



BRINGING BACK MAIN STREET



A Guide to Downtown Revitalization for Local Governments



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The Houston-Galveston Area Council is the regional organization through which local governments consider issues and cooperate in solving area-wide problems in a 13-county region. Through H-GAC, local governments also initiate efforts in anticipating and preventing problems, saving public funds.

BRINGING BACK MAIN STREET

For generations, small towns have served as cultural and economic centers for surrounding rural areas. Their physical and social fabric reflect the community's unique history and identity. Changing economic conditions and demographics create challenges for rural downtowns. Despite these challenges, some communities remain vibrant places, attractive to residents and visitors alike, by leveraging their physical, cultural, and economic assets and investing in a **Community-Based Vision**, **Attractive Streetscapes**, a **Variety of Uses**, and **Effective Marketing**.

This guide offers fundamentals of downtown revitalization and introduces best practices from small cities and towns throughout Texas.

COMMUNITY-BASED VISION



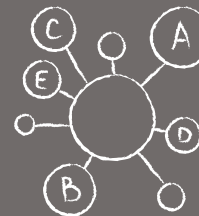
EFFECTIVE MARKETING



ATTRACTIVE STREETSAPES



VARIETY OF USES



WHY INVEST IN RURAL DOWNTOWNS?

According to the National Main Street Center, every \$1 invested in local Main Street programs generates \$33 in additional investment.¹ Below are just a few reasons why interest in living, working, and shopping in rural downtowns is growing.

SMALL TOWN LIVING

Rural downtowns offer many amenities homebuyers are looking for. More than half (55%) of Americans would choose to live in a smaller house in a walkable neighborhood over a larger house in an area inhospitable to pedestrians.² About two-thirds (65%) think it is important to live in an established neighborhood with older homes and mature trees, similar to those found in and around rural downtowns.³

RETIRING TO RURAL DOWNTOWNS

Retirees are increasingly interested in moving to small towns, since these places often have a lower cost of living and less congestion than their more urban counterparts, and many rural downtowns offer cultural and recreational opportunities in a walkable environment.⁴

“BUY LOCAL” MOVEMENT

Downtowns offer great space for local entrepreneurs to sell and promote local products and services. Approximately 55% of small business owners say “buy-local sentiment” is helping them compete with larger companies, because many Americans are interested in purchasing goods made within their own state or community.⁵

FLEXIBILITY PROVIDED BY INTERNET ACCESS

Internet access enables businesses to offer products and services online, expanding their reach without relocating to a large city. Business owners in smaller communities often enjoy lower rents.

TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES

Heritage tourism is a growing industry, and Texas ranks second nationwide in the number of visitors interested in seeing places that retain their historic character.⁶ Rural downtowns can be affordable tourist destinations for those wanting to learn more about Texas history and culture.



COMMUNITY-BASED VISION

Before making significant investments, communities should create a clear vision of what they want their downtown to become. When creating the community's vision:



Engage Stakeholders

Successful outreach garners feedback from diverse participants and allows the public to share their needs and vision. People living and working downtown can provide “insider information” on its condition and functionality, which can be used to create a successful revitalization strategy. Building consensus among different interests lays the foundation for partnerships to help improve downtown, increasing the likelihood the vision will be realized.

Stakeholders include:

- Residents
- Local elected officials and staff
- Local government agencies
- Local businesses and property owners
- Chambers of commerce

- Economic development organizations
- Civic groups
- School districts
- Colleges and universities

Determine Community Assets

Rural downtowns have physical, cultural, and economic assets they can leverage to attract new investment:⁷

- Access to waterways, natural areas, and other environmental resources
- Access to locally-grown agricultural products
- Historic buildings and landmarks
- Proximity to major metropolitan areas and regional transportation routes
- Affordable housing opportunities

- Unique economic niches
- Cultural events (e.g. festivals, fairs, etc.)

Identifying these assets will help communities develop their vision and distinct brand.

Conduct a Market Analysis

By studying local and regional economic trends, communities can develop a realistic vision of how they can generate new investment within their downtowns.

