

APPENDIX A: THE PURPOSE OF PLANNING

The purpose of a comprehensive plan is to gather information to make decisions about the future. We gather facts. We assess the challenges and opportunities. We look at possibilities for the future. We plan for ways to accommodate growth without sacrificing the quality of life we enjoy today. We decide what actions to take to achieve our vision for Harlingen.

This plan is comprehensive, meaning it looks at all the elements that make up a city: housing, transportation, parks and open space, economic growth, downtown, history, public services and facilities, neighborhoods, and community identity. It includes a Future Land Use Plan (FLUP) that guides the future development of the community. In essence, this plan is a blueprint for the city's growth, providing the City Commission, the Planning & Zoning Commission, city staff, and the community at large with a collaborative road map for expanding and modernizing the city and attracting new residents and businesses.

We must coordinate within the city, with other government agencies, with community partners, and with the citizens of Harlingen. By working together toward common community goals, we can achieve a bright future for Harlingen. One Vision - One Harlingen.

This plan is for everyone in Harlingen. We can work together in order to accomplish the goals of the comprehensive plan.

The Harlingen One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan articulates the vision for the future that respects the goals and priorities set by the citizens of Harlingen. It guides us in making policy decisions and prioritizing and spending public dollars.

Harlingen's last comprehensive plan was completed in 2002. That plan reviewed many of the same elements that this document addresses, including:

- Demographics
- Land use
- Transportation
- Zoning
- Environment
- Parks and recreation
- Drainage
- Water and wastewater
- Housing
- Economic development

This document will provide updates to these topics with a focus on current issues of interest in Harlingen. Parks and Recreation will be reviewed in its own document. Analyzing current data and understanding the interests of Harlingen residents will help us prepare a vision for the type of growth Harlingen wants.

THIS CHAPTER INCLUDES:

1. AN EXPLANATION OF PLANNING
2. THE STUDY AREA
3. THE PROCESS AND USE
4. A HISTORY OF COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING IN HARLINGEN

A Comprehensive Plan:

- Tells a community what it looks like today (existing conditions).
- Articulates a vision of how the community wants to grow as it looks to the future.
- Establishes goals and objectives for various elements to achieve that vision.
- Identifies specific recommendations and actions to help achieve the vision.
- Provides a framework for policy decisions and physical development of Harlingen.
- Covers a time frame of 10 to 30 years.
- Is integrated with other planning documents, studies, and initiatives carried out by the city and region.

A comprehensive plan is NOT zoning law, subdivision regulation, budget, a capital improvement program, or any other regulatory document. It is not a detailed master plan for any one area. It is meant to be the basis for the preparation of such documents.

Elements of a Comprehensive Plan

This plan does not focus on just one element of a community; rather, it evaluates all the components of a city and how they work together. According to the Texas Local Government Code, a comprehensive plan may include provisions on land use, transportation and public facilities, and may be used to coordinate and guide the establishment of development regulations.¹

Comprehensive plans may be adopted by municipalities, but they do not limit the city's ability to prepare other plans or policies as they are not binding policies themselves. In other words, even a map in a comprehensive plan illustrating future land use does not dictate a zoning or policy change, but rather provides the guidance for potential change in the future.²

¹ Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 213. Municipal Comprehensive Plans, Section 213.002.

² Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 213. Municipal Comprehensive Plans, Section 213.005

Why 2030?

Comprehensive plans typically look at a 10 to 30 year horizon. Planning for Harlingen is complex, and the community has to think far into the future about the decisions that are being made. Using a long time frame allows the community to look at population growth and consider the long-term implications of actions and decisions.

This plan can adapt. We live in a fast paced global environment, and changes occur every day to which we should respond. **This plan should be reviewed every three to five years**, with a major update every ten years. A five year review allows the city to measure progress toward implementation and identify new priorities. At the ten year update, significant public input and an evaluation of the goals and vision for the future of Harlingen should be included and may result in adjusting goals, objectives, and actions.

CITY PLANNING & REGULATORY AUTHORITY IN TEXAS

This section is not a legal document, and it is not intended to provide legal guidance on land use regulation issues. It is only intended to provide a brief summary of legislative authority for land use planning and regulations among municipalities.

Across the United States, land use planning and regulation is upheld as a way to protect health, safety, and welfare. In early planning history, regulations tended to precede planning; but over time, comprehensive plans have become the controlling documents that guide growth-based decisions.

For the “purpose of promoting sound development of municipalities and promoting public health, safety, and welfare,” the Texas Local Government Code (LGC) permits municipalities to develop a comprehensive plan “for the long-range development of the municipality.”¹ In Texas, the bulk of land use control falls on municipalities. And while comprehensive plans are not required in Texas, as they are in other states, municipalities across the state use comprehensive plans and the planning process to identify what they want and how to achieve it. Political leaders and decision makers use comprehensive plans as a foundation to establish development and land use regulations.

According to the LGC, cities may “define the content and design of a comprehensive plan” and may:

- (1) include but is not limited to provisions on land use, transportation, and public facilities;
- (2) consist of a single plan or a coordinated set of plans organized by subject and geographic area; and
- (3) be used to coordinate and guide the establishment of development regulations.²

The LGC requires adoption or amendment of a comprehensive plan include both review by the city’s planning commission or department (if one exists) as well as a public hearing.

¹ Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 213. Municipal Comprehensive Plans, Section 213.002.

² Ibid.

“Comprehensive planning is a process by which the community assesses what it has, expresses what it wants, decides how to achieve its wants and, finally, implements what it decides.”

Comprehensive Planning for Texas Cities, Office of Rural Affairs, p. 1

In addition, a municipality may define the relationship between a comprehensive plan and development regulations. Municipalities are given different authority to regulate land use and development depending on whether the property is within their full service jurisdiction or within the municipality’s extra territorial jurisdiction. Also, cities have different authority based on whether they are a home-rule or general-rule city. Home-rule cities have more authority and are established when a city having more than 5,000 residents vote to approve a charter to assume the full power of local self government (also known as a home-rule charter). Harlingen is a home-rule city.

