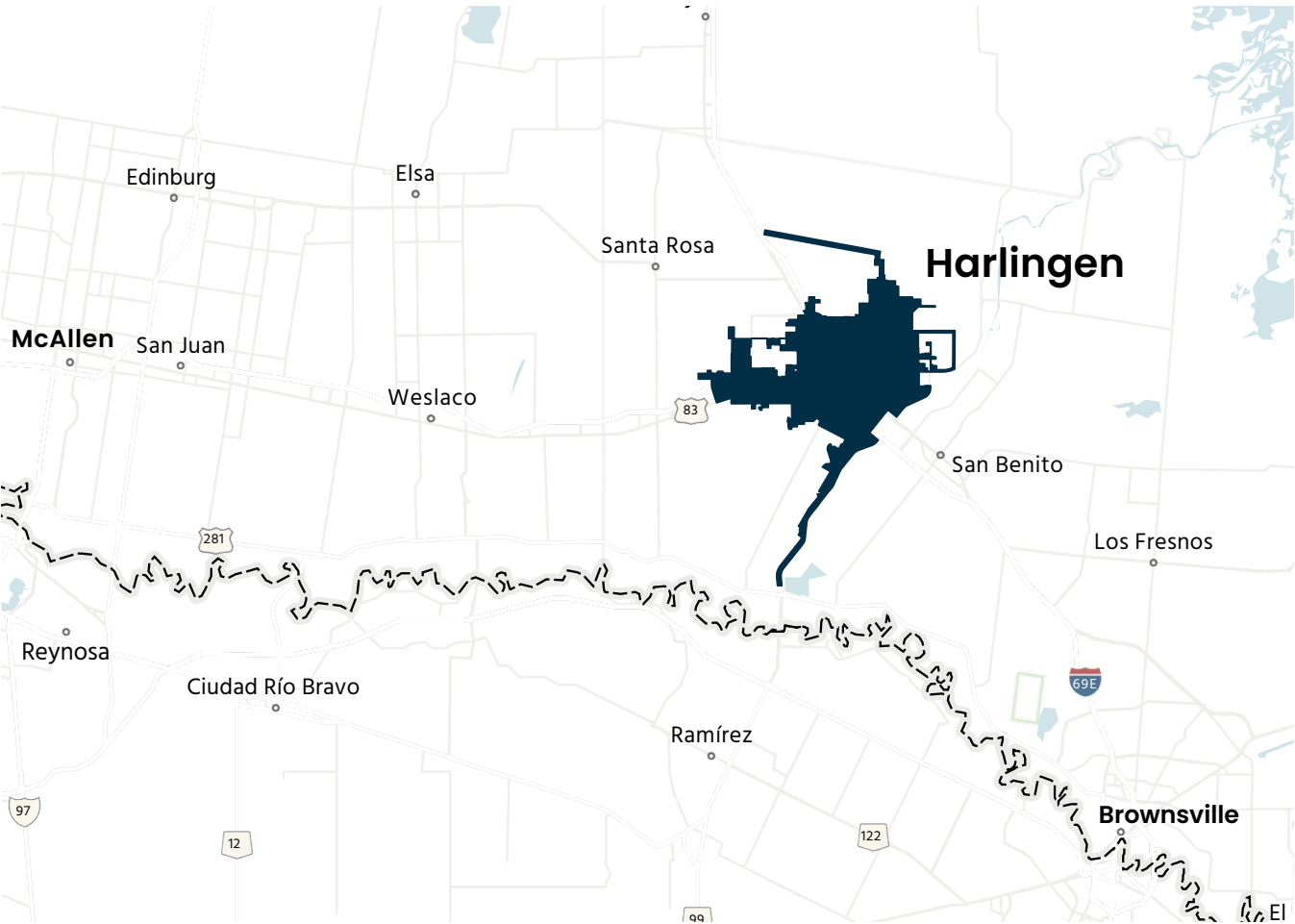


Planning Area

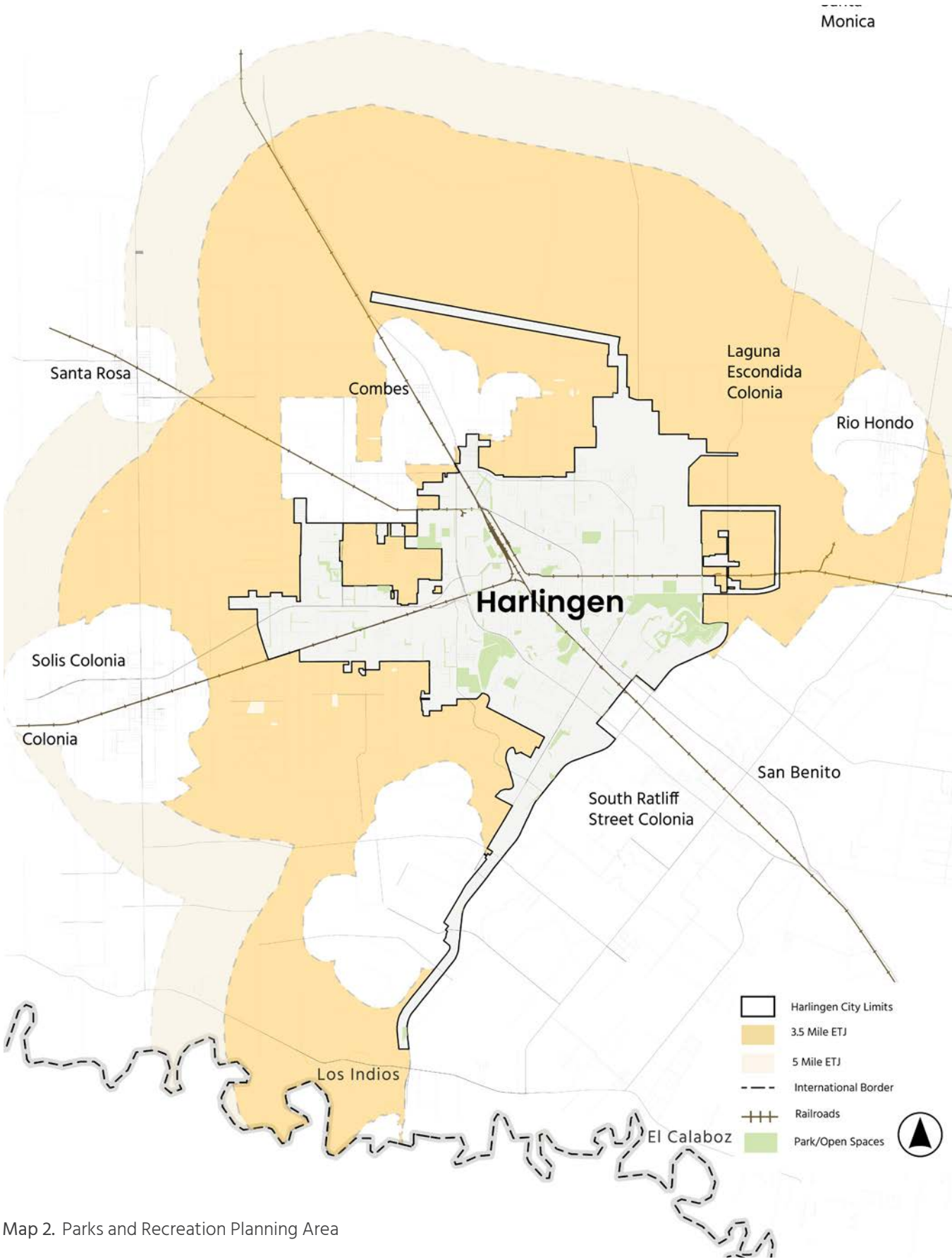
The planning area outlined in this Plan includes the entire city limits of Harlingen, along with its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ), as depicted in the map on the following page. Located in Cameron County, Harlingen is advantageously positioned in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley, with close access to both the U.S.-Mexico border and the Gulf Coast, and in proximity to other major regional cities like Brownsville and McAllen.

The City of Harlingen is the principal governmental entity responsible for planning and development services, which include parks, recreation and community facilities. While the City leads the implementation, the success of these initiatives

relies heavily on the active participation and support of the entire community. This includes residents, local organizations and businesses. Together, these partners play a crucial role in ensuring the continuous improvement and success of Harlingen’s parks and recreational facilities.



Map 1. Regional Context of Harlingen



Map 2. Parks and Recreation Planning Area

Previous Planning Efforts

Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2016)

The Plan outlines a vision for improving parks and recreation areas in the City and ETJ and identifies priorities for the Harlingen Parks System based on community engagement and stakeholder feedback. The focus areas included:

- Parkland Expansion: Secure land and enhanced recreational spaces at Pendleton Park and Hunter Park.
- Facility Enhancements: Upgraded amenities at Victor Park and Tom Wilson Sports Complex.
- Trail Development: Extended West Harlingen Drainage Corridor Trail and Commerce Street Trail.
- Inclusive Recreation: Improved accessibility at Windsor Park and Vestal Park.

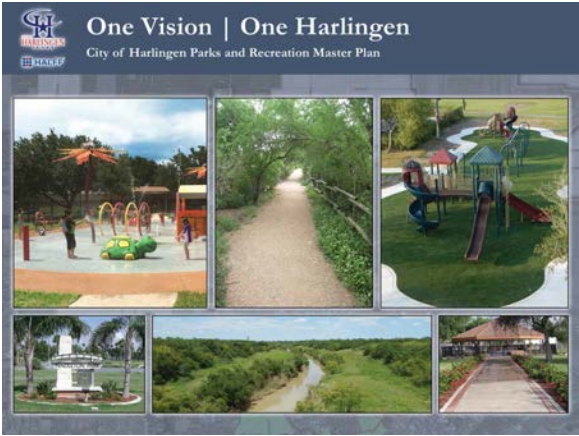


Figure 1. Parks & Recreation Master Plan Action Status

Action	Description	Status
1	Identify funding sources and priorities for critical initial phase of existing park improvements.	In Progress
2	Complete the Arroyo Colorado Trail as the premier trail corridor in the Rio Grande Valley from Dixieland Park to Hugh Ramsey Park.	In Progress
3	Establish land use patterns for undeveloped areas adjacent to the Arroyo.	Not Started
4	Develop Phase II of the Harlingen Soccer Complex.	Not Started
5	Develop a destination/inclusive play area (located in Victor, Pendleton, Lon C. Hill Park, or Wilson Sports Complex).	Complete
6	Improve Hugh Ramsey Park as a major birding and wildlife attraction.	Not Started
7	Work with Harlingen CISD to create “school parks” in West Harlingen and in North Harlingen.	Not Started
8	Reorganize and improve Lon C. Hill Park.	Complete
9	Establish additional high priority trail segments (Jackson Street corridor, West Harlingen trail, Commerce Street trail, connection to Soccer Complex).	Not Started
10	Conduct an indoor recreation center feasibility review to address indoor recreation needs.	In Progress
11	Address additional medium and high priority improvements to existing parks.	In Progress
12	Develop a nature center facility.	Not Started
13	Construct an indoor recreation center	In Progress

One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan (2016)

The Plan establishes a strategic framework for the growth and development of Harlingen. It emphasizes the creation of a vibrant and sustainable community within both the City and its Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). Developed through community engagement and stakeholder participation, the plan outlines five key areas:

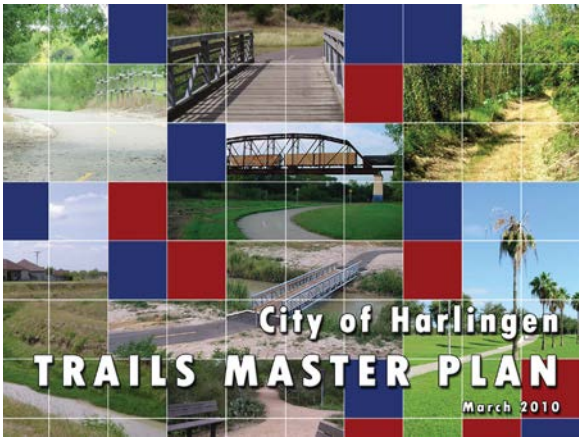
- Improving economic development and creating job opportunities.
- Expanding neighborhoods and diversifying housing options.
- Developing transportation systems and connectivity.
- Expanding parks, recreation, and open spaces.
- Encouraging environmental sustainability and resilience.



Trails Master Plan (2010)

The Plan outlines an expansion of Harlingen’s trail network to enhance connectivity and recreation throughout the City and ETJ. It identifies priority areas for development through public participation and stakeholder input. The critical areas include:

- Expansion of the Arroyo Colorado Trail to enhance connectivity and provide recreational opportunities along the natural corridor.
- Development of new hike-and-bike trails to improve pedestrian and cyclist access across Harlingen, linking neighborhoods and parks.
- Enhancement of trail access points and safety features to increase usability and accessibility for residents of all ages and abilities.
- Strengthening trail connections between parks, schools and key destinations to encourage active transportation and recreation.



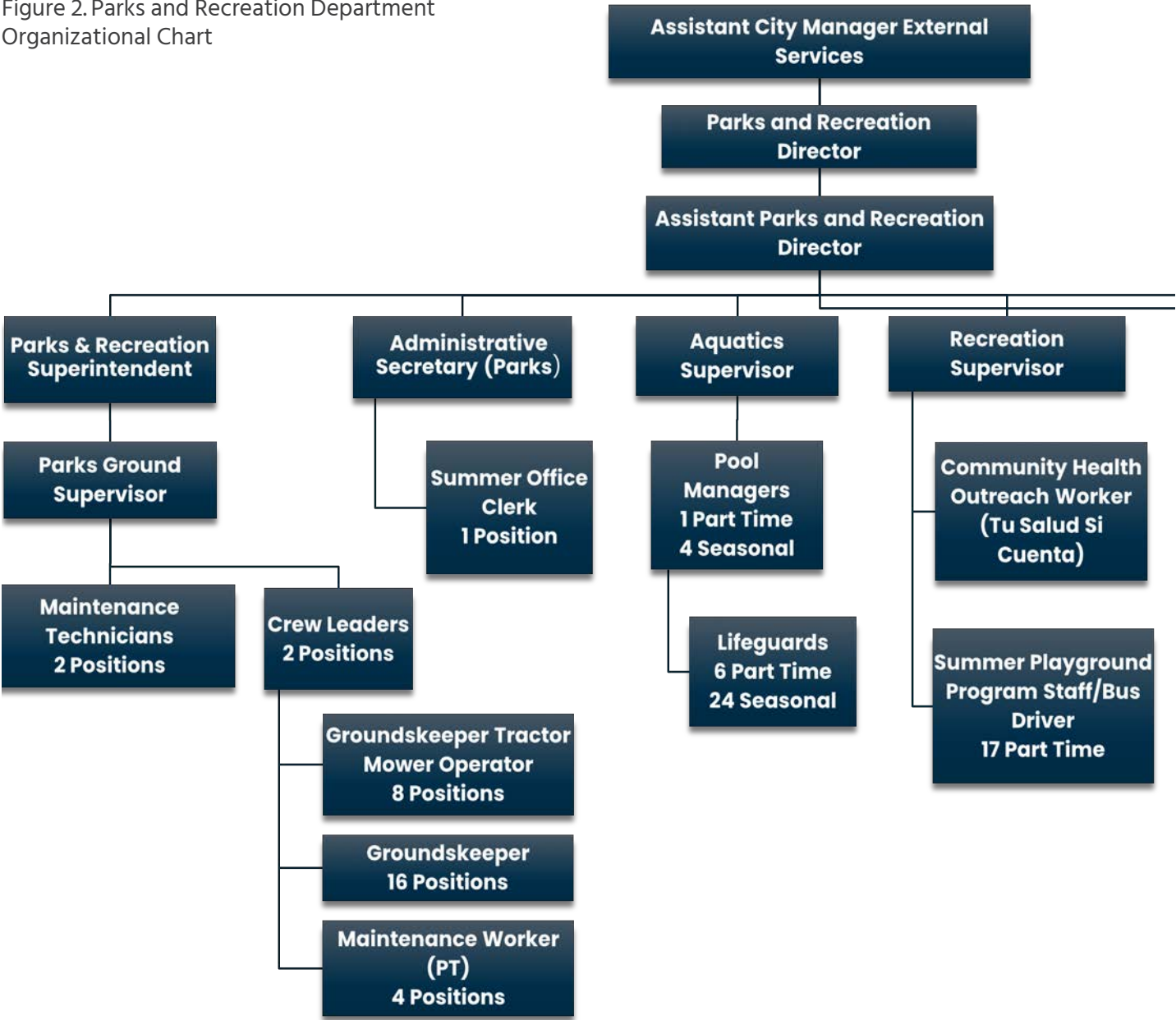
Harlingen Parks and Recreation Department

The Harlingen Parks and Recreation Department is the primary entity responsible for planning, maintaining and developing the City's parks and trails, as well as organizing community festivals and events. This includes facilitating several youth and adult sports leagues and operating several summer recreation programs. The Department is comprised of 35 full-time staff members, 11 part-time staff members and 55 seasonal workers. Parks

and Recreation staff maintain non-parkland owned by the City, which requires approximately 30% of their weekly time. They also assist with special events hosted by the City accounting for 20% of their weekly time.

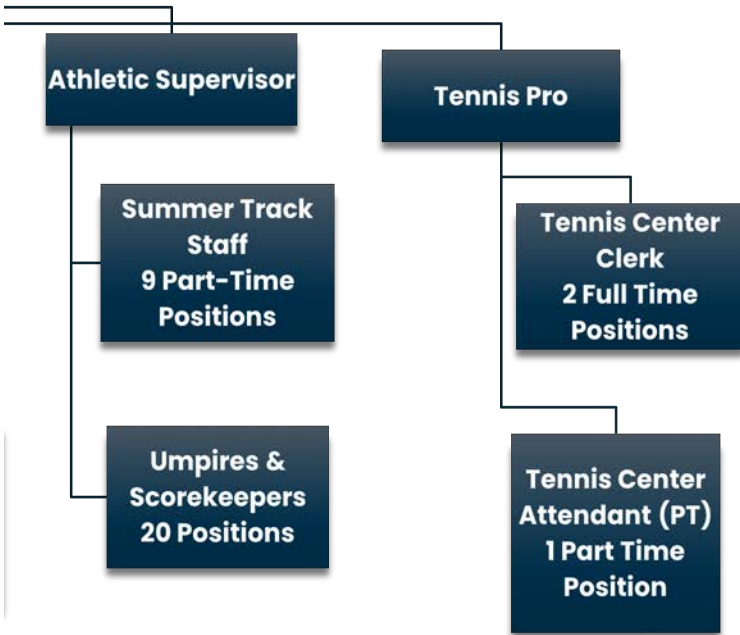


Figure 2. Parks and Recreation Department Organizational Chart



At present, there is a desire to hire two seasonal track coaches, five full-time grounds maintenance staff, a full-time aquatic facility operation technician and a community event director. These positions will support the department in maintaining the quality of existing facilities, ensuring the smooth operation of new and expanded services and facilitating current event offerings. As new facilities and events are considered in the future, it will

be crucial to ensure that there are sufficient staff available to operate and adequately maintain these areas and events.



Community Demographics

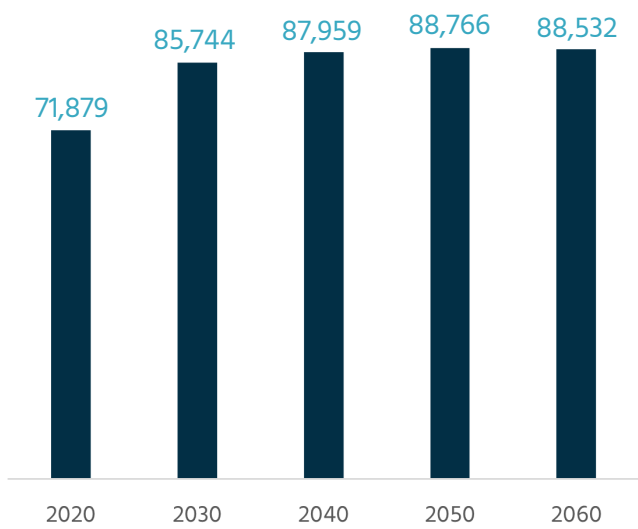
Demographic insights are crucial in parks planning, as they guide decisions on park locations, sizes, amenities and programming to address the varied needs and preferences of different population groups. In addition to current demographic data, it is important to consider projected community growth to ensure adequate parkland and facilities for future residents.

Population Growth

The City of Harlingen has experienced significant population growth, with an increase of 24.8% between 2000 and 2020. According to projections from the Texas Water Development Board, Harlingen is expected to continue its upward trajectory, boasting a compound annual growth rate of 0.52% per year, which surpasses that of Cameron County (0.27%).

As Harlingen’s population continues to expand, the need for thoughtful parks and recreation planning becomes more crucial. A growing community demands a wider array of recreational facilities to meet the needs of its residents. This includes the development of additional parks, playgrounds, sports fields, walking trails and other amenities that cater to individuals of all ages.

Figure 3. Population Projections



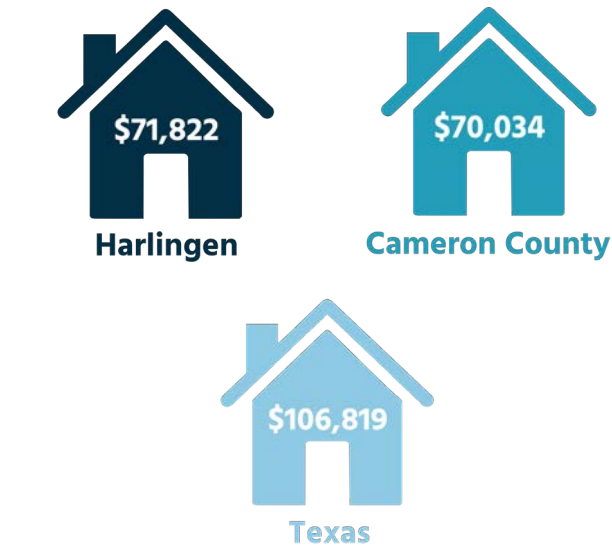
Source: Texas Water Development Board

Household Income

According to recent data, the average household income in Harlingen is \$71,822, which is slightly higher than the countywide average at \$70,034, but lower than the state average at \$106,819. The City also has a per capita income of \$26,217, which is also higher than Cameron County (\$23,142), but lower than the state (\$39,466).

