

# APPENDIX D: LAND USE

## THIS APPENDIX INCLUDES:

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF LAND USE IN GUIDING HARLINGEN'S GROWTH
2. EXISTING LAND USE IN HARLINGEN
3. A FUTURE LAND USE PLAN FOR HARLINGEN
4. SPECIAL CHARACTER DISTRICTS
5. GENERAL LAND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES
6. ANNEXATION STRATEGIES

## Definition: Land Use Planning

*The process by which lands are evaluated and assessed to become a basis for decisions involving land disposition and utilization. This involves studies on the environmental effects of land use and its impact on the community<sup>1</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup>land use planning. BusinessDictionary.com. Retrieved December 08, 2015, from BusinessDictionary.com website: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/land-use-planning.html>

## The Importance of Land Use Planning

Creating a framework for how Harlingen should grow is one of the key aspects of the City's Comprehensive Plan. A future land use plan is the most graphic representation of the long term vision for the city - it paints the picture of how the city should grow, the relationship of the existing city to the future Harlingen, and how the roadway and public spaces frameworks will interact with future growth.

The future land use plan that is incorporated into this chapter will guide growth in the following ways:

- It maps existing development patterns, so that new growth can correctly respond to what is already built;

- It helps protect existing property investments from potentially incompatible uses;
- It identifies potential locations for special or unique types of redevelopment; and
- It guides growth in largely undeveloped areas of the city.

Most importantly, the land use plan identifies unique and distinct areas of the city, and helps shape how those areas might build on the unique features or "character" that already exists in those areas.

This chapter summarizes land uses in Harlingen today, patterns and unique opportunities that may influence growth, and how potential annexation should be considered. The land use plan serves as a vision for the future of Harlingen.

### Existing Land Use Distribution

An understanding of existing land use patterns is key to developing a strong vision for Harlingen’s future. Harlingen has grown significantly since the year 2000, and as a result some land use categories have changed, while others have remained about the same. Table 5.1 below compares existing land use percentage changes within Harlingen’s city limits from 2000 and the end of 2014. As can be expected when a city is growing, almost every land use category has increased, while the amount of undeveloped land has decreased.

Key existing land use trends that help shape the recommended future land use patterns are:

- The largest category of land use is residential. Residential land use includes four designations: rural residential, low density, medium density and high density. Residential uses have nearly doubled since 2000, and today encompass almost 8,400 acres or 34% of the lands within the city limits.
- Retail land use includes commercial, wholesale, services and office uses. Retail areas have increased from 6% of the overall city area to over 7%, and in 2014 account for almost 1,800 acres.
- The smallest category of land use is industrial, but even this category has increased from 2 to 3% of the overall total area, almost 700 acres.
- Institutional land use refers to civic or governmental properties, and range from city facilities such as the library and City Hall to other facilities such as the airport, schools, hospitals and churches. This land use has always been significant for Harlingen because of Valley International Airport and the large medical presence in the city,

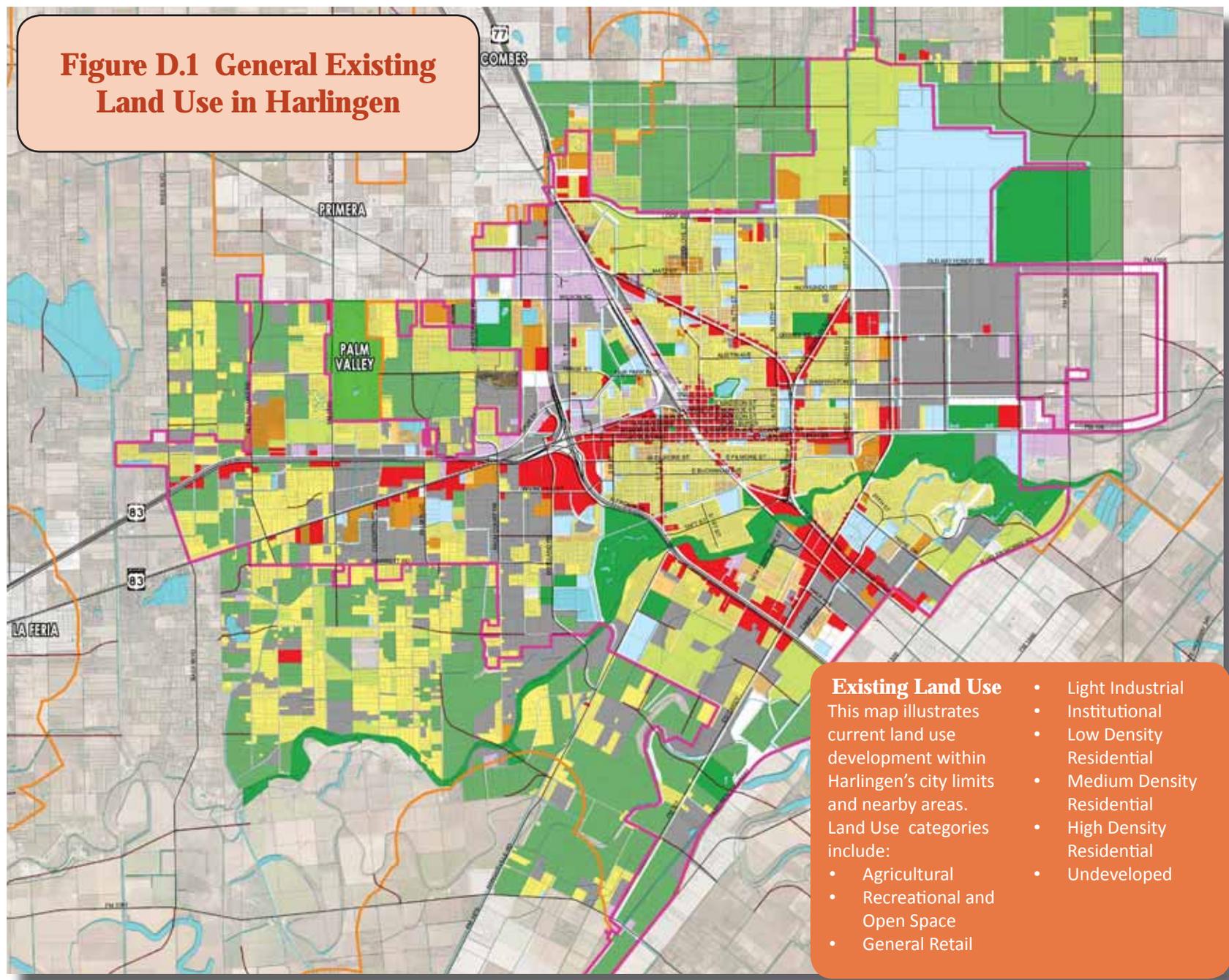
and the overall percentage of uses has increased from 9% to 11%, or by more than 500 acres since 2000.

- The second largest category of developed land is shared among agricultural, institutional, and recreational/open space.
- Land use outside the city limits has remained largely agricultural. Agricultural land use is the dominant land use in many areas outside the city limits compared to about 2,700 acres or 11% of land use within Harlingen.
- Recreational and open space lands extend across 2,600 acres of land in the city. This land use includes the Arroyo Colorado and public parks, and encompasses almost 11% of the overall city area. The 2000 Comprehensive plan measured only city parks, resulting in a much higher percentage for this category today when the Arroyo Colorado is included. The percentage of city owned parkland has increased from 2% in 2000 to 3% in 2014.
- The undeveloped land use category represents nearly 6,000 acres or 23%. The majority of undeveloped land can be found near the airport or in the southwestern part of the city.

LAND USE	2014 EXISTING LAND USE	2000 EXISTING LAND USE
Residential land use	34%	17%
Undeveloped/Vacant	23%	40%
Agricultural	11%	-
Institutional	11%	9%
Recreational and Open Space	11%	2%*
Retail	7%	6%
Industrial	3%	2%
Other (Streets and Water)	-	25%

\* Included only city parks

**Figure D.1 General Existing Land Use in Harlingen**



**Existing Land Use**  
 This map illustrates current land use development within Harlingen's city limits and nearby areas. Land Use categories include:

- Agricultural
- Recreational and Open Space
- General Retail
- Light Industrial
- Institutional
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Undeveloped

# A FUTURE LAND USE PLAN FOR HARLINGEN

The vision, guiding values and goals of One Vision One Harlingen help to shape the Future Land Use Plan (FLUP). While the City of Harlingen has a variety of strategies and tactics to influence the private development community, the primary tool the city has to directly influence how Harlingen grows is through development regulations and through guidance provided by the FLUP. The FLUP serves as a blueprint for development opportunities as they arise. It helps connect the vision and goals of the community about preserving character, connectivity, livability, identity, culture, and its economy to having that reflected in the built environment.