According to the LGC, municipalities have the following regulatory authority when it comes to land use and development:

- Zoning, such as the height, size, lot coverage, lot size, density, and location of a building and lot (LGC, Chapter 211).
- Subdivision, how a property is subdivided and used (LGC, Chapter 212).
- Structures (including housing), as it relates to the building code (such as structural integrity and plumbing) as well as establishing building lines (LGC, Chapter 214).
- Certain business operations (LGC, Chapter 215).
- Signs (LGC, Chapter 216).

HARLINGEN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN STUDY AREA

The study area for the comprehensive plan includes the current incorporated area of the City of Harlingen (the city limits) as well as the current extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Today, the incorporated area of the City of Harlingen includes approximately 40 square miles. The 3.5 and 5 mile ETJs add another 128.8 and 53.6 square miles, respectively.

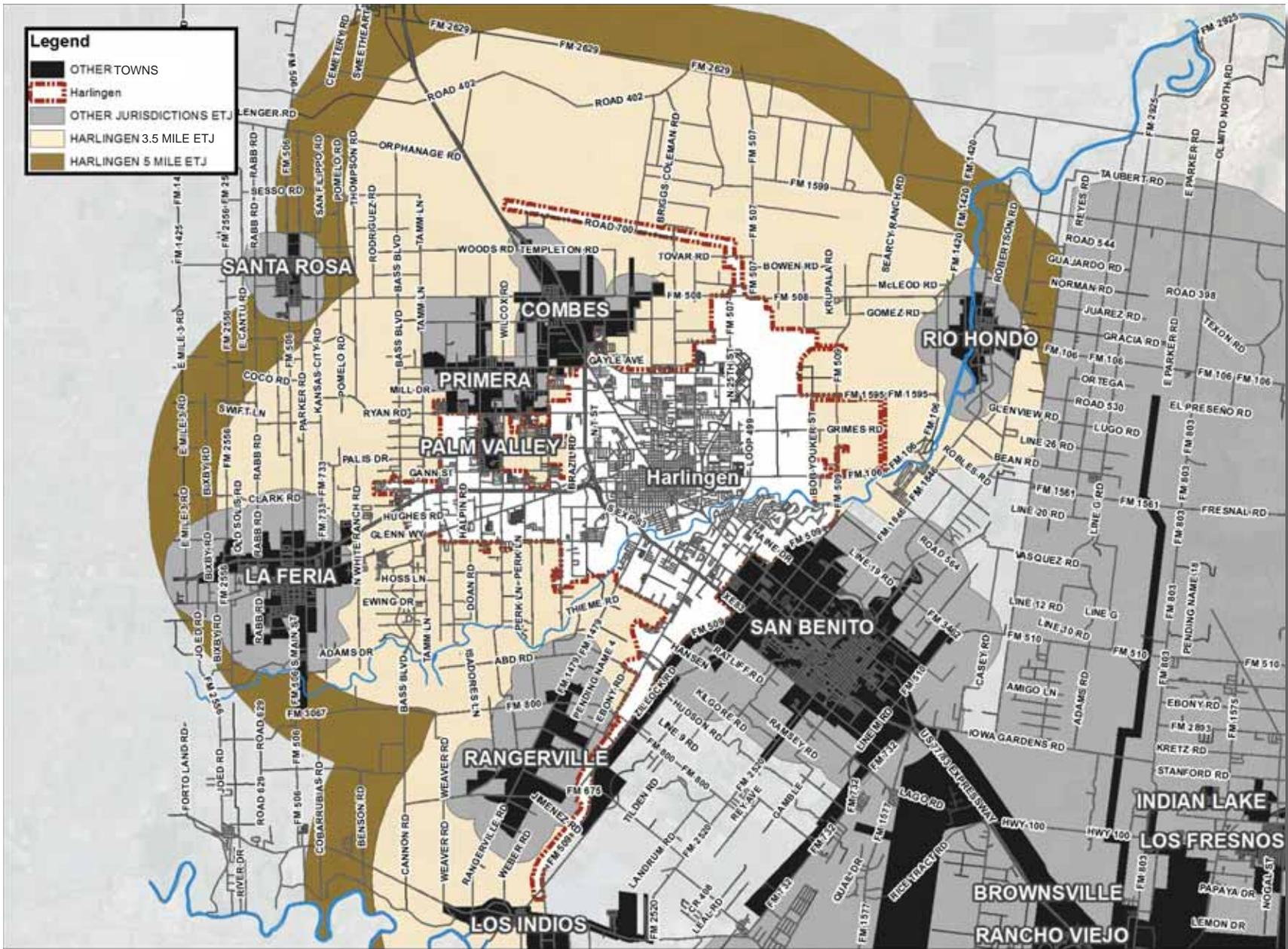
Surrounding the study area are the city limits and ETJs of several neighboring towns including San Benito, Rangerville, Palm Valley, Primera, Combes, La Feria, and the larger though further away city of Brownsville. There are also unincorporated areas that are not part of another municipality's jurisdiction. These areas may become part of Harlingen's or another city's jurisdiction depending on future annexations.



North Loop 499. Source: City of Harlingen

Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) the unincorporated land adjacent to the city's corporate limits that is not within any other city's municipality or ETJ. The size of a city's ETJ varies according to its population. Harlingen is a home-rule city with a population of over 50,000, so its ETJ currently extends 5 miles from the city limits.

HARLINGEN CITY LIMITS



CREATING THE HARLINGEN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Creating a comprehensive plan is a result of an extensive process involving analysis of existing conditions, engaging the public for their input, and developing recommendations and a draft report.

