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. Additionally, the plan integrates its recommendations with area hazard mitigation plans to enhance community resilience and safety. The Harlingen Comprehensive Plan was developed and funded as part of the Resilient Communities Program (RCP) sponsored by the Texas General Land Office (GLO).

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 resulting in a significant population loss for the city; 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%

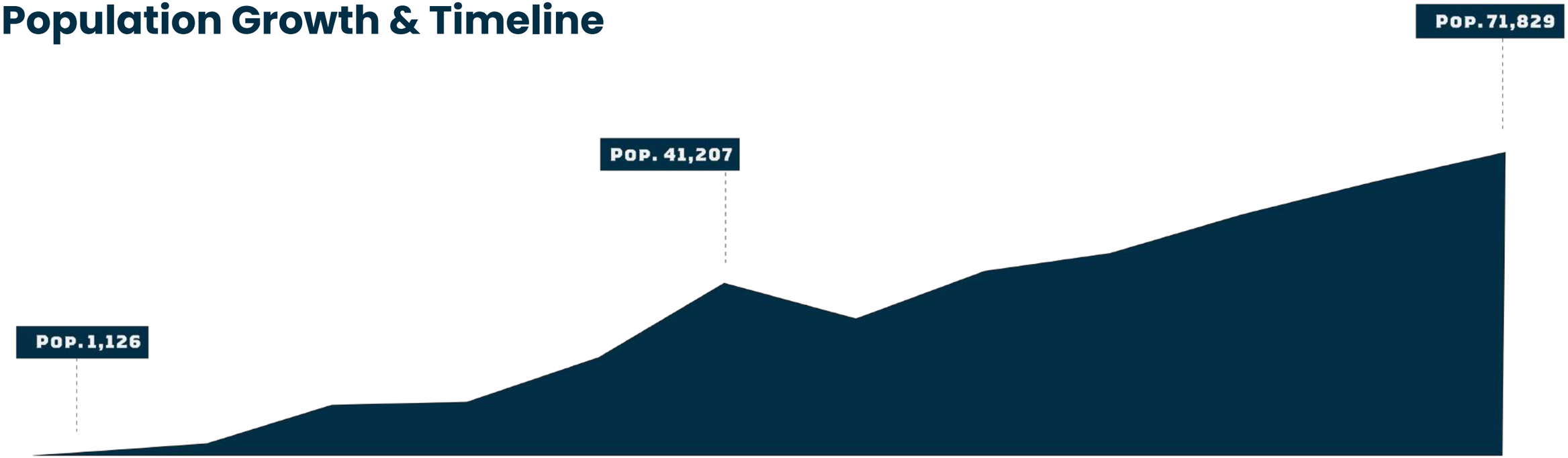
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census

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.

1925

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

1941

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

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.

1992

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

2002

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

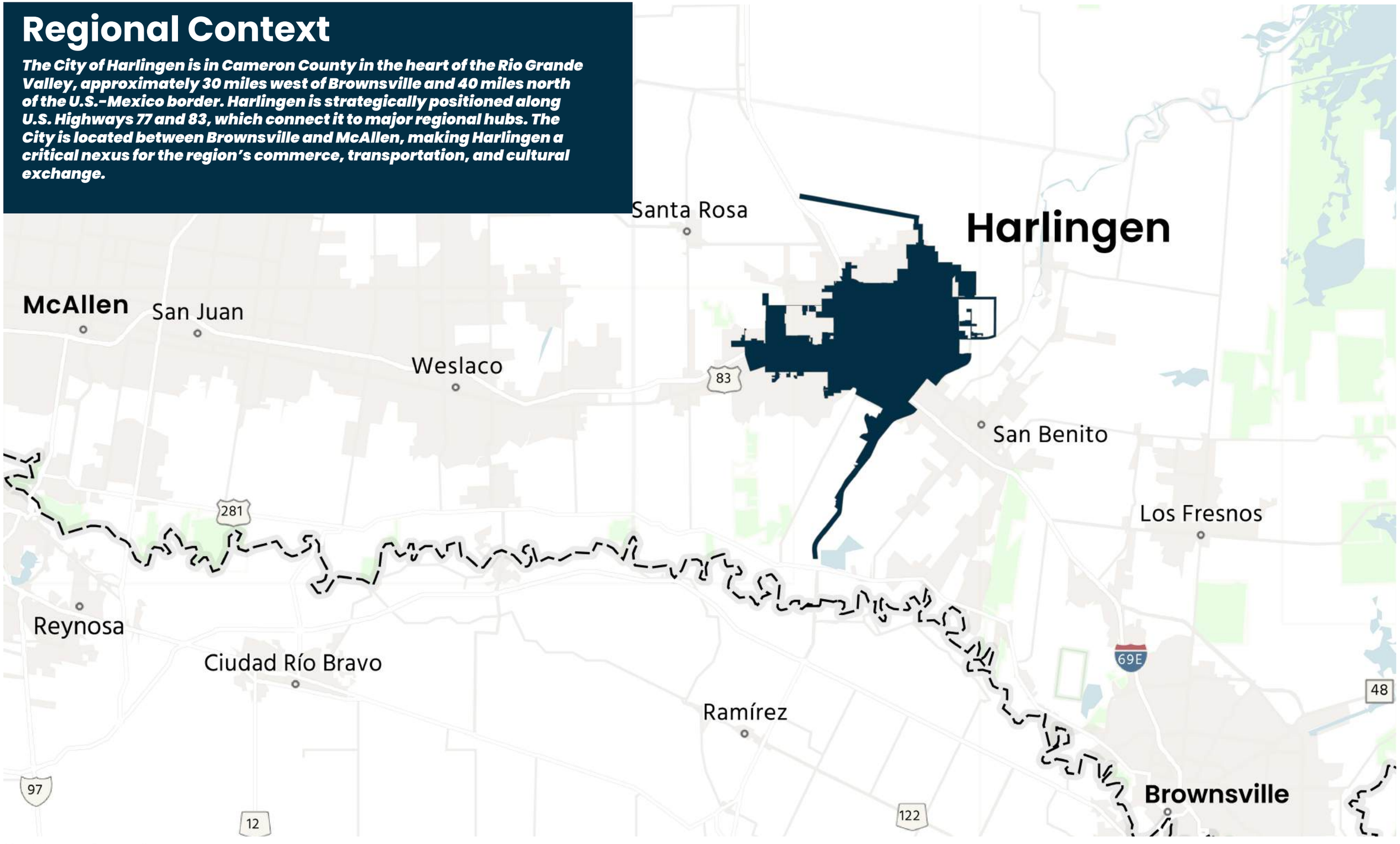
4 Port of Harlingen Authority. (n.d.). Celebrating 70 Years in Operation. Port of Harlingen Authority. Retrieved January 29, 2025, from https://portofharlingen.com/70th-anniversary/

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.

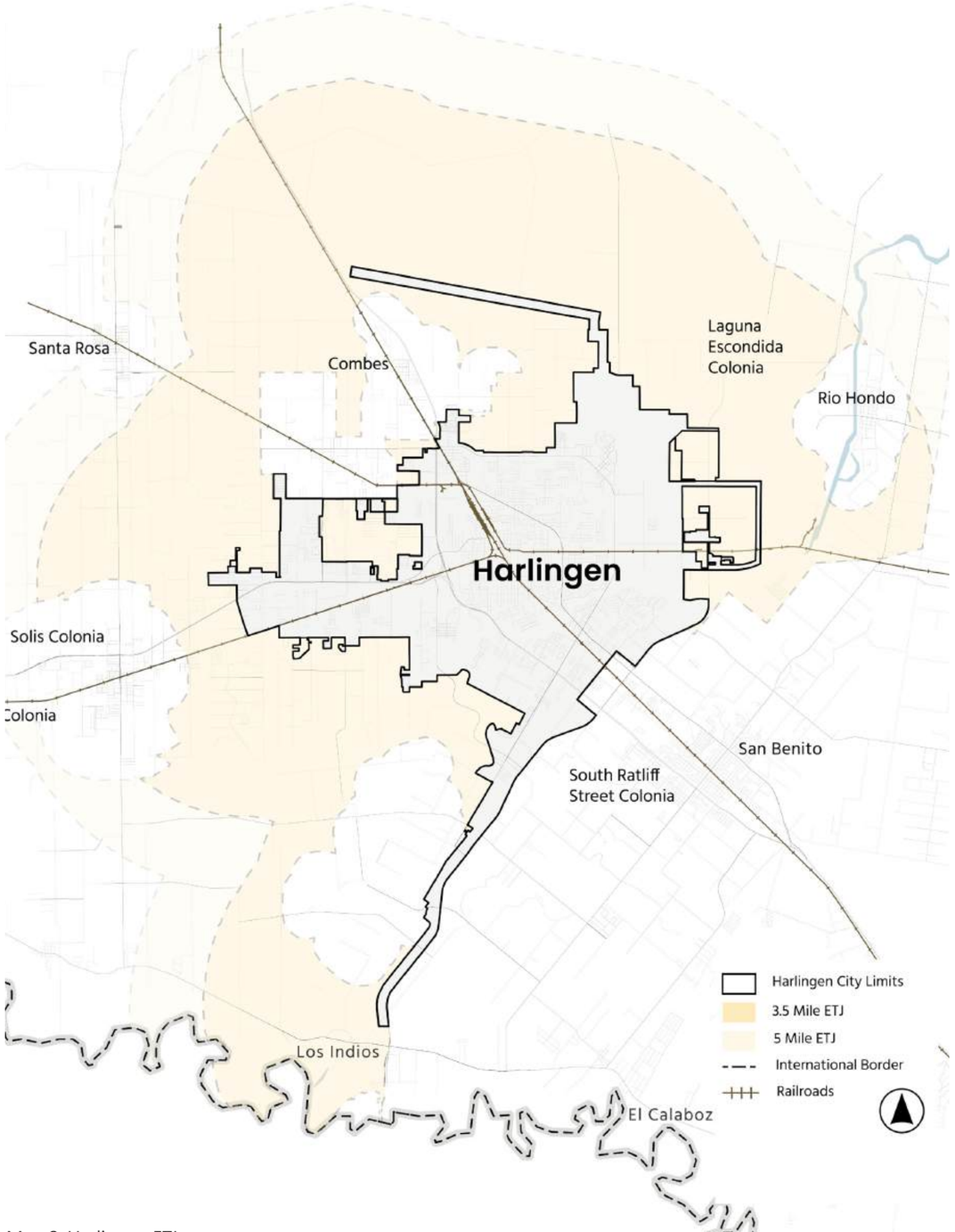


Map 1. Harlingen Regional Context

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 #1, November 18, 2024

Public Open House #2, February 24, 2025

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

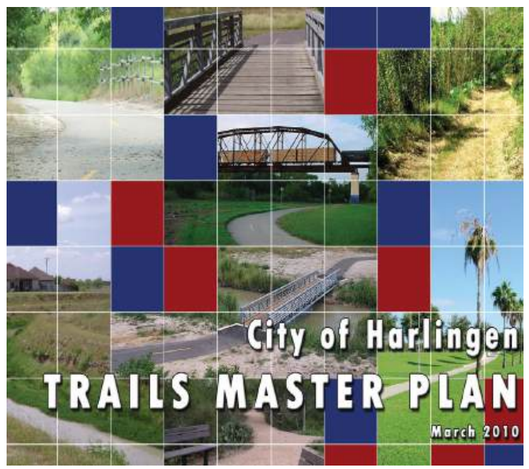
Harlingen's parks, trails, and proximity to the Arroyo Colorado offer unique opportunities for eco-tourism and community identity. Leveraging these strengths to create a string of parks or cooling nodes can make Harlingen a desirable destination. These efforts would reinforce its position as a city with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

2019 Bicycle Plan

Rio Grande Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization

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 Regulatory Features

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.

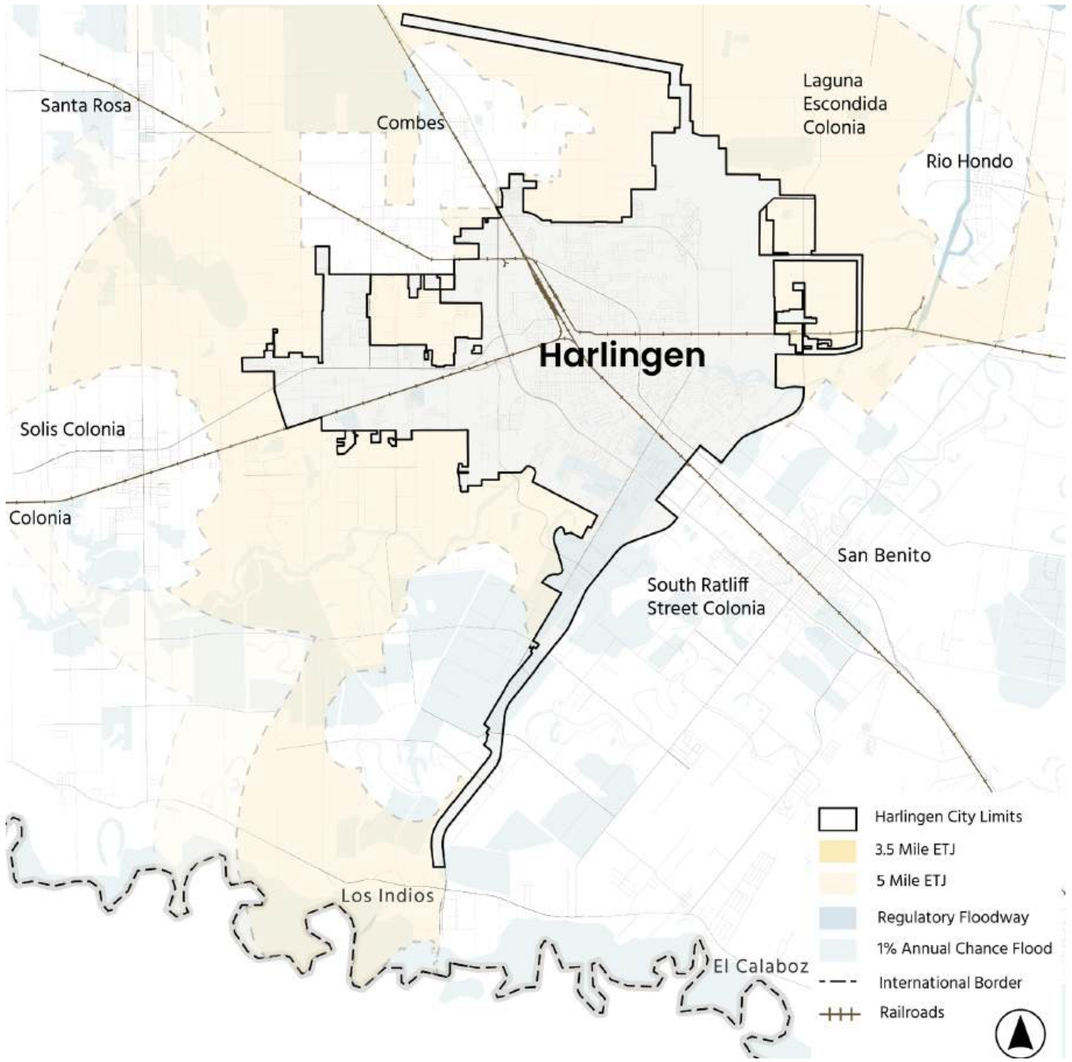
Harlingen's key public amenities, like Pendleton Park and the Harlingen Public Library, are centrally located, making them easily accessible for residents. The City has also invested in pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, incorporating sidewalks, shared-use paths, and bike lanes along Ed Carey Drive 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. Additionally, Harlingen serves a key node in the Rio Grande Valley's freight network, with tracks operated by Union Pacific and Rio Grande Valley Switching Company transecting the city. These railroads support local industry and connect Harlingen to major national and international markets.

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. Physical Features

What is Resilience?

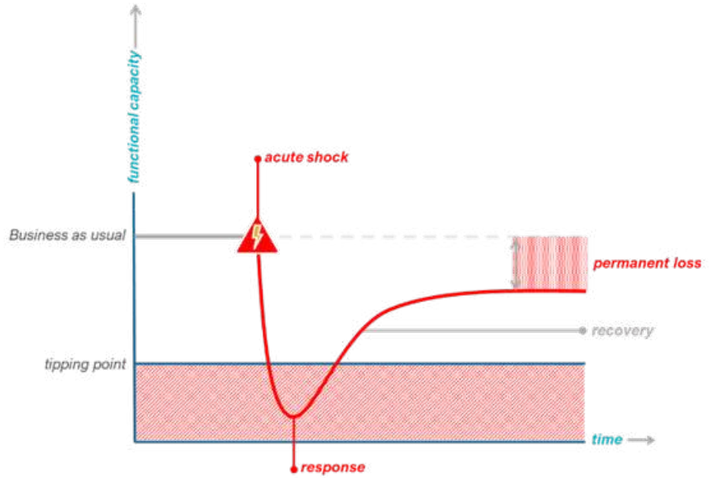
Resilience is defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), as the capacity to anticipate and prepare for potential threats and hazards, adjust to evolving conditions, and withstand and quickly recover from disruptions. In planning, resilience considers both sudden shocks, like extreme weather 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.

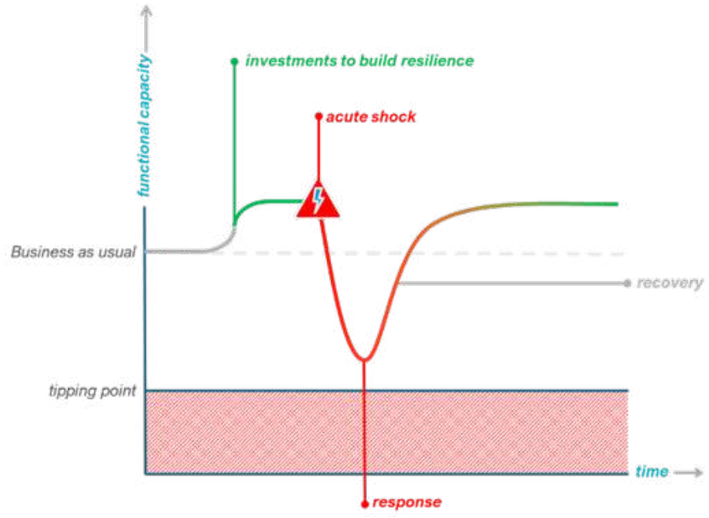
Figure 5. What is resilience?

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.

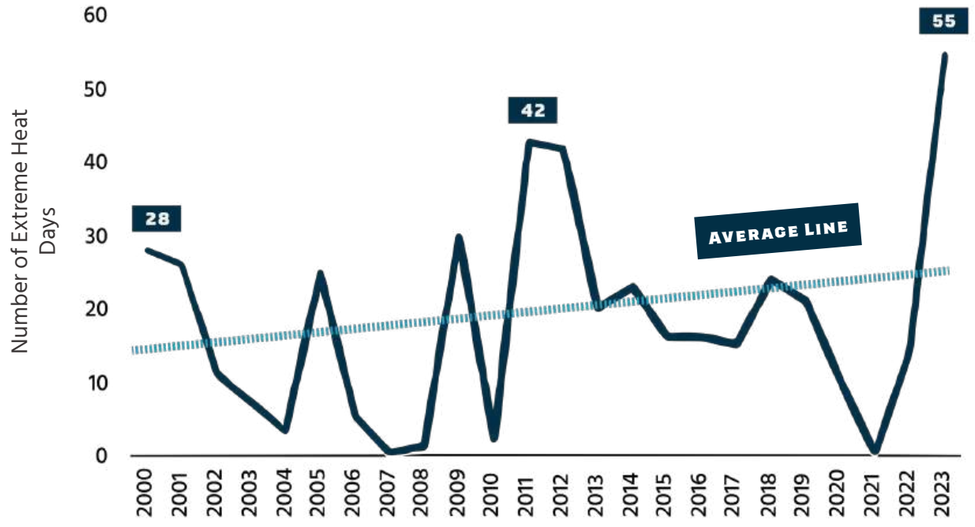
To enhance flood resilience, public facilities should elevate critical utilities and infrastructure and utilize flood-resistant materials during construction. Additionally, implementing effective drainage systems and barriers to redirect floodwaters is essential for increased resilience.

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

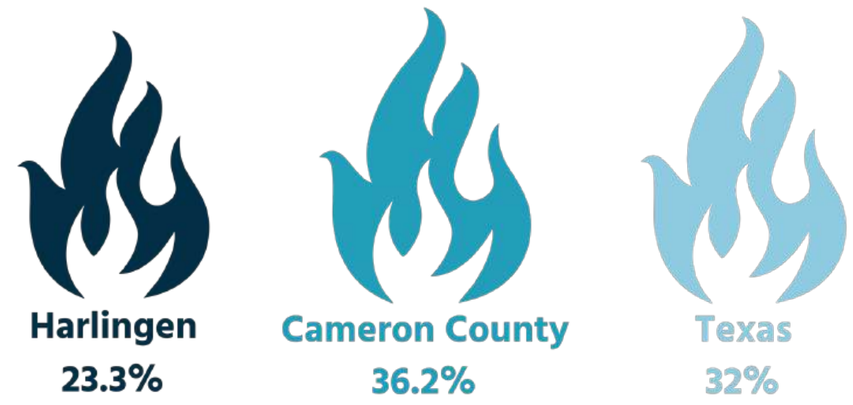
According to the Texas Forest Service, the City of Harlingen experienced three historical wildfire events between 2005 and 2015. It is estimated that 23.3% of the city's population resides within the Wildfire Urban Interface (WUI), a particularly vulnerable area where developed regions meet open grasslands.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

How Community Values Shape the Plan

THE VALUES COME FROM YOU

Why are they important?

They inform the vision

VALUES FORM THE VISION

THE VISION STATEMENT

Why is it important?

Provides the framework for all city plans

VISION ELEMENTS

GOALS

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

OBJECTIVES

Recommended actions to help achieve the goals

Community Values

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."

STRENGTHS

A community survey was conducted from October 30th, 2024, to January 23rd, 2025, receiving feedback from 166 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.

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.

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. While these institutions provide excellent educational resources and opportunities, there is a growing need for expanded higher education outreach and workforce training programs to better support local career pathways and economic growth.

