

CHAPTER

3

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation

The Harlingen Downtown Plan presents a coordinated set of strategies to guide revitalization, enhance economic activity and improve the quality and character of the Downtown district. While Harlingen has already made important investments through facade improvements, streetscape enhancements and public events, this Plan focuses on addressing remaining challenges such as underutilized buildings, limited housing options, gaps in the pedestrian environment and the need for a more predictable funding structure. Recommendations are organized into four categories:

- Built Environment
- Operational and Programming
- Policy and Regulatory
- Economic Development and Finance

Successful implementation will require strong leadership, collaboration across public and private partners, and alignment of funding resources. Establishing a five-year funding strategy is a foundational recommendation, including consideration of a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone to reinvest future tax revenues back into Downtown improvements. Other early actions include launching a second-story and infill housing incentive program, supporting redevelopment of vacant or underused properties, improving walkability and shade, enhancing alleyways and public spaces, and expanding cultural and economic activity. These efforts will help create a vibrant and resilient Downtown that attracts businesses, supports residents and reflects Harlingen’s identity.

Implementation will occur over time and must remain adaptable to available funding, local priorities and opportunities that arise. Some actions can be initiated through temporary pilots or phased demonstration projects, while others will require long-term coordination and capital investment. The Implementation Chapter serves as a flexible management tool to support decision-making, prioritize short-and mid-term efforts and ensure progress toward Harlingen’s community vision for Downtown.



Incremental Approach

Many cities approach downtown revitalization through large, single-phase investments or wait for significant funding cycles before acting. While this can result in transformative outcomes, it often delays progress and introduces financial risk. The Harlingen Downtown Plan encourages a more flexible and adaptive strategy rooted in incremental implementation. Modest and cost-effective actions can build momentum, demonstrate visible change and create a foundation for long-term improvements.

Cities that delay action while waiting for major infrastructure or redevelopment projects may overlook opportunities to activate public space and engage the community. Harlingen can instead pursue phased implementation by testing ideas in real-world conditions before committing to permanent solutions. Temporary curb extensions using paint or cones, pilot bike lanes, parklets, pop-up retail and event-based street activations are examples of small-scale interventions that allow the City to assess community response and adjust accordingly.

While the Plan includes recommendations that require significant investment, these are not the starting point. The initial focus is on strategies that can be implemented quickly, expanded if successful or revised if needed. The City of Harlingen, supported by its active Main Street program, downtown business owners and community partners, is well positioned to lead this approach. Incremental implementation will allow the City to test concepts, build trust and guide future improvements with confidence.



Economic Development Strategies

The success of Downtown Harlingen will depend in large part on aligning financial tools with revitalization priorities. A strong policy and funding framework can enable public improvements, attract private investment and sustain ongoing programming and operations. The Plan identifies several economic development strategies to support implementation and long-term downtown growth.

A range of local tools and financing programs can be leveraged to advance key projects. These include:



Public Private Partnerships

Partnerships between the City and private entities can be effective in facilitating infill development, second-story housing conversions and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.



Grants and Matching Funds

Targeted funding programs can support building renovations, new business development, public art installations and other priority initiatives.



Facade and Signage Programs

Expanding the existing program managed through the Downtown Public Improvement District can help improve the visual quality of buildings, encourage investment and support small business retention.



Housing Incentives

Incentives are essential to support second-story and infill housing projects that require substantial code compliance upgrades. These programs can help address feasibility gaps for new downtown residential development.



Tax Incremental Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ)

The City should consider establishing a Downtown TIRZ to capture the incremental increase in property tax revenues within the District and reinvest those funds into downtown improvements. Revenues could support infrastructure, public spaces, housing incentives and other catalytic projects. Coordination with Cameron County is recommended to maximize the financial impact and ensure long-term sustainability.

Priority Recommendations

This Plan identifies a series of targeted actions to advance the vision and goals for Downtown Harlingen. While the full plan includes numerous recommendations, the following ten have been prioritized for their potential to deliver visible results and generate momentum in the near term. These actions address both catalytic projects and practical improvements, positioning the City to respond to community needs and leverage partnership opportunities as they arise.