*The Future Land Use Plan helps ensure that new development is compatible with existing uses around it.*

The FLUP, illustrated in Figure 5.2, indicates future land use preferences. It guides city staff, elected officials, the public, and private developers on citywide desires for how Harlingen should grow.

*The FLUP does not constitute zoning regulations or establish zoning district boundaries. The FLUP is intended to provide guidance for making decisions on zoning regulations and zoning district boundaries.*

*Harlingen's Future Land Use Map is unique in that it is based on area character as well as use.*

## How the FLUP is Formed

This FLUP is different from a typical future land use plan/map in that it is not based just on use. Use-based land use planning tends to create isolated uses with little or no compatibility with the surrounding community, and can result in segregated and disconnected development patterns.

Rather, this FLUP focuses first on the compatibility of use, but also the attributes, unique features, unique and creative land use mix opportunities in different areas of Harlingen. It lets those character areas help influence how land is developed rather than how it is used. This results in an approach where existing conditions and environmental factors influence the appropriate development patterns and types, and sometimes uses for different areas of the city. This approach helps achieve the goals and guiding values of land use development by involving urban design, compatibility standards, and connectivity.

## Buildout Assessment

The recommended FLUP for Harlingen guides the configuration of land uses throughout the city. This includes both lands that are currently within the city limits as well as lands that are within the city’s extra territorial jurisdiction boundaries. Harlingen is well placed to have a great capacity for expansion and growth. The city has a carrying capacity for significant residential growth, as well as excellent locations along major regional corridors for retail and industrial growth.

The table on this page compares the city’s current land use distribution to the potential maximum at buildout in the future. Key items to consider regarding future growth and ultimate buildout include:

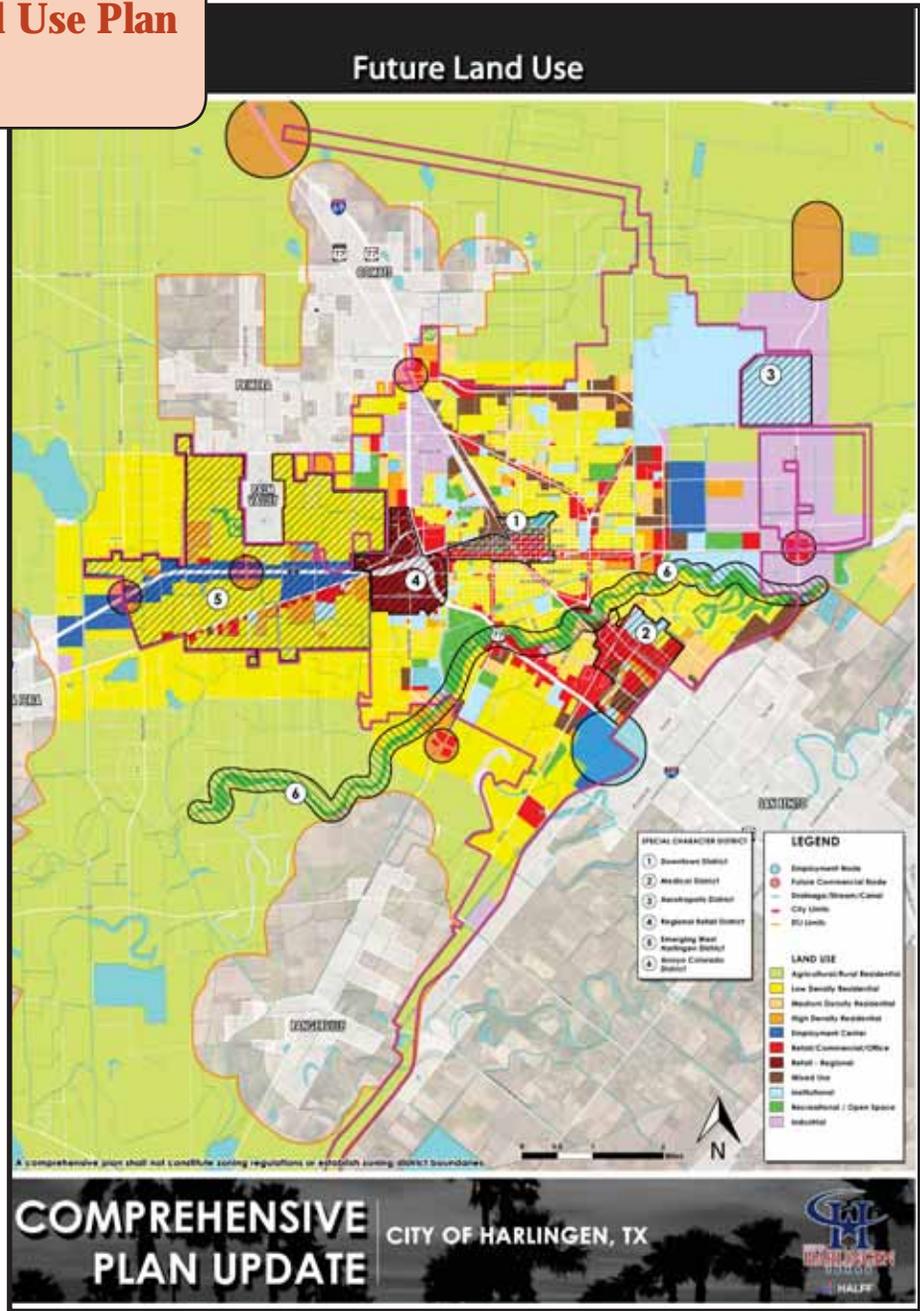
- **Ultimate population** – areas under the jurisdiction of Harlingen can readily support a future population that is more than five times the city’s current population. The city’s population could potentially increase to over 100,000 residents by the year 2040 +/-.
- **Focusing residential growth** – while Harlingen has over 130,000 acres of lands that could be someday be converted into residential land uses, much of that is recommended to be treated as agricultural preserves or rural residential. As envisioned by the FLUP, the city has 5,000 to 7,000 acres of traditional residential capacity, both within the city limits and in nearby ETJ areas. Using the city’s current residential density, an additional 50,000 to 75,000 residents can be accommodated within this area. A push to develop traditional subdivisions in the rural estate areas outside of the city is to be expected. Those areas are generally flat and less expensive

to acquire than closer in-lands. However, the burden on Harlingen Waterworks to provide efficient water and wastewater infrastructure in these areas makes the development of these areas a challenge for the city, to say nothing of the high cost of providing other services such as public safety, parks and library capacity. This plan recommends that the city maintain the very low density of rural residential in those areas. Instead commercial growth should be targeted along significant corridors such as I-2 and I-69E, FM 509, and the Loop 499 and Business 83 corridors. All offer significant average daily traffic volumes, high visibility and available areas for development. Future residential growth should continue to be focused on in-fill areas and other tracts of land that are near to the edge of existing residential development.

- **Significant infill capacity** – Harlingen has significant areas within its current city limits that can be developed. The city should encourage development of these areas that already have utility infrastructure and street access, rather than new developments that may require significant infrastructure extensions.

LAND USE	2014 EXISTING LAND USE	ULTIMATE BUILDOUT (WITHIN CITY LIMITS)	ETJ ULTIMATE BUILDOUT (ETJ ONLY)
Residential land use	34%	32%	3%
Undeveloped/Vacant	23%	0%	0%
Agricultural	11%	9%	5%
Institutional	11%	12%	-
Recreational and Open Space	11%	17%	5%
Retail/Employment/Mixed Use	7%	17%	2%
Light Industrial	3%	6%	1%
Rural Residential	-	7%	84%

**Figure D.2 Future Land Use Plan Map**



# LAND USE CATEGORIES FOR HARLINGEN

The following describes the general land use categories to be considered in Harlingen. This section identifies key characteristics of each land use type; notes where they are appropriate; where they are conditional based on specific uses and design of the property to mitigate adverse impacts; and where that development type is not appropriate. This information does not serve as a regulatory or zoning code, but is intended to provide decision-making guidance. It strikes a balance between ensuring predictable development patterns and outcomes, while retaining flexibility to address changing market conditions and community needs.