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

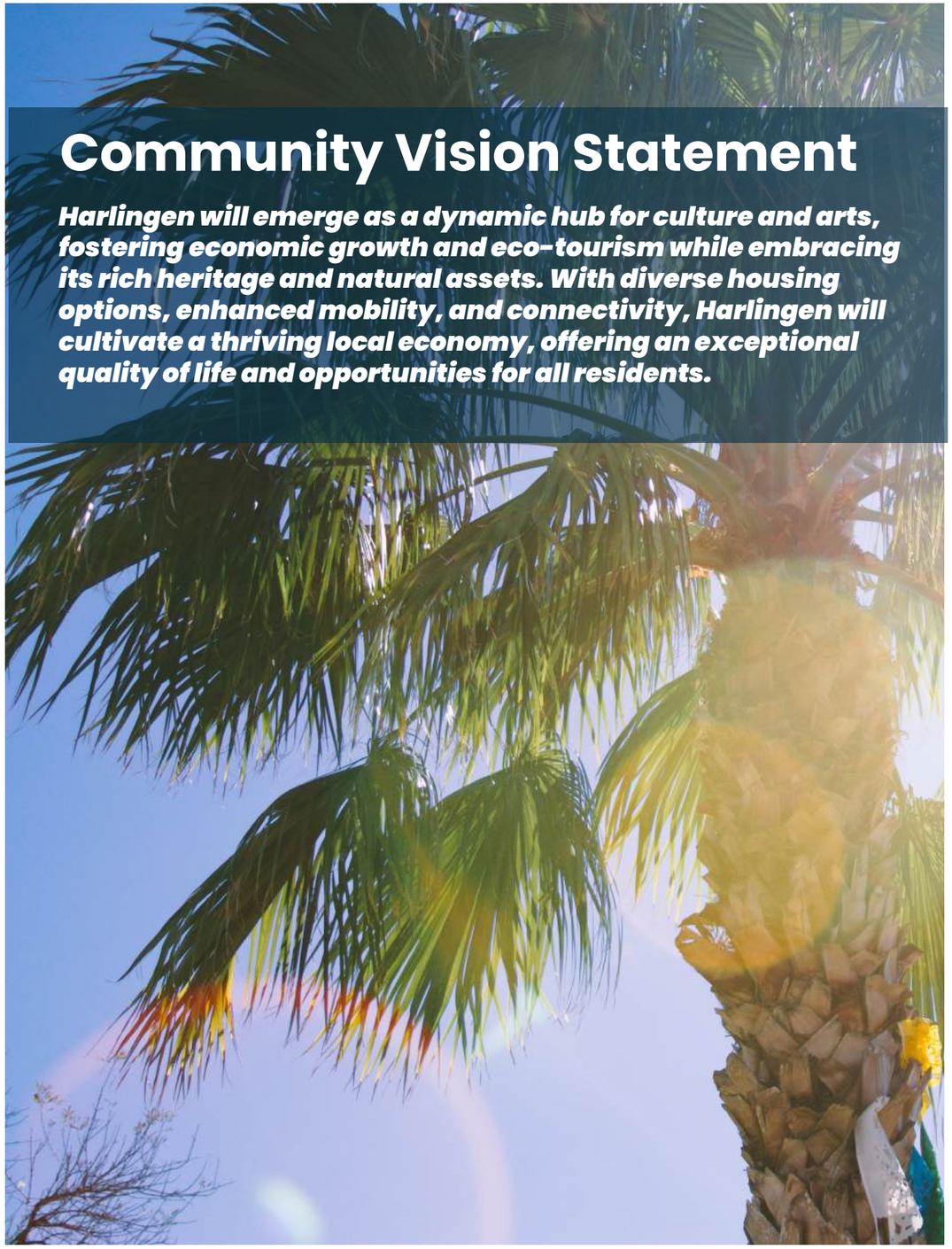
Create a unique sense of place in Harlingen through public art, trails into downtown, and revitalized public spaces to foster greater opportunties for community interaction and connection.

Retail and Dining Growth

Focus on attractring 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.

Infrastructure Improvements

Address the railroad barrier and expand multimodal transit options, including sidewalks, bike paths, and public transportation. In addition to mobility improvements, prioritize enhancements to drainage and flood prevention infrastructure, as these were major community concerns. Additionally, expand street lighting improvements to enhance safety, particularly in parks and downtown areas, ensuring a well-lit and secure environment for residents.



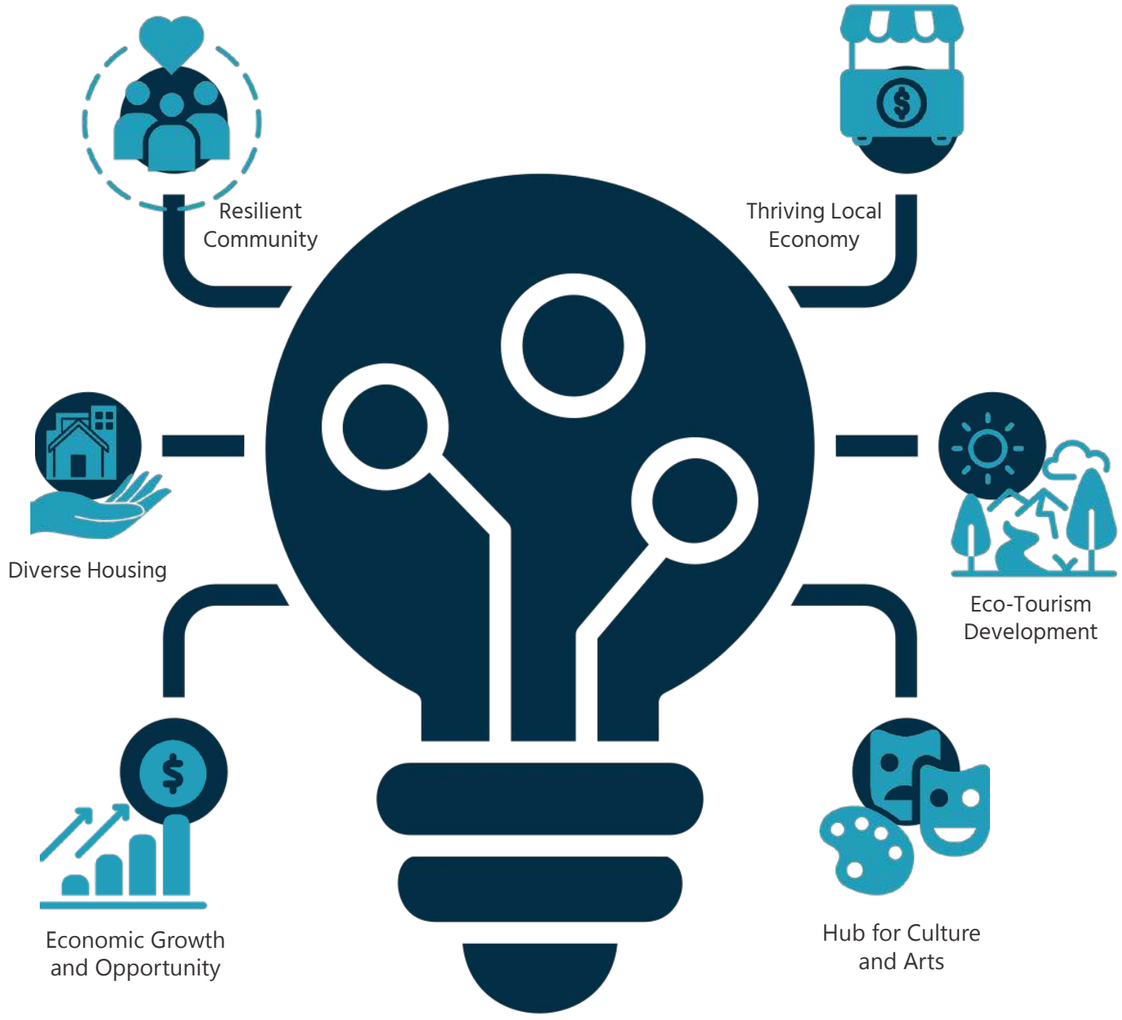
Community Vision Statement

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.



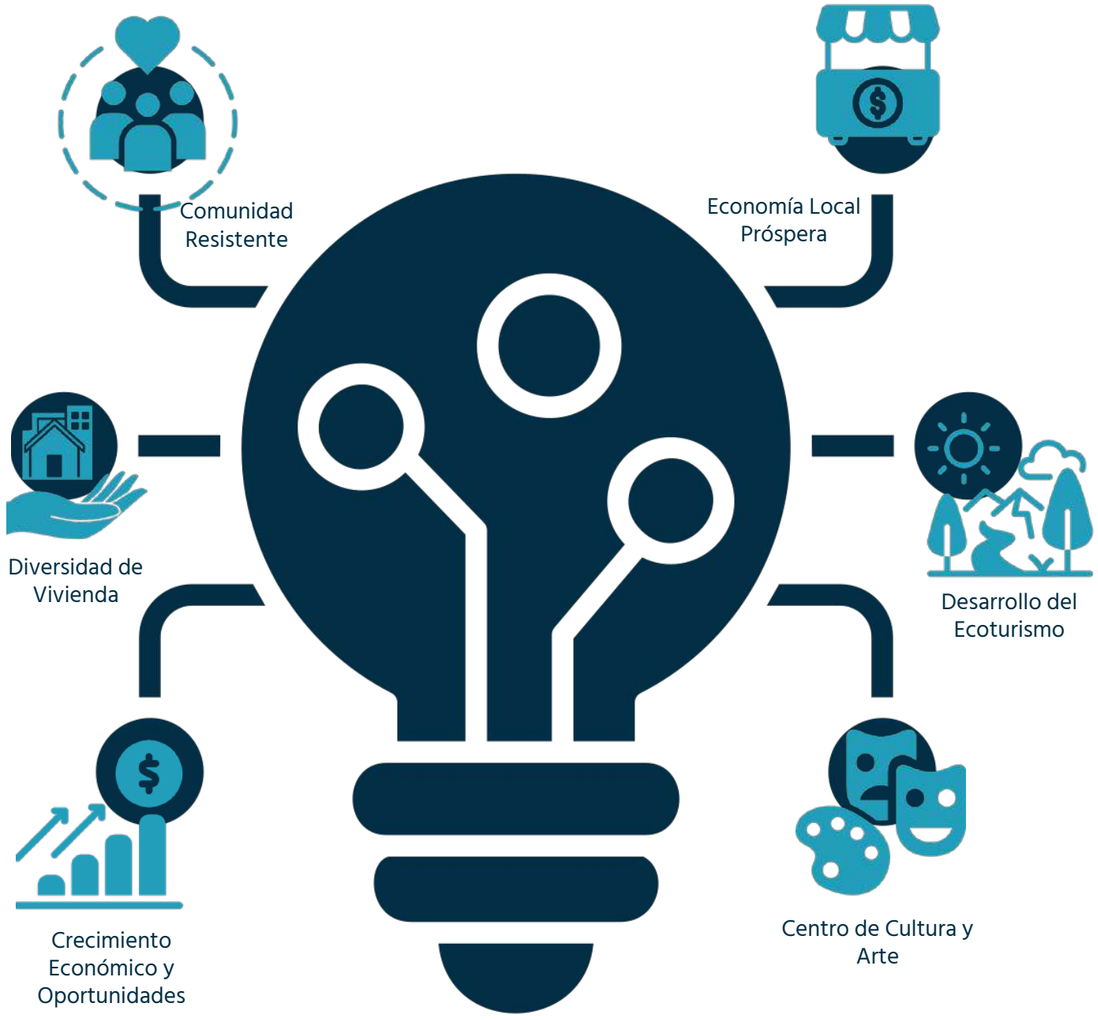
Declaración de visión comunitaria

Harlingen se consolidará como un centro dinámico para la cultura y las artes, impulsando el crecimiento económico y el ecoturismo, a la vez que valoriza su rico patrimonio y recursos naturales. Con diversas opciones de vivienda, mayor movilidad y conectividad, Harlingen impulsará una economía local próspera, ofreciendo una calidad de vida excepcional y oportunidades para todos los residentes.

Elementos de visión

Su visión para Harlingen

Ayudó a los planificadores a identificar seis elementos clave de la visión que conforman la base del Plan Integral. Estos elementos guían los objetivos del plan, garantizando que el crecimiento de Harlingen se alinee con las prioridades de la comunidad y las aspiraciones a largo plazo.



Vision Elements

Resilient Community

Diverse Housing

Economic Growth and Opportunity

Thriving Local Economy

Eco-Tourism Development

Hub for Culture and Arts

Goals

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

Objectives

- 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.
- Desire for luxury housing to attract professionals and boost economic growth.
- 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 to enhance connectivity.

- 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 visitors on local ecology connectivity.

- 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

Vision Elements

Resilient Community

Diverse Housing

Economic Growth and Opportunity

Goals

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

Objectives

- 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.
- Luxury 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 to enhance connectivity.
- Expand infrastructure for industrial and tech-focused industries.
- Encourage investment in underutilized areas such as downtown and vacant properties.
- Expand mixed-use developments to integrate business, housing, and public spaces.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.

Harlingen Land Use Policies

Harlingen's land use policies guide how the city grows in a way that is balanced, inclusive, and future-ready. These policies support reinvestment in existing neighborhoods, expansion of housing and job opportunities, and protection of natural resources. The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) helps coordinate where and how different types of development should occur. Together, these tools shape a more connected, equitable, and resilient Harlingen.

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.

Equitable and Strategic Growth

Support land use decisions that reduce disparities in access to amenities, services, and opportunities across neighborhoods. Encourage investment in historically underserved areas by prioritizing public facilities, quality housing, and infrastructure improvement

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."

Key Takeaways:

- Residents want improved public spaces, infrastructure, and parks.
- Economic development and job creation are top community priorities.
- Affordable and inclusive housing options are urgently needed.
- Transportation access and mobility remain key challenges.
- There is strong support for protecting and enhancing natural resources.
- Investment in cultural initiatives and community identity is important.
- Residents value equity in access to amenities across all neighborhoods.
- Future planning should focus on attracting and retaining young professionals and families.

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. Agriculture historically dominates Harlingen's landscape, with 5,773 acres (26%) of the city limits currently 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.

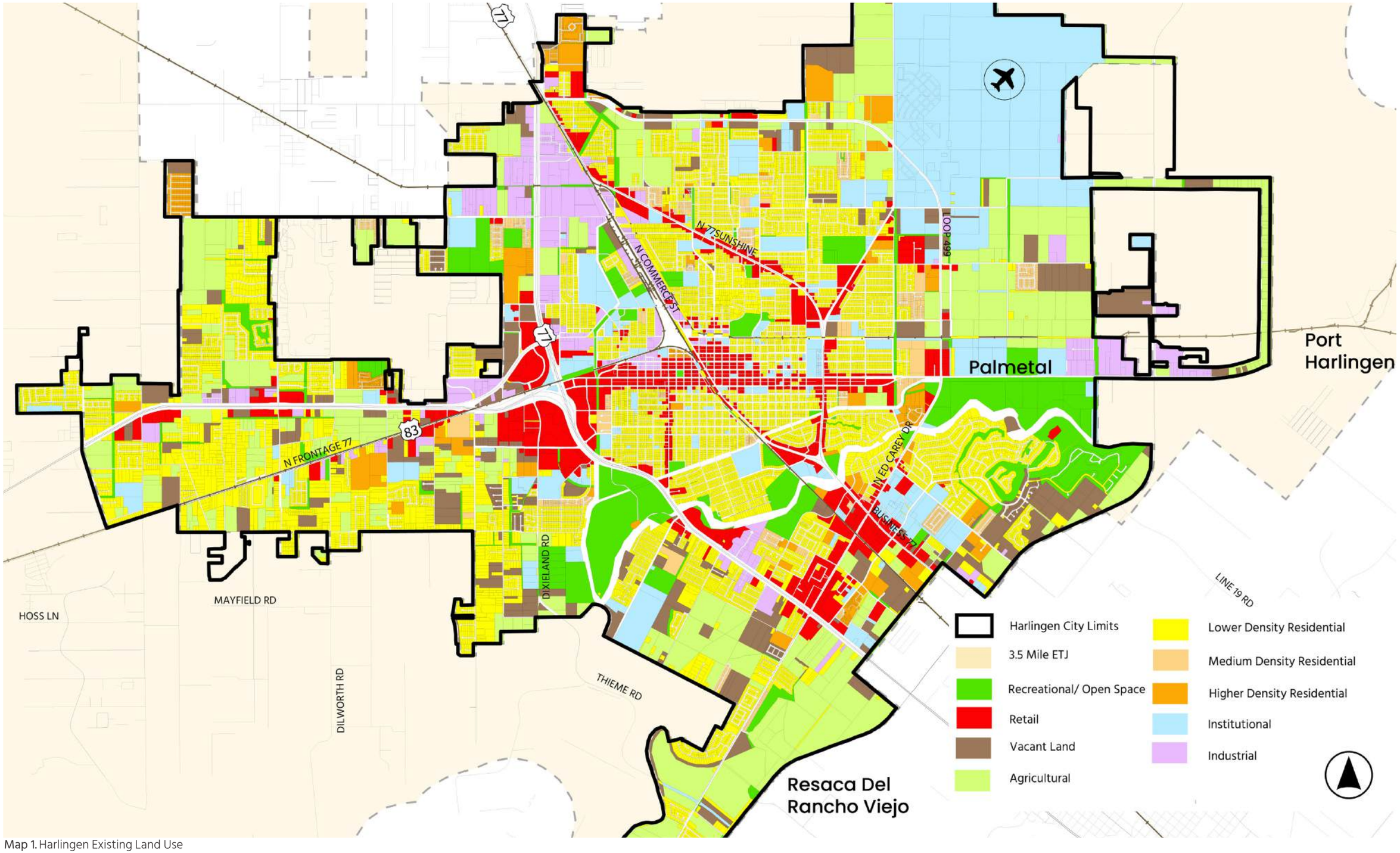
The second largest land use category within the city limits is low-density residential, accounting for 5,621 acres (25%), reflecting Harlingen's focus on single-family neighborhoods. When expanded to include the ETJ, low-density residential uses occupy 15,338 acres (11%), indicating opportunities for 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 (See Map 1 for existing land use).

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 1. 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 1. 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

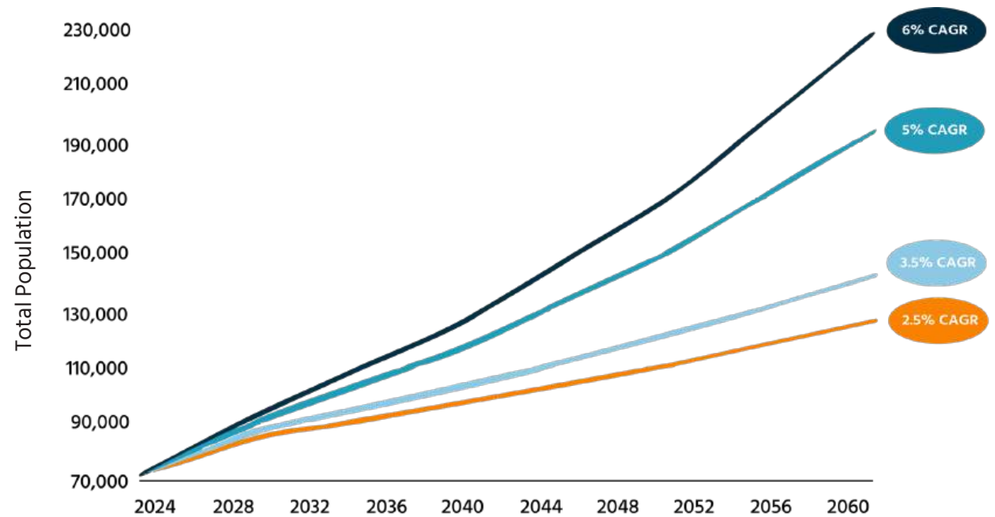
In recent decades, Harlingen's population has grown steadily at just over 1% annually. However, the evolving economic dynamics of the Rio Grande Valley region indicate the potential for higher growth rates. With its strategic location, economic opportunities, and ongoing urban development, annual growth 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 2. 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 3. Harlingen Growth Scenarios Line Graph



Source: Texas Water Development Board, 2026 RWP Municipal Data

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map (FLUM) is a foundational tool that guides how Harlingen will grow and evolve over time. It provides a long-term vision for where different land uses such as housing, retail, employment centers, parks, and community facilities should be located. The FLUM helps the city organize growth in a way that reflects community values, supports economic opportunity, enhances quality of life, and promotes sustainable development.

Serving as a blueprint for the future, the FLUM helps Harlingen make informed decisions about zoning changes, infrastructure investments, development approvals, and capital improvements. It brings clarity and predictability to residents, developers, and civic leaders by showing where various types of growth and change are expected to occur. It is not a zoning map, but it shapes future zoning decisions and guides day-to-day land use planning (See Map 1 for existing future land use).

The FLUM is especially useful when:

- Evaluating new development proposals.
- Coordinating infrastructure and transportation improvements.
- Planning for parks, schools, and public services.
- Aligning growth with available utilities and natural feature
- Making updates to zoning and development regulations

Importantly, the FLUM also helps the city manage growth and change, whether addressing future development on the west side, strengthening older neighborhoods, or revitalizing underutilized corridors in the central city.

The FLUM answers key questions for Harlingen's future:

- What types of housing, commercial, and recreational spaces will Harlingen need as it grows?
- How do we plan for economic development while protecting community character?
- How can land use policy support equity, sustainability, and quality of life across all neighborhoods?

The map is grounded in community values and was created through extensive input from residents, stakeholders, and city leadership. It serves as a living document that evolves with the needs and aspirations of Harlingen.

Trade-offs & Considerations

Westside Investments & Facilities

- West Harlingen has long been underserved in terms of parks, recreation, and public facilities. Prioritizing land for these uses may reduce the amount of land available for commercial or residential development—but helps advance equity and quality of life.
- Community centers and healthcare access points on the Westside may require subsidies or partnerships, but they serve essential roles in closing service gaps.

Healthcare & Retaining Medical Professionals

- As Harlingen positions itself as a regional healthcare hub, retaining and attracting medical professionals is critical. Land use decisions should support housing, schools, and amenities that appeal to healthcare workers.
- A strong population base with access to insurance and nearby services also helps retain healthcare infrastructure.

Luxury & Market-Rate Housing

- To grow the tax base and attract diverse residents, there is increasing interest in expanding higher-end housing. However, doing so must be balanced with the need for affordable and workforce housing across the city.
- Larger homes on the city's fringe may increase land consumption and strain infrastructure unless paired with smart planning.

Parks and Open Space

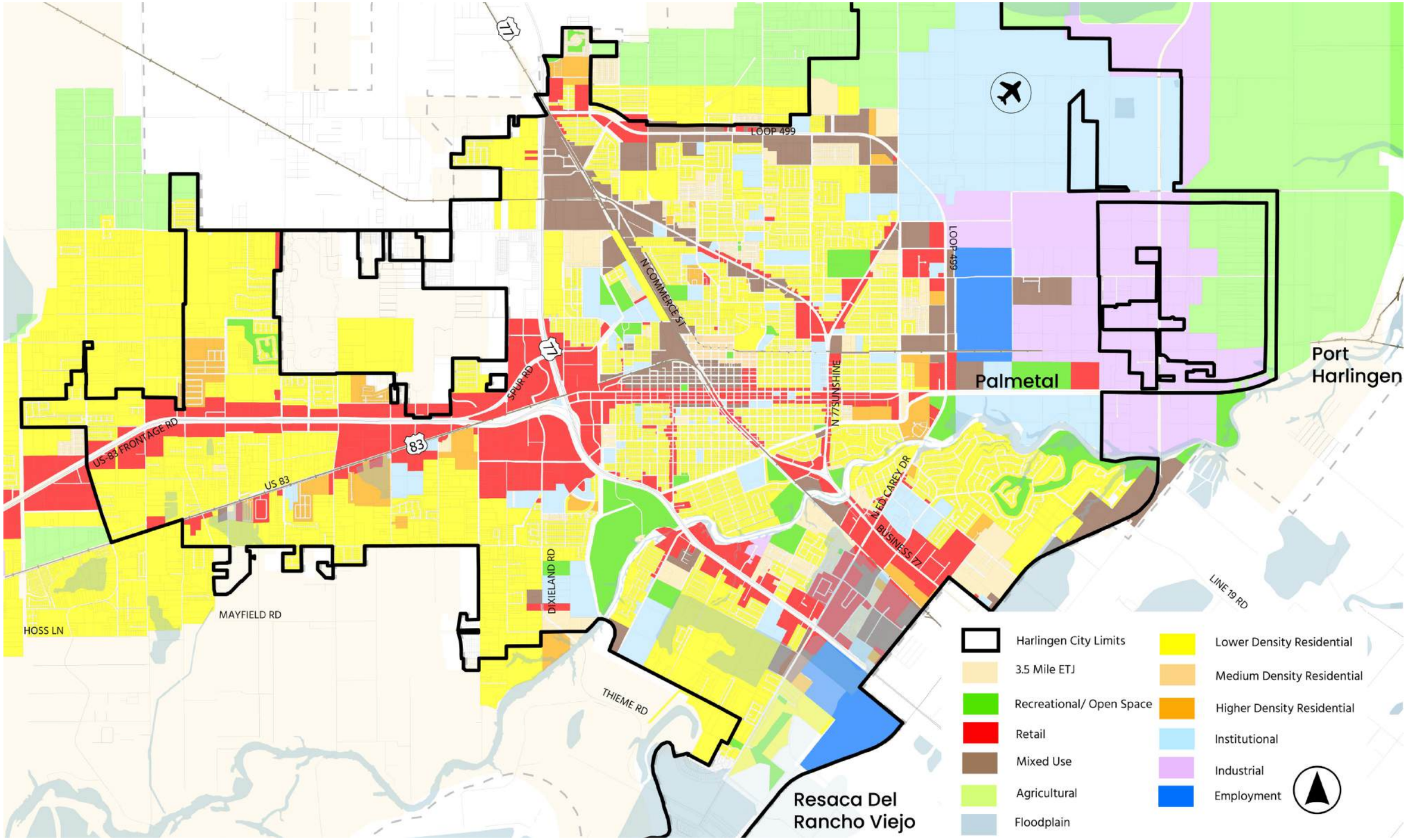
- Investing in high-quality parks boosts livability and health outcomes but may reduce land available for revenue-generating uses like retail or housing.
- Harlingen's year-round outdoor climate creates a strong case for integrating green space within new neighborhoods and redevelopment areas.