When conducting a market analysis, communities should:

- Determine the local trade area
- Study demographic data
- Identify existing businesses, attractions, and other economic assets
- Survey business owners and customers



Public Engagement Tools

Different outreach methods can be used to maximize citizen participation in the visioning process, including:

Public Meetings	Open houses and other public meetings allow stakeholders to learn about an issue and provide feedback. To increase participation, these meetings can be webinars.
Design Workshops	A design workshop (known as a charette) provides professionals and stakeholders with an opportunity to work collaboratively to address specific issues. This tool is best used to solve complex problems or address highly-visible projects that may have significant impacts on the surrounding community.
Focus Groups	Individuals representing different interests are invited to discuss a particular issue or topic as a group.
Mailings	To reach a wide audience at a lower cost, communities can consider including informational inserts with utility bills or other regularly-scheduled mailings.
Surveys	Surveys can be administered online, over the phone, or in person, or print copies can be mailed or inserted in the local newspaper. The results can be easily analyzed, helping policymakers understand the community's current views regarding local issues.
Interviews	Interviews allow those developing the plan to interact directly with stakeholders, helping them identify key issues or themes. They can be completed in-person or by phone. Depending on the media used, interviewers can detect and respond to changing body language and speech patterns, which allows them to better interpret participants' responses.
Websites	Interactive web pages allow interested parties to easily access information and submit comments electronically.
Social Media	Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other types of social media allow stakeholders to share comments, pictures, websites, and other information whenever they want. While these tools can expand the reach of planning efforts, managing and analyzing content can require significant time.
Local Media	Local newspapers or other media can help increase awareness about planning efforts.
Feet on the Streets	Instead of asking stakeholders to come to a meeting, planners can interact with community members at festivals, concerts, and other public events, helping them learn more about the community.

Elements of Successful Plans

Revitalization plans outline steps communities can take to make their downtowns more vibrant. To maximize effectiveness, plans should be:

COMPREHENSIVE

Plans should consider a range of issues affecting downtown, including land use, infrastructure, and accessibility. Before developing recommendations, the community should thoroughly examine existing conditions, market trends, and population and employment projections. The study area should encompass the entire downtown, as defined by community members.

ACTIONABLE

The plan should include a clear, locally-supported vision and identify strategies for improving downtown. Not only should there be realistic long-term strategies, but short-term ones that can be implemented immediately. Cost estimates for proposed projects should be included to help communities more easily pursue funding opportunities.

SUPPORTABLE

To solidify the community's vision and help ensure implementation, the plan should be endorsed by City Council, the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), Chamber of Commerce, and/or other local stakeholders that influence the community's physical and economic development. Identify the potential roles different groups can take to help implement the plan, and encourage inter-organizational partnerships.

MEASURABLE

The plan should include measures of success – quantifiable data points that can be tracked over time. For more information about possible metrics, see page 16.



**COMMUNITY-
BASED VISION**

Examples from the Houston-Galveston Region

Revitalization Plans

Hempstead, Waller, Bay City, and Huntsville have completed long-range studies that identify policies, programs, and improvements that support walking, biking, and mixed-use development within downtowns. These studies were completed in partnership with H-GAC as part of its Livable Centers and *Our Great Region 2040* initiatives.

Main Street Programs

Bay City, Huntsville, Rosenberg, and Sealy participate in the Texas Main Street Program, which aims to improve the vitality of downtown areas through economic development and infrastructure improvements.



FACT

\$2.9 billion was reinvested within communities participating in the Texas Main Street Program between 1981 and 2014.⁸



ATTRACTIVE STREETSAPES

Visitors first experience downtown from the street. Crafting an attractive, pedestrian-friendly streetscape is critical for creating a favorable perception of the area, encouraging visitors to spend time downtown and patronize nearby businesses.⁹



Elements of Attractive, Pedestrian-Friendly Streetscapes

PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS

Sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian signals make walking safe, convenient, and appealing. Decorative paving that reflects the area's cultural and architectural history (stamped concrete, inlaid brick, etc.) delineates pedestrian areas and directs traffic.

LANDSCAPING

Trees along the sidewalk shade pedestrians and improve the area's appearance. Placing planters along the street is a low-cost way to create immediate visual interest and demonstrate the community's commitment toward improving downtown.