**Land Use Categories** - Land Uses are shown by level of intensity of development, ranging from rural development to mixed use and industrial uses. Land use categories for Harlingen include:

Agricultural/Rural Residential  
 Low Density Residential  
 Medium Density Residential  
 High Density Residential  
 Retail/Commercial/Office  
 Retail-Regional  
 Mixed Use  
 Employment Center  
 Industrial  
 Institutional  
 Recreation/Open Space/Drainage/Irrigation

**Special Character Districts** - six unique areas have been identified for Harlingen. These will influence the land use choices and development form that occurs in these areas, and may result in special standards that are developed for each unique character area. They include:

Downtown District  
 Medical District  
 The Aerotropolis District  
 Regional Retail District  
 Emerging West Harlingen District  
 The Arroyo Colorado District

**Special Nodes** - key commercial and revenue generating nodes are highlighted on the future land use plan and include:

- **Employment Node**--includes a large scale office and potentially light industrial/research development providing employment on a regional level.
- **Commercial Node**--includes areas with mixed-use centers developed around regional attractions, such as entertainment venues, shopping malls or lifestyle centers. Provide a mix of supporting uses, including retail, restaurants and residential uses ranging from urban residential to townhome units.

Each Land Use category is further describe on the following pages.

**Agricultural/Rural Residential** lands comprise much of Harlingen’s ETJ.

**Agricultural lands** in the ETJ are used for the production and cultivation of various crops, such as citrus, vegetables and cotton. This land use has decreased as large lot “country estate” neighborhoods are developed. Harlingen should create a strategy to preserve agricultural land and avoid expensive extensions of utility, park and public safety infrastructure.

**Rural Residential** includes lots that are larger tracts of land that are part of agricultural properties, or are carved out of existing agricultural areas. In the context of Harlingen, they are intended to remain as agricultural or ranchland areas, with homes to support those uses. Typically lots in this category are larger than 5 acres in size. Infrastructure support to these areas to convert them to a more dense residential pattern should typically not be actively promoted by the city. Conservation subdivision design strategies should be promoted in these areas.

**Low Density Residential** includes developments built at eight units an acre to just under one unit per acre. This is the most common type of residential development and is found throughout Harlingen.

**Medium Density** includes residential development built between 8 and 18 units per acre. This may include single family dwellings, townhomes, duplexes, condominiums or small apartment complexes.



*These pictures illustrate different examples of low density residential development. The top photo is along Garrett Road. The bottom photo is in Wildwood Subdivision. (Source: City of Harlingen)*

**High Density Residential** includes residential development built denser than 18 units per acre. Typically in Harlingen these developments have not exceeded 30 units per acre or three story levels in the past. In the future, high density residential developments over 30 units per acre may be encouraged if in an appropriate location.

**Retail/Commercial/Office** uses include commercial areas, offices and retail complexes that provide every day services and shops. In the past these types of uses were typically separated, but in recent decades typical commercial developments that are more mixed are favored, and include everything from stores, offices, medical facilities and even small employment facilities. They are intended to be convenient to local residents and within easy walking or driving distance from housing. Specialty shops, galleries and goods can also be found here.

**Retail-Regional** includes large shopping centers that have large anchor tenants such as a big box store, grocery store, or department store, and other retail or service establishments. Regional Retail Centers tend to attract not only local residents, but also shoppers from a regional geography.



High density residential use allows for apartment complexes. Vantage Apartments at Palm Court Drive in West Harlingen. Source: City of Harlingen



Retail uses allow multiple stores for combined access. Harlingen Corners development is located along Lincoln Avenue. Source: City of Harlingen

**Mixed Use** developments are those that mix retail, office, and residential in a dense, pedestrian friendly environment. They are intended to bring different but supportive land uses together so they are in closer proximity rather than separating them. They create interesting and dynamic areas of the city, and the variety of uses allows for re-purposing of existing buildings.

**Employment Center** includes employment generators such as office, commercial, lodging and light industrial/distribution facility uses where these are appropriate. Some retail uses may be appropriate at or near intersections.

**Industrial uses** include larger properties that are typically used for manufacturing of products, storage and distribution of goods, or mining or construction activities. In Harlingen these areas typically occur east of the city near the airport and transfer station, or along IH 69.

**Institutional** developments are uses that receive special treatment such as schools, churches, hospitals, public buildings, and charitable organizations.



*Old town centers have a great design for accommodating mixed use. Continued investment in the redevelopment of Downtown Harlingen provides a vibrant atmosphere for people to live, work and play. Source: City of Harlingen*



*The Harlingen Public Safety Facility located on Fair Park Boulevard. Source: Halff Associates*



Hugh Ramsey Nature Park and World Birding Center on Loop 499. Source: City of Harlingen

**Recreational and Open Space areas** include land that is preserved in a more natural state. These areas are frequently open to the public such as parks, green space and the Arroyo Colorado. These spaces may be owned by private entities such as golf courses, publicly-owned parks, or the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). Because they add open undeveloped areas to the city, drainage and irrigation canals are included in this general category.



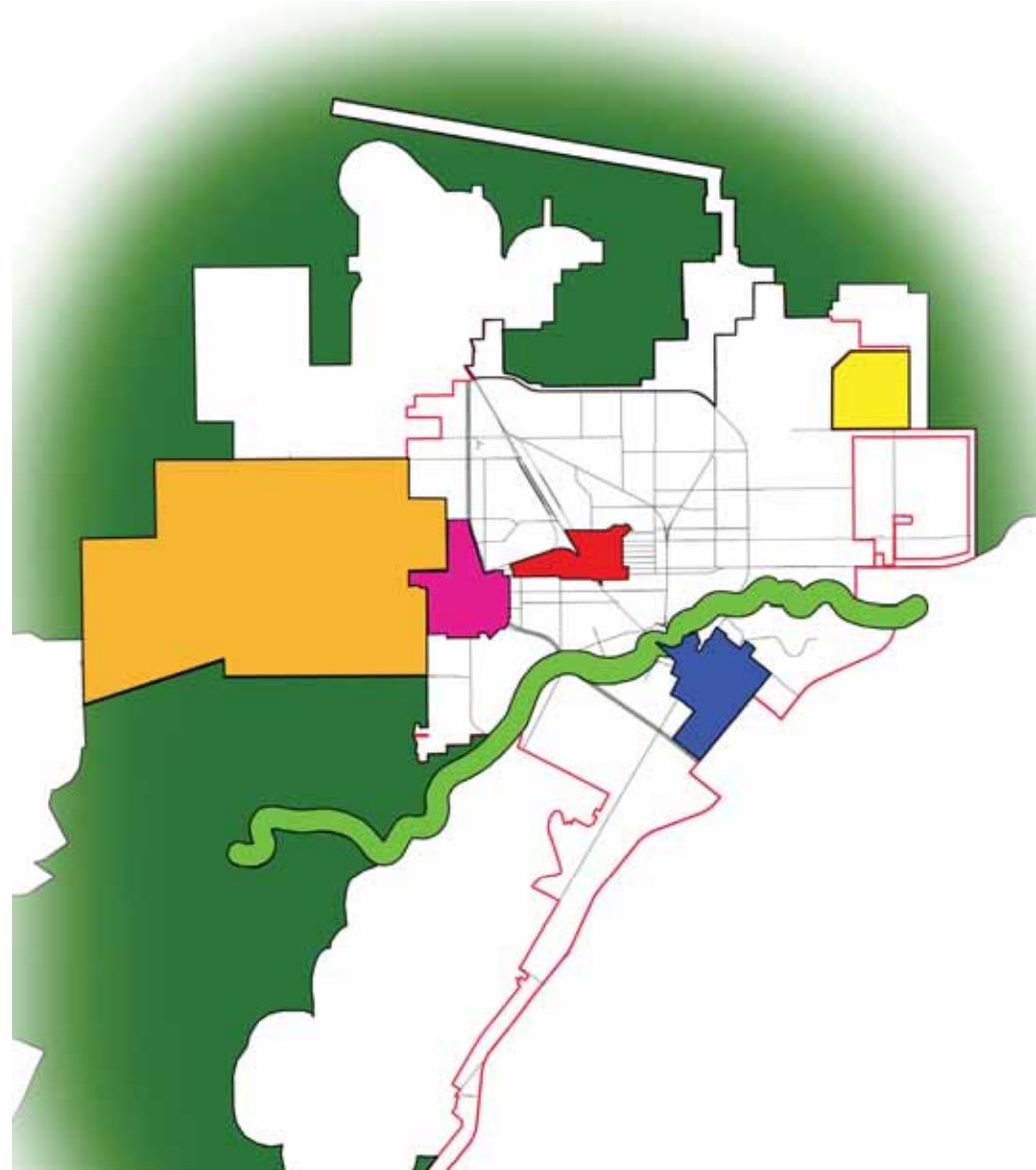
The 25th Street Trail in Harlingen, TX. Source: City of Harlingen



Undeveloped land in Harlingen, TX. Source: Halff Associates

## SPECIAL CHARACTER DISTRICTS

*Special character districts have been identified throughout Harlingen. Within each district, unique development strategies should be considered because of the cultural, environmental, land use, or infrastructure issues within those districts. Six special character districts have been identified.*



The six unique Character Districts of Harlingen.