Economic Development & Commercial Corridors

- Attracting new businesses may require strategic land banking or incentives, which could delay other types of development.
- Repositioning aging corridors for mixed-use may require upfront investments, but it creates long-term value and vibrancy.

Transportation & Connectivity

- Harlingen's spread-out development can create traffic congestion and auto-dependence. Compact, mixed-use areas with walkability and transit options can reduce vehicle miles traveled.
- Gridded streets and multi-modal infrastructure improve resilience and reduce the cost of long-term maintenance.



Map 2. Harlingen Future Land Use

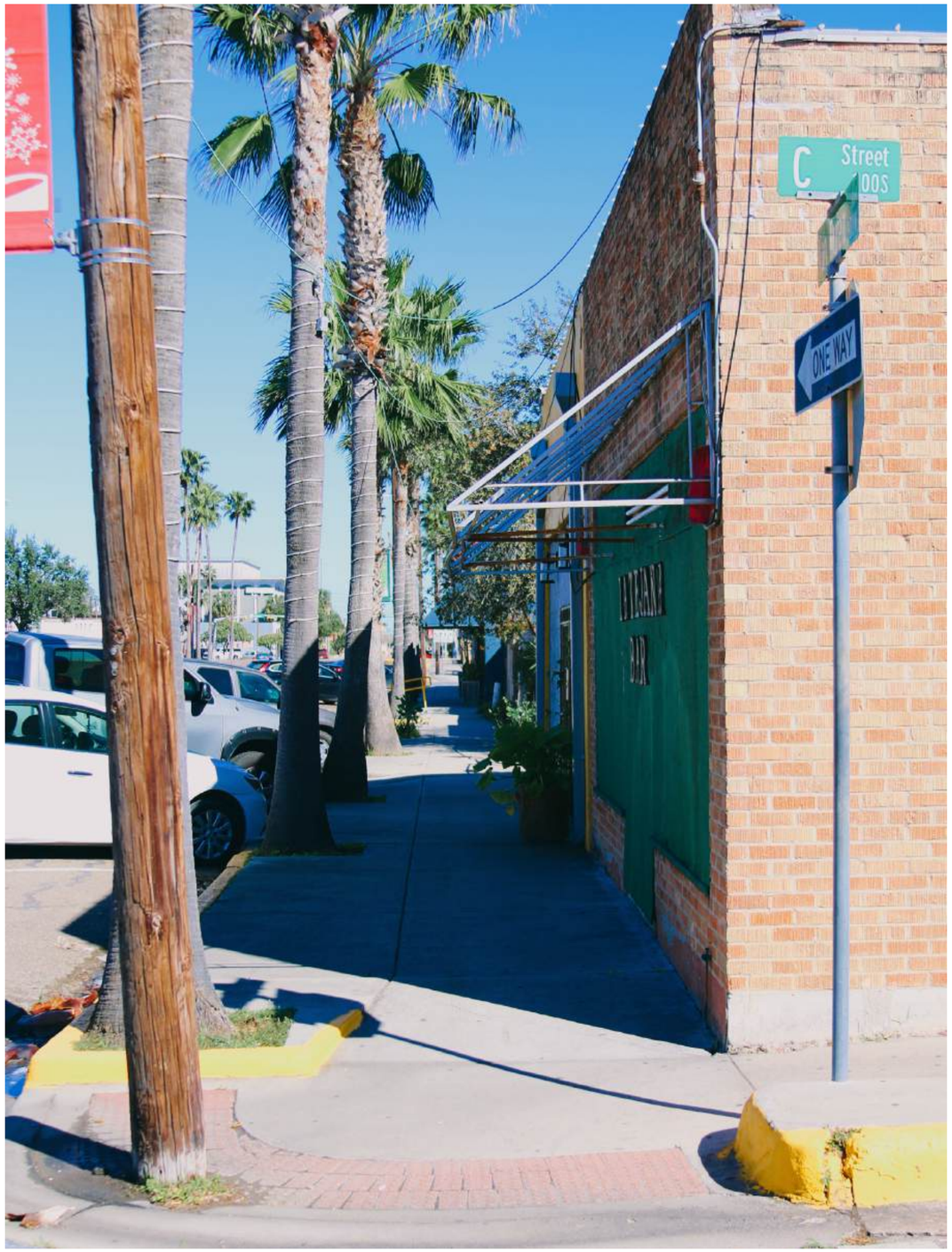
Future Land Use Categories

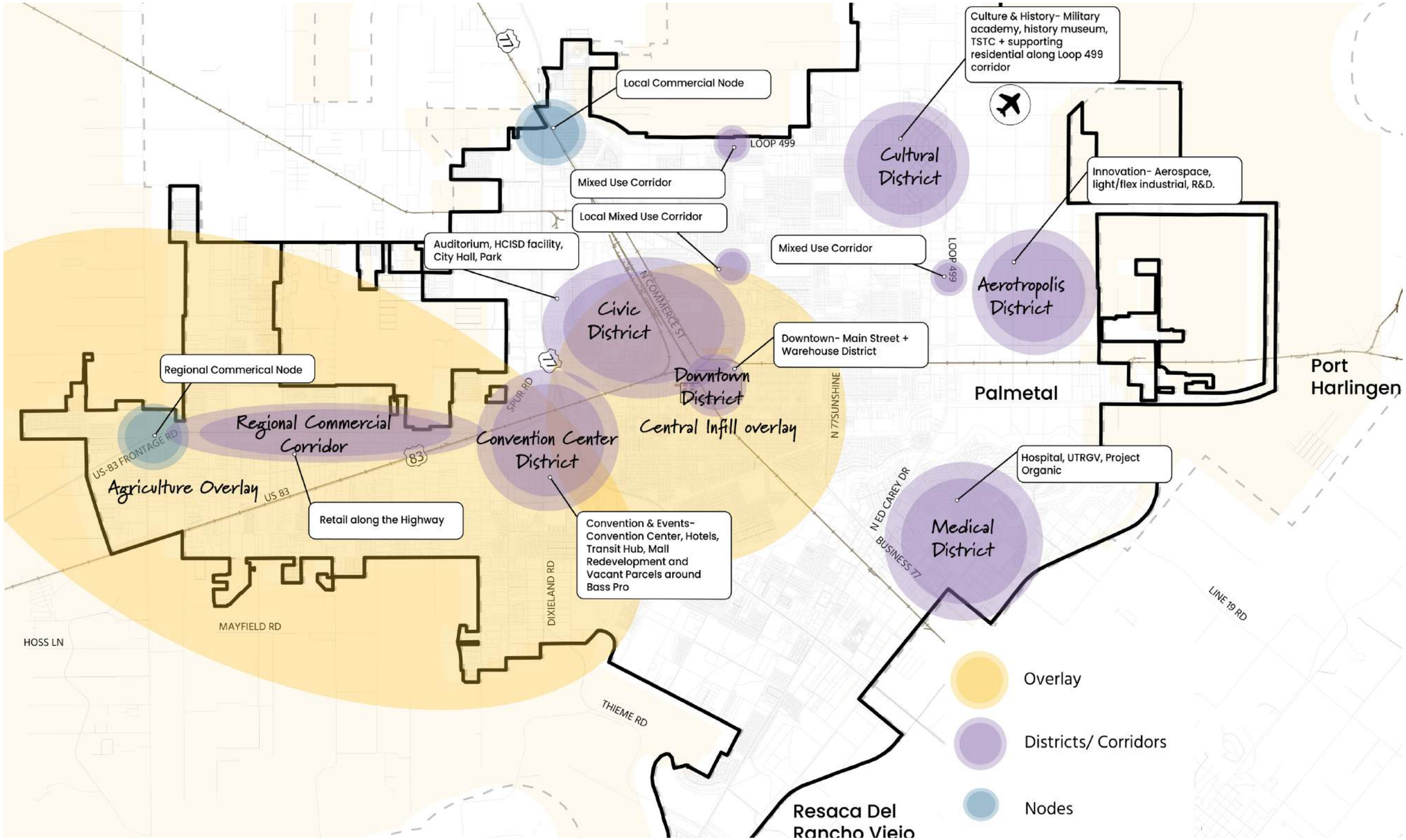
Future Land Use Categories define the intended character, scale, and mix of uses for different areas of Harlingen. They guide zoning and development to ensure growth aligns with the city's vision and priorities. These categories provide a framework for making consistent, community-focused land use decisions.

Land Use Type	Description	Image
Agricultural	Primarily consists of traditional agriculture, focusing on the cultivation of crops, as well as the raising of livestock. This is also inclusive of complementary uses that support agriculture, such as large-lot single-family housing, barns or stables, and landscape nurseries.	
Low Density Residential	Low-Density Residential consists of single-family housing with one dwelling unit per lot, detached from any other dwelling units and designed to be occupied by one family. This housing is typically individually owned and may be built singularly or within larger planned neighborhoods. These areas maintain a lower density, intensity, and scale, aligning with traditional uniform single-family home environments.	
Medium Density Residential	Medium-Density Residential includes a variety of housing options, including townhomes and duplexes, in a traditional neighborhood pattern. Duplexes have two attached units per lot, whereas townhomes have one unit per lot but with multiple units that share walls along a street frontage. These areas offer convenient access to small-scale neighborhood serving uses in select locations accessible without a car.	

Land Use Type	Description	Image
High Density Residential	High-Density Residential involves housing types with numerous dwelling units, designed to be occupied by multiple families in a single building or structure, such as an apartment or condo building. This land-use type may include ancillary uses such as parking structures and leasing offices and should be incorporated in close proximity to select commercial corridors.	
Mixed-Use	Mixed-use spaces consist of medium or high-density residential and non-residential land uses, integrating housing with employment and retail. These uses should be neighborhood-serving and accessible through multiple modes of transportation to create vibrant, walkable developments that foster greater social interaction. Mixed-use spaces may be developed horizontally or vertically.	
Retail	Retail involves businesses and establishments that primarily sell commodities or goods, or who provide services to consumers. These establishments can be local or regional in scale, ranging from big box stores along major vehicular thoroughfares, to local neighbor-hood serving businesses. Examples include restaurants, grocery stores, beauty salons and shopping centers..	

Land Use Type		Description	Image
	Employment	Employment includes all types of professional and administrative service office uses, as well as light industrial and tech/R&D. These uses are commonly found along major thoroughfares to connect to regional markets. Due to the commuters they generate, they are a primary generator of peak traffic..	
	Recreation/ Open Space	Open space and recreation consist of public parkland, open space and/or recreational areas. This land use type includes active and passive recreation, such as public sports fields or courts, swimming pools, walking trails and pavilions. It does not include privately owned parks and open spaces.	
	Institutional	Institutional includes public-serving facilities such as schools, churches, public buildings, libraries, cemeteries and some medical facilities. This land use type may also include support facilities for these uses, such as storage lots.	
	Industrial	Allows for general industrial activities including light and heavy industry, warehouses, and distribution. Must be sufficiently buffered from any adjacent uses.	





Map 3. Special District/ Nodes

Creation of Districts

To support targeted growth, Harlingen has identified distinct districts that reflect unique community roles and development potential. These districts help guide land use, infrastructure, and investment strategies (See Map 3 for Special District/ Nodes).

Downtown District

The heart of Harlingen, this district includes historic Main Street, the Arts District, and key civic buildings. With a strong foundation of local businesses and iconic architecture, the district is primed for walkable redevelopment, upper-floor housing, public events, and adaptive reuse. Reinforcing downtown's identity as a vibrant hub for commerce, culture, and community life is central to this district's future.

Civic District

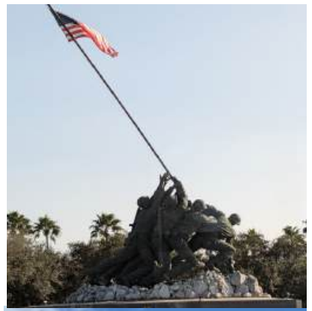
This district is anchored by City Hall, parks, and public service facilities such as schools, libraries, and community centers. It serves as the institutional backbone of Harlingen, providing space for education, governance, and civic engagement. Future efforts will focus on public realm improvements, housing located near civic services, and better physical connections between civic destinations and surrounding neighborhoods.

Convention Center District

A regional destination for entertainment, tourism, and events, this district centers around the Harlingen Convention Center and surrounding commercial areas, including revitalizing the mall site. The vision includes a mix of hospitality, retail, and office uses, supported by quality public spaces and enhanced access from I-69. This area also has potential to evolve into a major mixed-use employment center with strong regional visibility.

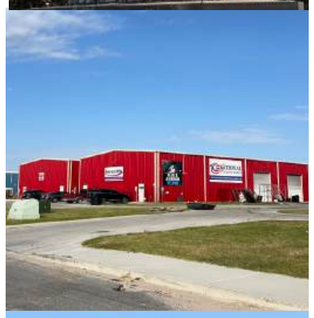
Regional Commercial Corridor

This district includes highway-adjacent retail hubs that serve both Harlingen and the surrounding region. It features large-format stores, restaurants, and service uses that support the local economy. Future improvements will focus on reinvestment, connectivity, and visual enhancements. There is also potential for more walkable, mixed-use redevelopment over time.



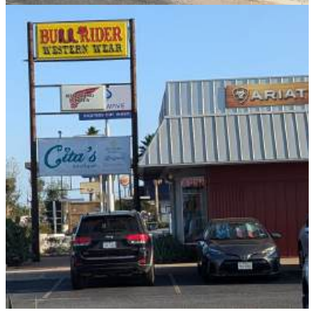
Cultural District

This district links Harlingen's cultural and educational anchors, such as the Harlingen Arts & Heritage Museum, TSTC campus, the Marine Military Academy and several public schools. It emphasizes storytelling, public art, heritage tourism, and identity-driven placemaking. This corridor supports creative businesses, student housing, and programming that celebrates Harlingen's diverse history and talent.



Aerotropolis District

With access to the Valley International Airport and nearby industrial parks, this district is positioned for long-term growth in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, logistics, and workforce training. Future development will focus on employment centers, regional infrastructure, and innovation-oriented land uses. It is also a potential site for business campuses that serve the broader region and benefit from airport adjacency.



Medical District

Anchored by Valley Baptist Medical Center and surrounding health facilities, this district plays a critical role in Harlingen's economy and community well-being. Supporting uses include clinics, research, health-tech businesses, and housing creating a medical district that is an attractive place for medical professionals to work as well as the rest of the community to enjoy. The district promotes walkability, transit access, and placemaking that reflects Harlingen's role as a regional medical hub.

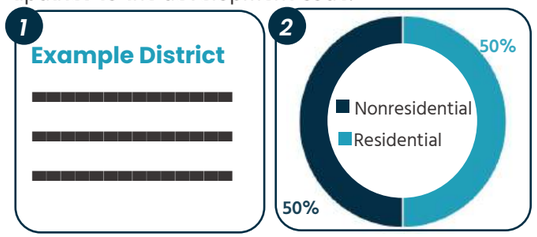
District Development Dashboards

Development Dashboards are a tool that provides staff, appointed officials, and elected representatives with comprehensive information related to the application of the future land use model and the districts to development proposals within the City. The components of each dashboard are described in the following section. These dashboards and their elements are meant to be used as guidance and display intent, not strict rules.

The Development Dashboards serve as a framework for the envisioned future of each City District. They provide direction on the types of development and features that may be suitable within that area.

1. District Description

Each dashboard includes the district title and a description of the district's primary purpose, character, and intended future conditions. Purpose statements should be used when considering land use decisions, such as the appropriateness of a rezoning case. Character statements should be used when evaluating the building form of a proposal or updates to the development code.



2. Development Ratio

The development ratio dial provides guidance on the overall target mix of residential to non-residential development types envisioned for the areas within the district. This is not intended to be a hard number but rather a general rule of thumb.

3. Density, Intensity, & Scale

The recommended density, intensity (i.e. lot coverage), and scale for development in each district are located beneath the purpose statement. Density is represented by dwelling units per acre (DUA) and should be referenced when considering land use decisions with new or redeveloped housing components. Intensity and scale should be considered based on a proposal's relationship to nearby residences and structures. For example, if immediately adjacent to a neighborhood, consideration may be given to limiting the scale of non-residential structures. Scale may be referenced in stories, with one story being approximately 12 to 14 feet high.

4. Visual Representation

Each dashboard includes images depicting examples of the intended character within each district. Local examples are used when available. These photos are not all-encompassing and may not illustrate all appropriate attributes. The representations, however, should be referenced when considering the built form of development inquiries.

5. Project Type & Appropriateness Table

The appropriateness table features ten common project types that illustrate compatible uses within each district. A description of each project type is provided below. Appropriateness ranges are given for each project type on a scale of zero to four markers. Where there is no marker, it means that project type should be prohibited within the district, while four markers mean that project type should likely be allowed by right within the district. Where additional considerations related to the application of a project type are necessary, clarification is provided in the last column. Notably, parks and public facilities are considered appropriate in all districts, regardless of marker designation.

Single-Family Detached (SFD)

Detached dwelling units on separate lots. These homes are typically individually owned and may be built singularly or within larger neighborhood developments.

SFD + Additional Dwelling Unit (ADU)

A detached dwelling unit with a secondary unit on the same property. These ADUs are smaller than the primary unit and can take many forms, including garage apartments, granny flats, or backyard casitas. ADUs allow for the provision of housing without drastically changing neighborhood character.

Single-Family Attached (SFA)

Residential dwellings that are connected by a shared wall, such as duplexes or townhomes. Units may be on an individual or shared lot and are higher density than detached single-family homes, but are similar in character and style.

Small Multi-Family (8-12 Units)

Multiple units contained within a single building, with units usually stacked on top of each other, with 8-12 units per lot. Usually the individual units are for rent (apartments), but may be for sale (condos). Multi-family development is the densest type of residential development and may include ancillary uses like parking structures and leasing offices.

Large Multi-Family (12+ Units)

Similar to small multifamily but with 12+ units per lot and may include multiple buildings on the lot, creating a complex.

Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale

Both residential, office, retail and/or other uses contained within a single building or development. These uses may be horizontal or vertical mixed-use. In vertical mixed-use, the ground floor is encouraged to be food and beverage or pedestrian-oriented retail and services, to encourage foot traffic and activity. The residential may be for rent or for sale in a condo regime. Neighborhood scale denotes density, intensity and scale are lower and more compatible with nearby residential neighborhood land uses.

Mixed-Use, Community Scale

Similar to mixed-use, neighborhood scale above but with somewhat higher density, intensity and scale. This project type should act as a community wide draw and attract residents outside of nearby neighborhoods.

Retail

Shops, restaurants, professional services, and entertainment uses that can be local or regional scale, depending on their service areas. Locally scaled retail is suitable for small businesses and appropriate for infill projects within existing neighborhoods. Regional scale includes big box stores typically located along major thoroughfares.

Office

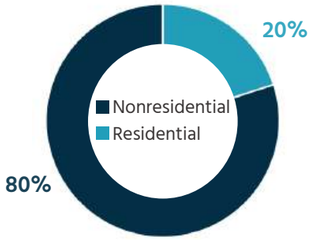
Professional and medical offices, including hospitals, that support various employment uses.

Industrial

Industrial is manufacturing, processing, assembly, warehouse, and similar uses that do not generate nuisances (noise, odor, dust, etc.) and are able to house the entire operation inside the building, meaning there are no materials/products being stored or work happening outdoors. They may also produce less heavy truck traffic than "heavier" industry.

Downtown District

The historic heart of the City, Downtown Harlingen features a vibrant Main Street lined with shops and restaurants as well as some warehousing. Plans for redevelopment in this district are laid out in Harlingen's Downtown Plan.

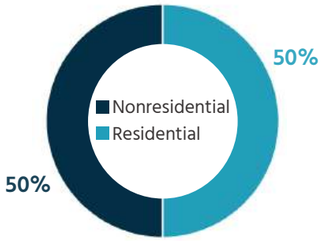


Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
10 to 75 units per acre	Medium, High in some circumstances	1 to 9 Stories Low to Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	● ○ ○ ○	Not considered compatible, as the intent is to provide higher-density housing and activity centers with retail.
SFD + ADU	● ○ ○ ○	
SFA	● ● ● ○	Residential developments can be compatible, provided that they are appropriately located in horizontal or vertical mixed-use areas close to the downtown core.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ● ●	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ● ● ●	This is the ideal form of development within the Downtown District, including activity centers, retail, services and diverse housing options; design should emphasize the pedestrian experience.
Retail	● ● ● ●	Most appropriate in the downtown core or major corridors.
Office	● ● ● ○	Most appropriate on upper floors of mixed use buildings with active ground floor uses.
Industrial	● ○ ○ ○	Flex and light industrial that supports the goals of downtown, such as maker spaces and studios.

Civic District

A predominately residential area that consists of single family and small-scale multifamily housing, local serving retail, and civic facilities including City Hall, Harlingen Municipal Auditorium, and Lon C Hill Park.

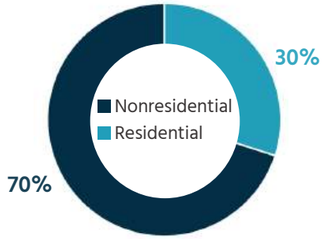


Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
3 to 22 units per acre	Low	1 to 4 Stories Low/Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	● ● ● ●	Appropriate in low-density residential areas.
SFD + ADU	● ● ● ●	
SFA	● ● ● ○	Appropriate in medium-density residential and mixed-use areas with close proximity to civic amenities.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ● ○	Most appropriate in northeast node of the District.
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ○ ○ ○	
Retail	● ● ● ○	Neighborhood-serving retail and entertainment is most appropriate in mixed use areas and along District corridors.
Office	● ● ○ ○	Most appropriate in existing space reserved for civic uses.
Industrial	● ○ ○ ○	All industrial project types should be located along the eastern corridor of the District.

Convention District

Located at the intersection of highways US-77 and US-83, this district is a central hub for retail, events, and entertainment that attracts local residents and visitors from out of town. Additionally, this district includes a variety of residential areas ranging from low-to high-density.

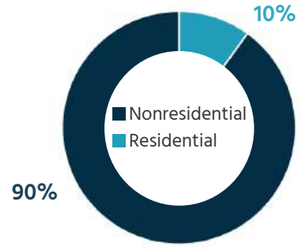


Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
10 to 40 units per acre	Medium, High in some circumstances	1 to 9 Stories Low to Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFD + ADU	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFA	● ● ○ ○	Most appropriate in medium-density residential areas.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	Appropriate in high-density residential areas.
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	○ ○ ○ ○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ● ● ●	Appropriate within the district core and along major corridors. Should account for local as well as community-wide draw to this project type.
Retail	● ● ● ●	Appropriate overall. Retail developments should be regional in the size and scale.
Office	● ● ● ●	Appropriate if located within a mixed-use development or along major corridors.
Industrial	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate for limited light industrial development.

Regional Commercial Corridor

A regional hub that serves as the western gateway along US-83. This districts features commercial land uses along the highway as well neighborhoods comprised of single-family homes.