- 1. Existing Conditions and Trends Analysis** - The Planning Team worked with city departments, regional agencies, key stakeholders, and interest groups to conduct an initial inventory of the existing conditions and review recent trends and projections of growth in Harlingen and the surrounding area. This process

established a baseline from which to frame recommendations. It included reviewing and summarizing existing and recently completed planning documents, data collection, and exploring the Harlingen community and its environment.

- 2. Public Engagement** - This component of the process extended throughout the entire planning effort. Early in the process, a comprehensive planning advisory committee

(CPAC) was established to guide the effort. The Mayor and City Commission selected representatives from throughout the city. Throughout the planning process the CPAC met multiple times to review input and existing conditions, develop ideas, and provide guidance to the Planning Team in creating the One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan.



Staff, elected officials, and citizens discuss the update of the comprehensive plan at the kick-off meeting. Source: City of Harlingen

In addition, there were opportunities for the public to provide input. A citizen survey, via mail-out and online, was used. It asked residents to identify the things they love about the city, the things that need improvement, and their priorities for the future of Harlingen.

A series of public workshops and presentations was also used. Many residents of Harlingen provided input on key topics that informed the comprehensive plan.

- 3. Developing and Reviewing Recommendations and Plan Report** - With ideas and input from residents and a baseline analysis of the current state of Harlingen, draft goals, objectives, and recommendations

were formed for each of the plan elements. These recommendations went through a series of reviews by city staff, the advisory committee, and the public.

- 4. Plan Adoption** - Once the recommendations were vetted by the community, the report and recommendations for implementation were

taken through the political process for approval. This included a presentation and public hearing to both the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Commission, and adoption by City Commission.

HOW TO USE THIS PLAN

The Harlingen Comprehensive Plan is a policy document that articulates a vision, outlines goals and objectives, and recommends actions. It ensures that new development and redevelopments of land, roads, parks, and public facilities are well-planned and occur in a manner that achieves the desired vision of the community.

Still, for a comprehensive plan to be successful, it requires action to implement the recommendations. This plan is ultimately a guiding document to the area's leaders and city staff regarding day-to-day decisions on policy making, developments, and spending priorities. General actions that carry out the goals and objectives of this comprehensive plan include:

- Changes to the regulatory tools, such as the Unified Development Code and zoning map that influence how the built environment is created.
- Capital improvement investments such as roadways, utility infrastructure, sidewalks, parks and trails, and public facilities.
- Ongoing planning efforts and studies that will further clarify needs and specify recommendations and actions, such as detailed topic plans (parks and recreation or tourism plans) and small-area plans (downtown plan).
- Efforts and actions among city departments and other agencies that advance the goals and objectives of the Harlingen Comprehensive Plan.
- Partnerships with other parties, including other government entities, private land owners or developers, and other stakeholders or interest groups who can carry forward actions of the Harlingen Comprehensive Plan.
- More aggressively pursuing other funding

resources such as public and private grants to supplement budgets.

In order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the Harlingen Comprehensive Plan and realize the vision, this document should guide all decisions by land owners, developers, government entities, city departments, and political leaders with regards to the elements of this plan and other topics that will impact the future of the community.

HOW THIS PLAN IS ORGANIZED

Public Engagement - This component describes the significant amount of effort on the part of Harlingen's citizens and stakeholders to identify challenges and opportunities, and develop ideas to create a unique and livable community.

Community Profile - This component describes the current state of the City of Harlingen, such as population and economic characteristics, and growth trends and patterns. It also projects future expected growth.

Vision & Guiding Values - This section describes the vision and guiding values of how Harlingen should grow. The vision and values were derived primarily from the engagement and input from the public.

Land Use and the Future Land Use Plan - This component includes land planning policies related to development and creating a desirable and sustainable built environment.

Element Goals & Recommendations

- Based on the vision and guiding values, a series of goal statements for the various elements of the comprehensive plan were developed. These include economic growth, transportation, parks and open space, housing and neighborhoods, community identity, civic facilities and programs, public safety, historic preservation, and education. It also includes specific recommendations for Downtown Harlingen and the Medical District area.

Implementation Strategy - The implementation component describes the strategy for seeing through the realization of the comprehensive plan, including a time frame for specific actions, resources to enhance funding options, and important relationships and partnerships to advance implementation.

EXISTING PLANS & STUDIES

Below is a discussion of current and recently completed plans and studies for Harlingen. These reports give insight to where Harlingen has been, what it has accomplished in recent years, and what planning for the future has been accomplished.

Comprehensive Planning

Four comprehensive plans for Harlingen have preceded this one.

The **Lon C. Hill Plan** (1911) established the original town into a grid of 300 foot blocks. It identified 80 foot avenues and 60 foot streets, and the 200 foot right-of-way for the railroad lines that transected the city.

Following the closure of Harlingen Air Force Base, the **Harland Bartholomew Plan** (1968/1969) was the first comprehensive plan for the city that addressed growth issues. Its major goals included reducing out-migration of population, attracting new industries, and stimulating the tourism and recreation industries in Harlingen.

The **Wayne W. Snyder Plan** (1982) was an update to the Bartholomew Plan to reflect established and emerging development patterns of intense commercial uses in the Valle Vista and Sun Valley Mall areas as well as industrial areas along the railroads and northwest areas. It also noted the beginnings of downtown revitalization.

Harlingen's Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan

The most recent comprehensive plan completed by the city is the **Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan**. It is a comprehensive guide for land use and development for the City of Harlingen. The last update to the general plan was in 2002. The purpose of Vision 2020 was to:

- Address most aspects of community and urban lifestyle.
- Identify issues that affect quality of life for residents.
- Define goals and objectives to meet existing and future needs.
- Recommend specific proposals for programs and actions to be implemented by the city.