Household income plays a significant role in determining the balance between fee-based and free recreation opportunities offered to the community. Some residents may be willing and able to pay for enhanced recreational options. Additionally, household income levels can impact the types of facilities and programs that are prioritized, the availability of financial assistance or subsidies for low-income families, and the overall budget and funding available for parks and recreation services.

Figure 4. Average Household Income



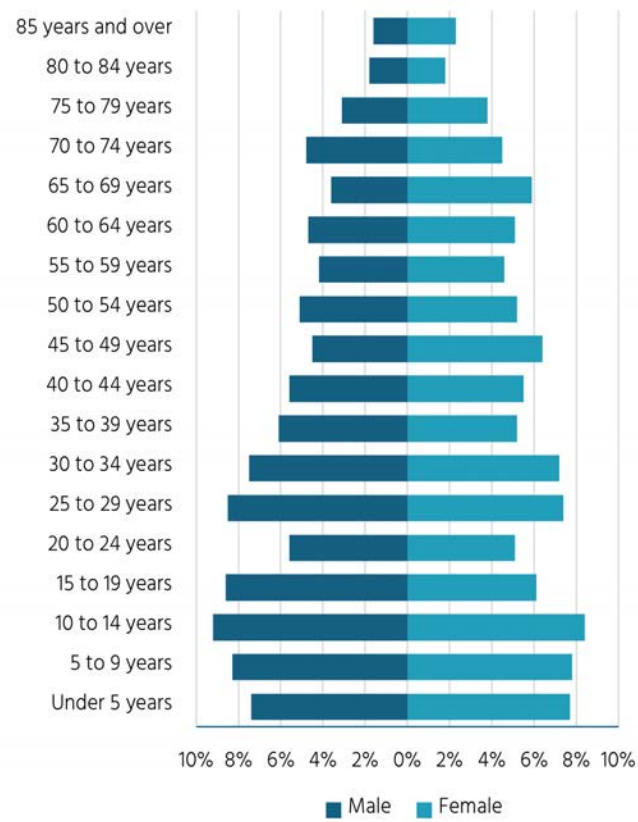
Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Age Distribution

Parks and recreational facilities play a vital role in accommodating the diverse needs of community members of all ages. For instance, playgrounds and sports fields are frequently enjoyed by families with young children, while walking trails offer a versatile option for people of all generations. Fitness areas, on the other hand, often appeal to both adults and seniors seeking to maintain their physical health. When planning and designing parks and recreational spaces, it is essential to take into account the age distribution within the community. Different age groups have unique recreational requirements, and creating inclusive spaces that address these needs is key to fostering a vibrant and active community.

Harlingen has a median age of 33.2 years, slightly higher than that of Cameron County (32.4), but lower than Texas (35.5). This is indicative of a relatively young population. The largest population groups in Harlingen are those of children, teenagers and young adults. This indicates a need for parks and recreational facilities that cater to families with children and active young adults. These amenities may include the incorporation of new playgrounds, sports fields or fitness areas to support these growing populations.

Figure 5. Age Distribution

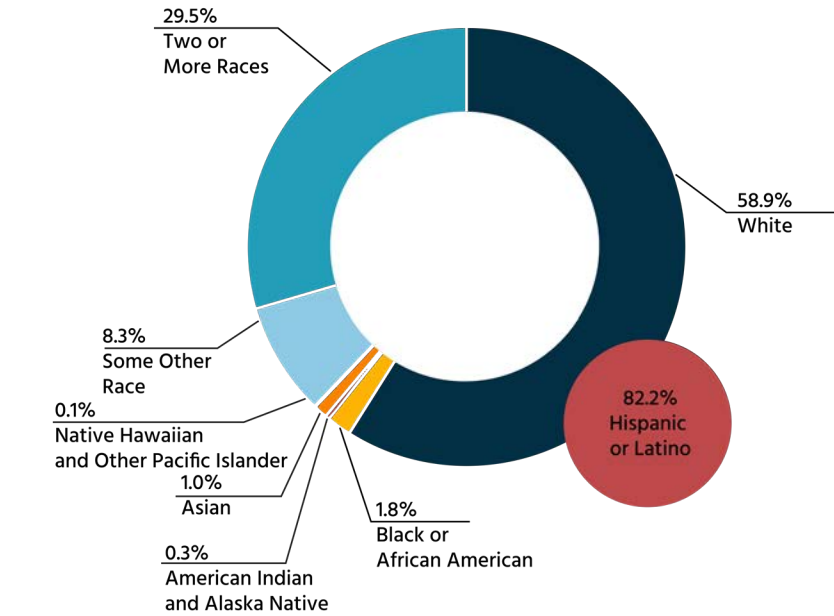


Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Race and Ethnicity

Harlingen boasts a diverse population, with a large portion identifying as White (58.9%) and Two or More Races (29.5%). There is also a notable population within the city who identify as Hispanic or Latino (82.2%), which is significantly higher than the statewide percentage of 39.5%. This rich diversity contributes to the cultural fabric of Harlingen and underscores the importance of inclusive community planning. Considering this diversity in parks and recreation planning is crucial. It ensures that the facilities and programs offered meet the varied cultural and recreational needs of the community.

Figure 6. Race and Ethnicity



Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Residential Growth Areas

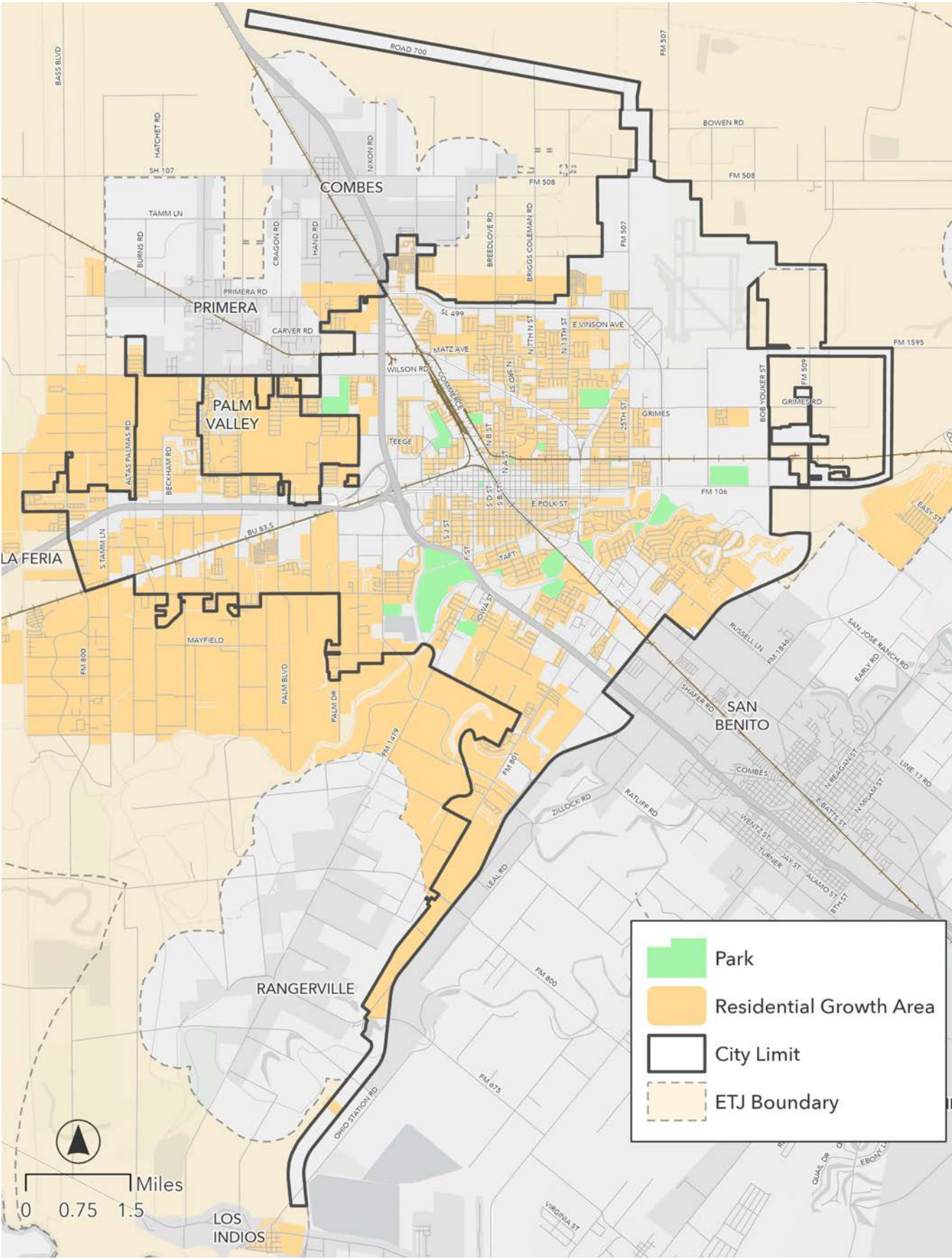
As highlighted in recent population projections, Harlingen is experiencing notable growth. Between 2023 and 2024, several key areas within the City saw significant in-progress developments. These developments include:

- **Roosevelt Industrial Park:** The forthcoming industrial development spanning over 26 hectares between Roosevelt Road and Primera Road, is set to bolster the City’s manufacturing and logistics capabilities. This development is anticipated to create new job opportunities and stimulate economic growth, as well as increase the demand for nearby housing.
- **Medical District Development:** The medical district in Harlingen is witnessing substantial growth, prompting a heightened demand for residential developments to accommodate professionals and support staff in the area.
- **Residential Construction:** The City continues to see steady growth in residential construction, with more than 1,000 single-family or multi-family lots under development, and over 46 subdivision developments in progress.
- **Downtown Revitalization:** Ongoing efforts to revitalize Downtown Harlingen aim to create a vibrant area with economically viable and unique businesses. These initiatives are designed to enhance the quality of life, attract visitors and encourage additional housing in the downtown area.



While much of the City and ETJ remain undeveloped, there is potential for future residential development throughout the majority of the City and portions of the ETJ. The orange zones on the Residential Growth Areas Map highlight regions where current or planned development might incorporate a residential element.

As Harlingen considers the future of its parks system, it’s important to locate parks in close proximity to residential areas. Future parkland acquisitions and/or development should aim to provide adequate parkland resources to serve any under-served neighborhoods in these areas. The assessment chapter further identifies target areas for future parks based on these growth areas.



Map 3. Growth Area

Community Engagement

The planning process offered numerous avenues for public engagement, ensuring community input shaped the Plan effectively. These opportunities included:

- Feedback on parks collected during the concurrent Comprehensive Plan update.
- Plans Steering Committee meetings.
- Stakeholder focus groups.
- A community survey.
- Public outreach events.
- A project website with an interactive mapping exercise.
- Summarization of the parks-specific outcomes and feedback are presented in the demand-based assessment section of this Plan.

Comprehensive Plan Engagement

During the update of the Comprehensive Plan, community input was actively collected through various channels, including community events, an interactive digital map, an online questionnaire, focus groups and sessions with the Plans Steering Committee (PSC). A significant portion of the feedback centered around parks and recreation, which played a crucial role in shaping this Parks Plan and its development process.

Plans Steering Committee Meetings

The Plans Steering Committee oversaw various stages of the planning process to ensure it aligned with the community’s vision and needs. Their responsibilities included advocating for the planning process, providing input on the analyses conducted by the planning team, shaping recommendations and ultimately recommending the final draft to the City Commission for approval. The PSC served as the advisory committee for all three plan processes running concurrently, the Comprehensive Plan, Downtown Plan and Parks Plan. This ensured a holistic approach to all three planning processes.

Public Outreach Events

The planning team organized three community outreach events throughout the process, varying in time, location and format to engage different segments of the community. These events included a community open house to introduce the project and receive initial feedback on the community’s vision for the plan. Additionally, materials from these in-person engagements were made available online through the project website.

Stakeholder Focus Group

Feedback was gathered from stakeholders during a focus group session. The session began with an overview of the Plan and its objectives, followed by interactive discussions. Participants were encouraged to evaluate the current parks and recreation system, identifying its strengths, areas for improvement and key priorities for the overall enhancement of the parks system.

Online Survey

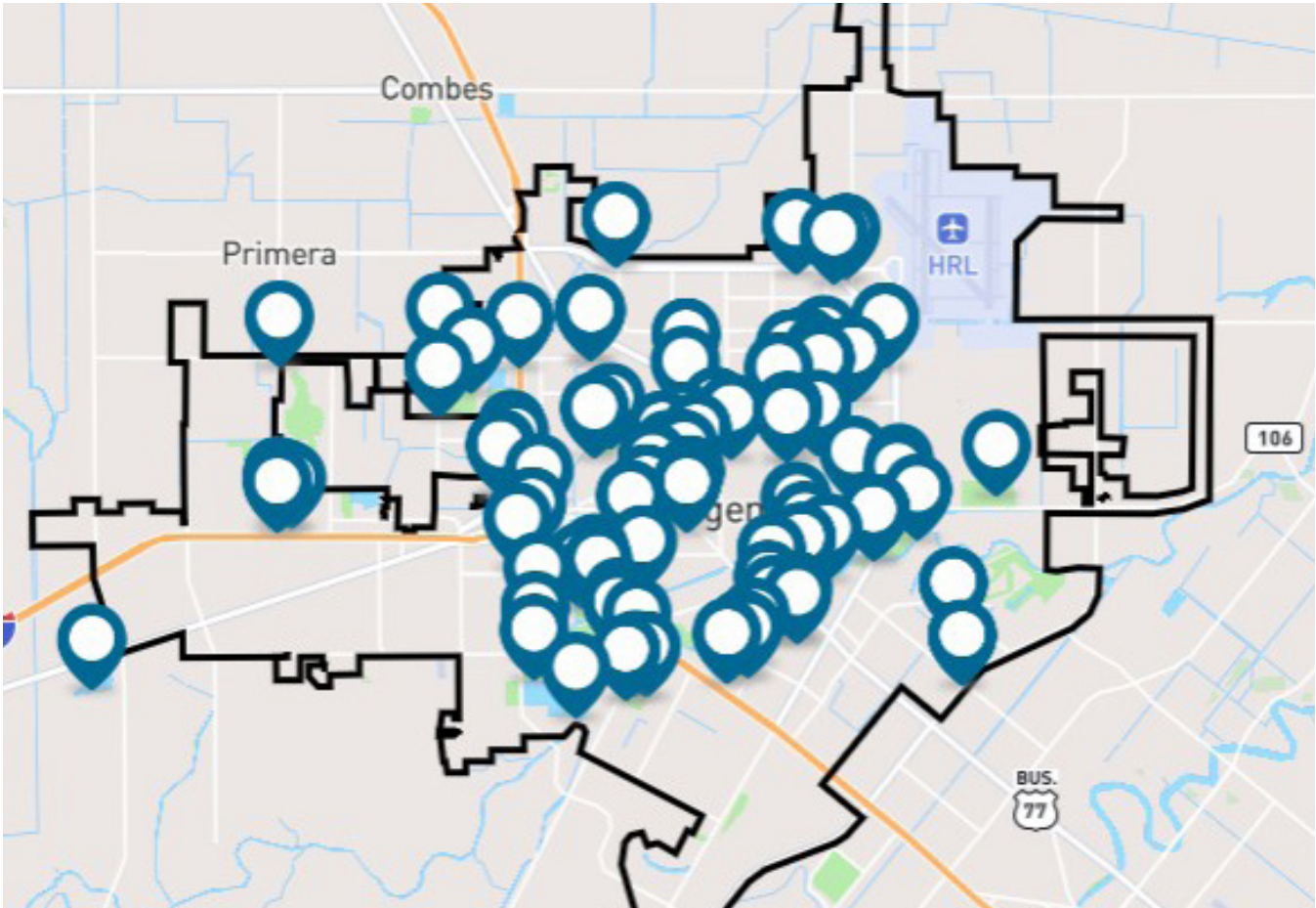
The Harlingen Parks Plan survey was open from October 30th through February 10th, 2025, and was promoted via the project website, the City’s various social media channels and the local news. The survey was also available in paper format during the November 18th engagement event. A total of 159 respondents participated in the survey while it was open.

Project Website and Interactive Map

To ensure all stakeholders had easy access to resources and updates regarding the Parks Plan, a dedicated project website was created. This site offered comprehensive information about previous planning efforts, an outline of the planning process, details on upcoming engagement events and a direct contact option for the project team. Additionally, an interactive map was included to gather feedback and concerns about specific parks and recreation facilities, as well as to collect input on the Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Plan. The map attracted 28 participants, who contributed a total of 92 comments.

159 Survey Responses

117 Map Comments



Map 4. Harlingen Interactive Map

CHAPTER

2

Inventory

Park Classifications



Pocket Parks

Pocket parks provide passive recreational opportunities to a concentrated population within an immediate proximity (e.g., a playground and/or picnic area in a residential area). Hunter Park is a local example of a pocket park.

Typical Size: 1/4 to 1 acre

Service Area: 1/4-mile radius in immediate neighborhoods

Characteristics and Considerations: These parks generally range in size from 2,500 square feet to one acre and usually contain a playground and picnic area. They should be located within close proximity to medium/high density residential areas. They are often located at the street edge and should be safely accessible by pedestrians. These parks are often built by developers and can be operated and maintained by a homeowners association or the City.

Pocket parks can also be found in urban contexts. In these situations, they often include amenities such as shaded seating and gathering areas, enhanced plantings and water features.



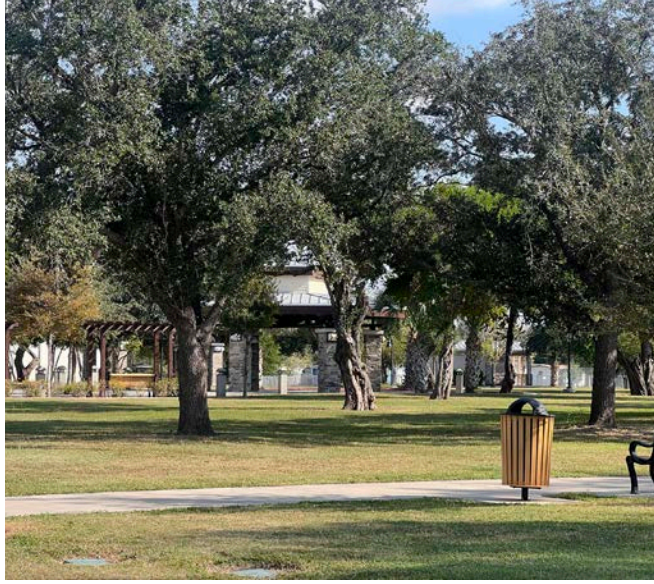
Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are the foundation of a well-balanced park system and provide the daily park experiences for residents. They serve as the social centers for residential districts in an active and passive capacity for a wide variety of age groups. C.B. Wood Park is a local example of a neighborhood park.

Typical Size: 3 to 10 acres

Service Area: 1/4- to 1/2-mile radius

Characteristics and Considerations: These parks should be located in the center of neighborhoods with good public access. At least one side of the park should front a residential street. Sites should drain properly and be suitable for a variety of uses such as playgrounds, sports courts, trail access and areas for family functions. Safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle access is important. Locations in flood areas should be avoided.



Community Parks

Community parks are larger in size and serve a broader population than neighborhood parks. They are intended to meet the recreational needs of several neighborhoods. Park development should protect desirable natural amenities and include active and passive activities for all ages. Lon C. Hill Park is a local example of a community park.

Typical Size: 10 to 100 acres

Service Area: 1- to 3-mile radius

Characteristics and Considerations: Whenever possible, these parks should be adjacent to desirable natural resources and have amenities such as athletic fields, pools, playgrounds, sports courts, picnic areas and restrooms. Community parks should be connected to citywide trail networks and be conveniently accessed by cars. Park programming should include adequate space for off-street parking.



Regional Parks

Regional parks are the largest type of park for a typical community's park system. The size varies depending on the purpose and character of the site. Regional parks provide recreational amenities for the entire community and even serve as a hub for surrounding communities. There are currently no regional parks in Harlingen.

Typical Size: Varies from less than 10 acres to several thousand acres

Service Area: Up to 50-mile radius, depending on site features

Characteristics and Considerations: Regional parks often help to protect and showcase valuable natural resources such as habitat preserves or bodies of water. These parks include a very wide range of active and passive recreation opportunities and can be an economic generator through sports tournaments, ecotourism or hosting large events. Typical amenities include destination playgrounds, athletic courts and fields, trail systems, water activities, unprogrammed open space and preserved natural areas. These parks can be located almost anywhere in the community. They should be accessible by car and connected to citywide trail networks.



Greenbelts and Linear Parks

Greenbelts and linear parks are often located along linear natural (e.g., creeks) or man-made (e.g., utility rights-of-way) features. These parks often include hike and bike trails and connect two or more parks or points of interest in a city. They are also used to protect wildlife migration routes and natural processes such as floodways or stormwater drainage. While Harlingen does have the Arroyo Hike and Bike Trail, it is not a dedicated greenbelt or linear park.

