Viva Laredo

CITY OF LAREDO, TX
COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN

V. 2017.9.1 Adopted September 18, 2017

Viva Laredo

A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR THE CITY OF LAREDO

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Jason King, AICP, CNUA, Principal
James Dougherty, CNUA, Director of Design
Pamela King, CNUA, Kenneth Garcia, Jennifer Garcia, Emily Glavey

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"DON'T BE AFRAID TO PLAN BIG"
- MAYOR PETE SAENZ

PREFACE

Every Great City Has a Plan

Laredo is looking to the future with a resolve to diversify its economy, increase employment opportunities, celebrate its history and unique culture, improve the health of its residents, improve affordability, and upgrade its quality of life. *Viva Laredo* is a plan created through an inclusive, participatory public process that presents both a grand vision and a practical plan to accomplish those goals.

Diversify the economy and increase employment opportunities. Infrastructure, education, and quality of life are the foundation for long-term economic development. The plan presents public and private approaches to help the city fully leverage its potential as the largest inland port along the United States-Mexican border.

Improve affordability. Well-designed cities are less expensive to live in. The plan seeks to decrease auto-dependence, increase access to parks and neighborhood amenities, and streamline the development process for projects that provide a variety of housing options at a range of prices.

Viva Laredo **is a living plan**. Planning is an ongoing conversation about the future. The conversation that *Viva Laredo* began does not end with the plan's adoption. The conversation is the most important part. A city's needs evolve continually and just as the plan for one's own life must be allowed to evolve as opportunities and challenges change, so must the city's comprehensive plan. For review and modification process, see Laredo City Charter, Article IX Planning and Zoning, Section 9.3 Comprehensive Plan.

Border Towns Can Be the Best of Both Worlds

Laredo has been shaped for over 250 years by forces of all kinds. There is no place like Laredo. There are few places in the world tied as closely to a sister city across a border. The border gives the city its economic purpose in many ways, as well as its history and unique culture.

Location. Laredo is the county seat of Webb County, Texas, and located on the north bank of the Rio Grande in South Texas, across from Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico. It is in the top ten of Texas' most populous cities in the state and third-most populated on the Mexican border. Laredo has a population of over 250,000 but the cross-border Laredo-Nuevo Laredo Metropolitan Area has an estimated population of over 650,000. Laredo's location gives it international importance. Capitalizing on that importance is a large part of the plan.

History. Founded in 1755, Laredo grew from a small village to the county seat and went on to become one of the world's most important inland ports. Border life is not without challenges, however. As a gateway between the United States and Mexico, the city will always have a major role to play in two major economies. The city must continue its role as the entry point and first home for many struggling and poor immigrants. At the same time the city must pursue to provide continued prosperity and energy to the next generations.

Culture. How can Laredo grow and adapt while still remaining the place its residents want it to be? The answer is to be found in the city's cultural and social institutions. The solution has to do with becoming a big city that still retains a small town feel. Increased, not decreased, connections across the river are central to facilitating the city's cultural uniqueness.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The city's comprehensive plan provides the basis for public policy in Laredo regarding physical and economic development. *Viva Laredo* establishes priorities for public-sector action while at the same time providing direction for complementary private-sector decisions.

This comprehensive plan provides a flexible framework that can be updated, revised, and improved upon over time to stay relevant to the issues the city must confront, as well as the ambitions the city chooses to pursue. The comprehensive plan's goals and policies serve as a tool to evaluate new development proposals, direct capital improvements, and to guide public policy in a manner that ensures Laredo continues to be the community that its residents want it to be.

Viva Laredo contains illustrative plans, diagrams, maps, and pictures to make concepts clear and accessible to city officials, residents, developers, community groups, and other stakeholders.

The plan is divided into chapters. Each chapter concludes with goals and policies that set a broad policy direction and identifies specific actions that will enhance the city's quality of life, respect its natural environment, and support complementary economic growth and development.

Each chapter is divided into four sections:

1. **Conditions**. A discussion of existing conditions;

2. **Community Concerns**. Consensus concerns expressed by community members as part of the public involvement process of meetings, charrettes, online engagement, focus groups, and interviews that were conducted during the planning process.

3. **Strategies**. Policy discussions and recommendations with illustrative plans and renderings that articulate strategies to be accomplished through city actions and partnerships among local governmental agencies, private sector businesses, community organizations, and neighborhood residents.

4. **Goals and Policies**. Each goal summarizes the desired end-state for a particular subject based on the community's vision. Each goal has a set of policies. Policies identify actions and principles that provide the best course of action for regulations and procedures to achieve stated goals and for the desired actions by the greater community.

Relationship to Other Plans

The City of Laredo should make periodic updates to its comprehensive plan and develop specific plans for the city that deal with a range of issues from transportation to parks and recreation. *Viva Laredo* has been developed in close coordination with existing plans and does not supersede those plans. *Viva Laredo* attempts to integrate social, economic, transportation, aesthetic, preservation, and sustainability goals from a variety of plans and initiatives into one framework.

Plan Implementation

This comprehensive plan is intended to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the city. Here are some practical ways to ensure that future activities are consistent with the comprehensive plan:

Annual Work Programs and Budgets. The City Council and individual city departments should be cognizant of the recommendations of the comprehensive plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets.

Development Approvals. The approvals process for development proposals, including rezoning and subdivision plats, should be a central means of implementing the comprehensive plan. The land development code and subdivision ordinances should be updated in response to regulatory strategies presented in the comprehensive plan.

Capital Improvement Plans. The city's capital improvement plans (CIP) and long-range utility, and transportation plans should be consistent with the comprehensive plan's land use policies and infrastructure recommendations. Major new improvements that are not reflected in the comprehensive plan, and which could dramatically affect the comprehensive plan's recommendations, should be preceded by a comprehensive plan update.

Economic Incentives. Economic incentives should carry out comprehensive plan goals and policies.

Private Development Decisions. Property owners and developers should consider the strategies and recommendations of the comprehensive plan in their own land planning and investment decisions. Public decision-makers will be using the comprehensive plan as a guide in their development-related deliberations.

Future Interpretations. The City Council may call upon the Planning and Zoning Commission to provide interpretation of major items that are unclear or are not fully addressed in the comprehensive plan. In formulating an interpretation, the Commission may call upon outside experts and other groups for advice. Minor items that require interpretation should be handled by the appropriate agency as it follows the comprehensive plan.

"THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IS OUR TOOL FOR MAKING LAREDO A SMART CITY, A CITY OF OPPORTUNITY, AND A METROPOLIS WHERE SUSTAINABILITY THRIVES FOR ALL ITS CITIZENS."

- HORACIO DE LEON,
LAREDO CITY MANAGER
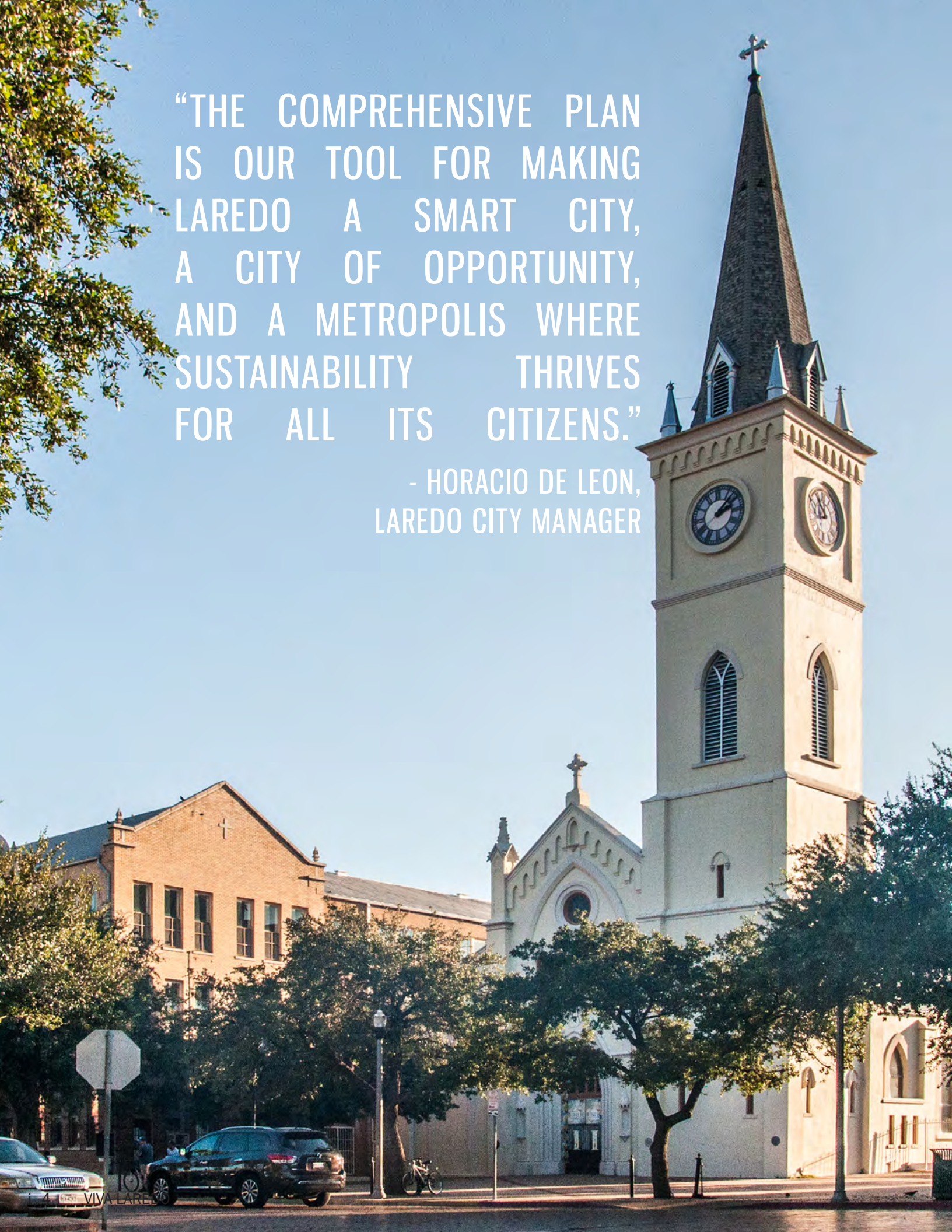
PLAN VISION

Through the charrette process and meetings with public officials, the following vision has been formulated for the City of Laredo:

Make The Downtown Great

The downtown should be the economic center and engine for the rest of the city. It is the international connection to Mexico and so much of Laredo's history. Making the downtown great will take effort from numerous angles in order for it to prosper as it once did.

The new mall that is being developed should be leveraged to enliven the surrounding streets. The mall will help to bring people downtown; events like the artwalk or other social events can help to draw people into the rest of the downtown.

A wayfinding program for locating convenient pools of parking will make getting to and staying in downtown feel more convenient and eliminate a mental barrier in many people's minds. As the downtown fills with new businesses, offices, and residents, additional parking may need to be created, but should not be tied to individual businesses or buildings.

A focus on historic preservation and fixing and repurposing existing buildings will help to enliven the streets and fill them with different types of retail, restaurants, cafés, and entertainment venues at the street level. The upper stories of these revitalized buildings could hold a mix of offices to create a central employment center as well as opportunities for housing. Attracting a vibrant mixture of uses in downtown will generate activity at all times of the day making downtown and Laredo more sustainable.

Create a trolley that runs from the border through the downtown; perhaps the trolley could even cross the border one day.

Create Attractive, Walkable Destinations

Laredo should become a network of connected walkable mixed-use destinations. Walkable destinations are places where people want to spend time. They provide a reason to stop, not just drive by on your way somewhere else.

As an example, downtown, should be the central walkable area that connects to a series of other central walkable areas. Each destination should be distinct and have its own reason for being, either based on the local micro-cultural heritage, or other unique reason for existing.

One of the first considerations in achieving a walkable destination is to ensure that a mix of housing, retail, office space, civic institutions, and public open space are located within a five-minute walk of one another.

The second step is to ensure that an interconnected street system binds these uses together, so that pedestrians can choose the most convenient path. Sidewalks should be wide to allow for pleasant strolling and outdoor dining while pedestrians are shaded by regularly-spaced street trees and awnings above shopfronts.

Third, the streets that connect these various destinations must be designed for pedestrian use, with generous sidewalks, shade trees, protection from passing cars, and street-oriented buildings rather than parking lots.

Finally, multi-story buildings within a mixed-use environment help create the spatial definition necessary for a place to feel relaxed and well-proportioned. People should feel like they are walking through a series of beautiful and properly-sized outdoor rooms.

Each walkable area should be connected to other walkable areas through dignified transit services such as trolleys loops, light rail, or convenient bus service.

Complete the Streets

Completing the streets means that streets should be planned, designed, operated, and maintained to enable safe, convenient and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities regardless of their mode of transportation. Rather than just defining a street from within its curbs, complete streets stretch farther out to incorporate the entire space between buildings which can include outdoor dining, street furniture, landscaping, art, and lighting, to name a few.

Progressive transportation engineering understands the important role that the public right-of-way plays in moving and connecting people so communities can truly thrive. A roadway is not a place solely for cars to move efficiently.

Complete streets do not have a "one size fits all" approach. How a roadway fits into the overall network and the purposes it serves can change the function and makeup that the right-of-way should ultimately take.

For Laredo this means enabling modes of transportation besides just the personal vehicle. It begins with walkable streets which include wide, shaded sidewalks in walkable, well-lit destination areas including safe connections from neighborhoods to schools. Enhancing the bike infrastructure throughout the city on both off-road and on-road systems will make the city more livable and affordable for those who cannot afford to drive as well as provide recreation for those that want to bike recreationally.

Moving vehicles and transit efficiently should remain a priority, it should just not be the only priority for streets. Traffic flow can be improved with better coordination of lights as well as providing a network of alternate routes.

Plan New & Improved Public Spaces

Laredo should be home to many different types of parks and recreational opportunities including small plazas, indoor soccer venues, dog parks, an amphitheater, linked trails, and neighborhood parks, among others.

The city has a system of formal plazas in the downtown and a series of parks and trails around the waterways. However, as development has occurred, adequate park space has not been provided for all types of uses. As new development occurs, different types of parks for different uses should be created. This may include creating new neighborhood parks, pocket parks, and setting space aside for more active regional parks. The city can introduce more gathering places by generating a network of safe, comfortable and well-connected civic and shared open spaces.

Some existing parks and spaces that exist can be enhanced and better activated and publicized. Lake Casa Blanca and the Lake Casa Blanca State Park are underutilized amenities that should become a highlight for the community. An integrated trail system should connect along the edge of the Rio Grande and through the city along the waterways to Lake Casa Blanca. The trail system can be activated with trail heads that provide bike repair stations, bike rentals, kayak rentals, and refreshments. Existing spaces can be activated with regular activities like food truck rallies, concerts or art walks.

Every home should be within a five to ten minute walk from a park. The unique neighborhoods of Laredo should be knit together with tree-lined streets that are safe for everyone. Public spaces throughout Laredo should serve residents of all ages with safe, well-maintained, and innovatively programmed places to play, exercise, relax, and connect with nature.

A Prosperous (But Still Affordable) City

Creating a prosperous and affordable city can mean many things. At its simplest, it means ensuring all Loredoans, with a wide range of incomes, should be able to live in safe and healthy housing. That can mean keeping Laredo affordable by focusing to provide a range of building types that cater to a variety of age groups, household sizes and configurations, and income levels.

Keeping Laredo affordable to the community can also mean supporting local businesses and artists as well as a range of commerce opportunities. A variety of commercial spaces can support small and emerging businesses and non profits, as well as anchor employers. Better jobs and opportunities can attract additional businesses and foster entrepreneurship.

Affordable living and better economic opportunities can create an environment where young people want to stay or return.

Creating real transportation choices can help to level the field for creating a prosperous city. Investing in transit, biking, and walking (not just roads) will benefit the lower sector of Laredoans who are less mobile, both physically and financially, who do not have the ability to have access to cars.

Government and decision-making processes should represent the full racial, socioeconomic, cultural, political and demographic diversity of the population, as the city actively seeks the public's voices to guide policy. City government and new development should address the infrastructure and effects of decisions and should proactively support equity and the quality of life for all residents when making land use, resource allocation, project implementation and other planning and policy decisions.

A new neighborhood is created at the Kansas City Southern Rail Yards.

EXISTING PLANS

Numerous plans and studies have been created for the city that present compelling ideas concerning future improvements throughout the city. It is important to highlight some of the main concepts that have been proposed in the past and that are still supported, and have the potential for continuing to improve the quality of life for the residents of Laredo.

Comprehensive Plan of Laredo Texas, Adopted August 26,1991

The previous comprehensive plan for the City of Laredo was adopted in 1991. Although the plan provides a mandate that it should be reviewed and updated once a year, no updates to the comprehensive plan have been made. The vision in the plan had a horizon of 2010. Some of the broad visions within the plan have been partially realized, but not necessarily to the extent hoped for. Some of these key ideas that are still relevant today include:

- Become a key center of world goods;
- Focus on cultural sophistication and economic opportunity reflective of the international community that Laredo is;
- Increase community pride and the physical appearance of the city;
- Combine school and park sites to become the focus of neighborhoods and bring people together;
- Create a linear park system along the creeks and Rio Grande;
- Create a center for warehouses and the industrial sector of the city along Mines Road; and
- Focus on the downtown in the Central Business District.

Viva Laredo picks up on many of these visions and lays the groundwork to take the next steps in realizing that vision.
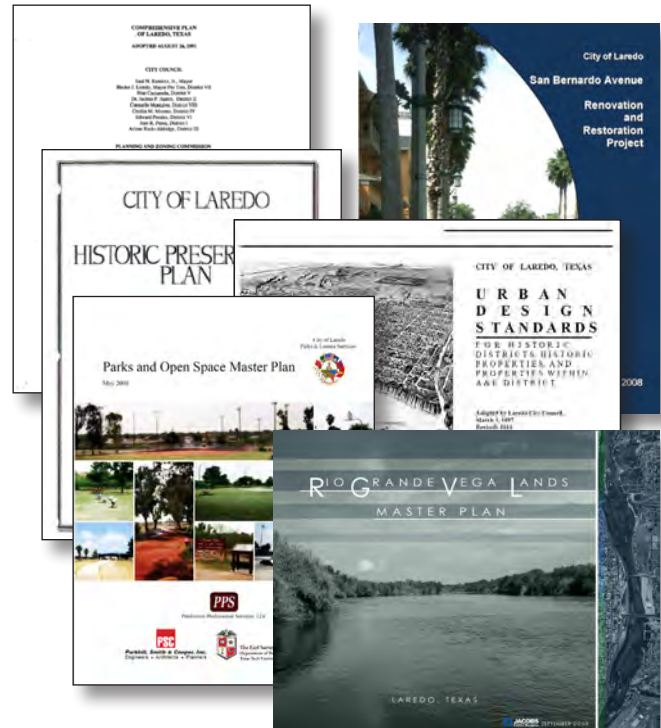
1995 Historic Preservation Plan

The plan discusses historic district designations within the downtown and the importance of preservation for the revitalization of downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. The plan functions as a preservation guide and policy statement on proposed and adopted preservation strategies. The plan concludes with a set of review standards for designated local historic districts.

The plan identifies four additional historic districts for the El Cuatro, Fort McIntosh, El Azteca, and Heights areas. Since the adoption of the plan, only the El Azteca neighborhood received recognition as a National Register Historic District which occurred in 2003.

1997 Urban Design Standards for Historic Districts, Historic Properties and Properties within A&E District (Revised 2010).

This report is an assessment, inventory and proposed set of guidelines for historic structures in the San Agustin, Old Mercado, and proposed Jarvis historic districts in downtown Laredo totaling a forty square block area.

2008 San Bernardo Avenue, Renovation and Restoration Project

The plan looks at the historic San Bernardo corridor, a destination where people go to shop, live and work. Multiple street sections were developed in order to transform the aging fractured corridor into a cohesive, amenity-filled corridor that enriches the surrounding community.

Of the options presented in the plan, the community prefers the option that keeps San Bernardo a two way street with on-street parking when possible and a center median planted with trees.

2008 Parks and Open Space Master Plan

The plan states several purposes:

- Provide the structure for systematic and consistent planning and development for the next decade;
- Provide detailed research regarding the community and the roles of the Laredo Parks and Recreation Department;
- Provide direction in the area of acquisition and development of park land within the city limits as well as in the Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) as growth continues;
- Establish priorities and implementation time lines based on documented research and a community-based needs analysis; and
- Conform to the Texas Parks and Wildlife guidelines for local Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plans.

The plan looks at a variety of park space types, sizes and uses. It tries to balance land currently owned by the city and developed; owned by the city and not developed; and the need for future acquisitions. The need for each park to have its own design and character is encouraged to meet the needs of the surrounding community and provide diversity throughout the park system.

2008 Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan

This plan lays out a concept for the redevelopment of Laredo's riverfront to promote tourism, job creation, and downtown revitalization. The plan promotes the active use of the waterfront through the downtown and connecting to trails to both the north and south of downtown, providing a consistent greenway for people throughout the city.

This plan has numerous ideas that have been incorporated into *Viva Laredo*. The Vega Lands Master Plan had two key concepts that should be highlighted. The first is the identification of the Kansas City Rail Yards as a potential redevelopment site. *Viva Laredo* expands on that concept by illustrating what development could entail in that location. The second is the widening of the Rio Grande to create an elevated promenade, making a "wall" that goes down to the river instead of being built up into view. As national demand for a border wall weakens and grows, the merit of this plan should be remembered.

Laredo 2020 (not adopted)

This plan for the downtown lays out a thorough understanding of the existing conditions found within downtown Laredo. The plan lays out some critical goals and potential projects to help revitalize the downtown, many of which have been expanded upon as part of *Viva Laredo* including:

- Create a downtown regulatory and revitalization mechanism / entity;
- Revive and expand tourism in the downtown;
- Redevelop the inner city areas with a greater mix-use density;
- Embrace the perennial values of Laredo's historic and cultural landscape;
- Development of a convention/business center;
- Revitalization of the Plaza Theatre;
- Streetcar System; and
- Link to Laredo Community College.

LAREDO'S HISTORY

Laredo Under Seven Flags
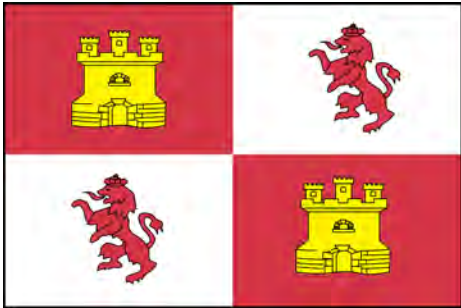
Spain
1519 - 1685; 1690 - 1821
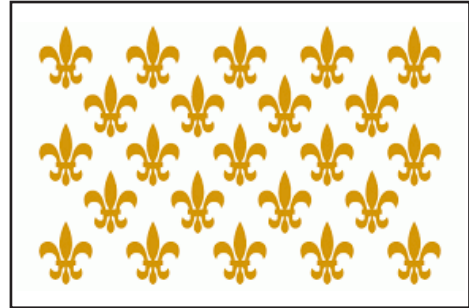
France
1685 - 1690

Mexico
1821 - 1836

Texas
1836 - 1845

Republic of the Rio Grande
1840

United States of America
1845 - 1861; 1865 - Present

Confederate States of America
1861 - 1865

* Laredo's History section adapted from, and used at the courtesy of, the Webb County Heritage foundation and the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum.

The Founding of Nuevo Santander and Laredo

Nuevo Santander, one of the last northern provinces of New Spain, was established by José de Escandón. Upon receiving a commission to conquer this northern frontier, Escandón organized an e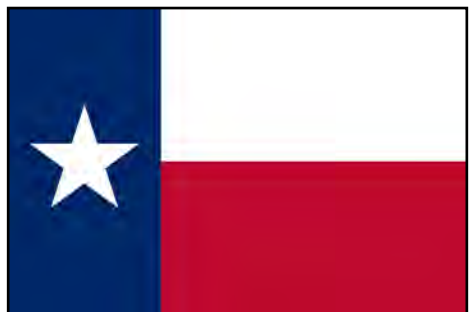ntrada of 1,750 soldiers that resulted in the founding of 20 towns and 18 missions between 1749 and 1755. By occupying this territory, comprised of what would become Tamaulipas, a piece of Nuevo León, and a portion of South Texas, New Spain hoped to convert the indigenous people to Christianity and to discourage French and English expansion.

The Spaniard, José de Escandón, born in 1700, served in a mounted regiment at Mérida, Yucatán. Later he conquered the native inhabitants of Sierra Gorda for New Spain. As Lt. General, he received a commission to inspect the land between the San Antonio River and Tampico known as the Seno Mexicano. Appointed governor, Escandón was responsible for settlements along the Rio Grande (Río Bravo): Camargo, Reynosa, Dolores, Revilla, Mier, and Laredo. Laredo is the only remaining Spanish colonial settlement on the northern bank of the Rio Grande.

Laredo was founded on May 15, 1755, when Captain Tomás Sánchez, with three families, was granted permission to settle 15 leagues of land near an Indian fort on the Rio Grande. Sánchez lived across the river from Dolores, and journeyed to Revilla to petition for a new villa. Born in 1709 in Nuevo León, Sánchez was a military veteran and had managed a ranch in Coahuila. The Sánchez estate ran cattle, sheep, goats, horses, mules, and oxen.

In 1767, Juan Fernando de Palacios, the governor of Sierra Gorda, officially designated the settlement as a villa and christened it San Agustín de Laredo, after a town in Escandón's native Santander, Spain. A central plaza was laid out, and land grants fronting the river were issued to the heads of households. Plots of land facing the plaza were surveyed for a church, a captains house, and a jail.

Map of Sierra Gorda and Costa del Seno Mexicano from Queretaro - circa 1747

Signature of Tomás Sánchez

Los Mexicanos - Tejanos

Thirty-four years after its founding, Laredo boasted 800 inhabitants, including Spaniards, natives, and mixed-race. In this stratified society, prominent Spanish landowners were granted the title of don and doña. *Mulatos* and *indios* occupied the roles of servants, shepherds, and stock handlers.

Ranching and trading became the sustenance of the colony. Products were hauled from the Mexican interior through Laredo to San Antonio de Bexar and La Bahía. Cattle hides and wool were traded south in exchange for food and household necessities.

The Texas cowboy, or *vaquero*, had his roots in Spanish-Mexican ranching traditions. During the Spanish colonial period, the city government regulated round-ups to insure the proper distribution of wild cattle. Spanish brands, many resembling Moorish and Indian designs, were publicly registered. Located near springs and creeks, family-operated ranches such as Los Ojuélos, Dolores, and San José de Palafox developed into small communities.

Laredo was struggling to survive the raids of Comanche and Apache Indians in 1821, the year Mexico gained its independence from Spain. To gain prestige and reap the spoils of war, the nomadic Plains Indians waged hit and run warfare against the Mexicans. The Indians wiped out nearby ranches as the pleas for additional garrison troops were ignored.

Carrizo Indians, a group of Coahuiltecan peoples, lived in thatched huts and practiced a hunting-gathering existence using the bow and arrow. Reduced by disease and warfare, the Carrizos became Christians and slowly assimilated into Spanish culture.

Sombre la Huella, by Theodore Gentilz, 1848

Carrizos Indians, by Lino Sánchez y Tapia, 1828-1834

"Marqueta" by Theodor Gentilz, 1848

The Republic of the Rio Grande

On November 5, 1838, Antonio Canales, a prominent lawyer, issued a proclamation in Ciudad Guerrero calling for the re-adoption of the federalist constitution of 1824 and opposition to the centralist government. By February 1839, the citizens of Laredo had joined the cause. Helped by the French blockade of Mexican ports, the Federalists were able to capture several towns. By March, 1839, however, the French had made peace with Mexico. Between May and September of 1839, Centralists captured Saltillo, Tampico, Monclova, and Laredo. Antonio Canales and his chief Lieutenant, Antonio Zapata, retreated to the Nueces River and sought the support of Mirabeau B Lamar, President of the Republic of Texas. Lamar officially remained neutral; however, he did allow the recruitment of Texians into the Federalist armies.

On January 7, 1840, the Republic of the Rio Grande was proclaimed by constitutional convention and Laredo was named its capital. Officers and a general council were elected to the new republic. Jesus Cardenas, a lawyer from Reynosa, was chosen President. Antonio Canales was named Commander-in-Chief of the army. Delegates were selected for Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Nuevo Leon. Colonel Antonio Zapata served as commander of the cavalry.

The Republic's forces embarked on a series of battles with Centralist forces. After a disastrous defeat at Santa Rita de Morelos in Coahuila, Federalist survivors of the battle were court-martialed, found guilty, and shot. Antonio Zapata's head was cut off and displayed on a pike for three days as a warning to others.

The armed struggle for the border villas continued and by the fall it was clear that the Federalists could not prevail. On November 6, 1840, Canales surrendered his troops at Camargo, and President Cárdenas and his forces stacked their rifles and arms in Laredo. The Republic of the Rio Grande was no more. The Laredo area was the only portion of Texas to have served under seven flags.

Republic of the Rio Grande Poster

War on the Rio Grande

The annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845 led to the declaration of war against Mexico. Zachary Taylor's victories around Monterrey and the fall of Mexico City brought an end to Mexico's claim to Texas. In the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Rio Grande was declared the boundary, and Mexico received $15,000,000 for 529,019 square miles of lost territory. Under this treaty, Laredo became a part of Texas in 1848.

Mirabeau B. Lamar assumed command of the town during the war and denied a petition by Basillio Benavidez, José María González, and José María Ramón, prominent Laredoans, to remain a Mexican town. Mexicans who wanted to retain their citizenship moved across the river. This area, previously settled as part of Laredo, became the town of Nuevo Laredo in 1848.

During the Civil War, Laredo was a transfer point on the Confederate cotton route to Mexico. On March 18, 1864, Major Alfred Holt led a Union army of about 200 men from Brownsville to destroy 5,000 bails of cotton stacked at San Agustín Plaza. Colonel Santos Benavides rose from his sick bed and, with 42 men, repelled three Union charges at Zacate Creek. This became known as the Battle of Laredo.

Camp Crawford, one of a line of U.S. forts along the Rio Grande, was established March 3, 1849. It was renamed Ft. McIntosh after Lt. Colonel James S. McIntosh, who perished in the Mexican War at the battle of Molino del Rey. The fort provided protection from the Native Americans and the defiant Mexican Juan Cortina. Abandoned during the Civil War, it was reoccupied later and operated until 1946.

The tumultuous Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 brought a flood of immigrants to Laredo. In 1914, the *carranzista* army attacked Nuevo Laredo and sections of the city were burned. Ft. McIntosh was reinforced with 10,000 National Guard soldiers for World War I.

5th and 12th Cavalry at Ft. McIntosh

Colonel Santos Benavidez Ramon

Public Institutions

Webb County, named for James Webb, Secretary of the Treasury for the Republic of Texas, was organized in 1848, and Laredo became the county seat. A courthouse was constructed in 1882 for $40,000. Early county officers were the chief justice, commissioners, treasurer, sheriff, and hide inspector.

Laredo incorporated as a city under Texas law in 1852. In 1882, the City of Laredo established a water works; however, water was delivered by water vendors to parts of the city as late as 1922. In 1889, a foot and wagon bridge was constructed across the Rio Grande. The Laredo Improvement Company built the first electric street cars west of the Mississippi.

Education in Laredo dates to 1783 when a Spanish order was issued that all children up to the age of twelve be sent to school. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and catechism were mandatory subjects. The first city-sponsored school opened in 1821. Later La Escuela Amarilla was built in the 1870's. In 1882, the Laredo Independent School District was created and administered by the city council. In 1910, the Central School was constructed on the site of Escuela Amarilla and retained the original name. The first high school was held at the old council house. Laredo High School was built on that same site in 1916.

The explosive growth of the city in the 1880's led to the development of two political factions: the Botas (Boots) led by Raymond Martin and C.M. MacDonell, and the Guaraches (Sandals), led by Darío González. Both parties vied for control of the city council. Political speeches, parades, excessive consumption of alcohol, and the shooting of firearms at anvils characterized the campaigns. On April 6, 1886, the election was won by the Bota candidates who led a mock funeral parade for the Guaraches the following day. The parade developed into a street battle that left possibly 30 dead. The 1888 election helped to mend differences, and members of the two factions joined the Independent Club in later years.

Aerial View of Laredo with Electric Trolley Line, 1892

Postcard with View of Laredo Courthouse and Jail, 1912

Water Delivery Cart in Laredo

Religious and Social Life

Religious institutions played a major role in the development of Laredo. The first church of San Agustín, one the oldest congregations in Texas, was conducted in a hut in 1767. Built of stone in 1778, the second church faced the river. The present Gothic Revival church was completed in 1872, and served as a cathedral under bishop Peter Verdaguer at the turn of the century.

Founded in 1868, the Ursuline Academy provided Catholic education to girls. Saint Augustine Parochial School was built in 1927, serving 500 youths in its first year. Laredo's first hospital, operated by the Sisters of Mercy, opened in 1894 and relocated to the Steffan residence on Jarvis Plaza in 1899.

German and Anglo-American immigrants established Protestant and Jewish congregations in the 1880s. The Laredo Seminary was founded in 1882 by the Methodist Episcopal church. It was later renamed the Holding Institute in honor of Nannie E. Holding.

Mexican holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and Dieciséis de Septiembre were traditionally celebrated in Laredo. The George Washington's Birthday Celebration originated in the 1860s and was revived by civic leaders in the Yaqui Tribe of the Improved Order of the Red Men to promote American patriotism. In 1923, the George Washington's Birthday Celebration Association formed to produce a night pageant depicting a colonial ball. A Fiesta Noche Mexicana was added in 1925.

Community organizations provided avenues for socializing, political achievement, mutual aid, and service. These include: Hijos de Juárez, the Mariano Ecobedo Lodge, Sons of Hermann, Woodmen of the World, Masonic Lodge, Knight of Pythias, Knight Templar and Miriam Chapter. The Knights of Columbus Council 2304 promoted education and charity and provided burial insurance to its members.
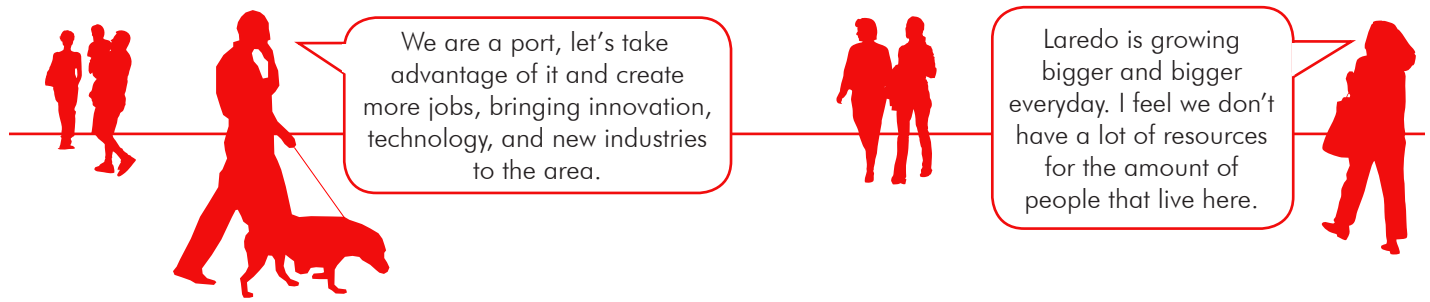

Ursuline Academy Graduating Class of 1900

First Mercy Hospital at 1320 Rosario Street

Masons in Lardeo

Early Industries

Ranching has been predominate throughout Laredo's history. As early as 1757, 11 families owned 100 cattle, 125 mules, 712 horses, and 9,089 sheep and goats, according to a Spanish inspection report. One of the largest Spanish ranches was Dolores, owned by José Vásquez Borrego. Over 9,000 animals were run on a 29,000 acre grant.

In the 1870's, cattle were driven to area rail heads for shipment north. Barbed wire fences brought an end to open range ranching in the 1880's, but the windmill fostered large spreads throughout Webb County.

Laredo became a major thoroughfare for trade between the United States and Mexico. The city's population of 3,512 in 1880 grew to 11,319 in 1890. Emigrants from Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, Scandinavia, and all parts of the United States moved to Laredo seeking employment and business opportunities.

Known since Spanish times, coal deposits located 27 miles upriver were mined by Refugio Benavides and Charles Callaghan as early as 1873. By 1900, the mines shipped 23,000,000 pounds of coal to Laredo and kept the railroads operative.

Onion Agriculture was practiced on a large scale in 1898 by Thomas C. Nye on irrigated acreage north of the city. The 1917 Souvenir Album of Laredo boasted, "The Laredo area is foremost in the world in the production of Bermuda onions."

A second boom resulted with the discovery of gas and oil. In 1921, Oliver Winfield Killam drilled the first commercial well of the Mirando Oil Company and later established Misko Refineries Company. Numerous fields were discovered, making the area a major center of oil and gas production.

Deutz Brothers, 1890

Market Plaza and Flores Ave, 1907

Bermuda Onion Field, 1916

CITY PROFILE

28.3
MEDIAN AGE
based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

252,309
PEOPLE
LIVE IN LAREDO
based on 2014 Population Estimates

Laredo is the largest inland port in the United States, and Nuevo Laredo the largest in Latin America. Located on the southern end of I-35 close to manufacturers in northern Mexico, Laredo's economy is based on international trade.
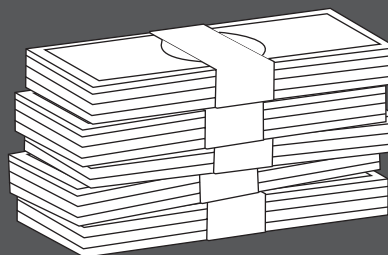
ABOUT
$39,408
Median Household Income in Laredo

based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Laredo travels primarily by **CAR.**

16.6% carpool

single-occupant vehicle

based on 2010 data

77.5%
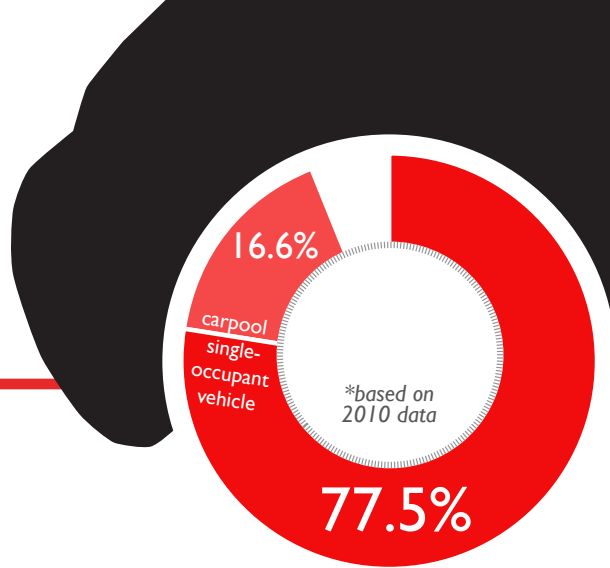
70,439

total housing units

based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

$173 billion

PROCESSED	TRADE

based on 2010 data

31.2%
of individuals
live below **poverty level**
in Laredo

65.4%
high school graduate or higher
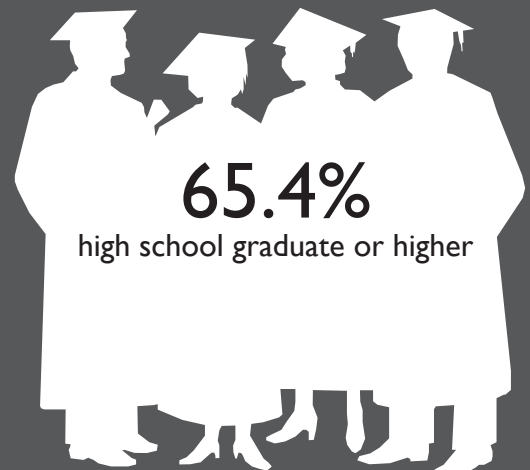
based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Land Use Patterns

1

plainspoken [ˌpleɪnˈspəʊkən] *adj* franco(ca).

plaintiff [ˈpleɪntɪf] *n* demandante *mf*.

plaintive [ˈpleɪntɪv] *adj* quejumbroso(sa), lasti-mero(ra).

plait [plæt] ◇ *n* trenza *f*. ◇ *vt* trenzar.

plan [plæn] ◇ *n* **- 1.** [strategy] plan *m*; **to go according to plan** salir según lo previsto **- 2.** [of story, essay] esquema *m* **- 3.** [of building etc] plano *m*. ◇ *vt* (*pt & pp* **-ned**, *cont* **-ning**) **- 1.** [organize] planear **- 2.** [career, future, economy] planificar; **to plan to do sthg** tener la intención de hacer algo; **it wasn't planned** no estaba previsto **- 3.** [design, devise] trazar un esquema OR boceto de. ◇ *vi* hacer planes; **we hadn't planned for that** no lo habíamos previsto.

◆ **plans** *npl* planes *mpl*; **to have plans for** tener planes para.

◆ **plan on** *vt insep*: **to plan on doing sthg** pensar hacer algo.

◆ **plan out** *vt sep* planear.

plane [pleɪn] ◇ *adj* plano(na). ◇ *n* **- 1.** [aircraft] avión *m* **- 2.** GEOM [flat surface] plano *m* **- 3.** *fig* [level - intellectual] nivel *m*, plano *m* **- 4.** [tool] cepillo *m* **- 5.** [tree] plátano *m*. ◇ *vt*

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Historical Growth

Over the past 250 years, Laredo has developed from a small settlement with a crossing point on the northern bank of the Rio Grande into a major city with the nation's largest inland port of entry. Laredo remains a mostly gridded city planned using 18th century conventions, though recent development utilizes a suburban pattern. Rail-based development gave way to highway-based development as, like elsewhere in the United States, growth patterns were driven by national transportation policy.

The original mode of transportation for the city was by foot, mule, or horse-drawn cart. Development began to push further from the downtown core with the introduction of the streetcar which opened between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo in 1890.

Map of historic trolley routes, Southern Traction Annals

LEGEND
— Electric Trolley Route
— Relocated or Abandoned Tracks

In 1916, automobile production began to sharply increase in the United States. The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1921 resulted in the funding of many major State and Federal roadway infrastructure projects. Among those projects was US Route 81 which was constructed in 1926 and passed through the city center along present day San Bernardo Avenue and terminated at the international border.

The proliferation of the automobile expanded the reach of development in the city and connected Laredo to cities further afield by means other than train. However, the primary pattern of development was still the small grid of blocks until after World War II.

Streetcar in Laredo (circa 1905)
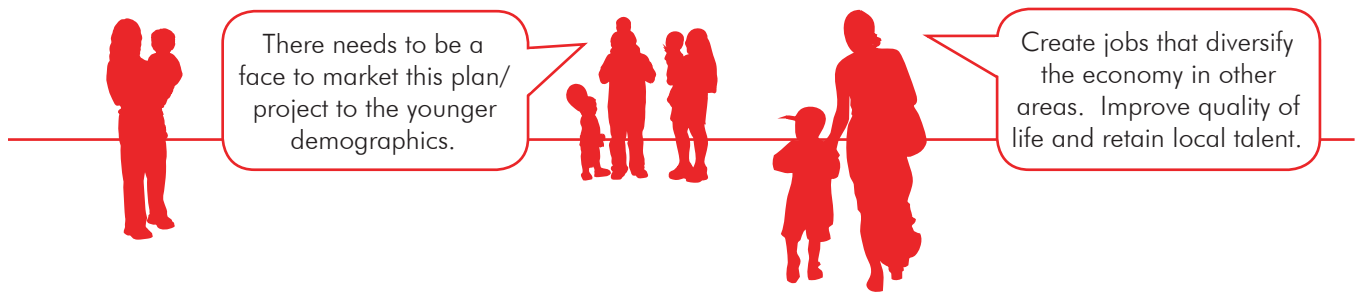
Following Word War II further highway expansion projects were approved throughout the country, including the expansion of US Route 81, which would become Interstate Highway 35 as a result of the adoption of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956. In the 1950s, additional economic expansion projects included the construction and completion of Bridge #1, also known as the Gateway to the Americas Bridge.

The growth of the port and the expansion of freight traffic continues to impact the landscape of the city. However, at its heart Laredo remains a mostly gridded city. Laredo shares this feature with Nuevo Laredo across the river.

Pushing north, west, east, and south the future of Laredo will continue to be defined by local, state, and federal transportation policy including plans to create a loop highway at the furthest extent of the city and the construction of additional entries into Nuevo Laredo. The city that began "at the bend in the river" reaches today in every direction with few physical constraints other than the international border.

1961 Map of the City of Laredo

2015 Aerial

LEGEND
— Street
— Highway
+++ Railroad
— Future Roadway
▬ City Boundary

United States

255

Rio Grande

I-35

69W

United States

255

MATCH LINE

Mexico

Rio Grande

Mexico

20

59

20

59

Nuevo Laredo

359

83

83

Existing Street Plan

The downtown and the adjacent areas to the north and east developed with a small block and street grid. North of Highway 59 and south of Lomas Del Sur Boulevard have a less connected local street network of subdivisions that connect to a system of collector and arterial roadways. Laredo has Interstate 35 connecting from the border crossing at bridge 2 to the north. Highway 20, also known as Bob Bullock Loop connects the eastern edge of the city to the northern and southern edges. Other major highways connecting the city include Highway 83 to the south, Highways 59 and 359 to the east, and FM 1472 (Mines Road) toward to the northwest.

The existing future thoroughfare plan builds on the existing collector and arterial roads creating a typically half mile grid system out to another future loop road at the edge of the extraterritorial jurisdiction.

LEGEND

- Single Family
- Multifamily
- Commercial
- Mixed Use Development
- Arts & Entertainment
- Historic District
- Agricultural District
- Industrial
- City Boundary

United States

Rio Grande

Mexico

Nuevo Laredo

Existing Zoning

Laredo is primarily commercial along the main corridors with single family and multi-family neighborhoods in-between. The northwestern portion of the city is primarily industrial with some new single family residential beginning to mix in. The downtown is located at the bend in the river. There are historic districts and an arts and entertainment district within the downtown. There is a large portion of mixed-use development north of the downtown where the city's first ring suburbs developed. There are still large areas within the city limits that are yet to be developed.

LEGEND
A
AE
AO
City Boundary

United States

Rio Grande

Mexico

Nuevo Laredo

United States

Mexico

Rio Grande

MATCH LINE

Flood Zone

A series of streams feed into the Rio Grande from throughout the city. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has determined areas along the streams to be subject to inundation by the 1% annual chance of flooding and require flood insurance.

Flood Zone A areas have not been studied so no Base Flood Elevations (BFEs) or flood depths can be shown. Flood Zone AE and AO have had hydraulic analysis performed so BFEs may be shown. Zone AO tends to have BFEs of one to three feet while Zone AE tends to be higher.

These barriers to development make it both riskier and more expensive to build in these locations. However, they also provide an opportunity to create a network of parks and trails that connect throughout the city.
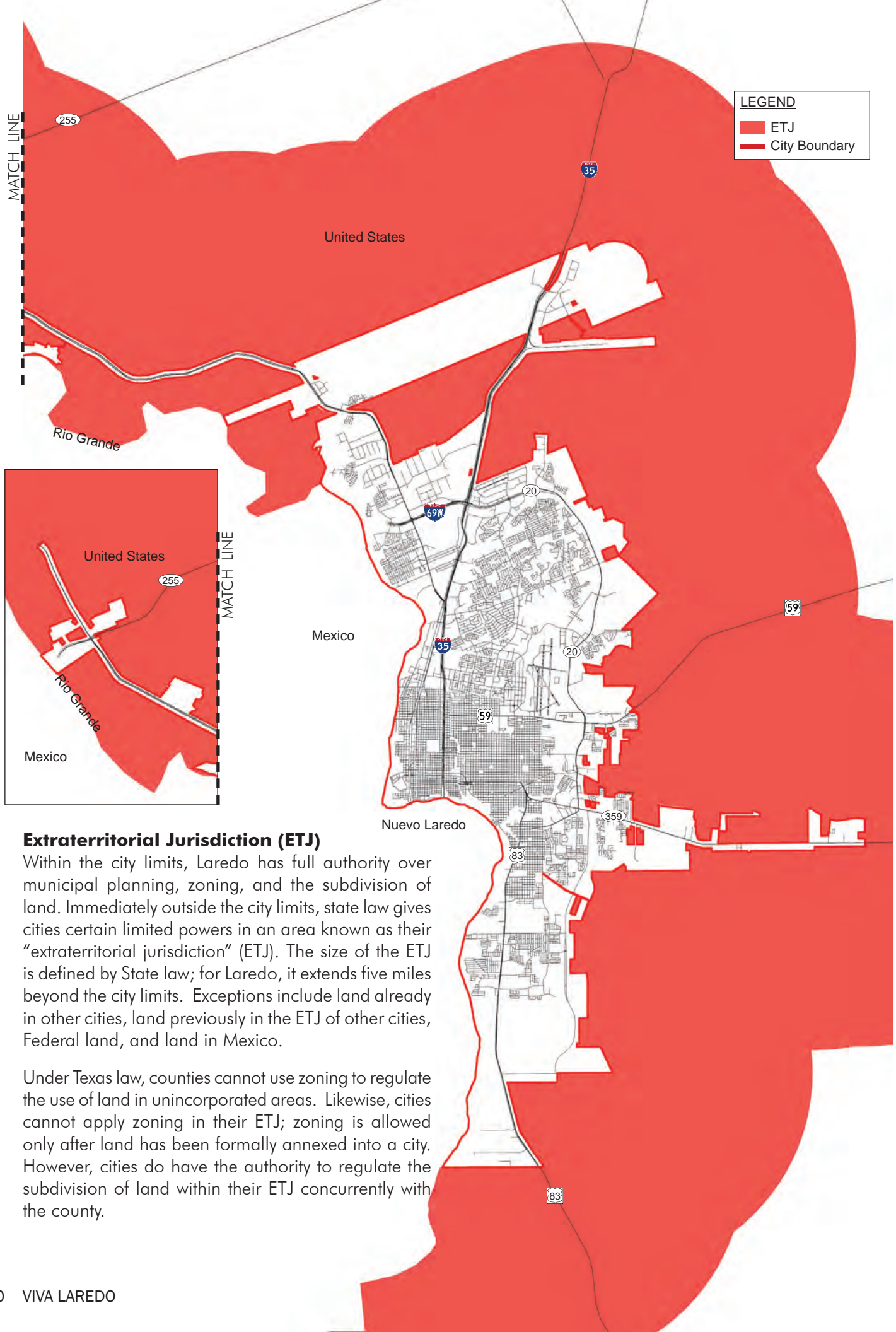
Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ)

Within the city limits, Laredo has full authority over municipal planning, zoning, and the subdivision of land. Immediately outside the city limits, state law gives cities certain limited powers in an area known as their "extraterritorial jurisdiction" (ETJ). The size of the ETJ is defined by State law; for Laredo, it extends five miles beyond the city limits. Exceptions include land already in other cities, land previously in the ETJ of other cities, Federal land, and land in Mexico.

Under Texas law, counties cannot use zoning to regulate the use of land in unincorporated areas. Likewise, cities cannot apply zoning in their ETJ; zoning is allowed only after land has been formally annexed into a city. However, cities do have the authority to regulate the subdivision of land within their ETJ concurrently with the county.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Revitalize Downtown

Downtown Laredo's rich architectural and cultural heritage is apparent. Unfortunately, so is the extensive disinvestment of recent decades. Laredoans want downtown to once again become the city's vibrant heart – a place of common ground, constant reinvention, living commerce, and varied entertainment.

In its heyday, downtown Laredo was a distinctive cultural scene and the most choiceworthy place in the region to work, live, and meet. Department stores, theaters, festivals, family celebrations, and visitors from across the U.S. and Mexico all brought life to downtown. Today, that life is only a fraction of what it once was.

Redevelopment is important throughout Laredo. Downtown streets provide the highest-quality pedestrian environment in the city. Well-built and beautifully crafted buildings face tree-lined streets. Local government agencies are still mostly located in the downtown, giving the downtown a functional primacy. Hundreds of thousands of people every year have their first experience of the United States in the downtown and the downtown remains the place that all the people of Laredo have in common as it continues to host Laredo's most important events.

The work of institutions like the Webb County Heritage Foundation, enduring businesses like La Posada Hotel, and new ventures like the outlet mall (to name just a few examples) give downtown advocates hope.

Protect Historic Neighborhoods

Laredo's older neighborhoods, like Barrio Azteca and St. Peter's Historic Neighborhood should be a source of local pride. And while they have suffered from disinvestment, they remain capable of serving generations of new residents thanks to their central locations, walkable neighborhood designs, and housing stock of distinctive, yet affordable buildings. Protection is key as the downtown and its surroundings evolve in the future.

Grow, But Grow In a Way That Prevents Traffic Delays

Laredo is still a relatively easy place to drive; however, automobile trips are increasingly taking more time and only a fraction of the buildable land in Laredo has been developed. Bob Bullock Loop is an attempt to create an alternate route to bypass this inner city traffic. As development occurs, however, congestion along that facility is likely to worsen.

Add New Land Uses Into Neighborhoods

New subdivisions offer only a single type of home. Families can rarely stay within the same neighborhood when they need to change the kind of home they live in. Residents also report that there are few destinations within distance of their homes to walk. Small shops that would be valuable to residents aren't permitted because the same zoning that would permit them would also permit much larger stores that would be perceived as disruptive to nearby housing. Residents say that most neighborhoods, old or new, could benefit from a greater variety of activities within walking and bicycling distance.

Restore Close Connections with Nuevo Laredo

The recent violence that has occurred in Nuevo Laredo and other northern states of Mexico has badly damaged the historic connectedness between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. The port industry still thrives, but other ties are severing. Nuevo Laredo and Laredo have grown together nearly as a single city, even though divided by a national border. The restoration of that closeness is an aspiration of citizens on both sides of the border.

STRATEGIES

Focus on the Downtown

City policies can inadvertently encourage growth and expansion at the edges of the city, and this can disincentive infill and redevelopment in the city's historic core and inner city. Laredo's downtown is remarkably intact, with many historic buildings still standing and the traditional street grid largely in place. Laredo needs to reimagine this valuable asset as a national destination. Revitalization of the historic center will anchor and enhance the overall character of the city and contribute to Laredo's long-term sustainability.

Revitalize Older Neighborhoods

Revitalizing Laredo's older neighborhoods, which feature walkable streets, parks, a mix of uses, a variety of housing types, and many historic buildings was a priority for community members. Revitalization includes improving public infrastructure, infilling empty lots as well as parking lots, and restoring valuable older buildings. Laredo should expand its programs, such as the neighborhood empowerment zones (NEZ) with design guidelines, to assist infill development.

At present the downtown has two National Historic Districts: Barrio Azteca Historic District (designated in 2003) and the San Agustin de Laredo Historic District designated in 1973. Additional neighborhoods and districts, like the Heights, and other inner city areas within the street grid defined in page 2.8, should be considered for designation as historic districts. Reusing existing buildings, even where they are not historic, is one of the most basic ways to foster a sustainable city. This can be facilitated through the creation of and adoption of a rehabilitation code.

Historic preservation should be seen as an economic development tool. All across America, blocks of older, smaller buildings are contributing to robust local economies and distinctive livable communities. Buildings of diverse vintage and small scale provide flexible, affordable space for entrepreneurs launching new businesses and serve as attractive settings for new restaurants and locally owned shops.

They offer diverse housing choices that attract younger residents and create human-scaled places for walking, shopping, and social interaction. These modest, often-overlooked buildings are irreplaceable assets.

Retrofit Suburban Neighborhoods at Strategic Locations

Strategically retrofit newer suburban and commercial areas. Suburban areas divide housing, shopping, and offices into separate districts that can only be reached by private car. This modern ideal of single-use districts is increasingly less attractive to Americans who are disenchanted with lengthening commutes and the lack of exercise allowed for by living in drive-only neighborhoods.

The Urban Design Chapter of this plan describes a wide variety of techniques for retrofitting suburban areas to increase the variety of buildings and provide opportunities for people of all ages, backgrounds, and cultures to live and work. Single-family detached homes can be carefully supplemented by a wider range of housing options, including rowhouses, condominiums, and even lofts that can be built above stores and offices.

Ensure that New Subdivisions Complete the Community

New development should match the quality of Laredo's best older neighborhoods. Understanding the characteristics of a complete neighborhoods can help create diverse communities instead of a monoculture of single family housing.

Future Land Use Map

The Future Land Use Map guides city growth policy. Most of the undeveloped land within the city and lands in the ETJ have been mapped with recommended new land uses along recommended new thoroughfares.

The Future Land Use Map organizes development based on place types organized by intensity. Walkable, mixed-use place-types include regional mixed-use centers, neighborhood mixed-use centers, and hamlets. The characteristics of each place-type is described on the following pages.

Legend:

- Agricultural / Rural
- Low Density Residential
- Medium Density Residential
- High Density Residential
- Neighborhood Mixed-Use
- Mixed-Use Center
- Downtown Mixed-Use
- Institutional
- Light Industrial
- Heavy Industrial
- Transportation
- Parks
- Water
- City Boundary

Land Use Equivalents Chart

New Land Use Types	Current Zoning Groups
Agricultural / Rural	AG
Low Density Residential	R-1,R-1-MH, R-1A, R-1B, R-S, B-1R, and R-O with exceptions *
Medium Density Residential	R-1, R-O, R-2, B-1R, R1-B, Small format market
High Density Residential	R-3, R-2, B-1R, B-1, R-O
Neighborhood Mixed-Use	ALL EXCEPT M-1, M-2, B-4, AH, AN, FH, OG, FiH
Mixed-Use Center	ALL EXCEPT, M-1, M-2, AH, AN, FH, OG. B4 allowed with exceptions**
Downtown Mixed-Use	CBD, R-1, R-2, R-3, R-1B, R-1A, R-O, AE
Institutional	CF, MF
Light Industrial	M-1, B-4, B-3
Heavy Industrial	M-1, M-2, B-4, B-3, FiH
Transportation	AH, AN
Parks	

* RO within a Low Density Residential is allowed with the exception of restaurants.
** Land uses allowed under a B4 are allowed with the exception of the following uses***:

    Farms, General (Crops & Livestock)
    Farms, General (Livestock/Ranch)
    Bulk Grain And/Or Feed Storage
    Veterinarian (Outdoor Animal Confinement)
    Stables (Private, Principle Use)
    Stables (Private, Accessory Use)
    Stables (Commercial)
    Auto Wrecker Service
    Inoperable Vehicle Holding Yard
    Jail
    Halfway House
    Scrap/Waste Recycle Collection
    Zoo
    Horse Training Facility
    Amusement Redemption Machine Establishment
    Auto Impound Yards
    Auto Salvage Yards
    Transit and Maintenance Vehicle Equipment Facility
    Collection Container

The intent of this table is to provide a transitional language between the uses recommended within the vision of this plan and the current land development uses which are organized through the use of zones. When the city's land development code is revised and adopted according to this plan, this table will no longer be necessary. This table should not be used to directly translate the current zoning to new land development code revisions. City staff should use discretion and best planning practices if using this table as guide in any approval process.

***Note: exceptions only apply to the extent that they do not contradict any other ordinances such as the Urban Agriculture Ordinance, as an example.

The city has no water features; only Casa Blanca. North Laredo Central Park could be turned into a river walk with an urban recreational lake surrounded by businesses.

Create incentives for job creation, economic development, and alternative land development options (higher and lower density).

Land Uses

Place types and neighborhoods are made up by different land uses in the future land use map. Specified land uses however, are not meant to equate to single-use zoning areas. Rather a land use type in the future land use map describes the overall character of a neighborhood.

Neighborhoods are generally made up of residential and mixed-use designations:

- **Low-Density Residential** describes a neighborhood whose character is primarily defined by single-family homes. A diverse range of lot sizes and unit types is encouraged, along with an interconnected network of blocks, streets and public spaces. Denser housing types such as duplexes, fourplexes and small apartment buildings should be designed to fit into the character of a single-family residential neighborhood. Thoughtfully designed small office, retail or mixed-use buildings can also be built at key intersections to provide neighborhood amenities. Civic buildings should also respect the character of a primarily residential neighborhood, but can also be used as landmarks.

- **Medium-Density Residential** describes a neighborhood that is primarily residential in character, but includes a full range of range of residential building types. These include single-family homes in small and medium sized lots, attached rowhouses and apartment buildings. Thoughtfully designed small office, retail or mixed-use buildings can also be built at key intersections to provide neighborhood amenities. Civic buildings should also respect the character of a primarily residential neighborhood, but can also be used as landmarks.

Low Density Residential

Medium Density Residential

High Density Residential

- **High-Density Residential** describes a neighborhood whose character is primarily defined by multi-family residential building types, but can also include single family homes in small lots and neighborhood-serving businesses. A diverse range of housing types is encouraged, including attached rowhouses, small and large apartment buildings, courtyard buildings and small mixed-use buildings. Small office, retail or mixed-use buildings can also be built at key intersections to provide neighborhood amenities. Civic buildings should be sited to provide landmarks to the neighborhood.

- **Neighborhood Mixed-Use** describes a neighborhood-serving mixed-use district that includes multistory, mixed-use buildings with commercial, office and residential uses. Multi-family residential buildings are also appropriate as a transition between main street shopping areas and primarily residential neighborhoods.

- **Mixed-Use Center** describes a mixed-use center that includes multistory, mixed-use buildings with commercial, office and residential uses. Regional or neighborhood oriented shopping areas are encouraged as a primary feature. Multi-family residential buildings are also appropriate as a transition between main street shopping areas and primarily residential neighborhoods.

- **Downtown Mixed-Use** describes the most intense urban development in the City of Laredo. Reserved primarily for downtown Laredo, it includes multi-story mixed-use buildings with commercial, office and residential uses. Multi-family residential buildings are also appropriate as a transition between the downtown and primarily residential neighborhoods. The addition of residential uses on the upper floors of downtown buildings is encouraged as a priority for downtown revitalization.

Neighborhood Mixed-Use

Mixed-Use Center

Downtown Mixed-Use

Development Place-Types

Regional Mixed-Use Centers

The center of a Regional Mixed-Use Center area is a place of intense activity that serves an important role both for economic reasons and for social interactions. The center is where one shops for necessities and can also be a place to greet friends, spend leisure time, and enjoy community events.

Regional Mixed Use Centers have been placed on the Future Land Use Map at the intersection of principal arterials and multi-way boulevards.

When Regional Mixed-Use Centers are planned, development typically starts with commercial investment at the main intersection. When unplanned and developed one project at a time, commercial investment typically comes only after there is enough residential "roof tops" to support the investment.

Regional Mixed-Use Centers are characterized by Main Street Shopping Districts which draw from both visitors from across the region as well as a built-in population of residents who live in nearby neighborhoods and walk to satisfy their daily or weekly needs.

Regional Mixed-Use Center Features

(A) The intersection of multiple adjoining neighborhoods may serve as a shopping district. This area consists of a higher volume of commercial and office area, as well as denser housing types. The commercial space in the shopping district is positioned for its larger number of users.

(B) Block sizes allow for larger format commercial tenants than what would be found in neighborhood centers.

(C) Each neighborhood has an identifiable center and edge. Within the neighborhood is a mix of uses, which could include such daily destinations as schools, a pharmacy, or banks. Each is sized so that there is approximately a 5-minute walk from center to edge.

(D) Large green spaces on the outside of the neighborhoods help define the communities' edge. They also provide large scale recreational opportunities.

(E) In addition to smaller schools which might be located within the neighborhoods, this area may provide an opportunity for a larger scale school.

(F) Within each neighborhood is an assortment of public open spaces. These could include plazas, squares, greens, playgrounds, community gardens, or parks.

(G) Thoroughfares in the regional center may consist of separate vehicular and pedestrian realms. Multi-way boulevards accomplish this by providing a higher speed environment in the central lanes, with narrow, slow-moving, pedestrian-oriented access lanes.

(H) Neighborhoods are designed with several points of access. This disperses car trips throughout the area rather than concentrating vehicles on a few streets.
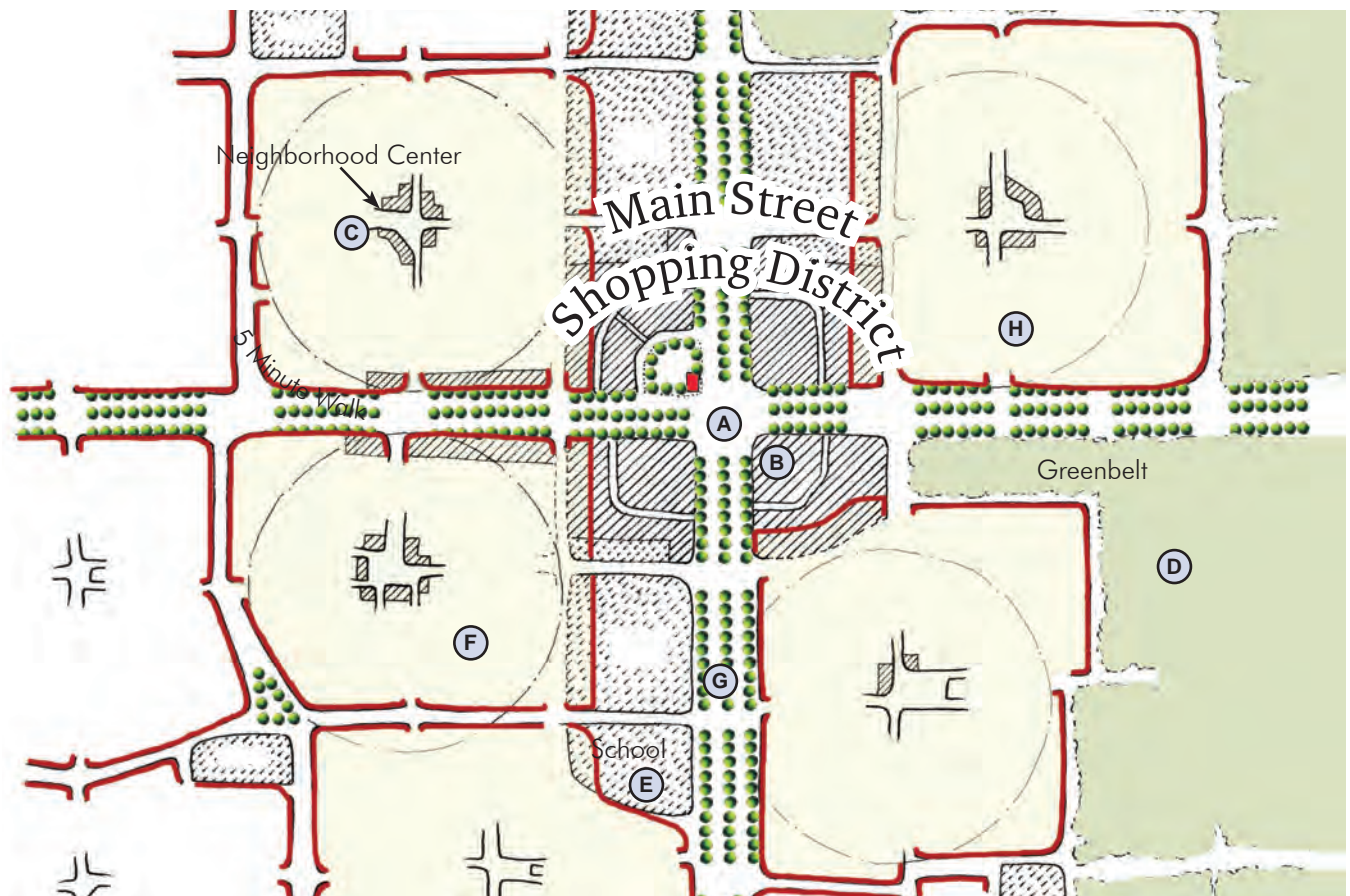
Regional Mixed Use Center Diagram
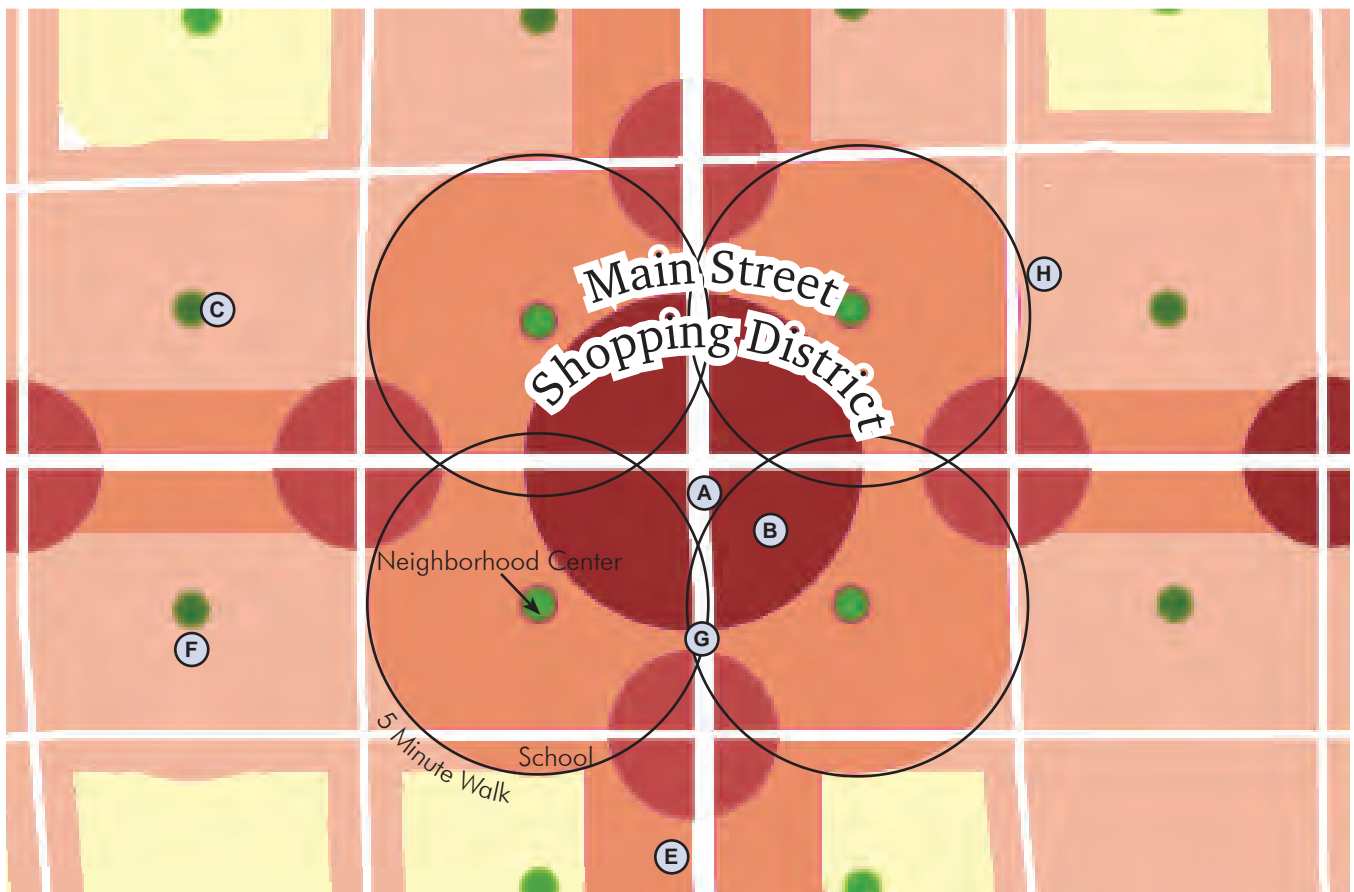
Regional Mixed Use Center as it appears on the Future Land Use Map

Neighborhood Mixed Use Centers

The Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center settlement is composed of multiple neighborhoods ranging from 40 to 80 acres clustered around a town center shopping area. The neighborhoods utilize a general-purpose block network which can support a diversity of uses and housing types. The residential portions of the neighborhood would have multifamily homes and rowhouses at the center and larger lots at the neighborhood edge. The core of the community would contain multistory, mixed-use buildings with commercial, office and residential uses.

A wide variety of parks and open spaces is provided to address a variety of needs including small tot lots for children close to homes, centrally located greens for unstructured recreation and public gatherings, and expansive recreational fields for soccer and football at the edge of the development. Neighborhood Mixed use centers typically have been placed at the intersection of minor arterial roads on the Future Land Use Map.

Neighborhood Mixed-Use Centers are often characterized by "four-corner" intersections with mixed-use buildings facing each other across a crossable four-point intersection.

Neighborhood Mixed Use Center Features

(A) The town center serves as the commercial core for a group of neighborhoods. It contains commercial and office uses based on the adjacent neighborhoods and is smaller than the shopping district at the regional mixed-use center.

(B) The town center should be anchored by a signature open space. This space could serve as an identifiable landmark for all the surrounding neighborhoods.

(C) The center of each neighborhood should be approximately a 5 minute walking distance from the neighborhood edge.

(D) Neighborhoods in the Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center Typology will contain a variety of residential housing types. Denser and more urban types will be located near the neighborhood centers or the town center.

(E) Neighborhood centers will feature more attached building types, including small commercial uses and denser housing types such as apartments, multi-family or rowhouses.

(F) Within each neighborhood is an assortment of public open spaces. These could include plazas, squares, greens, playgrounds, or parks.

(G) Large green spaces on the outside of the neighborhoods help define the communities' edge. They also provide large scale recreational opportunities.

(H) Neighborhoods are designed with several points of access. This helps disperse car trips throughout the area rather than concentrating vehicles on a few streets.
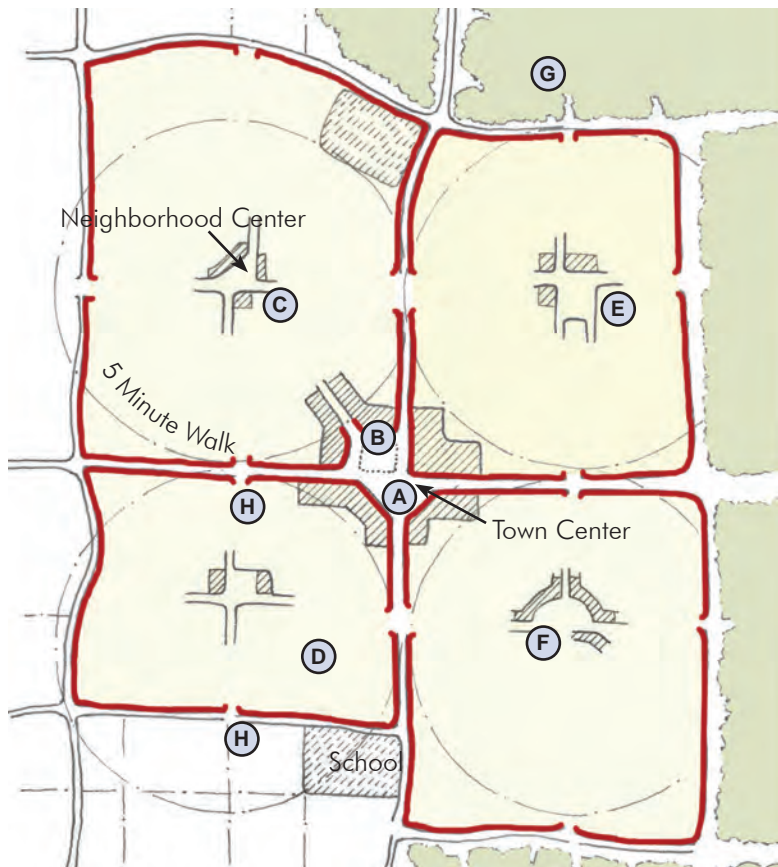
Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center Diagram
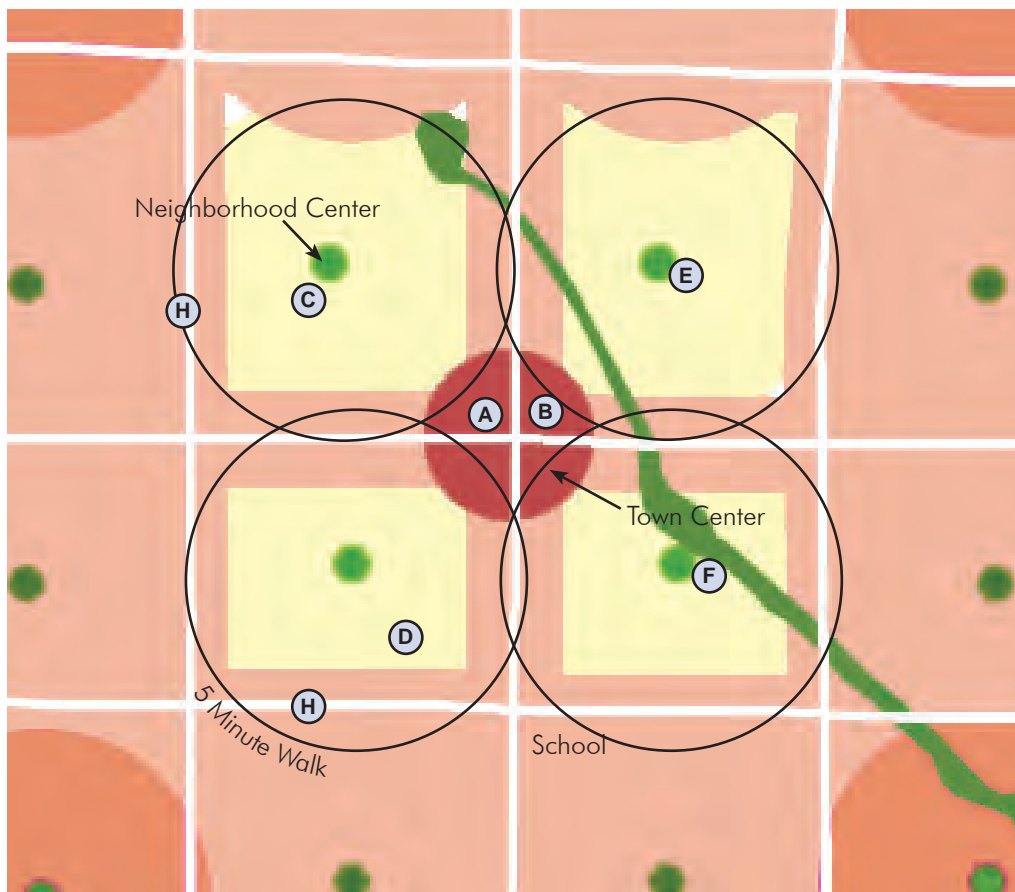
Rural Main Streets (or Crossroads)

Hamlets are smaller than a single neighborhood and are typically found in less developed areas, often at a rural crossroads. A corner store within walking distance to homes is enough to create a local destination.

Cafes, corner stores, and parks provide a social setting separate from the two usual social environments of home and work and are often referred to as "third places." They provide a "home away from home" that is conducive to conversation. Like traditional Mexican villages across the border, Laredo was once hosted by many small corner stores and several still exist in the historic neighborhoods.

Rural Main Streets Features

(A) Corner stores may serve as a center in more rural areas. Incorporating limited commercial opportunities can help satisfy the daily needs of nearby residences. Corner stores are intended to serve only adjacent areas.

(B) Rural residential units should be clustered with one another. This allows for true preservation of open space and natural areas.

(C) Large open space areas surround the hamlet neighborhood and help define its edges. They provide opportunities for recreation or agricultural uses.

A corner store

Corner Store

A

B

C

5 Minute Walk

Corner Store

A

B

C

5 Minute Walk
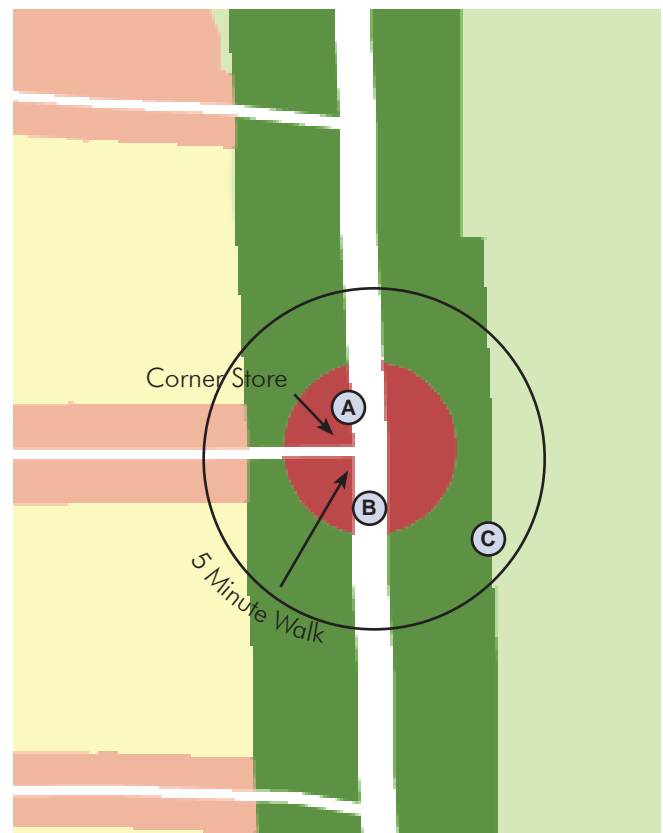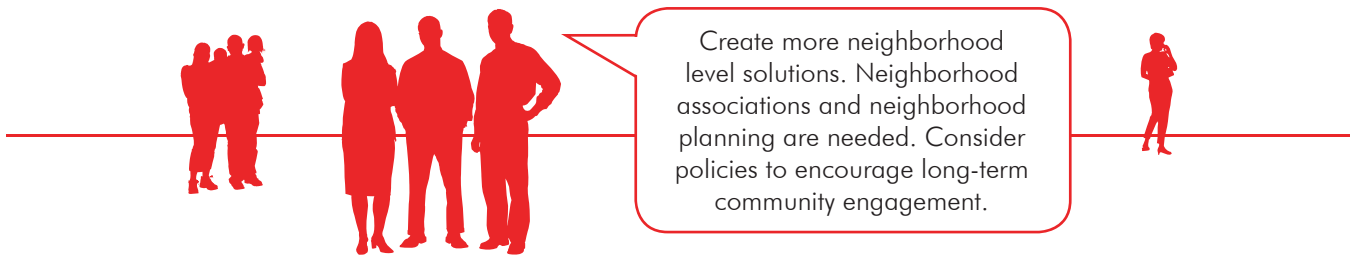
Rural Residential Agriculture and Livestock Estates Features:

Smart growth development is one of many approaches to subdivision developments. However, local food sustainability must be addressd in rural areas as well. Rural Main Streets or crossroads can be near by. A subdivision for 1/2 acre plus lots and an allowable use of land for agriculture and livestock can address the city's needs for community supported agriculture.

Industrial Lands
Industrial lands are treated differently than the mixed-use or residential areas in Laredo; however, some placemaking and multimodal transportation approaches still apply. Major thoroughfares should connect though industrial areas to keep the overall connectivity of the city consistent. Creating isolated areas within, or around industrial lands is undesirable.

As the country's largest inland port, the storage of goods coming across the border is essential to Laredo's economy.

Residential uses can be a short commute to industrial areas as workers should have the choice of living within proximity of where they work, reducing household transportation costs. However, residential areas should not be placed within industrial only areas because conflicts typically result.

Placement of Place-Types

The distance between the various place-types is based on the distances that transit and buses are likely to stop. This spacing also corresponds with the need to space out commercial uses so that they are convenient to all without having to travel too far, while also having a large enough population base to support the type of commercial envisioned.

Why plan based on transit? Because the Future Land Use Map guides the next 150 years of development in the city and it is foreseeable that one day a balance of transportation approaches will be necessary to alleviate traffic and congestion.

PEDESTRIAN SHEDS

The ped shed is 1/4 mile

1 mile

A bus can stop every 1/8 mile

A tram can stop every 1/2 mile

The ped shed is 1/2 mile

Light rail can stop every mile

Heavy rail can stop every two miles
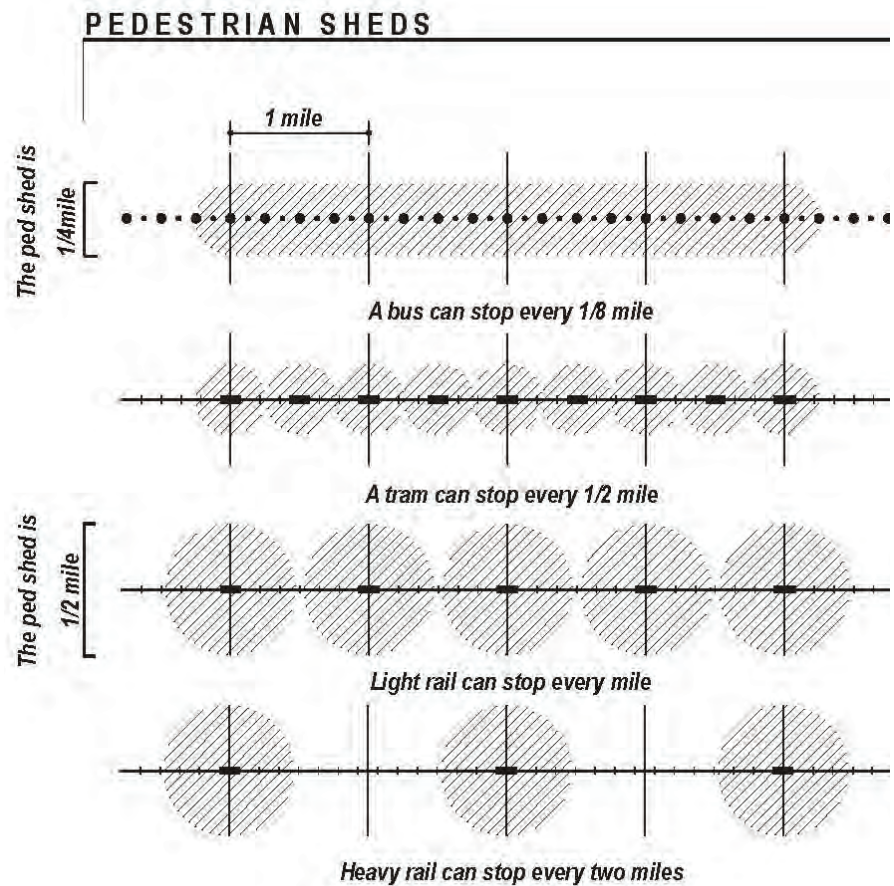
From *The Lexicon of the New Urbanism*

The Neighborhood Unit

The building blocks of the Future Land Use Map is the neighborhood. A genuine neighborhood is not the disconnected, single-use development that characterizes sprawl. Complete neighborhoods, unlike the stand-alone apartment complex or the subdivision tract, provide housing, workplaces, shopping, civic functions, and more. Pedestrian-friendly and mixed-use, these communities are designed to be compact, complete, connected, and ultimately more sustainable. Although the parameters of an ideal neighborhood vary in terms of size, density, and mix of dwelling types. There are five basic design conventions that provide a common thread linking great neighborhoods. The diagram of a complete neighborhood, at right, will be used to illustrate the five basic principles of a neighborhood.

Diagram of a complete neighborhood

1. Identifiable Center and Edge to the Neighborhood

One should be able to tell when one has arrived in the neighborhood and when one has reached its center. A proper center has places where the public feels welcome and encouraged to congregate. Typically, at least one outdoor public environment exists at the center that spatially acts as the most well-defined outdoor room in the neighborhood. While it most often takes the form of a square or plaza, it is also possible to give shape to the neighborhood center with just a special "four corners" intersection of important streets that include shade and other protection from the elements.

The best centers are within walking distance of surrounding residential areas, possess a mix of uses, and include higher-density buildings at a pedestrian scale. Discernible centers are important because they provide some of people's daily needs and foster social connections.

Identifiable center and edge

2. Walkable Size

The overall size of the neighborhood, which typically ranges from 40 to 200 acres, should be suitable for walking. Most people will walk approximately one-quarter mile before turning back or opting to drive or ride a bike. Most neighborhoods built before World War II were approximately one quarter mile from center to edge.

Neighborhoods of many shapes and sizes can satisfy the quarter mile radius test. Civic spaces requiring a great deal of acreage such as schools with play fields can be situated where they are shared by more than one neighborhood. Larger planned communities can satisfy the quarter mile radius test by establishing several distinct neighborhoods within the community, being sure to place different neighborhood centers one-half mile apart or less.

3. Mix of Land Uses and Housing Types with Opportunities for Shopping and Workplaces Close to Home

Great neighborhoods have a fine-grained mix of land uses and housing types. This condition enables residents to dwell, work, socialize, exercise, shop, and find some daily needs and services within walking distance. Variety-rich neighborhoods, in comparison with the single-use, single "pod" developments, have multiple benefits.

Mixing uses is a powerful way to alleviate traffic congestion as it reduces the number of car trips needed throughout the day. A mix of housing is better socially, allowing people with diverse lifestyles and incomes to live in the same neighborhood. Residents have the choice to move elsewhere within their community as their housing needs change over time, while families of modest means are no longer forced into segregated concentrations. In addition, households with varied schedules and interests will activate the neighborhood at different times of day, adding both to the vibrancy and security of a place.

5 minute walking distance
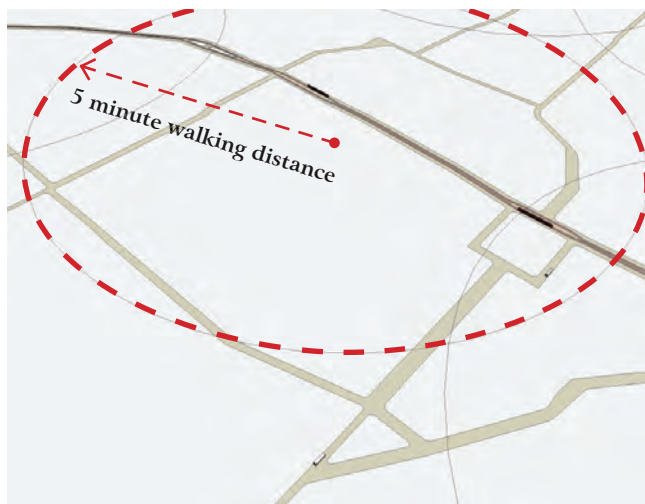
Walkable Neighborhood Size

Transect provides opportunity for mix of land uses and housing types

Walking Distance: The ideal travel distance for a person on foot is 1/4 Mile distance, also referred to as "five minute walk".

Walkable Block Size: A walkable block has a perimeter no greater than 1,320' (1/4 mile distance, also referred to as "five minute walk").

4. Integrated Network of Walkable Streets

A network of streets allows pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists to move safely and comfortably through a neighborhood. The maximum average block perimeter to achieve an integrated network is 1,500 feet with a maximum uninterrupted block face of, ideally, 450 feet, with streets at intervals no greater than 600 feet apart along any one single stretch.

A street network forms blocks that set up logical sites for private development, provides routes for multiple modes of transportation, and provides non-motorized alternatives to those under the driving age as well as for senior citizens. Streets should be designed to be walkable first while also serving cars and emergency vehicles. Slow traffic speeds, coupled with features such as narrow curb-to-curb cross sections, street trees, on-street parking, architecture close to the street edge, and tight radii at the street corners, work together to create highly walkable environments. A connected web of streets then allows for numerous driving patterns and the orderly management of traffic.

5. Special Sites are Reserved for Civic Purposes

In complete neighborhoods, some of the best real estate is set aside for community purposes. These locations are made significant by the geometry of the town plan. Unique settings such as terminated vistas or locations with greater activity should be reserved for landmark buildings that will act as permanent anchors for community pride. Similarly, special sites should be set aside for parks, greens, squares, plazas, and playgrounds (each of which has its own distinct character). Each neighborhood should have one special gathering place at its center, such as a village green.

Network of walkable streets

Special sites are reserved for civic purposes

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Encourage development that creates complete, compact neighborhoods to conserve environmental resources, spur economic investment, maintain social fabric, reduce the cost of providing infrastructure and services, and reclaim abandoned areas.

Downtown

Downtowns are the heart of a city and region and having a healthy heart is essential to having a strong city and region.

Goal 1.1: The City of Laredo places one of its highest priorities on the reinvigoration of downtown, whose strategic location, walkable blocks, and historic buildings will once again make downtown a vibrant destination and center of culture, shopping, government, and the arts.

> **Policy 1.1.1**: City policies and programs should encourage the rehabilitation of upper stories of existing downtown buildings as office, retail, entertainment, and residential space. Financial incentives should be considered to encourage investment from the private sector.
>
> **Policy 1.1.2**: The city encourages new multi-story mixed-use buildings with windows and doors facing all sidewalks to be constructed on vacant lots. The city should not require any on-site parking for buildings downtown.
>
> **Policy 1.1.3**: Large new downtown complexes such as a downtown mall, convention center, museums, or recreational facilities should fit urbanistically within the downtown. As large new uses are added, updated, or replaced, they should be integrated into Laredo's original street network and other land uses rather than being isolated in large complexes of civic buildings.

> **Policy 1.1.4**: Downtown redevelopment strategies will include new and improved civic buildings and civic spaces, plus shared parking for residents, employees, and visitors.
>
> **Policy 1.1.5**: The city's historic design guidelines should be expanded and made mandatory to highlight downtown's architectural heritage, to avoid unnecessary damage to this valuable resource, and to ensure that new buildings maintain and improve this historic character.

Inner City Neighborhoods

The inner city neighborhoods could host greater business creativity, non-profit entrepreneurs, and economic diversity, while providing an attraction for visitors, seniors, and young talent.

Goal 1.2: The City of Laredo highly values the historic neighborhoods that were laid out in a grid around the downtown and will maintain and improve their highly walkable character, transit accessibility, diverse mix of land uses, and historic building stock.

> **Policy 1.2.1**: The city should maintain and strengthen the historic landmark status of San Agustin, Old Mercado, and El Azteca neighborhoods.
>
> **Policy 1.2.2**: The city will actively consider historic landmark status for additional qualifying neighborhoods such as El Cuatro, Fort McIntosh, the Heights, Jarvis, St. Peter's, El Tonto, and the Heights.

Policy 1.2.3: Vacant and underutilized parcels in and around the city's traditional historic neighborhoods can be excellent locations for redevelopment that adds housing, shopping, employment, entertainment, and recreational options for nearby residents. Redevelopment of such sites should mesh with the scale and character of these existing neighborhoods rather than imposing a suburban or high-rise model on traditional neighborhoods. The city's zoning and development regulations should be modified accordingly. Additional infill incentives should be considered by the city.

Policy 1.2.4: The city shall coordinate its land development regulations and zoning regulations to create a unified development ordinance to make development more predictable and easier to navigate the development process.

Policy 1.2.5: The city shall explore the use of tax increment financing (TIF) to improve targeted areas such as the downtown and inner city neighborhoods. A TIF district essentially reallocates funds from property taxes to encourage investment within the district. Any increased tax revenues collected as a result of an increase in property values then go into the TIF fund and can be used by the city for a wide range of purposes within the TIF to promote redevelopment.

Policy 1.2.6: The city shall look for opportunities to partner with private entities to enable and encourage development within the inner city neighborhoods.

New Neighborhoods
Goal 1.3: The city wishes to augment conventional development pattern with strategic suburban retrofits or urban infill where practical.

Policy 1.3.1: The city's zoning and land development regulations should be reviewed and amended to encourage new neighborhoods to have:

a. Greater interconnection of internal streets;

b. Provision of small parks, community gardens, and civic functions within neighborhoods;

c. A greater variety of housing types within each neighborhood;

d. Protection of natural features such as stream beds and flood zones;

e. Mixed-use zoning; and

f. Form-Based Code.

g. Designated subdivision for agriculture and livestock estates.

Extraterritorial Jurisdiction & Annexation
Goal 1.4: The city will use the limited authority granted by Texas law to regulate the subdivision of land within its ETJ in order to shape future growth in accordance with *Viva Laredo*.

Policy 1.4.1: The city should strengthen its existing regulations that regulate the subdivision of land within the ETJ. Future subdivisions should be required to have a connected network streets and blocks and connect to surrounding development.

Policy 1.4.2: Future subdivisions also need to be interconnected with each other and with a suitable regional road network. This comprehensive plan's Major Thoroughfare Plan needs to be improved with a more tightly interconnected road network for the ETJ so that future subdivisions will not create isolated pods of development that are unlikely to become an integrated part of Laredo.

Policy 1.4.3: The City of Laredo should maintain a separate annexation policy that defines areas where voluntary annexations would be considered upon petition by affected landowners. The following criteria should be considered for potential future voluntary annexation:

a. Must be contiguous with the existing city limits;

b. The landowners must agree to build all local, collector, and arterial roads at their expense and must submit a general development plan for the area; and

c. The landowners must pay water and sewer impact fees plus an additional per-unit annexation fee toward fire, police, libraries, and recreation centers.

d. Permit a lower impact threshold when new development meets higher standards for complete, compact, connected neighborhoods.

e. Require a Transit Impact Development Fee (TIDF) levied on new development to offset new development's impacts on the transit system. Revenue generated by the fee is directed to El Metro and is to be used to fund capital and operations.

This annexation policy should require creating a commitment to mixed use development on the larger tracts in the development agreements that accompany formal annexation. The city may use economic incentives for landowners where it deems appropriate to accomplish the vision of the plan.

Industrial Lands

Goal 1.5: The regional economy depends on manufacturing and the storage and transportation of goods crossing the border. The City of Laredo will designate ample land that is well-suited for industrial facilities and will ensure that industrial facilities do not adversely affect the health, safety, or welfare of the community.

> **Policy 1.5.1**: Encourage the development of new industrial areas and the redevelopment of existing older or marginal industrial areas.

> **Policy 1.5.2**: Discourage access to industrial development through residential areas.

> **Policy 1.5.3**: Discourage the development of residential uses on industrial designated land.

> **Policy 1.5.4**: Obsolete industrial sites and rail yards pose technical challenges to redevelopment but are often ideally located within the city to offer new choices and opportunities for Laredo residents. The city should take affirmative steps to maximize this potential.

> **Policy 1.5.5**: The city should develop direct transit access from the downtown to the industrial zones to facilitate workers crossing the border to get to their jobs.

> **Policy 1.5.6**: Encourage the development of overnight parking facilities within or close to the industrial lands that includes restrooms and showers for truck drivers waiting for their next shift.

Future Land Use Map

Goal 1.6: A new Future Land Use Map is an integral part of *Viva Laredo*. This map has been created to assist city officials and private developers in understanding the growth management goals and policies of this plan, particularly as to the form and direction. The designations on this map are subject to change as Laredo grows and *Viva Laredo* is modified accordingly.

> **Policy 1.6.1**: Adopt the Future Land Use Map

Application of *Viva Laredo*

Goal 1.7: The City of Laredo will use the principles set forth in *Viva Laredo* as tools to shape future development, to protect natural resources, to direct capital improvements, and to guide public policy in a coordinated manner for the mutual benefit of Laredo's residents and landowners.

> **Policy 1.7.1**: *Viva Laredo* provides the basis for amendments to the City of Laredo's zoning and subdivision regulations. The adoption of *Viva Laredo* does not change the zoning districts on any property, nor does it interfere with or extend vested rights. Staff recommendations to discretionary bodies such as planning and zoning commission or the council shall be determined based the action's concordance with plan *Viva Laredo*.

> **Policy 1.7.2**: Decisions on rezoning requests will be made in accordance with *Viva Laredo* and in accordance with all requirements of city and State law. When evaluating whether a proposed rezoning is in accordance with *Viva Laredo*, the City Council may also consider the following factors:

> a. The proposed zoning district's effect on development or redevelopment of the property, particularly whether the rezoning will further

or at least not conflict with specific policies listed under other goals of *Viva Laredo*.

b. Whether the property is in a Regional Mixed-Use Center or Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center, defined in *Viva Laredo* For instance, these areas:

   i. Are preferred locations for higher density development and redevelopment;

   ii. Are ideal for a balance of housing, jobs, shopping, recreation, and civic uses;

   iii. Will be served by walkable thoroughfares; and

   iv. Are suitable for zoning districts that would orient most buildings toward streets.

c. The proposed zoning district's effect on the property and surrounding property, after evaluating the following factors:

   i. The physical context of the property and surrounding properties, including recent or anticipated changes to that context;

   ii. Any historic district or other special designations that may be applicable;

   iii. Potential adverse effects that might be caused by approval or denial of the requested rezoning;

   iv. Anticipated effects on the natural environment;

   v. Whether the area is stable (low vacancy rates and units that are not for sale) or in transition; and

   vi. Any changed social, economic, or physical conditions that make the existing zoning no longer suitable for the property.

Downtown & Inner City Revitalization & Historic Preservation

2

centralita *nf* : switchboard

centralizar {21} *vt* : to centralize — **centralización** *nf*

centrar *vt* **1** : to center **2** : to focus — **centrarse** *vr* ~ **en** : to focus on, to concentrate on

céntrico, -ca *adj* : central

centrífugo, -ga *adj* : centrifugal

centrípeto, -ta *adj* : centripetal

centro[1] *nmf* : center (in sports)

centro[2] *nm* **1** MEDIO : center ⟨centro de atención : center of attention⟩ ⟨centro de gravedad : center of gravity⟩ **2** : downtown **3 centro de mesa** : centerpiece

centroamericano, -na *adj & n* : Central American

ceñido, -da *adj* AJUSTADO : tight, tight-fitting

ceñir {67} *vt* **1** : to encircle, to surround **2** : to hug, to cling to ⟨me ciñe demasiado : it's too tight on me⟩ — **ceñirse** *vr* ~ **a** : to restrict oneself to, to stick to

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Downtown Laredo is the part of the city that all Laredoans have in common. It is the cultural center of the metropolitan area, a regional destination for the state, and an international destination for Mexican nationals. The downtowns of Laredo and of its sister city of Nuevo Laredo have long shared a common history and a mutually beneficial relationship spanning across the international border.

The downtown still has most of its historic fabric from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Streets like Convent

Gateway to the Americas International Bridge

The Laredo Federal Building and the Hamilton Hotel on Matamoros Street

Avenue, Iturbide Street (It Street), Flores Avenue, and Hidalgo Street retain a charming historic character not easily found elsewhere.

Pedestrian safety remains a concern despite the high levels of pedestrianism. Sidewalks are often very narrow, with wide one-way travel lanes that result in unnecessary speeding. Many downtown streets also lack shade trees, relying instead on awnings and canopies to provide shade for pedestrians.

In recent decades, investment has moved away from downtown as the city expanded. Downtown along Convent Avenue has remained a shopping destination for Mexican visitors on foot. This has resulted in relatively low ground floor vacancy rates, but very high upper floor vacancies. A combination of outdated regulations, unstable land values, and a perception of low parking supply, has resulted in very little reinvestment compared to other downtowns across the country.

The recent instabilities related to border violence in Mexico, and the devaluation of the Peso have created a fresh set of challenges for a downtown that caters almost exclusively to Mexican shoppers.

Relatively new public and private investment along Iturbide Street (It Street)

A vital shopping area for both Laredoans and Mexican nationals

Landmark historic structures with low upper-story vacancies
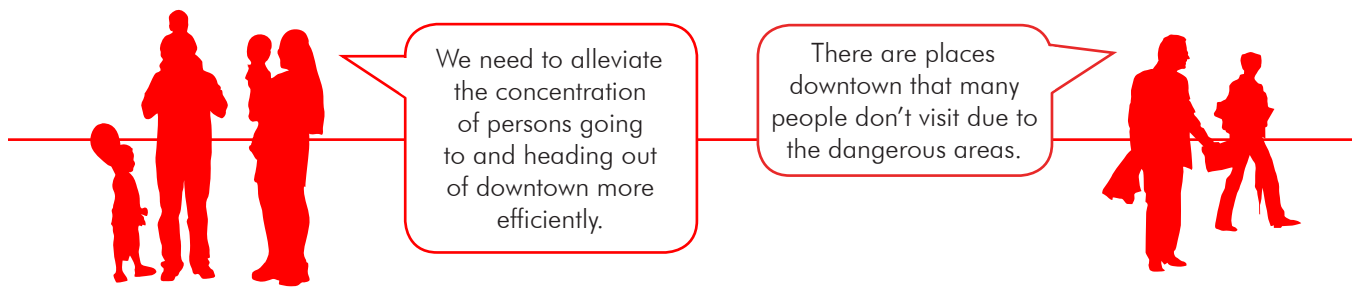
Downtown Laredo is composed of a dense grid of blocks and streets, punctuated by a series of public plazas. Laredo's founders, inspired by the Law of the Indies, which were guidelines required of Spanish colonial towns, had the foresight to plan for great public spaces from the outset of Laredo's development. Over the years, a few of Laredo's original plazas have been lost to a combination of public and private development projects. The ones that remain, though, form some of the best public spaces in the region.

San Agustin Plaza is centered around the oldest part of the city and is anchored by the Cathedral of San Agustin, the Old City Market Building, and La Posada Hotel. In many ways, it is the cultural heart of the city and is generally active throughout the day.

Jarvis Plaza is also a natural gathering space due to its adjacency to the downtown Transit Center. The historic Hamilton Hotel and Laredo Federal Building (the post office) also help to anchor the plaza and provide an instantly recognizable landmark.

The port of entry at Bridge 1 was recently revamped with new outbound processing facilities and retail plaza and esplanade. Adjacent to this, a new downtown outlet mall was recently completed. The outlet mall represents a major investment that is expected to attract significant traffic from

The Cathedral of San Agustin is the seat of the Catholic Diocese of Laredo, Texas

Downtown San Agustin Historical District

Jarvis Plaza

Monterrey. By locating downtown in an urban format, the mall can have a positive effect on the rest of downtown by attracting new visitors to the downtown area. Careful attention needs to be paid to the connections between the mall and the rest of downtown to ensure visitors are encouraged to explore beyond the outlet mall.

Historic Preservation is a crucial part of the future of downtown Laredo. The 1995 Historic Preservation Plan established some important frameworks and guidelines; yet many preservation efforts still happen in piecemeal fashion, and some historic buildings are still being lost to demolition and neglect. Preservation and restoration should be a major priority in the revitalization of the downtown area.

Thanks in part to its dense grid of intimate streets, lined by a continuous fabric of historic buildings, downtown remains one of the most walkable and bikable areas of the city. Yet investments continue to favor vehicular circulation at the expense of walking and biking. Careful attention should be paid to encouraging more people to bike and walk as a choice, rather than as a last resort.

This Downtown Revitalization and Historic Preservation Chapter looks at some of the potential big ideas for downtown that were explored during the comprehensive planning process to help revitalize downtown Laredo.

The new plazas of El Portal

Restored historic structure on Iturbide Street

Bicycles remain a primary mode of transit for downtown users of all kinds

Downtown and Inner City:
Existing Conditions Map

———	Inner City Grid
-------	Downtown Areas
———	Downtown and Inner City Boundary
●	Grid Interruption
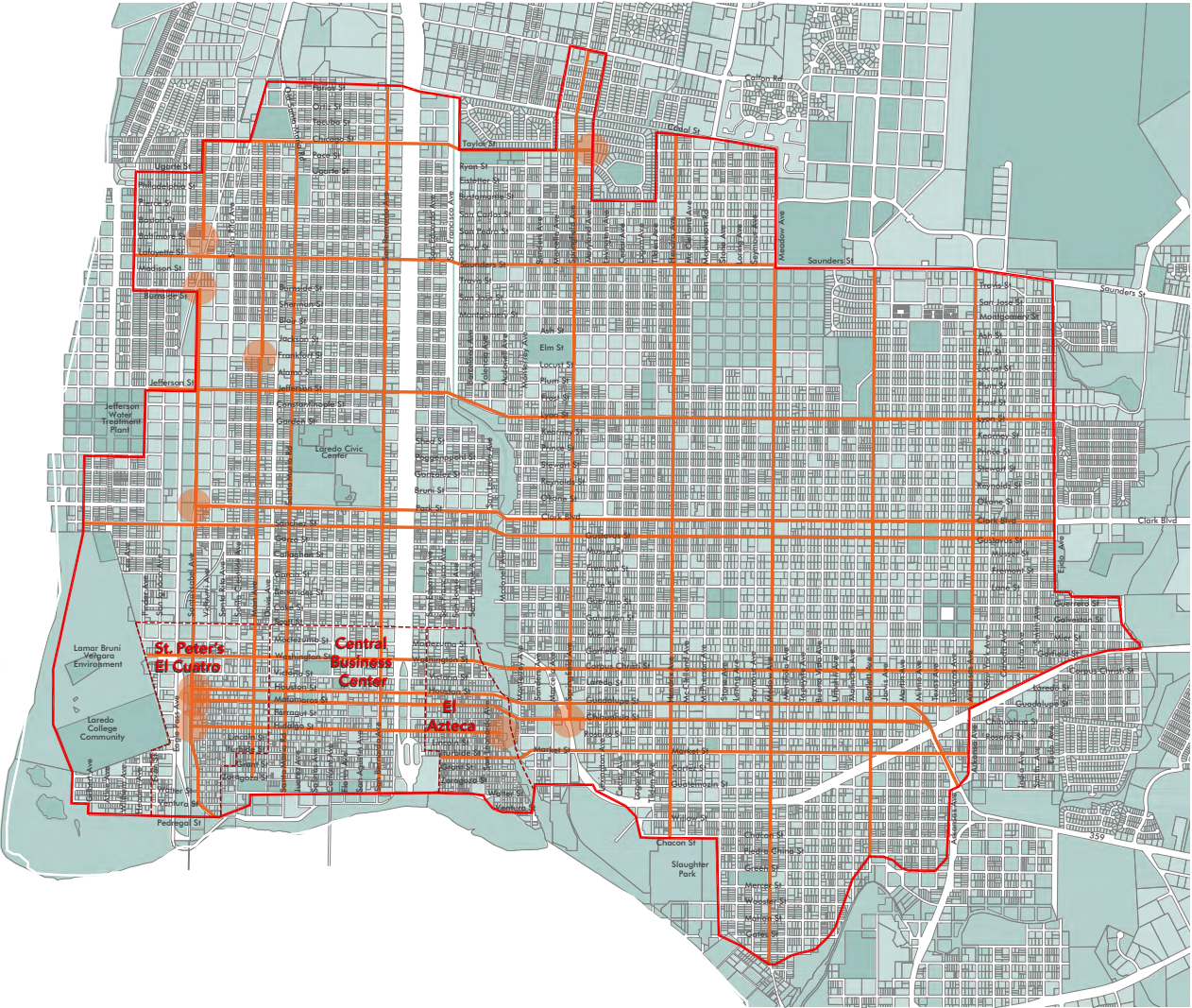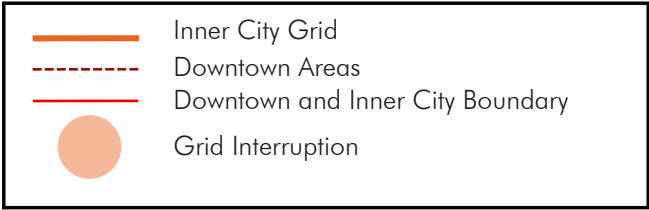
Downtown Areas

Downtown consists of the central business district and adjacent neighborhoods, St. Peter's El Cuatro to the west and El Azteca to the east. There are three currently designated historic districts: St. Peter's Historic District, Old Mercado Historic District, and the San Agustin Historic District.

The downtown grid extends and connects the inner city mid-century grid. It connects traditional neighborhoods and their commercial centers seamlessly. Inner City Neighborhoods need to be interconnected by the continuous street grid. Laredo's inner city grid is mostly intact within neighborhoods, but neighborhoods generally are not interconnected from one side of the grid to the other, and some neighborhoods are almost completely cut off. Much of the most historic fabric of the city is very poorly connected.

Inner City Street Grid

The Existing Conditions Map, shows major and minor streets within the boundaries of the inner city street grid. Highlighted streets represent the most transited and uninterrupted paths that connect across the inner city, north-south, east and west. The value of a street grid is degraded when streets are blocked by developments that cut street access, blocked by train tracks, limited bridging at creeks, and when limited and segregated by land uses usually meant for suburban subdivisions post 1960.

When one area becomes limited to accessibility, it can eventually wither into blight, and its return will not be possible until accessibility is restored. There are already areas that are experiencing this problem; in fact one neighborhood is called "Sal Si Puedes" which translates to "exit if you can."

Degrading street accessibility does not only make it difficult to exit, but as the translation also implies, it degrades chances for economic survival. Providing better economic opportunities to neighborhoods that are cut off, is almost impossible.

Historic Districts in Laredo

Historic District / Landmark Board

The Historic District / Landmark Board is part of the City of Laredo Planning and Zoning Department. The board consists of nine appointed representatives, one by each of the eight districts council persons and the mayor.

The Historic District/Landmark Board was established to provide for review of projects undertaken in the local historic districts. Design Standards have been established for the historic districts.

In 1995, the city provided for ad valorem tax abatement for historic rehabilitation to promote the restoration and preservation of historically designated structures and buildings. If a property owner restores their building to the standards set forth in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, the city exempts the owner from paying a portion of their property taxes.

The Historic Preservation Plan adopted on March 25, 1996 contains a wealth of historic knowledge and a clear path for expanding and adding to the existing historic districts. This document is hereby incorporated into this Comprehensive Plan as it sets a clear path for future designations; however, the time lines and desire for adding new historic and conservation districts should be reassessed and a new set of priorities created.

Downtown Districts and National Register Landmarks

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Revitalize Downtown

The downtown served an important role in the city's history and became the home to numerous cultural resources. A remarkably high percentage of downtown's historic structures have survived the test of time. While many of these buildings are still in very good condition, others have been left to neglect and are in danger of being lost.

Despite downtown's assets, it has not yet experienced the kind of urban revival that many other downtowns have experienced in recent years. Within the core of the downtown, there is no significant housing stock, few office buildings, and ground floor retail buildings have high vacancy rates. Accordingly, downtown streets often feel deserted, giving the impression that downtown is unsafe.

A downtown renaissance is long overdue, and Laredoans hope to see the vacant buildings filled with occupants, the streets busy with people throughout the day and week, and businesses and cultural facilities thriving.

Downtown as the Primary Center of Civic Life

Downtown Laredo is home to a number of civic institutions, including Laredo's City Hall, Webb County offices, and several great museums and cultural centers. These civic institutions currently provide invaluable anchors for the city; however, other civic functions have located outside of the downtown such as the Laredo Civic Center and the main public library.

Connect Inner City Grid

The boundary of the Laredo inner city street grid consists of all the inner city neighborhoods. A successful inner city conects neighborhoods and business districts seamlessly. Connecting the inner city street grid is important to Cultural Heritage, economic development, and for sustainable use of existing infrastructure.

Restore and Reuse Historic Buildings

The restoration of Laredo's downtown will increase property values and help to improve Laredo's regional identity. The first priority for the revitalization of downtown must be to implement the refurbishment and reuse of historic structures.

Priority should be placed on increasing the residential population in downtown, thereby increasing vitality throughout the entire day. In addition, reusing historic buildings and encouraging more people to move back into the city's original in-town neighborhoods is an excellent way for the city to evolve as a modern, environmentally sustainable place to live. A first step in this concept has begun with lifting parking requirements for residential uses within the downtown.

Historic buildings like the Plaza Theatre and the Royal Theatre are architectural gems that the community wants to see reopened. The Royal Theatre is currently being used as a retail store while the Plaza Theatre remains vacant and in need of costly cleanup and repairs. Reopening one of these theatres would help to create entertainment destination in the downtown.

Diversify and Add Missing Uses

Downtown Laredo currently serves primarily as a shopping district for people crossing the border, supplemented with civic uses and an emerging entertainment area. In the future, as downtown evolves into a 24-hour environment, it will be necessary to diversify uses and add elements that are currently missing. As residential units are added, a variety of supporting uses will be needed, including grocery stores, dry cleaners, daycare, hairdressers, and coffee shops. Increasing employment opportunities will also activate the downtown during the day.

Rethink Civic Spaces

Laredo's founders had the foresight to plan great public civic spaces within the downtown. These spaces include San Agustin Plaza, Jarvis Plaza, and St. Peter's Square, as well as the streets themselves. Many of these spaces have lost elements of their original design.
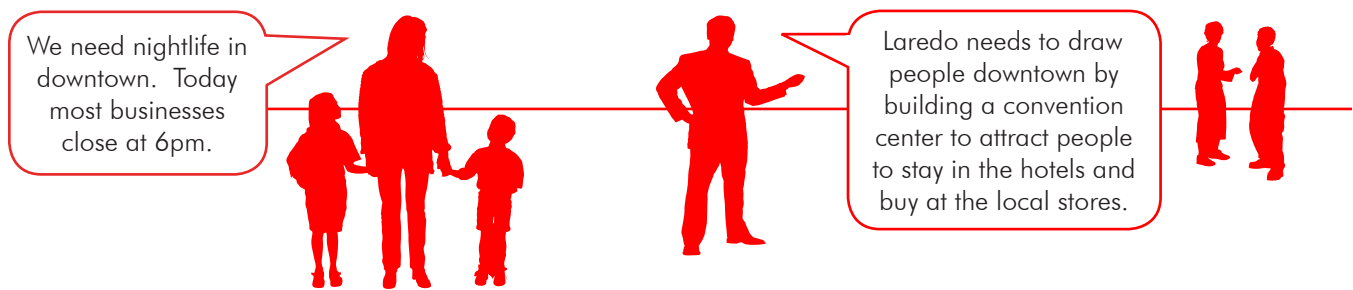
Park spaces and squares should serve as living rooms for the community. While San Agustin Plaza is very active, other squares have become underutilized. The needs of the surrounding neighborhoods should be assessed and these plazas can take on new forms while still meeting the civic function as a neighborhood gathering place. Once the city's historic public spaces have been cared for, opportunities may be found to introduce new public spaces within the downtown.

Streets should be reclaimed as places for people. Iturbide Street (It Street) underwent a transformation several years ago in the effort to make it an entertainment district. These efforts have begun to make a difference, though progress has been slow.

Bring Back the Trolleys

Laredo's small street car line operated for approximately 30 years, ceasing operation in 1918. There is community support to restore trolley service in the historic core of Laredo to serve regional residents, workers, and shoppers. Streetcars throughout the country complement heritage tourism.

Downtown Parking

The general perception from public input from the community is that the availability of parking within the downtown area is inconvenient, improperly managed, and detracts shoppers from travelling to retail stores. Traffic congestion in the area only further exacerbates the issues of convenience. These two issues are related. A surprising amount of traffic can be generated by people who are circulating around blocks trying to find a place to park. These cruising cars create a mobile queue of vehicles waiting for curb vacancies since on-street parking can be far cheaper than off-street parking lots and garages.

Invest in Historic Neighborhoods First

Most Laredoans agree that the city's core historic neighborhoods should be preserved, repaired, and completed. The neighborhoods themselves are still desirable as they are developed on the original street grid with walkable streets, sidewalks, central parks with neighborhood amenities, and a range of housing types. However, many goods and services are no longer available in the immediate area and school quality is in some cases, low.

Highlight Laredo's Arts and Cultural Assets

Laredo's long and proud history can be discovered at several institutions within the downtown such as the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum, the Border Heritage Museum, Museums of the Villa Antigua, Webb County Heritage Foundation, and the George Washington Birthday Museum. However, there is opportunity to create tourism programs and initiatives that would highlight the city's history and attract visitors interested in learning more about the city itself. Laredo is not yet a major destination for American tourism.

As the city's historical assets are revitalized, their role in history should be highlighted and made more a part of the day-to-day life of the city. Laredoans want to see the unique character of the city's historic core promoted as a distinctive place for people to visit from around the country.

STRATEGIES

Leveraging Streets

Enhancing the Street Environment

Investment in downtown in the early 20th century created a vibrant urban fabric with a mix of uses, street-oriented buildings, proud architecture of distinctive character, and numerous public and civic gathering spaces.

A historic street grid, distinct and historic architecture, buildings located immediately adjacent to the sidewalk that create a sense of enclosure, and a unique geographic location, are each examples of the potential for downtown to become *the* place where people want to be.

However, the downtown suffered from disinvestment as auto-oriented development on the edges of town became the preferred location to live and work for wealthier Laredoans. Further complicating the downtown story is the impact of international trade agreements and the relationship between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. Downtown Laredo was traditionally a popular shopping location for visitors from Nuevo Laredo, and much of the business conducted there depended on stable and constant trade with Mexico.

Redevelopment opportunities abound downtown; given appropriate incentives, developers can realize projects both large and small within the patchwork of individual properties, with each property contributing to a unified whole. These reinvestment efforts, which include adaptive reuse of historic properties, general façade improvements, and infill, should focus on providing housing options, office and retail opportunities. In particular, focus should be placed on renovating and leasing the upper floors of mixed-use buildings, many of which lay vacant. Redevelopment and infill efforts should be coordinated with streetscape improvements, including street trees, awnings, and street furniture. City investments in streetscape projects will inspire confidence on the part of developers and property owners, as well as attract visitors.

The recipe for a successful public realm involves a series of ingredients which, together, create a sense of place that is representative of local culture and tradition. Laredo already has many of the important parts that will help to create a thriving downtown.

Change does not happen overnight and requires a coordinated effort between city leaders, business owners, and residents. As with any long-term strategy, redevelopment of Laredo's in-town neighborhoods is a project including action steps to undertake immediately, and steps to address over a longer timeframe.

For example, while the sidewalks are widest and most continuous downtown, several are in need of repair, and on streets that will prioritize the pedestrian, more space is needed to accommodate the walkability required in this context. Also, building facades that line the street should be mostly transparent, specifically at the ground level, creating public spaces that are inviting and interesting. In addition, where possible, street trees or building elements like awnings and canopies can be added, providing shade and adding to the sense of enclosure. Last, restoring two-way traffic on downtown streets will increase circulation – a much needed improvement.

To redevelop the downtown area, we should create hot spots with identifiable landscape and retail.

There is no art and culture here, no incoming exhibitors, a border research center, or anything to inspire.
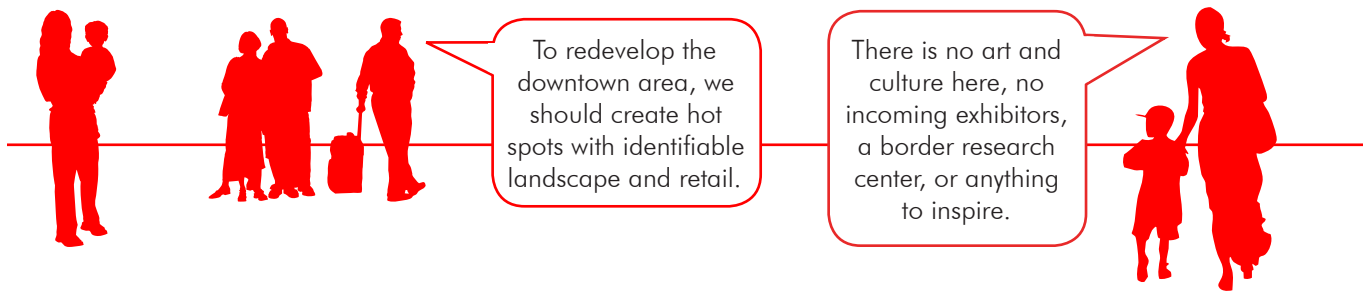
The following sequence illustrates the potential transformation of Convent Avenue between Iturbide and Lincoln Streets, following public and private investment. Key steps to implement over time, as opportunities arise, are illustrated. Each phase introduces elements that enhance the public realm.

Convent Avenue Existing Conditions

Convent Avenue is a one-way street with a bike lane, all leading away from International Bridge 1 where people have just crossed the border. Shopfronts are filled with low-end stores and the streetscape feels harsh and in need of cleaning.

Step 1: Public Infrastructure

Initial improvements could restore two-way travel and add a streetcar to the right-of-way. If a feasibility study deems this project sustainable, the streetcar could share space with cars while providing an amenity to travelers and helping to bridge the gap between the border and the transit center. In the version depicted, a striped bike lane and the existing wide sidewalks complete the street.

Step 2: Fill Second Floors

Following the addition of a streetcar and improved transit, facade improvements can help to revitalize many of the existing buildings. Where absent, transparent storefronts should be added on the first story, while the stories above ground can be retrofitted into offices or residences, creating a diverse neighborhood for people of different lifestyles and incomes. This variety will transform downtown into an 18-hour destination serving the entire community. This transformation from a business district that functions only during traditional work hours will also generate far greater economic returns for the city.