## Downtown District

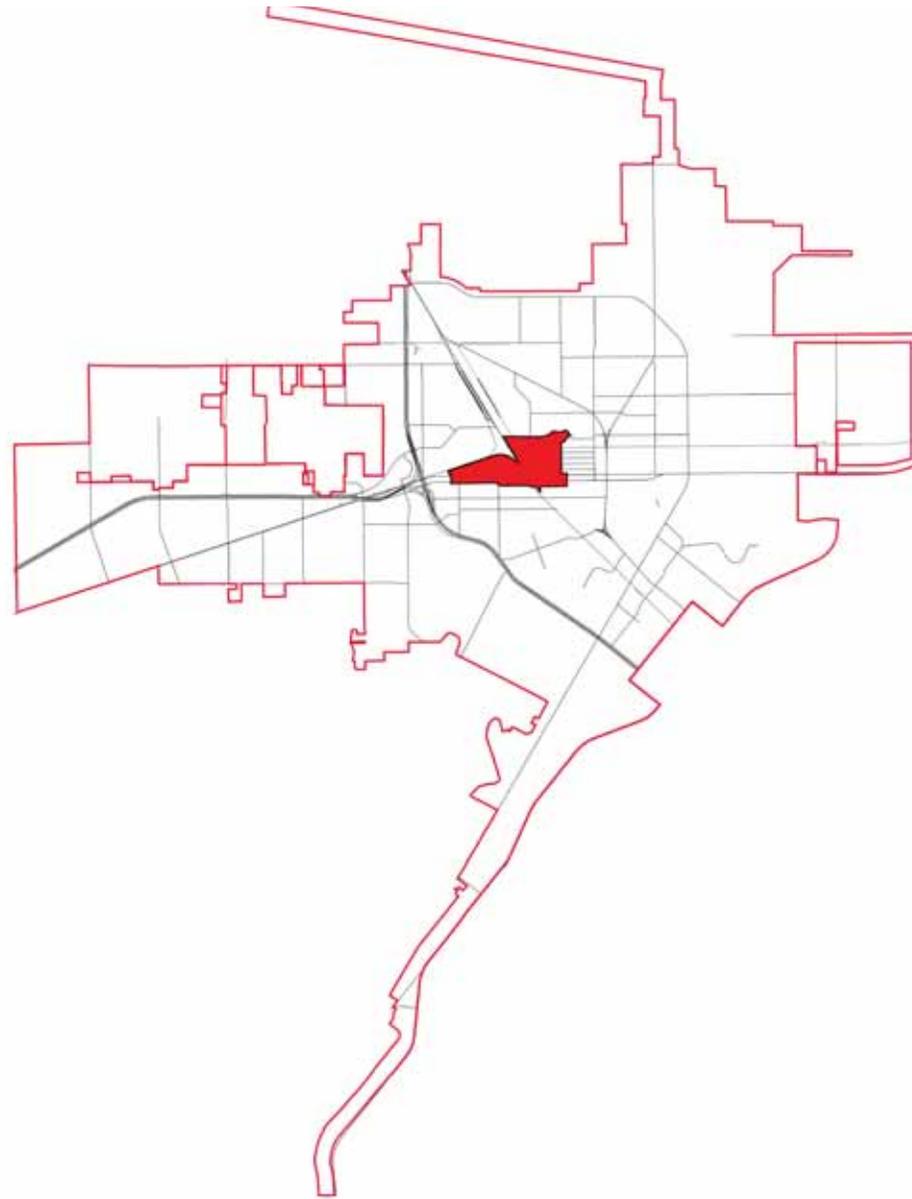
The goal of the Downtown District is to enhance the core area of the city by preserving historic structures while encouraging growth and development that is compatible with the urban character and density of the area. This area includes the Downtown Improvement District, La Placita, nearby neighborhoods, and the Tyler, Harrison and Commerce Avenue corridors.

### Purpose

The purpose of this district is to provide a growth-friendly environment that also preserves and enhances the architectural character of the area.

### Appropriate Uses and Development Types

Area development should help create vibrant, friendly places for people. Traditional town centers like Harlingen's Core were built to support mixed uses. This creates an exciting and denser environment by providing varied activities and allowing for more "eyes on the street" or civil surveillance. Short city blocks, continuous sidewalks, street furniture, and landscaping are especially important here because these design aspects help create a pleasant, urban environment.



## Medical District

The goal of the Medical District is to strengthen and enhance the existing and growing medical industry in Harlingen. The concept of a district can also attract additional medical entities to the area.

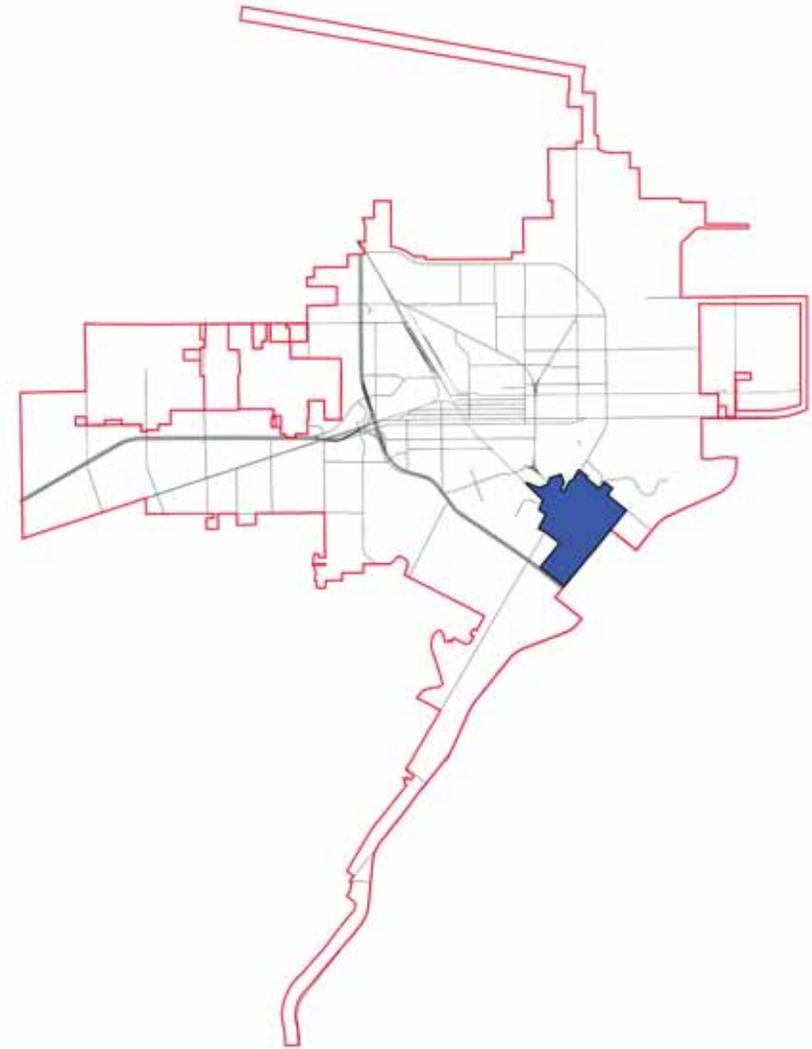
The Medical District is focused on the area around Valley Baptist Medical Center and Harlingen Medical Center. The area is also home to the UT Regional Academic Health Center, a major medical training school, and many other healthcare related uses.