Typical Size: Varies based on surrounding environment

Service Area: Varies based on amenities

Characteristics and Considerations: Greenbelts and linear parks include amenities for walking, jogging, bicycling and/or hiking. When property adjacent to creeks and floodplains is developed, floodplain property should be dedicated to the City. The City should not purchase floodplain property unless it provides an opportunity to preserve key natural resources and/or provide a link to another park. The City should also be careful in accepting dedication of linear parks unless they provide trail links or useful recreation. Acquisition of linear parks, if small in size, can burden maintenance budgets.



Special Use Parks

Special use parks can have a wide range of uses but are parks where facilities are oriented toward a single purpose. Skate parks and dog parks are examples of special use parks. Harlingen Rotary Bark Park is a local example of a special use park.

Typical Size: Varies

Service Area: Varies

Characteristics and Considerations: Special use parks serve varying user groups based on the programming. The location of the park within the community will vary based on available land and appropriate adjacent uses. Typical examples of special use parks include golf courses, skate parks, aquatic facilities, tennis complexes, ballfield complexes, nature centers or historic sites. These parks can be operated and maintained by the City or a private enterprise.



Open Space or Nature Preserves

Open space or nature preserves typically refer to areas of land that are undeveloped, natural or minimally developed. These areas may include nature parks, nature reserves, meadows, forests, wetlands, riparian zones and other natural landscapes. Open spaces help preserve biodiversity, protect wildlife habitats and maintain ecological balance. They provide an environment for native flora and fauna to flourish, thus, contributing to the overall health and well-being of the ecosystem. The Hugh Ramsey Nature Preserve is a local example.

Typical Size: Varies

Service Area: Varies

Characteristics and Considerations: The location of these areas varies based on available land and appropriate adjacent uses. Typical amenities include natural trails, observation points, picnic areas, restrooms and parking. Other amenities that are sometimes present include educational and safety signage, visitor center, campgrounds and recreational facilities such as fishing, non-motorized boating, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, nature play or exploration, outdoor classrooms, etc. Lighting should be limited so as to preserve the natural

darkness to the maximum extent possible, as light has a profound impact on ecosystem function and wildlife. Depending on site programming, safety and security can sometimes be an issue due to low visibility. Measures should be taken to minimize this effect.

Existing Parks and Facilities

Harlingen boasts a diverse parks system with a mix of public parks, recreational facilities and open spaces that collectively enhance the quality of life for its residents (see Figure 7). The City’s parks system includes various types of parks, spanning a range of sizes, from small neighborhood parks to larger community parks. They support active and passive recreation activities that cater to the community’s needs.

The parks in Harlingen are well-distributed across the City, ensuring accessible recreation options for residents in many neighborhoods. To maximize the use of park facilities, Harlingen may consider partnering with the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) to open school facilities for community use after hours, providing additional recreational spaces without requiring extensive new development.

Harlingen’s park facilities offer a range of activities. Active recreation areas support sports like baseball, soccer and tennis, while passive recreation spaces provide settings for relaxation and casual activities, such as walking trails, picnic areas and nature observation. The City’s park system also includes specialized facilities like playgrounds, dog parks and splash pads, which add variety and appeal for residents of all ages.

With many parks located close to one another, there is significant potential to connect Harlingen’s parks via an on- and off-street trail network, enhancing accessibility and encouraging healthy, active lifestyles. Additionally, the City can explore opportunities to develop programming for its undeveloped parks, expanding Harlingen’s offerings to better meet the recreational interests of the community.

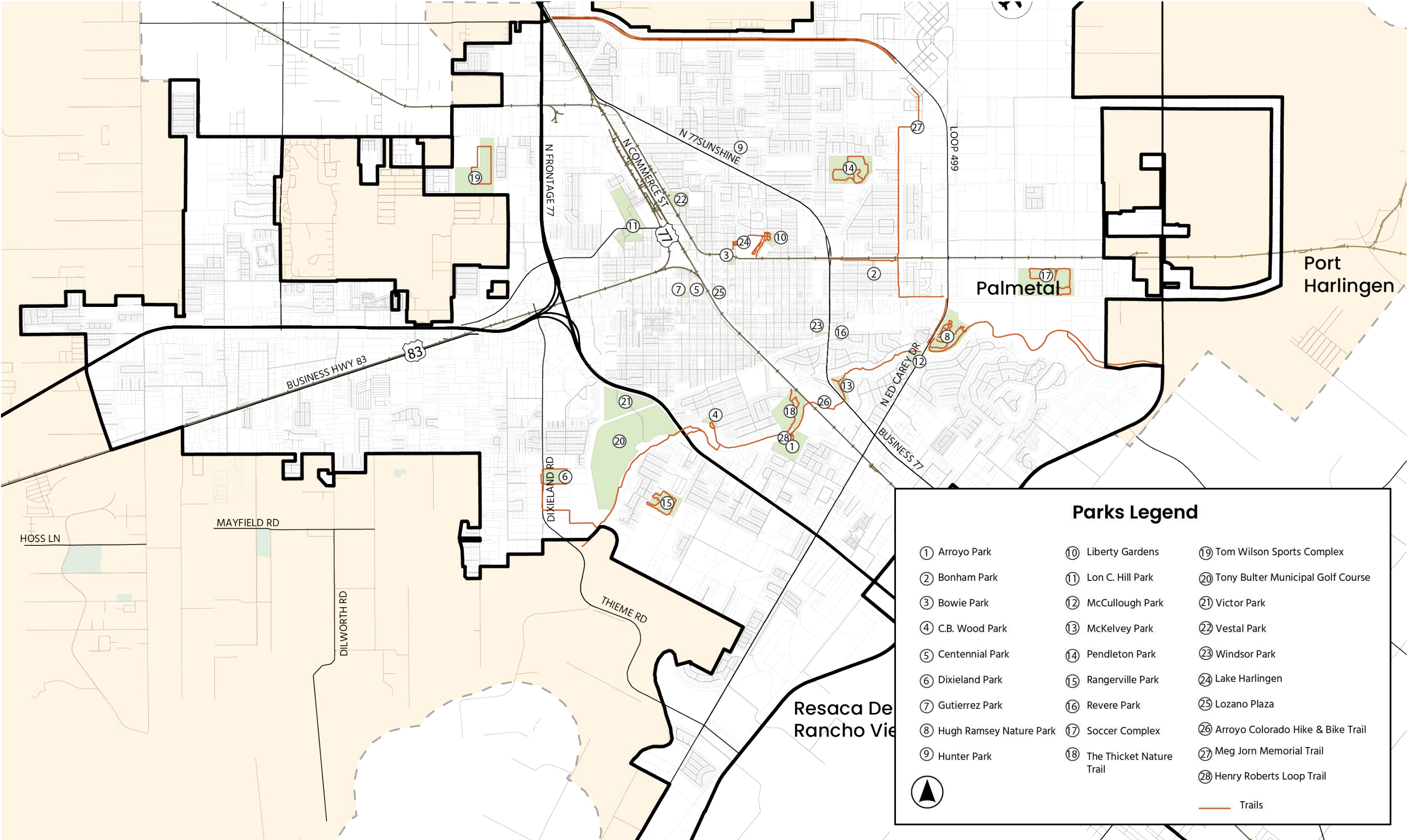
Figure 7. Harlingen Existing Parks and Trails

Map #	Park Name	Acres	Active Recreation						Active Recreation (cont.)								Water		Passive Recreation								Misc.			
			Baseball Field	Softball Field	Football Field	Soccer Field	Multipurpose Practice Field			Basketball Court	Tennis Court	Volleyball Court	Pickleball Court	Concession Stand	Trails (miles)	Disc Golf Course	Pumptrack	Exercise Equipment	Swimming Pool	Splash Pad	Dog Park	Playground	Horeshoe Pit	Picnic Tables	Benches	Pavilion	Picnic Shelter	Outdoor Event Space	Drinking Fountain	Restroom Building
Pocket Parks/Plaza																														
2	Bonham Park	2.2														3				1			4				1		42	
3	Bowie Park	2.1																											95	
5	Centenial Park	0.8											0.1									0							63	
7	Gutierrez Park	2.1																		1		6	15	1					43	
9	Hunter Park	1.5																		1		1			1		1		9	
16	Revere Park	0.6																											0	
23	Windsor Park	2.0																		2		10	4	1	1		1		9	
25	Lozano Plaza	0.3																				4							6	
Subtotal		11.6	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0.1	0	0	3	0	0	0	5	0	17	27	2	2	0	3	0	267
Neighborhood Parks																														
4	C.B. Wood Park	7.9											0.3							1		1	5		1		1		8	
10	Liberty Gardens	7.0											0.3									3							61	
12	McCullough Park	10.4																												
13	Mckelvey Park	12.6											0.2			4				2		4		1			1	1	47	
22	Vestal Park	13.6			3															1		1	4		1		1	1	70	
Subtotal		51.6	0	0	3	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0.8	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0	6	12	1	2	0	3	2	186
Community Parks																														
1	Arroyo Park	54.4		4					1				1	0.5		1	10				2		2	5		1		2	2	142
6	Dixieland Park	22.5													1					2		20	4	1	1			1	75	
24	Lake Harlingen	24.1											0.8																12	
11	Lon C. Hill	59.2	1						1		1			1.1				1	2		1		13	12	1	6		3	3	468



Figure 7. Harlingen Existing Parks and Trails (cont.)

Map #	Park Name	Acres	Active Recreation						Active Recreation (cont.)							Water		Passive Recreation								Misc.				
			Baseball Field	Softball Field	Football Field	Soccer Field	Multipurpose Practice Field			Basketball Court	Tennis Court	Volleyball Court	Pickleball Court	Concession Stand	Trails (miles)	Disc Golf Course	Pumptrack	Exercise Equipment	Swimming Pool	Splash Pad	Dog Park	Playground	Horseshoe Pit	Picnic Tables	Benches	Pavilion	Picnic Shelter	Outdoor Event Space	Drinking Fountain	Restroom Building
14	Pendleton Park	57.3	6				1		1	14			1	1.5			4	1			3	1	14	18	1	2		2	3	387
15	Rangerville Park	23.1												0.9			4				1		10	7	2	3		1	1	107
21	Victor Park	38.1	4		3					6			2					1		1	1		18	10	1	3		4	3	417
Subtotal		278.6	11	4	3	0	1		3	20	1	0	4	4.7	1	1	18	3	2	1	10	1	77	56	6	16	0	12	13	1608
Special Use/Sports Complex																														
17	Soccer Complex	76.9				10							1	1.2							1		8	8	1			1	1	635
19	Wilson Sports Complex	27.5		4	2		2		2				1	1			3				1		30	7	1	2		3	2	501
19	Tom Wilson Sports Complex	47.5	8										1										5					1	1	244
Subtotal		151.9	8	4	2	10	2		2	0	0	0	3	2.2	0	0	3	0	0	0	2	0	38	20	2	2	0	5	4	1380
Nature Preserves																														
8	Hugh Ramsey	48.9												1.5									6	6	1			1	1	45
18	Thicket Nature Park	45.5												1.5									2	3	1			1	1	20
Subtotal		94.4	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	9	2	0	0	2	2	65
Hike and Bike Trails																														
26	Arroyo Colorado Hike & Bike Trail													4.6																6
27	Meg Jorn Memorial Trail													4.1									5		1		1			
28	Henry Roberts Loop													6																
Subtotal		588.1	0	0	0	0	0		0	0	0	0	0	14.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	1	0	1	0	6
Grand Total		1176.2	19	8	8	10	3		5	20	1	0	7	25.5	1	1	28	3	2	1	21	1	146	129	13	23	0	26	21	3512



Map 5. Harlingen Parks

Pocket Parks/Plazas



Bonham Park

Existing Conditions: Bonham Park is a 2.2-acre park at the intersection of E Jefferson Ave and N 21st St with close proximity to Bonham Elementary School. The park includes a playground and outdoor exercise equipment in addition to ample open green space for recreational activities. In a concept plan released by the City, potential improvements to the park include the construction of two basketball courts, a restroom and a large covered pavilion.

Notable Opportunities:

- Implement a shading structure over the park’s playground.
- Install more prominent signage to differentiate the park from Bonham Elementary School.



Bowie Park

Existing Conditions: Bowie Park is a 2.1-acre park between E Jefferson Ave and E Madison Ave. The park includes the Harlingen Community Center and the Casa Del Sol event space, in addition to green space which is gated near the northeast perimeter. Potential improvements identified by the City for this park include the construction of eight pickleball courts.

Notable Opportunities:

- Enhance signage to increase visibility and community use.
- Improve park access to boost availability for the community.



Centennial Park

Existing Conditions: Centennial Park is a 0.8-acre park located in Downtown Harlingen between S West St and the railroad. The park’s most prominent feature is the History of Mexico and Mankind Mural near the north perimeter of the park.

Notable Opportunities:

- Due to the constrained size of the park, incorporate benches, picnic tables or a small covered pavilion onsite.



Gutierrez Park

Existing Conditions: Gutierrez Park, also known as the Lt. George Gutierrez Junior Park, is a 2.1-acre park located in Downtown Harlingen between W Van Buren Ave and W Harrison Ave. The park features a playground, benches, picnic tables and a gated pavilion. According to a concept plan released by the City, planned enhancements for the park include improved lighting, upgraded sidewalks and the renovation of electrical utilities.

Notable Opportunities:

- Increase security and maintenance of park grounds.
- Implement a shading structure for the playground.
- Add an additional pavilion and long wheelchair accessible picnic tables.
- Install crisis resource boards for community awareness.



Hunter Park

Existing Conditions: Hunter Park is a 1.5-acre park located off N 3rd St. The park features a sheltered picnic table and an updated playground. According to a City concept plan, proposed improvements for the park include the addition of a lighted basketball court and a large covered pavilion.

Notable Opportunities:

- Incorporate a multi-purpose field on the northern perimeter of the park.



Revere Park

Existing Conditions: Revere Park is a 0.6-acre park located off N Parkwood Dr. Nestled in the middle of a neighborhood, the park includes open green space and opportunities for shading.

Notable Opportunities:

- Add prominent Harlingen Parks & Recreation Department signage to the park.
- Incorporate recreational amenities suitable for its size and residential location, such as a playground, picnic tables, benches or a dog park.

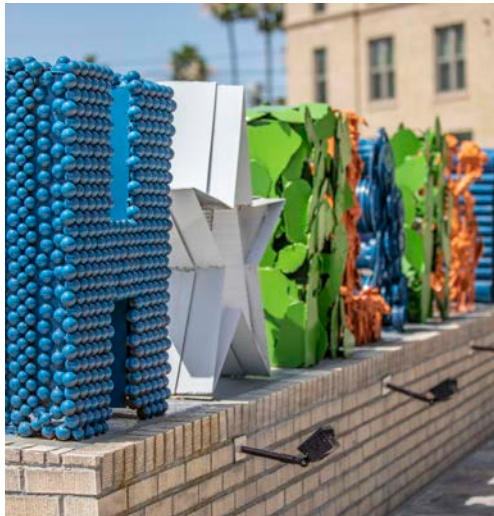


Windsor Park

Existing Conditions: Windsor Park is a 2-acre park located on E Filmore Ave, featuring an irrigation canal near its southern perimeter. The park offers local access to a pavilion, several picnic tables, and two playgrounds. Enhancements identified by the City for this park include the construction of a lighted basketball court and additional small picnic pavilions.

Notable Opportunities:

- Add sidewalks along E Filmore Ave to ensure safe access for local youth and individuals with disabilities.
- Construct a lighted pickle ball court on northern perimeter of park.



Lozano Plaza

Existing Conditions: Lozano Plaza is a 0.3-acre plaza off Jackson Ave, located on the former site of the Santos Lozano Building, which was the oldest brick building in Harlingen. The plaza includes open green space and a sign on its northwest corner. The City has identified potential uses for the site, including the construction of a covered stage and restrooms.

Notable Opportunities:

- Located in the heart of Downtown Harlingen, utilize Lozano Plaza for citywide events and in collaboration with local businesses.
- Host small-scale farmers or pop-up markets, community gatherings and fitness classes in the plaza.

Neighborhood Parks



C.B. Wood Park

Existing Conditions: C.B. Wood Park is a 7.9-acre park bordered by Harding Ave to the east and the Arroyo Colorado to the west. The park features a sheltered pavilion, a playground and a connection to the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. Enhancements identified by the City for this park include expanding onsite parking, constructing a restroom, adding additional pavilions and creating a bird and butterfly habitat garden.

Notable Opportunities:

- Increase irrigation of the open green spaces.
- Construct a multi-purpose field near the northern perimeter.



Liberty Gardens

Existing Conditions: Liberty Gardens is a 7-acre park off 76 Dr, located near several local amenities, including Lake Harlingen, the Harlingen Cultural Arts Center, and the Harlingen Public Library. The park features benches, shaded green spaces and a pergola for relaxation and gatherings.

Notable Opportunities:

- Improve pedestrian crossings between Lake Harlingen and Liberty Gardens.
- Incorporate picnic tables onsite.
- Install prominent signage along 76 Dr.



McCullough Park

Existing Conditions: McCullough Park is a 10.4-acre park located off N Ed Carey Dr. While the park is currently a blank canvas with unmarked dirt roads at its entrance, it offers great potential for future development and amenities.

Notable Opportunities:

- McCullough Park is in close proximity to several residential areas. Developing official park amenities, such as trails, public recreation spaces and a playground, will serve the local populations while also considering the park's limited topography.
- Install prominent signage along N Ed Carey Dr to draw in Harlingen residents from farther away.



McKelvey Park

Existing Conditions: McKelvey Park is a 12.6-acre park off S 77 Sunshine Strip, conveniently located near commercial centers and the Arroyo Hike and Bike Trail. The park features two playgrounds, exercise equipment and a pavilion. McKelvey Park is highly popular with residents and hosts numerous City events, including the Lighting of the Arroyo. A concept plan of enhancements for McKelvey Park, released by the City, includes the construction of additional parking, a permanent stage and a dog park.

Notable Opportunities:

- Improve local access to the park, with an updated entrance.
- Increase parking availability for high-demand events..



Vestal Park

Existing Conditions: Vestal Park is a 13.6-acre park in close proximity to Zavala Elementary School. The park features extensive open green space with three football fields currently used for youth sports. Additionally, a walking track and playground were constructed onsite for community use. Enhancements identified by the City for Vestal Park include the construction of additional parking, two lighted basketball courts, a concession stand and a dog park.

Notable Opportunities:

- Incorporate additional shading structures.
- Construct a sheltered pavilion.
- Install a splash pad to combat the impacts of excessive heat.

Community Parks



Arroyo Park

Existing Conditions: Arroyo Park is a 54.4-acre park at the intersection of E New Hampshire St and Hale Ave. The park offers a basketball court, softball fields, playgrounds, outdoor exercise equipment and Harlingen’s only pump track for bicyclists and skateboarders. Additionally, it serves as a connection point to the Henry Roberts Loop Trail. The City’s concept plan for the park identifies needed enhancements, including additional parking, renovations to the basketball court and softball fields, and the construction of a restroom.

Notable Opportunities:

- Implement shading structures over the park’s outdoor exercise equipment and playgrounds to mitigate the effects of excessive heat.



Dixieland Park

Existing Conditions: Dixieland Park is a 22.5-acre park located on Dixieland St, north of the Dixieland Water Reservoir. The park features Harlingen’s only disc golf course, two playgrounds and a pavilion. In a concept plan for Dixieland Park, the City identified the need for pavement upgrades, a restroom renovation, irrigation improvements and the construction of picnic pavilions. (Any existing concept plans for Dixieland Park are provided in the appendix.)

Notable Opportunities:

- Expand the current disc golf course space.
- Construct a lighted basketball or sand volleyball court.



Lake Harlingen

Existing Conditions: Lake Harlingen is a 24-acre park off 76 Dr, conveniently located near several local amenities, including Liberty Gardens, the Harlingen Cultural Arts Center and the Harlingen Public Library. The park features a lake and 0.76 miles of walking trails, offering a peaceful setting for local recreation.

Notable Opportunities:

- Improve the three primary pedestrian crossings between Lake Harlingen and nearby local amenities.
- Upgrade trail pavement around the lake.
- Incorporate additional benches for rest and leisure.



Lon C. Hill Park

Existing Conditions: Lon C. Hill Park is a recently renovated 59.2-acre park located on both sides of Fair Park Blvd. The park offers a baseball field, a playground, basketball and volleyball courts, two splash pads and a swimming pool. Additionally, there are numerous picnic tables and shelters that serve as local gathering places for Harlingen residents.

Notable Opportunities:

- Create safe pedestrian crossings between both sides of the park.
- Add sand volleyball courts near the northwest corner.



Pendleton Park

Existing Conditions: Pendleton Park is a 57.3-acre park off Morgan Blvd. The park offers basketball courts, baseball fields, a swimming pool, outdoor exercise equipment, playgrounds and the HEB Tennis Center. It also includes the Harlingen Veteran’s Memorial and the Hometown Heroes walking trail. Improvements identified by the City for Pendleton Park include additional parking, a lighted basketball court, pickleball courts and a championship tennis court.

Notable Opportunities:

- Implement shading structures over the park’s outdoor exercise equipment.
- Upgrade trail pavement.
- Add additional multi-purpose fields.



Rangerville Park

Existing Conditions: Rangerville Park is a 23.1-acre park on S Rangerville Rd, located east of Ben Milam Elementary School. The park features a playground, a basketball court and ample open green space for recreational activities. The City's identified enhancements for Rangerville Park include the construction of a canopy for the basketball court, a restroom, a lighted multi-purpose field for youth, additional picnic shelters and a bird and butterfly habitat.

Notable Opportunities:

- Develop additional multi-purpose fields.
- Improve security and maintenance.
- Enhance pavement on roadways and sidewalks.



Victor Park

Existing Conditions: Victor Park is a 38.1-acre park just off Interstate 69E. The park features recreational fields for basketball, football and tennis, as well as a dog park, swimming pool and a playground constructed in partnership with Harlingen Consolidated ISD. The City's identified improvements for Victor Park include the renovation of the swimming pool, upgraded parking, lighting upgrades, and the construction of a splash pad, lighted basketball court, concession stand and butterfly garden.

