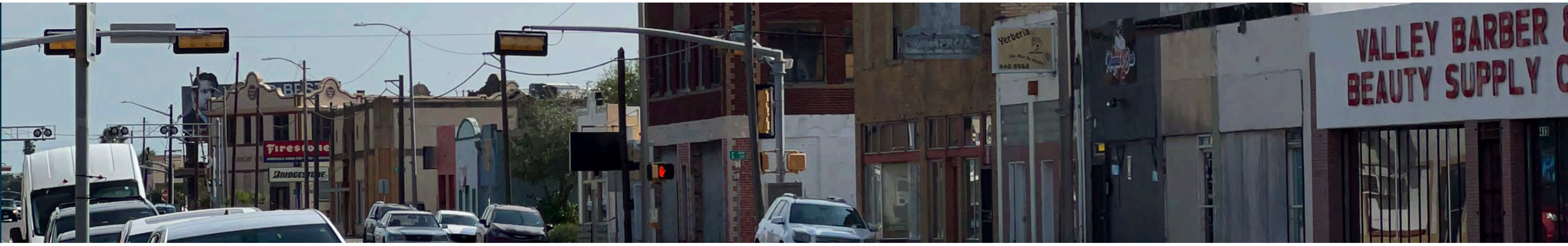
CHAPTER 1

Community Snapshot

Planning Harlingen's Future



W Harrison Ave, 2023

Introduction

The Harlingen Comprehensive Plan is a strategic framework designed to guide growth and development over the next 25 years. It serves as a decision-making tool for city officials, ensuring that policies reflect the community's needs and aspirations. The plan covers key areas such as land use, infrastructure, economic development, and public facilities, helping shape a sustainable and vibrant future for the city.

What is the Comprehensive Plan ?

A City's comprehensive plan can be defined as a long-range planning tool that is intended to be used by City staff, decision-makers, and residents to guide the growth and physical development of a community for long periods of time. The state of Texas has established laws with regard to the way in which incorporated communities can ensure the health, safety, and welfare of their residents through a comprehensive plan.

Importance of Comprehensive Planning

- To engage local residents in the decision-making process and achieve consensus on the future vision for Harlingen and its ongoing development needs
- To ensure public facilities can accommodate future growth and development
- To foster coordination between public and private investment sectors
- To minimize potential conflicts between land uses
- To ensure the long-term protection and enhancement of the community's visual image and appearance

Legal Basis for Planning

Chapter 211 of the Texas Local Government Code permits municipalities to implement zoning regulations, while Chapter 212 authorizes the governing body of a community to oversee subdivision development within City limits, with regulations varying based on the community's population. It's crucial to understand that a comprehensive plan is not a zoning ordinance; instead, it serves as a tool to guide future development, infrastructure, and land-use decisions. However, the comprehensive plan does provide a foundation for zoning decisions, as outlined in Chapter 211 of the Texas Local Government Code.

In Texas, cities are not mandated by the state government to create or maintain a comprehensive master plan, unlike some other states. Nevertheless, Section 213 of the Texas Local Government Code allows a community's governing body to adopt a plan aimed at promoting sound development decisions and enhancing public health, safety, and welfare. Texas cities have the flexibility to define the content and structure of the plan, resulting in a long-term blueprint tailored to the unique needs and capacities of each community.

How to Use this Plan

- The Comprehensive Plan is a strategic tool, not a zoning ordinance, designed to guide future policy and development decisions for the City.
- It serves as a reference for daily decisions, such as evaluating zoning requests, purchasing land, and planning infrastructure or public facilities.
- For developers and investors, the Plan outlines broad concepts and policies that promote growth aligned with the community's vision.
- The Plan is dynamic, adapting to changes in political, economic, physical, technological, and social circumstances, as well as unforeseen challenges.
- Regular reviews ensure the Plan remains relevant, with updated goals, objectives, and recommendations reflecting the community's evolving priorities.

A Brief History of Harlingen

Early Harlingen

Before the arrival of European settlers, the Rio Grande Valley was inhabited by several indigenous tribes, including the Coahuiltecan and Carrizo-Comecrudo people. Under Spanish colonialism the region became part of various land grants with land ownership eventually shifting between Spanish, Mexican, and American rule. Harlingen's modern history began in 1904 when Lon C. Hill, a visionary entrepreneur, established the townsite at what was then called "Six Shooter Junction", naming it after Harlingen, a city in the Netherlands. Hill aimed to create an agricultural hub, capitalizing on the fertile soils and irrigation potential of the Rio Grande Valley. In 1910, the City of Harlingen was officially incorporated into Cameron County with a population of 1,126 people.

Agriculture & Irrigation

Harlingen's growth surged in the early 20th century with the creation of Harlingen Irrigation District in 1914, which transformed the arid land into fertile farmland. The area became a major producer of crops like citrus, cotton, vegetables and sugarcane, attracting settlers and migrant workers. The construction of railroads facilitated trade and the shipment of agricultural products, cementing Harlingen's role as a regional economic center.

Harlingen Airforce Base

During World War II, Harlingen gained national significance with the establishment of the Harlingen Army Airfield in 1941, later renamed Harlingen Air Force Base. The base was a major training site for bomber crews and contributed to the city's population growth and economic development. The base closed in 1962 and its facilities were repurposed for civilian use as the Rio Grande Valley International Airport.

Modern Development

The City of Harlingen continued to expand throughout the second half of the 20th century, diversifying its economy with healthcare, education, and manufacturing. The city became known for its affordable living and central location, which attracted retirees and businesses. Harlingen is also recognized for its medical institutions, including the Valley Baptist Medical Center and UT Health RVG.

Cultural Heritage

Harlingen's culture reflects its proximity to Mexico, with a vibrant blend of Anglo, and Hispanic traditions. In 1994 the Free Trade International Bridge opened approximately 11 miles south of Harlingen further cementing the city's cultural and economic ties with Mexico.

Events like the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival and the Harlingen Art Night highlight the city's natural beauty and artistic community. Murals and public art across the city celebrate its diverse history and people. Today, Harlingen remains a vital part of the Rio Grande Valley, balancing its historical roots with modern growth while preserving its unique identity.



Lon C. Hill Building, 1908
Source: MyRGV

Population Demographics

Population Trends

The City of Harlingen has experienced consistent population growth since the early 1900s, with only one decade of negative growth. The upward trend is projected to continue, as evidenced by a 10.8% increase in population over the past decade. A growing population benefits city government by leading to increased economic opportunities, greater tax revenue, and enhanced community services.

Harlingen boasts a relatively young demographic, with a median age of 33.2 years compared to the statewide median of 35.5 years. Notably, nearly a quarter of its residents are 14 years old or younger, indicating a vibrant and youthful community. Such a youthful population can be advantageous for a city, often leading to a more dynamic workforce, innovative ideas, and a thriving future economy.

Figure 3. Harlingen Historic Population

Year	Population	% Change
1910	1,126	-
1920	1,784	+ 58.4%
1930	12,124	+ 579.6%
1940	13,306	+ 9.7%
1950	23,229	+ 74.6%
1960	41,207	+ 77.4%
1970	33,504	- 18.7%
1980	43,543	+ 30%
1990	48,735	+ 11.9%
2000	57,564	+ 18.1%
2010	64,849	+ 12.7%
2020	71,829	+10.8%

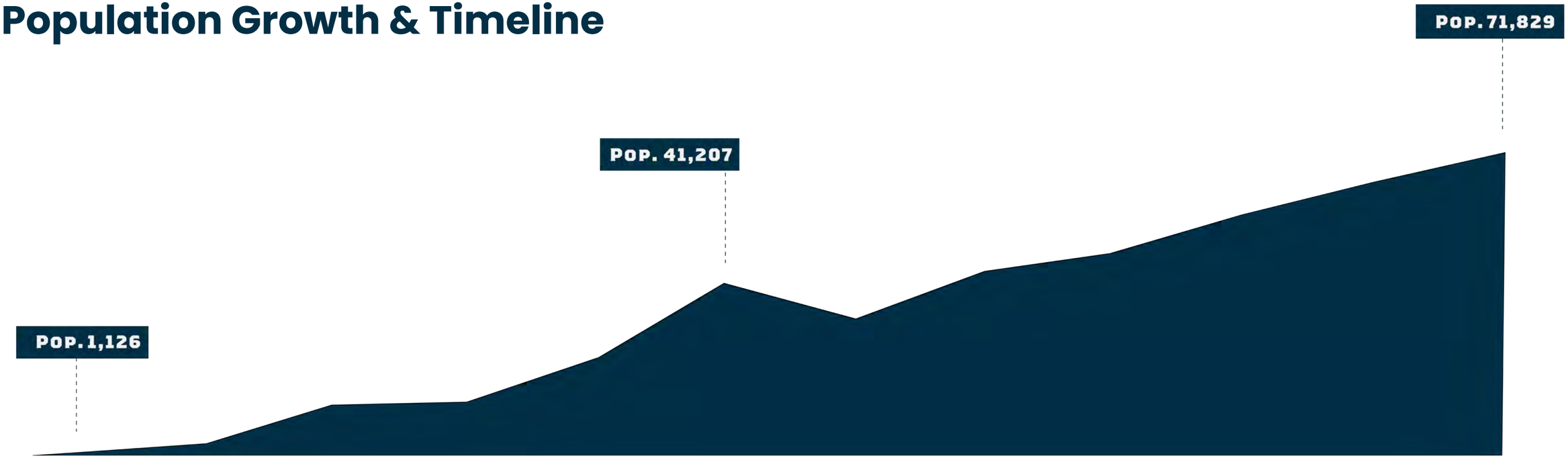
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census

Figure 4. Age Comparisons

	Harlingen	Cameron County	Texas
Median Age	33.2	32.4	35.5
Children 14 and Under	24.3%	23.9%	20.8%
Young Adults (20-24)	5.3%	7.6%	6.9%
Mid-Career (35-54)	21.8%	23.4%	26.3%

Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Population Growth & Timeline



1910

The City of Harlingen was officially incorporated into Cameron County on April 15, 1910.[1]



1925

Valley Baptist Hospital opened in Harlingen as a not-for-profit community hospital on January 22, 1925.[2]



1941

The Harlingen Army Airfield, later Harlingen Air Force Base, receives it's first class of gunnery students for training on August 4, 1941.[3]



1 MyRGV. (2018). The Rise and Demise of Harlingen Historical Preservation Society. MyRGV. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from https://myrgv.com/uncategorized/2018/04/15/the-rise-and-demise-of-harlingen-historical-preservation-society/

2 Valley Baptist Health System. (n.d.). Valley Baptist History. Valley Baptist Health System. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from https://www.valleybaptist.net/about/our-history

3 Valley International Airport. (n.d.). History of VIA. Valley International Airport. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from https://flythevalley.com/history/

1952

The Port of Harlingen opens for operations on February 27, 1952 becoming the second largest port in Cameron County.[4]



1992

The Free Trade International Bridge opens eight miles south of Harlingen on November 1, 1992.[5]



2002

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), then UTHSCSA, opens it's Medical Education Division in Harlingen in 2002.[6]



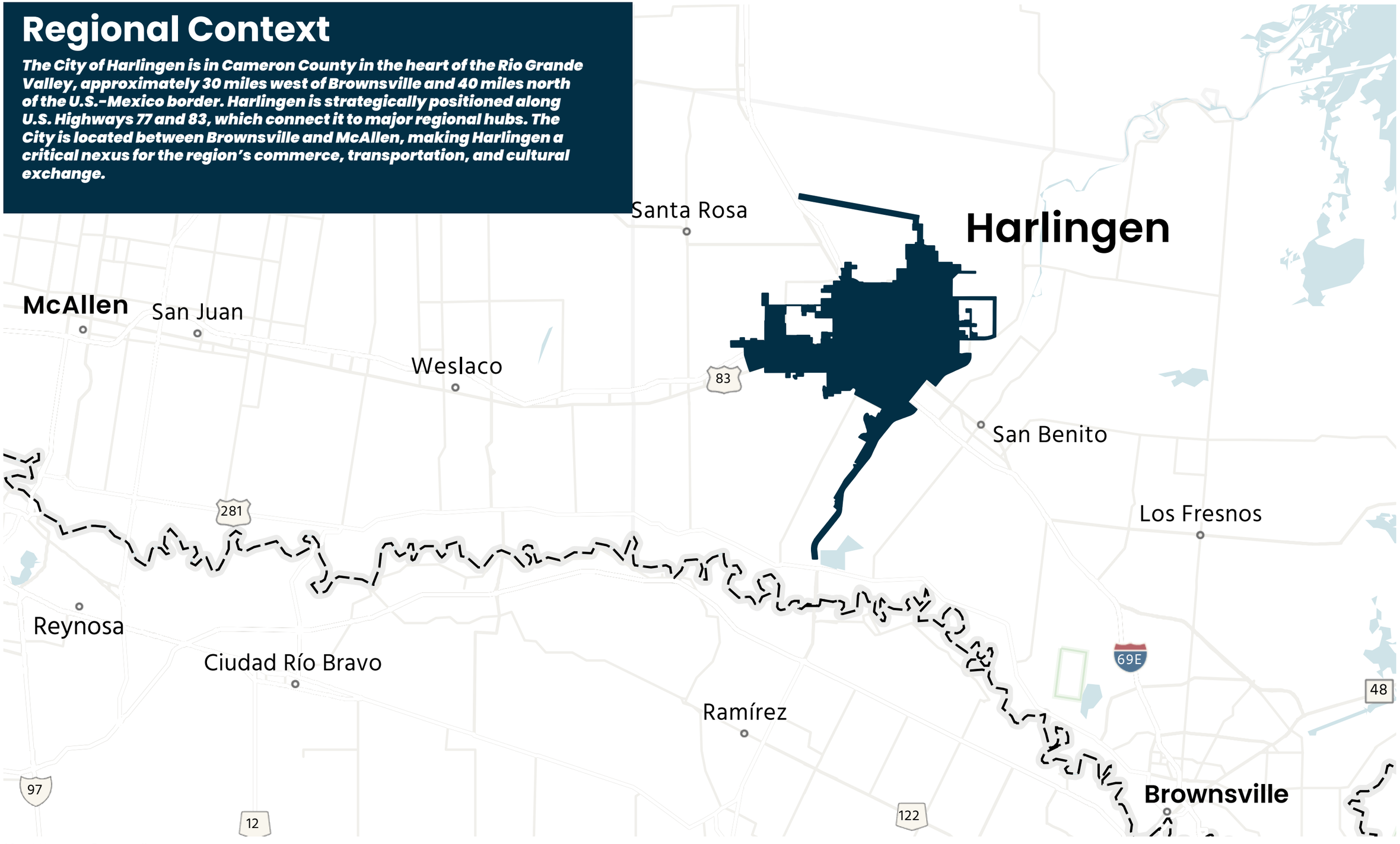
4 Port of Harlingen Authority. (n.d.). Celebrating 70 Years in Operation. Port of Harlingen Authority. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from https://portofharlingen.com/70th-anniversary/

5 Cameron County International Bridge System. (n.d.). Free Trade Bridge. Cameron County International Bridge System. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from https://www.ccibstx.us/bridges/free-trade-bridge

6 The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. (n.d.). UTRGV Harlingen Clinical Education Site. Locations. The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from https://www.utrgv.edu/about/locations/index.htm

Regional Context

The City of Harlingen is in Cameron County in the heart of the Rio Grande Valley, approximately 30 miles west of Brownsville and 40 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border. Harlingen is strategically positioned along U.S. Highways 77 and 83, which connect it to major regional hubs. The City is located between Brownsville and McAllen, making Harlingen a critical nexus for the region's commerce, transportation, and cultural exchange.

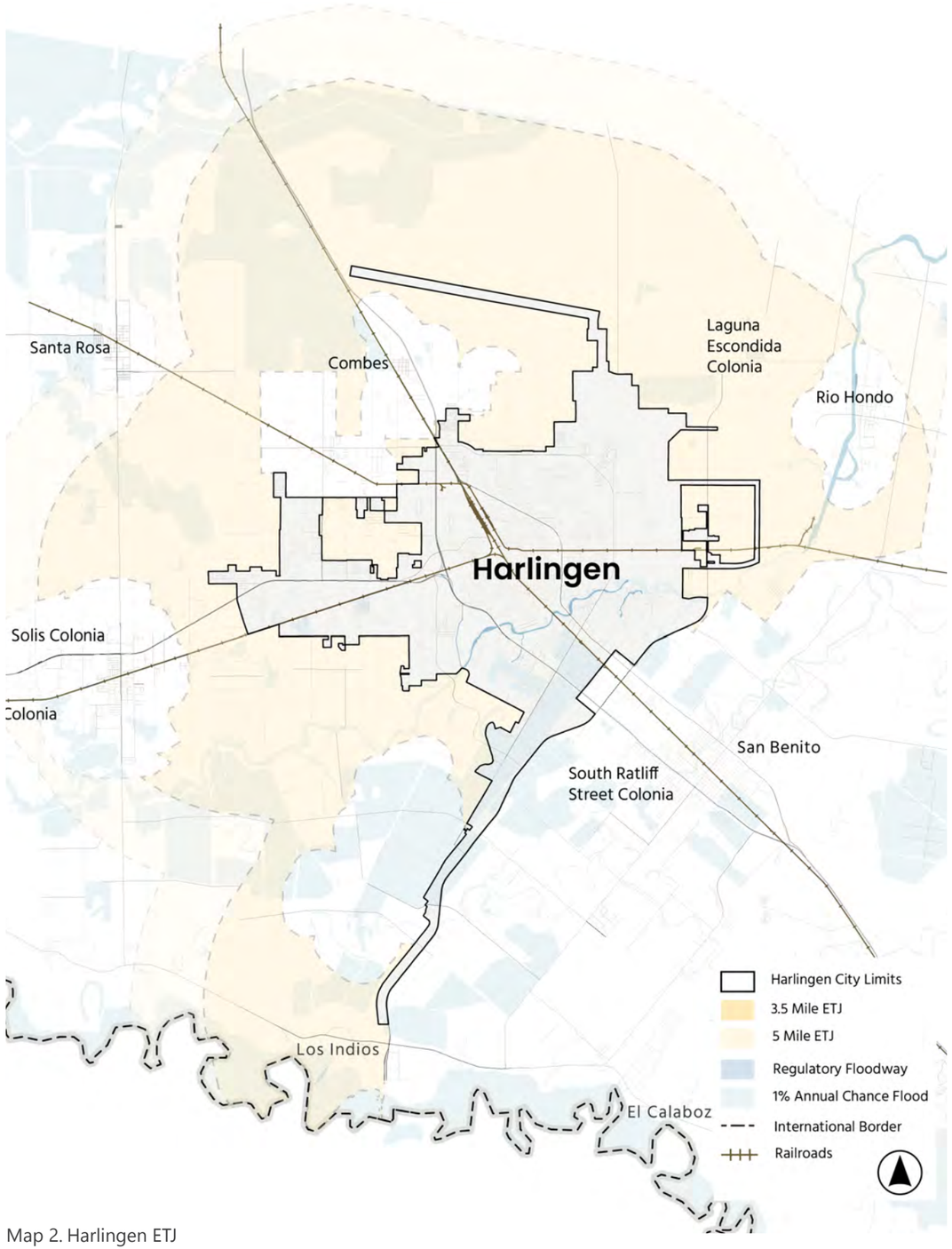


Map 1. Harlingen Regional Context

What is an ETJ?