Existing Conditions

Step 1: Public Infrastructure

Step 2: Fill Second Floors

Step 3: Revitalization Continues

Long-term improvements include additional façade improvements and greater recruitment of retail, dining and entertainment options that appeal to residents, workers, and visitors. Improving signage will be essential. Signs in a downtown need to be sized for the pedestrian scale rather than the automobile.

Streetcar Benefits

Streetcars have more advantages than just transportation. They signal to the public, to the property owners, to investors and developers, that something new is going to happen. They provide visitors a unique experience. Streetcar rails themselves calm traffic by signaling to drivers to move more cautiously. Streetcars also fit well into a multi-modal transit system, focusing on short trips and conveniently connecting with other rail and bus modes. Streetcars work in complement with other transit modes to improve regional mobility.

Step 3: Revitalization Continues

Return One-way Streets to Two-way Operation
In the 1960s, the city's greatest concentration of traffic occurred at the Central Business District (CBD) and the International Bridge, which connects the Laredo CBD with the Nuevo Laredo CBD. At this time, Laredo's CBD was largely two-way streets. Congestion was attributed to the narrow streets, high demand, the small city blocks, left turning movements, poorly timed traffic signaling, on-street parking, delivery vehicles loading and unloading during peak hours, and the numerous corner bus stops [City of Laredo, 1964]. Increases in capacity were needed to accommodate the dramatic increases in travel by automobile in the 1950s and '60s.

Laredo, similar in recommendation and in action with many other cities across the nation, altered the circulation patterns in the downtown area by converting many of the streets from two-way to one-ways, imposed on-street parking restrictions, and restricted delivery truck loading/unloading times. The resulting reduction in "congestion" by making traffic move faster resulting in a reduction in retail growth. Additionally, the expansion of the interstate highway system put a virtual stop to traffic growth in most CBDs and many downtowns realized actual declines in traffic volume.

LEGEND
One-way Street
Two-Way Street
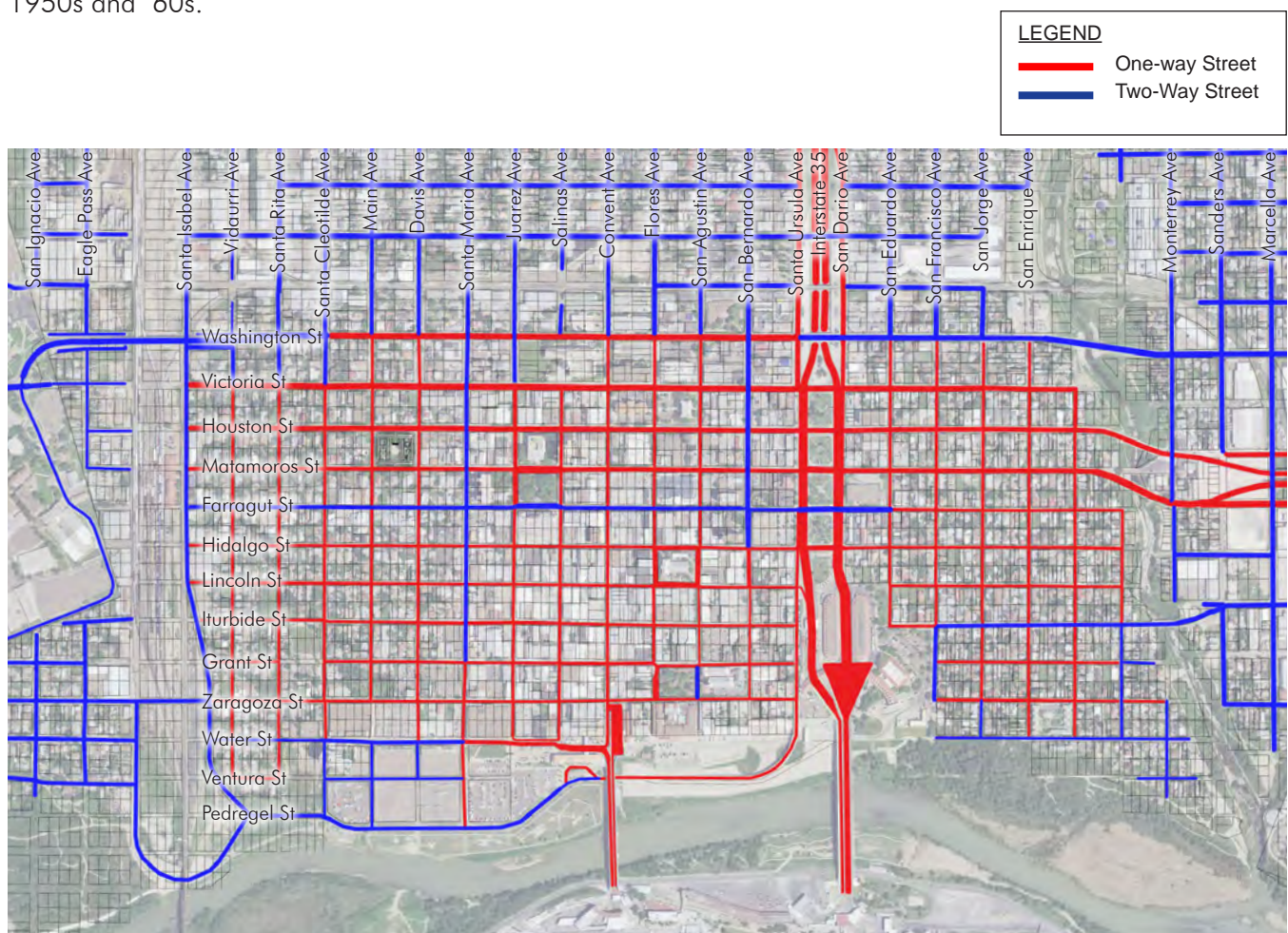
Existing downtown Circulation Pattern

One-way streets are largely considered warranted when the Average Daily Traffic Count reaches between 10,000 and 20,000 vehicles per day. However, the vast majority of Laredo's downtown streets range in traffic counts from 500 to 3,000 Average Daily Vehicles. The highest trafficked street is Convent Street which diverges from the norm with a count of 4,500 [TxDOT, 2015]. All of these streets are well below the 10,000 vehicles per day threshold.

As part of a revitalization effort of the downtown commercial district, it is recommended that efforts be made to investigate and convert one-way streets back to two-way streets where warranted. The change in traffic circulation has shown correlations with improvements to the economic well-being for many commercial businesses by supporting increased retail sales and employment, increased pedestrian activity, and reduced vacant floor space. As of recently, many cities have begun to restore their street networks to two-way operation. Cities that have largely been successful in this effort include Denver, Dallas, Lubbock, Tampa, Des Moines, Kansas City, Sacramento, among others.

LEGEND
──── One-way Street   ──── One-way Streets Converted
──── Two-Way Street   to Two-Way Streets
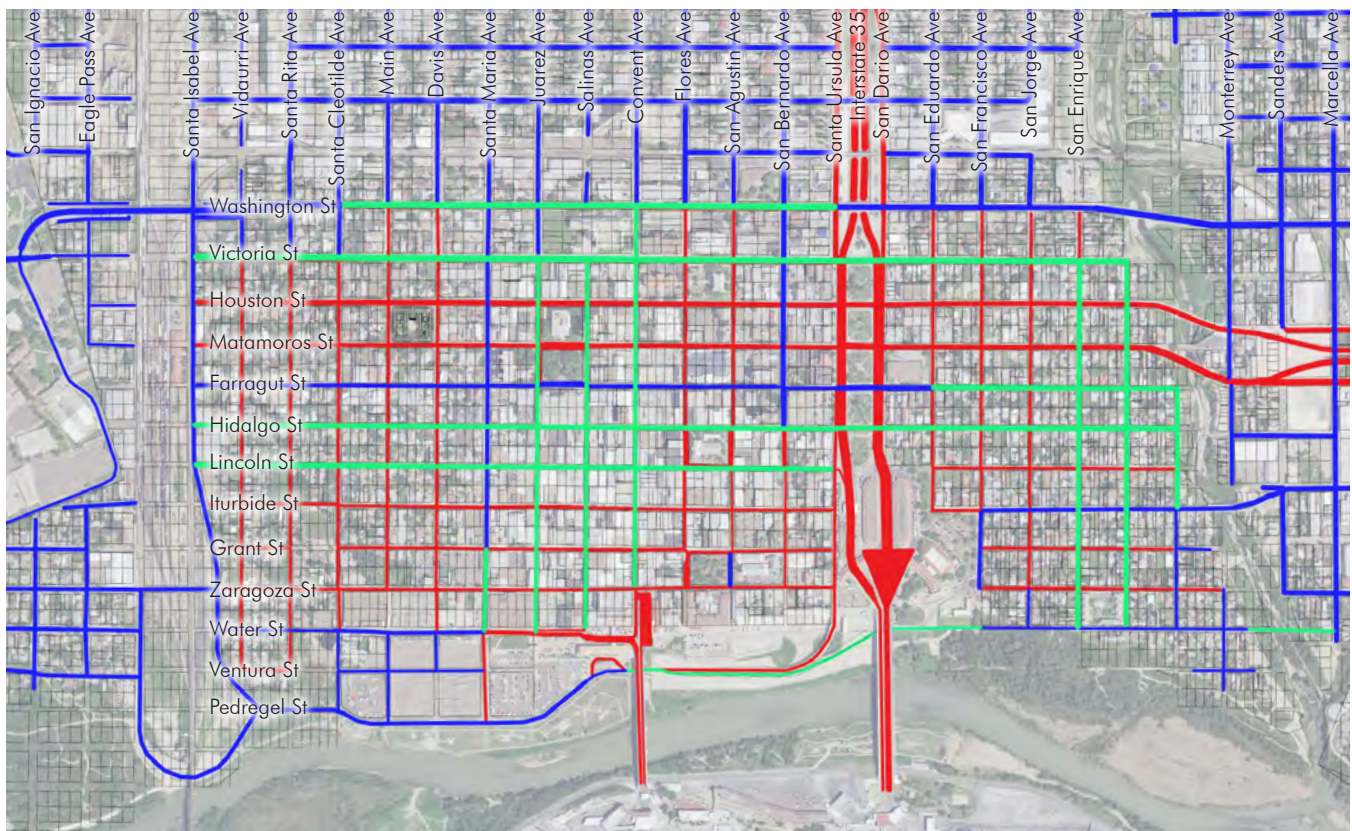
Proposed downtown Circulation Pattern

Two examples for how the existing right-of-way can be reconfigured from one way to two-way traffic are illustrated with Convent Avenue and Matamoros Street.

Convent Avenue, which is one of the most heavily trafficked streets downtown and is a gateway between the United States and Mexico, provides an opportunity to showcase Laredo's downtown and history. The typical street width is approximately 26 feet wide and is presently a one-way street northbound with a bicycle lane. The simple conversion of this street to a two-way road and the addition of an electric streetcar is illustrated.

Matamoros Street, which is presently a one-way from west to east, is approximately 30 feet wide and provides ample room to convert to a two-way street with 10-foot lanes, on-street parking, and extending the southern sidewalk from 4 feet wide to a more comfortable 6 feet wide.
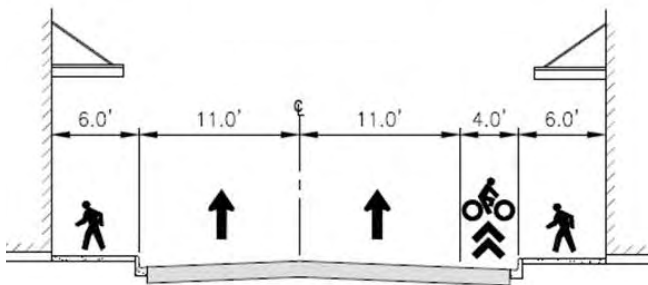
Convent Avenue - Existing Conditions
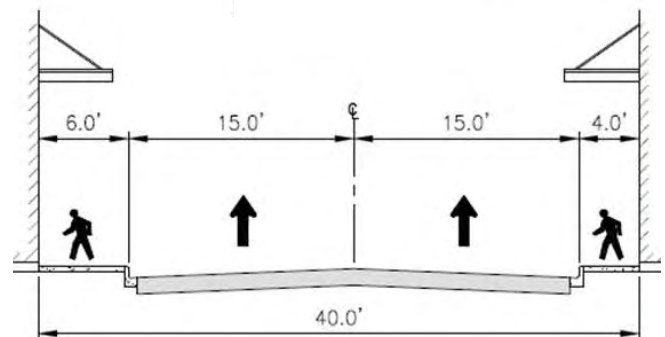
Matamoros Street - Existing Conditions
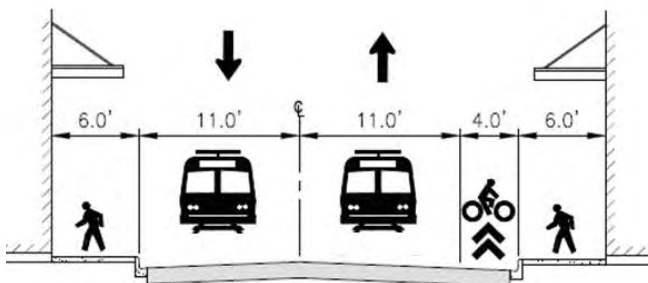
1-way to 2-way conversion with streetcar

Convent Avenue, One-way to Two-way Street Conversion
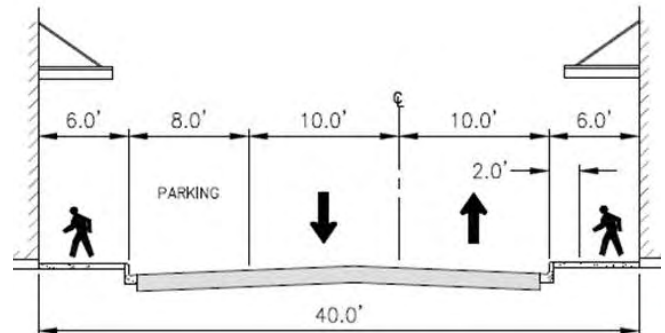
Matamoros Street, One-way to Two-way Street Conversion
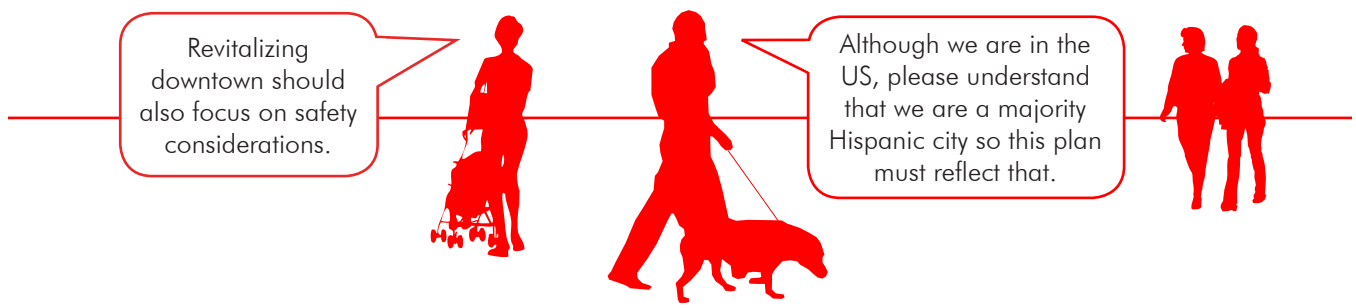
Most of the streets downtown have a relatively narrow right-of-way, creating an intimate sense of place, similar to many of the best historic cities throughout the world. The narrow right-of-way can be an asset for placemaking, walkability, and bikability.

Given the narrow right-of-way, the notion of shared streets, or shared space, is particularly relevant. Shared space utilizes a similar hardscape material, from one building face to another, often at the same elevation; in many cases, sidewalks lack curbs, but they don't have to. The concept of shared space, seeks to integrate the street space for all modes of travel -- rather than separate modes by type. The concept has been successfully in place in major cities and small towns around the United States and the world; shared space is just one ingredient out of many that can help to revitalize the space between the buildings.

Tatangelo Parkway

Tangelo Parkway is a one block street segment that spurs off of a corner from San Agustin Plaza. This street has at times been pedestrian only and at other times a slow one way street. It is one of the few streets in the downtown to have shade trees, however there is no activity on either side of the street. The space is not being taken advantage of by the buildings that frame the space so it is often vacant and forgotten about.

The street can become a truly shared space. The street is nicely paved, but the sidewalks can feel narrow and broken. By making the street all one level with bollards to separate the pedestrian from vehicular space the entire street will feel more unified. The street can also easily be temporarily closed for events.

Shared space in Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Details of shared space in St. Augustine, Florida.

In addition, the buildings that frame this space should open windows and doors onto this space to activate it and make it a lively attraction to the downtown.

Having a beautiful pedestrian space can help to enliven a downtown and become a beloved spot for the community. Similar pedestrian areas with revived buildings have become favorite wedding photo spots in other cities, a true mark of a unique and revitalizing downtown.

Tatangelo Parkway - Existing Conditions

Tatangelo Parkway - Proposed Conditions

Additional Street Improvements

Currently, downtown streets prioritize traffic lanes, creating an unsafe space for people to bike and walk. Many streets include wide travel lanes, which could be improved with additional parking and bike lanes.

Grant Street, west of the Plaza San Agustin, is a twenty-eight feet brick paved street, but only accommodates a driving lane and one row of on-street parking. Another row of parallel parking or two bike lanes (one counterflow) could be added. Lincoln Street, Flores Avenue, and Hidalgo Street are also overly wide around the Laredo Center for the Arts (Old City Hall). The parallel parking should be re-striped as angled parking for efficient use of street space and to increase the parking supply.

Santa Maria Avenue, south of Houston Street, is another example of a street that encourages cars to travel at high speeds with wide lanes. Without moving the existing curb, Santa Maria Avenue could be re-striped with a lane in each direction, and parallel parking on both sides. As Santa Maria Avenue passes south of Matamoros Street, the pavement width narrows and allows for two traffic lanes with one aisle of parallel parking.

San Bernardo Avenue widens north of Lincoln Street, creating wider lanes that induces higher speeds. These lanes could narrow and provide space for one bike lane. South of Hidalgo Street, San Bernardo Avenue widens to one twenty-seven foot wide driving lane. To accommodate additional parking and bike facilities, the addition of parallel parking and bike lanes should be incorporated on both sides of the street.

Downtown Access

Access to the downtown has become limited not only due to one way streets, but also because of larger infrastructure that physically disconnects it from the rest of Laredo.

- The physical barrier of the Rio Grande and the international border prevent any access to the south except for across the international bridges.

- The railroad tracks to the west often have trains sitting on the track blocking access to the west with the exception of Washington Street, which bridges over the tracks on the northern edge of downtown and a small, intimidating surface street, San Francisco Javier Avenue, which goes under the tracks by the edge of the Rio Grande. The only surface road connection is Zaragoza Street which connects the Saint Peter's neighborhood to the Fort McIntosh LCC campus.

- Railroad tracks also impede travel to the north. Although the grid still connects to the north, it is often blocked with train cars multiple times throughout the day and night.

- And finally to the east, International Bridge 2 and Interstate 35 disconnect the El Azteca neighborhood from the Central Business District.

All of these barriers isolate the downtown and make it feel unapproachable to the community, even if there are things for them to do in the downtown.

Opportunities to increase access to the downtown should be sought. Multiple options have been considered, but none will be an easy fix. Some of the possibilities to consider follow.

Connect to Fort McIntosh

Create a new street connection from Fort McIntosh to the downtown at Iturbide Street. Whether this connection would be a surface street, or bridge over the tracks should be studied as a bridge can disrupt the neighborhood for a few blocks on each side while a surface connection may not be very useful if it is often blocked by trains.
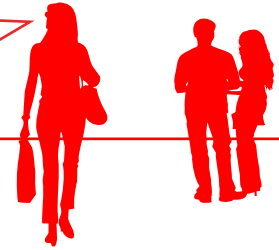
New Connection North

Numerous discussions have occurred about how to establish a north-south connection between downtown and the San Bernardo neighborhoods. Solutions have taken the form of either building a bridge over, or going under the railroad tracks. Streets that have been considered include Convent Avenue and Santa Maria Avenue. If this connection is to be pursued, the effect on the homes and businesses for two blocks on either side of the railroad tracks needs to be considered. A look at the effect the Washington Street bridge over the tracks can be used as an example. Access to these lots will be restricted or eliminated. This effect should be weighed against the benefit of additional access to the downtown that is not impeded by the heavy flow of trains along the railroad.

On-ramp South

The closest ramp to get onto I-35 headed south is at Madison Street, nearly a mile and a half from the downtown and the railroad bridge crossing. If an additional on ramp could be provided closer to the downtown, it could increase access to the downtown by allowing people to go under the train track instead of having to sit and wait for it to pass. The on-ramp would ideally be accessed near Benavides Street. It takes approximately two blocks to ramp from Santa Ursula Street level to the level of I-35.

Access East

A plan to make a multiway boulevard from the end of I-35 to the border has been developed. Making this area a premier, pedestrian-friendly, civic space can help to mentally bridge the gap between the El Azteca neighborhood and the downtown. This proposal, know as the "Boulevard of the Americas" is discussed further as a Signature Civic Space later in this chapter.

Coordinated Train Stoppage

The city should work with the rail operators to better coordinate where, when, for how long, and how often trains are stopped blocking surface roads to minimize the impact and inconvenience downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods.

Street Cleaning Campaign

The streets of Laredo's downtown feel old, worn, and dirty. A campaign to clean the streets should be undertaken. Pressure Cleaning a street can help to breathe new life into an area and make it feel less intimidating. Streets near the new mall and Iturbide Street should be first priorities for cleaning. Street cleaning of downtown streets could be coordinated through the Central Laredo Municipal Management District.

Clean streets make a first impression that the downtown is open for business.

Develop parts of Zacate Creek into walking and biking areas and develop the Tex-Mex area into a second downtown.
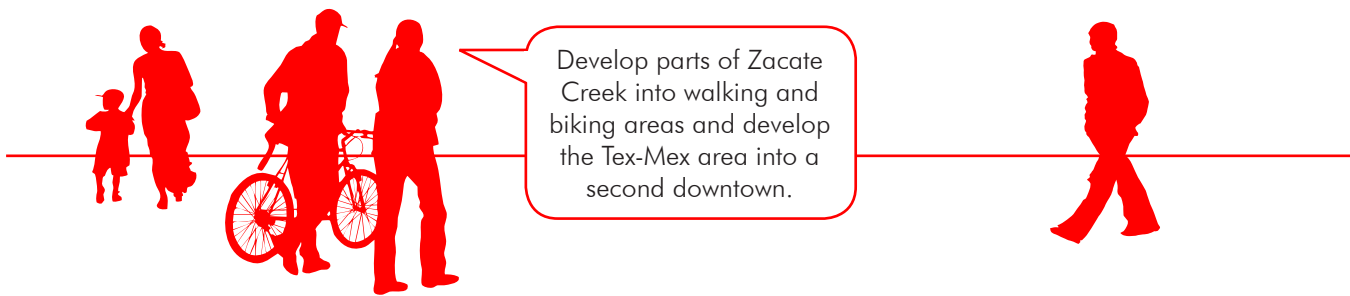
It Street as an Entertainment District

Iturbide Street (It Street) underwent a major streetscape overhaul several years ago to add trees, bus shelters, benches, and wider sidewalks. In addition, the city offers many incentives from facade improvement grants, elimination of fees during construction, waived permit fees, among others to entice people to open bars and restaurants along It Street from San Bernardo Avenue to Flores Street. These efforts should be highly publicized and continued.

Although the streetscape was revamped, it also needs to be kept up. The street should be regularly cleaned and occasionally pressure washed, and areas around trees should be maintained to prevent it from appearing dingy. This could be coordinated through the Central Laredo Municipal Management District.

Traffic Signs and Signaling

As streets are narrowed and made two-ways, the flow of traffic should still be considered. Four way stop signs and small roundabouts should be considered to allow the safe, slow flow of traffic along with safety for pedestrians. If traffic signals are warranted at an intersection, they should be coordinated with other intersections. The concept of coordinated signal timing is discussed in more detail in the Mobility Chapter of this comprehensive plan.

Street name signs are oriented toward motorists on one-ways streets, not facing all sides. This situation creates a difficult wayfinding environment for pedestrians. It is recommended that street signs should always face all directions.

Iturbide Street

Historic Preservation

Take Stock of Laredo's Historic Resources

As a first step towards strengthening Laredo's sense of place and community identity and spurring economic development and revitalization, the city must have a baseline survey of all historic resources that exist. Some preliminary surveys have been conducted. These initial surveys should be confirmed, updated, and expanded to include buildings in the surrounding residential neighborhoods.

Step 1: Conduct Blitz Surveys

The best way to undertake a comprehensive historic resources survey is to undertake "blitz," or sketch surveys, that are comprised of photographs, quick notes, and addresses for candidate historic properties.

These blitzes can be organized by the historic museum, city staff, or LCC, but the field work itself is conducted by community historic preservation partners and concerned citizens who are simply doing a first round of identification. The organizing entity can compile the materials collected by volunteer groups and use them as a basis to revisit properties and conduct further research to identify candidates for historic designation.

From this survey, city staff can create an endangered building list, comprised of the city's most at-risk properties. It would then be possible to prioritize actions such as local designation of key properties, public awareness campaigns, outreach to property owners, and financial incentive packages.

Significant historic structures in the central business district

Step 2: Gather Supporting Documentation

Once an initial blitz survey has been conducted, it would be possible to prioritize specific neighborhoods, streets, and buildings that are either particularly endangered or merit special attention based on historic significance or architectural distinction. Documentation supporting historic designation of these places should be gathered, including original architectural drawings of the buildings, and/or drawings of subsequent renovations, additions, and remodelings.

Oral history should be gathered from Laredoans that remember the early days of these buildings, if possible. Sanborn maps and any original plat maps should be gathered to help understand the original urban form of neighborhoods, as well as the placement of historic buildings and some of their distinguishing features. Historic city phone directories can aid in determining residency as well as the types of businesses that were located in specific buildings.

Finally, historic photographs and paintings should be gathered to determine the original appearance of the building as well as features such as landscaping, streetscape and road design.

Use Historic Landmarks to Leverage Economic Development

The City of Laredo is home to a significant amount of intact historic urban fabric, particularly a strong showing of American mercantile buildings within the Central Business District downtown. These resources can be used to anchor new development and leverage economic development initiatives.

There are numerous other historic resources in Laredo that could be restored and put to work in a similar fashion, such as St. Peter's Plaza and other historic parks. Historic areas such as El Azteca, Old Mercado, St. Peter's, and El Cuatro could be used to leverage smaller-scale infill and adaptive reuse projects such as mixed-use buildings, small apartment

Post Office is a Neoclassical Building from 1907.

buildings, rowhouses, and new single-family homes. Architectural guidelines or a pattern book should be created to guide appropriate new infill development.

Emphasize Qualitative Standards When Designating Post-WWII Landmarks

Historic preservation has had great success in preserving compact, walkable, mixed-use districts from the pre-WWII era, particularly downtowns and 19th and early 20th century neighborhoods. Preservation has proven to have positive environmental and social benefits for towns and cities across the country.

However, as the decades progress, the 50-year threshold for qualification as a historic structure or district is opening up more and more post-WWII construction for preservation, including public housing, the interstate highway system, and monotonous automobile-oriented suburban sprawl. The environmental and social consequences of preserving these auto-dependent places could be very serious. Historic designation of auto-oriented sprawl will hinder future possibilities for walkable retrofit, and could lock these areas into auto dependence for the long term.

Preserving post-WWII neighborhoods simply to avoid retrofit towards greater walkability or density should not be supported, since these neighborhoods require high levels of energy consumption and will not prove adaptable. In these cases, it is important that historic and architectural merit are weighed with environmental and social considerations.

Use Discernment When Evaluating the "Compatible but Distinct" Clause

Historic preservationists, according to current thinking, value contemporary design that is "of its time" and is "compatible but distinct" from historic places. Sleek glass boxes may not be appropiate as an addition to Georgian mansions. Consider urban infill projects that have similar but distinct design.

Rio Grande Plaza hotel built in 1975.

This ideological preference for contrast in historic environments should be kept in check. Oftentimes historic buildings were designed to be environmentally adapted, with operable windows spaced for cross-ventilation, sloped roofs provided to shed rain and snow, and arcades built to shade the ground floor and passing pedestrians. Moreover, most historic buildings were designed to be street-oriented and serve a pedestrian population. These important lessons should not be thrown away in contemporary additions, reconstruction, and infill, and they definitely should not be thrown away for the sake of fulfilling a standard to be "compatible but distinct."

When weighing the benefits of "distinction" in design, the end goal should not be aesthetic distinction for its own glory, but instead should consider economic, environmental, or social benefits of distinction. If the contemporary design fails to improve upon the economic, environmental, and social contributions of the original historic design, then it should not be considered. Designers should integrate the economic, environmental, and social contributions of the neighborhood.

Create, Enforce and Monitor a Vacant Building Ordinance

The city should create a specific plan for economic revitalization that provides incentives for addressing vacant and underutilized properties is the creation of a Vacant Building Ordinance, which would be applied to the city's most impacted neighborhoods. A Vacant Building Ordinance would require property owners to register their vacant buildings with the city and have them inspected by officials, create a long-term plan for the building's use, bring the buildings up to fire and safety codes, maintain the façade and exterior walls, and finally, provide insurance coverage for the buildings.

The ordinance should be designed to make it harder and more expensive to maintain a vacant building, therefore pressuring property owners to occupy their buildings, sell them, or in some cases, (only if the building is determined to have no historic value,) demolish them. The target of the Vacant Building Ordinance should be buildings in central Laredo; it has the potential to rejuvenate historic neighborhoods and improve the image of the city.

It is important that the Vacant Building Ordinance is actively enforced as a powerful tool for revitalization. Equally important, the effects of the ordinance should be monitored closely to ensure that it does not have unintended consequences, such as insensitive alterations to historic façades, including alteration of doors and windows, or destruction of historic features for the installation of safety upgrades. This is a particular risk for buildings that have no historic designation. First and foremost, it is critical to monitor the requests for demolition of vacant properties to make sure that a Vacant Building Ordinance does not result in the demolition of significant historic buildings.

Reform Tax Appraisal System for Income Properties

A great majority of downtown's historic multi-story commercial buildings are vacant or underutilized. The primary influence on this phenomenon is the State of Texas' tax appraisal system. This system allows income properties to be appraised according to the income produced annually by the property, rather than according to the value of the property. For commercial and mixed-use buildings, this system rewards property owners who make little or no income on their property by charging them very low taxes, sometimes lower than the taxes paid on a modest single-family home. This system provides owners with incentives to keep their buildings vacant, or to only rent the ground floor for retail and to leave the upper floors vacant. Reform of this tax appraisal phenomenon will require examination of local appraisal practices and may require reform of State law.

Continue and Expand Facade Improvement Program

Laredo has a facade improvement program to assist building owners, particularly within the downtown, with the cost of repairing and upgrading their facades to improve the public realm. While some businesses have taken advantage of this program to great affect, a campaign to get other building owners to participate should be encouraged.

Update the City's Historic Preservation Design Guidelines

In order to better assist property owners, the city should take stock of its existing Historic Preservation Design Guidelines and assess how well they are functioning. These Guidelines should be strengthened or updated as needed, or in the case of historic districts that do not currently have their own design guidelines, they should be created. In addition, the Historic District and Landmark Board, which is appointed by the Mayor and City Council, should be required to meet minimum qualifications so that it is known that they can assess and advise on the difficult task of preserving and enabling the enhancement of the city's historic assets. Consideration should be given to following a model as prescribed by in cities such as El Paso, Texas, with qualifications as follows:

All members shall have demonstrated special interest, knowledge, and experience in the architectural, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, ethnic and/or political history of the City of Laredo, and shall include two architects. No one business or professional interest shall constitute a majority membership of the Landmark Board. To the extent available in the community, professionals from the disciplines of architecture, engineering, construction, history (such as urban planning, American studies, American civilization, cultural geography, or cultural anthropology), architectural history, urban planning, archaeology, or other disciplines related to historic preservation shall be given preference for appointment for any membership positions.

Utilize Form-Based Codes for New Construction in Historic Neighborhoods

Often one school of thought in historic preservation does not want new construction to mirror historic buildings. However, the placement of buildings and the way that they respond to climactic conditions are lessons we can learn from.

La Posada hotel

Utilizing a Form-Based Code for new construction in historic neighborhoods can allow buildings to be distinct but fit in with the character of the surrounding community. The regulatory process can also be simplified as new construction would not need to go through historic preservation board review.

Revise the Approval Process to Make it Easier to Rehabilitate Historic Structures

Downtown property owners describe a difficult approval process which discourages rehabilitation. Rehabilitation requires city support and a positive, flexible attitude. City processes and their administration should be reviewed and discussed with elected officials and city staff.

Develop a Rehabilitation Code

The city or State should develop a rehabilitation code to facilitate the reuse of both historic and non-historic buildings. The code should be in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. North Carolina and Maryland have developed rehabilitation codes that could be used as models.

Improved building facade with funding from the facade improvement program on Iturbide Street.

Educate Property Owners

Another serious roadblock to historic preservation is ignorance. Many property owners in Laredo do not know that Historic Preservation programs and facade improvement programs exist, or if they do, they view them as a burden on their property rather than a benefit. It is important to educate property owners on the multiple benefits of historic preservation – economic, social, cultural, environmental, and aesthetic. In addition, property owners should be educated on the tools and resources available to help them finance the preservation and restoration of historic buildings and to make responsible decisions on how to properly restore or alter these structures.

In order to entice more property owners to seek historic designation for their property and to ensure that more properties are successfully restored and re-used, it is important that the toolbox of historic preservation incentives is well-understood by the public. Incentives, such as federal, state, and local tax exemptions and grants, should be packaged in an understandable and user-friendly manner so that property owners can be sure what their options are for funding rehabilitation work. Financial, logistical, and technical resources available to property owners should be advertised. This promotion can be done through the city's historic preservation website, through informational brochures, Central Laredo Municipal Management District workshops, and through direct communication with owners of currently-designated or should-be-designated historic properties.

Parking and Downtown Prosperity

Making it easier for customers, workers and residents to travel to and from downtown Laredo is important for future prosperity. Today, transit options for those traveling to and from downtown Laredo are quite limited. Therefore most people will continue, at least for the immediate future, to arrive by car. The current parking options in and around downtown's historic center can make finding a parking space a challenge.

There is ample parking supply in the downtown and within a five minute walk of most businesses. However, there are several reasons people feel that parking downtown is inadequate which can be common to many downtowns:

- Visitors do not know where to park.
- Parking may be located a block or two away from their desired destination.
- The downtown districts need better signage and wayfinding to alert visitors of public parking lots.

- Better lighting and sidewalk improvements to create safe walking environment throughout the day and night.
- Activate the private parking supply to be better utilized.
- Problematic parking during events and festivals.
- Time restrictions on parking that are either too long to support customer turnover during shopping hours or too short to support dining and entertainment uses.
- Strict parking times and strong enforcement can make people feel unwelcome downtown if they are even a few minutes late returning to their car.

Getting people to come downtown is essential to the prosperity of the city center. Growing the downtown population will only help to a certain extent. Downtown needs to become a destination for residents from all over the city. The following are some ways to address parking concerns in the downtown.

LEGEND

- Surface Parking Private
- Surface Parking Public
- Structured Parking Private
- Structured Parking Public
- On-Street Parking
- Traffic Direction
- Major Thoroughfares
- 5-Minute Walk Circle

Downtown Parking Supply

Parking Management

To relieve traffic congestion and efficiently maximize the use of available parking, downtown districts may consider, and are not limited to, the following strategies:

- Conduct a parking survey to understand the reasons for people going downtown and tabulate the distribution of uses with respect to shopping, dining, work, residents, errands/appointments, tourists, and other uses. As the downtown becomes more vibrant, this survey can be updated to ensure strategies to adequately address parking are being pursued.

- Perform a parking survey to understand the parking patterns for customers and employees regarding the use of parking lots and on-street parking with respect to distance from their destination. This data may illustrate that employees often park within one block of their destinations, while customers may park two or more blocks away, circumventing business and parking turnover.

- In business areas, consider giving priority use of the on-street supply to customers, visitors, and loading needs. In residential areas, the on-street supply should be managed for residential needs.

- Manage the pricing of meters to maintain 15 percent vacancy at all times—which may translate to high meter fees during peak demand and reduced rates at evening hours. The effect for a retail district is that it can improve convenience, increase shopper turnover and improve economic vitality.

- Look into utilizing a mobile parking app for all municipal spaces including on-street, in lots, and in garages. Allow private lot owners to add their lots to the app as well to encourage a wider use of the app and make parking and rates downtown predictable. Examples of mobile apps include Pay-by-Phone and ParkMobile which allow people alternate ways to pay, receive reminders of when their parking time is about to expire, and add additional time remotely if necessary.

- Reinvest parking revenues with improvements in such things as sidewalks, shade trees, lighting, street furniture and street cleaning to improve the vibrancy of the district.

- Encourage pedestrian activity by organizing the downtown area into parking sheds, which are walkable sectors that collectively address the parking demand needs by sharing municipal parking lots and on-street parking among the multiple users.

Signage and Wayfinding

Initiate a wayfinding signage program for the downtown. Wayfinding and signage should help people get to and navigate the downtown and direct people to pools of parking such as municipal garages and lots. The community should create a unified vision through signage to promote downtown. Wayfinding signage will assist residents and visitors with the location of shopping, parking, historic properties, and other areas of interest as well as convenient parking.
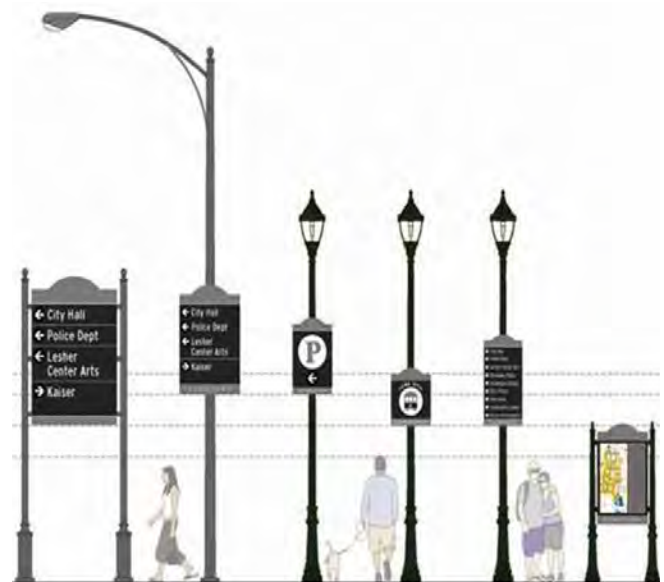
Examples of signage and wayfinding

Adding New Downtown Parking Supply

Downtown Laredo is an attractive destination in large part because of its highly-walkable, compactly-woven network of blocks and streets. While many historic downtowns in the United States have lost substantial portions of their building fabric to make way for parking, downtown Laredo has retained its building stock. Streets are continuously shaped by well-activated facades with plentiful doors and windows.

Exploration of additional parking options to supplement the current supply would be useful as Laredo looks to increase the prosperity of downtown by attracting greater numbers of customers, workers and residents. At the same time, Laredo should protect the continuity of its downtown building fabric as a top priority in any initiative to add new parking supply.

Parking at the Periphery

As downtown is a highly walkable environment, it is not necessary to locate new parking immediately adjacent to the uses it serves. Parking can be located several blocks away and still be perfectly functional. Parking located some distance from the uses it serves in fact has the distinct benefit in a downtown environment of increasing foot traffic, which is helpful for increasing the prosperity of shopfront uses.

Parking Structures vs. Surface Parking

As parking supply requires a geometrically larger amount of land area, surface parking lots in a downtown environment are especially destructive to the continuity of urban fabric. While more expensive per space to construct, parking structures are a better option to compress the footprint of new parking supply and result in lower land cost. The reduced footprint of parking structures can make new parking supply far easier to insert into the fine-grained block structure of Laredo and reduce the displacement of active urban fabric.

Design of Downtown Parking Structures

Once parking structures have been located on the periphery of the downtown and have been compressed into as small a footprint as possible, several other techniques can be used to integrate them into the urban fabric as seamlessly as possible.

Parking garages do not have the same enlivening effect in an urban environment as other buildings housing uses such as residential, office, and commercial. Parking structures do not provide "eyes on the street" and if they are located adjacent to a sidewalk can have a deadening effect on the vitality of a public space of the street.

Where possible, parking structures should be placed in a mid-block location where they are not adjacent to the sidewalk. Enough room should be reserved between parking structures and the street for a "liner" of buildings containing uses. These uses can then face the street with regular doors and windows and the continuity of the urban fabric remains unbroken.

If the space available does not permit the siting of a parking structure away from the sidewalk, then special care must be taken in the design of the garage itself. A parking garage located adjacent to a sidewalk should have active normal uses integrated into it on the ground floor. These ground floor uses should be designed with shopfronts, signage, awnings, and other details to preserve as continuous a streetscape as possible from the point of view of pedestrians. They could be designed with infrastructure to allow the permanent placement of food trucks lining the edge of the street.

Upper floors of the parking structure, while perhaps not housing active uses, can be designed with façade details to reduce disruption of façade continuity as much as possible.

Increased Downtown Potential

Downtown Malls Can Help an Entire Area
A mall or shopping destination located downtown has the potential to stimulate interest and economic vitality within the urban core. In Laredo, the new mall, an $80 million investment, located along the Rio Grande, in the historic center of the city, provides 77 new stores and ample services. The draw of the new center of commerce has many advantages, including local, regional and international appeal.

Economic Development and Revitalization
In the past, some cities have opted to locate new malls near the edge of town, far away from the city center; the result has often proven to be economically disastrous for historic centers. Urban malls, located within or adjacent to a downtown, provide an alternate model. Examples like City Place in West Palm Beach, Florida, and Providence Place in Providence, Rhode Island, have stimulated economic activity and contributed to a renewed interest in their downtowns.

An urban mall is a natural draw for many in Laredo, and there will also be international interest, given the highly accessible location. In order to have a thriving downtown, a variety of destinations are needed. In addition to many of the unique cultural organizations that exist in downtown Laredo, the mall now offers another reason for folks to travel to the city center.

Laredo's new urban mall
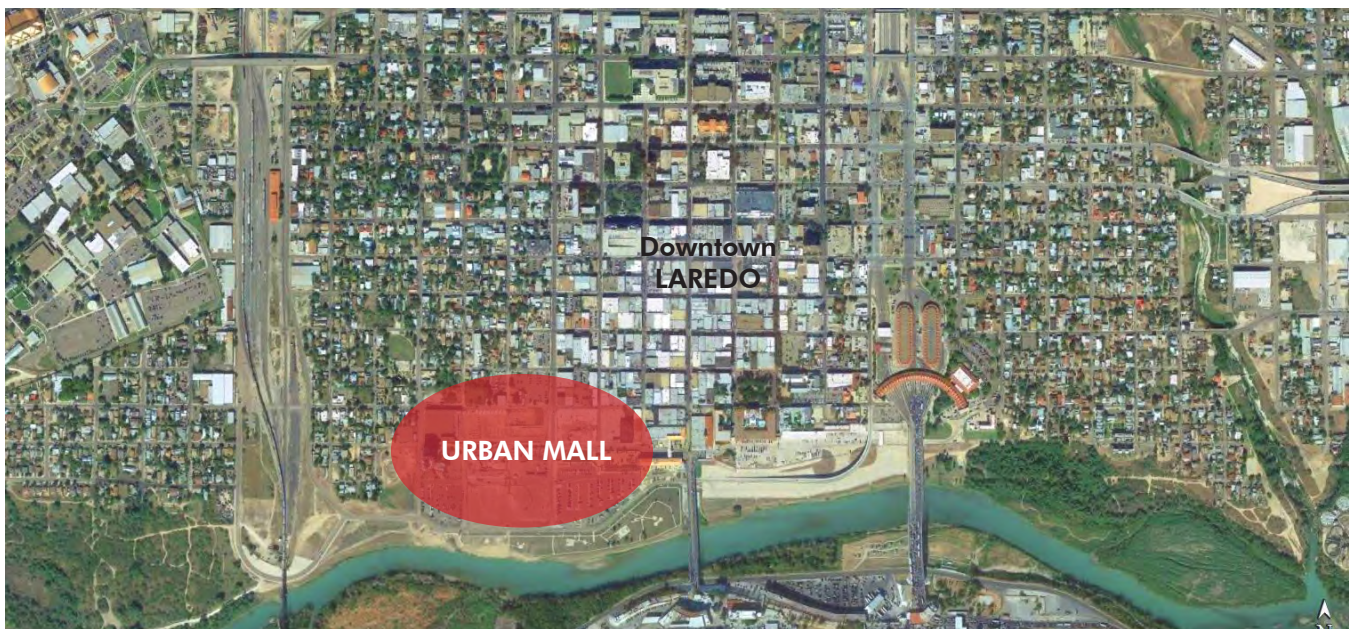
Aerial image displaying the new mall site, located immediately adjacent to downtown

The "Spillover Effect"

Prior to the construction of City Place, the urban mall in West Palm Beach, the adjacent historic center was in need of revitalization. Many historic buildings had an authentic character, but needed improvements. The economic success of the mall "spilled over" to adjacent streets, catalyzing reinvestment and providing a natural extension to downtown. Clematis Street, the historic central spine of the city, benefited from many unique, new businesses as well as upgrades to building facades and the public realm. Today, a symbiotic relationship exists between the urban mall and the historic city center in West Palm Beach; the fact that the city has also invested in public space and streetscape improvements also illustrates the impact that a revitalization effort can have in a neighborhood or downtown, when both public and private entities work together.

Walkability & The Urban Mall

Walkable places are also economically vibrant places. In an environment where pedestrians feel comfortable, they are likely to enjoy more of the local businesses than they would if they were driving through the neighborhood. Pedestrian access to the things that make Laredo interesting must remain; ensuring that the new mall remains connected to the districts cultural programs and institutions in the downtown will help to create a dynamic city center that works-- because a real variety of uses and services populate the area.
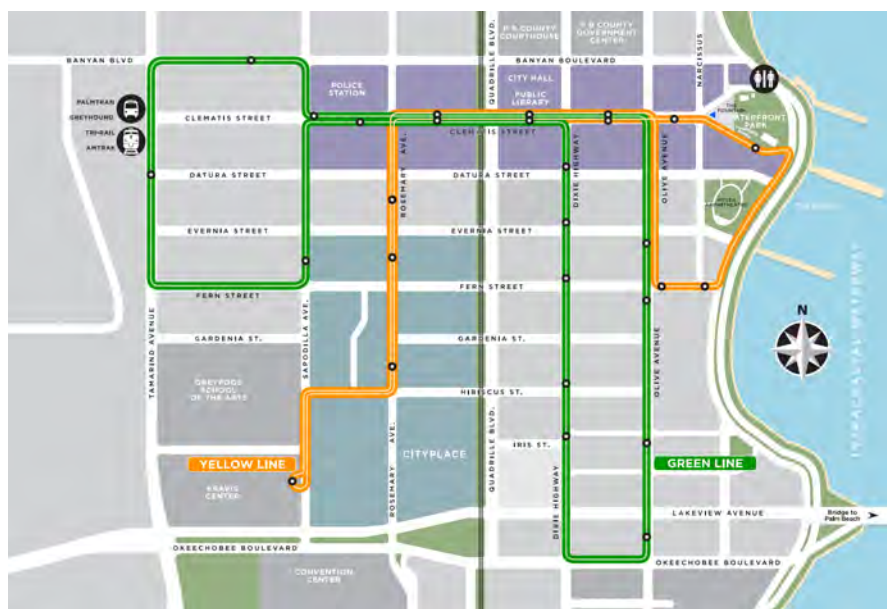
City Place, West Palm Beach, Florida, a thriving downtown mall providing services and citywide economic benefit. It is linked to the primary downtown street with two trolley routes.

The success of City Place has "spilled over" to nearby historic streets in West Palm Beach, Florida.

A Park-Once Environment

Another benefit that results from an urban mall and a nearby downtown involves the creation of a "park-once" environment.

The notion of a park-once location includes ample designated parking areas for those that are traveling to their destination by car. Once parked at their destination (at the mall or in the downtown area), people become pedestrians, so long as the streets and the public realm are safe, interesting and connected to other places. Providence Place Mall in Rhode Island has helped the historic center to return to a lively destination; its location has also encouraged a park-once environment.

The new mall in Laredo is likely to have a similar impact with parking provided on site adjacent to the downtown streets. Street improvements and the addition of new public spaces can supplement the new facilities, creating an environment where visitors park once and then walk around to access desired services.

Weybosset Street near Providence Place Mall

The mall in downtown Providence, Rhode Island, has stimulated revitalization in the historic city center.
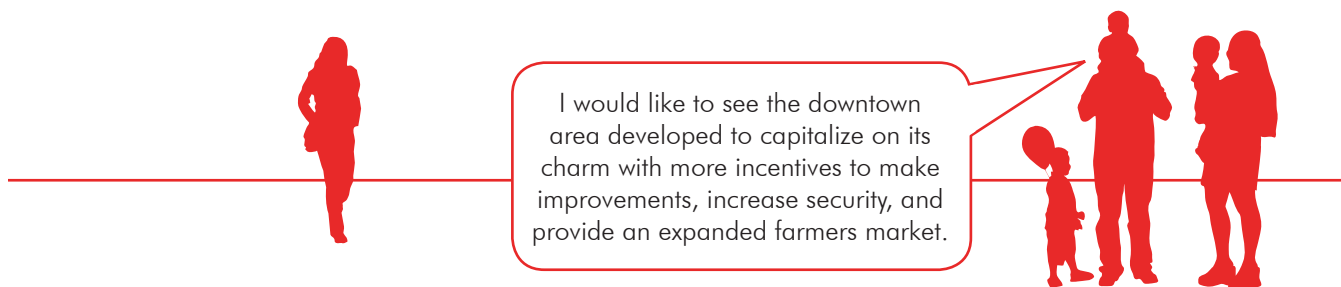
Convention and Conference Center

Laredo has a desire to create a convention and conference center in the downtown. The needs and subsequent siting of the convention and conference center should be carefully considered. Convention and conference centers often function internally and require a lot of space for open convention center floor space as well as smaller meeting rooms. Convention and conference centers are often sprawling internal structures. If not designed and treated carefully, it could have a deadening effect, instead of an enlivening effect on the downtown.

What ever location is eventually selected, the following should be considered:

- Carefully consider space needs
- Consider alternate methods of accommodating space. Perhaps the convention and conference center could utilize a multistory structure to require a smaller footprint
- Investigate the possibility of the convention and conference center utilizing multiple buildings.

Some of these considerations were taken into account when creating the shopping outlet which also has some of the same problematic siting concerns. In the case of the mall, the streets still penetrate through the site which helps to maintain the integrity of the downtown block structure and provides additional opportunity to let the economic impact of the shopping outlet to "spill" into the downtown.

Location #1: On the City's Edge Facing the River

The area is at the elevation of the downtown, above the flood zone. This area could be expanded over river vega area to extend the footprint of downtown. The location could accommodate incredible views across the river and into Mexico. Parking would be below on the river level, accessible directly from the down ramp on Santa Ursula.

Location #2: El Rincon Diablo

The location is adjacent to the downtown mall that was recently completed. At this location, parking supply with the mall could be shared. However, this may require the destruction of numerous neighborhood buildings, will likely result in a design that requires the vacation of streets, and is on the outer edge of the downtown, separating its success from the CBD.

Location #3: Central Business District

Locating the convention and conference center within the central business district would be ideal and mutually beneficial for the convention center and the surrounding businesses. However, the small block structure and prevalence of numerous historic structures may make it difficult to adequately accommodate the convention center space needs.

Signature Civic Spaces

Boulevard of the Americas

The Boulevard for the Americas is a plan for the four blocks between the one-way pair of San Dario Avenue and Santa Ursula Avenue from International Bridge 2 to the start of Interstate 35. This four block segment is envisioned to be a signature civic space.

The plan envisions turning this segment into a multiway boulevard. Separated access lanes will allow on-street parking next to businesses that face this street with a row of street trees separating this local traffic from through-lanes heading toward the border or tuning to head farther south down Highway 83.

Each of the intersections is envisioned to have paving patterns that bring more attention from drivers to the cross streets in a effort to make the whole area more pedestrian-friendly.

Making this space less intimidating for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists can have positive affect on the downtown. It will make getting to the downtown feel less intimidating as well as better connect the historic El Azteca neighborhood back to the Central Business District. This unification of the neighborhood can make it more attractive to residents and can help to populate the downtown neighborhoods.

Downtown Vega Lands

Vega land is primarily the area adjacent to the Rio Grande within the flood plain, and in the case downtown, in the jurisdiction of border control. This area cannot be developed with structures, but can provide an opportunity for recreation and to create a premier civic space for all Laredoans to enjoy.

The main proposal for the vega lands is to create a premier linear park with spaces for recreation and trails for hiking and biking that can connect Laredo's downtown to both the north and the south. This trail system along the water could infinitely extend the city's connectedness through modes other than cars. However, it can not be overlooked that this is also an international border and will also be patrolled and at least partially be under the control of border patrol.

One significant proposal within the vega land plan for the downtown area is to create a level of parking that is then covered by park and recreational space. This proposal also considers a widening of the Rio Grande in this location. The ultimate goal of this portion of the plan is to build positive space up from the river with a bulkhead for security and a positive vantage point, rather than build a wall to look through if such a barrier is determined necessary by the federal government.

Existing Conditions from Water Street to the Rio Grande
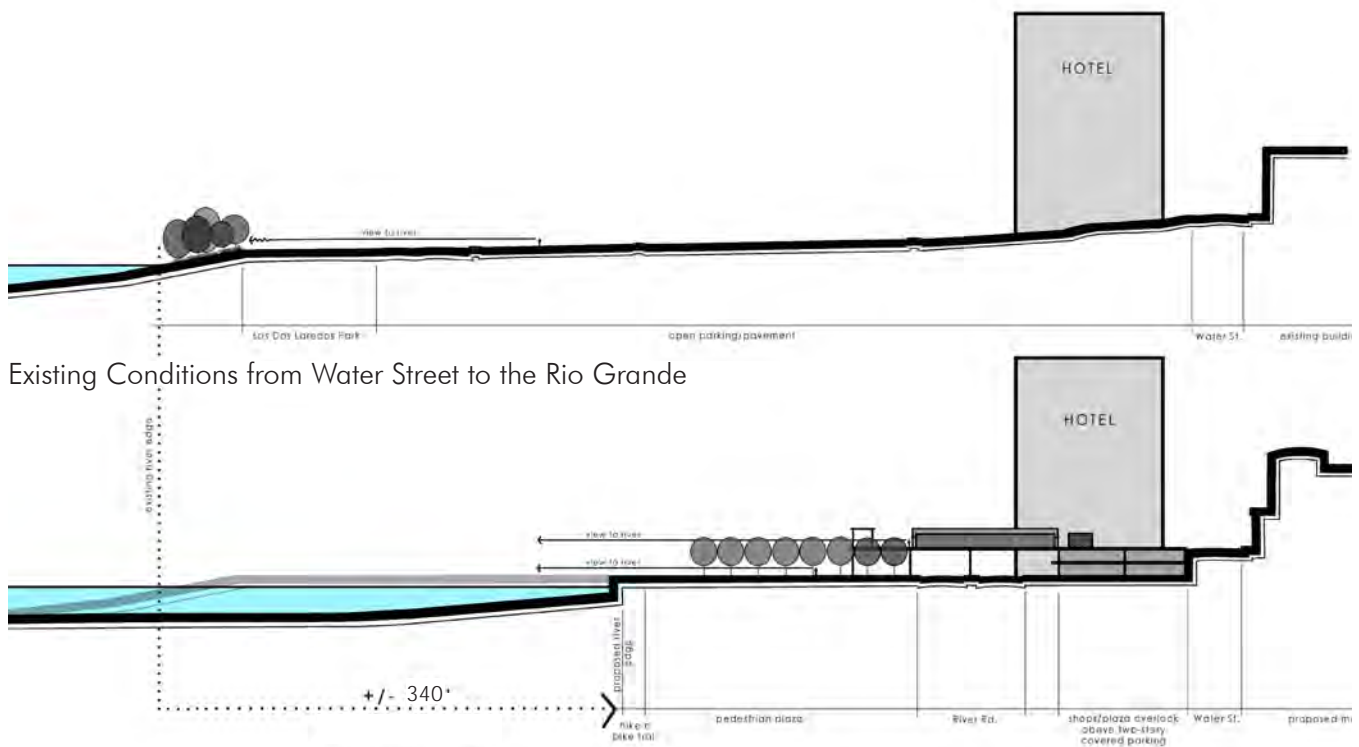
Proposed Condition from Water Street to the Rio Grande. This scheme widens the Rio Grande on the American side by approximately 340' and utilizes a pedestrian plaza and a two level parking garage to access views over the river to Mexico. *Image Credit: Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan, September 2008*

Saint Peter's Plaza

Laredo is fortunate to have a number of public squares in downtown. These squares, established in the historic plan for the city, also provide a tremendous benefit for residents. They provide opportunities for recreation, venues for cultural events, and locations for both informal and for civic gatherings.

Some, like San Agustin Plaza, are well equipped with shade trees, benches to sit, fountains and other amenities. Others, like Saint Peter's Plaza, would benefit tremendously from additional investment in physical design details to improve their utility.

Saint Peter's Plaza has the fundamental arrangement to be a very high quality public space. While details are currently under-developed, Saint Peter's Plaza is very well-sized, has a generous canopy of existing shade trees, and the edges of the space are well-shaped by being faced with the fronts and sides of buildings, many of which are beautiful historic structures.

Saint Peter's Plaza - Existing Conditions

What Saint Peter's Plaza currently lacks, however, is detailed programming that would make the space useful for particular activities. The space today features sod traversed with a crossing of pathways, and a single isolated basketball hoop above a plain circle of concrete at the center of the space.

Potential Future Improvements

Variety of facilities would increase the usefulness of the squares to a broader variety of people and would help to ensure that the space is well-activated throughout a longer period each day.

Saint Peter's Plaza would be greatly improved by the addition of places to sit. Benches should be located along pathways in such a configuration that they provide a pleasant vantage point from which to observe activities in the square.

Specific program recommendations need public input and improvements should be sensitive to the character of Laredo's historical plazas as they are unique landmarks. It is highly recommended that the City of Laredo develop a Historic Plazas Master Plan to work with the community on future plaza improvements.

Education is key to job opportunities. We have huge lack of skilled workforce. If this is not addressed the community will not prosper.
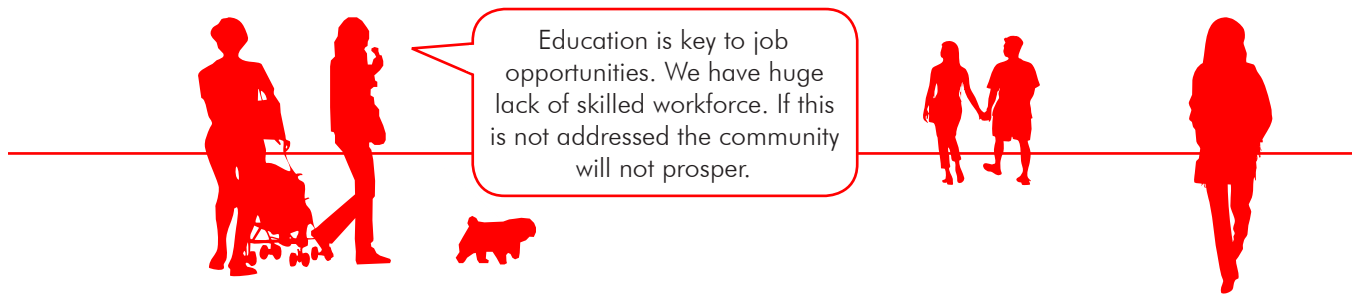
Connecting Downtown and LCC

The main campus for Laredo Community College, also known as the Fort McIntosh Campus because of its location on historic Fort McIntosh, is situated at the west end of Washington Street in downtown Laredo. The campus is situated on a small hill on the bend above the Rio Grande. The campus has many of the original United States Army buildings from the old fort along with modern buildings from the 1940s to the 21st century.

LCC can play a role in revitalizing downtown and the historic St. Peter's neighborhood. LCC can work to repopulate the buildings downtown by moving some classes downtown and utilizing the St. Peter's neighborhood as a location for student housing.

The college could bridge the gap between the existing campus and the St. Peter's neighborhood. A program for student housing in the neighborhood can be established. This will start to repopulate the downtown neighborhoods and provide a customer base for restaurants, bars, and other businesses in the downtown.

Create an Arts or Architecture College in Downtown

A major step in the successful preservation of downtown and its historic buildings is to re-populate it and begin to fill vacancies in these historic structures.

One strategy that has proven successful for downtown revitalization in cities such as Savannah, New York, Providence, and Charleston has been the integration of a college campus, particularly an art or architecture college, into the downtown fabric. Laredo could potentially have the added benefit of partnering with a Mexican college or university and help to strengthen the connection between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. Colleges in the downtown can help to saturate vacant historic buildings by restoring and occupying them with student housing, classroom space, and administrative offices.

Savannah College of Art & Design

Preservation projects undertaken within the City of Savannah:

- Massie School
- Unitarian Universalists Church
- Flannery O'Conner House
- Kennedy Pharmacy Building
- Federal Courthouse
- Custom House Historic Courtroom
- MLK Corridor
- Scottish Rite Building
- Historic Buildings, Savannah State University
- Historic Powder Magazine
- SCAD Buildings
- Broughton Street Retail Development Project
- Berrien House

SCAD injected new life into downtown Savannah by restoring and reusing historic buildings, such as this mid-century theatre.

Historic Preservation students participate in the opening of the restored Kennedy Pharmacy Building.

With the introduction of college life during the day and residential life at night, retail, restaurants, and services can locate to the ground floor of historic buildings downtown. These amenities will be available throughout the day and week, not just from 9 to 5 during weekdays. The overall effect can snowball, with more residents, offices, and retail moving into historic buildings downtown, attracted by the vitality already created by the college's presence.

The benefit of a downtown art or architecture college, as opposed to other programs, is that art schools have the tools and the drive to work with historic resources as a hands-on learning experience for students. This benefits the college, but even more, it benefits the city by creating a dependable stream of public/private/university partnerships, and by injecting the downtown with the creativity and zeal of student work.

It is important that an arts or architecture college teach in a way that is respectful of the downtown with its stock of traditional American mercantile buildings. Many schools do not teach the technique of traditional architecture and urban design, or even a sympathy for it. This is one of the reasons that when the majority of architects find that their livelihood demands the practice of traditional architecture in historic districts or in places in which traditional architecture is valued, they practice it inexpertly.

By contrast, in Savannah, Georgia, the creation of the Savannah College of Art & Design (SCAD) in 1978 was a watershed moment for Savannah's downtown, and the college has since played an important role in the restoration and revitalization of the historic city. Student housing and academic buildings are integrated throughout the downtown and many of the college's programs use the city as a living laboratory for their work. In particular, the college's Historic Preservation program has made significant contributions to the restoration and reuse of downtown historic buildings and places.

Tourism

Laredo's role in early American history is significant in many ways. There is no reason why Laredo should not be added to the list of priority destinations to learn more about the history of the United States, as well as Mexico.

Organized tours of the historic trails should be promoted within Laredo and throughout the country, and special events should be promoted there, such as festivals, concerts, and parades. Coordination between area hotels, restaurants, and cultural destinations should be encouraged to ensure that the entire tourism experience is a positive and cohesive one.

Laredo has the opportunity to promote its role as the only place in Texas to serve under seven flags. Greater efforts should be made to highlight the location of significant events downtown and along the US-Mexico border, through the creation of additional walking tours, guided tours, and historical markers.

Redevelopment and Zoning: Downtown and Inner City

The existing zoning code for the City of Laredo already contains polices that address concerns for a walkable, denser, and more lively urban fabric, reflecting strategies that encourage good urban growth. While the zoning regulations have made strides in promoting a walkable and vibrant downtown, there are other regulations that create roadblocks in the way of fully realizing this goal.

The reintroduction of residential uses in urban areas is a major factor in the revitalization of downtown areas. Therefore, it is important to consider policies that would encourage this growth and to reexamine policies that place barriers to residential development.

Mixed Use Infill Sample Development

The following sequence illustrates how a new multi-family building can be placed on two existing lots within the downtown. The example lots are at the corner of Davis Avenue and Zaragoza Street. The example illustrates how a ten unit corner building with a mix of 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units can occupy the space. This sample highlights some of the existing policy impediments to development that exist within the downtown neighborhoods.

1 Bedroom
2 Bedroom
3 Bedroom
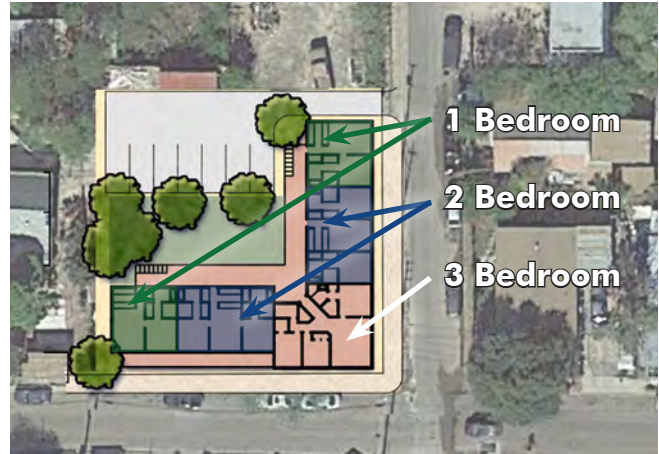
A floor plan of a mixed-use apartment building with 10 apartments of varying sizes that contributes to the quality of the urban space and more neighborhood commerce.

Parking Requirements

An influential component in the development of residences downtown is the minimum parking requirements. Allowing for off-site parking to count toward residential uses is a positive action; however the additional half space requirement for every bedroom after the first bedroom results in ballooning space requirements that are not conducive to the development of a successful, traditional urban environment.

Removing this additional half space requirement, allows developers to determine what their target market and funding sources require. This could allow for more flexibility and encourage urban development. To prevent over-supply of parking, the existing regulations could be established as a parking maximum in order to preserve the intent of the zoning code.

In order to address concerns for parking, the city should identify strategic locations for the addition of public and private parking structures to increase the available supply that can be considered for residential uses.

Minimum Lot Size and Density

The current minimum lot size requirements for residential uses in Laredo reflect a more suburban understanding of space required for residences and pose a challenge to developing a traditional urban environment. The current zoning requires 3,000 square feet for each dwelling unit in areas designated R-3, Mixed-Residential. As a result, a maximum number of dwelling units allowed for an average block is approximately 149 one-bedroom units. In order for a developer to realize a maximum potential of an entire block, a parking garage would be necessary and could also include some commercial spaces. This is not impossible to build; however the existing policy encourages a luxury market due to the combination of a costly process for purchasing each lot, the cost for construction, and the number of allowable units. Thus far, there has been no incentive and there is no market for the development of luxury residences downtown which has contributed to the lack of development of a lively urban area. Relaxing or even removing these regulations in the Commercial Business District would open the available market for development and could help incentivize growth.

Setback requirements usually result with parking lots out front and create conditions that are undesirable.
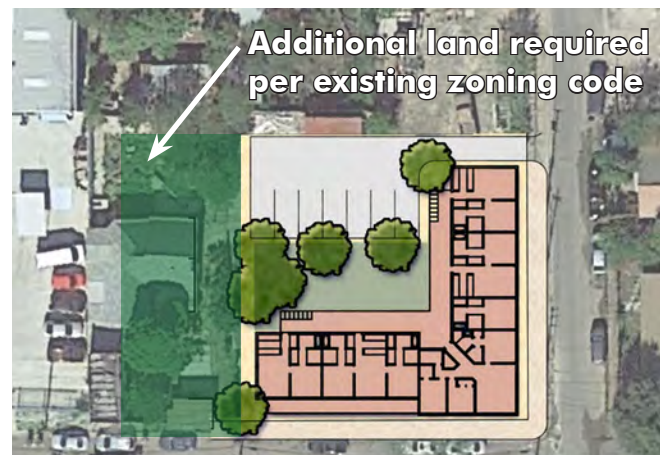
Existing lot size minimums make a denser urban fabric difficult to achieve by requiring more land for 10 units. Otherwise, only 7 units are buildable with this acreage.

Building Placement

Encouraging building development that engages pedestrians is an important aspect of successful, traditional towns. In order to achieve this, zoning should require building frontages to be built at the front and side property lines. Including this as a policy increases pedestrian safety by removing the incentive to place parking at the front of the lot where pedestrians would need to navigate around cars. In addition, this creates a continuous street frontage which also increases safety by removing spaces that cannot be easily observed and which encourage undesirable activity.

The existing code requires a 25 foot front setback and a 10 foot side setback in the Community Business zoning. Laredo could consider rezoning these areas downtown to a Central Business District, or reduce the front and side setback requirements to be zero.

Loading Requirements

Current loading dock requirements establish one loading dock per occupancy requiring pick-up and delivery for every building over 5,000 square feet. A lack of a lane or alley within the blocks necessitates that these loading docks areas be located on the sidewalk which has a negative impact on the safety of pedestrians. Removing this requirement while accommodating locations for truck delivery along the street would enable new construction to continue to add to the walkability of downtown. These locations could be at the curb of shop fronts and marked as zones for temporary truck parking and delivery during certain hours. Parking for visitors could then occur outside of these delivery hours. This approach is observable in existing urban areas such as historic Charleston, Savannah, New York, and San Francisco.

Permit a Mix of Uses

Including various business options in the Saint Peter's and El Cuatro neighborhoods of downtown is positive and helps bring more diversity to the urban life of these historic neighborhoods. However, the current Residential/Office zoning does not allow certain neighborhood services such as tailors, banks, credit unions, dry cleaning, beauty and barber shops, etc. Allowing these uses within a five minute walk from residences and places of work makes it possible to minimize dependence on cars within these areas.

As an example, rezoning both sides of Farragut Street to include B-3 would allow for these neighborhood service uses while also maintaining control as to where they could be located. A form-based code for the historic downtown neighborhoods should be considered so that new development focuses more on the placement and form of buildings to be consistent with and enhance the neighborhoods while not focusing on uses as much.

Certain blocks have different zones on either side of the street. Pedestrians tend to favor streets that reflect uses and heights on both sides of the street that are similar. This urban condition is also beneficial for businesses and property value stability. In order to encourage this condition, it is good practice to locate the transition between zones down the center of the block rather than the center of the street. This approach also avoids significant disparate uses from facing each other and enhances the satisfaction of residents at their home or place of work.

Filling in the Blocks

The following sequence expands on the development of a single building over a six block area from Santa Cleotilde Avenue to the west, Santa Maria Avenue in the east, Iturbide Street in the north, and Grant Street to the south. This location is directly to the north of the downtown mall location. There are not any significant historic structures within these blocks.

Step 1: Multi-family Building

With the previously noted zoning code adjustments, a 10 unit building is constructed at the intersection of Davis Avenue and Zaragoza Street.

Step 2: Additional Development

In time more lots become available to create new residential units with some commercial uses.

Step 3: Private Structured Parking

A larger project might be proposed with its own parking deck. The parking deck is completely lined with habitable space.

- Community Business
- Mixed-Residential
- Limited Business

Existing zoning

Step 1: Multi-family Building

Step 2: Additional Development

Step 3: Private Structured Parking

Step 4: Public Structured Parking

A public parking garage is added to the existing public surface lot. A liner of habitable or commercial space integrates the parking garage into the urban context.

Alternative Public Park

A possible final condition in downtown Laredo. With the right zoning code adjustments to incentivise desired outcomes, Laredo can transform its urban area into a vibrant, walkable and highly desirable downtown.
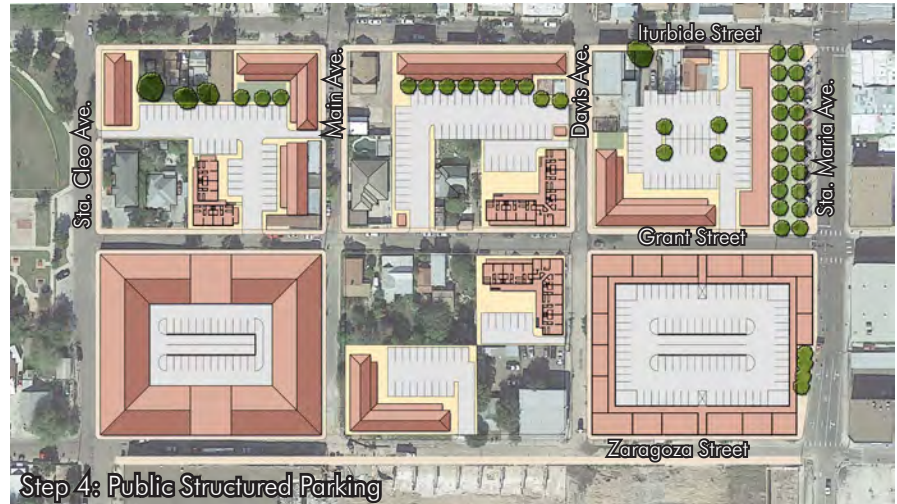
Step 4: Public Structured Parking

Alternative Public Park
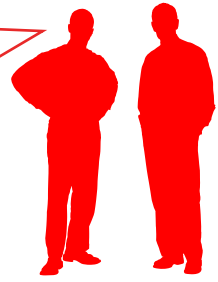
GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Create a more vital downtown and inner city neighborhoods with residential options of all kinds, quality places to shop, dine and recreate while preserving, renewing, and evolving historic buildings, districts, and landscapes for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

General

Goal 2.1: Create a roadmap for the coordinated effort to revitalize the downtown.

> **Policy 2.1.1**: Review and update the downtown and plan.

Downtown Public Realm

Goal 2.2: Enhance the public environment to encourage a lively and active downtown.

> **Policy 2.2.1**: Revise regulations that are oriented to suburban land use to encourage traditional urban development. Provide for easy access to daily activities and uses and provide a pedestrian friendly streetscape.

> **Policy 2.2.2**: Revise setback requirements in Community Business zones.

> **Policy 2.2.3**: Remove loading dock requirements in Commercial Business District zones.

> **Policy 2.2.4**: Relocate transitions between zoning districts from the center of the street to the center of the block along rear lot lines.

Goal 2.3: Improve downtown's streets until they become Laredo's premiere public spaces.

> **Policy 2.3.1**: The city should encourage the use of the illustrative plans and renderings in this chapter as examples to encourage best practices in improving downtown streets particularly for city projects.

Policy 2.3.2: Maintain and improve the downtown street network by providing multiple routes and pathways for vehicular and pedestrian movement.

a. Downtown streets, particularly within the Central Business District, are to be maintained first and foremost for pedestrians, transit vehicles, and deliveries. Private automobiles will be accommodated to the greatest extent possible consistent with this priority.

b. Streets should not be permanently closed or dead-ended or converted to one-way traffic except in cases of overriding public necessity or to allow the creation of pedestrian-only public spaces.

c. Seek opportunities to reopen former streets to bring more economic vitality to surrounding properties.

d. Convert one-way streets back to two-way streets to increase the economic viability of businesses and to make downtown more intuitively navigable for residents and visitors as per the Proposed Downtown Circulation Pattern found in this chapter.

Policy 2.3.3: Improve downtown streets to become more multimodal and appealing to pedestrians, with ample shaded sidewalks and on-street parking.

a. Improve safety and encourage pedestrians and transit users by managing vehicular speeds on downtown streets, using measures such as:
   i. Narrower travel lanes;
   ii. Changes in paving;
   iii. Restoration of two-way vehicular travel;
   iv. Artfully designed traffic calming measures; and
   v. Timing of traffic signals to reward managed steady vehicular speeds.

b. Provide on-street parking on at least 50% of all downtown streets.

c. Redesign downtown streets using pedestrian-friendly thoroughfare section assemblies from the thoroughfare plan in the Mobility Chapter. Design arterials using guidance in the ITE recommended practice, *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach*.

d. Turn traffic signals to four-way stops in off-peak times when long red wait times on empty streets discourage downtown visitors.

Goal 2.4: Recognize that public spaces and streets within the city's historic districts are themselves prime contributors to the vitality and appearance of the districts.

Policy 2.4.1: Create and enact a comprehensive green and public space plan to be integrated with downtown development to increase the overall amount of green space in the downtown.

Policy 2.4.2: Ensure that the redevelopment and enhancement of plazas, greens, playgrounds, paseos, and other public spaces within historic districts are done in a way which is sensitive to the context.

Lighting, Signs & Utilities
Goal 2.5: Streets and spaces are safe and inviting with adequate lighting and clear signage.

Policy 2.5.1: Adequate and pedestrian-scaled lighting should line each street in Laredo.

Policy 2.5.2: Utilities should not be located on the sidewalk, allowing clear access for pedestrians between destinations.

Policy 2.5.3: Install clear wayfinding signage in all of Laredo, directing residents and visitors to significant locations including available parking.

Downtown Buildings
Goal 2.6: Revitalize downtown first.

Policy 2.6.1: The city should provide financial incentives, regulatory guidance, and technical support for the adaptive reuse of downtown buildings for use as housing.

Policy 2.6.2: Promote downtown Laredo as a living classroom for historic preservation and architecture education and encourage partnerships with universities on research, documentation, and restoration projects.

Policy 2.6.3: The Historic Preservation Division and the Department of Planning and Economic Development should work to attract a professional arts school to downtown Laredo, for instance an art or architecture school with a historic preservation program.

Policy 2.6.4: Lobby State officials to reform the tax structure for vacant downtown buildings, which is currently based on a property's net income rather than its assessed value, thereby encouraging property owners to only lease the ground floor of their buildings and allow the upper floors to remain vacant. Work with city leaders and the County Tax Assessor-Collector. If necessary, also work with Laredo's State representatives and senator to address the issue at the State level.

Policy 2.6.5: Create a Vacant Building Ordinance to encourage the use of existing structures instead of allowing them to sit vacant, detracting from a vibrant downtown environment.

    a. Monitor the performance of the Vacant Building Ordinance to ensure that the intended goals are being achieved. If it is found that the ordinance results in degradation or insensitive changes to historic buildings, take measures to address them, such as:

        i. Designate historic buildings that are not currently protected and could be insensitively altered as a result of the Vacant Building Ordinance.

        ii. Work with the Building Department to adjust the terms of the Vacant Building Ordinance to require the sensitive repair and maintenance of buildings older than 50 years of age.

Goal 2.7: Facilitate reinvestment in the downtown.

Policy 2.7.1: Revise regulations that may be impeding development downtown.

Policy 2.7.2: Create and adopt a rehabilitation code to facilitate the reuse of both historic and non-historic buildings.

Policy 2.7.3: Rezone portions of downtown to be Commercial Business District zones to coordinate with the accepted comprehensive plan.

Policy 2.7.4: Remove lot size minimum requirements for residential uses in the Commercial Business District zones.

Policy 2.7.5: Remove minimum parking requirements for residential uses in the Commercial Business district zones.

Goal 2.8: Strive for the widest variety of activities downtown to create a healthy mix of housing, working, shopping, cultural, and civic uses. This concentration of diverse activities will reduce traffic impacts and infrastructure costs and re-use downtown's existing buildings to their maximum potential.

Policy 2.8.1: When evaluating rezoning requests and also when designing public buildings, consider the principles under policies 2.8.2, 2.8.3, and 2.8.4.

Policy 2.8.2: Expectations for downtown buildings include:

    a. Nearly all downtown buildings should be re-used or re-purposed instead of being replaced by a new building.

    b. Building façades that face sidewalks should not have more than 30% of their length or 30 feet, whichever is less, as blank walls (without doors and windows).

    c. Sidewalk-level retail, office, and service uses that face a public space should be designed to have clear glass on at least 60% of their façades between 3 and 8 feet above grade.

    d. Sidewalk-level retail, office, and service windows should be kept visible (unshuttered) at night.

    e. Sidewalk-level retail, office, service, and live-work spaces should comprise at least 60% of the street-level façade.

    f. Design new downtown buildings to have at least 70% of the total linear frontages of mixed-use and non-residential building façades within one foot of the sidewalk.

    g. All businesses and/or other community services on the ground floor should be accessible directly from sidewalks along

a public space, such as a street, square, paseo, or plaza.

h. Design new downtown buildings which have ground floor dwelling units such that at least 50% of those units have an elevated finished floor no less than 24 inches above the sidewalk grade.

i. Sidewalk-level dwelling units should be elevated at least 24 inches above the sidewalk.

Policy 2.8.3: City policies and programs will encourage the rehabilitation of upper stories of existing downtown buildings as office, retail, entertainment, and residential space. Financial incentives will be considered to encourage investment from the private sector.

Policy 2.8.4: Encourage a wide mix of residential housing types downtown and within downtown neighborhoods to encourage a diversity of ages and incomes and allow residents to trade up, downsize, or create multi-generational households without being forced to leave downtown. Housing should include arrangements such as: studio units, 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units, townhouses, penthouses, and live-work spaces; and should include both rental apartments and units that can be owned by their occupants.

Historic Resources
Goal 2.9: Preserve the City of Laredo's valuable historic resources.

Policy 2.9.1: Support the preservation of Laredo's historic resources through public information, advocacy, and leadership within the community and through the use of regulatory tools.

Policy 2.9.2: Begin a "blitz" campaign to document existing historic structures.

Policy 2.9.3: Create a priority list of buildings to protect and preserve that are in the most danger of being lost.

Policy 2.9.4: Provide widespread cultural and educational resources and information programs on historic preservation techniques and benefits.

Policy 2.9.5: Continue to encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings.

Policy 2.9.6: Continue to collaborate with various entities to promote historic preservation landmarks and historic events as tourist attractions.

Policy 2.9.7: Encourage development planning and design to sensitively incorporate preservation of historic structures and artifacts.

Policy 2.9.8: Encourage the development of attractive and unique characteristics which help each neighborhood in developing its individual historic value and identity.

Policy 2.9.9: Inform the public of tax benefits and funding sources available for restoration.

Policy 2.9.10: Continue to collaborate with various entities to promote historic commemorative events marking significant landmarks in Laredo's development.

Goal 2.10: Historic Preservation should be embraced as an effective economic development and revitalization tool for the City of Laredo.

Policy 2.10.1: Use Laredo's designated historic districts and structures as an integral element in citywide revitalization and economic development efforts.

Policy 2.10.2: Promote the value of historic preservation to spark interest in designating additional historic districts as well as individual properties.

Policy 2.10.3: Preserve architecturally or culturally significant structures which are not historically designated and lie outside of the historic districts.

Goal 2.11: Improve public perception of Historic District Designation so that more neighborhoods will seek and embrace preservation of their historic resources.

Policy 2.11.1: Educate property owners on the economic, social, and cultural benefits of historic preservation.

Policy 2.11.2: Provide workshops on how to care for a historic property in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Policy 2.11.3: Ensure that city practices uphold and support historic designation as a benefit to property owners, and not a burden.

Policy 2.11.4: Promote historic preservation and Laredo history in local schools. Create programs to educate children through field trips, workshops, and curriculum.

Goal 2.12: Improve the performance of Laredo's existing Historic Districts.

Policy 2.12.1: Work with federal, state, and local governments, non-profits, and private groups to identify additional funding resources for the rehabilitation of historic properties.

Policy 2.12.2: Provide a clearinghouse of existing financial resources for owners of historic properties in order to provide incentives for appropriate renovation and rehabilitation projects. Make this information accessible through the city's Historic District/Landmark Board on website and brochures and work with neighborhood leaders to spread the word on these resources to other property owners in their districts.

Policy 2.12.3: Educate the owners of historic properties on how to properly maintain and rehabilitate their property.

a. Create neighborhood associations to focus on the advancement and interests of the neighborhood.

b. Create master plans for each neighborhood to act as a guiding document for the neighborhood association.

c. Provide a historic preservation resource group that consists of the neighborhood association leaders for each historic district and set up a regular schedule of meetings.

    i. Use this group to disseminate new information and resources as they are available and to hold training and education programs.

    ii. Use this group to track the performance of each of the individual historic districts and to provide advice to city leaders as challenges arise.

Policy 2.12.4: Improve Code Enforcement efforts in Historic Districts so that properties are consistently maintained and owners can be assured that inclusion in a historic district guarantees a certain neighborhood character and higher level of maintenance.

    a. Ensure that Code Enforcement Officers are trained in the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation and that refresher courses are available for new and veteran officers.

Policy 2.12.5: Amend the Building Code for existing structures within historic districts to make it easier for property owners to undertake renovations and improvements.

Policy 2.12.6: Encourage new commercial and live/work uses within historic districts to make them more economically viable and livable by revising the zoning as necessary.

Goal 2.13: Promote historic preservation as part of a holistic strategy to promote walkable, livable, and humane place making.

Policy 2.13.1: Promote training programs for architects, designers, and builders to work with traditional buildings and learn traditional building techniques. As these professionals gain experience in rehabilitating historic buildings, they will learn how to transfer these lessons into a new generation of high-quality buildings and places throughout the city.

Policy 2.13.2: Market historic districts to potential homeowners and property owners for the walkable, complete lifestyle that these neighborhoods offer. These homeowners spark a new generation of homeowners who will enjoy the benefits of mixed-use walkable communities and can increase the market for new walkable communities throughout Laredo.

Parking

Goal 2.14: Incorporate adequate parking for private cars into new development while providing infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation, bike parking, transit or trolley access, and comfortable pedestrian access.

Policy 2.14.1: Create a downtown parking strategy plan that continues to utilize and improve upon the provision of on-street parking, public parking lots and garages, and shared private parking spaces, with clear signage to inform the public of all transportation and parking options.

Policy 2.14.2: The city should not require any on-site parking for buildings downtown and will encourage the sharing of private parking spaces between various uses to reduce the total number of parking spaces.

Policy 2.14.3: Locate parking lots and garages out of sight at the interior of blocks wherever practical.

Policy 2.14.4: Parking garages should be lined with habitable or storefront space to provide a safe, interesting environment for pedestrians and to screen parking from the view from public spaces such as streets, squares, and plazas.

Downtown Public Facilities

Goal 2.15: As civic buildings are added, updated, or replaced, they will be integrated into Laredo's original street network and other land uses rather than being isolated in large complexes of civic buildings.

> **Policy 2.15.1**: Civic buildings should be acts of civic art, embedded within the urban fabric of downtown and sited memorably, when possible on high ground and at the terminal axis of streets to increase their visibility.

> **Policy 2.15.2**: Important public facilities such as courthouses, post offices, museums, and administration buildings should not be moved from downtown to outlying locations.

Downtown and Inner City Connection

Goal 2.16: Recognize the important potential inherent to the existing inner city and focus on its vitality.

> **Policy 2.16.1**: Reestablish connections if street path has been interrupted at as many locations in the inner city possible, especially those that will enhance connectivity between one neighborhood and another.

> **Policy 2.16.2**: Consider adding a bridge or a surface railroad crossing to establish better connections between neighborhoods.

> **Policy 2.16.3**: Support the creation of neighborhood associations and engage them in decisions affecting each neighborhood.

Policy 2.16.4: Neighborhoods associations should define the special qualities of their areas; a district should not be defined by council district boundaries but by special qualities of the neighborhoods. Many of these may already exist.

Policy 2.16.5: Connect district to district.

Policy 2.16.6:Create a forum for dialogue with railroad companies concerning stop times of trains crossing into Mexico.

Urban Design

3

diseminar *vt* : to disseminate, to spread

disensión *nf, pl* **-siones** : dissension, disagreement

disentería *nf* : dysentery

disentir {76} *vi* : to dissent, to disagree

diseñador, -dora *n* : designer

diseñar *vt* **1** : to design, to plan **2** : to lay out, to outline

diseño *nm* : design

disentimiento *nm* : dissent

disertación *nf, pl* **-ciones** **1** : lecture, talk **2** : dissertation

disertar *vi* : to lecture, to give a talk

disfraz *nm, pl* **disfraces** **1** : disguise **2** : costume **3** : front, pretense

disfrazar {21} *vt* **1** : to disguise **2** : to mask, to conceal — **disfrazarse** *vr* : to wear a costume, to be in disguise

disfrutar *vt* : to enjoy — *vi* : to enjoy oneself, to have a good time

disfrute *nm* : enjoyment

disfunción *nf, pl* **-ciones** : dysfunction — **disfuncional** *adj*

Image Credit: Karen Gaytán

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Urban design is the organization and distribution of design elements like streets, buildings, and public spaces, in accordance with design principles like balance, rhythm, emphasis, variety, and unity. The practice of urban design reflects social, economic, aesthetic, functional, and symbolic intentions. Ultimately, urban design is a mix of problem-solving and art.

Laredo's current urban design is the sum of all its individual elements, the built environment and the natural environment considered. Community members felt that there is room for improvement.

Good urban design allows for the future redevelopment or reuse of areas in a way not necessarily perceived when originally designed and constructed. It also allows flexibility of use and allows areas to reinvent themselves over time.

Where the urban design of Laredo has been successful, places were created that people have enjoyed and taken care of for generations. Laredo, like all cities, is a work in progress. Through thoughtful planning and careful implementation, the city's design can make Laredo an ever better city in the future.

Iturbide Street

Typical Neighborhood Street

Linear parks along waterways with multiuse paths bring people close to nature.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Context Sensitive Development

During the public process, participants described how they did not want a "one size fits all" approach to the urban design of the city. New development should be sensitive to context. Downtown is envisioned as an urban center with a dynamic mix of uses. The historic neighborhoods have a locally distinct character which new development needs to respond to. And the new suburbs have a spacious, driving-friendly character.

However, even in the new suburbs, an overwhelming majority of participants during the public process said that new development needed to promote walkability, ensuring that new neighborhoods are connected to one another as well as to the existing neighborhoods throughout the city. They described pedestrian, bike, and transit networks that were safe, comfortable, and inviting.

More Walkable Mixed-Use Neighborhoods

The desire for more walkable and mixed-use development has probably never been more prescient; younger generations are not obtaining licenses and driving to get around at the same rate as their parents. Instead, younger folks prefer to live in places where walking, biking, transit use and car sharing are present. In addition, preferences among the baby boomer generation increasingly include the desire to live in a mixed-use neighborhood.

More Useful Public Spaces

Members of the community reiterated during the public design workshop that the city needed more public spaces, parks, and that existing public spaces also need to be made more accessible and useful. In addition, city streets are an important part of the public realm and need to reflect the multimodal nature of envisioned future transportation patterns.

In making more public spaces, including parks, plazas and improved streets, it is important to keep in mind that the average walking distance a person is willing to travel before considering driving is generally one-quarter to one-half of a mile if the walk is interesting and safe. Locating new parks or plazas should involve strategic insertions within neighborhoods - placing them within walking distance from the highest percentage of households possible.

Another variable to consider is that large parks or public spaces are not necessary for every neighborhood; a small, but useful park within one-half mile from a household is a valuable asset. Large public spaces are often located at the edge of several neighborhoods where there is a lot of activity; these places are typically iconic and often serve as the meeting point for a variety of planned and informal events.

There are multiple methods for achieving more useful parks. For example, programming specific activities, such as a dog park or a splash pad, are ideas that many expressed would benefit Laredoans throughout the city.

Prioritize Streets for Walking and Biking

How will citizens travel in the future? The city has begun to provide more options. Initial street improvements to increase walking can include the addition of sidewalks on streets where they are missing and prioritizing key routes for planting street trees. Bike infrastructure, that is sensitive to the context of each neighborhood has been considered.

Residents discussed how on primary bikeways, bike infrastructure should be separated from the vehicular travel lanes and have a buffer. On secondary and tertiary bikeways, street design should include traffic calming techniques to slow the speed of vehicular traffic where people are walking and biking. The inclusion of on-street parking should occur where it is possible.

STRATEGIES

Sample Area Plans / Opportunity Sites

Laredo is diverse and the urban design concerns and strategies for each area of the city differ depending on the current form of development, varying types of development pressures, and physical characteristics. Although some strategies are universal, specific concerns may apply to different parts of the city. For each general area of the city, sample areas have been selected that focus on redevelopment opportunities and strategies for reimagining the existing environments into viable, flexible, development patterns that meet many of the city's overall development goals. Further development should concentrate on enhancing, connecting, and retrofitting existing urban areas with sustainable development in an ecologically responsible manner. These sample area plans are described in this chapter.

Opportunity Sites

(A) Downtown

New Neighborhoods
(B) A New Downtown Neighborhood - Kansas City Southern Rail Yards

(C) New Neighborhoods in Southern Laredo

(D) New Neighborhood in Northern Laredo

Older Neighborhood Improvements
(E) Repurposing Clark Boulevard / Park Street

(F) San Bernardo Avenue

(G) Santa Ursula Avenue & Jefferson Street

Connecting South Laredo
(H) Zacatecas Street

(I) New York Avenue & Louisiana Avenue

College Campuses & Their Role in Placemaking
(J) Texas A&M International University - A New University Neighborhood

(K) Laredo Community College South Campus

Sprawl Retrofit
(L) West Delmar Boulevard

(M) Clark Boulevard & Bob Bullock Loop

LEGEND
Plan Areas
City Boundary

United States
Rio Grande
Mexico
Nuevo Laredo

MATCH LINE
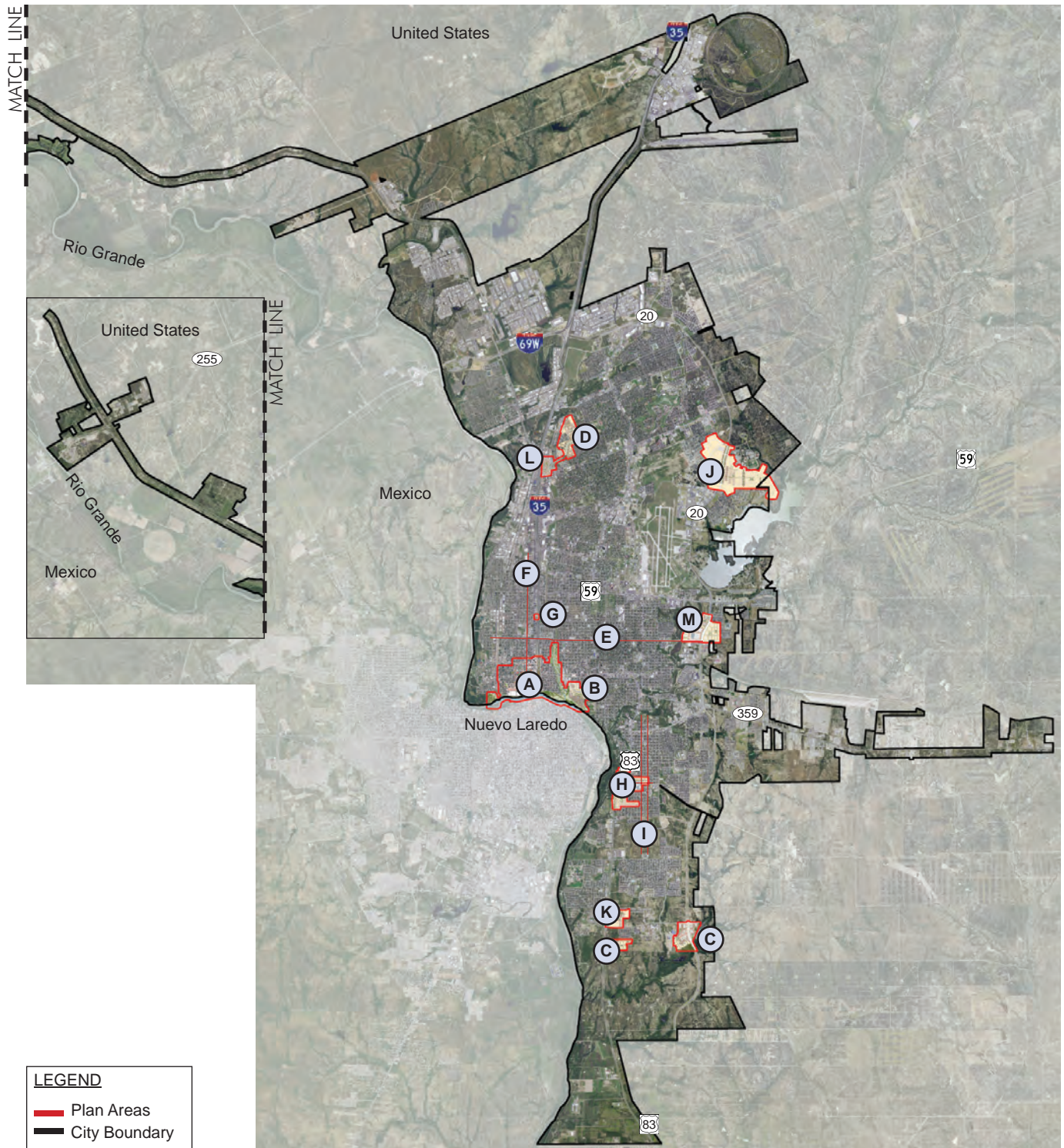
A Prosperous and Affordable Laredo

The Challenge:

According to the U.S. Census, the median household income for Laredo in 2015 was approximately $39,711. The Office of Housing and Urban Development suggests that the definition of affordable housing is, "In general, housing for which the occupant(s) is/are paying no more than 30 percent of his or her income for gross housing costs, including utilities..." Unfortunately, according to a 2016 study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) a household with two incomes from minimum wage jobs cannot afford the housing market in Texas. Coupled with the fact that Laredo residents devote approximately 32% of their income each year to driving-related costs, Laredo residents could benefit from a range of strategies to alleviate the cost of living.

The majority of housing options currently offered in Laredo are single-family, detached houses. A deficiency in living options contributes to an unaffordable housing market. Local zoning regulations also create an impediment to constructing affordable housing options. The current restriction in R-3 (Mixed Residential District) zoning requires a minimum lot size of 1,200 square feet per one bedroom dwelling unit with 400 square feet per additional bedroom. This requirement encourages suburban development even within urban quarters of the city.

Strategies:

Multi-Modal Transportation Options

Providing a well connected fabric of pedestrian-friendly urban streets that accommodate multi-modal forms of transportation would allow for and encourage walking, biking and the use of mass transit. This will help to encourage a healthy population in Laredo as well as reduce the dependence on car traffic and the annual driving-related cost burden on Laredoans.

Housing Diversity

In addition to a multi-modal transportation network, a diversity of housing types within walking and biking distance of downtown and employment centers should be encouraged. Current residents are faced with a limited choice of dwelling options, dominated by single-family detached housing. Allowing for row houses by right in R-3 and R-2 zones rather than by special permit will help to encourage a diversity of housing options.

Allowing for the construction of smaller dwelling units arranged in larger apartment buildings and courtyard apartments will increase the offerings to residents. In order to achieve this, the minimum lot size per dwelling unit should be relaxed in R-3 zones particularly within the downtown neighborhoods. Adjusting the zoning in these locations will accommodate a variety of dwelling options.

Providing a connected network of streets, bike facilities and transit options would make it possible for Laredoans to reduce their annual expenditures on automotive transportation.

Prioiritize affordable housing and bring downtown to life.

Need to create new infrastructure to allow for designated areas for walkability/recreation/leisure, etc.
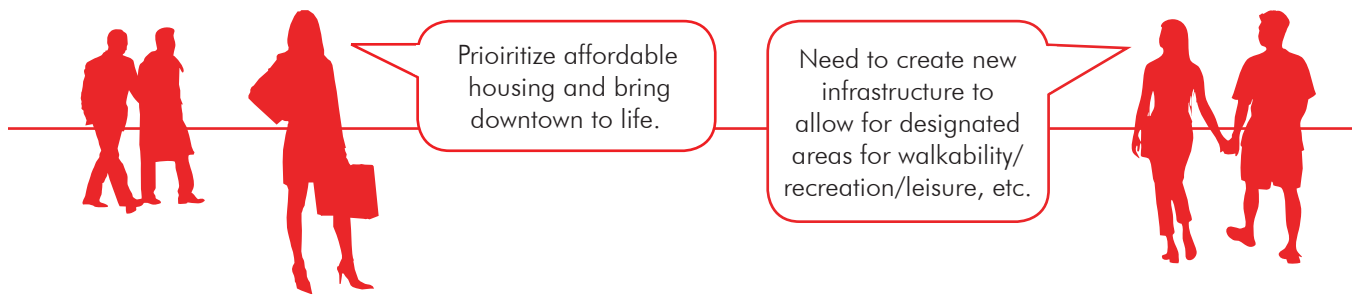
The inclusion of live-work units into the current Laredo zoning code should also be considered. Live-work buildings add flexibility and financial options for people who rent or own these properties. Accommodating professional services in the same building as the dwelling unit allows the building owner to pursue tax benefits and eliminate the need to drive to work. By making use of these benefits, a resident is more able to take entrepreneurial risks which could contribute to the vibrancy of Laredo.

Allowing residents to rent out an ancillary unit on their property should be considered as well. These units can take the form of cottages, or "granny-flats". Currently these can only be used for family members and are not permitted to be rentals. Relaxing this regulation could allow a property owner to increase his or her income, provide an economical housing option for renters and increase the diversity of a neighborhood.

Financial Incentives

In conjunction with the various transportation and housing options, policies should be established that incentivise the construction of affordable housing units mixed in with market-rate housing. This can be achieved by providing tax benefits to developers and land owners for achieving and maintaining a certain percentage of affordable units in new or existing developments. Certain federal and state organizations such as the Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (TLIHIS) work with organizations or governments to help establish policies to promote affordable housing.

Federal and state agencies such as the Office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as well as the State of Texas offer financial incentives to developers and property owners in the form of grants or tax benefits. In many instances, these programs have yielded positive results in achieving affordable housing markets and should be considered along with adjustments to zoning code regulations in an effort to achieve a more prosperous and affordable Laredo.

Relaxing lot size restrictions and allowing for other building types by right such as townhouses and live-work units will add diversity to the housing stock in Laredo and could help reduce the cost of living when implemented along with financial incentives.

A New Downtown Neighborhood

Kansas City Southern Rail Yards

The Kansas City Southern Rail Yards occupy a very strategic location adjacent to the Azteca neighborhood, and only a short distance from downtown Laredo. The site is on a bluff overlooking the Rio Grande, next to the mouth of Zacate Creek. The rail yard operations can be relocated to a location better suited to modern day needs, leaving only a few underutilized warehouse buildings on the site. Potential redevelopment of the rail yards represent a once in a generation opportunity to create a complete, mixed-use, walkable, urban neighborhood close to the downtown.

The plan envisions a complete neighborhood with a diverse mix of housing types, businesses, and civic uses laid out in an interconnected network of walkable streets. A series of public plazas and greens are intermixed in the neighborhood following the original tradition of development in Laredo. Street-oriented buildings line the streets and public spaces with doors and windows creating a pedestrian-friendly, urban environment. Streets are lined with shade trees to encourage walking and biking even during Laredo's hot summer months.

The Rio Grande frontage is reserved for a grand riverfront park. Development along the Rio Grande has historically turned its back to the river, reinforcing a sense of isolation from the international border. The redevelopment of the rail yards provides an opportunity to celebrate the border with a one-of-a-kind public space overlooking the Rio Grande, the international border, and Mexico that all Laredoans can enjoy. The fronts of buildings should face the new park, the riverfront and provide space for riverfront restaurants, shops, and residential lofts with views to the river.

The water treatment plant at the confluence of Zacate Creek and the Rio Grande will be relocated, providing additional space for the riverfront park.

LEGEND
- New Building
- Parking
- Development Parcel
- Greenspace
- Plaza
- Tree
- Trail
- Rio Grande
- Aerial/Parcel Line

Proposed Kansas City Southern Rail Yards Neighborhood

The treatment plant is currently situated on a prime location overlooking one of the most unique, natural features in the city.

The Zacate Creek is a valuable natural resource that needs to be restored, improved, and celebrated. The restoration of the Zacate Creek can provide a catalyst, not only to the redevelopment of the Kansas City Rail Yards, but for the restoration of the historic Azteca neighborhood. An additional bridge over the Zacate Creek, perhaps at Zaragoza or Water Street, can create a stronger connection between the rail yard redevelopment, the Azteca neighborhood, and downtown Laredo.

Aerial view of the existing Kansas City Southern Rail Yards and water treatment plant.

Skate park   Multi-story, mixed-use buildings   Important sites reserved for civic buildings   Public spaces incorporated into the neighborhood   Pedestrian and bike friendly streets   Grand riverfront park
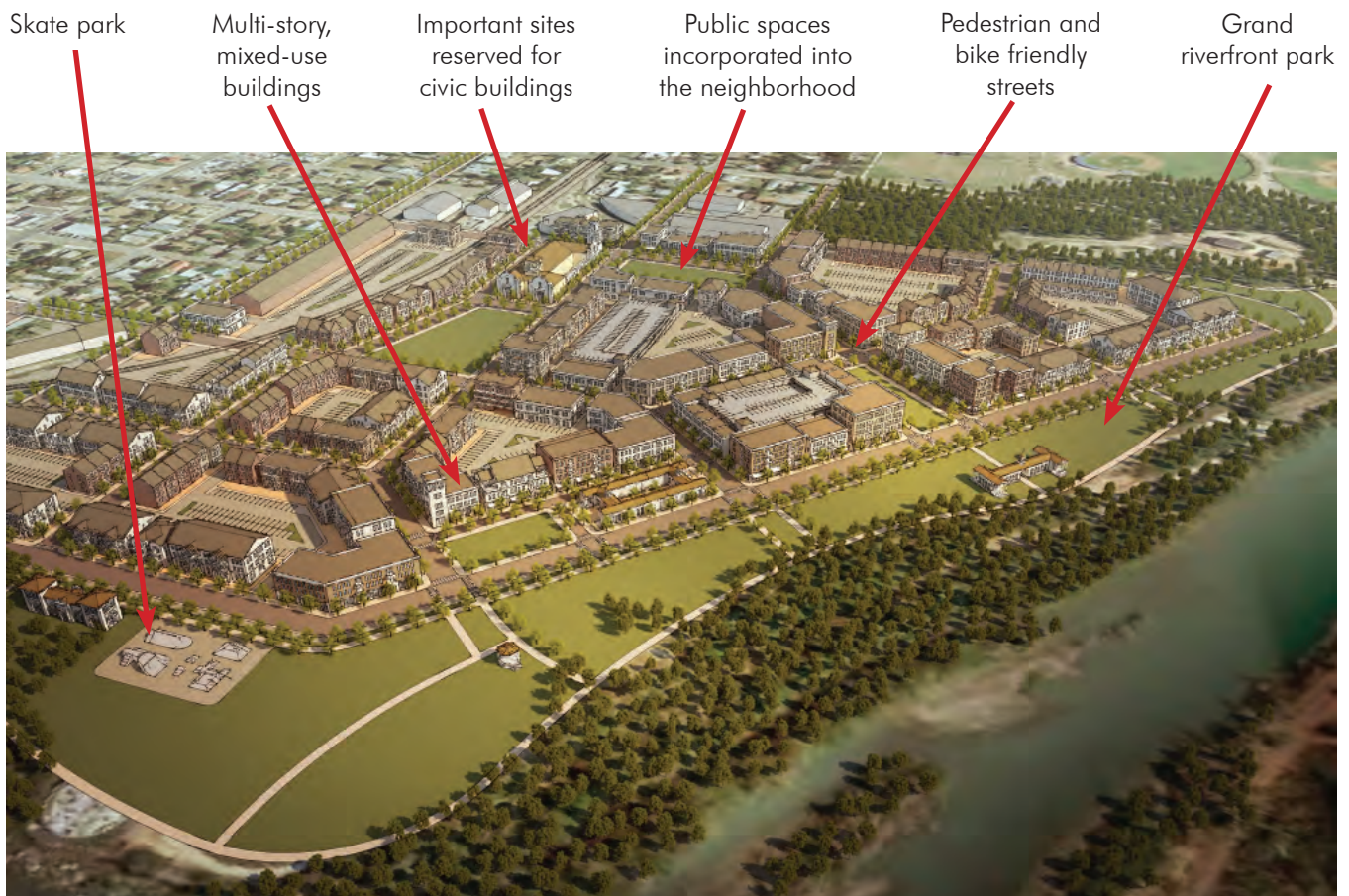
Aerial view of the rail yard redevelopment with a grand riverfront park overlooking the international border.

New Neighborhoods

New Neighborhoods in Southern Laredo
South Laredo is growing as parcels of land are developed as single-family neighborhoods. At the same time, there is a lack of amenities and services for the Laredoans that live this far south. Many residents have to drive north for miles to meet simple daily needs.

While the parcels along Zapata Highway are zoned for commercial use, it is important to integrate residential, office, and other uses. Providing a mix of uses will help create a supply of retail customers within close proximity to stores. It will also help reduce the distance people need to travel to meet some of their daily needs, greatly reducing or often eliminating the need for travel by car for every trip.

Many of the parcels along the highways are large and lend themselves to large-format retail. This type of single-use development has its economic benefits, but also results in an unwalkable auto-dominant environment that increases congestion on the regional road network. The benefits of large-format uses can be maintained, while mitigating the drawbacks, by integrating them into a traditional street and block network. Large parking fields typically associated with large-format uses can be accommodated in several ways. In most cases, the parking can be located within the interior of a block adjacent to the use. Being located within a block structure also allows on-street parking to be used to meet some parking needs, as well as allowing for passenger loading zones and parking directly in front of retailers.

Cielito Lindo Blvd

Lamar Bruni Vergara
Middle School

Cuatro Vientos Blvd

St. Luke Blvd

Cielito Lindo
Lake

LEGEND
- New Building
- Parking
- Development Parcel
- Greenspace
- Plaza
- Tree
- Trail
- Aerial/Parcel Line

Northern Laredo

The area that is currently largely comprised of vacant parcels surrounding the intersection of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue is one of the most important opportunity sites for an infill neighborhood in northern Laredo.

This crossing of major thoroughfares connects the area to and makes it easily accessible from the entire city. International Boulevard begins at I-35 and extends east and then northeast to the very edge of the city. Springfield Avenue runs south through central Laredo and almost to the edge of the Rio Grande. There is an opportunity to also connect Springfield Avenue to the north, possibly all the way to Bob Bullock Loop.

The area is currently surrounded by predominantly single family house fabric, as well as a selection of relatively drive-to apartments, commercial complexes, and warehouses.

If planned and designed carefully, there is an opportunity to create a much needed truly urban, mixed-use, walkable center for northern Laredo at the crossing of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue.

The following pages contains some of the key design principles that should be applied.

LEGEND
- New Building
- Existing Building
- Parking
- Development Parcel
- Greenspace
- Plaza
- Tree
- Aerial/Parcel Line
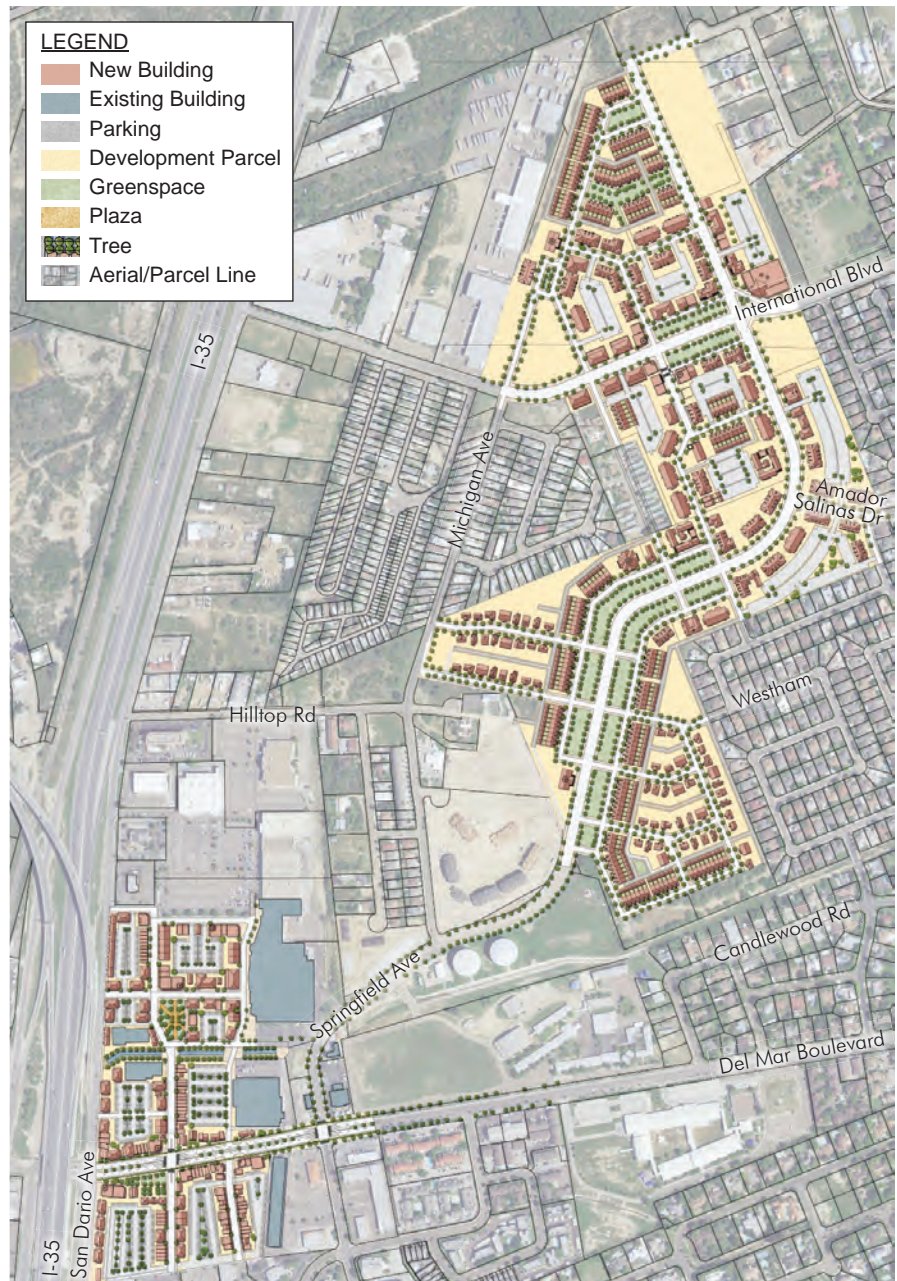
Connectivity

First, Springfield Avenue should connect through to International Boulevard from Del Mar Boulevard. Then the area should be traversed with an interconnected network of blocks and streets. This will distribute traffic, allowing roadways and intersections to be more compact. Connectivity will also shorten the distance for many trips, increasing the feasibility of walking and biking rather than only car use. Dead-ends and cul-de-sacs should be avoided wherever possible. Every opportunity should be taken to connect new streets to the street network of existing developed areas. Blocks should be compact - kept to a maximum average perimeter of approximately a quarter mile so they can be conveniently circumnavigated on foot within just five minutes or so.
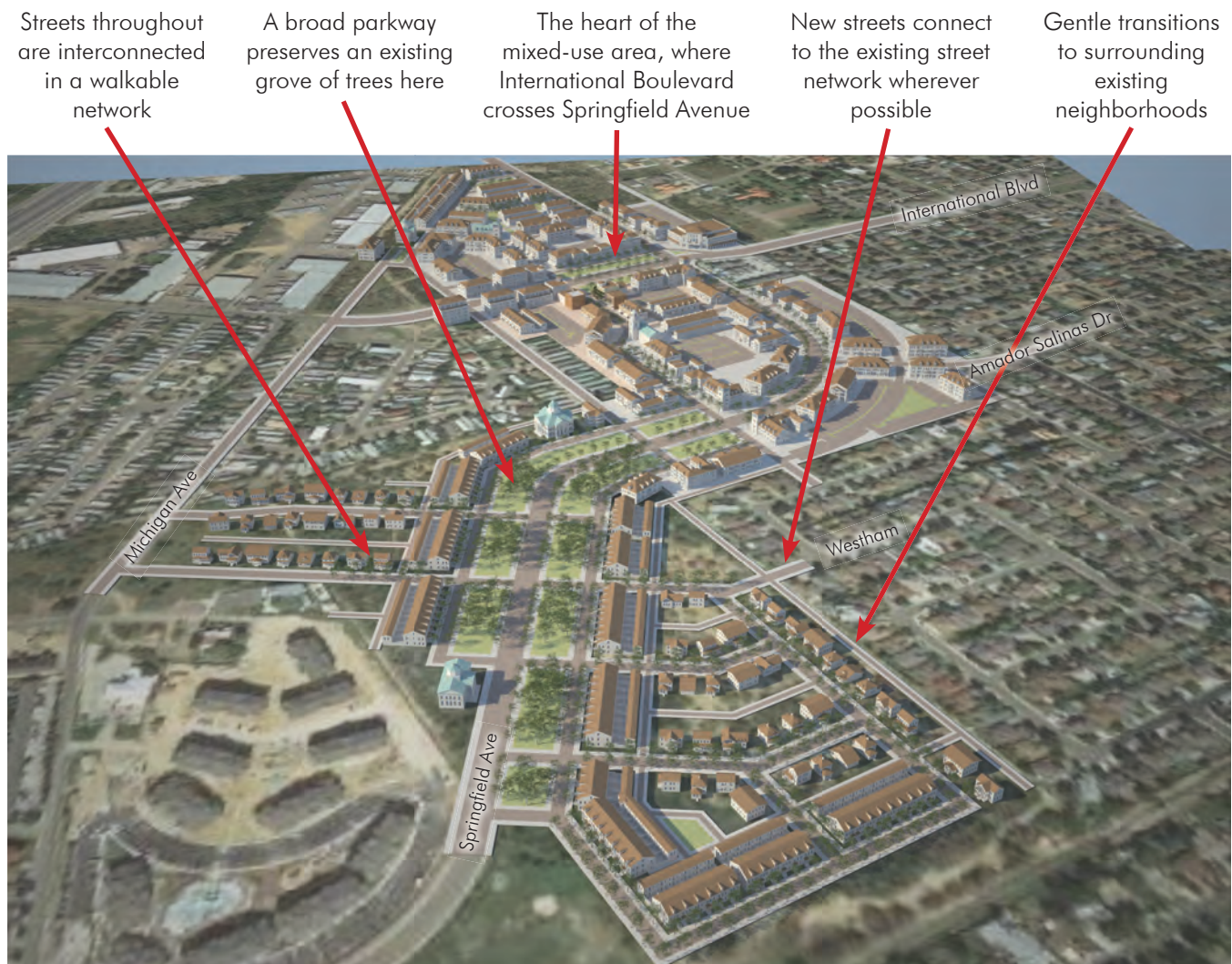
Streets throughout are interconnected in a walkable network

A broad parkway preserves an existing grove of trees here

The heart of the mixed-use area, where International Boulevard crosses Springfield Avenue

New streets connect to the existing street network wherever possible

Gentle transitions to surrounding existing neighborhoods

Aerial view of new mixed-use development at the intersection of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue.

Grammar of Building Fronts and Backs

The fronts of buildings facing public spaces (streets, parks, squares etc.) should be designed with plentiful doors and windows to provide "eyes on the street". Building fronts can also provide shelter to pedestrians with appurtenances such as awnings, colonnades, and porches.

Building backs, by contrast, should accommodate service functions such as loading, trash and parking, and should be concealed from view from public spaces.

Urban Character

This area should be a focus for a robust mixture of building types and uses. While transitions to surrounding suburban neighborhood fabric should be designed sensitively, this area should be urban in character and should function as a true mixed-use walkable center.

Awnings, colonnades and porches provide shelter for pedestrians

Broad sidewalks and street trees increase pedestrian comfort

Important sites are reserved for civic buildings and focal architecture

Plentiful doors and windows provide "eyes on the street"

Fronts of buildings face the public space

A main street near the heart of the mixed-use area.
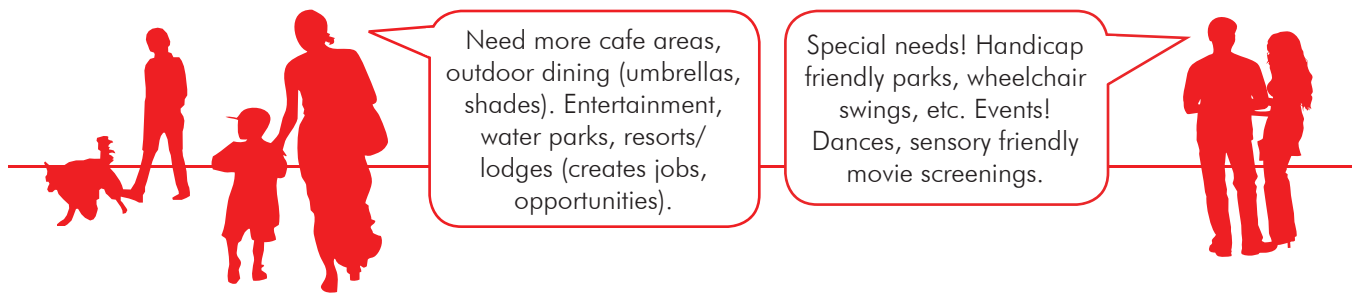
Older Neighborhood Improvements

A large portion of Laredo was developed with the same consistent block structure as the downtown. The small block size should be seen as an asset. Neighborhoods should be studied to see if additional park space can be added. Major connecting roads should also be examined for how they can better support the surrounding neighborhoods. A few examples of rethinking streets and infill development illustrate how small improvements can lead to larger investments and change the way a neighborhood is regarded.

Repurposing Clark Boulevard / Park Street

Clark Boulevard/Park Street is one of the main connectors that links east and west Laredo just north of the downtown core. It begins as Park Street by the railroad tracks in the west and crossing under I-35. It passes by public housing before crossing Zacate Creek and turning into Clark Boulevard. The street continues along neighborhoods until crossing Chacon Creek and ending at Bob Bullock Loop.

The typical street section is two lanes in each direction with the outside lane being wide enough to accommodate on-street parking. At some points the road widens enough to have a center turn lane. The sidewalks are often broken. Although through its length it is surrounded by a small block structure that connects it to the surrounding neighborhoods, it often has a disconnected and auto-oriented commercial areas.

Aerial View of Laredo's historic neighborhoods.

Recommendations for Future Improvements

The first step in the conversion of an auto-oriented, commercial strip into a walkable urban thoroughfare is to optimize the public right-of-way (ROW). Continuous sidewalks, shade from landscaping and buildings, and on-street parking are critical. The public ROW is the common element tying all the various properties along the corridor together. By reconfiguring the ROW first, public investment can be leveraged to catalyze private redevelopment investments.

The street should be rethought of as a commercial edge to the surrounding neighborhoods. The travel lanes could be reduced to one travel lane in each direction and parallel parking. After an initial look at traffic counts, except for the occasional red light cycle, Clark Boulevard could easily handle a diet and still remain a free flowing roadway Right sizing the road will leave enough space within the existing curb-

Intersection of Park Street and San Francisco Avenue - Existing Conditions

to-curb dimension to create a separated two-way cycle track. Crosswalks should also be added at each intersection. New buildings should be street-oriented and could have residential or offices on upper floors.

Park Street - proposed two-way cycle track and new street-oriented development.

Build Complete, Whole Public Spaces

As private redevelopment occurs on individual parcels, the emphasis should be on creating a series of complete urban spaces. Finished, whole public spaces are inviting places where people want to be. It is critical when building a street segment, square, or plaza that the buildings shaping all sides of the space be constructed in order for the full value of the space to be recognized.

Correctly Orient Building Fronts and Backs

When implementing a block and street network, be sure that the front presentation faces of buildings face streets, squares, and plazas. Service functions such as trash collection, loading, and parking should be located in back and be concealed mid-block. When this pattern is followed, public spaces, which occur between adjacent blocks, will be faced with high-quality façades and will therefore feel like inviting places to be.

A Rich Mix of Building Types and Uses

A variety of building types, sizes, and uses can be accommodated within the historic grid. Mixed-use buildings with retail ground floors can be placed facing important shopping spaces. This can transition to multi-family residential fabric, which can then transition smoothly to single-family detached residences.

Setting a Walkable Precedent

As the first parcels along a suburban corridor begin to redevelop into a walkable format, they serve as a seed for additional walkable redevelopment. Over time, one parcel at a time, an auto-oriented corridor can grow into a remarkably multimodal pedestrian and bike-friendly thoroughfare.

The retrofit of strip corridors into great walkable urban thoroughfares is a long-term process. Change often happens incrementally when a multitude of property owners are involved. A key to encouraging property owners to begin the process of retrofitting is to give

Version 1: This placita, or small plaza, configuration is ideal for corner sites. The two buildings are offset subtly to create a usable open space. An arched walkway provides pedestrian access from the rear parking lot, while connecting the buildings on their upper floors.