### Purpose

The purpose of this district is to enhance the value of investments in this area by encouraging clusters of health related uses and support uses (such as high quality rental housing, close-in dining, and recreation opportunities). Ideally, much of this area should take on mixed use qualities.

### Appropriate Uses and Development Types

Appropriate uses range from large medical centers, support offices and clinics, retail, dining, entertainment, and higher density housing uses. The entire area should be walkable, and incorporate landscaped and architectural treatments that help link the area together.



## Aerotropolis District

The goal of the Aerotropolis District is to encourage airport and industrial related development nearby, while preserving the ability of the airport to expand in the future.

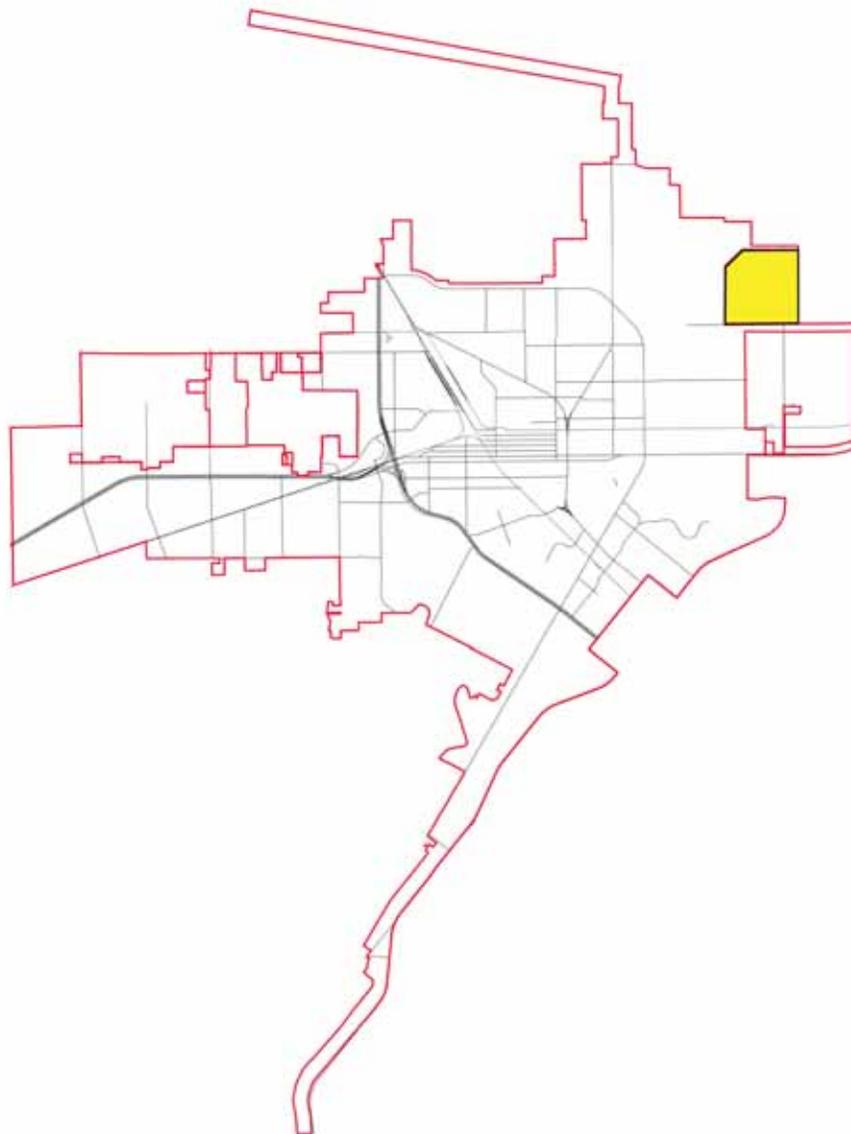
A master plan recently completed for 500 acres of airport owned land envisions a new high quality industrial and business park on the east side of the airport.

### Purpose

The main purpose of this district is to create opportunities for high quality industrial, business and office developments, all in a mixed use environment with nearby entertainment, retail and lodging opportunities.

### Appropriate Land Uses and Development Types

The airport requires more specific neighbors than other area districts. For safety and other measures including noise, land use around the airport should be limited to airport-related or industrial operations. Land uses like single-family residential should not be considered within the district for the safety and comfort of their users and the airport facilities. Extensive flight path safety corridors should be preserved.



## Regional Retail District

The goal of the Regional Retail District is to identify opportunities for business growth and expansion in Harlingen. Regional retail refers to larger retailers that draw from the region around Harlingen. These businesses are different from other stores or shopping areas in that they occupy more square footage therefore needing more space, attract a wide range of customers from all over the region, and generate significant revenue.

The Regional Retail Character District in Harlingen is on the western side of town by the intersection of Highway 77 and 169-E. Roughly, it is bound to the North by Teege Road, to the West by Palm Court Drive, to the East by South P Street, and to the South by Haverford Boulevard. Land in this area currently accommodates large retailers including Wal-Mart, Hobby Lobby, Bass Pro Shops, Target, Sam’s Club, and the Valle Vista Mall. While the existing land use already supports a Regional Retail District there is still land that can be developed within this area. Surrounding this District is mostly residential land use. As development within the Regional Retail District occurs it will be important to create transitional edges to help blend these uses and create a harmonious and seamless infrastructure and use pattern.

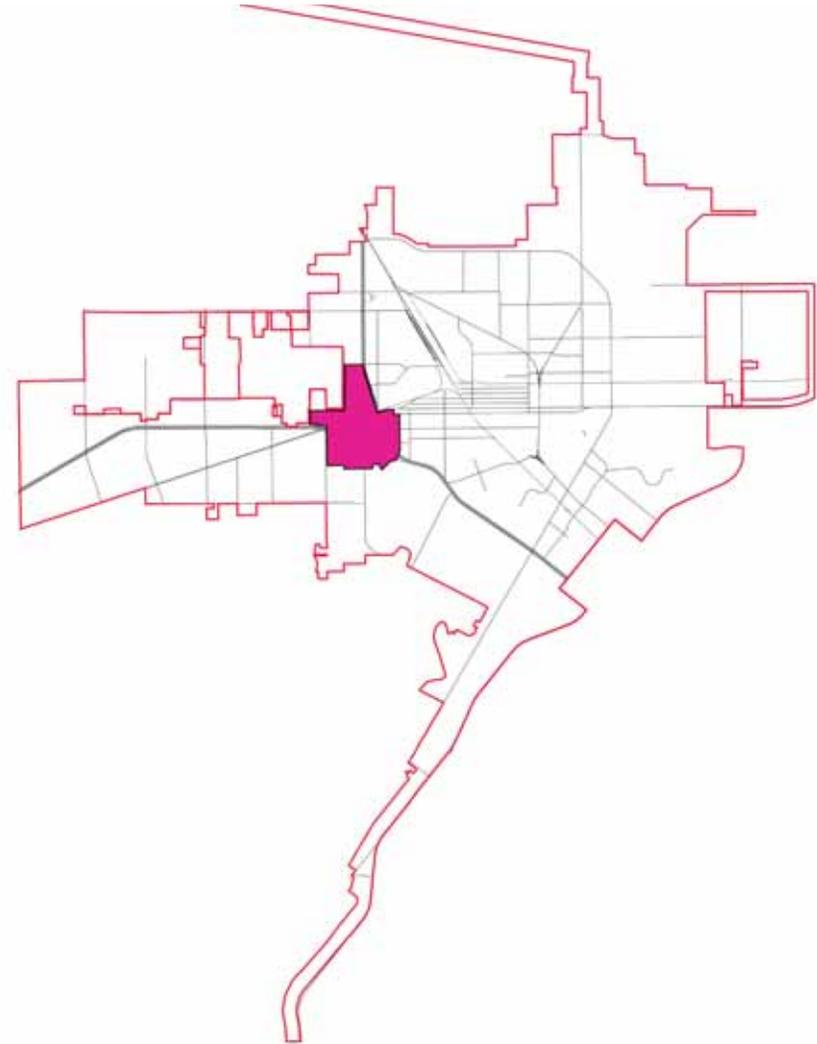
### Purpose

The purpose of this district is to capitalize on the opportunities for economic and business development given this district’s location near major transportation corridors. Encouraging regional retail development will enhance Harlingen as a shopping destination in the Rio Grande Valley.