The Vision 2020 Plan established a vision statement:

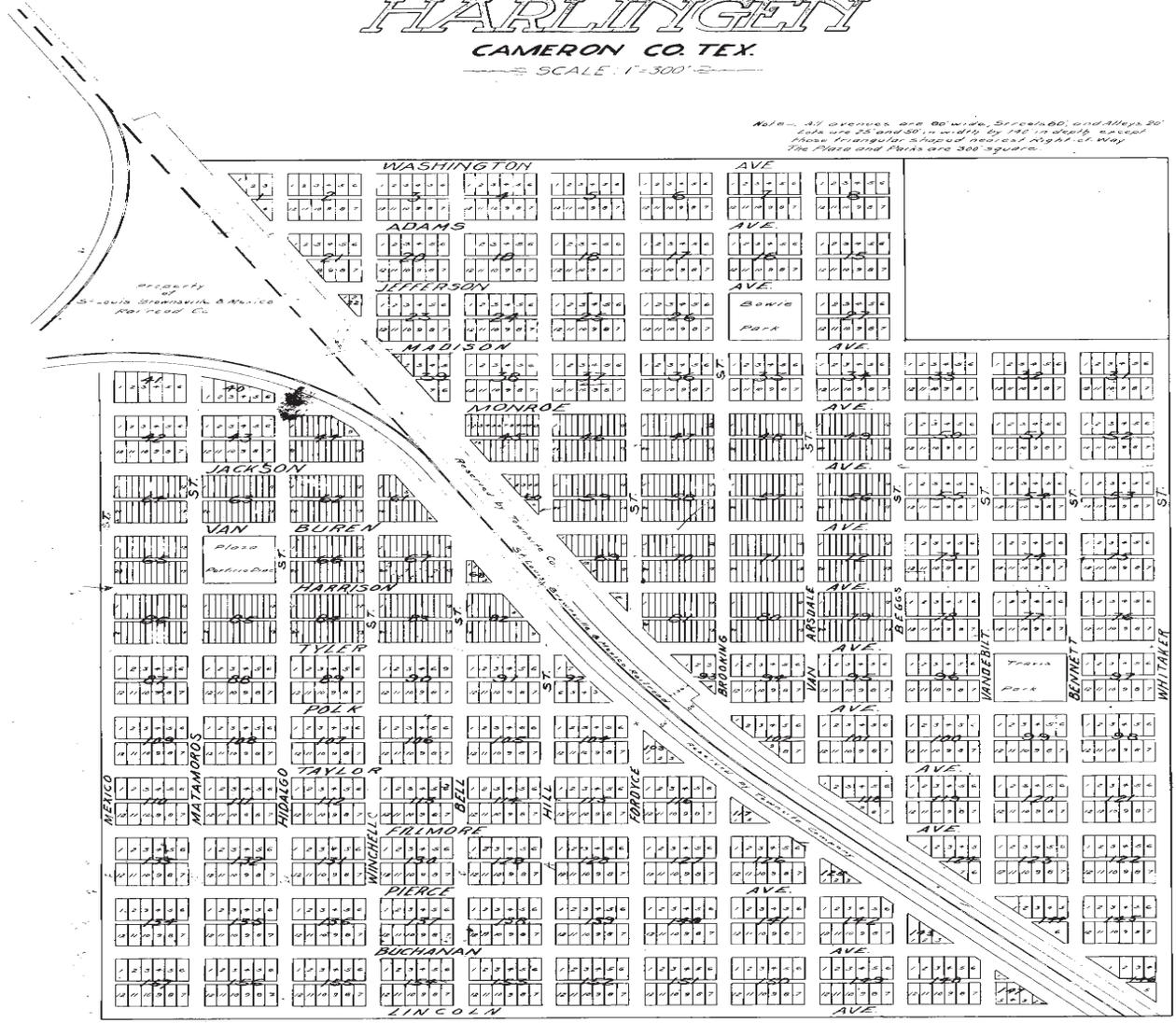
To be the International Leader of Excellence in Medicine, Industry, Transportation, Government and Education within a thriving Multicultural Community.

The plan recognized the community's rich heritage and culture, desiring to build the future on these. Moreover, the plan and vision recognized Harlingen's unique geographic, economic, and development potential and opportunities. The plan was organized into a series of goal statements and objectives, and it called for periodic review and modification of the goals and objectives as necessary to reflect changing issues and needs. It also included a plan for implementation which was to be used to guide annual fiscal budget priorities.

The Vision 2020 Plan covered these major plan elements: land use; transportation; the regulatory framework (zoning, annexation); environment; parks and recreation; drainage; water and wastewater; housing and neighborhoods; and economic development.

The study area of the Vision 2020 Plan included the incorporated area of Harlingen as well as the ETJ. At the time, the incorporated area was 34.1 square miles and the ETJ was an additional 208.6 square miles. Harlingen's population from the 2000 Census was 57,564 and the city was experiencing steady growth.

MAP
 of
HARLINGEN
 CAMERON CO. TEX.
 SCALE: 1"=300'



State of Texas
 County of Cameron
 Know all men by these presents, That Lon C Hill Town and Improvement Co., a private corporation, incorporated and existing under and by virtue of the laws of the State of Texas,

State of Texas
 County of Cameron,
 Before me the undersigned, a Notary Public in and for said County and State, on this day personally appeared Lon C Hill, known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument as President of the Lon C Hill Town

Harlingen's original town plat. Source: City of Harlingen

Harlingen 100 Strategic Plan (2007)

The Harlingen 100 was established by Mayor Chris Boswell in 2007 and was intended to prepare Harlingen for its centennial in 2010. The city completed The Harlingen 100 strategic plan “to improve and enhance the quality of life and economic vitality of the City of Harlingen.” It built on previous strategic plans that had been conducted, including 2006 Harlingen First!, Blueprint for Economic Vitality, and the 2003 Tourism Plan. A summary of key objectives include:

1. Tourism – Harlingen should showcase its attractions to business, education and leisure travelers and keep them here longer.
2. Healthcare – Harlingen can position itself as the state of the art healthcare hub of the region.
3. Image – Harlingen will be the cleanest, greenest, and most beautiful city in the Valley. Harlingen will clean-up, green-up, and step-up.
4. Recreation – Harlingen will provide first class recreational facilities for its youth and will attract regional, state and national tournaments in baseball, softball and soccer.
5. Business Recruitment and Retention – Harlingen will be known for innovative and aggressive economic development.
6. Education – Harlingen will be the catalyst for improved and enhanced education at all levels.
7. Revitalization – Harlingen will focus on its downtown as a key to development of place.