Version 2: This placita is formed by a "U"-shaped mixed-use building. A ground floor pedestrian passage through the building provides access to the rear parking area.

them a strategy to achieve a high quality public space without necessarily needing the participation of neighboring property owners. With careful attention to building and parking configuration, great public spaces can be achieved on remarkably small parcels.
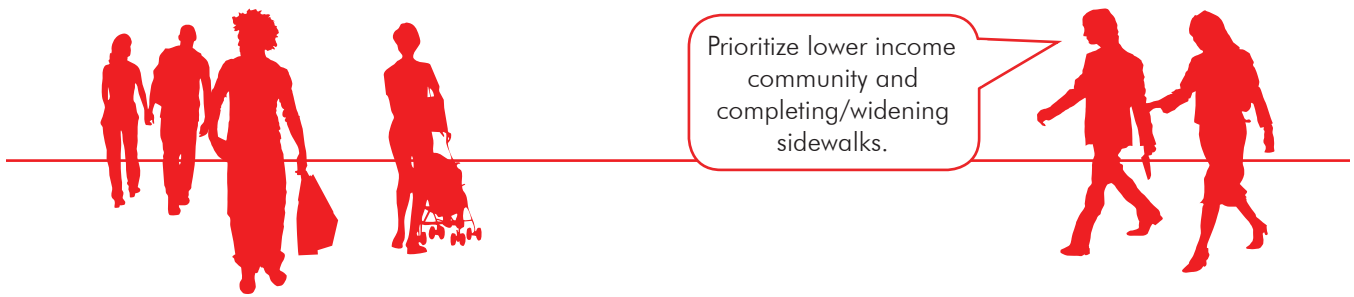
San Bernardo Avenue

San Bernardo Avenue runs in a north-south orientation and functions as a location for business. It was historically the corridor that ran from the border north to San Antonio and beyond until I-35 was constructed. The area was developed with a continuation of the small block pattern begun in the downtown. East-west streets connect this commercial corridor directly to the adjacent neighborhoods. The street grid should encourage people from the neighborhoods to walk to this corridor to visit businesses, but overtime the street has created a hostile environment to pedestrians.

Sidewalks are very narrow and located immediately adjacent to moving traffic. This combined with the lack of shade and street furniture discourages pedestrian traffic. Often paved parking lines the street. This has the affect of creating a parking lot linear to the streetscape which is less safe for pedestrians and discourages walking.

Buildings are typically set back a considerable distance from the street and are often surrounded by paved parking lots. Having a wide variety of setbacks and isolated buildings degrades the definition of public space and detracts from the quality of the urban fabric.

The "San Bernardo Avenue Reallocation and Restoration Project" (June 2008) establishes some good strategies for improving the pedestrian experience. These include: tree planters, parallel parking, encouraging the relocation of the building mass closer to the street, and the inclusion of human-scaled street lights and furniture. However, there are certain adjustments to this plan that would better utilize the right-of-way to enhance San Bernardo Avenue.

Recommendations for Future Improvements

There are several strategies to reorient development to be more pedestrian friendly and improve the quality of place along San Bernardo Avenue.

As noted in the "San Bernardo Avenue Renovation and Restoration Project," buildings should be located at their front property line with an uninterrupted wide sidewalk to better define the streetscape. Local examples from historic areas of Laredo suggest that a majority of these buildings should be in line with little variation in distance from the street. Specific attention should be given to existing architectural details, window opening sizes and relationships to the building, materials and colors in order to integrate new development with the historic context. These should also be done in conjunction with the community to help shape the desired identity for the neighborhood.

San Bernardo Avenue - Existing Conditions

Slight variations in the height of structures provide visual interest, and taller structures such as towers give a sense of place and motion down the avenue. Small green spaces along San Bernardo Avenue could be added to give visual breaks as well as locations for people to rest and gather.

The pedestrian realm could be better served by reallocating space within the right-of-way to widen the sidewalks and include options for bike lanes. Widening the sidewalks will allow for more generous tree planters where their shade can be enjoyed by pedestrians while also providing more space for pedestrians. This also has the added benefit of accommodating sidewalk café tables which would make walking more attractive by increasing the visual interest along the sidewalk and provide a destination.

Bicycle lanes would increase the pedestrian-friendly nature of San Bernardo Avenue by encouraging a multi-modal method of transportation and provide a lower cost option to safely get around. While a protected bike lane would be ideal, the tight curb to curb dimension only allows for a dedicated bike lane in traffic. Care should be taken to create a lane wide enough to prevent conflict with opening doors.

Buildings located along the edge of the sidewalk

Wider sidewalks, street furniture & cafés

Varying Building Heights

Parallel parking & bike lanes

Focal architecture

Architecture & landscaping provide shade & shape the street

San Bernardo Avenue - Recommendations for Future Improvements

Santa Ursula Avenue & Jefferson Street

The sparse connectivity from the east to west sides of I-35 results in an unfortunate physical division through the center of the city. As a result, the handful of streets that do connect receive a greater level of importance as gateways from one side of the city to the other.

Jefferson Street is one such thoroughfare. Presently, the entrance to the west side of the City of Laredo along Jefferson Street is physically inauspicious. The arrangement of development currently tends to be auto-oriented. There is a lack of application of fundamental principles of place-making such as the physical shaping of the street space and provision of well-connected and shaded sidewalks. Parking dominates the visual landscape.

Recommendations for Future Improvements

In the future, steps can be taken to incrementally improve the experience and sense of place for those passing through this important gateway.

First priority should be placed on connecting sidewalks and protecting them from moving vehicles with regularly spaced trees. This may also be done in conjunction with the addition of on-street parking and/or bike lanes.

Plan View

Jefferson Street from I-35 - Existing Conditions

Next, when configuring new development on parcels, attention should be given to shaping the public spaces with the fronts of buildings. This can be done in a variety of ways. Below is illustrated a new building placed up close to the street; the focal corner is emphasized with a prominent tower element. On the left is illustrated a building's primary entrance placed behind a forecourt / drop-off plaza. This forecourt is landscaped as a signature public space with an arrangement that leads people easily to the front door of the building.

New buildings should be articulated with plentiful doors and windows providing "eyes on the street". The scale of buildings – both height, and horizontal rhythm – should be calibrated with regard to reinforcing the identity the community desires for this part of Laredo.

Architectural details such as canopies, parapets, fenestration, and molding patterns can also help to reinforce the connection of new architecture to Laredo's distinct character.

New public space with benches, trees and fountain

Locally distinctive architecture

Street-oriented additions to existing buildings

Architecture and landscaping provide shade & shape the street

Focal architecture on key sites

High-visibility shop front windows
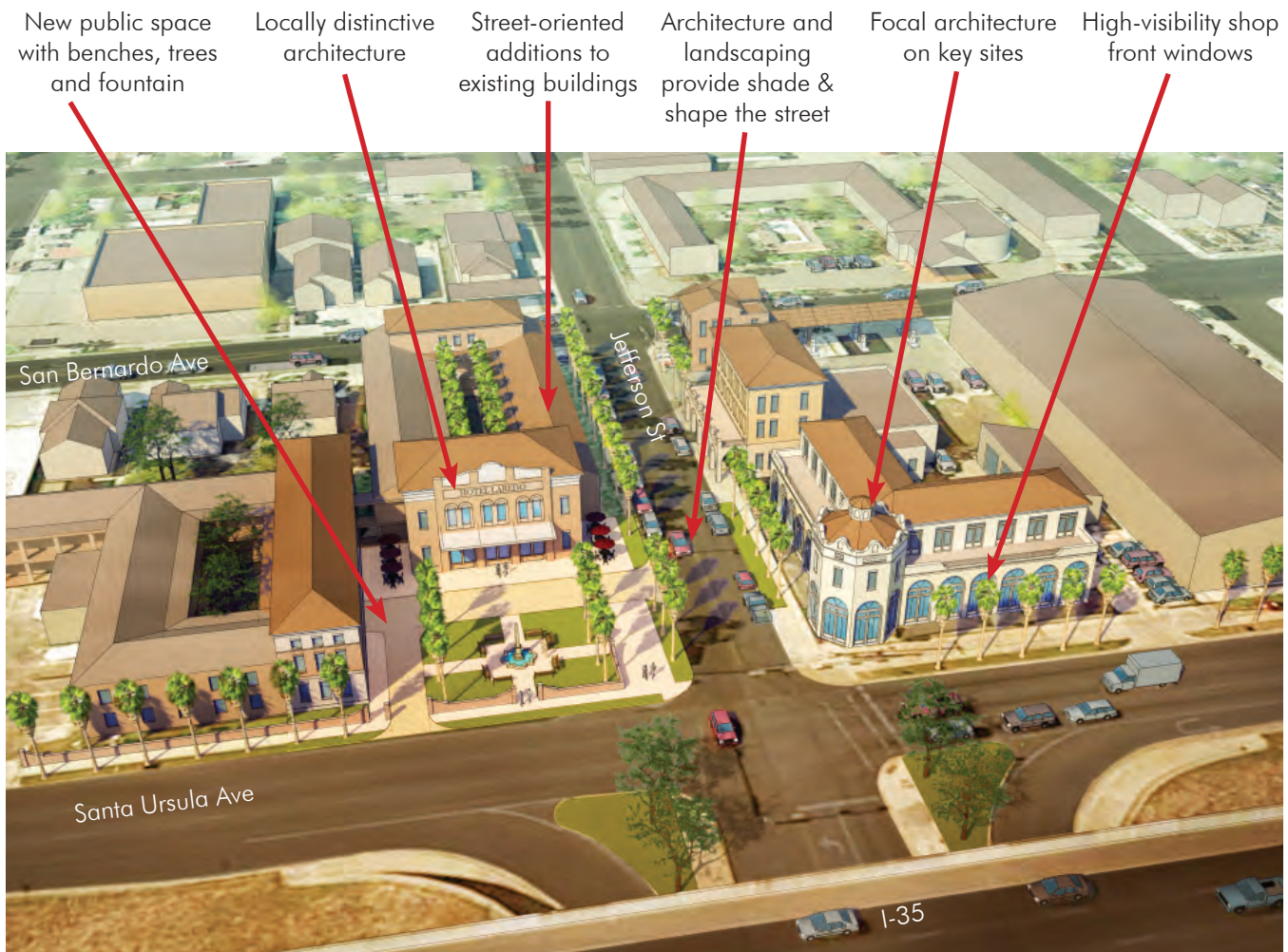
Jefferson Street from I-35 - Recommendations for Future Improvements

Connecting South Laredo

South Laredo is primarily residential, although there are several schools (both primary and secondary), as well as pockets isolated of commercial activity, particularly along Highway 83.

In many instances, the schools, medical services, and commercial uses, such as the H-E-B on Zapata Highway, are within a 1/4 mile or 1/2 mile from a majority of residences which would put them within walking distance. However, the existing conditions on most streets in South Laredo do not accommodate pedestrians or cyclists. For example, there are several streets that do not have continuous sidewalks or have existing sidewalks with minimal dimensions like Zacatecas Street, Louisiana Avenue, New York Avenue, Zapata Highway, among others. In addition, the amount of space in the right-of-way for cars is oversized on nearly all streets, and bicycle infrastructure does not exist. There are several opportunities to improve the public realm within the neighborhoods on local streets.

LEGEND
- New Building
- Parking
- Parcel
- Greenspace
- Plaza
- Tree
- Potential Bike Route
- Aerial/Parcel Line
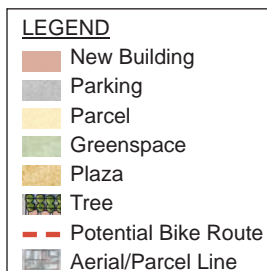
Aerial view of South Laredo

Zacatecas Street
Existing Conditions

Zacatecas Street, located in South Laredo, is representative of several neighborhood streets that connect residents to their daily destinations, such as areas of recreation, schools, and retail stores. There are several east-west streets, like Zacatecas Street, that need sidewalks on both sides of the street as well as street trees to define the pedestrian realm while also adding shade.

Based on community feedback, Zacatecas Street (and those that are similar in character) is envisioned to be improved, to become a truly multimodal space, with strategic infill that has an appropriate scale and character. Zacatecas Street is a priority since it serves multiple schools and recreational facilities in South Laredo.

Proposed Retrofit

The imagined transformation can evolve over time. Initial improvements should include a "road diet", narrowing the space for car travel, while also providing on-street parking for existing residents, schools and neighborhood serving commercial places. Street trees and wide sidewalks – with a minimum dimension of 10 feet by proposed commercial spaces and schools – will be necessary to provide shade and pedestrian comfort.
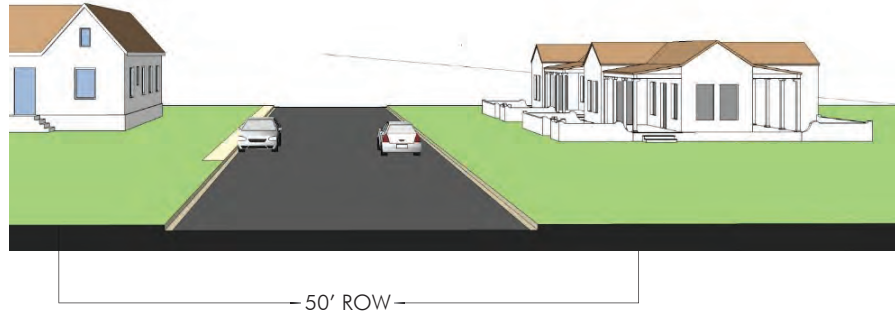
Existing Conditions on Zacatecas Street

Proposed Retrofit of Zacatecas Street

The idea to test the market for neighborhood-serving retail by beginning with a "pop-up" manner of retail which is temporary and does not require large amount of infrastructure or investment for it to occur in that particular location. Overtime, with improvements to the public realm, the temporary retail can transform to be a permanent store or shop. If mobile retail, like food trucks or the equivalent become successful in these neighborhoods, vacant parcels, may transform into small stores or convenience shops, that serve pedestrians, cyclists and students within the area.
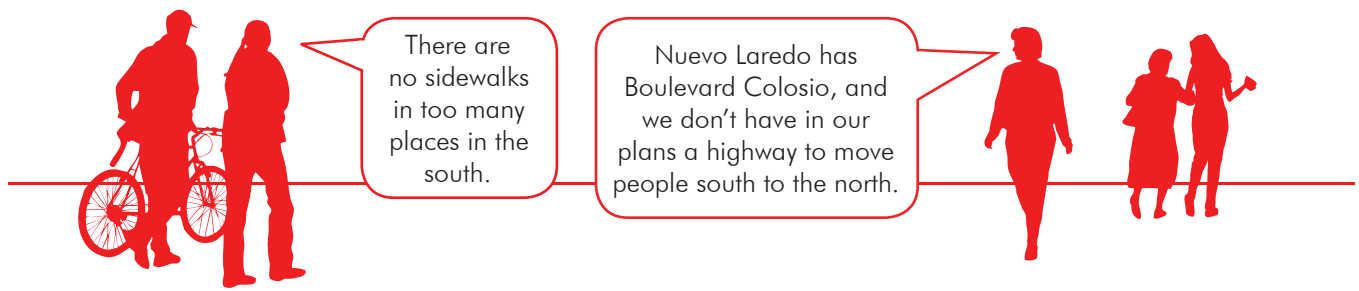
New York Avenue & Louisiana Avenue
Existing Conditions

The typical right-of-way for nearly all local streets is 50 feet in this part of the city. There are two north-south streets that are major connectors through South Laredo: New York Avenue and Louisiana Avenue. Both streets travel through the entire neighborhood, connecting to the southern most points at one end, and to downtown neighborhoods at the other end. Each of these streets should be a top priority for retrofitting the neighborhood, making it more accessible for walking and biking.

There are two proposed options for retrofitting these streets within the existing 50 foot right-of-way. The first option involves retrofitting both Louisiana Avenue and New York Avenue to become a one-way pair. Traditionally, one-way car traffic is not ideal; however, if a one-way pair is possible, and improves bike infrastructure as well as adds on-street parking are incorporated, one-way travel could make sense.

Existing view of Louisiana Avenue
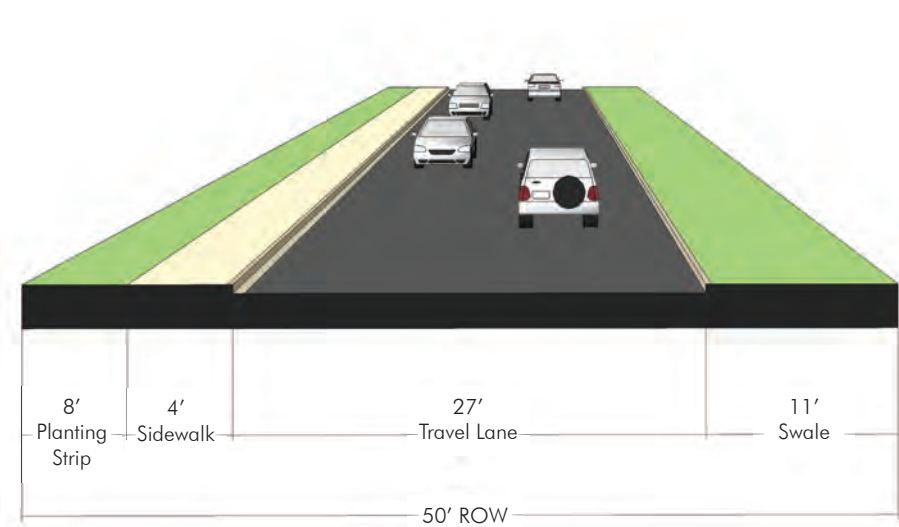
Typical Existing Condition for New York Avenue and Louisiana Avenue

Option 1

Both Louisiana Avenue and New York Avenue could be retrofitted to have a single ten foot travel lane with an eight feet for on-street parking that can serve area residences and neighborhood businesses. A separated and protected bike lane can be added traveling in the same direction as car traffic. The narrower travel lanes, on-street parking, and regularly spaced street trees are all traffic calming methods. Parallel parking is also a recognized traffic calming technique.

Option 2

In Option 2, either Louisiana Avenue or New York Avenue may be retrofitted. In this scenario, either street would be redesigned to incorporate narrower travel lanes, while maintaining two-way car travel. In addition, a separated two-way cycle track, can be accommodated on one side of the street. Like Option 1, wide sidewalks and regularly spaced street trees provide needed traffic calming. In this version, on-street parking would need to be accommodated on the east-west streets that cross either Louisiana Avenue or New York Avenue; this may be a viable solution since there are few commercial businesses along each street; the existing development is largely residential. The roadway can remain a major collector while still providing a safe comfortable space for bicyclists.

6'	4'	12'	8'	4'	6'	4'	6'
Sidewalk	Tree Well or Planting Strip	Travel Lane	Parking	Median	Cycle Track	Tree Well or Planting Strip	Sidewalk

50' ROW

Proposed Retrofit Option 1

5'	4'	10'	10'	2'	10'	4'	5'
Sidewalk	Tree Well or Planting Strip	Travel Lane	Travel Lane	Median	Cycle Track	Tree Well or Planting Strip	Sidewalk

50' ROW
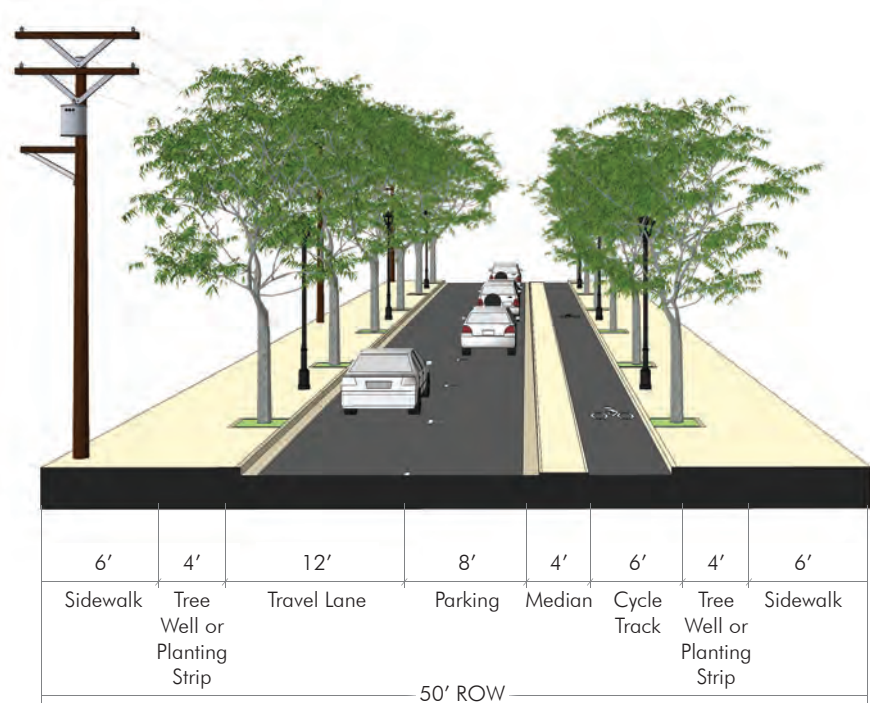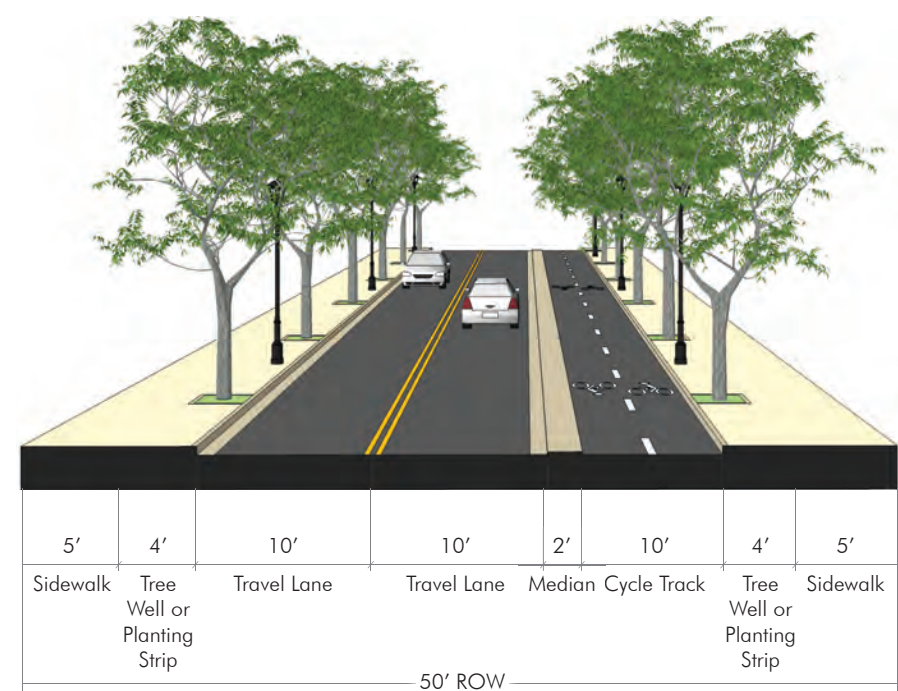
Proposed Retrofit Option 2

College Campuses & Their Role in Placemaking

In many cities across the country and around the world, college and university campuses have often served as catalysts for urban and suburban redevelopment. These tight pockets of learning bring together a unique and diverse group of young adults, faculty, and service industry professionals who benefit most from a tight sense of community and connection to the world around them. Not only do they represent an important market for local economies, but they also help to define what their city is today and what it can be in the future.

When college campuses successfully leverage their location and consciously invest in placemaking, through better architecture and urban design, they tend to become popular destinations. This phenomenon is not limited to large brand name universities either; it can happen at many different scales and types of schools.

At the smaller end of the spectrum, for example, there is quirky and eclectic Thayer Street in Providence, Rhode Island. Serving locals and students from Brown, RISD, Rhode Island College, and Johnson & Whales, Thayer Street hosts several independent shops and restaurants that embody the youthful and diverse character for which the neighborhood is known.

At a slightly larger scale there is Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Like Thayer Street, this triangular plaza is not directly affiliated with any one institution. It serves as a common space for students along with locals and tourists. Though today Harvard Square features more chain restaurants and stores than independent ones, it is still notable for its historic architecture and rich mix of uses. The square is surrounded by three to five story buildings which house apartments, offices, institutions, restaurants, and many kinds of stores.

Thayer Street, Providence, Rhode Island

Harvard Square, Boston, Massachusetts

Proposed Cincinnati Avenue, El Paso, Texas

Even in a border city like El Paso, it is possible to find places that exemplify this perfect marriage between campus and urban life. The University of Texas at El Paso has an enclave of urban activity along Cincinnati Avenue and Mesa Street that has numerous restaurants and businesses that cater to students as well as the surrounding neighborhoods. New student housing is also being developed.

As an isolated suburban commuter school, Laredo Community College and Texas A&M International University can learn a lot from other schools' example. Moving forward, they can begin working to create that unique synergy between campus and city that will not only bring the City of Laredo closer to the classroom, but also attract more students to enroll and can be used to help recruit faculty. Laredo is in the enviable position of having a remarkable number of institutions of higher learning for a city its size, including Texas A&M's local campus and both of Laredo Community College's campuses. Strengthening the connection between "town & gown" will provide both immediate and far-reaching benefits for both the schools and the surrounding community.

Students today are highly mobile and have many choices about where to go for higher education. Laredo must continually raise the bar on the quality of student life in order to continue to be their preferred choice in the future. Student life doesn't just include the experience while in classes, but should be viewed holistically. A close connection between a college or university campus and its surrounding neighborhood can provide a whole host of benefits that it is difficult for a campus alone to provide.

A strong connection between schools and their surrounding community is supportive of the mission to advance knowledge and learning. Universities and colleges are organized with departments focusing on diverse subjects. The reason for this close proximity is, historically, to encourage people of different backgrounds who may be experts in different disciplines to intermingle and connect with one another. These personal connections lead to the sharing of knowledge and cooperation which can lead to crucial breakthroughs in creative problem solving.

Entrance to Laredo Community College South Campus. The building is pushed back from the street and separated from the surrounding community.

Texas A&M International University
The University

Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) is part of the Texas A&M University System, one of the largest systems of higher education in the United States. TAMIU's 300 acre campus serves over 7,000 students. TAMIU is a major regional educational institution in Texas' fastest-growing demographic area and offers over 70 undergraduate, graduate, or doctoral degrees in the arts and sciences, business administration, and nursing in the four colleges of the University.

LEGEND
- New Building
- Parking
- Development Parcel
- Greenspace
- Plaza
- Tree
- Trail
- Rio Grande
- Aerial/Parcel Line

A new neighborhood around TAMIU campus.
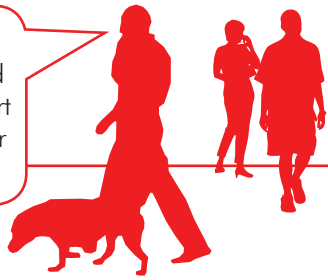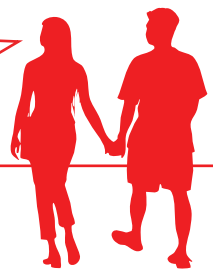
TAMIU's campus is located on the far eastern edge of Laredo, just northeast of Laredo International Airport. The campus is well-planned with buildings harmoniously arranged axially around a series of formal quadrangles.

Located beyond the edge of the urbanized area of Laredo, the campus is currently a drive-to only location that does not facilitate travel by foot or bicycle for students or faculty.

A New University Neighborhood

An opportunity exists to connect the TAMIU campus to the urban fabric of greater Laredo with new development. If this development takes the form of pedestrian-friendly, walkable neighborhood, it will open many possibilities for students and faculty to live within a pleasant walk or bike ride from the campus.

A new "University neighborhood" adjacent to TAMIU could provide a lively, walkable main street environment with cafés, coffee shops, stores and other places for those affiliated with the University to meet and mingle.

Street-oriented buildings and pedestian-friendly streets

A network of high quality public spaces connects the TAMIU campus to the city

TAMIU campus

Bob Bullock Loop configured as a grand urban boulevard
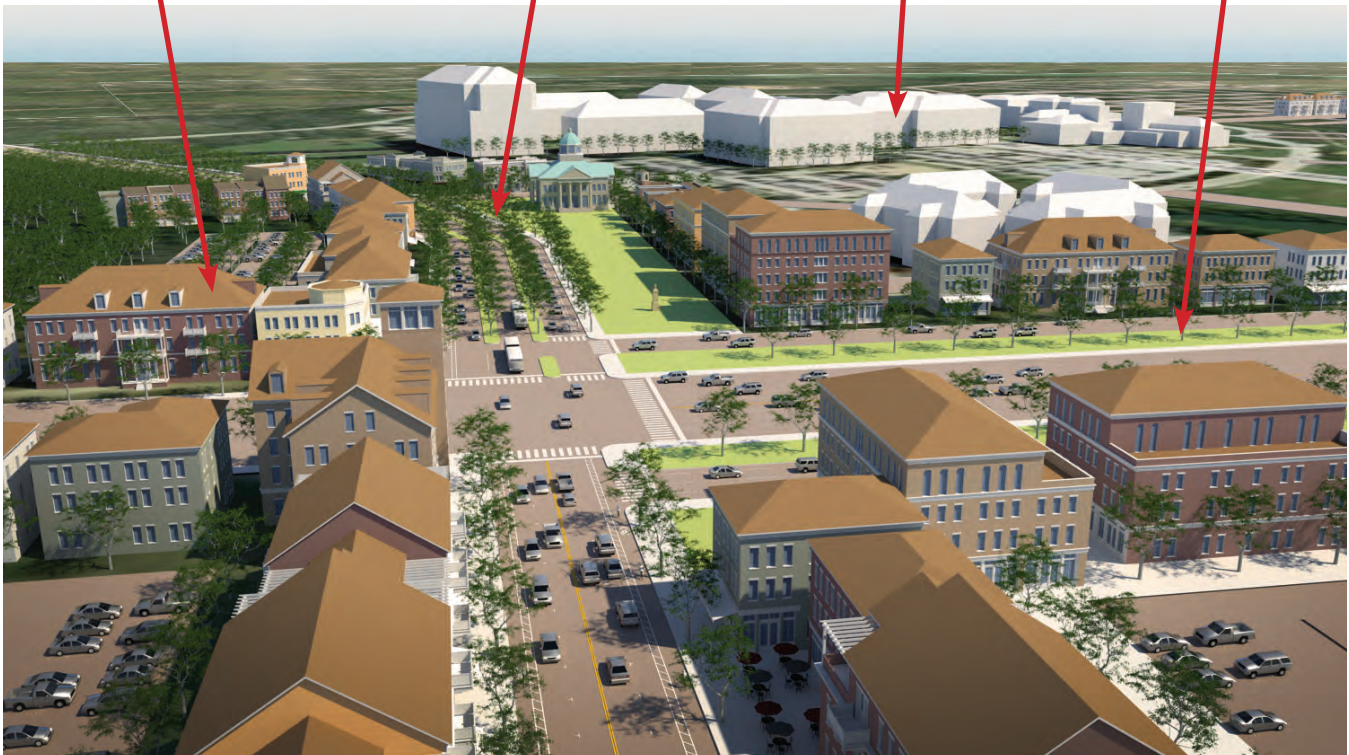
Looking east on University Boulevard toward the TAMIU campus, across a new University neighborhood.

A mixed-use University neighborhood could also provide a rich variety of residential options. The choices could include single family houses, attached rowhouses, small apartments, larger apartment buildings and even accessory dwelling units. A variety of residential unit types, sizes, and configurations will help to ensure that there are options for a broad variety of household types, age groups, and price points.

A mixed-use neighborhood adjacent to the University could also accommodate a variety of workplaces which could provide employment and business development opportunities for graduates. Such options could include incubator spaces, co-working spaces and other configurations supportive of aspiring business startup entrepreneurs. This could be a special district taking advantage of the adjacent university that specializes in researching and incubating Laredo's future industries.

Care should be taken that a new University neighborhood features the physical design details of walkable urbanism that are echoed throughout this plan.

Public spaces are shaped by the front presentation faces of buildings with plentiful doors and windows

Focal architecture helps identify uses of special importance

A variety of places to linger and mingle

Trees, awnings and colonnades provide shade crucial for pedestrian comfort

A walkable University neighborhood would connect TAMIU seamlessly with Laredo.

Laredo Community College South Campus

The physical environment of places of learning can either support or hamper creative interactions, depending upon their design.

Walkability is a fundamental prerequisite. If people are isolated within their individual automobiles, at the mercy of regional traffic patterns and congestion, the

| Architecture & landscaping provide shade | Building facades shape the public spaces | Mixed-use main street | Neighborhood square | Important sites for civic buildings |

Aerial view of new mixed-use development adjacent to the Laredo Community College South Campus.

likelihood of interaction and creative discourse developing is greatly reduced.

Basic walkability requires:

- An interconnected network of streets and public spaces that are sized and detailed for pedestrian comfort.
- Sidewalks should be wide and continuous. People should be screened from Laredo's intense sun by street trees or architecture that provides shade with awnings or colonnades.
- Places to walk should be shaped by buildings that present plentiful windows, doors and which are interesting and beautiful to look at.
- Uses should be mixed in a fine-grained way to increase convenience.

Competitive academic achievement and creative problem solving are time and energy-intensive activities. Those striving for excellence in their field of study will benefit greatly from having their daily needs met within a short distance. Places to live, study, shop, eat, and mingle should all be interspersed in a pleasant way.

Once basic walkability is achieved, places to support academic discourse should go even further in their design. Places should encourage people to linger. They should provide comfortable places for people to gather. "Third Places" – neither work nor home but places to just be, like a favorite coffee shop, should be plentiful. People should feel welcome to sit for a conversation, or to sit comfortably by themselves. A wealth of interesting focal points should also be included in the design of places for people to meet and mingle. These could be in the form of artwork, sculptures, fountains or interesting architectural features – anything which can serve as ice-breakers for initial conversations.

Traffic-calmed and bike-friendly

Architecture & landscaping provide shade

Comfortable places to sit and to stroll together

Coffee shops, restaurants & stores

Places where it's comfortable to linger and converse are crucial when developing near higher learning institutions.

Sprawl Retrofit

West Del Mar Boulevard

The I-35 exit of West Del Mar Boulevard is a classic example of a regional-scale single-use shopping destination. Important anchors, including Target and H-E-B, are housed in big box style one-story buildings surrounded by acres of surface parking lots. West Del Mar Boulevard is relegated to a single purpose: moving the highest number of vehicles in the shortest amount of time possible. Pedestrians and bicyclists are ignored, with the assumption that everyone traveling to these destinations will do so by car.

Existing Conditions

LEGEND
- New Building
- Parking
- Development Parcel
- Greenspace
- Plaza
- Tree
- Trail
- Rio Grande
- Aerial/Parcel Line

Plan View of Proposed Conditions

With the right incentives and land development regulations in place, auto-centric suburban shopping strips like these can be transformed over time into complete neighborhoods that provide all the elements of daily life within walking distance. Many people in Laredo drive to and past these destinations on a regular basis, but hardly anyone loves the area the way it is. What's missing is a sense of place and community. Currently, buildings and signs are close enough to create a sense of congestion, but too far apart to create a cohesive urban environment.

West Del Mar Boulevard will continue to be a street drivers use to get from one part of the city to another. However, creating a new boulevard that balances traffic capacity with safety, placemaking and local character can turn West Del Mar into a destination itself.

Over time, individual parcels can be redeveloped using a pattern of streets and blocks to create a complete urban neighborhood. A diverse mix of buildings, uses, and housing types are all built along an interconnected network of walkable streets. Public squares and green spaces are incorporated into the neighborhood, creating central gathering spaces for residents and visitors alike. Parking is provided behind buildings in mid-block locations, leaving the streets as immersive environments with narrow travel lanes, on-street parking, and buildings adjacent to large sidewalks to encourage interactions between people

Step 2: Street oriented buildings are developed along the edge of the H-E-B parking lot.

Step 3: A complete urban space with buildings on both sides of Del Mar Boulevard is created.

Step 1: Del Mar Boulevard is transformed into a tree lined boulevard.

Step 4: A new public square a the center of the neighborhood.

and accessibility. Just a few changes in the placement of buildings, parking, and streetscapes help to create the character of an urban neighborhood.

Existing anchor businesses can stay in their current configuration for as long as it is economically feasible, and can actually help anchor the neighborhood by bringing in traffic to smaller businesses and restaurants.

Step 5: Underutilized out-parcels are redeveloped with urban buildings.

West Del Mar Boulevard transformed as an urban street

Public square

Pedestrian and bike friendly streets

Target and H-E-B remain as anchors to the neighborhood

Multi-story mixed-use buildings with a mix of units

Step 6: Over time a complete neighborhood is created.

Clark Boulevard & Bob Bullock Loop

The intersection of Clark Boulevard and the Bob Bullock Loop is currently defined by wide roads and large commercial centers. A Walmart Supercenter sits on the northwest corner of the intersection, and a Target on the southeast corner. Conventional retail outparcels have followed. The following illustrative plan shows how careful planning, and development can begin to heal the edges of an auto-dependent environment to create a more walkable, mixed-use neighborhood while still integrating big box regional retailers which are an economic reality. The sample plan area shows how new development is designed around an interconnected network of walkable streets with a series of public spaces that form the heart of the community.

A successful transformation of an auto-dependent suburban center requires a rethinking of the role of streets in the public realm. New streets in suburban areas are often designed primarily as a way to move vehicular traffic. Partly as a result of the design of these streets, development along major corridors tends to turn inward, which further reduces the quality of the streets.

All streets, including major thoroughfares, should create a pedestrian and bike friendly public realm, and new buildings should face the streets with doors and windows. Parking lots should be concealed mid-block to create a continuos building frontage along the street. Setbacks should be rethought to encourage, or even require buildings to be built along the street edge, while at the same time the streets would need to be designed as walkable streets.

LEGEND
- New Building
- Existing Building
- Parking
- Development Parcel
- Greenspace
- Plaza
- Tree
- Aerial/Parcel Line

When new neighborhoods are built, such as the one envisioned on the northeast corner of the intersection of Clark Boulevard and Bob Bullock Loop, they should be designed around an interconnected network of blocks and streets. Each neighborhood can include a diverse range of buildings and unit types, including mixed-use buildings, apartment buildings, attached rowhouses, duplexes and single family homes. Special sites are reserved for civic purposes at prominent locations in the neighborhoods, and the tradition of public plazas is revived.

Regional shopping centers should also be designed as urban neighborhoods, with a mix of uses facing walkable streets and inviting public spaces. On-street parking is incorporated into public streets, while parking lots are moved to the back of buildings in mid-block locations. Big box stores can still exist in these areas, but they can fit into a block structure rather than within a vast exposed parking field.

Pedestrian-friendly streets are lined by shade trees and on-street parking

A central square forms the heart of the mixed-use district

Multistory mixed-use buildings shape the edges of the public realm

A slow-speed side access lane with on-street parking runs parallel to the Bob Bullock Loop

Aerial view of new mixed-use development at the intersection of International Boulevard and Springfield Avenue.

Urban Agriculture

Community Gardens & Urban Forestry

Throughout the *Viva Laredo* process, the concept of urban gardening in Laredo has been a popular request as citizens imagine the future of their city. An urban garden can be successful in a variety of contexts and locations, including places like downtown and on vacant parcels in existing neighborhoods, like those that are found in south Laredo. Urban gardens can also become the center of new neighborhoods, while helping to maintain both food production and continued growth within the built environment.

The multiple benefits of local food production, particularly community gardens, include physical activity, strengthening friendships and social bonds, food security, and the ability to eliminate the use of pesticides. With local control of food production, organic farming techniques can be employed, resulting in nutritious and affordable food.

In locating neighborhood gardens, an ideal place for this type of community space is often near an existing and popular institution, such as a church or a school. If located adjacent to or even on school grounds, educational courses could use the produce to teach cooking skills, as well as lifelong gardening skills. In addition, if there is extra crop, produce from the garden can be sold at a local farmers market, providing income to the institution that tends the garden. An urban garden or an urban forest also has the benefit of adding beauty to the neighborhood where it is located.

Urban forestry, or harvesting trees for use on city streets and in city parks, is another agricultural use that may occur within the city. For example, vacant or condemned parcels within existing neighborhoods could be split to include space for both gardening and harvesting mature trees.

Cities of all sizes throughout the US are implementing urban gardens.

Neighborhood gardening can be a community-wide activity for all ages. There are several locations throughout the neighborhoods in Laredo, that would be ideal for urban gardens or urban forestry.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Create places and destinations for people by improving the public realm and focusing on the comfort and interest of the pedestrian, cyclist, and transit user.

Urban Design Best Practices

Goal 3.1: Coordinate land use and transportation policies while making Laredo more walkable, bikable and memorable.

Policy 3.1.1: Determine desired land use, including a varied mix of uses; then design the transportation infrastructure that supports the desired land use.

Policy 3.1.2: Enhance the pedestrian environment. In existing neighborhoods, streets can be retrofitted with sidewalk installation, tree planting and interesting building facades.

Policy 3.1.3: Increase the density and incentivize a mix of uses at key nodes of activity, including downtown, the universities and new development sites.

Policy 3.1.4: Implement transit connections between major destinations, including downtown, the new mall, the universities and the neighborhoods in South and North Laredo.

Policy 3.1.5: New development will consist of compact blocks and lots, representative of the historic block pattern in Laredo; this will promote maximum connectivity and create better walkability.

Policy 3.1.6: Development is encouraged on brownfields if site contamination can be remedied.

Policy 3.1.7: Development is encouraged along existing or planned bicycle networks where additional segments and/or secure bicycle storage can be added to the network.

Policy 3.1.8: Development is discouraged on sites or portions of sites within the 100-year or moderate-risk floodplains as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Where development must occur within floodplains, development should be located on previously developed floodplains or in non-conveyance areas without flooding potential.

Goal 3.2: Update the city's zoning code to implement the plan vision.

Policy 3.2.1: Adjust zoning ordinances to promote mixed-use development wherever desired.

Policy 3.2.2: The city should develop a method of streamlining the process and guaranteed approvals such as permit administrative approvals when development is in accordance with the community's vision as illustrated in the small area plans and urban design best practices.

Goal 3.3: Make Laredo Planning and Zoning Department staff experts in best practices for community development.

Policy 3.3.1: Require all Planning and Zoning Department staff to become accredited in New Urbanism best practices through the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNUA).

Policy 3.3.2: Require all Planning and Zoning Department staff to become certified in LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED ND).

Neighborhood Patterns
Goal 3.4: The City of Laredo should change its growth pattern away from homogeneous land uses and return to a pattern of compact well-connected mixed-use neighborhoods.

Policy 3.4.1: City officials should consider the following neighborhood patterns when evaluating rezoning or development requests and also when locating and designing development on public land, seeking to achieve voluntary compliance with as many patterns as practical. While the land development code and State law ultimately dictate what shall be approved by the city, all design approaches that could increase the function, aesthetics, sustainability, marketability, and livability of projects should be discussed as part of the land development process. A variety of approaches to development should be added and permitted by the code.

The illustrative plans in various elements of *Viva Laredo* demonstrate the application of these design principles to a variety of sites within Laredo.

Policy 3.4.2: The design of new neighborhoods and additions to existing neighborhoods should strive for a mix of housing types to create neighborhoods that accommodate diverse ages and incomes and allow residents to trade up, downsize, or create multi-generational households without being forced to leave the neighborhood. Housing types include both small and large single-family detached homes, duplexes, townhouses, multi-family buildings, live-work units, and accessory dwelling units, and include both rental apartments and units that can be owned by their occupants.

Policy 3.4.3: Neighborhoods should strive to have a clearly defined center and edges that vary in intensity and character.

a. Each new neighborhood should have a primary civic space such as a square or green near its physical center.

b. Commercial and office uses at intersections should have direct paths to greens and squares.

c. When edges of neighborhoods lie along major roads, smaller lots can be placed facing the arterial road to accommodate attached dwelling units.

d. When edges of neighborhoods lie along natural features, larger lots can be placed there to increase the variety of the neighborhood's housing.

Policy 3.4.4: The design of new neighborhoods and additions to existing neighborhoods should strive for a balance of housing, jobs, shopping, recreation, and civic uses to avoid unnecessary travel and reduce infrastructure and public services costs.

a. Ideally, 50% of new residences will be within a ¼-mile radius of at least 4 diverse uses such as community-serving retail, services, civic/community facilities, and food retail.

b. New neighborhoods of 300 units or more on an arterial road should provide a viable location for a corner store.

c. Home offices and accessory dwelling units should be allowed on every lot.

Building Types & Placement
Goal 3.5: New development should incorporate local building types and public spaces, including the historic plazas found throughout historic Laredo.

Policy 3.5.1: New buildings should create an interesting street frontage, with parking hidden from view, typically located in the rear of the building or below ground. Setbacks requirements should be changed such that this is encouraged.

Policy 3.5.2: The relationship between the fronts and the backs of buildings should ensure that public spaces have natural surveillance; the fronts of buildings should face the primary street adjacent to the property.

    a. Fronts of buildings should face the fronts of other buildings or the sides where necessary; fronts should never face the backs of other buildings.

Policy 3.5.3: Large-format buildings and uses should be developed within a traditional street and block network. Large parking fields typically associated with large-format uses can be located within the interior of a block structure adjacent to the use. The block and street network will allow on-street parking to be used to meet some parking needs, as well as allowing for passenger loading zones and parking directly in front of retailers.

Policy 3.5.4: Local building types that have proven to react well to local climatic and weather patterns will be encouraged.

Policy 3.5.5: The historic plazas should be incorporated into new and retrofitted neighborhoods; plazas and smaller green spaces should be used to accommodate additional uses that supplement the larger public spaces.

Policy 3.5.6: Residences may face minor and major arterials to avoid presenting blank walls. Alleys can be provided by either the city or on private land to create a vehicular entry to the lots instead of vehicular access directly from arterials. Alleys should be either paved or gravel.

Policy 3.5.7: Semi-public building elements such as porches and balconies add to the congeniality of neighborhoods and should be encouraged within front setbacks. This applies to porches, stoops, bay windows, and balconies on residences.

Policy 3.5.8: Outdoor dining should be allowed on city sidewalks provided that chairs and tables are placed in a manner that allows a minimum three foot clear path for pedestrian movement.

Parking
Goal 3.6*: Incorporate adequate parking into new development while providing infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation, bike parking, transit or trolley access, and comfortable pedestrian access.

Policy 3.6.1: Parking should be located so that it is hidden from the street, either located behind the building or screened from view.

Policy 3.6.2: The careless placement of off-street surface parking lots can blight surrounding properties and public spaces. This blight can be avoided by using the following principles:

    a. Non-residential and multi-family buildings should have their surface parking lots placed at the side or rear of buildings.

    b. Buildings should have no more than 20% of their lots devoted to surface parking lots, with no individual lot larger than 2 acres.

    c. Parking lots should be designed for pedestrians as well as cars with pathways with double alleys of trees.

Policy 3.6.3: In non-residential and mixed-use developments, businesses and other community services on the ground floor should be strongly encouraged to be accessible directly from sidewalks along a public space, such as a street, square, *paseo*, or plaza, instead of accessible from a parking lot.

Policy 3.6.4: A majority of the principal entries to buildings should face public spaces such as streets, squares, parks, or plazas instead of facing parking lots.

Policy 3.6.5: New developments should place buildings close to streets using the following principles:

    a. At least 80% of the total linear feet of building façades should be within 25 feet of the sidewalk, and at least 50% of mixed-use and non-residential building façades should be within one foot of the sidewalk.

    b. Buildings should have functional entries an average of every 75 feet along non-residential or mixed-use buildings or blocks.

Policy 3.6.6: Encourage a reduction in the percentage of building walls that face streets that contain garage doors or service bays. A maximum of 20% of front walls containing garage doors or service bays should be encouraged.

Policy 3.6.7: Awnings, balconies, arcades, galleries, and colonnades (privately maintained) should be allowed to extend into the right-of-way of city streets provided that adequate clearances are provided for pedestrian movement and for right-of-way maintenance.

Street Design Principles

Goal 3.7: The City of Laredo wishes to create complete networks of multimodal streets with ample shaded sidewalks and frequent on-street parking.

Policy 3.7.1: Street networks should contain multiple paths for vehicular movement and should be designed using the following principles:

    a. New neighborhood streets should connect to the existing street network in all adjoining areas when practical.

    b. Bend new streets with restraint. Bending streets creates deflected vistas, but exaggerated curves are disorienting and difficult to connect to adjoining street networks.

    c. Challenging intersections can calm traffic, such as pinwheel intersections, small roundabouts, triangular intersections, and staggered intersections.

    d. Dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs should be allowed only when required by topographic or geographic constraints or when conditions on adjoining property prevent existing or future connections.

Policy 3.7.2: Street networks should be designed using the following principles:

    a. Limit average block perimeters in new development to no more than 2,000 linear feet.

    b. Provide rear alleys for access to mid-block parking spaces, to provide an out-of-sight location for utility equipment, and to allow the fronts of buildings to be free of garage doors and parked cars.

    c. Limit driveway crossings to no more than 10% of the length of sidewalks.

Policy 3.7.3: Street spaces should be designed to create prominent public spaces with a comfortable sense of enclosure using the following principles:

    a. Provide street trees on both sides on at least 60% of streets, between the travel lanes and sidewalk, at intervals averaging no more than 40 feet.

    b. Provide 90% of streets with sidewalks at least 8' wide on retail or mixed-use streets and 5' wide on all other streets.

    c. Provide on-street parking on at least 70% of both sides of all new and existing streets.

Policy 3.7.4: Neighborhood streets should be designed for pedestrians and bicyclists by moderating the speed of motorized vehicles:

    a. 75% of new residential-only streets should be designed for a maximum target speed of 20 mph.

Civic Space Principles

Goal 3.8: The City of Laredo wishes to supplement its neighborhood and regional park system with small civic spaces that are accessible to all citizens and are memorably placed in all new neighborhoods and mixed-use developments.

Policy 3.8.1: Civic buildings achieve prominence by strategic placement at the ends of streets, across greens, or at the center of greens, and by having grander proportions and materials than surrounding buildings. Civic buildings should be embedded within communities or on the edges of communities.

Policy 3.8.2: Civic spaces are outdoor gathering places for public use. Civic spaces can be defined by a combination of physical factors including their size, intended use, landscaping, and the character of their edges. New neighborhoods should be designed around optimal locations for civic spaces. Civic spaces should not be designated in awkward locations on residual tracts of land that are left over during the subdivision process.

    a. A civic space, such as a square, park, or plaza of at least 1/6 acre in size, should be within a ¼-mile radius of 90% of dwelling units and non-residential building entrances.

    b. Scale civic spaces comfortably for users, avoiding civic spaces that are too large.

    c. Enclose most civic spaces with building fronts to create a comfortable sense of enclosure; 75% of the perimeter of civic spaces should have a minimum building height to street width ratio of 1:6 (a minimum of one foot of building height for every 6 feet of width of the street that circumscribes the civic space).

Policy 3.8.3: Encourage, or even incentivize home owner's associations (HOA's) to purchase lots from developers for parks.

Policy 3.8.4: Require new developments to provide adequate park space.

Policy 3.8.5: Make a Parks Ordinance addressing the proposed Civic Space Principles.

Lighting, Signs & Utilities

Goal 3.8: Streets and spaces are safe and inviting with adequate lighting and clear signage.

Policy 3.9.1: Adequate and pedestrian-scaled lighting should line each street in Laredo.

Policy 3.9.2: Utilities should not be located on the sidewalk, allowing clear access for pedestrians between destinations.

Policy 3.9.3: Install clear signage throughout Laredo, directing residents and tourists to downtown, parking facilities, cultural destinations, and natural environments.

Mobility

4

movible *adj* : movable

movida *nf* : move (in a game)

móvil[1] *adj* : mobile

móvil[2] *nm* **1** MOTIVO : motive **2** : mobile

movilidad *nf* : mobility

movilizar {21} *vt* : to mobilize — **movilización** *nf*

movimiento *nm* : movement, motion ⟨movimiento del cuerpo : bodily movement⟩ ⟨movimiento sindicalista : labor movement⟩

mozo[1], **-za** *adj* : young. youthful

mozo[2], **-za** *n* **1** JOVEN : young man *m*. young woman *f*. youth **2** : helper. servant **3** *Arg, Chile. Col. Peru* : waiter *m*. waitress *f*

mucamo, -ma *n* : servant, maid *f*

muchacha *nf* : maid

muchacho, -cha *n* **1** : kid, boy *m*, girl *f* **2** JOVEN : young man *m*, young woman *f*

muchedumbre *nf* MULTITUD : crowd, multitude

Image Credit: Karen Gaytán

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Introduction

Transportation systems play a vital role in the economic growth and competitiveness of a city. A highly effective transportation system has the ability to bring a community together, remove barriers and promote social inclusion, enhance quality of life, and protect the environment. Likewise, a poorly planned transportation system can often result in physical breakdowns within the fabric of the community, reinforce social exclusion, and elevate stress levels.

Often the most visible and frequently cited issues as related to transportation are issues related to traffic congestion. High levels of congestion create significant economic impacts, especially in a trade dependent city that is heavily reliant on the free flowing movement of people, goods, and services across its US-Mexico border.

Commercial vehicle traffic due to international trade activity is a vital issue for the region and among the highest traffic and economic generators for the City. In addition, other major traffic generators such as public facilities, hospitals, educational institutions, shopping centers, and other special transportation hubs place special demands on the transportation system. Identifying and improving these regional traffic generators are important to plan effectively.

Transportation congestion can also be responsible for public health issues in cities due to air pollution (acidification, smog), noise, greenhouse gas emissions (ozone), and road accidents. Furthermore, a transportation system can be indirectly responsible for contributing to many non-communicable diseases like diabetes, stroke, and cardiovascular disease—all of which are attributed to inactive lifestyles.

Reducing traffic congestion by providing accessible, pedestrian-friendly streets with high connectivity can be catalysts for economic growth, improved convenience, reduced stress levels for drivers and pedestrians, reduced traffic accidents, reduced travel times, increased work productivity, and reduced air pollution. Therefore, a smartly planned transportation
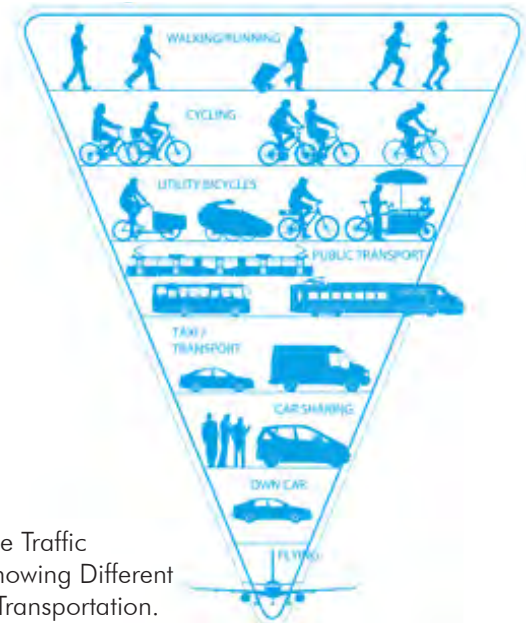
The Reverse Traffic Pyramid Showing Different Modes of Transportation.
Source: Bicycle Innovation Lab

system is one that places due consideration to social, economic, environmental, and cultural elements which will improve the City's prosperity and well-being.

This Mobility chapter presents an evaluation of the multi-modal transportation system's mobility, accessibility, and connectivity within the City of Laredo including the following assets:

- Road networks including roads, highways, and bridges;
- Alternative travel modes including bicycle, pedestrian facilities, public transportation, or other services for populations without automobiles;
- Parking concerns including areas with either too much or too little parking or inadequate parking facilities;
- Railroads, trucking, port facilities, and airports; and
- Transportation policies, programs, and projects and their alignment with local land use development policies.

Road System

The City was originally laid out in a street grid pattern modeled after the Spanish plaza settlement system. Laredo has one of the largest and most consistent block and street network in the country. However, transportation policy and development trends have changed overtime with more recent development following a typical more suburban pattern.

Roadway expansion projects and the establishment of the Interstate Highway system resulted in the growth of passenger automobile and truck freight traffic which highly impacted the transportation and economic landscape of the City. Consequently, much like the rest of the country, Laredo's transportation system is dominated by single-occupancy automobile trips, making the City an automobile-dependent City.

In the 1980s and continuing into the early 2000s, Laredo experienced a population growth much larger than the national average ranging from 31.2% to 43.7%, annually. Nationally, for the same period average population growth ranged from 9.8% to 13.2%. This explosion in population led to significant economic development and further construction of major infrastructure improvement and expansion projects including two international bridges and the widening and extension of Bob Bullock Loop.
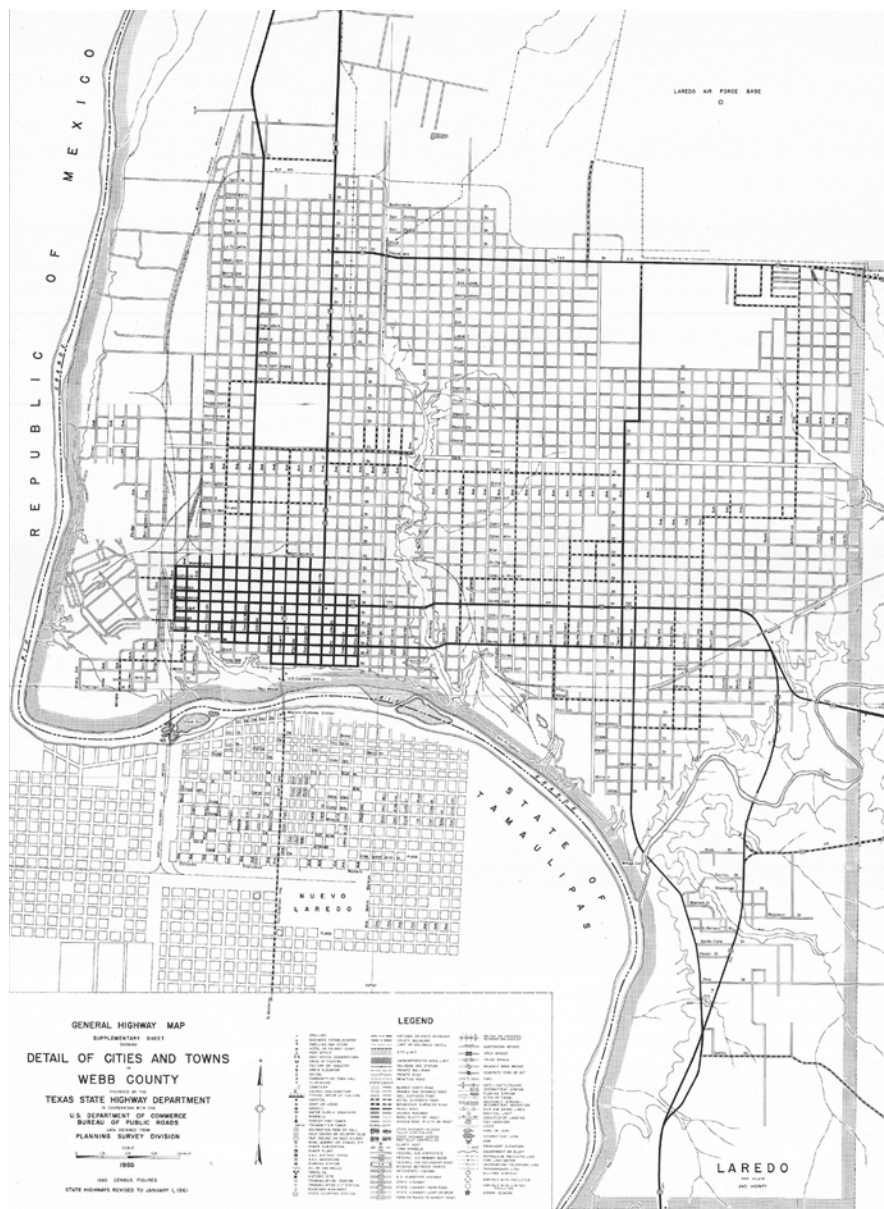
1961 Map of the City of Laredo

Large residential developments were constructed along the northern areas of the City, which moved away from the traditionally grid system familiar to the City up until the 1960s.

In 2000, the completion of the World Trade Bridge (Bridge IV) provided a huge benefit to the City by diverting commercial truck traffic off of I-35 near the Downtown area, shifting it to the northwest side of the City. The resulting reduction in traffic congestion supported the efficient movement of goods and fostered the creation of a centralized industrial district. Today, the industrial district located near Mines Road is heavily congested and is in need of relief.

In 2011, Bob Bullock Loop was extended for a length of seven miles from State Highway 359 south to Mangana-Hein Road, essentially completing the inner loop from I-35 eastward and around the City to the southern side.

Existing Roadway System

The City's road network consists primarily of a grid pattern street system within the incorporated boundaries of Laredo. In recent years, developments have expanded throughout the region with more curvilinear street patterns. These streets are mainly two-lane collector and local access roads with speed limits of 30 miles per hour.

The City maintains over 700 lane miles of street surface. Maintenance of these City streets and associated infrastructure is critical for the roadway system to function efficiently. As the City continues to develop, an ever greater demand is placed on the street infrastructure system to meet the needs of a growing population. Common practices to meet these demands are for the City to maintain its aging street infrastructure, widening streets to improve capacity, new roads, and improved traffic signaling. Each of these practices places additional burdens on the City by requiring commitments of additional resources and greater funding needs.

In order to help address these issues, the City's Long Range Thoroughfare Plan provides the transportation standards for the street system within the City and its extraterritorial jurisdiction.

For street design standards, the City has adopted the design standards set by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets. City ordinances require typical local streets to be designed to a standard 50 foot right-of-way width with a 30 foot paving section. Local Collectors are required to contain a 60 foot right-of-way width with a 40 foot paving section. Pavement length of service life are designed to meet a minimum of 20 years. Pavement design standards follow the AASHTO Guide for Design of Pavement Structures.

Blocks and street lengths are currently limited to a maximum length of 1,200 feet and not less than 300 feet. The maximum allowable continuous street length is 1,000 feet for streets classified as local residential and 1,200 feet for streets classified as local collector with frontage and street intersection layouts are required to be laid out at right angles.

These standards only account for vehicular travel and do not consider the implications that land use or alternative modes of travel may have on the system. The system that has been created in Laredo is like other national systems in that pedestrian and crash fatalities are still significant as the movement of vehicles quickly seems paramount over other concerns.
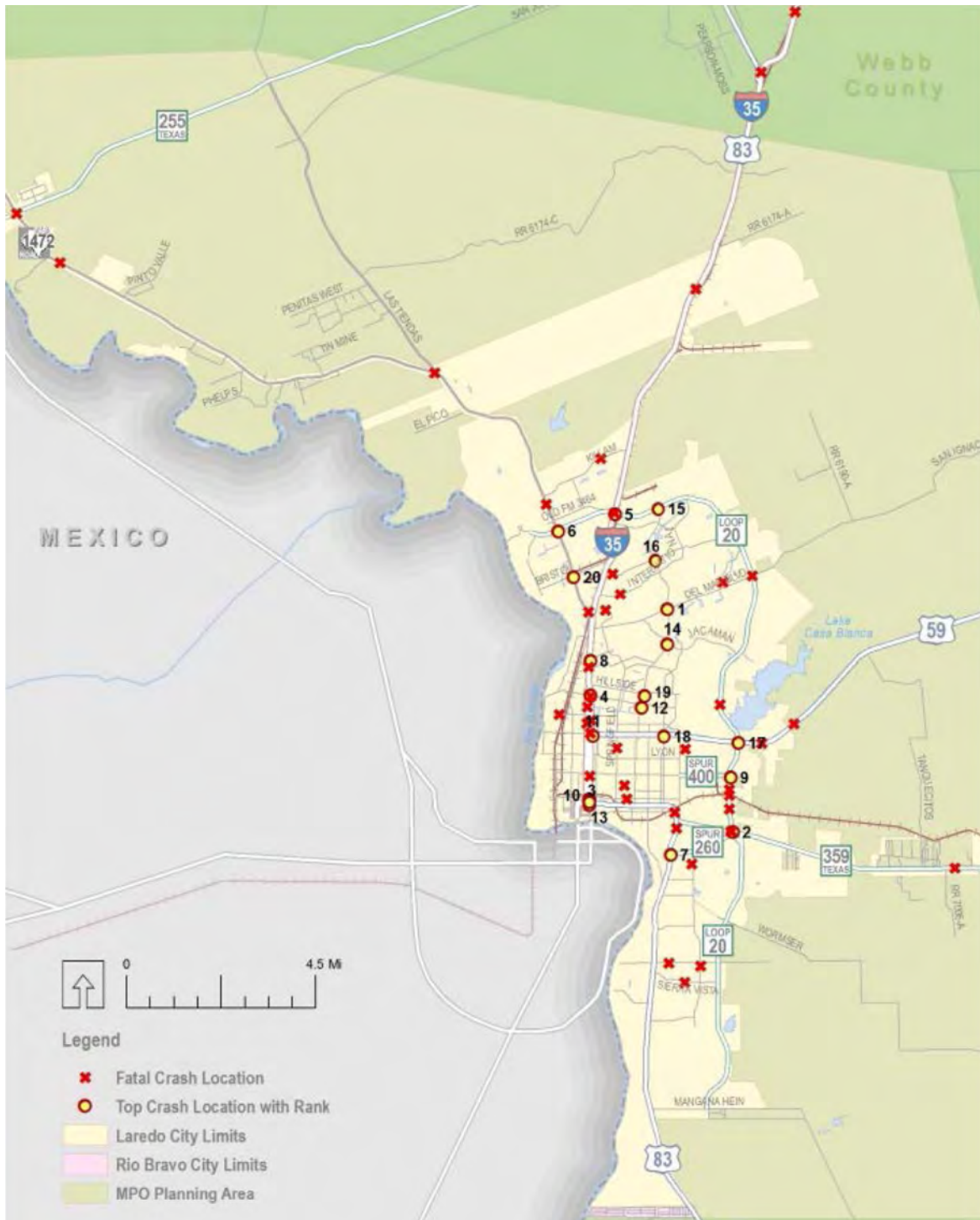
Top 20 Crash and All Fatal Crash Locations 2010-2012 (source: MPO)

Railroad Lines

Union Pacific Railroad (UP) has 41 at grade crossings through the City. Fifteen to twenty trains run through the City per day south of Bob Bullock Loop and twenty to twenty-five trains per day from the Texas Mexican Railway International Bridge to the City limits.

In addition, the Kansas City Southern Railroad has 32 at grade crossings running sixteen trains per day (eight day trains and eight night trains). Congestion at these crossings and noise are a stressor in the community.

Border Crossings

Laredo has the busiest commercial crossing points along the U.S.-Mexico border and the third busiest port in the United States (behind only Los Angeles and New York).

Commuting Trends

The mean travel time to work in Laredo is 21.2 minutes which is below the average for the state of Texas which is 25.2 minutes.[1]

Commuting by private vehicle has continuously increased overtime to its peak at 90% in 2000. Since then the rate of automobile commuting has declined slightly to approximately 86%. Public transit annual ridership on El Metro has been stable since 2011 but saw decreased in ridership from 2007-2011. At the same time the City has the least number of workers who commute by bicycle (0.1%) or by walking (1.5%) in the country.[2] So while Laredo is one of the poorest cities, it also seems to require people to drive or take transit rather than more inexpensive modes of travel like biking and walking.

Transportation Costs and Affordability

In Laredo, the estimated driving costs for the median household is estimated to be approximately 32% of the median household income.[3] At the same time, Laredo has among the most favorable commuting costs with respect to gas prices at an estimated $911.56 per
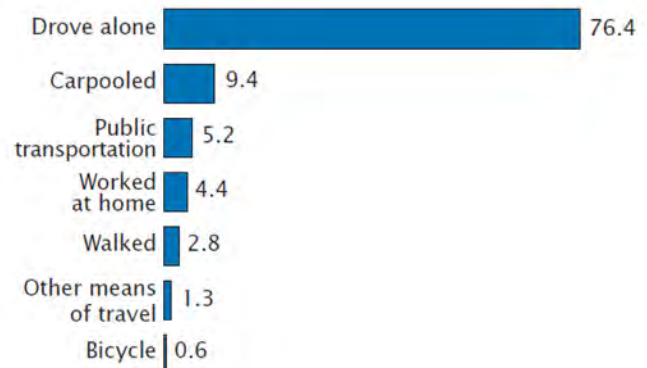
How People Travel to Work in the United States
Source: US Census Bureau, 2013 American Community Survey, Table S0801
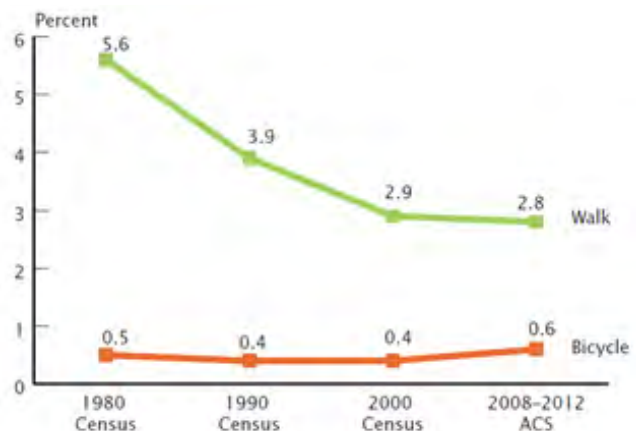
Walking and Bicycling to Work 1980 to 2008-2012
Source: US Census Bureau, 1980, 1990. 2000; American Community Survey, 2008-2012

year.[4] For those households earning below the median income, the expenses related to driving costs can be far greater. This larger expense could be attributed to the high number of trips that need a car beyond the work commute.

1 U.S. Census 2010-2014
2 2012 U.S. Census
3 CNT's Housing and Transportation Affordability Index

4 CNT's Housing and Transportation Affordability Index

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), transportation costs are generally considered affordable when they are 15% or less of household income. Additionally, the FHWA considers a Location Efficient Environment as a community that spends an average of 9% of household income on transportation costs.

With housing costs in Laredo typically at 33% of income, the remaining household disposable income amounts to approximately 35% or $13,800 per year to spend on food, insurance, healthcare, entertainment, apparel, and other goods.

Given the disproportionately high costs for the region, priorities should be considered and implemented to help improve and alleviate the transportation costs, thereby making a more affordable and livable community. A great deal of the cost of commuting leaves the local economy in the form of gas costs, insurance, and vehicle costs which ultimately turn into profits for companies located outside of Laredo.

Regional Transportation Planning Organizations

The following governmental and planning organizations operate within the City of Laredo.

Metropolitan Planning Organization

Planning studies for the City and region are largely initiated by the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which is the policy board responsible for carrying out the metropolitan planning process. The Laredo MPO is responsible for adopting and updating the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) at least every two years. The TIP includes projects for which the construction and operation funds can reasonably be expected.

Location Efficient Environment

Average American Family

Auto Dependent Exurbs
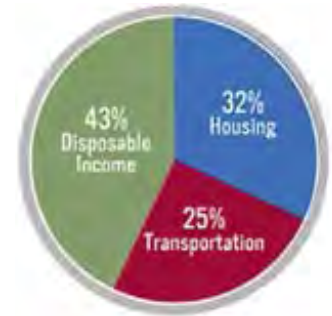
FHWA Transportation and Housing Affordability Index

● **Housing**
● **Remaining Income**
● **Transportation**
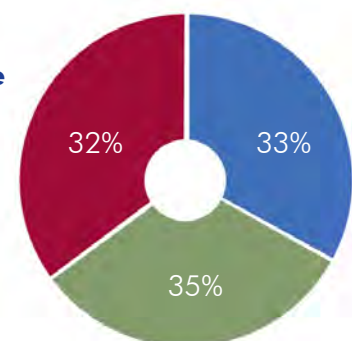
Laredo Average Housing + Transportation Costs, % Household Income

City of Laredo Capital Improvement Program (CIP)

The City currently maintains 734 miles of roadways. Improvement projects are managed by the City's CIP which is a short-range plan, usually four to ten years, which identifies capital projects, schedules, and allocates financing to complete projects as part of the City's comprehensive and strategic plan and the City's annual budget.

Webb County-Laredo Regional Mobility Authority (RMA)

Established February 27, 2014, the RMA is an independent local government transportation agency authorized to finance, design, construct, operate, maintain, and expand a wide range of transportation facilities and services. Currently the RMA does not operate any roads.

Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)

State agency responsible for the major roadway infrastructure network within the City. TxDOT currently maintains approximately 218 miles of state roadways within the Laredo MPO.

Webb County

Is the county seat of Laredo and currently maintains approximately 23 miles of roadways within the Laredo MPO boundary.

Texas Border Infrastructure Coalition (TBIC)

TBIC is a group of 15 cities and economic development groups that lobbies the state government to fund border projects. TBIC advocates that border cities receive a fair share of state funding for education, health, workforce development, transportation and tax reform. The group's efforts have resulted in more than $1 billion for border transportation projects.

El Metro Transit

El Metro is the transit authority in Laredo and operates 47 bus routes, two trolleys, and eighteen demand response vans. El Metro's Mission is to promote and provide high quality, cost-effective public transportation services that address the needs and demands of the citizens of Laredo, Texas.

Planned Transportation Projects

There are a number of new transportation projects and upgrades to existing roadways planned in the Laredo metropolitan area. Some of these include:

- Construction of Hachar Loop is intended to reduce vehicle travel time delays and generate new traffic from new land developments between Mines Road and I-35. This road will enable more development outside of the currently developed areas instead of encouraging infill within existing areas.

- Expansion and widening of Bob Bullock Loop and the construction of interchanges in several locations. Direct connectors for all movements between I-35 and Bob Bullock Loop along with lane widenings are being planned. These are expected to eliminate the need for traffic to stop at traffic signals when accessing I-35 or Bob Bullock Loop.

- Reconstruction of San Bernardo Avenue to accommodate a linear transit hub of 2.7 miles.

- Construction of improvements on Clark Boulevard including an overpass bridge at the Clark Boulevard intersection with Bob Bullock Loop and widening of an existing bridge over the Kansas City Southern Railroad (KCSR) tracks.

- Planning is in progress for the Outer Loop. The Outer Loop will complement Bob Bullock Loop and provide an alternative means of connecting to I-35. The Outer Loop is planned to be a two lane facility with four lanes in several sections, and will closely follow the Laredo MPO boundary and the alignment with KCSR railroad. The Outer Loop is expected to divert a share of the traffic to the outside of the City of Laredo from people trying to avoid traffic within the City.

- Several at-grade rail separations that are part of the Bob Bullock Loop project are planned in the vicinity of Shiloh Road and Las Cruces Drive.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

During the *Viva Laredo* process, the over-arching transportation theme was to "fight traffic." Residents report commuting times getting longer. The solution involves further enhancements to the vehicular system and the simultaneous expansion of personal mobility choices and options. Residents and stakeholders emphasized the importance of incorporating multi-modal transportation solutions to address all issues from pedestrians to cargo transport to highway systems.

Expand Walkability & Mixed-Use Zoning
As with transit, residents strongly supported expanded walking for both utilitarian and recreational use. Non-motorized transportation is highly valued in Laredo, whether for kids walking to school, safe walking and bicycling on major arterials, or access to transit. Residents indicated the improvement of neighborhood walkability. Providing more sidewalks in Southern Laredo was also advocated by the community.

Expanding walkability and bikability with improved transit options could drastically reduce a household's reliance on cars and reduce the overall household transportation costs. These work hand in hand with mixed-use zoning and a network of interconnected streets that promote walking and biking.

Address Congestion
Both residents and stakeholders wrestled with balancing multimodal street design and investment with significant traffic volume and congestion. Some residents advocated to alleviate traffic congestion ingress/egress access into Downtown's central business district. Others wanted to improve connectivity between South Laredo and I-35.

Residents and stakeholders emphasized the need to provide safety and traffic congestion improvements to the Texas A&M International University entrances. Similarly, residents asked to improve Mines Road and Industrial Park congestion and public safety. There is a need to improve connectivity between I-35 and Bob Bullock Loop. Some advocated for the regulation of commercial truck traffic throughout the City.

The issue of school traffic and the need to alleviate rush hour traffic around school zones, like United Middle School on Del Mar Boulevard, was voiced. Residents and stakeholders considered the idea of synchronizing the street lights to address most of these concerns.

Invest in Transit
Residents emphasized the need to improve northbound/southbound transit time. Many spoke passionately to improve the frequency, reliability and perception of public transit as extremely important. Many advocated to extend the transit route service hours. Several comments suggested smaller buses for El Metro. A rethink of the El Metro system should be considered to improve reliability to get people to where they need to go and change the perception of this vital service for the City. Having a reliable, easy to use transit choice can increase ridership.

Reinvest in Rail
Another important element that the community introduced was the railroad. Many voiced that the railroad was noisy and there was a need for quiet zones in the City. Others advocated for new railroad bridges. Some asked to institute alternative forms of cargo movement to help alleviate crossing times, using other ports like El Paso as examples.

Continue Investment in the Airport
The Laredo International Airport is a major gateway into Laredo. Residents emphasized the need to attract more airline routes to Laredo with more destinations that will help with tourism and trade. Lower costs and increased choices of travel for residents is a valuable quality of life amenity for attracting and keeping talented people in Laredo.

Improve Bridges
Connections to Nuevo Laredo are important to Laredo. Residents endorsed better technology and process for customs inspections on both sides of the border. Residents also spoke of the need for another international bridge/port of entry identifying a location in South Laredo toward the end of Bob Bullock Loop.

STRATEGIES

Expand Walkability & Manage Congestion

Towns and cities throughout the country are in the process of restoring old neighborhoods and creating new neighborhoods that are both walkable and accessible. Strategies that make Laredo easier to navigate as a pedestrian (or cyclist) will also make the City more livable and attractive.

Expanding walkability in in-town and mixed-use areas is part of the solution for managing current and future traffic congestion. Most transportation corridors should be more than just roadways for cars. Corridors can be designed and classified to reflect a balance between many modes of transportation and the surrounding land uses.

Active Transportation & Accessibility

A walkable community is a place that encourages a mix of travel modes, including pedestrians, bicycles, transit-users and automobiles.

Generally, The Campaign to Make America Walkable, a national project, has developed some general descriptions for a walkable community. Characteristics include: places where people of all ages and abilities have easy access to their community "on-foot"; neighborhoods that are safer, healthier and friendlier places; a place where pedestrians are given priority and motor vehicle speeds are reduced; and towns and cities with good air and water quality.

With respect to street design, walkable communities are best supported by street grids where the block width is 300 to 400 feet. Much of the Downtown, the Heights areas, and the older parts of Laredo, meet this ideal condition although many lack sidewalks. In the areas of the City that have newer development, such as the neighborhoods north of Calton Road and east of Ejido Avenue on the south side of Laredo, they have moved away from the ideal block size and have less walkable neighborhoods.

Walkable Downtown in El Paso, Texas

Walkable Downtown in Laredo, Texas

Walk Score

When it comes to walkable cities in general, Texas tends to get a failing grade according to WalkScore. com. Factors that go into determining the Walk Score include the availability of walking routes, how long it takes to get from one desirable location to another on foot, depth of choice, pedestrian-friendliness, and mixed-use versus single-use zoning practices.

Laredo's average Walk Score is a 40 out of 100, with 100 signifying the most walkable places. Neighborhoods like the Central Business District, El Cuatro, El Trece, La Guadalupe, and Los Amores all received high Walk Scores of 92, 79, 76, 74, and 72, respectively. The least walkable neighborhoods are La Bota Ranch, J.S.J. Estates, Los Presidentes, Indian Sunset West, and Del Mar, which have a Walk Score of 2, 14, 14, 15, and 21, respectively.

Walking Distance

Often, a city's hot and arid climate is mentioned as a barrier to greater walkability. The typical comfortable walking distance for a pedestrian ("pedestrian shed") is often defined as the area covered by a 5 minute walk, or about 1,320 feet. However, the challenges of a hot climate might reduce that comfortable walking distance down to 3 minutes, or 800 feet. Providing trees, shade structures, and reductions in pavement (or use of reflective materials) can provide improved comfort for longer distances.

A highly effective method for improving walkability is through the process of installing Complete Streets and Road Diets. These concepts convert roadways from auto-centric thoroughfares into people or community-oriented streets that accommodate the safe and efficient movement of all transportation users. The complete street principle includes design enhancements such as medians, street trees, on-street parking, and bike lanes set in an attractive, urban scale environment.

Awnings, eyebrows, and umbrellas all help shade people walking along Ocean Drive in South Beach, FL

A successful complete street redesign along Vanderbilt Avenue in Brooklyn, NY
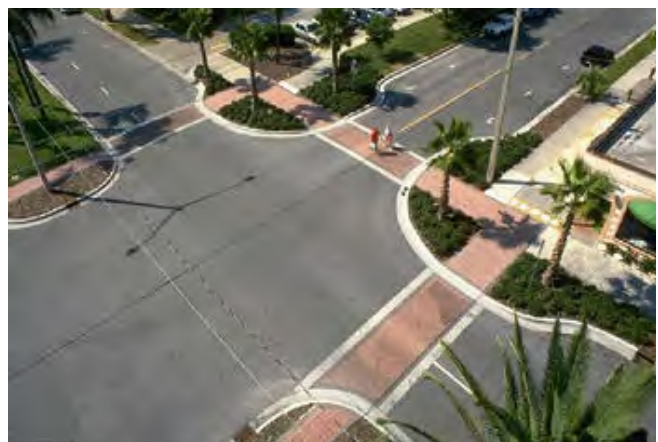
A pedestrian friendly example of curb extensions that can help slow down traffic
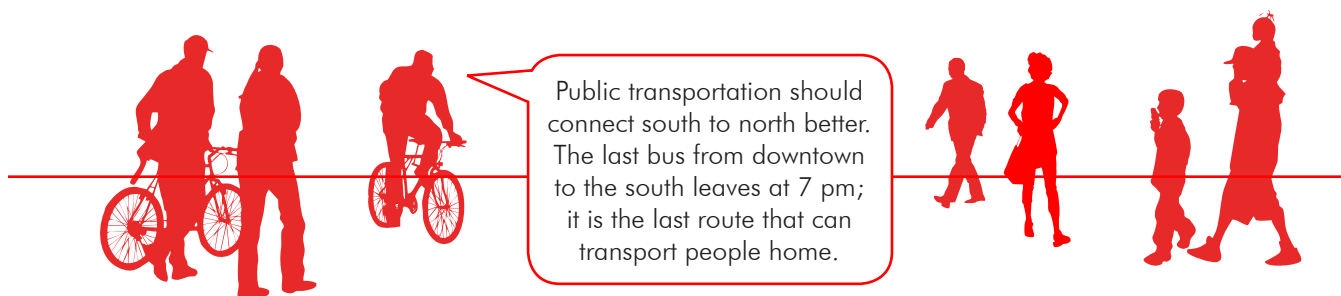
Complete Streets

"Complete Streets" is a concept for streets, designed to enable safe access and mobility for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Like safe vehicular travel, bicycles and pedestrians are important components of Laredo's transportation system. Where gaps in the bicycle and pedestrian networks exist, effective and safe circulation is hindered. In key locations, including retail and mixed- use centers, schools, and parks, a well-connected network is especially important.

Presently, the City of Laredo has not adopted a Complete Streets Policy, which would help facilitate more community-oriented neighborhoods.

Road Diets

A technique for creating Complete Streets includes implementing road diets, or re-shaping the public right-of-way to have an equal amount of road space dedicated to all users (pedestrians, bikes, transit users, and cars).

Current best practices, which are shaping local ordinances throughout the country, include the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) and the Congress for the New Urbanism/ Institute of Transportation Engineers Manual (CNU/ITE Manual). These references recommend adjustments to street dimensions that are required for a road diet (e.g. narrowed lane widths and parking space dimensions, wider sidewalks, minimum size of bike lanes, etc.).

In addition, on existing four-lane streets with less than 25,000 (ADT), transportation experts around the country are recommending road diets as a priority. Conversion of a four-lane undivided road to a three-lane undivided road, made up of two through lanes and a center two-way left-turn lane is a common retrofit.

Streets with three-lanes or two-lanes may also be considered for a road diet. Road diets can be completed on streets of all sizes; however, the re-design will need to be customized, depending on

Road Diet, part of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, Indiana

where the street is located (urban, suburban, or rural) and the desired land uses that are envisioned for the future adjacent to the roadway.

Benefits of road diet may include:

- An overall crash reduction of 19% to 47%;
- Reduction of rear-end and left-turn crashes through the use of a dedicated left-turn lane;
- Fewer lanes for pedestrians to cross and an opportunity to install pedestrian refuge islands;
- The opportunity to install bike facilities when the cross-section width is reallocated;
- Reduced right-angle crashes as side street motorists must cross only three lanes of traffic instead of four;
- Traffic calming and reduced speed differential, which can decrease the number of crashes and reduce the severity of crashes if they occur;
- The opportunity to allocate the extra roadway width for other purposes, such as on-street parking, transit stops, street trees, and bike or pedestrian enhancements;
- A community-focused, "Complete Streets" environment with places for people, not just cars; and
- Simplifying road scanning and gap selection for motorists (especially older and younger drivers) making left turns from or onto the mainline.
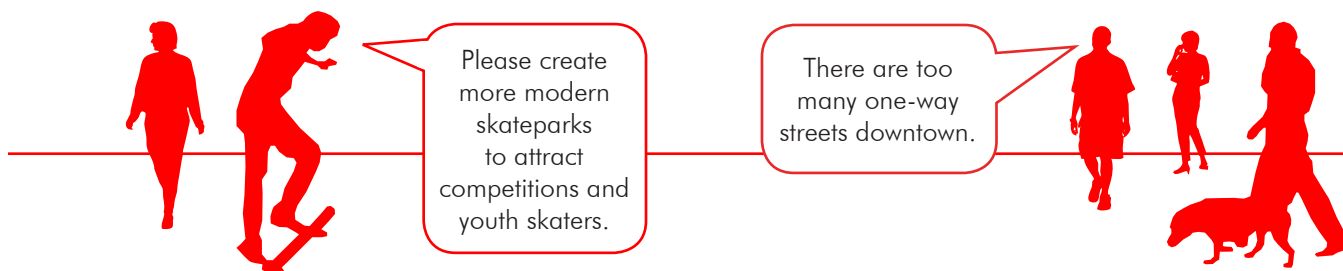
Calton Road and Jacaman Road are both examples of underutilized four-lane streets. These types of conditions are being transformed around the country, from four lanes to three, typically adding bike lanes on each side of the street.

Speed Management

Another important aspect of walkability and public safety involves reduced traffic speeds and the use of traffic calming devices. The speed of vehicles is a critical component to pedestrian safety and comfort. A pedestrian involved in a collision with a vehicle has a 95% chance of survival if the car is traveling at 20 miles per hour; there is a 10% chance of pedestrian survival if the car is traveling at 40 miles per hour. Pedestrian-friendly speeds are typically 20-25 miles per hour, and are no more than 30 miles per hour.

Sidewalks

The availability of a complete sidewalk network also supports the movement of residents. Wide and continuous sidewalks create active, safe, and healthy lifestyles for citizens and increase the accessibility and attractiveness of alternative modes of transportation (e.g. bus and rail transit). Properly-designed pedestrian networks accommodate persons with disabilities, the elderly, and children who walk to school and other places. Currently, many Laredo neighborhoods have incomplete sidewalk networks, with some segments being broken, overgrown with weeds, or blocked by parked cars.

Illustration of a walkable boulevard.
Source: Claire Vlach, Bottomley Design & Planning
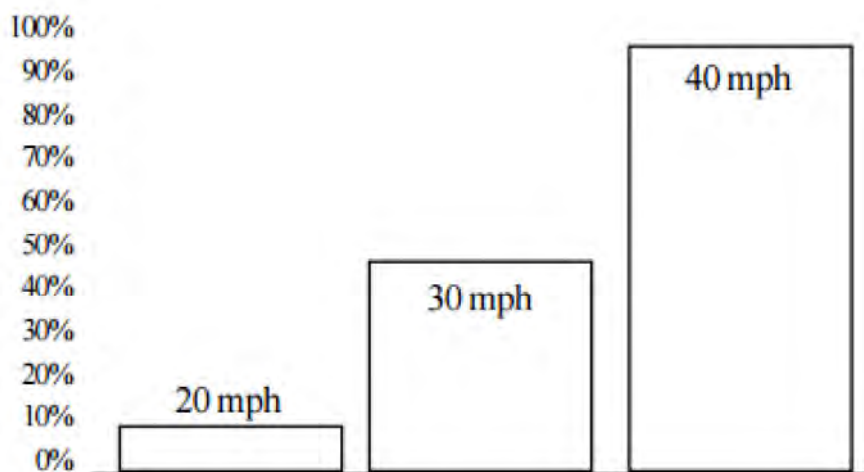
Fatalities Based on Speed of Vehicle (Source: Campaign to Make America Walkable, Wall Tall (Washington, DC, 1994))

Complete Streets: Clark / Park Street & I-35

Like much of the rest of the country, many major arterials in the City of Laredo, are dangerous places for people to walk or ride a bike. Large volumes of high-speed traffic are funneled onto these streets, often as a result of an insufficiently connected network of streets which would provide plenty of alternate routes to travel to one's destination. These heavily traveled streets also contain oversized lanes that encourage motorists to travel at high speeds and leave little room for sidewalks and bike lanes. Pedestrians and bicyclists are often forced to share a narrow strip of sidewalk located directly adjacent to vehicular lanes of travel.

Many streets are over-designed for the volume of cars that travel on them. In such cases, road diets, or narrowing or reduction in the number of travel lanes, can be applied to right-size the roadway and accommodate additional modes of travel. At the location at Clark/Park Street and I-35, the street currently has four vehicular travel lanes, along with on-street parking. Reconfiguring the roadway to include one vehicular travel lane in each direction, a center turn lane and on-street parking creates the space necessary to add a protected two-way bicycle facility.

To protect bicyclists from potential conflicts with doors opening from parked cars, a physical separation can be built; in this case a raised curb. This additional safety measure protects bicyclists on Clark Boulevard,

Clark / Park Street: existing broken sidewalks, no bicycle facility, and auto-oriented commercial.

and encourages new riders that would otherwise not feel safe to ride. Carefully designed intersections also improve safety for bicyclists when they are most vulnerable.

Pedestrians also feel more comfortable walking longer distances when shade trees protect them from the harsh sun. Street trees also provide a narrower field of vision for motorists – encouraging cars to drive at slower speeds. Regularly spaced, pedestrian-scaled lamp posts provide a sense of security and safety for people walking at night. Eventually, urban buildings can open out toward the street, with ample parking discretely tucked behind. These mixed-use, multi-story buildings activate Clark/Park Street with shopfronts, cafés and residential units with doors and windows that open up toward the street.

The proposed intervention on Clark/Park Street is one example of a road diet that returns a portion of the right-of-way to pedestrians and cyclists. Additional streets in Laredo may also benefit from a road diet; suggested street sections for a variety of new and existing roads can be found in the Bike Master Plan and the Future Thoroughfare Plan within this Mobility Chapter.

Clark / Park Street: reimagined with a protected two-way bike facility, urban, multi-story buildings with ample parking behind, creating street-oriented entrances, with residences on the second floor.

Reimagined Frontage Roads

Laredo's highways, including I-35 and Bob Bullock Loop, create several challenges for walkable development. The conventional layout of a Texas highway includes several lanes of limited-access, high-speed, through traffic in the central lanes, with bridges over major intersections. On either side of the highway is a one-way frontage road, with several more lanes of traffic that function as on-and-off ramps. These frontage roads typically have relatively high-speeds of car traffic and have a design that is unwelcoming to pedestrians and bicyclists. In response to the high-speed environment, auto-centric businesses, like gas stations and fast food restaurants, typically line these roads and have wide setbacks that accommodate parking in the front.

It might be difficult to reconcile this pattern of development with a vision for a more walkable and bikable City, but here the example of an historic multiway boulevard provides one potential solution. Multiway boulevards have long been the way cities accommodate heavy volumes of traffic while still creating a generous urban streetscape along the sides, that is pedestrian-friendly. Multiway boulevards have central travel lanes, and side travel lanes that separate local and through traffic with tree-lined medians.

The difference between historic boulevards and modern Texas highways is the limited-access of the through lanes and high-speed design of side traffic lanes of Texas' frontage roads. These frontage roads

Regional through traffic stays on highway

Bike lanes connect through intersections

Narrower lanes discourage speeding

Pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development

Street trees, wide sidewalks, slow moving cars, access to on-street parking

Frontage roads are redesigned as pedestrian-friendly tree-lined frontage boulevards fronted by mixed-use buildings.

are more akin to the center traffic lanes on a traditional multiway boulevard rather than the slow speed of the boulevards access lanes.

The part that is missing is the tree-lined, pedestrian friendly, slow-speed local access lanes. Areas that would like to encourage walkability can retrofit high-speed frontage roads to become frontage boulevards. Oversized lanes are narrowed to discourage speeding; the outside lane is converted to a narrow slow-speed access lane with on-street parking; a wide tree-lined median with bike lanes separates the frontage lanes from the local access lane; buildings are brought up to a wide sidewalk shaded by street trees; and additional parking is provided behind buildings in mid-block locations. This new pattern of development creates a more walkable urban environment and creates additional value for property owners.
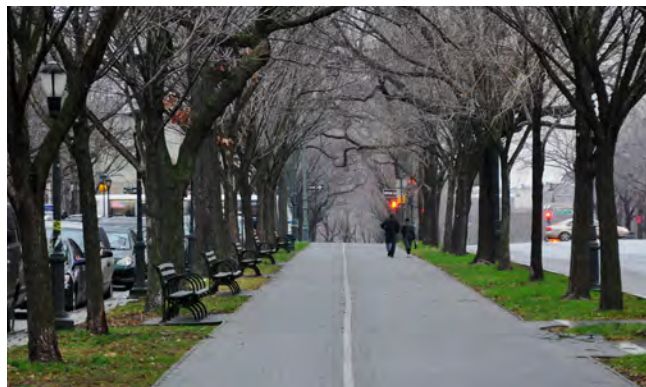
Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, New York is a multiway boulevard that has wide tree-lined medians that include bike and pedestrian paths.

Multiway boulevards have center traffic lanes, and side traffic lanes that separate local and through traffic with tree-lined medians.
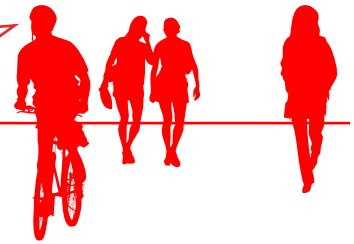
Manage Congestion

Traffic Congestion

The shift in managing transportation and mobility in places that are transforming into multi-modal centers for people and activity, requires a comprehensive approach to traffic congestion.

Currently, traffic congestion exists on many Laredo streets; managing the congestion will involve a series of strategies.

Major roads throughout the City are either at or are predicted to soon be at capacity. Based on the Laredo Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Congestion and Delay Study travel demand model results determined that in many cases, congestion or delays occurred due to stop signs or traffic signals. Less than optimal timing or signal progression may be the

cause of delay in these areas. Results also observed that a majority of the delays are localized within 0.1 miles of a controlled intersection and typically do not occur mid-block.

According to the updated 2008 base travel demand model, current roadway congestion is most severe along the US 83 in south Laredo, combined segments of Guadalupe Street and Chihuahua Street, Las Cruces Drive, and segments of US 59, SH 359, Bob Bullock Loop, Mines Road, Bartlett Avenue, Meadow Avenue, McPherson Road, Jacaman Road, and Washington Street/Corpus Christi Street.

Projections for population and job growth by the year 2040 anticipated the City to grow by more than 50%, with most of the growth occurring in currently
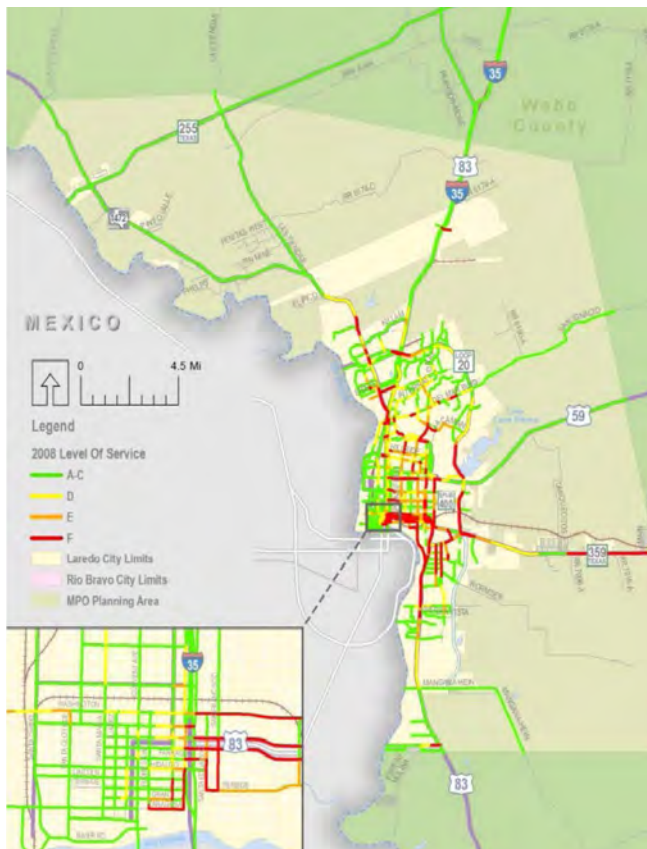
Level of Service Congestion Map (2008)

Level of Service Congestion Map Projection (2040)

undeveloped areas. Congestion is projected to reach a Level of Service of E, the second lowest rating, if no additional transportation investments are made. LOS E represents congested traffic – unstable traffic flow, poor signal progression, significant congestion, traffic near roadway capacity.

The greatest growth in daily traffic volumes from 2002 to 2012 occurred along Bob Bullock Loop between I-35 and McPherson Avenue, between McPherson Road and Del Mar Boulevard, and between Del Mar Boulevard and US 59.

The average weekly commute time in Laredo is 3.5 hours (US Census 2012). The average weekly commute times for San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, and Houston are 3.95, 3.75, 4.25, and 4.55 hours, respectively (2015 NYC Economic Brief). Compared to other major Texas cities, weekly commute times are still less than average, even though times could still be improved.

In 2014, Laredo experienced approximately 3.9 million hours of total annual delay, which ranks 99th in the nation (Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) 2015 Urban Mobility Report).

According to the Congestion and Delay Study prepared for the Laredo Urban Transportation Study in March 2015, the report listed 20 of the top congested routes in Laredo.

The conclusion of the Congestion and Delay Study was that the existing transportation system provides sufficient capacity for the current demand and that an increased focus should be placed on operations to maximize the benefits of the existing capacity and to minimize overall traffic delays, especially during peak periods. The distribution of recommend improvements from the study suggests that improvements to local operations related to intersection signal timing as the most heavily recommend solution.

Rank	Route Name	Intersection Segment	Peak Period
1	Del Mar - WB	Springfield to San Dario	PM
2	FM 1472 - SE	Muller Memorial to Interamerica	PM
3	Del Mar - WB	Springfield to San Dario	AM
4	Bob Bullock / Cuatro Vientos - NB	McPherson to IH 35 NBFR	PM
5	US 59 - EB	Buena Vista to Bartlett	PM
6	McPherson / McClelland - SB	Country Club to Del Mar	PM
7	Meadow - SB	Corpus Christi to Guadalupe	AM
8	US Highway 83 NB - NB	Canones to Sierra Vista	PM
9	FM 1472 - SE	FM 3464 to Bob Bullock WBFR	PM
10	McPherson / McClelland - SB	Tiera Trail to Shiloh	PM
11	US Highway 83 NB - NB	Palo Blanco to Zacatecas	AM
12	Del Mar - WB	McPherson to Lindenwood	AM
13	McPherson / McClelland - NB	Calle Del Norte to Jacaman	PM
14	IH 35 - SB	Scott Off-Ramp to Victoria	PM
15	US 59 - WB	Meadow to McPherson	PM
16	Santa Maria/Old Santa Maria - NB	Industrial to Del Mar	PM
17	Meadow - SB	Corpus Christi to Guadalupe	PM
18	Clark - EB	Aguila Azteca to Bob Bullock	AM
19	FM 1472 - SE	Interamerica to River Bank	PM
20	Bartlett - NB	Lane to Clark	PM

Top 20 Congested Segments (Source: MPO Congestion and Delay Study: March 2015)

Traffic Signaling, Intelligent Transportation System and Smart Streets

Important components for effectively managing a transportation network are completed through the implementation of strategies that efficiently manage the flow of traffic, as well as the implementation of best practices for prioritizing walkability, bikability and transit use. Regarding the flow of car traffic, methods for improving network efficiency without adding new roads or widening existing roads, include: optimization of traffic signal timing, proper traffic signal progression, effective access management policies, proper signage, and improved wayfinding.

Traffic Signaling

A relatively inexpensive way to make significant enhancements to the transportation network are through improvements to traffic signal timing, which can be a significant cause for delays and congestion due to inappropriately allocated green time signaling or signal progression. By adjusting cycle lengths and offsets, drivers can travel longer distances along the corridor before having to stop for a red light. These low cost improvements can make the best use of existing capacity, optimize allocation of funding, decrease travel time, and improve air quality.

Intelligent Transportation System

Intelligent transportation systems or ITS takes traffic signaling one step further by utilizing technology to mitigate real-time traffic congestion with rapid adjustments in traffic signal timing and coordination of response activities with local or regional transportation and emergency services.

Currently, the City's Traffic Department has deployed closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras on arterial streets, synchronized traffic signal systems, improved vehicle detection capabilities, and operates a Traffic Management Center (TMC). The City's ITS Masterplan provides recommendations that include some of the following improvements:

- Expansion of the TMC and improved coordination and incorporation of the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and 911 Dispatch Center;
- Upgrades to the existing traffic signal controllers and communications system;
- Deployment of 15 additional CCTV cameras.
- Implementation of signal preemption systems that allow for emergency vehicles to be given priority at 50 intersections;
- Smart cards for transit, parking meters, and international bridge crossing payment.

Smart Streets

Smart street principles are strategies that target the layout of streets (road diets/narrow streets), traffic-calming devices, land use development that promote higher densities and improve walkability like mixed use zoning, multiple choices of transportation modes and connections. Also, the utilization of the internet and GPS-enabled wayfinding can help to move people on the most efficient routes based on real-time user data. These are effective ways to increase the efficiencies of the existing transportation network, and all methods will need to be employed in order to create a more livable city.

Demand Management

Implementing Complete Streets in Laredo is one method for increasing the capacity of City streets; the City can also adopt strategies and policies aimed at reducing single-occupancy vehicle demand or redistributing the demand in space and/or in time. This approach is known as transportation demand management.

As with any network, managing demand can be a cost-effective alternative to increasing capacity. A demand management approach has the potential to improve the natural environment, public health, placemaking, and economic development that also extends the life of transportation infrastructure.

Strategies and Tools

Local governments use a number of legal tools to address traffic and transportation impacts, including access management regulations, Complete Street requirements, impact fees and adequate public facilities ordinances. Some notable examples include:

- Access management is a strategy to reduce the number of conflict points on arterial streets, thereby increasing both capacity and safety through Driveway Sharing Agreements. This strategy is applied primarily to areas where there are continuous retail and commercial developments along an arterial road, where the tendency is for each site to have its own driveway access points.

- Adequate public facilities ordinances require developers either to demonstrate the availability of adequate public facilities or to build whatever may be necessary to accommodate the needs of the new residents, including assurances that public schools, roads, sewers, police and rescue response times, and/or other infrastructure services are "adequate" to support the proposed new development.

- Traffic or transportation impact fees are used by governments to internalize the cost of transportation improvements associated with development proposals. Chapter 395 of the Texas Local Government Code authorizes a city to impose impact fees on landowners to cover the cost of capital improvements necessary to serve new development. Typically, this impact is assessed as part of a Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) and Study. Examples of other cities who assess this impact fee on developers include San Antonio, El Paso, and Fort Worth.

- Special Assessment District is an additional fee assessed on properties near a new highway or transit facility that is expected to benefit from such proximity. Revenues raised must be targeted to improvements in the district.

- Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Zones provide a mechanism for allocating any increase in total property tax revenues accruing from new access to improvements in a designated district.

Parking Management

Parking management is a set of programs and regulations that affect the supply, demand, location and price of parking. Properly managed, the parking system can support economic vitality and make neighborhoods and business districts more livable. Given that parking is a tool for economic development and livable communities, especially in auto-centric cities such as Laredo, the careful prioritization of parking supply and management must be well thought out and coordinated.

The City manages its policies for on-street and off-street parking through Chapter 19, Article VIII (Motor Vehicles and Traffic – Stopping, Standing or Parking) of the Code of Ordinances and in the City's Land Development Code Book, which sets minimum standards and requirements for parking by land use.

Standard tools and strategies for efficient parking availability often include the use of on-street parking, off-street parking (parking lots), code enforcement policies, and connections to an effective transit system with park-and-ride locations.

These standards do not always take into account the actual need for parking and were created with suburban drive-to only locations in mind. This can lead to vacant fields of parking throughout the City. In addition, the needs of a downtown or compact urban area are vastly different than further afield locations.

These standards should be reviewed for their effectiveness throughout the City and different standards should apply to suburban areas versus the downtown or compact urban areas.

Zoning and Parking Strategies

Zoning standards typically establish minimum requirements or formulas for how many parking spaces must be provided for specific land uses. The intent is often to require property owners to provide sufficient off-street parking spaces. Adequate off-street parking should not drive the development of a site. More creative solutions, especially in mixed-use or urban areas should be considered and encouraged. Some strategies include:

- Shared Parking, which allows adjacent land uses to provide parking based on the parking demand generated at different times of the day.

- Fees-in-Lieu of providing on-site parking can be considered in densely developed activity centers

where the City allows developers to contribute to the costs of developing additional municipal parking facilities in lieu of providing the total required amount of parking for a development.

- Off-Site Parking, which allows for parking to be accommodated on another site, typically within a quarter mile, for on-site parking.

- On-Street Parking could allow spaces on the street to count toward parking requirements.

- Reduced Parking Requirements in urban and mixed-use areas.

- Ridesharing, which refers to various forms of carpooling, vanpooling, and subscription bus services associated with employees' trips to and from work.
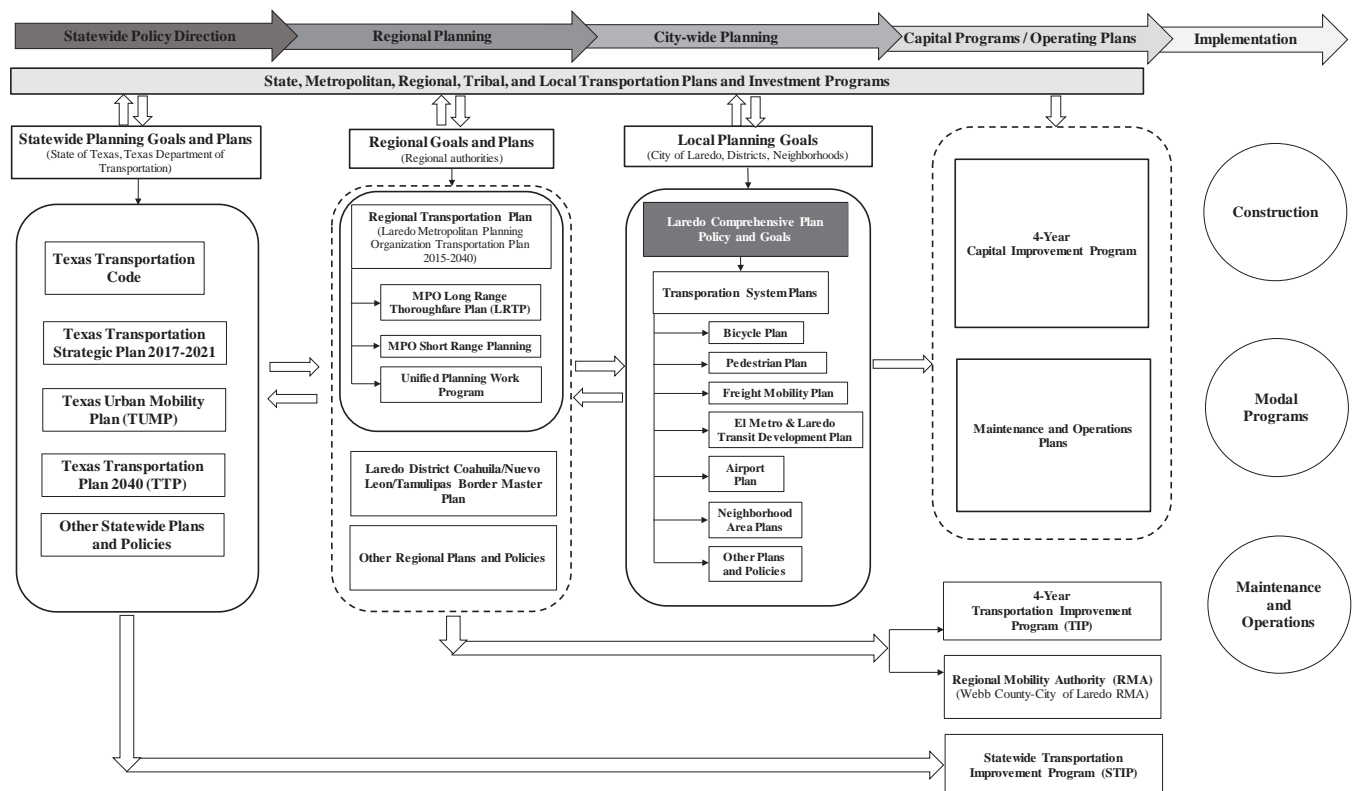
How does it come together?

The transportation planning process from a statewide perspective to the local and regional level.

I would like to see more bike lanes that are secure to use. If they are made, I wouldn't like cars invading the bike lanes.
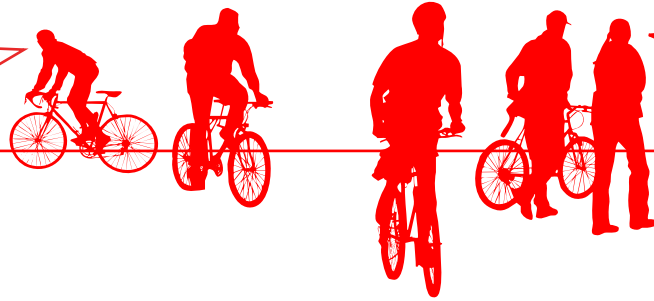
There should be more of an incentive to support biking in Laredo. This includes creating and maintaining bike lanes.

Bike Master Plan

Bicycling Facilities

Laredo currently has a handful of dedicated bicycle lanes located on:

- Clark Boulevard from North Arkansas Avenue to Bob Bullock Loop;
- Country Club Drive;
- Convent Street; and
- Additional bicycle paths are provided on Chacon Creek Trail, the Bob Bullock Loop Cycle Track, Zacate Creek Greenway Trail, and Manadas Creek Trail.

Perception within the community is that it is not safe to bike on the City streets. Commuter bicyclists include visitors from Mexico crossing into the Downtown area across the international bridges. Recreational users perform most of their activities in the northern parts of Laredo, as represented in the Strava Activity Heatmap. Presently, the City does not have a Bike Master Plan. The Bike Master Plan, included here, includes planning for bicycle routes, parking, and safety.

Methods for creating a safe and desirable bicycle network include the process of making all significant destinations accessible. Traits of a proper bicycle network include the use of a combination of four types of bikeways:

1. Bicycle paths - are physically separated from vehicular traffic and are often located outside of the City center.
2. Bicycle lanes - are demarcated by striping within medium-speed roadways.
3. Separated Bicycle Facilities - include a cycle track, with a buffer (physical or paint), separating bikes from car traffic.
4. Shared Routes - the majority of thoroughfares—are low-speed streets in which cars and bikes mix comfortably. These streets have low traffic volumes and often include various traffic-calming devices and signing.

Strava User Bicycle Heatmap
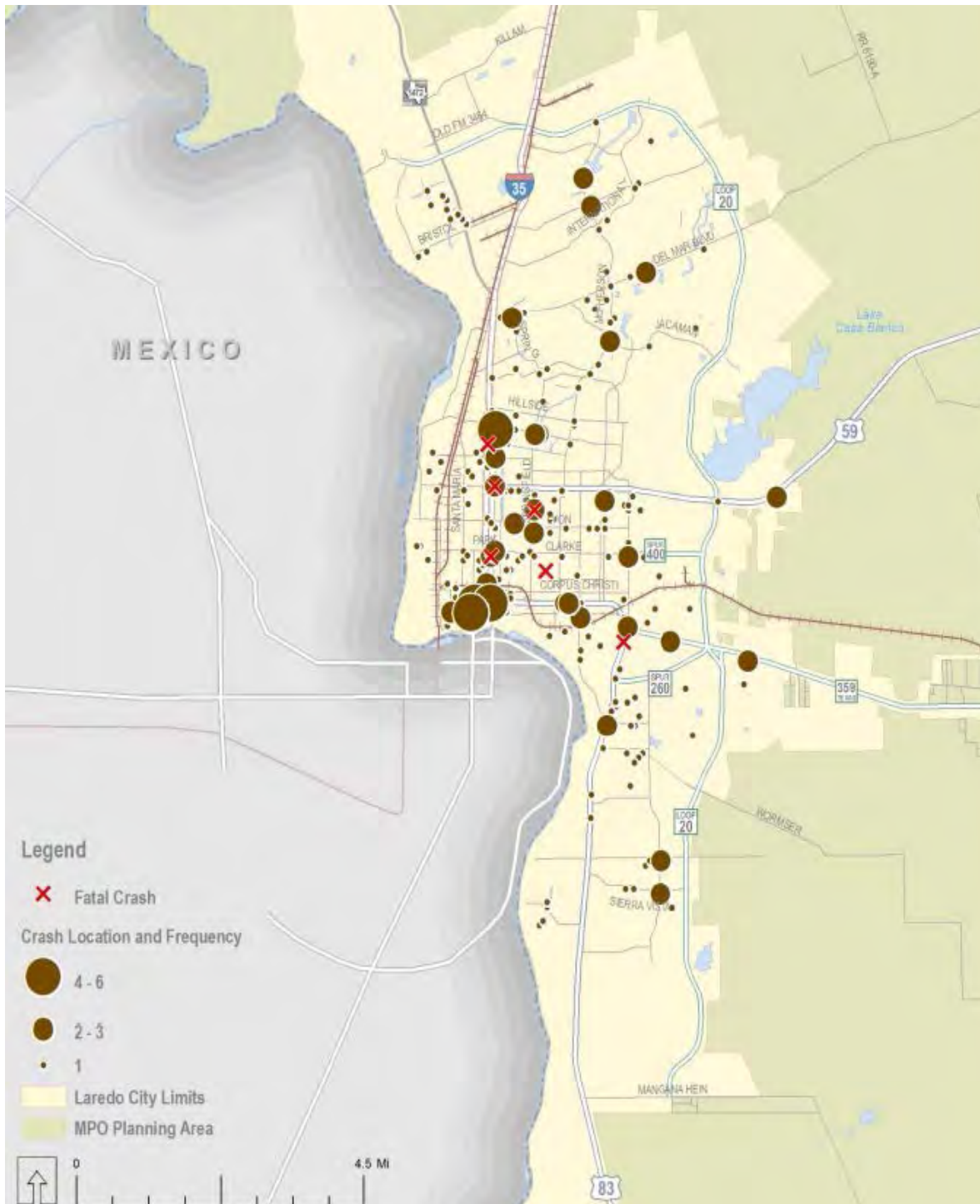
Bicycle and Pedestrian Crash Locations 2010-2012 (Source: MPO)

Planning for Bicycles

Bicycle planning in Laredo involves the process of assessing and addressing the needs of the community in the area of bicycle infrastructure, programs, and policies. It involves taking an inventory of the community's existing bicycle resources, and identifying strategies to build upon those resources. Consulting with the citizens of the community has been an important way to facilitate a vision for future transportation improvements. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of bicycle resources has resulted from on-the-ground observations and public outreach. The proposed approach capitalizes on the community's strengths while minimizing weaknesses.

Generally, there are two distinct types of cyclists in Laredo: recreational cyclists and 'last choice' cyclists. The recreational cyclists are those that use their bicycles for either training for races or occasional mountain biking on Laredo's trails. These types of users are rarely using their bikes on city streets or in urban conditions. The 'last choice' bicyclists include a group that uses their bike because it is their primary mode of transportation. These users brave the dangerous city streets, putting their own lives in danger.

Who Bikes Now?

60%
Interested but
concerned

6%
Enthused & confident
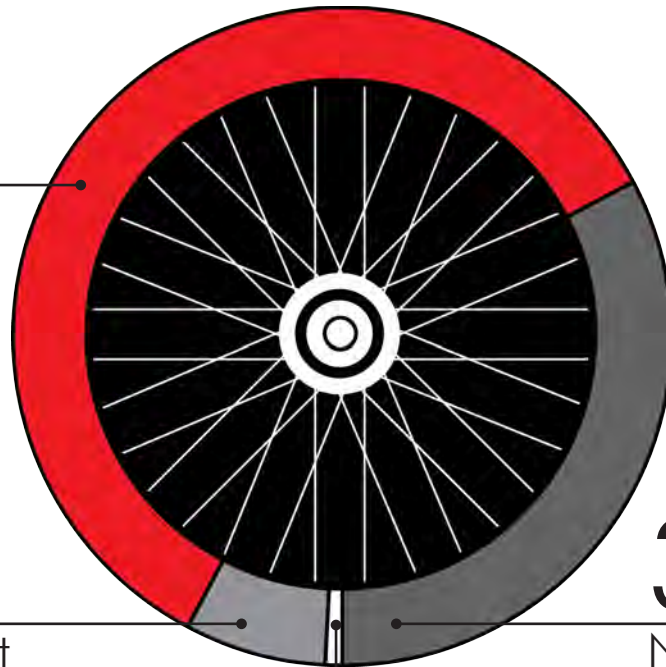
<1%
Strong & fearless

33%
No way,
No how

Source: Four Types of Cyclists by Roger Geller,
Bicycle Coordinator, Portland Office of Transportation

Laredo has been making advances in implementing bike facilities; yet concerns about the safety of cycling are still present. Bravery should not be required to ride a bicycle; yet cyclists and non-cyclists share this perception. Many cities are making improvements in bicycling conditions, and at the same time, each city is eliminating the fear associated with bicycling in an urban environment. Cities have created transportation systems that make cycling the most logical, enjoyable and attainable choice for many trips. For these residents, safety concerns are rarely a consideration.

Typically, there are four general categories of transportation cyclists: "The Strong and the Fearless," "The Enthused and the Confident," "The Interested but Concerned," and the last group are the non-riders, called the "No Way, No How" group.

Research shows that the number one reason people do not ride bicycles is because they are afraid to be on a bike in the street. This is not due to fear of other cyclists, pedestrians or injuring themselves in a bicycle-only crash; instead the fear is of people driving automobiles.

The largest percentage of cyclists, the "Interested but Concerned" group includes people who are curious about bicycling. The people are hearing the message about how easy urban biking is and how popular "bike culture" is becoming. They typically enjoy riding, but are afraid to do so. They don't like speeding cars and get nervous thinking about people running red lights, or passing them too closely. However, they would ride more often if they felt safer on the roadways.

Presently, the bicycle network lacks connectivity and does not yet appeal to the majority of people who are interested in riding. Indeed, the majority of the City's existing bikeway miles consist of bike lanes located along high-speed arterial thoroughfares that intimidate even the most experienced urban cyclist. Much of the City's existing infrastructure includes paved and unpaved trails along the local rivers and waterways. Laredo is currently constructing additional phases of these trail systems. As is the case with most bicycle infrastructure in cities around the country, these two types of bicycle infrastructure lack the ability to easily and safely move from one facility to the other.

Areas of Laredo that are disconnected due to land use discourages active transportation

Transportation & Land Use

Like many American cities, Laredo's regulatory practice of separating land uses by function (e.g. commercial, residential, industrial, etc.) has directed commercial and employment districts to locate along busy streets, away from residential neighborhoods. Such land use patterns, in combination with the development of an increasingly disconnected street network, isolate rather than knit together the City's neighborhoods. Furthermore, the normative arterial/collector/local thoroughfare network pattern forces high volumes of car traffic onto an increasingly limited number of streets. As a result, reaching daily destinations by means other than a car is very challenging.

Historic neighborhoods of Laredo support active transportation with its interconnected network of streets

Bike rentals in the downtown area and at parks would be nice.

Maybe adding more and better street lights will help make biking more safe at night.

Bicycle Network Plan

Legend (Existing bike network):
- ★ Proposed Bike Hubs
- Existing Bike Facility
- City limits
- Regional Destinations
- Priority Routes (Phase 1)
- Proposed
- Shared-Use Path
- Protected Bike Lane
- Shared Routes
- •• Bike Boulevard
- Creek/Waterway

Existing bike network

Legend (Priority Routes):
- ★ Proposed Bike Hubs
- Existing Bike Facility
- City limits
- Regional Destinations
- Priority Routes (Phase 1)
- Proposed
- Shared-Use Path
- Protected Bike Lane
- Shared Routes
- •• Bike Boulevard
- Creek/Waterway

Priority Routes (Phase 1)

If cycling is to be universally adopted as a means of transportation, then the concerns of the majority must be addressed. - Roger Gellar

Built-out Bike Network

The proposed bike plan for Laredo connects the existing bike infrastructure, providing any cyclist with the ability to reach further distances. The plan highlights regional destinations, mainly schools, campuses, and downtown. A network is created throughout the city that includes the connection of residential neighborhoods to these destinations. This bicycle network includes both on and off-road facilities in order to create a compact web and provide variety to cyclists. Priority routes are highlighted and given a specific bicycle facility. These routes are mostly extensions of the existing bicycle facilities or represent the implementation of popular proposals, such as connecting the college campuses. The priority routes are recommended to be the first phase of the bicycle master plan. Bike hubs are proposed at major destination points throughout the city.

Legend:

- ★ Proposed Bike Hubs
- ── Existing Bike Facility
- ── City limits
- ── Regional Destinations
- ── Priority Routes (Phase 1)
- - - Proposed
- ── Shared-Use Path
- ═ Protected Bike Lane
- ▪ ▪ Shared Routes
- • • • Bike Boulevard
- ── Creek/Waterway
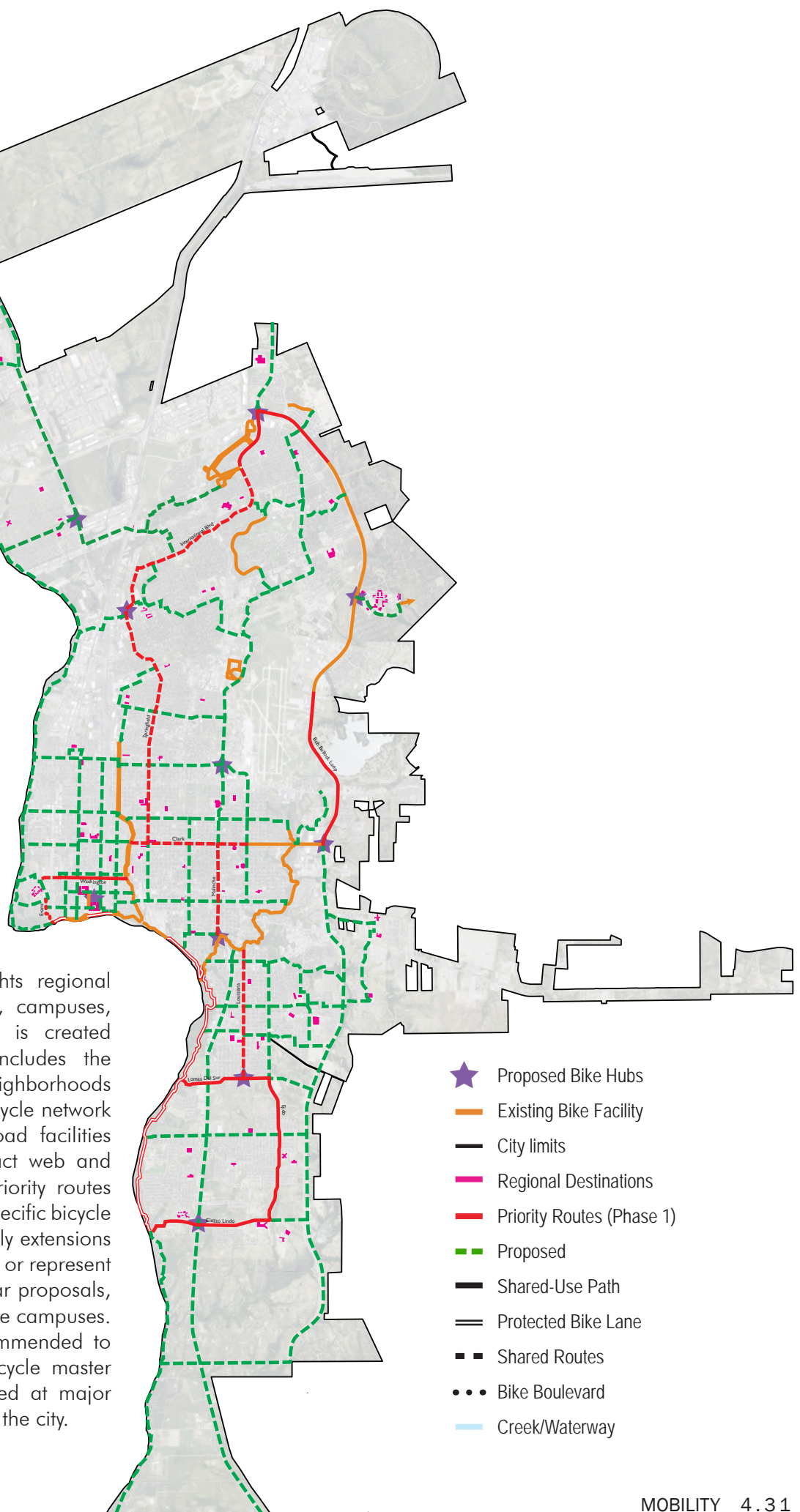
Bikeway Types

Shared Routes

Shared routes are typically located in compact or urban areas, at the center of a neighborhood, town, or city. They are often marked with a sharrow, a marking indicating that the travel lane is to be shared by cars and bikes.