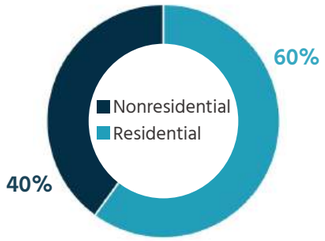
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
10 to 40 units per acre	Medium	1 to 4 Stories Low/Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFD + ADU	○ ○ ○ ○	
SFA	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate along northern perimeter of district to support transition to adjacent, lower density residential areas.
Small Multi-Family	● ● ○ ○	
Large Multi-Family	● ● ● ○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	● ● ● ○	May be appropriate if set-back from major roadways. Should focus on the retail and services for nearby neighborhoods.
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	● ○ ○ ○	
Retail	● ● ● ●	Appropriate overall, with a regional retail size and scale.
Office	● ● ● ●	Appropriate overall.
Industrial	● ● ○ ○	Appropriate if integrated within larger, regional commercial developments.



Cultural District

This district provides a hub for the City's culture and heritage while serving as a gateway for those arriving through the Valley International Airport. Supporting residential uses can be found along Loop 499 in addition to arts and historical institutions.



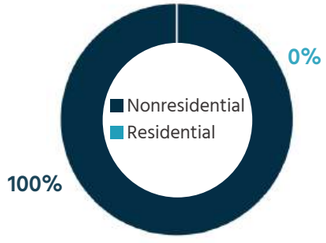
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
4 to 22 units per acre	Low to Medium	1 to 4 Stories Low/Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	●●●●	Appropriate in low-density residential areas.
SFD + ADU	●●●●	
SFA	●●●○	Appropriate to support transition to adjacent, lower density residential areas.
Small Multi-Family	●●●○	Most appropriate in high-density residential and mixed-use areas with close proximity to schools and employment centers.
Large Multi-Family	●●○○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	●●●○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	●○○○	
Retail	●●●○	Appropriate in mixed-use areas and along major corridors.
Office	●●●○	Appropriate along major corridors and near the Valley International Airport.
Industrial	●●●○	



Aerotropolis District

Located just south of the Valley International Airport, the Aerotropolis District is largely undeveloped, with the exception of an existing neighborhood. Plans for future development include light industrial uses such as research and development, aerospace and flex industrial.



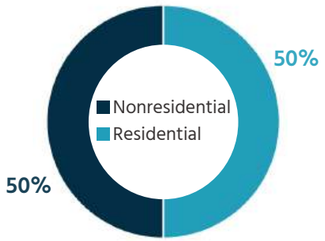
Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
0 units per acre	Medium	1 to 2 Stories Low-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	○○○○	Not considered appropriate, as this district can contain uses and businesses that may be considered a nuisance to residents.
SFD + ADU	○○○○	
SFA	○○○○	
Small Multi-Family	○○○○	
Large Multi-Family	○○○○	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	○○○○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	○○○○	
Retail	●●○○	Appropriate with increased emphasis on the service industry and office employment. These project types serve to boost attractiveness of office developments.
Office	●●●●	Appropriate in employment and industrial areas
Industrial	●●●●	Appropriate overall, with high quality design standards.



Medical District

Centered around the city's healthcare institutions, this district includes a variety of housing options and supporting retail along local corridors.



Residential Density	Intensity	Scale
18 to 40 units per acre	Medium, High in some circumstances	1 to 9 Stories Low to Mid-Rise

Project Type & Appropriateness		Compatibility Considerations
SFD	●●○○	
SFD + ADU	●●○○	
SFA	●●●○	Appropriate in medium and high-density residential areas. Should be located in close proximity to to schools and employment centers.
Small Multi-Family	●●●○	
Large Multi-Family	●●●●	
Mixed-Use, Neighborhood Scale	●●○○	
Mixed-Use, Community Scale	●●●●	Appropriate within the district core and along major corridors. Should account for local as well as community-wide draw to this project type and design should emphasize the pedestrian experience.
Retail	●●●●	Regional-scale retail is appropriate along major corridors. Local-scale retail should be concentrated within the district core, with nearby pedestrian access.
Office	●●●●	Appropriate in mixed-use and employment areas.
Industrial	●●○○	Appropriate for light industrial such as research and development, medical and flex industrial uses.

Urban Design Best Practices for Harlingen

Urban design is about shaping the everyday spaces where people live, work, and gather. For Harlingen, good design means more than just aesthetics it's about comfort, safety, connectivity, and creating a sense of pride in the city. These best practices reflect what we heard from the community and provide a roadmap for how public spaces, streets, and development can support a more vibrant, resilient, and inclusive Harlingen.

Prioritize the Public Realm

The public realm, including sidewalks, parks, streetscapes, and plazas, plays a major role in shaping community life. Investments in wider sidewalks, street trees, shaded bus stops, solar lighting, and benches can make Harlingen more walkable, welcoming, and safe for all residents. Feedback from the community emphasized a desire for better lighting, accessible walkways, and more comfortable places to gather, especially in Downtown and on the Westside.

- Install solar lighting in parks, alleys, and along sidewalks for added safety.
- Provide benches, shade, trash cans, and water fountains in gathering areas.
- Activate underused public spaces with events, art, and temporary installations.
- Improve sidewalks near schools, parks, and high-traffic streets.
- Focus on pedestrian-friendly design in Westside neighborhoods and Downtown.

Beautify Gateways and Corridors

Major roads and entry points into Harlingen shape how residents and visitors experience the city. Improvements such as native landscaping, public art, attractive signage, and lighting enhance community pride and attract investment. Corridors like Commerce Street were frequently mentioned as needing visual upgrades and better maintenance.

- Add trees, planting strips, and native flowers along major streets.
- Install coordinated signage and directional markers that reflect Harlingen's identity.
- Use lighting and public art to highlight key gateways into the city.
- Improve building facades and remove visual clutter in commercial areas.
- Maintain clean and consistent streetscapes across key corridors.

Make Downtown a Destination

Downtown Harlingen is full of charm and history. It has the potential to become a more vibrant and active place for shopping, dining, events, and daily life. Design strategies should focus on walkability, lighting, and bringing more housing and activity into the area. Residents want Downtown to feel safe, well-lit, and alive with culture.

- Encourage apartments or lofts above existing storefronts.
- Transform alleys into public gathering spaces with lighting and greenery.
- Expand outdoor events and evening programming like concerts and markets.
- Improve sidewalk conditions and pedestrian crossings on Jackson Street.
- Offer support for businesses to refresh storefronts and activate the ground floor.

Design for Connectivity

Getting around safely and comfortably is a top priority in Harlingen. Whether by foot, bike, or bus, residents want streets and trails that connect neighborhoods to parks, schools, and jobs. Streets should serve all users, not just drivers.

- Fill sidewalk gaps near schools, parks, and civic buildings.
- Build more bike lanes and connect them to existing trails.
- Add safe crossings at busy intersections and along major roads.
- Ensure sidewalks and trails are accessible for everyone, including those with disabilities.
- Extend and connect the Arroyo trail to more parts of the city.

Elevate Westside Neighborhoods

Equity in design means focusing investment where it is needed most. Harlingen's Westside has been identified as an area with unmet needs. Improving infrastructure and public spaces here can support long-term growth and well-being for all residents.

- Build parks, trails, and plazas in underserved Westside areas.
- Upgrade lighting, sidewalks, and drainage systems.
- Develop community centers, youth facilities, and local services.
- Improve access to jobs, schools, and transit in Westside neighborhoods.
- Use public art and placemaking to celebrate neighborhood pride.

Celebrate Harlingen's Identity

Design can help tell Harlingen's story and reflect its rich culture and heritage. From public art to historic buildings and signage, the city's unique character can be expressed in creative and authentic ways.

- Use murals and cultural installations that reflect Harlingen's people and history
- Preserve historic buildings and encourage adaptive reuse.
- Highlight the city's bicultural roots in signage, materials, and public spaces.
- Support local artists and makers through public art programs.
- Incorporate color, texture, and materials that are unique to the Rio Grande Valley.

Create Resilient and Climate-Friendly Design

With frequent flooding and extreme heat, Harlingen must build with the future in mind. Green design strategies can reduce risks, save resources, and make neighborhoods more livable.

- Plant trees and add shaded areas in parks and along streets.
- Use drought-resistant landscaping and rain gardens to manage stormwater
- Encourage permeable paving for sidewalks and parking areas.
- Design for passive cooling through shade, ventilation, and orientation.
- Use building and street materials that reduce heat and reflect sunlight

CHAPTER 3

COMPLETE COMMUNITIES

Vision Elements

Resilient Community

Diverse Housing

Economic Growth and Opportunity

Goals

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

Objectives

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Provide resources and initiatives to address poverty and affordable housing.
- 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.
- Desire for luxury housing to attract professionals and boost economic growth.
- Incentive 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 to enhance connectivity.
- Encourage investment in underutilized areas such as downtown and vacant properties.
- Expand mixed-use developments to integrate business, housing, and public spaces.

Housing Policies

Ensuring high-quality housing options is essential for fostering a resilient and thriving community. These housing policies aim to promote affordability, inclusivity, connectivity, and well-being, guiding future development to support Harlingen's diverse population and long-term growth. By prioritizing walkability, mixed-use development, and access to essential amenities, the city can create neighborhoods that enhance quality of life and economic opportunity for all residents.

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.

Health & Wellness Policy

Incorporating health and wellness policies into the housing chapter ensures that residential developments promote safe, walkable neighborhoods, access to parks and green spaces, and high-quality housing conditions. Prioritizing equitable access to healthcare facilities, active transportation options, and environmental sustainability will enhance overall community well-being.

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."

Key Takeaways:

- Strong demand for affordable starter homes for families and workforce housing for service industry employees.
- Need for downsizing options for older residents to help them remain in the community.
- Interest in "missing middle" housing, such as small-lot single-family homes and townhomes, to bridge affordability gaps.
- Desire for higher-end housing to attract professionals and boost economic growth.
- Emphasis on investments in subsidized affordable housing to improve accessibility for all income levels.
- Concern that lack of housing diversity may hinder population growth and economic opportunities in Harlingen.

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.

Diverse & Inclusive Housing Options

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.

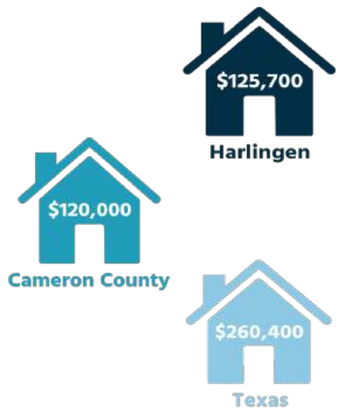
To support its growing population, Harlingen must diversify its housing options by increasing affordable rentals, expanding homeownership opportunities, and promoting missing middle housing. These efforts will ensure a vibrant and sustainable community that meets the needs of current and future residents.

Figure 1. New Single-Family Homes in 2024

Figure 2. New Multi-Family Units in 2024

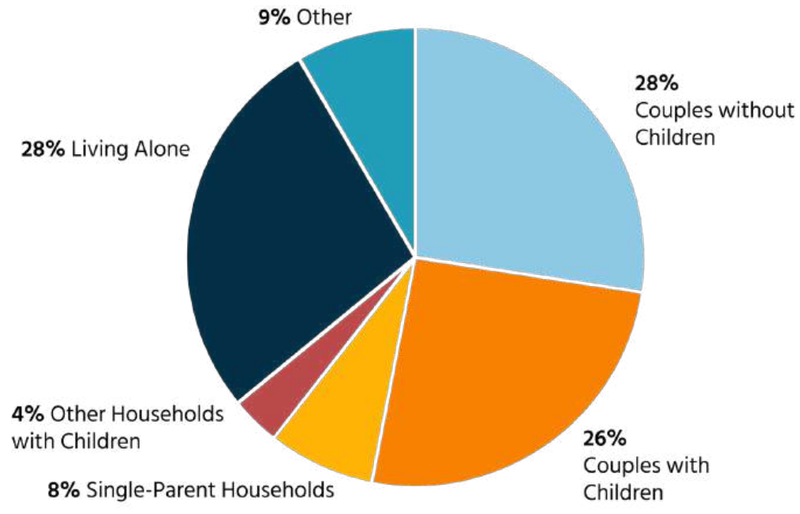
Source: City of Harlingen Planning & Development

Figure 3. Median Home Value



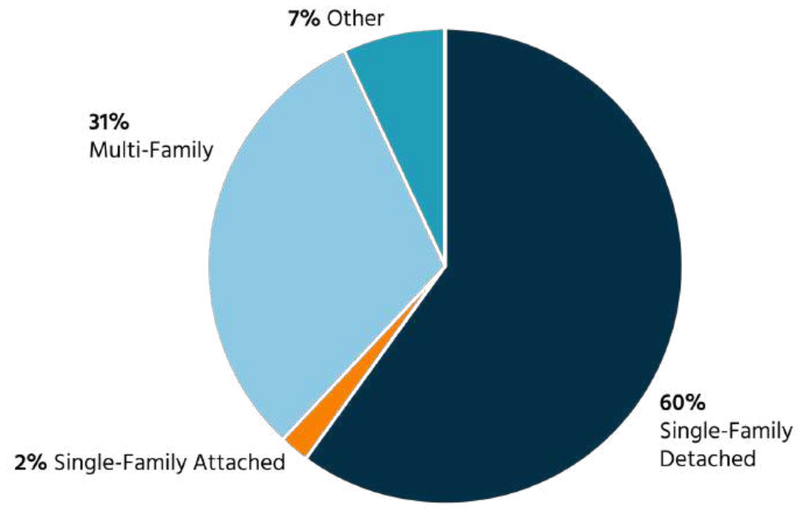
Source: 2019 - 2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Figure 5. Existing Household Makeup



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

Figure 4. 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.

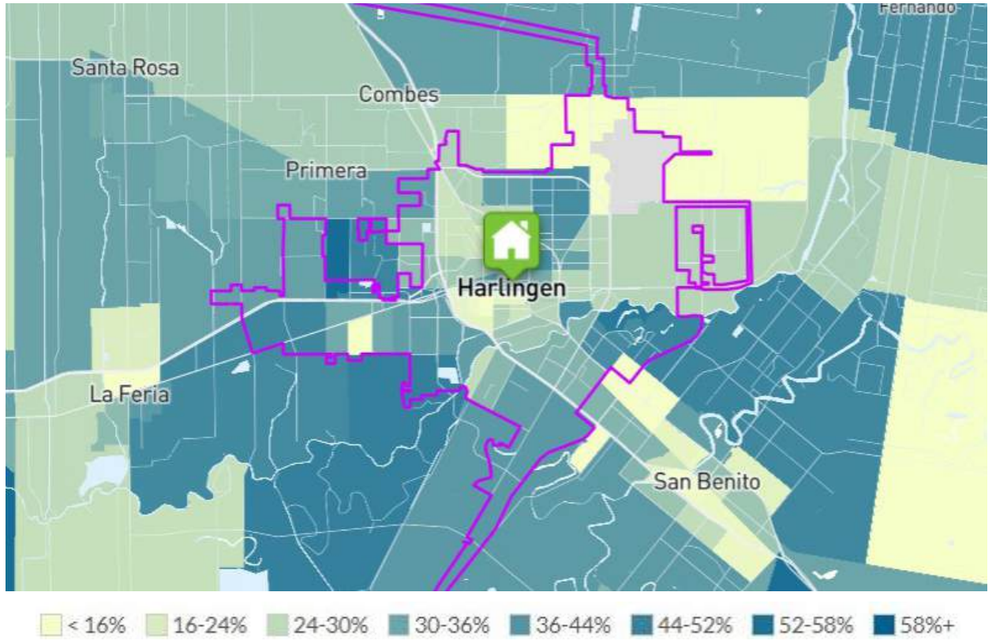
Highlights

- 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

Map 1. 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.

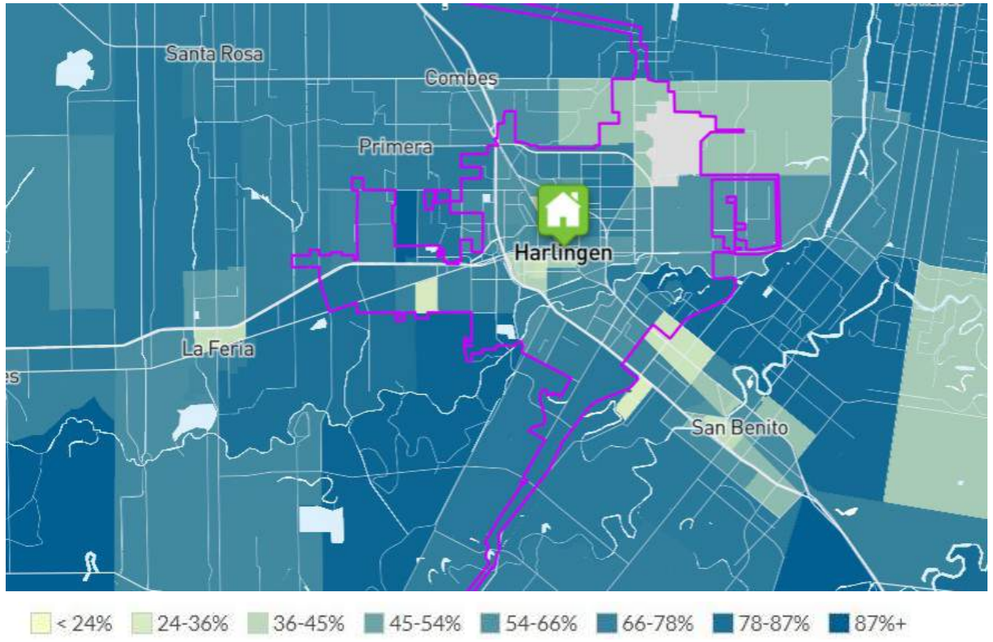
Highlights

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



Identification of Future Housing and Diversification Needs in Harlingen

As Harlingen continues to grow and evolve, ensuring a diverse and resilient housing market will be critical for long-term sustainability and affordability. The city's housing needs must align with changing demographics, economic development goals, and infrastructure investments, ensuring that all residents—whether young professionals, families, or retirees—have access to suitable housing. To build a future-ready housing market, the city must prioritize a balanced mix of housing types, strategic investments in revitalization, and policies that enhance affordability and resilience.

Future Housing Needs and Diversification Strategies

Expanding Missing Middle Housing

Harlingen's current housing stock is predominantly single-family detached homes, making up 60% of all housing units, while multi-family units account for 31%. To address affordability challenges and changing household preferences, the city must promote "missing middle" housing including townhomes, duplexes, and small-scale multi-family developments to bridge the gap between single-family homes and large apartment complexes. These housing types:

- Provide more attainable homeownership options for young families and first-time buyers.
- Support density and walkability in key areas, reducing car dependency.
- Encourage diverse neighborhood compositions that accommodate families, single professionals.

Affordable and Workforce Housing for Economic Sustainability

With a median household income of $38,758 and nearly 24% of residents facing high housing costs (spending 36-44% of their income on housing), affordability remains a significant issue. The city must expand housing options that cater to essential workforce members, including service industry employees, healthcare workers, and teachers. This can be achieved through:

- Incentives for developers to build affordable housing, particularly near employment hubs and transit corridors.
- Partnerships with local employers to support workforce housing initiatives.
- Rental assistance programs and first-time homebuyer support to help residents achieve housing stability.

Downsizing Options

Approximately 29.4% of Harlingen's households include seniors, yet the city lacks a significant number of downsizing-friendly homes for aging residents who wish to remain in the community. Addressing this need requires:

- Age-friendly housing design, including accessible units with universal design principles.
- More single-story townhomes and smaller lot homes to provide easier maintenance options for seniors.
- Senior-focused mixed-use developments that integrate housing with healthcare, retail, and recreational opportunities.

Luxury Housing to Attract Professionals

While workforce housing is essential, Harlingen must also diversify its higher-end housing market to attract professionals, business leaders, and remote workers who are relocating due to Texas' favorable business climate. Expanding luxury housing options can:

- Strengthen economic growth by retaining and attracting higher-income residents.
- Support local businesses and amenities by increasing demand for high-end retail, dining, and services.
- Enhance Harlingen's appeal as a business-friendly city, complementing ongoing economic development efforts.

Mixed-Use and Transit-Oriented Development

Housing should be integrated with commercial and transit opportunities to reduce long-term transportation costs for residents. Currently, Harlingen households spend an average of 32% of their income on transportation, reflecting the need for better connectivity. Future planning should:

- Encourage residential growth near retail centers and employment districts to reduce commuting burdens.
- Promote mixed-use development in areas like Downtown Harlingen to create a vibrant, walkable urban core.
- Enhance transit infrastructure to connect residential areas with major job hubs, education centers, and healthcare facilities.

Key Neighborhood & Housing Strategies for Harlingen

To address Harlingen's evolving housing needs and ensure long-term community resilience, the city should expand existing efforts and introduce new initiatives that promote affordability, inclusivity, sustainability, and neighborhood vibrancy. These programs should prioritize revitalizing older areas, supporting homeownership, expanding housing variety, and enhancing livability in all neighborhoods.

Infill Development and Adaptive Reuse

- Revitalize vacant lots and buildings, to support compact mixed use housing near existing infrastructure.

Housing Rehabilitation and Homeownership Support

- Expand repair grants and first time homebuyer programs to preserve aging homes and help more families build equity.

Sustainable and Resilient Housing Solutions

- Encourage storm resistant and energy efficient homes while integrating green infrastructure to reduce flooding and long term costs.

Neighborhood Revitalization and Placemaking

- Invest in community led improvements, beautification projects, and preservation efforts to strengthen neighborhood identity and livability.

Walkable & Connected Neighborhoods

Evaluating Neighborhood Completeness in Harlingen

A walkable and connected neighborhood is one where residents can conveniently access essential daily needs such as grocery stores, restaurants, schools, parks, healthcare, and employment centers without relying heavily on a car. These neighborhoods enhance quality of life, improve public health, and support local businesses by fostering vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environments.

In Harlingen, neighborhood completeness varies depending on proximity to commercial centers, transportation infrastructure, and residential density. While areas like Downtown Harlingen and parts of the Arroyo Colorado Corridor offer relatively strong walkability, much of the city remains auto-dependent, with limited transit options and fragmented pedestrian and bike infrastructure. Evaluating Harlingen's existing walkability and connectivity helps identify areas for improvement and shape future development that supports a more accessible, livable, and resilient community.
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.

Strengths in Walkability and Connectivity

Downtown and Commercial Corridors

Downtown Harlingen, particularly along Jackson Street and Commerce Street, offers a mix of shops, restaurants, and local businesses within walking distance of residential areas. Areas near La Plaza Mall and the Bass Pro Shops corridor also function as regional retail hubs, though pedestrian access and safety features in these areas are limited.

Parks and Recreational Access

The Arroyo Colorado Trail System and city parks provide key recreational assets and pedestrian pathways, supporting health and mobility. However, sidewalk gaps in surrounding neighborhoods limit full accessibility to these destinations.

Emerging Mixed-Use Areas

Some locations especially near schools, retail corridors, and major intersections show potential for compact, mixed-use development. Zoning adjustments and infrastructure investment may be needed to encourage this form of growth.

Gaps and Challenges in Walkability

High Car Dependency

Public Transit Limitations

Lack of Safe Walking and Biking Routes

Service Gaps in a few Areas

Key Strategies to Enhance Neighborhood Completeness

Improving walkability and access in Harlingen requires a targeted, place-based approach. These strategies focus on expanding everyday connections, improving public spaces, and reducing car dependency. Together, they support the creation of safe, vibrant, and inclusive neighborhoods.

Strengthen Neighborhood Connectivity

- Fill sidewalk gaps, improve bike and trail networks, and enhance pedestrian safety through better lighting and crossings.

Support Mixed Use and Walkable Development

- Encourage grocery stores, clinics, and services within neighborhoods and focus new growth near transit and high-activity areas.

Enhance Public Transit Access

- Expand Valley Metro service, introduce flexible microtransit options, and upgrade bus stops for safety, comfort, and accessibility.

Activate Public Spaces and Streetscapes

- Invest in downtown events, pocket parks, shaded sidewalks, and public art to create more inviting, people-friendly places.