In addition to these goals and identified strategies to achieve them, the Harlingen 100 Plan identified 10 “fast track” projects. These included projects such as building gateway features at the entrances to the city; enforcing and strengthening the sign ordinance and property codes; landscaping areas where canals intersect with major thoroughfares; lighting fields at parks; among other projects that would spearhead the effort to improve and enhance Harlingen. Furthermore, to strengthen implementation,

the plan identified the department or agency that would be responsible for each strategy, locating possible funding sources, and proposing a timeframe for completion.

The following are significant projects that resulted from the Harlingen 100 Plan:

- Formed a permanent “Healthcare Strategic Economic Development Group” which resulted in the creation of the South Texas Medical Foundation. This foundation has 35 acres of land transferred into its possession for the future development of The University of Texas RGV medical school near the Regional Academic Health Center.
- Supported the full implementation of the VA’s plan to create a 152,000 square foot VA Super Outpatient Clinic which resulted in the creation of the Veterans Administration Ambulatory and Surgical Center Speciality Clinic.
- Developed a Veteran’s Memorial. This resulted in the creation of the Veteran’s Memorial at Pendleton Park.
- Created the center for additional continuing educational opportunities. This resulted in the creation of the University Center at Texas State Technical College which has partnerships with the University of Texas at Brownsville, University of Texas at Pan American, Wayland Baptist University, University of Houston, Texas A&M Kingsville and Texas A&M Corpus Christi.
- Identified and eliminated by priority blighted. This program has resulted in the demolition of 233 dilapidated structures from 2010 to 2013.
- Renovation of the Historic Reese Hotel.

Transportation Planning

There are three documents guiding transportation in the City of Harlingen and surrounding region. The City of Harlingen's Transportation Plan is currently contained in the city's Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan. Regional transportation planning occurs through the Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization (HSBMPO). The HSBMPO produces a metropolitan transportation plan that is updated every five years. Traditionally, the MPO plan sets the framework for the local plan in terms of roadway classification and standards, but it does not dictate how the city plans for its local transportation network. Still, coordination between the city's transportation objectives and actions should coordinate with those of the MPO in order to create a comprehensive transportation network.

In addition to the plan, the HSBMPO administers a **Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)**, a four-year construction plan that identifies specific state and federal projects to be funded and built based on the transportation plan. The TIP is updated every two years. The projects identified in the TIP are based on the recommendations and prioritization prepared in the HSBMPO Plan (see graphic on Page A-13).

The City of Harlingen does not have a separate transportation plan document. Rather, it is a **Transportation Element of the Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan** (in addition to following the HSBMPO Metropolitan Thoroughfare Plan. The HSBMPO plan and the Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan both identify several key components to their transportation system (other than roads) that can affect the economy and growth of Harlingen, including:

- Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios
- Valley International Airport
- Union Pacific Railroad
- Port of Harlingen
- Cameron County Regional Mobility

Many of the goals and objectives of the Transportation Element of the Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan are related to these systems as well as the road network.

The most recent long-range MPO transportation plan was completed 2009 and updated in 2013: The **2010-2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan** (HSBMPO Plan). As discussed, this plan deals primarily with the regional network, including highways and many arterials and collectors. It is updated every 5 years. Not only does the HSBMPO Plan look at the regional road network, but federal requirements mandate that it includes a bicycle-pedestrian element, public transportation element, and other transportation elements such as rail, aviation, and other private transit providers.

Since the HSBMPO is on the border, it also includes an element on International Crossings. This is a critical component of Harlingen's regional transportation plan to strengthen and solidify its status in international and national trade. Also, the area is on the Gulf Coast, so the HSBMPO Plan also includes an element for hurricane evacuation routes and maritime facilities.

In 2013, Harlingen adopted an updated thoroughfare plan, which is used to guide transportation decisions in this Comprehensive Plan. The 2013 Thoroughfare Plan Update, shown on page 2-15, includes recommendations for roadway sizes and capacity in the near future. The thoroughfare plan includes a functional classification of roadways.

Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (CCRMA) also addresses regional transit. A few of the key projects the CCRMA will address includes West Railroad relocation, SH 32 and I69E.