Shared routes work best on streets with low design speeds, where car traffic moves slowly and parallel parking lines each side of the street. Travel lanes are typically narrow in this setting (10 feet) and street trees help to provide a sense of enclosure. Cyclists and pedestrians have the priority while motorists are permitted to travel through the streets.

Bike Lanes

A typical bike lane is a portion of the roadway which has been set aside for the exclusive or preferential use of cyclists. It is usually designated by adding a stripe, signage, and pavement markings. Bike lanes allow cyclists to ride at their own speed without interfering with motorists.

Conventional bike lanes run along the curb sides of the roadway or adjacent to parked cars when on-street parking is present. Cyclists usually travel in the same direction as traffic. These unprotected bike lanes work best on streets where the posted speed is less than 35 mph and should ideally be 6 feet in width, although 5 feet is also possible.

Buffered Bike Lanes

Like typical bike lanes, buffered bike lanes run along the curbs of the roadway or adjacent to on-street parking. However, they offer additional protection from moving traffic in the form of a buffer space between the edge of the bike lane and the edge of the vehicular travel lane. Adding a buffer helps encourage more cyclists to use the facility.

If the buffer is 3 feet or wider the interior shall have diagonal cross hatching or chevron markings. Narrower buffers can be marked with two solid white lines, which also helps discourage crossing. Buffered bike lanes are strongly preferred to typical bike lanes in areas with greater traffic volume and higher travel speeds.

Parking-Protected Cycle Track

Parking-protected cycle tracks are bikeways at the street level that are physically protected from vehicular traffic by parked cars and sometimes other additional barriers such as a wide painted buffer or elevated median. To reduce the risk of collision with parked car doors, a minimum 3 foot wide buffer should be provided between the parking lane and the bicycle facility.

Parking-protected bike lanes are more desirable for a wide variety of cyclists because of the additional protection they offer from traffic and parked car doors. They are only implementable, however, on streets where on-street parking is available or needed.

Raised Cycle Track

Raised cycle tracks are bike facilities that are vertically separated from the roadway. Sometimes they occur at the plane of the sidewalk, often with a furnishing zone or planting strip between the cycle track and the roadway, and sometimes the are placed at an intermediate height between the road and the sidewalk. At intersections they may be dropped and merged with the street or continue on the sidewalk, where they cross with pedestrians.

Raised cycle tracks are more attractive to a wider variety of cyclists and work best along higher speed streets with few driveways and interruptions.

Contra-Flow Bike Lanes

Like their names suggest, contra-flow bike lanes allow cyclists to ride in the opposite direction of vehicular traffic. The lanes are designated with yellow center lane striping. While this kind of design introduces additional points of conflict for motorists, they benefit cyclists traveling in both directions on a one-way street.

Contra-flow bike lines are typically recommended on streets where there are already many cyclists traveling in the wrong direction and on streets where alternate routes would require too much additional riding for cyclists. They work best on low speed and low volume roads unless additional protection is provided between cars and bicycles.

Two-Way Cycle Track

Two-way cycle tracks are physically separated cycle tracks that allow bicycle travel in both directions on one side of the road. They can be designed as a protected cycle track, at the street level with a parking lane or other barriers between bikes and vehicles, or as a raised cycle track with the track separated vertically from the roadway.

The benefits of a two-way cycle track are that they are attractive to a wide range of cyclists; they reduce the risk and fear of collisions; they allow for contra-flow bike travel on one-way streets; and they can have lower implementation costs. They work best on streets with fewer driveways and cross-streets on one side.
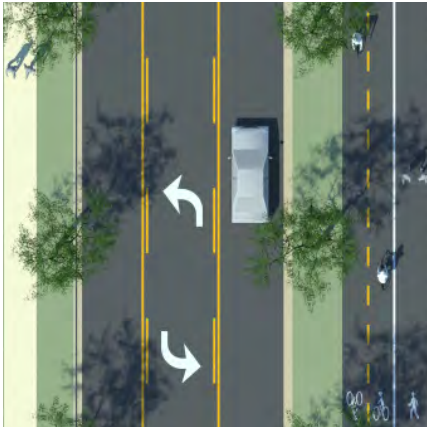
Shared-Use Path

Shared-use paths are a type of trail designed to provide off-road routes for many different users including cyclists, runners, pedestrians, and manual or motorized wheelchair users. While similar to other recreational trails, these paths are part of a larger transportation system and serve as a supplement to on-street bike lanes, shared roads, and paved shoulders.

Trail

A trail is a path designed for outdoor recreational use instead of mobility. Since they are not configured with transportation in mind, they are not usually adjacent to any roadway and they do not connect elements, spaces, or facilities within a site. They are mostly built for pedestrians and others to experience the outdoors and to provide a healthier lifestyle for community members.

Expanding the Network

Designing and implementing a bikeway network that is appropriate for the surrounding context should be strongly correlated to existing land use characteristics and to the desired development or preservation goals for each neighborhood in Laredo. The proposed network should be further fine-tuned at the scale of the block. This can occur through a Bicycle Master Plan update that incorporates these proposed bikeways and the latest advancements in bicycle planning.

In addition to a bikeway network, numerous design countermeasures may be applied to streets to increase the visibility and safety of existing and proposed bikeways. These include bicycle boxes, bicycle detection and signal heads, wayfinding and informational signs, and bicycle refuge islands.

Separated crossings at major points of interest

Bicycle detection and signal head

Bicycle hub at destination point

Clear pavement markings

Prioritized Interventions

Cielito Lindo

As with other infrastructure projects, when it comes to bicycle facilities, one size does not fit all. Existing conditions on Cielito Lindo include five travel lanes; the street is over-designed for the current traffic volumes. A future Cielito Lindo may include the installation of a separated bike lane in a median, shaded with trees.

Existing Cielito Lindo Boulevard
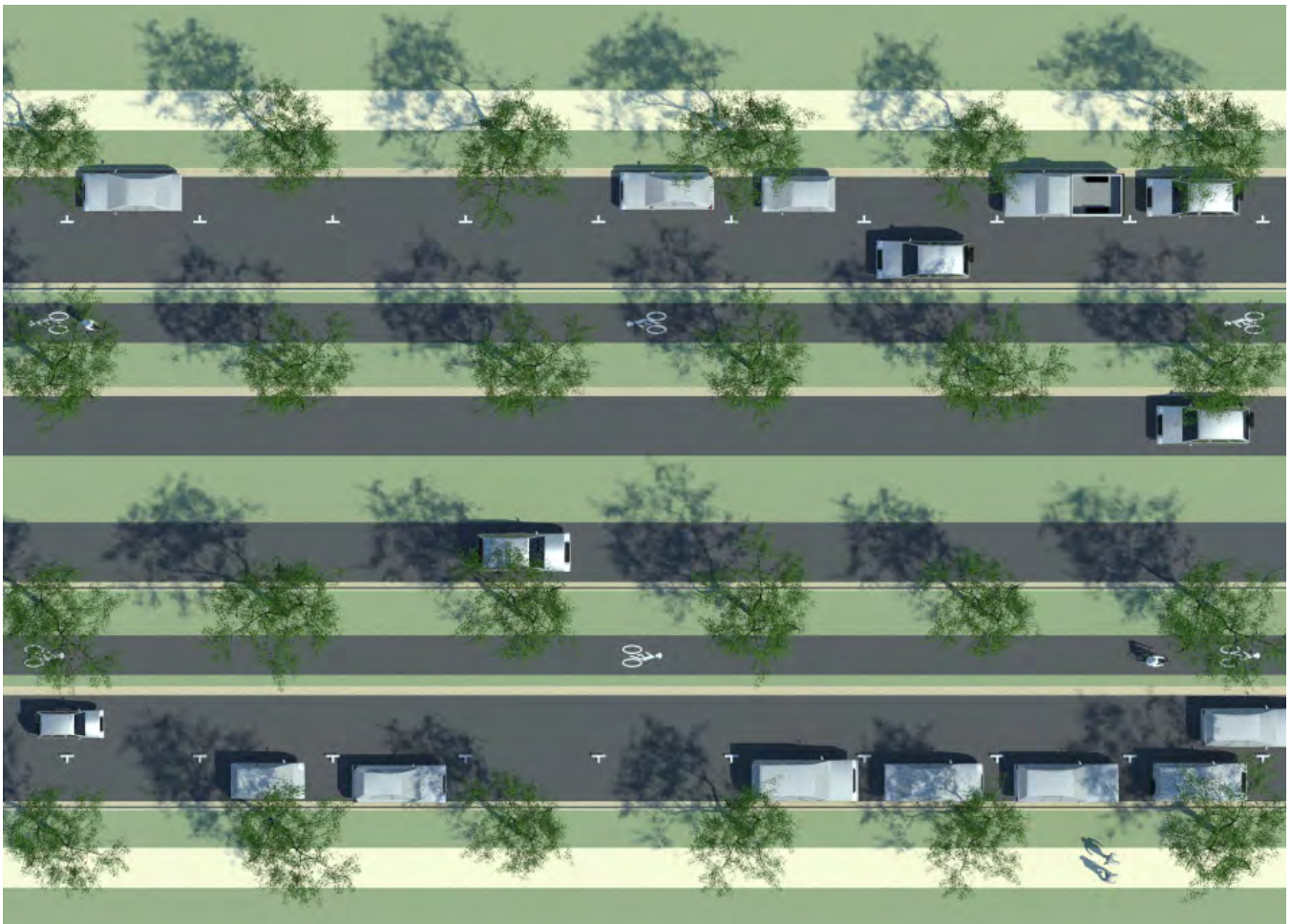
An intervention on Cielito Lindo may include the installation of a separated bike lane in a multi-lane boulevard.

Lomas del Sur

Other thoroughfares, like Lomas del Sur, may require the motorized vehicular capacity. A two-way cycle track could be added as a low-stress bicycle facility for families in the adjacent neighborhoods.

Existing Lomas del Sur

A future Lomas del Sur can attract a greater number of cyclists with the addition of a two-way cycle track.

Evans Street & Typical Downtown Streets

Many streets in the Downtown and historic areas of Laredo have a narrow right-of-way and would be difficult to provide a separated bike facility. In these conditions, it may be appropriate to add Shared Use Lane Markings or "sharrows" to indicate that this is a preferred bicycle route.

Existing Evans Street
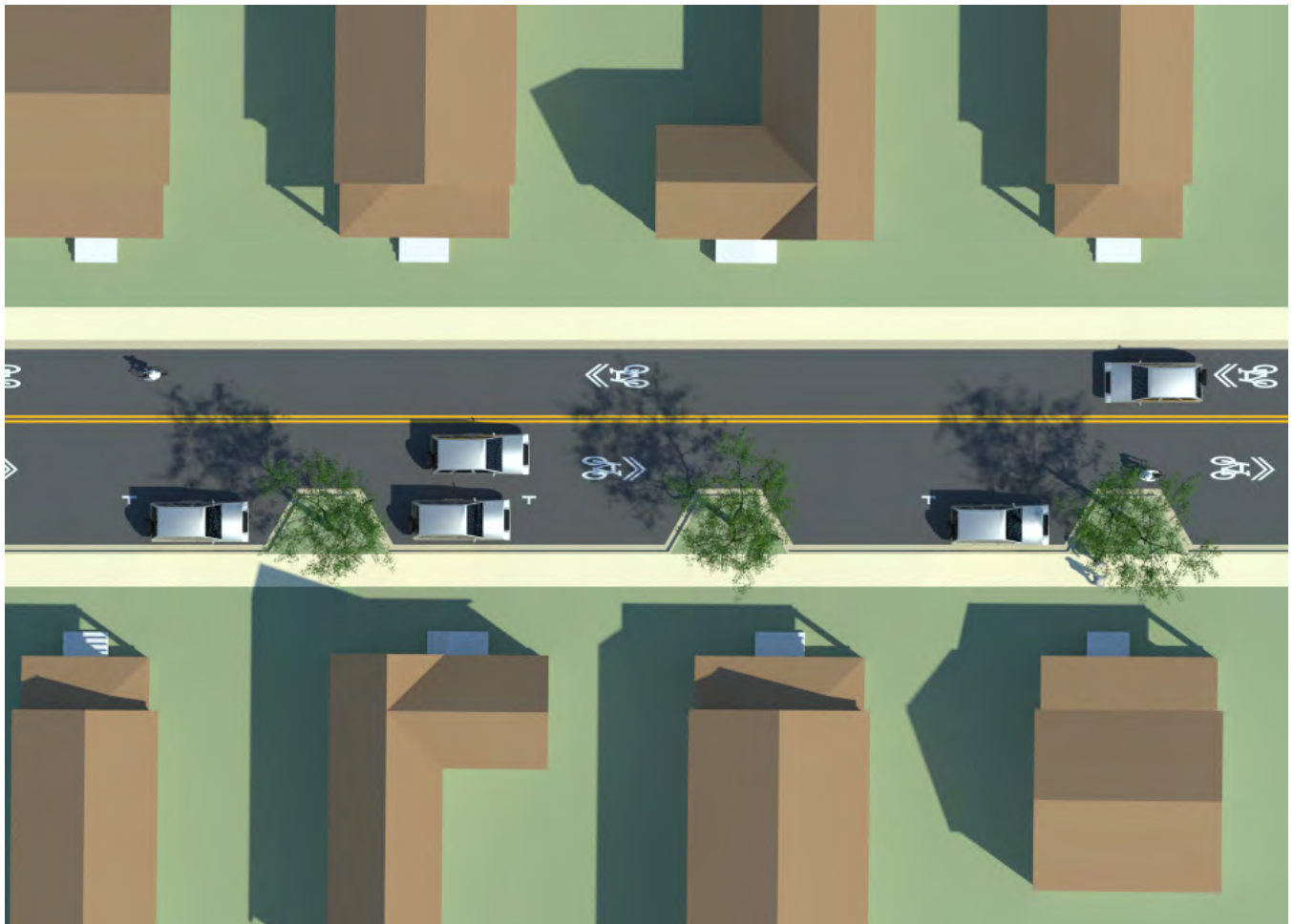
A low cost and immediate improvement for bicycle routes on narrow streets would be the addition of "sharrows"

Springfield Avenue & International Boulevard

The current configuration of International Blvd and Springfield Avenue includes overly-wide travel lanes that invite unwanted speeding. One approach to encourage more people to use bicycles would be the installation of a buffered bike lane, achieved by narrowing the travel lanes. Turn lanes would still be possible at intersections where the right-of-way widens.

Existing International Boulevard

An immediate and low cost improvement could include re-striping to include buffered bike lanes
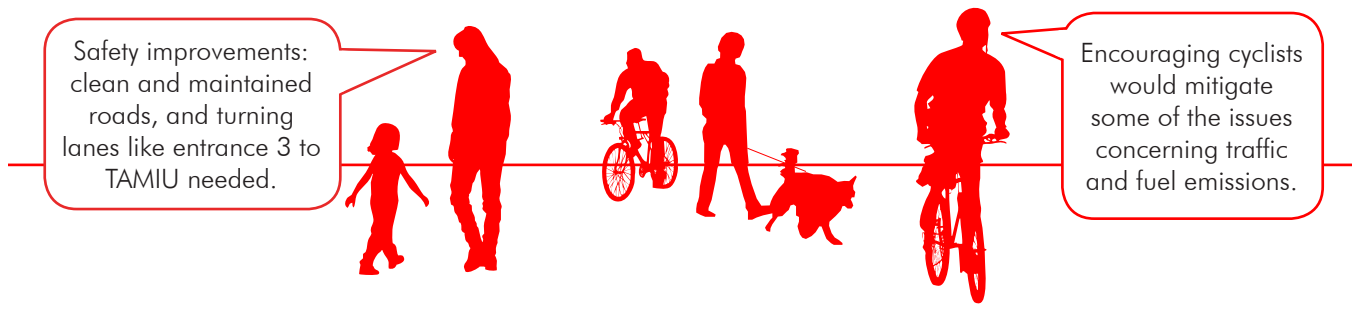
Bike Parking

Laredo has the potential to become a premier bicycling destination through strategic policy changes and infrastructure investments. The City has opportunities to further link to the region's natural beauty, excellent weather, and network of streets connecting Downtown, El Azteca, St. Peters, El Cuarto, and the Heights neighborhoods.

In addition, few bicycle parking facilities are found across Laredo; they are specifically lacking at schools, civic buildings, and some commercial shopping areas. There is also a need for secure parking in the Downtown area, near the US Mexico border.

In Laredo, adopting bicycle parking regulations will result in two basic types of bicycle parking facilities: short-term and long-term as well as where each type should be located, depending on surrounding land uses. This distinction is crucial in the City's bicycle parking regulations, which is essential for meeting the needs of various types of cyclists and the multiplicity of trip types (commuting, errands, recreational etc).

Bicycle parking should not be tied to automobile parking requirements; supply and demand for cars is not an adequate indicator of actual bicycle parking need. Furthermore, if a municipality adopts automobile parking maximums, or later reduces such parking requirements, the amount of bicycle parking would also be reduced when the opposite may be necessary. Therefore, bicycle parking ratios should be based on uses of the property (e.g., a gym would require more bicycle parking than a lumberyard) and quantifiable indicators like unit count, employee count, or building square footage.

Bicycle parking standards should be created that include graphic examples depicting acceptable and unacceptable rack types, locations, and placement. For those who manually install bicycle parking facilities, visual guidance will prevent the poor location and configuration of otherwise acceptable bicycle parking types.

Existing non-connectivity of bike routes

Bicycle parking located at the US Mexico border

Public Transit Service

El Metro Bus Transit System

El Metro is the public transportation system for the City. El Metro is currently in the process of updating their Five Year Transit Development Plan. The agency's Long Range Comprehensive Transit Plan aims to create more frequent and efficient service routes along major corridors, providing better transit mobility between important activity nodes throughout the City. Operations and routes should be reviewed, and more efficient routes should be prioritized; the review should focus on modern best practices for bus transit systems.

There are currently 22 fixed bus routes, two of which (Routes 12A and 12B) are Express Routes and 18 El Lift Van paratransit services for the handicap. El Metro's service currently most extensively serves the Downtown area, with all routes beginning or ending at El Metro's Transit Center (located in Downtown Laredo).

The bus transit and paratransit system has approximately 9,500 trips per day and serves over 3.1 million riders annually (2015). From the years 2007-2011 annual ridership decreased significantly by 27.2% over this 5-year period. Ridership appears to have stabilized since 2011.

Surveyed responses conducted as part of the Laredo Transit Development Plan (September 2009) documented that over one quarter (27%) of El Metro riders would like to see improvements to the schedule such as running the bus more frequently and extending service hours and operating more buses per route. About 14% of riders would like to see an improvement in the timeliness of the buses and 13% would like to ride in newer, cleaner buses.

In 2016, El Metro was awarded $9.9 million from the DOT's Federal Transit Administration's Bus and Bus Facilities Grant Program. The funding will be used to construct the first phase of a two-phase project for a new operations and maintenance facility located at Jacaman Road and Bartlett Avenue. [LMT 2016]

Route	Areas Served
1	Santa Maria Santa Maria - Mall del Norte - Target Store #1
2A	San Bernardo Mall del Norte - Social Security Office
2B	San Bernardo Park & Ride - Calton
3	Convent Laredo Medical Center - Doctor's Hospital
4	Springfield Target Springfield - Retama - Target Store #1
5	Tilden - Gateway Community Health Center - Public Library
6	Cedar - Casa Blanca Clinic
7	LCC - San Francisco Javier
8A	Guadalupe/Lane Corpus Christi - Texas Workforce
8B	Guadalupe Villa Del Sol Tilden - Cheyenne Subdivision
9	Market - New York/Lomas del Sur
10	Corpus Christi Meadow - Zacatecas/Bartlett
11	Gustavus/LEC Gustavus - Clark - Laredo Entertainment Center
12A	Del Mar Express Mall del Norte - International
12B	Shiloh Express Mall del Norte - Shiloh - International
13	Heritage Park Gustavus - Clark - Heritage Park
14	Santa Rosa LCC South Campus - Santa Rita
15	Main/Riverside Main - Riverside/Calton
16	TAMIU Texas A & M University
17	Mines Road Mall del Norte - Rancho Viejo
19	Santo Nino Concord Hills - Larga Vista
20	Los Angeles Zapata Highway - Los Angeles

El Metro Service Routes

El Metro Service Area Map

Phase II of the project will include the construction of a park-and-ride location.

Samuel Schwartz, a leading transportation expert, defines "a usefully frequent network" as "one that stops at a convenient transit node at least every fifteen minutes, and ideally even more often. The advantage of this of course, is that no one really needs to know a transit schedule to use such a system." Furthermore, a good system is one where most people live within a quarter-mile of a transit node where a bus (or streetcar) stops at least every fifteen minutes.

Electric Tramway Service Route

Downtown Street Car

In 1890, the second international street car line between the United States and Mexico, was constructed between Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Laredo, Texas. It was the first international electric tramway in the world and the first electric railway of any kind in Latin America. The McGraw Electric Railway Director, published annually in the United States, states that streetcar operation continued until about 1918. The international bridge burned in 1920 and a new bridge was opened in 1922. Little information is available about the remaining history of the streetcar; however, the decline of the Laredo streetcar corresponds to the period of decline for the streetcars in the United States, generally.

University of Texas
Institute of Texan Cultures
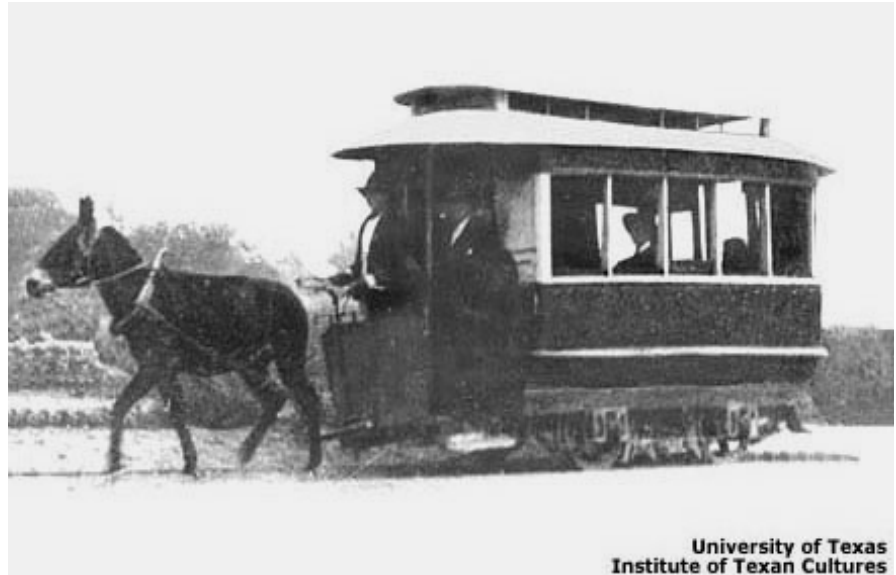
Undated Photograph of Streetcar in Nuevo Laredo

The advent of the streetcar, and its historic significance for Laredo, provides the City with an opportunity to reintroduce the electric tramway and support a more diverse and vibrant transportation system for the central business district.

Convent Street Depiction of the Streetcar

Legend

RAILROAD	
EXISTING BIKE LANES	
PROPOSED BIKE LANES	
PRIORITY ROUTES (PHASE I)	
SHARED USE PATH	
PROTECTED BIKE LANE	
BIKE LANE	
BIKE BOULEVARD	
EXISTING TRAILS	
BIKE COMMUTER STATION	
EMPTY OR LOW DENSITY PARCEL	CREEK/WATER
BUILT PARCEL	GREEN AREA
DESTINATIONS	

BUS ROUTES

1	SANTA MARIA	8A	GUADALUPE/LANE	14	SANTA RITA
2A	SAN BERNARDO/ SOCIAL SECURITY	8B	GUADALUPE/ VILLA DEL SOL	15	MAIN/RIVERSIDE
2B	SAN BERNARDO/ CALTON	9	MARKET	16	TAMIU
3	CONVENT	10	CORPUS CHRISTI	17	MINES RD
4	SPRINGFIELD	11	GUSTAVUS/LEA	19	SANTO NIÑO
5	TILDEN	12A	DEL MAR EXPRESS	20	LOS ANGELES
6	CEDAR	12B	SHILOH EXPRESS		
7	LCC	13	HERITAGE PARK		

Transit and Bike Network Map

The map overlays the existing transit route system with the proposed bike network to show a more complete transit system.

Ride-for-Hire Services & Ride-Sharing

The City of Laredo currently has eight taxi cab service companies concentrated mostly within the Downtown area. The rate schedule for the City varies but begins at $4.00. If traveling to Nuevo Laredo or Tamaulipas, Mexico, rates are the same as within Laredo except for an additional surcharge of $12.00.

Ridesharing services, which are a relatively new transportation option, operate much like a traditional taxi service whereby a rider can match up with a driver by requesting a ride using their GPS-enabled smartphone or schedule a future ride at a predetermined time. Rides are generally found to be convenient, accessible, quick, reliable, safe, and economical. For these reasons, ridership has appealed to many people that normally would not use a ride-for-hire service.

Outside of the Downtown area, ride-for-hire services are sparse at best and generally perceived as unreliable, especially late at night. Ridesharing services such as Uber and Lyft have provided a reasonable option for those wishing to find a safe and reliable way home. City policies have recently been changed to allow ride-sharing services such as Uber and Lyft to operate in the area.

Passenger Rail Service

No known light-rail or local commuter service trains are planned in the City. However, TxDOT is currently in the early part of the planning process regarding the construction of the Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Rail System which would provide passenger rail intercity service from Oklahoma City to Dallas/ Fort Worth to San Antonio to Laredo and Brownsville/ Harlingen.

Additionally, a high speed rail line has been in the planning stages for a route between Monterrey to San Antonio, which would stop in Laredo. Current railroad infrastructure is built for freight lines and is not up to high-speed standards and cannot be utilized by passenger tracks.

LEGEND
- Highway
- N4, Conventional
- C4A, Higher- and High-Speed
- C4B, Higher- and High-Speed
- C4C, Higher- and High-Speed
- S4, Higher-Speed
- S6, Higher- and High-Speed
- Highway route
- Railroad route
- Route outside of existing transportation corridor
- Shared commuter route
- Possible railroad extension
- City
- Airport
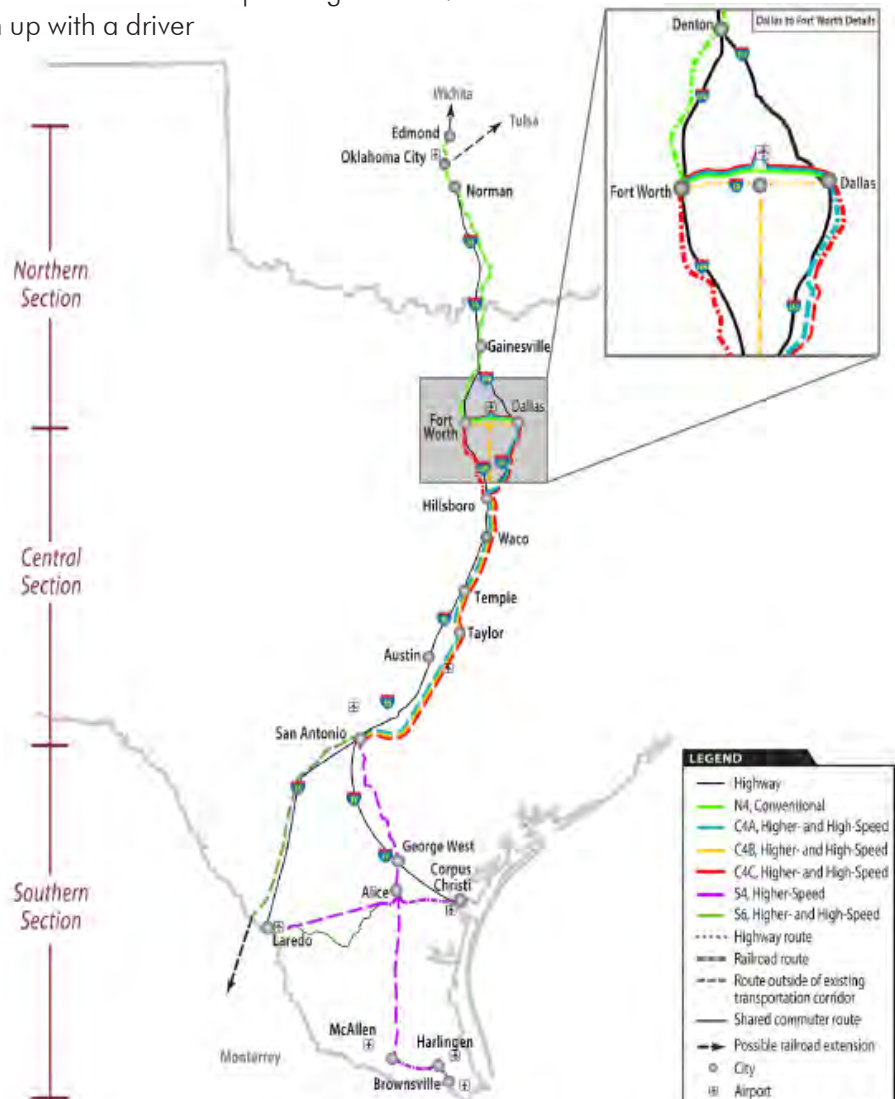
Geographic Sections and Alternatives for the proposed Texas-Oklahoma Rail System
Source: TxDOT in cooperation with Oklahoma DOT

International Transport & Local Logistics

Airport Facilities

The site of the Laredo International Airport was originally established in the 1940s as part of a military wartime training activities. From 1952 to 1973 the airport became the Laredo Air Force Base to provide basic training for the U.S. Air Force. It was not until 1975 that the airport facility would be opened to provide commercial aviation for the region.

The airport is currently a public-use airport, operated by the City of Laredo, located three nautical miles northeast of the central business district, and about five miles north of the United-States-Mexico border. The airport is classified as a primary non-hub airport by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

In 2013, approximately 103,000 passengers were enplaned and approximately 54.6 million pounds of cargo were accommodated at the airport. The airport is served by a number of airline cargo carriers including: Fed Ex, BAX Global, DHL, and Airborne among other cargo carriers. Currently, the airport has three commercial airline carriers: Allegiant Air, American Airlines, and United Airlines. A federal inspection station, which operates 24 hours a day, provides customs and immigration services and conducts agricultural inspections.

The airport has a 500 acre site that is designated as a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ). It is one of eight FTZs in the Laredo area and is a North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) gateway for air cargo.

Forecast for operations between 2013 to 2033 project that air carrier (passenger airlines) and air taxi/commuter (passenger airlines) are to change by 7.4%, and -0.2%, respectively. All-Cargo is anticipated to grow by 3% and all other air/taxi/general aviation is to grow by 1.1%. The number of enplaned passengers is expected to experience a compound annual growth rate of 4.3% according to the Laredo Airport Modernization Plan (Master Plan Update, December 2015).
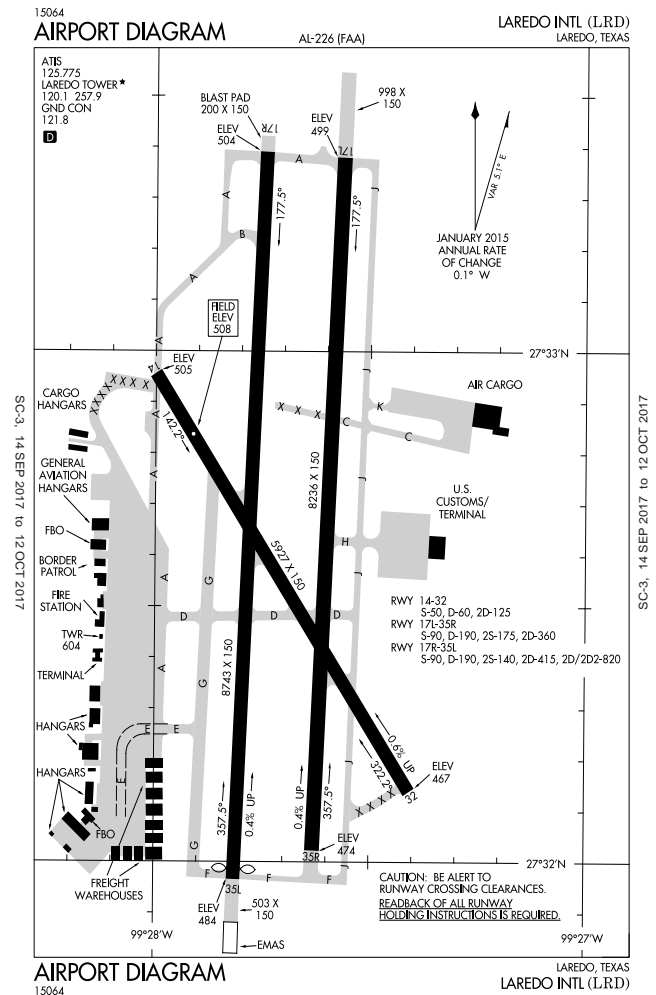
Laredo International Airport Diagram

Cross-Border Transportation Logistics
Ports of Entry

As the largest inland port along the US-Mexico border, Laredo benefits from the crossing of over $280 billion (2014) in commerce through the Laredo Customs District. This tremendous flow of goods through the region offers nearly endless opportunities to build up the local industry by finding ways to add value to products that are already moving through the area—keeping shipping costs and time low.

LEGEND
Rail   Highway   Port   Air

907 Million Tons
Rail 30%   Highway 31%
Air <1%   Port 39%
INBOUND

1.644 Billion Tons
Rail 5%   Highway 90%
Air <1%   Port 5%
WITHIN TEXAS

462 Million Tons
Rail 60%   Port 40%
THROUGH

744 Million Tons
Rail 18%   Highway 34%
Air <1%   Port 48%
OUTBOUND
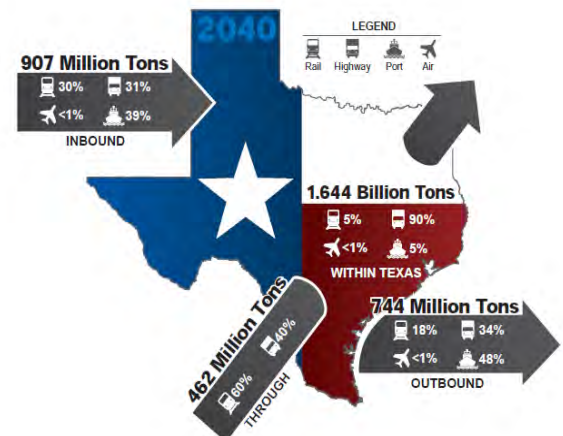
Texas Freight Mobility Plan 2040
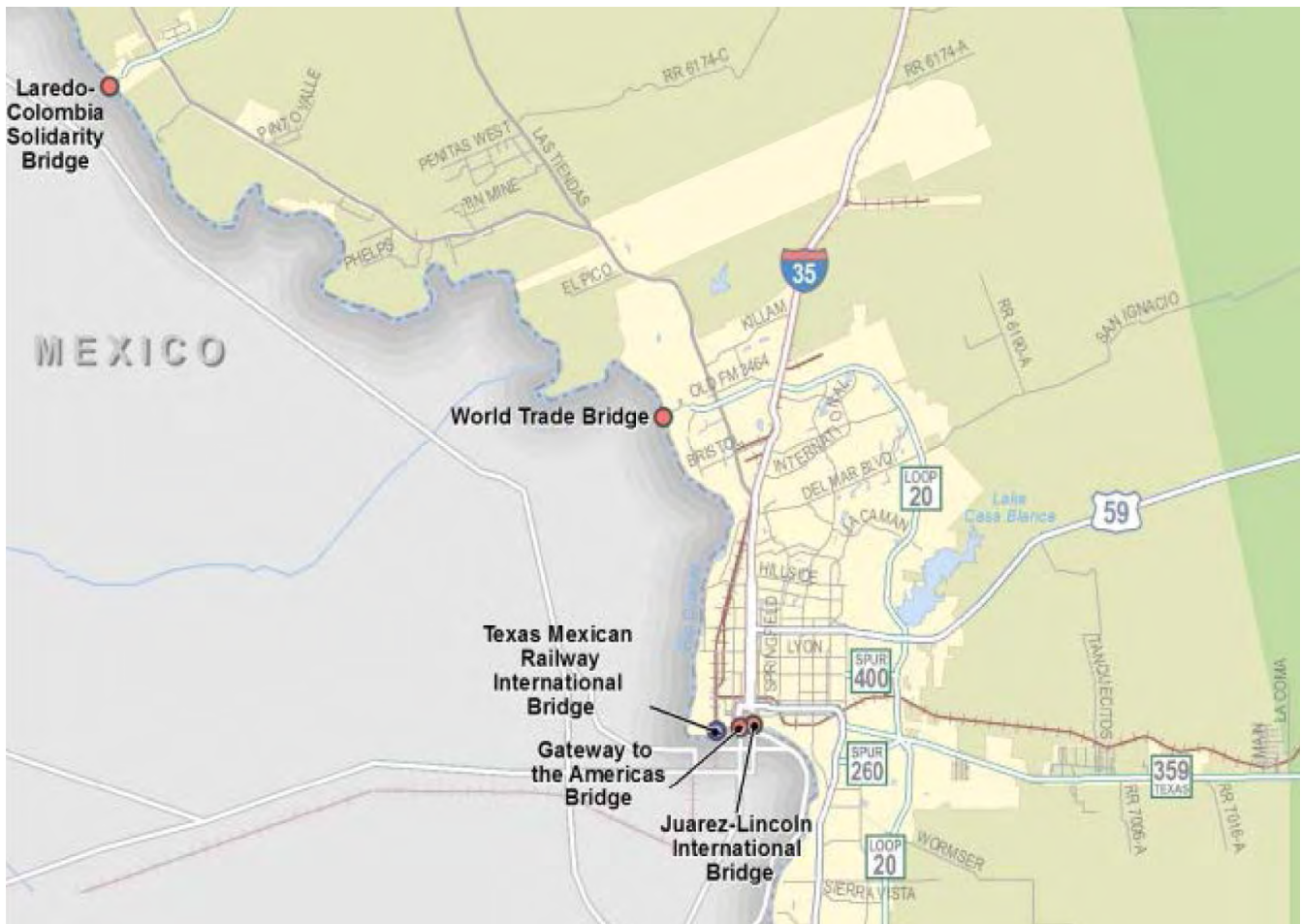
Bridge Ports of Entry
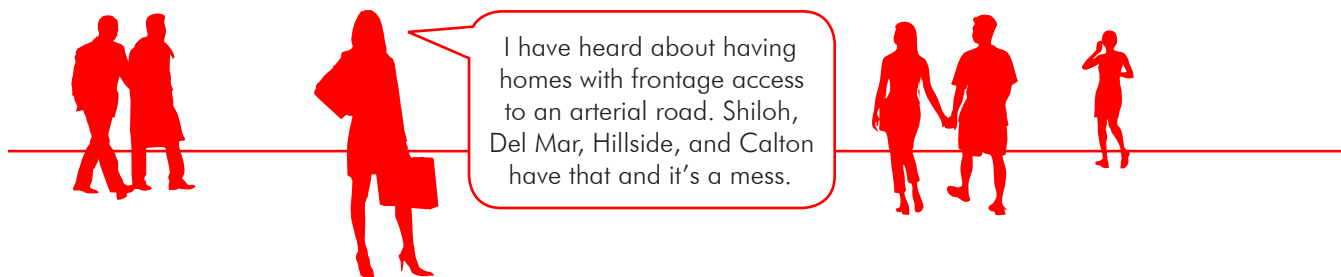
International Bridges
Bridge I- Gateway to the Americas Bridge
Non-commercial and Pedestrian
Bridge I is a four-lane bridge and allows privately owned vehicles (POVs) only. The original bridge was constructed in 1954 but was destroyed by a flood and reconstructed in 1956.

In December of 2015, Bridge I received $26.8 million in federal funding for renovation improvements that will allow for improved pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle mobility. The improvements are anticipated to reduce peak automobile wait times from 33 minutes to 15 minutes and peak pedestrian wait times from 49 minutes to 21 minutes. As part of the improvements, the historic building is also rehabilitated.

Bridge II - Lincoln-Juarez International Bridge Non-commercial
Bridge II is a six-lane bridge and allows POV only. The bridge was constructed in 1976.

Bridge II is ranked as the busiest crossing for bus passengers in fiscal year 2014, with an average of 2,796 passengers per day (125-150 bus crossings per day). Modernization work at the bridge includes expansion and construction of new bus stalls and vehicle inspection lanes, a new waiting area, new restrooms, and a canopy for loading and unloading buses. The improved bus configuration is expected to reduce peak transit times from 160 minutes to 40 minutes.

As of late 2015, the City of Laredo and TxDOT are negotiating the transfer of the four city blocks between the end of I-35 and the entrance of Bridge II. These blocks are currently used as parkland. When this transfer is complete, the City will take over all maintenance of this area and may provide additional services that are associated with incoming travelers while the remainder is being used as parkland.

Bridge III - Columbia Solidarity Bridge
Non-commercial and Commercial
Bridge III is an eight-lane bridge with two sidewalks. POV and commercial/cargo are permitted over the bridge. It was completed in 1991.

Bridge IV - World Trade Bridge Commercial
Bridge IV is an eight-lane bridge that allows commercial traffic only. It opened in 2000.

Between the World Trade Bridge and Columbia Solidarity Bridge, about 12,000 commercial trucks cross the bridges each day. This is only about 40% of the capacity of these bridges.

Future upgrades involve both the MPO and the City. They are currently looking at expanding the World Trade Bridge by doubling the lanes from eight to sixteen, with additional exit booths and weigh-in-motion, each of which support the FASTLANE Grant. FASTLANE Grants are awarded by the U.S. Department of Transportation to support transportation infrastructure for the new Fostering Advancements in Shipping and Transportation for Long-term Achievement of National Efficiencies.

Additionally, the City of Laredo, Webb County, the Webb County-City of Laredo Regional Mobility Authority (WC-CL RMA) and the TxDOT-Laredo District are proposing that Bob Bullock Loop from the World Trade Bridge to US 59 be upgraded to interstate highway standards and that this segment of Bob Bullock Loop be integrated into the I-69W corridor.

Bridge	Total Number of Bridge Lanes/Rail Tracks	
	2011	2035
Bridge #1 - Gateway to the Americas Bridge	4	4
Bridge #2 - Juárez-Lincoln Bridge	6	6
Bridge #3 - Laredo-Colombia Solidarity Bridge	6	6
Bridge #4 - World Trade Bridge	8	16
Rail - Texas-Mexican Railway International Bridge	1	1

Bridge Ports of Entry Total Number of Lanes

Commercial Truck Freight

Laredo experiences a very high volume of commercial vehicle traffic due to the importance of trade in the region. Commercial truck traffic into the City generally originates from the World Trade Bridge and southbound along I-35.

Major industrial facilities, including industrial parks and distribution centers, are situated along Mines Road, just north of Bob Bullock Loop. They are also located at the Unitec Industrial Park located on the east side of I-35, north of the Union Pacific terminal and about six miles north of Bob Bullock Loop. The gray areas on the adjacent map demarcate the industrial areas within the City.

Drayage truck traffic between the borders for distribution to warehouses is responsible for much of the congestion around the industrial areas and commercial routes. Drayage truck activities are defined as a truck pickup from or delivery to a seaport, border port, inland port, or intermodal terminal with both the trip origin and destination in the same urban area. Once a drayage truck unloads a shipment, the truck will often wait for the next dispatch request. This waiting period results in the drayage truck driving in a circuitous pattern around the industrial areas until the next dispatch is received.

Future freight demands are anticipated to grow by more than 200% by the year 2040, which will greatly increase the congestion and stressors on the existing transportation network, particularly in the areas near

Port Name	Year	Trucks	% truck/total
Laredo	2009	1,382,319	32%
Laredo	2013	1,846,282	36%
Total	2009	4,291,465	
Total	2013	5,194,867	

Border Crossings in Laredo, TX Compared to Total Entry at Southern Border Ports (Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics 2015)

Truck Routes (red) and Industrial Areas (gray)

the World Trade Bridge, the industrial facilities along Mines Road, and northward along I-35. Adequate planning and funding for upgrades to these roadway networks should be appropriated to accommodate this growth. Efforts should be made to separate truck freight traffic from residential neighborhoods to improve public safety, and to separate commercial traffic from commuter traffic as best as possible.

Drayage and long-haul commercial truck traffic are in need of places to park between dispatches and adequate truck stops for overnight sleeping. Given the large number of trucks in the area, there remains an economic opportunity to accommodate the truckers who are presently left with little or no choice other than to either violate mandatory rest times between shifts, park on the side of the road, or find a truck stop that is far away.

Roadway	Location	2012
IH 35	Between Del Mar & International Blvd	14,205
IH 35	Between Hidalgo St & US 59	10,324
IH 35	Between Mines Rd & Bob Bullock Loop	9, 570
IH 35	6.5 miles north of Bob Bullock Loop	5, 579
US 83	Between Loma del Sur Blvd & Zacatecas	5,166
IH 35	9.7 miles north of Bob Bullock Loop	4,991
IH 35	Between W Hillside Rd & W Del Mar Blvd	4,798
US 59	Between IH 35 and N Meadow Ave	4,740
US 83	Between Magana Hein Rd & Loma del Sur Blvd	4,680
IH 35	Between US 59 & Mann Rd	4,649

High Truck Traffic Volume Locations Average Daily Traffic
Source: TxDOT, Transportation Planning and Programming Division

Truck Route Level of Service, 2008 vs. 2040

Freight Rail Service

Freight rail cargo service is provided by the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), Barlington Northern Santa Fe Railroaway (BNSF), and the Kansas City Southern Railway (KCSR). The Texas Mexican Railway was sold to the KCSR in 2005. KCSR and UPRR are privately owned U.S. carriers. All rail traffic crosses via the international rail bridge between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, which is owned by KCSR and located in the heart of Laredo's Downtown area. After crossing the Rio Grande, the KCSR line turns and travels east-west.

There are three major rail yards in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo:

1. KCSR's Laredo Yard is a 750-car capacity yard and is located approximately 7.5 miles east of the Texas Mexican Railway International Bridge.

2. UP's Port Laredo Yard has a capacity of 750 cars and is located approximately 8.2 miles north of the bridge.

3. The Sanchez Yard is located 11 miles south of the bridge and to the west of Nuevo Laredo. The Sanchez Yard is a 1,500-acre facility that mirrors the functions at the Port Laredo and Laredo Yards. The yard has 22 tracks, including two for car repairs and an intermodal terminal capable of handling 1,500 trucks per day.

The Sanchez Yard is equipped to handle all Mexican Customs and agricultural inspections, thereby eliminating the need for international traffic to stop on the bridge for inspection. Sanchez Yard has transformed rail operations over the bridge from alternating six-hour northbound/southbound windows to a single-track through right-of-way. Northbound trains staged at the Sanchez Yard can be pre- cleared, pre-blocked, and inspected at the yard. This has doubled the bridge capacity to almost 40 trains per day (Kansas City Southern, 2007).

In 2008 and 2009, train traffic reduced tremendously to levels similar to the beginning of the decade with 2,716 train crossings. This decline occurred during the economic recession. In 2010, during the economic recovery, train traffic increased again by 12% compared to 2009 – a growth very similar to the 2000 to 2001 time period when traffic increased by 9%.

According to a Kansas City Southern (KCS) study, UP crosses approximately 10 to 12 trains per day over the Texas Mexican Railway International Bridge. By 2020, it is projected that UP will cross approximately 20 trains per day over the bridge. KCS currently crosses approximately 8 to 10 trains per day and by 2020, KCS is expected to cross approximately 30 trains per day over the bridge. KCS's traffic projections indicate a projected future growth that is in itself higher than the traffic using the bridge today. The projected rail traffic in the future will thus exceed the capacity of the bridge (Kansas City Southern, 2007).

At-Grade Crossings and Quiet Zones

Laredo has 32 at-grade crossings operated by the Kansas City Railroad, and 41 at-grade crossings operated by Union Pacific Railroad with upwards of 50 trains per day throughout the City.

These at-grade crossings require a locomotive engineer to regularly sound a train-mounted horn as the train approaches. The horn is sounded for at least 15 seconds and no more than 20 seconds within 500 feet of the crossing for trains traveling 5 to 15 miles per hour. Train horns must be sounded in a standardized pattern of 2 long, 1 short and 1 long blasts. Volume decibels for train horns are 96 to 110 decibels. This warning exposes residents and businesses in the area to highly disruptive sounds, especially at night.

To alleviate this noise, Laredo has been looking at implementing Quiet Zones, which are improved railroad grade crossings where locomotives are not required to sound their horn. A quiet zone can therefore significantly improve the environmental quality of a neighborhood.

A crossing or a group of railroad crossings can qualify for a quiet zone if, in addition to modern crossing flashers and gates, additional specific crossing devices are used to increase the safety of each crossing. City projects underway include quiet zone projects, new railroad crossing signal upgrades, crossing surface projects, grade separations (bridges and underpasses), and other rail projects.
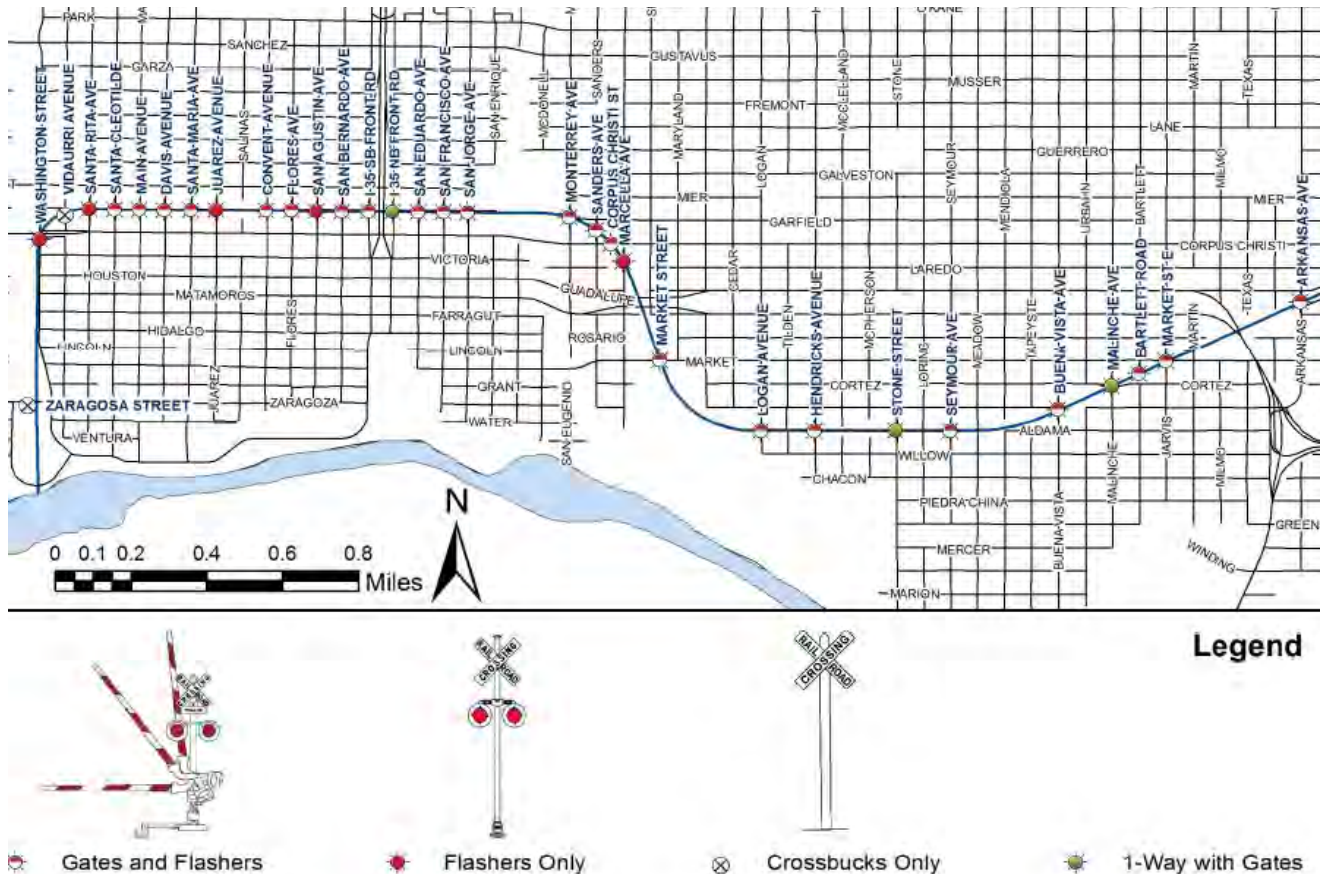
Laredo At-Grade Railroad Crossings

Air Quality

Air quality federal standards are set by the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), by providing allowable concentrations and exposure limits for certain pollutants. Primary standards are intended to protect public health, while secondary standards protect public welfare. Air quality standards have been established for the following six criteria pollutants:

- Ozone,
- Carbon monoxide,
- Particulate matter,
- Nitrogen monoxide,
- Lead, and
- Sulfur dioxide.

If monitored levels of any of these pollutants violate NAAQS, then the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in coordination with TCEQ will designate the contributing area as "nonattainment."

Laredo is considered to be in attainment, meaning it meets applicable air quality standards.

The City's transit department is currently in the process of replacing its diesel vehicles with those which utilize compressed natural gas. Over 50% of all City buses currently operate on compressed natural gas.

For the City to continue to be an attainment zone, transportation control measures should be implemented that include:

- Transportation emission reduction measures,
- Adoption of a local air quality mitigation fee program,
- Development of energy efficient incentive programs, and
- Adoption of air quality enhancing design guidelines.

We would like more beautiful, inviting, and walkable streets.

Are there any plans for roads like I-35, or plans to develop the Rio Grande front?
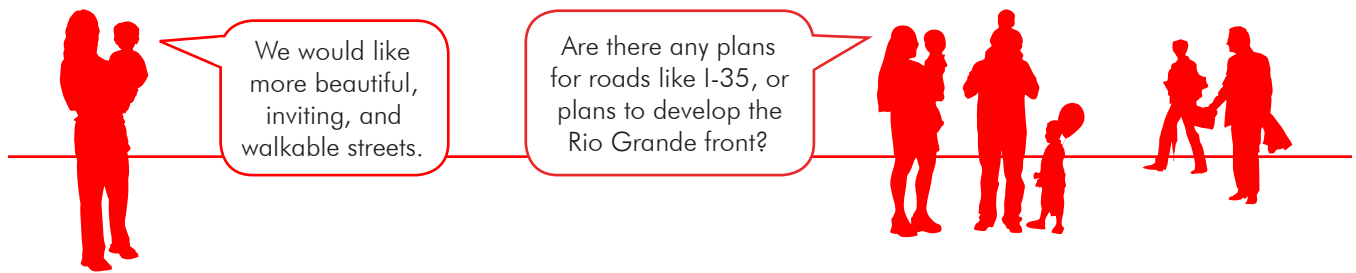
Future Thoroughfare Plan

The updated Future Thoroughfare Plan ensures that the future mobility network will contain a reasonably dense network of continuous routes. The new plan identifies arterials and collectors; those designations are based on the intended network function.

Under the updated functional classification system, "principal arterials" will provide for longer trips on relatively straight paths. Principal arterials often connect to expressways and provide direct routes. This classification combines the city's previous classifications of "major arterials" and "modified major arterials" to match the "principal arterial" terminology used by TxDOT and the FHA.

"Minor arterials" are typically found between principal arterials and provide continuous paths to intermediate destinations and alternate routes for longer trips. Minor arterials can follow less direct routes than principal arterials. Minor arterials typically have only two lanes, but may have four lanes if necessary. They can also be used to connect isolated neighborhoods.

"Collectors" are typically found between minor arterials to provide for frequent interconnections between neighborhoods. Collectors can follow less direct routes than minor arterials and are part of a larger network of continuous paths. In many cases collectors may be indistinguishable from local streets except that they will include dedicated bicycle facilities. They can also be used to connect isolated neighborhoods.

Because Laredo is one of the largest inland ports of entry with large industrial areas, the "industrial collector" classification has been maintained. These collectors are to accommodate large vehicular traffic.

Local streets are not shown on the Future Thoroughfare Plan. They should be completely interconnected within each neighborhood and to adjoining neighborhoods. Local streets can be designed to slow or discourage, though not block, through traffic. Limitations on through movements is possible only because the network of collectors and arterials is sufficient to provide for most traffic flow.

Existing Long Range Thoroughfare Plan	Updated Future Thoroughfare Plan
Expressway Freeways	Expressway
No Previous Designation	Multiway Boulevard
Modified Major Arterial Major Arterial	Principal Arterial
Minor Arterial Type A Minor Arterial Type A	Minor Arterial
Major Collector	Collector
Industrial Collector	Industrial Collector

Updated Functional Classification For Future Thoroughfare Plan

A "multiway boulevard" designation has been added as a new street classification. The multiway boulevard separates through travel lanes from local access lanes to simultaneously move vehicles while providing a calm, spacious pedestrian and living environment for adjacent residences. Multiway boulevards should occur along the most prominent arterials.

The design of individual thoroughfares will still be correlated to functional classification, but more choices will be provided than at present. Because of the variety of physical and social contexts that each type will traverse, a one-to-one correlation between thoroughfare types and street cross-sections is not desirable.

In more suburban areas, an important thoroughfare design determinant is the anticipated amount of traffic to be accommodated. In more compact or urban areas, however, the most important design determinant is managing traffic speeds to levels that are compatible with walking, bicycling, and transit use; this factor is much more important that accommodating anticipated traffic volumes on any given arterial or collector.

LEGEND

- —— Expressway
- - - - Expressway - Proposed
- —— Freeway
- - - - Multiway Boulevard - Proposed
- —— Principal Arterial
- - - - Principal Arterial - Proposed
- —— Modified Principal Arterial
- —— Minor Arterial
- - - - Minor Arterial - Proposed
- —— Collector
- - - - Collector - Proposed
- —— Industrial Collector
- - - - Industrial Collector - Proposed
- ·········· Railroad
- ·········· Trail
- ▢ City Boundary

Future Thoroughfare Plan

Although the City cannot dictate land use outside the City boundary, it can regulate the division of land with street placement and block size within the ETJ. The Future Thoroughfare Plan, coordinated with the Future Land Use Map, divides the ETJ outside the City boundaries into a grid for development to occur around.

Matrix of Updated Functional Classification Characteristics and Design Criteria

	Expressway	Multiway Boulevard	Principal Arterial	Minor Arterial	Collector	Industrial Collector	Local Streets
TYPICAL THOROUGHFARE CHARACTERISTICS							
Network Function	High-speed travel to regional destinations	Straight paths to distant destinations; blends faster moving travel with slower moving access lanes	Straight paths to distant destinations; connects to freeways	Continuous paths to intermediate destinations; alternate routes for longer trips	Continuous paths to arterial network; allows local trips to avoid the arterial network	Continuous paths between primarily industrial areas and the arterial network	Access to local destinations; Slow travel speeds
Direct Route	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes, may include minor deflections	Yes, may include deflections & minor jogs	Yes, may include deflections & minor jogs	No
Spacing	Not applicable	Occurs along most prominent principal arterials	1 mile	Mid-way between principal arterials	Between arterials	Between arterials	Not applicable
Maintenance	State	State or municipality	State or municipality	Municipality or county	Municipality or county	Municipality or county	Municipality or county
Transit	Express bus routes	High-capacity transit, option for dedicated bus lanes	High-capacity transit, option for dedicated bus lanes	Minor bus routes	Para-transit, occasional minor bus routes	Occasional minor bus routes and large vehicle capacity transit	None
DESIGN CRITERIA FOR NEW & RECONFIGURED THOROUGHFARES							
Number of Travel Lanes							
Compact / Urban	4 - 8 lanes	5 thru lanes w/ side access lanes	5 lanes typical; 7 lanes in boulevard	3 lanes typical; 5 lanes if necessary	2-3 lanes	N/A	2 lanes
Suburban		N/A	5 lanes typical; 7 lanes if necessary	3 lanes typical; 5 lanes if necessary	2-3 lanes	2-3 lanes	2 lanes
Width of ROW							
Compact / Urban	Variable Width	>140'	100' - 120'; >120' in boulevard	90'	80'	N/A	60' - 90'
Suburban		N/A	100' - 120'	90'	80'	70'	50' - 65'
Target Speed							
Compact / Urban	65 mph	30–35 mph	30–35 mph	25–30 mph	20–25 mph	N/A	10-25 mph
Suburban		N/A	45 mph	40 mph	20–30 mph	20–30 mph	10-25 mph
Bicycle Facilities							
Compact / Urban	None	Raised cycle track, sharrows in side lane	Raised cycle track	Raised cycle track	Sharrows or raised cycle track	N/A	Full Use of Lane or Sharrow
Suburban		N/A	Raised cycle track	Raised cycle track	Raised cycle track	Buffered bike lanes	Full Use of Lane
Pedestrian Facilities							
Compact / Urban	None	Wide sidewalks	Wide sidewalks	Wide sidewalks	Wide sidewalks	N/A	Wide Sidewalks
Suburban		N/A	Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Sidewalks	Sidewalks
On-street Parking							
Compact / Urban	None	Yes	Yes (not at bus stops)	Yes (not at bus stops)	Yes	N/A	Yes
Suburban		N/A	Occasionally	Occasionally	No	No	Yes (unmarked)
Maximum Curb Radius (without curb extensions)							
Compact / Urban	None	15 feet	15 feet	15 feet	15 feet	N/A	10 feet
Suburban		N/A	20 feet	20 feet	15 feet	15 feet	15 feet
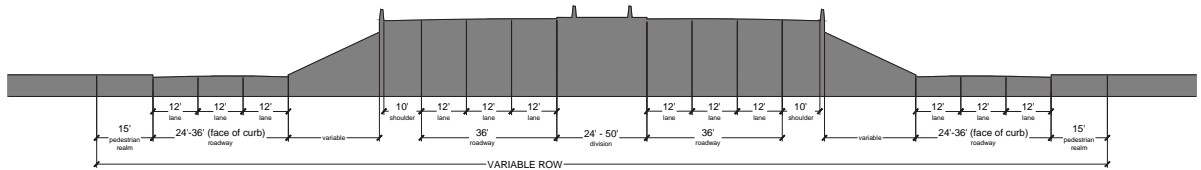
Existing Policy Cross Section: Major Arterial

EXPRESSWAY
COMPACT / URBAN

New expressways should include complete and urban frontage roads that include on-street parking, access lanes, and parkway-protected, elevated cycle tracks. Designing expressways like this will encourage more urban development along highways instead of sprawl, as well as providing superior bicycle facilities for long stretches across the City.

Reimagined Frontage Road in Laredo
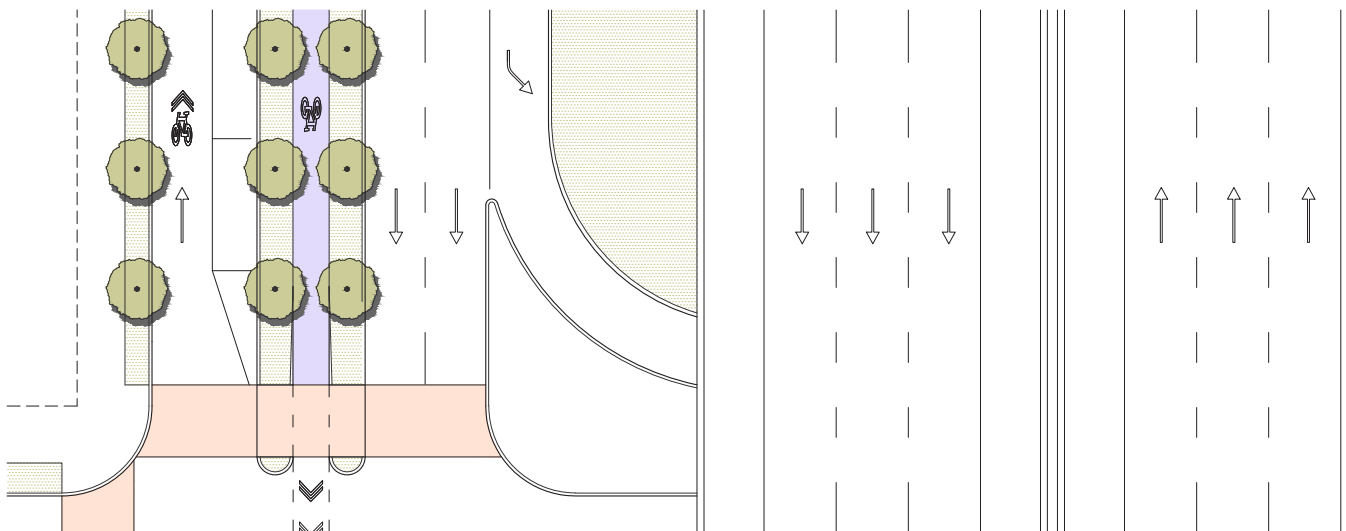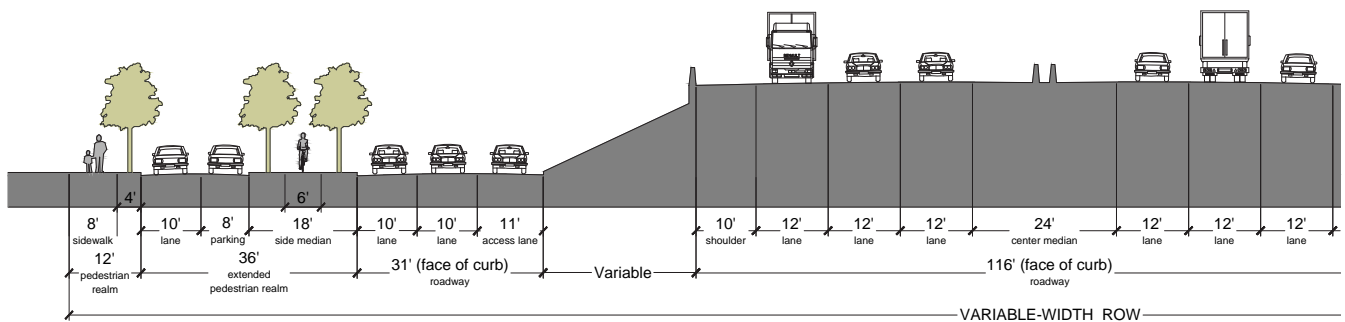
MULTIWAY BOULEVARD A: 140' ROW

COMPACT / URBAN

This multiway boulevard is a new policy section, to be used on important principal arterials in compact / urban areas across Laredo. These boulevards have a minimum ROW of 140' and can be widened as needed to accommodate additional travel lanes in higher traffic areas. They feature elevated and protected bicycle tracks as well separate on-street parking access lanes. Any principal arterial that exceeds 120' should become a multiway boulevard.

A Multiway Boulevard in Brooklyn, NY

TYPE A: 140' ROW

People drive way too fast along residential roads. I don't feel safe walking or biking.

There are too many broken sidewalks and drive-only commercial areas in Laredo.
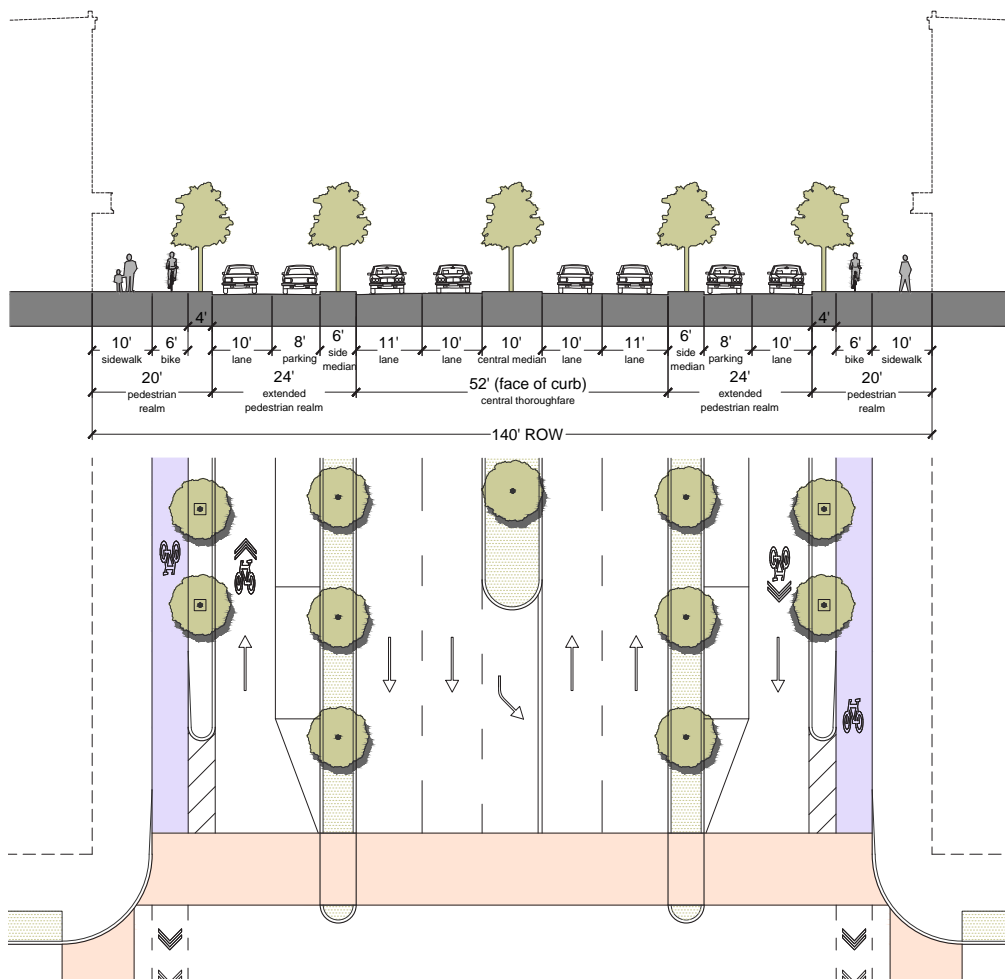
MULTIWAY BOULEVARD B: 150' ROW

COMPACT / URBAN

This multiway boulevard with a 150' right-of-way features a parkway-protected and elevated cycle track along the secondary median as well as bike sharrows along the parking access lanes in the opposite direction, which makes it easier for cyclists to make U-turns and reduces conflicts at intersections.

A Multiway Boulevard with Parkway Cycle Track

TYPE B: 150' ROW

14' sidewalk	10' lane	8' parking	17' side median	11' lane	10' lane	10' central median	10' lane	11' lane	17' side median	8' parking	10' lane	14' sidewalk

14' pedestrian realm — 35' extended pedestrian realm — 52' (face of curb) central thoroughfare — 35' extended pedestrian realm — 14' pedestrian realm
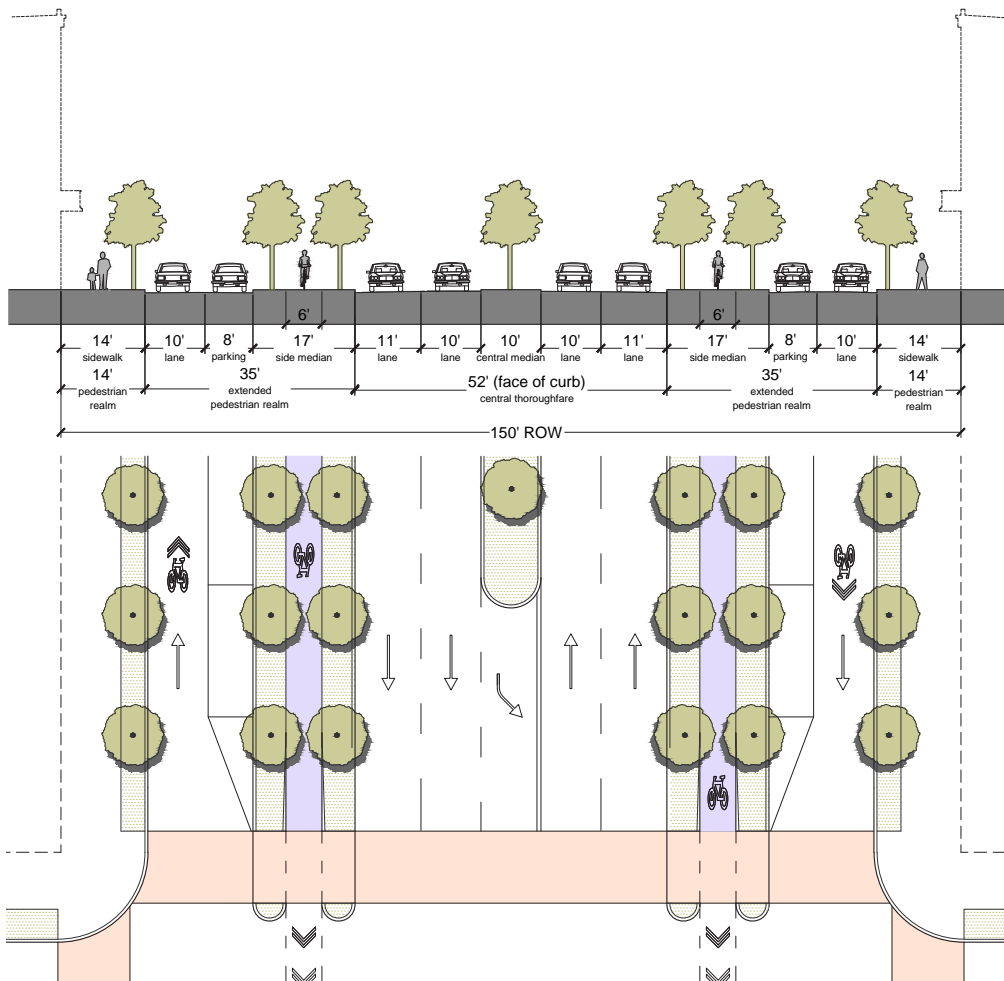
150' ROW

MULTIWAY BOULEVARD C: 150' ROW
COMPACT / URBAN

This multiway boulevard features a separated bike path in the parkway and future transit or bus stops along the secondary median, as well as bike sharrows within the access lanes. This example features two lanes of traffic, one in each direction, in order to accommodate the off-street bike facility and buffered bus-only lane.

Bike path on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn, NY

TYPE C: 150' ROW

| 12' sidewalk | 8' parking | 10' lane | 18' side median | 11' lane | 10' lane | 10' central median | 10' lane | 11' lane | 18' side median | 10' lane | 8' parking | 12' sidewalk |

36' extended pedestrian realm

54' (face of curb) central thoroughfare

36' extended pedestrian realm
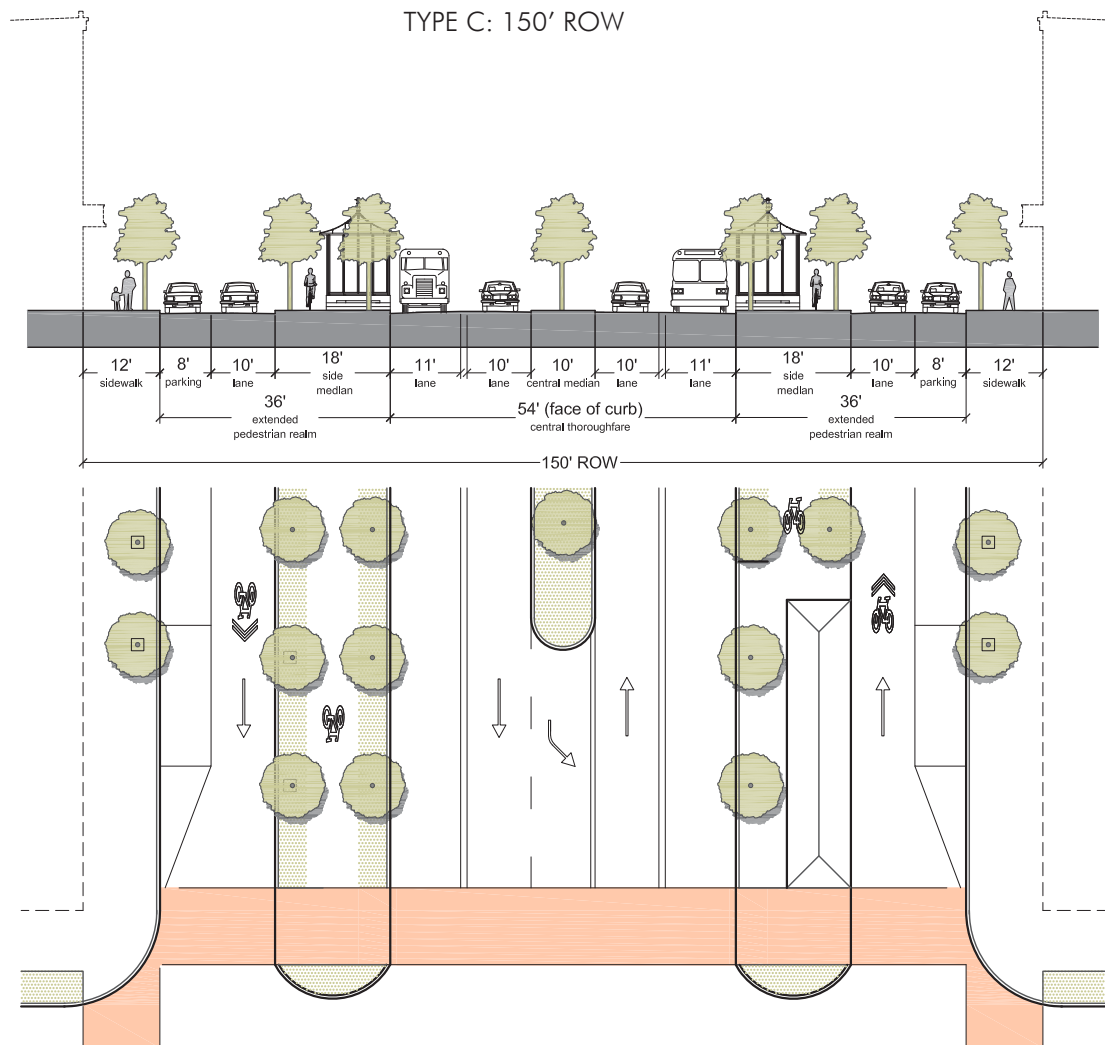
150' ROW

MULTIWAY BOULEVARD D: 150' ROW
COMPACT / URBAN

This multiway boulevard type features future transit or bus stops and bus-only lanes along the secondary median as well as bike sharrows along the parking access lanes.

A Multiway Boulevard separated transit lines

TYPE D: 150' ROW

| 12' sidewalk | 7' parking | 10' lane | 10' side median | 11' lane | 10' lane | 10' lane | 10' central median | 10' lane | 10' lane | 11' lane | 10' side median | 10' lane | 7' parking | 12' sidewalk |

27'
extended pedestrian realm

72' (face of curb)
central thoroughfare

27'
extended pedestrian realm

150' ROW

12' lane | 12' lane | 18'-6" pedestrian realm
24' (face of curb) roadway | 15' raised turning median
100' ROW
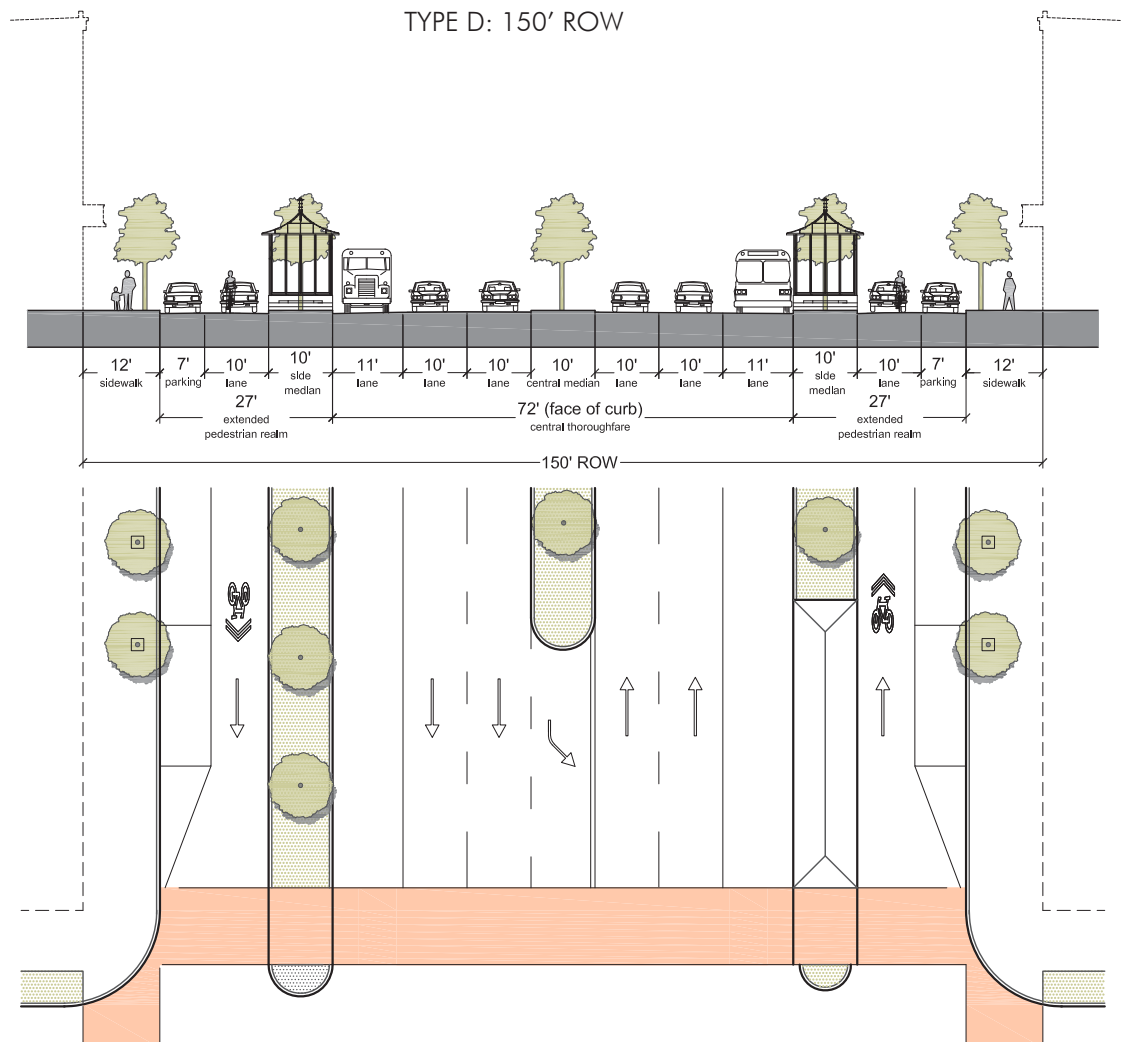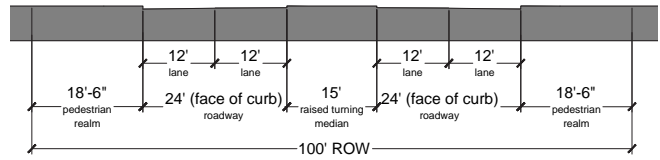
PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL A: 100' ROW

SUBURBAN

In suburban areas, new principal arterials should include four travel lanes, with 11' outer lanes and 10' inner lanes, and a 10' center turn lane with a raised median. Because it maintains the previous modified major arterial policy section with a 100' right-of-way, this section allows for a parkway-protected, raised cycle track.
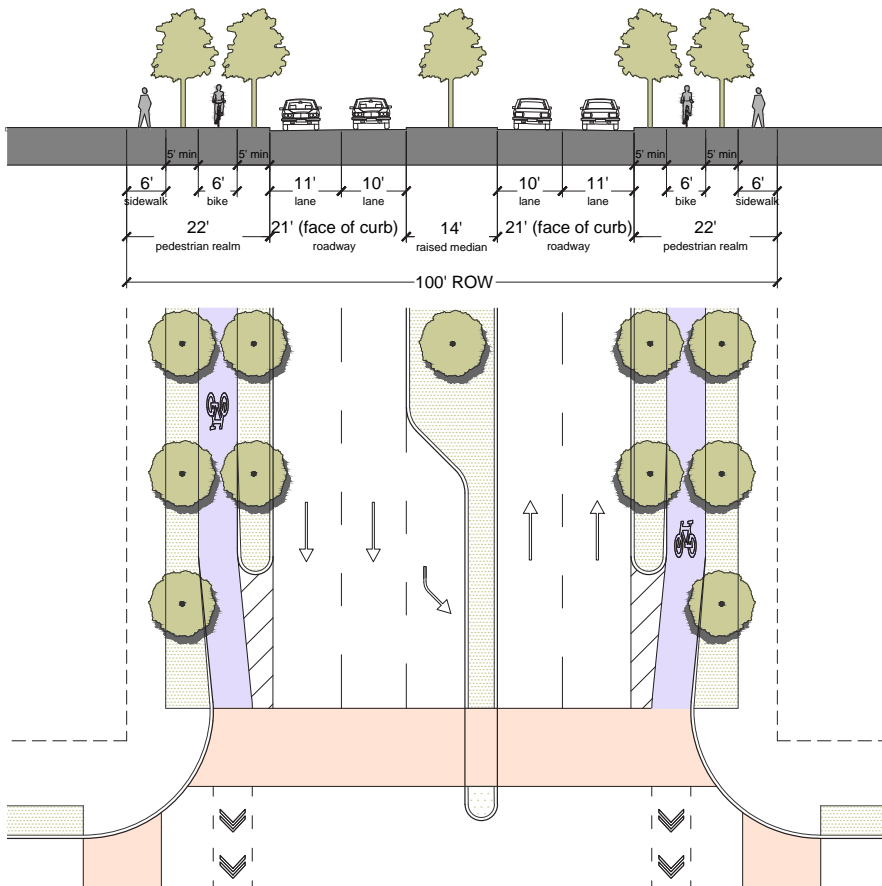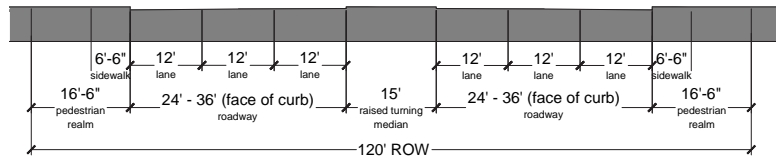
6' sidewalk | 6' bike | 5' min | 11' lane | 10' lane | | 10' lane | 11' lane | 5' min | 6' bike | 6' sidewalk
22' pedestrian realm | 21' (face of curb) roadway | 14' raised median | 21' (face of curb) roadway | 22' pedestrian realm
100' ROW

Existing Policy Cross Section: Major Arterial

SUBURBAN

In suburban areas, new principal arterials should include four travel lanes, with 11' outer lanes and 10' inner lanes, and a 10' center turn lane with a raised median. This section maintains the previous policy section's major arterial 120' right-of-way, which allows for a wider center median and wider parkway planting strips than principal arterial A when the right-of-way is wide enough.
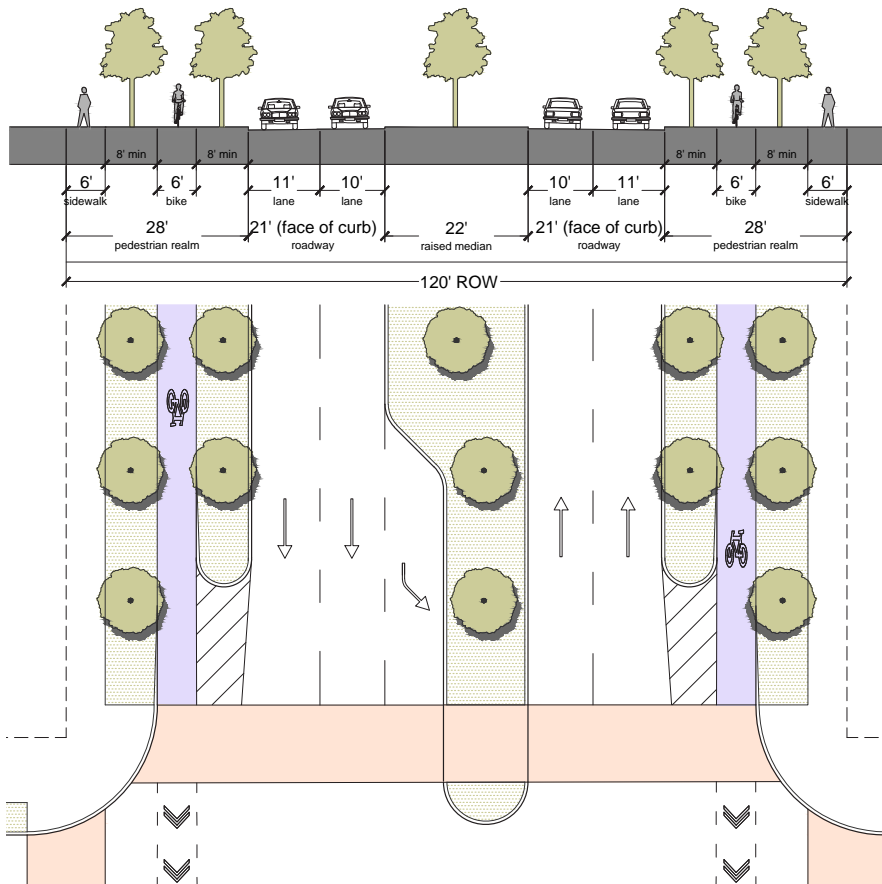
PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL B: 120' ROW

COMPACT / URBAN

In compact / urban areas, new principal arterials should have four 10' travel lanes with a center median and turn lane. The travel lane width has been reduced to help slow down traffic and 8' wide on-street parking is added. Commercial streets feature wider 16' sidewalks (which easily accommodate outdoor dining) and planter boxes. They also include elevated and protected cycle tracks in both directions.

Protected Bicycle Track Along an Arterial in Laredo

COMMERCIAL

| 16' sidewalk | 6' bike | 8' parking | 10' lane | 10' lane | 10' raised median | 10' lane | 10' lane | 8' parking | 6' bike | 16' sidewalk |

27' pedestrian realm | 28' (face of curb) roadway | 28' (face of curb) roadway | 27' pedestrian realm

120' ROW
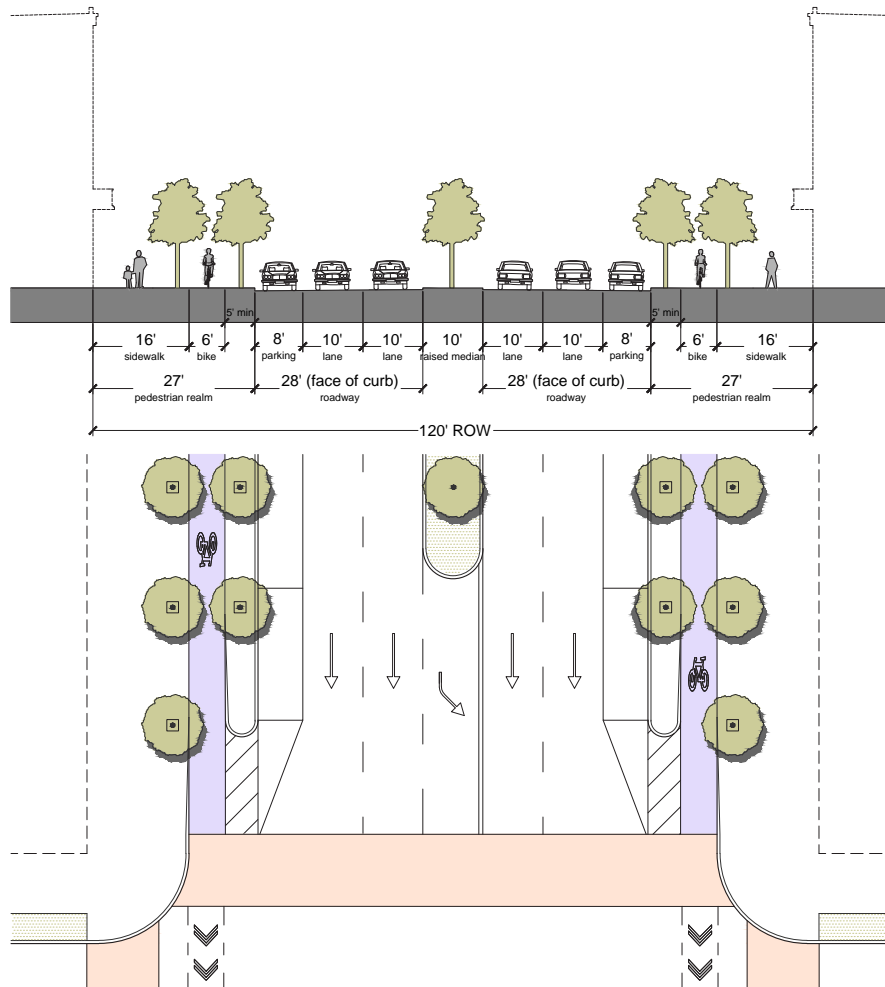
PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL (B)
COMPACT / URBAN

In compact / urban areas, new principal arterials should have four 10' travel lanes with a center median and turn lane. The travel lane width has been reduced to help slow down traffic and 8' wide on-street parking is added. Primarily residential streets maintain 6' sidewalks and planting strips in the pedestrian zone and includes a parkway-protected, elevated cycle tracks.

RESIDENTIAL
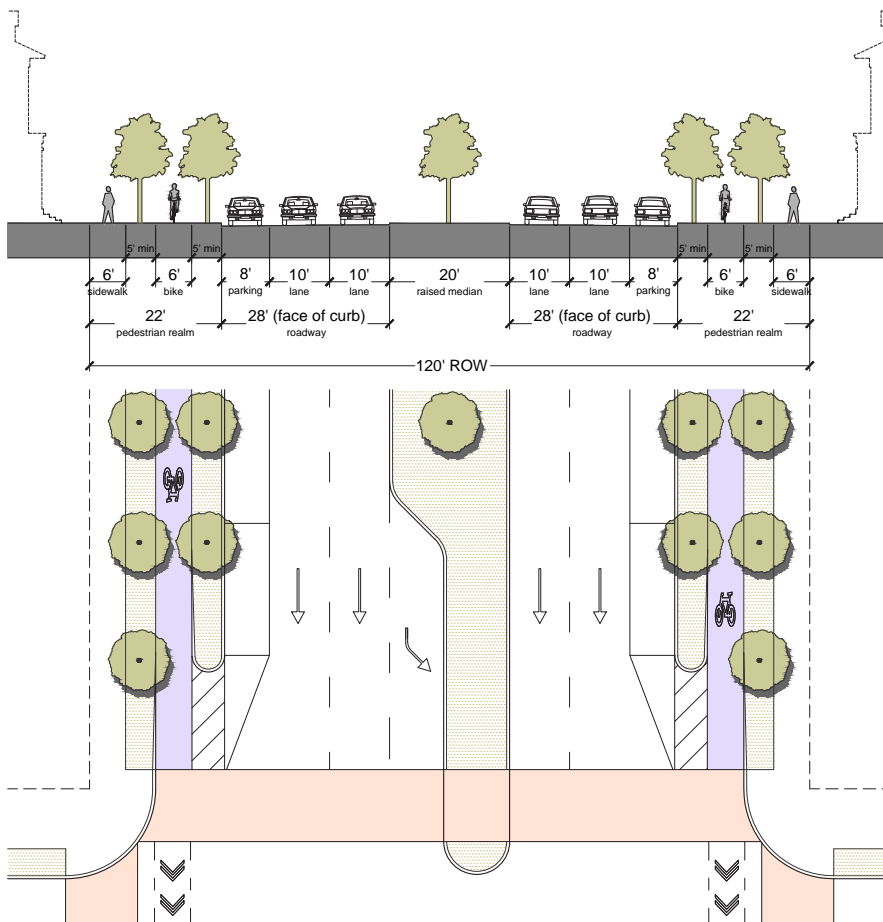
PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL B: 120' ROW
COMPACT / URBAN

In compact / urban areas, future transit or bus-only lanes are accommodated in the center lanes, separated from travel lanes with a median including bus or transit stops. Principal arterials have four 10' travel lanes with the median and turn lane. Commercial streets feature 12' sidewalks and planter boxes. A buffered bike lane is also included in both directions.

Double travel lanes, with transit in the center

COMMERCIAL

| 12' sidewalk | 7' bike lane | 10' lane | 10' lane | 10' raised median | 11' BRT lane | 11' BRT lane | 10' raised median | 10' lane | 10' lane | 7' bike lane | 12' sidewalk |

27' (face of curb) roadway

22' (face of curb) roadway

27' (face of curb) roadway

120' ROW
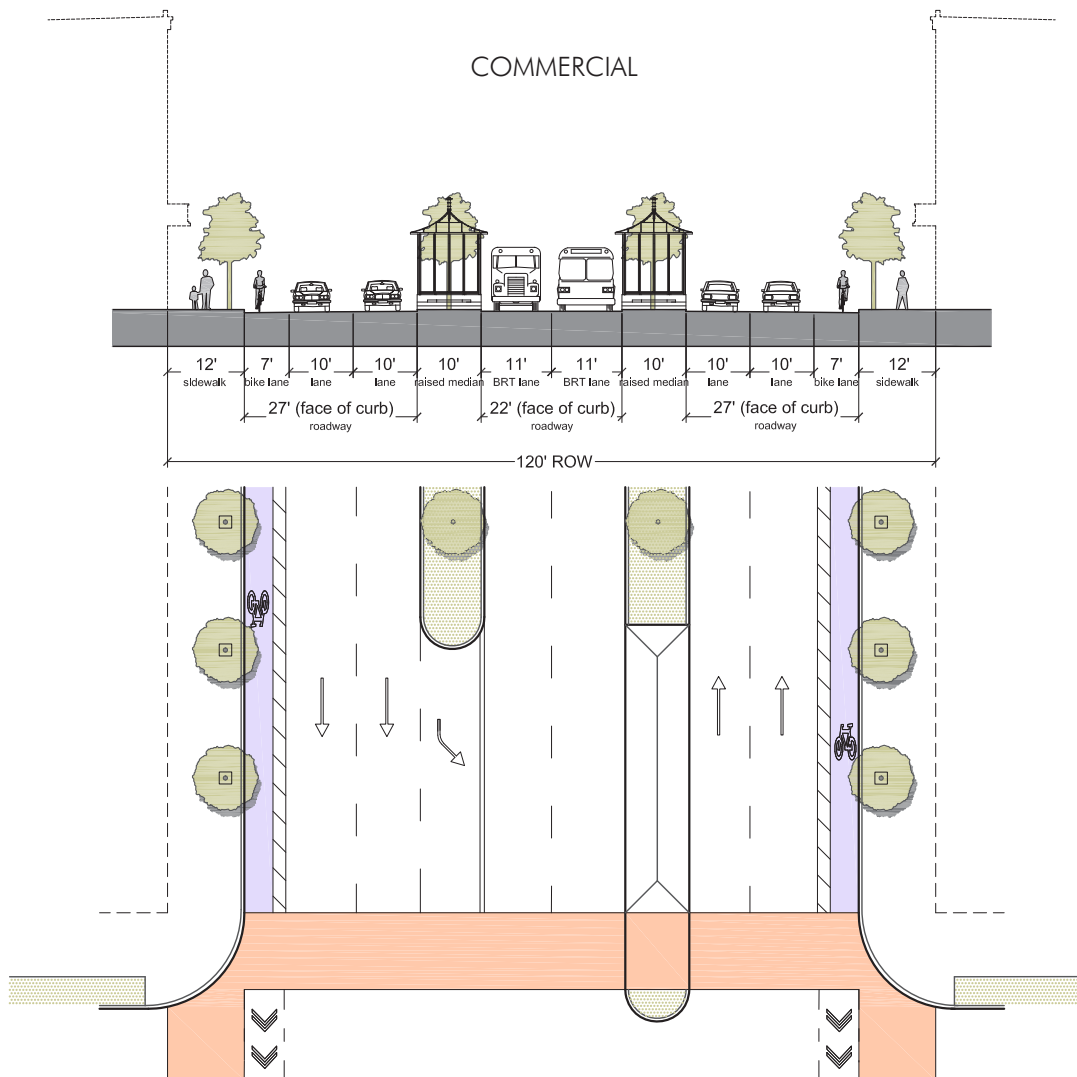
PRINCIPAL ARTERIAL (B)

COMPACT / URBAN

In this principal arterial, four lanes are reduced to two 10' travel lanes with a median and turn lane separating the future transit or bus-only lanes. The number of lanes has been reduced to provide 8' wide on-street parking and a separated bike lane.

Travel lanes are located on the sides with parallel parking

COMMERCIAL

| 12' sidewalk | 9' bike lane | 8' parking | 10' lane | 10' raised median | 11' BRT lane | 11' BRT lane | 10' raised median | 10' lane | 8' parking | 9' bike lane | 12' sidewalk |

27' (face of curb) roadway — 22' (face of curb) roadway — 27' (face of curb) roadway

120' ROW

12' lane 12' lane   12' lane 12' lane

14' pedestrian realm | 24' (face of curb) roadway | 14' raised turning median | 24' (face of curb) roadway | 14' pedestrian realm

90' ROW
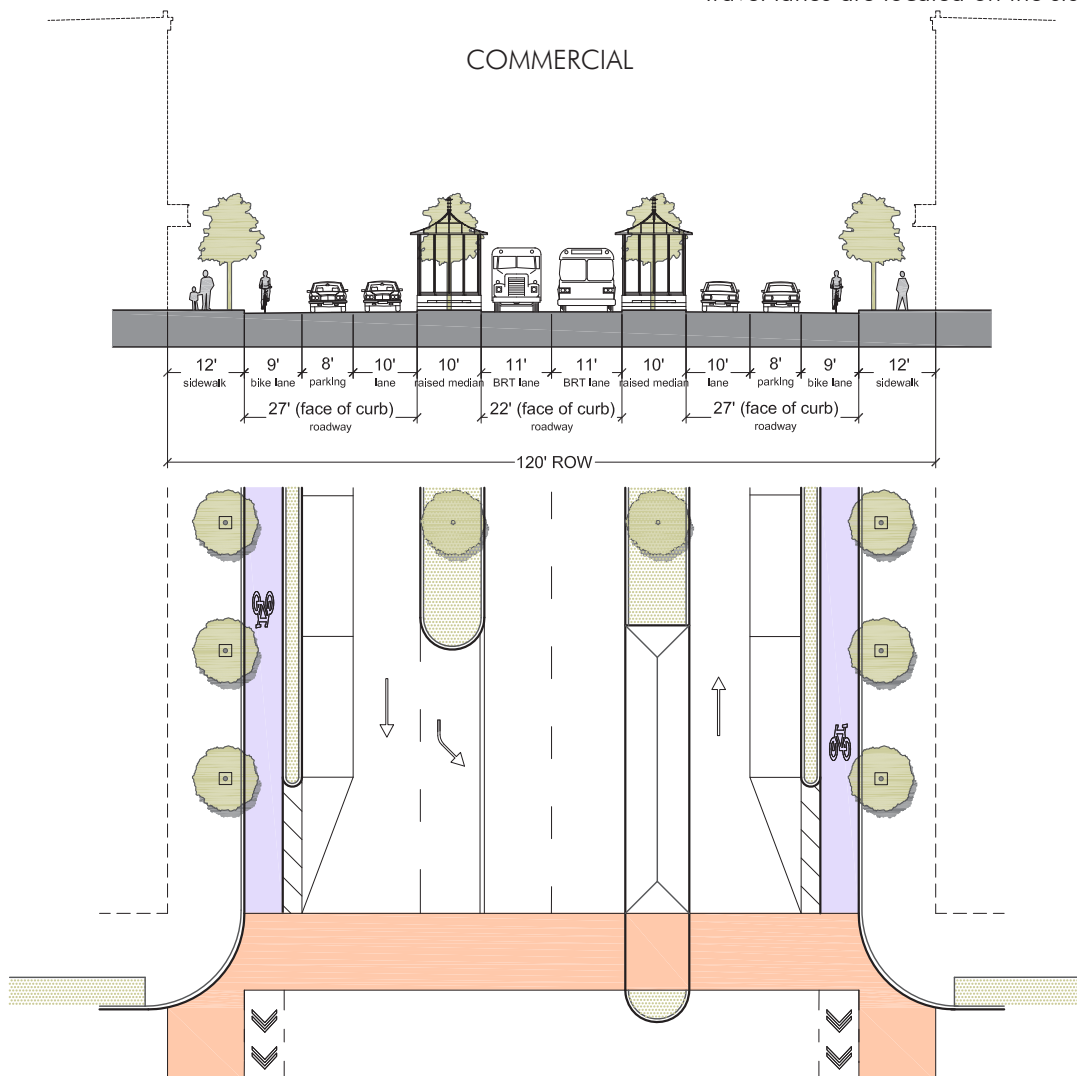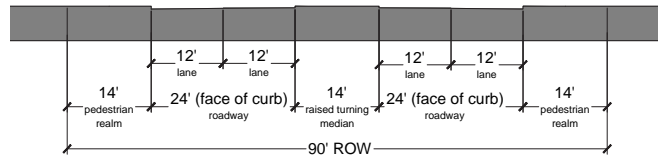
Existing Policy Cross Section: Minor Arterial (Type A)

MINOR ARTERIAL

SUBURBAN

In a suburban context, all new minor arterials should include two 11' travel lanes and a 10' center turn lane with a median. The pedestrian realm has increased, allowing for a parkway-protected, elevated cycle track protecting cyclists from both cars and pedestrians. If traffic demands are too high, there is an option to add two 10' inner travel lanes to create a five-lane roadway.

Raised Cycle Track in Vancouver; Source: NACTO
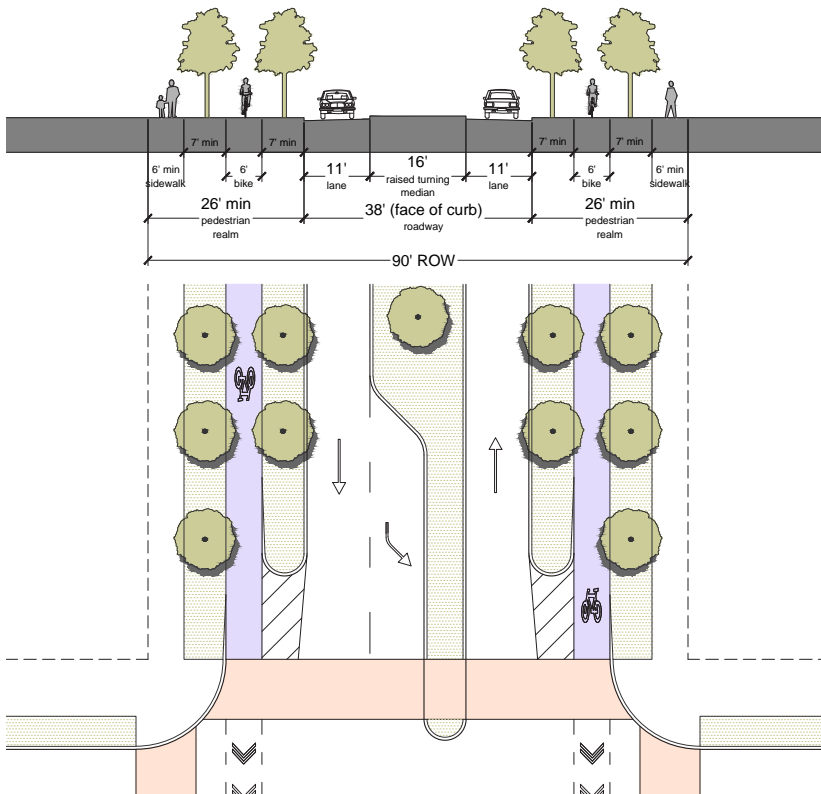
7' min   7' min   7' min   7' min

6' min sidewalk | 6' bike | 11' lane | 16' raised turning median | 11' lane | 6' bike | 6' min sidewalk

26' min pedestrian realm | 38' (face of curb) roadway | 26' min pedestrian realm

90' ROW

MINOR ARTERIAL

COMPACT / URBAN

In compact / urban areas, new minor arterials should have two 10' lanes with a center median and turn lane. Lanes have been reduced to help slow down traffic and 8' wide on-street parking is added. Commercial streets feature wider 12' sidewalks and planter boxes while primarily residential streets maintain 6' sidewalks and parkway planting strips in the pedestrian zone. Both streets include elevated and protected cycle tracks.

Protected and Elevated Bicycle Track Along Arterial

COMMERCIAL

| 12' sidewalk | 6' bike | 8' parking | 10' lane | 10' raised median | 10' lane | 8' parking | 6' bike | 12' sidewalk |

| 22' pedestrian realm | 18' (face of curb) roadway | 18' (face of curb) roadway | 22' pedestrian realm |

90' ROW

RESIDENTIAL

| 6' sidewalk | 6' bike | 8' parking | 10' lane | 10' raised median | 10' lane | 8' parking | 6' bike | 6' sidewalk |

| 22' pedestrian realm | 18' (face of curb) roadway | 18' (face of curb) roadway | 22' pedestrian realm |

90' ROW
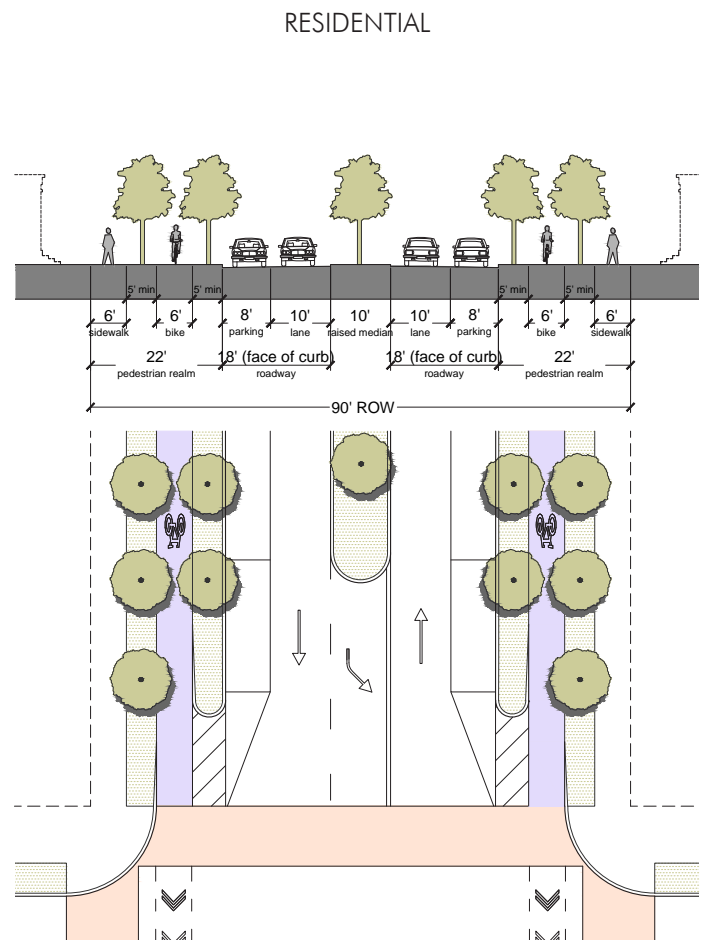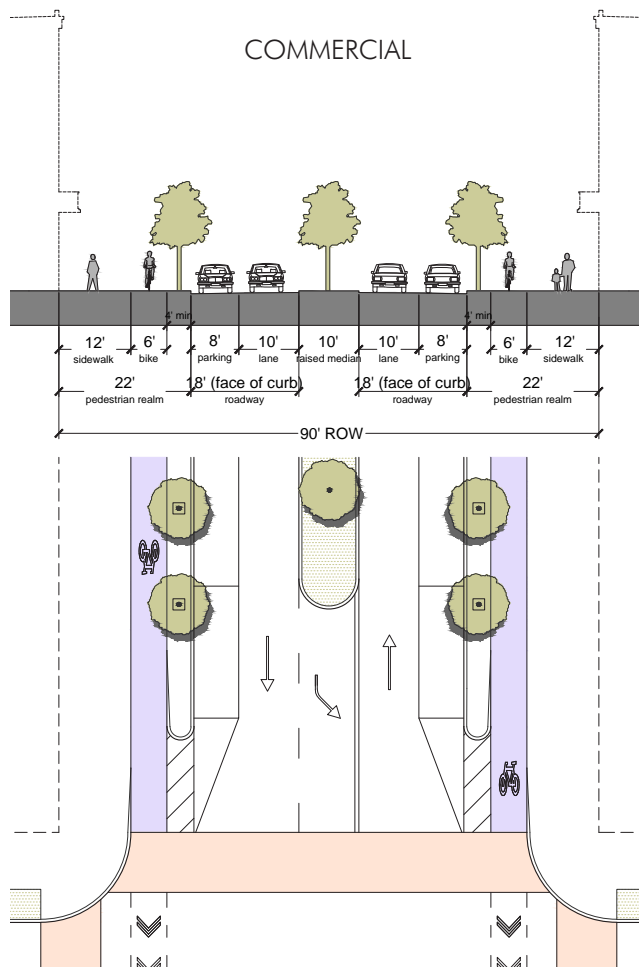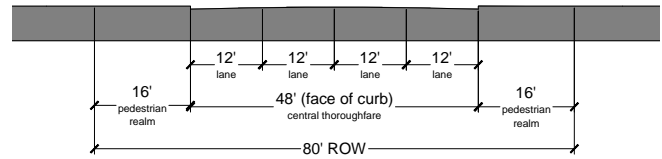
Existing Policy Cross Section: Industrial Collector

COLLECTOR

SUBURBAN

Maintaining the 80' right-of-way of the previous policy section, all new collectors should be reduced to two 11' travel lanes and a 10' center turn lane (with or without a medium, depending on the context). The pedestrian realm has also been increased to just over 23', allowing for a parkway-protected, elevated cycle track in both directions. This keep cyclists away from pedestrians in the sidewalk and cars on the roadway.

Raised Cycle Track in Vancouver; Source: NACTO

TYPE A: Two-Way Center Turn Lane
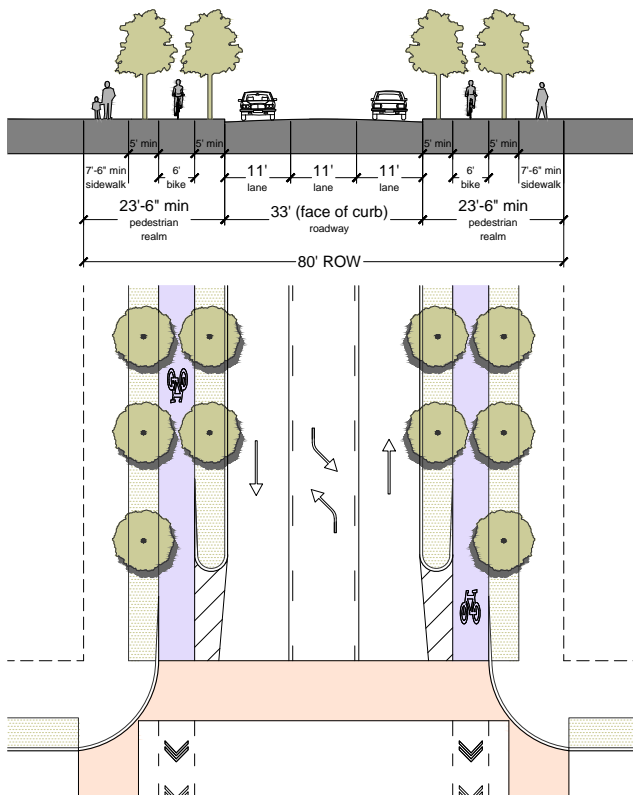
TYPE B: Center Turn Lane With Median
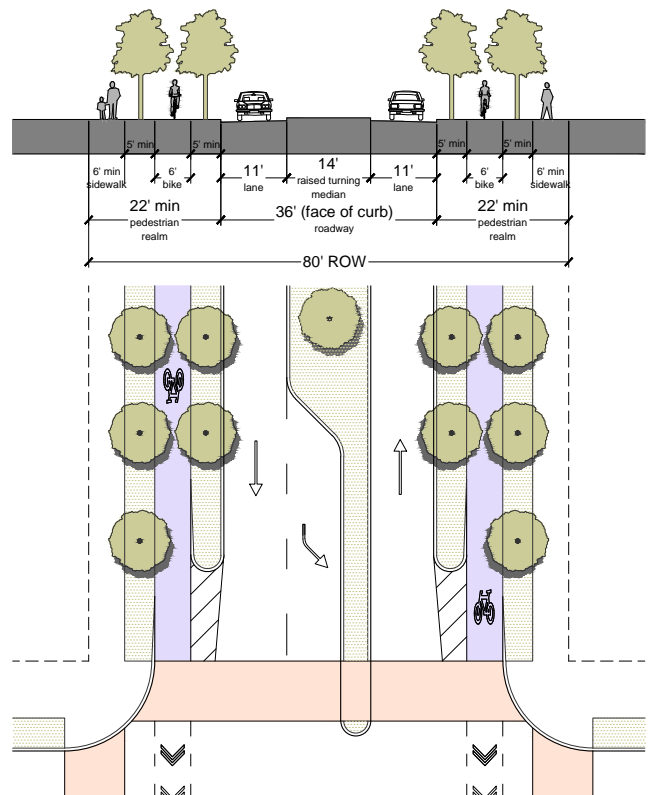
COLLECTOR

COMPACT / URBAN

In compact / urban areas, new collectors should have two 10' lanes with or without an additional center turn lane. The travel lane width has been reduced to help slow down traffic and 8' wide on-street parking is added. Commercial streets feature wider 12' sidewalks and planter boxes while primarily residential streets maintain 6' sidewalks and planting strips in the pedestrian zone. Both streets include elevated and protected cycle tracks.

Elevated Bicycle Track Along Commercial Street

COMMERCIAL

| 12' sidewalk | 6' bike | 5' min | 8' parking | 10' lane | 10' lane | 8' parking | 5' min | 6' bike | 12' sidewalk |

22' min pedestrian realm — 36' (face of curb) roadway — 22' min pedestrian realm

80' ROW

RESIDENTIAL

| 6' min sidewalk | 6' bike | 5' min | 5' min | 8' parking | 10' lane | 10' lane | 8' parking | 5' min | 5' min | 6' bike | 6' min sidewalk |

22' min pedestrian realm — 36' (face of curb) roadway — 22' min pedestrian realm

80' ROW
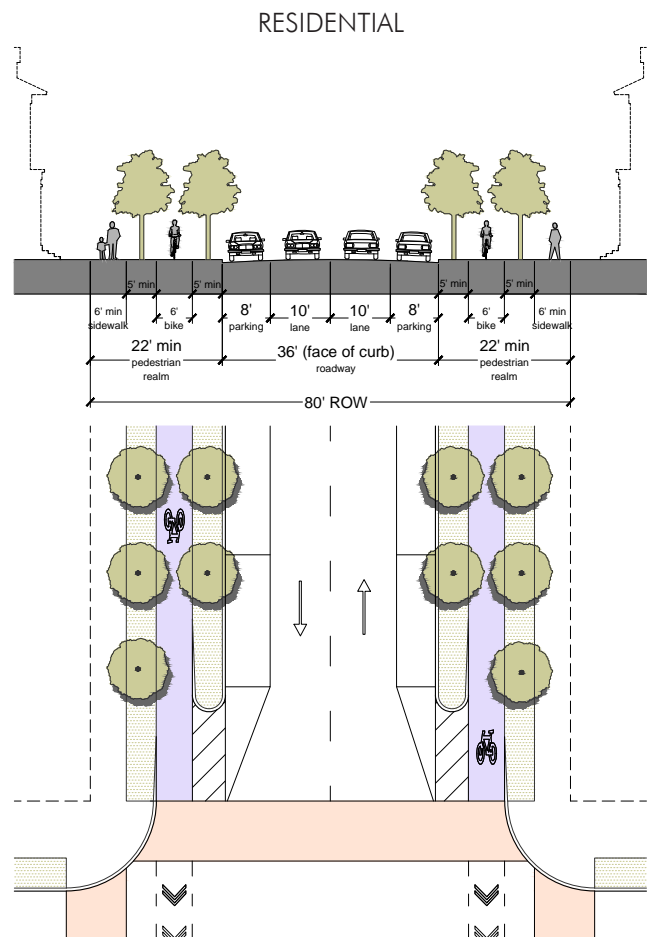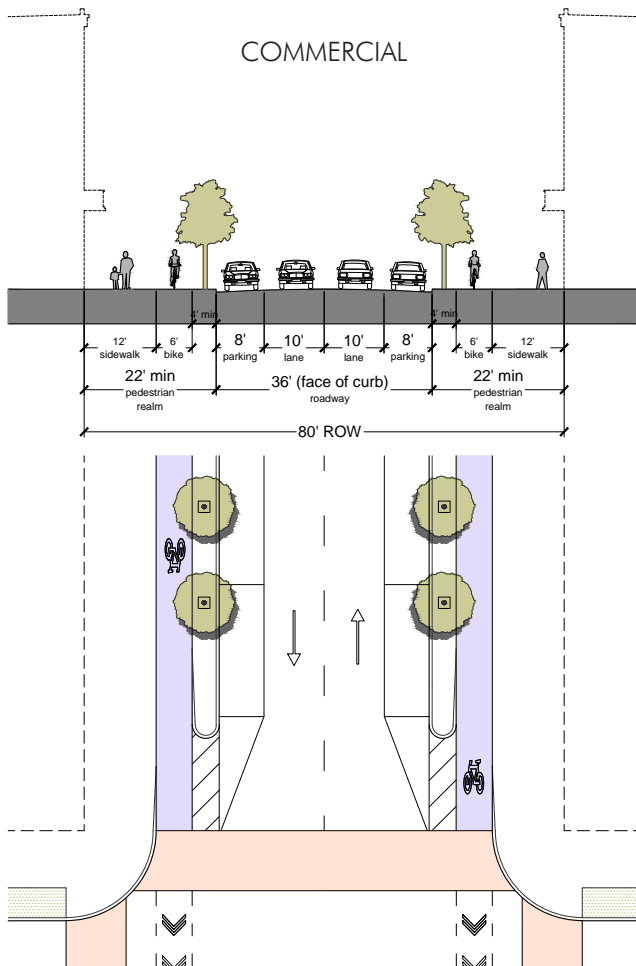
COLLECTOR

COMPACT / URBAN

For neighborhood main streets, new collectors should include a 10' center turn lane with planted median to help move traffic along. There is an option for 15' wide sidewalks that easily accommodate outdoor dining with bicycles sharing the street with cars, or an option for narrower 8' sidewalks and an elevated bicycle track in both directions that would protect cyclists from cars.