LIGHTING

Lighting improves the visibility and safety of the street and draws attention to nearby businesses and attractions. Banners and other decorative features attached to light posts highlight events and different aspects of the community.

STREET FURNITURE

Well-designed benches, trash cans, bicycle racks, and other amenities make spending time downtown more pleasant. Outdoor dining generates activity along the street, while providing restaurants with additional seating and increased visibility.

FACADE IMPROVEMENTS

Improving the appearance of downtown buildings enhances visitors' perception of the area, while highlighting its unique history and architecture. Decorating windows of vacant buildings provides visual interest and helps prospective owners and tenants imagine what types of businesses could be located there.

PUBLIC ART

Murals and other public art promote the community's natural and cultural assets, while creating a visually appealing streetscape.

Evolution of Successful Main Streets

Existing Conditions

- Historic buildings have fallen into disrepair.
- Overhead power lines create visual clutter.
- Pedestrians must cross a wide street without marked crosswalks.
- Sidewalks are uneven and have no protection from the elements.
- Vacant storefronts have few street-level windows and doors, limiting attractiveness to passersby.



Short-term Fixes

- Large display windows on the ground floor increase pedestrian safety and provide visual interest.
- Adding potted plants and landscaping is a low-cost way to create a welcoming streetscape.
- Awnings provide shade and include attractive signage for businesses.
- A bench offers additional seating, while increasing activity along the street.
- Unique, historically-appropriate architectural details add visual interest.



Long-term Investments

- Trees provide shade and protection from the elements, while improving the street's appearance.
- Infill development reflects established building patterns, creating additional space for residences and businesses.
- Crosswalks, curb extensions, and wide sidewalks make walking safer and more convenient.
- Decorative pedestrian-scale lighting improves visibility, safety, and overall ambiance.
- Burying utilities reduces visual clutter and creates more space for pedestrian facilities and landscaping.
- A mix of shops, restaurants, and other businesses offer a variety of goods and services, generating activity throughout the day.



Infill Development

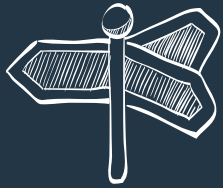
Where historic buildings do not exist or are unsalvageable, cities encourage context-sensitive infill development that reflects the character of the surrounding area. Form-based development codes (development codes focusing on a property's design rather than use) promote development appropriate for historic downtowns, while providing property owners with flexibility.

FACT

To attract customers, businesses should have attractive facades. In fact, 70% of first-time sales are generated by customers drawn inside by the building's appealing exterior.¹⁰



**ATTRACTIVE
STREETSCAPES**



ATTRACTIVE STREETSCAPES



Instant Impact

To generate immediate excitement downtown, communities can implement some simple, low-cost solutions aimed at improving the area's appeal and walkability.

BICYCLE RACKS

Placing bicycle racks near businesses and other destinations encourage people to bike downtown, reducing the number of automobile trips and the need for additional parking.

TEMPORARY ROAD DIETS

Striping, cones, or planters create a temporary bicycle lane or curbside parking, allowing communities to test different design strategies without making significant investments in new infrastructure.

STAGING VACANT BUILDINGS

Vacant storefronts make downtown unattractive to visitors and potential entrepreneurs. Lighting the windows of vacant buildings and adding holiday decorations, art and/or other unique features creates a more vibrant streetscape.

LIGHTING

Street trees and building edges wrapped in string lighting or highlighted with accent lights create an appealing ambiance at night.

TREES AND GREENERY

Trees, flowers, and other greenery are added along barren streetscapes. Potted plants are easily placed in strategic locations and repositioned as needed.

H-GAC's *Instant Impact Guide* offers more information on these techniques.¹¹

Historic Preservation

Historic buildings contribute to the community's sense-of-place and offer unique spaces for stores, restaurants, offices, housing and other uses. Local governments encourage the rehabilitation of historic structures, through measures such as:

GRANTS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Grants, loans, and other financial programs provide property owners with funding to renovate existing buildings and make other improvements.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines provide standards for the construction and rehabilitation of buildings downtown. They address the exterior appearance of buildings, the massing of new structures or additions, and streetscape improvements. These guidelines, which can be voluntary or mandatory, help ensure new development (and redevelopment) reflects the character and scale of existing buildings.