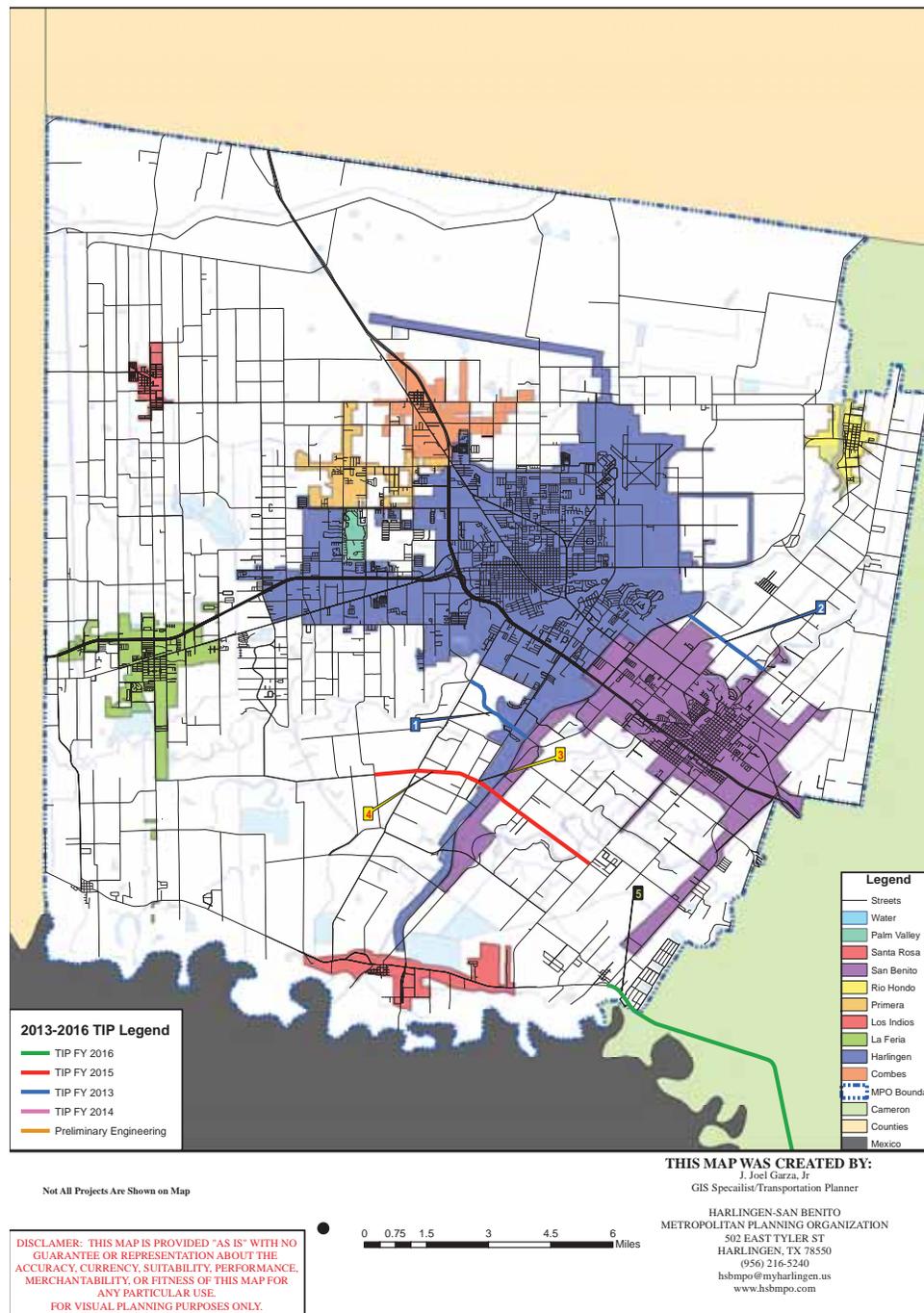
The table and map on the following pages show the current and proposed transportation projects based on these documents.

RECENT AND PLANNED ROADWAY & TRAIL PROJECTS

Project Name	Description	Status & Timeframe
FM 509, Bus 77 N to FM 106	Construct 4 lane divided	Complete (according to TIP)
FM 509 Ext, From US 77 to FM 508	New loop extension, 2 lane rural roadway	Projected by 2020
Primera Road, Stewart Place Rd to US 77	Widen to 4 lanes	Complete (according to TIP)
Stewart Place Rd, between Bus 83	Widen to 4 lanes	Complete (according to TIP)
San Jose Ranch Rd, FM 509 to SH 345	New road, 2 lane rural roadway	Complete (according to TIP)
South Parallel Corridor Phase I, FM 1479 to FM 509	New road, 2 lane rural roadway	Complete (according to TIP)
US 77, SH 107 to FM 508	Convert Frontage Rds to 1-way	Complete (according to TIP)
US 77, 3.7 mi N of SH 107 to FM 508	Convert Frontage Rds to 1-way	Complete (according to TIP)
Harlingen-25th Street Pedestrian & Bicycle Trail, Loop 499 to Bus 77	Construct new pedestrian and bicycle trail	Complete (according to TIP)

*Source: Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2010-2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, 2013-2016 Transportation Improvement Plan.
 Note: Does not illustrate transit projects as these were only operational and maintenance projects.*

2013-2016 HSBMPO Transportation Improvement Program



Parks and Recreation Planning

In 2000, the city adopted the **Parks and Recreation Master Plan**, a comprehensive plan for the park and open space system in Harlingen. Updated in 2005, the plan includes an inventory of the existing recreation facilities in the city, an analysis of recreation programs and facility needs in the city, goals for the Park and Recreation system, identifies significant issues and solutions to address the key recreation needs in the city, and creates a ten-year Action Plan. The Action Plan was created to prioritize implementation of the Master Plan, guide the rehabilitation of existing parks, provide guidance in the application of General Obligation Bond funding, and suggest alternative funding mechanisms for a ten-year time period. The Master Plan outlines a vision for parks, greenbelts and nature preserves that would create a strong recreation infrastructure, connect the major features of the city, and help create a more attractive Harlingen. This plan has been updated concurrently with this comprehensive planning effort. See Chapter 6 for more information.

In 2010, the city adopted a **Trails Master Plan** that identified the current status and needs for trails in the city. Both the Vision 2020 Comprehensive Plan and the 2005 Parks and Recreation Plan identified a desire to improve walking and bicycling in the city through a network of trails and sidewalks. The intent of this plan is to establish a comprehensive system of trails to be used for recreational and commuting purposes that connect all of Harlingen. The plan provides guidance on locating and designing trails; establishes a framework for public-private partnerships; and offers guidance and resources for funding trail projects to implement the recommendations of the plan.

The process identified nine miles of “off-street” trails existing throughout the city, most of which are internal paths in parks.