Bicycles and Cars Share the Road Along Main Street

MAIN STREET A: Center Median Turn Lane with Bike Sharrows and Space for Outdoor Dining
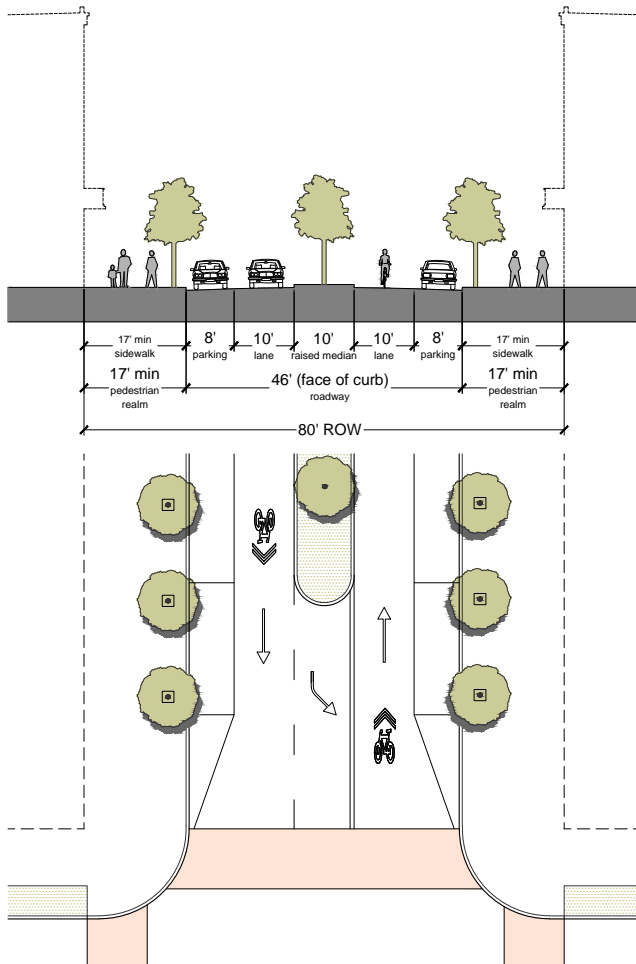
MAIN STREET B: Center Median Turn Lane with Raised Cycle Track and 8' Sidewalks

17' min sidewalk / 8' parking / 10' lane / 10' raised median / 10' lane / 8' parking / 17' min sidewalk

17' min pedestrian realm / 46' (face of curb) roadway / 17' min pedestrian realm

80' ROW

3' min

8' min sidewalk / 6' bike / 8' parking / 10' lane / 10' raised median / 10' lane / 8' parking / 6' bike / 8' min sidewalk

17' min pedestrian realm / 46' (face of curb) roadway / 17' min pedestrian realm

80' ROW
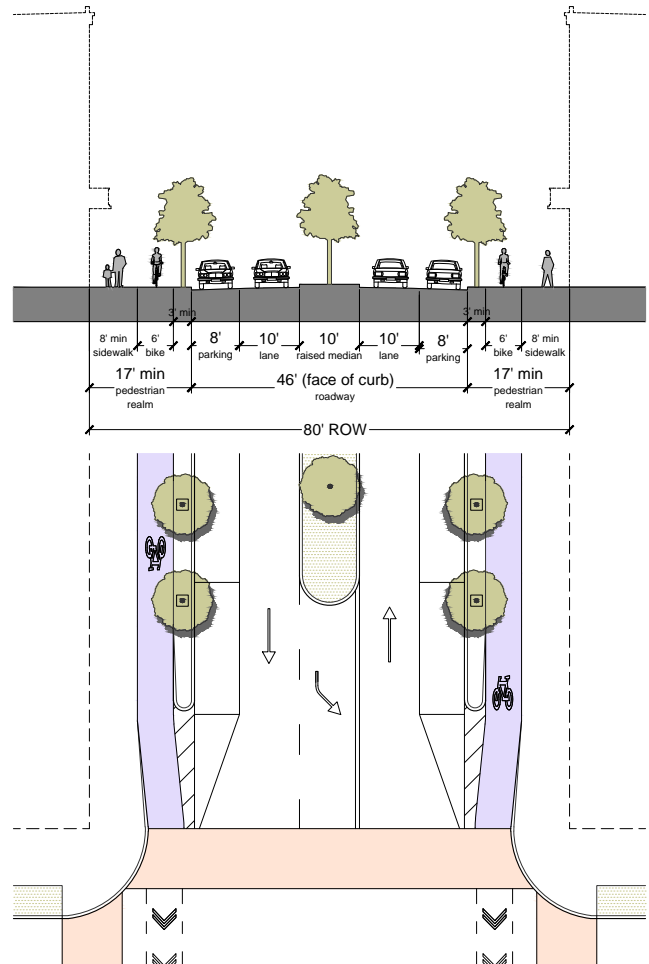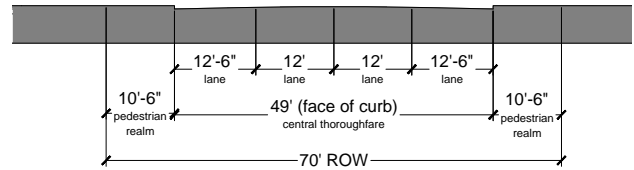
Existing Policy Cross Section: Industrial Collector

INDUSTRIAL COLLECTOR

SUBURBAN

In suburban settings, industrial collectors should have two 11' travel lanes with an 11' two-way center turn lane. This three lane configuration already exists along some industrial collectors, but lanes should be reduced and buffered bike lanes added in each direction. Sidewalks should also be included. Today many industrial collectors have some interrupted sidewalks, or none at all.

Buffered Bike Lane in Fairfax, CA; Source: NACTO
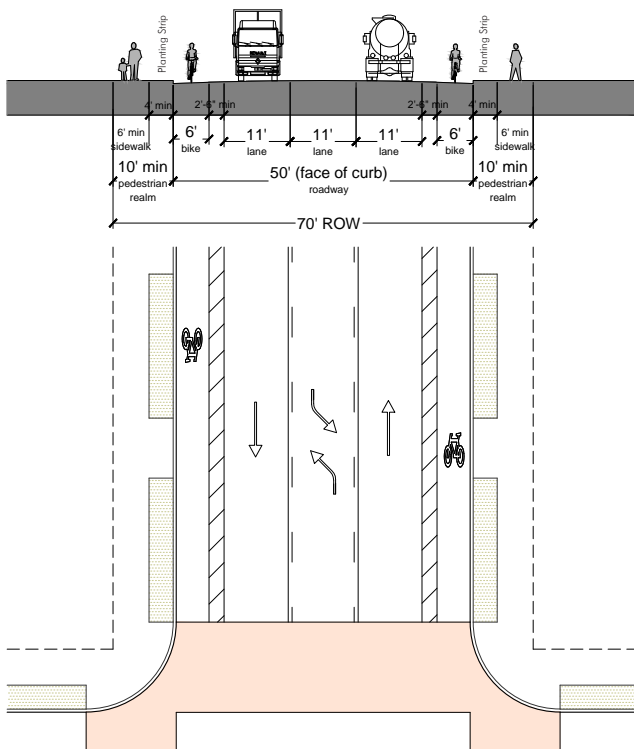
I would love to have more transportation options to get around Laredo.
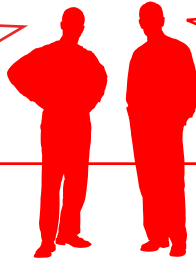
A streetcar would be a great addition to downtown. It adds charm to the neighborhood and helps us get around.

LOCAL STREET

MAIN STREET WITH ANGLED PARKING

In a small-scale neighborhood with a need for additional parking, a local main street should have two 10' travel lanes with an 18' back-in angled parking. Another option could allow for front-in angled parking. Wide sidewalks should also be included and provide space for outdoor dining.

Back-in angled parking in San Marcos, TX

| 17' sidewalk | 18' parking | 10' lane | 10' lane | 18' parking | 17' sidewalk |

56' (face of curb)
roadway

90' ROW
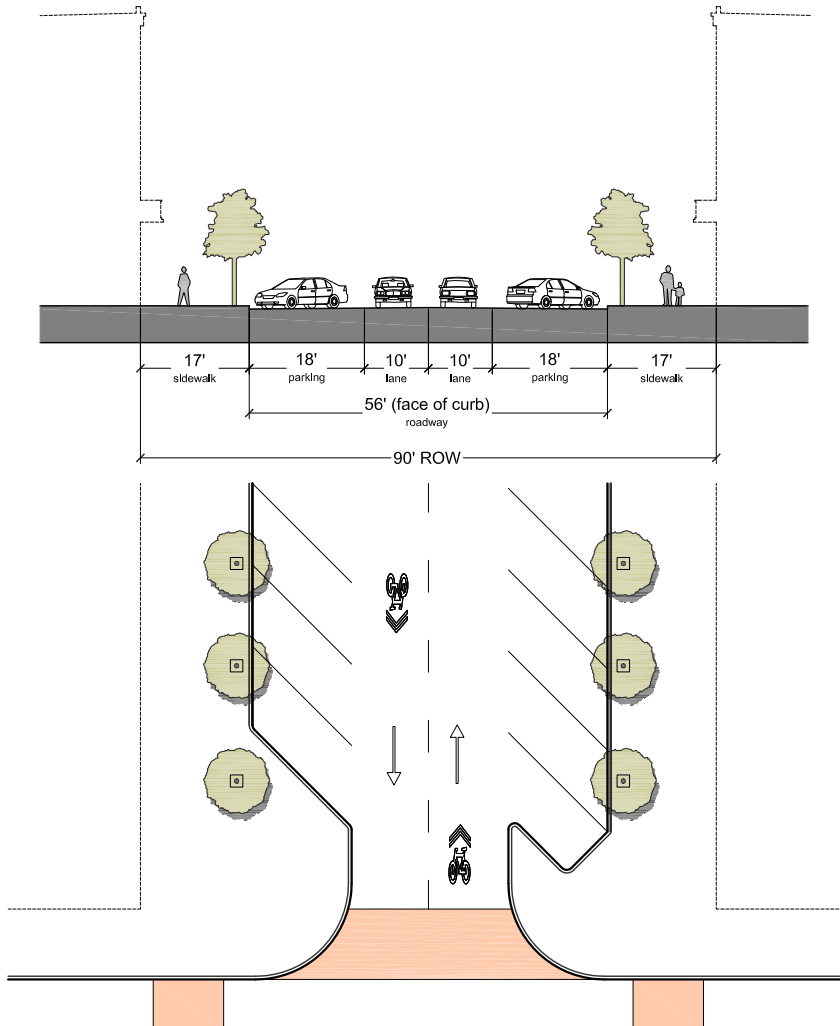
LOCAL STREET

MAIN STREET

In a smaller commercial settings, the main street should have two 10' travel lanes with 7' parallel parking on both sides to accommodate shops and store fronts. Sidewalks should also be wide enough for outdoor cafés and dining.

Main Street in Rhinebeck, NY

| 13' sidewalk | 7' parking | 10' lane | 10' lane | 7' parking | 13' sidewalk |

34' (face of curb) roadway

60' ROW
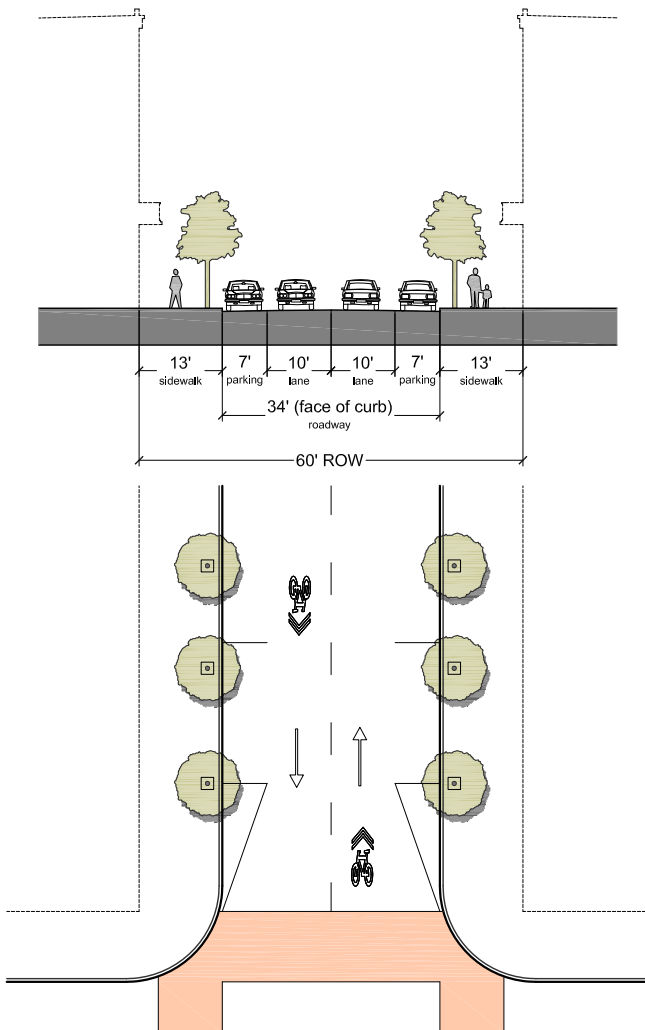
LOCAL STREET

YIELD STREET

In residential neighborhoods with low traffic counts, a local yield street should be used. It should have 27' of pavement between curbs to accommodate parking on both sides and one unmarked 10' travel lane. This condition requires cars to move at slow speeds and stop when approaching an on-coming car. A wide planting strip can grow large trees. Sidewalks should be included for casual walking.

Yield Street condition on Balfour Road, London
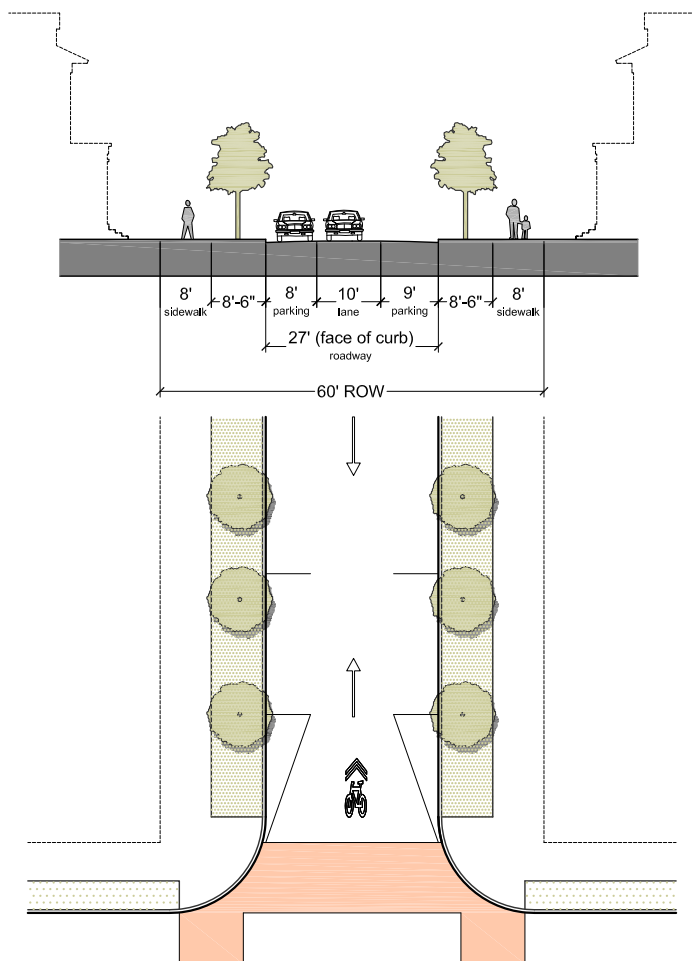
8'
sidewalk

8'-6"

8'
parking

10'
lane

9'
parking

8'-6"

8'
sidewalk

27' (face of curb)
roadway

60' ROW

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Create a multimodal transportation network throughout Laredo that provides access to opportunity, improves public health, reduces carbon emissions, and provides civic recreational opportunities while efficiently moving pedestrians, cyclists, transit, motor vehicles, cargo, and freight.

Land Use and Transportation Coordination
Goal 4.1: Create a coordinated, efficient, and more affordable multimodal transportation system that supports, complements, and meets the needs of different types of places throughout the City. Land use patterns and connections among different land uses are key elements defining the form and character of places.

> **Policy 4.1.1**: Transportation planning and development, expansion, and investment in transportation facilities should be coordinated with the growth in the region.
>
> **Policy 4.1.2**: New and modified thoroughfares will match the existing or proposed character of land along their paths as well as serving their essential functions in the regional road network.
>
> a. In urban areas, multimodal transportation design will become the norm to enhance neighborhood character, safety, and walkability. Character and function will be more important than capacity, and the street network will be sized to yield smaller blocks with greater "people moving" capacity.
>
> b. Existing Suburban areas are likely to maintain a predominately automobile-dependent development pattern. Thoroughfares will have sidewalks and bike lanes will be provided where travel speeds are higher.
>
> **Policy 4.1.3**: Safe and attractive transportation choices among all modes should be encouraged through street patterns that consider multimodal

transportation alternatives and access to and circulation between adjacent neighborhoods, parks, and commercial and employment nodes.

> **Policy 4.1.4**: New roadways and widening of existing roadways should utilize context-sensitive design to minimize impacts on historic buildings, neighborhoods, parks, and sensitive natural areas.
>
> **Policy 4.1.5**: Comprehensive transportation impacts, including parking and impacts on all modes of transportation, should be identified and addressed before a development or redevelopment is implemented. Considerations should not assume that all travel is by personnel vehicle.

Complete Streets
Goal 4.2: Laredo's thoroughfares will form a well-connected network of complete streets that support driving, walking, bicycling, and public transit.

> **Policy 4.2.1**: Street design standards should provide safe, accessible, and meaningful travel choices – driving, walking, bicycling, and public transit.
>
> **Policy 4.2.2**: Where optimal street connectivity cannot be or has not been provided, non-motorized connections should be added to reduce walking and bicycling trip lengths.
>
> **Policy 4.2.3**: In urban areas, walkability will be prioritized with wide sidewalks, shade, alleys, and street-facing access to adjacent land uses.
>
> a. Widen sidewalks where appropriate and feasible.
>
> b. Plant regularly spaced drought-tolerant trees along streets.
>
> c. Provide streetlights that improve safety for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians while maintaining a dark sky.

d. Curb radii should be small to discourage drivers from turning corners quickly and to shorten pedestrian crosswalk lengths.

e. Alleys should be included when possible so that buildings may be serviced from the rear, driveways and curb cuts can be minimized, and parking can be consolidated at mid-block locations.

f. Provide safe and convenient crosswalks at intersections, and at mid-block crossings where feasible and needed.

Policy 4.2.4: In urban areas, most new streets should have on-street parking in order to increase access to properties while calming traffic. Except on multiway boulevards, medians should be limited to short segments so that vehicular access to properties is not overly restricted.

Policy 4.2.5: New streets and redesigned streets should be two-way (unless they are designed as a narrow, slow speed, one-way streets).

Policy 4.2.6: The City wishes to achieve high levels of landscaping and other aesthetic improvements on all thoroughfares including those maintained by the county and state.

Policy 4.2.7: Continually update the City-wide plan that establishes priority locations for sidewalks, sidewalk repairs, and sidewalk improvements, prioritizing areas near schools, parks, transit stops, mixed residential and commercial districts, and other areas with high or potentially high levels of pedestrian activity.

Street Conversions
Goal 4.3: The City of Laredo will improve its thoroughfares over time as opportunities are found to increase transit service and improve connectivity, walkability, bikability, and economic benefits to surrounding areas.

Policy 4.3.1: The City will consider multiway boulevards for major travel corridors to balance regional through traffic, local traffic, other travel modes, and access to adjoining land.

Policy 4.3.2: The City will study and implement the conversion of Downtown's one-way street couplets to two-way operation.

Policy 4.3.3: The City will consider the use of roundabouts at intersections to calm traffic, increase safety, eliminate traffic lights, and create sites for public art and monuments on local and collector streets.

Policy 4.3.4: The City will incorporate "green infrastructure design" and similar light-imprint and low-impact principles for stormwater management and landscaping in streets that it builds and requires others to build.

Improve Connectivity
Goal 4.4: Reduce service disparities and achieve equitable access to all types of facilities and transportation modes.

Policy 4.4.1: Gaps in the street system should be eliminated by providing for network connectivity. The existing grid network should be preserved and extended where feasible to increase overall connectivity.

Policy 4.4.2: New residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments that require construction or extension of roadways should include a multimodal network. The use of cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets and local residential loops should be minimized.

Policy 4.4.3: New development should be encouraged to connect to the existing street network through collector streets, which should tie into the existing network at multiple points to improve trip distribution and emergency access. Street stubs for future connections should be required.

Policy 4.4.4: Access management strategies should be applied based on the functional characteristics of the roadway, surrounding land uses, and roadway users. Curb cuts along public streets should be minimized. Internal connections between parking lots should be encouraged.

Policy 4.4.5: When considering closure of public streets, alleys, and other rights of way, affected City departments and utility providers should consider the integrity of the City's street network, pedestrian and vehicular safety, emergency access, the ability to provide utility services, impacts on health and safety, and the welfare of the community.

Policy 4.4.6: Adding lanes to increase traffic capacity should be considered only after the street exceeds an established threshold of full capacity and all other alternative approaches have been considered. Improvements to the street network should increase vehicle dispersion and circulation.

Policy 4.4.7: Ongoing regional transportation planning efforts should be supported to coordinate planning, operations, and funding priorities and to identify existing and future transportation corridors that should be linked across jurisdictional boundaries.

Policy 4.4.8: New roadway projects and major reconstruction projects should preserve desirable existing trees where possible or plant new street trees where necessary. Multi-lane roads should be enhanced with landscaped medians when possible.

Policy 4.4.9: Bridge monitoring, maintenance, and rehabilitation should be coordinated with the TxDOT and the Federal Highway Administration. Bridge improvements, including provisions for all travel modes, should be considered when roadway investments are being pursued.

Future Thoroughfare Plan

Goal 4.5: Implement the Future Thoroughfare Plan that integrates all major travel modes and carries out the goals and policies of *Viva Laredo*.

Policy 4.5.1: The City of Laredo will use the Future Thoroughfare Plan that appears in *Viva Laredo* as the City's official Thoroughfare Plan.

Policy 4.5.2: Laredo's future transportation network will shape the City and its inhabitants. The network must meld all viable modes of transportation and carry out the goals of *Viva Laredo*.

Policy 4.5.3: Capacity and redundancy should be created by a densely interconnected network rather than by achieving high capacities on individual arterial streets.

Policy 4.5.4: Economically vital cities require multiple transportation modes and cannot hope to maintain free flowing traffic during all peak periods.

Policy 4.5.5: The character of each thoroughfare should be based on the physical context the thoroughfare is passing through in addition to its role in the larger network.

Policy 4.5.6: Limited-access freeways disrupt the healthy functioning of cities and should be the thoroughfare type of last resort when planning the City's network.

Policy 4.5.7: The regional transportation network must respect the human and natural environment and minimize or eliminate negative impacts such as bisecting or isolating communities, inducing suburban sprawl, or interfering with arroyos and other natural systems.

Policy 4.5.8: Implement a public announcement and mandatory waiting period for the deletion of any road appearing in the future thoroughfare plan.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation
Goal 4.6: Enhance and connect the bike and pedestrian circulation system throughout Laredo.

Policy 4.6.1: Bicycle and pedestrian circulation, access, and safety should be enhanced, especially along corridors, Downtown, in activity and employment centers, within densely-developed areas, at transit stations, and near schools, libraries, and parks.

Policy 4.6.2: A continuous bicycle and pedestrian network should be provided within and between existing and new developments to facilitate safe and convenient travel. New subdivisions, mixed-use developments, and large-scale commercial developments should include safe pedestrian walkways or multiuse paths that allow direct links between roadways and major destinations, transit stops, and schools.

Policy 4.6.3: New development, redevelopment, street reconstruction, and resurfacing projects should include bicycle and pedestrian facilities as appropriate for the roadway character. Existing development should be retrofitted with connections where possible.

Policy 4.6.4: Where possible, and especially where pedestrians are prioritized, tools such as protected left turns, pedestrian head start, raised crosswalks, curb extensions, medians, pedestrian refuge islands or mid-block crossings, and restricted right turns on red should be used to improve pedestrian and bicycle movements and safety.

Policy 4.6.5: Safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be maintained and should be universally accessible, adequately lit, and properly designed to reduce conflicts between motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians.

Policy 4.6.6: Pedestrians and bicyclists should be accommodated on bridges, interchanges, and over- and underpasses, where permitted by law. Bicycle lanes and wide sidewalks should be included in all new bridges, and over- and underpasses.

Policy 4.6.7: The City's greenways and trails network should be treated as part of the City's transportation network and connections should be planned for accordingly.

Policy 4.6.8: Infrastructure that encourages students to walk or bike safely to school should be supported. The City should continue to coordinate with the Laredo MPO to partner with schools, the Laredo Police Department, Webb County and the TxDOT to identify funding and opportunities to enhance walking routes to school.

Policy 4.6.9: Primary building entrances should front onto publicly accessible, easily discernible, and Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant sidewalks that lead directly from the street to the building entrance without parking lots in between.

Policy 4.6.10: Roadways and rail corridors should be retrofitted with bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as multi-use paths, cycle tracks or bike lanes, bike boxes, and bike detectors.

Policy 4.6.11: The City should continue to coordinate with the Laredo MPO to work with partners to identify creative funding solutions for bike and pedestrian infrastructure, including partnerships with the Webb County, Webb County-Laredo Regional Mobility Authority, and the TxDOT, parks and recreation partnerships, and public-private partnerships.

Bike Plan Network
Goal 4.7: Vigorously expand bicycle facilities throughout Laredo to create a full network of connected, safe, and attractive bikeways and supporting facilities for both transportation and recreation.

Policy 4.7.1: Continue developing and maintaining a system of bicycle lanes, bicycle routes, and multi-use pathways in accordance with *Viva Laredo*.

Policy 4.7.2: Investigate the possibility of a local bicycle share program in the City that places bicycles for rent at automated stations at key areas beginning with the Downtown and university areas.

Policy 4.7.3: Fund a bicycle and pedestrian coordinator position to be the steward of the bicycle master plan and all of its individual components.

Policy 4.7.4: Use best practices in physical design (i.e. bikeway width, type, signing, and advanced bicycle facility types) to create safer bikeways. Train select City staff to design bikeways.

Policy 4.7.5: Enhance the safety and visibility of the bicycle network through the implementation of safety and wayfinding signage improvements along all current and future bikeways.

Policy 4.7.6: Continue the regular street sweeping program, with priority given to bicycle lanes and primary bicycle routes.

Policy 4.7.7: Bicycle facilities such as secure racks, personal lockers, and showers should be encouraged in new and redeveloped office and employment centers to facilitate bicycling and walking as viable alternative modes for commuting to work.

Bicycle Outreach

Goal 4.8: Encourage increased bicycling by promoting health, recreation, transportation, tourism opportunities, and environmental benefits.

Policy 4.8.1: Make Laredo a safer City for bicycle riders through measures such as:

a. Work with the Laredo Police Department to address bicycle-vehicle safety measures through increased awareness of bicycle-related traffic laws and enforcement of existing and new laws.

b. Provide on-going training for City of Laredo police officers regarding bicycle safety laws and issues.

c. Advocate for bike safety as a prominent part of state driver's requirements, and for the creation of a volunteer bike patrol group.

Policy 4.8.2: Create and distribute print and online versions of the Laredo Bike Master Plan on an annually updated basis, to include wayfinding, safety, and facility type information.

Policy 4.8.3: Develop a Laredo bicycle programs website to store and disseminate all bicycle-related information, including bicycle traffic statistics.

Policy 4.8.4: Identify the most common conflicts between bicycle and motor vehicle users and create strategies to educate all roadway users.

Policy 4.8.5: Increase awareness of bicycle options and safety through trainings, public events, public service announcements, educational materials, and partnerships.

Policy 4.8.6: Promote bicycling for commuting, running errands and other short trips and socializing through social media/web-based communication tools and traditional communication outlets to position bicycling as a viable option for people who are interested in bicycling, but concerned about safety.

Policy 4.8.7: Continue to foster and implement Safe Routes to School programs.

Street Design, Complete Streets, and Age-friendly Design

Goal 4.9: Ensure safety for users of all transportation modes, with attention to the most vulnerable users, including people with disabilities, those using mobility devices, the young, and the elderly.

Policy 4.9.1: The majority of the City's streets should be designed as public spaces that are scaled for pedestrians and should be enhanced with appropriate street trees and landscaping.

Policy 4.9.2: Complete street design standards that provide mobility for all types of transportation modes and users should be promoted on all streets.

Policy 4.9.3: New roadway projects and major reconstruction projects should provide appropriate and adequate right-of-way for safe and convenient movement and amenities for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, and motorists.

Policy 4.9.4: When reviewing traffic impact analyses for infill and redevelopment, level of service measurements should consider all modes of transportation, including bicycles, pedestrians, and transit, in addition to automobile level of service.

Policy 4.9.5: Complete street amenities should be designed with all users in mind, with multimodal amenities appropriate for the type of roadway.

Transportation Safety, Traffic Calming, and Neighborhood Traffic

Goal 4.10: Support a safe, multimodal transportation network for all users, and include consideration of traffic calming, bike and pedestrian crossings, and crash analysis.

Policy 4.10.1: Safe routes for motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians should be provided. The City should work with its partners to improve the multimodal system to enhance safe transportation options across modes.

Policy 4.10.2: Traffic calming measures should be incorporated into the design of new or retrofitted local and neighborhood streets, within schools and parks, and around pedestrian-oriented business areas. Pedestrian and bicyclists should have safe, convenient, well-marked means to cross streets.

Policy 4.10.3: Feasible solutions to lessen the impacts of major street improvements on local streets should be developed with neighborhoods on an individual project basis.

Transportation Demand Management

Goal 4.11: Establish demand management procedures as a cost-effective alternative to increasing capacity. A demand management approach has the potential to improve the natural environment, public health, placemaking, and economic development that also extends the life of transportation infrastructure.

Policy 4.11.1: Incentivize a mix of uses at key nodes of activity, including Downtown, the universities and new development sites.

Policy 4.11.2: Programs that increase vehicle occupancy should be encouraged. Employer-based transportation demand management programs should be supported.

Policy 4.11.3: An integrated, multimodal transportation system that offers safe and attractive choices among travel modes should be promoted.

Policy 4.11.4: Conduct el Metro Ridership Service Survey.

Air Quality

Goal 4.12: Improve the region's air quality through more sustainable and energy-efficient transportation and land use practices.

Policy 4.12.1: Encourage compact land uses and urban design patterns that increase travel choices, reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicle travel, and reduce the overall number of vehicle-miles traveled.

Policy 4.12.2: Invest in bus service, rapid transit service, and high-capacity transit to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while better serving the traveling public.

Policy 4.12.3: Take steps that can reduce the travel frequency, distance, and duration of single-occupant vehicle trips.

Policy 4.12.4: Implement intelligent transportation systems (ITS) to reduce congestion and facilitate cross-border travel.

Parking Management

Goal 4.13: The City will strategically manage the amount, location, and physical form of on-street and off-street parking to help achieve the goals of *Viva Laredo*.

Policy 4.13.1: The effective supply of parking can be increased by building more spaces or by reducing demand.

a. Where parking supply needs to be increased on valuable land, parking garages may be constructed provided they are lined with habitable or storefront space to shield the garage from view and to provide a safe interesting environment for pedestrians.

b. As part of a long-term strategy, land devoted to surface parking lots in existing developed areas should be reduced through shared parking strategies, reduction in parking demand, and infill development on unneeded parking lots.

Policy 4.13.2: As part of the development and redevelopment process, the following policies should be followed:

a. Shared on-street parking spaces are preferred to separate parking lots for each user.

b. New parking lots should be placed behind or on the side of buildings instead of between buildings and the street.

c. Do not provide more parking than is likely to be needed.

d. Provide suitable loading zones for deliveries.

Policy 4.13.3: The amount of land devoted to surface parking should be minimized through measures such as parking decks and underground parking, shared parking, flexible ordinance requirements, improved parking standards, the implementation of transportation demand management plans, and provision of public transit to reduce parking needs.

Policy 4.13.4: Parking and development that encourages multiple destinations within pedestrian-connected areas should be encouraged. This will decrease single purpose trips for the user, saving time and miles driven and increase the economic potential for businesses located near other businesses.

Policy 4.13.5: A parking program and management strategies should be established at existing and planned transit stations.

Policy 4.13.6: On-street parking and drop-off areas should be located adjacent to sidewalks and building frontages to maximize on-street parking turn-over and for customer convenience. Excessive parking between sidewalks and building fronts should be discouraged.

Policy 4.13.7: Shared-use parking should be encouraged for land uses where peak parking demands occur at different times of the day, reducing the overall total number of spaces needed. Parking lots should be sized and managed so that spaces are frequently occupied.

Policy 4.13.8: Parking lots should include vehicular and pedestrian connections between and through lots. Parking facility quality should be considered equally with quantity of parking spaces. Parking lot design should minimize pedestrian conflicts, make use of appropriate landscaping, and properly manage stormwater.

Policy 4.13.9: The capacity of existing parking facilities should be optimized through tools such as small vehicle, motorcycle, and bicycle spaces, allowing motorcycles to share spaces, reducing the minimum parking space area requirement for low-turnover spaces such as residential and employee parking, and removing equipment and storage from parking spaces.

Policy 4.13.10: Single-occupancy automobile trips should be discouraged through parking supply and/or pricing strategies in areas where supply is limited and alternative transportation modes are available.

Public Transportation
Goal 4.14: Make a Metro Transit Master Plan and turn it into the most used Citywide transit system in Texas.

Policy 4.14.1: Review routes and operations to plan for the future and ensure El Metro Transit is meeting the needs of the community in the most efficient way possible.

Policy 4.14.2: Promote quality transit services that enhance mobility options, meet the needs of City residents and visitors, focus on transit-dependent households, and incorporate age-friendly elements.

Policy 4.14.3: Where opportunities exist, right-of-way for future transit should be reserved. New development and redevelopment should provide transit easements for planned alignments, rail stations, and bus stops within existing and planned transit corridors as appropriate.

Policy 4.14.4: Local and regional bus service along key corridors should be enhanced. Transit efficiency, including improved frequency of routes and transfer time, should be promoted within the El Metro Transit system.

Policy 4.14.5: Bus shelters, seating, lighting, trash receptacles, and related elements should be provided at transit stop locations. New developments located within planned transit corridors should coordinate with El Metro Transit to provide bus stop facilities at appropriate locations.

Policy 4.14.6: The use of transit facilities should be encouraged through enhancing the bike and pedestrian network near transit stops and sufficient sidewalk infrastructure should be installed near all transit stops. Where necessary, enhancements to make sidewalks compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should be prioritized.

Policy 4.14.7: Features such as traffic signal priority, queue jumps, and exclusive transit lanes to improve transit reliability should be encouraged, where possible.

Policy 4.14.8: Transit-oriented development should be encouraged. Planning for transportation, transit stop locations, public spaces, density, and land use should be coordinated, and high-density, mixed-use development patterns should be encouraged around express bus lines, the transportation center Downtown, and any future transit stations.

Policy 4.14.9: The possibility of returning the Downtown streetcar to Laredo should be considered.

Commercial Transport & Port Freight Mobility
Goal 4.15: Enable the safe and efficient movement of goods via rail, truck, and air. A reduction of the impacts of rail and truck operations on adjacent neighborhoods and sensitive lands is also important.

Policy 4.15.1: The safe and efficient movement of truck traffic in, around, and through the City via designated truck routes should be properly managed.

Policy 4.15.2: Infrastructure improvements and the use of emerging technologies that facilitate the clearance, timely movement, and security of trade, including facilities for the efficient intermodal transfer of goods between ships, trucks, rail, and air modes, should be supported.

Policy 4.15.3: Roadway and railway design and retrofit, to include complete streets upgrades, should balance the needs of freight movements along with the needs of all other types of transportation.

Policy 4.15.4: The City encourages the expanded use of railroads for regional and international shipment of goods due to the fuel-efficiency of rail transport and the heavy burden that trucks place on the system.

Policy 4.15.5: The relocation of major rail yards away from intensely developed areas could allow that land to be reclaimed for redevelopment, drainage improvements, parks, and civic spaces.

Policy 4.15.6: Preserve the ability and opportunity to transform any abandoned and underused railroad rights-of-way for other valuable uses.

Policy 4.15.7: The City should explore all opportunities for intercity passenger rail to other metropolitan areas such as San Antonio, Austin, and Corpus Christi.

Policy 4.15.8: The City should create a port master plan including a study of the ports economic impact to be updated yearly.

Global Trade and Airport

Goal 4.16: The Laredo International Airport will increase its role as a welcoming gateway for passengers, as an intermodal hub for incoming and outgoing goods, and as a center for related economic activities that serve the City and the region.

Policy 4.16.1: Utilize and improve El Metro Transit connections to the airport to improve passenger access to the airport and maximize the value of airport property for related purposes.

Policy 4.16.2: The City supports new mixed-use development and redevelopment on and around airport land.

Policy 4.16.3: Incorporate the Laredo International Airport Plan into the Port Plan. (See Policy 11.3.6).

Ports of Entry

Goal 4.17: Strengthen multimodal connections with Nuevo Laredo for binational mobility, commerce, economic development, familial bonds, tourism, and convenient routine travel between the two cities and countries.

Policy 4.17.1: Continue to manage the Ports of Entry as an integrated network to balance traffic flow and travel needs (employment, commerce, and tourism) while minimizing traffic in surrounding areas.

Policy 4.17.2: Provide meaningful alternatives to single-occupant vehicles at all Ports of Entry, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and restoration of public transit.

Policy 4.17.3: The need for and feasibility of an additional international point of entry in south Laredo should be explored.

Policy 4.17.4: Support the creation of additional public rest areas with bathrooms and showers where truck drivers can rest during federally mandated rest periods between shifts.

Housing

5

hours *npl* - **1.** [of business] horas *fpl*; **after hours** fuera de horas - **2.** [of person - routine]: **to keep late hours** acostarse muy tarde.

hourly ['aʊəlɪ] *adj* & *adv* - **1.** [every hour] cada hora - **2.** [per hour] por hora.

house ◇ *n* [haʊs, *pl* 'haʊzɪz] - **1.** [gen] casa *f*; **it's on the house** la casa invita, es cortesía de la casa; **to put** OR **set one's house in order** poner las cosas en orden - **2.** POL cámara *f* - **3.** [in theatre] audiencia *f*; **to bring the house down** *inf* ser un exitazo, ser muy aplaudido(da). ◇ *vt* [haʊz] [person, family] alojar; [department, library, office] albergar. ◇ *adj* - **1.** [within business] de la empresa - **2.** [wine] de la casa.

house arrest *n*: **under house arrest** bajo arresto domiciliario.

houseboat ['haʊsbəʊt] *n* casa *f* flotante.

housebound ['haʊsbaʊnd] *adj* confinado(da) en casa.

housebreaking ['haʊs,breɪkɪŋ] *n* allanamiento *m* de morada.

housebroken ['haʊs,brəʊkn] *adj* US [pet] bien enseñado(da).

"LET'S BUILD THE KIND OF PLACE WHERE OUR KIDS WANT TO STICK AROUND."

—GEORGE ALTGELT, CITY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE, DISTRICT VII

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Demographics and Housing Profile

Housing is one of the most vital components of any city. The economy of a city, the size of a city's population, and citizens' quality of life are all dictated by the housing conditions and neighborhood livability. For these reasons, and many others, the Housing Chapter of the *Viva Laredo* Comprehensive Plan seeks to address the varied concerns and multiple opportunities that exist within Laredo's housing markets.

Today, the United States Census Bureau ranks Laredo as the nation's 82nd largest city. As Laredo continues to grow, it will be critically important that the city and its leaders focus on housing and neighborhood development as an opportunity for economic growth and improved quality of life, as well as a means to increase and sustain the city's livability.

Population Growth

Since the 2010 Census, the City of Laredo grew by approximately 18,000 people. This represents an 8% increase between 2010 and 2015. Currently, Laredo's population stands at approximately 255,400.

Population Growth by Year

2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
237,059	241,207	245,487	249,379	252,635	255,473

Population Age

Laredo is a very young city. The median age is 28 years old, compared with the United States and Texas at 37.4 and 33.9, respectively. Also, more than one-third of the population is younger than 18 years of age (35.2%). The U.S. average is about one-quarter and Texas has 27.3% of people under 18 years of age. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Laredo ranks ninth for youngest median age among places with more than 100,000 inhabitants.

This signifies a high percentage of potential future homeowners, renters, and families that could benefit from the *Viva Laredo* policies.

Median Household Income (MHI)

Laredo's MHI is currently at $40,660. This is considerably lower than the United States' at $55,775 and Texas' at $55,563.

Home Starts

The data presented on this page depicts the level of housing activity based on actual home starts. Home starts are the number of homes constructed usually inventoried by the number of building permits given out by the city.

The average home starts for Laredo, according to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, is about 900 home starts per year. During the housing bubble of 2004-2006, the home starts increased to about 1,800 or twice as much. In the last seven years, that number has decreased to about 550 starts.

HOME STARTS DATA FOR LAREDO (AVERAGES)

Average since 1980:	914
Peaked in 2004-2006:	1,800
Last Seven Years:	555

HOME STARTS FOR OTHER TEXAS CITIES (AVERAGES SINCE 1980)

El Paso:	2,600
Austin-Round Rock:	7,800
Brownsville-Harlingen:	1,600
McAllen-Edinburg-Mission:	3,500
Houston:	24,000
Dallas/DFW:	26,000
San Antonio/NB:	6,500

(Actual housing units).

Housing Data

There are an estimated 70,439 housing units in Laredo; of these housing units, 92.3% or 65,014 units are currently occupied. This leaves about 5,400 vacant units, representing a tremendous opportunity for infill and redevelopment. Moreover, the first decade of the 21st Century saw a substantial increase in the number of housing units. Between 2000-2009, a total of 19,098 units were built, or 27% of today's total number of units.

The current homeownership rate in the nation is 63.5%, slightly lower than the pre-Great Recession rate of 66.4%. Laredo's current homeownership rate closely mirrors that of the country's at 61.8%, but still below the national average. The number of occupants living in each household is estimated at 3.80 people per household, slightly higher than the U.S. average of 2.7.

Home Values

Laredo's housing market is stable. Over the past five years, the number of housing starts has remained balanced. The average sale price of a new home is $199,500. For existing home sales, the average price is calculated at $153,000.

For existing homes, the median property value for owner-occupied housing units in Laredo is $118,900. When compared to the country's $194,000 and Texas's $152,000, Laredo's property values are low.

Sign outside of the La Cuesta subdivision.

New housing going up in Northeast Laredo.

Housing Permits & Certificates of Occupancy for Single Family Residential

One way to measure the number of housing units constructed in any given year is by aggregating the number of certificates of occupancy (CO). Certificates of occupancy are the permits issued by a city, after a home is constructed and has passed final inspection; it means the unit is ready for occupancy.

Between 2010 and July 2016, the number of COs in Laredo has been relatively steady. Over this time period, a total of 3,387 COs were issued for single family homes.

The heat map below illustrates the locations where these COs were issued. Most are concentrated outside the Bob Bullock Loop and on the city's fringes. Very little single family activity is identified in the city's urban core. This is also indicative of homogenous communities that are unsustainable in the long run. Given the latest market study trends and the housing preferences of millennials and baby boomers (two of the largest housing consumers), homogenous communities are not within their preferred housing choices. These groups of looking for more diversified housing choices that include walkable communities as well as various sizes of homes.
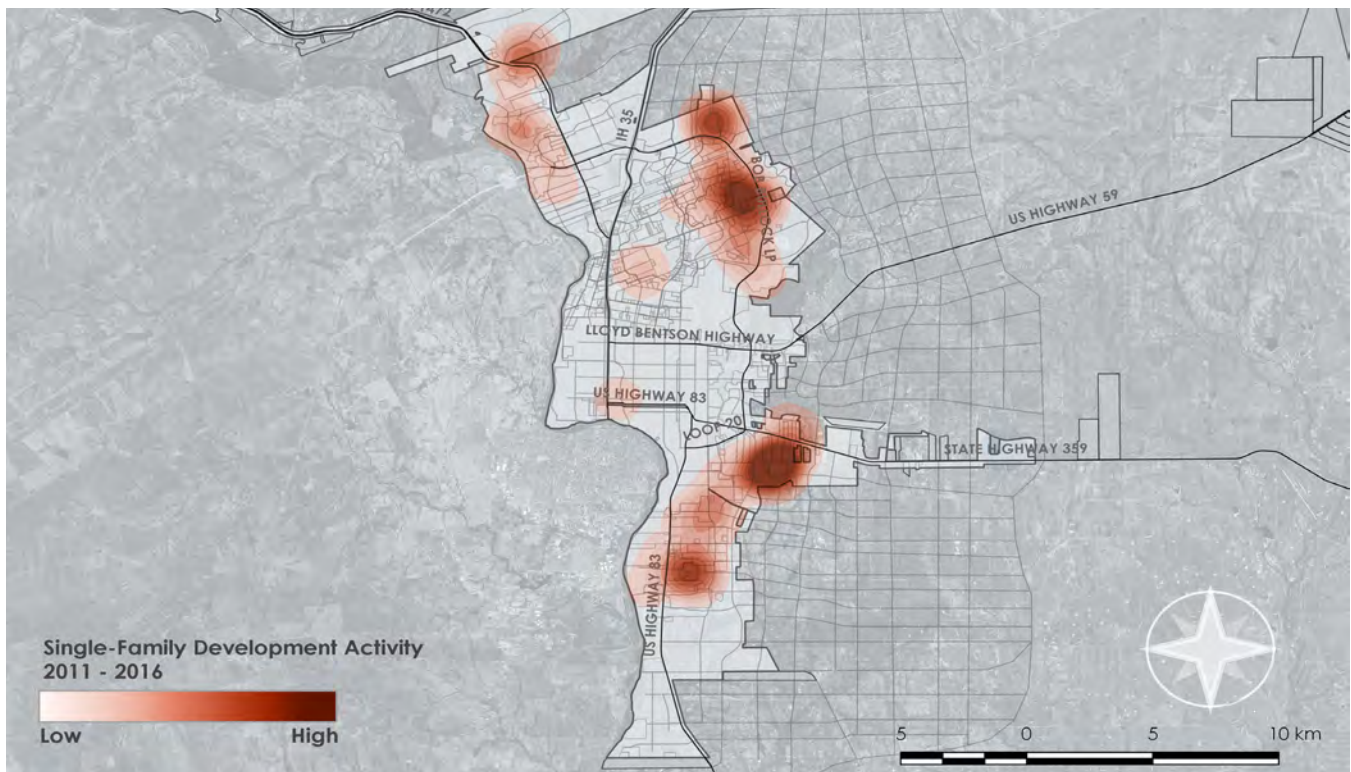
Single-Family Certificates of Occupancy from 2011 - 2016

Housing Permits & Certificates of Occupancy for Multi-Family Residential

Recognizing that not every family may qualify for or desire a single family home, a city should have a good balance of single family housing and multi-family units. Between 2012 and 2016, a total of 2,133 COs were issued for multi-family housing units throughout the city.

The heat map below illustrates the concentration of new apartment units within Laredo. Compared to the single family heat map in the previous page, the inverse of concentrated activity for apartments is evident. Where most single family homes are being developed in the fringes, most apartment units are being built in the urban core and within the Bob Bullock Loop. It would be helpful for economic mobility, for families to have a choice of housing--both single family and apartments--throughout all areas of the city.
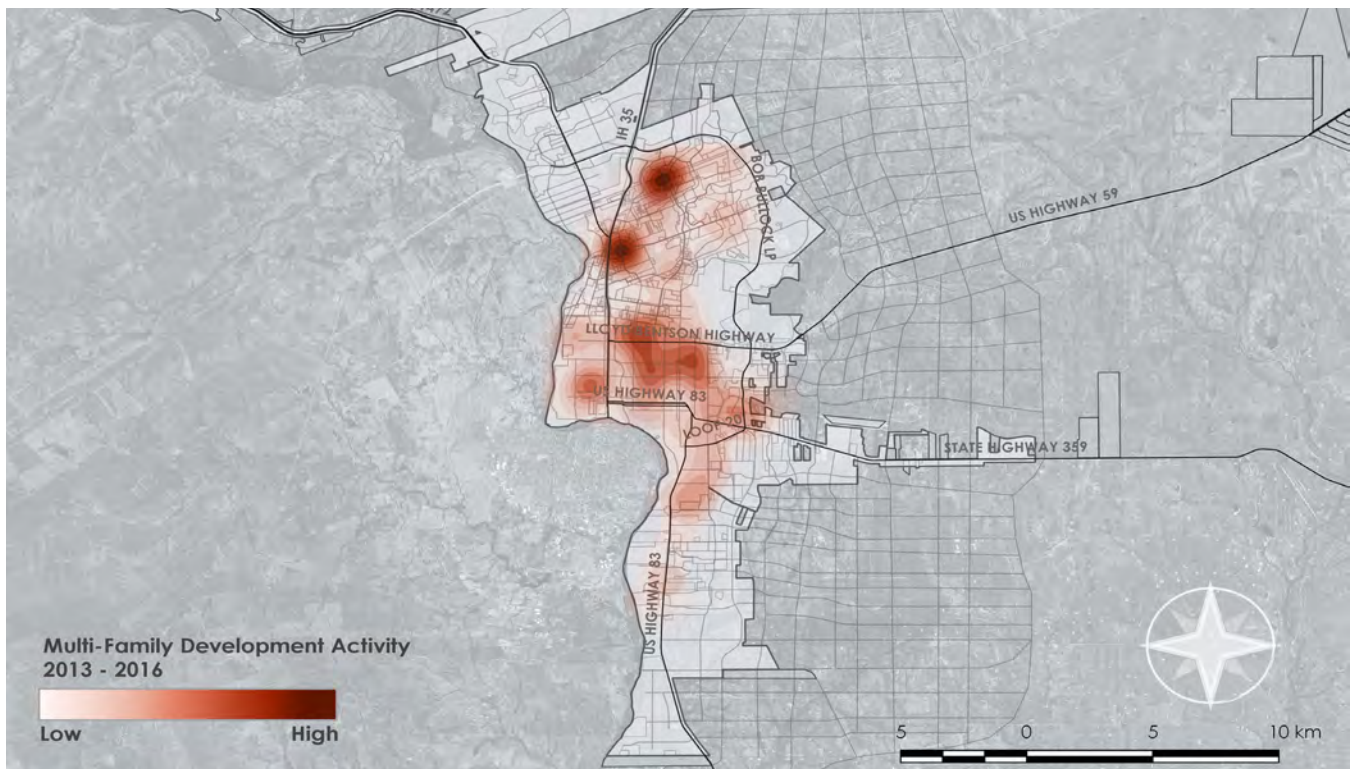
Multi-family Certificates of Occupancy from 2013 - 2016

Subdivision Activity

Another way to measure a city's growth is to review the level of subdivision plats that occur in any given year. Platting is the method by which land is subdivided for development.

The map on the right (produced by the City of Laredo) illustrates the locations of subdivision plats from 2010 to 2016. This map shows subdivision activity for all levels of development: residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional.

The striking characteristic is how little, if any, platting activity occurred in the city's downtown and urban core neighborhoods. This illustrates an opportunity to redirect development into these areas.

While platting is not the only indicator of development activity, there is a correlation between platting activity and building permits, serving as a critical measure.
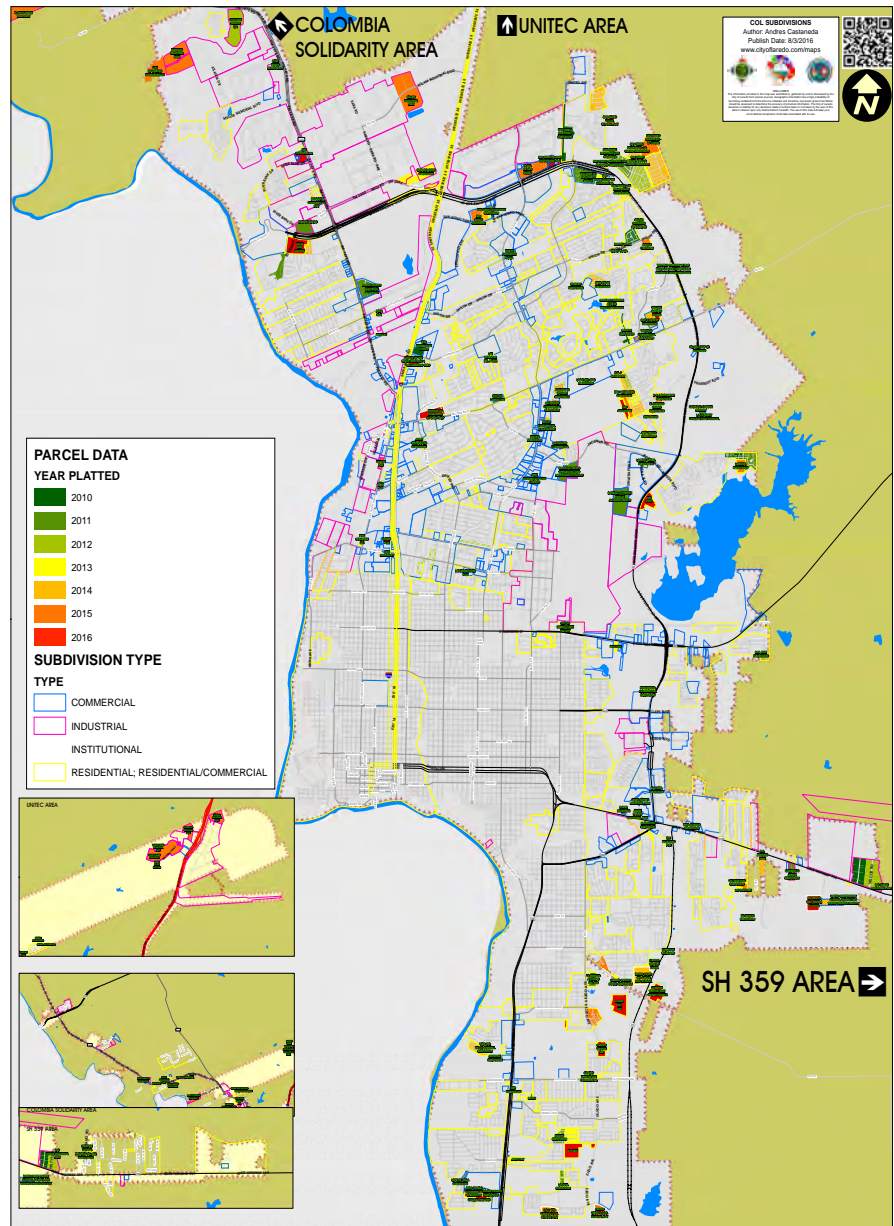
Subdivision Plats and Parcels 2010-2016, City of Laredo.

Vacant Parcels of Land

The City of Laredo has several areas where redevelopment can occur. One key area is in the amount of vacant land available for redevelopment. Using Appraisal District data provided by the Tax Assessor Collector, the following figures were developed:

- There are a total of 65,216 acres or 101 square miles within the City of Laredo.

- There are 34,883 acres or 53% of city's total acreage with no improvements.

- There are approximately 900 parcels for a total of 3,972 acres of vacant land in various areas of the city.

- This is in addition to vacant parcels owned by several other entities such as United and Laredo Independent School Districts, Webb County, and State land.

The idea of building or redeveloping on vacant land is an important one for numerous reasons. It decreases the cost of development if existing infrastructure such as streets, water/wastewater lines, and other utilities already exist. And these vacant parcels of land, owned by the city, are not generating any tax revenues. The city could design a program in which public-private partnerships are created to encourage private sector development on these lands.

A note on the data: it is important that more research be conducted by the city to further elaborate on this information. A complete inventory that includes zoning, platting, location (maps) and other relevant real estate development information should be a priority for the city in order to start generating revenue and develop both market rate and affordable housing opportunities. This Housing Element provides the groundwork for a specialized Housing Plan.

An example of a vacant lot that has great potential for infill housing.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Housing Survey Results

In addition to gathering community input through the two-week charrette, several community meetings, and various events, housing stakeholders were surveyed to gauge the city's housing concerns. The information below offers a snapshot at Laredo's housing concerns.

Through a series of questions, information from the Housing Stakeholder Committee and many other community members that participated in several of the community events was gathered.

The survey covered many topics through several questions. It was categorized by several key topics including: General Housing Issues, Affordable Housing, Downtown and Infill Strategies, New Developments, and Transportation.

This section is followed by implementation strategies that closely mirror the community concerns identified in this section.

General Housing Issues

These questions and responses provide an overall view of what Laredoans feels are the most pressing concerns facing the city in terms of housing-related matters.

Based on the results, the top three issues are:

- No pride in ownership
- Inability of individuals or families to qualify for financing
- Lack of housing choices in the market

Furthermore, one key concern is the lack of affordable housing choices for Laredoans and their inability to qualify for financing, as illustrated in subsequent responses.

Several local experts gathered to provide input during the public participation process.

Question: In general, what are the biggest housing concerns facing Laredo today?

Answer Choices	Responses
Lack of housing choices in the market (i.e. only one type of predominahousing type like single family homes)	44.00%
Homelessness	33.33%
Inability of individuals/families to qualify for financing	46.67%
Housing being built too far from services, i.e. suburban sprawl	24.00%
Saturation of multi-family units	9.33%
Teardown of historic structures	17.33%
No "pride of ownership"/run-down homes (weeds, lack of maintenance)	48.00%
New development that does not pay for itself	21.33%
Too many regulations for development	24.00%
Permitting process takes too long	12.00%

Question: Where we live affects our physical and mental health. Do you agree?

100%

All respondents agreed with the statement.

Over the last decade, across the country, more and more citizens are recognizing the importance that the built-environment plays in their health, both negatively and positively. More and more research is showing that where one lives can have a great impact on their health.

Richard Jackson, a nationally recognized doctor and urban advocate, states that "if the old adage holds true that we are what we eat, then it must also be true that we are what we built." The key takeaway from this overwhelming response is that many Laredoans are also recognizing this very important aspect of housing and neighborhood design.

Affordable Housing

One of the most pressing housing concerns facing Laredo today is the affordable housing issue. This area can take many aspects of concern, from lack of affordable housing opportunities to the quantity of low income families unable to qualify for safe and decent housing. Affordable housing refers to housing, whether rental or owner-occupied, that one can afford regardless of income. This is different from subsidized housing which refers to rental assistance.

Question: Do you think there is an affordable housing concern in Laredo?
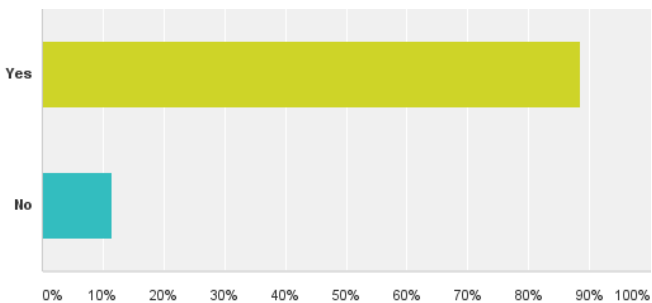
As housing advocates work on several strategies, this could be an area of emphasis on an overall citywide housing plan.
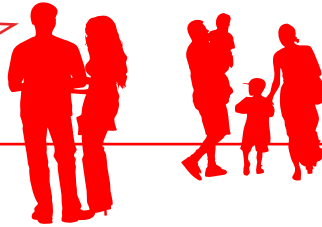
Question: What would be some strategies that the city can implement to create affordable housing in Laredo? (Pick Three)

Answer Choices	Responses	
Down payment assistance	38.46%	30
First time homebuyer education	37.18%	29
Economic incentives for infill housing	50.00%	39
Subsidies for affordable housing	56.41%	44
Inclusionary housing policies	21.79%	17
Making rezonings, entitlements easier	25.64%	20
Other (please specify)	24.36%	19
Total Respondents: 78		

The responses offer an array of possible opportunities for various housing strategies that can be implemented by the city. The most popular strategies include subsidies for affordable housing and economic incentives for infill. These could be in the form of tax credits, lowering building permit fees, or providing real estate equity for affordable housing developments.

Other strategies include down-payment assistance and first time homebuyer education; both of these areas can be easily implemented by one or several housing non-profit organizations.

Question: What special populations do you think face an affordable housing crisis?

Respondents were asked to pick the most vulnerable populations affected by the lack of affordable housing. The list included homeless, elderly, people living with HIV/AIDS, and at-risk youth, among others. By examining the results below, the population that most needs attention and advocacy is "very low-income families" followed by the elderly with single mothers rounding out the top three populations.

Population	Percentage
At-risk youth (runaways, etc)	16.88%
Farmworkers	3.90%
Elderly	63.64%
Disabled	25.97%
Homeless	35.06%
Single mothers	40.26%
Persons with HIV/AIDS	
Newly Released Prisoners	7.79%
Substance Abuse Pop.	14.29%
Foster Care Young Adults	20.78%
Mental Health Concerns	25.97%
Low Income Families	70.13%
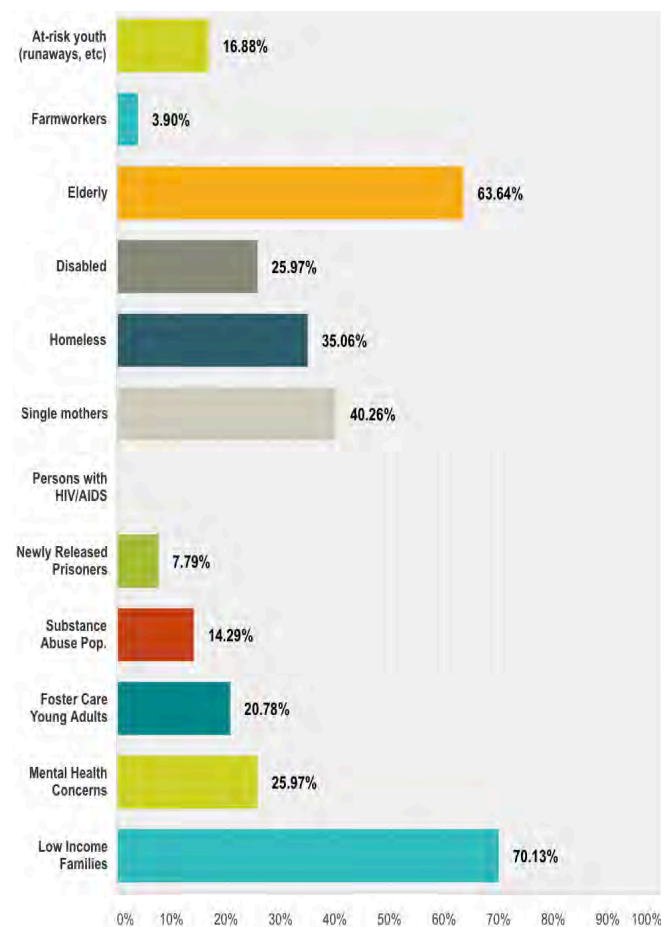
Downtown Core and Urban Fill

Across Texas, cities like Austin, San Antonio, Dallas, and El Paso are putting considerable resources into their urban cores. Laredo should be no different.

The level of citizen excitement presents the city with a reason to move forward on this important housing aspect.

Question: Do you believe there should be a concentrated effort to create housing in downtown Laredo?
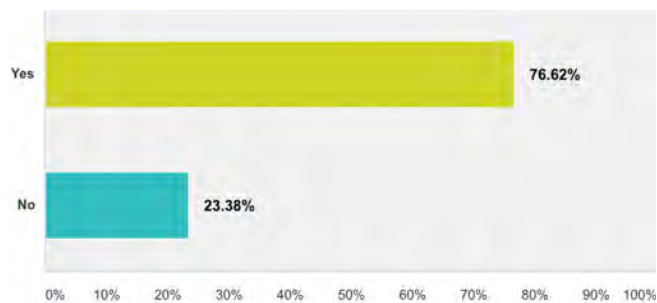
Question: Would you support an infill strategy that would give tax incentives to developers (public and private) to create new housing in the core of the city?
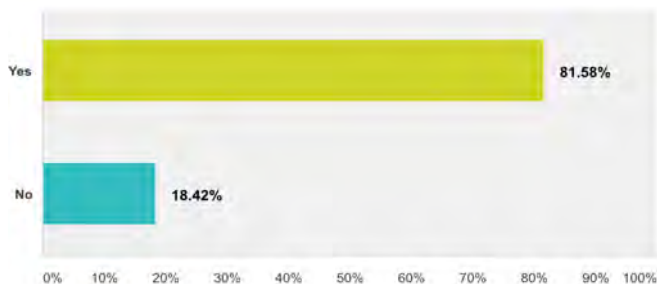
Question: What do you consider to be the biggest opportunities for housing in Laredo? (Pick Three)

The top three responses from above include: Mixed-used buildings (housing + retail or housing + office space) with 64%, followed by downtown redevelopment through new housing options at 60%, and finally with 42%, creating new communities with parks, public transport, and homes.

Mixed-use buildings (housing + retail or housing + office space)	64.10%
Downtown redevelopment through new housing options	60.26%
Infill opportunities in vacant parcels	23.08%
Creating communities integrated with parks, public transport, and homes	42.31%
Developing homes for homeless populations	15.38%
Lifestyle centers	14.10%
Adaptive reuse of old structures	34.62%
City to be more efficient in reviewing drawings/giving permits	8.97%
More apartments for various types of renters	14.10%
Green development/technologies of homes	17.95%
Other (please specify) Responses	14.10%

The responses to this question overwhelmingly correspond with Laredoans' desire to see improvements to the downtown and to retrofit existing buildings into mixed-use structures, as shown in two of the top three responses.

The lack of current new development in the urban core coupled with residents' recognition that more needs to be done in the area of infill redevelopment provides an opportunity for the City of Laredo to push for more mixed-used, mixed-income, and infill opportunities in these areas that have seen little or no investment in the past several years.

New Development

Equally important to a city's growth patterns and regional economy is the development of new housing areas in varied parts of the city. Downtown and urban core redevelopment are important facets of a city's total housing strategy, as well as providing new housing and communities for a growing population.

In reviewing the city's current development standards for new residential subdivisions and through questions in this survey, it is apparent that there are several community concerns and areas for improvement.

Question: What amenities would you like to see integrated into new subdivisions (pick three)?

At 75%, "Parks within walking distance," received a considerable amount of responses. Furthermore, "Hike and bike trails" received over 50% favorability; these two responses showcase citizens' knowledge that more needs to be done in new subdivision standards and amenities to provide more recreational opportunities and to encourage healthy lifestyles.

Parks within walking distance	75.32%
Schools	3.90%
Schools within walking distance	36.36%
Retail	27.27%
Public transportation choices	55.84%
Hike and bike trails	53.25%
Landscaped sidewalks	44.16%
Other (please specify) Responses	11.69%

Currently the city's parkland dedication for new developments is very low. Based on the city's formula of 1 acre per 1,000 residents, this equates to 1 acre of parkland dedication for every 256 dwelling units. There is also a payment in lieu of dedication option, currently set at $45,000 per acre. The city should revisit their subdivision ordinances to ensure more parks per housing units as well as within walking distance to people's homes.

Question: Do you agree with this statement: new development pays for itself?

This is an important question that many cities across the country--especially in Sun Belt cities like Laredo-- are grappling with. Based on the almost equally split response, it is evident that the City of Laredo could also utilize an examination of its current development policies, to determine whether development is or is not paying for itself.
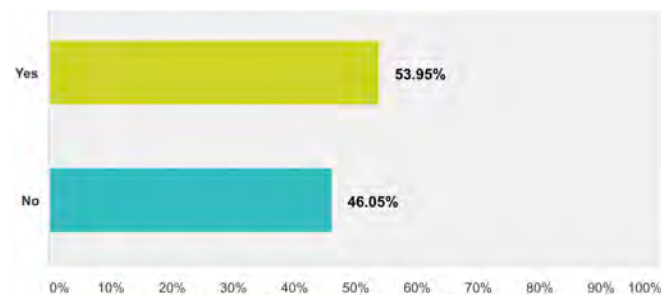
Homelessness

A growing concern in Laredo's housing community is the homeless population. The Laredo Homeless Coalition maintains vital records of various homeless data. The latest "Point-in-Time Homeless Survey" conducted on January 21, 2016 found 168 homeless individuals on the streets of Laredo. Since homeless counts can be notoriously under represented, one can assume that there are significantly higher number of homeless individuals on the streets of the city.

The image on the right, provided by Bethany House, one of the city's leading homeless advocacy and social service agency, shows key information regarding the current state of Laredo's homeless population.

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT
OUR HOMELESS POPULATION?

Individuals and families experience homelessness throughout the year – some for one day, some for weeks and months, and others for years.

2016
PRELIMINARY
OVERALL HOMELESSNESS
AND POINT-IN-TIME
CHARACTERISTICS

LAREDO TX

LAREDO HOMELESS COALITION

The number of those experiencing homelessness is not static, it's extremely fluid as individuals and families enter, exit, and return into the homeless services system.

This fact sheet depicts a preliminary assessment of overall homelessness in our community for a 1-year period.

Median Age 46

Hispanic or Latino	**85%**
Education: Less than 9th grade	**29%**
Unemployed	**51%**
Served in U.S. Armed Forces	**7.5%**

Male 72%
Female 28%

Became Homeless:
In Laredo 76%
Out of State 16%
In Texas, Not Laredo 8%

Annual Estimates for Homeless and At-Risk of Homelessness
2015 General Population for MSA: 282,145

459 HUD Point-In-Time Count + **406** McKinney-Vento School-Aged Children under Sec 725 + **556** At-Risk of Homelessness or otherwise locally defined as homeless*

TOTAL ESTIMATE = 1,421

WHERE DO THEY SLEEP?

① Emergency Shelter
② Street/ Sidewalk
③ Transitional Housing
④ Sharing Housing of Others
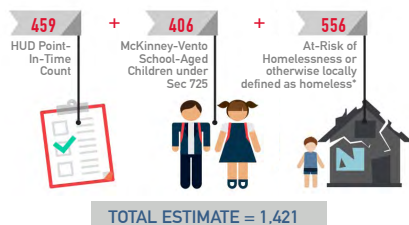
MAIN REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

1) Financial Reasons
2) Unemployment
3) Inability to pay rent or mortgage
4) Substance Abuse / Mental Health Issues
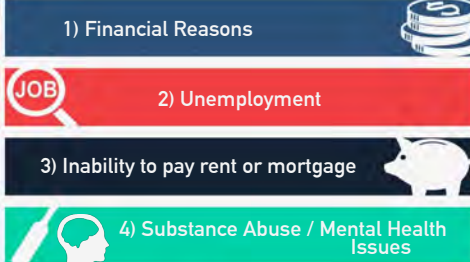
Homeless Segments NOT Included in PIT

People temporarily residing in the following settings:

- Correctional Facilities
- Hotels/ Motels
- Mexico
- Shared housing

SNAPSHOT OF HOMELESS VETERANS IN LAREDO

107* Estimated number of veterans experiencing homelessness or at-risk of becoming homeless in 1 year period.

200 TOTAL PERSONS SURVEYED ON JAN 21

15 VETERANS SURVEYED

LAREDO OVERALL EST. OF HOMELESS 1,421

Percentage Rate **7.5%**

*Derives from using same percentage represented during PIT
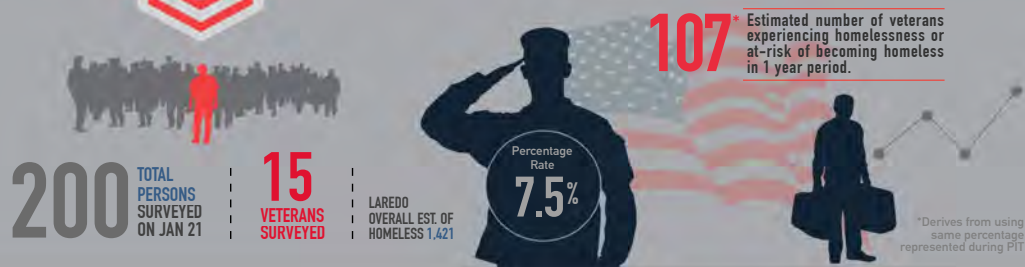
All PIT responses are self-reported.

PIT Conducted January 21, 2016 by community volunteers.

SOURCE: Laredo Homeless Coalition.

Housing and Transportation Costs

Nationally there is growing research and acknowledgement that the true and total cost of housing should also include transportation costs. In other words, transportation costs such as gas, insurance, automobile loans, and maintenance costs should also be considered in the total housing cost, along with mortgages or rent. Furthermore, the farther one lives from the urban core, the higher the cost of these two items. There is also an effect to the local economy, as most transportation costs associated with owning an automobile leave the local economy.

The Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology has created the H+T Affordability Index to examine these issues. Essentially, the closer one lives to existing infrastructure and inner core communities, the less one pays in combined housing and transportation expenses. When asked about the H+T connection, Laredoans seem to also understand this idea.

Question: Do you think it's important to consider the cost of transportation (gas, maintenance, time spent in traffic) when considering new developments?
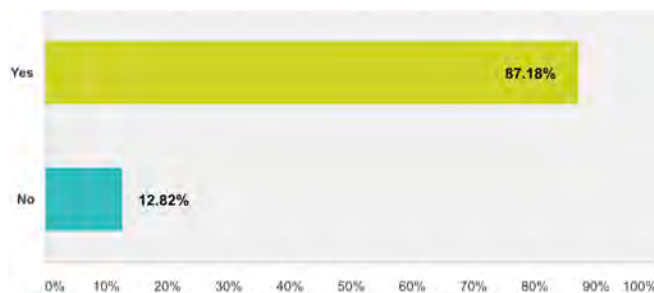
> *"Everyone of the people involved up to now has a passion for change but there is no stronger army than an idea whose time has come. Let's make housing an idea/dream whose time has come."*
>
> *-Survey Respondent*

I live in south Laredo. Our younger siblings would like more parks, so they won't have to play in the dangerous streets where cars pass every few minutes.

I would love it if my neighborhood were greener. We could also use more security.

Other Community Concerns

In addition to the themes identified, there are other areas of improvement identified by Laredoans. Some key opportunities to improve housing and neighborhood infrastructure are presented below.

Create new housing in downtown

Increase pedestrian safety by installing sidewalks

Decrease costs of providing services in the suburbs

Provide pedestrian amenities such as street trees

Increase tax base through infill redevelopment

Improve public transportation infrastructure

STRATEGIES

Creating Diverse Housing Opportunities

The overarching goal presented through these strategies is for the City of Laredo to provide varied housing opportunities for Laredoans with diverse economic backgrounds and housing preferences. At the same time, the city should be creating strong regional housing markets that include a robust urban core and infill strategies that balance the need for new affordable housing and complete, healthy, and accessible communities in all of Laredo.

Strategies

- Downtown Redevelopment
- Infill Opportunities
- Invest in Legacy Neighborhoods
- Build Complete and Healthy Communities
- Address Homelessness Concerns

Mural in the Azteca Neighborhood.

Downtown Redevelopment

While there are many vitally important strategies presented throughout *Viva Laredo*, one of the most important is for the city to redevelop its downtown. A city's downtown is its heart. It is the first and most lasting impression that one gets from that city. Laredo already has great downtown infrastructure including an essential street grid, a beautiful historic plaza system, and the international point of entry between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. While these things are a good start, there is more that the city can do to ensure a vibrant and economically prosperous urban core. This section looks at various housing ideas the can be implemented to assist in a comprehensive downtown strategy.

Identify Buildings for Housing Redevelopment

Downtown Laredo is filled with several historically and architecturally significant buildings. The city should identify several structures to redevelop for housing. A first step is to identify city-owned or managed buildings to begin a robust housing plan in downtown.

One obvious example of a good model is the Hamilton Hotel renovation. This structure located adjacent to Jarvis Plaza and renovated into senior housing, serves as a wonderful local redevelopment model. Future similar developments can also include a greater mix of incomes and uses.

To increase the economic vitality of the downtown, new housing should be either mixed income (market rate and affordable) or market rate. The city should avoid exclusively building affordable housing as it does not encourage the type of income levels necessary to sustain the neighborhood commercial and retail centers, important to any revitalized downtown. If the city moves forward with new redevelopments, it should do so with the intent of diversifying the population and income mix in the area.

Build Housing in Under-utilized Buildings

Many of Laredo's downtown buildings are under-utilized with only the first floors actively occupied or in service. The second stories of many buildings could be used as adaptive re-use housing units. As part of a larger downtown strategy, the city should identify one or two major corridors to begin a concentrated redevelopment effort that includes robust housing redevelopment.

The Hamilton Hotel located on Jarvis Plaza and near other downtown amenities.

I work downtown. Previously, I was afraid to go downtown due to limited experience, but now I'm an expert.

I love to live in the University Residence because I can go walking to my classes and it takes 2 minutes.

Concentrate Infrastructure Funds Downtown

The city should set aside funding from the newly formed Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) and the Neighborhood Empowerment Zone and through a Public Improvement District such as the Municipal Management District to place public infrastructure dollars in areas such as improved sidewalks, street trees, repaved streets, street cleaning, and street lights in areas where the city wants to encourage new development, especially housing.

The images to the right illustrate the potential for downtown housing redevelopment. The city can encourage private investment of many under-utilized buildings by increasing public investments in the form of wider, pedestrian-friendly sidewalks, the addition of street trees, benches, and new iconic street lighting. By doing this, obsolete and vacant structures could be brought back to life with new housing opportunities on the top floors and retail below.

However, without utilizing additional funds, the city can encourage this type of development by amending their development codes to give developers and property owners more flexibility.

Downtown Laredo streetscape with underutilized buildings.

Same streetscape with public and private investments that create a more welcoming and economically viable environment.

Develop a Robust Incentive Policy

The inception of a comprehensive downtown strategy will have to take many strategic forms in order to get things "off the ground." In an effort to facilitate the start-up of new development in areas of the city that have seen little investment in years past, the city should create an incentive policy to encourage new development faster.

These incentives should include:

- Property tax rebates: for a set number of years, usually 5 to 10 years, and depending on the level of investment (project costs), the city can rebate the city's portion of the property taxes.

- Sales tax rebate: the city can also rebate the city's portion of the sales tax for materials and supplies used during the construction of the project.

- Expedited plan and permitting review: one of the things developers appreciate is consistent city regulations and expectations. The city can commit to having dedicated staff to expedite the review and permit processes for downtown projects. A critique we heard is that many governmental boards lack consistency, efficiency and that a professional and well-trained staff should be encouraged to make recommendations on some of these matters.

Create a Residential Parking Permit Program

As the city moves forward with housing developments, parking will become an increased concern. One way to mitigate this is through a residential parking permit program that allows downtown residents to park on on-street parking spaces within defined residential zones. This allocation can be beyond the typical demand for downtown parking. For a minimal cost per year, a resident can be issued a parking permit that hangs in the car or a decal that is placed on the windshield, allowing them to park near or next to a redeveloped building downtown.

Establish Housing for Artists

Laredo has an active artist community that contributes to the vitality of the city. As a way to encourage more artists to live downtown, the city should provide artist-specific housing.

One national model replicated in several cities, including the border city of El Paso, is ArtSpace. By using various affordable housing tools such as housing tax credits or HOME funds subsidies, ArtSpace develops affordable housing opportunities for artists. This population is vital to any downtown revitalization strategy; artists provide creative outlets for other residents to enjoy while producing economic development activities through new retail, storefronts, and other quality of life experiences.

ArtSpace Lofts in downtown El Paso is a 51-unit affordable housing complex for artists. At a total cost of $12.7 million, it also provides about 7,000 square feet of retail space at the street-level. (Picture: HHL Architects)

Infill Opportunities

Laredo has many vacant parcels currently not generating any tax revenue for the city. Many of these properties are located in areas of the city with existing infrastructure. From a development perspective, this is advantageous because it has the potential to decrease the total development costs associated with streets and utilities because it is located within already established communities. In addition to having a downtown strategy that creates housing in the urban core, the city should simultaneously create an infill strategy in key areas of the city.

Develop a Comprehensive Database and Mapping System
One of the first things the city should engage in is creating a comprehensive database of all available vacant parcels to be utilized across departments and by various governmental entities. This database should include an online GIS mapping system, where potential investors can identify parcels of land and review relevant parcel information such as zoning districts, existing available infrastructure, and proximity to schools, parks, or retail.

This information will serve as the foundation of the infill program. It will be difficult to move forward with an implementable strategy without first having identifiable and up-to-date information from which to base this policy on.

Encourage New Housing on Vacant Land
Once the city has identified vacant parcels, the city should encourage new housing or mixed-used development in these areas.

By creating an incentive policy, similar to the one created for downtown reinvestment, the city can direct housing development in areas that already have infrastructure and thus, decrease the cost of development as well as the cost of providing municipal services.

Also, by encouraging new housing developments, the city can introduce more varied housing designs and products into homogenous neighborhoods. For example, duplex units, quads, or townhomes can be strategically placed to create more diverse neighborhoods.

A vacant parcel of land located in the historic neighborhood of The Heights. This parcel has been passed over for many years and does not contribute to the city's tax base.

This illustration shows the potential of redeveloping vacant parcels of land into new housing opportunities. New housing in these areas will also create new sidewalks, street trees, and other pedestrian-friendly amenities where none currently exist.

Continue "Operation Crackdown" Program
Through partnerships with the National Guard, Border Patrol, Laredo Police Department, and the City of Laredo, the "Operation Crackdown" program seeks to redevelop obsolete houses into new homes. By partnering with these agencies to identify drug houses, the city is able to coordinate with the property owners and to allow the national guard to demolish these homes at zero cost to the property owners. The images below, provided by Laredo's Community Development Department, show the before and after impact this program had one this particular property.

Before and after photos of an "Operation Crackdown" property.

Redevelop Mercy Hospital and Surrounding Areas into a Mixed-Used District

While this will be a long-term, generational strategy, it is nonetheless, an important initiative. Cities, neighborhoods, and their community fabric are not static things that remain vibrant or dormant forever. These things are cyclical and, therefore, an area like the Mercy Hospital site should not be left abandoned and without investment. Future generations of Laredoans should not have to witness the current state of this large area of the city.

Already the surrounding parcels of land and neighborhoods are feeling the stress of having this boarded-up and obsolete parcel of land within close proximity. Over the last several years, surrounding commercial activity has declined. If left unabated, this area will continue to decrease in property values and further deteriorate surrounding properties.

Through strategic programs and investments, the city can slowly begin to transform and reimagine this parcel of land.

Once a masterplan is developed, the city can re-create this area into a Mixed-Used Development that combines mixed-used and mixed-income districts and because of its proximity to downtown and other existing neighborhoods, this area can serve as a strategic location for higher density development serviced by efficient public transportation.

View of Mercy Hospital in its current state.

Lot adjacent to Mercy Hospital with a "For Sale" sign.

Invest in Legacy Neighborhoods

One of Laredo's major assets is the amount of historically and culturally significant communities it has. Many of these legacy neighborhoods, such as El Azteca, El Cuatro, La Guadalupe, San Agustin, and St. Peter's, could use reinvestment. Coupled with the previous strategies outlined in this plan, the city should invest in neighborhood area plans, pointed public funding, and social capital to reinvigorate these very important communities.

Create Adaptive Reuse Housing Opportunities

One key strategy in the Legacy Neighborhoods Program is to re-use existing buildings for housing opportunities. Throughout many of these communities, there are beloved neighborhood institutions and buildings. The Azteca Theatre building is one such structure.

Generations of Laredoans remember visiting this theatre to catch a glimpse of Mexican movie stars. Today the building sits idle and boarded-up. A new initiative can include repurposing this building for apartments or for neighborhood amenities such as a small community-arts space or small scale retail.

The Azteca Theatre in its current state.

The Azteca Theatre repurposed as loft apartments with ground floor retail.

Develop a Series of Neighborhood Plans

With very little investment, the city can begin to create meaningful area plans for these communities. By engaging the Planning Department and the historic preservation advocates, small concentrated plans can be developed that address neighborhood concerns, identify strategies for reinvestment, and provide housing opportunities. Once the plans are developed, the city can commit certain funds to these areas.

Create a Neighborhood Toolkit

Another small and meaningful initiative is for the city to develop Neighborhood Toolkits. These toolkits can provide resources and information on various neighborhood-themed initiatives and items.

For example, this policy can include the creation of neighborhood associations to encourage more neighborhood advocacy, civic pride, and a forum in which residents can prioritize initiatives and solicit funding through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs.

Encourage Neighborhood Retail to Increase Housing Amenities

Housing is not just about providing safe and decent homes, it is also about providing adequate residential amenities such as a good balance of residential and retail opportunities within walking distance.

Regional shopping centers are important to every city. But equally important is the ability of residents to walk short distances from their homes to grab a cup of coffee, pick up dinner, or get grocery items. All over Laredo there are these cherished shopping and dining spots. More should be done to sustain the vitality of these locally-owned businesses within close proximity to housing developments.

Café Dolce formerly located in the St. Peter's neighborhood.

Polo's Bakery located in one of the city's older communities.

"Innovative Public-Private Partnership Introduces $100 Million Program to Preserve Affordable Rental Homes"

"An innovative partnership to finance the preservation of federally-subsidized rental housing in underserved markets brings together major financial institutions, philanthropy, and the federal government.

MacArthur, which is providing a $20 million guaranty in connection with this new effort, aims to attract $100 million for non-profit developers working to preserve and renovate approximately 20 rental properties nationwide serving more than 2,000 low-income residents. Projects already slated to move ahead include renovations of affordable rental housing for low-income families and seniors in Minneapolis, Oklahoma City, Omaha, and Toledo.

"Our nation's need for affordable rental housing has never been greater and continues to grow," said Debra Schwartz, MacArthur's Director of Program-Related Investments. "This innovative approach, which brings together major financial institutions, philanthropy, and the federal government, shows that we can mobilize the capital needed to save thousands of at-risk affordable rental homes, even in difficult economic times. Much more needs to be done but this model offers one creative way forward."

As part of the public-private partnership, The National Affordable Housing Trust (NAHT) and Cornerstone Real Estate Advisers LLC jointly closed an investment fund through the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, a program that provides incentives for private investment in developments serving low-income renters. Investors in the fund include JPMorgan Chase, Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, MetLife, and United Bank. NAHT and Cornerstone will jointly manage the fund.

"This fund is an example of how public and private organizations working together creatively can engineer socially responsible investments that work for everyone involved, most notably the residents of the affordable housing that this fund will help preserve," said David J. Reilly, Cornerstone's president and CEO.

Since its creation in 1986, the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit has been the nation's primary source of low-cost capital for the development and preservation of affordable rental housing. However, in the wake of the recent financial crisis, participation in the program declined sharply. While the market for Low-Income Housing Tax Credits has begun to rebound, investors are focused disproportionately on major markets and new construction projects, causing many rental preservation projects to stall, especially in smaller and rural communities.

The new fund widened the range of rental housing projects that mainstream investors will support. MacArthur's financial support addressed investor concerns regarding construction and lease-up risks as well as the funding of certain federal subsidy programs. Additionally, capital for the projects was attracted to Cornerstone's innovative two-tier structure, which provides additional collateral coverage for the senior investors.

The fund will support nonprofit housing developers acquiring and renovating hundreds of existing, affordable rental homes in five states, including:

• Nicollet Towers, a landmark building in Minneapolis occupied by more than 300 low-income families and seniors, will be renovated by Volunteers of America. The overhaul will incorporate many new energy-efficient features, including re-facing of the façade. A groundbreaking event is scheduled for December 15.

• Southwoods Apartments, a 100-unit affordable rental property in Oklahoma City, will be renovated and managed by Volunteers of America. In addition to energy efficiency upgrades, a new wireless emergency call system will be installed to enhance the health and safety of the building's elderly residents.

• Millard Manor, an outdated but fully occupied rental property in Omaha will be significantly expanded to provide more suitable homes for its low-income senior citizen residents. The project is being renovated and managed by Good Samaritan Society.

• Renaissance Senior Apartments is a 100 year-old property in downtown Toledo, adjacent to the famous Valentine Theater. National Church Residences will fully renovate and manage the property's 53 rental apartments. A groundbreaking event is scheduled for December 14."

Source: MacArthur Foundation

Build Complete and Healthy Neighborhoods

Ensuring reinvestment in existing communities as well as redeveloping downtown are important strategies. However, recognizing that housing is not confined to those areas, the city should also examine areas where new growth is occurring. New subdivisions are sprouting up every year, and with them residents are moving to areas outside of the urban core and into the fringes of the city. Because of this, the city should ensure that these new communities are being developed in a sustainable manner and that they too contribute to citizens' overall quality of life.

View of streambed abutting the side of a home.

Encourage Amenities That Increase Healthy Living

One of Laredo's key assets is the network of streams and waterways that connect various neighborhoods throughout the city. This amenity is like no other and should be enhanced, especially around new developments. The current model, however, is to see this amenity as something to ignore, instead of the asset it is. The examples on the right illustrate how these waterways aren't being utilized to their full potential. Instead of encouraging homes to front these greenbelts, homes oftentimes turn their sides or backs to them, discouraging the use of these potential recreational areas.

Street view of waterway stream located within a neighborhood.

A different approach can include requiring, when appropriate, that homes front toward these greenspaces. By combining this important design element with narrower local streets, residents are invited and encouraged to utilize the waterways, as well as the abutting sidewalks and meandering trails, both for leisure and recreational purposes, in safe and pleasant environment.

SIDEWALK PARKWAY PARKING   DRIVING LANES   PARKING PARKWAY MEANDERING TRAIL

5'   5'   7'   10'   10'   7'   5'   8'

57' ROW - Traditional Neighborhood Street - Abutting Arroyo
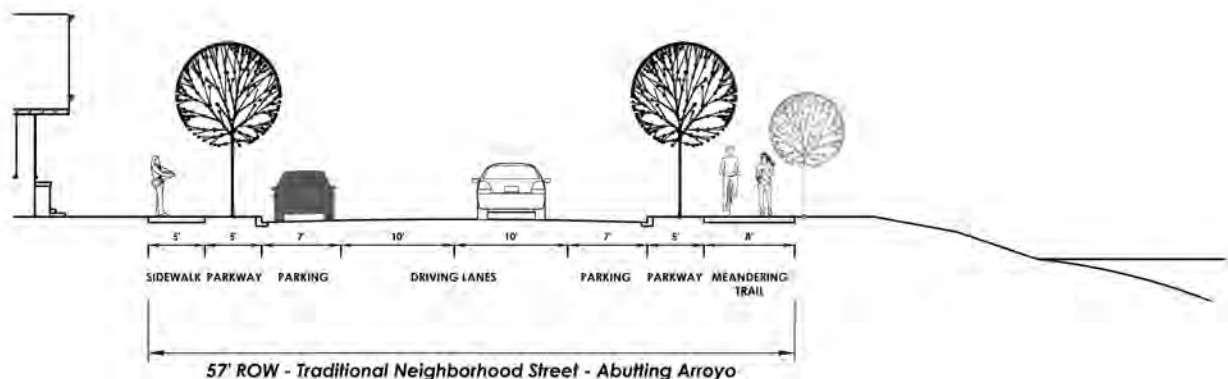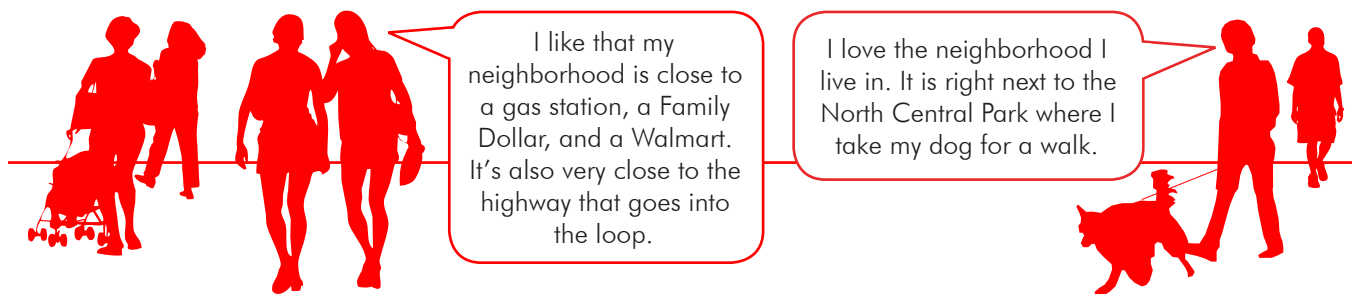
Develop Complete Pedestrian Amenities

There must be a concerted effort for the Planning Department to review current ordinances to ensure that the city's development standards are geared towards 21st century best practices. In communities across the country, neighborhoods are being designed and developed differently than during the post WWII subdivision era. It is important that the City of Laredo ensure that its zoning and subdivision codes encourage complete and sustainable neighborhood design. The city should solicit proposals to carry-out this activity.

One area to review is the cross section required for residential streets. Narrower streets with both sidewalks and parkways where street trees could be planted, as well as narrower driveways or garages in the rear served by alleys, should be the standard design for new communities. By doing this, pedestrians are provided a safe and inviting walking environment and other residents, who normally would not walk, are encouraged to use alternative transportation modes such bicycling or walking.

A safer and more practical approach to residential street design could include narrower driving lanes, both a sidewalk and a parkway (typical city standards do not include parkways), and a total right-of-way width of 54 feet.

Fasken Boulevard features wide sidewalks and parkways.

A typical residential street lacks parkways for planting street trees and includes a minimal 4 foot sidewalks. Improvements should be made to the current development standards to include parkways and 5 foot minimum sidewalks.

Fasken Boulevard serves as a collector street for the abutting residential areas but it also includes several elements for how to design pedestrian-friendly streets.

5'	5'	7'	10'	10'	7'	5'	5'
SIDEWALK	PARKWAY	PARKING	DRIVING LANES		PARKING	PARKWAY	SIDEWALK

54' ROW - Traditional Neighborhood Street
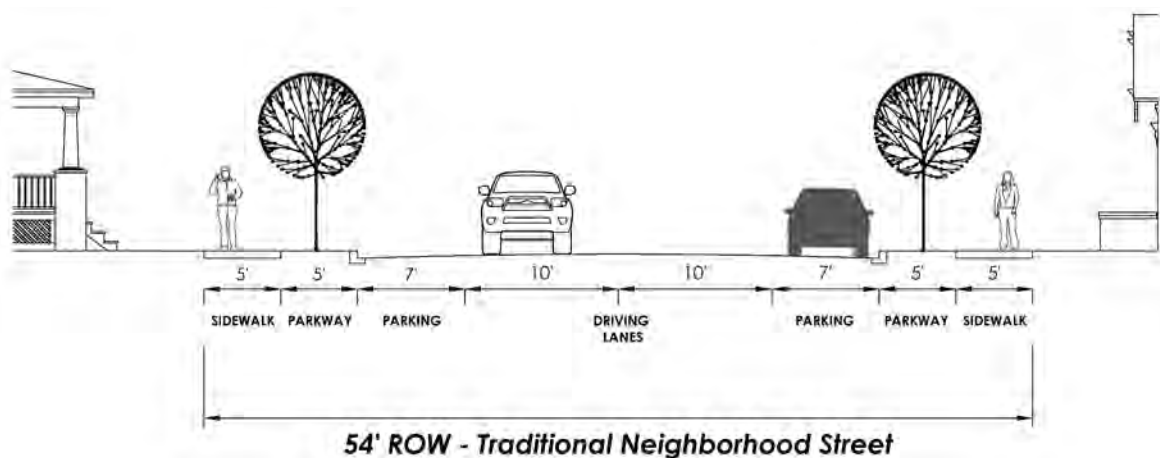
Address Homelessness Concerns

Through various interviews with homeless advocates and site visits to Bethany House, it is apparent that Laredo has dedicated groups focusing on the homeless population. It is also evident that there is still much to be done.

A complete scope in this area should include the following initiatives:

Engage All Housing Stakeholders

The city should convene a large-scale summit and/or a blue ribbon committee to address the homeless issues in Laredo.

Develop A Comprehensive Strategy

Through the efforts of this summit or committee, develop a robust strategy to address homelessness as well as other related issues such as substance abuse, unemployment, lack of affordable housing opportunities, and wages, among other items.

Bethany House in Downtown Laredo.

Increase Funding and Capacity

The city should review its current funding levels for this population and every effort should be made to increase funding, provide technical assistance, and/or assist nonprofit organizations in developing a sustainable financial and resource development stream.

Create A One-Stop Shop For Homeless Social Services

A model program should be developed that encompasses many social services for the homeless. This resource center could include housing, substance abuse counseling, workforce development training, and educational opportunities. If possible, it should be located along existing transit lines and within close proximity to other resources such as hospitals and employment centers.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

To provide varied housing opportunities for Laredoans with diverse economic backgrounds and housing preferences while at the same time creating strong regional housing markets that include a robust urban core and infill strategies that balance the need for new affordable housing and complete, healthy, and accessible communities throughout all of Laredo.

Downtown Redevelopment
Goal 5.1: Revitalize downtown by creating new housing opportunities.

> **Policy 5.1.1**: Create a list of potential properties to redevelop and develop and adopt an infill development master plan.

> **Policy 5.1.2**: Create elderly housing opportunities, like at the Hamilton Hotel.

> **Policy 5.1.3**: Create a residential parking permit program.

> **Policy 5.1.4**: Explore the opportunity for artist housing through the ArtSpace model.

> **Policy 5.1.5**: Ensure that market-rate housing is developed to encourage a mix of incomes.

> **Policy 5.1.6**: All new public infrastructure and facility investments should be concentrated downtown.

Infill Opportunities
Goal 5.2: Develop a robust infill strategy to redevelop existing neighborhoods and provide affordable housing choices.

> **Policy 5.2.1**: Create an infill incentive policy that includes property tax rebates, waiver of permitting fees, parking reductions, and sales tax rebates, among other possibilities.

> **Policy 5.2.2**: Redevelop the Mercy Hospital area into a mixed-used, mixed income development.

> **Policy 5.2.3**: City can identify all existing vacant parcels of land by developing a comprehensive map and list and pursue the purchase of these properties, when possible, for affordable housing units. Or use city parcels to create public-private partnerships.

> **Policy 5.2.4**: Continue and enhance the "Operation Crackdown" program.

> **Policy 5.2.5**: Allow micro housing as residential use within an existing residential lot and on vacant lots with increased density and decreased home size. Distinguish between home on slab and home on wheels, allowing both.

Invest in Legacy Neighborhoods
Goal 5.3: Develop a "Legacy Neighborhoods Program" to ensure that historic and culturally significant communities thrive.

> **Policy 5.3.1**: Create boundaries for these communities and work with neighborhood associations to create study area plans and implement preservation through zoning overlays.

> **Policy 5.3.2**: Develop an incentive policy to encourage development in these areas.

> **Policy 5.3.3**: Encourage more public art such as murals, gateway signage, and landscaping corridors that serve to beautify these areas while creating a unique sense of place.

> **Policy 5.3.4:** Main streets in each of these areas should be encouraged, ensuring a good balance of housing and neighborhood retail.

> **Policy 5.3.5:** Provide resources for residents to organize and for neighborhood planning toolkits.

> **Policy 5.3.6:** Create incentives program for developers to include permanently reserved affordable housing units within new developments. Affordable housing to be integrated and indistinguishable from market priced housing.

I would definitely like to see more parks in my area such as baseball fields, soccer fields, and covered basketball courts for the children.

Other Housing Policies

Goal 5.6: Review existing development codes and modify to match 21st century best practices.

Policy 5.6.1: City should hire consultant to revise the city's development codes.

Policy 5.6.2: Create an affordability index to ensure a balance between housing and transportation costs.

Policy 5.6.3: Discourage "Leapfrog" Development.

Policy 5.6.4: If needed, create financial policies such as impact fees that ensure new growth pays for itself without existing communities subsidizing the cost of new developments.

Policy 5.6.5: Explore various funding sources to create affordable housing and mixed-use/mixed income communities. These can include:

- Texas Department of Housing & Community Development Affairs programs such as tax credits, bonds, and loans.

- Leveraging the Community Reinvestment Act resources from the various banks.

- The Laredo Housing Finance Corporation can serve as a magnet for new investments.

- Allow Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP's) for affordable housing and mixed use developments through Low Income Housing Credit, Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, and New Markets Tax Credit.

Policy 5.6.6: Through the city's grants office, apply for housing and community development grants at the state and federal levels.

Policy 5.6.7: Pursue affordable housing redevelopment in partnership with the LHA and HUD through rental assistance demonstration

and similar project-based assistance programs. Laredo Housing Authority will ensure that all available federal funds and programs are being implemented.

Policy 5.6.8: Allocate New Urbanism training across city departments and key development and housing stakeholders. This will ensure city-wide coordination of *Viva Laredo* Comprehensive Plan.

Policy 5.6.9: Make city properties data available for possible investment.

Policy 5.6.10: Make a City Department in charge of Neighborhood Associations to provide eduaction, advice and empowerment.

Policy 5.6.11: Create an investment trust fund to grow through different venues.

Sustainability

6

a alguien to let sb off sthg; **perdonarle la vida a alguien** to spare sb their life **- 3.** [desperdiciar]: **no perdonar algo** not to miss sthg. ◇ *vi:* **perdone, ¿cómo ha dicho?** excuse me, what did you say?

perdonavidas *smf inv fam* bully.

perdurar *vi* **- 1.** [durar mucho] to endure, to last **- 2.** [persistir] to persist.

perecedero, ra *adj* **- 1.** [productos] perishable **- 2.** [naturaleza] transitory.

perecer [30] *vi* to perish, to die.

peregrina ▷ **peregrino**.

peregrinación *sf* RELIG pilgrimage.

peregrinaje *sm* RELIG pilgrimage.

peregrinar *vi* RELIG to make a pilgrimage.

peregrino, na ◇ *adj* **- 1.** [ave] migratory **- 2.** *fig* [extraño] strange. ◇ *sm, f* [persona] pilgrim.

perejil *sm* parsley.

perenne *adj* BOT perennial.

perentorio, ria *adj* urgent, pressing; [gesto,

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Sustainability is a broad concept that can be included in nearly all aspects of daily life. Its subjects include specific instances, examples, and solutions that involve a wholistic understanding of our surroundings. The built environment plays a significant role in how our communities impact the local ecosystem.

For example, a 2004 study by the United States Green Building Council (USGBC) revealed that transportation is responsible for approximately 33% carbon emissions while buildings are responsible for approximately 39%. According to information released by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, transportation accounted for 28.1% of energy consumption and buildings accounted for 47.6% in the U.S. in 2012.

These statistics make it clear that an overwhelming amount of emissions and energy can be attributed to our built environment. Methods to reduce the strain on the ecosystem as well as our infrastructure can be addressed in how we plan and build our cities and buildings, as well as our stewardship of the natural environment.

Green Space
The National Recreation Association Park Standards (NRAPS) recommends at least 10 acres of park and recreational space be set aside for every 1,000 citizens. A 2015 study by the Trust for Public Land revealed that Laredo has 5.7 acres set aside for every 1,000 citizens. While the current code for Laredo encourages the formation of public space, the desired level established identifies 11 acres per 1,000 citizens. Additionally, This space requirement can be offset by paying a fee to the city. A lower amount of green space also places a higher burden on infrastructure by channelling water runoff into city sewers and into the water treatment facilities. Currently, a plan for park locations and connections has not been established.

Natural Habitat and Biodiversity
The existing network of natural and wild places are distinct, permanent and irreplaceable. The Rio Grande and the rich, native habitat that surrounds it generates locally unique biodiversity and animal habitat. These places offer benefits to both humans and the environment. In developing new land or retrofitting existing neighborhoods, Laredoans will need to consider that these special places take generations and centuries to form, and their impacts are lasting. A key strategy for development will include maintaining the diverse habitat and utilizing it as a community asset.

Water
The quality of water in the Rio Grande is a continuing concern for residents, ecologists, and a variety of other public service agencies. Great strides have been made by the City of Laredo since the construction of water treatment plants to deliver clean water to residents. As Laredo continues to grow, strain will be placed on the existing infrastructure as well as the river itself. In order to help ease the strain on the system, passive and active conservation techniques should be considered.

Transportation
A large portion of central Laredo, including the downtown, is a gridded street network that is well connected and is already in good condition to encourage multi-modal transportation. Unfortunately, a vast majority of Laredoans do not walk, bike or use transit as a means of accessing Laredo. This is a result of a planning history of separating uses which translates into longer car trips in order to do even daily errands. This increases the amount of energy consumed for travel as well as the emissions released into the atmosphere. It also puts a strain on the street network that might otherwise be alleviated if other options were available. While positive steps have been taken to address this issue, more can be done to increase the possibility of a mere multi-modal Laredo.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

While discussing environmental concerns, Laredoans frame the topics in terms of quality of life and local challenges. These concerns are important because, through success in tackling local challenges, Laredo will also help address environmental concerns that are global in scale.

A Walkable and Accessible City
Many residents expressed their desire to move around Laredo using alternative modes of transportation, with a clear need to spend less time driving or sitting in traffic. This concern is particularly relevant to children and the elderly, but is also increasingly important to younger generations that are interested in vibrant, walkable neighborhoods. Less time driving will both reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, while also improving the health of the community. Residents requested that the city prioritize fixing and intensifying the infrastructure and policy that make Laredo more walkable and accessible.

Preservation
The historic buildings and plazas in Laredo are more than just a reminder of the history of the city; they represent a significant amount of embodied energy, materials, time and labor that were a part of their creation. It would be more economical and more sustainable to preserve these historic assets than to replace them with buildings of a similar quality. Adaptive re-use of these structures is an inherently sustainable enterprise for both the environment as well as the for the character and life of the city. Beyond green benefits, historic buildings help inform today's developers and architects in creating street-friendly, climate-responsive structures of enduring quality. Cities have realized that historic districts with coherent architecture also attract tourists while generating positive economic impacts.

Expanded Network of Parks & Open Spaces
Currently, within the City of Laredo, there are about 100 locations dedicated to its Parks and Recreation system. Via the design of hiking and biking trails, many of these locations have recently become inter-connected. This could potentially play a major role in increasing walkability and available open space for active recreation in Laredo.

Many residents expressed the need to update existing parks and open spaces—such as improving the existing trails or activating parks and plazas with new facilities and programs. In addition, thoughtfully considering the placement of development, including shopping destinations, fitness facilities, educational facilities, and restaurants within close proximity of parks could create a potential symbiotic relationship between the land uses and encourage more daily activity.

Habitat & Biodiversity
A common theme within the community involves the restoration and preservation of the dynamic habitats in the city, as well as a desire to encourage people to use the beautiful spaces and experience the panoramic views. Between the Rio Grande, Lake Casa Blanca, and the plains and fields, Laredo has distinct habitats and ecosystems.

Existing and shaded shared use path in Laredo.

Energy and Industry

The green economy does not resemble the previous generations' vision of industry. As city leaders seek to attract new business, they will be doing so with energy-saving and energy generating building and business models.

Many existing businesses and households want to retrofit their properties to be more efficient and more economical. While such innovation is occurring at the scale of the building, the city and county should coordinate and collaborate with private land owners to set aside open spaces for renewable energy generation such as solar and wind farms on the plains outside the city. As manufacturing and other enterprises return to this hemisphere, Mexico, the United States, Texas and Laredo will likely find that energy and resource-efficient modes of industry and logistics will help them remain competitive.

Existing wetlands and bike path.

Water[1]

Atmosphere and climate change affect the quantity and quality of water available to metropolitan area. Because water and its natural conveyance features are the very basis for survival in the region, Laredoans have become more interested in protecting and effectively managing these features.

There are different interests competing for water in Laredo. These include Rio Grande advocates, industry and businesses, government, and households. Natural habitats and ecosystems have needs that are indifferent to the other interests vying for water. This implies a series of important questions that must be revisited by each generation of Laredoans:

1. How should the city and its citizens determine the proper and equitable distribution of water?

2. How can Laredo sustainably diversify and expand the current contributors to its water budget - the river, water harvesting, and water reclamation technologies?

3. Are there ways that Laredo can reduce water consumption given its current population and prognosis for population growth?

4. How can the cost of infrastructure and water delivery be used to prevent suburban sprawl and encourage metropolitan compactness?

5. How can natural groundwater recharge and conveyance features be conserved, restored, and inform the design of new infrastructure, or retrofits?

1 Gilpin Engineering Environmental Consulting Technical Memorandum 12/02/2016

STRATEGIES

Limit Sprawl & Reduce Emissions

The strategies to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions span many aspects of the daily life of the city. Consequently, the strategies needed to accomplish this task are not only found in the Sustainability Chapter but in many other chapters.

Vehicle Miles Traveled

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction is the pillar of the sprawl and emission reduction strategy. Laredo needs to make multiple modes of mobility just as convenient as automobile usage. These include walking, cycling, buses, electric rail, and other forms of travel. Moving towards better transit options should be complemented by walkable, compact urban fabric, especially around major transit nodes.

Sprawling development segregated by use lacks overall connectivity, and forces most inhabitants to travel from home to work, school, entertainment or recreation by car only. In order to repair sprawl, neighborhoods need to be walkable, bikable and well connected. Walkable places aim to reduce VMT and subsequently reduce green house gas emissions. Plans for new neighborhoods, as well as revitalized neighborhoods in Laredo revolve around the notion of reducing auto only travel, and instead are designed for bike and pedestrian comfort, with transit access nearby.

Additionally, sidewalks, street trees, shading devices and dedicated bike infrastructure can make walking and biking easier and more comfortable. In addition, there are parts of the city that are already "transit-ready", meaning they already have many of the needed features for improved accessibility (e.g. interconnected network of streets, buildings that line the street with interesting facades, providing a sense of enclosure, etc.).

Illustration of a proposed neighborhood with new, compact development that is surrounding public open space, limiting sprawl, reducing car dependency, and allowing walkability.

Zero Emission Incentives

In order to help promote the use of low carbon vehicles such as hybrids and electric vehicles, the city should consider providing priority parking locations with free charging stations at public parking facilities. The city should also consider requiring bicycle facilities as part of commercial and multi-family development. Transit systems could also be run with cleaner running engines or by utilizing electric lines to power buses or trolleys.

Greener Buildings

There are many reasons to incorporate sustainable construction practices into new construction, especially when many of these are no more costly than unsustainable designs, and others generally pay for themselves in a short time frame. Some low-tech, common sense ways to construct more sustainably include using locally produced construction materials, using renewable or very durable materials, and designing buildings to be climate-responsive. Laredo's historic and vernacular building traditions offer many pointers on how to accomplish these things.

Some typical climate-responsive design techniques include cross-ventilation, high ceilings, use of daylight, and acknowledging solar orientation. Of course, the location and siting of buildings is also crucial. A designer or building owner should strive to build mostly in walkable or transit-served contexts. Unbuilt portions of the site can have roles in recharging groundwater and providing for habitat.

For those that can afford to build or retrofit using high-tech solutions, these may include on-site energy generation, integrated plumbing systems that recycle and differentiate water based upon intended use. The ability to increase the use of timers and sensors for lighting, air-conditioning, and other building systems, which can greatly reduce consumption and demand, already exists.

Weatherization

"Weatherization" should be considered low hanging fruit in the process of making buildings greener. Without even upgrading building systems, large savings can be gained from easy and inexpensive improvements to insulation and by sealing cracks in windows and doors. Regular maintenance of air conditioning and heating systems, such as coil and duct cleaning and filter replacement, are important practices when trying to reduce citywide electricity loads. Installing shade devices such as awnings and shutters, planting deciduous trees in appropriate sites, using high-albedo (reflective) roof surfaces also contribute. The latter two practices also mitigate the urban heat island effect.

Reduce Heat Island Effect

The heat island effect is where an area is significantly warmer than the surrounding areas due to manmade interventions such as large surfaces that reflect heat instead of absorbing heat such as large parking areas or roof surfaces.

There are both building roof and non-roof strategies that can be used to mitigate the urban heat island effect.

Roof Strategies
Create shade for roofs by using vegetated roofs, high albedo materials, trees to shade roofs, and pergolas, solar panels, and other devices to shade parking garages and/or flat sloped roofs.

Non-Roof Strategies
Create shade for the ground by installing vegetative ground cover and trees in planting strips, swales, and verges instead of pavement, using high albedo materials for paved surfaces, minimizing surface parking lots and the size of expanses of asphalt, installing trees and ground cover in parking lots.

Increase & Strengthen the Green Network

Creating a Green Network

Laredo's green network is much more than just its existing parks. A seamless system should also include trails, wild areas, tree-lined streets, and hardscaped plazas. All of these open space types can provide benefits such as increasing and preserving habitat, recreation and relaxation, public health and fitness, and providing psychological counterpoint to the intense urbanity of the city.

A more complete green network would also provide ecological services such as carbon sequestration, polishing the air of gaseous and particulate pollutants, aiding in groundwater recharge, and mitigating the urban heat island effect. VMT reduction due to trail users choosing to bike or walk instead of driving is also an important benefit of the green network. Economic considerations include higher real estate values and higher tax revenue for the city.

Laredo has the opportunity to set aside land for parks and trails on its expanding periphery before it is developed. The city should also strategically insert or improve such places in the already-built portions of the city.
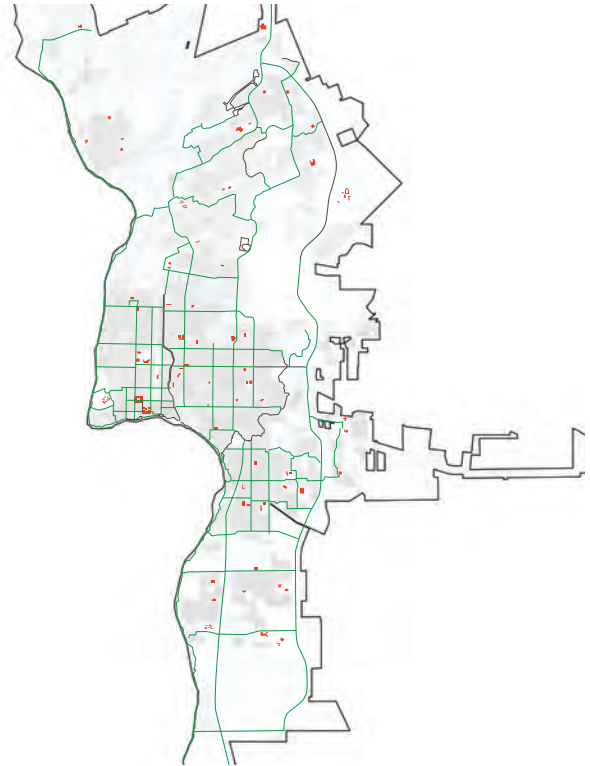
The Bike Master Plan outlines path and trail connections as well as bike infrastructure. Refer to the Mobility section of the plan for more detail.

Section of Chacon Creek Hike / Bike Trail (Rails to Trails Conservancy, 2016)

Introducing More Variety into the Public Space Options in Laredo

High-quality civic spaces should be thoroughly integrated into new development and introduced during redevelopment. Plazas and squares are the most urban types of space; they are enclosed by surrounding buildings that form an outdoor room. Parks and greens are more open, bounded on at least one side by buildings, and framed by plantings. Other types of civic spaces, including community gardens and playfields, are more open and only occasionally shaped by buildings or formal plantings.

A *park* is a natural preserve that serves environmental goals such as the preservation of habitat or filtration of water. It may also be available for active recreation. The shape of the park may follow the boundaries of natural features like the waterways running through the city. Parks may contain trails, rock escarpments, water bodies, woodlands, and meadows. A park may also contain orchards or food gardens. Adjacent buildings should face the park.
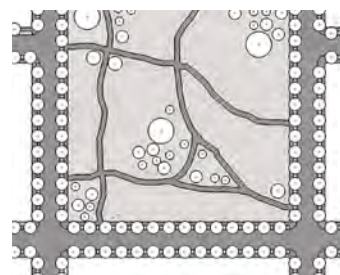
A *green* is available for structured or unstructured recreation. A green may be spatially defined by landscaping rather than by buildings. Trees can be formally or naturalistically planted. A green contains lawns, trees, pavilions, memorials, benches, and playground equipment. A green may also contain orchards or plots for cultivation of community gardens.
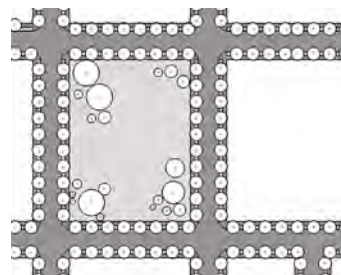
A *square* is available for structured or unstructured recreation and civic purposes. A square is clearly defined by building frontages. A square can provide a public open space that provides a setting for civic buildings. Squares are located at the intersection of important thoroughfares. Squares may contain lawns, trees, and pavilions that are formally disposed.
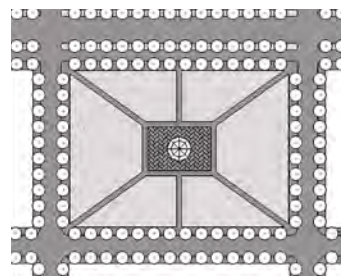
A *plaza* is designed for civic, commercial, or residential activities. A plaza is clearly defined by building frontages. Its surface is typically covered with pavers or compact earth. Trees are optional and plazas are located at the most central intersections or as quiet neighborhood centers.

We need community gardens. Places to inspire and promote creativity.

We need a clean river that can be used for tourism, walkability, and entertainment.
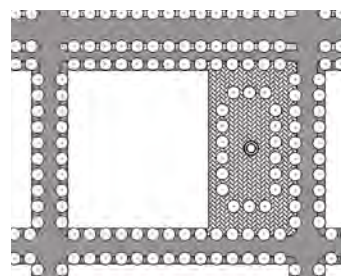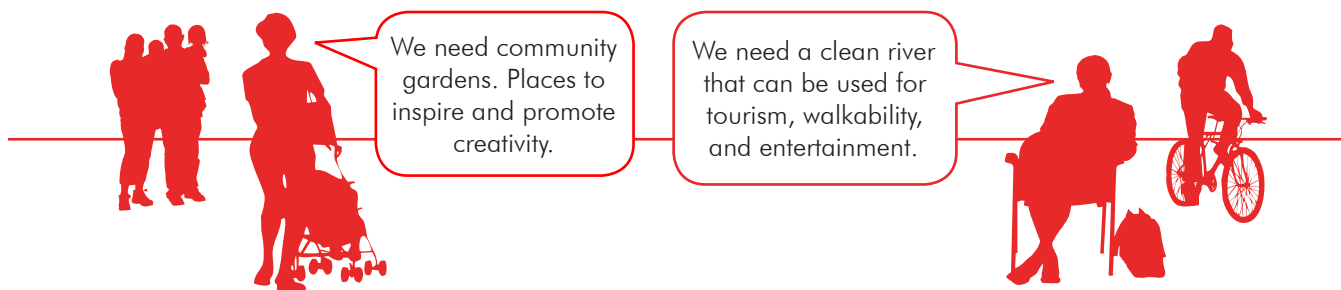
Design Around Civic Spaces

Neighborhood civic features can be a prime selling points for a community and should be designed accordingly. Greens should not be treated as leftover space. Integrating these spaces into neighborhoods should be an important priority; locating them prominently in conjunction with churches and schools is often beneficial.

To improve the usability and attractiveness of neighborhood parks created while land is being subdivided, the city should consider allowing multiple smaller neighborhood greens or parks that can be reached by more people on foot or by bicycle. Amenities such as playgrounds or gazebos are highly encouraged.

The edges of greens and small parks are critical to their success. The top illustration shows a typical neighborhood green that faces the backs of houses, which limits interaction with surrounding properties and reduces natural surveillance.

The civic space could instead be designed with a new layer of development with the fronts of buildings facing the green would activate this space, as shown in the middle illustration. One or more walkable tree-lined streets would provide an active edge to what will now function as a true neighborhood green or park. Shade trees would also be added to adjacent streets, helping to define the edges.

In compact settings, residents can enjoy neighborhood squares and engage more fully in civic life outside their homes. Additional uses are made possible by virtue of adding more people, and attached units around the parks periphery. The image shows five types of units: attached, detached, accessory, and apartments above shops and offices. This kind of diversity in housing type would likely lead to a neighborhood of varied ages and incomes.

A potentially lifeless neighborhood green with housing facing away from the park.

A lively neighborhood green fronted with detached homes.

A lively neighborhood green made more lively by adding a corner store and small offices.

Environmental Benefits of Parks[2]

Stormwater runoff created through new development can be offset by channeling this water to the increased greenspace of linear parks. The reduced volume and peak flows of stormwater will reduce the size and cost of necessary stormwater management infrastructure.

A case study done by the Davey Tree Expert Company and American Forests looks at a 3.8 acre residential site in Garland, Texas; this study provides insight into the potential stormwater volume reduction trees alone could provide (i.e. tree canopy coverage).

A notable reality that is worth considering from this example: if the City of Garland were to remove all of its existing tree canopy coverage, an estimated $2.8 million (annually) would be needed to build and maintain stormwater management infrastructure, such as retention facilities, to handle the additional runoff volume. What would the equivalent for Laredo be?

The proposal to use a connected linear park system in order to create a niche in each watershed in Laredo is a step forward towards modern urbanism and efficient infrastructure management. In Laredo, much of the needed infrastructure is already present on developed watersheds, making it possible for most of Laredo to ultimately benefit from this approach.

In addition to improving natural infrastructure, an urban network of linear open spaces would result in new parks that seek to connect to the larger system. The system of parks can continue to fill-in missing components in the overall trail system, which can ultimately connect to the larger bike and pedestrian network throughout the city. This green network has multiple functions, meeting both stormwater needs and the communities desire for parks and trails that are better connected to one another.

2 Gilpin Engineering Environmental Consulting Technical Memorandum 12/02/2016
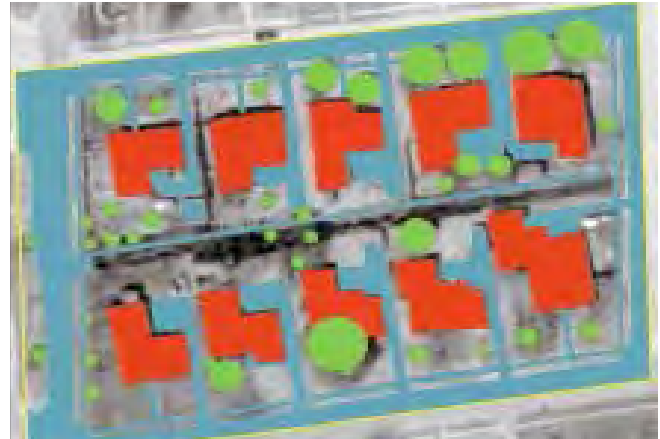
8% Tree Canopy Coverage = 34 ft^3/acre reduction in stormwater runoff
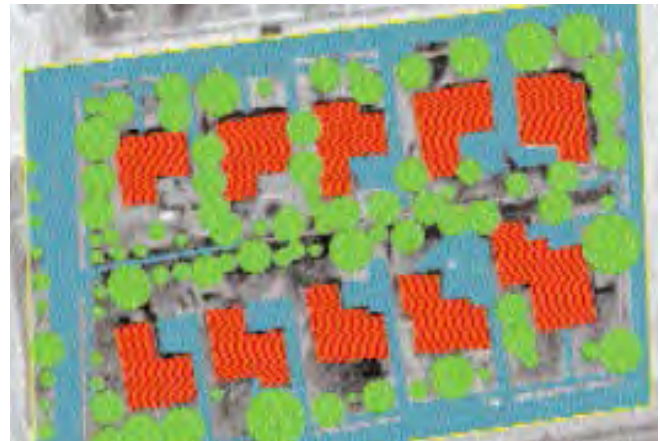
25% Tree Canopy Coverage = 4,200 ft^3/acre reduction in stormwater runoff
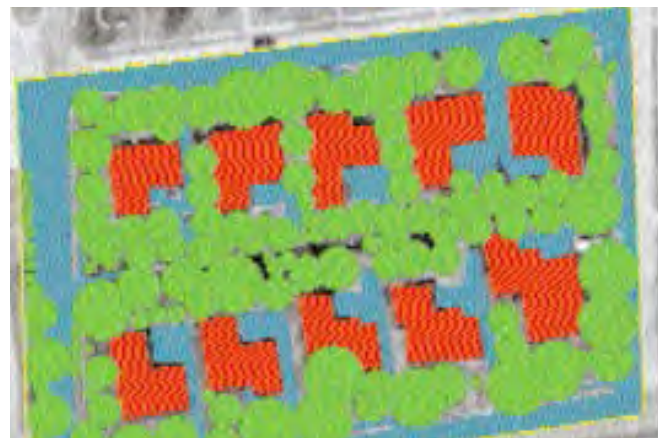
45% Tree Canopy Coverage =76,200 ft^3/acre reduction in stormwater runoff

Protect & Restore Nature

In response to the overwhelming community desire to retain the natural habitat and biodiversity that make Laredo and the wider region adjacent to the Rio Grande distinct, efforts to protect and restore natural features as the city grows will be central to realizing this vision. Natural areas serve multiple functions, acting as both infrastructure and open space.