In Texas, an ETJ (Extraterritorial Jurisdiction) is the area just outside a city's boundaries where the city can regulate certain aspects of land use and development to manage growth in areas that may be annexed. While cities can't enforce full regulations in the ETJ, they often apply subdivision and infrastructure standards to promote orderly development near city limits.

Harlingen has both a 3.5-mile and a 5-mile ETJ. Cities with populations between 25,000 and 50,000 have a 3.5-mile ETJ, while those with more than 50,000 residents can extend theirs up to 5 miles, allowing for greater influence over development just beyond city limits.



Map 2. Harlingen ETJ

Community Engagement

The planning team integrates quantitative data and research, like the information discussed earlier in this chapter, with the lived experiences and needs of residents shared throughout the process. This qualitative input from community members shapes the community vision, which then informs the guiding principles and, ultimately, the plan recommendations.

A summary of engagement efforts throughout the comprehensive planning process can be found in the Appendix A.

Plans Steering Committee (PSC) Meetings

The PSC consists of dedicated community members who volunteered their time to collaborate with the planning team throughout the process. Their involvement ensured that a diverse range of perspectives was considered and integrated into the plan recommendations.

Public Outreach Events

The planning team organized three community outreach events throughout the process, varying in time, location, and format to engage different segments of the community. These events included a community open house to introduce the project and receive initiall feedback on the community's vision for the plan. Additionally, materials from these in-person engagements were made available online through the project website.

Stakeholder Conversations

The planning team facilitated focused discussions with various community stakeholders, each representing unique needs or perspectives. These sessions included meetings with both forward-thinking community leaders and technical experts across different fields. Stakeholders engaged in the planning process included: non-profits and community groups, small business owners, real-estate developers and representatives from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

Virtual Engagement

In addition to in-person events, the planning team conducted an online survey, virtual engagement sessions, and a project website to gather broader community input. These digital tools provided residents with flexible opportunities to access information, share feedback, and contribute to the planning process.



Public Open House, November 18, 2024



Public Open House, November 18, 2024 * To be replaced with a photo from the second or third engagement event.

Current Conditions



Harlingen is Growing

Harlingen is witnessing steady population growth, which brings opportunities for economic development and community vitality. However, this growth underscores the need to balance new residential neighborhoods with retail development to sustain a thriving local economy.



Housing Market Dynamics

Harlingen faces challenges in providing a variety of housing options. With an increasing need for luxury and affordable homes, the City's housing market must adapt to changing middle-class expectations. Addressing absentee ownership and underutilized vacant properties remains critical to unlocking development potential.



Workforce Retention and Educational Barriers

Educational attainment remains a barrier to attracting higher-paying jobs and industries such as technology. Many workers commute outside Harlingen for employment, highlighting the need for localized workforce development and investment in education to meet employer needs and retain talent.



Strong Sense of Community with Opportunities for Growth

Harlingen is known for its close-knit community, with cultural events and festivals reinforcing its local identity. However, strategic efforts to capitalize on available vacant land, expand retail opportunities, and align new developments with community needs—such as placemaking and creating a desirable sense of place—are crucial to ensuring sustainable growth.



Transportation and Connectivity

Infrastructure barriers like railroads present challenges to connectivity within the City. Enhancing transportation networks, including overpasses and improved wayfinding, can address community mobility concerns and foster better access to amenities like parks and retail.



Natural Assets and Placemaking

Harlingen's parks, trails, and proximity to the Arroyo Colorado offer unique opportunities for eco-tourism and community identity. Leveraging these strengths to create a string of parks or cooling nodes can make Harlingen a desirable destination. These efforts would reinforce its position as a city with a vibrant and connected outdoor lifestyle.

Previous Planning Efforts



One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan (2016)

The One Vision, One Harlingen Comprehensive Plan establishes a strategic framework for the growth and development of Harlingen. It emphasizes the creation of a vibrant and sustainable community within both the city and its Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). This plan update replaces the 2016 plan, ensuring a renewed vision that reflects current community needs and priorities. Developed through community engagement and stakeholder participation, the plan outlines five key areas:

- Improving economic development and creating job opportunities
- Expanding neighborhoods and diversifying housing options
- Developing transportation systems and connectivity
- Expanding Parks, Recreation, and Open Spaces
- Encouraging Environmental Sustainability and Resilience



Trails Master Plan (2010)

The plan is to expand Harlingen's trail network to improve connectivity and recreation throughout the City and ETJ. The plan identifies critical areas to be developed through public participation and stakeholder input. The focus areas of the plan include:

- Expanding trails and access points
- Enhancing connections between parks and neighborhood areas
- Improving safety and accessibility
- Promoting health and wellbeing through recreational activities
- Preserving natural areas and scenic corridors.



Parks & Recreation Master Plan (2016)

The Plan outlines a vision for improving parks and recreation areas in the City and ETJ and identifies priorities for the Harlingen Park System based on community engagement and stakeholder feedback. Key priorities include:

- Securing land for the development of new parks and open areas
- Enhancing and maintaining current facilities
- Broadening the scope of recreational activities and programs
- Creating multi-use trails
- Enhancing accessibility and inclusive parks



Cameron County Hazard Mitigation Action Plan (2021)

The Cameron County Hazard Mitigation Action Plan outlines strategies to decrease the impacts of natural disasters and increase resilience in Harlingen and the broader county. Developed through community engagement and stakeholder participation, the plan highlights key areas:

- Improving flood risks through infrastructure improvements.
- Promoting public education on hazard mitigation.
- Strengthening building codes and land use regulations.











RGVMPO Bicycle Plan (2019)

The RGVMPO Bicycle Plan outlines a strategy for increasing the number of bike lanes across the Rio Grande Valley, including downtown Harlingen and its ETJ, to encourage safe and accessible cycling. Developed with input from the community and stakeholders, the plan highlights key areas:

- Expanding bike lanes along key corridors like Tyler and Harrison Avenues to improve connectivity.
- Enhancing safety with intersection upgrades and bike-friendly infrastructure in high-traffic areas.
- Developing multi-use trails linking Hugh Ramsey Nature Park to Arroyo Park for recreation and eco-tourism.

RGVMPO 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (2020)

RGVMPO's 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan outlines proposed long-range transportation investments in the Rio Grande Valley, including Harlingen. In the plan, current trends are identified, progress over the previous three years is outlined, future projects are explored and project funding is addressed. The 2045 Metropolitan Transportation Plan highlights key goals:

- Creating and maintaining an efficient multimodal Upgrading U.S. Highway 77/I-69E to improve traffic flow and regional connectivity.
- Expanding Valley Metro services to enhance public transit access in Harlingen.
- Developing bike lanes and pedestrian paths to support sustainable transportation options.

RGVMPO Transit Development Plan (2020)

RGVMPO's Transportation Improvement Plan (2020) provides a roadmap to improve public transportation throughout the Rio Grande Valley, including Harlingen. Developed via community engagement and stakeholders, the plan highlights key areas:

- Expanding Valley Metro routes to better serve Harlingen neighborhoods and key destinations.
- Increasing service frequency on routes connecting Harlingen to nearby regional hubs like Brownsville and McAllen.
- Upgrading transit stops and facilities in Harlingen to improve passenger safety and comfort.

RGVMPO Active Transportation Plan (2020)

The RGVMPO Active Transportation Plan (2020) provides a strategic plan to improve walking, biking, and other transportation options in the Rio Grande Valley, including Harlingen. Developed with community input and stakeholder participation, the plan highlights key areas:

- Extending the Arroyo Colorado Trail to connect neighborhoods and parks, enhancing recreation and mobility in Harlingen.
- Adding bike lanes in downtown Harlingen to improve safety and promote active transportation.
- Creating safer pedestrian routes near schools to encourage walking and biking for students.

Physical and Existing Land Use

Natural Features

The City of Harlingen lies almost 30 miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The terrain is relatively flat with gentle slopes along the city's canals and waterways. The Arroyo Colorado watershed flows through the city to Laguna Madre, serving as a shipping route and natural drainage system that protects low-lying areas from flooding.

The Rio Grande Valley's fertile ground is a mixture of sandy loams and clay rich soils supporting a variety of crops from corn to citrus trees. These soil types play a significant role in determining the area's natural vegetation, water absorption, and overall landscape management. Sandy loams are more permeable, allowing for efficient drainage and supporting a variety of native plants, while clay-rich soils in some areas tend to retain water, limiting infiltration and increasing surface runoff after rainfall.

Harlingen's parks and open spaces offer year-round opportunities for outdoor recreation while also providing a habitat for local wildlife including whitetail deer, javelinas, and hundreds of bird species. Located in the Central Fly Zone, where over 50% of birds migrate both in the spring and fall, the city is popular among bird watchers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Constructed Features

Harlingen's urban landscape is defined by a blend of residential, commercial, and recreational constructed elements. The City is primarily comprised of single-family homes with neighborhoods radiating along the key thoroughfares of U.S. Highway 77 and State Highway 107. New multi-family developments have been introduced in various parts of the City but particularly along Ed Carey Drive and Loop 499. Harlingen's primary commercial hubs offering shopping, dining and services are located along these primary thoroughfares. These roads provide essential connectivity throughout Harlingen and link the City to neighboring communities in the Rio Grande Valley region.

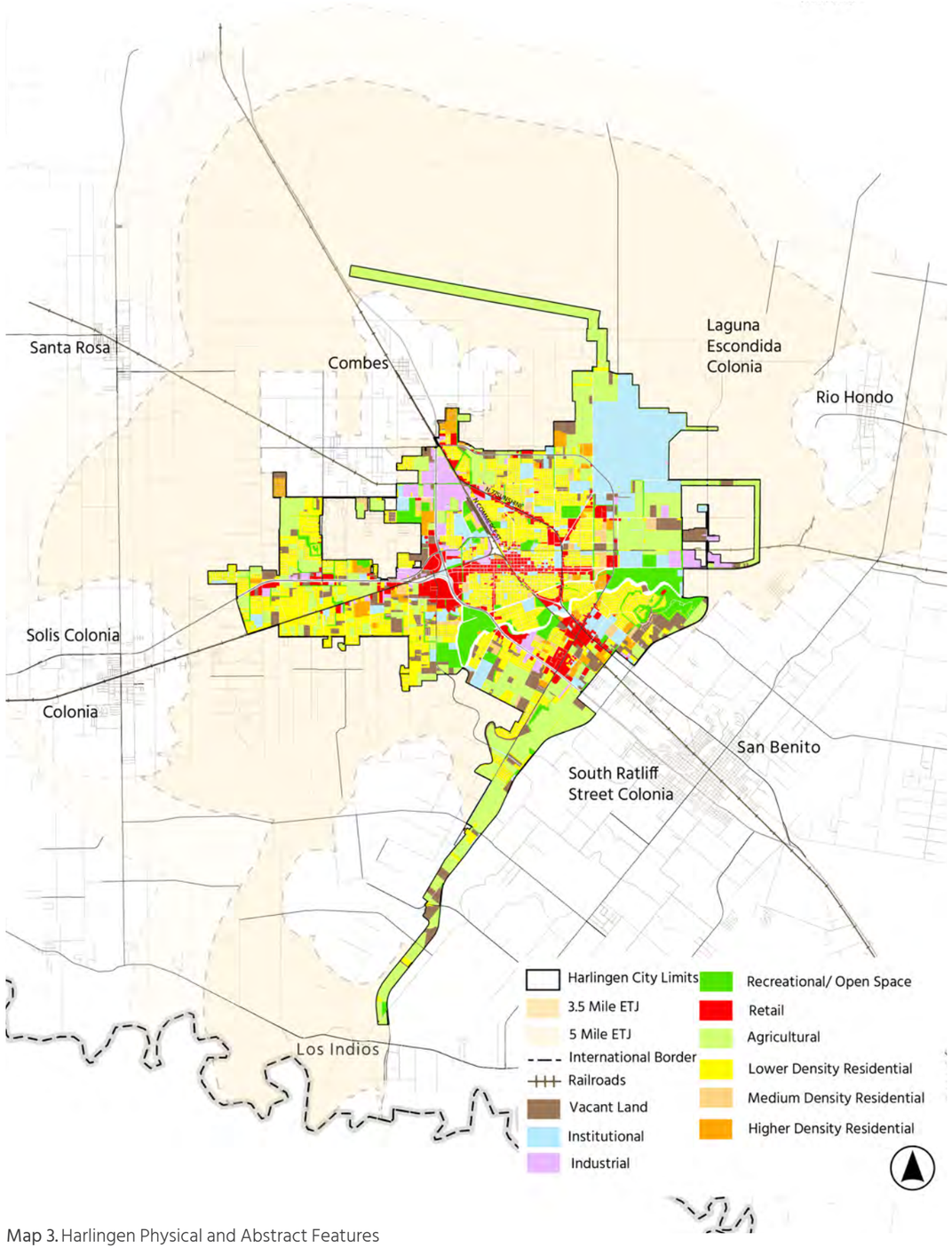
Harlingen's key public amenities, like Pendleton Park and the Harlingen Public Library, are centrally located, making them easily accessible for residents. The City has also invested in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, incorporating sidewalks, shared-use paths, and bike lanes along Ed Carey Drive and Tyler Avenue. These enhancements reflect Harlingen's commitment to walkability and safe, accessible routes for cyclists and pedestrians.

Notable infrastructure projects include upgrades to the City's stormwater drainage system, particularly in flood-prone neighborhoods in close proximity to the Arroyo Colorado. These projects, in collaboration with the Texas Water Development Board and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, reflect Harlingen's efforts to build robust infrastructure that supports future growth while safeguarding residents from water-related challenges.

Jurisdictional Features

Harlingen, Texas, spans approximately 40 square miles and is supported by a range of essential services and infrastructure designed to meet the needs of its residents. The city ensures public safety through over 100 first responders operating across eight fire stations managed by the Harlingen Fire Department.

Water, wastewater, and stormwater services are provided by the Harlingen WaterWorks System (HWW), a municipally managed utility board, ensuring reliable and efficient utility operations throughout the city. Education is a cornerstone of the community, with the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) offering a variety of elementary, middle, and high schools, along with specialized academies to support the educational needs of young residents.



Map 3. Harlingen Physical and Abstract Features

What is Resilience?

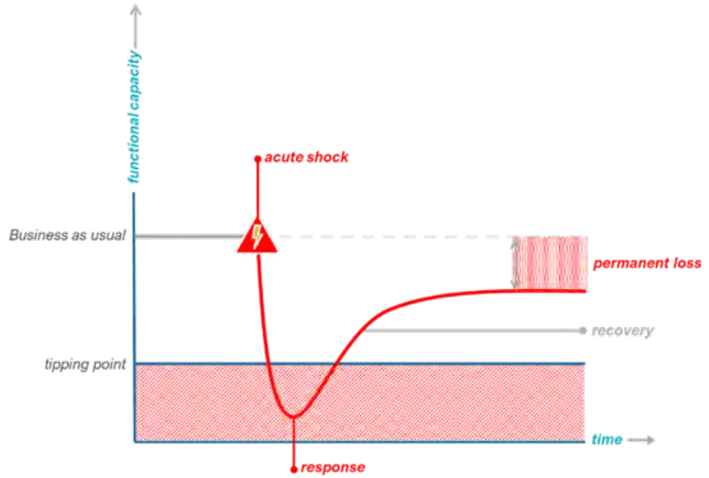
Resilience is defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as the capacity to anticipate and prepare for potential threats and hazards, adjust to evolving conditions, and withstand and quickly recover from disruptions. In planning, resilience considers both sudden shocks, like extreme weather events, and ongoing stressors, such as prolonged water shortages, which a community may face. It also involves identifying the potential social, economic, and environmental impacts of these challenges and exploring strategies for mitigation or adaptation to reduce their adverse effects.



Conventional Recovery Scenario

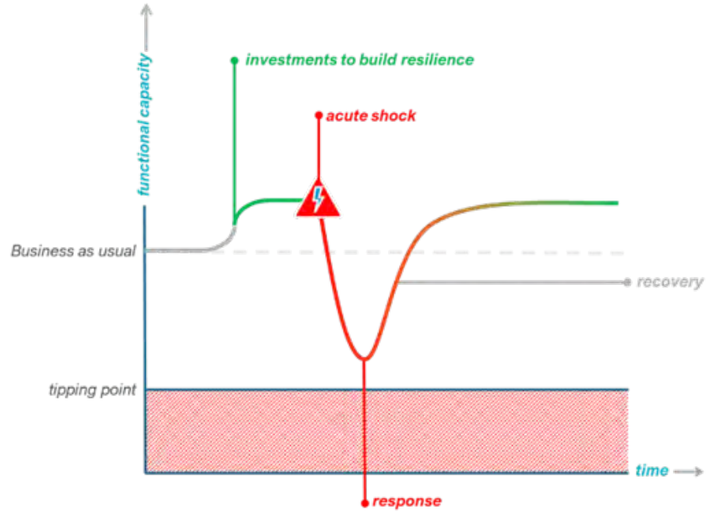
A community system will operate at a steady state (business as usual) until an impact event, such as an acute shock occurs or a long-term stressor finally reaches a breaking point. If the capacity or function of that system drops below a "tipping point", the system or community will attempt to recover but will have experienced permanent losses.

Figure 5. What is resilience?
Adapted from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)



Resilient Recovery Scenario

Investment in resilience projects that improve the overall condition of systems and communities will increase baseline capacity and functional levels prior to an impact event. From this higher baseline, the same event may still require a period of recovery, but irreversible damage and permanent losses are minimized.



Resilience Dashboard

The resilience dashboard offers an overview of the current risk landscape affecting the City of Harlingen. This tool, along with other risk assessment data, should be integrated into the site planning and design stages for any public facility within the city to ensure a comprehensive consideration of potential risks.

Flooding

According to the Cameron County HMAP, between 1996 and 2019, the City of Harlingen experienced nine flooding events, resulting in nearly $221,000 in property damage. Cameron County, which includes Harlingen, has faced seventy-four flooding events. Harlingen is highly vulnerable to flooding, with nineteen critical public facilities located in the floodplain. FEMA defines a critical facility as a structure providing essential services and functions for victim survival, public safety, and disaster recovery. There is a high likelihood of additional flooding events in Harlingen over the next three to four years.

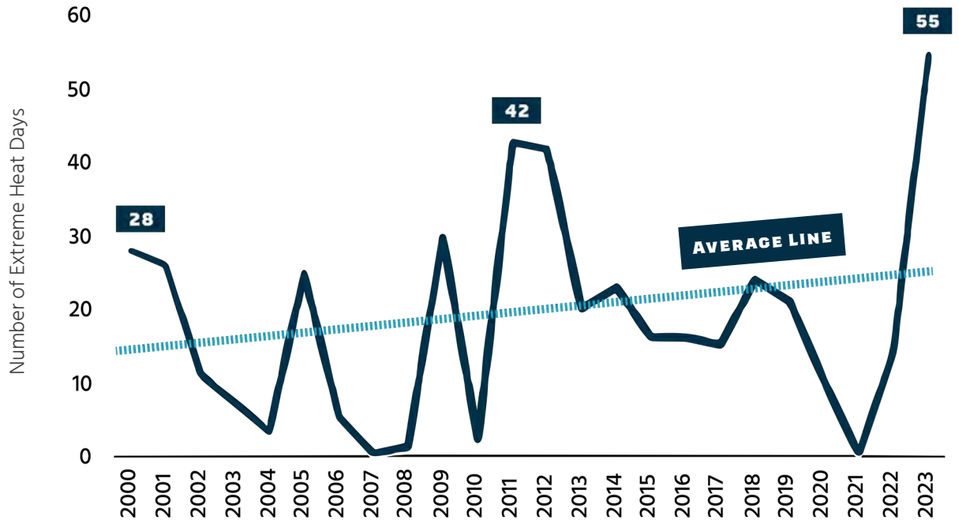
To enhance flood resilience, public facilities should elevate critical utilities and infrastructure and utilize flood-resistant materials during construction. Additionally, implementing effective drainage systems and barriers to redirect floodwaters is essential for increased resilience.

Extreme Heat

As reported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, in 2023, the City of Harlingen experienced 55 days of extreme heat, defined as days with temperatures reaching 100 degrees or higher. Between July 30th and August 20th, the city endured a record-breaking 22 consecutive days of such extreme temperatures. Extreme heat poses significant risks to vulnerable populations, including young children, the elderly, and individuals with poverty level incomes.

Public facilities should be equipped with sufficient cooling systems to manage rising local temperatures. Additionally, community facilities should be designed with the capacity to serve as relief centers for residents facing hardships due to extreme heat events. These centers should provide essential services such as hydration stations, cooling areas, and medical assistance to support vulnerable populations during heatwaves.

Figure 6. Harlingen Historic Extreme Heat Days (>100 Degrees)



Source: NOAA

Winter Storms

As indicated in the Cameron County HMAP, between 1996 and 2019 the county experienced 34 occurrences of winter storm watches, warnings, freezing rain, sleet or wind chill advisories. Most recently in February 2021, the City of Harlingen was subject to Winter Storm Uri which brought average temperatures in the high 20s to low 40s. Public facilities should be designed with high-quality insulation and energy-efficient heating systems to maintain indoor temperatures to serve as relief centers for residents facing hardships due to the extreme cold and winter storm. Additionally, ensuring backup power sources and well-sealed building envelopes can prevent heat loss and maintain operations during power outages.

Wildfire

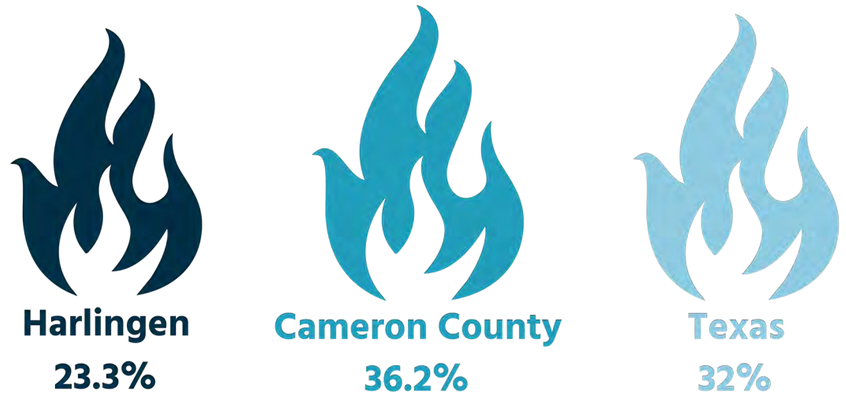
According to the Texas Forest Service, the City of Harlingen experienced three historical wildfire events between 2005 and 2015. It is estimated that 23.3% of the city's population resides within the Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI), a particularly vulnerable area where developed regions meet open grasslands. The Texas A&M Forest Service rates Southwest Harlingen as having a moderate to high risk of wildfire threats.

Key public facilities should be strategically located to ensure adequate access and egress during emergencies. Additionally, maintaining surrounding vegetation is crucial to create a defensible space between structures and potential fires. Wildfire smoke can significantly impact air quality, posing health risks to young children, the elderly, and individuals with asthma, even in areas far from the actual fire. It is also essential to equip these facilities with air filtration systems to mitigate the effects of poor air quality during wildfire events.

Tornado

According to the Cameron County HMAP, between 1953 and 2019, Cameron County, which includes the City of Harlingen, experienced 63 tornado events. The most recent tornado, an EF0, occurred in July 2019. Harlingen is situated in the FEMA Zone III Wind Zone, where tornado winds can reach up to 200 mph. There is a high likelihood of future tornado events occurring, particularly during the spring months. The 2,657 manufactured homes in Harlingen are especially vulnerable to the impacts from tornados. Public facilities should be constructed utilizing reinforced construction techniques and materials, as well as incorporating safe rooms designed to withstand high winds and flying debris prevalent during a tornado event.

Figure 7. Population Distribution in the Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI)



Source: Cameron County, Texas Department of Insurance

Community Values and Vision

A City that Celebrates Culture and Arts

Harlingen residents highly value its cultural diversity and artistic expression. There is a strong desire to promote community events, public art installations, and cultural programs that reflect the city's rich heritage. This vision emphasizes fostering a sense of pride and belonging through vibrant cultural opportunities.

"Cultural events and festivals are a cornerstone of what makes Harlingen unique."

A Thriving Local Economy with Job Opportunities

Residents expressed the need for more local, high-paying jobs and support for small businesses. Enhancing workforce opportunities and attracting diverse industries are key to fostering economic prosperity and retaining talent in Harlingen.

"We need more opportunities for high-wage jobs in Harlingen to support families and encourage young professionals to stay."

A Hub for Eco-Tourism

Survey respondents emphasized the importance of preserving Harlingen's natural assets while enhancing eco-tourism opportunities. Expanding trails, parks, and wildlife areas will strengthen the city's identity as an outdoor recreation destination.

"The Arroyo trails and natural spaces are incredible assets that should be expanded."

Diverse Housing Options for All

There is a strong call for a variety of housing types to meet the needs of all residents, from affordable starter homes to upscale developments. Providing inclusive housing options will ensure that Harlingen remains welcoming to families, seniors, and young professionals alike.

"We need affordable housing options that work for families and young people starting out."

Mobility and Connectivity

Improving transportation options, from walkability to bike paths and public transit, is a major priority for the community. Creating safe and accessible connections throughout the city will enhance quality of life and reduce reliance on personal vehicles.

"It's important to have better sidewalks and bike lanes to make it easier for people to get around safely."

Vibrant Public Spaces and Recreation

Expanding parks, playgrounds, and gathering spaces emerged as a critical value for residents. Harlingen's public spaces should be welcoming, inclusive, and provide opportunities for families to enjoy leisure activities close to home.

"Parks and public spaces are key to making Harlingen a great place to live."



Preliminary Survey Results

STRENGTHS

A community survey was conducted from October 30th, 2024, to January 23rd, 2025, receiving feedback from 155 respondents. The insights gathered through this survey were instrumental in establishing the community values, guiding principles, and overall vision of the Harlingen Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, the survey enabled the identification of strengths and opportunities, helping to shape a comprehensive and forward-looking plan for the city.

Affordability

The City offers a lower cost of living, making it appealing to familes, retirees, and young professionals. This affordability allows residents to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without the high expenses found in other parts of Texas.





Accessibility

Harlingen enjoys a prime location at the center of the Rio Grande Valley, offering significant strategic advantages. Its proximity to the Mexican border facilitates international trade and cultural exchange. The Harlingen International Airport and the Port of Harlingen also enhance the region's local connectivity and economic trade. This strategic positioning makes Harlingen a vital hub for the Rio Grande Valley.

Recreational Assets

The CIty provides 612 acres of parkland and recreational facilities for residents, along with 25.5 miles of trails. These parks, trails, and the Arroyo Colorado contribute in creating a distinctive identity for Harlingen which stands out among the Rio Grande Valey.





Edcuational Opportunities

Harlingen offers a variety of educational opportunities for residents close and nearby, including the Texas State Technical College (TSTC), which offers specialized technical training and degrees, as well as the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV), which has its School of Medicine in Harlingen. These institutions ensure residents have access to excellent educational resources and opportunities.

Sense of Community

Harlingen is known for its welcoming, small-city feel that fosters strong community bonds. Local events and gatherings such as the Lighting of the Arroyo create opportunties for local connection.



OPPORTUNITIES

Vacant Property Development

Utilize underused areas, such as the land near Bass Pro Shops, the Valle Vista Mall and downtown's warehouse district, for economic and residential growth. This economic growth should include an expansion of shopping, dining and entertainment enterprises.





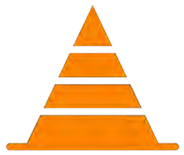
Eco-Tourism Expansion

Capitalize on the Arroyo Colorado, trails, and parks to position Harlingen as a destination for eco-tourism. Attract birding enthusiasts and outdoor adventurers by enhancing accessibility and promoting nature-based activities. Develop guided tours, events, and unique experiences to further showcase the city's natural assets.

Placemaking Initiatives

Create a unique sense of place in Harlingen through public art, trails into downtown, and revitalized public spaces to foster greater opportunties for community interaction and connection.





Infrastructure Improvements

Address the railroad barrier and expand multimodal transit options, including sidewalks, bike paths, and public transportation. In addition to mobility improvements, focus efforts on improved drainage and water infrastructure across Harlingen.

Retail and Dining Growth

Focus on attracting higher-quality retail, sit-down restaurants, entertainment establishments and innovative shopping experiences to meet the changing expectations of residents, as well as to attract residents from neighboring cities.



Survey Results to Goals



THE VALUES COME FROM YOU

Why are they important?

They inform the vision

ALL THE VALUES

FORM THE VISION

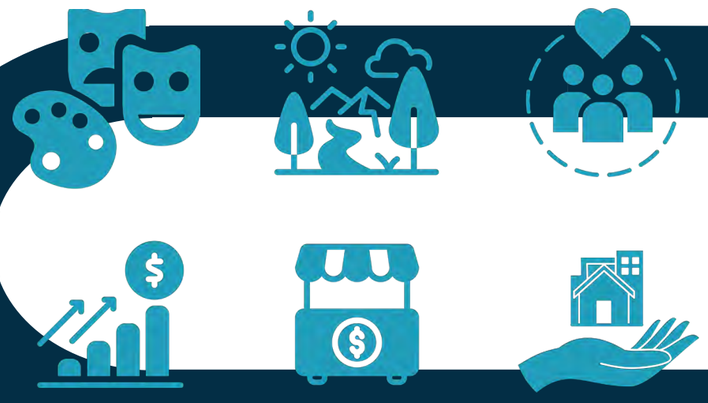
HOW COMMUNITY VISIONS

Why are they important?

Provides the framework for all city plans



INTO 6 VISION ELEMENTS



VISION ELEMENTS

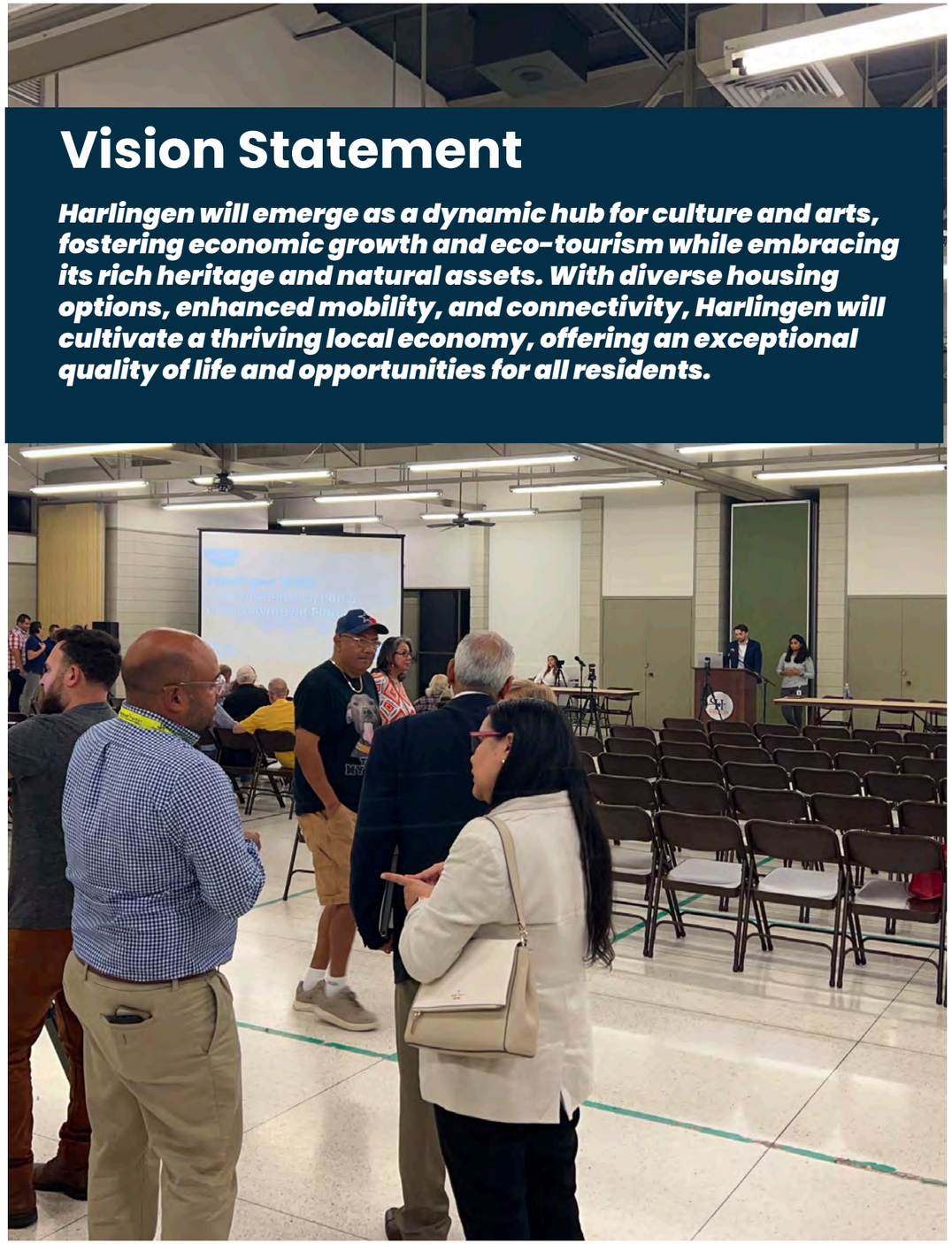
GOALS



Provide direction, set expectations for what the plan can do to help achieve the vision, and establish a decision-making framework

STRATEGIES

Recommended actions to help achieve the goals



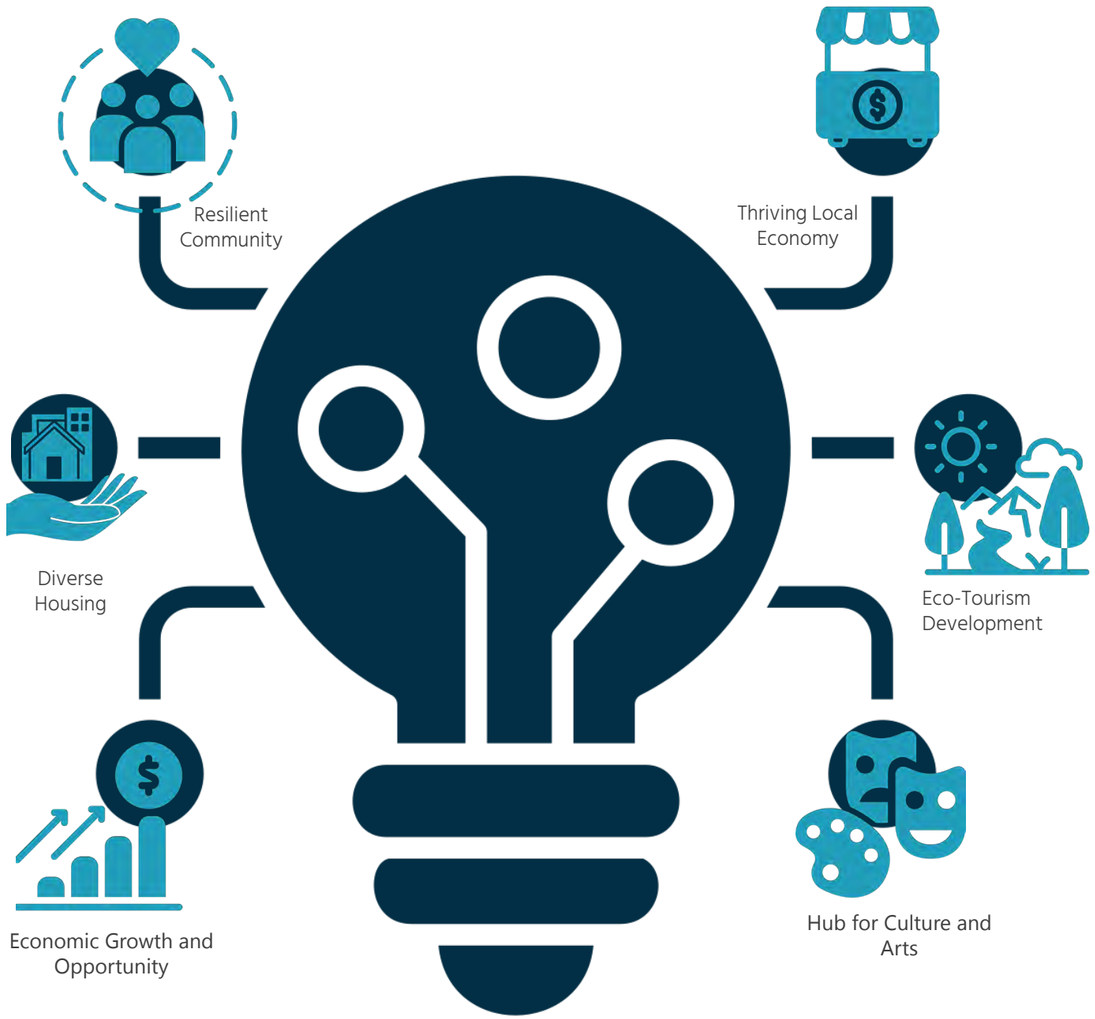
Vision Statement

Harlingen will emerge as a dynamic hub for culture and arts, fostering economic growth and eco-tourism while embracing its rich heritage and natural assets. With diverse housing options, enhanced mobility, and connectivity, Harlingen will cultivate a thriving local economy, offering an exceptional quality of life and opportunities for all residents.

Vision Elements

Your vision for Harlingen

You helped planners identify six key "vision elements" that form the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. These elements guide the plan's goals, ensuring Harlingen's growth aligns with community priorities and long-term aspirations.



Vision Elements



Resilient Community

In 2050

Harlingen aspires to foster a resilient community that supports its people through inclusivity, safety, and robust support systems.



Diverse Housing

In 2050

Harlingen will offer diverse housing options to accommodate all income levels, life stages, and family types.



Economic Growth and Opportunity

In 2050

Harlingen will focus on creating opportunities for economic growth that benefit all residents and future generations.



Thriving Local Economy

In 2050

Harlingen will develop a thriving local economy that attracts businesses, jobs, and investment while supporting small businesses.



Eco-Tourism Development

In 2050

Harlingen will embrace eco-tourism by enhancing its natural assets and promoting sustainable tourism opportunities.



Hub for Culture and Arts

In 2050

Harlingen will become a vibrant hub for cultural and artistic expression, celebrating diversity and creativity.

Goals

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Provide resources and initiatives to address poverty and affordable housing.
- Promote community engagement programs to build trust and inclusivity.
- Expand programs and facilities for youth, families, and seniors to ensure well-being across generations.
- Implement strategies for long-term resilience to economic and climate-related challenges.

- Increase the availability of affordable housing for low- and middle-income families.
- Encourage development of “missing middle” housing such as townhomes, duplexes, and small-lot single-family homes.
- Incentivize the rehabilitation of vacant and underutilized housing.
- Provide rental assistance and homeownership programs.
- Promote mixed-use developments that include residential options for all income levels.
- Align housing strategies with transit-oriented development

- Expand infrastructure for industrial and tech-focused industries.
- Promote workforce development initiatives tailored to local industries.
- Establish partnerships to provide higher education and technical training opportunities.
- Encourage investment in underutilized areas such as downtown and vacant properties.
- Provide financial incentives for small businesses and local entrepreneurs.
- Expand access to public transportation to connect people to job centers.

- Establish incubators and grants to foster small business growth and entrepreneurship.
- Attract diverse industries to create high-paying jobs for residents.
- Develop vibrant commercial nodes with retail, dining, and entertainment.
- Expand mixed-use developments to integrate business, housing, and public spaces.
- Promote tourism through cultural, historical, and eco-tourism attractions.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.

- Expand and enhance the Arroyo Colorado trail system for recreational activities.
- Protect and restore local ecosystems to promote biodiversity.
- Develop new parks and green spaces to attract visitors and support outdoor activities.
- Create eco-tourism programs such as birdwatching and kayaking.
- Partner with local organizations to host eco-friendly festivals and events.
- Promote Harlingen as a destination for sustainable travel through targeted marketing.
- Install interpretive signage in parks and natural areas to educate.

- Invest in public art installations, including murals and sculptures, in key areas like downtown.
- Develop venues for live performances, including theaters and outdoor amphitheaters.
- Support local artists through funding, workshops, and gallery spaces.
- Create an art incubator program to nurture emerging artists and creative professionals.
- Leverage Harlingen’s cultural diversity to promote inclusive cultural events.
- Incorporate cultural elements into urban design, including streetscapes and public spaces.

CHAPTER 2

Land Use and Development

Harlingen in 2050

Sustainable Growth & Development

Promote a balanced mix of land uses that support economic growth, job creation, and housing diversity. Encourage redevelopment of underutilized areas while preserving Harlingen's unique character and identity.

Connected & Inclusive Communities

Enhance accessibility and connectivity by prioritizing mixed-use developments, complete streets, and well-integrated public spaces. Ensure that land use decisions foster walkability, transportation options, and proximity to essential services.

Resilient & Adaptive Land Use Planning

Incorporate sustainable practices, green infrastructure, and disaster resilience strategies into future land use decisions. Support developments that minimize environmental impact and enhance Harlingen's long-term livability.

What We've Heard So Far...

"We need more opportunities for high-wage jobs in Harlingen to support families and encourage young professionals to stay."

"Affordable housing options are essential for making Harlingen a place where everyone can thrive."

"Supporting small businesses and creating more local shopping options will help strengthen our community."

"Public transportation options are lacking, making it hard for people without cars to get to work or school."

"Better infrastructure, like roads and streetlights, is essential for safety and future development"

"We need more diverse housing choices, including single-family homes, townhomes, and apartments."

"Sidewalks and bike lanes are critical for ensuring pedestrian safety and promoting alternative modes of transportation."

"We must focus on developing areas closer to the city core before expanding outward."

"Affordable housing options are crucial for retaining families and younger residents in Harlingen."

In the future, residents want Harlingen to:

- Expand and enhance public spaces.
- Foster economic growth by attracting businesses, creating job opportunities.
- Provide diverse housing options, ensuring affordability and inclusivity.

Top Priorities for City Investment:

- Public Infrastructure.
- Parks and Recreation.
- Economic Development.
- Affordable Housing.
- Cultural Initiatives.

Most critical issue facing Harlingen:

- Lack of job opportunities.
- Insufficient affordable housing options for families and young professionals.
- Transportation challenges.
- The need to protect and enhance natural resources.

Land Use & Resilience Connection

The incorporation of resilience into land use and growth planning involves thoughtfully integrating City development and leveraging growth in a resilient manner to steer responsible development.



Land Use Resilience

Natural Resource Management

Managing natural resources and preserving open spaces with new developments enhances ecological resilience. By prioritizing these considerations, the City can continue to advance environmental resiliency.

Historic Preservation

Preserving historic sites enhances cultural resilience by supporting community pride and fostering economic diversification through thoughtful development initiatives that harness existing assets.

Mixed-Use Development

Fostering a diverse and integrated community fabric supports a blend of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, creating an environment where residents can support local businesses while having access to environmental amenities.

Green Infrastructure

Integrating green infrastructure into land use planning incorporates urban design elements that fortify buildings and infrastructure for resilience against environmental challenges.

Housing Diversity

Planning diverse housing options, such as affordable housing developments and enhanced building standards, boosts social resilience, promotes housing stability, equitable access, and community well-being

Smart Growth

Implementing smart growth principles in landuse planning enhances resilience by optimizing resources, improving transportation efficiency, reducing environmental impacts and ensuring that growth occurs in a resilient manner.

Existing Land Use

Analyzing existing land use is a critical step in comprehensive planning, as it helps understand the distribution of residential, commercial, agricultural, and industrial spaces within the city. In Harlingen, agriculture dominates the landscape, with 5,773 acres (26%) of the city limits dedicated to agricultural uses and 91,832 acres (68%) when including the ETJ. This highlights the city's strong ties to its agricultural roots, which continue to shape its economy and land use patterns.

The second largest land use category within the city limits is low-density residential, accounting for 5,621 acres (25%), reflecting Harlingen's focus on single-family neighborhoods. When expanded to include the ETJ, low-density residential uses occupy 15,338 acres (11%), indicating opportunities for suburban growth and development in surrounding areas.

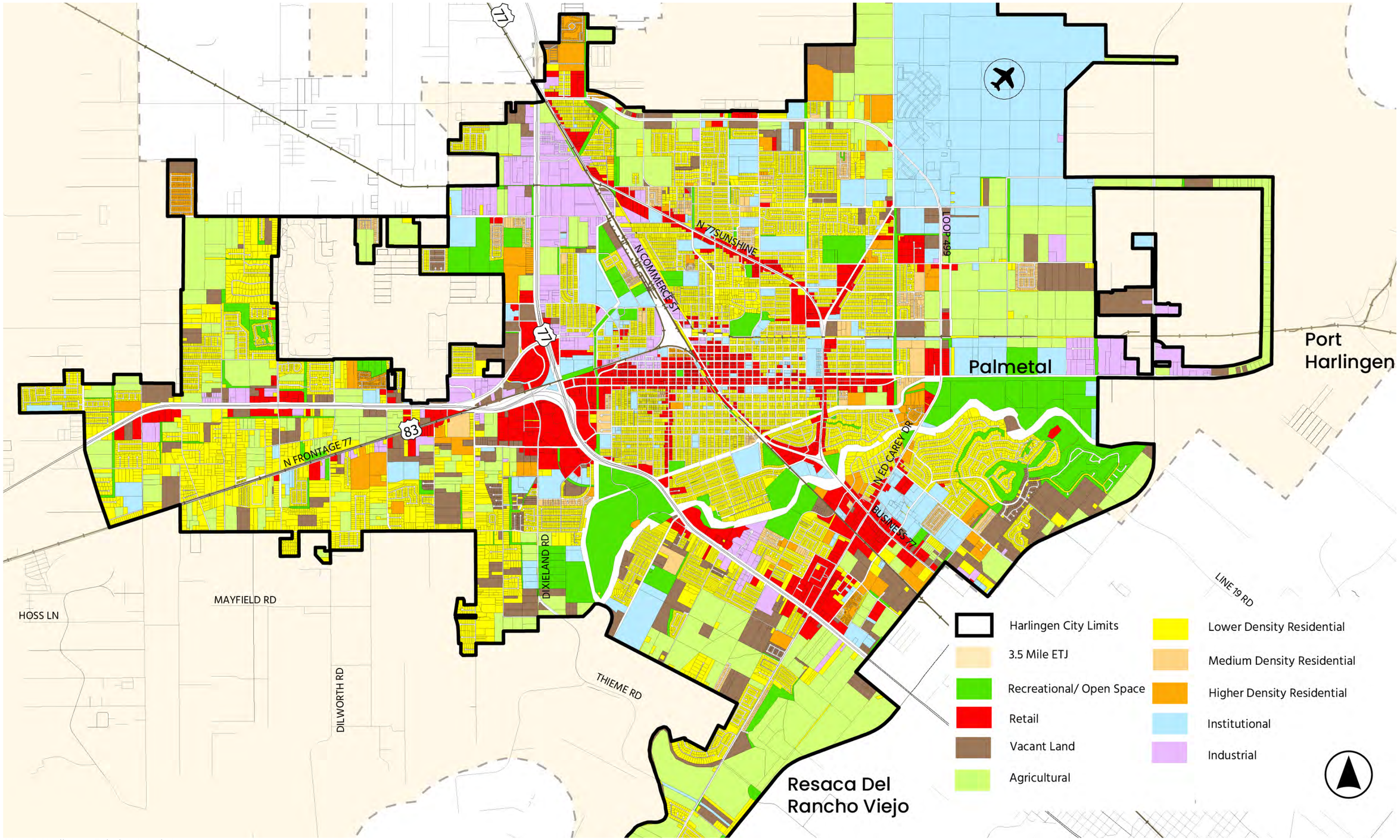
Other significant land uses include institutional and public spaces (15% of city limits), commercial uses (7% of city limits), and vacant or undeveloped land (8% of city limits). These categories reveal opportunities for future development, such as enhancing commercial corridors or utilizing vacant lands for housing or mixed-use projects to support the growing population.

High-density residential and medium-density residential areas are limited within the city, comprising 3% and 2% of city limits, respectively. Industrial uses account for 5% of city limits, with significant potential for expansion to attract industries and boost economic growth.

Harlingen's land use distribution demonstrates its agricultural legacy while highlighting areas for strategic growth in residential, commercial, and industrial sectors. By leveraging its existing land use patterns, the city can ensure sustainable development and balanced growth for its community.

Existing Land Use	City Limits (acres)	City Limits (%)	City Limits + ETJ (acres)	City Limits + ETJ (%)
Agriculture	5,773	26%	91,832	68%
Low Density Residential	5,621	25%	15,338	11%
Institutional/Public	3,397	15%	8,435	6%
Vacant/Undeveloped	1,871	8%	7,992	6%
Open Space	1,852	8%	6,276	5%
Commercial	1,573	7%	1,823	1%
Industrial	1,038	5%	1,586	1%
High Density Residential	712	3%	822	1%
Medium Density Residential	404	2%	524	0%





Map 5. Harlingen Existing Land Use

Population Growth

Insights for Harlingen's Future Development

Analyzing growth patterns in local cities within Texas provides valuable insights when comparing them to the City of Harlingen. This comparative study helps in understanding the broader regional trends, economic dynamics, and social factors that may influence Harlingen's development. By examining the trajectories of regional cities, Harlingen can also gain valuable insights that will aid in proactively planning and accommodating new growth, ensuring the community is equipped to handle increased population demands, infrastructure needs, and economic opportunities effectively. Growth comparisons were selected based on similar relative location to large metros and similar economic pressures to Harlingen. Most of these cities have already seen their first cycle of significant recent growth, which makes them valuable case studies for how the future of Harlingen may look.

Regional Growth Comparison Table

Here is a comparison of Harlingen and nearby Texas cities based on area, population, and 20-year Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR). Data is derived from available sources and approximations:

Figure 8. Regional Growth Comparisons

Texas Cities	City Limits Area (Square Miles)	2000 Population	2010 Population	2020 Population	20-Year CAGR
Harlingen	39.0	57,564	64,849	71,485	1.12%
Brownsville	81.5	139,722	175,023	186,738	1.40%
McAllen	62.3	106,414	129,877	142,210	1.46%
Edinburg	44.0	48,465	77,100	101,170	3.20%
Weslaco	13.1	26,935	35,670	41,868	2.24%

Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data, Decennial Census

Growth Rate Scenarios

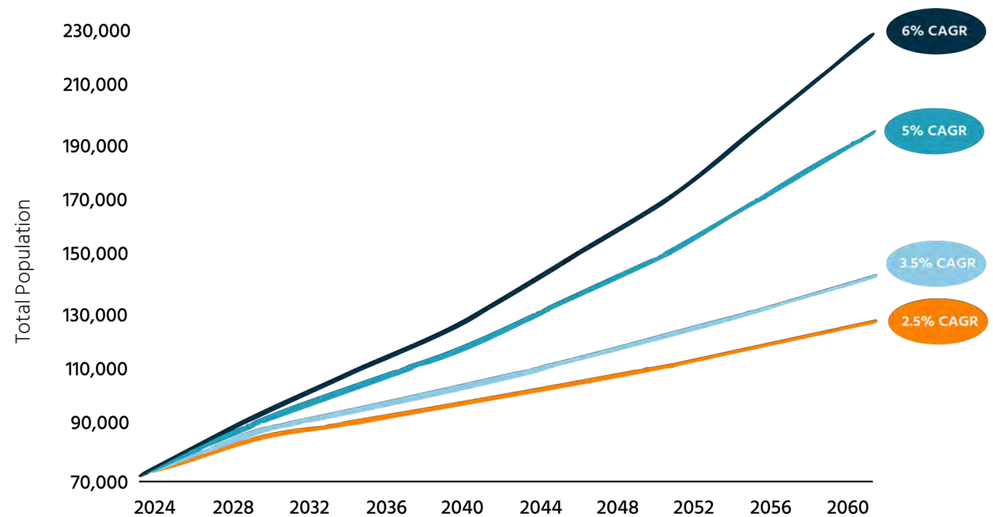
In recent decades, Harlingen's population has grown steadily at just over 1% annually. However, the evolving economic dynamics of the Rio Grande Valley region indicate the potential for higher growth rates. With its strategic location, economic opportunities, and ongoing urban development, annual growth rates between 2.5% and 6% are achievable. The following scenarios illustrate how Harlingen's population might grow if such trends continue through 2060:

Figure 9. Harlingen Growth Scenarios

Year	2.5% CAGR	3.5% CAGR	5% CAGR	6% CAGR
2024	72,273	72,273	72,273	72,273
2030	85,436	88,347	91,482	94,673
2040	97,430	103,561	117,354	126,847
2050	111,072	121,452	150,709	170,242
2060	126,598	142,397	193,564	228,176

Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Figure 10. Harlingen Growth Scenarios Line Graph



Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

CHAPTER 3

COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

Harlingen in 2050



Diverse & Inclusive Housing Options

Encourage a variety of housing types that cater to all income levels, life stages, and family sizes. Promote mixed-use developments that integrate residential spaces with jobs, retail, and services.



Walkable & Connected Neighborhoods

Enhance pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, expand public transit, and create vibrant streetscapes. Prioritize developments that reduce car dependency and improve access to essential amenities.



Strong Sense of Place & Community

Support policies that promote high-quality public spaces, parks, and gathering areas. Encourage development patterns that foster social interaction, local identity, and long-term neighborhood resilience.

What We've Heard So Far...

"We need more affordable housing options for families just starting out."

"The city should encourage development of mixed-use housing to attract young professionals."

"Downsizing options for older residents would help keep them in the community."

"Affordable housing is critical for service industry workers and blue-collar employees."

"Single-family starter homes are in high demand; we should focus on providing more of these."

"Small-lot single-family homes and townhomes could address the gap in the 'missing middle' housing."

"The lack of housing diversity is a barrier to attracting diverse populations to the city."

"Investing in subsidized affordable housing would make Harlingen more accessible for everyone."

"Developers should incorporate higher-end luxury housing to attract executives and high-income workers."

Housing & Resilience Connection

Incorporating housing resilience into growth planning entails strategically aligning city development with a focus on fostering resilient housing solutions. This approach leverages growth to promote responsible housing development practices and supporting community needs.



Housing Resilience

Policy/Finance

Establishing a policy and financial structures that support housing development and maintenance contribute to community resilience by promoting stability and adaptability in response to challenges.

Neighborhood Infrastructure

The physical infrastructure of a community, including transportation, utilities, and public spaces, enhances resilience by providing essential services and facilitates connectivity and accessibility during disruption.

Housing Stock

The physical condition and design of housing units directly impacts resilience by determining their ability to withstand environmental stressors and meet evolving resident needs.

People and Social Capital

Strong social networks and community relationships enhance resilience through support, information sharing, and coordinated responses, fostering community cohesion and reducing vulnerability.

Environmental Resilience

Integrating design principles into housing development minimizes environmental impact, conserves resources, and enhances the longterm ecological resilience of communities, promoting adaptability to environmental changes.

Equity Resilience

Equity in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes fosters social cohesion, reduces disparities, and promotes inclusive development strategies that support the well-being of all residents.

Housing Stock & Supply

Harlingen's housing landscape reflects a diverse mix of household types, with 37% of households including children and 29.4% having seniors. The city's average household size is 2.76 people, highlighting the need for flexible housing options to accommodate families, seniors, and individuals living alone.

The city's housing stock is primarily single-family detached homes, making up 60% of all units, with multi-family housing at 31% and manufactured or other housing types at 7%. While 56.5% of homes are owner-occupied and 43.5% renter-occupied, affordability remains a challenge for many residents. A wider variety of housing types, including townhomes and duplexes, could address these challenges by offering more attainable options and supporting diverse household compositions.

Housing affordability is a critical issue, with median monthly costs at $910 and a median mortgage value of $215,000. The majority of households (28.7%) spend $500-$799 monthly on housing. Introducing "missing middle" housing options, such as duplexes and small-scale apartments, could provide cost-effective alternatives for families and individuals while maintaining the city's character. Expanding these options can help attract young professionals, retain retirees, and meet the needs of multi-generational families.

Recent housing permit trends reveal growth, with 178 single-family home permits and 148 apartment unit permits issued in 2024. This recovery reflects efforts to address housing shortages, but strategic planning is necessary to ensure future developments align with affordability and accessibility goals. Additional focus on mixed-use developments could also bring jobs and amenities closer to residents, further reducing overall household costs.

To support its growing population, Harlingen must diversify its housing options by increasing affordable rentals, expanding homeownership opportunities, and promoting missing middle housing. These efforts will ensure a vibrant and sustainable community that meets the needs of current and future residents.

Figure 11. New Single-Family Homes in 2024



Figure 12. New Multi-Family Units in 2024



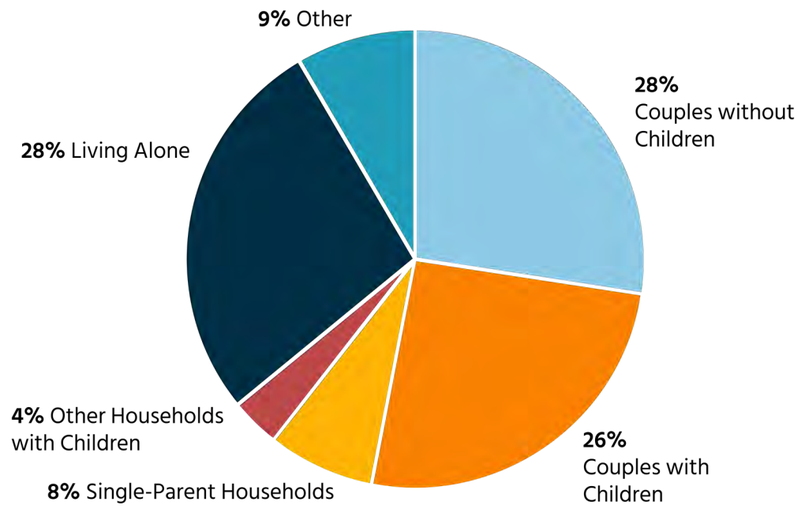
Source: City of Harlingen Planning & Development

Figure 13. Median Home Value



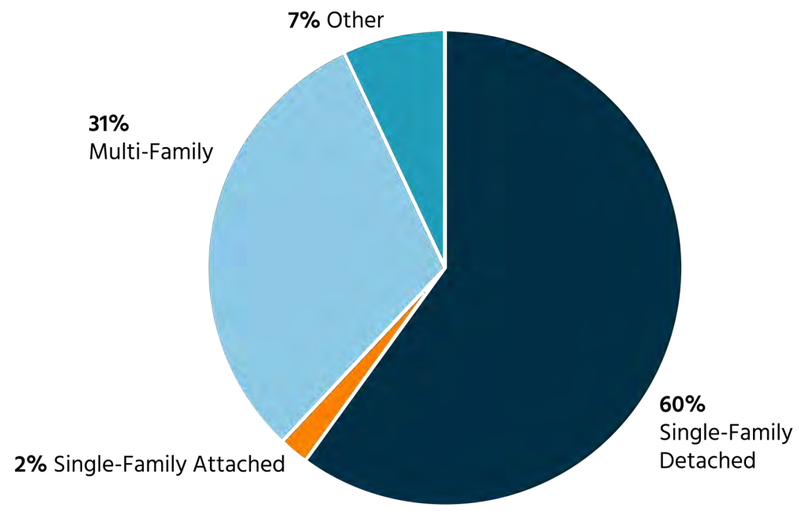
Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 15. Existing Household Makeup



Source: 2018 - 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 14. Existing Housing Mix



Source: 2018 - 2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Housing Affordability

Harlingen's housing affordability presents challenges and opportunities, as revealed by recent statistics from the H+T Index. With a median household income of $38,758 and an average household size of 3.36 people, housing affordability is a key concern for many residents. Housing costs in Harlingen represent 29% of household income on average.

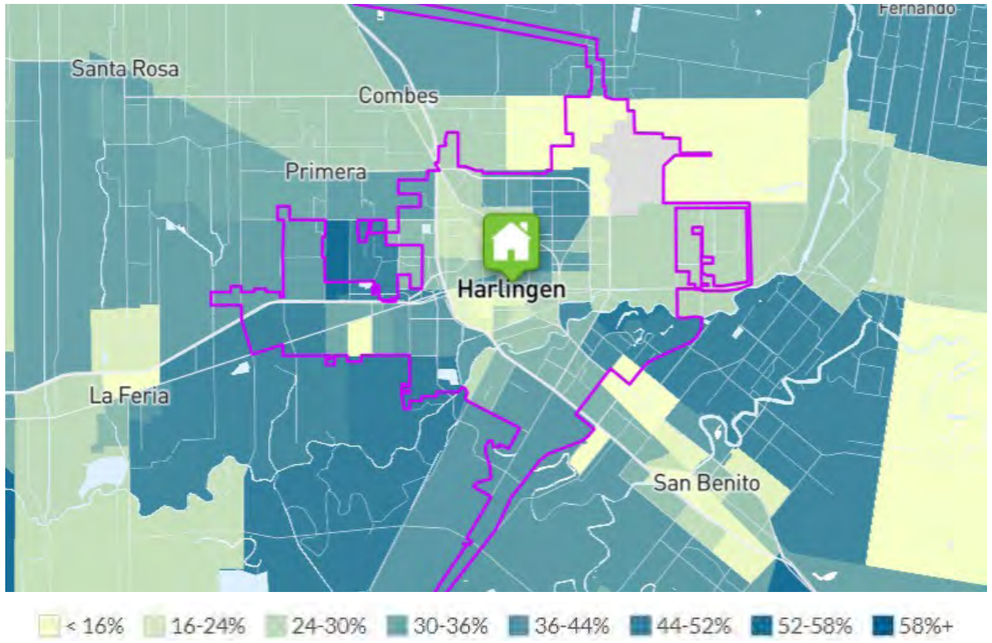
Highlights

- 34.8% spend 24-30% of their income on housing costs.
- 20.9% spend 30-36% of their income, marking the threshold for housing cost burden.
- Nearly 24% fall into the 36-44% range, indicating a substantial portion of residents facing high housing expenses.
- A small fraction, 2.7%, experience extreme housing cost burdens, spending more than 44% of their income on housing.

Recommendations

- Increase Affordable Housing Supply
- Support Rental Assistance Programs
- Promote Mixed-Income Development
- Enhance Public Transportation

Map 6. H+T Index Map - Housing Costs as % of Income



Housing + Transportation Affordability

The H+T Index, which combines housing and transportation costs, provides a clearer view of affordability. Nationally, only 26% of neighborhoods are affordable when transportation costs are included, compared to 55% under the traditional 30% housing-cost benchmark. In Harlingen, households spend an average of 61% of their income on housing and transportation—29% on housing and 32% on transportation—far exceeding the recommended 45% threshold. Transportation costs, the second-largest expense after housing, are driven by Harlingen's reliance on personal vehicles, long commuting distances, and limited access to nearby jobs and services, leading to higher fuel, insurance, and maintenance expenses.

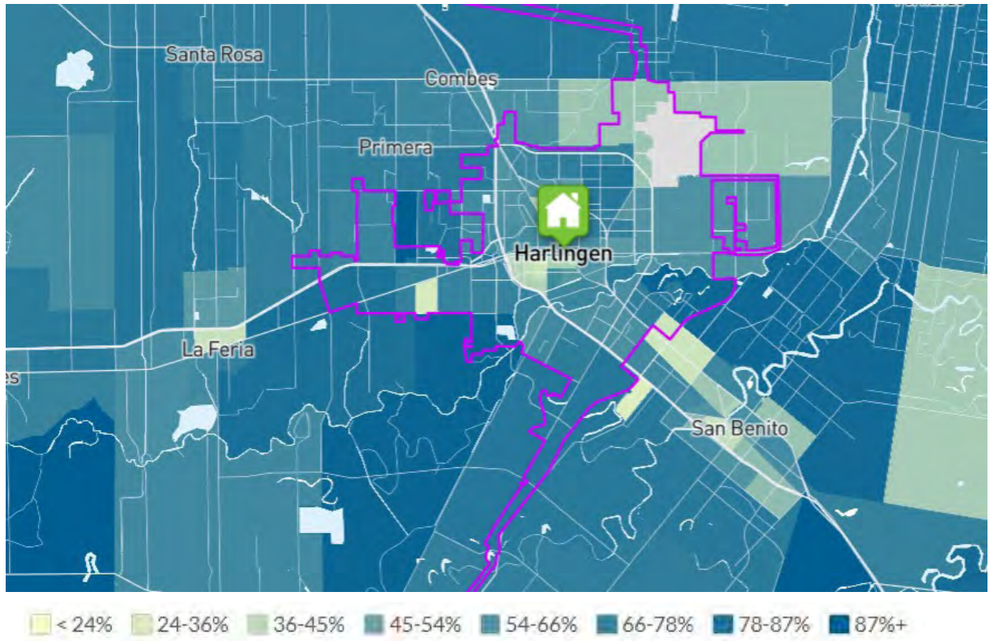
Highlights

- Harlingen's urban and suburban areas have the highest concentration of households spending 54-66% and 66-78% of their income on housing and transportation.
- Nearly 29% of the population spends 66-78% of their income on these combined costs.
- A significant portion, 47% of the population, spends between 54-66%, highlighting how transportation costs strain overall affordability.

Recommendations

- Expanding public transportation options and promoting walkability to reduce car dependency.
- Encouraging mixed-use developments to bring jobs and services closer to residential areas, lowering transportation costs.
- Implementing policies that ensure housing remains affordable while addressing the broader cost burdens

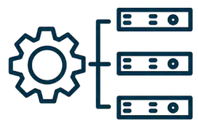
Map 7. H+T Index Map - Housing + Transportation Costs as % of Income



CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Harlingen in 2050



Strengthen & Maintain Essential Infrastructure

Ensure reliable water, sewer, drainage, and transportation systems that meet current needs while supporting future growth and sustainability.



Expand & Modernize Public Facilities

Invest in parks, recreation centers, libraries, and emergency services to enhance accessibility, promote inclusivity, and improve overall community well-being.



Build Resilient & Sustainable Infrastructure

Incorporate green infrastructure, renewable energy, and climate-adaptive solutions to improve long-term reliability, efficiency, and environmental sustainability.

What We've Heard So Far...

"We need improved drainage infrastructure to prevent flooding in neighborhoods and business areas."

"Updating water and sewer systems should be a priority as the city grows to ensure reliable services."

"We'd like to see safer options for walking and biking throughout the city and connections to parks."

"Consider investing in public safety facilities, like new fire stations, to keep up with the city's expansion."

"Funding should be allocated for improving the animal shelter and related services."

"City Hall needs to be expanded or replaced with a more functional building to handle growing city needs."

"Better roadway infrastructure and sidewalks are essential for ensuring safe mobility for residents."

"Efforts to improve water conservation and replace deteriorating utilities are necessary before they become environmental issues."

"Investment in beautifying public spaces and connecting areas with trails would make the city more livable."

Public Facilities/Infrastructure & Resilience Connection

Enhancing resilience in public facilities and infrastructure planning involves aligning development to strengthen the resilience of essential services and infrastructure. This leads to public facilities and infrastructure are capable of meeting the community's evolving needs effectively.



Economic Resilience

Redundancy

Harlingen's infrastructure network should maintain redundancy in critical facilities to ensure that natural or man-made shocks and stressors do not hinder essential services

Flexibility

Public facilities in Harlingen should be designed to adapt to a variety of community functions, enabling easy repurposing for future needs.

Risk Mitigation

Harlingen's public facilities and infrastructure should be designed to withstand major hazards while providing relief from community stressors.

Green Infrastructure

Green infrastructure enhances resilience by managing stormwater, reducing heat, and supporting sustainable urban development.

Maintenance

A plan for continuous and proactive maintenance of public facilities and infrastructure should be included in all development decisions.

Public Involvement

A resilient Harlingen requires active engagement with educated and prepared residents to foster a robust community partnership.

Public Facilities & Services

Public and community facilities are essential for the growth and development of a city like Harlingen. These facilities include critical public safety infrastructure such as police and fire stations, as well as community spaces like libraries, city halls, parks, and recreation centers.

As Harlingen grows, local authorities must evaluate the changing needs of the population and plan strategically for facility development. This ensures that essential services and quality-of-life amenities keep pace with the city's expansion. Collaboration with institutions like the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) and other local organizations helps address shared challenges and maximize opportunities for community development.

For example, Harlingen's fire safety services are managed by a City-funded fire department operating multiple stations, while EMS ensures rapid response to medical emergencies. Through partnerships with external organizations and investments in modern infrastructure, Harlingen continues to prioritize accessible and inclusive community resources.

By fostering collaboration and implementing strategic planning, Harlingen is positioned to remain a vibrant and resilient city that meets the evolving needs of its residents, now and in the future.

Harlingen City Hall

Harlingen City Hall, located at 118 E. Tyler Avenue, serves as the central administrative hub for the city. Built in 1950, the facility oversees local governance, public records, and community planning. As Harlingen grows, City Hall remains a vital space for civic engagement, hosting council meetings, public hearings, and key administrative operations.

Harlingen Public Library

The Harlingen Public Library, located at 410 '76 Drive is a modern facility that has been serving the community since 1993. It provides a wide array of resources, including books, internet access, educational programs, and public meeting spaces. The library is a cornerstone for lifelong learning and community engagement for residents of all ages.

Harlingen Fire Department

The Harlingen Fire Department operates multiple stations, including Fire Station #1 at 1212 N. 1st Street and Fire Station #2 at 601 S. 77 Sunshine Strip. Established to serve a growing population, these stations are equipped with advanced firefighting tools and staffed by trained personnel. The department is dedicated to fire safety, emergency response, and disaster preparedness across the city.

Harlingen Police Department

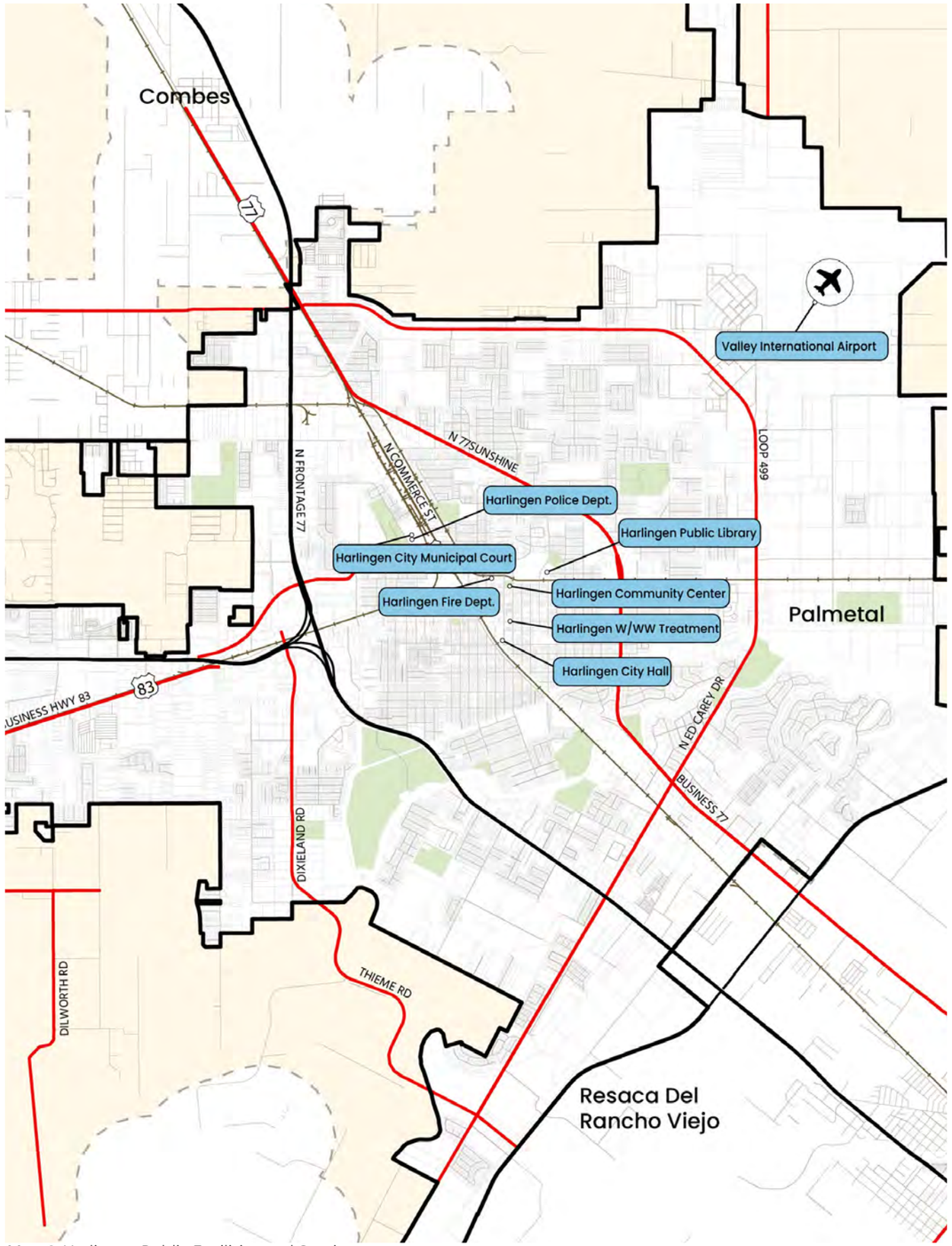
The Harlingen Police Department, located at 1018 Fair Park Boulevard, provides law enforcement services and ensures public safety for over 71,500 residents. With a history spanning over 100 years, the department is committed to crime prevention, community engagement, and maintaining peace through patrol operations and investigative services. The headquarters also supports emergency communications and operational teams to enhance public safety across the city.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

Harlingen EMS, based at 1422 Morgan Boulevard, has been serving the community since 1979, providing emergency medical care and hospital transport. Staffed by skilled paramedics and equipped with advanced life-support ambulances, EMS plays a crucial role in responding to critical situations and strengthening the city's healthcare network.

Valley International Airport

Located at 3002 Heritage Way, Valley International Airport spans 2,400 acres and features an 8,301-foot-long runway (17R/35L). Established in the 1960s, it serves over 250,000 passengers annually, supporting commercial travel and cargo services. The airport is a vital economic engine for Harlingen, boosting regional trade and tourism.



Map 8. Harlingen Public Facilities and Services

Water & Wastewater Systems

Existing Systems

The City of Harlingen's water system includes a network of pipes ranging from 6 to 30 inches in diameter, two water treatment plants (Downtown Water Treatment Plant and MFR Water Treatment Plant), and several pump stations and elevated storage tanks. The system provides clean and reliable water to more than 36,000 connections across the city. The water comes from surface water sources, and the system is designed to meet the needs of residents, businesses, and industries. With projected population growth, the system is being evaluated for additional storage and pumping capacity to ensure long-term reliability and regulatory compliance.

The wastewater system consists of pipes ranging from 6 to 36 inches in diameter, a wastewater treatment plant (Harrison Wastewater Treatment Plant), and 61 lift stations. This system handles wastewater from over 32,000 connections, processing average daily flows and managing peak flows during wet weather events. Planned upgrades focus on reducing inflow and infiltration and expanding treatment capacity to handle future peak wet weather events effectively.

Both the water and wastewater systems are maintained to meet current needs and are being upgraded to prepare for future growth. Harlingen Waterworks System (HWWS), the public water and wastewater utility for the City of Harlingen, most recently updated their Water and Wastewater Master Plan in March 2022. The improvements outlined in the plan aim to enhance system resilience, sustainability, and efficiency, ensuring Harlingen's infrastructure can support its expanding population and economic development.



Harlingen Waterworks System Water Filtration Plant, 2024

Historical Water Demands and Wastewater Flows

Harlingen's historical water demands and wastewater flows provide insight into the system's operational performance and help project future needs. The water demands average 1.49 MGD (Million Gallons per Day), with peak flows reaching up to 2.55 MGD. Wastewater flows average 1.04 MGD, with peak wet weather events significantly increasing flow rates.

Figure 16. Harlingen Historical Water Demands

Year	Connections	Avg. Daily Demand (MGD)	Avg. Daily Demand (Gallons/Connection/ Day)	Max. Day Demand (MGD)	2Max. Day to Avg. Day Peaking Factor
2018	4,828	1.54	319	2.26	1.47
2019	4,910	1.49	303	2.14	1.44
2020	4,963	1.52	306	2.20	1.45
2021	5,094	1.30	255	2.55	1.96
2022	5,210	1.49	286	2.17	1.46
2023	5,333	1.60	299	2.45	1.53
Average	-	1.49	295	-	1.55
Max	-	-	319	2.55	1.96

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 17. Harlingen Historical Wastewater Demands

Year	Connections	Avg. Annual Daily Flow (MGD)	Avg. Annual Daily Flow (Gallons/Connection/ Day)	Peak Wet Weather Flow (MGD)	Wet Weather Peaking Factor
2018	4,615	1.03	223	4.31	4.18
2019	4,678	1.01	216	2.94	2.91
2020	4,714	1.02	216	3.70	3.63
2021	4,814	1.11	231	4.48	4.04
2022	4,896	1.04	212	2.38	3.25
2023	4,983	1.06	213	4.48	4.04
Average	-	1.04	219	-	3.60
Max	-	-	231	4.48	4.18

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Water Demand and Wastewater Flow Projections

Water Demand and Wastewater Flow Projections for Harlingen

The City of Harlingen is anticipated to experience steady growth over the next few decades. To prepare for this, water and wastewater demand projections were developed using growth scenarios outlined in the master plan. These scenarios include projected compound annual growth rates (CAGR) of 2.5%, 5%, and 6%. The projections are based on the current number of water and wastewater connections and estimated population increases.

Water Connections

Water demand projections were calculated by considering average daily water use, peak daily demand, and peak hour demand. The average day rate reflects the daily amount of water used per connection and is key to estimating overall system needs. Maximum day demand identifies the highest water use day in a year and is critical for sizing treatment and storage facilities. Peak hour demand accounts for the largest one-hour use period and helps design pumping and transmission systems. Harlingen water system must be designed to handle these fluctuations efficiently. As the city grows, meeting both peak hour demands and maintaining a uniform and reliable water supply will require careful planning, including investments in system storage and transmission mains.

Wastewater Connections

Harlingen's water system is projected to grow steadily over the next decade, with increasing connections and rising demands. The system must handle higher average daily use, peak day demands, and peak hour demands as population and development expand. Upgrades to water treatment plants, storage tanks, and distribution lines will be essential to meet future needs. Ensuring reliable service will require strategic investments in system redundancy and capacity expansion. These improvements will help maintain compliance and ensure sustainability for Harlingen's growing population.

Figure 18. Harlingen Water Connections

Year	2.5% Growth Rate	5% Growth Rate	6% Growth Rate
2024	36,985	38,012	38,400
2029	41,761	44,126	45,300
2034	47,118	51,236	52,890

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 19. Harlingen Wastewater Connections

Year	2.5% Growth Rate	5% Growth Rate	6% Growth Rate
2024	33,200	34,200	34,600
2029	37,500	39,800	40,500
2034	42,300	46,200	47,300

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 20. Harlingen Water System Design Criteria

Criteria	Value
Average Day Demand per Connection	310
Maximum Day to Average Day Peaking Factor	1.65
Peak Hour to Maximum Day Peaking Factor	2.00

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

Figure 21. Harlingen Wastewater System Design Criteria

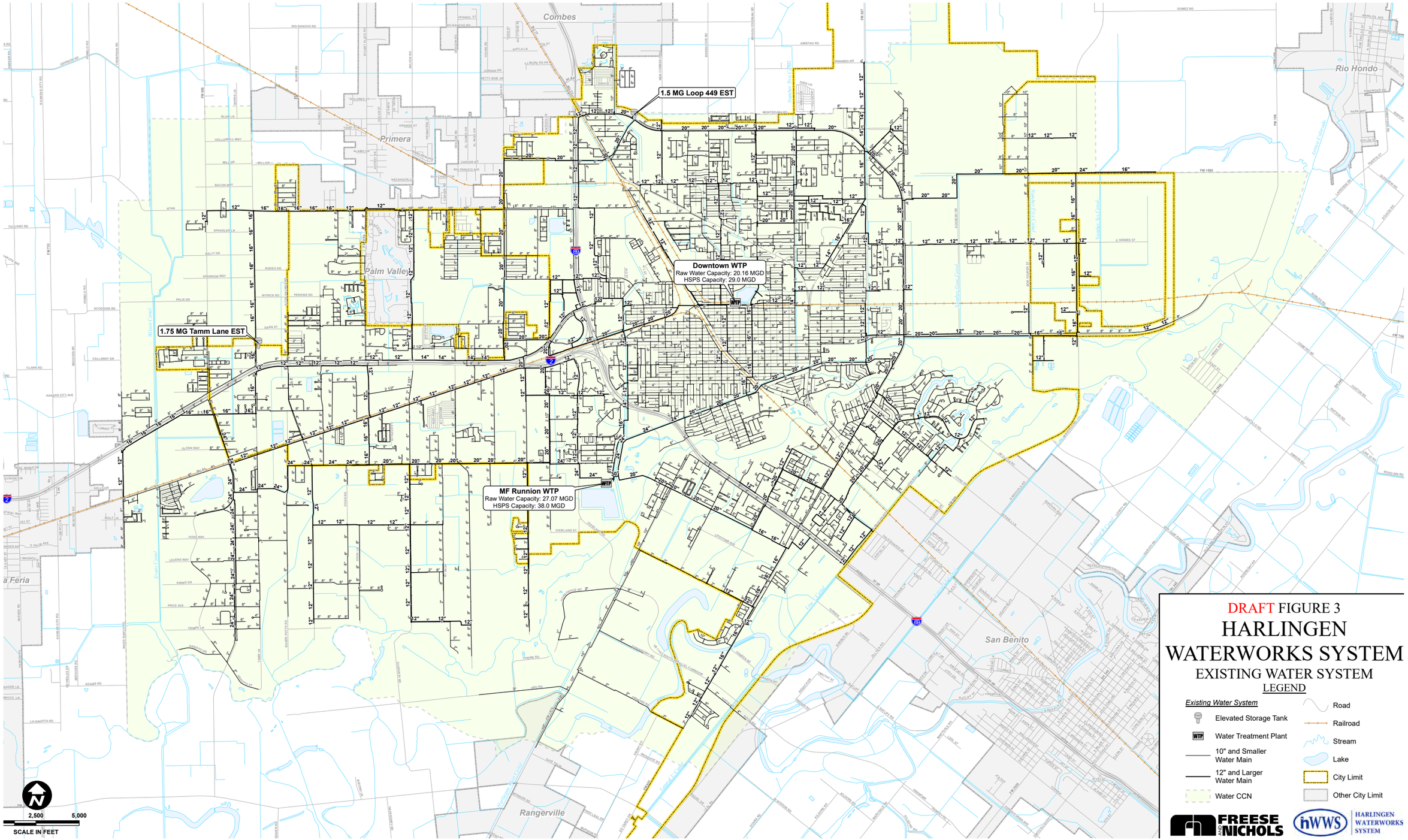
Criteria	Value
Average Day Flow per Connection	225
Peak 2-hour to Average Day Peaking Factor	4.00

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)

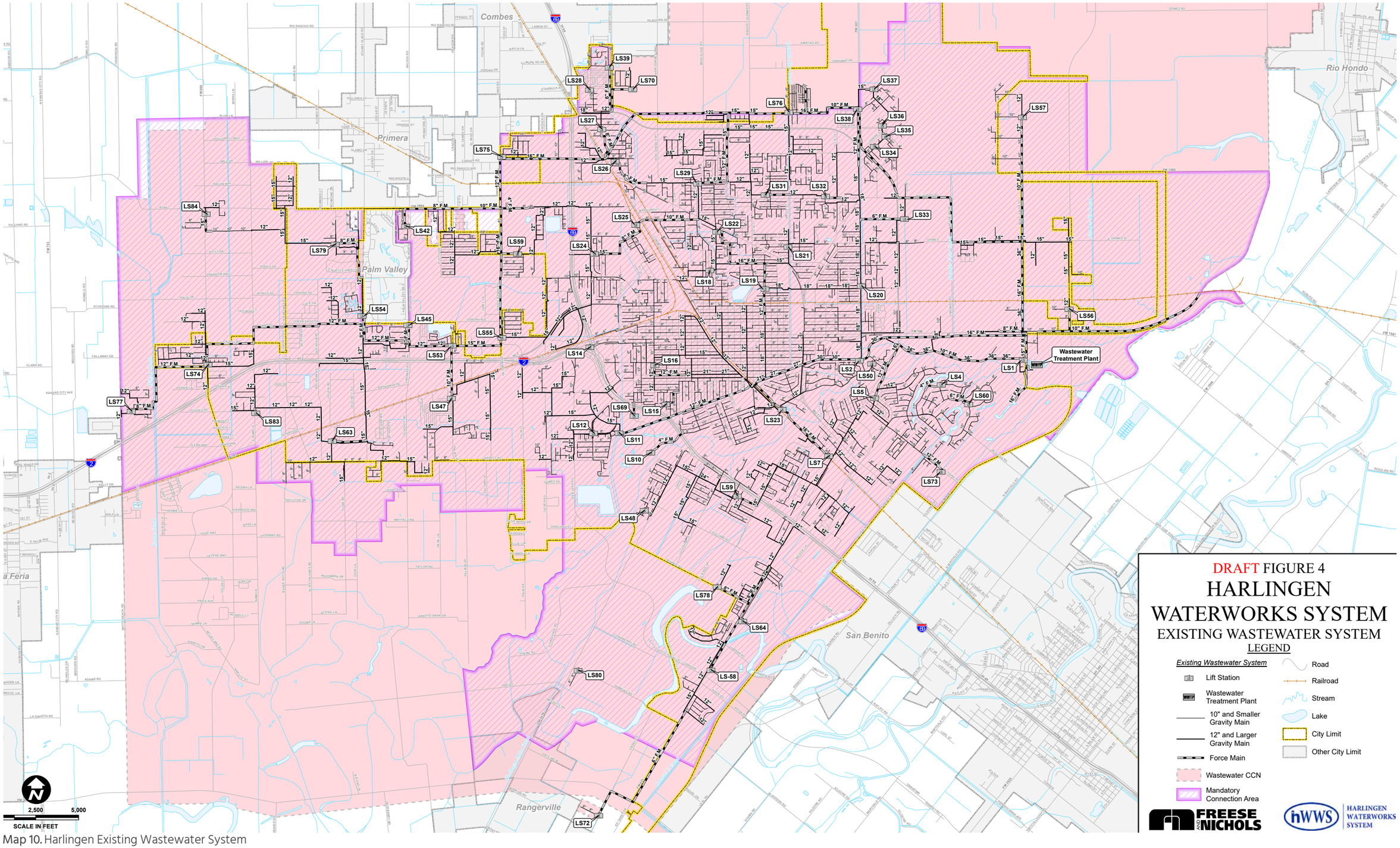
Figure 22. Harlingen Projected Water Demands

Connections	Average Day Demand (MGD)	Maximum Day Demand (MGD)	Peak Hour Demand (MGD)
2.5% Growth Rate			
2020	13.89	23.26	46.52
2025	14.98	25.11	50.23
2030	16.16	27.13	54.25
2040	18.83	31.71	63.41
5% Growth Rate			
2020	13.89	23.26	46.52
2025	14.98	25.11	50.23
2030	16.16	27.13	54.25
2040	18.83	31.71	63.41
6% Growth Rate			
2020	13.89	23.26	46.52
2025	14.98	25.11	50.23
2030	16.16	27.13	54.25
2040	18.83	31.71	63.41

Source: Harlingen Waterworks System Water and Wastewater Master Plan (2022)



Map 9. Harlingen Existing Water System



Map 10. Harlingen Existing Wastewater System

CHAPTER 5

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Harlingen in 2050



Strengthen Local Business & Entrepreneurship

Support small businesses, startups, and local industries by providing financial incentives, workforce training, and incubator programs.



Leverage Assets to Drive Sustainable Growth

Promote strategic development that enhances Harlingen's unique character, including downtown revitalization, tourism, and infrastructure investments.



Foster a Resilient & Diverse Economy

Encourage economic diversification by attracting industries in healthcare, technology, and manufacturing while maintaining a strong retail and service sector.

What We've Heard So Far...

"We need more job opportunities within the city, especially higher-wage jobs."

"Support local businesses and entrepreneurs so we can keep money in Harlingen."

"Rising rent and inflation are making it hard for small businesses to survive."

"Attracting new industries and employers will help retain young professionals."

"Downtown Harlingen has so much potential—let's make it a real destination."

"The city should invest in workforce training programs to match local job needs."

"Promoting Harlingen's cultural and eco-tourism opportunities will bring more visitors and revenue."

"A strong bi-national economy will help Harlingen thrive—we need to support cross-border trade."

"Affordable spaces for start-ups and micro-businesses will help grow Harlingen's economy."

Economics & Resilience Connection

Incorporating housing resilience into growth planning entails strategically aligning city development with a focus on fostering resilient housing solutions. This approach leverages growth to promote responsible housing development practices and supporting community needs.



Economic Resilience

Education

Expanding access to quality education, vocational training, and workforce development programs will equip Harlingen residents with the skills needed for stable, well-paying jobs, fostering long-term economic resilience.

Mobility

Limited transportation options make it difficult for residents without personal vehicles to access jobs, education, and essential services. Enhancing public transit and walkability will improve economic opportunities for all.

Recovery

Harlingen's small businesses and lower-income communities face challenges in rebuilding after natural disasters. Faster access to funding, disaster preparedness plans, and resilient infrastructure will support long-term recovery.

Risk Disparities

Many low-income households and small businesses in Harlingen are at risk of being located in flood-prone or underinvested areas. Strategic planning and investment in infrastructure can help mitigate these disparities and protect economic assets

Health Disparities

Limited access to healthcare and wellness services can strain household finances, making it harder for families to recover from economic shocks. Strengthening health infrastructure will improve community resilience.

Human Capital

Investing in Harlingen's workforce, entrepreneurship programs, and small business support will drive economic growth, encourage innovation, and strengthen the city's ability to adapt to future disruptions.

Background Information

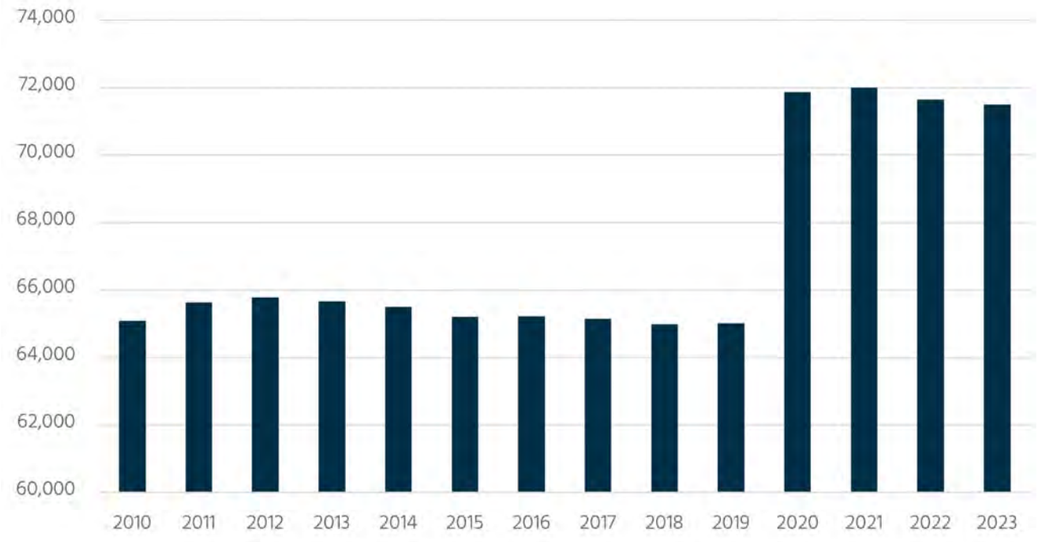
As Harlingen seeks to broaden its economy and build a more dynamic employment base, it finds itself in a favorable position. Demographics trends that include a growing regional population and local expansion at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine create opportunities for businesses recruitment and retention. The Socioeconomic Analysis evaluates demographic and economic trends emerging in Harlingen and Cameron County. The results of the analysis can help the City of Harlingen build long-term economic resiliency and sustainability.

Demographic & Economic Profile

The City of Harlingen is the 2nd most populous city in Cameron County. Since 2010, Harlingen's population has increased by 9.8 percent, adding more than 6,400 new residents. The 2023 population estimate for Harlingen is 71,510 residents. Harlingen has consistently represented 17.0 percent of Cameron County's overall population. As a point of reference, Cameron County's population expanded by 4.7 percent over this period. Harlingen's population growth is above the city of Brownsville, but well behind the much faster State of Texas.

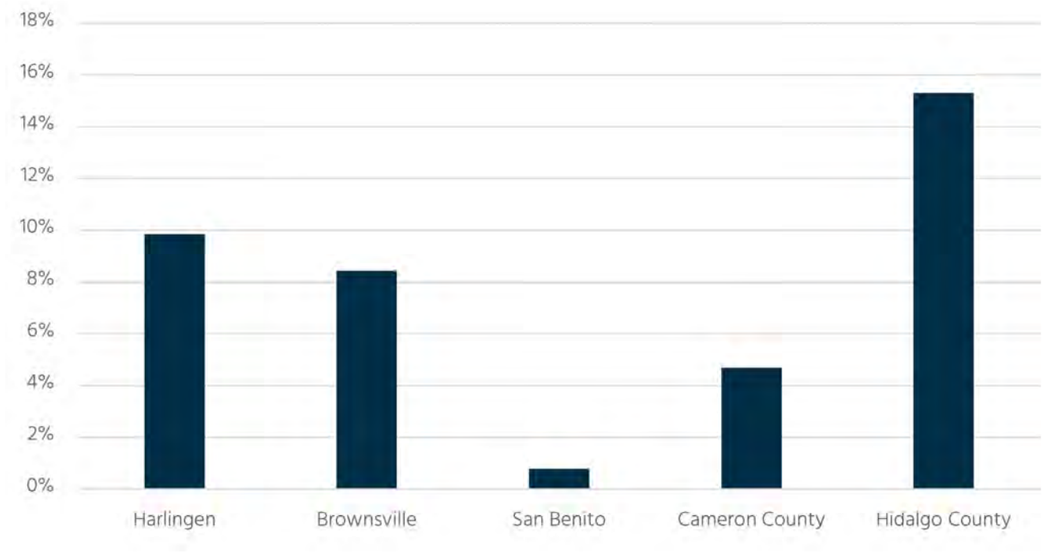
Over the next 10 years, the Texas Water Development Board projects the Harlingen Water User Group area will add just 5,000 residents. If trends hold, this translates into 2,500 new Harlingen residents. In the short term, Harlingen should continue to grow at a compound annual growth rate of less than 1.0 percent per year. This will create demand for local goods and services, but might not create enough excess labor supply to recruit a large employer.

Figure 23. Harlingen Population Growth



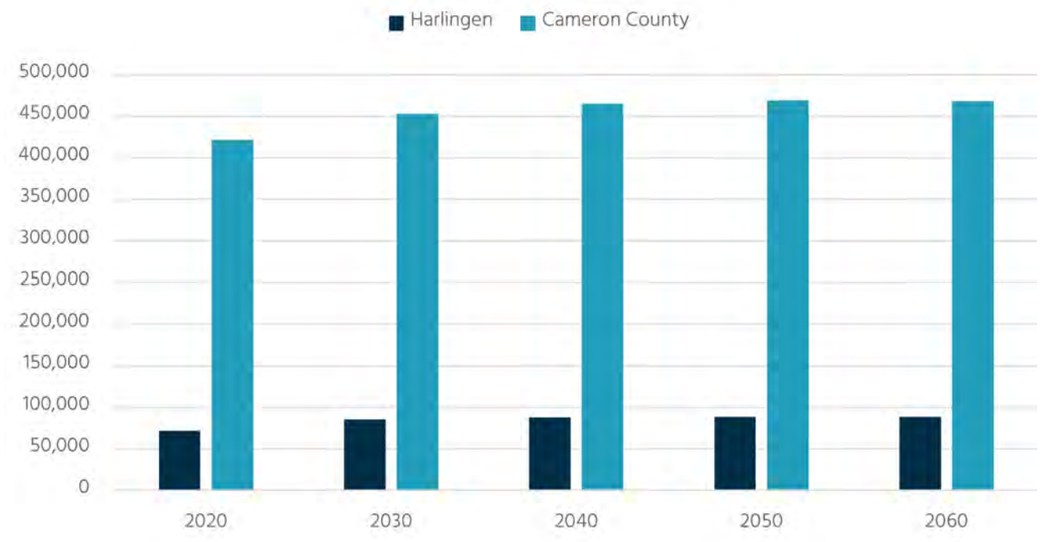
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 24. Regional Population Growth (2010 to 2023)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 25. Regional Population Forecast (2020 to 2060)



Source: Texas Water Development Board

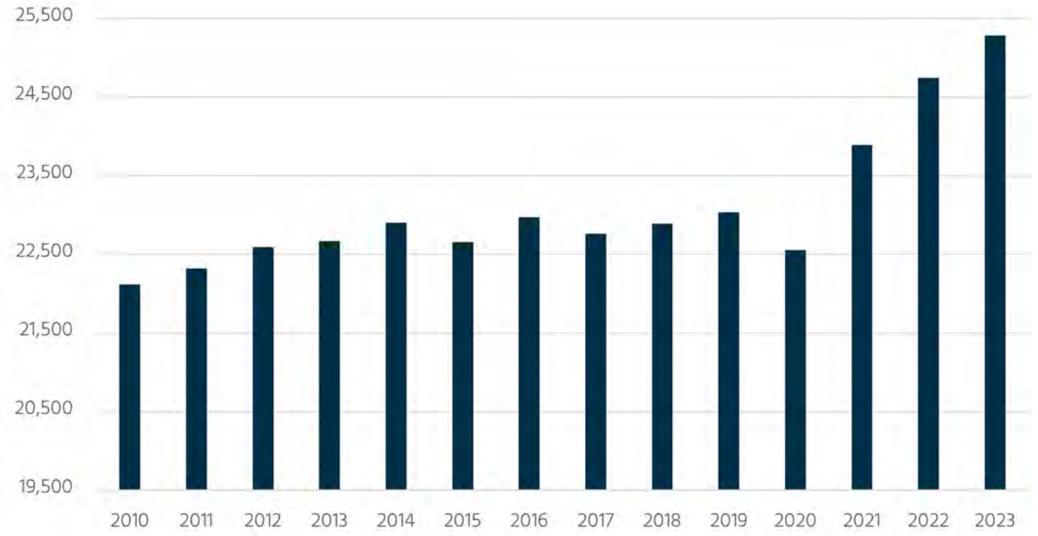
Harlingen-Based Employment

Total employment at businesses located within Harlingen has expanded over the past decade. In 2022, there were approximately 41,811 jobs at Harlingen-based employers. Between 2010 and 2022, Harlingen-based companies added 2,400 new jobs, a growth rate of 6.2 percent. Since 2010, employment opportunities at Harlingen-based companies have grown slower than overall population.

Based on a review of Cameron County establishment startups and exits datasets, businesses do not appear to have unique challenges in the Harlingen area. About the same percentage of establishments open and close in Cameron County as elsewhere in the state. This indicates the region has a favorable businesses climate compared to other places in Texas. Given the limited labor force, promoting small business start-ups and entrepreneurship is an opportunity to attract small firms to the area, and diversify employment opportunities.

A location quotient (LQ) is an analytical statistic that measures a region's industrial specialization relative to the United States. An LQ is computed as an industry's share of total regional employment divided by the industry's share of the national total employment. Using employment data from ESRI, it was possible to compute Harlingen's LQ. Harlingen has relatively strong concentrations in Health Care & Social Assistance, Accommodation and Food Services, Retail Trade, and Utilities.

Figure 26. Employed Harlingen Residents



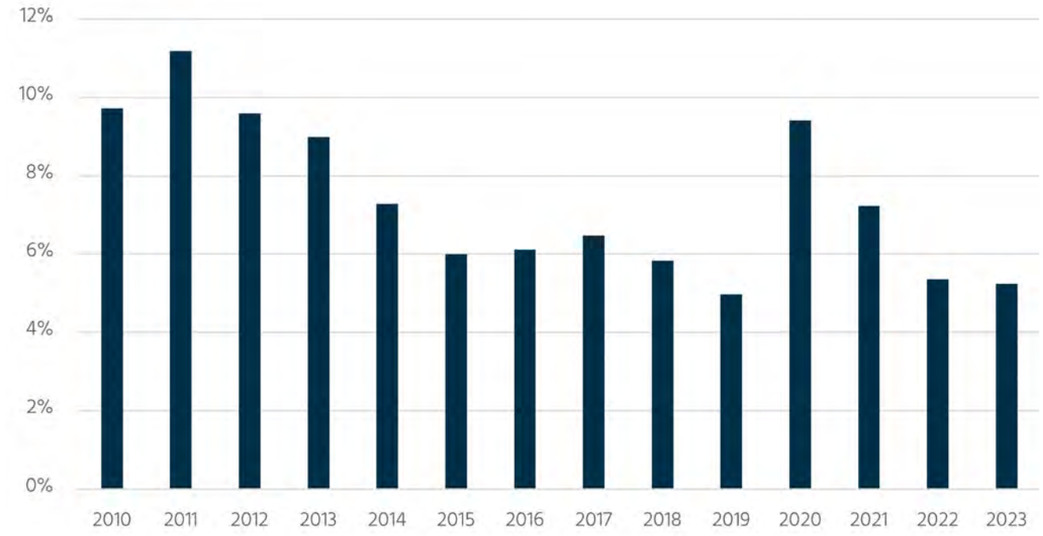
Source: Texas Workforce Commission

Labor Force Participation

The number of Harlingen residents in the labor force has increased over the past decade but at a slower pace than population growth. In 2023, the Texas Workforce Commission reported that 31,150 Harlingen residents were in the labor force. The city's unemployment rate for 2023 was 5.2 percent, significantly below the peak of 11.2 percent in 2011. Given the large number of Harlingen residents under 14 years of age or over 65 years of age, only 58.0 percent of the population is categorized as in the labor force, well below statewide labor force participation rate of 64.7 percent. However, the younger demographic does represent long-term labor supply that might be drawn into the labor market if the right employment opportunities and training existed.

Another metric used to evaluate the health of a labor market is the share of local jobs held by residents. This can be evaluated using two statistics: 1) the % of Harlingen residents who work in the city and 2) the % of overall jobs in the city held by Harlingen residents. In 2023, 65.5 percent of Harlingen residents indicated they worked at a job within their place of residence. This implies about 10,000 residents commute outside the city each day for work. Based on data from the US Census Bureau LEHD program, 73.1 percent of employees at Harlingen-based businesses (or 30,000 workers) commute to the city each day for work. This indicates Harlingen-based businesses can draw upon a regional labor market without overly relying on existing residents.

Figure 27. Unemployment Rate for Harlingen Residents



Source: Texas Workforce Commission

Figure 28. Employment Levels by Business Establishment Location (2022)

NAICS	Description	Harlingen	Cameron County	State of Texas
11	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	168	531	58,872
21	Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	45	99	192,735
22	Utilities	221	754	85,217
23	Construction	1,127	3,983	808,876
31-33	Manufacturing	580	7,178	924,909
42	Wholesale Trade	925	3,161	629,103
44-45	Retail Trade	4,808	16,644	1,381,623
48-49	Transportation and Warehousing	1,165	4,739	634,074
51	Information	994	1,392	233,968
52	Finance and Insurance	1,003	2,968	608,776
53	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	527	1,704	244,840
54	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	892	4,105	986,665
55	Management of Companies and Enterprises	31	652	171,279
56	Administrative and Support Services	3,865	9,778	902,896
61	Educational Services	3,788	17,377	1,283,229
62	Health Care and Social Assistance	15,018	42,816	1,737,154
71	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	337	1,358	167,005
72	Accommodation and Food Services	3,899	14,543	1,191,187
81	Other Services (except Public Administration)	914	2,701	353,921
92	Public Administration	1,504	5,528	395,704
	Total	41,811	142,011	12,992,033

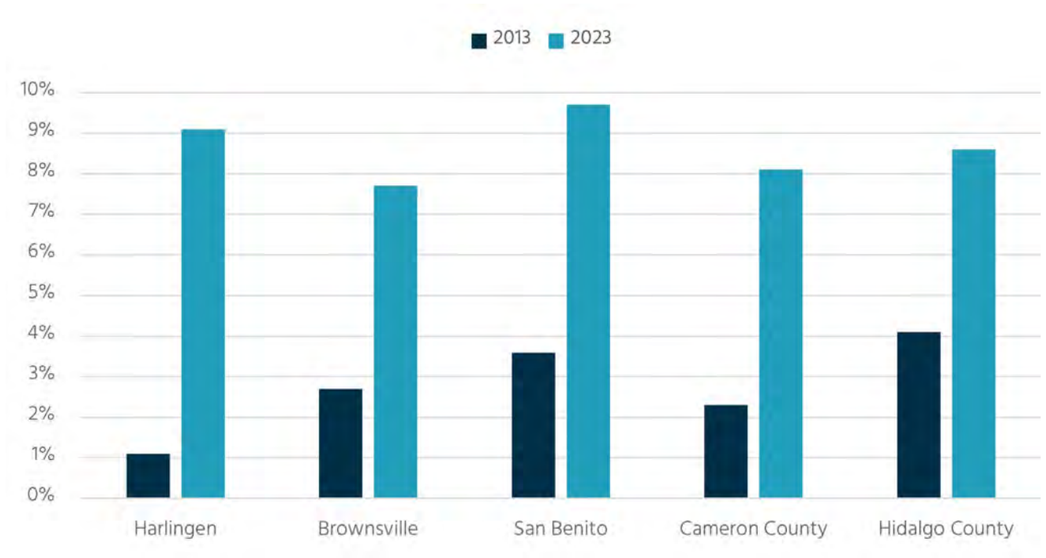
Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

Where Residents Work

Based on full-time employment data for full-time workers over the age of 16, nearly one third of Harlingen residents work in the Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance sector. This is not surprising given the city is home to several large hospitals as well as Texas State Technical College Harlingen. The region is below the statewide average for high paying industries such as professional services, finance, and manufacturing.

For 2023, 9.1 percent of Harlingen residents worked from home. This is much higher than the 2013 figure of 1.1 percent. This is a larger percentage than the averages for Brownsville and Cameron County. Remote or work-from-home jobs tend to be professional services jobs that pay high wages. However, more and more companies are asking employees to return to the office a few days a week. While many smaller and rural communities across the country attracted remote workers during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this trend appears to be reversing.

Figure 29. Percent of People Who Worked from Home (2013 and 2023)

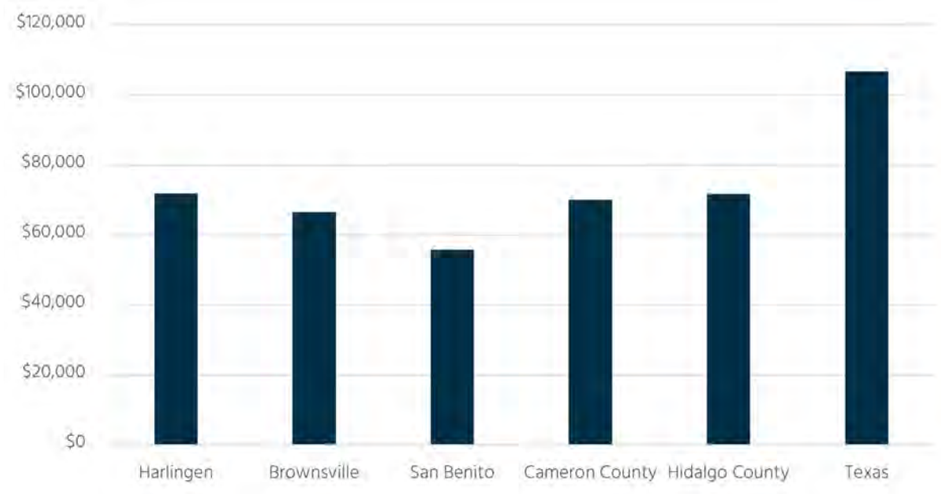


Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Wages & Income

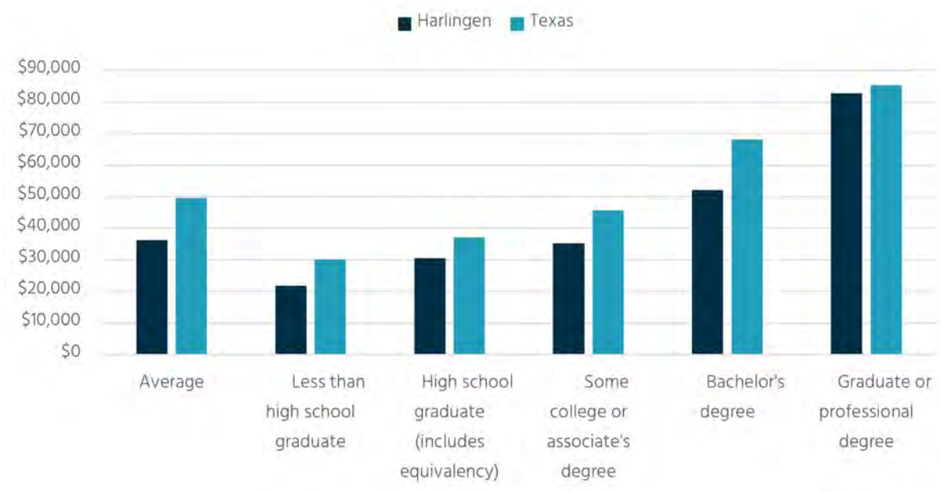
Similar to other communities near the Texas-Mexico border, Harlingen's wage and income levels are below the statewide averages. It is not projected that Harlingen wage and income levels will reach parity with the statewide figures. In 2023, Harlingen's median household income was $55,891 versus $76,292 for the State of Texas. Harlingen's per capita income was $26,217 versus $39,446 for the State of Texas for this same period.

Figure 30. Average Household Income (2023 ACS 5-Year Estimate)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Figure 31. Median Earnings by Educational Attainment (2023 5-Year Estimate)

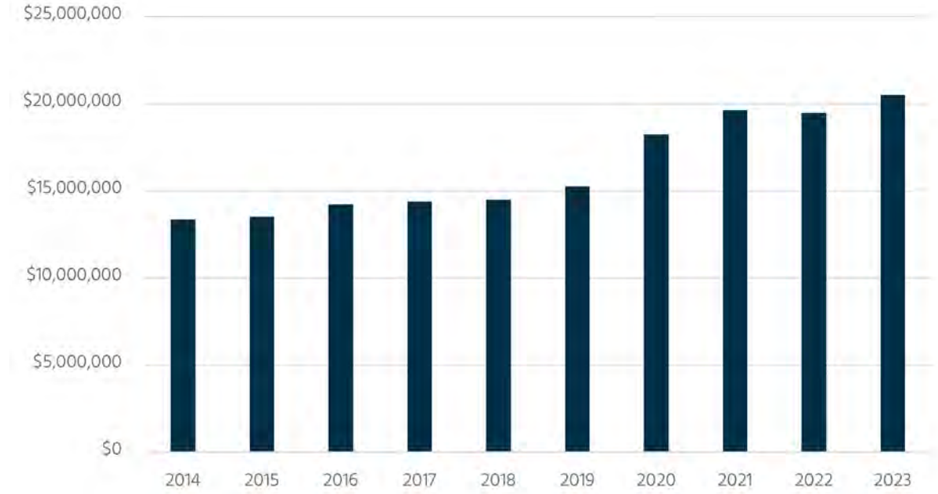


Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Tax Revenue

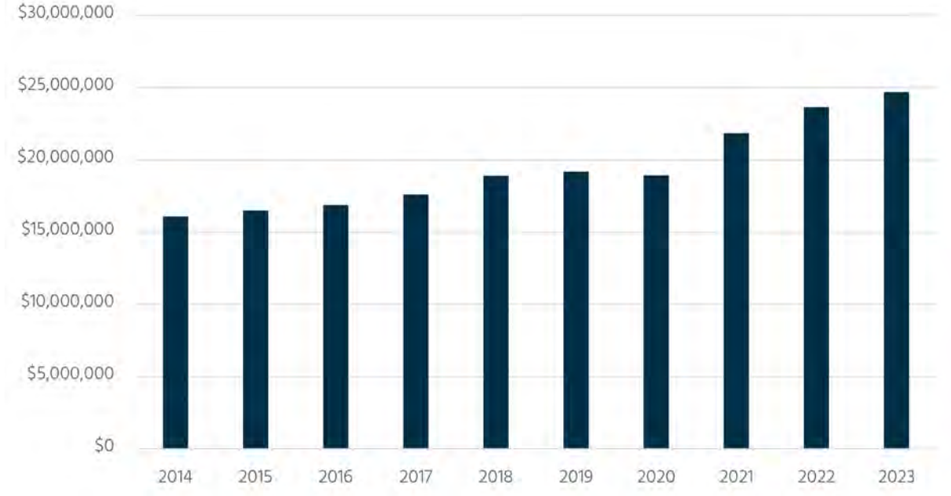
Over the past decade, Harlingen's property tax revenue has increased by more than 53.0 percent. In FY 2023, general fund property tax revenue was $20.5 million. Sales tax revenue has also been growing in Harlingen. For FY 2023, sales tax collections were $24.7 million. Between FY 2014 and FY 2023, sales tax revenue increased by 53.3 percent. For FY 2023, hotel occupancy tax revenue was $1.8 million.

Figure 32. Harlingen Property Tax Revenue



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Figure 33. Harlingen Sales Tax Revenue



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Visitor Activity

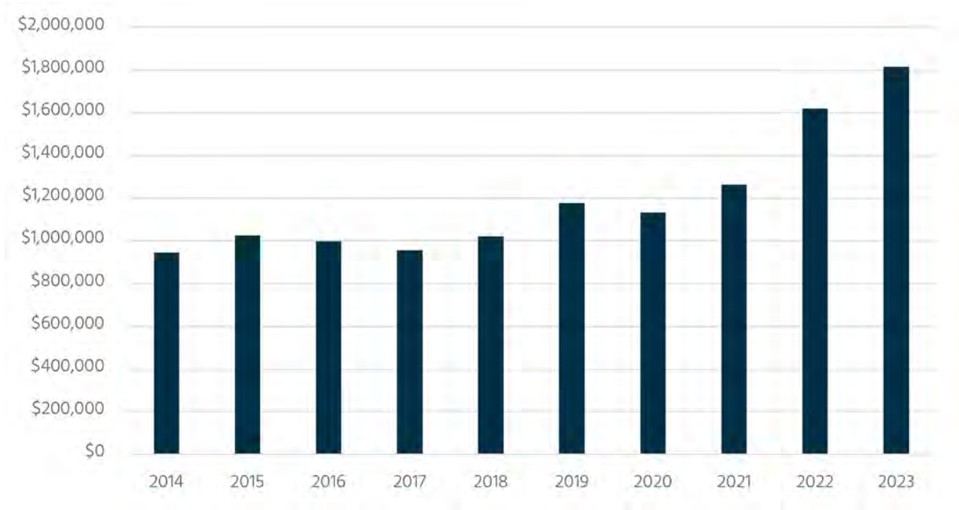
Visitor activity plays an important role in the Harlingen economy. According to the Governor's Economic Development & Tourism Department, tourism spending supports over 1,450 local jobs, $43.3 million in direct earnings, and $6.1 million in local tax receipts. Direct tourism spending supports roughly 3.5 percent of all jobs in Harlingen. Much of this tourism spending is linked to Winter Texans and Valley International Airport. To capture the full potential of tourism activity, Harlingen should focus on developing unique destinations and experience that keep people in Harlingen for multiple days spending money.

Figure 34. Tourism Activity in Harlingen

Year	Total Direct Travel Spending	Total Direct Earnings	Total Direct Employment	Local Visitor Tax Receipts
2010	$122,795,996	$22,679,420	1,060	$2,850,996
2011	$127,435,232	$23,027,168	1,050	$2,806,900
2012	$136,331,414	$24,586,617	1,100	$3,019,241
2013	$131,988,267	$24,464,024	1,090	$3,045,129
2014	$134,296,946	$25,605,441	1,110	$3,199,946
2015	$136,586,706	$28,494,959	1,220	$3,403,583
2016	$137,528,446	$29,260,094	1,270	$3,475,091
2017	$135,845,806	$29,580,724	1,270	$3,609,367
2018	$139,383,274	$29,283,631	1,220	$3,842,102
2019	$153,477,012	$33,986,453	1,390	$4,402,326
2020	$133,497,501	$30,010,888	1,140	$4,198,740
2021	$179,181,855	$35,696,139	1,330	$6,039,640
2022	$196,144,838	$39,832,193	1,410	$5,992,039
2023	$198,094,307	$43,258,482	1,480	$6,064,637

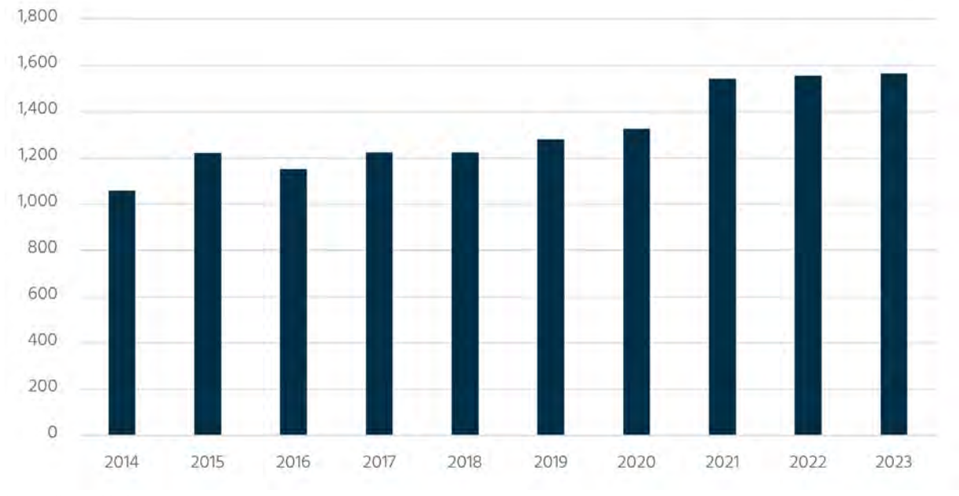
Source: State of Texas, Office of the Governor, Economic Development & Tourism

Figure 35. Harlingen Hotel Occupancy Tax Collections



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Figure 36. Number of Avaliable Rooms in Harlingen



Source: Source Strategies

Future Demand

Based on a forecast from Moody's Analytics, Cameron County businesses are projected to add 21,700 employees by 2033. A large percentage of these jobs will be in Harlingen. The Education & Health Services sector, for example, is forecasted to add over 9,400 jobs. The Professional & Business Services sector is expected to generate 2,200 jobs. A retail demand forecast from ESRI projects strong consumer demand for restaurants, entertainment, and shopping in Harlingen. Taken together, the future for Harlingen is bright but consistent with past growth trends. If Harlingen wants to change its future trajectory, stakeholders indicate the city will need to develop a bold plan that leverages the resources of all economic development partners.

Figure 37. Cameron County Employment Forecast

Description	2023	2033	Change	% Change
Natural Resources & Mining	120	80	-40	-33.3%
Construction	3,790	4,330	540	14.2%
Manufacturing	7,510	8,100	590	7.9%
Wholesale Trade	3,260	3,490	230	7.1%
Retail Trade	17,650	18,630	980	5.6%
Transportation, Warehousing, & Utilities	5,100	5,600	500	9.8%
Information	1,480	1,560	80	5.4%
Financial Activities	5,330	5,920	590	11.1%
Professional & Business Services	17,060	19,280	2,220	13.0%
Education & Health Services	48,660	58,140	9,480	19.5%
Leisure & Hospitality	18,500	20,780	2,280	12.3%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	3,580	4,050	470	13.1%
Government	28,880	32,690	3,810	13.2%
Total	160,800	182,570	21,770	13.5%

Source: Moody's Analytics

Figure 38. Harlingen Retail Demand Outlook for Key Sectors

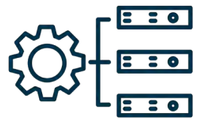
Description	2024	2029	Projected Growth
Apparel and Services	$42,964,466	$50,818,266	$7,853,800
Entertainment & Recreation	$66,946,731	$79,274,020	$12,327,289
Food	$201,126,792	$238,034,381	$36,907,589
Food at Home	$128,370,425	$151,934,452	$23,564,027
Food Away from Home	$72,756,367	$86,099,929	$13,343,562
Health			
Nonprescription Drugs	$3,282,830	$3,890,120	$607,290
Prescription Drugs	$7,238,822	$8,579,100	$1,340,278
Eyeglasses and Contact Lenses	$1,961,071	$2,322,583	$361,512
Household Furnishings and Equipment			
Household Textiles	$2,447,898	$2,895,864	$447,966
Furniture	$16,547,388	$19,594,729	$3,047,341
Rugs	$629,082	$744,966	$115,884
Major Appliances	$10,688,425	$12,663,526	$1,975,101
Housewares	$1,846,379	$2,186,334	$339,955
Luggage	$313,745	$371,321	$57,576
Telephones and Accessories	$2,026,137	$2,399,375	$373,238

Source: ESRI

CHAPTER 6

TRANSPORTATION

Harlingen in 2050



Enhance Network Connectivity

Harlingen has a strong street grid and like most cities, development within the past half century ha been less connected. Moving forward, city will refocus its transportation work to enhance connectivity, limit block sizes, and expand the route options available to all modes of transportation.



Ensure High Quality Street Design

Ensure the designs within street rights-of-way accommodate all users comfortably, so that walkers, bikers, drivers, and transit-riders and easily and safely navigate the city.



Invest in Transit

Prioritize transit for investments to ensure all residents in Harlingen are able to get around affordably and in a timely manner.

What We've Heard So Far...

placeholder

placeholder

placeholder

"Public transportation options are lacking, making it hard for people without cars to get to work or school."

"Better infrastructure, like roads and streetlights, is essential for safety and future development"

placeholder

"Sidewalks and bike lanes are critical for ensuring pedestrian safety and promoting alternative modes of transportation."

placeholder

placeholder

In the future, residents want Harlingen to:

- placeholder

Top Priorities for City Investment:

- placeholder

Most critical issue facing Harlingen:

- placeholder

Transportation & Resilience Connection

The incorporation of resilience into transportation planning involves thoughtfully integrating City street construction, transit investments, and capital improvements in a way that incorporates long term resilience.



Transportation Resilience

(graphic placeholder)

Accessibility

Accessibility is crucial for creating a resilient transportation network as it ensures that all members of the community can reach essential services, such as healthcare facilities, grocery stores, and schools.

Healthy Communities

The transportation network has a large impact on the health of a community as travel modes influence levels of physical activity and exposure to air pollution, directly affecting health.

Connected Street Networks

Fostering a compact network of streets helps to support land use goals of an integrated community fabric with a variety of uses, .

Green Infrastructure

Transportation design has the ability to directly impact a City's resilience to disasters, particularly by utilizing innovative stormwater and drainage management..

Neighborhood Streets

Planning great neighborhood streets that enhance safety and slow traffic boosts social resilience, promotes stability, equitable access, and community well-being

Extending a Sustainable Street Pattern

Implementing smart growth principles in transportation planning enhances resilience by optimizing resources, improving transportation efficiency, reducing environmental impacts and ensuring that growth occurs in a resilient manner.

Existing Transportation Conditions

Introduction

Central to the effort of building a socially and economically vibrant Harlingen is the quality of its transportation system. This chapter highlights opportunities to meet the transportation needs of Harlingen's residents and visitors by expanding transportation options, enhancing access throughout the region, and creating a healthy, safe, and fiscally-sound transportation network for people and industry.

Getting Around in Harlingen

Transportation networks have always been an important component of life in our city. As in most cities, street rights-of-way consist approximately one third of all the city's land use. Harlingen flourished from its early access to the railroad. Increasingly, Harlingen residents, visitors, and industries have access to local and regional roadway systems, transit service, air travel, and bikeway opportunities.

The city's location at the intersection of I-2 and I-69E creates a strategic central location for the distribution of services throughout the Lower Valley area. Valley International Airport and the Port of Harlingen provide key aviation and shipping options. With the Los Indios International Free Trade Bridge, Harlingen also has a border crossing with border transit. Mexico's Trans-Pacific Highway provides gateway routes for shipping.

Nationwide market trends indicate that residents across the U.S. increasingly want to live where they can reach places using their preferred choice of travel, whether on a bike, walking, driving, or taking transit. People are demanding more freedom and choice in how they get around. Demands are increasing for transportation infrastructure that add safe and affordable mobility options to the option of driving.

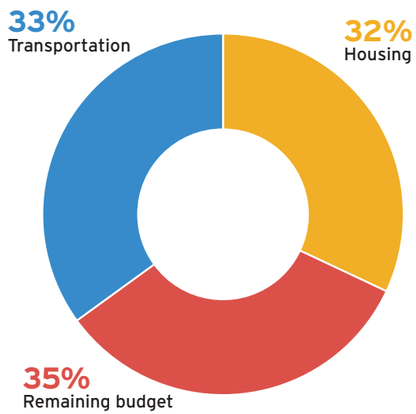
17.3 minutes
Average daily commute time for Harlingen workers

1.8
Average number of cars per Harlingen household

17,686
Average miles driven each year by Harlingen households

$13,444
Amount Harlingen households spend on transportation each year

placeholder graphic - will show Harlingen average budget





Transportation and Public Health

Health, transportation, and exercise are strongly correlated. Many communities along the U.S. - Mexico Border suffer from chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes. The County's population has higher rates of physical inactivity (45%) and obesity (47%) compared to the State of Texas (36% and 35%, respectively). These risk factors increase the likelihood of developing health problems, such as heart disease and stroke.

Studies shows that better integrating pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit facilities into roadway designs helps address public health in the community. Roadways with easily accessible and low stress pedestrian and bicycle facilities provide residents with options for safe utilitarian exercise that, along with other actions, can improve public health outcomes.

Roadway design standards that reduce vehicular speeds, provide buffers between vehicles and nonmotorized users, and separate pedestrian and bicycle facilities from travel lanes can promote a safe and comfortable environment for active transportation.

The Cost of Infrastructure

Harlingen should continue collaborating with regional communities, stakeholders, and TxDOT on capital plan strategies, including development and maintenance of a well connected network of sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and shared-use paths and trails that are accessible for all ages and abilities.

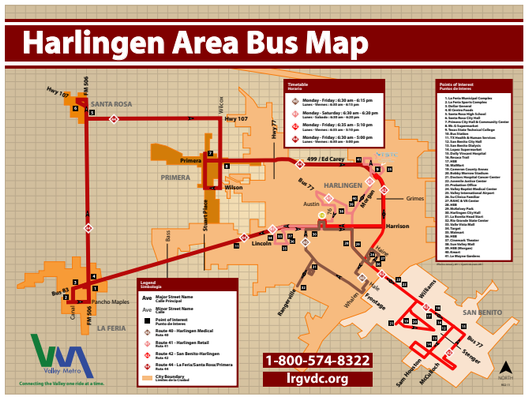
Development exactions and impact fees are among a variety of key strategies for construction of roadways that include pedestrian and bicycle options.

Additionally, the City of Harlingen should collaborate with the Rio Grande Valley MPO and TxDOT in a strategic approach to leveraging federal funding for roadway enhancements, bicycle lane construction, and trail development.

Transit

The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council provides public transportation in Harlingen and the lower Rio Grande Valley through its transit department, Valley Metro. Valley Metro connects Cameron County, Brownsville, Harlingen, La Feria, La Paloma, Olmito, Port Isabel, Primera, San Benito, and Santa Rosa.

Great transit is key to reducing VMTs, expanding travel options, and supporting vulnerable residents. Transit is improved by making it faster, easier, more comfortable, and convenient. One opportunity to expand transit is by establishing bus rapid transit (BRT) routes, including dedicated bus-only lanes, within Harlingen (north-south) and interjurisdictionally (east-west).



Street Trees

Street trees are a vital element of city infrastructure. They clean the air, filter stormwater, improve human physical and mental health, reduce impacts of heat island effect, and promote walkability by providing shade to pedestrians. Furthermore, when planted between the curb and the sidewalk, they provide a barrier between people and moving vehicles. Many studies measuring the net financial impact of trees show that despite maintenance costs, they can be fiscally and economically positive investments.

When planted appropriately, street trees reduce long term road maintenance infrastructure costs by providing shade that prolongs the life of the pavement. Shaded streets can save up to 60 percent of repaving costs.

Congestion

With continued growth in the Lower Valley, traffic congestion continues to increase on arterial roadways, particularly along commercial corridors or near commercial centers. Recent improvement projects have been constructed by TxDOT to address congestion on I-2.

Strategies to address traffic congestion should include a multimodal approach with continued improvements to arterial roadways that include pedestrian, bicycle, and mass transit enhancements that promote additional options for travel.

Freight

Freight transportation is an essential part of urban transportation networks. The Rio Grande Valley's multimodal freight network supported more than $22 billion in exports and $31 billion in imports in 2019, as well, as $37.4 billion in gross regional product (GRP). Approximately 1,000,000 trucks and 100,000 railcars entered the Rio Grande Valley from Mexico, representing a 23% increase of inbound trucks and a 10% increase of inbound trains since 2010.

Since 2017, the Port of Harlingen has experienced a 235% increase in tonnage, growing from 990,000 tons to consistently handling 3.2 million tons annually. Over the same period, commercial traffic surged by 671%. The port now generates approximately $1.79 billion in economic activity each year.

Municipalities around the US are exploring innovative ways of providing adequate freight transportation without jeopardizing street safety and air quality, including providing suitable infrastructure along freight truck routes, ensuring that truck routes avoid neighborhoods and sensitive areas, and providing access to major roadway systems. The Rio Grande Valley is the only location in Texas with truck, rail, maritime, air, pipeline, and space activity.

TxDOT conducted a Regional Freight and Trade Transportation Plan in 2020. The plan addresses the binational and multimodal freight challenges and opportunities in the Rio Grande Valley.

Air Travel

The City of Harlingen owns the Valley International Airport, the largest airport in the Rio Grande Valley serving 1,200,000 passengers annually as of 2024. It is operated by a nine-member airport board appointed by the mayor.

Interjurisdictional Planning

The Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (RGVMPO) was established in 2019 and serves the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Area Boundary (RGVMAB). Continuing to coordinate with RGVMPO is key to building a successful transportation system in Harlingen and the region.

Harlingen Existing Thoroughfare Plan

Harlingen is part of the Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization, a federally funded program that works with Rio Grande Valley communities and the Texas Department of transportation to plan for the region's future transportation needs. The MPO also serves as a collaborative structure of committees and organizations that creates partnerships to address this region's needs.

The Harllingen Future Thoroughfare Map depicts where roadway extensions or new roadways are needed to accommodate the City's anticipated growth. The Map represents the thoroughfare network for the City of Harlingen. The City should work with the Rio Grande Valley MPO to update the region's thoroughfare map for consistency with the City's principles.

Principles

NOTE TO STAFF: Given recent work on the MPO's Thoroughfare Plan, content within this section will be further discussed and tailored with the City.

The Future Thoroughfare Map should follow four key principles:

- The functional classification scheme follows a hierarchy of roadways. This plan carries that concept forward, while enhancing design elements that encourage safe multimodal transportation options.
- Street Type Areas are used to enhance the vital connection between land use and transportation.
- Interconnectivity is key to be able to accommodate vehicular traffic, slow traffic in appropriate places to enhance safety, provide more travel routes, and promote more safe and comfortable travel options. Local streets and alleys are another critical element of connectivity.
- Considering a balanced ratio of Street Right-of-Way Components, including vehicular movement space (travel lanes, turning lanes, etc.) and roadside space (sidewalks, street trees, bicycle lanes, etc.) is a key principle of Harlingen's Future Thoroughfare Map.

New infrastructure designs, amenities, and proportions seek to meaningfully and realistically expand safe and comfortable travel choices.

Using the Future Thoroughfare Map (to be developed)

The placement of proposed thoroughfares on the map is conceptual - representing general location. As growth continues, new development may warrant the identification and development of thoroughfares that are not depicted on the Future Thoroughfare Map.

Spacing: While the map guides the general location of future roads, the spacing of thoroughfares is dictated through the spacing described in the Street Types tables **(to be developed)**. Where proposed as a thoroughfare, future development may need additional roadways not indicated in the map in accordance with the desired spacing.

Local streets: Future local streets are not shown on the Future Thoroughfare Map. In addition to the Street Types tables, the City requires new local streets and street improvements in accordance with its zoning and subdivision regulations, manuals, plans, and any other standards and agreements.

Relationship with other Transportation Plans

When the City of Harlingen enacts updates and changes to its thoroughfare plan, those updates are shared with the Rio Grande Valley MPO.

Changing and amending the map

As circumstances change and development and redevelopment occurs, there may be instances where the City seeks to make an amendment to the Future Thoroughfare Map. Similar to amendments to the Future Land Use Map, proposed map amendments to the Future Thoroughfare Map should be approved by City Council subject to coordination with the Rio Grande Valley MPO.

Map 1. Existing Harlingen Thoroughfare Map