The recommendations are for a trail network built on four foundations: along the Arroyo Colorado, along irrigation and drainage canals, along rail lines, and along streets. The high priority actions of the Trails Master Plan that are recommended in the updated 2016 Parks and Recreational Master Plan are:

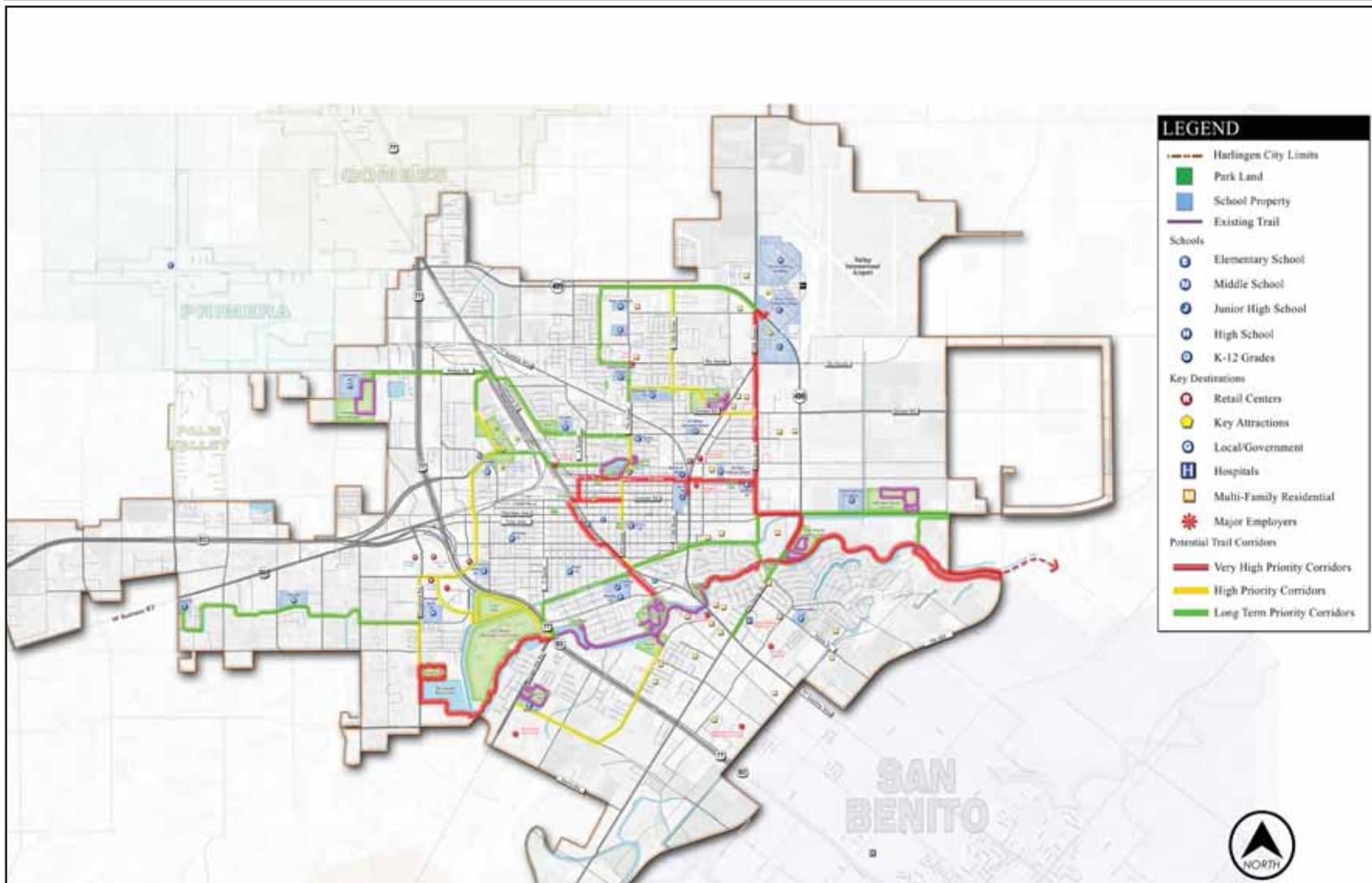
- 25th Street Trail
- Trails along the Arroyo
- Rail-trail and drainage corridor, from Jefferson Avenue to Bonham Elementary, connecting to Lake Harlingen
- Centennial/ Thicket Rail-Trail
- Jackson Street urban pedestrian corridor
- Dixieland Park/ Reservoir

These recommendations are carried forward in this plan.



New equipment at Rangerville Park. Source: City of Harlingen

2010 TRAILS MASTER PLAN PROPOSED TRAIL NETWORK



Downtown Harlingen Plan

Harlingen’s formal Downtown Plan was created in 1988, and it has been the guiding document for other studies and catalyst projects since. The plan identified four major components to be addressed: 1) physical improvements, 2) marketing and management, 3) finance and investment zones, and 4) parking and traffic management.

The plan also established the Downtown Overlay District, an ordinance to protect the character of the area. This ordinance recognizes that development in the Downtown area is unique and that certain traditional zoning regulations are not applicable in the Downtown environment.

The 1988 Downtown Plan also led to the formation of the Downtown Improvement District, a public improvement district that oversees revitalization efforts of the Downtown District and spending of the revenue from the special assessment in this district. Downtown property owners have voted in favor of this assessment six times.



Jackson Street

La Placita

This area is immediately west of the Downtown Improvement District. Like Downtown, it is a historically and culturally significant area because of development in the more suburban areas of Harlingen. In 1998, an Action Plan was developed



for this area to identify opportunities and a strategy to attract reinvestment in the district. Strategies focused on public safety, building appearances, traffic circulation and parking, streetscape and landscape. Lt. George Gutierrez Veteran’s Memorial Park, a key landmark and central focal part of the area, was also recently renovated.