Existing Habitats

Consider the network of natural and wild places, where they exist, as permanent and irreplaceable. Defend the interconnectivity of habitats with the same fervor with which the interconnected network of streets is defended. When developing land, consider that natural places are eons in the making. Such places offer multiple benefits to humans and the environment. The ecology of Laredo will be healthier as a result of their protection; biodiversity is maintained or increased. Additionally, wild areas provide the benefits of water recharge and needed contrast to the realities of the built world and its stresses.

Restoration

The restoration of natural habitats can occur at all levels—including households, developers and the local government. Together, each resident, property owner, or governmental department can contribute, parcel-by-parcel and neighborhood-by-neighborhood, protecting existing species and working to restore those that are endangered.

Every yard, median or planting strip can become a part of citywide restoration. The result will be a city that has lower heating and cooling loads, enhanced water conservation, contact with plants and animals and the pride that comes with protecting the elements of the ecosystem that make Laredo unique.

Due to the location and the geographic features in the city, many of Laredo's existing parks have room for either the expansion or the creation of wetlands. Such efforts would be considered Low Impact Development (LID) and include stormwater management. Wetland creation and expansion can help to manage the flow and storage of stormwater while also prioritizing green infrastructure. Compact neighborhood development reduces the tendency to encroach on wetlands by increasing the yield of land for developers in terms of units per acre.

Protecting and restoring natural features is beneficial for both residents and visitors.

Tourism

Tourism is partially dependent upon travelers seeking out what is unique to the region. Travelers often spend more time and money in a place that they perceive to be authentic, which has an identifiable character, and which offers them tastes, sounds, and sites that cannot be experienced elsewhere. The built environment contributes to some of this unique "Laredo" character, but the natural environment is the complement.

Creation and Expansion of Wetlands[3]

As part of the National Recreation Association Park Standards, green belt and natural state areas are recommended for park design. Wetlands provide many important services to the environment and to the public. They offer critical habitat for birds, fish, and other wildlife. They purify polluted waters, and they help lessen the damage caused by floods and storms. Wetlands also provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities such as fishing, photography, and wildlife observation.

In Laredo, there is ample space in existing parks and open lands for the expansion and the creation of new wetlands. New wetlands would contribute to LID, making stormwater infrastructure more sustainable.

An example worth considering involves the City of La Feria along with the Rio Grande Valley Storm Water Management team. Together, they designed and built a wetland at the La Feria Nature Complex as part of the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Protection Plan. Some of their 24 million gallons of effluent per year is used to sustain the wetland, while the rest is used for irrigation purposes. The City of Uvalde has developed a similar project; these wetlands now enjoy being a national destination for Audubon Society enthusiasts and photographers.

In Laredo, a similar approach, using bypass piping systems from the effluent collection system supplying Lake Casa Blanca, could ultimately be directed toward connected parks and creeks throughout the city in order to revitalize and add wetlands. These wetlands could be sustained year-round. Future areas could be added to the effluent distribution system as they are developed in conjunction with linear parks along their watersheds.

Natural, existing infrastructure in Laredo

La Feria (Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership, 2016)

3 Gilpin Engineering Environmental Consulting Technical Memorandum 12/02/2016

255

Santa Isabel Creek

Sombrierito Creek

United States

I-35

Chacon Creek

Rio Grande

La Bota East / Rock Pond

Manadas Creek

20

Deer Creek

I-69W

Santo Tomas Creek

255

United States

Mexico

Rio Grande

Mexico

I-35

59

20

59

Zacate Creek
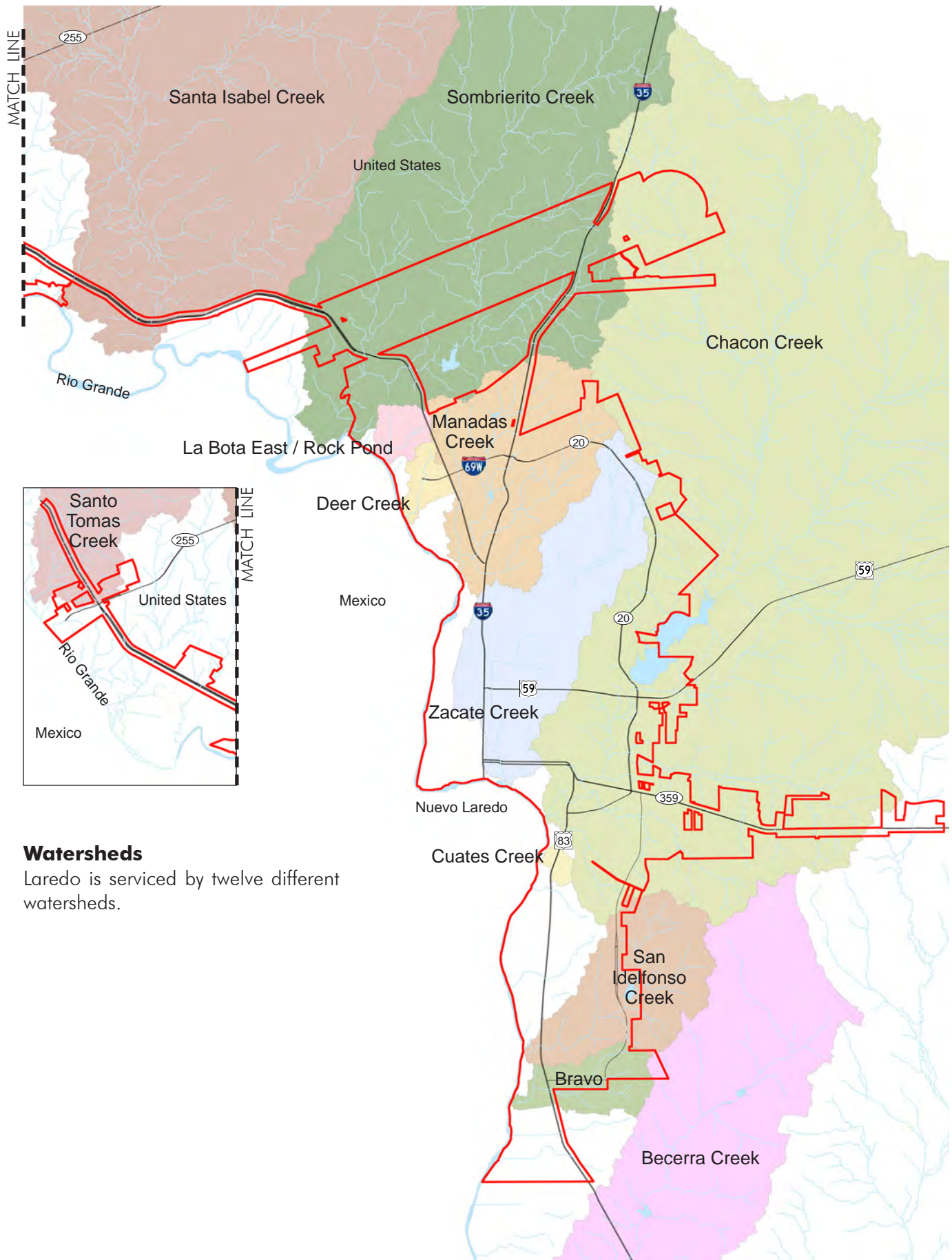
Watersheds

Laredo is serviced by twelve different watersheds.

Nuevo Laredo

359

83

Cuates Creek

San Idelfonso Creek

Bravo

Becerra Creek

Pursue Renewable Energy & Upgrade the Grid

The question of sustainable energy needs to encompass the technology by which energy is generated, where the energy is produced, the storing of that energy, and optimizing its distribution.

The city should commit to expanding energy derived from renewable sources such as sun, wind, and geothermal/geoexchange. The modes of energy generation that should be discouraged are coal and petroleum-burning.

Wherever possible, district heating and cooling can reduce distribution inefficiencies by shortening the trip from generating plant to consumer or by generating heat as a community rather than each individual household converting electricity into heat. Though district heating can be accomplished by burning fossil fuels, it can have a lower carbon footprint by using biomass and renewable energies. By creating on-site renewable generation, such as with roof-mounted photovoltaic panels, the distance between the point of consumption and the point of generation is shortened, thereby increasing efficiency and decreasing pollution.

The city should consider implementing a smart grid, or at least aspects of a smart grid. Meters could take into account peak loads, mode of energy generation, and reduce distribution inefficiencies associated with the aging, conventional grid. Off-peak usage and non-polluting modes would be rewarded monetarily.

A smart grid would also ideally include capacity upgrades in order to accommodate a larger city fleet of electric or hybrid vehicles, which would increase loads during nighttime charging. Net metering would allow consumers to produce renewable energy and sell the excess power back to the grid and to the utilities, thereby rolling back meters and their electric bills.

Harnessing renewable, low-carbon energy such as wind, solar, and geothermal power can make the region less vulnerable to a fluctuating oil market while reducing atmospheric pollutants.

Diversifying the Energy Portfolio

A long-term sustainability goal for the city and the region depends upon its ability to diversify its energy portfolio, especially with renewable energy. The following are considerations for each of the current and proposed methods of generating energy that could enrich or diversify the city's energy portfolio.

Fossil Fuel: Petroleum

Petroleum, its by-products and related hydrocarbons are often used to fuel electric plants, cars, trucks, lawn mowers, and generators. Such liquid fossil fuels may come from domestic sources in Texas and neighboring states. However, they also may be extracted from Canadian tar sands at great environmental cost due to deforestation and pollution or from politically unstable countries that are openly hostile to America's interests.

Fossil Fuel: Natural Gas

Of the fossil fuels, the burning of natural gas may have the lowest carbon footprint. Natural gas has come under national scrutiny due to the common practice of "fracking." This practice is extremely water intensive and involves forcing high pressure water and chemical mixtures into rock strata in order to free gas deposits. Some studies indicate fracking can result in the pollution of groundwater.[4] Careful public consideration should be given to balancing the economic and the environmental impacts.

Fossil Fuel: Coal

Coal is one of the most abundant American fossil fuels. One of coal's advantages is its ease of transport and its potential to help the country achieve short-term energy independence. Its disadvantages are that it is intensely polluting, producing more greenhouse gases than other modes of electricity generation.

4 EPA's Study of Hydraulic Fracturing for Oil and Gas: Impacts from Hydraulic Fracturing Water Cycle on Drinking Water Resources in the United States, December 2016

Solar

The box entitled "The Solar Transect" provides guidance on the implementation of solar energy in Laredo. Another document that could be considered a handbook for the city is *The Solar Task Force Report* published by Senator Eliot Shapleigh in November 2010.

Wind

Wind farms have been installed within Webb County. Wind farms rely upon transmission lines to deliver power to cities and should be erected where the wind is steady enough to justify their cost.

Geothermal

The Texas Renewable Energy Resource Assessment has identified Geothermal as a promising energy horizon for the state. Geothermal comprises three different technologies: geothermal HVAC systems, direct use of heated water, and electrical power production. In addition to these technologies, geoexchange or thermal exchange technologies take advantage of temperature gradients between the building and underlying geology in order to heat or cool buildings.

Landfill Gas

Landfills release methane as the disposed trash decays. As methane is a potent and malodorous regulated greenhouse gas, it is often harvested to create electricity or provide power for industrial processes.

Biomass and Biofuel

Biomass refers to the incineration of plants and organic material to generate power. Concerns for air quality should be considered and mitigated if energy generation from burning is considered.

The Solar Transect

There is a considerable range of solar responses that can reduce demand for electricity or conventionally produced electricity as shown on the spectrum below. Low-tech solutions can be undertaken by individuals, households, business owners, and any other building owner, including government. High-tech solutions, due to their complexity and space requirements, may require partnership with other entities such as the County.

Passive Solar Design

Passive solar design strategies include designing façades with the exposure patterns of the sun in mind; designing deep porches to shade doors and windows; high albedo façades and roofs to reflect sunlight; high ceilings so that hotter air rises; abundant windows to provide cross-ventilation; deep overhangs or projecting cornices; adobe construction; courtyards with fountains; and thick masonry walls that insulate in the winter but which are slow to heat up in the summer. Contemporary architecture may also include light shelves and adjustable exterior louvers. Additionally, skylights and solar tubes can direct natural sunlight into interior spaces that lack windows, thereby reducing demand for electric lighting.

Solar Water Heaters

Unlike photovoltaic panels, which convert sunlight into electricity, solar water heaters convert sunlight directly into heat, which in turn heats water. Solar water heaters are relatively inexpensive compared with higher-tech solutions, and can be installed on most rooftops with ease. Such devices can pay for themselves very quickly due to their cost and their potential to reduce electricity loads for hot showers, dishwashers, clothes washing machines, and sinks.

Low-Tech

Roof-Mounted Photovoltaics

Photovoltaic panels can be added to most building roofs. These not only convert sunlight to electricity, but also may provide shading of roof surfaces, thereby reducing loads on air conditioning systems. Photovoltaic panels may be fixed or may incorporate sun tracking technology. Advances in photovoltaic technology are making solar generated electricity inexpensive enough to compete with conventionally generated energy. There are grants and tax incentives at the state and federal levels that encourage the installation of photovoltaics and other means of harnessing solar energy. Many energy companies now also have the option of earning electricity bill credits for selling back solar electricity that you generate but don't use.

Solar Arrays

A solar array requires more land than the other technologies listed. Also, as is the case with conventional generation plants, solar arrays require transmission lines in order to connect consumers of electricity with its source. Solar arrays may employ different technologies. Photovoltaic panels, similar to those that are mounted on buildings, convert sunlight into electricity. Other arrays employ reflectors, or mirrors, which direct and concentrate sunlight to a central water tank, converting heat energy into steam, which then generates electricity. The performance of solar arrays is optimized by sun tracking technology, in which computers and motors keep mirrors or photovoltaics oriented toward the sun as the surface of the earth changes its relative angle to the sun throughout the day.

Project done by Texas Solar Power Company, Austin, TX

High-Tech

Better Utilize Available Water[4]

Because of its constrained water budget, Laredo must protect and enhance natural sources as it begins to incorporate water harvesting strategies that can be adopted by all Laredoans.

At the Building

Starting at the scale of the individual and household, the first step is changing behavior. Low-flow faucets and fixtures, efficient or composting toilets, shorter showers, and efficient dishwashers and washing machines can help the city to live. Gutters, rain barrels, and cisterns can keep precious rainwater for on-site use and also reduce stormwater runoff. Homeowners and land developers should be aware that minimizing impervious surfaces can reduce flash flooding and increase the recharge of groundwater resources. Native and drought tolerant plants should be the norm in most landscape plans. Landscapes that are less thirsty help consumers use less water and lower energy costs.

Reclaiming Treated Water

Currently, Laredo's water cycle begins with water pumped from its sole water source, the Rio Grande, to two city-owned Water Treatment Plants (WTP), El Pico WTP and Jefferson WTP, to produce a combined average of 40 million gallons per day (MGDs) of drinking water on peak days.

In the cycle, river water is pumped into the WTPs, cleaned, and then distributed throughout the city. The resulting wastewater is transmitted through collection systems leading to one of six wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs), and converted to approximately 30 MGD, on peak days of treated water, or effluent. The effluent produced is cleaner than the water in the Rio Grande where it was first sourced. While a small portion of this cleaned effluent is reused, there is ample opportunity for water re-use and reduction within the existing water cycle in Laredo.

Arrow Legend
- Effluent
- Rio Grande Influent
- Drinking Water
- Wastewater
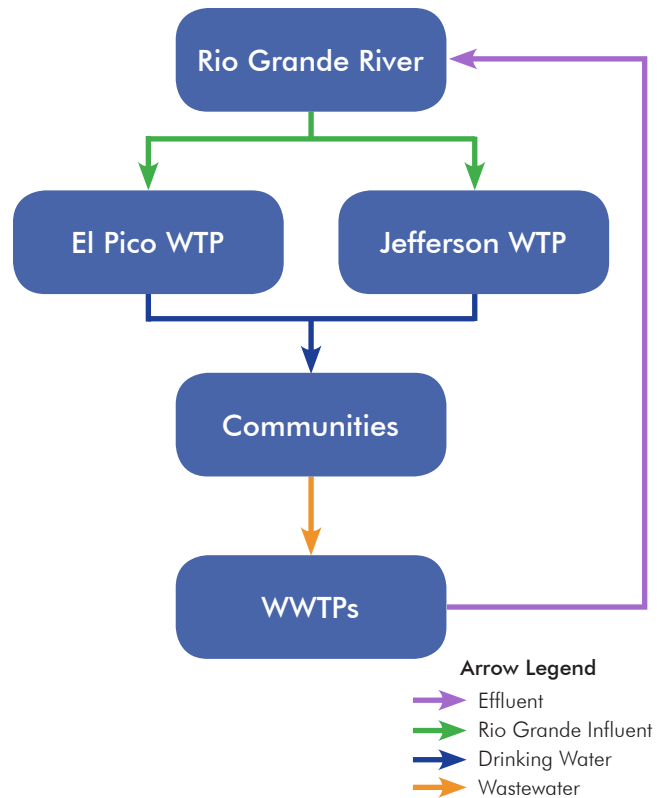
Laredo's Current Water Cycle

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4 Gilpin Engineering Environmental Consulting Technical Memorandum 12/02/2016

I love the idea of having solar panels. I also like the idea of a green house in Laredo and more organic produce in our local stores.

More light or 'green' roofs. More street trees and plants - including fruit / productive trees (not just shade).

Proposed Water Cycle for Laredo

Rio Grande River

El Pico WTP

Communities

WWTPs

Lake Casa Blanca → Creeks & Local Water Bodies

Jefferson WTP

Arrow Legend
- Effluent
- Rio Grande Influent
- Drinking Water
- Wastewater
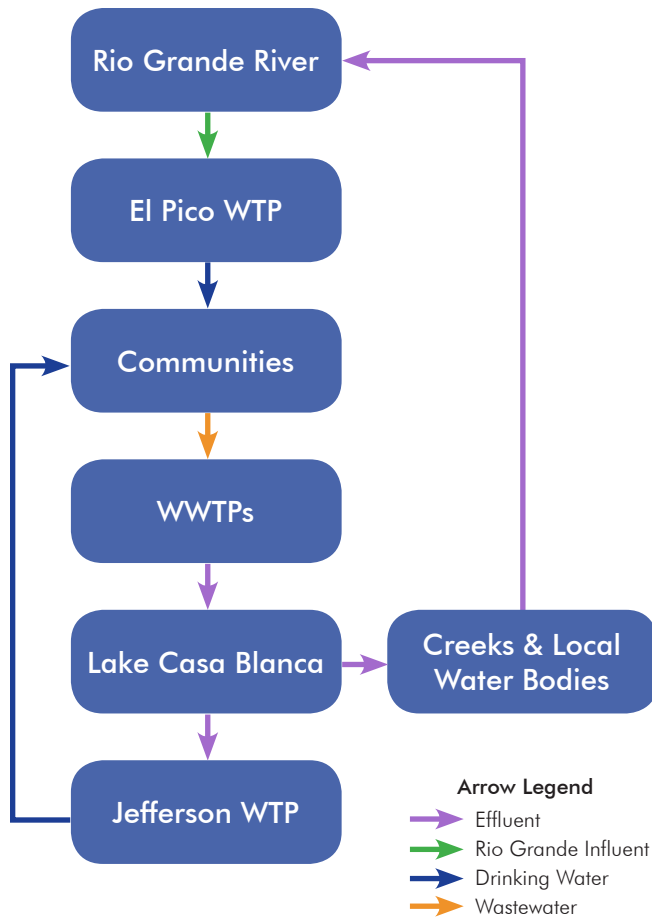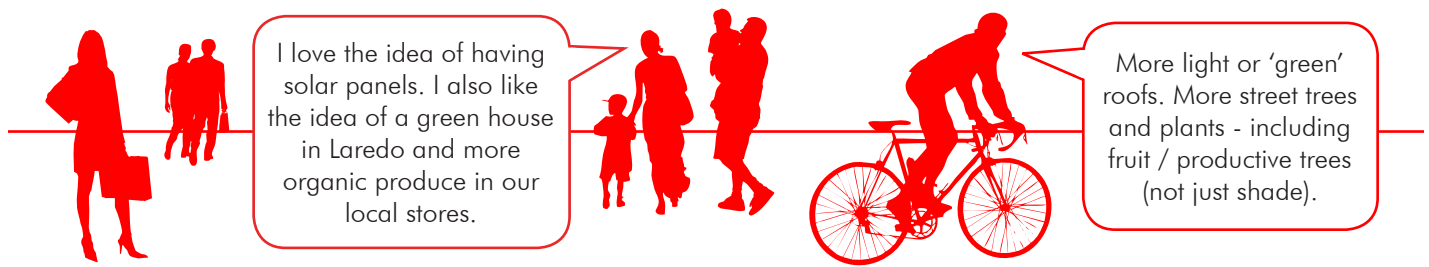
Proposed Water Cycle for Laredo

Lake Casa Blanca

Currently, approximately one MGD, on peak days, of effluent is discharged to reservoirs used to irrigate the Casa Blanca Golf Course and the Laredo Country Club Golf Course. The remaining water is either directly discharged into the Rio Grande or discharged into creeks that lead to the river.

The treated effluent could, instead, play a greater role and serve as a stepping stone to bigger scale water and natural habitat conservation efforts. Fluctuating water levels have been a persistent problem for Lake Casa Blanca, one of the main attractions of Laredo's only national park.

Redirecting effluent into Lake Casa Blanca would improve Laredo's quality of life by keeping the lake full and at a constant water level. This would allow any overflow to keep the Chacon Creek, located below the lake outfall, flowing continuously. Like other cities in Texas, the City of La Feria re-uses its effluent in a similar way to feed a wetland.

Furthermore, at that point in time, some water could also be sent gravitationally from Lake Casa Blanca to be treated and converted back to drinking water by the Jefferson WTP. As a result, El Pico WTP could ultimately lower its pumping quantity, unburdening the Rio Grande and reducing pumping costs by over 35% that are associated with energy consumption and maintenance.

This proposed change to the use of Laredo's effluent would call for a new water cycle. The city should consider studying the local ecology to better understand what amount of effluent should be returned back to the land to support the ecosystem and how much reclaimed water can be reused within the community.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Ensure that environmental resources are conserved and properly managed in Laredo so that future generations may experience an improving environment that is more resilient than that of the previous generation.

Sustainable Buildings

Goal 6.1: Create new and revitalize existing sustainable architecture throughout the city.

Policy 6.1.1: Implement programs and utilize best practices for efficient energy use in new buildings, such as LEED or other lifecycle costing initiatives.

Policy 6.1.2: Implement programs to use energy more efficiently in existing buildings.

Policy 6.1.3: Enhance energy efficiency measures in local government operations.

Policy 6.1.4: Embrace technological responses to the green building challenge.

Policy 6.1.5: In addition to technology, embrace low-tech response to the green building challenge. Develop standards to encourage buildings to be designed with inexpensive components, including passive solar design, climate responsive architecture and vernacular design that is adapted to Laredo.

Policy 6.1.6: Implement programs that utilize best practices for sustainable site development.

Policy 6.1.7: Promote behavioral changes and consumption patterns that conserve energy including energy efficient building systems, fixtures and appliances.

Policy 6.1.8: Promote weatherization techniques such as adding weather strips on doorways, caulking, sealing and insulating doorways.

Policy 6.1.9: Promote durable materials and architectural designs with a long life.

Policy 6.1.10: City government should lead the way in new construction and remodeling with green building principles.

Policy 6.1.11: Promote education programs, especially in schools, which stress the responsibility of each person to conserve energy resources.

Civic Spaces

Goal 6.2: Provide a wide variety of neighborhood parks and recreational programs that are integrated with neighborhoods and accessible to most residents and visitors to Laredo.

Policy 6.2.1: The city shall strive to create extraordinary parks that express the natural beauty and cultural diversity of Laredo and fund the park system at a level that corresponds to its significant importance to Laredo residents.

Policy 6.2.2: The city will provide a balanced parks system with a variety of park sizes and facilities, including trails, open spaces, and indoor recreation facilities.

Policy 6.2.3: The city will regularly update and manage a park system plan.

Policy 6.2.4: The city will continue to require improved neighborhood greens or parks when land is subdivided, with adequate regulations (a minimum of 10 acres for every 1,000 residents) that ensure they will become important features in the new neighborhood:

a. The edges of small greens and parks are critical to their success; the fronts and sides of buildings, not the backs, must face the park to provide natural surveillance and a well-maintained edge.

b. Greens and parks must be separated from private buildings with a street or public path.

c. Drought-tolerant shade trees should define the edges of parks and greens.

Policy 6.2.5: Create partnerships for the future success of the park system, involving every governmental entity, the school systems, the county, and the state. Recreational facilities at schools should be integrated into Laredo parks system for the mutual benefit of schools and the community. Stormwater detention areas can often be integrated with parks.

Policy 6.2.6: Incorporate stormwater detention facilities in an interconnected network of civic spaces.

Policy 6.2.7: Create trails, greenbelts, and linear parks for their inherent value and to provide connections among other parks, schools, neighborhoods, and natural open spaces.

Policy 6.2.8: Update the current landscaping ordinance to integrate the goals of this plan.

Habitat and Biodiversity
Goal 6.3: Protect and enhance ecologically sensitive areas, plants and wildlife resources.

Policy 6.3.1: Allow high-density land uses and cluster developments that protect ecologically sensitive areas. Encourage "light imprint development" where development cannot be avoided adjacent to or within ecologically sensitive areas.

Policy 6.3.2: Encourage retention of land that is in a natural, undisturbed condition. Plan new parks and open spaces to preserve ecologically sensitive areas.

Policy 6.3.3: Use the existing and future recreational connected park systems along creeks to interconnect potential development sites with complimentary land uses for park goers.

Policy 6.3.4: Incorporate the expansion and creation of wetlands into park systems in order to complement urban design and enhance parks and natural habitat.

Policy 6.3.5: Encourage the establishment and maintenance of wildlife and nature preserves.

Policy 6.3.6: Assure preservation of natural habitats for wildlife and protect threatened/ endangered species of plants and animals.

Policy 6.3.7: Enhance and enforce a citywide tree preservation ordinance.

Policy 6.3.8: Establish a tree planting and maintenance campaign throughout the city.

Policy 6.3.9: Encourage the conservation, creation, or restoration of native habitat in urban areas such as public parks and publicly or privately owned lots.

Policy 6.3.10: Require that the majority of plants used on private lots, rights-of-way, and unbuilt portions of developments be native species, appropriate to the ecosystem viable for the particular site. Native shade trees should be prioritized; yet use of some acclimated species might be necessary under certain conditions.

Energy and Atmosphere
Goal 6.4: Develop Laredo in a way that requires less automobile use for access to daily needs, which will help to reduce the prevalence of green house gases. Strive to continue to meet the national ambient air quality standards for all pollutants.

Policy 6.4.1: Promote new development that encourages a sustainable lifestyle such as walking, cycling, the use of public transit, and reducing the dependence on automobiles.

Policy 6.4.2: Consider the energy efficiency of proposed development when land use and development decisions are made. This would include energy consumed by buildings and their users as well as energy used by commuting and vehicle trips generated due to new development.

Policy 6.4.3: Emphasize infill and higher density development located in walkable area and areas served by public transit to reduce dependency on automobiles.

Policy 6.4.4: Promote the concepts in the program for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) as a tool for evaluating development proposals.

Policy 6.4.5: Promote the adoption of on-site, low-carbon footprint (such as natural gas), and renewable energy sources by households, government and businesses.

Policy 6.4.6: Promote the use of renewable energy sources that reduce demand on fossil fuels such as solar, wind, and geothermal.

Policy 6.4.7: Promote citywide car and van pooling systems and implement other forms of transit to connect major destinations, such as downtown or the universities.

Policy 6.4.8: Meet or exceed federal air quality standards for green house gases and other common pollutants.

Policy 6.4.9: Promote research and education that focuses on improving air quality.

Policy 6.4.10: Promote both roof and non-roof strategies to mitigate the urban heat island effect.

Policy 6.4.11: Secure sufficient energy resources to meet present and future community needs without degrading local, regional or global ecology.

Policy 6.4.12: Promote architecture that exhibits sustainable design and technological innovations that conserve or generate energy.

Policy 6.4.13: Consider an increase of local gasoline tax to be earmarked for funding El Metro and improving El Metro's level of service.

Policy 6.4.14: Direct additional and new environmental impact fees to El Metro.

Policy 6.4.15: Plan for adequate and sustainable solid waste management practices such as ctiy-wide composting, landfill gas harvesting, and expanding of recycling capacity.

Water Management
Goal 6.5: Continue to develop policies that promote water reclamation, conservation, stormwater management, and access to a sustainable water supply.

Policy 6.5.1: Develop cost effective processes to re-use and reclaim water; use new technologies to expand capacity.

Policy 6.5.2: Develop policies that promote and incentivize the development of surface water treatment, conveyance, and reclamation.

Policy 6.5.3: Implement the re-use of wastewater treatment plant effluent to initially combat Lake Casa Blanca's fluctuating water levels; this will ultimately decrease Laredo's reliance on the Rio Grande.

Policy 6.5.4: Pursue active and passive water harvesting techniques, including small-scale techniques, such as rain barrels or cisterns.

Policy 6.5.5: Maximize the use of native and drought resistant species in required landscaping policies.

Policy 6.5.6: Maximize the use of permeable surfaces where they can replace impermeable surfaces, such as conventional asphalt or concrete.

Policy 6.5.7: Continue to implement the existing water conservation program.

Policy 6.5.8: Recognize that climate change will affect water supply, stormwater management, and conservation and that the annual flows of the Rio Grande will be affected, resulting in needed adjustments to local ordinances, specifically related to properties that are in flood zones.

Policy 6.5.9: Protect the community from floods and reduce the risk of flood damage.

Policy 6.5.10: Locate development outside of flood plains and instead dedicate these spaces for suitable uses, such as recreational, agricultural, or open spaces.

Policy 6.5.11: Design necessary flood control facilities to blend with and enhance surrounding areas.

Policy 6.5.12: Create a unified drainage ordinance that considers the initiatives outlined in this plan.

Policy 6.5.13: Develop a Future Water Resource Plan.

Health

7

◆ **salto de cama** *sm* negligée.

saltón, **ona** *adj* [ojos] bulging; [dientes] sticking out.

salubre *adj* healthy.

salubridad *sf* - **1.** [cualidad] healthiness - **2.** *culto* [salud pública] public health.

salud ◇ *sf* *lit & fig* health; **estar bien/mal de salud** to be well/unwell; **rebosar de salud** to glow with health; **beber** *o* **brindar a la salud de alguien** to drink to sb's health; **curarse en salud** to cover one's back. ◇ *interj*: **¡salud!** [para brindar] cheers!; **¡a su salud!** your health!; [después de estornudar] bless you!

saludable *adj* - **1.** [sano] healthy - **2.** *fig* [provechoso] beneficial.

saludar *vt* to greet; **saludar con la mano a alguien** to wave to sb; MIL to salute; **saluda a Ana de mi parte** give my regards to Ana; **le saluda atentamente** yours faithfully.

◆ **saludarse** *vprnl* to greet one another.

saludo *sm* greeting; **retirarle el saludo a alguien** to stop speaking to sb; MIL salute; **Ana te manda saludos** [en cartas] Ana sends you her regards; [al teléfono] Ana says hello; **un saludo**

Image Credit: Karen Gaytán

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Issues and Challenges

Laredo's most common health challenges are the same challenges faced nationwide – diabetes, stress, depression, an aging population, childhood nutrition, and the spread of infectious and preventable diseases. Yet, Laredo is still a young city in terms of its size and it can grow in a way that gives its residents advantages other American cities may never have. At the same time, Laredo faces challenges that are unique to a border community.

Laredo's geographic location on the United States/Mexico border provides additional challenges and opportunities. Border residents may possess different economies and politics; however, they share a common culture, language, environment, and health status. In general, the United States/Mexico border region is one of the fastest growing areas in the nation, with a majority Hispanic population.

The population in the border region generally has lower educational attainment, lower income status, higher rates of poverty, and a significant shortage of health care providers. These unique border challenges contribute to diminished health, well-being, and access to health care.

Factors Affecting Health
Health is affected by many overlapping factors, some internal, others external. A comprehensive plan may address some of these quite directly, especially those that help create a physical environment that encourages good health rather than one that thwarts it. However, certain factors such as genetics can only be addressed tangentially by this document, if at all.

What is a Health Element?

The Health Element is not meant to function as a Comprehensive Health Plan for the city of Laredo. Up until recently, Municipal or County Comprehensive Plans did not contain elements pertaining to health. Yet, more and more people are beginning to recognize the relationship between health and the built environment, public policy, and the management of the city and its environment. The Health Element seeks to describe these relationships and how they can be improved.

EXERCISE

NUTRITION

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

PSYCHOLOGICAL & EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS

HEALTH

LIFESTYLE BEHAVIORS & HABITS

GENETICS
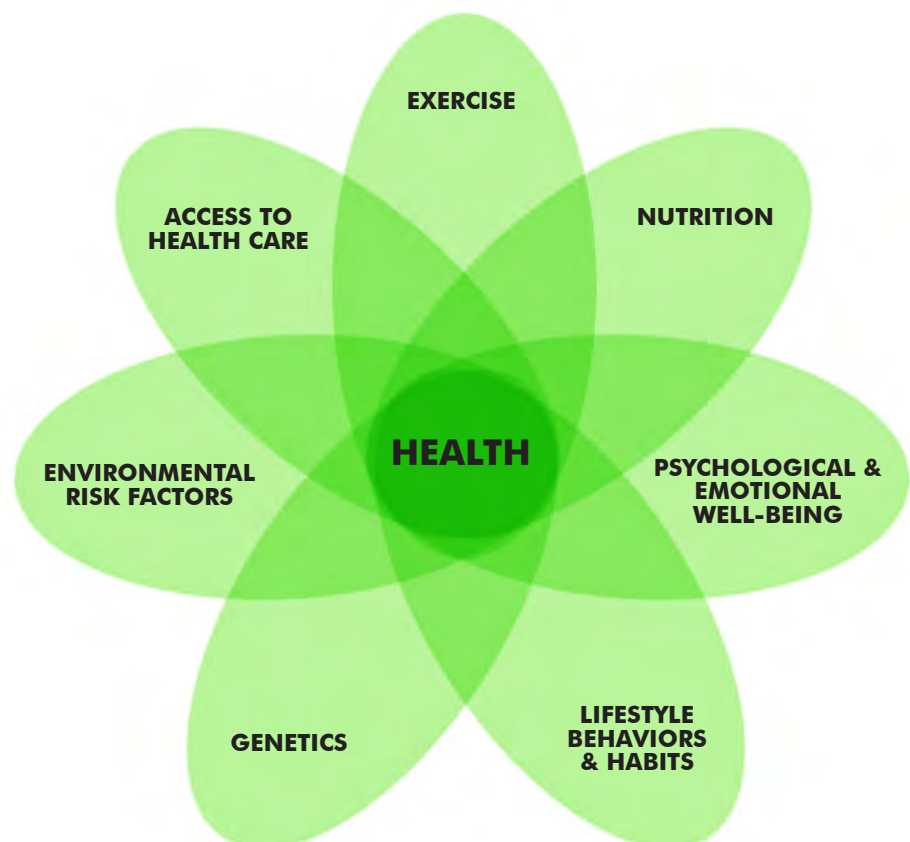
Access to Health Care

Webb County is federally designated as a "medically underserved" area. By definition, these are areas or populations that are designated by the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services as having: too few primary care providers, high infant mortality, high poverty, and/or a high elderly population. Services that are lacking include primary care, dental services, and mental health.[1]

Lack of Health Insurance

Most recent estimates indicate that approximately 32% of adults in Laredo do not have health insurance and approximately 14% of children have no health insurance. Lack of health insurance is a huge barrier to health care and results in reactive health care, not proactive. Lack of health insurance has led to higher rates of severe complications in the border Hispanic population, particularly with diabetes-related complications. Residents without insurance are often forced to manage chronic diseases such as diabetes through emergency room visits versus regular check-ups.[2]

Access to Nutrition & Exercise

Proper nutrition and adequate exercise are key elements in any healthy lifestyle. Preventing and managing most chronic diseases, particularly diabetes, requires a healthy lifestyle. In Laredo; approximately 33% of the adult population is obese, with another 38% considered overweight. A reported 34% of the adult population participates in no physical activity at all.[3] Specific to Laredo, obesity and diabetes are major areas in which such preventative methods as good nutrition and daily exercise could have significant effects on the community.

Recreation trails are disconnected within the city.

Recreation facilities such as El Cuatro Park in El Rincon del Diablo provide access to exercise.

Environments like downtown Laredo could be made more walkable and allow shoppers, workers, and inhabitants to get their daily exercise by simply running errands and traveling from one place to another.

1 https://datawarehouse.hrsa.gov/topics/shortageAreas.aspx
2 http://www.towncharts.com/Texas/Healthcare/Laredo-city-TX-Healthcare-data.html
3 http://www.governing.com/gov-data/obesity-rates-by-state-metro-area-data.html

Common Diseases

Diabetes

Diabetes is a chronic disease that requires regular medical treatment in order to manage its effects and complications. Type 2 diabetes is 2.5% more prevalent among adults along the border than elsewhere in the United States. Type 2 diabetes is two to three times higher in Mexican-Americans, and the mortality rate is higher for diabetic Mexican-Americans than non-diabetic Mexican-Americans.[4] This is particularly important in Laredo given that 95.6% of the population of Laredo is Hispanic.

Existing binational programs for diabetes focus on prevention, diagnosis, and treatment. Basic medical treatment required to manage diabetes includes office visits, quarterly blood work, daily blood sugar testing, annual foot exams, annual vision exams, annual dental exams, and flu and pneumonia vaccinations. This basic care can be extremely costly for even those with insurance to deal with the chronic disease proactively.

Heart Disease

Many behavioral risk factors for heart disease, such as inactivity, smoking, and obesity can be treated through preventative methods. Implementing lifestyle strategies that help residents modify their behavior will have a direct effect on the occurrence and treatment of heart disease.

Stress

Stress is a difficult factor to measure especially when it comes to its effect on our daily lives. However, given the pressures of a family's normal activities, time to de-stress is not always incorporated. Increased usage of outdoor walking trails and parks facilities is directly related to reducing stress and increasing Vitamin D absorbency.

Infectious Diseases

Specific infectious diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), influenza, and sexually transmitted diseases are prevalent in Laredo. With respect to tuberculosis, both Mexico and the United States consider their southern borders to be areas of the greatest risk for migration of TB patients. So, for Mexico, their common border with the U.S. is not their highest priority for funding TB programs. The opposite is true for the United States.

Resources

United States-Mexico Border Health Commission

The United States-Mexico Border Health Commission (USMBHC) is an organization that is dedicated to border regions and optimizing health and quality of life along the border. The USMBHC was established through a binational agreement in 2000 and provides leadership to develop coordinated and binational actions to improve the health of border residents.

The USMBHC developed the Healthy Border 2020: A Prevention and Health Promotion Initiative. The program has five public health priorities of binational concern, including:

- Chronic and degenerative diseases
- Infectious diseases
- Maternal and child health
- Mental health and addiction
- Injury prevention

City of Laredo Health Department

The City of Laredo's Health Department has a wealth of resources and information that covers all areas of health. Their mission statement is "As a leader in public health, the City of Laredo Health Department is committed to providing culturally competent environment for the residents of Laredo."

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4 Stern, M. and Mitchell, B. "Diabetes in Hispanic Americans." Diabetes in America. 1995.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Create Safe Places To Walk and Ride Bikes
Overwhelmingly, residents requested more areas to safely walk and ride their bikes. Citizens had varied suggestions on where and how to improve walkability, but the one area where they agreed was that people should be able to live, walk, and ride their bikes without being afraid.

Many residents felt that there could be better walking and cycling infrastructure in the city. Though this could mean off-road trails and separate lanes, it could also mean streets designed at lower design speeds so that cyclists may share the roadway and pedestrians may feel comfortable using streets as well.

Some residents were just as interested in destination walking and cycling (walking and cycling to accomplish a certain task) as in recreational walking and cycling. Whether residents were "destination" or "recreation" pedestrians and cyclists, all agreed that there was a need for more tree canopy, a more complete trail network, and increased park and recreational space.

Provide More Recreational Opportunities Through More Parks and Green Spaces
Another area suggested by residents to make Laredo a healthier city is the addition of parks, recreational opportunities, and green areas. Public trails and parks should be added along the Rio Grande as well as along the waterways that cut through the city and lead to the Rio Grande. More sports-related activities and family-oriented recreational opportunities should be provided for the general public including safe recreational centers for teenagers.

The city also wants to be more pet-friendly, and residents routinely asked for more dog parks. The community overwhelmingly supported the addition of both traditional and non-traditional parks and recreational areas. Incorporating plazas, walkable urban areas, and tree-lined streets are important elements of encouraging residents to be more active. Increased outdoor activity is one key factor in addressing behavioral health issues.
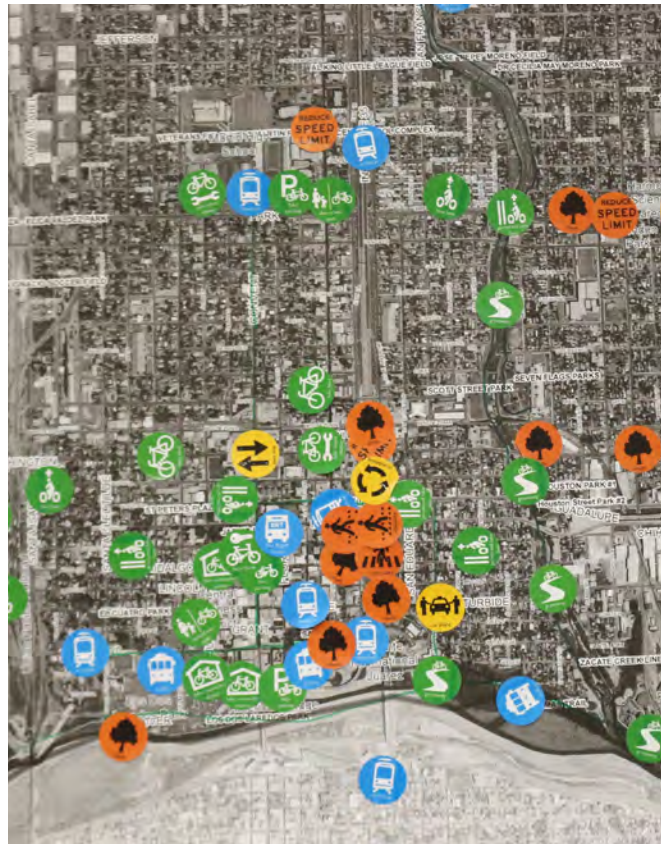
A number of Laredoans desire more parks and access to fresh food.

Improve Flood Management

Flooding issues in the colonias are of concern to many homeowners. Standing, stagnant water along the Rio Grande results in mosquito problems and incidents of the West Nile virus and potentially Zika virus. Issues such as flood management and pest control are borderless health issues that require action from both nations.

Improve Access to Medical Care

Residents expressed concern regarding the lack of access to medical facilities in Laredo – both physical access and the availability of adequate facilities. Additional hospitals and medical facilities were suggested.

Maximize the Delivery of Health Services

There are many health organizations in Laredo that provide vital health services to the community; however, it is difficult to find the specific organization even amongst other non-profit groups. A comprehensive database should be developed for referrals between agencies that includes accurate contact information, and the services they provide.

Address Specific Diseases & Health Conditions

Obesity is a citywide risk factor in both adults and children for other chronic diseases. The city should tackle the obesity epidemic through many different avenues.

Access to Healthy Food Choices

The community is interested in more opportunities to create community gardens throughout the city. There was also concern for access to healthy food options. A grocery store in the downtown recently closed, and other neighborhoods have limited access to grocery stores.

There is only one prevalent grocery store in Laredo – HEB. Their model for selecting food quality they stock in stores creates inequitable availability of healthier food options for lower income residential neighborhoods. This contributes to health concerns in those areas, plus adds to the factors that keeps the community economically segregated.

The Mario Tijerina Park provides exercise and recreation opportunities for children in the Santo Nino neighborhood.

The City of Laredo Health Department: "As a leader in public health, the City of Laredo Health Department is committed to providing culturally competent environment for the residents of Laredo."

STRATEGIES

The Built Environment and its Effect on Health

Lower the Risk of Health Problems Through Walkable Urban Design

Those who live in completely unwalkable sprawl often have to drive for all of life's daily necessities, including commuting to school and work, purchasing food, attending services at places of worship, visiting friends and relatives, and even visiting health and fitness centers. This, combined with industrialized food distribution networks that facilitate the consumption of unhealthy foods while creating impediments to a healthy diet, can partially explain the rise in obesity and many related conditions.

A sedentary lifestyle and poor diet not only put people at risk for obesity but also at greater risk of diabetes, heart disease, cancers, and depression. Therefore, considering that one's health may be one's most precious asset, it would be wise to avoid unwalkable forms of development such as sprawl and instead pursue patterns of development conducive to walking and other forms of physical activity, such as running and cycling.

In order to achieve walkability throughout the city, each neighborhood should be studied in order to determine how it could be made more complete through small interventions. Some may be exclusively residential and may need additional retail or civic uses to achieve equilibrium. Others may have a predominance of workplace or retail and could easily accommodate residences so that households could be within easy walking or short driving distance of these amenities.

It is often not possible to fit all types of uses and buildings within each neighborhood, but if the most important uses, such as places of employment, health care providers, schools, and mixed-use districts are located with transit access, then access to these amenities can be increased for many more users and customers beyond the pedestrian shed.

Another way to shorten walking and cycling distances, and thereby encourage physical activity is by establishing an interconnected network of streets, or grid of streets, to provide multiple direct routes. In addition to streets, a network of open spaces consisting of parks, trails, and cycle tracks can increase convenience for walkers and cyclists and entice people to spend more time outdoors. The less people drive, the more likely air quality and community health will improve, and chronic illness can be reduced.

Typical neighborhood street – existing conditions

Typical neighborhood street – after infrastructure improvements

Safer Streets

One of the leading causes of preventable death in the United States is injury involving a motor vehicle. There are several ways that the design of the built environment can lead to a safer environment.

Intersections and Crossing Distance

From the viewpoint of the pedestrian and cyclist, this includes the provision of clearly marked crosswalks at frequent intervals. Where traffic lights exist, the pedestrian crossing time should be long enough to accommodate even the slowest crossers, such as children or the elderly. Movements and traffic patterns at intersections should be enforced in favor of the pedestrian. Curb-to-curb widths should be minimized in order to shorten crossing distances and increase the sense of "visual friction" and spatial enclosure along the street, leading to slower vehicular speeds. Intersections can be designed with tighter turning radii so that drivers must put on the brakes to make a turn.

Roundabouts

Roundabouts, when designed correctly, minimize head-on and broad-side type accidents by causing drivers to deflect and decelerate at intersections. They also have been shown to reduce pedestrian fatalities when installed.

Sidewalks

Sidewalks in urban areas should be wide, generally protected from moving traffic lanes by a zone of parked cars, street trees, and a curb.

Block Size

Blocks should be small, implying a finely grained network of interconnected streets. This minimizes the walking, cycling, and driving distance between origin and destination. It also results in frequent intersections that can calm traffic.

An example of a curbless intersection that features bollards and a high degree of spatial enclosure, resulting in slow driving speeds.

Grid of Streets

A more dispersed pattern of narrow streets lessens the need for large arterial roadways. Large, wide arteries are barriers to pedestrian and cyclist movement; they may sever neighborhoods from other neighborhoods by discouraging pedestrians who wish to reach shared amenities such as schools, retail, or parks.

Slow Streets

Slower design speeds, as well as slower posted speeds, can reduce crashes between vehicles and pedestrians but also will result in less grave injuries in vehicle-to-vehicle crashes.

Healthy street designs acknowledge the needs of the most vulnerable segments of the population, such as children, the elderly, and the disabled. Additional information may be found in the Mobility and Urban Design Chapters.

Safe Routes to School

When designing neighborhoods, decision-makers should ask, "Can a child easily walk from any house to a school, playground, or tot-lot without crossing a street more than two lanes wide?" There is a national trend of less children walking to school every year, but in Laredo there have been efforts to keep community schools that allow a larger portion of their students to have the ability to walk or ride their bikes to school.

Improving Air Quality

Respiratory ailments can be lessened by reducing vehicular emissions and their underlying causes. Ozone, carbon monoxide, particulate matter, and nitrogen oxides are produced by the combustion engines of cars, trucks, and other vehicles. Such pollutants can be reduced by providing a neighborhood and citywide urban structure where walking, cycling, or transit usage are viable alternatives to cars and by continuing to work on decreasing border wait times to reduce idling trucks.

Many other choices in building maintenance and operation can improve air quality and user comfort.

- Schools should feature no-idling zones.

- Interior finishes such as wood, stone, and tile may be cleaner than carpets, which may harbor allergens and insects.

- Pest control and cleaning fluids and powders should be organic or non-toxic.

- Paints and other interior finishes should contain low volatile organic compound (VOC).

- HVAC, plumbing, and septic tank systems should be regularly maintained.

- Increasing the extent of smoke-free environments, both in buildings and in public spaces, along with an expanded campaign against smoking and vaping, will continue to discourage this health threat.

- Pulmonary and cardiovascular diseases are linked to both polluted air and smoking.

- Sulfur dioxide, largely a result of fossil fuel-burning power plants, can be addressed by emphasizing renewable energy rather than carbon-intensive modes for producing energy.

Downward-pointing, widely-spaced, energy-efficient street lamps can diminish light pollution.

Reducing Acoustical and Light Pollution

Noise and light pollution can be environmental stressors and can affect sleep patterns. Sleep is an important regenerative and healing activity for the human body. Alert drivers and operators of heavy machinery cause fewer accidents than sleep-deprived ones do.

Airports, construction sites, wide roads, highways, and freeways can generate tremendous acoustical pollution. Each of these can minimize acoustical pollution through different strategies.

- Developers and the city also have a responsibility to encourage development in areas that are less likely to be affected by flight paths according to the airports acoustical profiles for take-off and landing approaches study.

- Construction sites should concentrate louder activities during daylight hours.

- Major highways and interstate freeways should be planned with acoustical barriers.

- Lighting on thoroughfares and upon private property should be designed with dark sky principles in mind. This entails providing no more luminosity than that which is necessary and also entails preventing upward glare. Downward-pointing lanterns and subtle lighting can help prevent disruptions to circadian rhythms for trees, animals, and humans.

More healthy places to eat instead of fast food restaurants. More parks for kids to play and exercise.

Another help would be more speeding and reckless driving enforcement.

Ultraviolet Exposure

While vitamin D deficiency poses health risks, excessive exposure to ultraviolet spectrum rays does as well. Even one blistering sunburn in childhood can increase the risk of developing skin cancer in adulthood. In order to reduce the risk of skin cancer, it is important that shade be increased. While clothing and sunblock offer a first line of defense against UV rays that may lead to melanoma and other malignancies, the urban environment can also contribute to reducing exposure.

In parks, playgrounds should be shaded either by trees or by canvas shading devices. Routes to and from parks, mixed-use centers, and ideally, all streets, should offer some degree of shade. This can be best accomplished by establishing a tree canopy. Where this may be difficult due to irrigation needs and soil conditions, buildings can provide shade as well. By minimizing setbacks from the sidewalk, avoiding parking lots between the street and building, incorporating tall garden walls, arcades, colonnades, awnings, galleries, balconies, and other integrated sheltering features, architecture can provide shade for the public realm where there is a lack of trees like in the downtown.

The U.S. Department of Public Health provides recommendations regarding how to avoid dehydration, sun-sickness, and other conditions that are common on hot, sunny days.

Safer Water

Drinking water in Laredo currently receives fluoride treatment, which contributes to dental health. Water quality should be monitored frequently for both contaminants and pathogens. A certain amount of chlorine is desirable in order to disinfect water and to improve taste and odor. Pathogens that are removed by chlorination and other disinfection processes include bacteria, protozoa, and viruses. Water utilities also test for a number of inorganic chemicals and monitor water to ensure that levels do not exceed certain limits.

Canvas tent-like devices create shade for the playground equipment and its users while trees are immature or if they are not yet planted in the park.

Reducing the Risk of Infection and Poisoning

The U.S. Department of Public Health has emphasized the concept of "preparedness," or readiness to confront infectious outbreaks or bio-terrorist attacks. The Department maintains information on the major infectious agents such as anthrax, botulism, plague, pneumonic plague, smallpox, and tularemia. It provides similar information on toxins such as chlorine, ricin, and sarin, along with isolation and quarantine protocols. Aside from infectious agents and toxins that can be used in an attack, the Department has published instructions on food preparation and food safety. There is also information regarding how to avoid and respond to household poisoning events and proper disposal of hazardous chemicals. The city's epidemiology division focuses on the prevention, detection, and investigation of communicable diseases and environmental hazards in Laredo and Webb County.

Insects and Illness

Other forms of infrastructure can influence mortality rates from infectious diseases. For instance, certain areas prone to mosquito infestation and West Nile and Zika viruses can benefit from drainage improvements to prevent flooding and standing water.

Reducing Exposure to Harmful Elements
Lead
Laredoans are exposed to lead through a number of different ways.

- One of these is the leaching of lead from corroding plumbing systems. Infants who consume formula may be exposed to unsafe levels of lead in water.

- Paint chips, dust, and other particles containing traces of lead are sometimes directly inhaled. Chipping, decaying, or crumbling paint from pre-1978 paint jobs should receive special scrutiny, as most lead-based paints were used before this year.

- Soils near major roadways and highways may contain traces of lead from when leaded gasoline was used. These areas should be avoided for planting food gardens.

Radon
Radon is a radioactive gas that is odorless, tasteless, and invisible. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer. It can build up inside a home that is not well ventilated without anyone knowing. Inhalation of radon gas can increase the risk of lung cancer, while ingesting radon in water can lead to cancer of the stomach. Testing for radon is the first step in reducing households' exposure. The city should continue to work with Webb County in order to monitor radon levels and educate citizens on how to test and mitigate for radon.

Lighting and electrical distribution infrastructure can minimize Laredo's citizens to exposure to electrocution and other hazards by hiding wires and by incorporating on-site energy generation. Off-grid infrastructure is also less-polluting. *Image courtesy of Multipole Global*

Reducing Risks Associated with the Electrical Grid
Updating the aging electrical grid can potentially reduce several environmental risk factors. Risk of electrocution can be minimized by placing utilities underground. Where they are located above ground, transmission lines and wires should be installed at the rear property lines, in alleys, or rear easements. By removing electrical lines from the front property lines, shade trees may be planted along the street without regard to conflicts with overhead wires. This does not eliminate the need to be aware of underground utilities when planting trees near the front property line. High tension wires and major electrical easements should be located at greater distances from neighborhoods. Also, where such easements already exist, a buffer zone well beyond the width of the easement should be set aside in order to keep residents at a safe distance from electromagnetic fields.

The U.S. Department of Public Health provides instructions for how to respond to downed power lines.

Nutrition

Increase Access To Quality Food Sources

Laredo residents should have immediate access to affordable and nutritious food. Limited access to nutritious food and relatively easier access to less nutritious food may be linked to poor diets which ultimately lead to obesity and diet-related diseases.

The city could use economic development tools and site facilitation to promote the location of grocery stores within close proximity to underserved areas.

In conjunction, the city could work with local transit providers to facilitate access to food shopping for low-income residents through incentives. The city could encourage farmers' markets, like the one hosted by the Laredo Main Street, and other healthy food retailers to accept federal nutrition programs like WIC and SNAP.

Access to Local Food

Laredo and its surrounding areas have traditionally been used for ranching rather than farming. Overtime, ranching can strip the nutrients from soil making the option of switching to farming difficult and expensive. As a result, there are very few food producing farms in the Laredo region. This can make access to local food very difficult. The city should look for ways to encourage small producers and home and community gardens to increase access to healthy, local food.

Farmers' Markets

Access to local produce could be improved through traditional produce stands, food coops, and additional farmers' markets. Modern zoning codes and standards typically prohibit road side produce stands. Laredo Main Street hosts a monthly farmers' market in Jarvis Plaza downtown. Laredo should encourage the establishment of more farmers' markets within close proximity to residential areas.

Incentivize Corner Stores

Laredo should work to incentivize the development and operation of corner stores throughout the city that provide quality food options to help balance the current limited options.

A new community garden in Laredo.

Home and Community Gardens

Community gardens should be encouraged throughout the city on both private and public lands to give citizens the opportunity to grow their own food. Community gardens in city parks and schools can provide nutritious food for neighborhood families. Often used as a catalyst for neighborhood and community development, community gardens also provide opportunities for recreation, exercise and education.

Currently, community gardens are not allowed in public parks. In order to encourage better access to quality food sources, Laredo should consider allowing garden activities in public parks.

Community Food Assessment

Community food assessment (CFA) is a tool to locate and identify "food deserts," which are districts that have little or no access to fresh and healthful food. Commonly, food deserts are characterized by a lack of farmers' markets, no grocers that carry whole food products, and a reliance upon outlets such as fast food restaurants and gas stations, which often supply highly processed food laden with sodium, sugars, and fats.

City leaders and community leaders can use CFAs to focus on those areas that need rebalancing of the "foodscape."

Community Gardens & Farmers' Markets

Allow local residents and service organizations to develop community gardens within existing parks. A community garden provides a catalyst for neighborhood and community development. In addition to producing nutritious and affordable food, community gardens stimulate social interaction and beautify neighborhoods.

A community-managed garden could be the foundation of a neighborhood sustainable food program. Produce from the garden could be sold at a local farmers' market, utilized in educational programs such as youth cooking classes and other entrepreneurial efforts. A community garden could create income opportunities and economic development within neighborhoods.

Typical block

Infill housing, community gardens, and a farmers' market fill vacant parcels while providing food and economic development to the neighborhood. Regulations need to allow community gardens, sales pavilions, and civic buildings for community supported agriculture and neighborhood events.

Mental Health

Psychological & Emotional Well-being

Much of a person's emotional and psychological well-being is a result of internal conditions that are related to the structure and chemistry of the brain and which are shaped by life's experiences. Yet, there are occasions in which external events and patterns may either help or thwart this type of well-being. It is important that decision-makers are aware of the social implications of each proposed change to the physical environment.

For example, the physical framework of neighborhoods should be inclusive of different generations and household types. The presence of grandparents and great-grandparents can help both the younger members of the family as well as the elderly. The younger relatives are able to learn oral traditions, culinary traditions, and benefit from the advice and wisdom of their older relatives. The elderly are able to rely upon younger generations for support and fellowship, rather than be left in isolation. A high degree of social interaction may be correlated to longevity.

Often relatives, whether they be elderly or not, can assist with child-care for working parents. Whether or not this is for pay, a physical framework that acknowledges these demands on modern families and facilitates interdependencies can help lessen the pain of finding good quality, affordable child care.

The Psychological Structure of Community

"The life, work, and happiness of all societies depend on certain 'psychological structures' which are infinitely precious and highly vulnerable. Social cohesion, cooperation, mutual respect, and above all, self-respect, courage in the face of adversity, and the ability to bear hardship – all this and much else disintegrates and disappears when these 'psychological structures' are gravely damaged. A man is destroyed by the inner conviction of uselessness. No amount of economic growth can compensate for such losses – though this may be an idle reflection, since economic growth is normally inhibited by them."

Schumacher, Ernst Friedrich. Small is Beautiful – Economics as if People Mattered.
London: Blond & Briggs Ltd., 1973.

Conventional vs. Traditional Neighborhoods

Conventional, gated subdivisions that feature one house type and price point repeated by the hundreds and that are built for one demographic or income group, do not offer the same flexibility as do the diverse and traditionally designed neighborhoods. Often, downsizing households such as empty nesters cannot find high-quality, smaller, low-maintenance homes. Young singles or couples who wish to live independently, but in close proximity to parents or siblings, often cannot do so due to monocultural subdivisions. Homes for the elderly and assisted-care facilities can be designed to appear as cheerful and home-like as any other house on the block, even if they are a bit larger.

By including a range of housing types and sizes in close proximity to each other in each neighborhood, neighborhoods can allow families with different housing needs to live close to one another. This can help maintain family and community stability.

Multi-generational Housing

Houses can be designed with "granny flats," "in-laws quarters," or other spaces that can provide privacy but togetherness for extended, multi-generational families living together. "Family compounds" or courtyard homes can also feature multiple household units that can be built incrementally, often around a common patio or yard.

Reducing Commutes

Time is a scarce resource for families. Reducing average commuting times should be a long-term goal for Laredo. By providing housing in close proximity to workplaces, there is a better chance that one would be able to shorten commutes and perhaps switch to walking, cycling, or transit. Also, new workplaces should be located along existing or planned transit corridors. When the design and siting assumes that all users will drive, most users probably will drive. When a project is designed and sited with other modes of travel in mind, then there is a chance that they will be activated as well.

Each district should be studied to determine how it can be made more balanced in order to shorten commutes and encourage walking. The notion of "bedroom communities" should be phased out in Laredo; neighborhoods should be regarded as not merely places where families sleep, but where they may satisfy many of their daily needs, which may even include their places of employment.

Neighborhood Schools

Nurturing school environments can also assist in psychological and emotional well-being. Though the trend has been towards ever larger school campuses which may have thousands of students, many studies show that smaller schools may be better. While the economy of scale would seem to show that larger campuses perform better, student performance is optimal in smaller, more approachable school buildings and campuses. School buildings should be embedded thoughtfully within neighborhoods or between neighborhoods. "Safe Routes to School" provides guidance on the proper integration of schools into the community fabric.

Sick building syndrome (in which mildew, mold, and other respiratory irritants accumulates in ducts) has been attributed to the windowless, sealed designs that characterize many modern schools. Not only do sick-buildings seem to contribute to asthma, but windowless classrooms may also work against alertness. All classrooms should have operable windows.

Mental Health & Substance Abuse Facilities

Providers of mental health care or substance-abuse professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors, and nurses should be able to attend to patients in dignified, easy-to-access locations that remove the stigma and therefore a major barrier to treatment or rehabilitation.

Visitability and the Disabled

Visitability is an important consideration for inclusive, multi-generational development. Over a home's lifespan it may accommodate many different families, each having different needs. Creating basic access at the time of construction costs relatively little compared to the cost of a future retrofit. If a building or dwelling is to be made visitable, the following design considerations are informed by ADA requirements but which also take into account the formation of legible street walls, aesthetics of ramps, and the shallow setbacks and elevated finished floors that are desirable urban environments:

- There should be provided one zero-step entrance from an accessible path at the front, side, or rear of each building.

- There should be a half or full bath provided on the first story of each visitable unit.

- All first floor interior doors (including bathrooms) should provide at least 32 inches of clear passage.

Configurations

There are many methods with which visitability to residential units can be achieved while maintaining an elevated finished floor, which is vital to privacy in urbanized areas.

- On alley-served lots: the ground may be sloped or raised to provide a zero-step entrance at the rear, convenient to parking. This may be accomplished by grading the alley or lane higher than the thoroughfare by sloping individual lots toward the alley or lane or by providing well-integrated rear-access ramps.

- Well-integrated ramps may be provided at the side of the unit, leading to a side or rear porch. For apartment and townhouses side or rear ramps are encouraged to be shared between units. The entrance to the ramp at the sidewalk could be through a doorway or integrated into the building design as an archway.

Shared ramps can provide access to multiple buildings. Ramps can provide access from the front or rear of a building.

- In cases where visitability cannot be met by rear grading or access ramps, one alternative is to provide an at-grade entrance at the front of the building with an exterior stair leading to the entrance of the unit above.
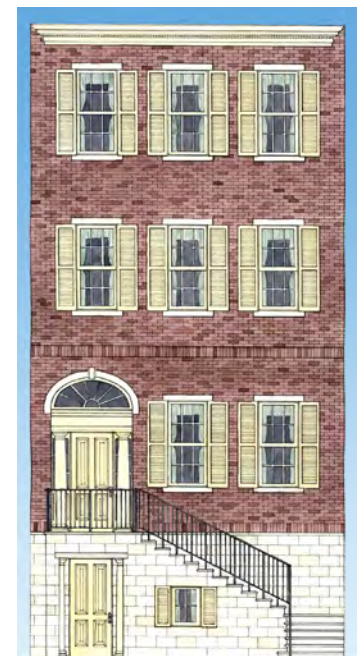
Access

Improve Access To Health Care Facilities

Support initiatives and programs that improve access to health care facilities and health care professionals. Transit linkages should be added to improve the physical access to health care facilities by all residents.

Currently, the main hospital in Laredo is located north in the city. This adds time to emergency services which could be what separates life and death. Additional hospital and health care locations should be investigated to promote the health of all neighborhoods in Laredo.

Access to social services should be considered at a neighborhood level in order to better address the needs of the local community. Having neighborhood-scaled location of services promotes the effective use of these services through easy access by reducing the need to plan for long trips and further reducing dependence on the car for personal health. Locations should be determined by investigating current conditions and identifying locations with the greatest need.

Certain related services may benefit from being located in relative proximity to each other. Other services may better serve the community by consolidating local, state and federal offices; however each consolidated initiative requires thorough study to evaluate its effectiveness as some states have discovered anticipated cost savings do not get realized or may be minimal.

Physical Access to Medical Care

Medical care can be accessed at several different types of facilities including hospitals, clinics, urgent care clinics, doctor's offices, and laboratories. These should be distributed throughout the city. Land should be set aside for health-related buildings when planning new development. Larger health care providers, such as hospitals, should be located on major corridors and transit routes so that they can be more accessible to a larger base of patients.

Efficient and compact multi-story buildings should be the norm rather than low-slung campuses. When siting hospitals along transit-served corridors, parking footprint can be reduced, thereby lessening the costs of development. Savings in the development of hospital sites can potentially contribute to savings in the overall cost of the service.

Likewise, hospitals can be designed to allow for views and sunlight for each patient. By using courtyards and smaller building footprints than conventional large floor-plate hospital designs, daylight can be brought into interior spaces.

Emergency Vehicle Access

One strategy that could reduce mortality is the reduction of response times for emergency vehicles. Fire trucks, ambulances, and police vehicles would benefit from an open network of interconnected streets that offer multiple routes for accessing properties.

Caution must be taken in not designing streets only for the occasional passage of emergency vehicles. By increasing turning radii at intersections or excessively widening standard curb-to-curb dimensions, streets may inadvertently become speedways that are more dangerous for residents on a day-to-day basis. Strategies to accommodate emergency response vehicles without sacrificing pedestrian safety include:

- Recognize the difference between actual and effective turning radius.
- Use mountable curbs or clear-zones.

- Eliminate curbs at corners of "shared-space" intersections.

- Provide staging areas for fire trucks at key mid-block locations rather than widening the entire block frontage.

- Eliminate speed bumps and speed humps, which are particularly disliked by paramedics and ambulance drivers as they may needlessly shake patients and equipment. A better strategy for traffic calming is to build in a high degree of spatial enclosure rather than retrofit or "hobble" streets with bumps.

- Minimize dead-ends, cul-de-sacs, gated subdivisions, and promote interconnected street networks.

- Downsize fire trucks so that they fit the street dimensions found in traditional and historic neighborhoods, rather than designing streets and intersections to fit the vehicle. Distribute smaller fire stations with fewer and smaller trucks in neighborhoods rather than consolidating them in larger facilities.

- Reduce the risk of fire by using non-combustable and soakable construction materials and deploying sprinklers in buildings rather than relying solely upon fire hydrants to douse fires.

- Educate homeowners on the importance of keeping and knowing how to use fire extinguishers, establishing escape routes, minimizing the use of bars on windows, and other methods for reducing the risk of fire in the home. Many risks arise from the use of cooking appliances, cigarettes, lighters, matches, candles, and faulty electrical systems. Maintaining smoke detectors and changing their batteries are also necessary habits which each household and business should cultivate.
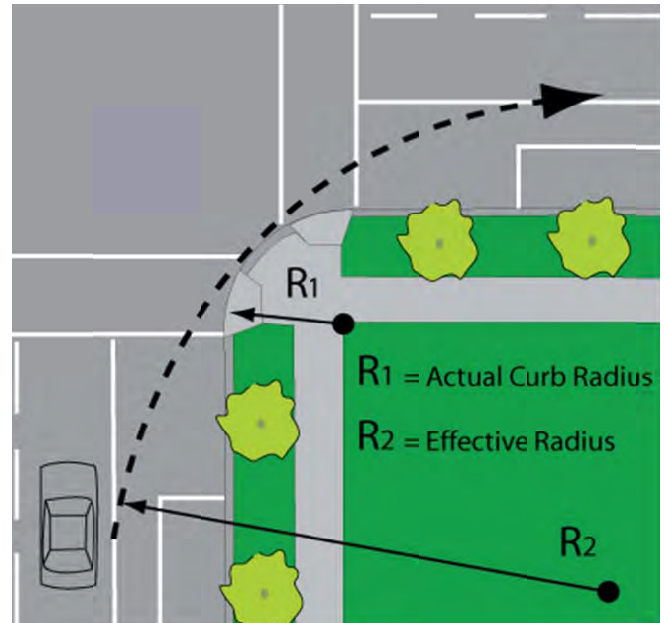
Diagram of Actual Curb Radius and Effective Radius based on AASHTO Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets, 2004, Exhibit 5-10.
Courtesy of Hall Planning and Engineering, Inc.

R_1 = Actual Curb Radius
R_2 = Effective Radius

Path of Emergency Vehicle

Mountable Curbs

Clear Zone

Emergency Vehicle Friendly Radius
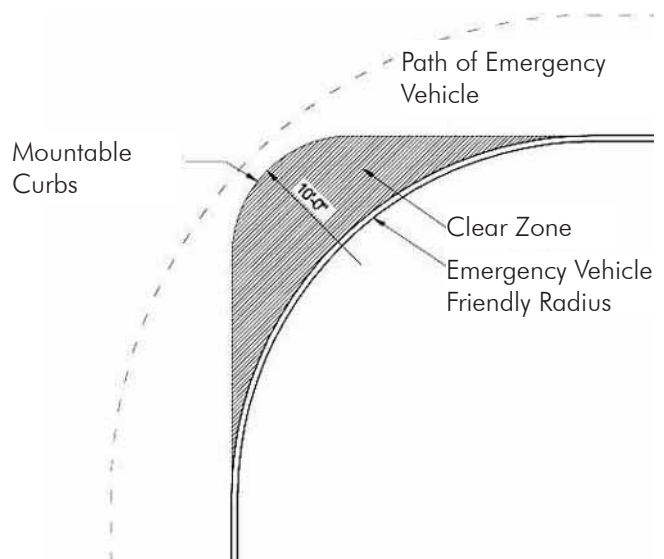
If on-street parking is not present, then a mountable curb or clear zone can create the appearance of a tighter turning radius to which most drivers would adhere, although a large vehicle could easily and quickly cross it in an emergency.

Partnerships and Programming

Partner With The School Districts To Promote Healthy Living

Strategic partnerships with the school district can be effective in preventing health-related problems through the built-environment and educational programs. Childhood Obesity health issues are very complex and require complex solutions. The most effective strategies have come from a combination of strategies including the built environment, lifestyle changes and better access to facilities.

National Safe Routes to School

The City of Laredo has a commitment to neighborhood schools and allowing kids the opportunity to either walk or ride their bikes to school. The city should expand its commitment with the National Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. Federal funds are distributed to states based on student enrollment. These funds may be used for both infrastructure projects and non-infrastructure activities.

Transportation Alternatives Program

The Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) should continue to be promoted in maintaining safe paths to school through the implementation of multi-modal facilities.

Coordinated Approach to Child Health

The State's Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) program is a coordinated school health program designed to promote physical activity, healthy food choices, and prevent tobacco use in elementary school aged children. Establishing healthy habits in childhood can promote behavioral changes that carry into adulthood. There are multiple sources for CATCH grants and mini-grants available at the state and federal level.

Recipe for Success

The Recipe for Success (RFS) Foundation in Houston has been successfully increasing the number of servings of fruit and vegetables school children consume each day. RFS is attempting to prevent childhood obesity by changing the way kids eat. Through the program, Houston-area students grow, harvest and prepare their own dishes. RFS offers hands-on nutrition education through after school sessions, summer camps and nutrition education classes for parents.

Use Health Impact Assessments (HIA's) For Reviewing & Addressing Health Issues

HIA's are a systematic method for reviewing the health issues facing a population. Assessments establish agreed priorities and resource allocation that will improve health and reduce inequalities. HIA's are used to determine the priority of local health service needs. An HIA should be performed for each new large scale development studying the potential effects upon physical activity, availability of nutritious foods, and other health consequences on the population in the area of the new project.

http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/projects/health-impact-project/health-impact-assessment

Include Health Officials In Planning Decisions

Support the participation of public health officials in land use decisions and transportation planning to help identify and mitigate potential health problems. The formation of a Land Use and Health Team should be explored in order to educate and engage the community regarding the effect of community design upon health.

One model program that could be researched is in Ingham County, Michigan. Their team is increasing awareness in local planning and development communities and among residents about the correlation of land use and health issues.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Improve the overall physical and mental health of Laredo citizens by increasing the quality of life in the region.

Regional Collaboration

Goal 7.1: Address the health needs of all residents in the region through collaboration and coordination among local, state, and binational entities.

> **Policy 7.1.1**: Partner with local, state, and binational entities to prevent health-related problems through prevention programs and policies.

> **Policy 7.1.2**: The Planning Department should educate developers, neighborhood associations, and other building permit applicants for major projects on the connection between the built environment and public health.

Environmental Risk Factors

Goal 7.2: Reduce exposure to environmental risk factors.

> **Policy 7.2.1**: Reduce risk of injury and fatality due to vehicular accidents.
>
> a. Lower design speeds on existing and proposed streets and highways.
>   i. Retrofit streets to be more pedestrian-friendly.
>   ii. Include on-street parking and street trees as barriers between pedestrians and moving travel lanes and which increase visual friction to discourage speeding.
>   iii. Include wide sidewalks and narrower travel lanes.

b. Convert signalized or geometrically complex intersections to modern roundabouts or fully-circulating intersections in order to reduce or eliminate turn-lanes, slow traffic while improving flow, and reduce the incidence of broadside and head-on collisions.

c. Increase the frequency of crosswalks and increase signal time in favor of pedestrians crossing streets, especially multi-lane arterials and other major streets.

d. Minimize crossing distance at intersections with pedestrian refuges, bulb-outs, speed tables, and other strategies.

e. Promote the use of woonerfs, shared spaces, curbless streets, and stripe-free zones as ways to create very traffic calmed residential streets that need less right-of-way than conventional streets.

f. As silent hybrids and electric vehicles become more common, expand the city's use of Audible Pedestrian Signals (APS) to assist blind pedestrians at intersections and crosswalks.

Policy 7.2.2: Reduce exposure to air pollution.

a. Minimize VMT through increased walking, cycling, and transit usage. Strategies to accomplish this are found in the Land Use Patterns, Mobility, and Urban Design Chapters.

b. Work with federal entities to reduce bridge congestion, especially by means other than road widening which would increase polluting idling.

Policy 7.2.3: Reduce exposure to excess ultraviolet rays.

    a. Provide for shade along sidewalks and pedestrian pathways with one or more of the following: high degree of spatial enclosure formed by buildings and narrow right-of-way, street trees, canopies, awnings, colonnades, arcades, and galleries.

    b. Provide shade devices for playgrounds to protect children from sunburn and increased risk of skin cancers.

    c. Educate citizens on the importance of sunscreen, clothing, and avoiding peak sunlight hours for outdoor activity as a first line of defense against melanoma and other skin cancers.

    d. Educate citizens on the need for adequate exposure to sunlight in order to avoid Vitamin D deficiencies and how to achieve this without damaging the skin.

    e. Plan to tackle tree attrition and replacement by conducting a tree/canopy survey of parks and other public spaces, with annual updates.

Policy 7.2.4: Increase access to safe water.

    a. Continue to monitor water for contaminants.

    b. Continue to educate citizens and visitors on practices that reduce groundwater pollution, such as proper disposal of medicines, chemicals, batteries, and hazardous materials.

Policy 7.2.5: Reduce infectious and communicable diseases and infection.

    a. Coordinate with the Department of Public Health and its efforts to combat the spread of infectious diseases.

    b. Map disease clusters.

    c. Coordinate with governmental entities south of the border to identify and prevent pathogens that may spread in either direction across the border.

    d. Support efforts to immunize the uninsured and underinsured population of Laredo and the surrounding areas and to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases in all ages.

    e. Support efforts to educate and test for HIV, syphilis, and other STDs, in addition to education and provision of contraceptives.

    f. Support efforts to halt the spread of tuberculosis.

    g. Support dental care programs for children.

Policy 7.2.6: Reduce exposure to heavy metals, radon, lead, and mercury.

    a. Embrace clean, renewable energy generation.

    b. Monitor levels of radon and educate households on how to test for and mitigate radon gas.

    c. Educate households, contractors, and real estate professionals on how to identify, remove, or stabilize lead-based paints and other sources of lead in construction.

Policy 7.2.7: Reduce risks associated with the electrical grid.

   a. Support the electric company's instructions on how to respond to downed power lines.

   b. Strengthen the electrical distribution grid.

   c. Locate electrical wires at rear property lines or in alleys or rear easements in order to lessen conflicts between street trees and electrical infrastructure while reducing the blight caused by overhead wires.

   d. Provide incentives for the relocation of existing above ground electrical wires underground.

   e. Reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields by locating residences at a safe distance from high voltage transmission lines and easements.

Policy 7.2.8: Continue to develop animal care and control services including education and animal population control practices accessible to the public.

Physical Activity
Goal 7.3: Encourage physical activity through the design of the built environment.

Policy 7.3.1: Study existing neighborhoods for deficiencies.

   a. Determine if residents can easily walk to retail, especially a grocer, where they may obtain daily necessities.

   b. Determine if residents are less than a five-minute walk from public facilities such as schools, parks, libraries, and transit stops.

   c. Work with communities to increase density, connectivity, and completeness (mixture of uses).

Policy 7.3.2: Adjust land development regulations and zoning policies in order to make neighborhoods more complete, walkable and connected.

Policy 7.3.3: Improve existing and new streetscapes so that traffic speeds are reduced and pedestrians' and cyclists' comfort and safety is increased.

   a. Utilize the Complete Streets approach to pedestrian and bike accommodation.

Policy 7.3.4: Design new neighborhoods to be amenity-rich, mixed-use, interconnected, dense, and compact. Neighborhoods should be able to supply most of life's daily necessities on foot or on bike, with easy access to transit service. Streets should be designed with low-design speeds.

Policy 7.3.5: Integrate walkable neighborhood design according to techniques and policies described in Land Use Patterns and Urban Design Chapters.

Policy 7.3.6: Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department, and TxDOT where appropriate, to increase pedestrian and cyclist connectivity across natural and man-made barriers such as freeways, ravines, river beds, canyons, and arroyos. Provide a shorter and more convenient route for non-motorized traffic across barriers.

Policy 7.3.7: Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department, and TxDOT where appropriate, to invest in a recreational infrastructure that provides not only recreational walking, jogging, and cycling, but also may provide an alternative to car trips. Such infrastructure may include trails (multi-use, hiking, equestrian, jogging), cycle tracks, bike lanes, parks, and restored or conserved wild areas. Use the Rio Grande and stream networks as a multi-use recreational amenities.

Policy 7.3.8: Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department to integrate fixed, durable outdoor fitness equipment in parks that allow for flexibility and resistance training.

Policy 7.3.9: Encourage workplace fitness by including fitness centers within or in close proximity to employment centers.

Policy 7.3.10: Encourage employers to remove subsidies for parking and provide financial incentives to cycling, transit, and walking as a commuting alternative.

Policy 7.3.11: Encourage the inclusion of showers, lockers, and changing areas at places of employment.

Policy 7.3.12: Create "visitable" building types for the disabled that also satisfy the goal of creating walkable street frontages.

Policy 7.3.13: Create safe routes to school using mapping tools, the planning of street networks, and walkable and multimodal street designs.

Policy 7.3.14: Encourage schools to provide open campuses. At a minimum, recreational fields should be open to the community after school hours and on weekends.

Obesity & Chronic Illnesses
Goal 7.4: Help reduce obesity and the chronic illnesses associated with obesity, such as Type 2 Diabetes, cancers, and heart disease.

Policy 7.4.1: Create recommendations to improve nutrition and increasing physical activity, and making policy recommendations toward obesity prevention.

Policy 7.4.2: Map citywide prevalence of diabetes and examine where diabetes-related services (such as dialysis, insulin, and diet counseling) are needed.

Policy 7.4.3: Map cancer clusters in order to identify anomalies and environmental factors such as carcinogens.

Basic Nutritional Needs
Goal 7.5: Create a food system in which city residents can meet their proper nutritional needs.

Policy 7.5.1: Encourage local groceries and convenient stores to stock nutritional food across all stores.

Policy 7.5.2: Initiate research, policies, and programs that increase food security, improve health outcomes, and create social and economic opportunities to attempt to ensure that every resident has access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

    a. Perform Community Food Assessments to determine where "food deserts" exist in Laredo. Target food deserts as areas to start focusing food production, farmers' markets, and small community-based grocers.

b. Ensure that schools have access to organic and unprocessed whole food products. Incorporate cultivation plots on school grounds for the education of students and to potentially supply schools, food banks, needy households, and local retailers with fresh produce.

c. Ensure that Homeowner's Associations do not prohibit food production and the growing of crops such as fruits, vegetables, and herbs in front, back, or side yards.

d. Encourage Parks and Leisure Services Department efforts to integrate food gardens into parks.

e. Encourage development of community food gardens through grant or partner funding.

f. Improve access to direct or whole sale buying for low-income and limited-mobility residents.

g. Remove barriers to the raising of poultry on private lots in suburban areas.

h. Continue to ensure that food service establishments and grocery stores are inspected by a registered sanitarian at least twice each year.

i. Continue to support the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to improve the nutrition of vulnerable members of the population.

Policy 7.5.3: Promote responsible parenting and family planning including non-pharmaceutical-based methods.

Psychological Well-Being
Goal 7.6: Encourage psychological and emotional well-being.

Policy 7.6.1: Coordinate with the health care providers, psychologists, and researchers to provide therapy for sufferers of stress, depression.

Policy 7.6.2: Seek to reduce commuting times to maximize quality time with friends and family.

Policy 7.6.3: Seek to improve sleep by reducing light and acoustical pollution.

a. Enact a Dark Sky Ordinance in the city.

b. Erect acoustical barriers and implement sound mitigation.

c. Locate residential areas at a safe distance from major sound and light polluters or limit hours and levels of illumination to allow for a period of darker skies between midnight and sunrise.

d. Discourage commercial uses that have intrusive levels of lighting from locating adjacent to residential land uses.

Policy 7.6.4: Encourage residential building types that accommodate extended or non-conventional households.

Policy 7.6.5: Encourage small schools embedded within the neighborhood fabric rather than large drive-only campuses.

Policy 7.6.6: Strengthen extended support networks by reducing land use patterns that lead to social isolation.

Policy 7.6.7: Integrate assisted-living facilities into neighborhood fabric and design them as dignified home-like facilities.

Policy 7.6.8: Continue to educate patients and family members of patients on the symptoms, therapy, rehabilitation, and medications associated with mental health disorders.

Substance Abuse
Goal 7.7: Discourage substance abuse.

Policy 7.7.1: Work on policies to discourage retailers of alcohol and tobacco products within the sight of school entrances or access points.

Policy 7.7.2: Expand no-smoking zones to outdoor public spaces that are owned by the city.

Policy 7.7.3: Enforce existing laws related to sale and use of tobacco and alcohol to minors.

Policy 7.7.4: Collaborate with local and binational entities to discourage and prevent the trade of drugs and arms across the border.

Policy 7.7.5: Encourage programs focused upon drug counseling, rehabilitation, and sobriety.

Policy 7.7.6: Support efforts to educate and prevent the use of tobacco.

Access to Health Care
Goal 7.8: Improve access to medical care.

Policy 7.8.1: Distribute primary care offices, clinics, and laboratories, amongst the various districts and neighborhoods that make up the city. Encourage consolidation of major medical facilities to create efficiencies in providing care.

Policy 7.8.2: Locate medical care providers and human services at transit locations.

    a. Encourage medical providers to locate at stations or bus stops with reduced parking footprints.

Policy 7.8.3: Allow access by emergency response vehicles without sacrificing walkable, traffic-calmed street designs.

Policy 7.8.4: Achieve a sufficient medical provider-to-patient ratio.

    a. Collaborate with private, non-profit, and other governmental entities to establish and implement a method for recruiting and retaining medical providers.

    b. Increase quality of life and housing options throughout the city as a means of attracting health care practitioners.

Policy 7.8.5: Engage the philonthropic and private sector to develop and sustain the expansion of the health care industry.

Policy 7.8.6: Complete the development of the laboratoy response network at the Laredo Health Department for local, regional, and international disease control.

Policy 7.8.7: Promote the integration of disease self-management and behavioral health screening, and education into primary care.

8

Parks

beyond comparison

par·fait' (-fā') *n.* ice cream dessert in a tall glass

pa·ri'ah (-rī'ə) *n.* outcast

par'i·mu'tu·el (-chōō əl) *n.* racetrack betting in which winners share the total amount bet

par'ing (per'-) *n.* strip peeled off

par'ish *n.* **1** part of a diocese under a priest, etc. **2** church congregation

pa·rish'ion·er *n.* member of a parish

par'i·ty *n., pl.* **-ties** equality of value at a given ratio between moneys, commodities, etc.

park *n.* public land for recreation or rest —*v.* leave (a vehicle) temporarily

par'ka *n.* hooded coat

Par'kin·son's disease *n.* disease causing tremors

park'way' *n.* broad road lined with trees

par'lance *n.* mode of speech

par'lay *v.* **1** bet (wager plus winnings from one race, etc.) on another **2**

KEEP OFF
THE GRASS
NO PISAR
EL CKSPED

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EXISTING CONDITIONS

One of the many benefits of living in Texas is that the weather is often complimentary to the ability to be outside barbecuing, fishing, playing sports, or just soaking up the sun. Residents across Laredo appreciate the opportunities for leisure and it is in these experiences that it becomes common to see the state motto of "friendship" finding its way into being a unifying element of the community.

Parks are intrinsic to the promotion and realization of a friendly community. These spaces provide the opportunity for the respite needed from the demands of busy work or school days by providing the backdrop for the many gatherings of family, friends, and neighbors. While parks allow us to socialize and recreate, they also provide many other benefits that are often overlooked. The other benefits of parks are:

Improvements to health
Recreational opportunities benefit a person's physical and mental health. Exercise is a key component to physical health, while mental health is affected by social opportunities and the restorative effects of interactions with nature.

Opportunities for Involvement
Parks also provide an opportunity for community service. A neighborhood group can volunteer to maintain a specific park through an Adopt-A-Park program. Local citizens can become instructors for programs or coaches for athletic leagues. Special events and festivals hosted in local parks are great ways to get to know neighbors and local businesses.

Safe Places for Youth
Parks and recreation programs can have a positive social impact. Many neighborhood and community parks are programed to provide a safe and supervised environment for youth.

Increase Tourism
People will visit a community because of local attractions. This includes parks with desirable facilities or unique features. Festivals, concerts, sports tournaments, and other special events typically take place in community owned public spaces. These types of activities attract people from outside the local community providing trip spending which support local business and add tax revenues to local government coffers.

Contribute to the Economy
Parks have a positive impact on surrounding property values as home and business owners are willing to pay a premium to be adjacent to park land. This can be for increased proximity to nearby amenities or seeking entrepreneurial advantages of providing park visitors with complimentary services.

Protect the Natural Environment
Park space can provide needed protections through designating land to be set aside to preserve native plants and provide habitat for local wildlife. Additionally it can promote improved water quality by acting and keeping in place vegetative buffers to water bodies, sparing them from the impacts of nearby development.

A better understanding of the contributions to the local community by Laredo's park system helps frame its existing role within the function of the local government.

Previous and Complimentary Park Planning Efforts

The following are a series of park planning efforts that directly impact the City's promotion of parks and recreation offerings.

Parks and Open Space Master Plan (2008)
This plan has provided the guidance for administration of the parks system since its adoption in 2008. The plan addressed many park planning related topics including: park development guidelines, park standards and classifications, establishment of a linear park system, the definition and identification of special use parks/facilities, and park improvement implementation strategies. These planning topics were framed by a series of planning goals and objectives that provided context for decisions affecting parks to meet the specific needs of the community of Laredo. Those goals are as follows:

- To provide a variety of recreation experiences that appeal to all segments of the population of Laredo.
- To enhance the physical attractiveness of Laredo by developing parks and open space amenities.
- To protect the natural resources of Laredo and Webb county by preserving those resources.
- Improve the quality of the urban environment by providing adequate parks and open space within the City of Laredo.
- Provide parks and open spaces that are safe for use by persons of all ages and abilities.
- Expand the range of recreation opportunities available to all age groups.
- Increase private sector involvement in developing and maintaining parks and open spaces.

The goals and polices developed as part of Viva Laredo provide foundational guidance to coming park planing efforts. Future park plans are expected to drill down and develop additional recommendations and implementation strategies for continued improvement and growth of the City's park system.

Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan (2008)
This plan serves as a long term guide (10-20 years) for two and a half miles of the Rio Grande riverfront. The plan identifies the establishment and build-out of an interconnected system of parks, greenways, and nature trails. The plan recommends a series of projects that promote recreation, economic development, ecotourism, and downtown revitalization. The intended result of the plan will be a unique environment that blends the natural features of the Rio Grande River into the fabric of the community while restoring and preserving its inherent ecological health.

Laredo 2020 (2011)
This plan is a master plan for the City of Laredo's downtown. The vision of the plan is that, "the downtown serves as the economic, civic, social and cultural center for Laredoans and revives its legacy as a Pan American destination for people and trade." The plan has a multifaceted approach to revitalizing the downtown which includes recommendations for land use, economic development, transportation, urban design, housing, and infrastructure, as well as plazas, parks, and open space. The plan references the Rio Grand Vega Lands Master Plan and identifies the plaza and parks in the downtown area as being vital components to the long range (50 year plan horizon) success of the downtown.

Organization of A Park System

The expectations for park systems are changing across the country and Laredo is not insulated from the shifting demands. Demand for access to park amenities often comes from the neighborhood level, but it is not always feasible for a city to duplicate park offerings at that scale. This is why it is important to establish the organizational framework to promote equity and clarity as to what citizens can expect in a park. This organization framework starts by classifying the different types of parks and park offerings, establishing how connectivity contributes to promoting park access, and a guiding approach for park system standards moving forward.

Park Classifications
Different parks types serve different geographic areas, functions, and users. Understanding this helps to identify gaps and overlap in the overall system and whether or not existing facilities are addressing the current park, recreation, and open space needs of the City. The 2008 Parks and Open Space Master Plan was the starting point for the following definitions of park classifications. These park classifications should be used to program parks with facilities as well as to gauge maintenance demands.

Mini Parks
These are small spaces and typically contain playgrounds geared to toddlers and young children. These parks are most often accessed by foot and parking is not provided. These facilities are most common in apartment complexes and residential subdivisions. In many cases, the provision of this park type is best left to private development.

Neighborhood Parks
These parks contain park facilities like playgrounds, basketball courts, picnic areas, walking trails, and on occasion a sports field or two. Neighborhood parks are expected to be within easy walking or bicycling distance to the neighborhoods, subdivisions, or developments they serve. They are the most prevalent type of municipal park and should not be located on busy thoroughfares. They are not intended to be a city-wide destination which would generate unwanted traffic to the neighborhood they inhabit. Street parking should meet most of the parking needs and local resident surveillance is the most common way to promote park safety. As these parks are typically located in neighborhoods, the programing of the park should not create unwanted nuisances.

Neighborhood and community parks make up a bulk of a park systems properties. It is important for these facilities to have high quality amenities that compliment particular user experiences. Picnic pavilions being located near playgrounds promote parks being used for family outings and birthday parties.

Community Parks
Community parks offer many of the same features of a neighborhood park, just on a larger scale, as they are intended to serve a group of neighborhoods or portion of a city. They are usually accessed by motor vehicle, but they may also be accessed by nearby residents by walking or biking. A variety of recreational facilities are provided within community parks including multiple sports fields (often lighted), connections to hike/bike trails, large playgrounds, swimming pools, etc. These parks require sufficient parking to accommodate participants, spectators, and other park users.

Metropolitan Parks
Metropolitan Parks are large park facilities that are intended to serve the entire city and in some instances several communities. These parks may contain urban elements as wall as natural areas. They may host festivals, large sport complexes for hosting tournaments, entertainment venues, and multiple special use parks/facilities. When these parks are primarily located within a natural area, they can provide opportunities for boating, fishing, camping, hiking/biking trails, wildlife viewing, shooting sports and archery. There may be a series of internal roads and parking lots required to meet access demands. In some instances they will require special accommodations and connection to mass transit to help address parking and access limitation issues. The impact of additional traffic on areas surrounding large community or metropolitan parks should also be considered and addressed.

Regional Parks
Regional parks are very large parks which are intended to serve several communities or a region. Typically these types of parks are under the jurisdiction of the county, state, or federal government.

Civic Spaces
Size is not the key factor of the typical civic space, but rather the quality of the landscaping and other design features which are more urban in character. Benches, fountains, formal landscaping, and other focal features are common items found in these civic spaces. These spaces are characterized by the frequencies of activity in the space and their propensity to host community gatherings. These spaces may take the form of squares, plazas, or greens (see pages 6.10 and 6.11 for further detail).

Special Use Parks/Facilities
A special use park is typically a space or facility that is developed to satisfy a specific intent or use. These parks may charge entrance fees and be structured with revenue-generating mechanisms and require staff to specifically oversee their operations. Examples include community centers, golf courses, aquatic facilities, stadiums, etc. Special use parks or facilities may be located in conjunction with a community park or a metropolitan park and in some instances a neighborhood park.

Linear Parks and Greenways
Linear parks and greenways are park land that connects larger tracts of open space together. This park land type is intended to promote swaths of green space throughout the city. It is appropriate that this type of park land is home to trails as it provides long stretches of uninterrupted travel.

Undeveloped Park Land
Undeveloped park land is property that has been acquired for future park development or as an open space set-aside. Having this classification of parkland allows for the City to reserve park land to search out partnerships with private sector development, buffer certain land uses, and protect environmentally sensitive areas. This land is set in reserve until funds become available or development patterns trigger its build-out.

Trails and Mobility
A multi-use trail system is an important component of a parks system, but it also serves as a link to improving community wide mobility through providing support to active transportation. The City has over 23 miles of trail system currently in the park system that can be integrated with an overall bicycle and pedestrian planning effort. Multi-use trails provide connections between parks and city residents, as well as providing linkages to other destinations within a community. Long term development of a city-wide trail system should be based upon the recommendations found in a City's Parks Master Plan and its Trails Master Plan.
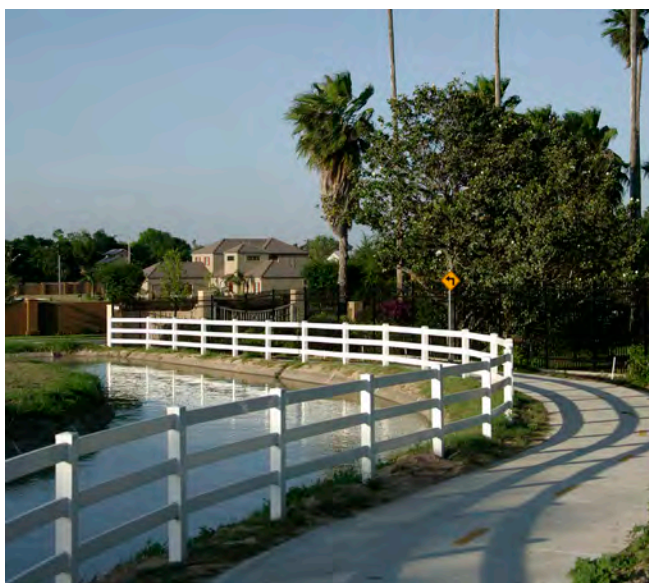
Trail connections into residential areas will be an important part of a Trails Master Plan.

Park Standards
Park standards are an important component to ensuring equity of park and recreation offerings throughout the community. The 2008 Parks Master Plan provides an assessment of the different park classifications and their services area at a district level. This is an example of using park standards as a measure of equity between different parts of the city. Park standards establish levels of service (LOS) based on park acreage, park proximity, and park facility count. Park acreage and park facilities are typically measured in units per 1000 residents. Proximity is measured by distance and/or travel time. Using a travel time measure can assist in accounting for barriers that may impede access. The following table identifies the types of standards applicable to each park classification:

Park Classification	Acreage LOS	Proximity LOS	Facility LOS
Mini Park	No	No	No
Neighborhood Park	Yes	Yes	No
Community Park	Yes	Yes	No
Metropolitan Park	No	No	Yes
Regional Park	No	No	No
Special Use Park/Facility	No	Facility Specific	Yes
Linear Parks and Greenways	No	Yes	Yes
Undeveloped Park Land	Yes	Yes	No

The establishment of each respective LOS is to be done as part of the City's system-wide Parks Master Plan, as that effort provides the level of analysis and community involvement required by such an undertaking.

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Offerings

Sports Complexes

Residents have stated the need for Laredo to better meet the demands of recreational and competitive sports leagues in hosting tournaments. This means the development of sport complexes that have the necessary number of facilities to host the various types of recreation leagues in the community. Recreation league presidents and representatives have stated that both an increase in the number of facilities and improvements to facility types is important, allowing Laredo to be on par with similar communities in Texas.

The location of sports complexes is not expected to be accomplished in a one-size-fits-all park. Residents expressed the desire for sports complexes to be spread around the City. Community members identified the efforts area school districts are making to meet demands of their respective students, but these facilities are not consistently available as they are operated to meet the needs of the school, with the general public being secondary in accommodation, if being accommodated at all.

It was recommended that a number of the older sports fields be redeveloped as parkland because they don't meet the recreation leagues' current needs. Residents expressed growing demands for youth sports, specifically tennis and baseball, but likely other youth sports like soccer, football, and softball will also need to be accommodated as part of new sports complexes.

Landscaping and Trees

Using parks as a means of City beautification was a common theme expressed by many members of the community. The improvements to landscaping and increased presence of trees throughout is seen as a way to make parks more inviting, promoting increased comfort levels while experiencing a park property. It is important to qualify that residents expressed the desire for improvements to landscaping city-wide as a way to beautify the City's appearance along city streets and within private development, specifically identifying parking lot enhancements through applications of xeriscaping (landscaping with little to no water use and maintenance demands).

Public input consistently identified the need to increase the amount of plantings in City park land, focusing on extensive additions of new trees (but not more mesquite trees). Residents expressed their desires that the extent of the tree planting should range in size from saplings to mature trees. This approach would help address a specific concern directed towards the City of, "Why aren't we planting big trees?" Many residents made the connection to protecting existing trees and native landscaping as a means to preserve some of their region's inherent beauty.

A secondary theme of improving the City's appearance included the need to address the affects of litter in public spaces. Suggesting that the causes are part cultural and a lack of waste receptacles. Education programs aimed at changing mindsets and initiatives to reduce litter could help address this concern.

Expanding Trails and Linear Parks

Improving community connectivity through trails was identified by the community as something that City is currently doing that is popular. While the City has seen significant progress in the addition of the trails and linear park, continued emphasis by the City was identified as an important part of future park system development.

Residents would like the trail system to be complimented by bike lanes and other enhancements to the on-street pedestrian and bicycle networks. It is believed this would help increase safe routes to parks as well as connecting parks to other destinations throughout the City. This relates to topics raised in the Health Chapter on the need for increasing the City's walk-ability and accessibility.

Experiences

Parks to Promote Healthier Living

Parks have been identified by community residents as having a beneficial impact on the ability to live a more active and healthy life. Residents identified that parks and community recreation centers are the facilities that host the types of classes and clubs that help people get and stay motivated to be healthy. Residents identified that parks play an important role in providing children, elderly, and economically disadvantaged people the opportunities that help them make those types of lifestyle improvements.

Parks, specifically in more urban environments, can assist in providing increased dietary nutrition through access to fresh produce from community gardens. Community members have identified the desire for community gardens to be located in parks to provide opportunities for residents to be able to grow their own food.

Inclusive Accessible Spaces

Building upon the residents' stated desires for parks to providing opportunities for healthier and active lifestyles, they have also expressed the need for parks to be accommodating of all abilities. Residents are calling for parks to provide specific opportunities for people with special needs and to incorporate accessible principles throughout the park system that makes the parks more inclusive.

The desire for inclusiveness of the parks system has local citizens asking for the City to provide a range of facilities and activities in parks to meet the varying demands of a diverse population. This not only includes a variety of recreational offerings at parks, but asks that these recreational offerings target different age groups and skill levels. This would include providing recreational opportunities for youth that are outside the realm of organized sports, such as skate parks.

Community gardens are a type of addition to a park system that contribute to increases in both healthy living and expanded services to a more diverse group off Laredo residents.

STRATEGIES

Complimenting Land Uses and Public-Private Partnerships

Infill Development Demands

More and more cities are trying to react to market demands for land use regulation that allows for the creation of live-work centers. Developers are trying to maximize the buildout of residential dwelling units and retail, dining, and office space while trying to develop cost effective parking solutions and recoup the investment of the necessary infrastructure to support these live-work development projects. When these developments occur in infill or redevelopment scenarios, the increased up-front cost of these projects makes the utilization all of the existing property a vital necessity.

Cities have the opportunity to complement infill and redevelopment by partnering with developers to find mutually beneficial solutions where the requirements triggered by park land development ordinances can be addressed outside the traditional relationships associated with greenfield development. Simply put, existing nearby parkland may be able to accommodate the needs of these new residents, but upgrades to those park properties will be required to handle the demands of higher population concentrations.

Transfer of Park Land Development Requirements to Existing Parks

A city has the authority to establish the flexibility in its park land dedication and development fee ordinance to meet the emerging development demands of urbanization. The ability to use exactions from redevelopment to retrofit nearby existing park land is appropriate if it can meet the constitutional standard of "rational nexus" through the municipality demonstrating that the park serves residents of the subdivision subject to the exaction.[1]

A city's ability to apply these exactions at a scale

1 Fletcher, J.E., Kaiser, R.A. & Groger, S. (1992). An assessment of the importance and performance of park impact fees in funding park and recreation infrastructure. Journal of Park and Recreation Administration 10(3), 73-87.

larger then neighborhood parks is important to being able to help fund the types of contributions and range of recreational offerings found within community parks and metropolitan parks. The resulting increases in population densities from infill and redevelopment projects will rely on a city's ability to confidently apply these exactions for the access, acquisition and development of larger parks.

"The rational nexus test for parks and recreation can be expanded beyond the neighborhood park to community and regional parks where additional user pressures will occur and additional park and recreation capacity will be needed.[2]"

2 Mertes, J.D. & Hall, J.R. (1995). Park, recreation, open space and greenway guidelines. Ashburn, VA: National Recreation Park Association

Adding parks in urban areas can be complex, such as Klyde Warren Park which capped a freeway and added much need green space to downtown Dallas. These types of park additions are often expensive, but creating flexibility in park land dedication requirements can help provide resources needed to accomplish similar projects.

Proximity Measures

Location, Location, Location

Acreage standards for park development will continue to play an important role in guiding the land acquisition and build-out of a park system. A city would be significantly more successful in meeting recreation demands for access and equity goals by increasing the role proximity standards play in determining locations and need for respective park classifications. Locating future parks of larger acreages in close proximity to land uses that result in higher population density should be a guiding principle for land use decisions. In instances where assembling park land near existing high population areas is not feasible, emphasizing bicycle and pedestrian connection to large tracts of park land should be a priority. Park land proximity evaluations will use level of service standards as metrics for location and population density analysis as a means of quantitative assessments.

Increased Access, Increase Park Offerings

It is not uncommon for Cities to meet the provisions of acreage level of service standards while still possessing a community perception of a lack of park land. While this phenomena can be partly explained by large community or metropolitan parks skewing acreage totals, its more likely explained by parks relying too heavily on motorized transportation as a means of access. Connecting a series of neighborhood parks or a group of subdivisions to a larger community park via an off-street trail will have a positive impact on the perceived prevalence in park land throughout a community. Additionally focusing on safe off-street connections to parks will help improve access for youth and other groups of the population without the means of a personal automobile.

The image above is a Pedestrian Shed Study form the Laredo 2020 plan and it shows a 5 minute walking distance (1/4 miles) from town or neighborhood centers. This is the type of analysis that would depict park proximity measures for park land location analysis.

Maintaining Laredo's Park System

Conservation

Park management practices should hold fast to the concepts of conservation as they promote the highest and best use within reason of affordability and long term feasibility. Proper practices and approaches to storm water runoff reduce flooding, prioritize clean water, and promote wise use of resources. The identification or set aside of park land and open space is complementary to the buildout of a city. Passive recreation activities such as hiking and wildlife viewing brings the conservation of open space into the realm of protecting environmentally sensitive or unique areas that are valued additions to a park system, without the intense maintenance requirements of other recreational choices.

"Conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men."
~ Gifford Pinchot

Increase Native Plantings

The use of native plantings and reclamation approaches have the potential to provide mutually beneficial relationships of lower maintenance costs and opportunities for passive recreation. This approach is geared to providing wildlife viewing opportunities and bucolic aesthetics along walking or biking trails.

Communities are engaging in habitat restoration by casually or directly converting previously unprogrammed land into nature preserves. Nature preserve, or designated natural areas, are now becoming integral components of municipal park systems. Casual restoration of park land into small areas of natural vegetation or wildlife habitat simply refers to allowing the land to remain fallow. As the land repairs itself, non-native invasive grasses, shrubs, and trees, are gradually replaced by native species.

Communicating Beauty

Park systems require the necessary upkeep and care to remain an aesthetic addition to the built environment. They often require an increased approach in public education on the maintenance demands and resource cost to maintain these manicured spaces. Arborist, horticulturists, and turf grass specialist are valued members of a parks system staff and each plays a distinct role in a functional park system. These members of a parks department staff provide the knowledge and expertise to maintain a dynamic and functional park system; they have the potential to provide a valuable role in educating the general public on the demands of a park system.

Outreach efforts geared to the general public about the maintenance practices exercised daily, seasonally, and annually basis can more appropriately align expectations with the realities of maintaining a park system. This can result in communities understanding and anticipating park management practices related to water conservation, the needs of maintaining a healthy and resilient urban forest, and the promotion of year round botanical interest within parks. This is typically accomplished through the posting of informational signs within parks and making educational material available on city websites. These efforts can have the potential to change critics of the park system to informed advocates.

Equity in Parks

Accessibility

The initial development of park properties in the Laredo parks system occurred before the passing of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. These ADA requirements have paved the way for increased consideration and inclusion of accessibility standards in the design of the built environment. Park design has implemented these accessibility principles into design approaches for almost 30 years. Though these principles have become common place, it is still important for the City to be vigilant in the implementation of accessible park and facility design. Manufacturers of play equipment integrate a variety of accessible and inclusive play principles into their products, and the City will have the opportunity to capitalize on this in future additions to all park properties.

Making parks accessible and inclusive is a significant responsibility that cities are assigned. It is important to communicate, educate, and promote these additions to park and park facilities to the general public. Providing a comprehensive listing of park features that contribute to accessibility and promote inclusive play can serve both as a reference tool for local citizens and a measuring stick for the City.

District or Park Zones

The 2008 Parks Master Plan identifies park land and park facility deficiencies at the district level. This approach is important to ensure equal provision of parks and recreation opportunities in each respective part of the community. It is recommended to continue this approach moving forward with the caveat that park districts or park zones be established through an apolitical means. Having park zones deviate from council districts will reduce the potential competition between districts over park funds and facilities. There are components of the park system that are intended to serve the entire community, and it is important for elected officials to work together in their role of implementing these future park additions.

Establishing parks zones based on a combination of factors like population served, maintenance hours required, physical or natural boundaries, and other local considerations may be important to streamlining park development and administration to better serve the community. Whatever is decided, park zones should ultimately be developed to help promote the equitable offering of recreation opportunities and park amenities for residents of Laredo.

Playground facilities have made significant strides in promoting inclusive design concepts. The City should highlight these additions when adding new equipment. Photo courtesy of Play for All, www.playitsafeplaygrounds.com.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Laredo will have an extraordinary parks system that is valued by the communities it serves and one that strives to address the recreational demands of all of Laredo's Citizens.

Park Development

Goal 8.1: Develop future park land and add improvements to the existing park system to meet the needs of the residents of Laredo.

Policy 8.1.1: The City shall strive to create extraordinary parks that express the natural beauty and cultural diversity of Laredo; the City will fund the park system at a level that corresponds to its significance and importance to Laredo residents.

Policy 8.1.2: The City will provide a balanced parks system with a variety of park sizes and facilities, including trails, open spaces, and indoor recreation facilities.

Policy 8.1.3: The city will continue to update, and implement the parks master plan to refine strategies for oversight and development of park land. This plan should meet with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department guidelines to ensure grant fund eligibility. As such, it is recommended that the City continue with the plan structure of a 10 year plan timeframe, with a subsequent 5 year update.

Policy 8.1.4: The City should continue with its park land dedication requirements. The City should routinely review and update regulations as necessary to ensure that park land dedication ordinances complement development impacts.

Policy 8.1.5: Create partnerships for the future success of the park system, involving every governmental entity, the school systems, the county, and the state. Recreational facilities at schools should be integrated into the Laredo parks system for the mutual benefit of schools and the community.

Policy 8.1.6: Formalize any relationships with school districts or other groups where land is being integrated into the park system, as this will strengthen the ability of utilizing grant funding for park improvements.

Policy 8.1.7: Create task forces as part of the next parks planning effort to evaluate and provide recommendations for sports complexes to meet the respective needs for hosting different athletic tournaments.

Policy 8.1.8: Establish mechanisms that allow for the collection of park land development fees for the build-out of metropolitan parks. These can be used to help implement the recommendations found in the Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan, as this is a park that will benefit all residents of the City of Laredo.

Policy 8.1.9: The City should consider the inclusion of a staff landscape architect within the Parks and Leisure Services Department to oversee the design, drainage, and use of parks, park ponds, and drainage facilities throughout the City. The goal of the landscape architect should be parks and park facilities that are artful, recreational, and functional.

Policy 8.1.10: Facilitate the conversion of undeveloped land such as drainage easements, vacant lots, and areas prone to flooding adjacent to both new and existing neighborhoods that lack nearby parks.

Policy 8.1.11: Collaborate with home owner associations to advance the goals and policies of the plan.

Policy 8.1.12: Promote the use of the Rio Grande River for recreation purposes by development of public river access facilities, such as docks and boat ramps.

Park Access

Goal 8.2: Ensure that residents have access to recreational opportunities through the equitable distribution of park land and open space.

Policy 8.2.1: Increase the application of proximity level of service standards for each respective park classification as deemed appropriate.

Policy 8.2.2: Acquire parcels for the assembly of interconnected greenways as a way to increase community access to open space.

Policy 8.2.3: Promote community garden programs as means to increase park offerings in economically disadvantaged areas. This may include acquisition of small tracts of land to accommodate garden plots.

Goal 8.3: Promote parks that provide offerings and accommodations for persons of all ages and abilities.

Policy 8.3.1: Ensure that new park facilities and renovations meet accessibility requirements. Identify ways to include a variety of sensory engagement offerings into park design to make parks more inclusive. Communicate and develop reference materials so the general public is educated on the opportunities that exist.

Policy 8.3.2: Emphasize ways to accommodate park facilities, programs, and recreation opportunities for youth with an emphasis on teens, specifically outside the realm of organized sports. Skateparks are an example of this type of facility.

Policy 8.3.3: Create an aquatic facilities plan to increase the overall access to water based recreation. This includes a strategy to meet any facility levels of service standards for splash parks, community swimming pools, and aquatic centers/water parks.

Policy 8.3.4: Encourage cross department dialogue as a means to promote the use of parks for hosting city and community wide events. With established fee mechanisms, this can create a source of revenue and may encourage visits from residents who don't typically use parks for recreation purposes.

Goal 8.4: Ensure parks are safe and comfortable environments for all park users.

Policy 8.4.1: Continue with the application of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, as identified in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.

Policy 8.4.2: Identify and evaluate potential hazards in the park system. Develop a plan to systematically reduce or remove their threat and review and update annually.

Policy 8.4.3: In upcoming park planning efforts, evaluate the need for increased shade in area parks, as well as the need for system wide lighting standards and an implementation program.

Trails, Linear Parks, and Greenways

Goal 8.5: Increase park connectivity, recreation offerings, and bicycle and pedestrian networks through the development of a Trails Master Plan.

Policy 8.5.1: Develop a Trails Master Plan for the City, including the ETJ as part of the planning area. Work with Webb County to identify opportunities for collaboration.

Policy 8.5.2: The Trails Master Plan should not only connect existing parks and open space to residential areas but be integrated into other bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts. This should encourage and promote connections to key destinations, like schools.

Policy 8.5.3: Modify park land dedication ordinance to include trail system dedication requirements to correspond with the design criteria for shared-use paths.

Policy 8.5.4: Define "proximity" criteria in the trail system dedication requirements for purposes of creating a City Trail System Fund for the implementation of trail projects. Amend development regulations to provide connections to existing and proposed trails found in a Trails Master Plan. Tailor so that a maximum number of Laredo residents have close proximity to parks and trails.

Policy 8.5.6: Adopt design standards for multi-use trails building upon the trail classes established in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.

Maintaining Parks
Goal 8.6:Strive for the efficient use of City resources while promoting aesthetically pleasing and functional parks and park facilities.

Policy 8.6.1: Continually refine maintenance approaches to reflect the current industry-wide best management practices. This includes establishing practices for routine tasks, nutrient management plans, mowing guidelines, integrated pest management, facility upkeep, and landscaping and tree pruning guidelines.

Policy 8.6.2: Identify parks that require a disproportionate amount of hours for maintenance and solicit ways from staff to reduce those demands. This includes looking at parks where only one or two sports fields are located and assessing if they should be repurposed.

Policy 8.6.3: Establish a water conservation program that includes a variety of methods for irrigation reduction, including acreage irrigated reductions and infrastructure that allows for more efficient applications. This may include identifying areas for xeriscape and native plantings in both neighborhood and community parks.

Policy 8.6.4: Promote park maintenance and conservation approaches as part of a community wide education effort. Focus on changing the way citizens view parks as manicured lawns to a more dynamic part of the built environment and natural ecosystem.

Policy 8.6.5: Develop a tree planting program to increase tree diversity geared to creating a more resilient urban forest and larger tree canopy in City parks. A tree planting program should include the addition of larger caliper trees, not just saplings. It would be appropriate to complement this tree planting program with a strategy to   preserve existing trees.

Policy 8.6.6: Identify standards and approaches where park land and other open space can integrate storm water detention facility into a network of green spaces.

Policy 8.6.7: Create multi-faceted strategies for maintaining an increase in smaller and more dispersed parks by requiring the use of lower maintenance native vegetation, more durable materials, and promote the public care and vigilance of the facilites through good urban design which faces home fronts toward neighborhood parks. Restructuring city budget to account for added maintenance should also be considered.

Economic Development

9

eclesiástico¹, -ca *adj* : ecclesiastical, ecclesiastic

eclesiástico² *nm* CLÉRIGO : cleric, clergyman

eclipsar *vt* **1** : to eclipse **2** : to outshine, to surpass

eclipse *nm* : eclipse

eco *nm* : echo

ecografía *nf* : ultrasound scanning

ecología *nf* : ecology

ecológico, -ca *adj* : ecological — **ecológicamente** *adv*

ecologista *nmf* : ecologist, environmentalist

ecólogo, -ga *n* : ecologist

economía *nf* **1** : economy **2** : economics

económicamente *adv* : financially

económico, -ca *adj* : economic, economical

economista *nmf* : economist

economizar {21} *vt* : to save, to economize on — *vi* : to save up, to be frugal

ecosistema *nm* : ecosystem

ecuación *nf, pl* **-ciones** : equation

ecuador *nm* : equator

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Market Assessment

Introduction

In order to better identify the economic development policies Laredo should pursue, it is important to better understand the economic realities and the potential for growth. Salient information on local demographics and economic performance have guided this investigation into Laredo and provide a foundation for assessing the local business climate. The market assessment that follows will identify and discuss local and regional assets that Laredo would be wise to leverage and the current challenges facing the city to support both short and long term economic sustainability.

Current Economic Climate

We begin with a summary of Laredo's current economic climate as a way to understand the economic development potential of the city. To ground our assessment, we have benchmarked Laredo with three cities that serve as either competitors for business relocations or expansions or as targets for future growth (in terms of both quality of life and economy). The benchmarks chosen for this market assessment include El Paso, New Orleans, and San Antonio. For most of the information presented in this section, data points for Texas and US are also provided.

Laredo is the smallest Metropolitan Statistical Area (the area selected for the data points presented in this section, unless otherwise noted) amongst the benchmarks. With nearly one more person per household than the statewide average, Laredo also has the largest household size compared to the benchmarks. Degree attainment is low, with the percentage of residents with a high school degree or above only at 65% and over 10% lower for attainment of bachelor's degrees or higher.

Average Household Size (2014)

Laredo: 3.7
El Paso: 3.2
New Orleans: 2.6
San Antonio: 2.9
Texas: 2.8
US: 2.7

Degree Attainment (2014)

	Percent bachelor's degree or higher	Percent high school graduate or higher
US	30%	87%
Texas	28%	82%
San Antonio	26%	84%
New Orleans	29%	86%
El Paso	21%	76%
Laredo	17%	65%
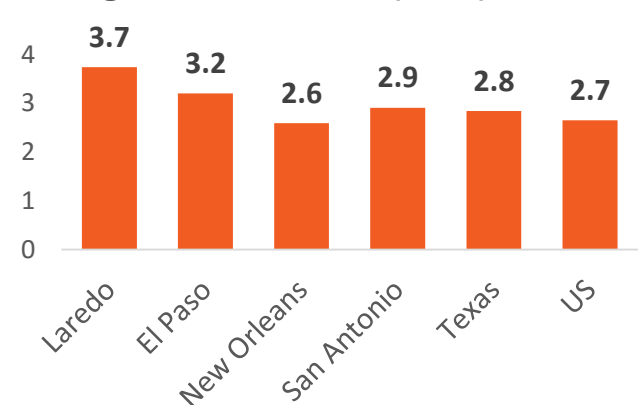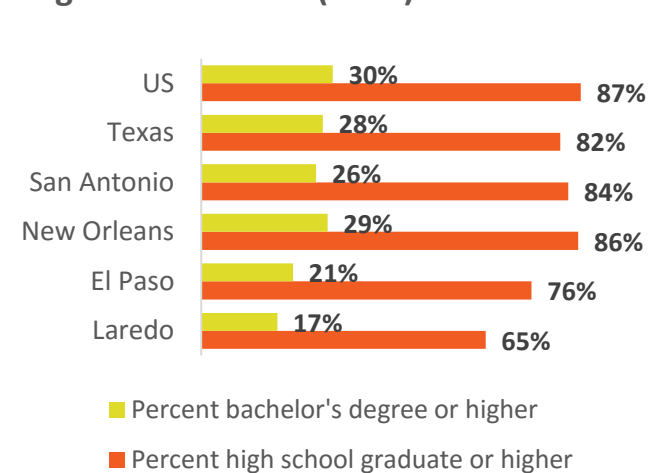
Source: US Census Bureau

While the unemployment rate is lower than most benchmarks, the participation rate is also relatively low. This likely means that many more in Laredo have decided to stop looking for work. Given that the median age is lower than most cities, this participation figure is not likely due to aging workers leaving the labor force early. Labor force participation in Laredo may simply be a product of incomes not being high enough to offset costs of childcare, transportation, or other costs that workers may endure. Thus, it is important for any economic development policy in Laredo to help create good-paying jobs throughout the city and to strive to bring people back into the labor force.

Residents who are foreign born make up 26% of the total population, which is nearly double the national figure. Only about 15% of those residents have entered into the US since 2010. Immigration is an important factor for the economic health of cities. Immigrants are more likely to start businesses than native-born Americans, which can become a greater benefit for Laredo if investment into entrepreneurship is increased.

Median household incomes are the lowest amongst the benchmarks, with El Paso not far off. While the total cost of living in Laredo is relatively low, particularly for housing and transportation, this benefit is truly only felt for individuals or businesses moving to Laredo from more expensive markets. While median rents are nearly $150 less than the state average, lower median incomes can make Laredo an expensive place to live. With an increase in higher-paying jobs and opportunities for skills development, more will be able to see the benefits of relatively low costs of goods and services.

Source: US Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Angelou Economics

Unemployment and Labor Force Participation (2015)

	Unemployment Rate	Labor Force Participation Rate
US	5.3%	63.9%
Texas	4.5%	64.9%
New Orleans	6.8%	63.6%
San Antonio	3.7%	64.7%
El Paso	4.8%	60.4%
Laredo	4.3%	58.2%

- Unemployment Rate
- Labor Force Participation Rate
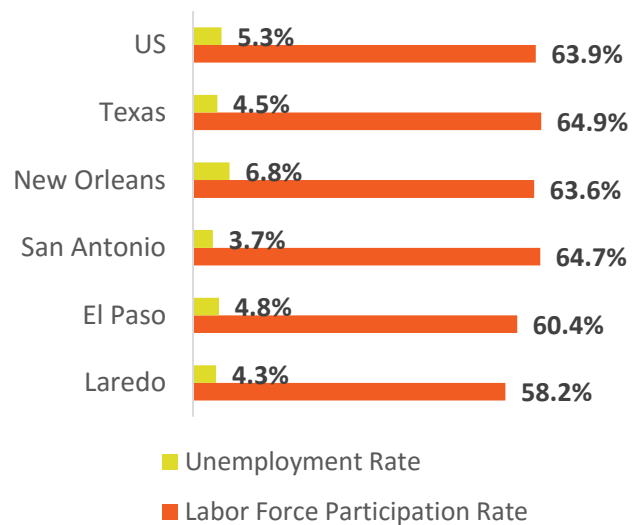
Household Income and Benefits Combined (2014)

	Laredo	El Paso	New Orleans	San Antonio	Texas	US
$150,000 or more						
$75,000 to $149,999	4%	5%	9%	9%	11%	11%
$35,000 to $74,999	19%	18%	23%	25%	25%	25%
$15,000 to $34,999	31%	33%	29%	32%	31%	31%
Less than $14,999	25%	27%	23%	21%	21%	21%
	22%	17%	16%	13%	13%	13%

- Less than $14,999
- $15,000 to $34,999
- $35,000 to $74,999
- $75,000 to $149,999
- $150,000 or more
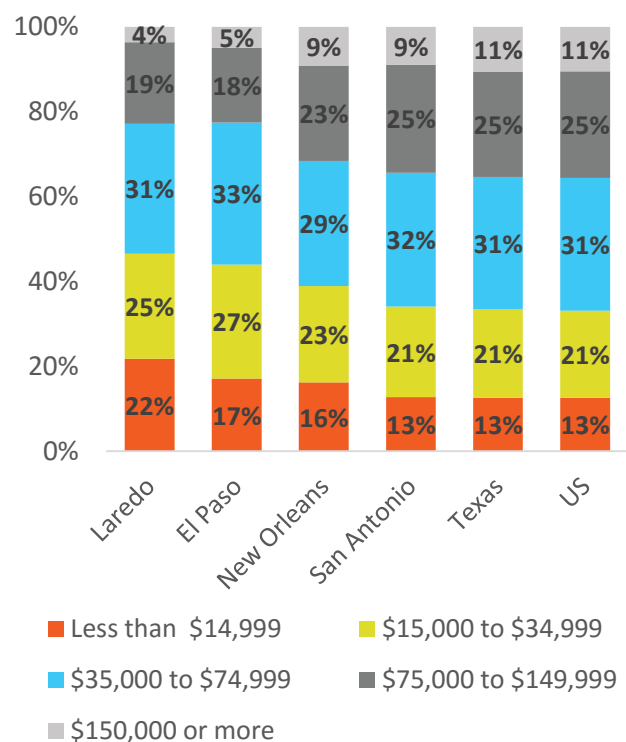
SWOT Analysis

Following the market assessment, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis was performed to better organize our identification of assets and challenges. The items identified in this analysis are found below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Unique culture & history	Aesthetics of the city
Young workforce, one of the youngest large cities in US	Many neighborhoods in the city stricken with poverty
TAMIU & LCC	Informal housing settlements
World-class hub for trade	Poor health outcomes for residents
Potential to support high-growth	Lack of options for entertainment
Architecturally interesting downtown	City not seen as encouraging new development
Proximity to Mexico	City not seen as partner for arts and cultural community
Sufficient green space	No unified vision for economic development or consistent use of tools or incentives
	Lack of vibrant urban core/significant downtown development

Opportunities	Threats
Passionate citizenry for supporting downtown and history	Changes in international trade agreements
Marketing TAMIU's and LCC's low cost of attendance	Other border communities are savvier at using economic development tools
Promoting amenities of Laredo to attract young professionals and families back to their home city	Continued contraction in oil and gas industry
Access to engineering talent in Mexico and US	Increased congestion and wait times at Port of Laredo
Reviving draw for tourists from Mexico and elsewhere in Texas	Economy largely dependent on trade, not diverse
Diversifying port-related activities and leading port innovations	Crime spilling over the border into Laredo
	Retaining graduates and skilled, young workers

Assets to Leverage

World-class hub for Trade

Laredo is at the heart of not only trade between the US and Mexico, but the flow of goods between the US and many Latin American countries. Amongst land-based ports, Laredo has the highest number of border crossings in the US. A significant amount of NAFTA-based trade, 22% of total trade value, passes through the Port of Laredo. Port facilities are world-class, but it is important to keep innovating and increasing efficiencies so that Laredo maintains a competitive edge.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Port of Laredo to the local economy, as many business owners and residents rely on the Port's activity. In the past 10 years, while personal vehicle crossings have declined overall, border crossings by truck have increased by 38%. This has helped the local economy grow. As trade becomes a greater focus of public policy at all levels of government, it is important that Laredo advocates for policies that can keep port activity growing so that other industries continue to grow as well.