Strong Sense of Place & Community

Defining Harlingen's Identity

Harlingen is known for its welcoming atmosphere, cultural heritage, and strong sense of community. The city's character is shaped by its historic downtown, public spaces, and community-driven events that bring residents together. Strengthening these elements through thoughtful design, preservation, and engagement can enhance local pride, foster social connections, and support long-term community resilience.

Community Assets & Opportunities

- Harlingen's historic downtown, public murals, and cultural landmarks celebrate local heritage and provide gathering spaces for residents.
- Community events such as Market Days, Winter Texan celebrations, and local parades foster engagement, tourism, and economic activity.
- Beautification projects, public art, and well-maintained streetscapes enhance neighborhood identity, civic pride, and overall livability.

Challenges and Gaps

- Public spaces and gathering areas are limited in certain neighborhoods, reducing opportunities for community interaction.
- Inconsistent streetscape improvements and a lack of cohesive design standards impact the overall visual appeal of key corridors.
- Walkability and accessibility need enhancement in certain areas to create safer and more inviting public spaces.

Key Community Needs

Vibrant Public Spaces

- Improving parks, plazas, and gathering areas will create more opportunities for social interaction and cultural expression.

Historic and Cultural Preservation

- Protecting and revitalizing historic sites and landmarks will strengthen Harlingen's identity.

Neighborhood Beautification

- Investing in landscaping, public art, and streetscape enhancements will improve the visual appeal and character of local areas.

Local Events and Community Engagement

- Supporting festivals, farmer's markets, and neighborhood initiatives will strengthen social connection.

Safe and Walkable Streets

- Enhancing sidewalks, lighting, and pedestrian-friendly design will create a more inviting and connected city for residents and visitors.

Health & Wellness Policy

Evaluating Health & Wellness in Harlingen

Harlingen has the potential to become a more resilient, equitable, and vibrant community by making health and wellness a central focus of housing and neighborhood planning. The city benefits from a strong healthcare network, including Valley Baptist Medical Center, Harlingen Medical Center, and the UTRGV School of Medicine, which provide essential medical care, specialized treatments, and professional training. Parks, trails, and recreational facilities further support active lifestyles, fostering physical and mental well-being for residents of all ages. Investments in walkability, mixed-use development, and access to fresh, nutritious food contribute to a healthier and more connected community. By continuing to enhance healthcare accessibility, expand wellness initiatives, and integrate health-conscious planning strategies, Harlingen can create an environment where all residents have the resources and opportunities to lead healthier lives.

Current Health Indicators and Access

- Harlingen's average life expectancy is around 77 years, which falls slightly below the state's average. This highlights the need for targeted health initiatives and improvements in environmental factors that contribute to well-being. Chronic illnesses such as obesity and diabetes are common in the community, with a greater impact on older adults and lower-income households.
- The city has a well-established healthcare network that includes Valley Baptist Medical Center, Harlingen Medical Center, and the UTRGV School of Medicine, ensuring access to essential medical care and professional training. However, some neighborhoods, particularly in West Harlingen, face challenges in accessing preventative healthcare, fresh food options, and spaces for physical activity.

Community Needs to Improve Health and Wellness

Improving health and wellness in Harlingen requires a focus on accessible healthcare, nutritious food options, active living infrastructure, and safe housing. Addressing these key areas will help create a healthier and more resilient community.

Walkable and Active Neighborhoods

- Investing in sidewalks, trails, parks, and bike infrastructure will promote physical activity and improve overall well-being.

Safe and Healthy Housing

- Addressing code enforcement, overcrowding, and aging homes will help reduce health risks related to poor living conditions.

Health Education and Wellness Programs

- Promoting initiatives focused on nutrition, chronic disease prevention, and senior wellness will support long-term community health.

Access to Fresh, Affordable Food

- Encouraging grocery stores, farmers markets, and community gardens will help address food insecurity in underserved areas.

CHAPTER 4

PUBLIC FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Vision Elements

Resilient Community

Diverse Housing

Economic Growth and Opportunity

Goals

In 2050

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

In 2050

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

In 2050

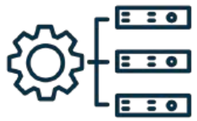
Harlingen will focus on creating opportunities for economic growth that benefit all residents and future generations.

Objectives

- Strengthen public safety and emergency preparedness for natural disasters and community challenges.
- Implement strategies for long-term resilience to economic and climate-related challenges.
- Expand infrastructure for industrial and tech-focused industries.
- Invest in infrastructure improvements to attract new businesses and retain existing ones.

Public Facilities & Infrastructure Policies

As Harlingen continues to grow, investing in reliable, modern, and resilient infrastructure is essential to maintaining a high quality of life and supporting long-term economic growth. Public facilities and utilities such as drainage systems, parks, libraries, and civic buildings shape how residents interact with their city each day. These policies reflect what the community has shared as most important: safe and well-maintained infrastructure, accessible and welcoming public spaces, and a forward-looking approach that prepares Harlingen for future needs.



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.

Enhance Mobility & Connectivity Through Infrastructure

Invest in pedestrian and bike infrastructure, sidewalk networks, and roadway upgrades to support safe, accessible, and multi-modal transportation options citywide.

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."

Key Takeaways:

- Drainage improvements are a major priority, especially in neighborhoods and business areas that experience flooding.
- Water and sewer systems need upgrades to keep up with growth and maintain reliable service.
- Many residents want safer and more connected routes for walking and biking across the city.
- Public safety services like fire stations and emergency response need more investment as the city expands.
- City Hall is seen as outdated and in need of expansion or replacement to meet future needs.
- Residents value clean and well-maintained public spaces, with support for beautification and trail connections.

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.

Public Facilities/Infrastructure

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 play a pivotal role in fostering Harlingen's growth and development. These include essential public safety infrastructures such as police and fire stations, alongside community hubs like libraries, city halls, parks, and recreation centers. To meet the evolving needs of its residents, local authorities must strategically plan for facility development, ensuring critical services and quality-of-life amenities keep pace with the city's expansion. Partnerships with institutions like the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District (HCISD) and other local organizations are vital in addressing shared challenges and maximizing community development opportunities.

Harlingen exemplifies this collaborative approach through its City-funded fire department, which operates multiple stations to ensure fire safety, and its efficient EMS services for rapid medical response. By investing in modern infrastructure and maintaining strong relationships with external organizations, the city prioritizes accessible and inclusive resources for its residents. Through strategic planning and collaboration, Harlingen remains a vibrant, resilient community poised to adapt to the needs of its growing population.

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

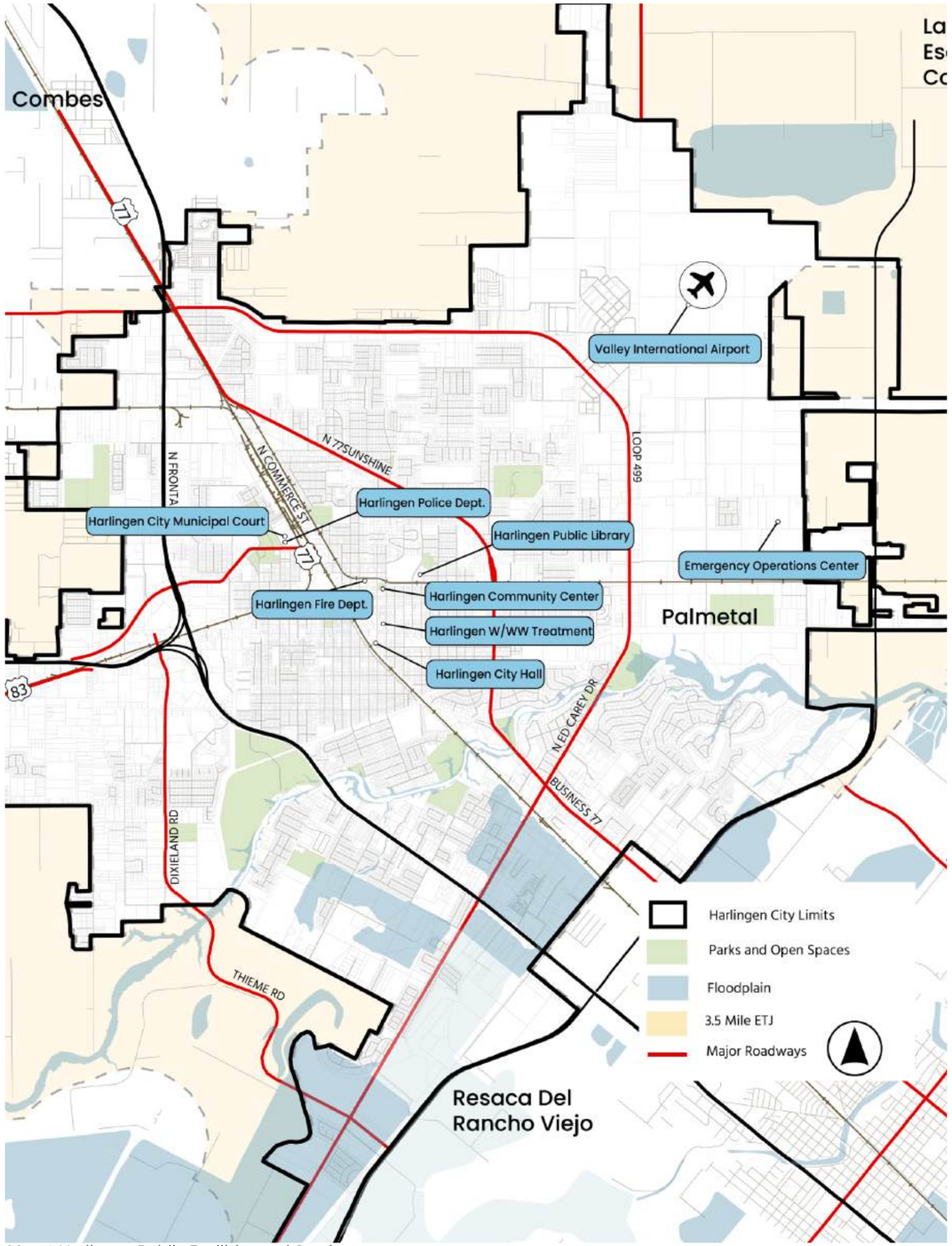
The Harlingen Police Department, located at 1018 Fair Park Boulevard, provides law enforcement services and ensures public safety for over 71,500 residents. With a history spanning over 100 years, the department is committed to crime prevention, community engagement, and maintaining peace through patrol 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 1. Harlingen Public Facilities and Services

Facility & Community Resilience

Harlingen's location in South Texas makes it vulnerable to multiple environmental hazards, including flooding, extreme heat, hurricanes, and potential wildfire exposure. As the city modernizes its infrastructure, resilience must be a core principle to ensure critical services remain operational, residents stay safe, and city resources are protected. To achieve this, Harlingen prioritizes redundancy, flexibility, risk mitigation, green infrastructure, and maintenance in its resilient infrastructure approach. Redundancy ensures that critical systems like electricity, water, and communication networks have backups such as generators, multiple water sources, and redundant IT systems. This is especially important in flood prone areas where a single failure can disrupt citywide operations. Flexibility allows public buildings to serve multiple purposes under different conditions. For example, libraries and recreation centers can function as cooling centers or emergency shelters, with modular layouts and emergency supply storage enhancing adaptability. Risk mitigation focuses on constructing infrastructure that addresses hazards such as floods, heat, tornadoes, and wildfire by using elevated structures, wind resistant materials, and power resilient designs, particularly in vulnerable areas like the Arroyo Colorado. Green infrastructure incorporates nature based solutions like bioswales, rain gardens, tree plantings, and permeable paving to reduce environmental risks while improving stormwater management and public space quality. Finally, maintenance and planning are essential to long term resilience, requiring ongoing inspections and repairs for critical systems, as well as capital improvement planning to ensure infrastructure continues to function safely and efficiently.

Facilities and Services Recommendations

As Harlingen plans for the next 20 years of growth, it is important to assess the condition, location, and availability of city facilities and supporting infrastructure. While many services are valued, feedback from residents and the community highlights gaps in coverage, aging infrastructure, and unequal access. These issues are especially prevalent in areas experiencing rapid growth or those that have historically been underserved. The considerations below outline key facility and infrastructure priorities to support a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready Harlingen.

Electrical Substation

Electrical substation identified as a top concern, especially in areas near the Port of Harlingen. As Harlingen continues to expand its industrial base, reliable power will be vital to support manufacturing, logistics, and port-related development. Additional substations or upgrades to existing systems will be necessary to meet future demand.

Broadband Easement Expansion

Limited access to high-speed internet, particularly in West Harlingen, creates challenges for education, remote work, and economic growth. To address these issues, the City should focus on establishing broadband easements and collaborating with providers to achieve universal access, prioritizing low-income and outlying neighborhoods.

Improvements in West Harlingen

West Harlingen has faced consistent neglect, with insufficient investment in parks, lighting, sidewalks, and digital infrastructure. Future improvements should focus on equitable facility distribution, including park upgrades, recreational courts, and expanded trails along Business Highway 83. These efforts will create a more inclusive and well-resourced community.

Stormwater and Drainage Infrastructure

Flooding is one of the most frequently reported challenges in Harlingen, especially near schools and major roadways. Enhancing drainage systems, particularly on 13th Street, is crucial for improving public safety, safeguarding property, and building resilience to the growing impacts of extreme weather conditions. This upgrade would address immediate concerns while preparing the city for future challenges.

Sidewalk and Trail Connectivity

Several areas in the cit such as Ed Carey Drive, 13th Street, and the Harlingen High School area lack continuous sidewalk infrastructure. Expanding sidewalks and building out a citywide network of off-street multi-use trails will improve safety and encourage active transportation.

Indoor Recreation Center

An indoor recreation center is essential to support wellness and recreational needs for all age groups. It would offer versatile spaces, modern amenities, and foster community engagement while enhancing economic development.

Public Safety Facilities (North Harlingen)

Concerns about crime and public safety were especially high in North Harlingen. A new police substation or shared emergency services center could help improve response times and increase police visibility. These investments should be paired with expanded street lighting and community outreach efforts.

Public Facilities Best Practices

As Harlingen grows and evolves, its public facilities must keep pace with the needs of a diverse, resilient, and connected community. Facilities such as libraries, police and fire stations, recreation centers, and city service buildings are not just operational assets—they are places where residents engage with government, access essential services, and build community identity. By applying best practices in facility planning, design, and maintenance, Harlingen can ensure its public spaces serve current needs while remaining adaptable to the future. The following best practices offer guidance to align infrastructure investments with long-term goals for equity, safety, sustainability, and quality of life.

Strategic Location and Equitable Access

Public facilities should be located to serve all areas of Harlingen equitably, especially neighborhoods that have historically lacked access to civic services and amenities. For example, West Harlingen has fewer public-facing facilities and amenities despite growing residential needs. Site selection should consider walkability, transit access, population growth trends, and community input. The goal is to ensure that all residents regardless of where they live can access key services like libraries, parks, health centers, and public safety buildings without significant travel barriers.

Flexible Design for Multi-Use Programming

Modern public buildings should be designed to accommodate a wide variety of uses, including community events, educational programs, emergency sheltering, and recreation. Facilities like recreation centers, libraries, and even fire stations can benefit from modular layouts, operable partitions, and multi-purpose rooms that support both daily use and emergency operations. This flexibility not only maximizes the value of city investments but also enables facilities to adapt to changing community needs over time.

Safety Through Design and Community Integration

Incorporating Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles into public facility design helps improve safety and community confidence. Well-lit paths, clear lines of sight, active frontages, and secure access points reduce opportunities for crime while encouraging positive activity around facilities. Co-locating public safety buildings such as police substations near parks, schools, or transit stops can reinforce safety in high-traffic public areas while building trust through community presence.

Resilience and Redundancy in Infrastructure

Nature-based solutions should be incorporated into public spaces to reduce flood risk and urban heat. This includes bioswales, rain gardens, tree plantings, and permeable paving around civic buildings, parks, and streets. These strategies not only manage stormwater and cool the environment but also create more attractive and usable spaces for the public.

Green Infrastructure and Environmental Performance

Public buildings and sites should integrate nature-based design solutions to manage stormwater, reduce urban heat, and create welcoming environments. Features such as bioswales, rain gardens, shade trees, reflective materials, and permeable pavement can be incorporated into civic plazas, parking areas, walkways, and park-adjacent facilities. These elements not only support Harlingen's environmental goals but also enhance the visual appeal and comfort of public spaces.

Accessibility and Universal Design Principles

All public facilities must prioritize universal accessibility, going beyond minimum ADA requirements to ensure all users can move freely and comfortably. Design considerations should include wide pathways, tactile guidance surfaces, accessible restrooms, shaded seating areas, and multilingual signage. As the city's population ages and diversifies, universal design will be key to making civic spaces inclusive for people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds.

Planning and Preventive Maintenance

Sustainable public facilities require long-term investment not only in construction but also in ongoing maintenance and renewal. Cities should develop and follow asset management plans that schedule routine inspections of HVAC systems, roofing, electrical, plumbing, and other critical components. Preventive maintenance reduces emergency repairs, extends building lifespans, and ensures public safety and functionality. Facilities budgets should include both capital renewal and operating costs to support year-round upkeep.

Community Partnerships and Co-Located Services

Cities can expand access to services by forming strategic partnerships with school districts, nonprofits, healthcare providers, and regional agencies. For instance, a library branch could be co-located with a workforce training center, or a senior health center.

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 1. 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
	-	1.49	295	-	1.55

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

Figure 2. 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
	-	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 3. 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 4. 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 5. 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 6. 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 7. 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)

The table above illustrates Harlingen's projected water demands through 2040 based on varying growth scenarios. As connections increase, so do daily, maximum day, and peak hour demands. These projections are essential for planning upgrades to the City's water treatment capacity, elevated storage, and distribution systems to ensure reliable service and regulatory compliance as the community grows.

Figure 8. Harlingen Projected Wastewater Demands

Connections	Average Annual Daily Flow (MGD)	Peak Wet Weather Flow (MGD)
2.5% Growth Rate		
2020	5.97	23.88
2025	6.76	27.04
2030	7.65	30.60
2040	9.72	38.88
5% Growth Rate		
2020	5.97	23.88
2025	7.62	30.48
2030	9.72	38.88
2040	12.41	49.64
6% Growth Rate		
2020	5.97	23.88
2025	7.98	31.92
2030	10.68	42.72

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

Water and Wastewater System Improvements

To meet future growth and ensure reliable service, the City of Harlingen must invest in targeted improvements to its water and wastewater infrastructure.

For the water system, key priorities include expanding treatment plant capacity, constructing additional elevated storage (such as the proposed Camelot tank), and replacing aging asbestos-cement pipelines. Improvements to high-service pumps and system redundancy—especially in areas like the Arroyo Colorado crossings are critical to maintaining pressure and reliability.

For the wastewater system, upgrades are needed at the Harrison Wastewater Treatment Plant to handle projected flows. Reducing inflow and infiltration, deepening lift station wet wells, and upsizing pumps and force mains will help manage peak wet weather events and support continued development in growing areas of the city.

These improvements will ensure that Harlingen's utility systems are capable, resilient, and aligned with the city's long-term vision for growth and sustainability.

Utility Service Best Practices

As Harlingen plans for the next 20 years of growth, upgrading and managing utility services will be vital to supporting a high quality of life, attracting economic investment, and enhancing community resilience. Public feedback has emphasized widespread concerns with aging infrastructure, energy reliability, flood risks, broadband access, and stormwater drainage, particularly in West Harlingen and low-income neighborhoods. Best practices in utility planning emphasize integration, equity, sustainability, and proactive maintenance. The following strategies reflect a tailored approach to utility service planning in Harlingen that is responsive to local challenges and aligned with modern infrastructure trends.

Plan Utilities with Equity and Growth in Mind

Utility infrastructure should be equitably distributed and responsive to both existing underserved areas and future development corridors. Areas like West Harlingen need focused utility upgrades, while growth near the Port and major corridors must be supported with strategic investments. Coordinated planning across city departments will ensure that utilities grow alongside housing, industry, and transportation improvements.

Embrace the One Water Approach

Harlingen should adopt a One Water approach managing all water resources holistically to maximize efficiency, improve resilience, and reduce costs. By integrating drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater systems, the City can explore options like rainwater harvesting, greywater reuse, and green stormwater infrastructure. One Water supports long-term sustainability while preparing the city for drought and flooding challenges.

Implement Water Auditing for Efficiency and Accountability

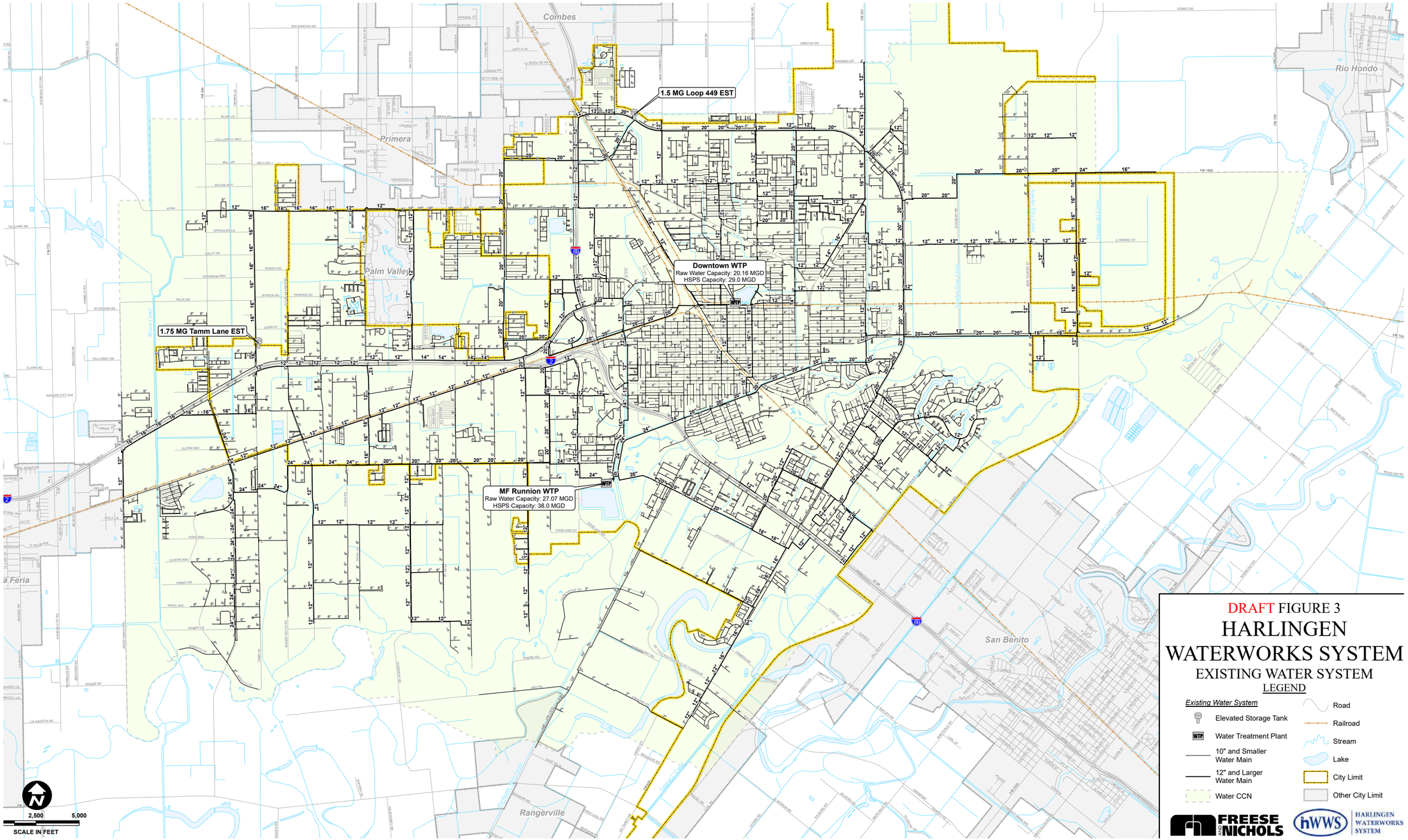
Water auditing is a critical step toward understanding and managing Harlingen's water system performance. Regular audits help identify system losses (leaks, theft, or unmetered use), reduce non-revenue water, and guide conservation efforts. Harlingen can adopt auditing standards provided by the Texas Water Development Board to assess both systemwide efficiency and water use in municipal facilities. Water audits also provide data that can inform targeted upgrades and community education programs.