### Appropriate Uses and Development Types

Stores like Bass Pro Shop or Walmart take up a lot of space, ranging from 20,000 square feet to 200,000 square feet. These stores should be accessible by car, bicycle, walking and transit if possible. As development fills in this district it is important

that the edges consider its residential surroundings. Methods of blending the edges and being a desirable neighbor include providing sidewalks, plenty of trees and other landscaping, the size of the building setback, and the location of delivery and loading truck zones.



## Emerging West Harlingen District

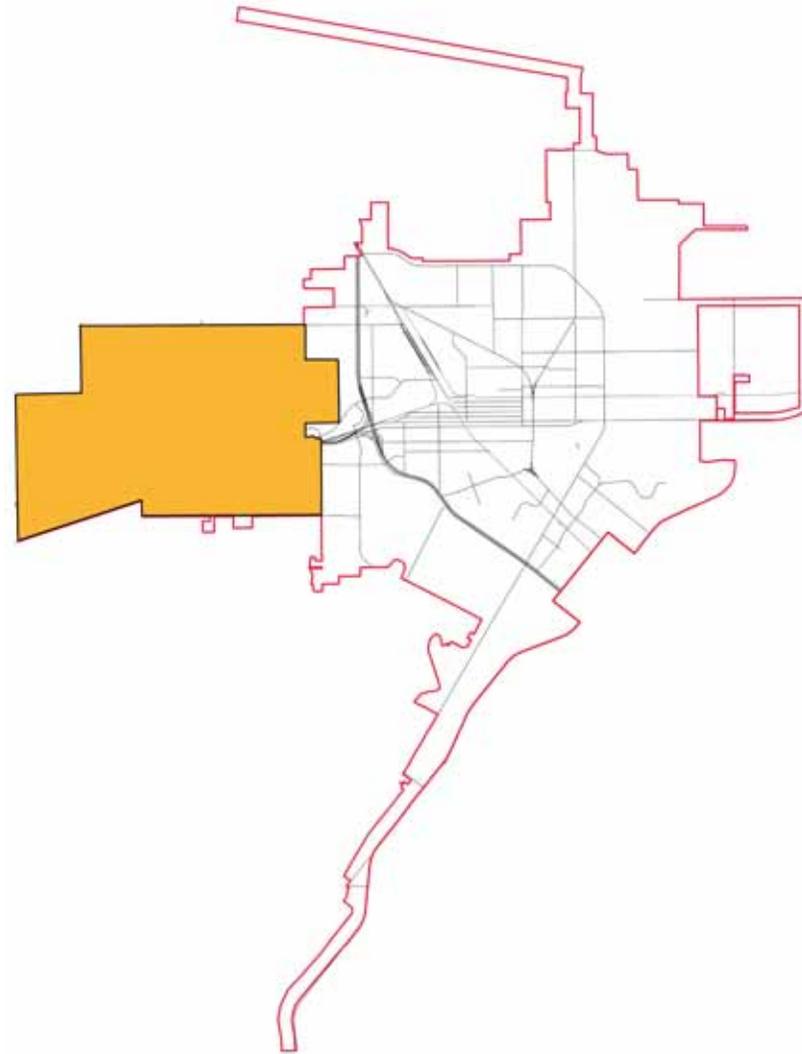
Most of the growth of Harlingen in the past decade has been to the west. This area, extending both north and south of I-2 between La Feria and Valle Vista Mall, started out as mostly county subdivisions and general business along I-2. Residential types vary widely, ranging from larger manufactured housing developments to traditional residential subdivisions to large high end estates.

Multiple north/south roadways connect the areas on the north and south sides of the freeway. Beyond I-2, Business 83 is the primary and only major east/west road in the area, and this lack of major arterials and collectors hampers growth in the area. However, some roads and the homes near them, such as Garrett Road, have a unique country/urban feeling to them, with attractive estate homes, large trees and a quiet country feeling that accentuates the large lots and homes. These qualities are unique to this area, and should be preserved at all costs. Closer to Dixieland Road, the character of Garret Road changes completely, becoming much more traditional suburban-like in nature.

This mix of uses and a general reliance on remnant small farm to market roads provides a quaint and country feel. Some new residential developments have stressed an “enclave” approach, using gated entries and walls to create smaller residential pockets sealed off from the areas around them. Developments tend to average between 30 and 100 lots, a size that makes it difficult to provide parkland or other amenities.

### Purpose

The purpose of this district is to better organize ongoing and new development in West Harlingen, and to plan for the provision of neighborhood retail and civic amenities. This will remain a key growth area for the city, and considering it as a larger character district will provide consistency as it develops.



## Emerging West Harlingen District Continued

### Appropriate Uses and Development Types

This area is at a crossroads – careful district planning can lead to better organization and preserve its best features while allowing for more growth. While the area is generally designated for low density residential, new residential developments need to be better connected, and clusters of larger estate lots need to be preserved via a lower density zoning designation.

Small scale local connections need to be required between developments, even if it disrupts the gated community feeling. This will allow local traffic to flow to two area collectors rather than just one, and helps to disseminate traffic more evenly.

Garrett Road is planned to expand to an eventual four lanes.

Rather than expand the road, plan for turn lanes only at key intersections, where most bottlenecks occur. Instead, plan for Mayfield Road to be the major arterial for the area, or plan for additional smaller east/west collectors as development occurs.

The area has no major natural feature like the Arroyo, but does have an extensive drainage canal system. Developments should be required to preserve local access to these canals, so as to create an area wide trail system leading to Dixieland Park and the Arroyo. Small local parks are needed, since Dixieland Park is the only park in this large area. School/parks at existing and future elementary schools should be planned for.

Adopt neighborhood guidelines and unique street sections for this area that capitalize on the rural feeling of the area.



*Large lot, single-family development style within the Emerging West side of Harlingen. Source: City of Harlingen.*

## Arroyo Colorado District

More of a corridor than a character district, the Arroyo Colorado is Harlingen's most distinctive natural feature. Running east to west from one end of the city to the other, it can create a citywide amenity that is unparalleled in any community in the Rio Grande Valley.

The types of development along the Arroyo vary, ranging from residences to the city's closed landfill to a car dealership and some industrial uses. Southwest of I69-E, much of the corridor is still open and undeveloped. This will not last long as the new Dixieland Road extension to Rangerville Road will make development in this area much more attractive. Development in the area needs to be shaped to take advantage of its proximity to the natural beauty and trail amenities provided by the Arroyo. Unique high value residential areas can be created, which in turn make Harlingen a more attractive target for economic investment.

### Purpose

The purpose of this district is to adopt uniform requirements for development and redevelopment along the Arroyo. Internally, this district will also unify the open space and trail uses of the Arroyo, as well as simplify its primary use, which is for flood control.

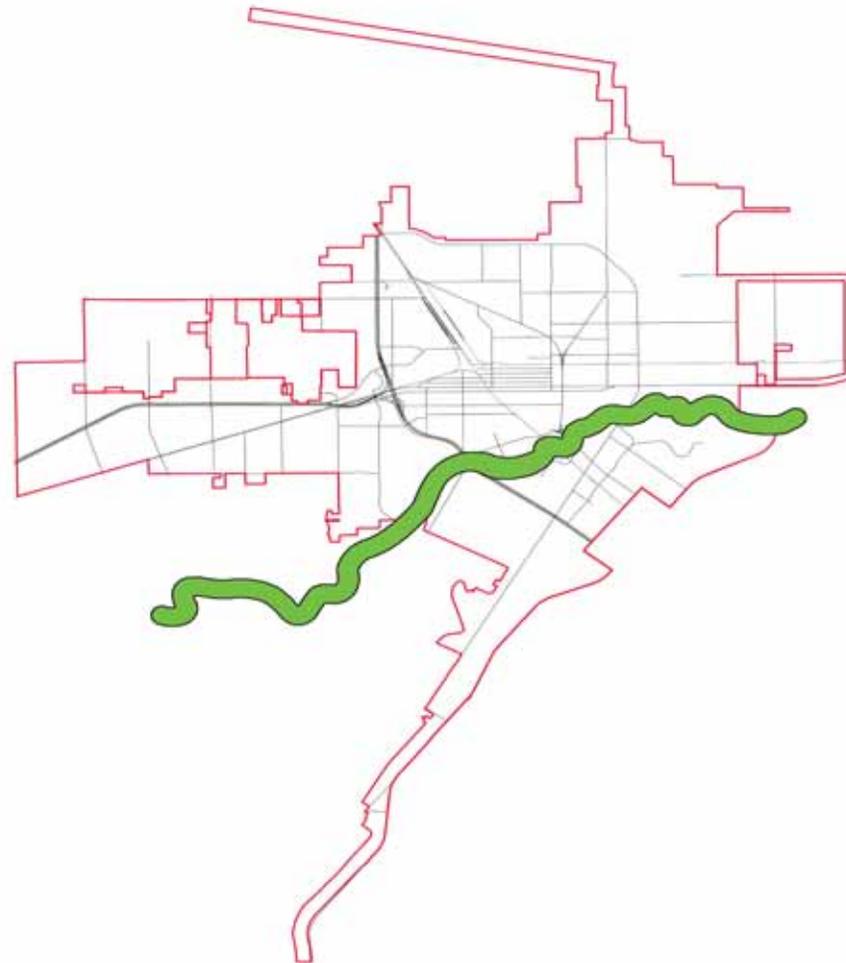
### Appropriate Uses and Development Types

Primary new uses along the Arroyo should be residential, except in the vicinity of major roadways, where more intense and high value development is envisioned. These could include higher density residential areas overlooking the Arroyo, or unique mixed use developments that combine hotels, restaurants and office uses overlooking the Arroyo.