The priority recommendations are not intended to limit other implementation efforts. Rather, they serve as a starting point for action, offering clear direction for City leadership, stakeholders and partners. Early progress on these initiatives will demonstrate the benefits of the Plan, strengthen public support and lay the foundation for continued investment in Downtown Harlingen’s revitalization.



1. Launch a Second Story Housing Incentive Program to encourage adaptive reuse of upper floors for residential use, especially along Jackson Street.
2. Establish a 5-Year Downtown Funding Strategy and TIRZ with Cameron County participation to finance catalytic projects.
3. Redesign Gutierrez Park and Activate Art Park Programming as a cultural and event hub.
4. Implement Key Sidewalk and Pedestrian Safety Improvements at identified high-traffic intersections.
5. Develop a Downtown Parking Management Strategy including potential meter revenue reinvestment.
6. Launch a Pilot Alley Activation between Harrison and Van Buren to test lighting, art and event use.
7. Create a Cultural Events Plan and Expand Evening Programming in partnership with Main Street Harlingen.
8. Install Comfort Stations at Lozano Plaza and Gutierrez Park to support events and daily visitors.
9. Attract Anchor Tenants such as a coworking hub or public market to increase daily foot traffic.
10. Strengthen the Main Street Façade Grant Program with matching City funds for greater participation.

10 Keys to Successful Downtown Implementation

- 1

Prioritize incremental progress
 - Use quick wins and small-scale pilots to show visible change.
 - Adapt, refine, and scale projects over time based on community feedback.
- 2

Build a flexible funding toolbox
 - Activate tools like TIRZ, grants and matching funds.
 - Combine public and private resources to fund catalytic projects.
- 3

Center the pedestrian experience
 - Invest in walkability, shade and safety.
 - Reduce barriers to mobility and enhance comfort for all users.
- 4

Remove redevelopment barriers
 - Provide technical and financial support for code upgrades.
 - Incentivize residential conversions and adaptive reuse of vacant spaces.
- 5

Activate space and grow demand
 - Use cultural programming, events and placemaking to draw people in.
 - Focus on activating underutilized areas like alleyways and side streets.
- 6

Lead with local commitment
 - Relocate or activate City services in Downtown.
 - Show investment through leadership presence and visible public projects.
- 7

Leverage what already works
 - Build on Main Street Harlingen’s momentum and community trust.
 - Connect Downtown to broader City assets like trails and cultural nodes.
- 8

Invest in public space transformation
 - Make parks, plazas and streets central to Downtown’s identity.
 - Design flexible, multi-use spaces that invite all ages and cultures.
- 9

Measure what matters
 - Track progress using metrics like housing units, event participation and business growth.
 - Share results regularly to maintain momentum and accountability.
- 10

Stay rooted in Harlingen’s identity
 - Highlight the City’s unique culture, history and binational character.
 - Adapt national best practices, but tailor solutions to reflect local values.

Implementation Plan

The Downtown Harlingen Plan includes a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at supporting revitalization, economic development, public space improvements and increased livability. To ensure these strategies are effectively executed, the implementation framework organizes each recommendation by category, estimated timeframe, lead entities and performance indicators. This structure allows the City and its partners to track progress, allocate resources and adapt over time as new opportunities and constraints arise.



Actions

Each recommendation in this Plan is tied to a specific goal and is designed to either advance progress on its own or serve as a catalyst for other improvements. Some actions focus on operational or programming changes that require minimal investment, while others involve regulatory updates, targeted incentives or larger-scale infrastructure and capital projects. This variety allows the City to pursue a balanced mix of short-term and long-term strategies.



Implementation Timeframe

To support sequencing and phasing, each action is categorized by the following timeframes:

- Short Term (1 to 3 years): Focuses on early wins, demonstration projects, pilot initiatives and actions that require limited investment or coordination.
- Mid Term (4 to 6 years): Includes moderate-cost projects, policy initiatives and infrastructure improvements requiring design and permitting.
- Long Term (7 years and beyond): Encompasses major capital projects, land use changes and broader system-wide initiatives.
- Ongoing: Refers to programs and strategies that require sustained effort, regular evaluation and consistent community engagement over time.



Key Entities

Implementation will involve coordination across public, private and nonprofit sectors. Key implementation partners include the City of Harlingen (Planning, Public Works, Parks, Finance), Harlingen Economic Development Corporation (EDC), Main Street Harlingen, Valley Metro, the Harlingen Chamber of Commerce, private developers, downtown business and property owners, and philanthropic or community-based organizations.



Incremental Steps

To mitigate risk and facilitate progress, the City should initiate major actions through pilot programs, temporary demonstrations or phased implementation. This strategy enables evaluation of feasibility, incorporation of public feedback and refinement of proposals prior to permanent adoption.

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Key Entities
Built Environment (Includes infrastructure, public spaces, urban design, housing, and streetscape improvements)			
BE-1	Second-story housing and infill incentive program.	Short-Term	City of Harlingen
BE-2	Set goal of new residential units in Downtown.	Short-Term	Planning Department
BE-3	Improve alley and side street lighting.	Short-Term	Public Works, Utilities Department
BE-4	Create small shade nodes with seating and fountains.	Short-Term	Parks Department, Public Works
BE-5	Launch temporary parklet program.	Short-Term	Planning, Main Street Harlingen
BE-6	Improve sidewalk and pedestrian safety.	Short-Term	Public Works, Planning Department
BE-7	Enhance pedestrian crossings at key intersections.	Short-Term	Public Works
BE-8	Redesign Gutierrez Park and activate programming as the cultural heart of Downtown Harlingen.	Short-Term	Parks Department
BE-9	Activate alley between Harrison and Van Buren including lighting and art.	Medium-Term	Planning Department
BE-10	Develop code-compliance support for housing conversions.	Medium-Term	Planning Department
BE-11	Install comprehensive wayfinding system across Downtown.	Medium-Term	Planning, Main Street Harlingen
BE-12	Improve street tree canopy in pedestrian corridors.	Medium-Term	Parks, Public Works
BE-13	Evaluate feasibility of Downtown stormwater features.	Medium-Term	Public Works, Engineering
BE-14	Install comfort stations at Lozano and Gutierrez Parks.	Medium-Term	Parks, Public Works
BE-15	Develop an urban pocket park near 3rd and Monroe designed as a flexible community space with shade, seating and public art.	Medium-Term	Parks, Planning
BE-16	Improve connectivity between parks and Arroyo trail.	Medium-Term	Parks, Planning

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Key Entities
Operational and Programming (Includes events, public engagement, business support, and activation strategies)			
OP-1	Upgrade trail pavement and add shade structures over exercise equipment.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen
OP-2	Develop cultural events and evening programming plan.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, Chamber of Commerce
OP-3	Promote consistent evening hours for Downtown businesses.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen
OP-4	Develop Downtown business recruitment toolkit.	Short-Term	EDC
OP-5	Pilot event-based programming in underutilized spaces (e.g. Art Park, lot activations).	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, City of Harlingen
OP-6	Launch pop-up business incubation pilot.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, Chamber of Commerce
OP-7	Improve Downtown gateways with art and landscaping.	Medium-Term	Planning, EDC
OP-8	Establish seasonal event series (e.g. outdoor movie nights, food festivals).	Medium-Term	Main Street Harlingen, Chamber, Nonprofit Partners
OP-9	Create Downtown volunteer program to support events and clean-up days.	Medium-Term	Main Street Harlingen
Policy and Regulatory (Includes zoning updates, regulatory tools, pilot testing, and management strategies)			
PR-1	Develop Downtown parking management strategy.	Medium-Term	City of Harlingen
PR-2	Explore shared parking agreements.	Medium-Term	City of Harlingen, Private Property Owners
PR-3	Coordinate with Valley Metro on central transit station.	Medium-Term	Planning, Valley Metro
PR-4	Incentivize adaptive reuse of vacant buildings.	Medium-Term	EDC, Planning

#	Action Item	Initiation Time Frame	Key Entities
Economic Development and Finance (Includes incentive programs, funding tools, public-private partnerships, and business support strategies)			
EC-1	Establish five-year Downtown funding strategy.	Short-Term	City Manager’s Office, EDC
EC-2	Establish Downtown TIRZ with County support.	Short-Term	City of Harlingen, Cameron County
EC-3	Strengthen facade grant program with city match.	Short-Term	Main Street Harlingen, City of Harlingen
EC-4	Attract anchor tenants such as coworking or public market.	Medium-Term	EDC
Public Safety & Vitality			
PSV-1	Assign permanent officer presence in Downtown to build relationships with businesses and residents.	Short-Term	Police Department
PSV-2	Improve alleyway safety with enhanced lighting and CPTED design strategies.	Short-Term	Public Works, Police, Downtown Partners
PSV-3	Expand public camera network with real-time access for dispatch.	Medium-Term	Police Department, IT
PSV-4	Upgrade crosswalks and pedestrian safety features at key intersections.	Medium-Term	Public Works, Planning
PSV-5	Permit sidewalk beer gardens in designated downtown zones with security measures.	Medium-Term	Planning Department, Downtown Partners
PSV-6	Install public restrooms at strategic locations.	Medium-Term	Public Works, Downtown Partners
PSV-7	Support special events and festivals that increase overnight hotel stays and strengthen downtown vibrancy.	Ongoing	EDC, Main Street, Downtown Partners
PSV-8	Install or improve protected bicycle lanes throughout Downtown to enhance safe mobility.	Medium-Term	Planning Department, Public Works

Funding Mechanisms

Funding Tools

- Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) – Capture and reinvest future increases in property tax revenues generated within Downtown into infrastructure, public spaces and redevelopment projects. County participation will significantly increase revenue potential.
- Facade & Signage Improvement Programs – Continue and expand the Main Street grant program with City or EDC match to incentivize visible building upgrades.
- Special Purpose Districts – Explore opportunities to create targeted districts for cultural programming, parking management or tourism promotion.
- Impact Fees – Dedicate a portion of applicable fees from new development to Downtown infrastructure improvements.
- Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) – Allocate eligible HOT revenues to tourism-related Downtown improvements, events and marketing.
- Local, State, and Federal Grants – Aggressively pursue competitive grants for transportation, parks, resilience, housing and economic development (e.g., TxDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program, Texas Parks & Wildlife Local Park Grant, CDBG Downtown Revitalization, FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance).

Partnership Models

- Public–Private Partnerships (P3) – Formal agreements between the City and private developers to co-invest in infrastructure and redevelopment projects that meet shared goals.
- Public–Public Partnerships (PUP) – Collaborations with other public entities such as Cameron County or Valley Metro to deliver shared facilities, mobility projects or workforce housing.
- Anchor Institution Partnerships – Partner with hospitals, higher education or major employers to integrate Downtown into recruitment, retention and branding strategies.

State & Federal Grants

- TxDOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program – Funds sidewalks, crosswalks, shared-use paths and bike facilities that improve safety and connectivity. Can link Downtown Harlingen to surrounding neighborhoods and the Arroyo trail.
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Local Park Grant Program – Provides matching funds for parkland acquisition, development and enhancements. Can support pocket parks, shade structures and recreation upgrades like those planned for Gutierrez Park.
- CDBG Downtown Revitalization Program – Supports sidewalk reconstruction, ADA access, lighting, drainage and façade restoration. Targets projects that increase economic activity and pedestrian comfort in the Downtown.
- FEMA Hazard Mitigation Assistance – Finances projects that reduce risks from flooding, extreme heat and severe storms. Eligible improvements include stormwater systems, shade features and resilient infrastructure.
- USDA Rural Development – Offers grants and low-interest loans for rural and small-city economic development. Can fund business incubation, building rehab and community facilities that boost downtown vitality.