PRESERVATION TAX INCENTIVES

Federal and state tax incentives are available, and local governments may grant property tax exemptions for the rehabilitation of historic structures. While these programs offer financial benefits, property owners may have to meet additional structural and accounting requirements. For more information, consult the National Park Service or the Texas Historical Commission.

Preservation Tax Incentives

FEDERAL	<p>20% TAX CREDIT Owners restoring income-producing buildings certified historic by the National Park Service (NPS) may be eligible to receive a federal tax credit equal to 20% of rehabilitation costs.</p> <p>10% TAX CREDIT Owners restoring non-historic, income-producing properties built before 1936 may be eligible to receive a federal tax credit equal to 10% of rehabilitation costs.</p> <p>HISTORIC PRESERVATION EASEMENTS Owners of historic properties may donate an historic preservation easement to a non-profit organization. These easements permanently protect historic properties by restricting future development and preventing incompatible building modifications. Donors may be eligible for different tax benefits.</p>
	<p>TEXAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION TAX CREDIT PROGRAM Owners restoring buildings certified historic by NPS or the Texas Historical Commission may be eligible to receive tax credits equal to 25% of eligible rehabilitation costs, which can be applied against a business's franchise tax liability.</p> <p>STATE SALES TAX EXEMPTION ON LABOR Owners of non-residential buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places may be eligible to receive a sales tax exemption on the labor associated with repairing, restoring or remodeling their properties.</p>
	<p>LOCAL Local taxing authorities may offer tax exemptions for historic properties designated as state or local landmarks.*</p>

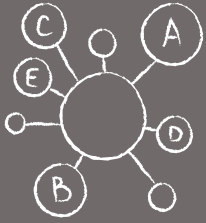
*For state enabling legislation, see Sec. 11.24 of the Texas Tax Code.

Examples from the Houston-Galveston Region

Facade Improvements	Several communities, including Bay City and Wharton, have used funding provided by H-GAC's Downtown Public Spaces Improvements Program to repair building facades and make other improvements.
Restoring Public Buildings	Colorado and Wharton counties have restored their courthouses using funds provided by the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program.
Development Regulations	Dickinson's State Highway 3 Overlay District establishes guidelines aimed at promoting mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development.



**ATTRACTIVE
STREETSCAPES**



VARIETY OF USES

Having a mix of uses attracts visitors throughout the day, creating a vibrant environment.¹²

To generate pedestrian traffic and create a lively streetscape, many communities encourage retail shops and restaurants to open on street level, with offices and/or residences on upper floors.¹³



Business Recruitment and Expansion

Activities to attract, retain, and incubate businesses can spur economic development within existing downtowns. Communities are supporting local businesses in a variety of ways, such as:

BUSINESS RECOGNITION PROGRAM

Recognition programs highlight businesses that make significant cultural and/or economic contributions to downtown areas.¹⁴ For example, businesses are recognized for completing an exceptional building rehabilitation, improving the appearance of the adjacent street, and/or selling locally-produced goods.

BUSINESS INCUBATORS

Incubators provide low-cost office space, financial assistance, and/or technical support to new businesses interested in locating in downtown areas.¹⁵

Residents Downtown

Providing housing options downtown increases economic vitality, as residents will patronize local businesses and help generate activity throughout the day. Retirees, empty nesters, and young professionals are all attracted to downtown living. New housing can be built on vacant lots, historic buildings can be rehabilitated for residential

use, and additional units can be added atop businesses. Careful design ensures new housing reflects the character of Main Street and the surrounding area. Cities throughout the country are offering financial incentives and modifying development regulations to encourage residential development downtown.¹⁶

Challenges to Creating Mixed-Use Environments Downtown

PARKING

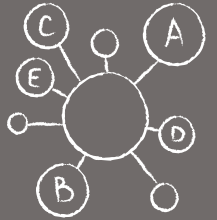
In historic downtowns, there is often limited space for parking. Development regulations may require a certain amount of parking be available for businesses and other uses, but it may be difficult to meet these requirements in downtown areas. Some towns allow and encourage shared parking between different uses, decreasing the need for additional parking spaces.¹⁷ For example, offices share parking with downtown restaurants, as they have different parking demands at different times of day. People visiting local offices use the parking during the day, while restaurant patrons use it on nights and weekends.