La Placita



Source: City of Harlingen

Retail Analysis (2011)

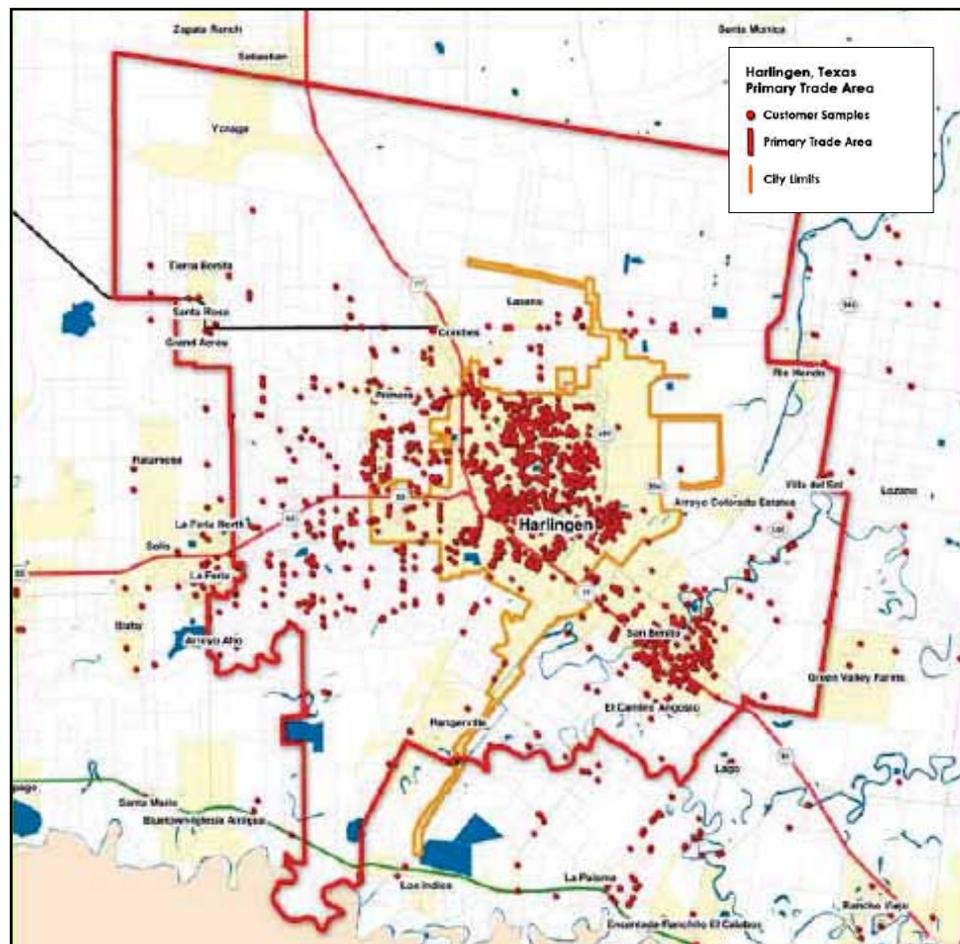
In 2011, the City of Harlingen retained Catalyst Commercial, Inc. to provide an analysis of the retail trade area of the city and the downtown area, and develop a retail strategy given Harlingen’s assets and demand drivers. It established a primary trade area, analyzed demographic and psychographic profiles to assess consumer spending, and analyzed existing and potential retail sites to determine retail uses they could accommodate.

The analysis identified the following commercial corridors and nodes:

- Valle Vista Mall area, being a super regional destination
- Valle Vista/Cameron Crossing corridor along I-2
- South Ed Carey Drive corridor
- Sunshine Strip corridor
- Downtown corridor

Generally, the plan found that there was an abundant supply of retail for Harlingen’s primary trade area. However, taking into account spending by regional populations such as commuters and tourists coming through the area, additional retail capacity exists. The city needs to focus on attracting a larger non-residential customer base, and the plan suggests “a strategic focus of continued regional retail recruitment and retention should be implemented for regional uses, niche Downtown Harlingen tenants which can reinforce downtown, categories which are underserved for the local population, and uses which would support winter Texans and the Mexican national customers.”

PRIMARY TRADE AREA MAP



Source: Catalyst Commercial, 2011

Harlingen Economic Analysis (2014)

In conjunction with this comprehensive planning effort, a general economic analysis was performed by Pegasus Planning and Development in order to confirm broad economic opportunities for the city to pursue. The report includes an analysis of area demographics, employment opportunities, of active and growing industries, and of land uses to support these industries, and offers several recommendations specifically for economic development in Harlingen. Components of the report have been incorporated into this comprehensive plan and help shape the recommendations for economic development.

The report found that Harlingen exhibits a competitive advantage in education & health services; public administration; and information. Professional, scientific, management, and waste services are growing industries, indicating that the area has been replacing imported services with ones that are locally sourced. Finally, agriculture and fishing are small but growing industries that could be targeted areas for continued intervention.

It also found that in Cameron County the industry analysis reinforces the region's strength in health care as well as several retail industries.

Economic strategies are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, The Future.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Industry: Target opportunities with the Texas-Mexico Automotive Supercluster. Integrate with workforce development programs. Target suppliers for outreach. Attend trade shows and conferences to market Harlingen's assets.

Healthcare: Invest in ancillary healthcare employment opportunities. Work toward creating a healthcare training facility. Connect with area colleges to align curricula to train medical students and medical technicians.

Transportation & Logistics: Maximize on logistics opportunities provided by Valley International Airport, The Los Indios Free Trade International Bridge, and Port of Harlingen. Improve communication with and connections to these ports to improve their utilization.

Oil & Gas: Pursue the growing oil and gas mining and processing industry by improving access to suppliers through pipelines and logistical assets.

Downtown: Continue to invest in programs to enhance Downtown Harlingen, including incentive programs, tax abatement programs, redeveloping the Historic Baxter Building, and connectivity between downtown public spaces.

Source: 2014. Pegasus Planning and Development. Economic Analysis for the Harlingen Comprehensive Plan 2014.

“But the city is more than text, and more than an artistic or technological artifact. It is a place where natural forces pulse and millions of people live - thinking, feeling, dreaming and doing.”

- Anne Whiston Spirn
Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning, MIT