Young workforce

Laredo is one of the youngest large cities in the US. This is a benefit for employers looking to hire entry level workers. While Laredo has increased the size of the High School and College-aged population, the city has seen a 1% decrease in young and early professionals (25 to 44) between 2009 and 2014. This may be due to the fact that some young professionals have found greater job availability in other communities.

Unique culture and history

The history and culture of Laredo are unique (its culinary history, artistic community, music, and murals), even within the Texas border region. Outsiders should know more about significant cultural events (like the

Source: US Census Bureau, US Dept of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics

Total Trade Value of Freight by Port (NAFTA)
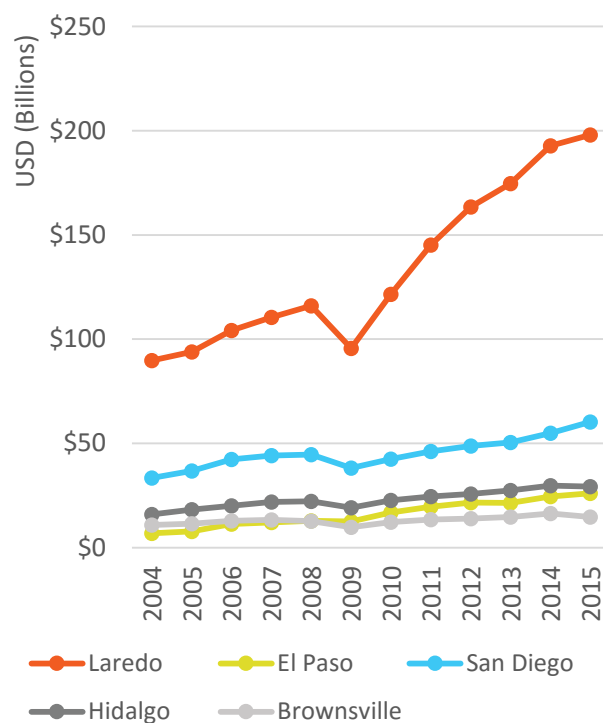
Age Groups - 5 Year growth (2009 to 2014)
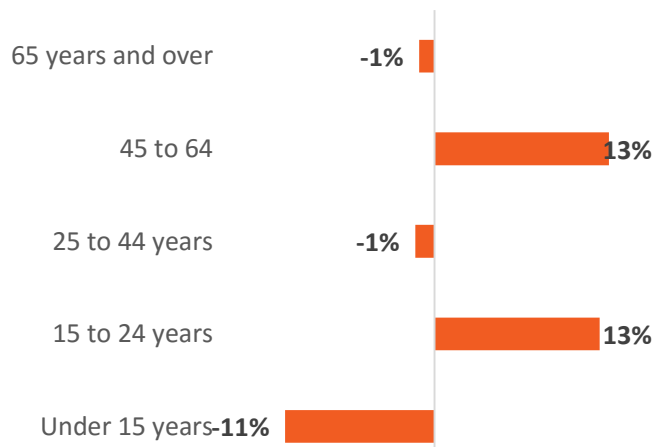
Washington's Birthday Celebration, the Jamboozie Festival, and the Border Olympics) that could draw them to Laredo. These events bring consumer spending to Laredo and help to contribute to the image of Laredo as a vibrant community. Supporting these events and the arts can help to ensure that Laredo has the ability to attract skilled professionals and new businesses.

Architecturally interesting downtown
Downtowns serve as the "face" of a community. Laredo is blessed with a historic city center and buildings that offer a cultural value to the community. Visitors can sense the history of Downtown Laredo and remark at the architectural beauty of some of the buildings. Organizations that preserve Downtown's history and manage the district should be promoted and garner greater support. Doing so can build a greater sense of place for Laredo, which will help Laredo compete for skilled workers, and allow for small businesses to flourish in underutilized areas. Many cities throughout the Texas and the nation have revitalized their downtown districts through local investments and state and federal grants for redevelopment projects. Laredo would be wise to utilize economic development tools such as tax increment financing or business improvement districts that can help to spur redevelopment of downtown.

Parks and green space
Parks and green space can provide benefits to the health of residents. These benefits can help workers be more productive and make the community more attractive to new residents. Laredo has a significant amount of park space, which residents value (as found in the stakeholder engagement process). Among the benchmark communities, Laredo lands near the middle. San Antonio, given the size and wealth of historical sites in the community, has invested in building a sizeable inventory of parks. Given the public support for parks and green space, Laredo should continue to plan for and ensure that these amenities are part of new neighborhoods and redevelopment of existing neighborhoods.

Parks and Green Space		
	Park space (acres)	Acres per 1,000 residents
Laredo	1,035	5.7
El Paso	853	1.0
San Antonio	15,337	6.6
New Orleans	2,000	1.6

Source: Various City Parks, Rec Departments, & NRAPS

Benefits of Commercial Growth & Diversification
Every city depends on taxpayers to provide city services. It is important to keep in mind, however, that having the lowest cost per person is not always the best means to successful economic development. Nor does it necessarily mean that the burden to residents will be low. While Laredo's cost of government per capita is higher than El Paso, it is substantially lower than the two larger benchmark cities. These cities, however, have a greater commercial tax base which can offset costs to residents. Greater expansion of the commercial sector will bring in additional property tax revenues, lowering the property tax burden for residents and allowing revenues to contribute to greater quality of life amenities. It is important that the City view the benefits of commercial growth as an asset to make Laredo a better place to live and work.

Cost of Government		
	General Revenue Fund (FY 2016)	Cost of Government per capita
Laredo	$177 M	$723
El Paso	$369 M	$550
San Antonio	$2.2 B	$1,603
New Orleans	$602 M	$1,633

Source: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, US Census

Challenges to Overcome

Poverty

Poverty is a challenge for Laredo that has implications for the City's ability to attract and retain businesses. Impoverished communities become and stay economically disadvantaged because of a lack of investment in building financial and social capital. In turn, this leads to a lack of opportunities for skills development and job access. Economic development policies should focus on bringing in good-paying jobs and supporting programs that allow more of Laredo's residents to contribute to the economic successes of the city. Supporting job retraining programs is essential, as well as utilizing federal and statewide grant programs in targeted areas of Laredo.

Poor health outcomes

The rate of residents without health insurance is higher than many other places in Texas, which is among the states with the highest percentage of uninsured residents. One of the results of a high uninsured population is that health outcomes will be worse overall. Nearly every type of negative health factor has higher incidence in Webb County. As the chart to the right indicates, residents see about 1.5 more "poor physical health days" over a 30 day timespan compared to statewide average, which results in a less productive workforce. Expanding access to health insurance and promoting healthy habits through employers can begin to help make progress on this issue.

Months Income is Below the Poverty Level (2014)

- ■ All families
- ■ All families with related children under 18 years
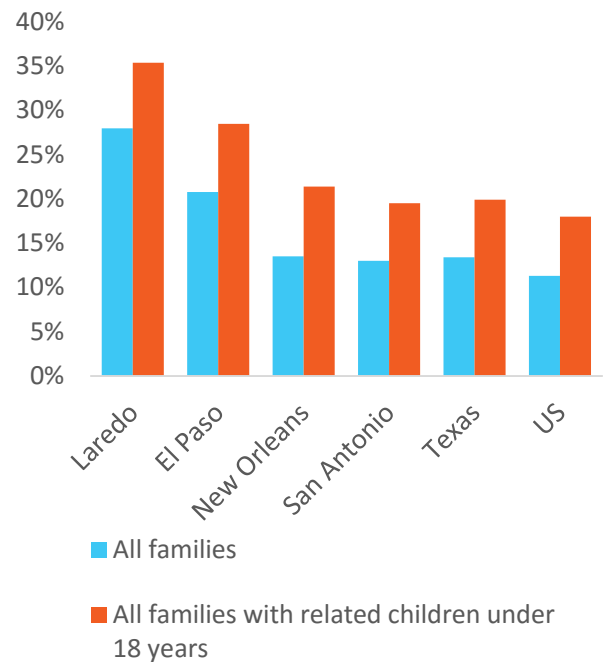
Poor Physical and Mental Health Days in Past 30 Days (2016)
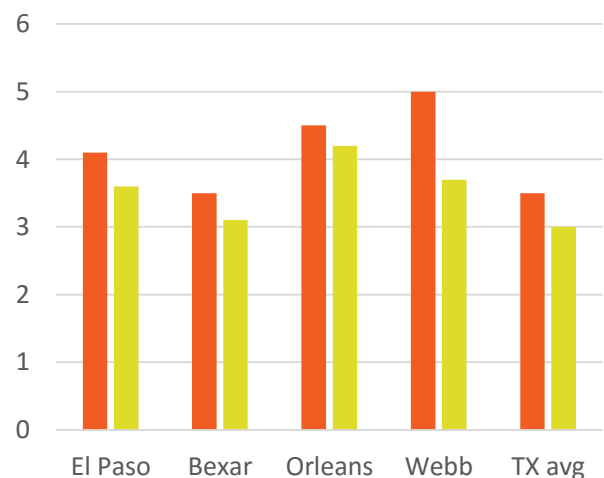
Source: US Census, County Health Rankings

Encouraging new development
Encouraging the development of new businesses is a strong motivating force for economic developers. In a basic sense, cities can help by lowering barriers to starting a business or expanding existing operations. Business incentives, either as qualified tax abatements, grants, or exemptions of certain requirements (such as parking spaces or permitting fees) are one way to encourage new development, but the satisfaction of existing businesses can also play a large role in how successful a city is at growing its economy. In the online questionnaire, only four business respondents reported receiving any sort of economic development incentives from the city and just around 30% reported that they would not recommend Laredo as a place to do business. This sentiment is a clear indication that Laredo should find new solutions to helping the business sector grow. It is key that the economic development strategy for Laredo and this comprehensive plan are used to institute sound and proven tools for business attraction, expansion, and retention.

Consistent economic development policy
Economic development incentives and activities by the City have lacked consistency, due to fact that they have historically not been a well funded or staffed priorities for Laredo. Overall, the business community has voiced support for greater and more consistent use of incentives. The strategy that follows offers guidelines for specific incentives policies that Laredo can use, but, more than anything else, it is important to have a clear and well-communicated policy on how business can apply for the incentives that the City offers.

What are the primary challenges facing your business?

Challenge	
Skills shortage	~43
Available talent pool	~40
Lack of coordination between development efforts and government	~36
Resources for business support	~34
Taxes	~33
Lack of market demand or client base	~31
Infrastructure	~26
Broadband internet connectivity	~17
Access to capital	~15
Wait times to pass through Laredo ports of entry	~14
Supply chain deficiencies	~3

Source: AngelouEconomics

Target Industry Analysis

While it is the goal of economic development to grow all industries that are able to do so, it is important to focus attraction, retention, and expansion efforts on a set group of targeted industries that have the best chance for growth and the best return on investment for the community. Targeting industries also provides a clear message for marketing to site selectors about how supportive local policymakers are for those industries and to how well their strategic planning efforts align with the needs of businesses within those industries.

The process of selecting targeted industries for Laredo begins with an identification of local clusters, followed by a review of national and regional employment trends, a look into assets that may support industry expansion, and how well each industry aligns with the community's goals.

Following the description of the selection process is a discussion of the rationale for choosing each industry, a presentation of relevant industry data, and a score card determining overall competitiveness.

Selection Process

Step 1: Identifying Local Clusters
It is first important to understand the geographic patterns of Laredo's economy. Laredo's US-based workforce is largely commuting within the City. However, the workforce that resides in Nuevo Laredo is sizeable. On an average day, just under 40,000 individuals cross the border into Laredo. Each of the sectors shown to the right are impacted by these flows.

Sector	2015 Employment	LQ
Resource Extraction	2,424	4.61
Transportation & Warehousing	13,162	3.69
Education	12,648	1.47
Retail Trade	14,270	1.20
Health Care	15,235	1.08
Accommodation & Food	9,765	1.07
Business Support Services	5,527	0.89
Wholesale Trade	3,005	0.73
Finance & Insurance	2,889	0.72
Real Estate	939	0.63

Location Quotient (LQ)
A calculated ratio between the local economy and the national economy that indicates industry concentration.
LQ = 1.0 indicates average concentration
LQ > 2.0 indicates a strong cluster
LQ < 0.5 indicates a weak cluster

Step 2: Measuring Opportunities for Growth
Sizeable clusters that experience national growth are displayed in the top right quadrant, as is displayed on the following page. Transportation & Warehousing, Resource Extraction, Health Care, and Education stand out from the pack as sizeable sectors of the economy that have seen national growth.

Step 3: Cataloging the Regional Asset Base
Regional assets support the expansion of certain industries through their ability to lower costs for businesses, develop and attract skilled workers, offer profitable markets for companies to participate in, or connect businesses to a broader range of ideas, suppliers, or other resources. The list to the right is a high-level summary of the major industry assets found in Laredo.

Step 4: Aligning with the Community Vision
Finally, the goals expressed by community members throughout the stakeholder engagement process, along with the overarching goals developed for this economic development plan also factor into the target industry selection process.

The recommended target industries identified through this process are presented on the following page. Underneath each major industry is a set of niches that may provide significant focus for Laredo's economic development team. These selected target industries will drive promotion efforts and use of business incentives.

Competitive Industry Assets

- World-class hub for trade
- TAMIU, LCC, & UT Health and Sci. Center
- Large and young market & workforce
- Access to engineering talent in Mexico & US
- Potential to support high growth
- Low cost of living

Webb County Clusters

Strong Locally,
Shrinking Nationally

Strong Locally,
Growing Nationally

Bubble size = County
Employment

Resource Extraction

Transportation & Warehousing

Webb County LQ

Education

Business Support Services

Entertainment

Accommodation & Food

Retail Trade

Health Care

Finance & Insurance

Construction

Manufacturing

Agriculture

Management

Information

Professional Services

Utilities

Personal Services & Organizations

Wholesale Trade

Real Estate

6.00
5.00
4.00
3.00
2.00
1.00
0.00
-1.00

-30%   -20%   -10%   0%   10%   20%   30%   40%   50%

Weak Locally,
Shrinking Nationally

US 10 Year Employment Growth (2005-2015)

Weak Locally,
Growing Nationally

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

Economic Development Activities	Health Care	Trade & Adv. Logistics	Tourism & Retail	Business & Ed. Services
Core Targets • Retention • Expansion	Home Health Services	Transportation Services	Traditional Retailers	Oil & Gas Services
	Specialized Services	General Warehousing		Legal Services
Diversification Targets • Attraction • Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development	Vocational Assistance Services	Innovative Freight Technologies	Applied, Performing, & Culinary Arts	Design Services
			Boutique Hotels	Shared Services
Emerging Targets • Expansion • Attraction • Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development	Elderly Health Services	Logistics Consulting	Destination Retail	Engineering Services
	Outpatient Care Centers		Cultural & Heritage Tourism	Computer Programming
				Aircraft Maintenance & Repair

Target Industry Analysis - Health Care
Rationale
Health Care not only includes ambulatory health services and hospitals, but elderly care and social assistance services. Within the last few years there has been a significant increase in employment in Webb County. Business establishments, however, have remained steady.

The niches within the Health Care have been identified due to the assets and needs of the community. Within **home health services**, new technologies continue to change how patients receive care and how health care professionals monitor their well-being. **Specialized services** and **outpatient care centers** have seen significant local growth, and should continue to do so as more individuals gain access to health insurance. **Vocational assistance providers** may help to connect residents to retraining programs and other information to get them back in the labor force.

Webb County Snapshot
2015 Employees: 14,100
2015 Total Payroll: $407 M
2015 Establishments: 522

Industry Criteria:
☑ Access to sizeable market
☐ Existing medical industry presence
☑ Skilled workforce
☑ Proximity to colleges and universities
☐ Proximity to research institutions

Areas of Growth				
Industry Component	**Webb County 5 yr**	**Webb County 10 yr**	**US 5 yr**	**US 10 yr**
Ambulatory Health Care Services	X	X	X	X
Hospitals	ND	ND	X	X
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	ND	ND	X	X
Social Assistance	X	X	X	X

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, AngelouEconomics; ND = No data available

Industry Scorecard

Competitive Analysis					
Assessment Rationale	**Community Factor**	**Leading**	**Strong**	**Lacking**	**Weak**
• Support from educational institution on building talent pipeline	Workforce		●		
• Ample sites for industry development	Land Availability		●		
• Infrastructure and capacity to support industry in place	Utilities		●		
• Local institutions understand needs for industry	Public Policy Support		●		
• Activity currently limited	Research & Development Assets			●	
• Analysis shows Laredo less competitive on wages and building costs	Cost Factors			●	

Target Industry Analysis - Trade & Advanced Logistics

Rationale

Trade and Advanced Logistics is a significant piece of Laredo's economy. After a considerable dip during the Great Recession, employment rebounded and showed sizeable growth from 2014 to 2015. A similar trend appears in business establishments.

The key to niche development for this industry is to realize potential through staying ahead and encouraging innovation. The need for **warehousing** continues to rise, and expansion in this niche is vital to meeting demand. Attracting the most **innovative freight technology** companies can ensure that other border ports don't make significant inroads to the detriment of Laredo. Finally, **consulting services in logistics** will continue to see expansion as the market for goods in the US grows.

Webb County Snapshot*
2015 Employees: 13,500
2015 Total Payroll: $505 M
2015 Establishments: 1,000

Industry Criteria:
- ☑ Skilled workforce
- ☑ Proximity to interstate highways
- ☐ Availability of low cost land
- ☑ Low utility and labor costs
- ☑ Public policy support

Areas of Growth				
Industry Component	**Webb County 5 yr**	**Webb County 10 yr**	**US 5 yr**	**US 10 yr**
Truck Transportation	X	X	X	X
Other Transportation	X	X	X	
Support Activities for Transportation	X	X	X	X
Warehousing and Storage	X	X	X	X
Commodity Contracts & Trade Financing	X	X	X	X

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, AngelouEconomics; ND = No data available

Industry Scorecard

Competitive Analysis					
Assessment Rationale	**Community Factor**	**Leading**	**Strong**	**Lacking**	**Weak**
• Strong, experienced workforce • Greater private sector ties to educational institutions can show more students the industry's opportunities	Workforce	●			
• Demand for warehouse space growing at faster rate than supply	Land Availability			●	
• Sufficient capacity and infrastructure in place	Utilities		●		
• Public policies support industry expansion, but greater cooperation between City and industry groups will help to keep Laredo competitive	Public Policy Support		●		
• Institutions in place, but greater support and funding can lead to greater returns	Research & Development Assets			●	
• Significant savings in wages and property taxes seen in capital intensive segments of the industry	Cost Factors		●		

Target Industry Analysis - Tourism & Retail

Rationale

Tourism & Retail can become a high growth industry if continued support is given to small business owners and redevelopment projects and if current market conditions remain stable. Recent trends suggest slower pace of growth, but still above 2% annually. Tourism and Retail business establishments have seen considerably more erratic growth, yet are now at their highest.

Revitalization of Downtown Laredo can have massive benefits for this industry, but retailers, entertainment venues, and hotels will need to be attracted in the near term to support revitalization efforts. **Performing arts** is a niche identified by many residents as particularly important for future growth. Attracting this niche requires affordable, but walkable neighborhoods, and organizational support. **Destination retail** are shops that offer unique or artisanal goods. These retailers can compliment other local tourist activities. Similarly, target **restaurants** that promote the culinary identity of Laredo.

Webb County Snapshot
2015 Employees: 23,600
2015 Total Payroll: $488 M
2015 Establishments: 1,200

Industry Criteria:

☑ Dependable workforce

☑ Natural, historic, and cultural assets

☑ Accessibility

☐ Hotel space

☑ Low business costs

☑ Growing local market

Areas of Growth				
Industry Component	Webb County 5 yr	Webb County 10 yr	US 5 yr	US 10 yr
Retailers	X	X	X	X
Arts, Culture, and Recreation	X	X	X	X
Accommodation	X	X	X	X
Food Services & Drinking Places	X	X	X	X

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, AngelouEconomics; ND = No data available

Industry Scorecard

Competitive Analysis					
Assessment Rationale	**Community Factor**	**Leading**	**Strong**	**Lacking**	**Weak**
• Some employers report a lack of soft skills, but overall few concerns about local competitiveness	Workforce			●	
• Meets needs for new development, but infill development sites may need additional public support to become feasible	Land Availability		●		
• Meets industry demands	Utilities		●		
• Greater support needed for artists, artisans, and culinary businesses throughout the community	Public Policy Support			●	

**Target Industry Analysis -
Business & Educational Services**

Rationale

Business and Educational Services encompass a large sector of the economy in terms of the scope of the industries' activities, but occupy a relatively small corner of Laredo's economy. Many of these companies are small businesses and rely heavily on the specialization of the employees for success. Some unreliable data has lead to employment appearing more volatile than what the industry is likely seeing. Using the establishment's figure, growth has been steady, but significant.

Although the oil & gas industry has seen recent declines statewide, there will continue to be need for **oilfield service** companies in the Eagle-Ford-Shale region. **Software development** and **creative arts** are two industries that residents of Laredo highlighted for business attraction. **Design services** and **computer programming** can help support these sectors of the economy. **Engineering and legal services** compliment businesses found in the Trade & Adv. Logistics target industry. Finally, the infrastructure is in place for attraction of the **aircraft maintenance and repair** industry.

Webb County Snapshot
2015 Employees: 2,500
2015 Total Payroll: $77 M
2015 Establishments: 210

Industry Criteria:
- ☐ Skilled workforce
- ☑ Proximity to client businesses
- ☑ Small business support
- ☐ Telecommunications infrastructure
- ☑ Proximity to colleges and universities
- ☐ Business incubator or accelerators

Areas of Growth				
Industry Component	Webb County 5 yr	Webb County 10 yr	US 5 yr	US 10 yr
Computer Design	X	X	X	X
Business Services	X	X	X	X
Legal & Financial	X	X	X	
Education Services	X	X	X	X
Other Professional & Technical Services	X	X	X	X

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, AngelouEconomics; ND = No data available

Industry Scorecard

Competitive Analysis					
Assessment Rationale	**Community Factor**	**Leading**	**Strong**	**Lacking**	**Weak**
• Keeping talented young professionals is a hurdle identified by numerous stakeholders	Workforce			●	
• As with Tourism & Retail, policies that support redevelopment downtown will allow for greater competitiveness	Land Availability		●		
• Meets the needs for this industry	Utilities		●		
• Programs supporting entrepreneurs and small businesses could help to make Laredo more competitive	Public Policy Support			●	
• Some institutional support for related activities, but lacking capacity for innovation	Research & Development Assets			●	
• While local wages offer cost savings, real estate prices are less competitive for office space	Cost Factors		●		

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Stakeholder Engagement

Introduction

Any good planning process involves engaging local residents and providing them with a means for voicing their ideas and opinions. For economic development planning, it is important to understand not only how residents view the current state of the economy and governance, but to describe their aspirations for the local economy. The process of engaging stakeholders in Laredo included both a survey of the current conditions and a visioning exercise on the city's potential. Online questionnaires received 830 responses to a survey of residents and just under 170 responses to a survey of businesses. One on one interviews and focus groups engaged over 120 stakeholders as well.

Resident Survey Feedback

Online respondents skewed older and more educated than Laredo's populace. Whereas the median age in Laredo is 28 years, nearly 60% of respondents were 35 or older. While 60% of Laredoans have no more than a high school degree, over 90% of respondents reported having some college experience or professional degree.

The table below displays respondent feedback on important quality of life and economic development issues. Respondents were asked to, first, measure the importance of each factor and, second, to rate the city's performance on each. Public schools, jobs, and parks and recreation are the most important factors according to respondents. The city's aesthetics, infrastructure, and available jobs had the widest gaps between importance and satisfaction.

Resident Comparison of Importance vs. Satisfaction		
Importance (1 - 5)	Satisfaction (1 - 5)	Difference
Quality of public schools	4.8	2.86	1.94
Available jobs	4.67	2.45	2.22
Parks and rec	4.65	2.6	2.05
Affordable healthcare	4.62	2.45	2.17
Aesthetics	4.61	2.3	2.31
Cost of living	4.6	2.45	2.15
Infrastructure	4.56	2.28	2.28
Affordable housing	4.51	2.33	2.18
Creative and cultural arts	4.41	2.34	2.07
Employee compensation	4.38	2.5	1.88

Business Survey Feedback

Professional services, Retail, Creative Arts, and Entertainment were the among the most common industries respondents represented. Just under two-thirds employ under ten workers. 43% of respondents have been in business in Laredo for 25 or more years.

The table below displays business survey respondents feedback on a similar list of quality of life and economic development issues. Access to customers, ability to attract and retain skilled employees, and quality of life are the most important factors to businesses. In general, the gaps between their measure of importance and satisfaction are smaller than for residents. Ability to attract and retain skilled employees saw the widest gap by far and received the lowest average satisfaction rating.

Summary

There are a few common themes that both the online questionnaires and focus groups and interviews identified. Those include the desire for increasing the opportunities for a quality education and promoting skills development, along with the desire to use economic development principles to help increase the quality of life and job opportunities in Laredo.

As mentioned, the information gathered through this process has allowed for a more pointed investigation of Laredo's economic development potential and the identification of targeted industries.

Business Comparison of Importance vs. Satisfaction			
	Importance (1 - 5)	Satisfaction (1 - 5)	Difference
Access to customers	4.52	2.8	1.72
Ability to attract and retain skilled employees	4.22	2.03	2.19
Quality of life	4.18	2.49	1.69
Quality of public schools	4.05	2.7	1.35
Entrepreneurial environment	4.04	2.42	1.62
Utilities and infrastructure	4.04	2.41	1.63
Community appearance	3.99	2.35	1.64
Operating costs	3.95	2.74	1.21
Cost of living	3.91	2.38	1.53
Broadband internet connectivity	3.9	2.63	1.27

STRATEGIES

Increasing the Capacity for Economic Development

The market assessment and target industry analysis pinpoint the assets, challenges, and markets for growth for Laredo. It is clear that Laredo has strengths and assets that can help build greater industry diversification and help to increase access to good-paying jobs. This includes the local education institutions (TAMIU and LCC), the Port of Laredo and the business and activity that it brings, a young workforce, and the unique culture and history of the city.

As for challenges, they are clear as well. Poverty, health, and the lack of economic development planning in the past have the potential to hinder progress to industry expansion. These challenges can be overcome, however, through a community-wide effort to support the cause of economic development and through the City's commitment to utilizing economic development tools that can help attract a diverse set of businesses and build a greater capacity for entrepreneurship.

The recommendations that follow need to be supported not just by the City of Laredo and the economic development community, but by civic groups, educational institutions, business leaders, and individuals passionate about the betterment of their city. Each step will require collaboration, local expertise, and support to be accomplished. Building an engaged coalition for this economic development strategy is of upmost importance to achieve these goals.

Strategies
- Proactive Economic Development
- Promote Regional Cooperation
- Spur Entrepreneurship
- Cultivate a Vibrant Community

Proactive Economic Development

Proactive economic development is a long term investment in the community. It is best achieved when professionals, tasked with supporting existing businesses and pursing new ones, find ways to strengthen local human capital and institutions. In this capacity, Laredo has many assets to put economic development as a top priority. Local educational institutions, trade and business groups, and community pride can be better utilized for the ends of economic development.

The following policies can serve as a means to develop a sustained economic development culture in the city. This can be led by both a new Economic Development Liaison working for the City of Laredo and through a commitment to fully funding and staffing the Laredo Development Foundation. These are the steps that will allow Laredo to better compete for new businesses and utilize tools that other cities in Texas and throughout the US have found effective.

An update to this economic development strategy should be pursued within 5 to 6 years after adoption of the plan. Continuing to undertake this exercise is vital to the economic sustainability of Laredo. Ongoing and formal review of the progress made toward the goals of economic development is also key.

Provide increased funding and sustain support for economic development activities
To sufficiently support economic development activities, and to follow through on the recommendations included in this document, the City of Laredo and the private sector should contribute more financially to ensure that the potential for job growth is not limited.

This is why it is recommended that Laredo hire an Economic Development Liaison to help new business prospects navigate through all necessary approvals

and requirements. The City of Laredo should provide sufficient and sustained funding for a team of economic developers at the Laredo Development Foundation, while continuing to engage the private sector to invest in economic development and planning for the creation of a 4B corporation, as outlined in Laredo's Economic Development Strategy.

Staffing is a key part of ensuring that investments into economic development are effective. The International Economic Development Corporation (IEDC) and CDFA (Council of Development Finance Agencies) are two professional organizations dedicated to economic development that can offer access to talent and training.

A city's ability to attract new industries can be transformed by supporting a team of skilled economic development professionals and providing them with the necessary tools to incentivize development and investment. This team can not only help to attract and retain jobs, but build bonds between local institutions and leaders to create policies that build a better business climate. Supporting these efforts is not a one-time investment, but a continued and responsive investment directly tied to the capacity of the community to build a sustainable economy.

Business incentives for expansions and relocations, and other investments in commercial and residential development, should be guided through a transparent and well-communicated framework that specifies how to qualify and the City agencies that are responsible for review of such developments. The City of Laredo should work with Webb County to ensure that both jurisdictions utilize a consistent approach to providing tax incentives.

Property tax abatements are one key tool that the City can offer to spur development and expansion for new and existing companies. To become more competitive, tax abatement should be offered for a 10 year term, instead of 5 years. Job creation requirements for projects should also be lowered to the following:

Example Property Tax Abatement Policy	
New Full Time Jobs	Percentage of property tax abatement (for 5 year term)
25 to 50	25%
51 to 100	50%
101 to 200	75%
Over 200	100%

Additionally, projects should also be able to qualify for an additional year of abatement if they offer wages at 110% of the industry average. This can help to incentivize employers to increase wages. Finally, additional years can also added for projects that are developed in designated areas of the city, such as commercial centers in lower-income neighborhoods and portions of downtown.

Tax-Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZs), a statewide tax-increment financing tool, allows for the use of additional property tax revenues to be used for public improvements. In some areas of Laredo, additional development of public infrastructure is needed and would help to stimulate growth. Consider implementing these zones to incentivize commercial and residential development. The decision to utilize this tool should be made on the merits of each project and instituted in a consistent manner, while also meeting with the vision and goals outlined in this comprehensive plan.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) or Public Improvement Districts (PIDs) are special purpose districts that levy property taxes to provide for infrastructure improvements and city services in a given area. Many downtown, Main Street, or neighborhoods throughout Texas utilize PIDs to promote economic development and livability. Laredo should consider creating these districts in Downtown and in central city neighborhoods to promote development and job expansion.

Take Care of Local Businesses

The local businesses that currently call Laredo home are one of the greatest assets that city has to furthering local job growth. Understanding how to enable them to realize their potential for expansion and additional investment is key.

The economic development team should survey business owners and managers to understand their short and long term outlooks, the obstacles for their growth, and their utilization of local business support services. The broad findings of these surveys can be communicated to the local community to get a sense of the local business climate.

It is important to not only survey businesses, but to identify the challenges that these businesses see and look for ways to improve policies that can mitigate them. Working with local institutions and community groups can help Laredo be better able to find solutions.

Apart from surveys, visiting local employers can show that the community is committed to their success. Local officials and economic developers should be involved to support these efforts.

Lastly, it is often that local real estate developers and business owners express frustration with the permitting and approval process in their community. The best way to address this issue is for City staff to host semi-annual meetings with the development community to explain the development process and any recent changes, to answer questions, and be responsive to any issues brought to light.

Bring Business and Institutions Together to Support Target Industry Cluster Development

Developing industry clusters is best promoted by engaging business and institutions to work together. This is not simply a task for an economic development team, but for the community as a whole. When properly communicated, promotion of Laredo's target industries and niche sectors serve as guides for site location consultants looking to Laredo for development projects. They also serve as a way to organize efforts within the community to get the public and private sector to collaborate on cluster development.

A task force composed of industry leaders, academics specializing in related fields, and workforce developers can offer guidance to the City and the economic development team on the best ways to address broader issues impacting cluster development. This group can meet on a quarterly basis to assess progress and develop new strategies for success.

Enhancing workforce development efforts can also embolden cluster development. Twice a year the economic development team can bring together workforce development professionals and interested business owners to bring more awareness to the programs offered for workforce development. This event and more consistent communications on these programs can encourage businesses to take advantage of them.

Having a strong pipeline of skilled workers is important for both existing and prospective businesses. Working within the Trade & Advanced Logistics industry can offer workers a stable and rewarding career, yet many in Laredo's schools do not clearly see the degree path to this career or how they can earn advanced degrees or certifications to provide for them increased economic mobility. This is why a "seamless" degree program, that shows students a clear degree path and career outcomes and that ensures transfer of course credits between institutions, can attract additional workers to the Trade & Advanced Logistics industry.

Educational institutions, employers, and workforce development professionals should come together to better understand the skills that are needed for various in-demand or hard to fill positions. Once these skills are determined, educational institutions should work to build training programs or coursework to existing or new degree tracks. Collaboration between high schools, community colleges, and universities is necessary to ensure that students can meet the outcomes needed for industry or continuing education. Finally, marketing each program so that high school students, or students at any point on their path to a degree, can see a clear path to a job in the industry will be needed to ensure success.

Market Laredo's Strengths and Assets

Marketing Laredo is a key aspect of proactive economic development. Site selectors and business owners need to know not only about the benefits of locating in the city, but to understand the significance of the economic activity within the city, the assets Laredo can offer to developing their business, and the strengths of the community.

Participating in these sort of conferences, namely hosted by the IEDC and Site Selector's Guild, can allow the economic development team to raise the city's status in the economic development community and put themselves in front of potential projects. Similarly, trade shows and conferences can help to build networks within the target industries. While not all companies attending will be looking to expand or relocate, they can help to increase the recognition and understanding of Laredo's appeal to businesses. A full Laredo Economic Development Strategy includes a selection of these conferences.

Teams of local businesses and local officials can offer testimonials to the appeal of Laredo's business climate when meeting with companies in other markets. A short guide to conducting these tours is found below.

An informative economic development website describing local assets, target industries, and available real estate should be created. Some of the best examples of an economic development website include the Charleston Regional Development

Best Practice
Conduct Marketing Tours
➢ Identify industries and geographic areas to target
➢ Develop tour marketing collateral
➢ Build a team of private industry leaders, government officials and university leaders to attend tours
➢ Select tour dates
➢ Arrange meetings
➢ Post visit follow up & thank you
➢ Add tour contacts to newsletter distribution list
➢ Follow-up periodically by phone
➢ Invite top potential contacts to FAM (familiarization) visit

Alliance (www.crda.org) and GO Topeka (www.gotopeka.com). These sites offer a clear guide to site selectors on what industries have been able to prosper in the region and what they are looking to help grow through available incentives, along with images of available sites and buildings. The ability to have visitors sign up for a community newsletter focused on economic development is also a good way to market to site selectors and business owners.

Finally, a strategy for proactive economic development in Laredo will be best served by reviewing progress on each of these recommended initiatives and updating the community of the successes for economic development and the work that still needs to be done to reach the goals set out in this chapter. An annual "Scorecard" event can be held to grade the progress of the community to spur a more sustained push toward implementation.

Promote Regional Cooperation

Economies operate in a larger scale than the jurisdictions set for them. Laredo, and the surrounding region, understands this better than most places, given the importance of international trade to the local economy. Yet, Laredo has not built considerable structures of cooperation on a regional scale with Nuevo Laredo.

It is up to both communities to better understand the economic linkages between the two cities, build relationships between community groups, and advocate as a region to their respective state and federal governments.

Formalize Relationship with Nuevo Laredo on Economic Development

To cement a lasting regional partnership, a more formal economic development relationship with Nuevo Laredo should be pursued. A local leadership group can fill this role. The group should be made up of representatives from both cities. While each city may have slightly different priorities for local development, regional priorities can be identified that tackle regional issues, such as workforce, education, and cluster development.

Marketing as a region is essential in economic development today. It provides a more comprehensive look at the true economic development capacity of an area and indicates forward-thinking planning. Laredo and Nuevo Laredo should begin to develop a regional marketing plan that highlights the strengths and assets of each community. Jointly marketing to companies in other cities will show a greater dedication to regional economic development and offer connections to a wider variety of businesses.

Data is key to understanding the true state of the regional economy. Communities that span national borders tend to have a tough time providing regional data given the impediments of differences in collection methods and a lack of organized efforts to collect this information in the first place. Undertaking the building of a database of regional business indicators should be pursued with academic institutions in both cities, but TAMIU can be the catalyst for this effort.

Advocate as a Region to State and Federal Governments

Advocacy efforts to state and federal governments can also promote regionalism by supporting projects and initiatives that tackle regional economic development.

Various groups already exist to advocate for economic development issues with local priorities in mind, including the Laredo Development Foundation, Laredo-Webb County Regional Mobility Authority, along with the City and County leadership. Pursuing regional priorities for advocacy can help to strengthen regional ties. Coordinating economic development efforts is the first step to begin a campaign for regional issues.

Lastly, one key way to promote regional cooperation is through grassroots efforts in conjunction with community organizations. Not only should the leadership, advocacy groups, and economic developers be thinking on a regional level, but so should residents. This "bottom-up" approach to regionalism can help apply needed pressure for community leaders to stay committed to regional cooperation and a healthier regional economy. The Laredo Development Foundation and City should inform community groups about the issues they are advocating for, such as infrastructure improvements, and push for a greater understanding of the policies that can help progress their economic development goals.

Work Within Broader Region to Promote Cluster Development

Beyond Nuevo Laredo, there will be other partnerships that the City of Laredo, the Laredo Development Foundation, educational institutions, or others may decide to form in order to promote one or more industries. Laredo has already done a good job seeking out these partnerships (with the Port of Corpus Christi, institutions in Monterrey, etc.) and should continue to do as they come about. The City should encourage and support these efforts.

Within the broader region, such as South Texas or the I-35 corridor, Laredo can develop partnerships to share best practices, collaborate on marketing or advocacy for their target industries, or share data. The work already done toward this effort is a good start, but should expand to additional partners, local clusters, and institutions.

The "SWAT" team created for industry recruitment purposes can also serve as ambassadors to create relationships with other communities and for promoting the economic development success of Laredo. It is important to hold regular sessions with these team members to update them on new development projects in Laredo or new programs for economic development.

Spur Entrepreneurship

Economic development should not only be guided by attracting new businesses and retaining current ones, but by creating the infrastructure for entrepreneurial success. Entrepreneurs need access to capital, shared business services, and expertise. Building incubator/accelerator spaces, developing a network of Angel investors, and promoting entrepreneurship in schools are a few key steps to a better entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Laredo should also market itself as a place where logistics innovations occur. This can be accomplished through traditional marketing and relationship building within the logistics industry, but by also further developing a knowledge base around logistics.

Invest in entrepreneurial infrastructure

Entrepreneurial support require "hard" and "soft" infrastructure. Hard infrastructure includes the physical spaces needed for startups. Soft infrastructure, on the other hand, includes networks of Angel investors, mentors, and young professionals that can support entrepreneurs. Both of these kinds of infrastructure are important for success.

Laredo should play to the economic strengths currently found in the city. The institutional knowledge in logistics is high, as well as activity in the sector. Thus, an incubator or accelerator space that specialized in logistics or technologies for logistics companies would be a wise investment.

Angel investor networks are helpful in creating a "go-to" base of financial support for startups. Begin by reaching out to successful entrepreneurs in Laredo that are interested in providing capital to startups from local incubators or to companies within specific sectors of the economy. A community the size of Laredo can begin by building a fund of $1 to $2 million.

A young professionals group can not only help to provide a voice for young residents or means for networking, but can help to provide access to business services and mentors for aspiring young entrepreneurs.

This group can start informally, but offer networking and seminar events to build a membership base. It should also be a priority to connect this group to any existing groups in Nuevo Laredo.

Organizations such as Junior Achievement and the Kauffman Foundation offer programs that promote and introduce an entrepreneurial mindset to students. Laredo should consider utilizing these programs to instill an entrepreneurial drive in the community.

Training for coding and programming is an important asset for today's economy. Private enterprises offer these programs across the nation. Laredo should look to partner with one of these companies to help develop the skill set of the local workforce and to potentially build a supply of labor for technology startups.

Market Logistics Industry Innovations

Laredo needs to become better known as a significant hub for the logistics industry. Although data clearly supports this claim, much of the broader public understanding of Laredo's significance to international trade pales in comparison to other port cities. Better marketing Laredo as a hub for logistics can be done in two ways. First, to build up the expertise of Laredo in logistics industry knowledge and, second, to further connect Laredo with logistics industry innovations.

Along with the other target industries, Laredo should build a presence at logistics industry trade shows and conferences. This is not only a means for attracting business, but marketing the successes of Laredo's logistics sector.

Innovative logistics companies and startups in Laredo should be celebrated for their successes. Informing the residents of Laredo through articles produced by the economic development team and developing case studies for outside marketing purposes can help to build the case for entrepreneurs to start their business in Laredo. Involving local media in a reoccurring segment on the economic development success of

Laredo, or to highlight innovative local businesses, is key to marketing to both local and national audiences.

An annual conference on global innovations in logistics can be developed in partnership with trade groups, TAMIU, and LCC. Bringing logistics industry analysts and professionals to Laredo can serve as a way to show them what the community has to offer for the industry. This event can also include a business plan competition or pitching event organized by local business leaders in the industry and local incubators.

Any new development, or redevelopment of existing properties, that increases the commercial activity between the two communities should be supported, not only as a way to grow the economy, but as a way to innovate in how border communities build border crossing facilities. A mixed-use development along the border can show how border crossings can truly be great places that celebrate international trade and connectivity.

Cultivate a Vibrant Community

Laredo is a city with an impressive culture and history. However, there are many improvements that can be made to better the local quality of place, which will aid in Laredo's ability to attract and retain talent. Improving downtown is a good place to focus improvements, but other areas of the city should not be ignored. Economic development tools can be used to incentivize developers of new neighborhoods in order to achieve the urban design goals defined by the citizens. Artistic and culinary businesses would do particularly well in downtown and other established or newly developed commercial nodes in Laredo.

Additionally, to continue to attract talent, Laredo needs to make housing more attainable and build walkable, diverse neighborhoods. There are a number of methods that can be explored to make it easier for residents to purchase a home. Likewise, Laredo should strive to engage residents and push for "quality" in local business and governance. Local leaders in business and government should champion the community's success to further instill community pride.

Bring Investment and Community Support to Downtown and Inner-City Neighborhoods
Downtown is an important piece of Laredo's history and of the stories shared by many residents. While it may be difficult to recapture the place downtown once had in the commercial and culture life of the city, investment, and community support can lead to a revitalized downtown that serves as the enduring image and communal space of Laredo.

Downtown and the neighborhoods that surround it have the potential to see greater development of denser, mixed-use buildings which, with necessary public infrastructure improvements, can build supply of housing connected to amenities and City services. Downtown and nearby neighborhood projects can be incentivized through fast track permitting or the waiving of certain permitting fees. Finding ways to connect building owners and developers to grants

and loans for rehabilitation can also help lower the burden of cost for some projects. Laredo should do all it can to support redevelopment of its downtown, including revising existing development codes.

Additionally, the economic development tools afforded to the City of Laredo, such as TIRZ, neighborhood empowerment zones, PIDs, and maintenance/management districts can help to pay for public infrastructure to incentivize new downtown businesses and mixed-use developments, as well as development in inner-city neighborhoods. The current municipal management district in downtown Laredo should be activated to support existing businesses and increase the potential for investment in downtown. The use of all of these economic development tools, however, should follow the vision and be consistent with the goals of this comprehensive plan.

Grant programs for improving building façades should be fully supported to incentivize building owners to maintain their properties. Additional, beautification programs, PIDs, or maintenance/management districts can help to ensure that streetscapes remain both walkable and appealing to visitors and potential business owners.

The City of Laredo should support the promotion of downtown events, and thereby downtown businesses, to the broader community. Events of every size should be supported to continue to expand the base of consumers for the downtown. Community events and festivals, along with unique local businesses, offer a greater sense of place for visitors of downtown. These kinds of amenities can attract consumers to downtown and help to build a base of support for new and existing businesses.

There are ample opportunities for redevelopment of this site, and the City should consider projects that have public benefits. The City should create a development plan in consultation with the community's and neighborhood's vision for the site through a town hall or charrette meeting.

Building a downtown Wi-Fi zone can be explored as a means of attracting downtown visitors and foot traffic. Although many would not likely travel to downtown because of Wi-Fi access, it would add an additional amenity for consumers and, perhaps, extend their time in the downtown area. Downtown businesses, who may see benefits from the development, can be asked to contribute to a fund for developing a downtown Wi-Fi network.

These investments into downtown Laredo and the central city, along with other key investments recommended in this comprehensive plan, can be pursued the development and approval of "Quality of Life" bonds. City leadership should begin by prioritizing specific investment with broad community support.

Ensure that Residents can Find Attainable Housing

Housing is a key consideration for maintaining a skilled workforce. The City can be more proactive on addressing the challenges that face residents.

Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are set up to allow residents to purchase a home and lease the underlying land. This set up makes the cost of homeownership more affordable. Generally, CLTs purchase homes in specific areas of a city to ensure that neighborhoods remain affordable for residents. The City of Laredo should explore this option to maintain affordability.

Simply put, a city's development code should enable the development goals of the community. To allow for a more vibrant community with various attainable housing options, new development and redevelopment need to be feasible. This means that the requirements for these projects needs to help keep them financially viable, while ensuring safety and quality. The City of Laredo should look to revising the existing code to meet the needs of the comprehensive planning goals and to create a separate set of requirements for downtown rehabilitation projects.

Laredo should look for ways in which local ordinances may hinder residents who desire to rent out portions of their homes, which may add a wider variety of housing options and lower the costs of homeownership. Again, a expanded effort to update the City's development codes may be beneficial for implementing this strategy.

A private equity fund to acquire and preserve affordable housing in Laredo should also be considered. These kinds of funds also can deliver adequate returns to investors, while sustaining lower prices for affordable housing.

The City should consider creating an incentive policy to encourage redevelopment and allows for the development of affordable housing. Incentives to consider are property tax abatements, waiving permitting fees, parking reductions, or density bonuses.

Encourage Community Engagement

Community engagement is not only important to the quality of life in Laredo, but for the economic development of the city. The recommended actions for this strategy will not only further the goal of cultivating community vibrancy, but can help to further the overall economic development strategy of Laredo.

This event, informed by the progress identified by the task force, can help to keep the public informed and engaged in the process of implementing the plan. This group should meet with the City of Laredo, the economic development team, and others to inform them on the progress being made. These events can help to sustain momentum for public support and engagement with the plan's implementation.

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award is a nationally-recognized award for excellence in performance in all sectors of the economy. Leaders in the community should push for businesses to pursue this award or to develop a local council on quality business practices in order to spur engagement in the community from the business sector.

Support Applied, Performing &Culinary Arts
Promotion of arts, culture, and restaurants, for many cities, contributes to the overall quality of life for residents and the positive impressions of visitors. Laredo has a history of and should do more to support these kinds of businesses because of the benefits they provide for workforce attraction and retention efforts.

Lowering barriers for arts and culinary businesses to open up is key to stimulating the growth of the industry. Fee waivers, fast track permitting, and a review of development codes can help.

Residents involved in the arts and cultural community of Laredo should have a platform to speak with a clear voice. Developing an arts council or board is one way to help become more flexible to the needs of this industry. This board can help to encourage and support additional public art within the community.

Many of Laredo's festivals and sporting events draw large crowds and are well attended by those from outside the region or from across the border. Major events can seek reimbursement from the state of Texas based on out of state spending by attendees. Working to increase attendance for existing events (such as the George Washington's Birthday Celebration or the Border Olympics) can ensure that these events qualify for the program (the Events Trust Fund) and allow them to expand and do more to promote Laredo.

One hurdle for enabling and sustaining an artistic community is being able to offer housing and workplace options that are affordable and appealing. Organizations such as Artspace find opportunities for live/work spaces for artists in communities and help to make these developments feasible and sustainable. The City of Laredo should look to programs such as these to ensure that the housing supply can support the artistic community.

Art in public spaces and in private establishments contributes to the overall aesthetic of the city and can help to increase a feeling of local pride. Many cities have plans and programs for displaying public art (as is discussed below), but it is also important for the economic development community to connect businesses with local artists to help find ways to display their work. In many cases, artists are entrepreneurs and small business owners. Support from the broader business community is key.

Best Practice

Art Saint Paul

In 2009, the City of Saint Paul enacted a Public Art Ordinance, drafted by Public Art Saint Paul at the request of the City Council. Public Art Saint Paul's projects arise from City Artist, Creative Grounds and Stewardship programs. They are produced by Public Art Saint Paul in partnership with the City of Saint Paul and a host of artistic and organizational partners. Projects play out citywide over an extended arc of time; they span the breadth of contemporary public art practice, coming forth in multiple media as temporary installations, permanent works, and art events.

An underlying principle in the Public Art Ordinance holds that artists should be involved from the earliest stages of conceptual planning, and continue through project design and implementation. Through the Ordinance artists add their perspectives and insights to the City's plans and capital project designs, as well as create public art for capital projects. The Ordinance encourages performances, installations, events and other temporary works. It also embraces Public Art Saint Paul's privately-funded City Artist Program, with City Artists curating major projects that play out citywide over a long arc of time.

After its adoption and with grant support from Saint Paul Cultural STAR and others, Public Art Saint Paul worked with a City staff working group to develop Guidelines and a Technical Manual to guide Ordinance implementation.

For more information, visit:
http://publicartstpaul.org/projects/

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal

Build greater industry diversification, increase access to good-paying jobs, and enhance the capacity for entrepreneurship through a commitment to utilizing economic development tools and further private sector engagement.

Proactive Economic Development
Goal 9.1: Increase the capacity for and ability to pursue investments and opportunities for job growth.

Policy 9.1.1: Hire an Economic Development Liaison.

Policy 9.1.2: Utilize a well-communicated and transparent framework for incentives.

Policy 9.1.3: Utilize Tax-Increment Financing districts and business improvement districts to spur development.

Policy 9.1.4: Conduct annual surveys of businesses.

Policy 9.1.5: Identify challenges found in these surveys and promote improvements.

Policy 9.1.6: Conduct annual visits to major employers with a team of local partners.

Policy 9.1.7: Hold semi-annual meetings with development community.

Policy 9.1.8: Promote awareness of workforce development programs to employers on a semi-annual basis.

Policy 9.1.9: Package logistics and supply chain management degrees as "seamless" educational offerings.

Policy 9.1.10: Cultivate stronger relationships and goal alignment between educators and employers.

Policy 9.1.11: Participate in economic development and site selection conferences.

Policy 9.1.12: Attend trade shows and conferences related to target industries.

Policy 9.1.13: Organize "SWAT" teams to aggressively market the city to potential employers.

Policy 9.1.14: Develop an effective web site catered to site selectors.

Policy 9.1.15: Review and grade progress on an annual basis.

Promote Regional Cooperation
Goal 9.2: Allow for a more coherent vision of the region to be developed.

Policy 9.2.1: Create a leadership group to discuss regional economic development priorities on an annual basis.

Policy 9.2.2: Build a regional marketing plan for business recruitment.

Policy 9.2.3: Create regional business data hub at TAMIU.

Policy 9.2.4: Develop communications strategy to build public support for economic development issues through allied community organizations and social media.

Policy 9.2.5: Seek partnerships with cities in the broader region to cooperate on economic development initiatives.

Policy 9.2.6: Utilize "SWAT" team of industry experts to promote economic development.

Spur Entrepreneurship

Goal 9.3: Provide the necessary environment for local, regional, and international entrepreneurs to find success in Laredo.

Policy 9.3.1: Support global business incubator/accelerator specialized in logistics and associated technologies.

Policy 9.3.2: Organize an Angel fund to support entrepreneurs.

Policy 9.3.3: Create a regional young professionals/entrepreneurs group.

Policy 9.3.4: Strongly promote entrepreneurial education at K-12 and institutions of higher education, with connections to target industries.

Policy 9.3.5: Create or attract a coding school.

Policy 9.3.6: Build presence of Laredo at industry trade shows and conferences.

Policy 9.3.7: Market existing innovative companies and startups.

Policy 9.3.8: Hold an annual global conference on innovations in logistics.

Policy 9.3.9: Consider new developments or redeveloping properties adjacent to border crossings as mixed-use, free-trade commercial centers.

Policy 9.3.10 Encourage the development of higher bandwidth networks throughout the city especially those servicing the target industries identified herein.

Cultivate a Vibrant Community

Goal 9.4: Strengthen the quality of place and build greater community engagement.

Policy 9.4.1: Provide greater support for downtown projects, especially those that encourage downtown living, mixed-use development, and "smart growth" ideals.

Policy 9.4.2: Continue to fund façade improvement grants, NEZ, TIRZ, and MMD that help business owners maintain market and buildings.

Policy 9.4.3: Promote downtown businesses and events that help to create a "sense of place".

Policy 9.4.4: Leverage downtown HEB site and create development plan.

Policy 9.4.5: Consider offering free Wi-Fi in downtown.

Policy 9.4.6: Fund major improvements through "Quality of Life" bonds.

Policy 9.4.7: Consider developing a Community Land Trust to lower the cost of homeownership and support development of micro housing.

Policy 9.4.8: Revise development code to incentivize development of mixed-use, walkable, neighborhoods and to encourage rehabilitation of underutilized buildings.

Policy 9.4.9: Ensure proper flexibility in code an occupancy limits to allow residents to rent out portions of their homes.

Policy 9.4.10: Partner with private sector to set up a community affordable housing fund.

Policy 9.4.11: Develop a new infill incentive policy to encourage "smart growth".

Policy 9.4.12: Create a community drive toward quality.

Policy 9.4.13: Direct incentives to applied, performing, and culinary arts businesses through fee waivers and fast track permitting.

Policy 9.4.14: Create and support an arts and culture board.

Policy 9.4.15: Work to expand existing festivals and sporting events.

Policy 9.4.16: Look into attracting development of artist housing, such as Artspace.

Policy 9.4.17: Encourage art in public places and in businesses.

Education, Arts & Culture

10

cultivator n. a mechanical implement for breaking up the ground.

cultural adj. **1** relating to the culture of a society. **2** relating to the arts and to intellectual achievements.
■ **culturally** adv.

culture ● n. **1** the arts and other instances of human intellectual achievement regarded as a whole. **2** an understanding or appreciation of this. **3** the arts, customs, ideas, etc. of a nation, people, or group. **4** a preparation of cells or bacteria grown for medical or scientific study. **5** the growing of plants. ● v. (**cultures**, **culturing**, **cultured**) grow cells or bacteria for medical or scientific study.
– ORIGIN Latin *cultura* 'growing'.

cultured adj. **1** well educated and able to appreciate art, literature, music, etc. **2** (of a pearl) formed round a foreign body inserted into an oyster.

culvert /kul-vert/ n. a tunnel carrying a stream or open drain under a road or railway.

cum /kum/ prep. combined with: *a study-cum-bedroom.*
– ORIGIN Latin.

cumbersome adj. **1** difficult to carry or use through size or weight.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Education

The City of Laredo public school system falls under the Laredo Independent School District (LISD) and United Independent School District (UISD) jurisdiction for Webb County, with local control over the education system in their respective areas. This accounts for 13 High Schools, 14 Middle Schools and 48 Elementary/Primary Schools, plus the Gateway (Student Alternative Program Inc) and Harmony Science Academy (Laredo's First Charter School). There are also several private schools. While the City has a limited role in education, its collaboration with the school districts and both institutions of higher education, Texas A&M International University and Laredo Community College, is strongly encouraged. Developing policies and a support structure that will ultimately enrich our city by supporting education and its many academic components is key to the future and success of the city and its citizens.

Laredo as a bicultural and bilingual community faces several challenges other border cities have, such as the challenge to level two completely different languages among children and adults alike, and one of the highest illiteracy rates in the country. Laredo's school systems have the least diverse communities, being almost 99% Hispanic. 66% of the population's first language is Spanish, so test indicators are usually lower compared with other cities with a less bilingual component.

Several programs have been in operation to combat some of these existing challenges. The Texas Migrant Council started the first Mobile Head Start Program designed especially for migrant families in 1971. This program started in Laredo, Texas providing mobile education for non-permanent immigrant families. The program continues and has diversified within the City of Laredo, and today they manage the Laredo-Webb County Safe Haven Program, Head Start and the Early Head Start Services, and Early Childhood Intervention; they are state and federally funded.
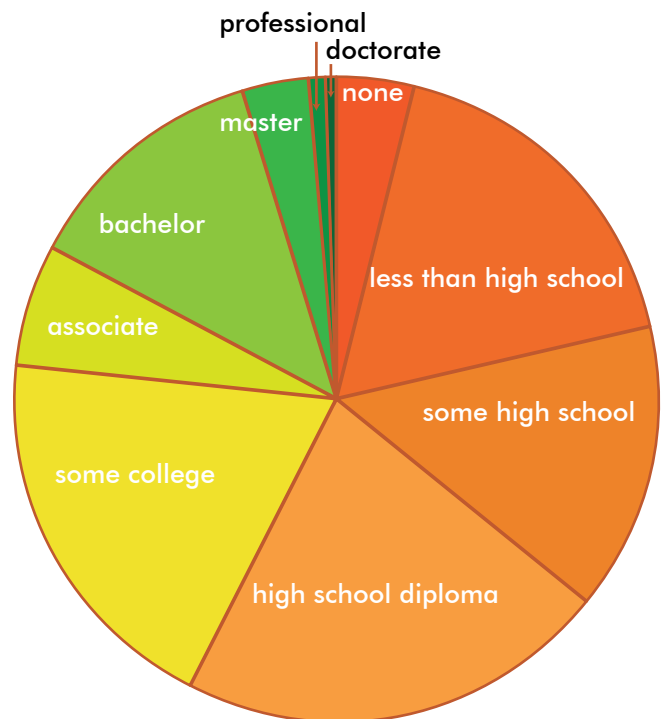
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Texas Migrant Council Seasonal Head Start

Los Presidentes Early Head Start

Head Start and Early Head Start Programs

Head Start and Early Head Start Program Centers in Laredo are under the Webb County Office of Head Start, focused primarily on low-income families. Physical and mental health, nutrition counseling, along with disabilities treatment services are provided. Education is aligned with the Texas Pre-K Guidelines, Head Start Program Child Development and Early Learning Framework.

The Project Niños is another Early Childhood Intervention Program, a non-profit organization under the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services. It is State funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education ACT (IDEA, P.L 108-446).

Nonetheless, the community still experiences a serious lack in expert evaluation for children above the toddler age. Children that schools send for neurological evaluations for conditions such as ADD often find themselves having to travel to San Antonio or McAllen for qualified attention, diagnosis and treatment courses. Private and Public Schools face the same need for qualified psychological attention.

The City of Laredo should endeavor to support the further development of these services locally and provide facilities and proper conditions for existing programs to expand and new required programs to bloom.
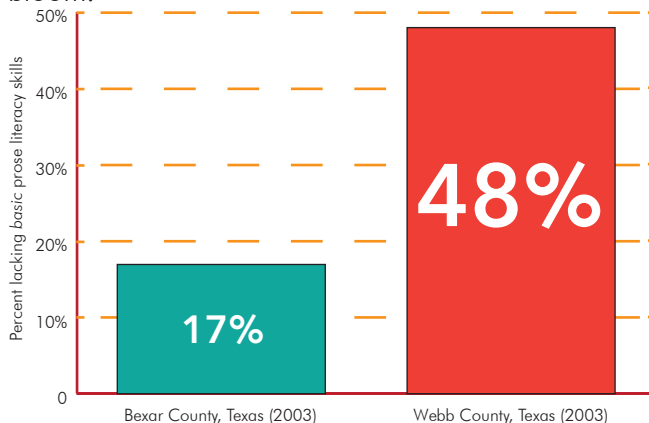
Chart: Percent lacking basic prose literacy skills

- Bexar County, Texas (2003): 17%
- Webb County, Texas (2003): 48%

Childcare-Kindergarten Facilities

In terms of private facilities many of them do not last long enough due to lack of specialized teachers. Among them, daycares such as Los Pepitos, First Class, Lollipop, Blooming Kids, and Mundo Montessori are just a few that have been around for more than ten years. Mundo Montessori is one of Laredo's alternative schooling methods. Other alternative schooling options are almost non-existent in the community.

Problems noted in establishing alternative education programs include the lack of organized resources providing guidance and advice. There appears to be a need to support awareness of grants and benefits available to these programs.

Fisrt Class Learning Center

Mundo Montessori School

Arts and Culture

While daily life is mostly filled by trade and logistics, the diverse arts in the city are a testament to the Hispanic American culture of the border which has blended to form a distinct expression. Art, theater, spoken word, music, dance, culinary arts are well represented on the border. Although the city has not made the arts a priority quality of life issue, the artists are exuberant about the culture of the border.

The city has produced artists, actors, directors, musicians, and chefs that have gone on to have major careers, and all have credited the culture of the border as a defining inspiration in their work. While most no longer live in the city, their memory of Laredo and their goodwill is a valuable resource for the city.

Much about the city can be discerned about the culture by the local festivals that are attended by the citizens. Laredoans will show up for a party and a parade.

The Washington Birthday Celebration arguably Laredo's most prominent event. A month long, the event is 121 years old. The WBCA website describes the reason for the event:

> "Well, besides being proud citizens of this great nation and there being many deserving men and women in our history -- The WBCA™ decided that Celebrating George Washington was as good a cause as any. Also, with the unique geographical location of Laredo and its predominantly Hispanic community, the city wanted to do something to remind the nation, just how proud the citizens of South Texas are to be a part of the United States of America."

The event culminates in two debutant events, Society of Martha Washington and Princess Pocahontas Pageant and Ball, and one grand parade. There are many events along the way for everyone and many opportunities in these events to highlight the arts and culture in Laredo.

As in most cities, the arts bubble up in places that offer support to the talented individuals who simply want a venue to showcase a developing idea or a fully formed work yet to be seen. Laredo has few places like these because patrons are needed. A more energetic support of the arts is required to sustain a burgeoning artistic community. There is some movement in this direction in Downtown Laredo and in surrounding neighborhoods. It is a result of the City representatives catalyzing investment in the area.

The following is a compendium of the Arts and Culture entities, venues, and programs that exist today in Laredo and the City of Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.

Laredo, TX
Laredo Center for the Arts
Laredo Little Theater
Laredo Energy Arena
Republic of the Rio Grande Museum
Villa Antigua Border Heritage Museum

Texas A&M International University (TAMIU)
Fine and Performing Arts Center
Helen Richter Watson Art Gallery
Casa Ortiz

Laredo Main Street Events:
- Artisan Bazaar
- Jamboozie
- City Tours
- Laredo Border Slam

Cultural Events and Organizations

- Washington Birthday Celebration
- Webb County Heritage Foundation
- CaminArte
- Hecho a Mano
- Laredo International Fair & Exposition
- Laredo Theater Guild Events
- Laredo Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorale events

Laredo Community College (LCC):

- Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Fine Arts Center Theatre

Concert Theater, TAMIU Fine and Performing Arts Center

Nuevo Laredo Cultural Centers

- Casa de la Cultura de Nuevo Laredo
- Estación Palabra Gabriel Garcia Márquez
- Zoológico y Acuario Nuevo Laredo

Cultural Events

- Expomex Nuevo Laredo
- Secretaría de Cultura y Deporte-events
- Compañía de Danza Nuevo Laredo-events

Local Philanthropic Organizations Which Support the Arts and Culture

- The Guadalupe and Lilia Martinez Trust
- The Lamar Bruni Vergara Trust
- The Hachar Trust

Estación Palabra, Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.

Laredo Center for the Arts

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Education

On June 14th and August 26th people attended the Town Hall meetings to engage the citizens in the making of this Comprehensive Plan. During both events people were given small comment cards. The comment cards asked participants to rank the importance of eleven plan-related categories, and to provide any additional comments or concerns for Laredo that they had. In both Town Hall meetings Education was the number one priority topic.

First Comprehensive Plan Town Hall meeting survey results

During the Education workgroup meetings, several professionals stated the absolute need to engage children in reading fluently and preferably in both languages. One of the main concerns for families around the city is for their children to grow up and choose to stay in Laredo. Local access to excellent education options that lead to diverse job opportunities were often cited as the proper strategy to achieve retention.

In this Comprehensive Plan, page 3.28, College Campuses and Education have been addressed as assets to place making and community enhancers. Several programs in TAMIU and LCC already consider specific short term programs intertwined with the Economic Development needs of the community, such as, the specific curriculum created for the Oil and Gas industry. However, talent recruitment continues to be a challenge for the City, namely in target industries such as health care, education, and advanced manufacturing technology.

The community asks that the current assets defined by trade and transportation logistics expertise be enhanced and supported by education. LCC and TAMIU already have these programs in place; they believe the next step is to promote awareness of these programs locally and market them as a worldwide learning center for international trade logistics.

Arts and Culture

One unifying theme among many artists and promoters of the Arts in the community is that there needs to be more City resources spent on the arts. They agree that there is a great need for public art, yet a real lack of energy and resources spent by the city representatives. They would like to have a commission for the arts, and like other cities, have 2% of the city capital improvement projects spent on public art. There is a common belief that the Arts in Laredo can contribute to the economy on a local and regional level. They would also like the public in general to support the arts more. There is a great need for funding opportunities to sustain the Arts and Culture in Laredo.

The consensus is that there exists an untapped opportunity to make Laredo a destination celebrated for its contribution to the arts and culture in the region and US. The arts community and its patrons of the arts and culture strongly believe that the arts can enhance the quality of life of Laredoans; they also believe that it is valuable to our culture to support professional growth of the arts. The art community affirms that the arts support a strong economy, enhance the experience of tourists, and promote the authenticity of place.

Participants of the second Plan Viva Laredo Town Hall were asked to rank **11 KEY FACTORS TO A CITY'S SUCCESS.** What were the findings? Here is how they stacked up.

Viva Laredo
2ND TOWN HALL RESULTS

EDUCATION, JOB OPPORTUNITIES and **ARTS & CULTURE** were among some of the highest ranked

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

"...Creation of jobs, bring innovation, technology, industries to the area. The eleven topics are important and all of them are interconnected, let's do synergies..."

"...opportunity through the Arts!!! Entertainment!! Culture!! Focusing on this through walkability and affordability..."

"...Laredo needs to draw people downtown by building a connection center to attract people to stay in the hotels and buy at the local stores. We need nightlife in downtown..."

EDUCATION / JOB OPPORTUNITIES / ARTS & CULTURE / AFFORDABILITY / REVITALIZING DOWNTOWN / WALKABILITY / ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE / PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION / OUTDOOR RECREATION / LESS TRAFFIC / HEALTHIER FOOD OPTIONS

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Get involved, share your vision and make Laredo the best it can be. visit **VivaLaredo.org**

Second Comprehensive Plan Town Hall meeting survey results

STRATEGIES

Establish a City of Laredo Education, Arts and Culture Department

The City should create a department within City Hall in charge of Education, Arts and Culture. This department can bring funding strategies as well as offer specific venues that support projects for Education, Arts, and Culture, and that work to enrich and market Education and the Arts.

The department would facilitate two commissions, Education, and Arts and Culture. The Arts and Culture Commission would be made up of the different institutions and organizations related to arts and culture. It would assign resources from a set aside budget to different arts projects, advise council in all arts related matters such as long term projects, and and coordinate with the Public Arts Plan. The Commission would also seek cooperation from private citizens, institutions, and agencies interested in or conducting activities relating to the arts in the City.

The Education Commission would be made up of the four primary investment sectors of the community; public, private, academic, and philanthropic for the purpose of accelerating Plan initiatives in education as they relate to talent retention and business growth.

Education

Provide Smart Code Use for Current School Neighborhoods

Complete streets benefit school areas, where families can walk with small children to several places around a school and engage in different activities without depending on a car for each destination. Areas surrounding schools, daycares, and kindergarten facilities should consider different strategies to reduce the heat island effects and sun exposure for children, such as vegetated roofs and trees, pergolas, flat sloped roofs or/and vegetative ground cover, trees in planting strips, swales and verges instead of pavement.

Promote Stronger Literacy and a Bilingual Community

A comprehensive outreach program should capitalize and can catalyze the community's strengths. Coordination of both school districts in Webb County (LISD and UISD), as well as the many private and non-profit organizations in the community, will synergize the efforts already in place.
Lack of information of the many events at bookstores, libraries and alike is one of the biggest obstacles in educational outreach. Coordination with general media on a plan (print, radio and TV) to commit to a weekly section in each medium would help disseminate information on events on arts, technology, books, festivals happening around the City.

Mobile libraries are already in place through by the Laredo Public Library System. The advantage of having the mobile library is that they can be located at several venues and provide some experience in place making that ultimately can become permanent. These small libraries park in the same location, and those locations could also be places for impromptu art exhibits and/or also provide a location for literacy volunteering for children and adults alike. Libraries, even small ones, should be allocated in each neighborhood within walking distance.

Economically accessible venues and programs, must provide intertwined activities that complement educational and cultural experiences with other type of activities, such as storytelling, theater, music concerts, and matching mixed use as coffee spots, places to sit that foster community gathering and communication.

Arts, Culture and Technology Programs K-12
Support STEM Initiatives and Education in Arts and Culture for all ages. Make them economically accessible to school age children in as many public venues as possible.

Acknowledge and promote Laredo as the best of both cultures
Most of the statistics in education as they relate on the border region focus on its many challenges:

"Webb County, Texas, has a higher than average percentage of foreign-born adults (28 percent compared with the U.S. average of 12.5 percent); more adults with a high school education or less (60 percent vs. 45 percent U.S. average); a high Hispanic population (94.5 percent vs. 15 percent for the United States); and more poverty (25 percent of families live below poverty level compared with U.S. average of 9.6 percent). The cumulative impact of each of these variables contributes to the high value for the percentage of adults who lack basic prose literacy in English; in Webb County, the estimate is 48 percent, which is more than double the highest state-level estimate (23 percent in California)."[1]

1. The Occurrence of Low Literacy Among Adults in U.S. States and Counties. 2010 National Center for Education Statistics.

In an effort to counterbalance and redefine life on an International border, the University of El Paso, Texas has developed the project, the "Philosophy for Children in the Borderlands" targeting immigrant children to tackle these mind frames and ultimately help create a feeling of belonging and pride in their dual culture nature. A strategy of positive identity helps create communities that are collectively thoughtful, deliberative, and intellectually curious.

A similar program could be developed by the departments of Philosophy in both TAMIU and LCC to promote a positive cultural image among not only children but the community in general. Funding via grants can be submitted to the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Economic Development and Education, Arts and Culture
The city's economy is tied to education opportunities and funding mechanisms for entrepreneurs. The Economic Development liaison proposed in chapter 9 of this document should help coordinate city plan initiatives with School Districts and institutions of higher education. For example the liaison could coordinate efforts to best take advantage of FOBESSII, The U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Forum on Higher Education, Innovation and Research, programs. These organization and programs were created to promote binational cooperation in higher education and research, especially regarding important areas for innovation in businesses in the two countries. Combining talented people in science, engineering as well as entrepreneurs, fosters bi-national and regional competitiveness. In Mexico, these programs are headed by the SEP (Ministry of Education) and CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology). In the US the programs are headed by the State Department and the Department of Education. One of the three main initiatives is to enhance the unique potential of the US-Mexico Border. The City of Laredo should encourage and foster access to these programs.

Work with the Education Sector to Become a member of the World Affairs Council of America to Foster, Promote and Retain Talent

The City and the education sector could help establish a World Affairs Council and design a program similar to CONACYT (National Council for Science and Technology), in which students are encouraged to study abroad and specialize in industries that align with the City's economic development plan.

The City of New York recently implemented the Excelsior Scholarship, making public college tuition free for families meeting the stated requirements. The City of Laredo can implement a very similar program that would allow students to acquire such a benefit, particularly one that would focus on students who need to work and study at the same time.

In this endeavor, the city would work with the Binational Center at Texas A&M and LCC office of Economic Development. A membership council could also promote a program that enlists LISD and UISD teachers with a curriculum based on particular issues present on the border and specifically in Laredo, such as literacy and dual language excellence.

Encourage a Commission for Regional Funding, made up of Local and Regional Public Representatives, Private Business Representatives, District and Higher Education Representatives, and Philanthropic Organizations to Foster, Promote and Retain Talent

For the City to sustain a good quality of life, education opportunities provide a vital component of any plan for a healthy, sustainable economy. Cities compete with other cities for talent; regions compete with other regions for talent. A Commission made up of the 4 sectors which provide the highest investment in the community: public, private, educational, and philanthropic can act with laser point precision when it comes to planning and funding needed projects and programs for educational innovation as it pertains to talent retention and business retention and attraction.

Food Sustainability Curriculum K-12

Given the importance of food security, the City must work with the School Districts to establish ongoing urban agriculture programs within the school facilities as well as City urban farms, engaging the community to understand and participate in food local production.

World Affairs Councils of America's mission:

"The World Affairs Councils of America represents and supports the largest national non-partisan network of local councils that are dedicated to educating, inspiring and engaging Americans in international affairs and the critical global issues of our times."

Arts & Culture

Develop a Public Art Program Plan

The City and the Arts and Culture Community must work to adopt a Public Arts Master Plan and pass a Public Arts Ordinance to establish a set aside budget for the acquisition of public art for municipal property. The Program should strive for inclusive input concerning a neighborhood's distinctive sense of place.

The Program's goals would be to enhance the quality of life of residents, promote economic revitalization, and strengthen Laredo's image as a unique place.

Establish a Community Art Center and Artist Incubator

There is a need for a Community Gallery, Community Art Center and artist incubator program in the Arts and Entertainment District in Downtown Laredo. The center could provide an Artists in Residence Program where local artists can create and produce art. The incubator could also provide low cost studio space to start up artists.

Expand Public Entertainment Venues in Public Spaces

The city can provide municipal public areas for theatrical and musical entertainment. The recent ordinance that permits musicians in the downtown area can be expanded to include street shows. Promotional campaigns which call for musicians and actors to participate will need to be programmed and funded.

Supporting Art Festivals and Film Festivals is another way to bring visitors and attention to Laredo.

Promote Cultural Heritage

Investment in historic architecture and the streets of Downtown Laredo sets the stage for a strong economic sector of cultural tourism.

GOALS & POLICIES

Overall Goal:

Establish by ordinance a Department for Education, Art and Culture, to include an Education Liaison, and an Arts and Culture Liaison, as well as a Commission of Arts and Culture, with close integration with the Department of Economic Development.

Education

Goal 10.1: Support the improvement of the education system of Laredo through coordination of efforts across all agencies.

Policy 10.1.1: Establish the Commission on Education for the purpose of accelerating Plan initiatives in education as they relate to talent retention and business growth. The Commission would be governed by persons from the four primary investment sectors of the community: public, private, academic, and philanthropic.

Policy 10.1.2: Support and coordinate curriculum alignment across all education agencies and grade levels. Special focus should be placed on aligning curriculums that support target industries.

Policy 10.1.3: Enter into partnerships with the school districts and the institutions of higher education to increase educational opportunities and improve student performance.

Policy 10.1.4: Coordinate with educational and business sector to promote and support quality early education, child care, and after school programs for all residents, while working to foster potential and increase retention of citizens.

Policy 10.1.5: Promote Food Sustainability Curriculum for grades K-12.

Arts and Culture

Goal 10.2: Recognize local and regional arts and culture as the foremost indicator of the community's unique identity and support its development to cultivate civic pride and identity and as an essential component to economic development and for attracting and retaining talent.

Policy 10.2.1: Establish a Commission on Arts and Culture. The Commission would help realize the goals of the Public Arts Plan.

Policy 10.2.2: Create a Public Art ordinance to establish a 2% for the arts program, setting aside 2% from every Capital Improvement Project budget for the acquisition of art for municipal property.

Policy 10.2.3: Promote Higher Education in the Arts.

Policy 10.2.4: Support creative and professional growth of the arts community.

Policy 10.2.5: Support economic growth of Heritage Tourism by investing in the Historic Streets of Laredo and in Historic Architecture.

Policy 10.2.6: Enhance the experience visitors have of Laredo by investing in wayfinding signage and apps, and support the creation of a Tourism Bus/Trolley Route.

Policy 10.2.7: Promote Laredo as a unique place, community, and destination.

Policy 10.2.8: Make Arts and Culture the cornerstone of Laredo's identity by encouraging and growing our cultural arts base, film and art festivals, theater, and other artistic projects.

Policy 10.2.9: Promote Children's Art Programs.

Policy 10.2.10: Promote the creation of an art incubator studio, exhibition, performance and office space for arts organizations, artists, and creative industry businesses.

Policy 10.2.11: Create a standard policy for selection of artists for public art through RFQ's and paid competitions to encourage the development of the industry and to help the recruitment of more artists into the local community.

Global Initiatives

11

the mid 18th cent.

glob /gläb/ ▶ **n.** informal a lump of a semiliquid substance: *thick globs of melted mozzarella cheese.*
– ORIGIN early 20th cent.: perhaps a blend of BLOB and GOB².

glob·al /ˈglōbəl/ ▶ **adj.** of or relating to the whole world; worldwide: *the downturn in the global economy.* ■ relating to or embracing the whole of something, or of a group of things: *some students may prefer to be given a global picture of what is involved in the task.* ■ Computing operating or applying through the whole of a file, program, etc.: *global searches.*
– DERIVATIVES **glob·al·ly adv.**

glo·bal com·mons ▶ **plural n.** the earth's unowned natural resources, such as the oceans, the atmosphere, and space: *financial speculators and other abusers of our global commons.*

glob·al·ist /ˈglōbəlist/ ▶ **n.** a person who advocates the interpretation or planning of economic and foreign policy in relation to events and developments throughout the world. ■ a person or organization advocating or practicing operations across national divisions.
– DERIVATIVES **glob·al·ism** /-ˌlizəm/ **n.**

glob·al·ize /ˈglōbəˌlīz/ ▶ **v.** develop or be developed so as to make possible international influence or operation: [with obj.] *communication globalizes capita[l] markets* | [no obj.] *building facilities overseas is part o[f]* *aims to globalize.*

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Los Dos Laredos
Twin Cities: Communities Generated from One History, One Economy

Global Trade in the Laredo Region

The Laredo Borderplex is the number 1 inland port along the US-Mexico border crossing over $183 billion imports and exports with IH-35 bisecting the city, all industrial parks and logistical centers within 5 miles.[1] Just the World Trade Bridge, alone, ranked No. 2 for total trade among the nation's roughly 450 airports, seaports and border crossings through December of 2016.[2]

Existing Border Plans
Plans on Transportation
Border Corridors and Trade Report.
January 2017

Analyzes Texas trade data and correlates with transportation and logistics facilities in state.

In the Laredo Region, the report includes border rail investments as well as 4 planned highway investment projects concerning Laredo:

1. Eagle Pass Connector.
2. Laredo Connector.
3. Planned Highway Infrastructure Projects on East-West Border Corridor.
4. Planned Highway Infrastructure Projects on La Entrada al Pacifico Corridor.

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1 http://ldfonline.org/site-selection/international-trade/. Laredo Development Foundation

2 https://www.ustradenumbers.com/ports/port/world-trade-bridge-border-crossing-laredo-tx/. World Trade Bridge, Border Crossing, Laredo, TX's trade ecember. World City, Trade Numbers.

Texas-Mexico International Bridges and Border Crossings (Existing and proposed 2015)

Laredo Metropolitan Transportation Plan 2015-2040

Laredo District- Coahuila/Nuevo Leon/Tamaulipas Border Master Plan. 2012
- Laredo POE Projects
- Laredo Road and Interchange Projects
- Laredo Rail Projects
- Tamaulipas POE Projects
- Tamaulipas Road and Interchange Projects
- Tamaulipas Rail Projects

Laredo World Trade Bridge, Top Trading Partners January-July 2017

Mexico	$118,892027,690
China	$1,333,009,315
Malaysia	$604,259,797
Thailand	$323,845,793
Japan	$223,286,889
France	$81,005,768
Estonia	$78,953,935
Brazil	$76,973,883
Germany	$75,245,131
Panama	$60,083,886

Total Trade: $122.38 billion

Source: WorldCity ustradenumbers.com, 9/29/2017.

Environment
- Border 2020: U.S.-Mexico Environmental Program
- International Boundary & Water Commission (IBWC)

Binational Networks of Cooperation
- Nuevo Laredo Institute for Competitivness and Foreign Trade (*Instituto para la Competitividad y el Comercio Exterior de Nuevo Laredo – ICCE*)
- Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development
- Border Liaison Mechanism
- Laredo Chamber of Commerce
- Laredo Development Foundation (LDF)
- Laredo Logistics and Manufacturing Association (LLMA)
- Binational Center of Texas A&M International University
- National Chamber of Transformation Industry (*Cámara Nacional de la Industria de la Transformación, CANACINTRA*)
- Nuevo Laredo Economic and Industrial Development Council (*Consejo para el Desarrollo Económico e Industrial de Nuevo Laredo, CODEINE*)
- Nuevo Laredo Chamber of Commerce and Tourism (*Cámara Nacional del Comercio Servicio y Turismo-CANACO Nuevo Laredo*)
- Employers Association of Mexico (*Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana- COPARMEX*)

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Downtown Nuevo Laredo and Downtown Laredo
Connectivity between Downtown Laredo and Nuevo Laredo should become welcoming and easily accessible to visitors from Mexico and the Global community.

Cultural and Economic Diversity
The Laredo and Nuevo Laredo region has achieved advanced expertise in the trade and logistics industry. The region capitalizes on that fact; however, the lack of economic diversity puts the Laredo region in distress when national border uncertainties that compromise the trade and logistics industry arise. Economic diversity can be incentivized by identifying other elements the Laredo Region has to offer: a vibrant culture that attracts tourism, a unique history and proximity to Mexico, and diverse unique urban characteristics that predate the US Constitution.

The Rio Grande Experience
The international river is an excellent opportunity for recreational facilities on both sides of the Border. Landscape improvements, biking and hiking trails, and other recreational enhancements could enhance the life of residents on both sides and are a visible improvement that enhances the international uniqueness of Border cities.

Region Marketing and Image Improvements
The Laredo Region image can be improved in order to stimulate economic development and tourism. Media reports of border violence have impacted external perceptions. Laredo as the largest inland port is also a major hub for Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies and is one of the safest cities in America. In addition, many major retailers recognize the buying power of the larger region, Nuevo Laredo, and the north-east region of Mexico which consider Laredo a shopping hub.

Many Nuevo Laredo residents travel to Laredo to purchase basic goods; citizens from Laredo cross the border to access Mexican doctors, goods and groceries. The retail success of the region is based upon shoppers who are Mexican nationals.

More Efficient, Safe, and Friendly Border Crossings
International transportation/transit options should be explored. The border is a physical constraint, however, moving across the border is an opportunity for innovations in efficiency. Customs brokers on both sides of the border and other transportation experts during the workgroup meetings addressed the need for more efficient authority approvals for both commercial and non-commercial traffic, as well as better bridge infrastructure and additional airport carriers. Consideration for alternative modes of transporting goods across the Border such as underground bridges as well as helicopter cargo transport were mentioned as possible additional alternatives. Marked improvements in cross-border traffic flow should be achieved in the short term with changes to operations and by incorporating chain of custody technologies (which track freight containers from the manufacturer to the point of destination and can detect and alert authorities if a container has been tampered with) and tractability automation.

Additionally, border crossing pedestrian facilities should be accommodating to foreign visitors from both sides of the Border with amenities found in international airports.

STRATEGIES

FEDERAL STRATEGIES
Security
Make the Region a vibrant interconnected international community:

Continue to work with federal agencies and support border security efforts beneficial to both Laredo and Nuevo Laredo.

Trade
MEXICO/TEXAS

- Maintain regional stability and a robust economy through meaningful binational coordination and efficient Ports of Entry.
- Continue to excel and expand on logistics and trade industries through innovative strategies.
- Collect regional data to address regional trade issues and to identify and accelerate regional strengths.

GLOBAL TRADE

- Create a World Trade Center Association to provide immediate access to trusted trade connections network.
- Establish honorary Trade Representatives Council from the Top 10 Partners in Trade with Laredo.
- Promote regional data collection to address global trade issues and to identify global strength.

Planning for Los Dos Laredos:
Establish planning meetings with entities responsible for PDM-2026-2018 (COPLADEM) and the City of Laredo to coordinate the implementation of both Comprehensive Plans.

The City of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo share many of the same goals for the region:
1. Create a Binational Center for Economic Development
2. Education Alignments
3. Downtown revitalization and improvement
4. Mobility options and interconnectedness
5. Land use plan

Capitalize on the region's economic, cultural and environmental resources to promote an international tourism component.

Labor
Support Nuevo Laredo in its present Economic Development Strategy.
Continue to excel in the fields of adaptive, flex trade, logistics models and explore the creation of designated manufacturing and warehousing (campus) zones.

Immigration
Support legislation and immigration reform that improves opportunities for labor force.

Ports of Entry/Transportation
Facilitate the movement of people and goods across the border in an economically and environmentally responsible manner.

REGIONAL STRATEGIES

Education
Implement binational educational programs that benefit both American and Mexican students by preparing them for a future in regional opportunities.

Promote Graduate Studies collaborative initiatives in arts and culture.

Medical
Implement a regional medical facilities plan for the region.

Environment
Monitor and implement corrective measures when needed to improve the health of the border region residents through environmental organizations focused on border issues.

GOALS AND POLICIES

Overall Goal

Make Laredo, a world class international vibrant community, fostering and attracting talent, trade, tourism, technology, and creativity.

Laredo Regional Economic Development Zone (LREDZ)

Goal 11.1: The cities' Binational Council should promote the interests of LREDZ with representatives from both cities, and states.

> **Policy 11.1.1:** The Binational Council should support interaction among the local trade industry and both current and potential trade partners in the Region.
>
> **Policy 11.1.2:** The Binational Council should foster complementary cultural experiences throughout the region, enhancing both cities existing programs as well as promoting new intercultural facilities and venues.
>
> **Policy 11.1.3:** The Binational Council should support awareness of the existing programs among the Region and provide the venue and resources for these entities to meet on a regular basis to promote innovative educational alignments.
>
> **Policy 11.1.4:** Continue to gather input from the city's Binational Council for further expansion of global initiatives.

Planning in both Laredos

Goal 11.2: Maintain alignment between both cities' Comprehensive Plans.

> **Policy 11.2.1:** Implement a plan for downtown revitalization programs and include them in an international historic corridor.

Policy 11.2.2: Create a plan for a Cross-Border Heritage Tour of both cities.

Policy 11.2.3: Encourage the addition of a bi-national committee to the Metropolitan Planning Organizations and its counterpart in Nuevo Laredo.

Policy 11.2.4: Provide input on international crossing facility planning on the Federal level to promote pedestrian-friendly approaches to duty free shopping areas, nearby local restaurants, and shaded public rest areas.

Policy 11.2.5: Develop a bi-national conference, thus building upon both cities' vision of improvement and revitalization.

Policy 11.2.6: Organize Bike Plan programs that envision bi-national routes.

Trade

Goal 11.3: Participate in the support of innovative strategies for alleviation of long border wait times, infrastructure improvements, public safety, economic development, border inspection and national security at the international border.

> **Policy 11.3.1:** Create a Laredo Chapter of the World Trade Center Association.
>
> **Policy 11.3.2:** Research possible future trade zone designations that leverage advanced security and chain-of-custody technologies
>
> **Policy 11.3.3:** Foster trade opportunities with regional trade partners through an international incubator such as a "Global Street" workspace for investment and talent retention.

Policy 11.3.4: Facilitate synergistic interaction between the Region's Incubator Programs such as Mile 1 (International Business Assistance Center) and the *Instituto Municipal de la Juventud de Nuevo Laredo* (IMJUVE).

Policy 11.3.5: Develop an Airport Modernization Plan of the Laredo International Airport which accommodates global cargo carriers services and implement compatible land use in properties surrounding the Laredo International Airport.

Policy 11.3.6: Develop a Laredo Port Plan and Plan Implementation Commission to include railroad, airport, bridge, and port connectivity expansion studies together with Nuevo Laredo. Include a supply chain management study and port economic development and diversification strategy.

Policy 11.3.7: Improve the World Trade Bridge traffic signal phasing and timing.

Education

Goal 11.4: Create a Binational Council Branch on Education to plan joint education programs that reach beyond the border.

Policy 11.4.1: Create a binational education fund to allow talent to study abroad in areas related to support Laredo's success as an inland port, a historical tourist destination with commitment to return for a specified timeframe and provide expertise into the Region's home community.

Policy 11.4.2: Create a liaison between school districts and the CREDE (Regional Education Development Center, Tamaulipas State Institution for Education) in Nuevo Laredo to create an "adopt a school" program.

Policy 11.4.3: Become a member of the World Affairs Council (an educational support venue).

Policy 11.4.4: Engage and associate with NAFSA (Association of International Educators-nonprofit), become a member and help guide both cities' education professionals in providing high-quality international education.

Branding of the Region/Data-based Marketing

Goal 11.5: Create data-based joint regional branding together with our regional partners.

Policy 11.5.1: Support a recreational and cultural agenda to promote the Region.

Policy 11.5.2: Enhance and foster the Region's rich historical heritage.

Policy 11.5.3: Encourage a common vision for the Rio Grande.

Policy 11.5.4: Create a communication plan that celebrates the Region.

Health and Environment

Goal 11.6: Establish infrastructure for healthy region and sustainable environment.

> **Policy 11.6.1:** Develop a binational plan to curb the carbon footprint of the Inland Port.

> **Policy 11.6.2:** Develop yearly binational summits to create a joint set of goals regarding environmental impact and quality.

Regional History, Arts and Culture

Goal 11.7: The proposed Laredo Arts and Culture Commission should coordinate arts and culture programing with the *Centro Cultural Mexicano de Nuevo Laredo* with funding mechanisms considered a priority in both city's budget.

> **Policy 11.7.1:** Support the creation of a comprehensive historical landmark tour on both sides of the Border.

Implementation

12

implant² ['ɪmˌplænt] *n* : implante *m* (de pelo), injerto *m* (de piel)

implantation [ˌɪmˌplænˈteɪʃən] *n* : implantación *f*

implausibility [ɪmˌplɔzəˈbɪləti] *n, pl* -**ties** : inverosimilitud *f*

implausible [ɪmˈplɔzəbəl] *adj* : inverosímil, poco convincente

implement¹ ['ɪmpləˌmnt] *vt* : poner en práctica, implementar

implement² ['ɪmpləmənt] *n* : utensilio *m*, instrumento *m*, implemento *m*

implementation [ˌɪmpləmənˈteɪʃən] *n* : implementación *f*, ejecución *f*, cumplimiento *m*

implicate ['ɪmpləˌkeɪt] *vt* -**cated**; -**cating** : implicar, involucrar

implication [ˌɪmpləˈkeɪʃən] *n* **1** CONSEQUENCE : implicación *f*, consecuencia *f* **2** INFERENCE : insinuación *f*, inferencia *f*

implicit [ɪmˈplɪsət] *adj* **1** IMPLIED : implícito, tácito **2** ABSOLUTE : absoluto, completo ⟨implicit faith : fe ciega⟩ — **implicitly** *adv*

implied [ɪmˈplaɪd] *adj* : implícito, tácito

implode [ɪmˈploːd] *vi* -**ploded**; -**ploding** : implosionar

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

1. Land Use Patterns

Overall Goal: Encourage development that creates complete, compact neighborhoods to conserve environmental resources, spur economic investment, maintain social fabric, reduce the cost of providing infrastructure and services, and reclaim abandoned areas.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Downtown - Downtowns are the heart of a city and region and having a healthy heart is essential to having a strong city and region.		
Goal 1.1: The City of Laredo places the highest priority on the reinvigoration of downtown, whose strategic location, walkable blocks, and historic buildings will once again make downtown a vibrant destination and center of culture, shopping, government, and the arts.		
	Policy 1.1.1: City policies and programs should encourage the rehabilitation of upper stories of existing downtown buildings as office, retail, entertainment, and residential space. Financial incentives should be considered to encourage investment from the private sector.	• Planning & Zoning • Environmental Services • Community Development
	Policy 1.1.2: The city encourages new multi-story mixed-use buildings with windows and doors facing all sidewalks to be constructed on vacant lots. The city should not require any on-site parking for buildings downtown.	
	Policy 1.1.3: Large new downtown complexes such as a downtown mall, convention center, museums, or recreational facilities should fit urbanistically within the downtown. As large new uses are added, updated, or replaced, they should be integrated into Laredo's original street network and other land uses rather than being isolated in large complexes of civic buildings.	
	Policy 1.1.4: Downtown redevelopment strategies will include new and improved civic buildings and civic spaces, plus shared parking for residents, employees, and visitors.	• Planning & Zoning • Environmental Services • Community Development • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 1.1.5: The city's historic design guidelines should be expanded and made mandatory to highlight downtown's architectural heritage, to avoid unnecessary damage to this valuable resource, and to ensure that new buildings maintain and improve this historic character.	• Planning & Zoning • Environmental Services • Community Development

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Inner City Neighborhoods - The inner city neighborhoods could host greater business creativity, non-profit entrepreneurs, and economic diversity, while providing an attraction for visitors, seniors, and young talent.		
Goal 1.2: The City of Laredo highly values the historic neighborhoods that were laid out in a grid around the downtown and will maintain and improve their highly walkable character, transit accessibility, diverse mix of land uses, and historic building stock.		
	Policy 1.2.1: The city should maintain and strengthen the historic landmark status of San Agustin, Old Mercado, and El Azteca neighborhoods.	• Planning & Zoning • Environmental Services • Community Development
	Policy 1.2.2: The city will actively consider historic landmark status for additional qualifying neighborhoods such as El Cuatro, Fort McIntosh, the Heights, Jarvis, St. Peter's, El Tonto, and the Heights.	
	Policy 1.2.3: Vacant and underutilized parcels in and around the city's traditional historic neighborhoods can be excellent locations for redevelopment that adds housing, shopping, employment, entertainment, and recreational options for nearby residents. Redevelopment of such sites should mesh with the scale and character of these existing neighborhoods rather than imposing a suburban or high-rise model on traditional neighborhoods. The city's zoning and development regulations should be modified accordingly. Additional infill incentives should be considered by the city.	
	Policy 1.2.4: The city shall coordinate its land development regulations and zoning regulations to create a unified development ordinance to make development more predictable and easier to navigate the development process.	
	Policy 1.2.5: The city shall explore the use of tax increment financing (TIF) to improve targeted areas such as the downtown and inner city neighborhoods. A TIF district essentially reallocates funds from property taxes to encourage investment within the district. Any increased tax revenues collected as a result of an increase in property values then go into the TIF fund and can be used by the city for a wide range of purposes within the TIF to promote redevelopment.	
	Policy 1.2.6: The city shall look for opportunities to partner with private entities to enable and encourage development within the inner city neighborhoods.	
New Neighborhoods		
Goal 1.3: The city wishes to augment conventional development pattern with strategic suburban retrofits or urban infill where practical.		
	Policy 1.3.1: The city's zoning and land development regulations should be reviewed and amended to encourage new neighborhoods to have: a. Greater interconnection of internal streets; b. Provision of small parks, community gardens, and civic functions within neighborhoods; c. A greater variety of housing types within each neighborhood; d. Protection of natural features such as stream beds and flood zones; e. Mixed-use zoning; and f. Form-Based Code. g. Designated subdivision for agriculture and livestock estates.	• Planning & Zoning • Environmental Services • Community Development
Extraterritorial Jurisdiction & Annexation		
Goal 1.4: The city will use the limited authority granted by Texas law to regulate the subdivision of land within its ETJ in order to shape future growth in accordance with *Viva Laredo*.		

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 1.4.1: The city should strengthen its existing regulations that regulate the subdivision of land within the ETJ. Future subdivisions should be required to have a connected network of streets and blocks and connect to surrounding development.	• City Attorney • Planning & Zoning • El Metro • Engineering
	Policy 1.4.2: Future subdivisions also need to be interconnected with each other and with a suitable regional road network. This comprehensive plan's Major Thoroughfare Plan needs to be improved with a more tightly interconnected road network for the ETJ so that future subdivisions will not create isolated pods of development that are unlikely to become an integrated part of Laredo.	
	Policy 1.4.3: The City of Laredo should maintain a separate annexation policy that defines areas where voluntary annexations would be considered upon petition by affected landowners. The following criteria should be considered for potential future voluntary annexation: a. Must be contiguous with the existing city limits; b. The landowners must agree to build all local, collector, and arterial roads at their expense and must submit a general development plan for the area; and c. The landowners must pay water and sewer impact fees plus an additional per-unit annexation fee toward fire, police, libraries, and recreation centers. d. Permit a lower impact threshhold when new development meets higher standards for complete, compact, connected neighborhoods. e. Require a Transit Impact Development Fee (TIDF) levied on new development to offset new development's impacts on the transit system. Revenue generated by the fee is directed to El Metro and is to be used to fund capital and operations. This annexation policy should require creating a commitment to mixed use development on the larger tracts in the development agreements that accompany formal annexation. The city may use economic incentives for landowners where it deems appropriate to accomplish the vision of the plan.	

Industrial Lands

Goal 1.5: The regional economy depends on manufacturing and the storage and transportation of goods crossing the border. The City of Laredo will designate ample land that is well-suited for industrial facilities and will ensure that industrial facilities do not adversely affect the health, safety, or welfare of the community.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 1.5.1: Encourage the development of new industrial areas and the redevelopment of existing older or marginal industrial areas.	• Planning & Zoning • El Metro • Engineering
	Policy 1.5.2: Discourage access to industrial development through residential areas.	
	Policy 1.5.3: Discourage the development of residential uses on industrial designated land.	
	Policy 1.5.4: Obsolete industrial sites and rail yards pose technical challenges to redevelopment but are often ideally located within the city to offer new choices and opportunities for Laredo residents. The city should take affirmative steps to maximize this potential.	
	Policy 1.5.5: The city should develop direct transit access from the downtown to the industrial zones to facilitate workers crossing the border to get to their jobs.	
	Policy 1.5.6: Encourage the development of overnight parking facilities within or close to the industrial lands that includes restrooms and showers for truck drivers waiting for their next shift.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)

Future Land Use Map

Goal 1.6: A new Future Land Use Map is an integral part of *Viva Laredo*. This map has been created to assist city officials and private developers in understanding the growth management goals and policies of this plan, particularly as to the form and direction. The designations on this map are subject to change as Laredo grows and *Viva Laredo* is modified accordingly.

	Policy 1.6.1: Adopt the Future Land Use Map	• Planning & Zoning • El Metro • Engineering • Utilities

Application of *Viva Laredo*

Goal 1.7: The City of Laredo will use the principles set forth in *Viva Laredo* as tools to shape future development, to protect natural resources, to direct capital improvements, and to guide public policy in a coordinated manner for the mutual benefit of Laredo's residents and landowners.

	Policy 1.7.1: *Viva Laredo* provides the basis for amendments to the City of Laredo's zoning and subdivision regulations. The adoption of *Viva Laredo* does not change the zoning districts on any property, nor does it interfere with or extend vested rights. Staff recommendations to discretionary bodies such as planning and zoning commission or the council shall be determined based on the action's concordance with plan *Viva Laredo*.	• All Departments

	Policy 1.7.2: Decisions on rezoning requests will be made in accordance with *Viva Laredo* and in accordance with all requirements of city and State law. When evaluating whether a proposed rezoning is in accordance with *Viva Laredo*, the City Council may also consider the following factors:
	 a. The proposed zoning district's effect on development or redevelopment of the property, particularly whether the rezoning will further or at least not conflict with specific policies listed under other goals of *Viva Laredo*.
	 b. Whether the property is in a Regional Mixed-Use Center or Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center, defined in *Viva Laredo* For instance, these areas:
	    i. Are preferred locations for higher density development and redevelopment;
	    ii. Are ideal for a balance of housing, jobs, shopping, recreation, and civic uses;
	    iii. Will be served by walkable thoroughfares; and
	    iv. Are suitable for zoning districts that would orient most buildings toward streets.
	 c. The proposed zoning district's effect on the property and surrounding property, after evaluating the following factors:
	    i. The physical context of the property and surrounding properties, including recent or anticipated changes to that context,
	    ii. Any historic district or other special designations that may be applicable,
	    iii. Potential adverse effects that might be caused by approval or denial of the requested rezoning,
	    vi. Anticipated effects on the natural environment,
	    v. Whether the area is stable (low vacancy rates and units that are not for sale) or in transition, and
	    vi. Any changed social, economic, or physical conditions that make the existing zoning no longer suitable for the property.	

2. Downtown & Inner City Revitalization & Historic Preservation

Overall Goal: Create a more vital downtown and downtown neighborhoods with residential options of all kinds, quality places to shop, dine and recreate while preserving, renewing, and evolving historic buildings, districts, and landscapes for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

General		
Goal 2.1: Create a roadmap for the coordinated effort to revitalize the downtown.		
	Policy 2.1.1: Review and update the downtown plan.	• Community Development • Building Development Services
Downtown Public Realm		
Goal 2.2: Enhance the public environment to encourage a lively and active downtown.		
	Policy 2.2.1: Revise regulations that are oriented to suburban land use to encourage traditional urban development. Provide for easy access to daily activities and uses and provide a pedestrian friendly streetscape.	• Convention & Visitors Bureau • Community Development • Building Development Services • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 2.2.2: Revise setback requirements in Community Business zones.	
	Policy 2.2.3: Remove loading dock requirements in Commercial Business District zones.	
	Policy 2.2.4: Relocate transitions between zoning districts from the center of the street to the center of the block along rear lot lines.	
Goal 2.3: Improve downtown's streets until they become Laredo's premiere public spaces.		
	Policy 2.3.1: The city should encourage the use of the illustrative plans and renderings in this chapter as examples to encourage best practices in improving downtown streets particularly for city projects.	• Building Development Services • Planning & Zoning • El Metro • Engineering

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 2.3.2: Maintain and improve the downtown street network by providing multiple routes and pathways for vehicular and pedestrian movement. a. Downtown streets, particularly within the Central Business District, are to be maintained first and foremost for pedestrians, transit vehicles, and deliveries. Private automobiles will be accommodated to the greatest extent possible consistent with this priority. b. Streets should not be permanently closed or dead-ended or converted to one-way traffic except in cases of overriding public necessity or to allow the creation of pedestrian-only public spaces. c. Seek opportunities to reopen former streets to bring more economic vitality to surrounding properties. d. Convert one-way streets back to two-way streets to increase the economic viability of businesses and to make downtown more intuitively navigable for residents and visitors as per the Proposed Downtown Circulation Pattern found in this chapter.	• Building Development Services • Planning & Zoning • El Metro • Engineering
	Policy 2.3.3: Improve downtown streets to become more multimodal and appealing to pedestrians, with ample shaded sidewalks and on-street parking. a. Improve safety and encourage pedestrians and transit users by managing vehicular speeds on downtown streets, using measures such as: i. Narrower travel lanes; ii. Changes in paving; iii. Restoration of two-way vehicular travel; iv. Artfully designed traffic calming measures; and v. Timing of traffic signals to reward managed steady vehicular speeds. b. Provide on-street parking on at least 50% of all downtown streets. c. Redesign downtown streets using pedestrian-friendly thoroughfare section assemblies from the thoroughfare plan in the Mobility Chapter. Design arterials using guidance in the ITE recommended practice, *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach*. d. Turn traffic signals to four-way stops in off-peak times when long red wait times on empty streets discourage downtown visitors.	
**Goal 2.4**: Recognize that public spaces and streets within the city's historic districts are themselves prime contributors to the vitality and appearance of the districts.	
	Policy 2.4.1: Create and enact a comprehensive green and public space plan to be integrated with downtown development to increase the overall amount of green space in the downtown.	• Building Development Services • Planning & Zoning • El Metro • Engineering • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 2.4.2: Ensure that the redevelopment and enhancement of plazas, greens, playgrounds, paseos, and other public spaces within historic districts are done in a way which is sensitive to the context.	
**Lighting, Signs & Utilities**	
**Goal 2.5**: Streets and spaces are safe and inviting with adequate lighting and clear signage.	
	Policy 2.5.1: Adequate and pedestrian-scaled lighting should line each street in Laredo.	• Utilities
	Policy 2.5.2: Utilities should not be located on the sidewalk, allowing clear access for pedestrians between destinations.	
	Policy 2.5.3: Install clear wayfinding signage in all of Laredo, directing residents and visitors to significant locations including available parking.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Downtown Buildings		
Goal 2.6: Revitalize downtown first.		
	Policy 2.6.1: The city should provide financial incentives, regulatory guidance, and technical support for the adaptive reuse of downtown buildings for use as housing.	• Convention & Visitors Bureau • Community Development • Building Development Services • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 2.6.2: Promote downtown Laredo as a living classroom for historic preservation and architecture education and encourage partnerships with universities on research, documentation, and restoration projects.	
	Policy 2.6.3: The Historic Preservation Division and the Department of Planning and Economic Development should work to attract a professional arts school to downtown Laredo, for instance an art or architecture school with a historic preservation program.	
	Policy 2.6.4: Lobby State officials to reform the tax structure for vacant downtown buildings, which is currently based on a property's net income rather than its assessed value, thereby encouraging property owners to only lease the ground floor of their buildings and allow the upper floors to remain vacant. Work with city leaders and the County Tax Assessor-Collector. If necessary, also work with Laredo's state representatives and senator to address the issue at the State level.	
	Policy 2.6.5: Create a Vacant Building Ordinance to encourage the use of existing structures instead of allowing them to sit vacant, detracting from a vibrant downtown environment. a. Monitor the performance of the Vacant Building Ordinance to ensure that the intended goals are being achieved. If it is found that the ordinance results in degradation or insensitive changes to historic buildings, take measures to address them, such as: i. Designate historic buildings that are not currently protected and could be insensitively altered as a result of the Vacant Building Ordinance. ii. Work with the Building Department to adjust the terms of the Vacant Building Ordinance to require the sensitive repair and maintenance of buildings older than 50 years of age.	
Goal 2.7: Facilitate reinvestment in the downtown.		
	Policy 2.7.1: Revise regulations that may be impeding development downtown.	• Convention & Visitors Bureau • Community Development • Building Development Services • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 2.7.2: Create and adopt a rehabilitation code to facilitate the reuse of both historic and non-historic buildings.	
	Policy 2.7.3: Rezone portions of downtown to be Commercial Business District zones to coordinate with the accepted comprehensive plan.	
	Policy 2.7.4: Remove lot size minimum requirements for residential uses in the Commercial Business District zones.	
	Policy 2.7.5: Remove minimum parking requirements for residential uses in the Commercial Business district zones.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Goal 2.8: Strive for the widest variety of activities downtown to create a healthy mix of housing, working, shopping, cultural, and civic uses. This concentration of diverse activities will reduce traffic impacts and infrastructure costs and re-use downtown's existing buildings to their maximum potential.		
	Policy 2.8.1: When evaluating rezoning requests and also when designing public buildings, consider the principles under policies 2.8.2, 2.8.3, and 2.8.4.	• Convention & Visitors Bureau • Community Development • Building Development Services • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 2.8.2: Expectations for downtown buildings include: a. Nearly all downtown buildings should be re-used or re-purposed instead of being replaced by a new building. b. Building façades that face sidewalks should not have more than 30% of their length or 30 feet, whichever is less, as blank walls (without doors and windows). c. Sidewalk-level retail, office, and service uses that face a public space should be designed to have clear glass on at least 60% of their façades between 3 and 8 feet above grade. d. Sidewalk-level retail, office, and service windows should be kept visible (unshuttered) at night. e. Sidewalk-level retail, office, service, and live-work spaces should comprise at least 60% of the street-level façade. f. Design new downtown buildings to have at least 70% of the total linear frontages of mixed-use and non-residential building façades within one foot of the sidewalk. g. All businesses and/or other community services on the ground floor should be accessible directly from sidewalks along a public space, such as a street, square, paseo, or plaza. h. Design new downtown buildings which have ground floor dwelling units such that at least 50% of those units have an elevated finished floor no less than 24 inches above the sidewalk grade. i. Sidewalk-level dwelling units should be elevated at least 24 inches above the sidewalk.	
	Policy 2.8.3: City policies and programs will encourage the rehabilitation of upper stories of existing downtown buildings as office, retail, entertainment, and residential space. Financial incentives will be considered to encourage investment from the private sector.	
	Policy 2.8.4: Encourage a wide mix of residential housing types downtown and within downtown neighborhoods to encourage a diversity of ages and incomes and allow residents to trade up, downsize, or create multi-generational households without being forced to leave downtown. Housing should include arrangements such as studio units, 1-, 2-, and 3-bedroom units, townhouses, penthouses, and live-work spaces and should include both rental apartments and units that can be owned by their occupants.	
Historic Resources		
Goal 2.9: Preserve the City of Laredo's valuable historic resources.		
	Policy 2.9.1: Support the preservation of Laredo's historic resources through public information, advocacy, and leadership within the community and through the use of regulatory tools.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.9.2: Begin a "blitz" campaign to document existing historic structures.	
	Policy 2.9.3: Create a priority list of buildings to protect and preserve that are in the most danger of being lost.	
	Policy 2.9.4: Provide widespread cultural and educational resources and information programs on historic preservation techniques and benefits.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 2.9.5: Continue to encourage adaptive reuse of historic buildings.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.9.6: Continue to collaborate with various entities to promote historic preservation landmarks and historic events as tourist attractions.	
	Policy 2.9.7: Encourage development planning and design to sensitively incorporate preservation of historic structures and artifacts.	
	Policy 2.9.8: Encourage the development of attractive and unique characteristics which help each neighborhood in developing its individual historic value and identity.	
	Policy 2.9.9: Inform the public of tax benefits and funding sources available for restoration.	
	Policy 2.9.10: Continue to collaborate with various entities to promote historic commemorative events marking significant landmarks in Laredo's development.	
Goal 2.10: Historic Preservation should be embraced as an effective economic development and revitalization tool for the City of Laredo.		
	Policy 2.10.1: Use Laredo's designated historic districts and structures as an integral element in citywide revitalization and economic development efforts.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.10.2: Promote the value of historic preservation to spark interest in designating additional historic districts as well as individual properties.	
	Policy 2.10.3: Preserve architecturally or culturally significant structures which are not historically designated and lie outside of the historic districts.	
Goal 2.11: Improve public perception of Historic District Designation so that more neighborhoods will seek and embrace preservation of their historic resources.		
	Policy 2.11.1: Educate property owners on the economic, social, and cultural benefits of historic preservation.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.11.2: Provide workshops on how to care for a historic property in compliance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.	
	Policy 2.11.3: Ensure that city practices uphold and support historic designation as a benefit to property owners, and not a burden.	
	Policy 2.11.4: Promote historic preservation and Laredo history in local schools. Create programs to educate children through field trips, workshops, and curriculum.	
Goal 2.12: Improve the performance of Laredo's existing Historic Districts.		
	Policy 2.12.1: Work with federal, state, and local governments, non-profits, and private groups to identify additional funding resources for the rehabilitation of historic properties.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.12.2: Provide a clearinghouse of existing financial resources for owners of historic properties in order to provide incentives for appropriate renovation and rehabilitation projects. Make this information accessible through the city's Historic District/Landmark Board on website and brochures and work with neighborhood leaders to spread the word on these resources to other property owners in their districts.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)

	Policy 2.12.3: Educate the owners of historic properties on how to properly maintain and rehabilitate their property.
	a. Create neighborhood associations to focus on the advancement and interests of the neighborhood.
	b. Create master plans for each neighborhood to act as a guiding document for the neighborhood association.
	c. Provide a historic preservation resource group that consists of the neighborhood association leaders for each historic district and set up a regular schedule of meetings.
	  i. Use this group to disseminate new information and resources as they are available and to hold training and education programs.
	  ii. Use this group to track the performance of each of the individual historic districts and to provide advice to city leaders as challenges arise.
		• Landmark Board
		• Planning & Zoning
		• Community Development

	Policy 2.12.4: Improve Code Enforcement efforts in Historic Districts so that properties are consistently maintained and owners can be assured that inclusion in a historic district guarantees a certain neighborhood character and higher level of maintenance. a. Ensure that Code Enforcement Officers are trained in the Secretary of the Interior's Guidelines for Rehabilitation and that refresher courses are available for new and veteran officers.	
	Policy 2.12.5: Amend the Building Code for existing structures within historic districts to make it easier for property owners to undertake renovations and improvements.	
	Policy 2.12.6: Encourage new commercial and live/work uses within historic districts to make them more economically viable and livable by revising the zoning as necessary.	
Goal 2.13: Promote historic preservation as part of a holistic strategy to promote walkable, livable, and humane place making.		
	Policy 2.13.1: Promote training programs for architects, designers, and builders to work with traditional buildings and learn traditional building techniques. As these professionals gain experience in rehabilitating historic buildings, they will learn how to transfer these lessons into a new generation of high-quality buildings and places throughout the city.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.13.2: Market historic districts to potential homeowners and property owners for the walkable, complete lifestyle that these neighborhoods offer. These homeowners spark a new generation of homeowners who will enjoy the benefits of mixed-use walkable communities and can increase the market for new walkable communities throughout Laredo.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Parking		
Goal 2.14: Incorporate adequate parking for private cars into new development while providing infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation, bike parking, transit or trolley access, and comfortable pedestrian access.		
	Policy 2.14.1: Create a downtown parking strategy plan that continues to utilize and improve upon the provision of on-street parking, public parking lots and garages, and shared private parking spaces, with clear signage to inform the public of all transportation and parking options.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.14.2: The city should not require any on-site parking for buildings downtown and will encourage the sharing of private parking spaces between various uses to reduce the total number of parking spaces.	
	Policy 2.14.3: Locate parking lots and garages out of sight at the interior of blocks wherever practical.	
	Policy 2.14.4: Parking garages should be lined with habitable or storefront space to provide a safe, interesting environment for pedestrians and to screen parking from the view from public spaces such as streets, squares, and plazas.	
Downtown Public Facilities		
Goal 2.15: As civic buildings are added, updated, or replaced, they will be integrated into Laredo's original street network and other land uses rather than being isolated in large complexes of civic buildings.		
	Policy 2.15.1: Civic buildings should be acts of civic art, embedded within the urban fabric of downtown and sited memorably, when possible on high ground and at the terminal axis of streets to increase their visibility.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development
	Policy 2.15.2: Important public facilities such as courthouses, post offices, museums, and administration buildings should not be moved from downtown to outlying locations.	• Landmark Board • Planning & Zoning • Community Development • Municipal Court

3. Urban Design

Overall Goal: Create places and destinations for people by improving the public realm and focusing on the comfort and interest of the pedestrian, cyclist, and transit user.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Urban Design Best Practices		
Goal 3.1: Coordinate land use and transportation policies while making Laredo more walkable, bikable and memorable.		
	Policy 3.1.1: Determine desired land use, including a varied mix of uses; then design the transportation infrastructure that supports the desired land use.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Utilities
	Policy 3.1.2: Enhance the pedestrian environment. In existing neighborhoods, streets can be retrofitted with sidewalk installation, tree plantings and interesting building facades.	
	Policy 3.1.3: Increase the density and incentivize a mix of uses at key nodes of activity, including downtown, the universities and new development sites.	
	Policy 3.1.4: Implement transit connections between major destinations, including downtown, the new mall, the universities and the neighborhoods in South and North Laredo.	
	Policy 3.1.5: New development will consist of compact blocks and lots, representative of the historic block pattern in Laredo; this will promote maximum connectivity and create better walkability.	
	Policy 3.1.6: Development is encouraged on brownfields if site contamination can be remediated.	
	Policy 3.1.7: Development is encouraged along existing or planned bicycle networks where additional segments and/or secure bicycle storage can be added to the network.	
	Policy 3.1.8: Development is discouraged on sites or portions of sites within the 100-year or moderate-risk floodplains as defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Where development must occur within floodplains, development should be located on previously developed floodplains or in non-conveyance areas without flooding potential.	
Goal 3.2: Update the city's zoning code to implement the plan vision.		
	Policy 3.2.1: Adjust zoning ordinances to promote mixed-use development wherever desired.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Utilities
	Policy 3.2.2: The city develops a method of streamlining the process and guaranteed approvals such as permit administrative approvals when development is in accordance with the community's vision as illustrated in the small area plans and urban design best practices.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Goal 3.3: Make Laredo city staff experts in best practices for community development.		
	Policy 3.3.1: Require all city staff to become accredited in New Urbanism best practices through the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNUA).	• All Departments
	Policy 3.3.2: Require all city staff to become certified in LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED ND).	

Neighborhood Patterns

Goal 3.4: The City of Laredo should change its growth pattern away from homogeneous land uses and return to a pattern of compact well-connected mixed-use neighborhoods.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.4.1: City officials should consider the following neighborhood patterns when evaluating rezoning or development requests and also when locating and designing development on public land, seeking to achieve voluntary compliance with as many patterns as practical. While the land development code and state law ultimately dictate what shall be approved by the city, all design approaches that could increase the function, aesthetics, sustainability, marketability, and livability of projects should be discussed as part of the land development process. A variety of approaches to development should be added and permitted by the code. The illustrative plans in various elements of *Viva Laredo* demonstrate the application of these design principles to a variety of sites within Laredo.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Utilities
	Policy 3.4.2: The design of new neighborhoods and additions to existing neighborhoods should strive for a mix of housing types to create neighborhoods that accommodate diverse ages and incomes and allow residents to trade up, downsize, or create multi-generational households without being forced to leave the neighborhood. Housing types include both small and large single-family detached homes, duplexes, townhouses, multi-family buildings, live-work units, and accessory dwelling units, and include both rental apartments and units that can be owned by their occupants.	
	Policy 3.4.3: Neighborhoods should strive to have a clearly defined center and edges that vary in intensity and character. a. Each new neighborhood should have a primary civic space such as a square or green near its physical center. b. Commercial and office uses at intersections should have direct paths to greens and squares. c. When edges of neighborhoods lie along major roads, smaller lots can be placed facing the arterial road to accommodate attached dwelling units. d. When edges of neighborhoods lie along natural features, larger lots can be placed there to increase the variety of the neighborhood's housing.	
	Policy 3.4.4: The design of new neighborhoods and additions to existing neighborhoods should strive for a balance of housing, jobs, shopping, recreation, and civic uses to avoid unnecessary travel and reduce infrastructure and public services costs. a. Ideally, 50% of new residences will be within a ¼-mile radius of at least 4 diverse uses such as community-serving retail, services, civic/community facilities, and food retail. b. New neighborhoods of 300 units or more on an arterial road should provide a viable location for a corner store. c. Home offices and accessory dwelling units should be allowed on every lot.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)

Building Types & Placement

Goal 3.5: New development should incorporate local building types and public spaces, including the historic plazas found throughout historic Laredo.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.5.1: New buildings should create an interesting street frontage, with parking hidden from view, typically located in the rear of the building or below ground. Setbacks requirements should be changed such that this is encouraged.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Utilities
	Policy 3.5.2: The relationship between the fronts and the backs of buildings should ensure that public spaces have natural surveillance; the fronts of buildings should face the primary street adjacent to the property. a. Fronts of buildings should face the fronts of other buildings, or the sides where necessary; fronts should never face the backs of other buildings.	
	Policy 3.5.3: Large-format buildings and uses should be developed within a traditional street and block network. Large parking fields typically associated with large-format uses can be located within the interior of a block structure adjacent to the use. The block and street network will allow on-street parking to be used to meet some parking needs, as well as allowing for passenger loading zones and parking directly in front of retailers.	
	Policy 3.5.4: Local building types that have proven to react well to local climatic and weather patterns will be encouraged.	
	Policy 3.5.5: The historic plazas should be incorporated into new and retrofitted neighborhoods; plazas and smaller green spaces should be used to accommodate additional uses that supplement the larger public spaces.	
	Policy 3.5.6: Residences may face minor and major arterials to avoid presenting blank walls. Alleys can be provided by either the city or on private land to create a vehicular entry to the lots instead of vehicular access directly from arterials. Alleys should be either paved or gravel.	
	Policy 3.5.7: Semi-public building elements such as porches and balconies add to the congeniality of neighborhoods and should be encouraged within front setbacks. This applies to porches, stoops, bay windows, and balconies on residences.	
	Policy 3.5.8: Outdoor dining should be allowed on city sidewalks provided that chairs and tables are placed in a manner that allows a minimum three foot clear path for pedestrian movement.	

Parking

Goal 3.6: Incorporate adequate parking into new development while providing infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation, bike parking, transit or trolley access, and comfortable pedestrian access.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.6.1: Parking should be located so that it is hidden from the street, either located behind the building or screened from view.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Utilities

	Policy 3.6.2: The careless placement of off-street surface parking lots can blight surrounding properties and public spaces. This blight can be avoided by using the following principles:
	  a. Non-residential and multi-family buildings should have their surface parking lots placed at the side or rear of buildings.
	  b. Buildings should have no more than 20% of their lots devoted to surface parking lots, with no individual lot larger than 2 acres.
	  c. Parking lots should be designed for pedestrians as well as cars with pathways with double allees of trees.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.6.3: In non-residential and mixed-use developments, businesses and other community services on the ground floor should be strongly encouraged to be accessible directly from sidewalks along a public space, such as a street, square, paseo, or plaza, instead of accessible from a parking lot.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Utilities
	Policy 3.6.4: A majority of the principal entries to buildings should face public spaces such as streets, squares, parks, or plazas instead of facing parking lots.	
	Policy 3.6.5: New developments should place buildings close to streets using the following principles: a. At least 80% of the total linear feet of building façades should be within 25 feet of the sidewalk, and at least 50% of mixed-use and non-residential building façades should be within one foot of the sidewalk. b. Buildings should have functional entries an average of every 75 feet along non-residential or mixed-use buildings or blocks.	
	Policy 3.6.6: Encourage a reduction in the percentage of building walls that face streets that contain garage doors or service bays. A maximum of 20% of front walls containing garage doors or service bays should be encouraged.	
	Policy 3.6.7: Awnings, balconies, arcades, galleries, and colonnades (privately maintained)should be allowed to extend into the right-of-way of city streets provided that adequate clearances are provided for pedestrian movement and for right-of-way maintenance.	

Street Design Principles

Goal 3.7: The City of Laredo wishes to create complete networks of multimodal streets with ample shaded sidewalks and frequent on-street parking.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.7.1: Street networks should contain multiple paths for vehicular movement and should be designed using the following principles: a. New neighborhood streets should connect to the existing street network in all adjoining areas when practical. b. Bend new streets with restraint. Bending streets creates deflected vistas, but exaggerated curves are disorienting and difficult to connect to adjoining street networks. c. Challenging intersections can calm traffic, such as pinwheel intersections, small roundabouts, triangular intersections, and staggered intersections. d. Dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs should be allowed only when required by topographic or geographic constraints or when conditions on adjoining property prevent existing or future connections.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Environmental Services
	Policy 3.7.2: Street networks should be designed using the following principles: a. Limit average block perimeters in new development to no more than 2,000 linear feet. b. Provide rear alleys for access to mid-block parking spaces, to provide an out-of-sight location for utility equipment, and to allow the fronts of buildings to be free of garage doors and parked cars. c. Limit driveway crossings to no more than 10% of the length of sidewalks.	
	Policy 3.7.3: Street spaces should be designed to create prominent public spaces with a comfortable sense of enclosure using the following principles: a. Provide street trees on both sides on at least 60% of streets, between the travel lanes and sidewalk, at intervals averaging no more than 40 feet. b. Provide 90% of streets with sidewalks at least 8' wide on retail or mixed-use streets and 5' wide on all other streets. c. Provide on-street parking on at least 70% of both sides of all new and existing streets.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.7.4: Neighborhood streets should be designed for pedestrians and bicyclists by moderating the speed of motorized vehicles: a. 75% of new residential-only streets should be designed for a maximum target speed of 20 mph.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Environmental Services

Civic Space Principles

Goal 3.8: The City of Laredo wishes to supplement its neighborhood and regional park system with small civic spaces that are accessible to all citizens and are memorably placed in all new neighborhoods and mixed-use developments.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.8.1: Civic buildings achieve prominence by strategic placement at the ends of streets, across greens, or at the center of greens, and by having grander proportions and materials than surrounding buildings. Civic buildings should be embedded within communities or on the edges of communities.	• Building Development Services • El Metro • Engineering • Environmental Services • Environmental Services
	Policy 3.8.2: Civic spaces are outdoor gathering places for public use. Civic spaces can be defined by a combination of physical factors including their size, intended use, landscaping, and the character of their edges. New neighborhoods should be designed around optimal locations for civic spaces. Civic spaces should not be designated in awkward locations on residual tracts of land that are left over during the subdivision process. a. A civic space, such as a square, park, or plaza, of at least 1/6 acre in size should be within a ¼-mile radius of 90% of dwelling units and non-residential building entrances. b. Scale civic spaces comfortably for users, avoiding civic spaces that are too large. c. Enclose most civic spaces with building fronts to create a comfortable sense of enclosure; 75% of the perimeter of civic spaces should have a minimum building height to street width ratio of 1:6 (a minimum of one foot of building height for every 6 feet of width of the street that circumscribes the civic space).	
	Policy 3.8.3: Encourage or even incentivize home owner's associations (HOA's) to purchase lots from developers for parks.	
	Policy 3.8.4: Require new developments to provide adequate park space.	
	Policy 3.8.5: Make a Parks Ordinance addressing the Civ Space Principles.	

Lighting, Signs & Utilities

Goal 3.8: Streets and spaces are safe and inviting with adequate lighting and clear signage.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 3.9.1: Adequate and pedestrian-scaled lighting should line each street in Laredo.	• Building Development Services • Engineering • Environmental Services • Environmental Services • Utilities
	Policy 3.9.2: Utilities should not be located on the sidewalk, allowing clear access for pedestrians between destinations.	
	Policy 3.9.3: Install clear signage throughout Laredo, directing residents and tourists to downtown, parking facilities, cultural destinations, and natural environments.	

4. Mobility

Overall Goal: Create a multimodal transportation network throughout Laredo that provides access to opportunity, improves public health, reduces carbon emissions, and provides civic recreational opportunities while efficiently moving pedestrians, cyclists, transit, motor vehicles, cargo, and freight.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Land Use and Transportation Coordination		
Goal 4.1: Create a coordinated, efficient, and more affordable multimodal transportation system that supports, complements, and meets the needs of different types of places throughout the city. Land use patterns and connections among different land uses are key elements defining the form and character of places.		
	Policy 4.1.1: Transportation planning and development, expansion, and investment in transportation facilities should be coordinated with the growth in the region.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.1.2: New and modified thoroughfares will match the existing or proposed character of land along their paths as well as serving their essential functions in the regional road network. a. In urban areas, multimodal transportation design will become the norm to enhance neighborhood character, safety, and walkability. Character and function will be more important than capacity, and the street network will be sized to yield smaller blocks with greater "people moving" capacity. b. Existing suburban areas are likely to maintain a predominately automobile-dependent development pattern. Thoroughfares will have sidewalks, and bike lanes will be provided where travel speeds are higher.	
	Policy 4.1.3: Safe and attractive transportation choices among all modes should be encouraged through street patterns that consider multimodal transportation alternatives and access to and circulation between adjacent neighborhoods, parks, and commercial and employment nodes.	
	Policy 4.1.4: New roadways and widening of existing roadways should utilize context-sensitive design to minimize impacts on historic buildings, neighborhoods, parks, and sensitive natural areas.	
	Policy 4.1.5: Comprehensive transportation impacts, including parking and impacts on all modes of transportation, should be identified and addressed before a development or redevelopment is implemented. Considerations should not assume that all travel is by personnel vehicle.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)

Complete Streets

Goal 4.2: Laredo's thoroughfares will form a well-connected network of complete streets that support driving, walking, bicycling, and public transit.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.2.1: Street design standards should provide safe, accessible, and meaningful travel choices – driving, walking, bicycling, and public transit.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.2.2: Where optimal street connectivity cannot be or has not been provided, non-motorized connections should be added to reduce walking and bicycling trip lengths.	
	Policy 4.2.3: In urban areas, walkability will be prioritized with wide sidewalks, shade, alleys, and street-facing access to adjacent land uses. a. Widen sidewalks where appropriate and feasible. b. Plant regularly spaced drought-tolerant trees along streets. c. Provide streetlights that improve safety for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians while maintaining a dark sky. d. Curb radii should be small to discourage drivers from turning corners quickly and to shorten pedestrian crosswalk lengths. e. Alleys should be included when possible so that buildings may be serviced from the rear, driveways and curb cuts can be minimized, and parking can be consolidated at mid-block locations. f. Provide safe and convenient crosswalks at intersections and at mid-block crossings where feasible and needed.	
	Policy 4.2.4: In urban areas, most new streets should have on-street parking in order to increase access to properties while calming traffic. Except on multiway boulevards, medians should be limited to short segments so that vehicular access to properties is not overly restricted.	
	Policy 4.2.5: New streets and redesigned streets should be two-way (unless they are designed as a narrow, slow speed, one-way streets).	
	Policy 4.2.6: The city wishes to achieve high levels of landscaping and other aesthetic improvements on all thoroughfares, including those maintained by the county and state.	
	Policy 4.2.7: Continually update the city-wide plan that establishes priority locations for sidewalks, sidewalk repairs, and sidewalk improvements, prioritizing areas near schools, parks, transit stops, mixed residential and commercial districts, and other areas with high or potentially high levels of pedestrian activity.	

Street Conversions

Goal 4.3: The City of Laredo will improve its thoroughfares over time as opportunities are found to increase transit service and improve connectivity, walkability, bikability, and economic benefits to surrounding areas.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.3.1: The city will consider multiway boulevards for major travel corridors to balance regional through traffic, local traffic, other travel modes, and access to adjoining land.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.3.2: The city will study and implement the conversion of downtown's one-way street couplets to two-way operation.	
	Policy 4.3.3: The city will consider the use of roundabouts at intersections to calm traffic, increase safety, eliminate traffic lights, and create sites for public art and monuments on local and collector streets.	
	Policy 4.3.4: The city will incorporate "green infrastructure design" and similar light-imprint and low-impact principles for stormwater management and landscaping in streets that it builds and requires others to build.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Improve Connectivity		
Goal 4.4: Reduce service disparities and achieve equitable access to all types of facilities and transportation modes.		
	Policy 4.4.1: Gaps in the street system should be eliminated by providing for network connectivity. The existing grid network should be preserved and extended where feasible to increase overall connectivity.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.4.2: New residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments that require construction or extension of roadways should include a multimodal network. The use of cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets and local residential loops should be minimized.	
	Policy 4.4.3: New development should be encouraged to connect to the existing street network through collector streets, which should tie into the existing network at multiple points to improve trip distribution and emergency access. Street stubs for future connections should be required.	
	Policy 4.4.4: Access management strategies should be applied based on the functional characteristics of the roadway, surrounding land uses, and roadway users. Curb cuts along public streets should be minimized. Internal connections between parking lots should be encouraged.	
	Policy 4.4.5: When considering closure of public streets, alleys, and other rights of way, affected city departments and utility providers should consider the integrity of the city's street network, pedestrian and vehicular safety, emergency access, the ability to provide utility services, impacts on health and safety, and the welfare of the community.	
	Policy 4.4.6: Adding lanes to increase traffic capacity should be considered only after the street exceeds an established threshold of full capacity and all other alternative approaches have been considered. Improvements to the street network should increase vehicle dispersion and circulation.	
	Policy 4.4.7: Ongoing regional transportation planning efforts should be supported to coordinate planning, operations, and funding priorities and to identify existing and future transportation corridors that should be linked across jurisdictional boundaries.	
	Policy 4.4.8: New roadway projects and major reconstruction projects should preserve desirable existing trees where possible or plant new street trees where necessary. Multi-lane roads should be enhanced with landscaped medians when possible.	
	Policy 4.4.9: Bridge monitoring, maintenance, and rehabilitation should be coordinated with the TxDOT and the Federal Highway Administration. Bridge improvements, including provisions for all travel modes, should be considered when roadway investments are being pursued.	
Future Thoroughfare Plan		
Goal 4.5: Implement the Future Thoroughfare Plan that integrates all major travel modes and carries out the goals and policies of *Viva Laredo*.		
	Policy 4.5.1: The City of Laredo will use the Future Thoroughfare Plan that appears in *Viva Laredo* as the city's official Thoroughfare Plan.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.5.2: Laredo's future transportation network will shape the city and its inhabitants. The network must meld all viable modes of transportation and carry out the goals of *Viva Laredo*.	
	Policy 4.5.3: Capacity and redundancy should be created by a densely interconnected network rather than by achieving high capacities on individual arterial streets.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.5.4: Economically vital cities require multiple transportation modes and cannot hope to maintain free flowing traffic during all peak periods.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.5.5: The character of each thoroughfare should be based on the physical context the thoroughfare is passing through in addition to its role in the larger network.	
	Policy 4.5.6: Limited-access freeways disrupt the healthy functioning of cities and should be the thoroughfare type of last resort when planning the city's network.	
	Policy 4.5.7: The regional transportation network must respect the human and natural environment and minimize or eliminate negative impacts such as bisecting or isolating communities, inducing suburban sprawl, or interfering with arroyos and other natural systems.	
	Policy 4.5.8: Implement a public announcement and mandatory waiting period for the deletion of any road appearing in the future thoroughfare plan.	

Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation

Goal 4.6: Enhance and connect the bike and pedestrian circulation system throughout Laredo.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.6.1: Bicycle and pedestrian circulation, access, and safety should be enhanced, especially along corridors, downtown, in activity and employment centers, within densely-developed areas, at transit stations, and near schools, libraries, and parks.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.6.2: A continuous bicycle and pedestrian network should be provided within and between existing and new developments to facilitate safe and convenient travel. New subdivisions, mixed-use developments, and large-scale commercial developments should include safe pedestrian walkways or multiuse paths that allow direct links between roadways and major destinations, transit stops, and schools.	
	Policy 4.6.3: New development, redevelopment, street reconstruction, and resurfacing projects should include bicycle and pedestrian facilities as appropriate for the roadway character. Existing development should be retrofitted with connections where possible.	
	Policy 4.6.4: Where possible, and especially where pedestrians are prioritized, tools such as protected left turns, pedestrian head start, raised crosswalks, curb extensions, medians, pedestrian refuge islands or mid-block crossings, and restricted right turns on red should be used to improve pedestrian and bicycle movements and safety.	
	Policy 4.6.5: Safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be maintained and should be universally accessible, adequately lit, and properly designed to reduce conflicts between motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians.	
	Policy 4.6.6: Pedestrians and bicyclists should be accommodated on bridges, interchanges, and over- and underpasses, where permitted by law. Bicycle lanes and wide sidewalks should be included in all new bridges, and over- and underpasses.	
	Policy 4.6.7: The city's greenways and trails network should be treated as part of the city's transportation network and connections should be planned for accordingly.	
	Policy 4.6.8: Infrastructure that encourages students to walk or bike safely to school should be supported. The city should continue to coordinate with the Laredo MPO to partner with schools, the Laredo Police Department, Webb County and the TxDOT to identify funding and opportunities to enhance walking routes to school.	
	Policy 4.6.9: Primary building entrances should front onto publicly accessible, easily discernible, and Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant sidewalks that lead directly from the street to the building entrance without parking lots in between.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.6.10: Roadways and rail corridors should be retrofitted with bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as multi-use paths, cycle tracks or bike lanes, bike boxes, and bike detectors.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.6.11: The city should continue to coordinate with the Laredo MPO to work with partners to identify creative funding solutions for bike and pedestrian infrastructure, including partnerships with the Webb County, Webb County-Laredo Regional Mobility Authority, and the TxDOT, parks and recreation partnerships, and public-private partnerships.	

Bike Plan Network

Goal 4.7: Vigorously expand bicycle facilities throughout Laredo to create a full network of connected, safe, and attractive bikeways and supporting facilities for both transportation and recreation.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.7.1: Continue developing and maintaining a system of bicycle lanes, bicycle routes, and multi-use pathways in accordance with *Viva Laredo*.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.7.2: Investigate the possibility of a local bicycle share program in the city that places bicycles for rent at automated stations at key areas beginning with the downtown and university areas.	
	Policy 4.7.3: Fund a bicycle and pedestrian coordinator position to be the steward of the bicycle master plan and all of its individual components.	
	Policy 4.7.4: Use best practices in physical design (i.e. bikeway width, type, signing, and advanced bicycle facility types) to create safer bikeways. Train select city staff to design bikeways.	
	Policy 4.7.5: Enhance the safety and visibility of the bicycle network through the implementation of safety and wayfinding signage improvements along all current and future bikeways.	
	Policy 4.7.6: Continue the regular street sweeping program, with priority given to bicycle lanes and primary bicycle routes.	
	Policy 4.7.7: Bicycle facilities such as secure racks, personal lockers, and showers should be encouraged in new and redeveloped office and employment centers to facilitate bicycling and walking as viable alternative modes for commuting to work.	

Bicycle Outreach

Goal 4.8: Encourage increased bicycling by promoting health, recreation, transportation, tourism opportunities, and environmental benefits.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.8.1: Make Laredo a safer city for bicycle riders through measures such as: a. Work with the Laredo Police Department to address bicycle-vehicle safety measures through increased awareness of bicycle-related traffic laws and enforcement of existing and new laws. b. Provide on-going training for City of Laredo police officers regarding bicycle safety laws and issues. c. Advocate for bike safety as a prominent part of state driver's requirements.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.8.2: Create and distribute print and online versions of the Laredo Bike Master Plan on an annually updated basis, to include wayfinding, safety, and facility type information.	
	Policy 4.8.3: Develop a Laredo bicycle programs website to store and disseminate all bicycle-related information, including bicycle traffic statistics.	
	Policy 4.8.4: Identify the most common conflicts between bicycle and motor vehicle users and create strategies to educate all roadway users.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.8.5: Increase awareness of bicycle options and safety through trainings, public events, public service announcements, educational materials, and partnerships.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 4.8.6: Promote bicycling for commuting, running errands and other short trips and socializing through social media/web-based communication tools and traditional communication outlets to position bicycling as a viable option for people who are interested in bicycling, but concerned about safety.	
	Policy 4.8.7: Continue to foster and implement Safe Routes to School programs.	

Street Design, Complete Streets, and Age-friendly Design

Goal 4.9: Ensure safety for users of all transportation modes, with attention to the most vulnerable users, including people with disabilities, those using mobility devices, the young, and the elderly.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.9.1: The majority of the city's streets should be designed as public spaces that are scaled for pedestrians and should be enhanced with appropriate street trees and landscaping.	• Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services • Health
	Policy 4.9.2: Complete street design standards that provide mobility for all types of transportation modes and users should be promoted on all streets.	
	Policy 4.9.3: New roadway projects and major reconstruction projects should provide appropriate and adequate right-of-way for safe and convenient movement and amenities for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, and motorists.	
	Policy 4.9.4: When reviewing traffic impact analyses for infill and redevelopment, level of service measurements should consider all modes of transportation, including bicycles, pedestrians, and transit, in addition to automobile level of service.	
	Policy 4.9.5: Complete street amenities should be designed with all users in mind, with multimodal amenities appropriate for the type of roadway.	

Transportation Safety, Traffic Calming, and Neighborhood Traffic

Goal 4.10: Support a safe, multimodal transportation network for all users, and include consideration of traffic calming, bike and pedestrian crossings, and crash analysis.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.10.1: Safe routes for motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians should be provided. The city should work with its partners to improve the multimodal system to enhance safe transportation options across modes.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services • Health
	Policy 4.10.2: Traffic calming measures should be incorporated into the design of new or retrofitted local and neighborhood streets, within schools and parks, and around pedestrian-oriented business areas. Pedestrian and bicyclists should have safe, convenient, well-marked means to cross streets.	
	Policy 4.10.3: Feasible solutions to lessen the impacts of major street improvements on local streets should be developed with neighborhoods on an individual project basis.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)

Transportation Demand Management

Goal 4.11: Establish demand management procedures as a cost-effective alternative to increasing capacity. A demand management approach has the potential to improve the natural environment, public health, placemaking, and economic development that also extends the life of transportation infrastructure.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.11.1: Incentivize a mix of uses at key nodes of activity, including downtown, the universities and new development sites.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services • Health
	Policy 4.11.2: Programs that increase vehicle occupancy should be encouraged. Employer-based transportation demand management programs should be supported.	
	Policy 4.11.3: An integrated, multimodal transportation system that offers safe and attractive choices among travel modes should be promoted.	
	Policy 4.11.4: Conduct El Metro Ridership Survey regularly.	

Air Quality

Goal 4.12: Improve the region's air quality through more sustainable and energy-efficient transportation and land use practices.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.12.1: Encourage compact land uses and urban design patterns that increase travel choices, reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicle travel, and reduce the overall number of vehicle-miles traveled.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services • Health
	Policy 4.12.2: Invest in bus service, rapid transit service, and high-capacity transit to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while better serving the traveling public.	
	Policy 4.12.3: Take steps that can reduce the travel frequency, distance, and duration of single-occupant vehicle trips.	
	Policy 4.12.4: Implement intelligent transportation systems (ITS) to reduce congestion and facilitate cross-border travel.	

Parking Management

Goal 4.13: The city will strategically manage the amount, location, and physical form of on-street and off-street parking to help achieve the goals of *Viva Laredo*.

	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.13.1: The effective supply of parking can be increased by building more spaces or by reducing demand. a. Where parking supply needs to be increased on valuable land, parking garages may be constructed provided they are lined with habitable or storefront space to shield the garage from view and to provide a safe interesting environment for pedestrians. b. As part of a long-term strategy, land devoted to surface parking lots in existing developed areas should be reduced through shared parking strategies, reduction in parking demand, and infill development on unneeded parking lots.	• Public Works • Planning & Zoning • Tourism • El Metro
	Policy 4.13.2: As part of the development and redevelopment process, the following policies should be followed: a. Shared on-street parking spaces are preferred to separate parking lots for each user. b. New parking lots should be placed behind or on the side of buildings instead of between buildings and the street. c. Do not provide more parking than is likely to be needed. d. Provide suitable loading zones for deliveries.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.13.3: The amount of land devoted to surface parking should be minimized through measures such as parking decks and underground parking, shared parking, flexible ordinance requirements, improved parking standards, the implementation of transportation demand management plans, and provision of public transit to reduce parking needs.	• Public Works • Planning & Zoning • Tourism • El Metro
	Policy 4.13.4: Parking and development that encourages multiple destinations within pedestrian-connected areas should be encouraged. This will decrease single purpose trips for the user, saving time and miles driven and increase the economic potential for businesses located near other businesses.	
	Policy 4.13.5: A parking program and management strategies should be established at existing and planned transit stations.	
	Policy 4.13.6: On-street parking and drop-off areas should be located adjacent to sidewalks and building frontages to maximize on-street parking turn-over and for customer convenience. Excessive parking between sidewalks and building fronts should be discouraged.	
	Policy 4.13.7: Shared-use parking should be encouraged for land uses where peak parking demands occur at different times of the day, reducing the overall total number of spaces needed. Parking lots should be sized and managed so that spaces are frequently occupied.	
	Policy 4.13.8: Parking lots should include vehicular and pedestrian connections between and through lots. Parking facility quality should be considered equally with quantity of parking spaces. Parking lot design should minimize pedestrian conflicts, make use of appropriate landscaping, and properly manage stormwater.	
	Policy 4.13.9: The capacity of existing parking facilities should be optimized through tools such as small vehicle, motorcycle, and bicycle spaces, allowing motorcycles to share spaces, reducing the minimum parking space area requirement for low-turnover spaces such as residential and employee parking, and removing equipment and storage from parking spaces.	
	Policy 4.13.10: Single-occupancy automobile trips should be discouraged through parking supply and/or pricing strategies in areas where supply is limited and alternative transportation modes are available.	
Public Transportation		
Goal 4.14: Make a Metro Transit Master Plan and turn it into the most used citywide transit system in Texas.		
	Policy 4.14.1: Review routes and operations to plan for the future and ensure El Metro Transit is meeting the needs of the community in the most efficient way possible.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services • Health
	Policy 4.14.2: Promote quality transit services that enhance mobility options, meet the needs of city residents and visitors, focus on transit-dependent households, and incorporate age-friendly elements.	
	Policy 4.14.3: Where opportunities exist, right-of-way for future transit should be reserved. New development and redevelopment should provide transit easements for planned alignments, rail stations, and bus stops within existing and planned transit corridors as appropriate.	
	Policy 4.14.4: Local and regional bus service along key corridors should be enhanced. Transit efficiency, including improved frequency of routes and transfer time, should be promoted within the El Metro Transit system.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.14.5: Bus shelters, seating, lighting, trash receptacles, and related elements should be provided at transit stop locations. New developments located within planned transit corridors should coordinate with El Metro Transit to provide bus stop facilities at appropriate locations.	• El Metro • Engineering • Planning & Zoning • Traffic • Utilities • Parks & Leisure Services • Health
	Policy 4.14.6: The use of transit facilities should be encouraged through enhancing the bike and pedestrian network near transit stops and sufficient sidewalk infrastructure should be installed near all transit stops. Where necessary, enhancements to make sidewalks compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should be prioritized.	
	Policy 4.14.7: Features such as traffic signal priority, queue jumps, and exclusive transit lanes to improve transit reliability should be encouraged, where possible.	
	Policy 4.14.8: Transit-oriented development should be encouraged. Planning for transportation, transit stop locations, public spaces, density, and land use should be coordinated, and high-density, mixed-use development patterns should be encouraged around express bus lines, the transportation center downtown, and any future transit stations.	
	Policy 4.14.9: The possibility of returning the downtown streetcar to Laredo should be considered.	

Commercial Transport & Port Freight Mobility

Goal 4.15: Enable the safe and efficient movement of goods via rail, truck, and air. A reduction of the impacts of rail and truck operations on adjacent neighborhoods and sensitive lands is also important.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 4.15.1: The safe and efficient movement of truck traffic in, around, and through the city via designated truck routes should be properly managed.	• Airport • Bridge • City Attorney
	Policy 4.15.2: Infrastructure improvements and the use of emerging technologies that facilitate the clearance, timely movement, and security of trade, including facilities for the efficient intermodal transfer of goods between ships, trucks, rail, and air modes, should be supported.	
	Policy 4.15.3: Roadway and railway design and retrofit, to include complete streets upgrades, should balance the needs of freight movements along with the needs of all other types of transportation.	
	Policy 4.15.4: The city encourages the expanded use of railroads for regional and international shipment of goods due to the fuel-efficiency of rail transport and the heavy burden that trucks place on the system.	
	Policy 4.15.5: The relocation of major rail yards away from intensely developed areas could allow that land to be reclaimed for redevelopment, drainage improvements, parks, and civic spaces.	
	Policy 4.15.6: Preserve the ability and opportunity to transform any abandoned and underused railroad rights-of-way for other valuable uses.	
	Policy 4.15.7: The city should explore all opportunities for intercity passenger rail to other metropolitan areas such as San Antonio, Austin, and Corpus Christi.	
	Policy 4.15.8: The city should create a port master plan including a study of the port's economic impact to be updated yearly.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Global Trade and Airport		
Goal 4.16: The Laredo International Airport will increase its role as a welcoming gateway for passengers, as an intermodal hub for incoming and outgoing goods, and as a center for related economic activities that serve the city and the region.		
	Policy 4.16.1: Utilize and improve El Metro Transit connections to the airport to improve passenger access to the airport and maximize the value of airport property for related purposes.	• Airport • Bridge • City Attorney
	Policy 4.16.2: The city supports new mixed-use development and redevelopment on and around airport land.	
	Policy 4.16.3: Incorporate the Laredo International Airport Plan into the Port Plan. (See Policy 11.3.6).	
Ports of Entry		
Goal 4.17: Strengthen multimodal connections with Nuevo Laredo for binational mobility, commerce, economic development, familial bonds, tourism, and convenient routine travel between the two cities and countries.		
	Policy 4.17.1: Continue to manage the Ports of Entry as an integrated network to balance traffic flow and travel needs (employment, commerce, and tourism) while minimizing traffic in surrounding areas.	• Airport • Bridge • City Attorney
	Policy 4.17.2: Provide meaningful alternatives to single-occupant vehicles at all Ports of Entry, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and restoration of public transit.	
	Policy 4.17.3: The need for and feasibility of an additional international point of entry in south Laredo should be explored.	
	Policy 4.17.4: Support the creation of additional public rest areas with bathrooms and showers where truck drivers can rest during federally mandated rest periods between shifts.	

5. Housing

Overall Goal: To provide varied housing opportunities for Laredoans with diverse economic backgrounds and housing preferences while at the same time creating strong regional housing markets that include a robust urban core and infill strategies that balance the need for new affordable housing and complete, healthy, and accessible communities throughout all of Laredo.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Downtown Redevelopment		
Goal 5.1: Revitalize downtown by creating new housing opportunities.		
	Policy 5.1.1: Create a list of potential properties to redevelop and develop and adopt an infill development master plan.	• Building Development Services • Community Development • Environmental Services • Health • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 5.1.2: Create elderly housing opportunities like at the Hamilton Hotel.	
	Policy 5.1.3: Create a residential parking permit program.	
	Policy 5.1.4: Explore the opportunity for artist housing through the ArtSpace model.	
	Policy 5.1.5: Ensure that market-rate housing is developed to encourage a mix of incomes.	
	Policy 5.1.6: All new public infrastructure and facility investments should be concentrated downtown.	
Infill Opportunities		
Goal 5.2: Develop a robust infill strategy to redevelop existing neighborhoods and provide affordable housing choices.		
	Policy 5.2.1: Create an infill incentive policy that includes property tax rebates, waiver of permitting fees, parking reductions, and sales tax rebates, among other possibilities.	• Building Development Services • Community Development • Environmental Services • Health • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 5.2.2: Redevelop the Mercy Hospital area into a mixed-used, mixed income development.	
	Policy 5.2.3: City can identify all existing vacant parcels of land by developing a comprehensive map and list and pursue the purchase of these properties, when possible, for affordable housing units. Or use city parcels to create public-private partnerships.	
	Policy 5.2.4: Continue and enhance the "Operation Crackdown" program.	
	Policy 5.2.5: Allow micro housing as residential use within an existing residential lot and on vacant lots with increased density and decreased home size. Distinguish between home on slab and home on wheels, allowing both.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Invest in Legacy Neighborhoods		
Goal 5.3: Develop a "Legacy Neighborhoods Program" to ensure that historic and culturally significant communities thrive.		
	Policy 5.3.1: Create boundaries for these communities and work with neighborhood associations to create study area plans and implement preservation through zoning overlays.	• Building Development Services • Community Development • Environmental Services • Health • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 5.3.2: Develop an incentive policy to encourage development in these areas.	
	Policy 5.3.3: Encourage more public art such as murals, gateway signage, and landscaping corridors that serve to beautify these areas while creating a unique sense of place.	
	Policy 5.3.4: Main streets in each of these areas should be encouraged, ensuring a good balance of housing and neighborhood retail.	
	Policy 5.3.5: Provide resources for residents to organize and for neighborhood planning toolkits.	
	Policy 5.3.6: Create incentive programs for developers to include permanently reserved affordable housing units within new developments. Affordable housing to be integrated and indistinguishable from market priced housing.	
Build Complete and Healthy Communities		
Goal 5.4: Create walkable neighborhoods to help improve the health of Laredo citizens.		
	Policy 5.4.1: All new subdivisions will maintain Laredo's street grid.	• Building Development Services • Community Development • Environmental Services • Health • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 5.4.2: Develop parks and open spaces within a five-minute walk of all new homes.	
	Policy 5.4.3: New schools will implement Smart Growth Schools policies and design standards.	
	Policy 5.4.4: Where available, new neighborhoods should utilize the open streams and waterways as open space and recreational amenities.	
	Policy 5.4.5: New subdivisions will have 5 foot sidewalks and 5 foot parkways.	
Address Homelessness Concerns		
Goal 5.5: Create a comprehensive social service model.		
	Policy 5.5.1: Increase CDBG funding to nonprofit housing corporations.	• Building Development Services • Community Development • Environmental Services • Health • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 5.5.2: Work with the Laredo Homeless Coalition to identify areas in the city where homeless shelters can be located in close proximity to other services such as transportation, social services, and health care.	
	Policy 5.5.3: Fund and develop a comprehensive One Stop Shop for homeless services.	
	Policy 5.5.4: Develop the capacity of existing housing social service agencies through additional training, resources, and funding allocation.	
	Policy 5.5.5: Convene a citywide summit of housing advocates to develop a comprehensive homelessness plan.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Other Housing Policies		
Goal 5.6: Review existing development codes and modify to match 21ˢᵗ century best practices.		
	Policy 5.6.1: City should hire consultant to revise the city's development codes.	• Building Development Services • Community Development • Environmental Services • Health • Planning & Zoning
	Policy 5.6.2: Create an affordability index to ensure a balance between housing and transportation costs.	
	Policy 5.6.3: Discourage "Leapfrog" Development.	
	Policy 5.6.4: If needed, create financial policies such as impact fees that ensure new growth pays for itself without existing communities subsidizing the cost of new developments.	
	Policy 5.6.5: Explore various funding sources to create affordable housing and mixed-use/mixed income communities. These can include: • Texas Department of Housing & Community Development Affairs programs such as tax credits, bonds, and loans. • Leveraging the Community Reinvestment Act resources from the various banks. • The Laredo Housing Finance Corporation can serve as a magnet for new investments. • Allow Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP's) for affordable housing and mixed use developments through Low Income Housing Credit, Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, and New Markets Tax Credit.	
	Policy 5.6.6: Through the city's grants office, apply for housing and community development grants at the state and federal levels.	
	Policy 5.6.7: Pursue affordable housing redevelopment in partnership with the LHA and HUD through rental assistance demonstration and similar project-based assistance programs. Laredo Housing Authority will ensure that all available federal funds and programs are being implemented.	
	Policy 5.6.8: Allocate New Urbanism training across city departments and key development and housing stakeholders. This will ensure city-wide coordination of *Viva Laredo* Comprehensive Plan.	
	Policy 5.6.9: Make city properties data available for possible invesment.	
	Policy 5.6.10: Make a City Department in charge of Neighborhood Associations to provide education, advice and empowerment.	
	Policy 5.6.11: Create an investment trust fund to grow through different venues.	

6. Sustainability

Overall Goal: Ensure that environmental resources are conserved and properly managed in Laredo so that future generations may experience an improving environment that is more resilient than that of the previous generation.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Sustainable Buildings		
Goal 6.1: Create new and revitalize existing sustainable architecture throughout the city.		
	Policy 6.1.1: Implement programs and utilize best practices for efficient energy use in new buildings, such as LEED or other lifecycle costing initiatives.	• Building Development Services • Engineering • Environmental Services • Planning & Zoning • Public Works
	Policy 6.1.2: Implement programs to use energy more efficiently in existing buildings.	
	Policy 6.1.3: Enhance energy efficiency measures in local government operations.	
	Policy 6.1.4: Embrace technological responses to the green building challenge.	
	Policy 6.1.5: In addition to technology, embrace low-tech response to the green building challenge. Develop standards to encourage buildings to be designed with inexpensive components, including passive solar design, climate responsive architecture and vernacular design that is adapted to Laredo.	
	Policy 6.1.6: Implement programs that utilize best practices for sustainable site development.	
	Policy 6.1.7: Promote behavioral changes and consumption patterns that conserve energy, including energy efficient building systems, fixtures and appliances.	
	Policy 6.1.8: Promote weatherization techniques such as adding weather strips on doorways, caulking, sealing and insulating doorways.	
	Policy 6.1.9: Promote durable materials and architectural designs with a long life.	
	Policy 6.1.10: City government should lead the way in new construction and remodeling with green building principles.	
	Policy 6.1.11: Promote education programs, especially in schools, which stress the responsibility of each person to conserve energy resources.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Civic Spaces		
Goal 6.2: Provide a wide variety of neighborhood parks and recreational programs that are integrated with neighborhoods and accessible to most residents and visitors to Laredo.		
	Policy 6.2.1: The city shall strive to create extraordinary parks that express the natural beauty and cultural diversity of Laredo and fund the park system at a level that corresponds to its significant importance to Laredo residents.	• Building Development Services • Engineering • Environmental Services • Planning & Zoning • Public Works • Building Development Services • Engineering • Environmental Services • Planning & Zoning • Public Works
	Policy 6.2.2: The city will provide a balanced parks system with a variety of park sizes and facilities, including trails, open spaces, and indoor recreation facilities.	
	Policy 6.2.3: The city will regularly update and manage a park system plan.	
	Policy 6.2.4: The city will continue to require improved neighborhood greens or parks when land is subdivided, with adequate regulations (a minimum of 10 acres for every 1,000 residents) that ensure they will become important features in the new neighborhood: a. The edges of small greens and parks are critical to their success; the fronts and sides of buildings, not the backs, must face the park to provide natural surveillance and a well-maintained edge. b. Greens and parks must be separated from private buildings with a street or public path. c. Drought-tolerant shade trees should define the edges of parks and greens.	
	Policy 6.2.5: Create partnerships for the future success of the park system, involving every governmental entity, the school systems, the county, and the state. Recreational facilities at schools should be integrated into Laredo parks system for the mutual benefit of schools and the community. Stormwater detention areas can often be integrated with parks.	
	Policy 6.2.6: Incorporate stormwater detention facilities in an interconnected network of civic spaces.	
	Policy 6.2.7: Create trails, greenbelts, and linear parks for their inherent value and to provide connections between other parks, schools, neighborhoods, and natural open spaces.	
	Policy 6.2.8: Update the current landscaping ordinance to integrate the goals of this plan.	
Habitat and Biodiversity		
Goal 6.3: Protect and enhance ecologically sensitive areas, plants and wildlife resources.		
	Policy 6.3.1: Allow high-density land uses and cluster developments that protect ecologically sensitive areas. Encourage "light imprint development" where development cannot be avoided adjacent to or within ecologically sensitive areas.	• Planning & Zoning • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 6.3.2: Encourage retention of land that is in a natural, undisturbed condition. Plan new parks and open spaces to preserve ecologically sensitive areas.	
	Policy 6.3.3: Use the existing and future recreational connected park systems along creeks to interconnect potential development sites with complimentary land uses for park goers.	
	Policy 6.3.4: Incorporate the expansion and creation of wetlands into park systems in order to compliment urban design and enhance parks and natural habitat.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 6.3.5: Encourage the establishment and maintenance of wildlife and nature preserves.	• Planning & Zoning • Parks & Leisure Services
	Policy 6.3.6: Assure preservation of natural habitats for wildlife and protect threatened/endangered species of plants and animals.	
	Policy 6.3.7: Enhance and enforce a citywide tree preservation ordinance.	
	Policy 6.3.8: Establish a tree planting and maintenance campaign throughout the city.	
	Policy 6.3.9: Encourage the conservation, creation, or restoration of native habitat in urban areas such as public parks and publicly or privately owned lots.	
	Policy 6.3.10: Require that the majority of plants used on private lots, rights-of-way, and unbuilt portions of developments be native species, appropriate to the ecosystem viable for the particular site. Native shade trees should prioritized; yet use of some acclemated species might be necssary under certain conditions.	

Energy and Atmosphere

Goal 6.4: Develop Laredo in a way that requires less automobile use for access to daily needs, which will help to reduce the prevalence of green house gases. Strive to continue to meet the national ambient air quality standards for all pollutants.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 6.4.1: Promote new development that encourages a sustainable lifestyle such as walking, cycling, the use of public transit, and reducing the dependence on automobiles.	• Utilities • Public Works • Engineering
	Policy 6.4.2: Consider the energy efficiency of proposed development when land use and development decisions are made. This would include energy consumed by buildings and their users as well as energy used by commuting and vehicle trips generated due to new development.	
	Policy 6.4.3: Emphasize infill and higher density development located in walkable areas and areas served by public transit, to reduce dependency on automobiles.	
	Policy 6.4.4: Promote the concepts in the program for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) as a tool for evaluating development proposals.	
	Policy 6.4.5: Promote the adoption of on-site, low-carbon footprint (such as natural gas), and renewable energy sources by households, government and businesses.	
	Policy 6.4.6: Promote the use of renewable energy sources that reduce demand on fossil fuels such as: solar, wind, and geothermal.	
	Policy 6.4.7: Promote citywide car and van pooling systems and implement other forms of transit to connect major destinations, such as downtown or the universities.	
	Policy 6.4.8: Meet or exceed federal air quality standards for green house gases and other common pollutants.	
	Policy 6.4.9: Promote research and education that focuses on improving air quality.	
	Policy 6.4.10: Promote both roof and non-roof strategies to mitigate the urban heat island effect.	
	Policy 6.4.11: Secure sufficient energy resources to meet present and future community needs without degrading local, regional or global ecology.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 6.4.12: Promote architecture that exhibits sustainable design and technological innovations that conserve or generate energy.	• Utilities • Public Works • Engineering
	Policy 6.4.13: Consider an increase of local gasoline tax to be earmarked for funding El Metro and improving El Metro's level of service.	
	Policy 6.4.14: Direct additional and new environmental impact fees to El Metro.	
	Policy 6.4.15: Plan for adequate and sustainable solid waste management practices such as ctiy-wide composting, landfill gas harvesting, and expanding of recycling capacity.	
Water Management		
Goal 6.5: Continue to develop policies that promote water reclamation, conservation, stormwater management, and access to a sustainable water supply.		
	Policy 6.5.1: Develop cost effective processes to re-use and reclaim water; use new technologies to expand capacity.	• Utilities • Public Works • Engineering
	Policy 6.5.2: Develop policies that promote and incentivize the development of surface water treatment, conveyance, and reclamation.	
	Policy 6.5.3: Implement the re-use of wastewater treatment plant effluent to initially combat Lake Casa Blanca's fluctuating water levels; this will ultimately decrease Laredo's reliance on the Rio Grande.	
	Policy 6.5.4: Pursue active and passive water harvesting techniques, including small-scale techniques, such as rain barrels or cisterns.	
	Policy 6.5.5: Maximize the use of native and drought resistant species in required landscaping policies.	
	Policy 6.5.6: Maximize the use of permeable surfaces where they can replace impermeable surfaces, such as conventional asphalt or concrete.	
	Policy 6.5.7: Continue to implement the existing water conservation program.	
	Policy 6.5.8: Recognize that climate change will affect water supply, stormwater management and conservation and that the annual flows of the Rio Grande will be affected, resulting in needed adjustments to local ordinances, specifically related to properties that are in flood zones.	
	Policy 6.5.9: Protect the community from floods and reduce the risk of flood damage.	
	Policy 6.5.10: Locate development outside of flood plains and instead dedicate these spaces for suitable uses, such as recreational, agricultural, or open spaces.	
	Policy 6.5.11: Design necessary flood control facilities to blend with and enhance surrounding areas.	
	Policy 6.5.12: Create a unified drainage ordinance that considers the initiatives outlined in this plan.	
	Policy 6.5.13: Develop a Future Water Resource Plan.	

7. Health

Overall Goal: Improve the overall physical and mental health of Laredo citizens by increasing the quality of life in the region.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Regional Collaboration		
Goal 7.1: Address the health needs of all residents in the region through collaboration and coordination among local, state, and binational entities.		
	Policy 7.1.1: Partner with local, state, and binational entities to prevent health-related problems through prevention programs and policies.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.1.2: The Planning Department should educate developers, neighborhood associations, and other building permit applicants for major projects on the connection between the built environment and public health.	
Environmental Risk Factors		
Goal 7.2: Reduce exposure to environmental risk factors.		

	Policy 7.2.1: Reduce risk of injury and fatality due to vehicular accidents.
	a. Lower design speeds on existing and proposed streets and highways.
	   i. Retrofit streets to be more pedestrian-friendly.
	   ii. Include on-street parking and street trees as barriers between pedestrians and moving travel lanes and which increase visual friction to discourage speeding.
	   iii. Include wide sidewalks and narrower travel lanes.
	b. Convert signalized or geometrically complex intersections to modern roundabouts or fully-circulating intersections in order to reduce or eliminate turn-lanes, slow traffic while improving flow, and reduce the incidence of broadside and head-on collisions.
	c. Increase the frequency of crosswalks and increase signal time in favor of pedestrians crossing streets, especially multi-lane arterials and other major streets.
	d. Minimize crossing distance at intersections with pedestrian refuges, bulb-outs, speed tables, and other strategies.
	e. Promote the use of woonerfs, shared spaces, curbless streets, and stripe-free zones as ways to create very traffic calmed residential streets that need less right-of-way than conventional streets.
	f. As silent hybrids and electric vehicles become more common, expand the city's use of Audible Pedestrian Signals (APS) to assist blind pedestrians at intersections and crosswalks.
		• Health
		• Planning & Zoning
		• Engineering
		• Parks & Leisure

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.2.2: Reduce exposure to air pollution. a. Minimize VMT through increased walking, cycling, and transit usage. Strategies to accomplish this are found in the Land Use Patterns, Mobility, and Urban Design Chapters. b. Work with federal entities to reduce bridge congestion, especially by means other than road widening which would increase polluting idling.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.2.3: Reduce exposure to excess ultraviolet rays. a. Provide for shade along sidewalks and pedestrian pathways with one or more of the following: high degree of spatial enclosure formed by buildings and narrow right-of-way, street trees, canopies, awnings, colonnades, arcades, and galleries. b. Provide shade devices for playgrounds to protect children from sunburn and increased risk of skin cancers. c. Educate citizens on the importance of sunscreen, clothing, and avoiding peak sunlight hours for outdoor activity as a first line of defense against melanoma and other skin cancers. d. Educate citizens on the need for adequate exposure to sunlight in order to avoid Vitamin D deficiencies and how to achieve this without damaging the skin. e. Plan to tackle tree attrition and replacement by conducting a tree/canopy survey of parks and other public spaces, with annual updates.	
	Policy 7.2.4: Increase access to safe water. a. Continue to monitor water for contaminants. b. Continue to educate citizens and visitors on practices that reduce groundwater pollution, such as proper disposal of medicines, chemicals, batteries, and hazardous materials.	
	Policy 7.2.5: Reduce infectious and communicable diseases and infection. a. Coordinate with the Department of Public Health and its efforts to combat the spread of infectious diseases. b. Map disease clusters. c. Coordinate with governmental entities south of the border to identify and prevent pathogens that may spread in either direction across the border. d. Support efforts to immunize the uninsured and underinsured population of Laredo and the surrounding areas and to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases in all ages. e. Support efforts to educate and test for HIV, syphilis, and other STDs, in addition to education and provision of contraceptives. f. Support efforts to halt the spread of tuberculosis. g. Support dental care programs for children.	• Health • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.2.6: Reduce exposure to heavy metals, radon, lead, and mercury. a. Embrace clean, renewable energy generation. b. Monitor levels of radon and educate households on how to test for and mitigate radon gas. c. Educate households, contractors, and real estate professionals on how to identify, remove, or stabilize lead-based paints and other sources of lead in construction.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.2.7: Reduce risks associated with the electrical grid. a. Support the electric company's instructions on how to respond to downed power lines. b. Strengthen the electrical distribution grid. c. Locate electrical wires at rear property lines or in alleys or rear easements in order to lessen conflicts between street trees and electrical infrastructure while reducing the blight caused by overhead wires. d. Provide incentives for the relocation of existing above ground electrical wires underground. e. Reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields by locating residences at a safe distance from high voltage transmission lines and easements.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.2.8: Continue to develop animal care and control services including education and animal population control practices accessible to the public.	
Physical Activity		
Goal 7.3: Encourage physical activity through the design of the built environment.		
	Policy 7.3.1: Study existing neighborhoods for deficiencies. a. Determine if residents can easily walk to retail, especially a grocer, where they may obtain daily necessities. b. Determine if residents are less than a five-minute walk from public facilities such as schools, parks, libraries, and transit stops. c. Work with communities to increase density, connectivity, and completeness (mixture of uses).	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.3.2: Adjust land development regulations and zoning policies in order to make neighborhoods more complete, walkable and connected.	
	Policy 7.3.3: Improve existing and new streetscapes so that traffic speeds are reduced and pedestrians' and cyclists' comfort and safety are increased. a. Utilize the Complete Streets approach to pedestrian and bike accommodation.	
	Policy 7.3.4: Design new neighborhoods to be amenity-rich, mixed-use, interconnected, dense, and compact. Neighborhoods should be able to supply most of life's daily necessities on foot or on bike, with easy access to transit service. Streets should be designed with low-design speeds.	
	Policy 7.3.5: Integrate walkable neighborhood design according to techniques and policies described in Land Use Patterns and Urban Design Chapters.	
	Policy 7.3.6: Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department, and TxDOT where appropriate, to increase pedestrian and cyclist connectivity across natural and man-made barriers such as freeways, ravines, river beds, canyons, and arroyos. Provide a shorter and more convenient route for non-motorized traffic across barriers.	
	Policy 7.3.7: Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department, and TxDOT where appropriate, to invest in a recreational infrastructure that provides not only recreational walking, jogging, and cycling, but also may provide an alternative to car trips. Such infrastructure may include trails (multi-use, hiking, equestrian, jogging), cycle tracks, bike lanes, parks, and restored or conserved wild areas. Use the Rio Grande and stream networks as a multi-use recreational amenities.	• Health • Engineering • Parks & Leisure

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.3.8: Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department to integrate fixed, durable outdoor fitness equipment in parks that allow for flexibility and resistance training.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.3.9: Encourage workplace fitness by including fitness centers within or in close proximity to employment centers.	
	Policy 7.3.10: Encourage employers to remove subsidies for parking and provide financial incentives to cycling, transit, and walking as a commuting alternative.	
	Policy 7.3.11: Encourage the inclusion of showers, lockers, and changing areas at places of employment.	
	Policy 7.3.12: Create "visitable" building types for the disabled that also satisfy the goal of creating walkable street frontages.	
	Policy 7.3.13: Create safe routes to school using mapping tools, the planning of street networks, and walkable and multimodal street designs.	
	Policy 7.3.14: Encourage schools to provide open campuses. At a minimum, recreational fields should be open to the community after school hours and on weekends.	
Obesity & Chronic Illnesses		
Goal 7.4: Help reduce obesity and the chronic illnesses associated with obesity, such as Type 2 Diabetes, cancers, and heart disease.		
	Policy 7.4.1: Create recommendations to improve nutrition, increasing physical activity, and making policy recommendations toward obesity prevention.	• Health • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.4.2: Map citywide prevalence of diabetes and examine where diabetes-related services (such as dialysis, insulin, and diet counseling) are needed.	
	Policy 7.4.3: Map cancer clusters in order to identify anomalies and environmental factors such as carcinogens.	
Basic Nutritional Needs		
Goal 7.5: Create a food system in which city residents can meet their proper nutritional needs.		
	Policy 7.5.1: Encourage local groceries and convenient stores to stock nutritional food across all stores.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.5.2: Initiate research, policies, and programs that increase food security, improve health outcomes, and create social and economic opportunities to attempt to ensure that every resident has access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food. a. Perform Community Food Assessments to determine where "food deserts" exist in Laredo. Target food deserts as areas to start focusing food production, farmers' markets, and small community-based grocers. b. Ensure that schools have access to organic and unprocessed whole food products. Incorporate cultivation plots on school grounds for the education of students and to potentially supply schools, food banks, needy households, and local retailers with fresh produce. c. Ensure that Homeowner's Associations do not prohibit food production and the growing of crops such as fruits, vegetables, and herbs in front, back, or side yards. d. Encourage Parks and Leisure Services Department efforts to integrate food gardens into parks. e. Encourage development of community food gardens through grant or partner funding. f. Improve access to direct or whole sale buying for low-income and limited-mobility residents. g. Remove barriers to the raising of poultry on private lots in suburban areas. h. Continue to ensure that food service establishments and grocery stores are inspected by a registered sanitarian at least twice each year. i. Continue to support the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to improve the nutrition of vulnerable members of the population.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.5.3: Promote responsible parenting and family planning including non-pharmaceutical-based methods.	

Psychological Well-Being

Goal 7.6: Encourage psychological and emotional well-being.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.6.1: Coordinate with the health care providers, psychologists, and researchers to provide therapy for sufferers of stress, depression.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.6.2: Seek to reduce commuting times to maximize quality time with friends and family.	
	Policy 7.6.3: Seek to improve sleep by reducing light and acoustical pollution. a. Enact a Dark Sky Ordinance in the city. b. Erect acoustical barriers and implement sound mitigation. c. Locate residential areas at a safe distance from major sound and light polluters or limit hours and levels of illumination to allow for a period of darker skies between midnight and sunrise. d. Discourage commercial uses that have intrusive levels of lighting from locating adjacent to residential land uses.	
	Policy 7.6.4: Encourage residential building types that accommodate extended or non-conventional households.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.6.5: Encourage small schools embedded within the neighborhood fabric rather than large drive-only campuses.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 7.6.6: Strengthen extended support networks by reducing land use patterns that lead to social isolation.	
	Policy 7.6.7: Integrate assisted-living facilities into neighborhood fabric and design them as dignified home-like facilities.	
	Policy 7.6.8: Continue to educate patients and family members of patients on the symptoms, therapy, rehabilitation, and medications associated with mental health disorders.	

Substance Abuse

Goal 7.7: Discourage substance abuse.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.7.1: Work on policies to discourage retailers of alcohol and tobacco products within the sight of school entrances or access points.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure • Police
	Policy 7.7.2: Expand no-smoking zones to outdoor public spaces that are owned by the city.	
	Policy 7.7.3: Enforce existing laws related to sale and use of tobacco and alcohol to minors.	
	Policy 7.7.4: Collaborate with local and binational entities to discourage and prevent the trade of drugs and arms across the border.	
	Policy 7.7.5: Encourage programs focused upon drug counseling, rehabilitation, and sobriety.	
	Policy 7.7.6: Support efforts to educate and prevent the use of tobacco.	

Access to Health Care

Goal 7.8: Improve access to medical care.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.8.1: Distribute primary care offices, clinics, and laboratories, amongst the various districts and neighborhoods that make up the city. Encourage consolidation of major medical facilities to create efficiencies in providing care.	• Health • Planning & Zoning • Mayor & Council
	Policy 7.8.2: Locate medical care providers and human services at transit locations. a. Encourage medical providers to locate at stations or bus stops with reduced parking footprints.	
	Policy 7.8.3: Allow access by emergency response vehicles without sacrificing walkable, traffic-calmed street designs.	
	Policy 7.8.4: Achieve a sufficient medical provider-to-patient ratio. a. Collaborate with private, non-profit, and other governmental entities to establish and implement a method for recruiting and retaining medical providers. b. Increase quality of life and housing options throughout the city as a means of attracting health care practitioners.	
	Policy 7.8.5: Engage the philonthropic and private sector to develop and sustain the expansion of the health care industry.	
	Policy 7.8.6: Complete the development of the laboratoy response network at the Laredo Health Department for local, regional, and international disease control.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 7.8.7: Promote the integration of disease self-management and behavioral health screening, and education into primary care.	

8. Parks

Overall Goal: A parks system that is valued by the local communities it serves and one that strives to address the recreational demands for all of Laredo's Citizens.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Park Development **Goal 8.1**: Development of future park land and improvements to the existing park system to meet the needs of the residents of Laredo.		
	Policy 8.1.1: The city shall strive to create extraordinary parks that express the natural beauty and cultural diversity of Laredo and fund the park system at a level that corresponds to its significant importance to Laredo residents.	• Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 8.1.2: The city will provide a balanced parks system with a variety of park sizes and facilities, including trails, open spaces, and indoor recreation facilities.	
	Policy 8.1.3: The city will continue to update, and implement the parks master plan to refine strategies for oversight and development of park land. This plan should meet with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department guidelines to ensure grant fund eligibility. As such, it is recommended that the City continue with the plan structure of a 10 year plan timeframe, with a subsequent 5 year update.	
	Policy 8.1.4: The City should continue with its park land dedication requirements. The City should routinely review and update regulations as necessary to ensure that park land dedication ordinances compliment development impacts.	
	Policy 8.1.5: Create partnerships for the future success of the park system, involving every governmental entity, the school systems, the county, and the state. Recreational facilities at schools should be integrated into Laredo parks system for the mutual benefit of schools and the community.	
	Policy 8.1.6: Formalize any relationships with school districts or other groups where land is being integrated into the park system, as this will strengthen the ability of utilizing grant funding for park improvements.	
	Policy 8.1.7: Create task forces as part of the next parks planning effort to evaluate and provide recommendation for sports complexes to meet the respective needs for hosting different athletic tournaments.	
	Policy 8.1.8: Establish mechanisms that allow for the collection of park land development fees for the build out of metropolitan parks. These can be used to help implement the recommendations found in the Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan, as this will benefit all residents of the City of Laredo.	
	Policy 8.1.9: The City should consider the inclusion of a staff landscape architect within the Parks and Leisure Services Department to oversee the design, drainage, and use of parks, park ponds, and drainage facilities throughout the City. The goal of the landscape architect should be parks and park facilities that are artful, recreational, and functional.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 8.1.10: Facilitate the conversion of undeveloped land such as drainage easements, vacant lots, and flood zones adjacent to existing and new neighborhoods that lack nearby parks.	
	Policy 8.1.11: Collaborate with HOA's to advance the goals and policies of the plan.	
	Policy 8.1.12: Promote the use of the Rio Grande River for recreational purposes by development of public river access facilities along the river such as docks and boat ramps included within river park programs.	

Park Access

Goal 8.2: Ensure that residents have access to recreational opportunities through the equitable distribution of park land and open space.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 8.2.1: Increase the application of proximity level of service standards for each respective park classification as deemed appropriate.	• Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 8.2.2: Acquire parcels for the assembly of interconnected greenways as a way to increase community access to open space.	
	Policy 8.2.3: Promote community garden programs as means to increase park offerings to economically disadvantaged areas. This may include acquisition of small tracts of land to accommodate garden plots.	

Goal 8.3: Promote parks that provide offerings and accommodations for persons of all ages and abilities.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 8.3.1: Ensure that new park facilities and renovations meet accessibility requirements. Identify ways to include the variety of sensory engagement offerings into park design to make parks more inclusive. Communicate and develop reference materials so the general public is educated on the opportunities that exist.	• Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 8.3.2: Emphasize ways to accommodate park facilities, programs, and recreation opportunities for youth with an emphasis on teens, specifically outside the realm of organized sports.	
	Policy 8.3.3: Create an aquatic facilities plan to increase the overall access to water based recreation. This includes a strategy to meet any facility levels of serve standards for splash parks, community swimming pools, and aquatic centers/water parks.	
	Policy 8.3.4: Encourage cross department dialogue as a means to promote the use of parks for hosting city and community wide events. With established fee mechanisms, this can create a source of revenue and may encourage visits by residents who don't use parks for recreation purposes.	

Goal 8.4: Ensure parks are safe and comfortable environments for all park users.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 8.4.1: Continue with the application of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, as identified in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.	• Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 8.4.2: Identify and evaluate potential hazards in the park system. Develop a plan to systematically reduce or remove their threat review and update annually.	
	Policy 8.4.3: In upcoming park planning efforts, evaluate the need for a system wide lighting standards and implementation program.	

Trails, Linear Parks, and Greenways

Goal 8.5: Increase park connectivity, recreation offerings, bicycle and pedestrian networks through the development of a Trails Master Plan.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 8.5.1: Develop a Trails Master Plan for the City; include ETJ as part of the planning area. Work with neighboring communities to identify opportunities for collaboration.	• Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 8.5.2: The Trails Master Plan should not only connect existing parks and open space to residential areas, but be integrated into other bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts. This should encourage and promote the connection to key destinations, like schools.	
	Policy 8.5.3: Modify park land dedication ordinance to include trail system dedication requirements to correspond with the design criteria for shared-use paths.	
	Policy 8.5.4: Define "proximity" criteria in the trail system dedication requirements for purposes of creating a City Trail System Fund for the implementation of trail projects. Amend development regulations to provide connections to existing and proposed trails found in a Trials Master Plan.	
	Policy 8.5.6: Adopt design standards for multi-use trails building upon the trail classes established in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.	

Maintaining Parks

Goal 8.6:Strive for the efficient use of City resources while promoting aesthetically pleasing and functional parks and park facilities.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 8.6.1: Continually refine maintenance approaches to reflect the industry current best management practices. This includes establishing practices for routine tasks, nutrient management plans, mowing guidelines, integrated pest management, facility upkeep, and landscaping and tree pruning guidelines.	• Planning & Zoning • Engineering • Parks & Leisure
	Policy 8.6.2: Identify parks that require disproportionate amount of hours for maintaining and solicit ways from staff to reduce those demands. This includes looking at parks where only one or two sports fields is located and assess if they should be repurposed.	
	Policy 8.6.3: Establish water conservation program that includes a variety of methods for irrigation reduction, including acreage irrigated reductions and infrastructure that allows for more efficient applications. This may include identify areas for xeriscape and native plantings in both neighborhood and community parks.	
	Policy 8.6.4: Promote park maintenance and conservation approaches as part of a community wide education effort. Focus on changing the way citizens view parks as manicured lawns to a more dynamic part of the built environment and natural ecosystem.	
	Policy 8.6.5: Develop a tree planting program to increase tree diversity geared to creating a more resilient urban forest and larger tree canopy in City parks. A tree planting program should include the addition larger caliper trees, not just saplings. It would be appropriate to complement this tree planting program with a strategy to preserve existing trees.	
	Policy 8.6.6: Identify standards and approaches to where park land and other open space can integrate storm water detention facility into a network of green spaces.	
	Policy 8.6.7: Create multi-faceted strategies for maintaining an increase in smaller and more dispersed parks by requiring the use of lower maintenance native vegetation, more durable materials, and promote the public care and vigilance of the facilites through good urban design which faces home fronts toward neighborhood parks. Restructuring city budget to account for added maintenance should also be considered.	

9. Economic Development

Overall Goal: Build greater industry diversification, increase access to good-paying jobs, and enhance the capacity for entrepreneurship through a commitment to utilizing economic development tools and further private sector engagement.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Proactive Economic Development **Goal 9.1**: Increase the capacity for and ability to pursue investments and opportunities for job growth.		
	Policy 9.1.1: Hire an Economic Development Liaison.	• Mayor and Council • Finance
	Policy 9.1.2: Utilize a well-communicated and transparent framework for incentives.	
	Policy 9.1.3: Utilize Tax-Increment Financing districts and business improvement districts to spur development.	
	Policy 9.1.4: Conduct annual surveys of businesses.	
	Policy 9.1.5: Identify challenges found in these surveys and promote improvements.	
	Policy 9.1.6: Conduct annual visits to major employers with a team of local partners.	
	Policy 9.1.7: Hold semi-annual meetings with development community.	
	Policy 9.1.8: Promote awareness of workforce development programs to employers on a semi-annual basis.	
	Policy 9.1.9: Package logistics and supply chain management degrees as "seamless" educational offerings.	
	Policy 9.1.10: Cultivate stronger relationships and goal alignment between educators and employers.	
	Policy 9.1.11: Participate in economic development and site selection conferences.	
	Policy 9.1.12: Attend trade shows and conferences related to target industries.	
	Policy 9.1.13: Organize "SWAT" teams to aggressively market the city to potential employers.	
	Policy 9.1.14: Develop an effective web site catered to site selectors.	
	Policy 9.1.15: Review and grade progress on an annual basis.	
Promote Regional Cooperation **Goal 9.2**: Allow for a more coherent vision of the region to be developed.		
	Policy 9.2.1: Create a leadership group to discuss regional economic development priorities on an annual basis.	• Mayor and Council
	Policy 9.2.2: Build a regional marketing plan for business recruitment.	
	Policy 9.2.3: Create regional business data hub at TAMIU.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 9.2.4: Develop communications strategy to build public support for economic development issues through allied community organizations and social media.	
	Policy 9.2.5: Seek partnerships with cities in the broader region to cooperate on economic development initiatives.	
	Policy 9.2.6: Utilize "SWAT" team of industry experts to promote economic development.	
Spur Entrepreneurship		
Goal 9.3: Provide the necessary environment for local, regional, and international entrepreneurs to find success in Laredo.		
	Policy 9.3.1: Support global business incubator/accelerator specialized in logistics and associated technologies.	• Mayor and Council • Convention & Visitors Bureau
	Policy 9.3.2: Organize an Angel fund to support entrepreneurs.	
	Policy 9.3.3: Create a regional young professionals/entrepreneurs group.	
	Policy 9.3.4: Strongly promote entrepreneurial education at K-12 and institutions of higher education, with connections to target industries.	
	Policy 9.3.5: Create or attract a coding school.	
	Policy 9.3.6: Build presence of Laredo at industry trade shows and conferences.	
	Policy 9.3.7: Market existing innovative companies and startups.	
	Policy 9.3.8: Hold an annual global conference on innovations in logistics.	
	Policy 9.3.9: Consider new developments or redeveloping properties adjacent to border crossings as mixed-use, free-trade commercial centers.	
	Policy 9.3.10 Encourage the development of higher bandwidth networks throughout the city, especially those servicing the target industries identified herein.	
Cultivate a Vibrant Community		
Goal 9.4: Strengthen the quality of place and build greater community engagement.		
	Policy 9.4.1: Provide greater support for downtown projects, especially those that encourage downtown living, mixed-use development, and "smart growth" ideals.	• Planning and Zonning • Building Services • Finance • Community Development
	Policy 9.4.2: Continue to fund façade improvement grants, NEZ, TIRZ, and MMD that help business owners maintain market and buildings.	
	Policy 9.4.3: Promote downtown businesses and events that help to create a "sense of place".	
	Policy 9.4.4: Leverage downtown HEB site and create development plan.	
	Policy 9.4.5: Consider offering free Wi-Fi in downtown.	
	Policy 9.4.6: Fund major improvements through "Quality of Life" bonds.	
	Policy 9.4.7: Consider developing a Community Land Trust to lower the cost of homeownership and support development of micro housing.	
	Policy 9.4.8: Revise development code to incentivize development of mixed-use, walkable, neighborhoods and to encourage rehabilitation of underutilized buildings.	
	Policy 9.4.9: Ensure proper flexibility in code an occupancy limits to allow residents to rent out portions of their homes.	
	Policy 9.4.10: Partner with private sector to set up a community affordable housing fund.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 9.4.11: Develop a new infill incentive policy to encourage "smart growth".	
	Policy 9.4.12: Create a community drive toward quality.	
	Policy 9.4.13: Direct incentives to applied, performing, and culinary arts businesses through fee waivers and fast track permitting.	
	Policy 9.4.14: Create and support an arts and culture board.	
	Policy 9.4.15: Work to expand existing festivals and sporting events.	
	Policy 9.4.16: Look into attracting development of artist housing, such as Artspace.	
	Policy 9.4.17: Encourage art in public places and in businesses.	

10. Art, Culture & Education

Overarching Policy: Establish by ordinance a Department for Education, Art and Culture, to include an Education Liaison, and an Arts and Culture Liaison, as well a Commission of Arts and Culture, with close integration with the Department of Economic Development.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Education **Goal 10.1**: Support the improvement of the Education system of Laredo through coordination of efforts across all agencies.		
	Policy 10.1.1: Establish the Commission on Education for the purpose of accelerating Plan initiatives in education as they relate to talent retention and business growth. The Commission would be governed by persons from the four primary investment sectors of the community; public, private, academic, and philanthropic..	• Mayor and Council • Community Development
	Policy 10.1.2: Support and coordinate curriculum alignment across all education agencies and grade levels. Special focus should be placed on aligning curriculums that support target industries. .	
	Policy 10.1.3: Enter into partnerships with the school districts and the institutions of higher education to increase educational opportunities and improve student performance.	
	Policy 10.1.4: Coordinate with educational and business sector to promote and support quality early education, child care, and after school programs for all residents, while working to foster potential and increase retention of citizens.	
	Policy 10.1.5: Promote Food Sustainability Curriculum for grades K-12.	
Arts and Culture **Goal 10.2**: Recognize local and regional arts and culture as the foremost indicator of the community's unique identity and support its development to cultivate civic pride and identity and as an essential component to economic development and attracting and retaining talent.		
	Policy 10.2.1: Establish a Commission on Arts and Culture. The Commission would help realize the goals of the Public Arts Plan.	• Mayor and Council • Community Development • Public Works • Planning • Convention and Visitors Bureau • Finance • Parks and Leisure
	Policy 10.2.2: Create a Public Art ordinance to establish a 2% for the arts program, setting aside 2% from every Capital Improvement Project budget for the acquisition of art for municipal property.	
	Policy 10.2.3: Promote Higher Education in the Arts.	
	Policy 10.2.4: Support creative and professional growth of the arts community.	
	Policy 10.2.5: Support economic growth of Heritage Tourism by investing in the Historic Streets of Laredo and in Historic Architecture.	
	Policy 10.2.6: Enhance the experience visitors have of Laredo by investing in wayfinding signage and apps and support the creation of a Tourism Bus / Trolley Route.	
	Policy 10.2.7: - Promote Laredo as a unique place, community, and destination.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
	Policy 10.2.8: Make Arts and Culture the cornerstone of Laredo's identity by encouraging and growing our cultural arts base, film and art festivals, theater, and other artistic projects.	
	Policy 10.2.9: Promote Children's Art Programs.	
	Policy 10.2.10: Promote the creation of an art incubator studio, exhibition, performance and office space for arts organizations, artists, and creative industry businesses.	
	Policy 10.2.11: Create a standard policy for selection of artists for public art through RFQ's and paid competitions to encourage the development of the industry and to help the recruitment of more artists into the local community.	

11. Global Initiatives

Overall Goal: Build greater industry diversification, increase access to good-paying jobs, and enhance the capacity for entrepreneurship through a commitment to utilizing economic development tools and further private sector engagement.

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Laredo Regional Economic Development Zone (LREDZ) **Goal 11.1**: Create a Binational Council to promote the interests of LREDZ with representatives from both cities, states.		
	Policy 11.1.1: The cities' Binational Council should promote the interests of LREDZ with representatives from both cities, states.	• Mayor and Council
	Policy 11.1.2: Bi-national Council should foster complementary cultural experiences throughout the region, enhancing both cities existing programs as well as promoting new intercultural facilities and venues.	
	Policy 11.1.3: Bi-national Council should support awareness of the existing programs among the Region and provide the venue and resources for these entities to meet on a regular basis to promote innovative educational alignments.	
	Policy 11.1.4: Contine to gather input from the city's Binational Council for further expansion of global initiatives.	
Planning in Both Laredos **Goal 11.2**: Maintain alignment between both cities' Comprehensive Plans.		
	Policy 11.2.1: Implement a plan for downtown revitalization programs and include them in an international historic corridor.	• Mayor and Council • Planning • Convention and Visitors Bureau
	Policy 11.2.2: Create a plan for a Cross-Border Heritage Tour of both cities.	
	Policy 11.2.3: Encourage the addition of a bi-national committee to the Metropolitan Planning Organizations and its counterpart in Nuevo Laredo.	
	Policy 11.2.4: Provide input on international crossing facility planning on the Federal level to promote pedestrian-friendly approaches to duty free shopping areas, nearby local restaurants, and shaded public rest areas.	
	Policy 11.2.5: Develop a bi-national conference, thus building upon both cities' vision of improvement and revitalization.	
	Policy 11.2.6: Organize Bike Plan programs that envision bi-national routes.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Trade **Goal 11.3**: Participate in the support of innovative strategies for alleviation of long border wait times, infrastructure improvements, public safety, economic development, border inspection and national security at the international border.		
	Policy 11.3.1: Create a Laredo Chapter of the World Trade Center Association.	• Mayor and Council
	Policy 11.3.2: Research possible future trade zone designations that leverage advanced security and chain-of-custody technologies.	
	Policy 11.3.3: Foster trade opportunities with regional trade partners through an international incubator such as a "Global Street" workspace for investment and talent retention.	
	Policy 11.3.4: Facilitate synergistic interaction between the Region's Incubator Programs such as Mile 1 (International Business Assistance Center) and the Instituto Municipal de la Juventud de Nuevo Laredo (IMJUVE).	
	Policy 11.3.5: Develop an Airport Modernization Plan of the Laredo International Airport which accommodates global cargo carriers services and implement compatible land use in properties surrounding the Laredo International Airport.	
	Policy 11.3.6: Develop a Laredo Port Plan and Plan Implementation Commission to include railroad, airport, bridge, and port connectivity expansion studies together with Nuevo Laredo. Include a supply chain management study and port economic development and diversification strategy.	
	Policy 11.3.7: Improve the World Trade Bridge traffic signal phasing and timing.	
Education **Goal 11.4**: Create a Binational Council Branch on Education to plan joint education programs that reach beyond the border.		
	Policy 11.4.1: Create a binational education fund to allow talent to study abroad in areas related to Laredo's success as an inland port, a historical tourist destination with commitment to return for a specified timeframe and provide expertise into the Region's home community.	• Mayor and Council
	Policy 11.4.2: Create a liaison between school districts and the CREDE (Regional Education Development Center, Tamaulipas State institution for education) in Nuevo Laredo to create an "adopt a school" program.	
	Policy 11.4.3: Become a member of the World Affairs Council (an educational support venue).	
	Policy 11.4.4: Engage and associate with NAFSA (Association of International Educators-nonprofit), become a member and help guide both cities' education professionals in providing high-quality international education.	

Goal	Policy	Responsible Department(s)
Regional Image		
Goal 11.5: Create data-based joint regional branding together with our reginal partners.		
	Policy 11.5.1: Support a recreational and cultural agenda to promote the Region.	• Mayor and Council • Convention and Visitors Bureau
	Policy 11.5.2: Enhance and foster the Region's rich historical heritage.	
	Policy 11.5.3: Encourage a common vision for the Rio Grande.	
	Policy 11.5.4: Create a communication plan that celebrates the Region.	
Health and Environment		
Policy 11.6: Establish infrastructure for healthy region and sustainable environment.		
	Policy 11.6.1: Develop a binational plan to curb the carbon footprint of the Inland Port.	• Environmental Services • Utilities
	Policy 11.6.2: Develop yearly binational summits to create a joint set of goals regarding environmental impact and quality.	
Regional History, Arts and Culture		
Policy 11.7: The proposed Laredo Arts and Culture Commission should coordinate arts and culture programing with the Centro Cultural Mexicano de Nuevo Laredo with funding mechanisms considered a priority in both city's budget.		
	Policy 11.7.1: Support the creation of a comprehensive historical landmark tour on both sides of the Border.	• Planning • Parks and Leisure

Process

A

do la conferencia⟩ ⟨the road proceeds south : la calle sigue hacia el sur⟩

proceeding [proˈsiːdɪŋ] *n* **1** PROCEDURE : procedimiento *m* **2 proceedings** *npl* EVENTS : acontecimientos *mpl* **3 proceedings** *npl* MINUTES : actas *fpl* (de una reunión, etc.)

proceeds [ˈproːˌsiːdz] *npl* : ganancias *fpl*

process[1] [ˈprɑˌsɛs, ˈproː-] *vt* : procesar, tratar

process[2] *n, pl* **-cesses** [ˈprɑˌsɛsəz, ˈproː-, -səsəz, -səˌsiːz] **1** : proceso *m* ⟨the process of elimination : el proceso de eliminación⟩ **2** METHOD : proceso *m*, método *m* ⟨manufacturing processes : procesos industriales⟩ **3** : acción *f* judicial ⟨due process of law : el debido proceso (de la ley)⟩ **4** SUMMONS : citación *f* **5** PROJECTION : protuberancia *f* (anatómica) **6 in the process of** : en vías de ⟨in the process of repair : en reparaciones⟩

procession [prəˈsɛʃən] *n* : procesión *f*, desfile *m* ⟨a funeral procession : un cortejo fúnebre⟩

processional [prəˈsɛʃənəl] *n* : himno *m* para una procesión

PLANNING IN PUBLIC

Why Plan in Public?

Planning in public is a vital component to the long-term success of any plan, including an entire comprehensive plan for the city. Having the community help create the plan ensures support for the plan long after the planners are gone. An active group of people will also help to implement the plan's concepts and strategies that they themselves help to shape. Also, by gathering a wide range of ideas and visions for the future, the plan becomes more nuanced and specific to the community.

Innovative Plan with Community Support

As the guiding document for the City of Laredo, it was important that the comprehensive plan be created with the input and collaboration of the citizens of Laredo, public officials, and staff members. To achieve this goal, *Viva Laredo* was created using an open planning process that included numerous opportunities and ways for people to participate and add their ideas, concepts, and priorities to the development of the plan. Events included press conferences, town hall meetings, a New Urban Film Festival, a 10-day public planning charrette, online resources and conversations, and interactive workshops.

The plan is also innovative in its approach to planning policy. While many comprehensive plans simply talk about how growth or preservation should occur, *Viva Laredo* addresses policy decisions by first studying the implications of policies on the built environment to illustrate the preferred form of development. The foundation is established by small area urban design plans. Focus areas selected throughout the city illustrate development and policy decisions that can be applied throughout the city. By carefully studying and planning these areas, the team was able to make policy recommendations that were based on the established and depicted vision.

This appendix includes a summary of the public planning process that was used to create *Viva Laredo*.

Hands-on design session

The City of Laredo's previous comprehensive plan was adopted in 1991 and had a vision horizon of 2010. The city decided it was time to update the plan. The city teamed with local architecture firms Hickey Peña Architects and Frank Architects, Inc. to collaborate on this citywide planning effort. These two local architecture firms assembled an acclaimed team of local and national experts to help facilitate the creation of the comprehensive plan including Dover, Kohl & Partners, Speck and Associates, Angelou Economics, LNV, Inc, and Gallinar Consulting, among others. Each firm brought an expertise that made them uniquely qualified to address citywide concerns specific to Laredo while also helping to draft the vision and policies.

The public planning process centered around a public charrette held September 27 through October 6, 2016. Numerous events occurred prior to the charrette, to prepare the city and to get the planning teams up to speed on the current conditions.

Before the charrette, the planning team gathered base information and studied the existing physical and economic conditions of the city. This included reviewing previous plans and studies, examining existing city ordinances and land development regulations, and analyzing the physical, social, and economic characteristics of Laredo.

Open public design studio

Housing working group meeting

What is a Charrette?

Design charrettes are intensive, multi-day, collaborative workshops that are organized with a specific goal. The *Viva Laredo* charrette helped form the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan, which guides the city's planning policy decisions and long-term growth. One of the benefits of a charrette is that all interested parties come together to tackle hard issues. The parties often include citizens, key stakeholders, designers, staff, and public officials.

The charrette provides an opportunity to incorporate a wide range of ideas. Throughout the process, the initial ideas are tested, refined, and presented in draft form. Charrettes often help participants look past a single issue and instead identify consensus and common ground on big picture items.

PRE-CHARRETTE EVENTS

Public Kick-Off Press Conference

The Viva Laredo process officially began on Friday, May 6, 2016 when the multidisciplinary team, led by Hickey Peña Architects and Frank Architects, held an official press conference with the city.

City Manager Jesus Olivares introduced the project and the project team. The timeline and the public events that are necessary to create the comprehensive plan and methods for how the public can get involved, were described.

At this event, Jason King, a planning expert and principal with Dover, Kohl & Partners, gave a presentation titled "The Five Goals of Contemporary Planning." This presentation draws from his experience working in Texas, across the country, and around the world.

The press conference was followed by a tour of the city with both city officials and the planning team, to help bring everyone up to speed and to discuss overall goals for the comprehensive plan.

Working Group Meetings

At the project start, fourteen working groups were established, each focusing on a different topic of concern for the city. These working groups are made up of members of the community and help to focus and steer the development of the plan by working with the planning team. Technical meetings were held with each working group throughout the process— to ensure that concerns are identified and addressed within the comprehensive plan. The working groups focused on the following topics:

- Urban Planning;
- Economic Development;
- Mobility and Transportation;
- Housing;
- Greenspace, Recreation, and Landscape;
- Infrastructure;
- Environment and Natural Resources;
- Education;
- Health and Wellness;
- International Border Relations;
- Logistics and International Trade;
- Technology and Communications;
- Philanthropic; and
- Think Tank.

City Manager Jesus Olivares speaking at the Kick-off Press Conference   *Photo Credit: Cesar Vanoye*
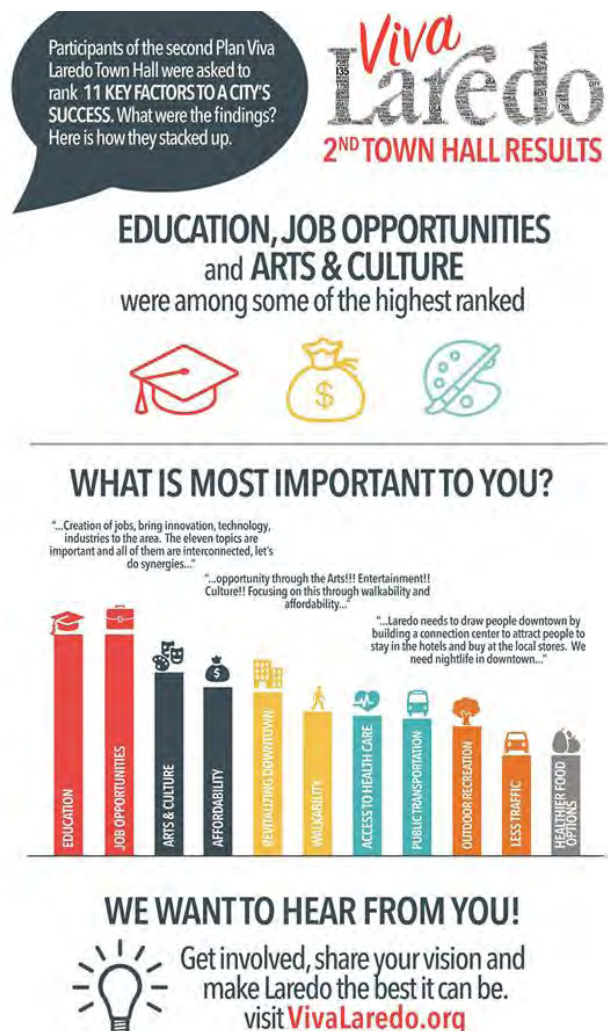
First Town Hall

On June 14, 2016, a town hall was held at the Mckendrick Ochoa Salinas Library. At this event, people were given small comment cards. The comment cards asked participants to rank the importance of eleven plan-related categories and to provide any additional comments or concerns for Laredo that they may have. Education was the number one priority topic for people, followed closely by job opportunity and affordability.

Second Town Hall

On August 16, 2016, a second town hall event was held at the Falcon International Bank, and the team asked participants the same questions that were asked in the first town hall—in order to gain additional feedback. This time, education and job opportunities tied as a first priority, followed by both arts and culture, and then affordability.

Plan Viva Laredo! Town Hall #1 Survey Results

Participants of the first Plan Viva Laredo Town Hall were asked to rank 11 key factors to a city's success. What were the findings? Here is how they stacked up.

education, affordable living, job opportunities and a thriving downtown were among some of the highest-ranked.

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Get involved with the City of Laredo Comprehensive Plan, and share your vision for the future!

Follow us at VIVALAREDO.ORG for more surveys and event information.

Participants of the second Plan Viva Laredo Town Hall were asked to rank 11 KEY FACTORS TO A CITY'S SUCCESS. What were the findings? Here is how they stacked up.

Viva Laredo 2ND TOWN HALL RESULTS

EDUCATION, JOB OPPORTUNITIES and ARTS & CULTURE were among some of the highest ranked

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Get involved, share your vision and make Laredo the best it can be. visit VivaLaredo.org

New Urbanism Film Festival

The New Urbanism Film Festival, based out of Los Angeles, California, screens short and feature length films on the topic of the built environment. On September 8, 2016, *Viva Laredo* hosted a screening of some of these films, inviting everybody in the community to an entertaining block party outside the historic Plaza Theater.

The event was attended by hundreds of people who enjoyed the films, gathered together with neighbors, and enjoyed food trucks. The films illustrate what communities around the country are doing to create more livable cities. This event worked as an educational primer for what may be possible in Laredo's future.

The following films were screened at the Film Festival:

- **Children Lost their Freedom to Roam** - youtu.be/TwJ9tviY8iI
- **Saga City** - youtu.be/_WVZuINTjBU
- **Borrowed Light** - youtu.be/KwstqlCW-1c
- **Broad Avenue - The Building of Business** - youtube.com/watch?v=mWnOCQDNYOQ
- **Memfix** - youtu.be/h1ADRJQROBo
- **City Walk CicLAvia** - youtube.com/watch?v=7ZlAAaRj4HU
- **The Idea District** - youtube.com/watch?v=GCFBYJKgVUU
- **Grafstact** - youtube.com/watch?v=Dy_wZcMTvjE
- **The Edible Bus Stop: Community Gardens from Neglected Sites** - youtube.com/watch?v=9C51FZ3zW6w

Additional Recommendations Videos

The following list of movies is also recommended viewing:

- **Built to Last** - youtube.com/watch?v=VGJt_YXIoJI
- **The Edge of Memphis** - youtube.com/watch?v=z-efujw1PZ8
- **Medellin** - youtube.com/watch?v=uEE0K3EsYxo
- **Unconventional Agriculture** - youtube.com/watch?v=qYh28k-xNn4
- **Detroit Voices** - youtube.com/watch?v=P5uumpJYKkw
- **Community-Supported Agriculture** - youtube.com/watch?v=o_uZSCaUaQY
- **Portland Plan** - youtu.be/Eckjmv_mpVc
- **Steve Jobs on Changing Your World** - youtu.be/MLAgnACjwf8
- **Jeff Speck Walkable City** - youtu.be/Wai4ub90stQ
- **Jeff Speck Walkable Laredo** - dropbox.com/s/sc9o9tv69y6d104/SPECK%20%28iPad%29.m4v?dl=0
- **Suburbs Are Dying** - youtube.com/watch?v=FyhCyB4oXXQ

CHARRETTE

Site Tour

To further understand Laredo, the planning team toured the city on September 26, the day before the official start of the public charrette. The tour was guided by team leaders Frank Rotnofsky of Frank Architects and Mario Peña of Hickey Peña Architects. Team members were briefed on Laredo's unique history, previous planning efforts, current initiatives, and goals for different areas within the city.

The team toured all areas of the city, from Rio Bravo in the south to the industrial areas along Mines Road in the north. The neighborhoods to the south, up through the El Azteca neighborhood, adjacent to downtown, were explored throughout the morning. In the afternoon, the team participated in a walking tour, followed by tours of Laredo Community College, San

Bernardo Avenue, the Heights, Mines Road, and the newer neighborhoods in the north along Bob Bullock Loop.

The tour enhanced the team's understanding of current issues, concerns, and redevelopment prospects throughout the city. Team members walked, photographed, and noted building form, building placement, street design, and street connections on base maps of the existing conditions.

Project team walks around the downtown.

Kick-off Presentation & Hands-on Design Session

On Tuesday, September 27, 2016, a Kick-off Presentation and Hands-on Design Session took place, to officially mark the start of the charrette. Over 180 residents, city leaders, elected officials, and local stakeholders gathered at the Laredo Public Library on Calton Road, for an evening presentation and interactive table sessions.

An introduction was provided by City Council Member Roberto Balli, who emphasized the importance of citizen involvement throughout the process, to ensure the creation of a plan truly representative of community ideals. Mario Peña and Viviana Frank outlined the timeline for the project and the overall goals of the comprehensive plan.

Jason King, charrette leader from Dover, Kohl & Partners, then outlined the challenge for participants throughout the charrette week and provided background information on traditional town building, national development trends, and Smart Growth and New Urban design principles.

Carlos Gallinar of Gallinar Associates was on hand to talk about housing concerns, but also to tout successes in El Paso, Texas, a neighboring city that has gone through a similar process updating their comprehensive plan in 2012.

Jason King presents at the kick-off presentation.

Participants discuss Laredo's future in groups.

Throughout the kick-off presentation, the audience was asked questions, using keypad polling, about who was in the room and their priorities for the city.

Working in small groups of approximately eight to ten people per table, participants gathered around 17 tables, to draw and share their varied ideas for the future of Laredo. Each table was equipped with a base map of the entire city, a second map of a focus area within the city, markers, scale bars, and a table facilitator from the planning team. Citizens drew on the base maps to illustrate how they might like to see Laredo evolve over time and described the uses, open spaces, building design, landscaping, street design, transportation, parking, and services that they hoped to one day see.

At the end of the session, a spokesperson from each table presented their table's map and ideas to the entire assembly. Some of the most widely expressed ideas included:

- Create attractive, walkable destinations;
- Make the downtown great;
- Complete the streets;
- Plan new, improved public spaces; and
- A prosperous (but still affordable) city.

In addition to the table maps and group presentations, participants were also asked to fill out an exit survey and "one word" cards as an additional way to express their ideas, hopes and vision for the future.

Spokespeople present their Tables's big ideas

Laredo, In One Word
Participants were asked to write their vision for the future of Laredo on a one-word card. Words like "progressive" and "vibrant" were popular responses.

Now:

In the future:

95%

Of Laredo get around primarily by their personal car

Keypad Polling Results

31% Job Opportunities

24% Arts & Culture

4% Shopping

What is Laredo missing that people leave to find in other places?
(Pick top 2)

15% "City" Life

9% Affordable Living

7% Education

7% Outdoor recreation

2% Other

Do you like?

Love it

Hate it
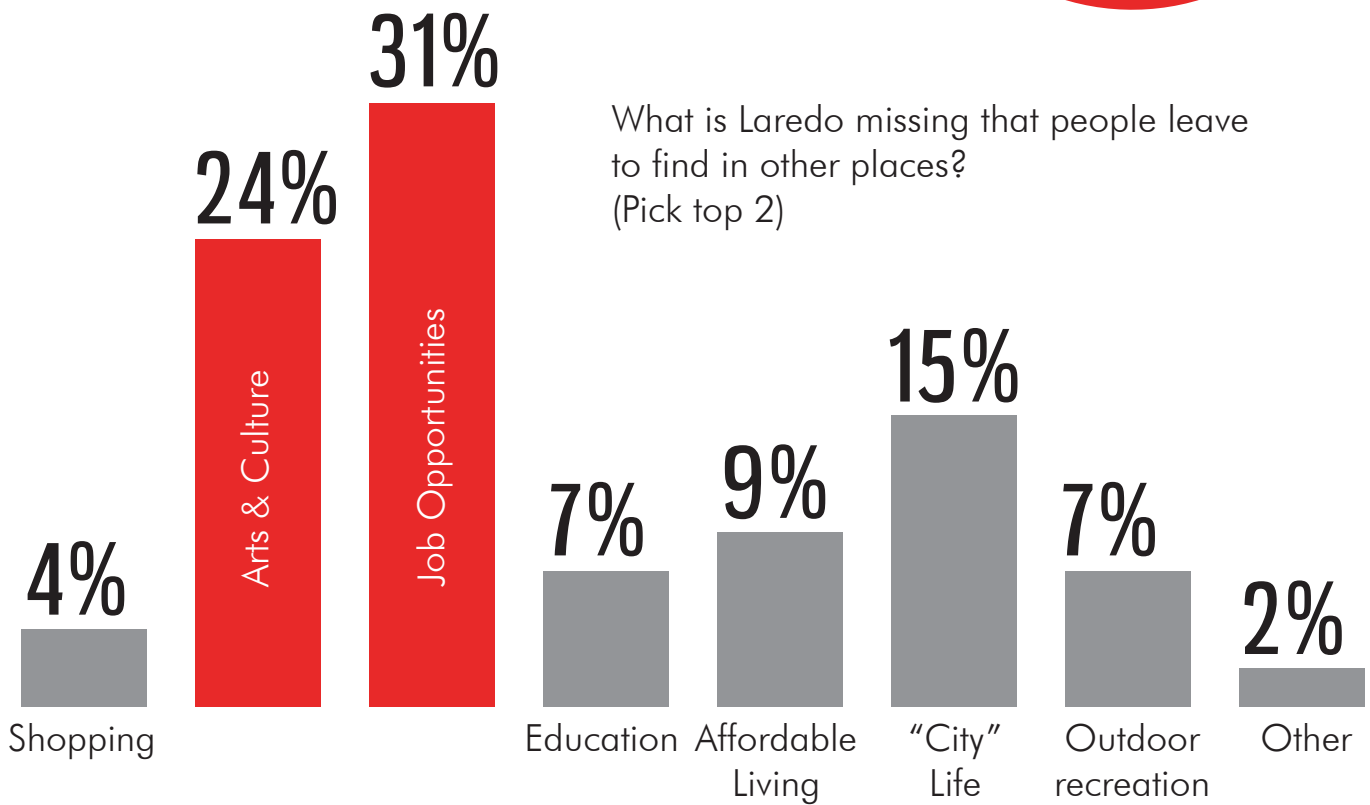
Public Studio

From Wednesday, September, 28 through Wednesday, October, 5, the planning team continued to work with the community in an open public studio at the Laredo Public Library. Residents and local leaders were encouraged to stop by the studio throughout the week to check the status of the plan, provide further input, and to make sure the design team was on the right track.

The convenient location of the studio, as well as the immense community interest, resulted in over 300 people participating throughout the week. The table drawings and plans from Tuesday night's hands-on design session were placed around the room for continual review. While community members visited the studio, the planning team continued to analyze the information gathered from the community to formulate the major concepts for the plan.

Starting on Wednesday morning, the team began synthesizing the many ideas heard from the community at the hands-on design session and transforming them into a single, cohesive synthesis plan. The synthesis plan included physical design elements with more abstract policy ideas. The planners created lists, diagrams, drawings, and plans, working to combine and refine the ideas provided by the community.

Numerous events and exercises were held within the Public Studio to continue to gather information from the public and focus on certain aspects of the plan.

Public Design Workshop Schedule

Working in the public studio

Youth-Centered Hands-on Design Sessions

Throughout the charrette week, additional hands-on events took place to engage younger crowds, a traditionally underrepresented group when larger public meetings are held.

HB Zachry Elementary School

Students from the HB Zachry Elementary School second grade class participated in a Hands-On Design Session on Thursday, September 29. Members of the planning team joined their class for an interactive planning exercise. After showing the students pictures of parks, public spaces, and neighborhood streets, they were asked to draw their vision for Laredo in the future. Concepts ranged from creative interactive playgrounds to a downtown that linked both sides of the river.

Millennials

Millennials were invited to the Public Studio on Sunday, October 2, to discuss and draw their vision for Laredo's future.

LBJ High School

Students from LBJ High School also participated in a hands-on design session at the Public Studio on Monday, October 3. Students focused on the Laredo Community College (LCC) area near their school and drew ideas for the area.

Millennials Hands-on Session

LBJ High School Students Hands-on Session

HB Zachry Elementary School Students Hands-on Session

Bike Master Plan

Throughout the charrette, studio visitors were encouraged to place a variety of stickers on large print outs, representing all portions of the city. Four modes of transportation (walking, biking, transit, and car travel), were represented with four sets of colored stickers; these were used throughout the city. The stickers included bike facility interventions such as different types of bike lanes, greenways, fix-it stations, bike commuter stations, bike share kiosks, and more.

A concentration of improvements accumulated around downtown, along the US-Mexico border, and major thoroughfares. Through these results, major bike routes were identified to create a network.

Two-Wheel Survey

To test the bike plan exercise and to further develop Laredo's first bike master plan, a group from the planning team toured Laredo on two wheels. They documented the existing bike infrastructure as well as looked for possibilities for new facilities to create a better, more connected network for all users.

Two-wheel survey ride

Participants working on the transportation and bike plan map in the public studio
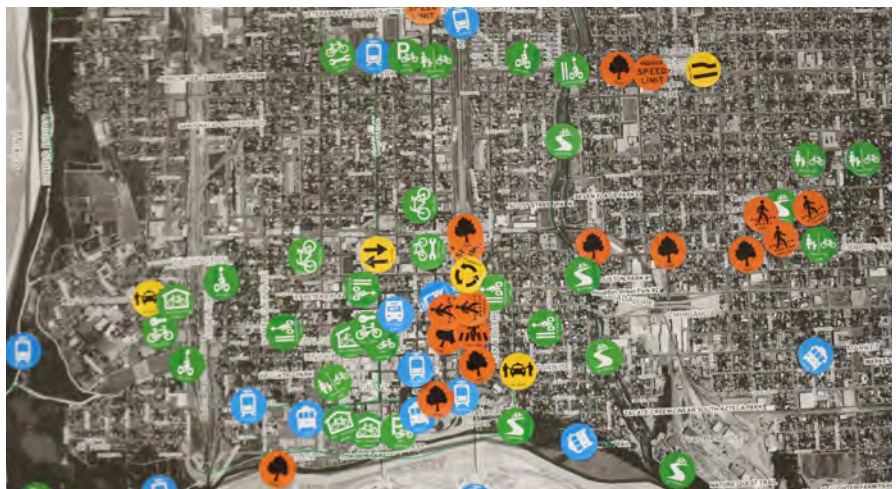
Downtown portion of the citywide map
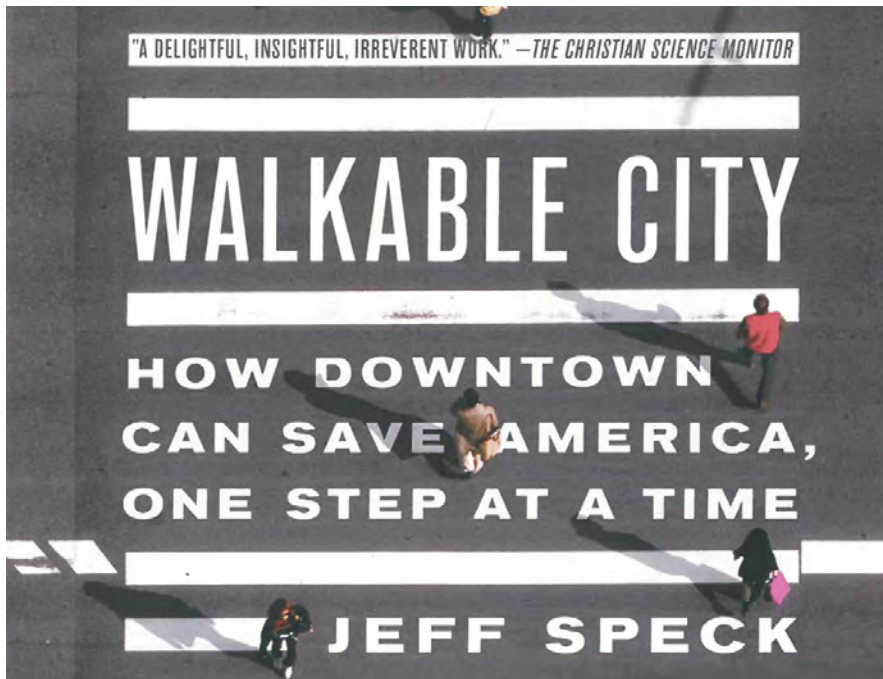
Walkable City cover

Jeff Speck Presents

The evening of September 28 featured a special presentation by the acclaimed author of "Walkable City" Jeff Speck. As a city planner and urban designer, Jeff led a stimulating discussion where the public was not only able to actively learn and listen, but participate as well. He discussed policies and changes needed to increase the ability to walk in Laredo, particularly within the downtown area.

Participants adding to the maps in the public studio

Maps

Members of the community that were unable to attend the Kick-off and Hands-On event or wanted to add information, were encouraged to write on large maps that were displayed on the studio walls. This provided the planning team additional information in the update of the comprehensive plan.

Technical and Workgroup Meetings

Throughout the week, members from each of the professional firms were on hand to add their expertise, to help to craft the plan, and to lead topical workgroup and technical meetings. Over twenty individual groups came to the Public Studio to discuss and share information with the planning team.

Workgroup Meeting

Legend: discussion · public studio 10am - 6pm · presentation/events

	tuesday sept. 27	wednesday sept. 28	thursday sept. 29	friday sept. 30	saturday oct. 1	sunday oct. 2	monday oct. 3	tuesday oct. 4	wednesday oct. 5	thursday oct. 6
10 AM		Urban and Planning		Arts and Culture			Parks & Recreation	Workgroup Rep. Meeting	Economic Development	
11 AM			Hands On Event Local School							
12 PM										
1 PM										
2 PM		Mobility/ Transportation	Education	Housing				Trade/ Logistics		
3 PM										
4 PM		Downtown Advocates		Philanthropy			Infrastructure/ Environmental	Health/ Wellness		
5 PM			Tech./ Telecom.			Open House		Planning and Zoning Board Workshop		
6 PM	Kick-Off Hands On	Jeff Speck — How to make Laredo a great place to live in.								
7 PM										Final Presentation

Economic Development Meetings

To further understand the economics of Laredo, specific meetings focused on the topic were held as well as an online survey for residents and business was conducted.

On June 14 - 16, 2016, a series of focus groups were organized and one-on-one interviews with several members of the community were held. Different sectors were addressed, i.e., young professionals, real estate, entrepreneurial, international trade and logistics, the chamber of commerce, and the government as well.

On September 8, 2016, Angelou Economics met with the Steering Committee, and presented their findings for the Laredo Marketing Assessment after evaluating material from the online survey, previous interviews and focus groups. After the presentation, the initial report was sent to all participants requesting feedback.

On October 5, the Steering Committee met during the Public Design Workshop, and the Target Industries Analysis was presented. The report was sent to all participants requesting feedback.

Finally, on January 30, 2017, Angelou Economics presented the draft of the Laredo Economic Development Strategic Recommendations. The draft was also distributed to all the Steering Committee members asking for feedback.

Most members of the Steering Committee seek reassurance and alternatives for economic growth in case NAFTA is dissolved. Strategies showing how to diversify Laredo's economy were discussed, and the majority of the members showed to be eager to present this document to City Council as soon as possible.

Open House

Mid-way through the charrette, on Sunday, October 2, draft concepts were pinned up on boards and easels. Planning team representatives spoke with attendees to gather their feedback and reactions to the draft illustrations that originated from their ideas, to date.

Draft policies were on display based on the community input from the hands-on design session and various interactions during the open design studio. Community members were encouraged to write their feedback and suggestions to these draft policies that will become a key portion of the Laredo Comprehensive Plan.

Residents adding policy ideas

Planners discussed emerging concepts one-on-one at the open house

Viviana Frank, principal of Frank Architects, welcoming the audience

Kenneth Garcia of Dover, Kohl & Partners presenting the draft bike plan

Jason King, Principal of Dover, Kohl & Partners presenting the key vision of the comprehensive plan.

Work-in-Progress Presentation

The charrette ended with an evening "Work-in-Progress" presentation on Thursday, October 6. Over 100 citizens gathered at the library for the presentation.

The planning team provided a summary of the public input received and then presented the emerging comprehensive plan concepts. Illustrative plan drawings and renderings were used to demonstrate the various urban design strategies applied to specific sites.

Throughout the presentation, participants were surveyed using keypad polling, to assess if the planning team had properly translated their ideas into the vision for Laredo. Survey results showed that 92% of the audience believed the plan was on the right track.

FOLLOWING THE CHARRETTE

The end of the charrette is not the end of the conversation. The community continues to shape the plan through adoption. People were able to continue to provide feedback in multiple ways following the charrette.

Drafting the Plan

Following the charrette, the various members of the planning team took the feedback they received following the work-in-progress presentation and began to write the elements of the comprehensive plan. The result of those efforts are what make up the different chapters of Viva Laredo, the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Laredo.

My Sidewalk

For people that were unable to attend the charrette events or for people who just weren't ready to stop the conversation, a 'My Sidewalk' site was set up. MySidewalk is an online tool that has helped more than 2,000 organizations understand and make the best decisions on behalf of their communities. It is a virtual town hall where people can answer and ask questions about their community and the comprehensive plan. MySidewalk enables the conversation to continue online and allows everyone to participate in shaping the plan.

Post Charrette Workshops

As the plan is being written, additional hands on workshops are being held with various groups throughout the city. *Viva Laredo* wants everyone to have a say in what the future of Laredo will look like. Information from these workshops continues to have an impact on the comprehensive plan as it is being written. Some of these events are listed below.

Sta Rita Community
City Councilman Alex Perez brought the *Viva Laredo* design workshop to his Sta Rita constituents. The City of Laredo's comprehensive plan is truly the people's plan, and on November 22 the Sta Rita Community added their ideas to it.

TAMIU
The *Viva Laredo* team held a workshop with TAMIU student leaders on Friday, December 2. The group offered several great ideas, and provided a solid vision for the future of Laredo.

Laredo Community College
A workshop was held at Laredo Community College to gather additional information and input from students.

Sta Rita workshop

Mario A. Pena, Principal of Hickey Peña Architects, explains comprehensive plans to TAMIU students

B

Glossary

DEFINITIONS

This chapter provides definitions for terms in the Comprehensive Plan that are technical in nature or that otherwise may not reflect a common usage of the term. If a term is not defined, then the City shall determine the correct definition.

Accessory Dwelling Unit: a subordinate living unit added to, created within, or detached from a single family dwelling that provides basic requirements for independent living, (i.e. sleeping, eating, cooking and sanitation).

Albedo: the fraction of solar energy reflected by an object. High albedo surfaces reflect solar energy and are lighter in color; low albedo surfaces absorb energy and are darker in color.

Alley: a vehicular way located the rear of lots providing a location for utility easements and access to service areas, parking, and outbuildings.

Apartment: a residential unit sharing a building and a lot with other units and/or uses; may be for rent or for sale as a condominium.

Arcade: a private frontage conventional for retail use wherein the Façade is a colonnade supporting habitable space that overlaps the sidewalk, while the façade at sidewalk level remains at the frontage line.

Arterial: a thoroughfare that is intended to provide the highest level of service at suburban speeds for the longest uninterrupted distance with some degree of access control. Arterials, therefore, provide higher levels of vehicle mobility and lower levels of land access.

Avenue: a thoroughfare of high vehicular capacity and low to moderate speed, acting as a short distance connector between urban centers, and usually equipped with a landscaped median.

Bicycle Boulevard: a low-speed street that prioritizes bicycle travel over other modes, though also allows local vehicle traffic.

Biodiversity: the variety of living things; it includes the variety of living organisms and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur.

Block: the aggregate of private lots, passages, alleys and rear lanes, circumscribed by thoroughfares.

Charrette: a planning session in which participants brainstorm and visualize solutions to a design issue. Charrettes provide a forum for ideas and offer the unique advantage of giving immediate feedback to designers while giving mutual authorship to the plan by all those who participate. The term "charrette" comes from the French term for "little cart" and refers to the final intense work effort expended by architects to meet a project deadline. At the École de Beaux Arts in Paris during the 19th century, proctors circulated with little carts to collect final drawings, and students would jump on the charrette to put finishing touches on their presentations minutes before their deadlines.

Civic Art: monuments, statuary, sculpture, memorials, fountains, and other architectural elements sited in public spaces visible to all. A broader definition is the sum total of the architecture, public spaces, monuments, urban design, and landscape of a city. See also Public Art.

Civic Building: a building operated by not-for-profit organizations dedicated to arts, culture, education, recreation, government, transit, and municipal parking, or for use approved by the legislative body.

Civic Space: an outdoor area dedicated to public activities. Civic spaces may be parks, plazas, playgrounds, or civic building sites.

Collector Road: a thoroughfare that provides a less highly developed level of service at a lower speed for shorter distances than an arterial, by collecting traffic from local roads and connecting them with arterials. Collectors specifically balance vehicle mobility and land access.

Common Destination: an area of focused community activity, usually defining the approximate center of a pedestrian shed. It may include without limitation one or more of the following: a civic space, a civic building, a commercial center, or a transit station, and may act as the social center of a neighborhood.

Community Food Assessment (CFA): a tool to locate and identify food deserts, which are districts that have little or no access to fresh and healthful food.

Community Garden: a community garden is a piece of land gardened by a group of people. Community gardens provide access to fresh produce and plants as well as neighborhood improvement, sense of community, and connection to the environment. They are publicly functioning in terms of ownership, access and management, as well as typically owned in trust by local governments or non-profits.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): a community of individuals who pledge support to a farming operation where the growers and consumers share the risks and benefits of food production. CSAs usually consist of a system of weekly delivery or pick-up of vegetables and fruit, in a vegetable box scheme, and sometimes include dairy products and meat.

Complete Streets: a policy for the design and operation of thoroughfares enabling safe access for all users. By adopting a complete streets policy, communities direct their transportation planners and engineers to routinely design and operate the entire right of way to enable safe access for all users, regardless of age, ability, or mode of transportation.

Condominium: a for sale residential unit sharing a building and a lot with other units and/or uses.

Connectivity: the number of publicly accessible street intersections per square mile, including intersections of streets with dedicated alleys and transit rights-of-way and intersections of streets with non-motorized rights-of-way. If one must both enter and exit an area through the same intersection, such an intersection and any intersections beyond that point are not counted; intersections leading only to culs-de-sac are also not counted.

Corridor: a lineal geographic system incorporating transportation and/or greenway trajectories. A transportation corridor may be a lineal transect zone.

Cul-de-Sac: a dead-end street with only one inlet/outlet.

Cycle Track: an exclusive bike facility that has elements of a separated path and on-road bike lane. A cycle track, while still within the roadway, is physically separated from motor traffic and is distinct from the sidewalk.

Dark Sky: a movement to reduce light pollution so people can see the stars, to reduce the effects of unnatural lighting on the environment, and to cut down on energy usage.

Discretionary Riders: riders who choose to ride transit though they have other travel options.

Edible Landscape: the replacement of plants that are strictly ornamental with plants that produce food. Edible landscaping allows the creation of a multi-functional landscape that provides returns (fruits, vegetables, etc.) on the investment of water, fertilizer, and time.

Exotic Species: a plant introduced from another geographic region to an area outside its natural range. For the purpose of this plan, this term shall be used primarily to describe conventionally cultivated and hybridized species of non-native plants that are non-invasive.

Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ): the legal ability of a government to exercise authority beyond its normal boundaries. In Texas, the size of the ETJ is defined by state law.

Façade: the exterior wall of a building that is set along a frontage line.

Federal Highway Administration (FHWA): the federal agency, part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, charged with funding and regulating the nation's roadways, freeways and highways.

Flat: see Apartment.

Flood Plain: the land adjacent to a water body such as a stream, river, lake or ocean that experiences occasional flooding.

Food Desert: a district that has little or no access to fresh and healthful food.

Footcandle (fc): a unit of measure of illuminance. A unit of illuminance on a surface that is one foot from a uniform point source of light of one candle and equal to one lumen per square foot. Footcandle values can be measured directly with handheld incident light meters. One footcandle is equal to 1 lumen cast per sq. ft. of surface.

Frontage Line: a lot line bordering a public frontage. Façades facing frontage Lines define the public realm and are therefore more regulated than the elevations facing other lot lines.

Gallery: a private frontage conventional for retail use wherein the façade is aligned close to the frontage line with an attached cantilevered shed or lightweight colonnade overlapping the sidewalk.

Gazebo: a pavilion structure, sometimes octagonal, that may be built, in parks, gardens, and public areas. Gazebos are freestanding or attached to a garden wall, roofed, and open on all sides; they provide shade, shelter, ornamental features in a landscape and a place to rest.

Green: a civic space for unstructured recreation, spatially defined by landscaping rather than building frontages.

Green Infrastructure Design (GID): a general term for managing stormwater through an interconnected network of parks, preserves, arroyos, wetlands, and native vegetation.

Greyfield: a shopping mall with a high vacancy rate or a low consumer traffic level or that is dated or deteriorating in some manner.

Headway: a measurement of the distance/time between vehicles in a transit system. It is most commonly measured as the distance from the tip of one vehicle to the tip of the next one behind it, expressed as the time it will take for the trailing vehicle to cover that distance. A "shorter" headway signifies a more frequent service.

Highway: a rural and suburban thoroughfare of high vehicular speed and capacity. This type is allocated to the more rural transect areas.

Impervious Surface: any surface through which rainfall cannot pass or be effectively absorbed such as roads, buildings, paved parking lots, sidewalks etc.

Infill: (noun) new development on land that had been previously developed, including most greyfield and brownfield sites and cleared land within urbanized areas; (verb) to develop areas including most greyfield and brownfield sites and cleared land within urbanized areas.

Interconnected Network of Streets: See Street Network.

Invasive Plant Species: a noxious exotic plant reproducing outside its natural range and outside cultivation that disrupts naturally occurring plant communities by altering structure, composition, natural processes or habitat quality.

Law of the Indies: a comprehensive guide composed of 148 ordinances to aid Spanish colonists in locating, building, and populating settlements. They codified the city planning process and represented some of the first attempts at a general plan. Signed in 1573, the Laws of the Indies are seen as the first wide-ranging guidelines towards design and development of communities.   These laws were heavily influenced by Vitruvius' Ten Books of Architecture and Alberti's treatises on the subject.

Level of Service (LOS): a measure of congestion and performance, typically on an A through F scale; a very congested freeway, for example, would have a "low" level of service (such as LOS F); LOS can also be applied to transit, bicycle, and pedestrian travel modes.

Life-cycle Maintenance Costs: the concept that transportation infrastructure maintenance occurs throughout its useful life; for example, a street rebuilt every 15 years will still need regular maintenance during that time.

Linear Green: see Linear Park.

Linear Park: a park that is much longer than wide. Linear parks make use of strips of public land next to canals, streams, electrical lines, highways, and shorelines.

Liner Building: a building specifically designed to mask a parking lot or a parking structure from a frontage.

Livable: pleasant and convenient to inhabit, preferably without the need for a vehicle to meet daily needs.

Live-Work: a mixed-use unit consisting of a commercial and residential function. The commercial function may be anywhere in the unit. It is intended to be occupied by a business operator who lives in the same structure that contains the commercial activity or industry. (Syn.: flexhouse.)

Local Road: a thoroughfare that primarily provides access to land with little or no through movement.

Localvore: those who prefer to eat locally grown/ produced food.

Loggia: a gallery or corridor at ground level, sometimes higher, on the façade of a building and open to the air on one side, where it is supported by columns or pierced openings in the wall.

Lot: a parcel of land accommodating a building or buildings of unified design. The size of a Lot is controlled by its width in order to determine the grain (i.e., fine grain or coarse grain) of the urban fabric.

Mansion Apartment: a building that appears to be a large house from the exterior, while on the interior is divided into rental units. This building type allows higher densities while maintaining the appearance of a single family detached house.

Maquiladora: a concept often referred to as an operation that involves manufacturing in a country that is not the client's. It normally requires a factory that may import materials and equipment on a duty-free and tariff-free basis for assembly or manufacturing and then "re-exports" the assembled or manufactured product, sometimes back to the originating country. A maquila is also referred to as a "twin plant."

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO): a federally-mandated and federally-funded transportation policy-making organization that is made up of representatives from local government and governmental transportation authorities.

Mixed-Use Development: development that includes a mixture of complementary land uses. The most common mix of land uses include housing, retail, office, commercial services, and civic uses.

Monoculture: the practice of producing or growing one single plant species over a wide area.

Multi-Family: a structure that contains three or more dwelling units that share common walls or floor/ceilings with one or more units. The land underneath the structure is not divided into separate zoning lots. Multi-dwellings include structures commonly called garden apartments and condominiums.

Multimodal: the combination of several travel modes within a single corridor or facility; also refers to the ability to choose among several travel modes.

Multiway Boulevard: a thoroughfare designed for high vehicular capacity and moderate speed, traversing an urbanized area. Boulevards are usually equipped with slip roads buffering sidewalks and buildings from higher speed vehicles.

Native Plant Species: a plant occurring within the Laredo region prior to European contact, according to the best scientific and historical documentation. This includes species that are considered indigenous, occurring in natural associations with habitats that existed prior to significant anthropogenic effects.

Neighborhood: a neighborhood is compact, pedestrian-friendly, and mixed-use. There are five basic design conventions that provide a common thread linking neighborhoods: identifiable center and edge, walkable size, integrated network of walkable streets, mix of land uses and building types, and special sites for civic purposes. The neighborhood is the basic increment of town planning. One neighborhood alone in the countryside is a village. Two or more neighborhoods grouped together sharing a specialized hub or main street is a town. The neighborhood concept remains in force even as the size increases to city scale. Coupled with special districts and corridors, neighborhoods are the building block from which cities are formed.

Neighborhood Center: a proper center has places where the public feels welcome and encouraged to congregate. Typically, at least one outdoor public environment exists at the center of a neighborhood that spatially acts as the most well-defined outdoor room in the neighborhood. The best centers are within walking distance of surrounding residential areas, possess a mix of uses, and include higher-density buildings at a pedestrian scale.

Net Metering: the practice that allow consumers to produce renewable energy and sell the excess power back to the grid and to the utilities, thereby rolling back meters and their electric bills.

New Urbanism: a planning movement that promotes the creation and restoration of diverse, walkable, compact, vibrant, mixed-use communities composed of the same components as conventional development, but assembled in a more integrated fashion, in the form of complete communities.

Open Space: undeveloped land or land that is used for recreation. Farmland as well as all natural habitats (forests, fields, wetlands etc.) are often included in this category.

Park: a civic space type that is a natural preserve available for unstructured recreation.

Paseo: a pedestrian connector that passes between buildings to provide shortcuts through long blocks and connect rear parking areas to frontages.

Pedestrian Shed: an area that is centered on a common destination. Its size is related to average walking distances for the applicable community type. Pedestrian sheds are applied to structure communities.

Perimeter Block: a block where buildings are built up to the front property line along the street frontage, reserving the interior of the block as public or private space, or for surface parking or Structured Parking.

Pervious Surface: a surface which allows water to filter into the ground, which enables natural groundwater to recharge, helps with filtration of pollutants, and reduces erosion and flooding. The use of pervious asphalt and concrete for parking lots, roads and sidewalks is an important part of stormwater management that conserves precious natural resources.

Placita: small plaza. See Plaza.

Planting Strip: a strip of land within the right-of-way that separates the sidewalk from the vehicular lanes.

Plaza: a civic space type designed for civic purposes and commercial activities in the more urban transect zones, generally paved and spatially defined by building frontages.

Pocket Park: a small Park accessible to the general public Although they are too small for physical activities, pocket parks provide greenery, a place to sit outdoors, and sometimes a children's playground. They may be created around a monument, historic marker or civic art.

Potable Water: water of a quality that is sufficient for human consumption.

Private Frontage: the privately held layer between the frontage line and the principal building façade.

Property Line: the legal boundary of a parcel of land.

Public Art: any work of art or design that is created by an artist specifically to be sited in a public space or visible from a public space.

Public Frontage: the area between the curb of the vehicular lanes and the frontage line.

Purple Pipe: pipe used to distribute reclaimed water in a dual piping network that keeps reclaimed water pipes completely separate from potable water pipes. Reclaimed water, or recycled water, is former wastewater (sewage) that is treated to remove solids and certain impurities and used in sustainable landscaping irrigation or to recharge groundwater aquifers.

Quarter Mile Neighborhood: the overall size of a neighborhood, which typically ranges from 40 to 200 acres, that is suitable for walking. Most people will walk approximately ¼-mile (1,340 feet), or 5 minutes, before turning back or opting to drive or ride a bike.

Rain Barrel: a water tank used to collect and store rain water runoff, typically from rooftops via rain gutters.

Reclaimed Water: former wastewater (sewage) that is treated to remove solids and certain impurities, and used in sustainable landscaping irrigation or to recharge groundwater aquifers.

Renewable Energy: generation of power from naturally replenished resources such as sunlight and wind. Renewable energy technologies include solar power, wind power, hydroelectric power, Geothermal, and Biomass.

Right-of-Way (ROW): the strip of land dedicated to public use for pedestrian and vehicular movement, which may also accommodate public utilities. This strip of land is either publicly owned or subject to an easement for right-of-way purposes benefiting the general public.

Rio Bravo: the Rio Grande River.

Road: a local, rural and suburban thoroughfare of low-to-moderate vehicular speed and capacity.

Rowhouse: a single-family dwelling that shares a party wall with another of the same type and occupies the full frontage line. (Syn: Townhouse)

Shared Use Path: a wide pathway, separated from the street, that is used for both walking and bicycling.

Sharrow: shared lane marking, per the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

Shed: in transportation planning, an area of influence or importance for access and travel using a specific mode, such as a transit shed along a transit route; there are general travel sheds, as well as transit, bicycle, and pedestrian sheds.

Signal Prioritization: an Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) technique that extends the "green time" at traffic signals for approaching buses to improve their on-time performance and "time-competitiveness" with auto travel.

Single-Family Attached: a building that contains one primary dwelling unit per zoning lot in which the dwelling unit shares common walls with its neighbor or in which the side wall(s) abut the adjacent building.

Single-Family Detached: a detached dwelling unit located on an individual zoning lot, designed for, or intended to be occupied by one family.

Slow Food: an international movement that strives to preserve traditional and regional cuisine and encourages farming of plants, seeds and livestock characteristic of the local ecosystem.

Smart Grid: a digitally enabled electrical grid that gathers, distributes, and acts on information about the behavior of all participants (suppliers and consumers) in order to improve the efficiency, reliability, economics, and sustainability of electricity services.

Smart Growth: well-planned development that protects open space and farmland, revitalizes communities, keeps housing affordable and provides transportation choices. The principles of Smart Growth are based on compact and multi-use development, infill and redevelopment, expansion of infrastructure, enhanced livability, expanded mobility, and conservation of open space.

Solar Farm: a facility where solar powered devices, either photovoltaic (PV) or turbine systems, are clustered. It should be large enough to generate at least one megawatt.

Solid Waste: a waste type consisting of everyday items that are consumed and discarded. It predominantly includes food wastes, yard wastes, containers and product packaging, and other miscellaneous inorganic wastes from residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial sources.

Sprawl: development patterns where rural land is converted to urban/suburban uses more quickly than needed to house new residents and support new businesses that result in higher than necessary infrastructure or transportation costs.

Square: a civic space designed for unstructured recreation and civic purposes, spatially defined by building frontages and consisting of paths, lawns, and trees, formally disposed.

Standard Pedestrian Shed: a pedestrian shed that is an average ¼-mile radius or 1,320 feet, about the distance of a 5 minute walk at a leisurely pace. See Pedestrian Shed.

Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP): a State Department of Transportation's multi-year listing by timeframe of transportation projects and services for funding and construction; similar to TIP.

Stormwater: water that originates during precipitation events. Stormwater that does not soak into the ground becomes surface runoff, which either flows directly into surface waterways or is channeled into storm sewers, which eventually discharge to surface waters.

Story: a habitable level within a building, excluding an attic or raised basement.

Street: a local urban thoroughfare of low speed and capacity.

Street Frontage: the private frontage designated to bear the address and principal entrance to the building.

Street Network: a system of interconnecting streets or roads for a given area that provides for the movement of people and goods. Street networks can become very complex in cities. A grid is the most efficient network of streets because it is completely interconnected, and provides both direct and multiple routes rather than circuitous roads and dead end streets that hinder movement.

Streetcar: a passenger rail vehicle which runs on tracks along public urban streets and also sometimes on separate rights-of-way.

Streetspace: the space between the buildings on either side of a street that defines its character. The elements of a streetscape include: building frontage/façade; landscaping (trees, yards, bushes, plantings, etc.); sidewalks; street paving; street furniture (benches, kiosks, trash receptacles, fountains, etc.); signs; awnings; and street lighting.

Structured Parking: a building containing two or more stories of parking above natural grade.

Subdivision: a Subdivision occurs as the result of dividing land into lots for sale or development.

Suburban Retrofit: the process of entirely revamping, and in many cases completely replacing, conventional zoning, encompassing the idea of systemic, long-lasting, transformative change. It includes directing new growth into existing areas in keeping with the principles of both New Urbanism and Smart Growth.

Superblock: a type of city block that is much larger than a traditional city block.

Surface Water: water collecting on the ground or in a stream, river, lake, wetland, or ocean; it is related to water collecting as groundwater or atmospheric water.

Sustainability: the basis upon which an organism or a community can manage its own continuing viability, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Swale: a low or slightly depressed natural area for drainage.

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ): the agency charged with protecting the state's environmental lands and resources.

Thoroughfare: a way for use by vehicular and pedestrian traffic and to provide access to lots and open spaces, consisting of vehicular lanes and the public frontage.

Traditional Neighborhood Development (TND): a community type structured by a standard pedestrian shed oriented toward a common destination consisting of a mixed-use center or corridor and in the form of a medium-sized settlement near a transportation route.

Trailhead: the point at which a trail begins, where the trail is often intended for hiking, biking, horseback riding, or off-road vehicles.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP): the MPO's multi-year listing by timeframe of transportation projects and services for funding and construction; similar to STIP.

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD): by designation on a regional plan, permitting increased density, mixture of uses, and special design features to support ridership and usage of rail or transit.

TxDOT: Texas Department of Transportation.

Urban Heat Island Effect: the elevated temperatures in developed areas compared to more rural surroundings. Urban heat islands are caused by development and the changes in radiative and thermal properties of urban infrastructure as well as the effects buildings can have on the local micro-climate.

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT): refers to vehicle miles traveled and is a standard measure of transportation activity.

Visitability: an international movement to change home construction practices so that virtually all new homes, whether or not designated for residents who currently have mobility impairments, offer three specific accessibility features:

1. At least one zero-step entrance on an accessible route leading from a driveway or public sidewalk,

2. All interior doors providing at least 31¾ inches (81 cm) of unobstructed passage space, and

3. At least a half bathroom on the main floor.

Walkability: a measure of how friendly an area is to walking. Walkability has many health, environmental, and economic benefits. Factors influencing walkability include the presence or absence and quality of footpaths, sidewalks, or other pedestrian rights-of-way, traffic and road conditions, land use patterns, building accessibility, and safety, among others.

Wastewater: any water that has been adversely affected in quality by anthropogenic influence. It comprises liquid waste discharged by domestic residences, commercial properties, industry, and/or agriculture, and can encompass a wide range of potential contaminants and concentrations.

Wayfinding: signs, symbols, arrows, markers, textures, and other elements to guide travelers, typically pedestrians, to a destination.

LAREDO

Gravel Pit

PHILADELPHIA ST

Santa Maria Sch

LA FAYETTE ST

Christian Union Sch

CONVENT AVE

BLAIR ST

Cabrini Sch

RIO

MISSOURI

Filtration Plant

Gaging Sta

JEFFERSON ST

WT

419

419

Leyendecker Sch

SAN BERNARDO

Foot-bridge

Foot

AVE

Picnic Area

TAMAULIPAS

TEXAS

417

Christen Jr High Sch

AVE

AVE

Martin HS

BM 416

Park

Par

Ruins

PARK ST

Landing Area

CLOTILDE

MARIA

GARCIA ST

SANTA

SAN FRANCISCO

Bruni Sch

FORT MC INTOSH

TEXAS

MEXICAN

VICTORIA

BM 414

ST

MEXICO

UNITED STATES

BM 420

St Peters Sch

PO

CH

Laredo Jr College

HIDALGO

AVE

Park

Central Sch

CONVENT

Xavier Sch

GRANT ST

WATER ST

Gravel

Toll Port of Entry