ZONING

Zoning and other development regulations may prohibit multiple uses from occurring within the same building. To encourage a greater variety of uses within a single building or property, communities use a mixed-use zoning classification for downtown areas.¹⁸ Form-based codes are used to help ensure new development is architecturally-compatible with existing buildings.

BUILDING CODES

Historic buildings can house a variety of uses, but rehabilitating them to meet modern building codes can be cost-prohibitive. Some communities are adopting alternative building standards applicable to historic structures, such as the International Existing Building Code.¹⁹



VARIETY OF USES



FACT

Having businesses open throughout the day is important since 70% of retail spending takes place after 6 p.m.²⁰

Examples from the Houston-Galveston Region

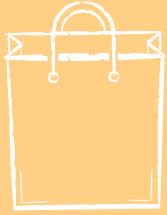
Long-Term Plans

Long-term planning documents can encourage mixed-use development in appropriate locations. The City of Magnolia's Comprehensive Plan (2013) supports a variety of uses in its historic town center.

Zoning Downtown

The City of El Campo has a zoning district (CBD: Central Business District) specifically for its downtown area, which allows for a variety of uses and has flexible standards aimed at ensuring development is compatible with existing buildings.





EFFECTIVE MARKETING

To attract visitors and new investment, communities should clearly articulate their brand. Marketing efforts should draw attention to unique assets that differentiate downtown from other communities, creating a positive image for residents and visitors. Local businesses can use this branding in their own marketing efforts, further strengthening the brand's image and expanding its reach.



Tourism

Small cities and surrounding rural areas often have notable cultural and natural resources. Supporting context-sensitive economic development in these areas draws tourists and investment downtown, while creating new opportunities for landowners. There are several different types of tourism, such as:

HERITAGE TOURISM

Our region's small towns offer visitors an affordable opportunity to learn more about the state's unique history and culture.

AGRITOURISM

Many farmers are looking for new ways to generate income, while preserving the area's rural character. Agritourism focuses on providing visitors with opportunities to experience activities associated with agricultural production, such as raising and harvesting crops. Agritourism businesses include wineries, farmers' markets, pick-your-own operations, rural bed-and-breakfasts, corn mazes, horseback riding, and other

farm-related activities. Visitors will not only patronize these rural businesses, but visit shops, restaurants, and hotels in nearby downtowns. Agritourism operations in scenic areas within a short drive of major cities are often the most successful.

ECO-TOURISM

Our region contains high-quality protected landscapes, including coastal wetlands, prairies, and forests, that can accommodate hiking, birding, and other types of outdoor recreation. Rural downtowns serve as base for people visiting surrounding natural areas, providing eco-tourists with accommodations, restaurants, and other necessities.

Public Events

To attract tourists and locals downtown, organizations can sponsor different types of events:

FESTIVALS

Festivals, parades, concerts, and similar events highlight the community's unique assets, attracting out-of-town visitors.

FARMERS' MARKETS

Farmers' markets attract locals and out-of-towners alike, while creating new economic opportunities for nearby agricultural producers and highlighting the area's rural heritage. Food trucks, arts and crafts vendors, and other local businesses also participate.

ATHLETIC EVENTS

Fitness classes (dance, yoga, etc.) are held in parks, plazas, and other public spaces, bringing people (and new activity) downtown. Organized runs (5K runs, marathons, etc.) attract visitors, especially on weekends.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

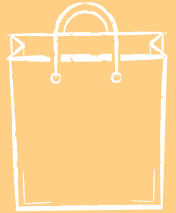
Communities provide opportunities for citizens to improve their downtowns, such as painting facades, planting and maintaining landscaping, and/or picking up trash. These efforts not only beautify public spaces, but build support for local businesses and public investment in downtown areas.

Partnerships

Nearby communities can work together to attract investment and visitors downtown. Partnerships maximize the reach of inter-jurisdictional marketing efforts in a cost-effective manner. Communities can provide complementary services and accommodations for tourists.

FACT

When developing marketing strategies, downtown retailers should consider that women account for 80% of all consumer spending.²¹



EFFECTIVE
MARKETING

Examples from the Houston-Galveston Region

Eco-Tourism

Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge is working with the City of Liberty and other organizations to better connect local destinations with public lands. As part of this project (From Crosswalks to Boardwalks), a network of signed bicycle routes will link trailheads with neighborhoods, municipal parks, and other points-of-interest throughout Liberty.

Festivals

The Hempstead Watermelon Festival and Monterrey Square Wine and Arts Fair (Wharton) are just two events held in our region's downtowns.

Farmers' Markets

Bay City, Columbus, Huntsville, and other communities have farmers' markets downtown, supporting local agricultural producers.

Cultural Arts

Downtown Huntsville and Downtown Rosenberg are designated state cultural districts by the Texas Commission on the Arts. This designation is used as a marketing tool, helping attract businesses and tourists downtown.

Athletic Events

Several organizations host bicycling events that draw thousands of people to small towns and rural areas. More than 1,000 people participate in Bike Around the Bay, a two-day, 180-mile ride benefiting the Galveston Bay Foundation. About 13,000 people participate in the BP MS 150, a two-day, 180-mile ride between Houston and Austin.



MEASURING SUCCESS

Creating a vibrant downtown takes time and patience. To measure the success of revitalization efforts, communities track economic health using pre-determined indicators.

INDICATOR	WHY MEASURE?
Amount of Public and Private Investment	Investments in infrastructure, building rehabilitation, and other improvements indicate community support for revitalization and demonstrate interest in living, working, and doing business downtown.
Changes in Property Values	Increasing property values indicate growing demand for residents and businesses to locate downtown.
Sales Tax Revenue	Increasing sales tax revenues indicate how well local businesses are attracting customers.
Hotel Occupancy Rate	Higher hotel occupancy rates demonstrate the community's success at becoming an attractive tourist destination.
Business Mix	Downtowns should have a mix of business types, which should include a combination of locally-owned businesses and larger franchises.
Number of Attendees at Downtown Events	Increasing attendance at public events indicates how successful the community's marketing efforts are at attracting locals and visitors downtown.
Vacancy Rate: Commercial Buildings	Low commercial vacancy rates indicate that downtown is an attractive, economically viable location for businesses to operate.
Vacancy Rate: Residential Buildings	Low residential vacancy rates indicate that downtown is an attractive place to live.
Percentage of Streets with Sidewalks	To attract customers and improve mobility, most (if not all) streets downtown should be lined with well-designed, well-maintained sidewalks. Some communities have seen lower vacancy rates and greater sales tax revenues after improving sidewalks downtown. ²²

RESOURCES

Downtown Revitalization

National Main Street Center (National Trust for Historic Preservation)
www.preservationnation.org/main-street

Texas Main Street Program (Texas Historical Commission)
www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-main-street

Texas Downtown Association
www.texasdowntown.org

Texas Cultural Districts Program (Texas Commission on the Arts)
www.arts.texas.gov/initiatives/cultural-districts

Historic Preservation

National Trust for Historic Preservation
www.preservationnation.org

National Register of Historic Places (National Park Service)
www.nps.gov/nr

Texas Historical Commission
www.thc.state.tx.us

Preservation Texas
www.preservationtexas.org

Streetscape Improvements

Instant Impact Guide (H-GAC)
www.h-gac.com/community/livablecenters/publications/instant_impact_guide.pdf

Building Better Bikeways (H-GAC)
www.h-gac.com/community/qualityplaces/pedbike/publications/building_better_bikeways.pdf

Pedestrian Pathways (H-GAC)
www.h-gac.com/community/qualityplaces/pedbike/publications/pedestrian-pathways.pdf

Livable Centers (H-GAC)
www.h-gac.com/community/livablecenters

Livability in Transportation Guidebook (U.S. Department of Transportation)
www.fhwa.dot.gov/livability/case_studies/guidebook/livabilitygb10.pdf

Tourism and Marketing

Office of the Governor: Economic Development and Tourism Division
gov.texas.gov/ecodev

Texas Cultural Districts Program (Texas Commission on the Arts)
www.arts.texas.gov/initiatives/cultural-districts

GO TEXAN (Texas Department of Agriculture)
www.gotexan.org/AboutUs/AboutGOTEXAN.aspx

Certified Retirement Communities Program (Texas Department of Agriculture)
www.retireintexas.org/Home/CertifiedRetirementCommunities.aspx

Texas Heritage Trails Program (Texas Historical Commission)
www.thc.state.tx.us/preserve/projects-and-programs/texas-heritage-trails

Planning

PlanSource, a cooperative purchasing program managed by H-GAC, can be used to hire consultants to complete a range of planning projects. www.the-plansource.org

FUNDING TOOLS

PRIVATE FUNDING

FOUNDATIONS

Some foundations provide financial support for revitalization efforts, including historic preservation, public arts initiatives, and infrastructure improvements.

NON-PROFITS

Community groups, business organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Downtown Merchants Associations, etc.), and preservation groups provide funding and/or volunteers to support improvements downtown.

VOLUNTEERS

By utilizing volunteers to help improve downtown spaces, communities can complete revitalization projects at a lower cost.

LOCAL PROGRAMS

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

Local governments throughout Texas are using tax increment financing (TIF) to fund public improvements in downtown areas. Bonds finance public improvements within designated areas (tax increment reinvestment zones). These improvements increase the area's desirability, raising property values. The additional revenue attributed to higher property values is used to repay the bonds.

HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAXES

Texas cities may use funds generated by their hotel occupancy tax (HOT) to promote tourism and preserve historic sites.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SALES TAXES

Some communities use revenue generated from economic development sales taxes to support downtown revitalization efforts. Type A and Type B Economic Development Corporations (EDCs) use this revenue to invest in different kinds of projects.

REGIONAL PROGRAMS

HOUSTON-GALVESTON AREA LOCAL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (H-GALDC)

H-GALDC manages Small Business Administration loans (SBA 504) for new and expanding businesses. H-GALDC also provides business programs for the community, including this guide.

DOWNTOWN PUBLIC SPACES IMPROVEMENTS PROGRAM (H-GALDC)

Local governments and non-profits may use this funding to improve the appearance of public land or buildings in downtown areas.

COMMUNITY TREES GRANT PROGRAM (H-GALDC)

Communities may use these funds to plant trees on public land.

	Streetscape Improvements	Other Infrastructure	Historic Preservation	Business Development	Housing	Marketing
PRIVATE FUNDING						
FOUNDATIONS Some foundations provide financial support for revitalization efforts, including historic preservation, public arts initiatives, and infrastructure improvements.	■	■	■		■	■
NON-PROFITS Community groups, business organizations (Chambers of Commerce, Downtown Merchants Associations, etc.), and preservation groups provide funding and/or volunteers to support improvements downtown.	■	■	■		■	■
VOLUNTEERS By utilizing volunteers to help improve downtown spaces, communities can complete revitalization projects at a lower cost.	■		■		■	■
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	Streetscape Improvements	Other Infrastructure	Historic Preservation	Business Development	Housing	Marketing
STATE PROGRAMS						
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT (CDBG) PROGRAM FOR RURAL TEXAS (TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE) Small cities and counties in rural Texas use this funding to improve infrastructure and for planning activities.	■	■			■	
TEXAS CAPITAL FUND: MAIN STREET DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE) Funding supports infrastructure improvements in rural downtowns designated as an official Texas Main Street City by the Texas Historical Commission.	■	■				
TEXAS CAPITAL FUND: DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROGRAM (TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE) Funding supports infrastructure improvements in rural downtowns that do not participate in the Texas Main Street Program.	■	■				
TEXAS CAPITAL FUND: INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE) Funding supports investments in public infrastructure in small, rural communities.		■		■		
TEXAS HISTORIC COURTHOUSE PRESERVATION PROGRAM (TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION) