

CITY OF BROWNSVILLE

DOWNTOWN RENAISSANCE MASTER PLAN

2026

City Commission

John Cowen, Jr., Mayor

Tino Villareal, Jr., City Commissioner, At-Large "A"

Nurith Galonsky, City Commissioner, At-Large "B"

Bryan L. Martinez, City Commissioner, District 1

Linda C. Macias, City Commissioner, District 2

Gustavo De León, City Commissioner, District 3

Pedro Cardenas, City Commissioner, District 4

Planning and Zoning Commission

Eliza Vasquez, Chairman

David Betancourt, Secretary

Bob Torres, Commissioner

Aida I. Rodriguez, Commissioner

Amalia Benson, Commissioner

Cesar Andres Rodriguez, Commissioner

Dr. Daniel Elkin, Commissioner

Historic Preservation Commission

Calvin Walker, Chairman

Martin Leal, Vice Chair

Tara Putegnant

Eduardo Garrido

Ricardo Diaz

Lawrence Lof

Emanuel Hernandez

City Staff

Daniel Leal, Director, Planning and Redevelopment

Martin Vega, Assistant Director, Land Development Services

Evaristo Ramos, GIS Program Manager

Juan Velez, Historic Preservation Officer

Allan Garces, Downtown Manager

Samantha Diaz, Downtown Event Coordinator

Consultant Team

Table of Contents

Introduction **4**

DISCOVER **9**
Background information and data analysis.

IMAGINE **45**
Community engagement and vision.

TRANSFORM **57**
Major projects that would transform the Downtown area.

LIVE **71**
Encouraging new housing.

ACTIVATE **83**
Urban design strategies to enhance activation.

GET AROUND **115**
Mobility and transportation recommendations.

BUILD **143**
Implementation and action items for making progress.

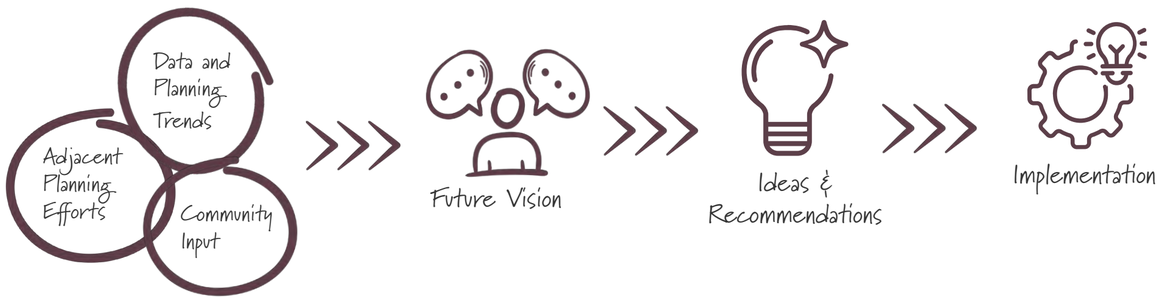


INTRODUCTION

The Downtown Brownsville Renaissance

In recent years, Downtown Brownsville has undergone a significant transformation, welcoming a new wave of activity from visitors, business owners, and residents who live, work, and spend time in the heart of the City of Brownsville. This momentum has been made possible through strategic public and private investment. The City has committed to critical infrastructure improvements, including historic preservation, water and wastewater upgrades, and broadband expansion. Catalytic projects such as the El Jardín affordable housing redevelopment, the new Mitte Cultural Center, and Market Square's activation through First Fridays are reshaping Downtown's physical and cultural landscape.

To build on this progress, the City has pursued intentional planning to guide the next chapter of Downtown's evolution. The Downtown Renaissance Master Plan (DTRMP) or Plan provides a clear framework for continuing to enhance Downtown Brownsville, guiding future growth, investment, and placemaking. Grounded in extensive community engagement and technical analysis, the Plan sets forth a shared vision for a vibrant, walkable, and welcoming Downtown. The strategies and priorities presented in this Plan ensure that future improvements reflect the values and aspirations of the Brownsville community.



Regional Context

The City of Brownsville is located at the southern tip of Texas along the Rio Grande, directly across from Matamoros, Mexico. About 25 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, Brownsville is connected to the region by U.S. Highways 77, 83, and 281, and State Highway 48, linking it to the Port of Brownsville, South Padre Island, and other Rio Grande Valley communities.

Brownsville is the largest city in the Rio Grande Valley and serves as a regional gateway for trade, culture, and tourism, supported by multiple international border crossings and direct access to Interstate 69E. Founded in 1848, the City was established to facilitate international trade between Mexico, the United States, Cuba, and Europe. Given its significance as an economic gateway, Brownsville positioned itself as one of the most historically significant cities in Texas.

Major employers in the region impacting Brownsville include SpaceX at Boca Chica, the Port of Brownsville, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), and regional healthcare providers. Cultural and recreational destinations such as the Gladys Porter Zoo, South Padre Island, and Resaca de la Palma State Park contribute to a diverse and growing regional economy supported by tourism, education, industry, and international trade. Additionally, the City's location along major bird migration corridors supports ecotourism focused on birding and wildlife viewing, drawing visitors during seasonal migrations and reinforcing Brownsville's role as an ecological destination.



Map 1. Regional Context Map

Local Context

At a more local scale, Downtown Brownsville serves as both the civic and cultural heart of the City and a shared destination for the broader Rio Grande (Valley). Anchored by government offices, local businesses, educational institutions, and cultural venues, Downtown provides essential services and daily destinations for residents across Brownsville while also welcoming visitors from throughout the region. Its position near the international border further reinforces Downtown's role as a hub for cross-border activity, retail, and cultural exchange.

As the oldest urban core in the Valley, Downtown Brownsville also plays a broader regional role as a destination for arts, entertainment, and heritage tourism. Nearby attractions such as the Mitte Cultural District, the Gladys Porter Zoo, and the Children's Museum draw visitors into Downtown and support local businesses. County and City offices further establish Downtown as the region's civic center, while the Jefferson Corridor area, anchored by Valley Baptist Medical Center, serves as a major employment hub that generates daily activity and visitation.

Downtown Study Area

The Downtown study area covers Brownsville's historic urban core and the surrounding blocks that support its civic, cultural, and commercial activity. The boundary generally extends from International Boulevard on the south to Palm Boulevard on the north, and from Mexico Boulevard on the west to US Highway 77 on the east. An additional area north of Palm Boulevard is included to provide connectivity to the Jefferson Corridor. The study area was strategically chosen to include key assets such as Market Square, Washington Park, the Warehouse District, and the connection to La Plaza. Some of the key destinations or assets within the study area are noted below and identified on the adjacent map.

1. Gladys Porter Zoo
2. Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Park (Linear Park)
3. Washington Park
4. Market Square
5. La Plaza at Brownsville Terminal
6. Children's Museum of Brownsville & Dean Porter Park
7. Valley Baptist Medical Center
8. Amigoland Mall
9. International Bridge
10. El Jardin (HACB)
11. Buena Vida (HACB)
12. Bougainvillea (HACB)
13. County Courthouse
14. City Hall
15. Immaculate Conception Cathedral
16. Brownsville & Matamoros (B&M) Express International Bridge



Map 2. Downtown Renaissance Master Plan Study Area