Strengthen Utility Resilience

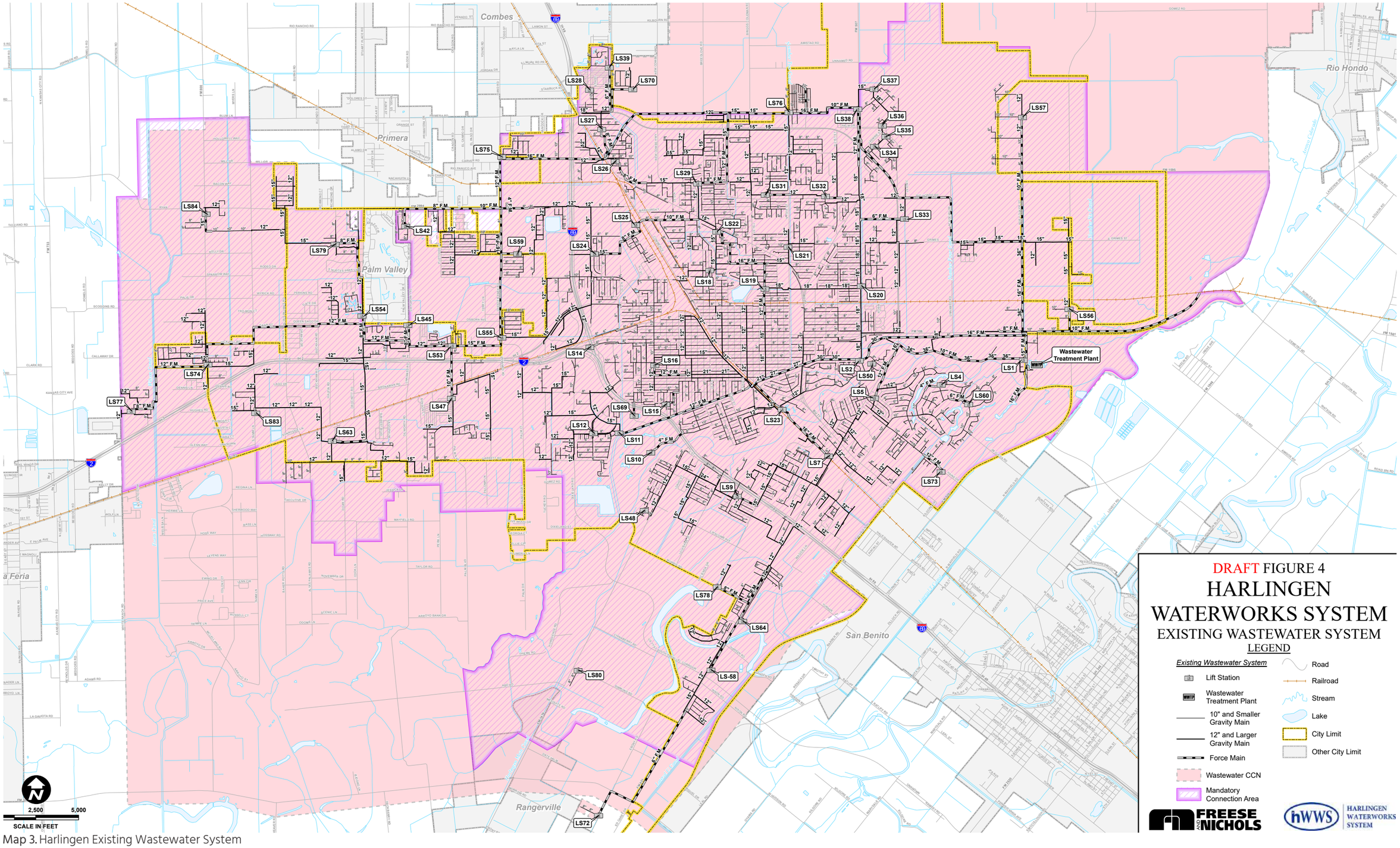
Utilities must be able to withstand climate shocks and continue functioning during emergencies. This includes upgrading pump stations, wastewater systems, and substations with backup power, elevated designs, and redundancies. Infrastructure in flood-prone areas should be reinforced or relocated. Resilient utilities are critical for ensuring safety, economic continuity, and rapid recovery.

Modernize Energy Infrastructure

As industrial activity expands near the Port and other areas, the city should work with energy providers to install new substations and upgrade grid capacity. Harlingen can also encourage distributed generation—such as solar panels on municipal buildings to improve resilience and reduce energy costs.



Map 2. Harlingen Existing Water System



Map 3. Harlingen Existing Wastewater System

CHAPTER 05

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation Policies

An effective and inclusive transportation system is key to Harlingen's future. Community input has made it clear that residents want safer streets, better connectivity, and more options for getting around—whether walking, biking, driving, or taking transit. These transportation policies reflect local priorities and aim to build a network that is accessible, efficient, and supports long-term growth.

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...

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

"Ramsey sidewalk trail is a good example — need connectivity to Ramsey."

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

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

"Activate alleys throughout the city."

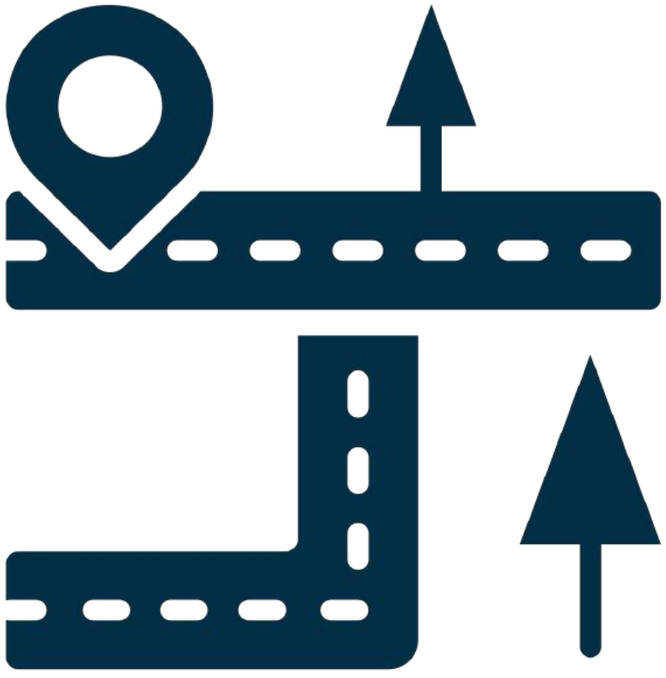
"Lots of intersections need pedestrian-friendly improvements."

Key Takeaways:

- Residents want more options for how they get around the city.
- Reducing traffic accidents and creating great streets are top community goals.
- Transit, sidewalks, and multi-use paths are seen as the most important investments for the future.
- Transportation safety is the most critical issue facing Harlingen.
- Expanding transportation choices is essential to meet current and future needs.

Transportation & 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.



Transportation Resilience

Stormwater Management

Managing stormwater throughout the public right-of-way is a key opportunity. By prioritizing these considerations, the City can continue to advance environmental resiliency..

High Quality Design

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

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

Integrating green infrastructure into transportation planning incorporates design elements that support sustainability and climate resilience.

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

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.

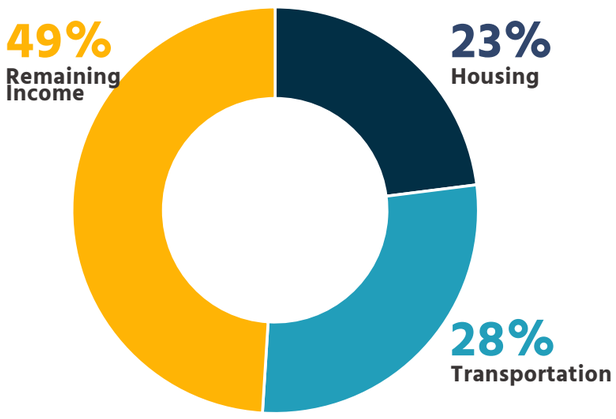
17.3 minutes
Average daily commute time for Harlingen workers

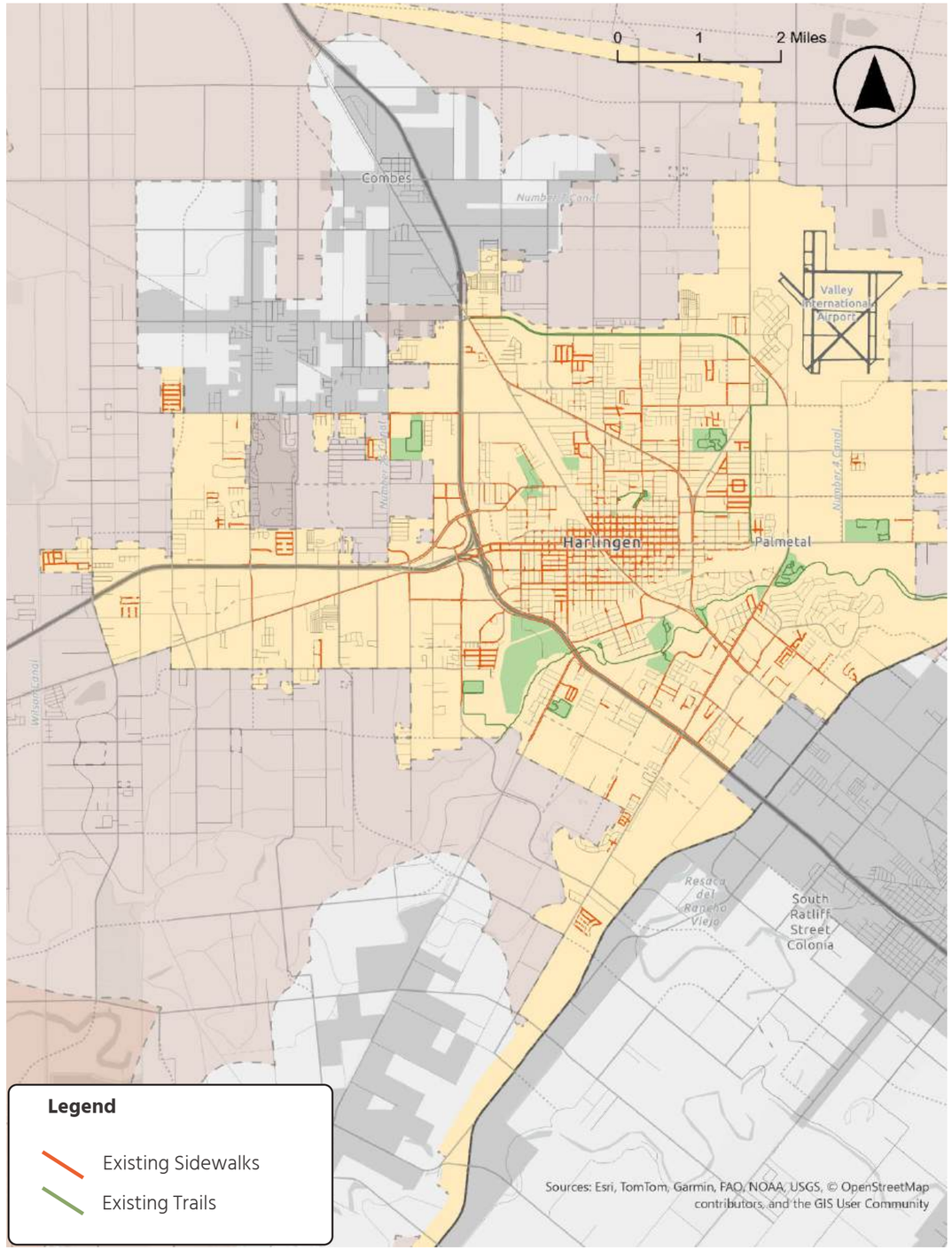
1.8
Average number of cars per Harlingen household

17,686
Average miles driven each year by Harlingen households

$13,444
Amount Harlingen households spend on transportation each

Average Expenditures as % of Income for Harlingen Households





Map 1. Existing Sidewalks and Trails

Transportation and Public Health

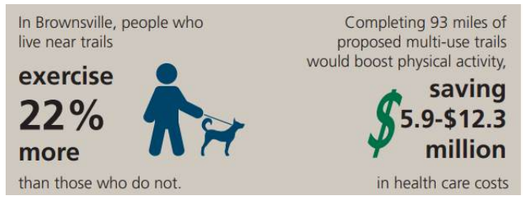
Health, transportation, and exercise are strongly correlated. Many communities along the U.S. - Mexico Border suffer from chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes. The County's population has higher rates of physical inactivity (45%) and obesity (47%) compared to the State of Texas (36% and 35%, 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. Traffic collisions represent a common cause of death and injury in Harlingen, with 37 people dying on the city's streets in 2023.

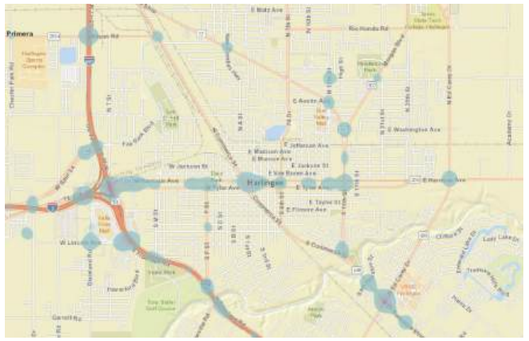
Roadway design standards that reduce vehicular speeds, provide buffers between vehicles and nonmotorized users, and separate pedestrian and bicycle facilities from travel lanes can promote a safe and comfortable environment for active transportation.

37

Number of people who died in car crashes in Harlingen in 2023 (35 people were killed in 2022)



Information from the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Active Tourism Plan

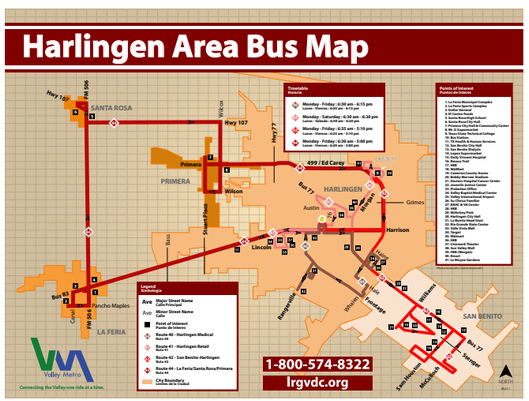


Traffic collision hot spots

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).



Interjurisdictional Planning

Harlingen must plan closely with its local and regional partners. The Rio Grande Valley MPO (RGVMPO) is a federally funded program that addresses the mobility goals of the communities within the urbanized area of the Rio Grande Valley. RGVMPO works with Rio Grande Valley, cities within the region, transit providers, and the Texas Department of Transportation to plan for the future transportation needs of this metropolitan area. The Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority is an independent government agency created in 2004 to finance, acquire, design, construct, operate, maintain, expand or extend transportation projects in the region. Continuing to coordinate with RGVMPO, adjacent and nearby municipalities, and Hidalgo and the surrounding counties is key to building a successful transportation system in Harlingen and the region.

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.

Rail Infrastructure

Harlingen is served by two Class I railroads: Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) and the Rio Valley Switching Company (RVSC). The UPRR's Harlingen Subdivision runs north-south through downtown, while the Brownsville Subdivision extends east-west, serving the Port of Harlingen and industrial parks. Historically, the presence of multiple at-grade crossings, particularly near the downtown switching yard, has caused traffic delays and safety concerns. To address these issues, the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority is implementing the Harlingen Rail Improvements Project, which involves relocating and realigning approximately 1.7 miles of track, eliminating seven at-grade crossings, and constructing one new crossing. This project aims to streamline rail operations, reduce congestion, and improve safety by connecting the Harlingen and Brownsville subdivisions and straightening two curves. Additionally, the relocation of the switching yard to Olmito has already alleviated some downtown congestion by moving switching operations out of the city center. These initiatives are part of a broader effort to modernize Harlingen's rail infrastructure and support the region's growing trade and transportation needs.

Harlingen Rail Improvements Project

Freight

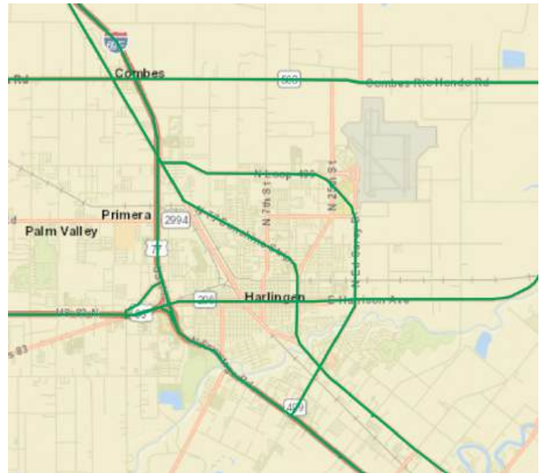
Freight transportation is an essential part of urban transportation networks. The Rio Grande Valley's multimodal freight network supported more than $22 billion in exports and $31 billion in imports in 2019, as well, as $37.4 billion in gross regional product (GRP). Approximately 1,000,000 trucks and 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. The Rio Grande Valley Freight and Trade Transportation Plan identifies freight and trade activity, opportunities, challenges, and strategies for the region. It identifies how freight and trade needs and opportunities impact the local, regional, and statewide transportation network and economic competitiveness. It identifies strategies for enhancing freight mobility, safety, connectivity, and other factors within the region.

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.

RGV Freight Corridors



Free Trade Bridge

Cameron County owns and operates three international bridges that span the Mexico–United States border.

The Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios is an international border crossing located eight miles south of Harlingen and San Benito. Cameron County owns and operates the bridge; however the cities of Harlingen and San Benito each receive 25% of the net revenues. The bridge facilities are located on a

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. Valley International Airport (HRL) in Harlingen, Texas, is undergoing significant upgrades to enhance its capacity and operational efficiency. The airport recently completed a $32 million runway extension, lengthening Runway 17R/35L from 8,301 feet to 9,400 feet, making it the longest runway south of Austin. This expansion allows cargo jets to operate at 75% of their maximum takeoff weight, up from 48%, thereby accommodating larger aircraft and increasing cargo capacity. Additionally, the airport has implemented advanced Category II instrument landing systems to improve safety and reduce flight delays during inclement weather. A new air traffic control tower, funded by a $4.5 million FAA grant, is under construction to replace the outdated 65-foot tower built in 1971. This 120-foot tower is expected to be completed within two years. Other enhancements include the installation of a $3 million fiber optic circuit for improved data transmission and the addition of covered parking, increasing capacity to about 800 spaces. These developments position Valley International Airport as a modern and efficient hub for both passenger and cargo services in the Rio Grande Valley.

Paying for 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 RGVMPO and TxDOT in a strategic approach to leveraging federal funding for roadway enhancements, bicycle lane construction, and trail development.

Street Design

The City of Harlingen Subdivision Development Guide contains dimensional standards for street designs. These dimensional standards have served Harlingen well. There are also opportunities to update existing standards and implement guidelines. In some cases dimensions can remain the same. In other cases designs should be updated and/or ROW or street widths can be reduced depending upon context and connectivity.

Sec. 109 – 290 PAVEMENT DESIGN

Sec. 109 – 291 Flexible Pavement Design

The following City minimum design sections shall be applicable to the noted street classifications:

Table 2: City of Harlingen Minimum Street Sections

Street Classification				
Characteristic	**Local**	**Collector**	**Minor Arterial**	**Major Arterial**
Street Width[7]	32' – 37'	42' – 48'	≥ 60'	≥ 80'
Target Right - of - Way	50' – 60'	80'	100'	120'
Minimum Structural Section				
Subgrade[2]	6"	6"	12"	12"
Flexible Base[3]	8"	10"	12"	12"
HMAC Ty D / Ty B[4]	2"	2" / 2.5"	2" / 5"	5" / 5"
Min. Trans. Slope	2.0%	2.0%	2.5%	2.5%
Min. Long. Slope	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%
Min. Width C&G[5]	24"	24"	24"	24"

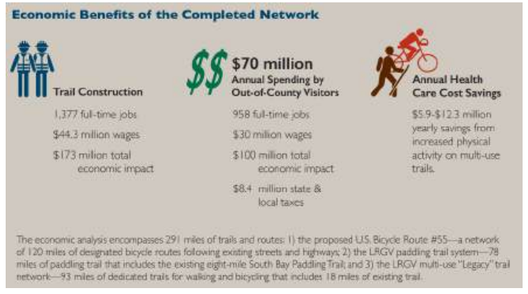
Multimodal Infrastructure

Multimodal infrastructure includes the infrastructure for transit, pedestrians, and bicyclists, in addition to automobiles. This infrastructure includes storefront space, public sidewalks, street trees, utility space and areas for seating, bike lanes, curb and gutter, on-street parking. The dimensions and design of streets have a major impact on the comfort and safety of traveling along Harlingen's streets using multiple modes.

Harlingen has several arterials and local streets with sidewalks. Still, most streets lack this basic amenity, making it difficult and sometimes dangerous for residents to walk places. The existence of physical barriers between people and vehicles significantly increases the safety and usability of streets.

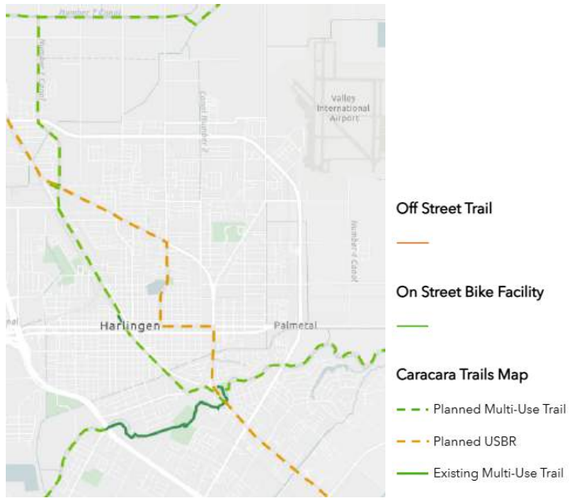
Street trees are a vital element of city infrastructure. They clean the air, filter stormwater, improve human physical and mental health, reduce impacts of heat island effect, and promote walkability by providing shade to pedestrians. Furthermore, when planted between the curb and the sidewalk, they 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.



Information from the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Active Tourism Plan

Cara Cara Trails Network



Future 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 transportation needs. The MPO also serves as a structure of committees and organizations that creates collaborative partnerships. 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

The Future Thoroughfare Map should follow four key principles:

- Design elements encourage safe multimodal transportation options within the functional classification roadway hierarchy scheme
- Street Context Areas enhance the vital connection between land use and transportation
- Interconnectivity accommodates 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
- 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.)

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

Using the Future Thoroughfare Map

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 updated)**. Where proposed as a thoroughfare, future development may need additional roadways not indicated in the map in accordance with the desired spacing.

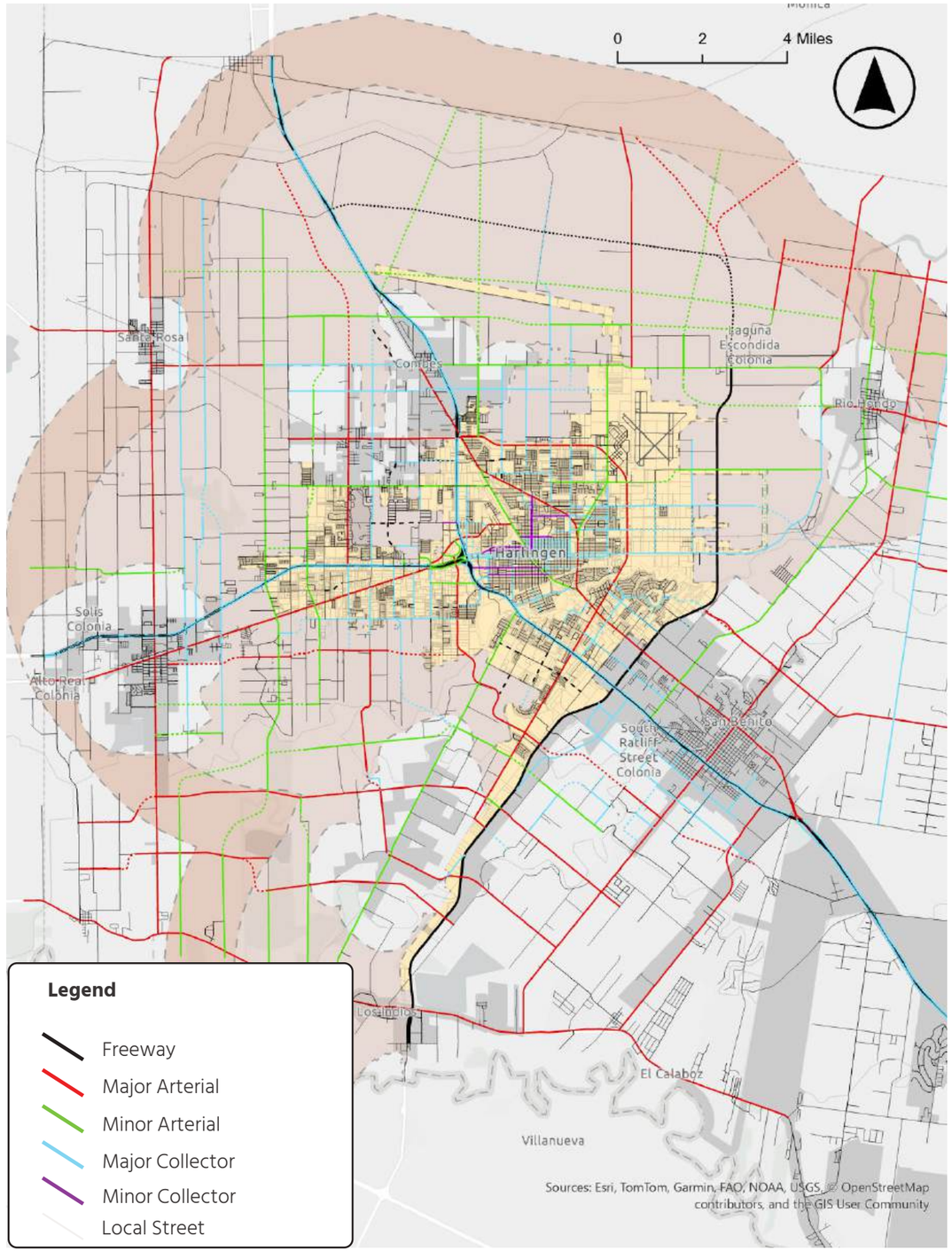
Local streets: Future local streets are not shown on the Future Thoroughfare Map. In addition to the Street Types tables, the City requires new local streets and street improvements in accordance with its zoning and subdivision regulations, manuals, plans, and any other standards and agreements.

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

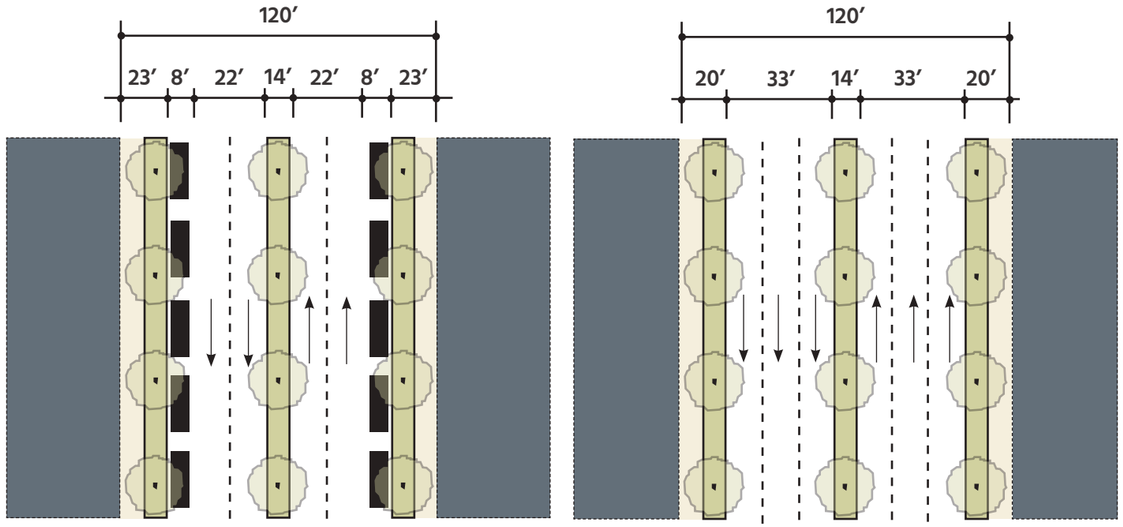
As circumstances change and development and redevelopment occurs, there may be instances where the City seeks to make an amendment to the Future Thoroughfare Map. Similar to amendments to the Future Land Use Map, proposed map amendments to the Future Thoroughfare Map should be approved by City Council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



Map 2. Future Thoroughfare Plan

Street Cross-Sections

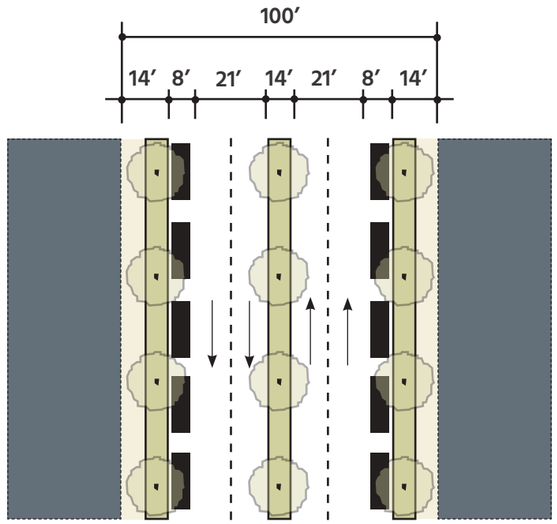
Major Arterial 120′



Road Type	Major Arterial 1	Major Arterial 2
Right-of-Way Width	120 feet	120 feet
Design Speed	35 MPH	35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	4 lanes	6 lanes
Lane Width	10.5-11 feet	10.5-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel	None
Median / Turn lane	8-14 feet	8-14 feet
Curb Radius	15-25 feet	15-30 feet
Walkway Type	6-20 foot Sidewalk/Multi-use Path	6-15 foot Sidewalk/Multi-use Path
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway	Tree well or parkway

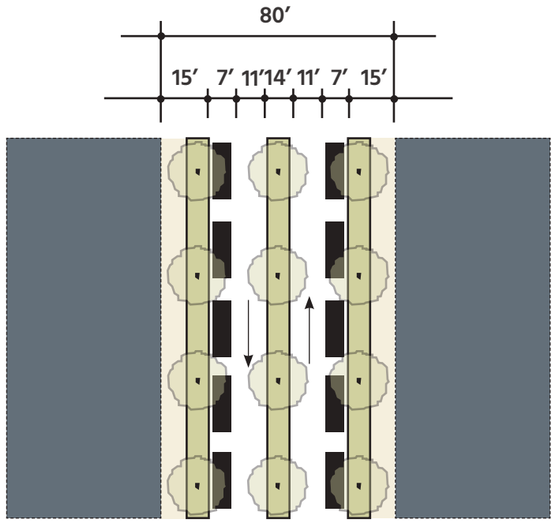
NOTE TO STAFF: Please consider these cross-sections as a starting point for further discussion. For example, we would like to discuss your preference for how to proceed with major arterial cross-sections. Some communities are moving away from local roads with three lanes in each direction toward two lanes, with greater street connectivity.

Minor Arterial 100′



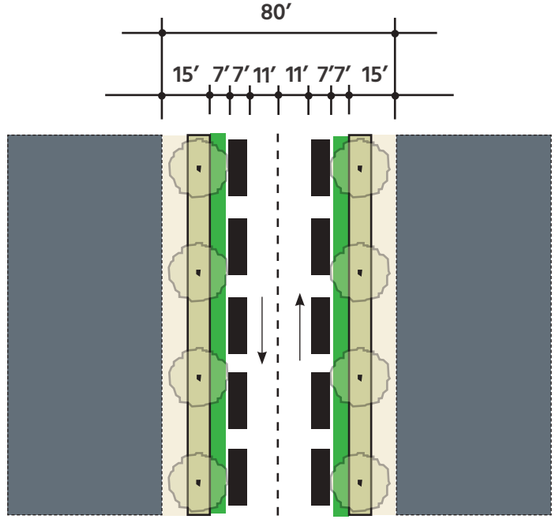
Right-of-Way Width	100 feet
Design Speed	35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	4 lanes
Lane Width	10-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	8-14 feet
Curb Radius	10-20 feet
Walkway Type	6-14 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway

Major Collector 80′



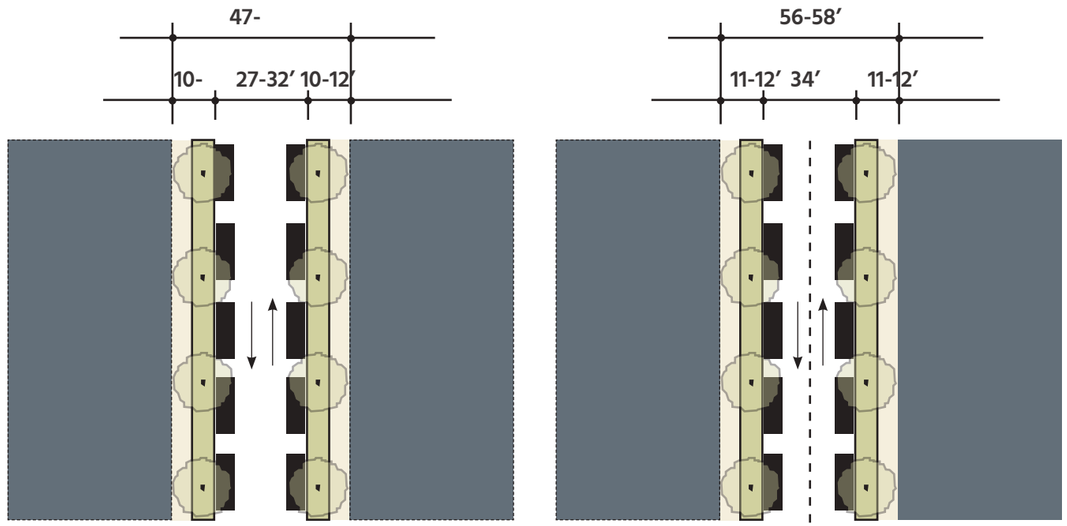
Right-of-Way Width	80 feet
Design Speed	30-35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	2 lanes
Lane Width	10-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	8-14 feet
Curb Radius	10-20 feet
Walkway Type	6-15 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway

Minor Collector 80′



Right-of-Way Width	80 feet
Design Speed	35 MPH
Traffic Lanes	2 lanes
Lane Width	10-11 feet
Parking Lanes	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	8-15 feet
Curb Radius	10-20 feet
Walkway Type	6-15 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes
Bike Facility	Physically protected / above curb
Street Trees	Tree well or parkway

Local 40’-56’



	Residential Local	Commercial Local
Right-of-Way Width	47-52 feet	56 feet
Design Speed	15 MPH	15 MPH
Traffic Lanes	n/a	n/a
Lane Width	n/a	n/a
Parking Lanes	Parallel	Parallel
Median / Turn lane	None	None
Curb Radius	5-15 feet	5-15 feet
Walkway Type	5-7 foot Sidewalk	6-8 foot Sidewalk
Planter Type	5-7 foot continuous Planter	4-5 foot continuous Planter
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes
Bike Facility	Shared	Shared
Street Trees	Parkway	Tree well or parkway

Alternative Cross-Sections (in development)

NOTE TO STAFF: Let’s discuss what cross-sections would be useful for you. We can also reference external best practices such as NACTO Guidelines and ITE Standards.

- Walkable mixed-use street
- Alley
- Rural
- Woonerf (shared)
- Bus rapid transit

Street Design Guidelines

These Guidelines are intended to be used on existing thoroughfares that - due to existing conditions, right-of-way widths, or other factors - require more design flexibility than that provided in the cross-sections.

Harlingen's Thoroughfare Plan determines the location and character of future thoroughfares. It also considers improvements or expansions to existing streets and the location of future roadways based on anticipated and planned growth patterns.

Traditionally, Thoroughfare Plans in many communities have classified different types of roadways based solely on function. The Harlingen Thoroughfare Plan emphasizes the design of streets based on the context of the intended surrounding built environment. Thus, this Plan emphasizes the integral connection between the public and private realms, improving the link between buildings and streets.

Street Context Areas

Street Context Areas distinguish different street designs applied based upon existing or planned transition to an intended development pattern. The Street Context Areas include:

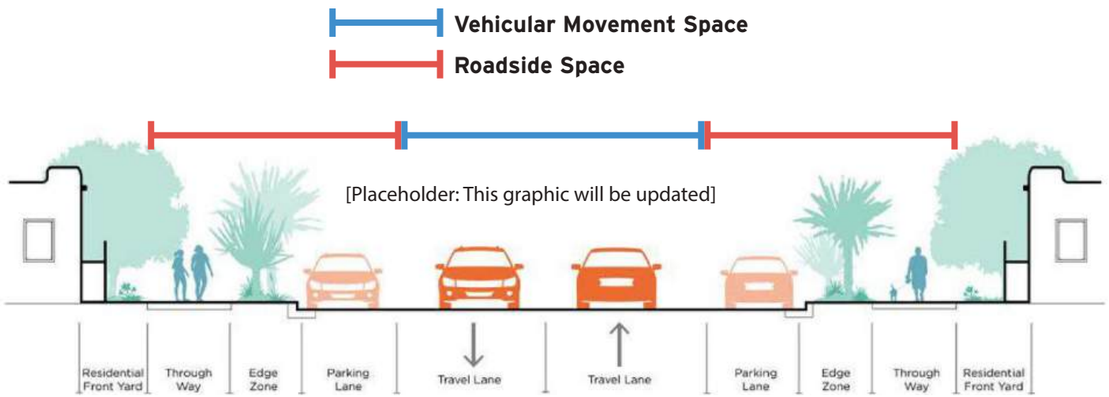
Context Area 1

Context Area 2

Context Area 3

Street Right-of-way Ratios

This plan considers 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 Plan.



Context Area Map

This map will be completed with the Future Land Use Map

Context Area 1

Streets in Context Area 1 should be designed to provide safe and comfortable transportation options to pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit-riders. The proportion of the public street rights-of-way width dedicated to non-vehicular transportation infrastructure should equal a minimum 50 percent of the total width.

Future Land Use Categories

- To be completed

Context Area 1 - Street Design Guidelines

Street Component	Arterial	Collector	Local
Street Characteristics			
Desired Spacing	0.5 - 1 mile	660 - 2,000 feet	Up to 660 feet
Community Relationship	Defines neighborhood and district edges	Provides access across neighborhoods	Defines neighborhood experience
Design Speed	35 MPH	25-35 MPH	15-25 MPH
Traffic Volumes	7,000 - 27,000	1,100 - 6,300	80 - 700
Street Design Elements			
Number of Travel Lanes	4	2	1 - 2
Lane width	10.5 ft (11 ft outer lane)	10.5 - 11 ft	9 ft
Medians	Where widths permit	Limited	Limited
On-Street Parking	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sidewalk	10 - 20 ft	8 - 15 ft	6 ft
Bike Facility	Physically protected	Protected or separated	On-street
Street Trees	Tree well	Parkway or tree well	Parkway
Medians	Optional	Minimally used	Discouraged

Context Area 1 Street Retrofit Opportunities

- Widen existing sidewalks, fill gaps, and add sidewalks in priority locations
- Add shade trees abutting the curb every 30 ft
- Street right-of-way widths should be divided equally between roadside space and vehicular movement space with 50% of the width allocated for roadside space
- Consider space within the public right-of-way for public gathering and dining space in and around activity areas
- Frame walkable streets with buildings; first floors should have transparent windows and multiple entrances
- Convert diagonal parking to parallel parking
- Move solid waste and utilities underground and to rear alleys
- Consider above-curb improvements like bike lanes, restaurant seating, bicycle parking, and public art
- Enhance street connectivity with small block sizes
- Locate off-street parking behind buildings
- Make intersections safer for pedestrians

Context Area 2

Streets in Context Area 2 are generally designed primarily for automobile use within existing automobile-oriented land use contexts. There are opportunities for short and long-term retrofits to enhance safety along these corridors and at intersections.

The proportion of the right-of-way width dedicated to non-vehicular transportation infrastructure should equal a minimum 30 percent of the total width.

Future Land Use Categories

- To be completed

Context Area 2 - Street Design Guidelines

Street Component	Arterial	Collector	Local
Street Characteristics			
Desired Spacing	One mile	800 - 3,000 feet	Up to 800 feet
Community Relationship	Defines neighborhood and district edges	Provides access across neighborhoods	Defines neighborhood experience
Design Speed	35 MPH	25-35 MPH	15-25 MPH
Traffic Volumes	10,000 - 50,000	1,000 - 15,000	80 - 700
Street Design Elements			
Number of Travel Lanes	4	2	1 - 2
Lane width	11 ft (12 ft outer lane)	11.5 ft	9 - 10 ft
Medians	Encouraged, With trees	Where widths permit	Limited
On-Street Parking	Parallel in retrofit	Parallel	Parallel
Curb & Gutter	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sidewalk	5 - 12 ft	5 - 12 ft	5 - 6 ft
Bike Facility	Multi-use path	Multi-use path	On-street, shared
Street Trees	Parkway or tree well	Parkway or tree well	Parkway
Medians	Optional	Minimally used	Discouraged

Context Area 2 Street Retrofit Opportunities

- Enhance intersection designs and street crossings to improve bike, pedestrian, and driver safety
- Slow traffic, narrow lanes and street widths, and enhance non-auto infrastructure around schools and other activity centers
- Street right-of-way widths should provide at least 30% of the width allocated for non-automobile space
- Incorporate hike-bike trails where feasible
- Plant street trees adjacent to the curb in priority areas
- Enhance street and trail connectivity
- Intersection curb radii of 5 - 15%

Context Area 3

Streets in Context Area 3 are located in rural areas with existing open space, farmland, and rural neighborhoods. Roads generally do not have curb and gutter. These represent areas that may eventually transition in the future, however minimal roadway improvements are expected in these areas. Where feasible, there may be opportunities for trails or road shoulders that can accommodate cyclists and joggers. Where future development pressures encroach on these areas, use the street cross-sections or design guidelines for

Future Land Use Categories

- To be completed

Context Area 3 - Street Design Guidelines

Street Component	Arterial	Collector	Local
Street Characteristics			
Desired Spacing	One mile	660 - 2,000 feet	Up to 660 feet
Community Relationship	Defines edge of large land tracts	Defines edge of large land tracts	Provides residential access
Design Speed	35 - 55 MPH	25 - 45 MPH	15 - 25 MPH
Traffic Volumes	300 - 3,000	300 - 3,000	15 - 400
Street Design Elements			
Number of Travel Lanes	2	2	1 - 2
Lane width	12 ft	12 ft	9 - 11 ft
Medians	Where widths permit	Limited	Limited
On-Street Parking	None	None	Allowed
Curb & Gutter	None	None	None
Sidewalk	5 - 8 ft	5 - 8 ft	6 ft
Bike Facility	Trail, shoulder	Trail, shoulder	On-street
Street Trees	Gateways	Gateways	Where desired
Medians	None	None	None

Type 3 Street Retrofit Opportunities

- Street rights of way should include shoulders and/or adjacent trails to accommodate multiple modes of travel
- Include stormwater swales where appropriate
- Plant trees and other types of landscaping in targeted locations and at key gateways

Goals and Policies

As Harlingen grows and changes, transportation facilities will be carefully designed and coordinated to achieve the goals of this plan. That means creating new streets—and redeveloping existing streets—using well-proven best practice design standards and guidelines that enhance the safety, affordability, and comfort for all users. By expanding transportation options, Harlingen is investing in its quality of life, cost-of-living,

Goal 1

Harlingen's transportation system is safe and healthy

Policy 1.1: Use well-designed traffic calming devices to enhance street intersection safety and pedestrian crossings.

Policy 1.2: Prioritize physical barriers, such as curbs, on-street parking, street trees, or raised reflectors between automobile lanes and non-automotive infrastructure.

Policy 1.3: Encourage the use of rear alleys in new development and redevelopment to reduce the need for street-facing curb cuts and conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.

Policy 1.4: To handle high traffic flows, it is preferable to increase the number of parallel streets and connections, rather than making fewer roads wider. Roads with 6 lanes or more are discouraged.

Policy 1.5: Educate motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians on transportation safety. Education should be used as a tool to promote safety and to increase knowledge among Harlingen residents of the array of transportation options.

Goal 2

It is easy to get around Harlingen

Policy 2.1: Promote a connected network of local and regional protected bicycle lanes, shared use paths, and greenways.

Policy 2.2: Expand the City's sidewalk and street tree network within both new and existing development. Enhance connectivity between denser neighborhoods and services.

Policy 2.3: Expand short term and long term bicycle parking in areas of social and economic activity.

Policy 2.4: Support future initiatives that would expand access to regional and interstate rail transportation and other rapid transit options.

Policy 2.5: Leverage federal and state funding to maximize capital spending impacts.

Goal 3

Parking that supports multimodal transportation

Policy 3.1: Maximize use of current parking supply by promoting shared parking and wayfinding for existing parking.

Policy 3.2: Wherever possible, locate surface and structured parking in the rear of buildings, with on-street parallel parking.

Policy 3.3: Encourage land use patterns that support and encourage non-auto modes of travel.

Goal 4

More people in Harlingen have access to transit and use it

Policy 4.1: Provide safe, visible, and accessible transit stops and transit lines. Identify potential corridors for bus-only lanes.

Policy 4.2: Coordinate infrastructure and land use planning for walkable, mixed-use activity centers to support future local and regional transit expansion.

Policy 4.3: Enhance and expand regional transit options in coordination with regional planning agencies, like the Rio Grande Valley Development Council and adjacent municipalities.

Policy 4.4: Plan for local and regional bus rapid transit systems, including dedicated bus lanes, high quality and visible elevated BRT stations, and coordinated traffic signalization at appropriate intersections.

Goal 5

Harlingen has well-planned freight corridors

Policy 5.1: Continue to work with the RGVMPO to identify key freight corridors that best accommodate large vehicles and minimize safety and environmental justice issues.

Policy 5.2: Reduce freight conflicts with other modes of transportation. Redirect freight trucks from retail and residential areas.

Policy 5.3: Support access of manufacturing and warehousing properties to regional roads through transportation and land use planning.

CHAPTER 6

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

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

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

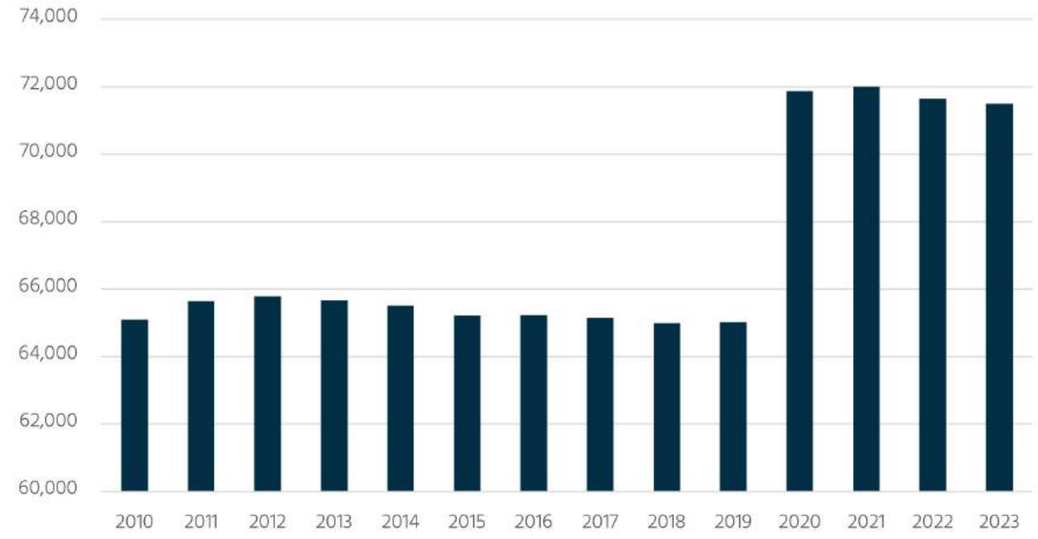
As Harlingen seeks to broaden its economy and build a more dynamic employment base, it finds itself in a favorable position. Demographics trends that include a growing regional population and local expansion at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Medicine create opportunities for businesses 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.

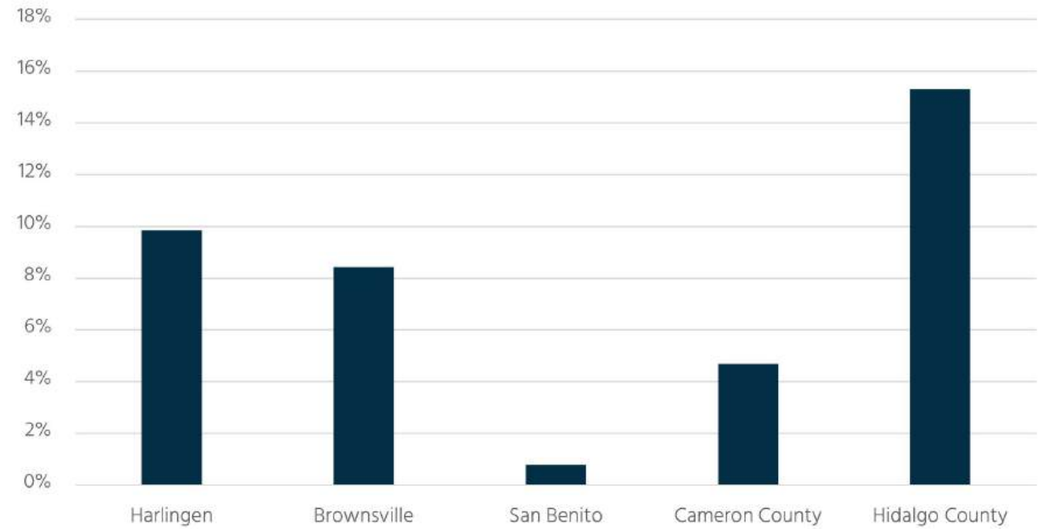
Over the next 10 years, the Texas Water Development Board projects the Harlingen Water User Group area will add just 5,000 residents. If trends hold, this translates into 2,500 new Harlingen residents. In the short term, Harlingen should continue to grow at a compound annual growth rate of less than 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 1. Harlingen Population Growth



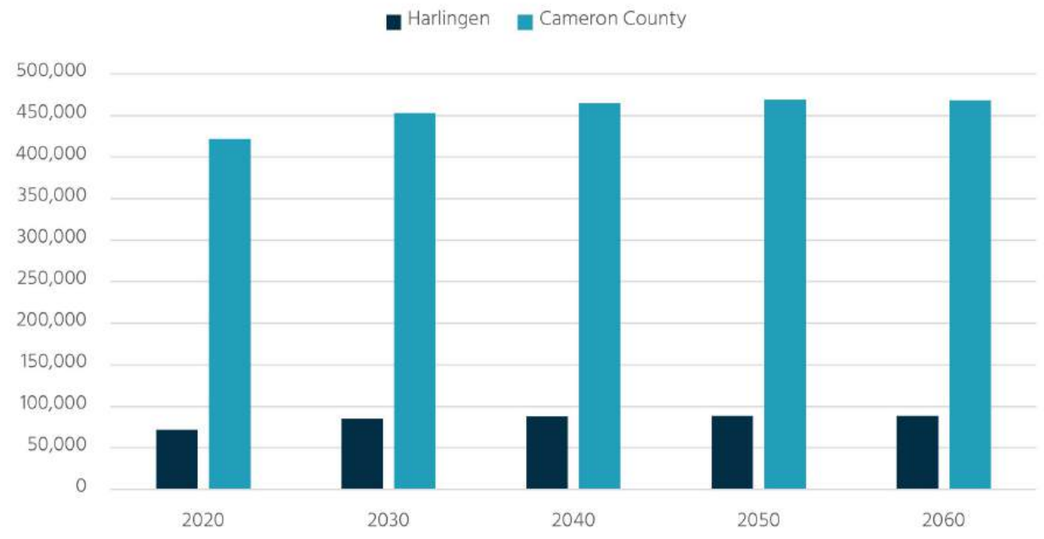
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2. Regional Population Growth (2010 to 2023)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 3. Regional Population Forecast (2020 to 2060)



Source: Texas Water Development Board

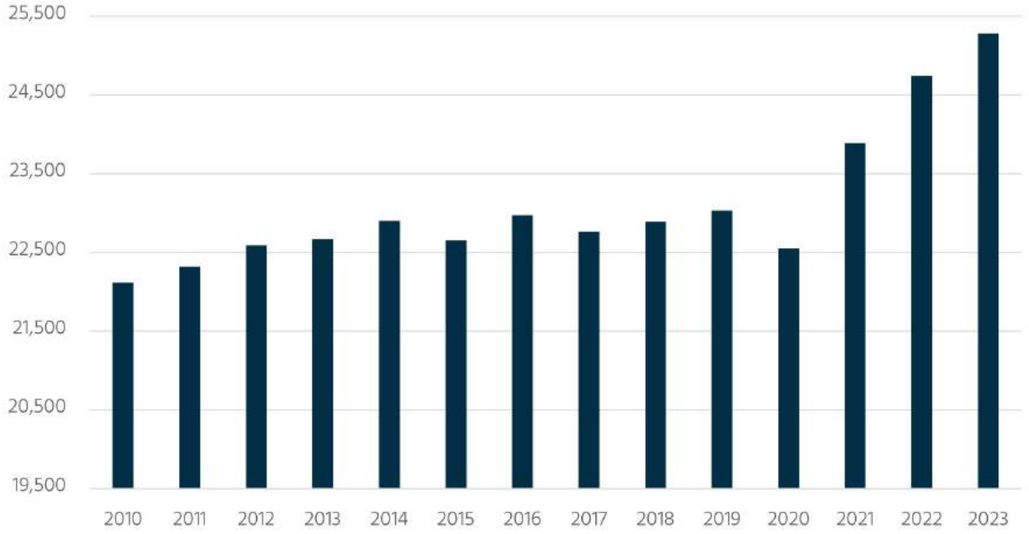
Harlingen-Based Employment

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 4. Employed Harlingen Residents



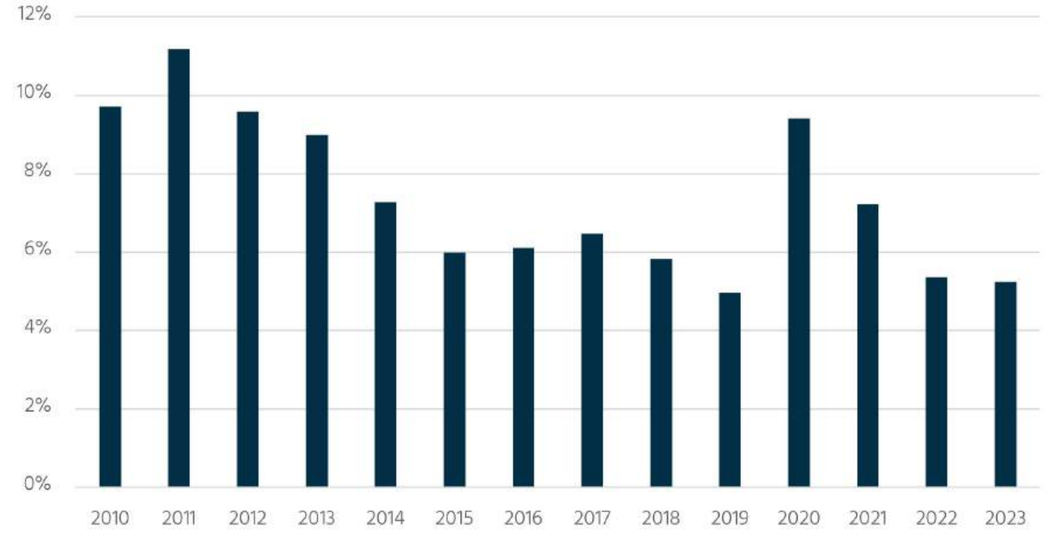
Source: Texas Workforce Commission

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 5. Unemployment Rate for Harlingen Residents



Source: Texas Workforce Commission

Figure 6. 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

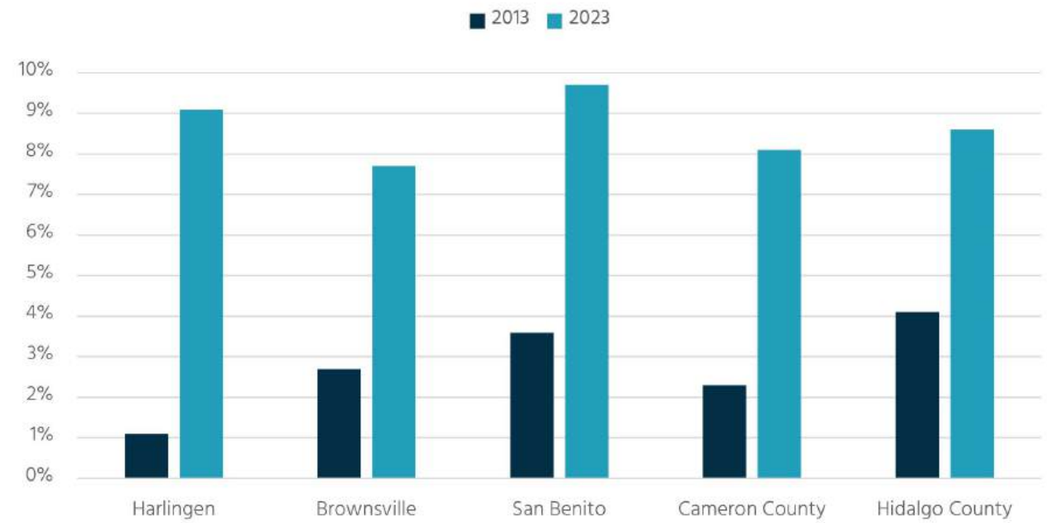
Source: U.S. Census Bureau - Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics

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

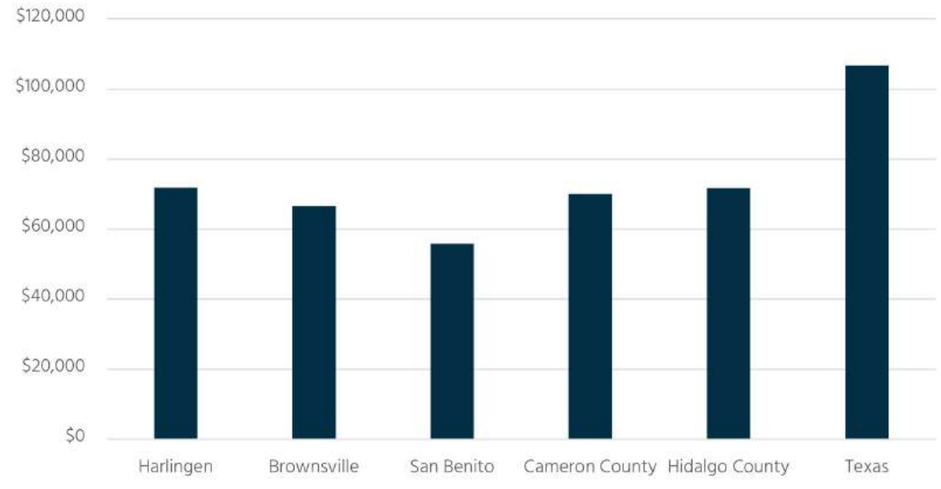


Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Wages & Income

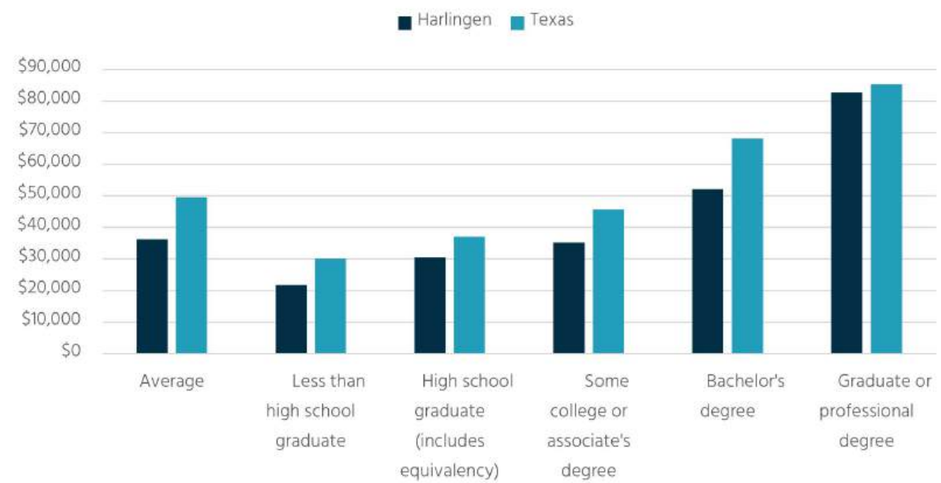
Similar to other communities near the Texas-Mexico border, Harlingen's wage and income levels are below the statewide averages. It is not projected that Harlingen wage and income levels will reach parity with the statewide figures. In 2023, Harlingen's median household income was $55,891 versus $76,292 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 8. Average Household Income (2023 ACS 5-Year Estimate)



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

Figure 9. Median Earnings by Educational Attainment (2023 5-Year Estimate)

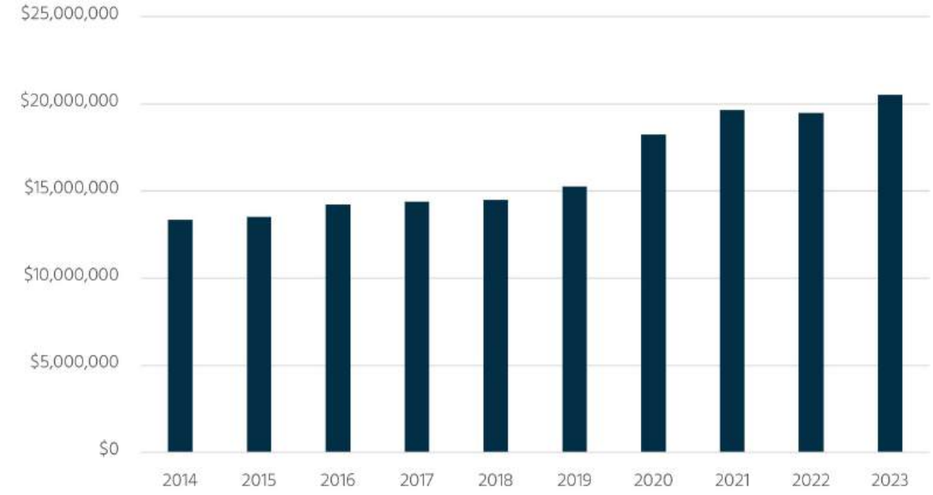


Source: U.S. Census Bureau - American Community Survey (ACS)

Tax Revenue

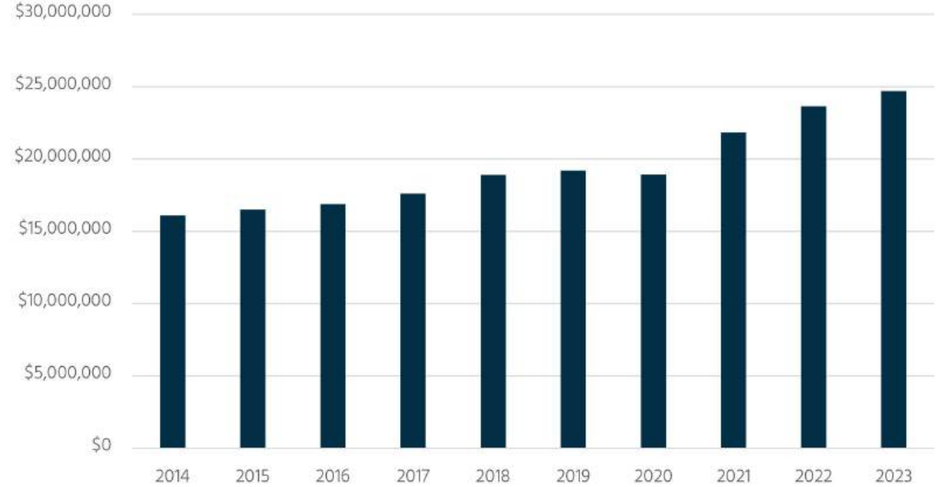
Over the past decade, Harlingen's property tax revenue has increased by more than 53.0 percent. In FY 2023, general fund property tax revenue was $20.5 million. Sales tax revenue has also been growing in Harlingen. For FY 2023, sales tax collections were $24.7 million. Between FY 2014 and FY 2023, sales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

Figure 10. Harlingen Property Tax Revenue



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Figure 11. Harlingen Sales Tax Revenue



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Visitor Activity

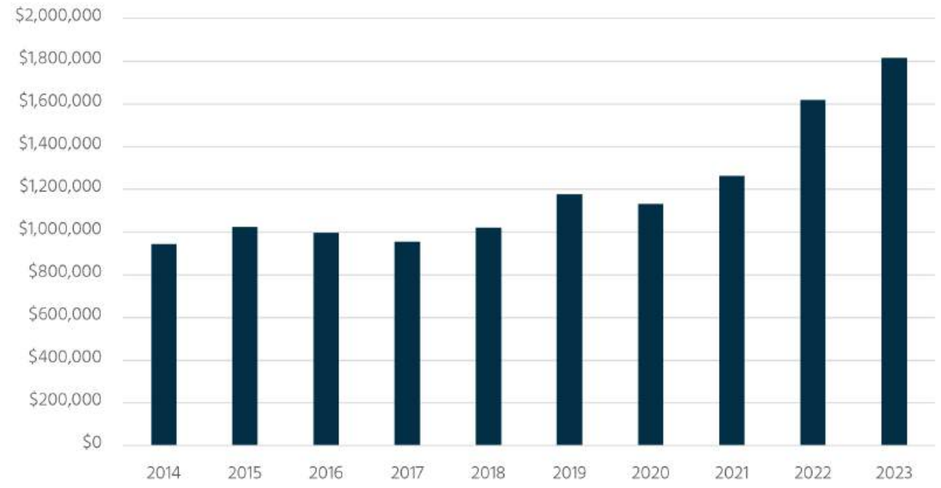
Visitor activity plays an important role in the Harlingen economy. According to the Governor's Economic Development & Tourism Department, tourism spending supports over 1,450 local jobs, $43.3 million in direct earnings, and $6.1 million in local tax receipts. Direct tourism spending supports roughly 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 12. 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

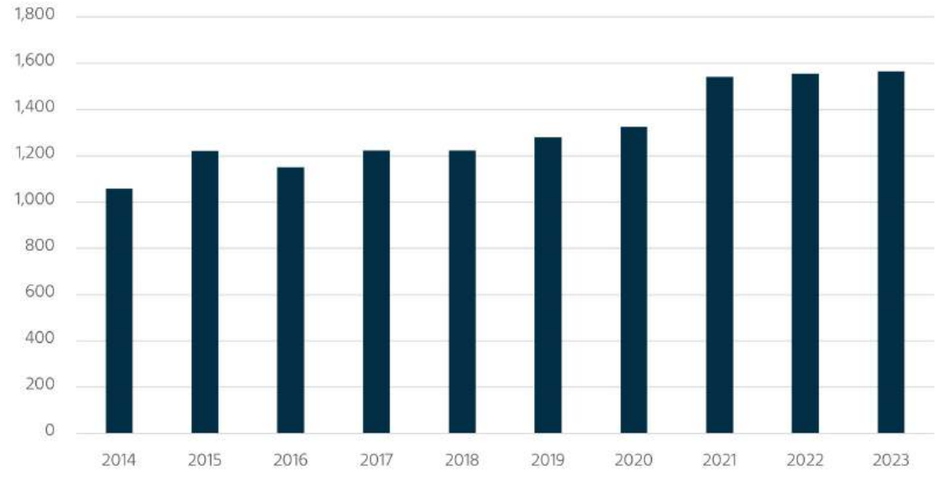
Source: State of Texas, Office of the Governor, Economic Development & Tourism

Figure 13. Harlingen Hotel Occupancy Tax Collections



Source: City of Harlingen Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Figure 14. Number of Avaliable Rooms in Harlingen



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

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 15. 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 16. 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

Economic Development Best Practices

To support a thriving local economy, Harlingen must take proactive steps to differentiate itself, attract investment, and create the right conditions for sustainable growth. The following best practices reflect feedback from stakeholders, economic trends across the Rio Grande Valley, and the unique assets and challenges present in Harlingen. Together, these strategies aim to strengthen the city's competitive position, enhance quality of life, and ensure long-term economic resilience.

Develop a brand for Harlingen that differentiates the city from other communities in the Rio Grande Valley

Economic development in the Rio Grande Valley is competitive. There are numerous well-funded Type A and Type B EDCs actively recruiting and incentivizing projects in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties. Despite its strategic location and Valley International Airport, Harlingen has not developed a unique brand or identity for the community. What is it that Harlingen offers or provides that cannot be found in another city? Harlingen should craft a marketing campaign that differentiates the city from its neighbors. Harlingen should create marketing materials for target audiences that clearly articulate the value proposition available to each.

Proactively support the redevelopment of Valle Vista Mall

Once a thriving regional destination and sales tax generator, Valle Vista Mall has been struggling for years. With the rise of ecommerce, malls across the country have had to reinvent themselves. The 60 acres site has significant constraints due to the complex ownership structure of occupiable spaces and existing use restrictions. Harlingen will likely have to play a proactive role in the redevelopment of this site, including the use of incentives. All options should be explored as the community seeks the highest and best use of this site.

Extend infrastructure along key corridors to drive growth

Harlingen stakeholders identified basic infrastructure as a major impediment to the type of growth the community would like to attract. Water, sewer, transportation, and drainage issues were described throughout the city. The opportunity for Harlingen as it considers fiscal sustainability is to use its financial resources and incentives to strategically guide growth geographically (ex. special districts). In addition, this would assist in creating more sites that are shovel ready for development.

Commit long-term financial resources to Downtown

Harlingen's authentic downtown is important to the community. However, other cities in the Rio Grande Valley also have thriving downtowns too. Harlingen will need to make long-term strategic financial investments to keep pace with neighboring cities. Without long-term dedicated financial resources, it will be challenging to implement strategic planning initiatives. The existing public improvement district (PID) provides some financial resources to pay for limited grant programs, but additional financial resources should be identified.

Facilitate the development of planned neighborhoods with high-quality amenities

Limited housing options were identified as a major impediment to attracting higher-income professionals (ex. medical sector, college faculty, and business professionals) to live and work in Harlingen. While housing affordability is a real issue, long-term fiscal sustainability is linked to a diversity of jobs, housing options, and quality of life. Ultimately, the real estate market will indicate what is appropriate for Harlingen long-term based on supply and demand. However, it is likely Harlingen will have to participate