It is envisioned that an overlay district would be created that would establish height to setback ratios, as well as identify where upper bank natural areas and trees should be preserved. Carefully planned access points could be

identified, and solutions to complete trail connections from Hugh Ramsey Park to Dixieland Park could be drawn up. Special signage graphics and markers could be developed for the entire corridor to lend a sense of continuity to it.

Nearby developments should be required to provide access to the Arroyo, as well as ensure that their architectural styles that front on the Arroyo are consistent with the desired character of the area.



CHARACTER DISTRICTS: APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT TYPES

	Development Type								
	Mixed Use	Retail-Regional	Neighborhood Shopping Center	Office	Industrial	Low Density Residential	Medium Density Residential	High Density Residential	Agricultural/Rural Residential
CHARACTER DISTRICTS									
Downtown District	●		●	●		◐	●	●	
Medical District	●		●	●	◐				
Aerotropolis District	◐			◐	●				
Regional Retail/ Entertainment District	●	●	●	◐		◐	◐	◐	
Emerging West Harlingen			◐	◐		●	●		●
Arroyo Colorado District	●		◐	●		●	●	●	●
	Appropriate		Conditional		Not Appropriate				
	●		◐						

**Determining Appropriate Use**

The table to the right identifies a strategy to determine what uses are appropriate, conditional, or not appropriate in each Character District. Appropriate means the use is simply allowed, with minimal conditions. Conditional means the use is only allowed based on certain conditions (depending on the use and the location). Not Appropriate means the use is not appropriate in the district.

# GENERAL LAND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

General land development policies are general statements that reflect the Vision, Guiding Values, Goals, Objectives, and Actions established in the One Vision One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan. They apply to all land development decisions throughout the city, and should provide general guidance on decisions related to land development.

## Management of Future Growth

1. New developments should be compatible with existing development and surrounding community character.
2. New development should promote the character, look, and feel of Harlingen.
3. New development must occur in a fiscally responsible manner (and not leapfrog undeveloped areas).
4. Where feasible, establish a clear preference for development where infrastructure exists or can readily be extended.
5. Through policies and incentives, promote re-development and investment in the core area of the city as well as in its newer areas.

## Environmental Protection

1. Preserve and protect creeks, rivers, waterways, and floodplains.
2. Preserve and protect the quality of surface water and ground water resources and other hydrologically-active areas.
3. Cooperate with area governmental entities to ensure sufficient water quantity and quality.
4. Seek public acquisition of open space or develop conservation development options for areas of environmental sensitivity.
5. Protect close-in agricultural and ranch lands. Work with land owners who may be interested in conservation easements or transfer of development rights.
6. Promote and incentivize water conservation practices.
7. In rural areas, promote dense, cluster development in order to protect natural features.

## Economic Development

1. Ensure that land development standards are compatible with the city's desire for new development.
2. Promote quality development that is compatible with neighboring areas.
3. Promote development that adds to Harlingen's community character.
4. Enhance the downtown center as a key economic development component for area residents and visitors.
5. Promote economic development that is consistent with other goals, objectives, and land use policies.
6. Promote the development of the proposed Aeropolis.
7. Promote businesses that diversify Harlingen's economy.

## Housing

1. Provide quality housing options for all stages of life and all income levels within Harlingen.
2. Emphasize and facilitate improvement of the existing housing stock, especially in core area neighborhoods.
3. Encourage developments with unique natural settings (e.g. resaca like areas).
4. Ensure housing is compatible with existing neighborhoods and land uses.
5. Promote sustainable and efficient housing developments.
6. Ensure that streets and pedestrian ways in new housing developments are connected.
7. Work with developers to ensure that new neighborhoods have adequate access to park and trail amenities.
8. Create a large lot zoning category to protect areas with larger existing lots.

## Parks and Recreation

1. Promote the Arroyo Colorado as Harlingen’s largest and most unique “park.”
2. Develop trails as a major component of the city’s quality of life features.
3. Provide resources to adequately maintain all parks and recreation resources.
4. Provide open space, parkland, trails, and recreation opportunities in proximity to the maximum number of residents possible.
5. Use linear open areas along drainage ditches, irrigation canals, and railroads for trails as a way to provide connectivity throughout Harlingen.

## Transportation

1. The design of streets should reflect the character of the community and surrounding environment.
2. Reconfigure standard street sections to include more multi-modal and boulevard options.
3. Provide more east-west connectivity, especially in west Harlingen.
4. Support regional roadway initiatives, such as the I-69 corridor, the North Tollway to South Padre Island, and the enhancement of the 509 corridor.
5. Include pedestrian connectivity throughout new and/or existing developments.
6. Provide for safe options in travel, including walking, bicycling, automobile, and mass transit.
7. Ensure that streets and thoroughfare networks are designed with a focus on inter connectivity, and avoid channelling all area traffic to one major road. Provide appropriately-scaled access between neighborhoods.
8. Ensure that appropriate levels of parking are provided for commercial, office, and retail developments in a way that does not compromise the character of the development and surrounding area. Don’t “overpark” if not necessary.

Encourage the placement of parking along the sides or rear of development, not in front.

9. Utilize safe and integrated driveway access management.

## Urban Design

1. Encourage and provide incentives for mixing land uses.
2. Renovate the core area of the city as a unique place making feature.
3. Establish neighborhoods that include public spaces, access to commercial districts, connectivity, and a variety of housing densities and types.
4. Promote compatibility between adjoining land uses.
5. Develop design criteria to ensure safe and desirable pedestrian access.
6. In appropriate areas, utilize form based design criteria to regulate physical and aesthetic characteristics of the built environment.
7. Signage should not detract from the visual integrity of the community.
8. Lighting associated with signs, parking lots, or any development should not pose a safety, environmental, or aesthetic concern, particularly as it relates to the impact on existing or new residential development.
9. Neighborhoods should be designed with a high level of connectivity to provide options in transportation routes as well as promote alternative choices in modes of transportation such as walking or bicycling.

### Civic Facilities

1. Civic buildings and spaces should be given prominent and accessible locations.
2. Civic facilities should be designed to allow for future expansion when needed.
3. Schools - particularly elementary schools - should be the physical and social center of a neighborhood or group of neighborhoods and located within safe and easy walking distance from the maximum number of dwelling units possible.
4. New schools should emphasize walking and bicycle access as well as by car or bus.

### Historic Preservation

1. Preserve and enhance historic areas throughout the city.
2. Use Harlingen's unique history to promote tourism and economic development.



Character within the downtown area. Source: City of Harlingen



Redeveloped apartments in the Harlingen Original Townsite. Source: City of Harlingen



The new behavioral health hospital on Victoria Lane. Source: City of Harlingen

# A STRATEGY FOR GROWTH & ANNEXATION

## What Is Annexation

Annexation is a process by which a city extends its municipal services, regulations, voting privileges, and taxing authority to a new territory in a well thought out, responsible way. Cities can grow sensibly by balancing current responsibilities with the anticipation of new developments and increased tax base.

## Why Annex?

Annexation is a means where by Harlingen can allow and manage growth without creating hardships for existing neighborhoods.

The following are some of the reasons Harlingen would choose to annex:

- To provide municipal services to developed and developing areas.
- To exercise regulatory authority necessary to protect public health, safety and general welfare in addition to guide and assure orderly development. This is especially applicable in areas that in the past have grown without baseline standards that have applied to areas within the City limits.
- To ensure that residents and businesses outside the corporate limits share the tax and maintenance burdens for facilities, streets and utilities that they use.
- To enable the city to regulate the subdivision and development of land in an expanded extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ).

## Authority to Annex

Harlingen, as a home rule city, may (under Texas Local Government Code Chapter 43) annex property both through voluntary and involuntary means.

- Voluntary annexation occurs when property owners petition the City to be included in the City's boundaries.
- Involuntary, or unilateral annexation, occurs regardless of whether property owners and/or residents in the affected area give their consent.

Within a newly annexed area, the City can impose its existing regulations relating to the following:

- Location of sexually oriented businesses
- Colonias
- Preventing imminent destruction of property or injury to persons
- Public nuisances
- Flood control
- Storage and use of hazardous substances
- Sale and use of fireworks and the discharge of firearms

## Land Area of Annexation

A city may annex up to ten percent (10%) of the amount of land area within its city limits each year. Should the city decide not to annex, the ten percent can be carried over to the following year, but cannot exceed a maximum amount of thirty percent (30%) of the total land area within City limits.

The ten percent annual limitation does not apply if an area is annexed at the request of the property owners, or a majority of the qualified voters of the area, or a majority of qualified voters and the owners of at least fifty percent (50%) of the land in the area or is owned by the municipality, a county, the state, or the federal government and is used for a public purpose.

Upon annexation, the City is required to provide essential services to the newly annexed area. These may include water and wastewater treatment, police protection, fire protection, emergency medical services, solid waste collection, operation and maintenance of roads and streets, and street lighting, operation and maintenance of parks and playgrounds, and operation and maintenance of other publicly owned facilities and services.

The services provided must be equivalent to those provided in a similar area of the City; however, services after annexation cannot be less than prior to annexation.

### **Recent growth occurring in Harlingen**

Understanding where existing development is occurring is a good predictor of where the market is indicating that land is developable under current conditions. It also helps to identify where private sector growth pressures may occur in the future.

Over the past decade, much of the growth in and near Harlingen has been to the west along the I69-E corridor. The majority of growth in this area has been residential at a variety of lot sizes and values.

Growth is also occurring south of the City along Garrett Road, where new residential development is occurring.

### **Policies Related to Annexation**

Both on a day to day basis and as part of longer range goals, the following growth policies should be considered:

- Evaluate the fiscal implications of annexation to understand their impacts on City capital investments, staffing, operations, maintenance, and debt.
- Promote contiguous, nodal / district, infill / redevelopment growth opportunities over linear or scattered growth. In other words, direct development towards already incorporated areas which are served by existing infrastructure and public services.
- Prioritize annexation of commercial areas as designated on the Future Land Use Plan to maximize tax revenue and to create additional employment opportunities.
- Where feasible, use development agreements and voluntary ETJ agreements to protect the City's growth trajectory and to ensure implementation of the community's vision for the future.

- Plan for the extension or upgrade of infrastructure to support growth in areas that have opportunities for infill, revitalization, or redevelopment.
- Plan for the extension of infrastructure in areas of predicted growth as set out in the Growth Plan Map, shown on the following page.
- Promote and gain public access to the Arroyo Colorado corridor at selected nodal points as part of longer range annexations.

### **Actions Related to Annexation**

#### **Manage the City's pattern of growth concurrent with the provision and maintenance of adequate facilities and services.**

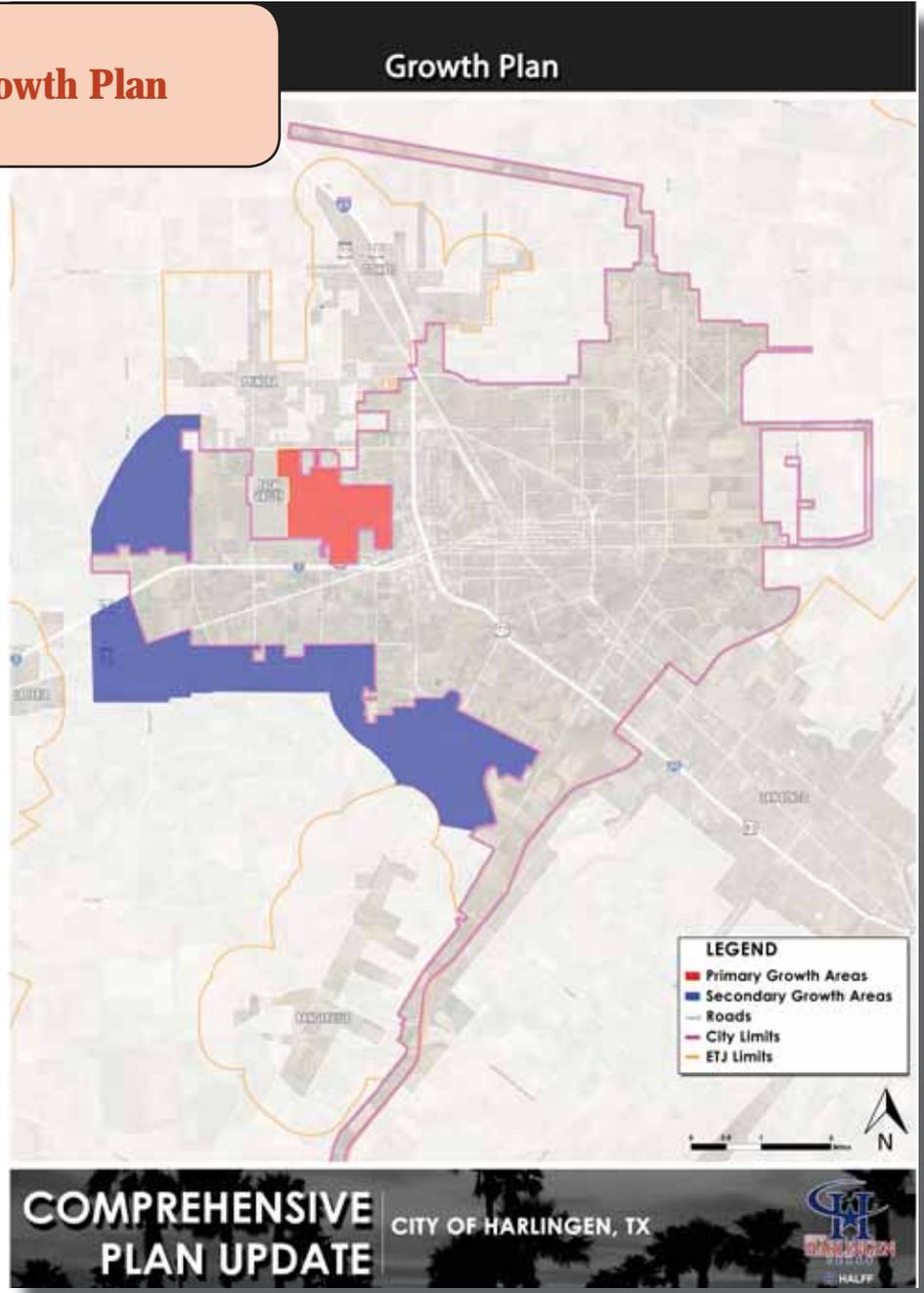
Harlingen should pursue annexation in a fiscally sound manner by evaluating and making decisions according to the fiscal benefits and consequences of that growth. An understanding of potential capital improvements (especially water and sewer) that may be needed to provide "full municipal services" within two and one-half years from the date of annexation should be developed.

#### **Pursue near-term annexation of property designated as primary growth areas on the City's Growth Plan.**

Key growth areas, as shown on the Future Growth Map on the following page, are as follows.

1. Initial annexation areas may be as a result of the need to upgrade developing areas that are impacting quality growth around them. As shown on the Growth Map, these areas primarily exist north of I69-E and west of Brazil Road.
2. Additional primary growth areas are along major corridors, and in the vicinity of FM 509 and FM 106 (East Harrison Ave).
3. Secondary growth areas consist of areas where new residential growth is occurring, and are generally contiguous with residential areas that are already within the City limits. These occur along Rangerville Road, and south of Garrett Road.

**Figure D.3 Growth Plan**



*"The future is not a result of choices among alternative paths offered by the present, but a place that is created--created first in the mind and will, created next in activity. The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating."*

Unknown author

