

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN

Earlier chapters of the One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan discuss how to achieve the desired vision and goals for the future of Harlingen. Successful implementation requires more than simply going after an action. An implementation strategy identifies methods for strengthening execution of the recommendations.

The implementation strategy is organized into the following seven components:

1. The Use of Districts
2. Targeted Catalyst Projects
3. Public Investment Priorities
4. Promote Partnerships
5. Explore a Variety of Funding Mechanisms
6. Regulatory Mechanisms
7. Monitoring Progress

1. KEY IMPLEMENTATION DISTRICTS

A comprehensive plan is intended to be global in nature and concerned with all aspects of a city. In doing so, it highlights key actions and areas of emphasis, but leaves many of the very detailed strategic actions or design decisions to be made at a more focused level. This allows for more detailed interaction with stakeholders and implementers, but ensures that those detailed strategies follow the overall philosophy and guidance of the Comprehensive Plan.

The creation of smaller subdistricts or target areas is a key implementation tool recommended in this plan. Two broad types of focused areas are recommended.

Creation of “Action” Districts - smaller areas allow for actions and recommendations at a very detailed level to

Principles of Implementation



Partnership driven. Implementation of this plan depends on successful partnerships between

a variety of public, private and non-profit stakeholders. Harlingen’s role will be to bring those partners together and to create common themes and direction in implementation.



Committed investment by both public and private sector.

The city’s role in implementing this plan is to unify public and private interests and steer them in one direction. Investments from both sides will enable efficient execution of the goals of this plan.



Significant citizen and stakeholder input. In order to engage residents of Harlingen and ensure community buy-in,

the planning and implementation process will be open to the citizens of Harlingen for participation and opportunities to give feedback.



Promote diversity to create long-term stability. Diversity creates choices and alternatives. This includes diversity

in housing, the economy, funding resources, and transportation. Having choices and alternatives makes a community more resilient to economic downturns than single-minded approaches and solutions.



Balance needs and desires. It is inevitable that conflict will arise between views and goals. Trade-offs are

expected, but the city and community must work together to achieve the goals that promote the entire Harlingen community.



Fiscal responsibility.

As illustrated in this comprehensive plan, choices and investments have impacts on various components of a city. Harlingen must recognize the extent of the impact of public investments and choices to best facilitate the vision and goals for Harlingen.

be considered. Recommendations in each of these areas should come in the form of “actions” that are prioritized and that should be undertaken to achieve the goals of that district.

Districts can be formally or informally set up. Formal districts, such as the current Downtown Improvement District, have distinct boundaries, regulations and established funding mechanisms (a public-private partnership including a self assessment in the case of the Downtown Improvement District). If a funding mechanism is designated, the district must have formal boundaries to guide where the funding is to be used.

Districts can also be set up as regulatory mechanisms. Overlay standards, such as those recommended for the Aerotropolis District, can be incorporated into the overlay standards.

The size of a district should be carefully considered. Large districts or sectors of the city may be developed to provide overall guidance. For example, a West Harlingen sector plan is recommended, and would encompass much of West Harlingen west of I-69E. However, that sector plan should have two sub-sectors, divided by areas north and south of I-2.

Also, the number of districts should be carefully considered. The overuse of districts can dilute the emphasis and attention brought to the newer districts.

Districts to Be Created - Key districts, as recommended in Chapter 2 of the plan, include:

1. **Medical District**, encompassing all major medical facilities between I-69E and Treasure Hills Boulevard, the areas north and south of Camelot Drive, as well as nearby undeveloped lands. Through overlay standards, this district should help guide the quality of new development as well as renovations in the area.

The Medical District, through self assessments or other funding mechanisms, could pay for key parking, infrastructure and appearance needs. These would help add value to the

Medical District and maintain its competitiveness.

2. **Arroyo Colorado District or Overlay Zone**, encompassing the entire length of the Arroyo within the city limits and the ETJ of Harlingen, as well as adjacent lands within a quarter mile from the upper bank of the Arroyo. This district should be regulatory in nature, and its purpose would be to encourage and guide appropriate high value development along the edge of the Arroyo.
3. **Aerotropolis District**, which would encompass VIA lands adjacent to FM 509. The District would follow the 2014 master plan and design guidelines for the area, and is intended to be regulatory in nature.
4. **A Regional Retail District**, intended to focus both on regional retail, but also entertainment and even mixed use housing. It would incorporate the current Tax Increment Financing District #3, but would also add in high visibility areas outside of TIF#3. This goal of this district would be to attract new retail and commercial development to the area, and also to promote redevelopment of nearby areas.
5. **A Core Areas of Harlingen District**, encompassing the areas surrounding the Downtown Improvement District. This district should include the La Placita area, the Commerce Street area near Downtown, areas along Jefferson Avenue, and other nearby in-town neighborhoods. The purpose of this district is to promote redevelopment in the Core Areas of Harlingen surrounding the Downtown area. This district would be primarily regulatory in nature, but could help market the Core Areas and be used as a tool for grant requests.
6. **Emerging West Harlingen**, where neighborhood preservation should be targeted (for example the East Austin Street neighborhood between 1st and 5th streets).

Specific types of districts with funding mechanisms (such as Tax Increment Funding districts) are described further in this chapter.

2. CATALYST PROJECTS

Certain key catalyst projects or redevelopment targets are noted in this plan. Whether noted here or determined in the future, these catalyst projects, located in key high visibility or high impact areas, are chosen since they should have a ripple effect and help transform the areas around them. An example might be a specific dilapidated house or business at a key intersection near the Downtown District, or the re-development of the Historic Baxter Building in Downtown Harlingen. These should be chosen because of their ability to have the greatest influence on a larger area around them.

3. RECOMMENDED PUBLIC INVESTMENT PRIORITIES

This section focuses on the key public investment opportunities to be implemented by the public sector, predominantly the City of Harlingen, but also possibly involving Cameron County, the Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization, the Texas Department of Transportation, and any other public entity that may have a stake. These actions include investments in public infrastructure such as roadways, and utilities; important changes to the regulatory framework to achieve the desired built environment; and efforts and investments toward key public facilities.

The importance of public investment. Investment is risky, particularly in the economic climate we live in today. Before private investment occurs, it needs to be reassured of the future conditions and status of an area. Public investment not only creates a more appealing environment to generate private investment, but it also demonstrates to private investors the level of attention that city leaders and staff are paying to key community issues.

Parameters for prioritizing public funding. Public funding dollars are limited, and therefore need to be targeted to where

they can provide the greatest benefits. The following criteria should be used to determine where funding is allocated. Specific funding sources may have their own more specific funding priorities.

These recommended funding priorities refer to revenue sources, such as bonds, 4B funds, hotel/motel taxes and other funds targeting capital improvements. They do not refer to day-to-day general fund expenditures.

1. **Economic benefit to the citizens of Harlingen** - First and foremost, public dollars should help catalyze job creation.
2. **Maintenance and improvements to city infrastructure** - City infrastructure should be maintained at a superior level. Where large expenditures are required, these funds should target those upgrades. However, bond funds should not be used for minor replacements and repairs - those should be funded through general fund expenditures.
3. **Elements that improve quality of life** - Actions that make Harlingen an attractive place to live, and that attract others to the city, should be prioritized.
4. **Elements that facilitate investment in Harlingen** - Harlingen should be viewed as an attractive place to invest in, and actions that reinforce that notion should be prioritized. In particular, code changes that facilitate creative reinvestment in the downtown area of the city should be heavily prioritized.
5. **Actions that leverage funding resources** - Expenditures that help bring external funding resources to the table, such as grants or private investment, should be actively pursued.
6. **Actions that use existing city resources or city owned lands and leverage those** - These actions, such as attracting development to VIA owned lands on the east side of the airport and take under-utilized city resources and leverage those.

Key short and longer term actions to be initiated by the city are shown on the following page.

Key Short-Term Public Investment Actions

Action No.	Recommendation	Responsibility or Potential Partners	Potential Cost Range	Need for Action	Timeframe
1	Assign and confirm responsibilities for key actions for each element of the Comprehensive Plan. Much like Harlingen 100, determine task force or committee to assist department or entity assigned to that action.	City Administration, City Commission	NA	Determines responsibility for key actions.	Immediate, within 6 months
2	Determine funding resources for initial priorities.	City Administration, City Commission	NA	Establishes funding strategies to accomplish key goals of the plan over the next 5 years.	Within 6 months
3	Establish new incentives for renovation and improvements to both commercial buildings and homes in the Core Areas of the city.	City Administration, City Commission, 4B, HEDC, others	NA	Encourages private sector and individual homeowner reinvestment in the Core Areas of the city.	Within 6 months
4	Begin process of establishing medical district. Conduct strategy sessions with key players, enlist cooperation.	City Administration, City Commission, HEDC, Medical area leaders	TBD	Creates consistency of development in the area, and by doing so raises value of the area.	Complete within 1 year
5	Assign zoning for non-designated properties.	Planning Department, Planning and Zoning Commission	NA	Provides guidance to property owners, simplifies development process.	Ongoing, target completion within 1 year
6	Develop detailed Downtown and Core Areas master plan.	Planning, Downtown District	\$50,000 to \$75,000	Confirms and develops specific actions for the Downtown area and surrounding areas as well.	Within 1 year
7	Adopt overlay standards, including some form based guidelines, for Downtown and the Core Areas of the City	Planning, Downtown District	NA	Helps facilitate rehabilitation and new development in the Downtown area.	Within 1 year
8	Begin marketing of Aerotropolis District	VIA staff, HEDC, City Administration	TBD	Accelerates marketing and pursuit of entities to help develop the project.	Within 6 months
9	Begin development of class 1 business park, with an eye on potential Space X and other distribution/manufacturing prospects.	HEDC	TBD	Accelerates development of project that can attract investment and employment to Harlingen	Within 6 months to a year
10	Develop West Harlingen Plan, creating detailed neighborhood and zoning plan for the area. Include consideration of near term annexations.	Planning Department	TBD	Clarifies thinking and development in the fast growing west area of the city, helps attract high quality development to the area.	Within 1 to 2 years
11	Hire grant expertise to aggressively pursue grant funding for city initiatives.	City Administration	TBD	Hire staff to pursue a variety of grant funding sources. Supplements but also greatly expands current system of each department pursuing grants with existing staff (who have limited time and expertise in grant sources and pursuits).	Near Term, within 1 year

Key Short-Term Public Investment Actions (continued)

Action No.	Recommendation	Responsibility or Potential Partners	Potential Cost Range	Need for Action	Timeframe
12	Accelerate beautification efforts, including new medians and enhancements of key streets (begin with Tyler/Harrison)	Keep Harlingen Beautiful, Public Works, Planning Department, Parks and Recreation Department, Chamber of Commerce, others.	TBD (but funding levels and responsibilities for Keep Harlingen Beautiful should be increased beyond current level)	Need to accelerate and significantly expand beautification efforts.	Start in current fiscal year
13	Beginning planning for a new City Hall in Downtown Harlingen	City Administration, Public Works, Planning & Development Department	TBD	Current City Hall is inadequate in size, and building is dated.	Near Term, within 1 to 2 years
14	Pursue funding sources for expansion of Arroyo Trail to Dixieland Park and to Hugh Ramsey Park.	Parks and Recreation Department	TBD (may require making project “shovel-ready” to be more attractive grant candidate)	Completes major city attraction and amenity.	Near Term, within 1 year
15	Complete cleanup of old treatment plant adjacent to the Arroyo	Harlingen Waterworks, City Public Works Department, 4B	\$500,000 to \$1,000,000	Encourages reinvestment of attractive tract of land adjacent to Arroyo and near the Medical area.	Within 1 year
16	Continue to pursue private re-development of the Historic Baxter Building.	City Administration, Planning Department, Downtown District	TBD	Key catalyst for re-investment in the Downtown District	Ongoing, within 1 year
17	Complete the Soccer Complex	Parks and Recreation Department	TBD	Accelerates completion of key sports tourism asset.	Within 3 years
18	Create material to help promote Harlingen as a key residential location for United Launch Alliance and Space X personnel and other professionals in the area	Harlingen CVB, HEDC, Chamber of Commerce, Board of Realtors	TBD	Helps promote and crystallize Harlingen as a community of choice for new professionals and business entities relocating to the area	Immediate

4. PARTNERSHIPS

Interdepartmental and interagency collaboration are critical components to strengthening implementation efforts. Federal-aid funding opportunities often require cooperation among local and regional agencies. By partnering with other agencies and organizations, funding resources can be utilized more efficiently and efforts will carry farther.

Moreover, the City of Harlingen needs to create strong partnerships with private entities such as the development community, employers, non-profit organizations, and other

entities that can help achieve the goals and recommendations of One Vision One Harlingen. This will help create buy-in among the various affected entities and strengthen implementation efforts.

Many recommendations in this plan require partnerships and collaboration with other city departments, public agencies, and organizations across the Harlingen area and Valley region.

Agency	Potential Role or Function
Public Departments and Agencies	
CoH Planning and Zoning Division	Planning and Zoning will oversee implementation of the Harlingen Plan, including guiding efforts and advising City Commission and other departments on how decisions promote or impact the comprehensive plan.
CoH Parks & Recreation	Crucial in implementing the parks and open space element of One Vision One Harlingen.
CoH Public Works	Help influence the design, maintenance, and provision of public facilities such as roadways, infrastructure, and water and wastewater resources.
Downtown Harlingen Public Improvement District	Instrumental in the economic development, historic preservation and revitalization of Downtown Harlingen.
CoH Police Department	Key entity in maintaining a high standard of public safety in Harlingen. The Police Department will also be an important partner for the parks component as extending parks service may require more patrol officers.
Economic Development Corporation	Will play a significant role in promoting Harlingen as an employment destination. This includes attracting new investment and assisting major employers in expanding their operations in Harlingen.
Harlingen Community Improvement Board	Harlingen's 4B corporation, helps fund a variety of community-wide quality of life projects.
Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District	Key entity in helping schools become a neighborhood center by identifying future school locations central to neighborhoods and increasing public use and access to schools.
TXDOT	A necessary partner in maintaining an arterial network that moves traffic efficiently while also balancing the community goals of a strong character and sense of place.
Cameron County	A partner in a number of efforts, including transportation, environmental protection, and resource management.
Harlingen-San Benito MPO	Help Harlingen plan for and implement regional transportation projects that help create a comprehensive transportation system that promote choices in movement.
Valley Metro	The main local mass transit authority for the lower Rio Grande Valley. Efforts to expand transportation options in Harlingen will call upon Valley Metro.
Private Entities	
Area builders and developers	Key players in forming the built environment.

5. FUNDING MECHANISMS

Funding for implementing key plan strategies will come from a variety of sources, including local resources such as the general fund, which is supported by property and sales taxes as well as fees; voter-approved bonds; and federal grants. In addition, Texas law provides for a number of mechanisms to finance public improvements. The following discussion identifies potential funding opportunities and mechanisms that Harlingen can use to assist with implementation of One Vision One Harlingen.

Capturing Latent Sales Tax Potential

In Texas, the property tax and sales tax are the main sources of revenue for cities. Sales tax rates in Texas are capped at 8.25% (2% of which is available to local governments, counties, transit authorities, or special purpose districts).

Harlingen currently uses its half-cent allocation for both economic development (through the Harlingen Economic Development Corporation) and for quality of life efforts (through the Harlingen Community Improvement Board).

These funds will be a key source of revenue for implementing recommendations of One Vision, One Harlingen. In particular, 4B funds (Harlingen Community Improvement Board) will be pulled in many directions, and the prioritization criteria contained in this section should be used to balance how those funds are allocated.

Tax Increment Finance (TIF) / Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)

A TIF District is a zone where certain property tax revenue generated in the district is reinvested back into the district through development of infrastructure. TIFs operate on the idea that public investment helps stimulate and grow property values, justifying the reinvestment of property taxes back into the district generating the revenue.

At the creation of a TIF, the assessed property value of properties of a defined area is set as the base value. Over the years, as the property values increase and property tax revenue increases,

the property tax revenue generated by the incremental property value above the base is reinvested into the TIF district. A key aspect of TIF districts is that they should be created before development has occurred, so as to gain as high an increment as possible.

Harlingen currently has three TIF districts.

TIF Reinvestment Zone #1 - Loop 499 - includes lands south of Valley International Airport and generally on the east side of Loop 499. It encompasses 2,170 acres, and has significant potential areas for development.

TIF Reinvestment Zone #2 - FM 509 - this district is primarily between FM 801 (Ed Carey) and FM 509, both north and south of I-69E. It encompasses 1,183 acres and has significant growth potential for freeway oriented retail, manufacturing and distribution facilities, and developments related to or supporting health care.

TIF Reinvestment Zone #3 - Spur 54 - encompasses an area north and south of I-69E and I-2, and includes the new Harlingen Crossing development as well as the Valle Vista Mall area. This TIF has been critical in helping to spur the development of the Bass Pro Shops and Sam's Club. It includes approximately 670 acres.

Efforts to spur development in the three TIF Reinvestment Zones should continue. The boundaries of each should be evaluated and adjusted to include adjacent areas that may have significant development potential.

Potential New TIF Districts - TIF's are a powerful tool to spur growth in targeted areas. However, the city's three reinvestment zones already largely cover key target areas, and the city's efforts should continue to focus on those TIF districts.

Public Improvement District (PID)

Chapter 372 of the Texas Local Government Code permits the formation of PIDs, which allows a city and/or county to levy and collect special assessments on property that is within the city or within its extraterritorial jurisdiction. Funds generated by the PID tax are invested back in the district and may be used to fund the following types of improvements:

- Water, waste water, health and sanitation, or drainage improvements;
- Street and sidewalk improvements;
- Mass transit improvements;
- Parking improvements;
- Library improvements;
- Park, recreation, and cultural improvements;
- Landscaping and other aesthetic improvements;
- Art installation;
- Creation of pedestrian malls;
- Similar improvements;
- Supplemental safety services, including public safety and security services;
- Supplemental business-related services for the improvement of the district.

Subchapter A of Chapter 372 of the Texas Local Government Code outlines the procedures by which a PID must be established.

A majority of the taxpayers in the proposed PID area must petition the local government to form a PID. This petition may be initiated by either the property owners or the local government, but still must be signed by at least 50 percent of property owners in the proposed district, or owners of at least 50% of the land area. The petition must also state:

- The general nature of the proposed improvement;
- The estimated cost of the improvement;

- The boundaries of the proposed assessment district;
- The proposed method of assessment;
- The proposed apportionment of cost between the PID and the municipality;
- The management of the district;
- That the persons signing the petition request or concur with the establishment of the district; and
- That an advisory body may be established to develop and recommend an improvement plan to the governing body of the municipality.

Additionally, before the district is established, a public hearing must be held to advise the community of the nature of the district. Once the PID is established, actual construction of any improvements may not start till after the 20th day after authorization of the PID. This allows any public comment to be submitted to the municipality.

The PID advisory body must maintain and annually update a service plan for the PID, which must be presented to and approved by the municipality. The service plan must cover a minimum five-year period and define annual indebtedness and projected costs for proposed improvements.

Money generated for public improvements in a PID is done so through assessments on properties in the PID. An assessment plan must be included in the annual service plan. Assessments may be determined in the following ways:

- Equally per square foot or feet of property frontage;
- According to the value of the property as determined by the governing body, with or without regard to improvements on the property; or
- In any other manner that results in imposing equal shares of the cost on property similarly benefitted.

DOWNTOWN HARLINGEN PUBLIC IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Downtown Harlingen is a Public Improvement District that was established in the 1980s to enhance economic growth and investment in the Downtown area. True to the PID definition, property owners within the Downtown Harlingen area voted on an assessment that would create a fund to help pay for the landscaping, signage, promotions and storefront improvements within the district. The Improvement District functions as a public-private partnership between the city and property owners. While the assessment rate has fluctuated between 1 cent and 50 cents per \$100 of property valuation, the current rate is 15 cents, raising about \$29,000 a year. Today, Downtown Harlingen has an occupancy rate of more than 90% with over 170 businesses and organizations in district.



IMAGE CREDITS: CITY OF HARLINGEN



Development Incentives

Chapter 380 of the Texas Local Government Code allows the granting of certain economic development incentives by cities to encourage developers to build in their jurisdiction. Development incentives typically take the form of property tax abatements, loans or grants, commitments for infrastructure, or sales tax rebates.

The following discussion briefly describes incentive structures commonly used in communities in Texas to attract businesses and encourage development. This discussion should not serve as a formal Chapter 380 policy for incentive funding.

Property Tax Abatement - A tax abatement is an agreement between a taxpayer and a taxing unit that exempts all or part of the increase in the value of the real property and/or tangible personal property from taxation for a period not to exceed ten years. Abatements recognize the potential for other benefits of property development other than increased property value, such as job creation and sales tax revenue. Abatements are typically tied to job creation and value of the investment. Tax abatements would not work well with a TIF district, since a TIF relies on increasing property values to generate revenue while a tax abatement essentially freezes the property value.

Sales Tax Incentives - One type of incentive that Texas cities have used is sales tax incentives to develop commercial and retail projects. These agreements allow a city to attract development by refunding a portion of the sales tax the project generates back to the developer. The developer receives assistance to make the project viable, and the city benefits from growth in sales tax revenue, property taxes, and new jobs. The Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts recommends the following guidelines concerning Sales Tax Incentives:

- Place a limit on both the percentage of sales tax granted to the developer and the total amount of the grant. For example, the grant could be limited to a portion of the sales tax generated by the development, up to \$1 million.

- The agreement should have a termination date depending in part on the developer's total investment.
- Milestones and deadlines should be included in the agreement to ensure that the developer completes the project according to the city's expectations. The city should include terms by which the developer could be considered out of compliance or in default of the agreement, and consider possible penalties such as reductions in the sales tax incentive.
- The city should consider including terms in the contract to remedy adverse impacts caused by the development, such as increased traffic and increased demand for law enforcement and utilities.
- Payment of grants under the agreement should be based on the net sales tax allocation, after adjustments and fees, and not due to the developer until the city receives the funds from the comptroller.

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive - The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive program encourages private sector rehabilitation of historic buildings. According to the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Service, current tax incentives for preservation include:

- A 20% tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of certified historic structures. The credit is available for properties rehabilitated for commercial, industrial, agricultural, or rental residential purposes, but not for properties used exclusively as the owner's private residence.
- A 10% tax credit for the rehabilitation of non-historic, non-residential buildings built before 1936. The credit is available only to buildings rehabilitated for non-residential uses.

In all cases, the rehabilitation must be substantial (determined by value of rehabilitation) and must involve a depreciable building.

Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program - The Texas Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program is a state tax credit for the certified rehabilitation of certified historic structures.

- Eligible structure include those currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places individually or part of a historic district, or a Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks, or State Antiquities Landmarks. The rehabilitation must be consistent with the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation (Standards) to qualify.
- A 25% tax credit on the eligible rehabilitation costs which must be at least \$5,000 applied against a business’s franchise tax liability.



The new interstate connection in Harlingen. Source: Harlingen-San Benito Metropolitan Planning Organization.

6. REGULATORY MECHANISMS

Public investment and improvements only go so far; creating the built environment of Harlingen will be implemented in large part by the private community, including developers, community leaders, organizations, etc. Therefore, the city must take steps to create the right regulatory environment and incentives for private-sector development.

In order to achieve the goals outlined in Harlingen 2030 and the Future Land Use Plan, the City of Harlingen must research and adopt the appropriate regulatory tools to influence private development in a way that creates the character and environment Harlingen desires. There are a variety of regulatory tools that show how to create a building or series of buildings that shape the public realm as much as they shape the area within the walls. These regulations focus on influencing the character and physical form of the building or site.

A New Way of Thinking About Zoning

The type of environment envisioned for Harlingen will require modifications to the existing zoning and development regulations. The existing ordinances reflect conventional land use-based rules that are structured around segregating uses and quantitative limits on height, setback, and density.

Instead, development in Harlingen should largely be guided by design-based regulations. These regulations seek to establish a certain quality of place by focusing on the form of buildings and formation of quality public space such as streets and sidewalks. These development regulations go beyond traditional land use zoning by establishing rules that regulate street frontage, sidewalks, and building placement to create the public area between buildings.

New design standards should seek to:

- Allow a mix of uses to achieve the densities necessary for successful downtowns and construction of a variety of housing types; and
- Require better urban design through building placement, building character/material standards, and streetscape standards to create a unique and strong sense of place.

Design-based regulations may be adopted in the form of a new zoning district, changes to the existing zoning regulations, or with an overlay district that applies additional regulations on top of the existing regulations of the base zoning. The guidelines should create a framework that governs the following key elements:

- Land uses, both permitted and not permitted - evaluated based on compatibility with other land uses rather than separating different ones.
- Building placement on a lot
- Building relationship to adjacent streets and to other buildings
- Building size, height, and volume
- Building setbacks, both minimum and maximum
- Building color and materials
- Compatibility between adjacent land uses
- Transition between non-compatible districts and uses
- Facade articulation
- Streetscape elements along a street and adjacent to a building
- Location of parking and relationship of parking to the building and to the lot it serves
- Vegetation types and sizes
- Lighting
- Signage

Form-Based Codes

Form-based code (FBC) is a type of design-based regulatory tool that has been promoted by planners and designers as an alternative to conventional zoning. It places less emphasis on use and more emphasis on the building form - the dimensions, place on the lot, location of parking, materials, and so on. It is more effective in establishing standards that influence the design of the public realm in addition to the design of the built environment.

Form-based codes are effective because they address the relationship between buildings and the public realm by regulating the form and mass of buildings in relation to one another. They recognize that different uses are compatible, and are therefore effective in mixing uses. FBC regulations are also intended to be flexible so they can respond to and be applied in different situations and environments. FBCs also address the “transition” between different uses and densities.

Form-Based Codes can be used for:

- Complete zoning and development code updates
- Downtown Master Plans
- Corridor Plans
- Neighborhood Revitalization Plans
- Development Standards for a Specific Site
- Regional Plans
- Implementation of a Comprehensive Plan
- Transit Village or Centers
- Land Conservation through Cluster Developments

Most importantly, FBCs are not guidelines or general statements of policy. They are law as regulations as conventional zoning is.

Conventional Zoning vs. Form Based Code

CONVENTIONAL PLANNING & ZONING	FORM-BASED CODES
Auto-oriented, segregated land use planning principles	Mixed-use, walkable, compact development-oriented principles
Organized around single-use zones	Based on spatial organizing principles that identify and reinforce an urban hierarchy, such as the rural-to-urban transect
Use is primary	Physical form and character are primary, with secondary attention to use
Reactive to individual development proposals	Proactive community visioning
Proscriptive regulations, regulating what is not permitted, as well as unpredictable numeric parameters, like density	Prescriptive regulations, describing what is required, such as building-to lines and combined minimum/maximum building heights
Regulates to create buildings	Regulates to create places

Source: Parolek, Parolek, Crawford. 2008. *Form Based Codes*

7. MONITORING PROGRESS

Harlingen's Comprehensive Plan, One Vision, One Harlingen, is a *living document* and should be updated periodically to assess progress, identify new opportunities, and reevaluate goals and priorities. Plans are evaluated to obtain information that can guide future decisions.

Harlingen 2030 identifies benchmarks for each plan element to measure implementation. Data should be collected, reported, and evaluated frequently to evaluate ongoing progress and the appropriateness and effectiveness of certain actions.

Every 3 to 5 years, the city should evaluate progress toward implementation with the benchmarks below. Additionally, a 10 year update allows the city to evaluate the goals and vision for the future of Harlingen, which may result in adjusting goals, objectives, and actions.



Gathering for the start of the comprehensive planning process. Source: City of Harlingen

Implementation Actions

Action ID	Economic Growth Actions
1-1	Ensure that all area entities and the city are in alignment with the HEDC as it pursues economic growth opportunities for the city.
1-2	Continue to support the HEDC as it pursues economic growth in the city.
1-3	Continue to support and maximize BiNED partnerships and opportunities.
1-4	Aggressively explore potential growth in the Mexico energy, oil and gas industry.
1-5	Develop specific strategies to target sales tax generating businesses.
2-1	Strengthen the city’s economic infrastructure (including Los Indios, Port of Harlingen and Valley International Airport).
2-2	Target and sustain the Medical and Health Industry as a key economic initiative.
2-3	In every way possible, support improvements to the educational system and infrastructure in Harlingen.
3-1	Pursue retail and entertainment opportunities that increase the quality of living in Harlingen.
3-2	Continue to target ecotourism opportunities.
3-3	Promote and expand city amenities.
4-1	Continue to adjust city policies and development standards as necessary to make Harlingen an attractive place in which to invest.

Action ID	Transportation Actions
1-1	Support completion of the FM 509 corridor.
1-2	Work with the CCRMA to ensure that the proposed north Tollway addresses Harlingen’s needs and benefits the city.
2-1	Adopt and implement a policy of connected developments.
2-2	Improve roadway capacity in West Harlingen.
2-3	Improve connectivity in the Core Areas of the city.
2-4	Continue to work to relocate rail lines that bisect the city to a location outside of the urban core.
2-5	To facilitate east/west travel, improve East Wilson Road and connect it to N. Business 77 (Sunshine Strip).
2-6	Re-evaluate the planned connection of Rio Hondo from Ed Carey to FM 509 along the southern edge of the airport.
3-1	Designate boulevards, avenues and streets as “Great Streets.”
3-2	Enhance key median intersections into major distinctive citywide landmarks.
3-3	Maintain Tyler and Harrison as a one-way couplet through the city, but enhance the appearance of both avenues, add bicycle lane/facilities, landscape islands, and complete missing sidewalk segments.
4-1	Ensure that all roadway types have optional standard cross-sections that incorporate bicycle lane/facilities and sidewalks.
4-2	Identify key nodes and areas with potential for increased bicycle and pedestrian activity.
4-3	Improve walking and bicycling lanes/facilities around area primary and secondary schools.
4-4	In the future, put a buffer between sidewalks and the back of curb.
5-1	Maintain Valley International Airport as the premier airport in the region.

Implementation Actions

5-2	Continue to support and expand area mass transit options.
5-3	Consider and adopt policies to become a leader in innovative private transportation systems.
Action ID	Parks, Recreation, Trails and Open Space Actions
1-1	Identify funding sources and priorities for critical existing park improvements.
2-1	Complete the Arroyo Colorado Trail as the premier trail corridor in the Rio Grande Valley (from Dixieland Park to Hugh Ramsey Park).
2-2	Complete other high priority trail segments within 10 years.
2-3	Develop a linear park/trail corridor along drainage corridors and new streets in West Harlingen.
3-1	Complete development of the Harlingen Soccer Complex.
3-2	Improve Hugh Ramsey Park as a major birding and wildlife attraction.
3-3	Develop a nature center facility.
4-1	Work with Harlingen CISD to create “school parks” in West Harlingen and in North Harlingen.
4-2	Identify new developments where dedication of land for future parks may occur.
5-1	Conduct an indoor recreation center feasibility review.
Action ID	Housing and Neighborhoods
1-1	Select key neighborhoods within the Core Areas of Harlingen for preservation and protection.
1-2	Continue to aggressively pursue code enforcement and removal of dilapidated housing.
2-1	Pursue and/or facilitate the development of housing in unique areas, such as overlooking the Arroyo Colorado, around bodies of water.
2-2	In Core Areas of the city, encourage the development of unique housing types to increase the heart of the city population.
3-1	Create simple neighborhood plans for key Core Areas neighborhoods.
3-2	Incentivize reinvestment in the Core Areas of the city.
3-3	Review and adjust standards and requirements as necessary to make it much easier and attractive to renovate older buildings and convert them into housing.
Action ID	Community Character and Identity Actions
1-1	Adopt uniform standards for installation and maintenance of landscaping in public spaces, streets and facilities around the city.
1-2	Identify and target specific areas for building improvements.
1-3	Target key streets and boulevards for landscape treatments.
1-4	Install “mini medians” at key locations to improve street character.
1-5	Enlist civic organizations to “adopt” key landscape areas.
1-6	As a signature element of Harlingen, consider expanding the scope of the mural program both in the Core Areas of the city and to other parts of Harlingen.
2-1	Target blighted or dilapidated buildings at key locations for improvement or removal by property owners.

Implementation Actions

2-2	Tie business incentive grants to building or site improvements.
2-3	Work with new development or redevelopment efforts to add distinctive features to buildings throughout the city.
2-4	Upgrade requirements for signage and facade treatments.
2-5	Where feasible, screen existing parking areas, and require landscaping for new developments.
2-6	Incorporate a strong cultural identity into the next City Hall and other key civic buildings.
3-1	Incorporate public art at key civic facilities and parks throughout the city.
3-2	Continue to support and promote unique events such as Blues on the Hill, the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival, Jalapeño 100, and Harlingen Half Marathon.
3-3	Promote the city’s unique assets, such as nature tourism, unique museums and murals.
Action ID	Civic Facilities and Buildings Actions
1-1	Conduct a Facilities Assessment Plan.
2-1	Select the location for the replacement/consolidated City Hall.
2-2	Fund and develop the new City Hall.
2-3	Identify uses for the existing City Hall building.
3-1	As part of the citywide facilities assessment, consider indoor recreation center needs.
3-2	Evaluate operational costs of current civic/community center buildings.
4-1	Identify a location and develop a new fire station for West Harlingen.
5-1	Identify strategies for addressing facility needs.
Action ID	Education Actions
1-1	Re-establish a Harlingen Education Task Force Committee.
1-2	Support grant and financial pursuits by area educational entities where feasible.
1-3	Enlist community entities, agencies, key employers, and associations to support local education initiatives and pursuits.
1-4	Support the growth of health care programs and initiatives at all levels.
1-5	Provide opportunities for joint training and employment with Harlingen CISD and TSTC.
1-6	Continue to expand opportunities for higher education in Harlingen.
1-7	Continue to aggressively pursue bringing innovative employers to the Harlingen area.
Action ID	Public Safety Actions
1-1	Update assessments on fire station relocations, and determine funding source and improved fire protection in the western areas of the city.
1-2	Address equipment needs to maintain current levels of fire protection.
2-1	Continue to promote the use of best practices to target crime reduction throughout the city.
2-2	Promote the use of CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) to help create safe environments throughout the city.

Implementation Actions

Action ID	Downtown Actions
1-1	Create a Core Areas of Harlingen District.
2-1	Enhance Tyler and Harrison Avenues through the Core Areas of Harlingen, and create gateways into Downtown Harlingen.
2-2	Examine the costs and benefits of converting one-way streets back to two-way travel.
2-3	Revitalize the Jefferson//Madison/Monroe Avenues area.
2-4	Create a strong pedestrian link between the Lake Harlingen/Library area and the greater Downtown area.
2-5	Connect the Downtown and the Lake Harlingen area to the 25th Street Trail Corridor.
3-1	Adjust city codes and processes to smooth the redevelopment process.
3-2	Adopt a form based overlay.
3-3	Allow and encourage mixed use development in the Core Areas of Harlingen.
3-4	Strengthen incentives for investment in the Core Areas of Harlingen.
3-5	Relocate Harlingen’s City Hall into Downtown Harlingen.
3-6	Pursue redevelopment of the Historic Baxter Building as a key Downtown landmark.
3-7	Address parking needs in the vicinity of the Historic Baxter Building and the Reese Building.
3-8	Encourage revitalization and redevelopment in the La Placita area.
3-9	Target key catalyst properties for improvements.
3-10	Encourage adaptive reuse of existing warehouse/industrial buildings in the new Core Areas of Harlingen.
4-1	Aggressively encourage the development of renovated inner city housing.
4-2	Enhance the Core Areas of Harlingen neighborhoods.
5-1	Develop a formal Core Areas of Harlingen plan with individual subdistrict recommendations.
Action ID	Medical District Actions
1-1	Create a “Medical District.”

*"A good plan is like a road map:
it shows the final destination and
usually the best way to get there."*

H. Stanelly Judd