Notable Opportunities:

- Develop a recreation center in partnership with Harlingen Consolidated ISD.
- Improve irrigation and signage.

Special Use Parks/Sports Complexes



Soccer Complex

Existing Conditions: The Harlingen Soccer Complex is a 76.9-acre park off E Harrison Ave. The park offers local access to 10 soccer fields for adult and youth sports leagues, as well as a playground, a pavilion and walking trails for local residents. The City's concept plan for the soccer complex identifies needed enhancements, including upgrades to field topsoil, trail pavement and the construction of additional fields and parking as a part of the Phase II initiative under the 2016 Parks Master Plan.

Notable Opportunities:

- Increase opportunities for shading throughout the complex to mitigate the effects of excessive heat.
- Construct additional restroom facilities.
- Install mini soccer pitches for futsal.



Tom Wilson Sports Complex

Existing Conditions: The Tom Wilson Sports Complex, also known as the Harlingen Sports Complex, is a 74.9-acre park off Wilson Rd, near Gutierrez Middle School and the Harlingen Consolidated ISD Performing Arts Center. It offers 12 softball and baseball fields for adult and youth sports leagues, two basketball courts, and a fish-stocked lake for recreation. City-identified enhancements for the complex include 372 additional parking spaces, two lighted basketball courts, additional restrooms and renovated walking trails.

Notable Opportunities:

- Improve the highly popular pavilion and lake.
- Construct multi-purpose fields.

Nature Preserves



Hugh Ramsey Nature Park

Existing Conditions: The Hugh Ramsey Nature Park is a 48.9-acre urban forest nature preserve located off S Loop 499. The park provides access for local residents and tourists alike, offering birdwatching and educational programming along its 1.5 miles of trails. The preserve is commonly frequented by local migrating birds. City-identified improvements for the park include the addition of the Arroyo Colorado Hike and Bike Trail along its southern perimeter.

Notable Opportunities:

- Explore opportunities to raise public awareness of the preserve through enhanced signage and a welcome center and partnerships with Harlingen Consolidated ISD (HCISD) and local youth organizations.



Thicket Nature Park

Existing Conditions: The Thicket Nature Park and Trail is a 45.5-acre urban forest nature preserve located off E Taft Ave, near the Colorado Arroyo on its southeast perimeter. Similar to Hugh Ramsey Nature Park, the Thicket Nature Park offers access for birdwatching and educational programming along its 1.5 miles of trail, as it is commonly used by local migrating birds.

Notable Opportunities:

- Explore opportunities to raise awareness of the park through enhanced signage and partnerships with HCISD and local youth organizations.
- Increase the number of benches and picnic tables to match the offerings of the Hugh Ramsey Nature Park.

Hike and Bike Trails



Arroyo Colorado Hike & Bike Trail

Existing Conditions: The Arroyo Colorado Hike and Bike Trail is a 10-foot wide, 4.6-mile trail in Central Harlingen that runs along the Arroyo Colorado. The trail is highly frequented by local residents and currently connects to McKelvey Park, Arroyo Park, the Thicket Nature Trail and C.B. Wood Park. According to a concept plan released by the City, the trail is expected to undergo three additional phases of expansion, with future connections to McCullough Park, Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and the Soccer Complex.

Notable Opportunities:

- Incorporate additional lighting and emergency call stations.
- Install hydration stations and rest stops.



Meg Jorn Memorial Trail

Existing Conditions: The Meg Jorn Memorial Trail is a 10-foot wide, 4.1-mile trail that begins at Rio Hondo Rd and runs along N 25th St, ending at the Hugh Ramsey Nature Park. Its residential location offers convenient access for local residents.

Notable Opportunities:

- Developing additional lighting.
- Install hydration stations.
- Create shaded areas to provide respite during days of extreme heat.



Henry Roberts Loop

Existing Conditions: The Henry Roberts Loop is a 10-foot wide, 6-mile trail within Arroyo Park. It offers access for trail running, mountain biking and hiking recreational activities.

Notable Opportunities:

- Explore opportunities to raise public awareness of the trail through enhanced signage.
- Construct an adaptive trail to increase safety and access for people with physical restrictions.



Recreational Programming

The City of Harlingen is dedicated to ensuring that all community members have access to enjoyable and enriching recreational activities. The City offers a variety of seasonal and year-round recreational programs, festivals and sports leagues for the community. More than half of the programs are geared toward children 12 years of age or under. The Lighting of the Arroyo, Trails of Treats and the Easter Egg Hunt were among the most well-attended events of 2023. Harlingen also provides numerous events for teenagers, adults and seniors, including the Lager Jogger St. Patrick's Day Festival and Bachata/Salsa and Country dancing classes. Most events are open to the public either for free or at a nominal fee. McKelvey Park, Lon C. Hill Park, the Harlingen Cultural Arts Center and the Soccer Complex are some of the most utilized parks and facilities in the City. The Harlingen Parks and Recreation Department also oversees a number of youth and adult sports leagues, as well as youth summer programming. Figure 8 lists the recreation programming available to the Harlingen community. Recreational programming must adapt to the evolving needs of the community. The City should routinely evaluate its list of offerings and make adjustments based on demographic trends, participation rates, available funding and the presence of comparable programs offered by other organizations within the community.

Figure 8. Harlingen Parks and Recreation Programming

Event or Program Name (City run or operated by other vendor on City property)	Age Group					Location	Season	Fee	Estimated Attendance					
	Age 12 and under	Age 13-18	Adults	Seniors					2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Festivals/Events														
Trails of Treats	x	x	x	x		Lon C. Hill Park	Fall	None				3000	3000	
Lighting of the Arroyo	x	x	x	x		McKelvey Park	Winter	None				5000	5000	
Lager Jogger St. Patrick's Day Festival	x	x	x	x		Harlingen Field	Spring	\$35/person				400	400	
Easter Egg Hunt	x	x	x	x		Harlingen Soccer Field	Spring	None				2000	2000	
Summer Movie Series	x	x	x	x		Multiple Parks	Summer	None				1000	1200	
Recreational Programs														
Acoustic Guitar Lessons	x	x	x	x		Harlingen Cultural Arts Center	Winter/ Spring/Fall	\$80/person	30	0	0	3	9	
Bachata/ Salsa Class	x	x	x	x		Harlingen Cultural Arts Center	Winter/ Spring/Fall	\$40/person				26	54	
Baby Ballet	x					Harlingen Cultural Arts Center	Winter/ Spring/Fall	\$25/person				53	33	
Baby Combo	x					Harlingen Cultural Arts Center	Winter/ Spring/Fall	\$50/person			25	77	30	
Young Beginner's Ballet	x					Harlingen Cultural Arts Center	Winter/ Spring/Fall	\$50/person	31	9	68	36	44	
Country Dance	x	x	x	x		Casa De Amistad	Winter/ Spring/Fall	\$40/person	14	0				
Valley Fencing Club	x	x	x	x		Casa De Amistad	Winter/ Spring/Fall	\$40/person				32	117	

CHAPTER

3

Needs Assessment

Assessment Methodology

This Plan uses a multifaceted analysis to help determine the parks and recreational needs of the Harlingen community. The needs assessment analyzes whether those needs are being met and what types of improvements or changes would benefit Harlingen. Existing parks and recreation opportunities are analyzed in terms of public opinion, the location and quantity of parkland, the number of facilities within parks and natural resources in the City.

The needs assessment includes three parts. These include demand-based, standards-based and resource-based assessments. The use of multiple assessment methods helps to establish an understanding of key parks and recreation needs and inform Plan recommendations to address those needs.

This approach ensures that both public input and objective data inform decision-making. By combining multiple assessment methods, the Plan captures a well-rounded understanding of needs. The results will guide future improvements and investments in Harlingen’s parks and recreation system.

Demand-Based Assessment

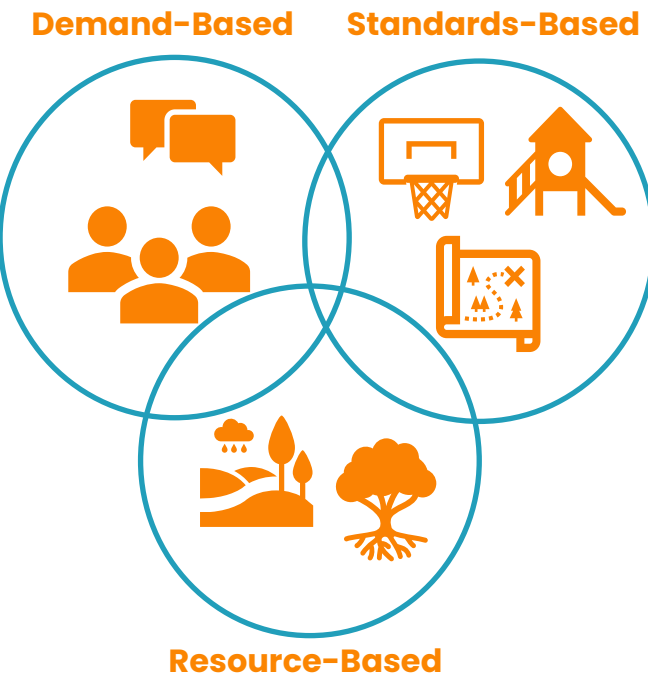
The needs assessment starts with a demand-based assessment. This includes an analysis and summary of public feedback to identify what the community wants and expects from the parks and recreation system and how this compares to its current state.

Standards-Based Assessment

The standards-based assessment then analyzes parkland acreage, location and amenities, comparing them to the needs and location of the current population and future residential growth areas. This is used to determine an appropriate target level of service for the Harlingen community and identify surpluses or deficits.

Resource-Based Assessment

Lastly, the resource-based assessment evaluates Harlingen’s existing physical, man-made and natural resources to identify opportunities to leverage for public recreation benefit.



Demand-Based Assessment

The demand-based assessment is a reflection of the community’s needs, as expressed directly by residents through various public engagement opportunities. Community engagement included:

- Parks Stakeholder Focus Group
- Parks-Specific Community Survey
- Online Mapping Exercise
- Public Open House

The following pages present highlights from the community input received. These highlights are opinions from Harlingen residents and/or park users and may differ between the various engagement opportunities and questions.

Stakeholder Focus Group

As part of the Harlingen Parks planning process, a stakeholder listening session was held to gather in-depth feedback from key user groups. Participants included representatives from youth and adult sports leagues, as well as park advocates who regularly engage with the City’s parks and recreational facilities. The session provided an opportunity for these stakeholders to share firsthand experiences, challenges and priorities related to the parks and recreation system.

Participants spoke positively about the City’s commitment to recreation but highlighted several areas where improvements are needed. A common priority was the expansion of Harlingen’s existing trail network to support walking, running and biking across more neighborhoods. There was also a strong desire to see the development of a full-service indoor recreation center to provide year-round access to programming, particularly during inclement weather or extreme heat. Additional sports courts, restrooms and upgraded amenities were also emphasized as important steps to meet growing demand.

Alongside these priorities, stakeholders expressed concerns around ongoing maintenance, limited parking at sports complexes and insufficient lighting throughout parks and trails. Security was also noted as a concern, with several participants calling for improvements at specific parks. Another key issue was the limited after-hours access to Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) outdoor facilities, which stakeholders felt could serve as valuable shared-use spaces, especially for league play.

Key Priorities Identified:

- Expand the existing trail network to improve connectivity.
- Develop a new indoor recreation center for year-round programming.
- Improve security measures at select parks.
- Construct additional basketball courts.
- Add more restrooms to support longer visits and larger crowds.
- Expand recreational sports fields and increase parking capacity for tournaments.

Key Concerns Raised:

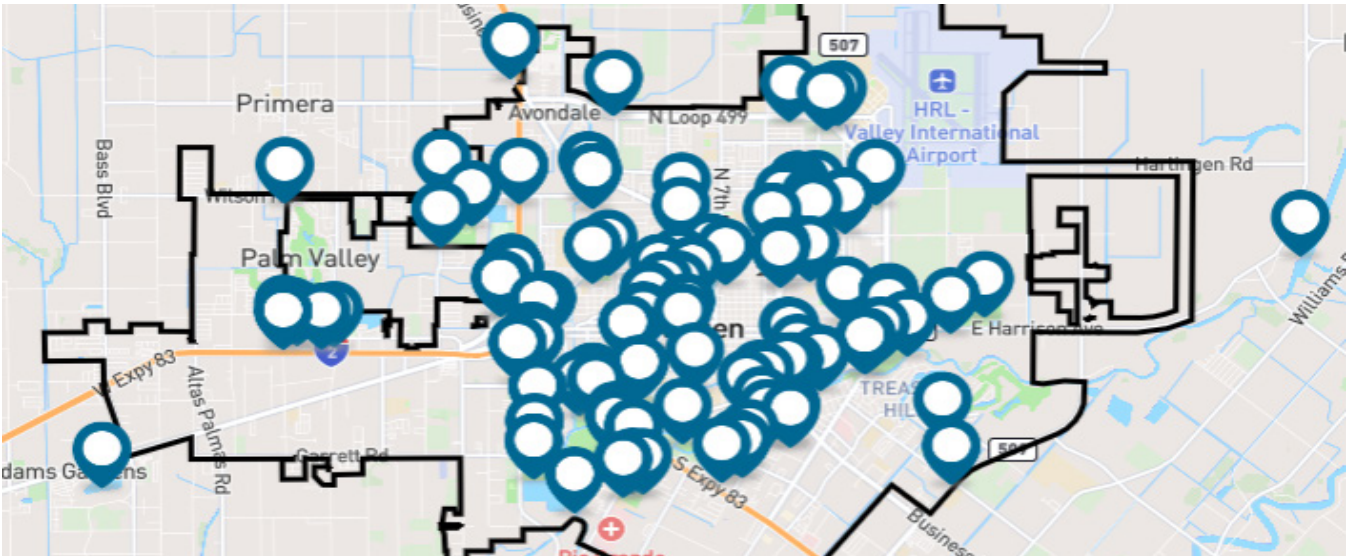
- Park beautification and maintenance need greater attention.
- Demand for league play exceeds current facility capacity.
- Inadequate lighting in parks and along trails.
- Limited after-hours access to HCISD facilities for community use.
- Insufficient parking for hosting large-scale sports events.
- Ongoing safety concerns in certain parks.

Online Mapping Comments

Throughout the course of the project, there was an online mapping exercise available for residents to provide comments and ideas related to specific points around Harlingen. The map had 38 total participants that left 117 comments. Participants were able to upvote and downvote other comments. The following represents real responses from participants regarding parks and recreation feedback:

- I love the space and peace of Rangerville Park. However, the playground equipment is old, rusty and unsafe for my children. I would really love to see an update on that, and in the restrooms and driveway, you can visibly see the metal sticking out of the concrete! Also, if there were easier access to the park from the surrounding communities, that would be great as well.
- There needs to be better access to Pendleton Park when walking from the neighborhoods. I have asked many times for a crosswalk on Grimes with lights to Pendleton. There is a sign that says 'Duck Crossing,' which I love. Can we please have a dedicated crossing for us humans as well?
- Could this trail [Meg Jorn Trail] have some sort of shade or native tall trees for us runners?
- Please extend the bike trail from Hugh Ramsey to McElvey Park. There is no safe bike path between the two since they are both on major roads. This would be a huge upgrade to the trail and give so many more people safe access to it.
- Trail [Meg Jorn Trail] should also connect to the soccer complex.
- This area [Treasure Hills Blvd and Golden Bear Rd] should be turned into a pocket park. Many rare and uncommon birds have been spotted here (over 200 species) being on the migration corridor that birds use as they make pit stops as they migrate makes this location critical. Of about 50 species of shorebirds in North America, at least 31 species have been documented on record at this one spot. Birding tours also stop here, so it's also an important location economically.
- Victor Park tennis courts need new windscreens! The current ones are in shreds or are missing.
- I always said this park [Rangerville Park] needs a major update in the park's playground and restroom. My family and I love coming here, and I don't ever want to stop coming here, but the playground has been the same since I was eight, and now I'm 32. Please consider Rangerville Park for renovations!
- Need signs that CLEARLY state the rules for motorists, walkers, runners and cyclists, including emergency contact numbers. Lighting would be good, and the city should consider the use of trail marshals such as those in San Antonio. Safety is a big concern in the evening at [Arroyo Park]
- The basketball court [at Pendleton Park] needs better lighting. The walking track needs better lighting. Trees around the pond need to be trimmed back and cleaned up.

Map 6. Online Mapping Comment Pin Distribution



Public Open House

On February 24, 2025, the City of Harlingen hosted a joint Public Open House at the Harlingen Community Center. The event invited community members to engage with and provide feedback on the Comprehensive Plan, the Parks Plan and the Downtown Plan. A variety of interactive boards encouraged residents to share their thoughts, particularly on the City's parks and recreation offerings.

Participants expressed a strong interest in enhancing recreational opportunities across the City. Many called for an expanded network of walking and biking trails to improve connectivity and promote active lifestyles. The need for more restrooms in existing parks was another frequently raised issue, with residents emphasizing that better facilities would make parks more family-friendly and accessible for all ages.

Another major topic of discussion was equitable park access. Attendees voiced a desire for more investment in sports facilities like basketball and pickleball courts, along with a clear call for new park development in West Harlingen. Residents in that area noted the limited access to quality recreational spaces and encouraged the City to address this gap in future planning.

Key Feedback Highlights:

- Strong support for adding more walking and biking trails throughout the parks system.
- Requests for additional restroom facilities in existing parks to enhance usability.
- Increased interest in sports courts, including basketball, tennis and pickleball.
- Calls for new park development in West Harlingen to improve access and equity.
- Emphasis on connectivity between neighborhoods and parks via trails and sidewalks.



Parks Survey

A detailed 18-question survey focused on Harlingen’s parks and recreation system, was carried out to collect feedback from a wide range of Harlingen residents and stakeholders.

The survey, which was available for approximately three months, received a total of 159 respondents. The respondents span a range of ages, with the majority being between 36 and 50 years of age. Nearly half of the survey respondents noted that they have no children in their household, with the next largest share of respondents identifying children between 6 and 10 years of age in their household.

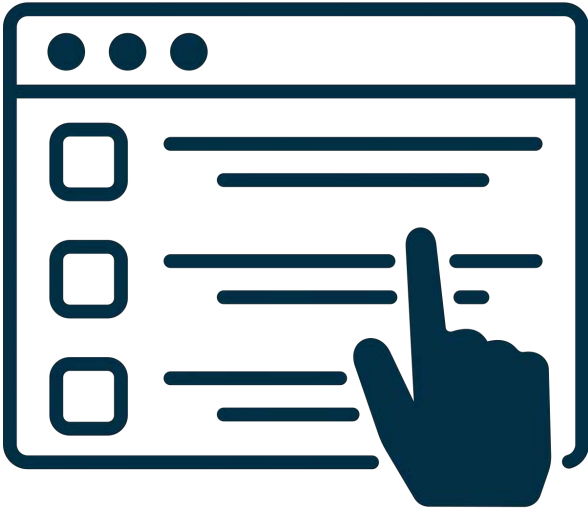


Figure 9. Age of survey respondents

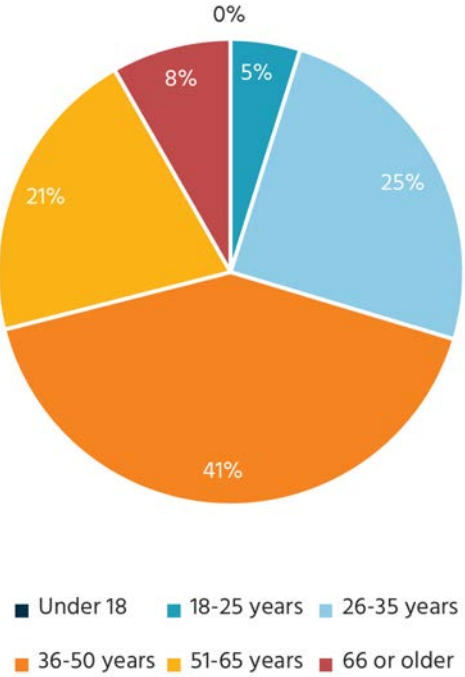
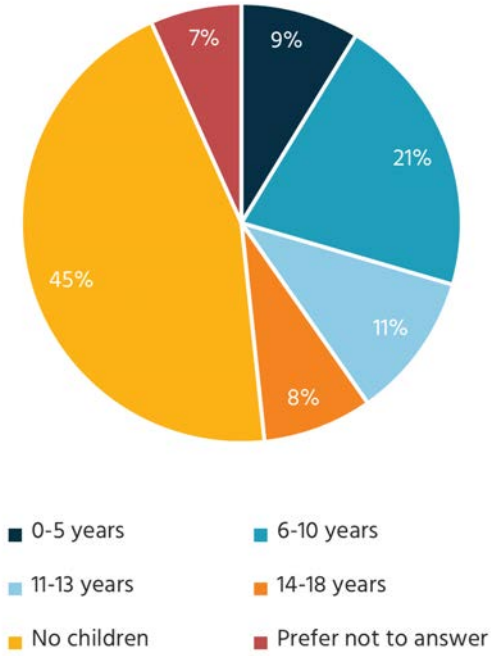


Figure 10. Age of children in respondent households

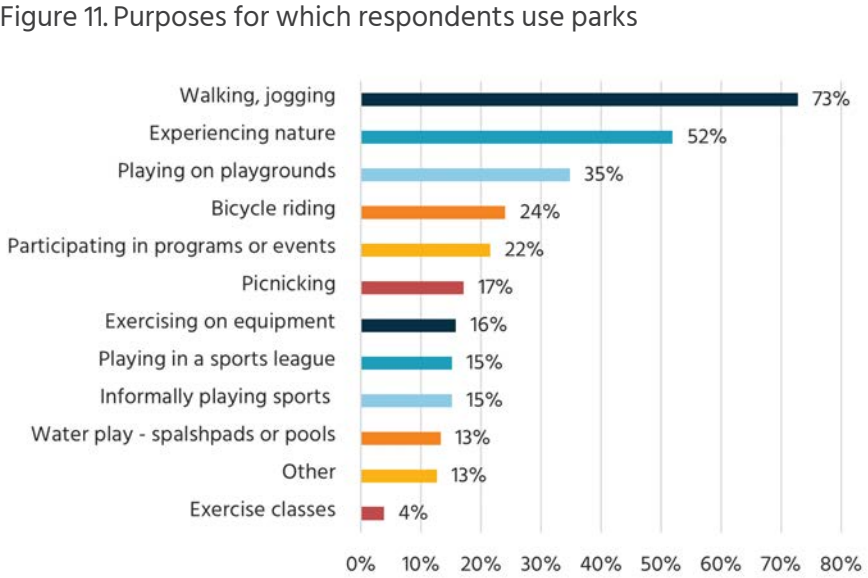


Parks & Recreation System Usage

Main Purposes for Parks & Recreation Usage

Understanding the primary uses of a city’s parks system is essential for effective planning and resource allocation.

Respondents primarily use Harlingen’s parks and recreation facilities for walking or jogging, experiencing nature and utilizing the playgrounds.



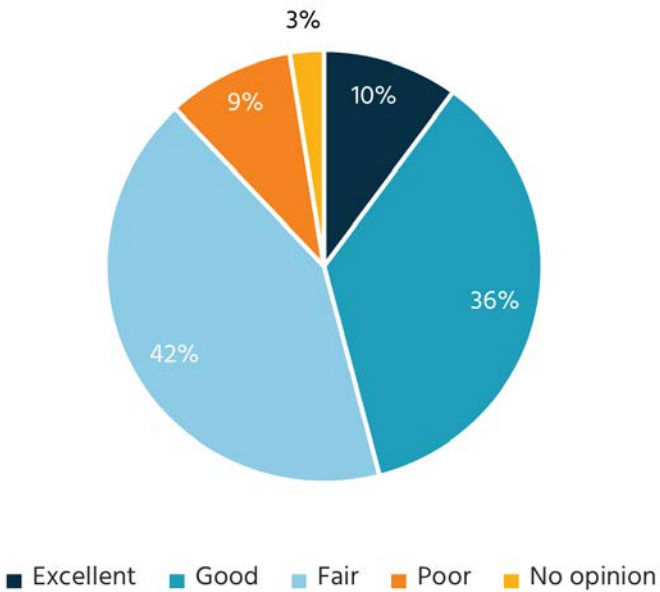
Overall Ratings of the Parks & Recreation System

Rating the Quality of Parks, Recreation and Open Space Opportunities in Harlingen

Nearly half of respondents (46%) rated the quality of parks, recreation and open space opportunities as excellent or good. The largest share of respondents rated the parks, recreation and open space opportunities as fair (42%). Of the respondents who rated the system fair or poor, the main themes were:

- Outdated or broken park equipment.
- Poor maintenance of existing parks.
- Overgrown and uneven trails.
- Inadequate lighting within park facilities.
- Lack of shade in some playground areas.
- Restrooms are frequently dirty.
- Demand for more events and activities.
- Concerns of excessive loitering.

Figure 12. Quality ratings of Harlingen’s Parks & Open Space

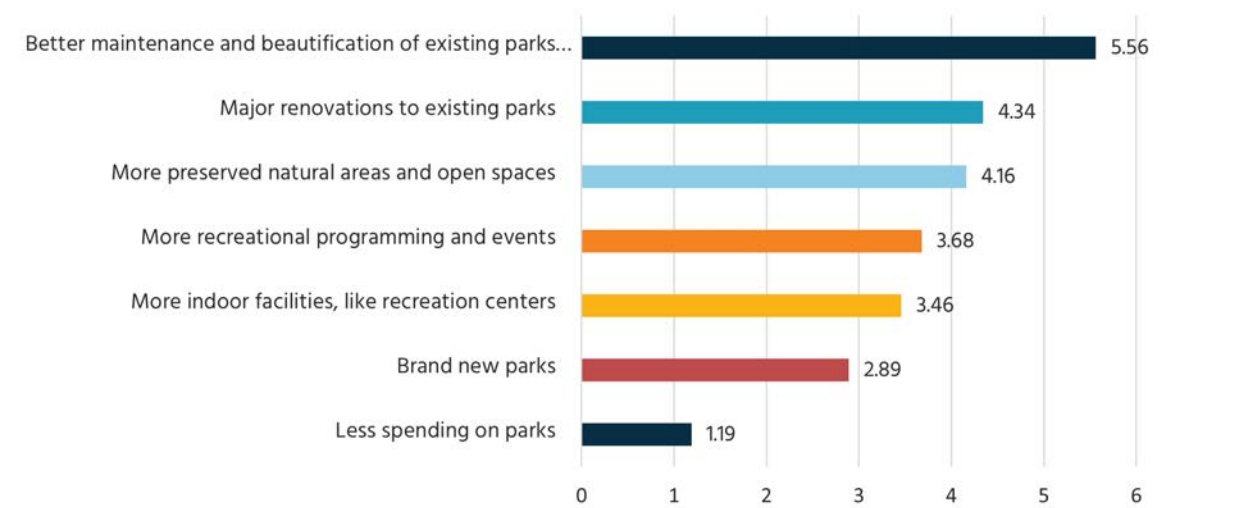


Parks & Recreation System Priorities

Most Important Priorities for Parks & Recreation in Harlingen

The primary parks and recreation functions that respondents viewed as priorities for the City included: better maintenance and beautification of existing parks and amenities, major renovations to existing parks and more preserved natural areas and open space.

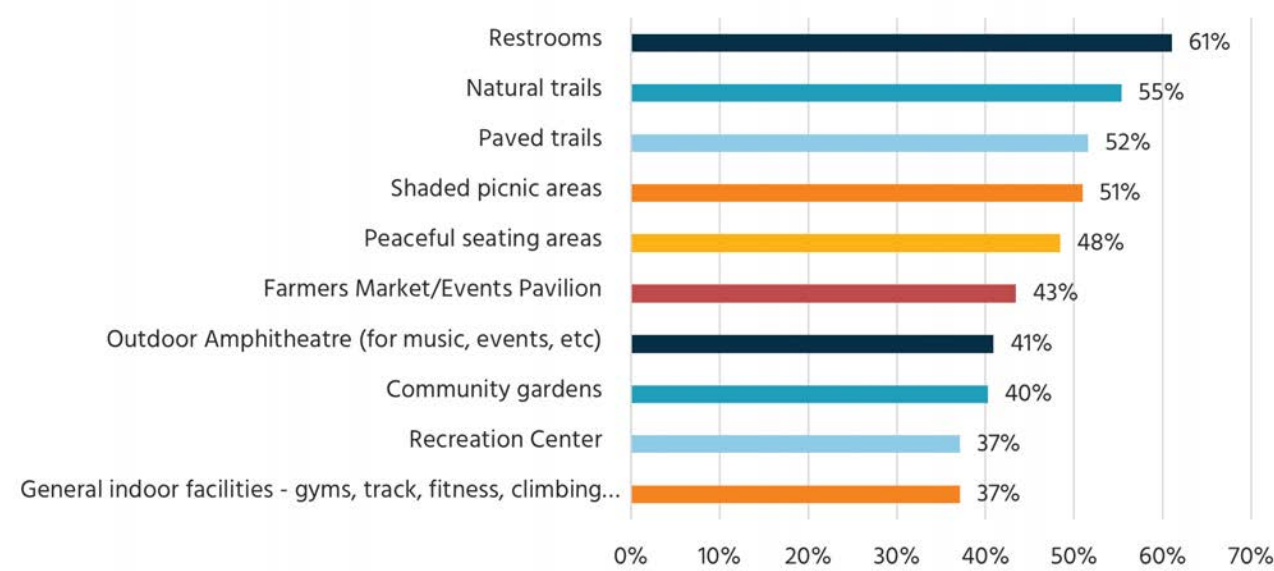
Figure 13. Respondents priorities for parks and recreation



Most Important Facility Priorities for Parks & Recreation in Harlingen

The top parks and recreation facilities that respondents viewed interest in included: additional restrooms, extended natural or paved trail connections and more shaded picnic areas.

Figure 14. Respondent priorities for parks and recreation facilities

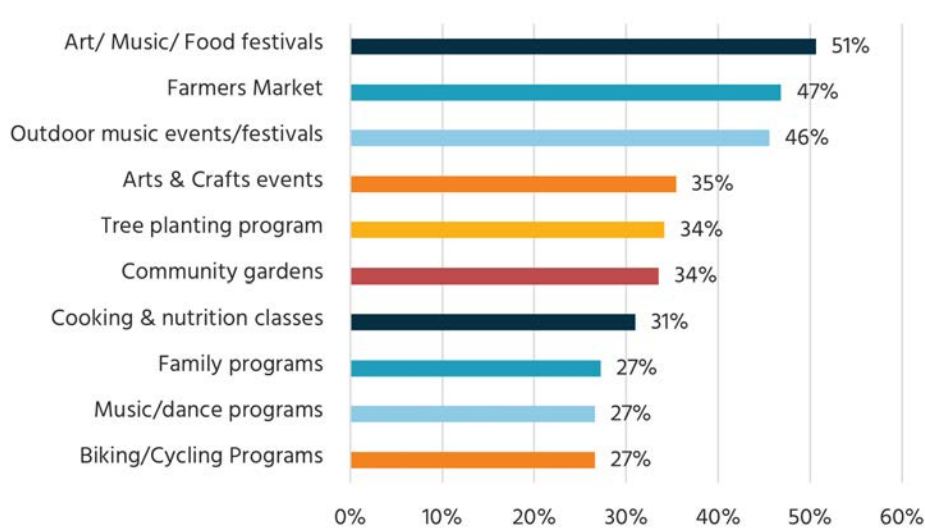


Parks & Recreation System Programming

Recreational Programming Priorities

The top parks and recreation program priorities that respondents expressed interest in included: the facilitation of festivals pertaining to art, music or food; particularly the development of a farmers market on parks grounds; and arts and crafts programming.

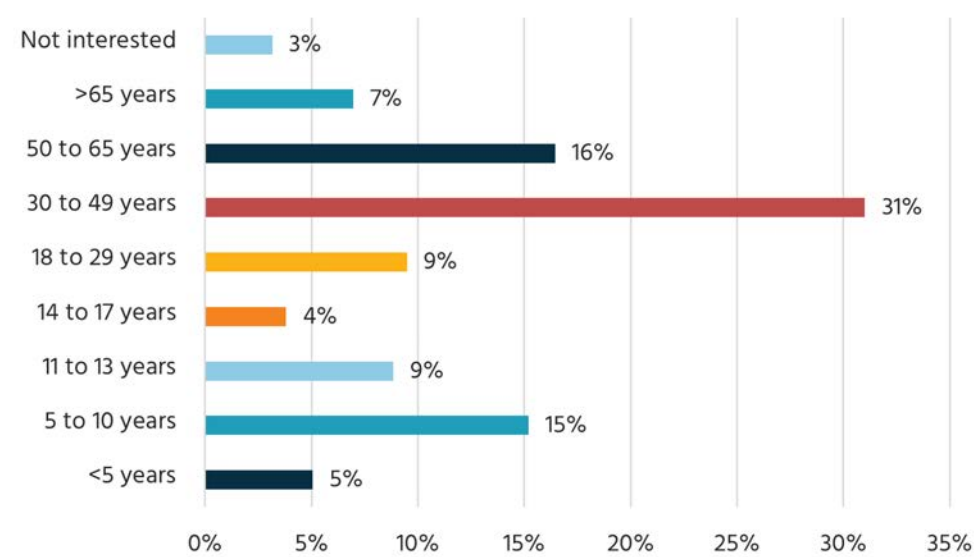
Figure 15. Respondents priorities for parks and recreation programming



Age Groups Interested in Parks Programming

Parks programming attracts interest from all age groups. The highest interest among children is seen in those aged 5 to 10 years, while adults aged 30 to 49 years show the greatest interest in parks programming.

Figure 16. Programming interest by age group

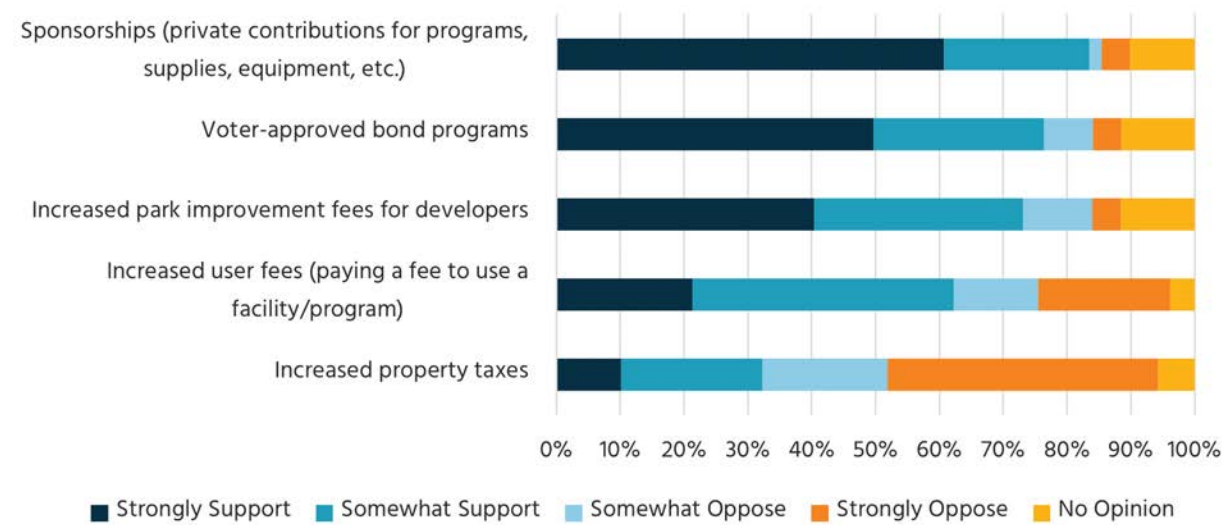


Parks & Recreation System Funding

Support for Funding Sources

Respondents were asked to rank their preferred funding sources for parks and recreation. Respondents had strong support for sponsorships and voter-approved bond programs as the preferred funding strategies to pay for developing and maintaining park and recreation facilities/amenities. There is less support for funding sources that pass the cost onto residents, such as increased user fees or property taxes.

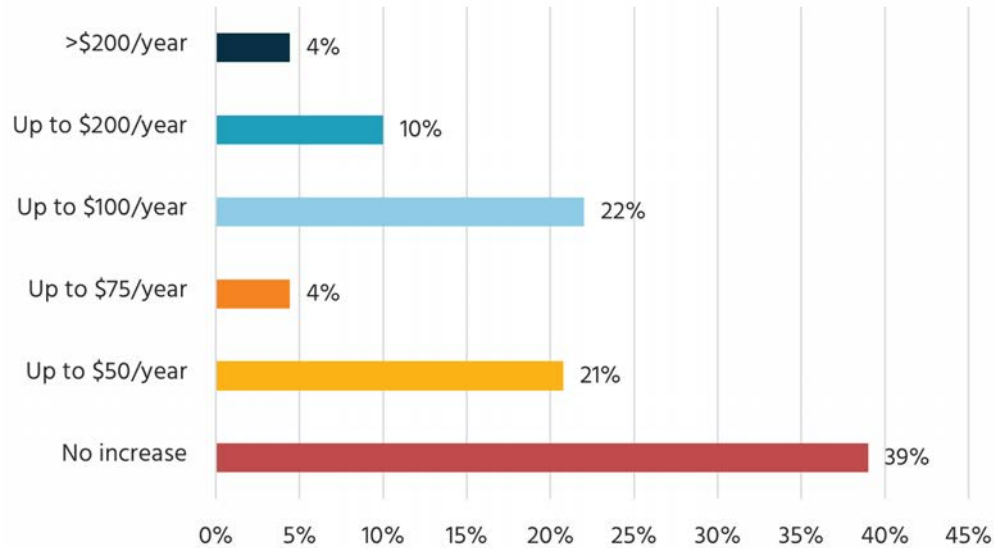
Figure 17. Respondents preferred funding sources



Willingness to Pay

Although increasing taxes was the least desirable funding mechanism noted above, 61% of respondents said they are willing to pay some additional property taxes annually to help fund the improvement priorities suggested in this survey. Respondents are willing to pay an average of \$64 per year to help fund these priorities.

Figure 18. Amount respondents are willing to pay annually to support parks priorities



Standards-Based Assessment

The standards-based assessment analyzes parkland in terms of acreage, location and number of park facilities. It identifies the current level of service and whether it is meeting the community’s needs. Levels of service represent a specific acreage of parkland or number of facilities needed per given population. The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) publishes its Agency Performance Review annually. It presents data and insights from 1,000 parks and recreation agencies nationwide. This information was referenced throughout the standards-based assessment as a baseline comparison.

Three types of standards were examined in this assessment: acreage, location and facilities.

Acreage Level of Service

The acreage level of service defines the quantity of parkland acreage as a ratio to population. The results are expressed as park acreage per 1,000 residents. The analysis examines whether there is sufficient parkland for residents today and in the future.

Spatial Level of Service

The spatial level of service looks at the location and distribution of different park types to identify underserved areas and where new parks may be needed.

Facility Level of Service

The facility level of service defines the number of park facilities needed to meet the community’s recreational needs. Standards are expressed as a ratio of facility per population size (e.g., one baseball field per 3,500 residents).



Acreage Level of Service

Different types of parks are intended to serve different needs. Pocket, neighborhood and community parks, cumulatively thought of as close-to-home parks, are focused on recreational benefits for nearby residents. In addition to local residents, regional parks serve a population beyond the immediate community. Linear parks/greenways and open space/nature parks provide passive recreation opportunities for the whole community, while special purpose parks serve a focused user group (e.g., dog parks).

While Harlingen’s parks system includes 588.1 acres of parkland, approximately 152 acres are currently geared toward dedicated user groups or a single use in special use parks.

According to the 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review, the median community with 50,000-99,999 people had 10.2 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. A target level of service has been defined for Harlingen through comparison with the NRPA Agency Performance Review and an understanding of the community’s goals, opportunities and challenges.

Existing and target levels of service per park type are listed in the table on the next page. The City’s total combined level of service today is 8.2 acres per 1,000 residents. Considering the total of all park types (including those without target levels of service), there is a current parkland deficit of 4.5 acres, with a future deficit that grows as the population increases toward its projected 2035 population.

The City is primarily lacking close-to-home parkland (i.e., pocket, neighborhood and community parks) today and in the future, as listed in the “surplus/deficit acreages” columns in the table. There is also projected to be a growing deficit in parkland identified for nature preserves or open space.

The City should consider opportunities for additional close-to-home parks in areas with new development in the future. Based on Harlingen’s extensive amount of special-use parkland, it will be essential to enhance pocket, neighborhood and community park amenities (e.g., playground, basketball court, picnicking) within these parks to ensure that they can help meet the daily recreational needs for residents in the vicinity.

It will also be important to identify opportunities to expand or acquire additional parkland for nature preserves or open space within the City. This type of park is intended to remain minimally developed or in its natural state. As Harlingen evaluates development options for these parks, consideration should be given to including trails and picnic amenities, where appropriate, to allow the acres to provide some recreational benefit.

National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA) 2024 Agency Review

Average Total Parkland per 1,000 residents (for communities 50,000-99,999 people)

- Lower Quartile: 4.8 acres/1,000 people
- Median: 10.2 acres/1,000 people
- Upper Quartile: 17.4 acres/1000 people

Figure 19. Parkland Acreage Level of Service

Park Classification	Existing Level of Service (LOS)			Recommended Level of Service (2025)				Recommended Level of Service (2035)	
	Existing Acreage (2025)	Current LOS (based on 71,829 population)		Recommended Target LOS (2025-2035)		2025 Recommended Acreage (based on 71,829 population)	Surplus/ Deficit Acreages (2025)	2035 Recommended Acreage (based on 92,516 population)	Surplus/ Deficit Acreages (2035)
Close-to-Home Parks									
Pocket Parks	11.6	0.16	Ac/1,000 Residents	0.25	Ac/1,000 Residents	18.0	-6.4	23.1	-11.5
Neighborhood Parks	51.6	0.7	Ac/1,000 Residents	1.5	Ac/1,000 Residents	107.7	-56.1	138.8	-87.2
Community Parks	278.6	3.9	Ac/1,000 Residents	4	Ac/1,000 Residents	287.3	-8.7	370.1	-91.5
Close-to-Home Parks Subtotal	341.8	4.8	Ac/1,000 Residents	5.75	Ac/1,000 Residents	413.0	-71.2	532.0	-190.2
Other Parks									
Open Space/ Nature Preserves	94.4	1.3	Ac/1,000 Residents	2.5	Ac/1,000 Residents	179.6	-85.2	231.3	-136.9
Regional Parks	0	0.0	Ac/1,000 Residents	0	Ac/1,000 Residents	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Special Use Parks	151.9	2.1	Ac/1,000 Residents	Varies		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other Parks Subtotal	246.3	3.4	Ac/1,000 Residents	Varies		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
All Park Types	588.1	8.2	Ac/1,000 Residents	8.25	Ac/1,000 Residents	592.6	-4.5*	763.3	-175.2*

*The bottom row includes all park types and an overall recommended level of service of 8.25 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. The total 2025 and 2035 surplus and deficit calculations are based on all park types combined (e.g., 588.1 existing acres - 592.6 recommended acres in 2025 = 4.5 acres deficit).

Negative numbers indicate acreage deficits.

Spatial Level of Service

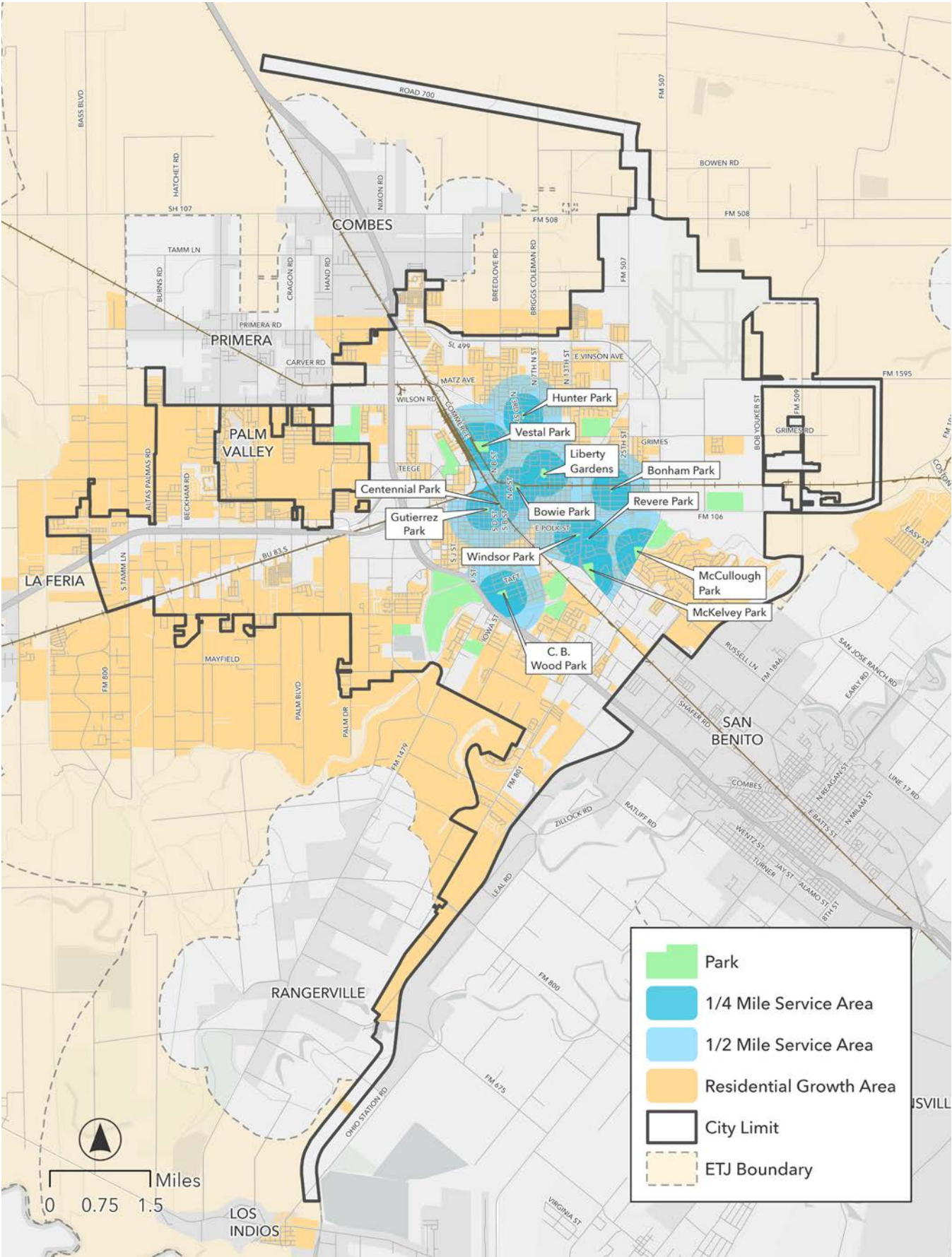
Access to Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks in Harlingen are generally designed to serve residents within a one-quarter to one-half mile radius, supporting daily recreational needs and encouraging walking or biking access. A one-quarter mile service area equates to approximately a five-minute walk, while a one-half mile service area corresponds to a ten-minute walk. To support equitable access, parks should be integrated into neighborhoods and located away from barriers such as major highways or rail lines.

Map 7 illustrates the current one-quarter mile and one-half mile service areas of existing neighborhood parks in Harlingen. It shows that while the central areas of the City particularly around Bowie Park, Windsor Park and Vestal Park, are well served by multiple parks within walking distance, significant gaps in park access exist in several areas. Notably, residential neighborhoods in the western and southern parts of the City, as well as the growing community of Rangerville, fall outside of the one-half mile walking radius of any park.

Parks like McKelvey Park, Centennial Park and Liberty Gardens offer valuable amenities to surrounding neighborhoods. However, areas near Palm Valley, eastern La Feria and parts of southeast Harlingen show limited access to parks within walkable distances. C B Wood Park and McCullough Park provide broader recreational amenities and can function as local neighborhood parks if supported by appropriate pedestrian and bike connections and amenities such as playgrounds, shaded trails and rest areas.

As Harlingen continues to grow, especially in western and southern areas, priority should be given to adding neighborhood parks in areas currently underserved by the existing park network. Infill park development and enhanced pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure should be considered to improve connectivity and ensure that all residents, regardless of location, can access a neighborhood park within a one-half mile walk or bike ride.



Map 7. Service Area of Neighborhood Parks

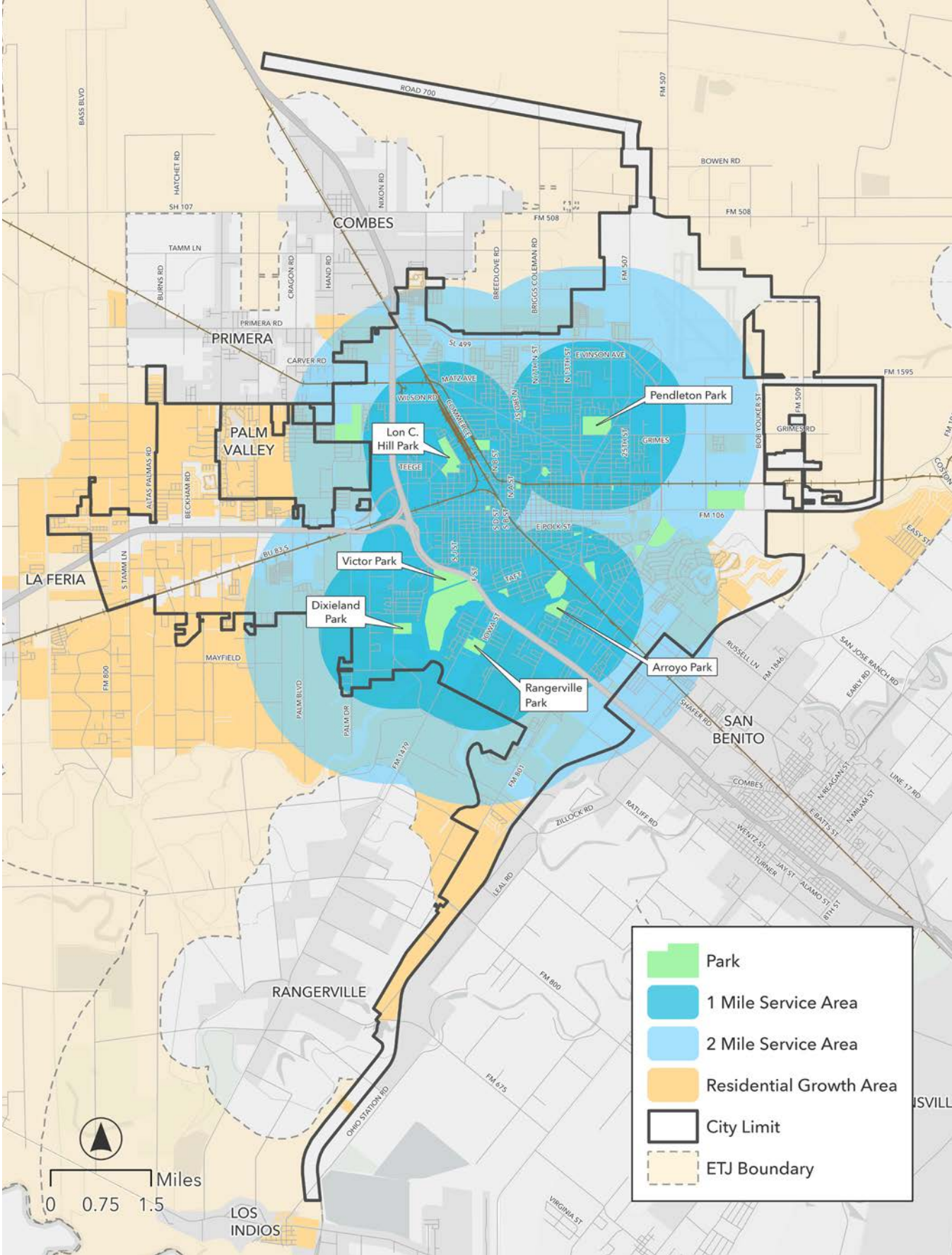
Access to Community Parks

Community parks in Harlingen are designed to serve multiple neighborhoods and provide a broader range of recreational amenities compared to neighborhood parks. These amenities may include playgrounds, picnic areas, pavilions, athletic fields, basketball and tennis courts, trails, swimming pools and splash pads. Because of their larger size and greater variety of amenities, residents are generally willing to drive to access these parks.

Map 8 illustrates one-mile and two-mile service areas around existing community parks in Harlingen, showing which areas benefit from proximity to these major recreational destinations. While most of the City is covered within the two-mile service areas of parks like Victor Park, Lon C Hill Park and Arroyo Park, there are still several underserved areas, particularly on the southwestern and northwestern edges of the City, as well as near the ETJ boundary around Rangerville and Palm Valley.

The community parks offer significant recreational amenities within their respective service areas. These parks serve as destinations for residents across the City and nearby areas. The vast majority of Harlingen’s population falls within the two-mile service area of at least one community park. However, small gaps in access remain in fast-growing areas on the western and southeastern fringes of the City.

As residential development continues in and around Harlingen, especially near Rangerville and La Feria, the City should prioritize the creation of new community parks in underserved areas or the expansion of existing parks to ensure that all residents have equitable access to larger recreational spaces.



Map 8 Service Area of Community Parks

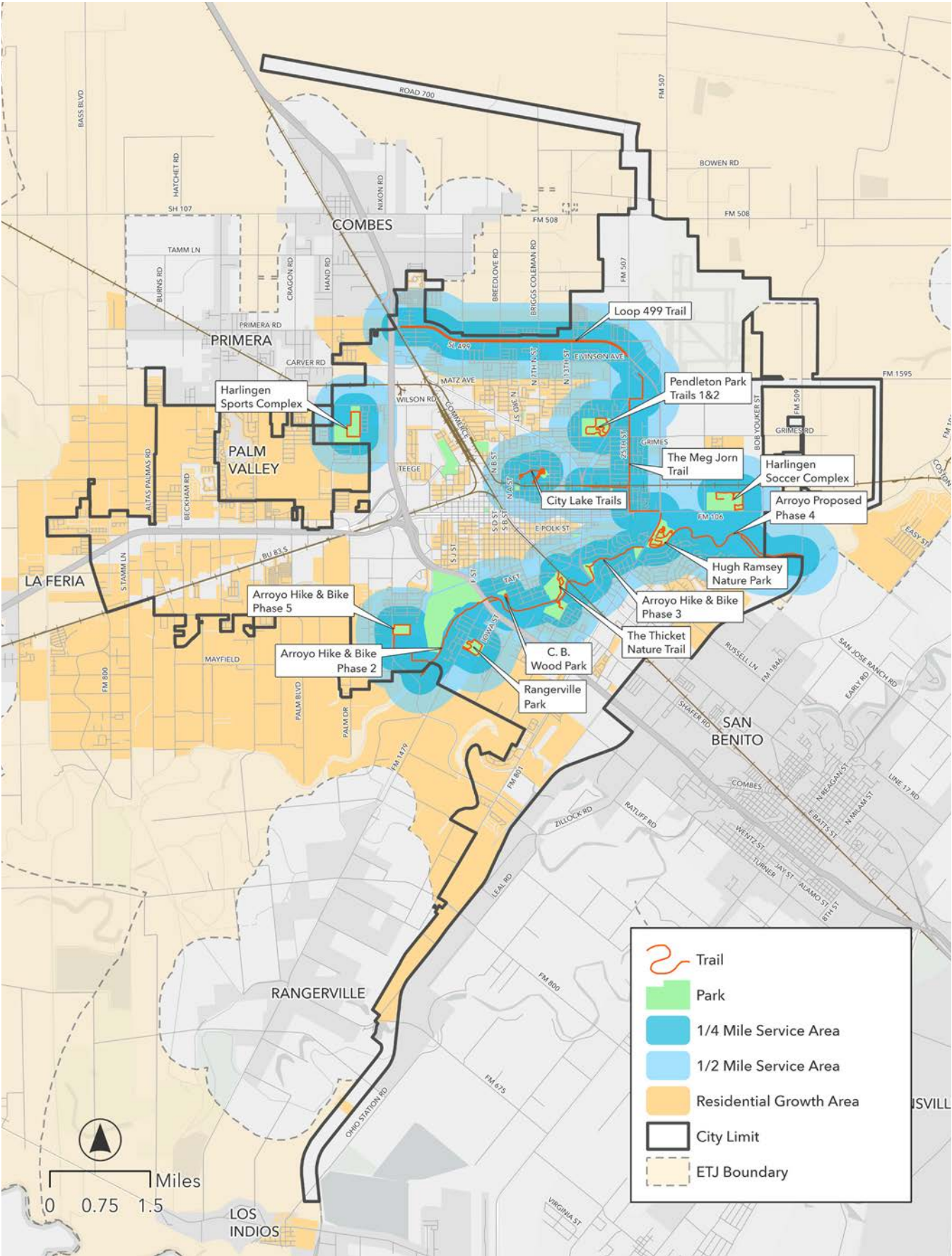
Access to Trails

Trails in Harlingen function as key community connectors, often accessed by foot or bicycle and typically serving the same one-quarter mile and one-half mile service areas as pocket and neighborhood parks. These trails support both recreational use and alternative transportation options, encouraging active lifestyles and providing direct links between parks, neighborhoods, schools and major destinations.

Map 9 illustrates existing and planned trails across Harlingen, along with their corresponding service areas. The existing trail network provides strong connectivity through central Harlingen, particularly along Arroyo Colorado and major parks like McKelvey Park, Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and Bowie Park. However, the current trail system does not extend into large portions of the City, including neighborhoods in the southwest, northwest and ETJ boundary near Rangerville and La Feria.

Harlingen’s trails are currently concentrated along a few key corridors. To improve access, future trail development should prioritize linking residential areas, neighborhood and community parks, and other important community destinations. Expanding the trail network in underserved areas would improve walkability and bikeability while increasing access to outdoor amenities and safe travel options for all residents.

As the City continues to grow, particularly in areas south and west of the City center, expanding trail infrastructure will be essential for building a comprehensive and connected park system. Opportunities should be explored to connect existing parks such as Dixieland Park, Windsor Park and Victor Park with new trail segments to ensure all residents are within walking or biking distance of trails.



Map 9. Service Area of Trails

Facility Level of Service

In addition to evaluating overall parkland, it is important to assess the types of recreation facilities available for resident use. The facility level of service analysis provides an overview of existing facilities in Harlingen and compares them to recommended levels of service. The 2024 NRPA Agency Performance Review offers comparison data for the prevalence of outdoor park and recreation facilities per population. The facility target levels of service were determined through a baseline comparison of national averages for cities with populations between 50,000 and 99,999. These targets were then tailored to Harlingen based on community input, goals and an understanding of parkland access and staffing resources.

The facility level of service table outlines the current number of facilities in Harlingen and compares them to the estimated need based on the City’s 2025 and 2035 population projections. This comparison identifies where current deficits exist and highlights future needs as the City continues to grow.

There are currently deficits in the following facilities:

- Softball fields
- Soccer fields
- Football fields
- Standalone backstops
- Basketball courts
- Pickleball courts
- Volleyball courts
- Playgrounds
- Splash pads
- Skate park

Looking to 2035, without the addition of new facilities, deficits will increase or emerge in:

- Baseball fields
- Additional restrooms and trails
- Swimming pool/aquatic facility
- Picnic pavilions



Figure 20. Facility Level of Service

Active	Facility/ Amenity	Current Available	Current LOS (1 Facility per # Residents)	Target LOS (Per Residents)	2025 Need (based on 71,829 pop.)	2025 Deficit or Surplus	2035 Need (based on 92,516 pop.)	2035 Deficit or Surplus	Cities between 50,000 to 99,999*
	Baseball Fields	19	3,780	1 per 5,000	15	4	19	0	Diamond fields 1 per 3,675
	Softball Fields	8	8,979	1 per 5,000	15	-7	19	-11	
	Backstop	3	23,943	1 per 5,000	15	-12	19	-16	
	Basketball Courts	5	14,366	1 per 10,000	8	-3	10	-5	1 per 8,363
	Disc Golf	1	71,829	2 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 58,603
	Fitness Equipment Circuit	6	11,972	1 per 35,000	3	3	3	3	1 per 35,000
	Football Fields	8	8,979	1 per 5,000	15	-7	19	-11	1 per 4,070 (Rectangular Field)
	Skate Park	0	0	1 per city	2	-2	2	-2	1 per 60,904
	Soccer Fields	10	7,183	1 per 5,000	15	-5	19	-9	1 per 4,070 (Rectangular Field)
	Pickleball Courts	0	0	1 per 10,500	7	-7	9	-9	1 per 10,500
	Tennis Courts	20	3,591	1 per 5,000	15	5	19	1	1 per 5,865
	Trails (miles)	25.5	2,817	1 per 7,500	9.6	15.9	12.3	13.2	Median 18.1 miles
	Volleyball Courts (Outdoor)	1	71,829	1 per 10,000	8	-7	10	-9	1 per 26,612

*Metrics were obtained from the 2024 NRPA Agency Review. Some facility categories are not included in the Agency Review.

	Facility/ Amenity	Current Available	Current LOS (1 Facility per # Residents)	Target LOS (Per Residents)	2025 Need (based on 71,829 pop.)	2025 Deficit or Surplus	2035 Need (based on 92,516 pop.)	2035 Deficit or Surplus	Cities between 50,000 to 99,999*
Passive	Outdoor Event Space	0	0	1 per 59,000	2	-2	2	-2	1 per 59,000
	Dog Park	1	71,829	2 per city	1	0	1	0	1 per 55,135
	Horseshoe Pits	1	71,829	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	
	Picnic Pavilions	36	1,995	1 per 2,000	36	0	47	-11	
	Picnic Facilities (e.g., tables)	146	492	In all publicly accessed parks	In all publicly accessed parks		In all publicly accessed parks		
	All inclusive playground	1	71,829	1 per city	0		0		1 per 30,239
	Playgrounds	21	3,420	1 per 2,000	36	-15	47	-26	1 per 3,707
Water	Fishing Piers	1	0	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies	
	Swimming Pool	3	23,943	1 per 30,000	3	0	4	-1	1 per 46,353
	Splash Pad	2	35,915	1 per 25,000	3	-1	4	-2	1 per 54,100
Misc.	Recreation Center	0	0	1 per 39,886	2	-2	3	-3	1 per 39,886
	Restrooms/ Portable	21	3,420	Where feasible	Where feasible	Varies	Where feasible	Varies	1 per 5,520

Resource-Based Assessment

The resource-based assessment is the third analysis for the needs assessment. This exercise recognizes key physical, man-made or natural resources within the community that may provide potential recreational opportunities. These areas can either support active recreational pursuits or provide opportunities for passive enjoyment. The following areas have potential to be further leveraged for recreation or open space preservation.

Extend the Arroyo Colorado Greenbelt System

The Arroyo Colorado is one of Harlingen’s most significant natural assets, offering tremendous potential for greenbelt expansion and ecological preservation. By enhancing trail connectivity, restoring native vegetation, and developing passive and active recreational nodes along the Arroyo, the City can transform this underutilized corridor into a continuous linear park. This extension would improve pedestrian and bicycle access across the community, connect neighborhoods to nature and serve as a vital ecological buffer that supports flood mitigation and water quality improvement.

Maximize the Use of Underserved Parks

While Harlingen has an extensive network of parks, many remain underutilized due to limited programming, outdated infrastructure or lack of accessibility. A resource-based approach encourages investment in these spaces through upgraded amenities, inclusive play areas and year-round programming that reflects the needs and interests of surrounding communities. Revitalizing these parks especially in areas with lower access to recreational opportunities can transform them into vibrant, multi-generational community spaces that foster connection and well-being.

Enhancing Interaction with Nature

Harlingen’s ecological richness, particularly in the context of bird migration and native habitat, creates unique opportunities to strengthen residents’ interaction with nature. Expanding interpretive signage, birdwatching lookouts, native plant



gardens and educational trails can deepen public appreciation for local ecosystems. Collaborations with schools, nature centers and conservation groups can further elevate these spaces as outdoor learning environments, promoting environmental stewardship across all age groups.

Leverage Flood-Prone Areas for Resilient Park Design

Given Harlingen’s vulnerability to flooding, especially in areas near the Arroyo Colorado and low-lying neighborhoods, park design can serve a dual function providing recreation while managing stormwater. Flood-prone lands can be transformed into resilient open spaces through the use of detention basins, bioswales and wetlands that absorb runoff while supporting recreation, education and habitat restoration. These green infrastructure solutions not only reduce flood risk but also add value to neighborhoods and reduce infrastructure strain.

Address Heat Resilience with Shaded and Cooling Amenities

Extreme heat is a growing concern in Harlingen’s subtropical climate. Parks play a critical role in mitigating the urban heat island effect and offering relief during hot months. Strategic tree planting, especially around seating areas, playgrounds and trails, along with the use of shade structures and water play features, can create more comfortable and inclusive park experiences. Incorporating reflective materials, native vegetation and park layouts that take advantage of wind patterns can also contribute to cooling while reducing long-term maintenance costs.

Summary of Needs

Through the needs assessment and public engagement process, the need for additional distribution of parkland, increased connectivity, new and improved facilities, and expanded recreational programs were identified.



Parkland Acreage and Development

- Additional close-to-home parks are needed to address service area gaps, especially in West Harlingen, Rangerville and new growth areas.
- Enhancing existing parks with upgraded amenities and new features will help meet the community’s growing needs.
- Expanding access to nature parks and open space is a priority, particularly for flood resilience and passive recreation.



Park Facilities

- Address shortages in multi-purpose fields to facilitate a greater amount of space specifically for soccer and football.
- Develop a full-service indoor recreation center to support year-round use.
- Provide additional restrooms, splash pads and shaded playground areas in high-use parks.
- Improve lighting, safety and maintenance in existing parks and along trails.
- Respond to demand for dog parks, pickleball courts and updated court amenities.



Parkland Access and Connectivity

- Expand the trail network to create a more accessible, connected park system.
- Improve sidewalk and bike access to parks from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Connect parks through greenways, particularly along the Arroyo Colorado corridor.
- Prioritize park and trail investments in underserved areas with limited walkable access.



Recreational Programs

- Expand youth and senior programming to serve all age groups.
- Support more community-wide events like concerts, farmers markets and festivals.
- Introduce environmental education, nature-based activities and fitness programs.
- Promote inclusive programming for people with disabilities and underserved populations.



CHAPTER

4

Recommendations & Implementation

Recommendations & Implementation

Summary of Highest Priority Needs

This Plan outlines the most urgent parks and recreation needs in Harlingen, based on extensive community feedback, a detailed needs assessment and input from City staff and stakeholders. These high-priority items reflect community expectations for improved access, safety, amenities and quality of life. Focusing investment on these areas will guide future park improvements and strengthen the City’s competitiveness for grant funding.

New facilities needed based on community input	New facilities needed based on level of service	Upgraded facilities needed based on existing condition
1. Indoor Recreation Center 2. Splash Pad 3. Dog Park 4. Farmers Market or Flexible Event Pavilion 5. Community Gardens	1. New neighborhood parks in underserved areas 2. Extended trails and greenbelt connections 3. Additional restrooms 4. Shaded seating areas 5. ADA accessibility upgrades	1. Playground replacements 2. Restroom renovations 3. Improved park lighting and safety 4. Trail surface repairs 5. Drainage improvements in older parks

Top 6 Cumulative Facility Needs in Harlingen

- 1. Playgrounds — Replace aging equipment with inclusive, safe and shaded play areas suitable for all ages.
- 2. Restrooms — Add and modernize restrooms in high-use parks to support longer visits and larger crowds.
- 3. Indoor Recreation Center — Develop a year-round indoor facility to expand programming and community access during extreme weather.
- 4. Trail and Greenbelt Extensions — Expand the Arroyo Colorado Greenbelt and fill trail gaps to improve walking and biking connections citywide.
- 5. Splash Pads — Introduce splash pads in key parks to provide accessible, family-friendly aquatics options.
- 6. Dog Park — Establish a fenced, off-leash dog park with shaded seating, water access and waste stations.

Parks & Recreation Mission

The mission of the Harlingen Parks and Recreation Department is to provide high-quality, equitable and inclusive recreational opportunities and public spaces that enrich the health, well-being and quality of life for all residents and visitors. The Department is committed to excellent customer service, sustainability and the responsible stewardship of Harlingen’s natural and built environments.

Parks and Recreation Vision

Harlingen envisions a safe, connected and resilient parks and trails system that celebrates the City’s natural beauty, supports active and healthy lifestyles, and fosters a strong sense of community pride. The system will offer diverse, accessible recreation opportunities that meet the evolving needs of all ages and neighborhoods, while promoting environmental sustainability and equitable access for all.

System-Wide Goals and Recommendations

These recommendations apply broadly across all Harlingen parks and recreational facilities, as well as address park department operations and maintenance. They guide citywide standards for maintenance, connectivity, safety and funding to keep the system vibrant and resilient. By addressing trail linkages, signage, partnerships and equitable access, these strategies help build a thriving park network that supports community health and quality of life.

Park-Specific Action Plan

These actions focus on targeted improvements for individual parks across the Harlingen park system. The recommendations highlight clear priorities for upgrades, enhancements and new features, along with suggested timeframes and potential cost ranges to guide future implementation and funding efforts.





System-wide Goals & Recommendations

1: Provide Close-to-Home Parks Within One-Half Mile of All Homes in Harlingen

1.1 Acquire parkland in target areas

- Proactively pursue the acquisition of additional parkland acreage in the target areas, as noted in the target areas map; with a focus on West Harlingen, Rangerville, Palm Valley and La FERIA where there are notable service gaps.
- Add neighborhood and pocket parks to address the projected 71-acre deficit by 2025 and 190-acre deficit by 2035.

1.2 Update the Parkland Dedication Ordinance

- Ensure the parkland dedication requirements are adequate to provide the necessary park access for new communities.
- Encourage the dedication of land over fee-in-lieu, unless extenuating circumstances arise or the City has a strategic reason to decline the land.

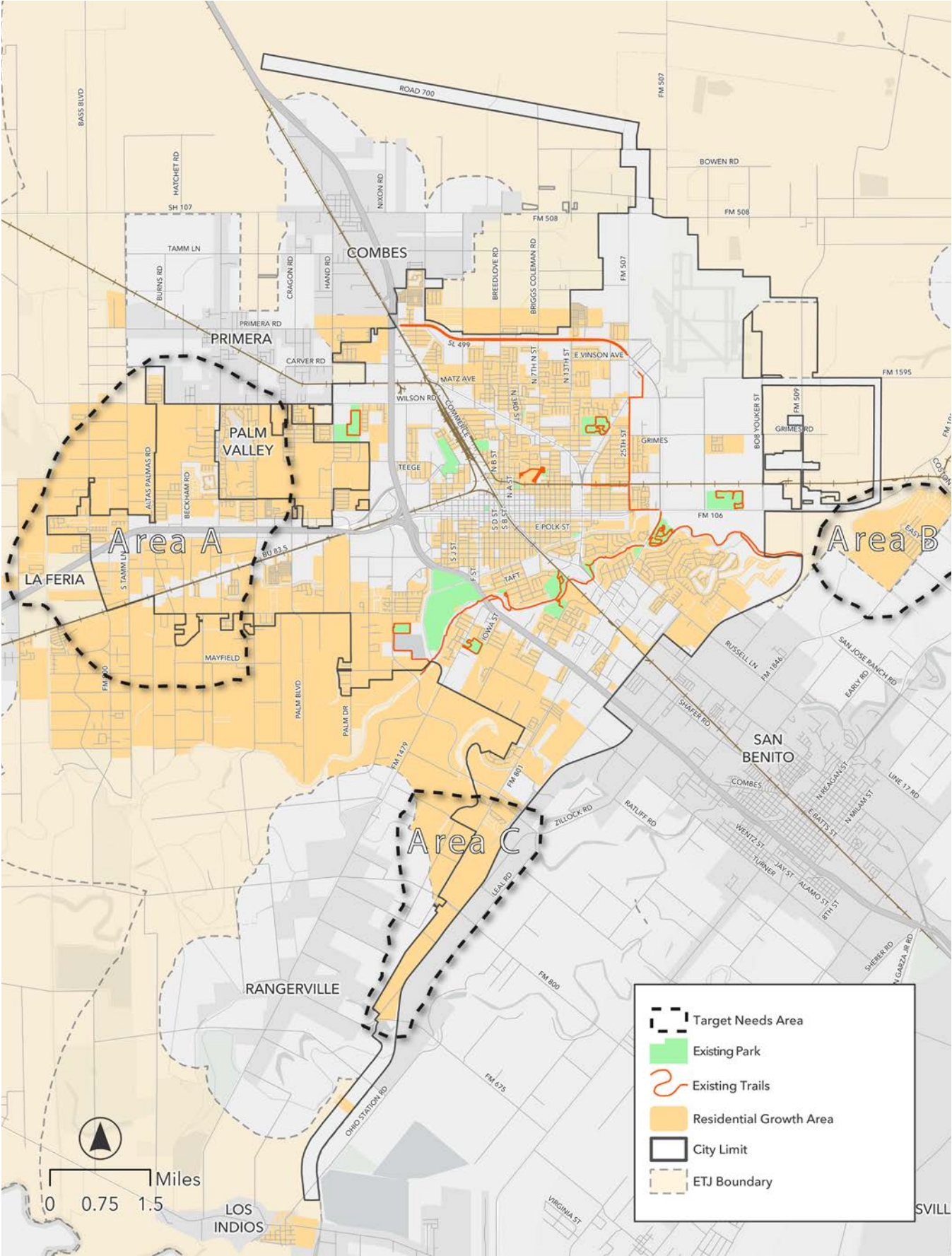
2: Improve Connectivity Between Parks and Residential Areas

2.1 Expand and enhance trail and sidewalk connections

- Extend the Arroyo Colorado Greenbelt and develop new trails and safe sidewalks that link neighborhoods, schools and parks.
- Provide sufficient parking and bike racks at busy parks and trailheads to support increased use.
- As new parks are proposed and completed, update the Trails Plan to provide trail connectivity to those new parks.

2.2 Enhance route safety and wayfinding

- Install crosswalks and pedestrian signals where the trail network crosses major thoroughfares.
- Install dedicated bike lanes where the trail network utilizes on-street infrastructure.
- Install branded entrance signs, trail markers and directional wayfinding to make it easy for residents and visitors to navigate the system.
- Install lighting on trails, at crossings and near entrances to increase safety, especially in high-use evening areas.



Map 10. Target Areas Map

3: Strengthen Park Operations and Maintenance

3.1 Ensure adequate funding and staffing accompany park system expansions and increased expectations of residents.

- The City should conduct a staffing assessment to determine needs for additional staff. The assessment should consider increased maintenance regularity, capacity to quickly address safety and security concerns, and handle recreational programming as the parks and recreation network in the City expands.
- As the City develops additional park facilities, it is crucial to budget adequate funding and staffing to allow for increased park system maintenance, repairs and program/event production at the same quality level of service.

3.2 Develop and implement a maintenance plan

- A maintenance plan should focus on proactive updates and quickly addresses any equipment safety concerns should be created. Proactive maintenance can help prevent unexpected costs and undue risk for the City as well as allow staff to identify the most efficient and effective way to maintain parks. At a minimum, this Plan should include:
 - An inventory of park assets.
 - Maintenance plans and schedules for each park that addresses landscaping, trash removal, safety checks and seasonal repairs.
 - Accounting for regular replacement or upgrade plans for furniture and amenities.

3.3 Monitor and track maintenance using centralized tools

- Use digital systems to log and resolve maintenance requests quickly and efficiently.

3.4 Address deferred maintenance and prioritize repairs

- Prioritize repairs based on the following order: safety hazards, ADA compliance issues, anything that impacts access and usability and highest-use areas.
- Create a 5-year funding and work plan to update old playground equipment and renovate restrooms across the system for safety, accessibility and comfort.

3.5 Develop Park Design Guidelines.

- These guidelines should be applied to all new park design and construction projects as well as any park renovations. The guidelines should consider providing guidance on the following, and more as deemed necessary:
 - Accessibility requirements.
 - Signage design and location.
 - Park lighting policies and guidelines per park classification, including the use of dark skies strategies for all park lighting.
 - Contextual considerations; buffers, etc.
 - Plant species selection; native plantings, low water use plantings, etc.
 - Reduction of light pollution.
 - Use of low-maintenance, high-quality materials and furnishings.
 - Resilience and sustainability strategies. The City may consider utilizing Sustainable SITES strategies to improve environmental performance; even if certification is not desirable, Sustainable SITES can still be used as a framework for designing, implementing and maintaining parks for better performance.

3.6 Keep the Parks Plan updated.

- The community's parks and recreation needs and desires will change as the population grows and demographics shift. The City should plan to update the Parks Plan periodically to ensure that it reflects current needs and priorities. The TPWD recommends updating the Plan every five years or before any new major developments occur that significantly change the parks and recreation needs of residents. This can also help the City during a TPWD grant funding evaluation, as TPWD places a higher point value on submittals that demonstrate that a plan has been updated within the previous five years. All Plan updates should include a public involvement process. The City should review and update the Plan per the following:
 - Annually: Staff review implementation to identify progress and provide an annual report to the City Commission.
 - Every five years (or sooner if needed): Conduct a full review and make needed updates to the inventory, needs assessment, recommendations and prioritization, if needed.

3.7 Keep parks data and GIS layers updated

- The Parks and Recreation Department should work with the City's GIS staff annually to update the City's parks-related shapefiles including trails and parkland names, locations and status (undeveloped, under design/construction, completed, etc.)

4: Enhance the Usability of all Parks

4.1 Seek opportunities to increase shade.

- In Texas's climate, shade is an important element in making the parks usable and comfortable and in promoting community health and wellness in public spaces. It is recommended that the City provide additional shaded areas in all parks. This can be through the use of shade structures, shade fabric or the planting of more shade trees. Shade trees is the preferred shade strategy, since tree planting brings additional multi-benefits to the community. Shade investments should be focused around gathering areas, at amenities and along walking trails.

4.2 Improve park beautification.

- Beautifying parks helps to increase community pride, attract greater usage and improve the City's overall image. The City should create a beautification program for existing parks that includes enhanced landscaping in high-visibility areas, upgrading materials for durability and aesthetics (e.g., furnishings and pavilions) and proactively repairing and replacing amenities as needed. Beautification efforts are a great opportunity to bring out community members for park clean-up and planting days.
- Develop a program for the installation of art in public places, including in parks and along trails.

4.3 Enhance park safety.

- Install improved lighting, emergency call stations and hydration points to enhance safety and usability.
- Incorporate regular patrols and security presence to deter crime and increase visitor confidence.
- Apply CPTED strategies to improve visibility, access control and overall park safety.

4.4 Provide ADA-compliant features.

- Incorporate ADA-compliant features such as accessible pathways, entrances, restrooms, seating and play equipment to ensure all park amenities are usable by visitors of all abilities.

4.5 Offer free Wi-Fi.

- The City should consider providing public WiFi access at all neighborhood and community level parks.
- The City can also utilize QR code quick links on signs throughout the parks to allow people to report an issue, learn about a recreation opportunity, educate themselves about natural features or participate in organized activities (e.g., digital scavenger hunt).

4.6 Provide Clear Signage and Information.

- Install clear, visible signage showing park rules and hours of operation to guide visitor use.
- Include signage with information on available resources for homeless outreach, as noted in community recommendations.

5: Address High-priority Facility and Amenity Needs

5.1 Evaluate opportunities to provide a city-wide market pavilion and festival plaza.

- Based on community input, there is a strong desire for a more frequent farmers market and more locally focused community events. The City should conduct a feasibility study to determine the viability, location, programming, cost and potential funding sources and partnerships for such a program. The location identification should consider:
 - Space for a festival plaza that is primarily hardscape.
 - Space for a permanent market stalls/pavilion.
 - Pedestrian-oriented.
 - Parking availability.
 - Adjacency or connectivity to other City destinations or activity centers where events are held, such as Downtown Harlingen.

5.2 Evaluate opportunities to provide an indoor recreation center.

- Based on community input, there is a strong desire for a community or recreation center in Harlingen that would support year-round programming, especially during extreme heat and inclement weather. It is recommended that the City undertake a recreation center feasibility study to determine the viability, location, programming, cost and potential funding sources for such a facility. The study should consider space needs for:
 - Provide rentable spaces for meetings and events of various sizes.
 - Include a teen lounge featuring a student-staffed coffee shop/café, an e-sports room and comfortable lounge furniture.
 - Ensure adequate parking to accommodate all planned programming.
 - Offer after-school programs for youth of all ages.
 - Explore potential partnership opportunities to support programming and operations.
- The site of the new recreation center should connect to the city-wide trails network and specifically to the middle and high schools via safe multi-modal routes.
- Following identification of the preferred location, programming and funding or partnership strategy, the City should proceed with the design, construction and management of an indoor recreation center.

5.3 Create a community garden program.

- Community gardens were an identified need by the community and can provide a variety of health and wellness benefits for community members. The City should seek to provide community garden plots in their parks as noted elsewhere in these recommendations. Along with the provision of the physical garden, there must be a program in place to ensure proper use and maintenance of plots. This can be a community or City-led program that is responsible for member and plot management as well as the communal elements of the garden, such as:
 - General area upkeep and workdays.
 - Communal tools.
 - Rules and security.
 - Educational programs, either for members or external groups.
 - Care trades (for when members are out of town and need extra help caring for their plot).

6: Broaden Community Programming and Events

6.1 Activate parks with year-round events and activities

- Host family-friendly festivals, outdoor movies, fitness classes and cultural events to encourage residents to gather and enjoy public spaces.

6.2 Expand recreational programs for all ages and interests

- Offer new programs such as youth camps, senior wellness activities, arts and crafts, and community gardening workshops.

6.3 Partner with local schools, nonprofits, and community groups

- Collaborate to share spaces, co-host events and offer programs that reflect Harlingen's diverse community needs.

6.4 Create flexible spaces for community markets and pop-ups

- Develop adaptable event spaces or pavilions within parks that can support farmers markets, food trucks and pop-up cultural gatherings throughout the City.

7: Design for Environmental Resilience and Natural Enjoyment

7.1 Create Ecological Restoration and Maintenance Plans (ERMPs) for appropriate parks.

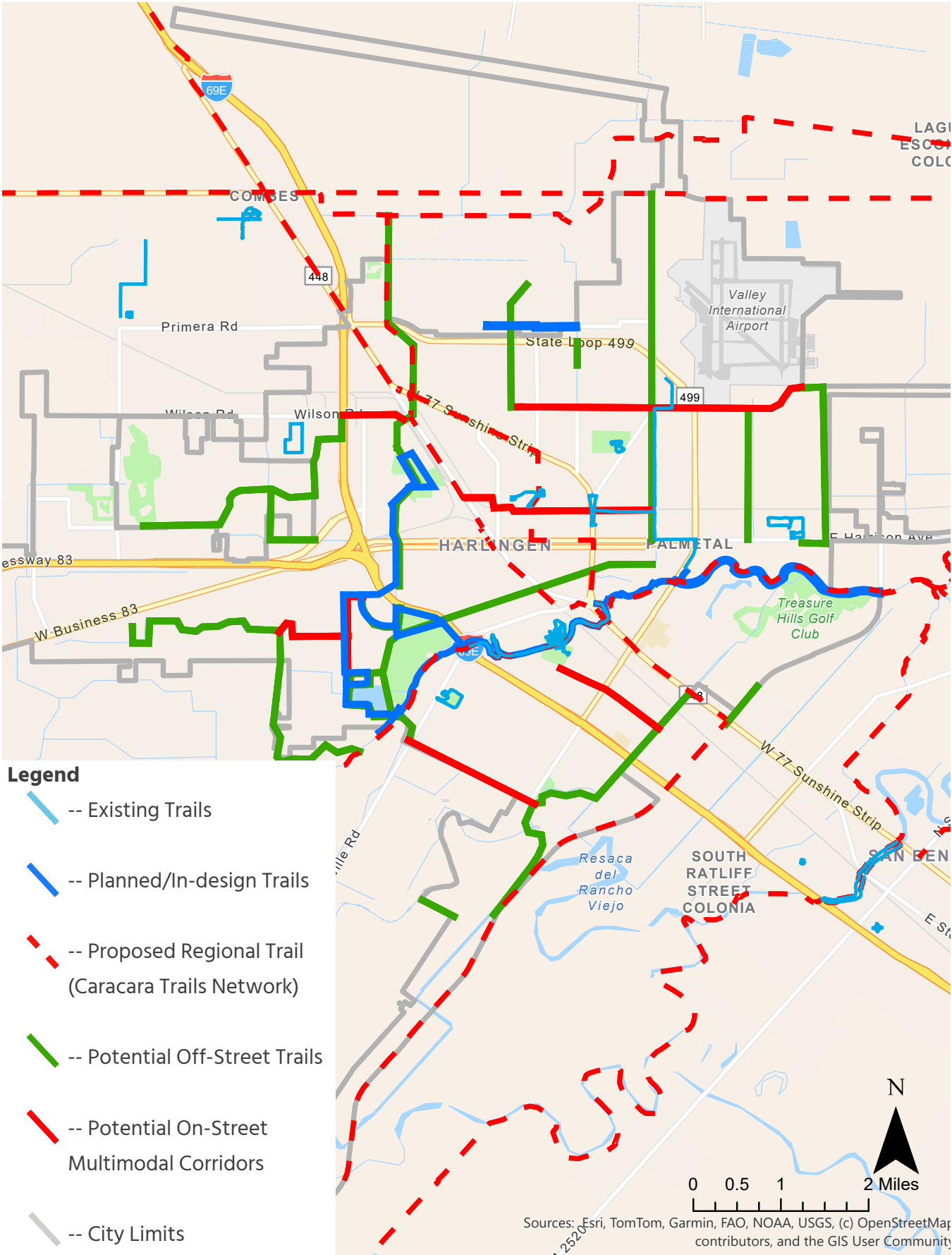
- Future climate conditions and the possible impact of those on plants and animals in the parks should be studied as a part of these plans, and recommendations should be made that carefully consider this. Develop an ERMP for parks with natural areas that focuses on:
 - Preserving the biodiversity of the parks.
 - Restoring habitat and removing invasive species.
 - Improving water quality.
 - Enhancing soil health.
 - Promoting access to the natural features.

7.2 Use Parks to Build Environmental Stewardship.

- Provide demonstration areas in parks that highlight native trees and wildflowers, birdwatching areas and habitat, pollinator gardens, drought-tolerant lawns, rainwater harvesting, etc.
- Install interpretive signage at demonstration locations and near important natural features to promote environmental awareness.

7.3 Adopt sustainable maintenance practices for parks.

- Fleet and equipment/tool upgrades to electric or higher-efficiency vehicles and equipment.
- Implement no-mow, low-water, low-fertilizer, integrated pest management and similar policies and practices as appropriate.
- Utilize nature-based solutions (NbS), green infrastructure (GI), rain gardens, etc. for stormwater management in parks where feasible and effective, and ensure staff are properly trained to maintain these unique features.
- Assess extreme weather events (heat, drought, rain, freeze) and their potential impacts on park assets, infrastructure and maintenance and develop strategies to mitigate or adapt to these impacts.



Map 11. Trail Network Map

8: Trail Design and Standards

8.1 Adopt Consistent Trail Design

- Establish a consistent set of trail design standards that unify the system and guide future projects. These standards ensure that all trails provide a safe, accessible, and recognizable experience.
- Build primary multi-use trails at widths that safely support walking, running, and bicycling, and use narrower surfaces only in sensitive natural areas.
- Ensure all trail segments, crossings, and access points are ADA-compliant and aligned with state and national standards.
- Standardize furnishings such as benches, lighting, trash receptacles, and kiosks to establish a consistent Harlingen trail identity.
- Use native landscaping, permeable surfaces, and durable materials to reduce costs and extend the lifespan of facilities.

8.2 Implement Wayfinding and Signage Standards

- Establish consistent wayfinding and signage standards across the trail system to improve navigation and strengthen identity. Branded and bilingual signs reflect Harlingen’s community and ensure that both residents and visitors can use the trails with confidence.
- Install entrance signs, mile markers, and directional signage to clearly guide users between parks, downtown, and other major destinations.
- Add interpretive signs that highlight local history, natural resources, and cultural features.
- Apply a standardized signage template with consistent colors, fonts, and branding elements across all trail segments.
- Coordinate wayfinding with regional partners to align Harlingen’s system with regional priorities and create a seamless experience for trail users moving between communities.

8.3 Incorporate Safety Features

- Integrate safety features into all trail projects so residents and visitors feel secure and comfortable using the system. Design elements such as lighting, clear signage, and safe crossings make trails accessible for all ages and abilities.
- Install lighting at trailheads, access points, and along high-use corridors to improve visibility in the evening.
- Provide high-visibility striping, refuge islands, or flashing beacons at major street crossings to protect walkers and cyclists.
- Post rules of use, etiquette signage, and hours of operation at all trailheads to promote safe, shared use.
- Add emergency call boxes, wayfinding markers, or location IDs on longer trail segments to support user confidence and assist with emergency response.
- Manage vegetation to maintain clear sightlines and apply design strategies that improve visibility and deter crime.

9: Trail Connectivity and Regional Integration

9.1 Expand Arroyo Colorado Trail as a Spine Corridor

- Position the Arroyo Colorado as the primary spine of Harlingen’s trail system, creating a continuous corridor that connects parks, neighborhoods, and regional destinations. Organizing future trail investments around this framework gives the system a clear identity and citywide reach.
- Strengthen the Arroyo corridor as a year-round recreation destination by adding trailheads, rest areas, and overlooks.
- Make the Arroyo the first priority for closing gaps in the trail system so residents can travel long distances within the city without leaving the corridor.
- Partner with conservation groups and drainage authorities to balance habitat protection and flood control needs with expanded trail use.
- Feature the Arroyo Colorado Trail in marketing and tourism efforts as Harlingen’s signature link in the Valley-wide trail network.

9.2 Link Trails to Regional Network

- Use Harlingen’s central location in Cameron County to position the city as a hub for active transportation. Strengthening regional trail links will connect residents and visitors to destinations across the Lower Rio Grande Valley.
- Coordinate with the Rio Grande Valley MPO, TxDOT, and Cameron County to align Harlingen’s trail investments with the multi-county network envisioned in the Active Plan.
- Prioritize projects that tie Harlingen’s trail system into regional destinations such as coastal resources, wildlife refuges, and nearby communities.
- Partner with tourism and economic development organizations to promote Harlingen as a gateway city for regional trail and cycling events.
- Work with adjacent cities to pursue joint funding applications that highlight the regional benefits of intercity trail connections.

9.3 Strengthen School and Park Access

- Make schools and parks a top priority for trail connections, since they are among the city’s most frequented destinations. Stronger access will give families, students, and youth sports participants safe, realistic options to reach these places without a car.
- Partner with Harlingen CISD to coordinate shared-use agreements and connect trails directly to campuses where possible.
- Expand trailheads, crossings, and sidewalks around major community parks to support heavy youth and family use.
- Build new trail segments that create safe, direct routes for students walking or biking to nearby schools.
- Incorporate Safe Routes to School principles into trail planning and prioritize improvements in high-demand areas identified by parents and school staff.

10. Health, Tourism, and Economic Impact of Trails

10.1 Promote Trails as Health Infrastructure

- Position trails as Harlingen’s most accessible form of health infrastructure, offering daily opportunities for walking, running, and cycling. Framing trails as part of the City’s wellness strategy emphasizes their role in improving quality of life and reducing preventable health costs.
- Build partnerships with healthcare providers, schools, and community organizations to promote trails as tools for prevention, fitness, and everyday wellness.
- Expand trail access near schools and neighborhoods so children, families, and older adults can safely incorporate physical activity into daily routines.
- Add hydration stations, shaded rest areas, and lighting to make trails usable during early mornings, evenings, and hot summer months.
- Monitor trail use and track health data to demonstrate benefits and strengthen eligibility for outside funding

10.2 Position Harlingen as a Trail Tourism Hub

- Establish Harlingen as a hub for trail-based tourism by building on its parks, nature areas, and regional trail links. Expanding trail-related tourism strengthens the city’s role in the Valley, complements coastal attractions, and generates new spending in local businesses.
- Coordinate with regional partners to package Harlingen’s trails with nearby birding centers, cultural sites, and nature preserves.
- Host and expand annual events such as bike rides, runs, or birding festivals to draw visitors from across Texas and northern Mexico.
- Support local businesses in offering services near trailheads, including rentals, guided tours, and food or beverage options.
- Promote Harlingen’s trail system in tourism campaigns and visitor materials to raise visibility as an active travel destination.

10.3 Leverage Trails for Economic Development

- Position trails as a tool for economic growth by linking them to neighborhood planning, business recruitment, and redevelopment. Trails raise nearby property values, attract new residents, and make commercial areas more appealing, connecting quality of life with economic opportunity.
- Incorporate trail access into new business parks, residential areas, and redevelopment projects to ensure growth areas are tied into the citywide network.
- Encourage small businesses such as cafes, rental shops, and service providers to cluster near trailheads and high-use segments.
- Collaborate with local business and economic development partners to highlight trails as assets that support investment and community growth.
- Pursue funding sources that connect trail expansion with workforce development, housing, and tourism to broaden the economic return of the system.

11. Trails for Access, Connectivity, and Natural Systems

11.1 Expand Access Through Trails

- Position trails as a way to reach parts of Harlingen with limited park and recreation options, giving every resident a short connection to the system. Expanding access in this way creates a more balanced network across the city.
- Identify neighborhoods with limited park acreage and prioritize trail routes that extend into those areas.
- Use utility corridors, drainage channels, and vacant parcels to bring trails into underserved parts of the community.
- Establish neighborhood-level trailheads with safe entry points and wayfinding to make the system easy to navigate.
- Fill short gaps in the network that currently prevent residents from walking or biking directly into the trail system.

11.2 Connect Trails to Transit and Daily Needs

- Link trail corridors with local bus stops to give residents more choices for reaching work, shopping, and parks. Integrating trails with transit strengthens Harlingen’s transportation system and supports households that rely on more than one mode.
- Locate trailheads near transit stops and equip them with bike racks, shade, and wayfinding information.
- Improve intersections where trails meet major roads so residents can safely continue to nearby shopping areas and services.
- Work with transit providers to align future bus routes and stops with existing and planned trail corridors.
- Promote trail-to-transit connections through maps, apps, and signage so users understand how the two systems work together.

11.3 Align Trails with Natural Systems

- Design trail corridors to work with natural systems by managing drainage, protecting habitat, and showcasing ecological assets. Trails planned in this way are more durable, cost-effective, and integrated into Harlingen’s landscape.
- Incorporate bioswales, permeable paving, and native plantings into trail design to manage stormwater and reduce maintenance needs.
- Route trails along drainageways and flood corridors where feasible, turning underused land into safe and functional public space.
- Protect habitat areas by creating natural buffers and directing activity to designated paths.

11.4 Celebrate Heritage and Nature through Trails

- Use trails to highlight Harlingen’s cultural identity alongside its natural environment. Combining heritage and nature in the trail experience builds pride of place and fosters awareness of local resources.
- Install interpretive features that share the history of neighborhoods and landmarks together with information about native plants, wildlife, and water systems.
- Incorporate murals, art, and design elements at trailheads and nodes to reflect community character.

Park-Specific Action Plan

One of the most important elements of a parks plan is having actionable recommendations that clearly outline the initial steps to being implementing the plan. The following implementation table provides individual actions that will help achieve the vision established by the community. The table is organized by specific parks that were assessed as part of this project. For each action, an associated time frame for implementation and potential cost ranges are identified to assist with planning and completing the action.

Prioritization Strategies

While this plan provides suggested timelines for specific actions, and therefore prioritizes some actions over others, the City may elect to take on a project sooner or later based on a variety of considerations. Some of these considerations include:

- **Equity:** A desire to invest in underserved neighborhoods with limited walkable access to parks and trails.
- **Alignment with Population Growth:** To coordinate park development with ongoing housing development.
- **Capitalizing on Funding:** Opportunities may arise to fund certain parks or initiatives, the City should take advantage of those opportunities regardless of the plan timeframe for the action.



Using the Action Plan

Action Items

The action items include recommended strategies paired with corresponding action keys. They are developed based on assessments and community input across various topics outlined in this Plan. These action items represent practical strategies that the City can implement to achieve the vision set forth in this Plan.

Implementation Time Frame

This Plan provides a phased approach to implementation to help the City identify achievable actions in the near future and distinguish them from long-term actions that might need extensive studies and preparation. The recommended actions are categorized into the following time frames.

Ongoing

Recommendations that are continuously being implemented or should be revisited regularly throughout the life of the recommendation or implementation of the Plan.

Short-Term (1-3 years)

Actions that are typically “low-hanging fruit” or easier to achieve because they do not require a large amount of capital.

Mid-Term (4-6 years)

Actions that may require more planning and capital than the short-term 3-year horizon.

Long-Term (7+ years)

Actions that generally need a large amount of capital, require significant planning and coordination for completion, or other steps must take place before implementation. In some cases, there may be opportunities to make some initial progress in the short- or mid-term.

Potential Cost Range

Each action item is assigned a rough cost estimate using dollar signs to indicate scale. This helps the City prioritize actions based on available funding and anticipated expenses.

\$ – Minimal cost: covers maintenance, signage or small-scale repairs (e.g., new signs, benches)

\$\$ – Moderate cost: minor infrastructure, equipment or landscaping improvements (e.g., shade structures, lighting)

\$\$\$ – Significant cost: new amenities, courts, restrooms or trail extensions (e.g., splash pads, playgrounds)

\$\$\$\$ – Highest cost: large-scale projects such as major park renovations, new construction or multi-phase expansions (e.g., new indoor rec center, multiple sports fields)

* As of 2024, the City of Harlingen allocates approximately \$3.5 to \$4 million annually to Parks and Recreation operations and maintenance expenses.

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Potential Cost Range
Arroyo Park			
1	Add shade structures over playgrounds and outdoor exercise equipment.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Renovate restrooms and drinking fountains.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
3	Enhance trail lighting and safety signage.	Short-Term	\$
4	Expand creek access and rest areas.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
Lon C. Hill Park			
1	Add sand volleyball courts near the northwest corner.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
2	Improve pedestrian crossings and pathway lighting.	Short-Term	\$\$
3	Expand splash pads and shaded picnic shelters.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$\$
4	Add outdoor fitness equipment and accessible play areas.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
Victor Park			
1	Upgrade tennis court windscreens and lighting.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Improve irrigation, parking lot layout and new park signs.	Short-Term	\$\$
3	Renovate the swimming pool and pool deck.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$\$
4	Install a splash pad and native butterfly garden.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$\$
Rangerville Park			
1	Replace aging playground and install modern safety surfacing.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
2	Build new restrooms and picnic shelters with shade structures.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
3	Install canopy over basketball court and light multipurpose field.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
4	Create bird and butterfly habitat with educational signs.	Medium-Term	\$\$
Pendleton Park			
1	Upgrade trail pavement and add shade structures over exercise equipment.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Renovate basketball courts with new surfacing and lights.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
3	Improve crosswalks on Grimes Street and add directional signs.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Add new multipurpose fields and improve soccer field turf.	Long-Term	\$\$\$\$

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Potential Cost Range
McKelvey Park			
1	Add a dog park and shade structures near main lawn.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Build permanent stage for community events.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
3	Improve landscaping buffers and park signage.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Expand parking and upgrade trail entrances.	Long-Term	\$\$\$
Hugh Ramsey Nature Park			
1	Add welcome center and interpretive signage.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
2	Add native pollinator gardens and educational markers.	Medium-Term	\$\$
3	Expand boardwalks and birdwatching lookouts.	Long-Term	\$\$\$
4	Collaborate with schools for environmental programming.	Long-Term	\$
Thicket Nature Park			
1	Install benches and picnic tables along trail loops.	Short-Term	\$
2	Add clear trail wayfinding and habitat interpretation signs.	Medium-Term	\$\$
3	Construct shaded rest shelters and water fountains.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Partner with schools and youth groups for nature tours.	Long-Term	\$
Dixieland Park			
1	Expand disc golf course layout and repair greens.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Build a lighted basketball or sand volleyball court.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
3	Upgrade trail pavement, add benches and water fountains.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Construct picnic shelters and improve irrigation.	Medium-Term	\$\$
Lake Harlingen			
1	Upgrade pedestrian crossings linking to Liberty Gardens.	Short-Term	\$
2	Improve trail surfacing and add trail edge lighting.	Short-Term	\$\$
3	Add benches, shaded rest spots and native planting beds.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Restore shoreline habitat for birds and pollinators.	Long-Term	\$\$\$
Vestal Park			
1	Build a splash pad to provide summer recreation.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
2	Construct shaded pavilions and picnic shelters.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
3	Upgrade playground with inclusive, shaded structures.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
4	Expand parking, add lighting and ensure ADA connections.	Long-Term	\$\$\$\$

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Potential Cost Range
C.B. Wood Park			
1	Create bird and butterfly garden near pavilion.	Short-Term	\$
2	Upgrade existing shelter and signage.	Short-Term	\$
3	Add multi-purpose field on northern edge.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$\$
4	Expand parking and create a new restroom facility.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$\$
Liberty Gardens			
1	Install picnic tables and shaded seating.	Short-Term	\$
2	Improve pedestrian crossings to Lake Harlingen and nearby amenities.	Short-Term	\$
3	Add new identity signage and wayfinding markers.	Medium-Term	\$
4	Plant additional native trees and enhance lawn irrigation.	Medium-Term	\$\$
McCullough Park			
1	Install park entry sign and directional signs.	Short-Term	\$
2	Improve entrances and ADA access.	Short-Term	\$
3	Develop looping trail with benches and fitness stops.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Add a playground and community picnic areas.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
Windsor Park			
1	Construct lighted pickleball court on northern perimeter.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Install sidewalks along E Filmore Ave for safe access.	Short-Term	\$
3	Build additional picnic pavilions and benches.	Long-Term	\$\$
4	Upgrade playground shade canopy and fencing.	Long-Term	\$\$
Bonham Park			
1	Install shading structure over playground.	Short-Term	\$
2	Add clear signage to distinguish from nearby school.	Short-Term	\$
3	Construct two basketball courts and large pavilion.	Long-Term	\$\$\$
4	Improve landscaping and add pathway lighting.	Long-Term	\$\$\$
Bowie Park			
1	Construct eight pickleball courts with seating and shade.	Short-Term	\$\$\$
2	Improve park entry paths and ADA access.	Short-Term	\$\$
3	Add security lighting and enhance wayfinding.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Incorporate landscape edges and shaded benches.	Medium-Term	\$

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Potential Cost Range
Centennial Park			
1	Add benches, tables and a small covered pavilion.	Short-Term	\$
2	Install lighting near mural and gathering area.	Short-Term	\$
3	Build event-ready infrastructure for pop-up markets.	Short-Term	\$\$
4	Coordinate programming with local businesses and events.	Short-Term	\$
Gutierrez Park			
1	Upgrade lighting, repair sidewalks and restrooms.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Install playground shade structure.	Short-Term	\$\$
3	Add benches and picnic tables throughout.	Medium-Term	\$
4	Improve park entry with signage and landscaping.	Medium-Term	\$
Hunter Park			
1	Build lighted basketball court on west side.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Enhance landscaping and update play equipment.	Short-Term	\$\$
3	Construct large covered pavilion with tables.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Add multipurpose field near north boundary.	Long-Term	\$\$\$
Revere Park			
1	Install playground with safety surfacing.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Add picnic tables, benches and shade trees.	Short-Term	\$
3	Build dog run or small pet area.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Add park entrance sign and lighting.	Medium-Term	\$
Lozano Plaza			
1	Build covered stage for performances and community events.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Construct restrooms to support events and markets.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
3	Add power, lighting and pop-up market pads.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Partner with local businesses to host regular activities.	Medium-Term	\$
Soccer Complex			
1	Add shaded seating areas and hydration stations.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Construct additional soccer fields and expand Phase II.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
3	Upgrade trail pavement and add security lighting.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Install mini soccer pitches.	Medium-Term	\$\$
5	Expand parking lot and build additional restrooms.	Long-Term	\$\$\$

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Potential Cost Range
Tom Wilson Sports Complex			
1	Expand parking and add tree shade islands.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Build additional multi-purpose fields for sports tournaments.	Medium-Term	\$\$\$
3	Improve pavilion and seating for large events.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Upgrade trails and add interpretive signage.	Long-Term	\$\$
Henry Roberts Loop Trail			
1	Add adaptive trail spur with safety surfacing.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Install new directional signage and entry markers.	Short-Term	\$
3	Place benches and shaded rest stops every half mile.	Medium-Term	\$
4	Coordinate connections with other trail segments.	Long-Term	\$\$
Meg Jorn Memorial Trail			
1	Add shade structures and hydration stations.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Install trail lighting.	Short-Term	\$\$
3	Add wayfinding and interpretive ecological signs.	Medium-Term	\$
4	Connect trail to Soccer Complex and neighborhood paths.	Long-Term	\$\$
Arroyo Colorado Hike & Bike Trail			
1	Add lighting and emergency call stations for safety.	Short-Term	\$\$
2	Install trailhead signage and rest stops with hydration stations.	Short-Term	\$
3	Enhance trailhead landscaping and parking.	Medium-Term	\$\$
4	Expand trail phases to reach new residential growth areas.	Long-Term	\$\$\$

Funding Mechanisms

- **Municipal General Funds:** Funded via ad valorem taxes, most suitable for maintenance, small capital projects and operations.
- **General Obligation Bonds:** Funded by property taxes, best for land acquisition and long-term infrastructure projects.
- **Revenue Bonds:** Ideal for self-sustaining amenities like golf courses or event venues.
- **Economic Development Corporations (EDCs):** Utilize Type B sales tax revenues to support parks as economic development catalysts. Can align with Harlingen EDC’s goals to promote livability and business attraction. This may be especially applicable to fund trail expansions or a recreation center.
- **Developer Contributions:** Require land dedication, trail easements or fee-in-lieu payments as part of subdivision approval. Helps ensure new development contributes to park infrastructure proportionally.
- **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Grants:**
 - Local Park Grants: For acquisition, development and renovation.
 - CO-OP Grants: For programming targeting underserved populations.
 - Recreational Trail Grants: Funded through federal gas taxes, good for expanding the Arroyo Colorado Trail.
- **Private Donations, Sponsorships and Partnerships:**
 - Solicit land, funding, equipment or services from individuals, organizations and local businesses and establish a Parks Improvement Trust Fund to manage contributions.
 - Work with RGV Birding Festival and similar local organizations to co-fund nature-based infrastructure (e.g., blinds, signage, boardwalks).
 - Private foundations like the Meadows Foundation or Houston Endowment may support nature education and environmental justice in underserved areas.
- **Public Improvement Districts (PIDs):** Potentially useful in new residential areas (e.g., West Harlingen, Rangerville) to maintain and fund public green space.
- **Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ):** Capture increased property tax revenue from revitalized areas like Downtown Harlingen for reinvestment in public amenities.
- **School District and County Partnerships:** Collaborate with Harlingen Consolidated ISD and Cameron County to share athletic facilities and develop shared use parks that double as both school and community assets.
- **Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC):** Partner on regional planning grants, especially for transportation-related trail connectivity and to access Valley Metro initiatives for integrated trails and transit infrastructure.
- **Texas General Land Office (GLO):** Community Development Block Grants for Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) can fund dual-purpose parks that provide stormwater detention and recreation, especially in flood-prone zones near the Arroyo Colorado.
- **USDA Rural Development Programs:** Harlingen and nearby ETJ areas may be eligible for Community Facilities Grants for an indoor recreation center.
- **The Brownsville Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and CAMPO (Cameron County):** May offer transportation enhancement funds for trails, bicycle facilities, ADA improvements and wayfinding in parks.
- **Several tracts in Harlingen may fall within Opportunity Zones:** Encourage public-private partnerships in these areas for mixed-use development that incorporates public parks and open space.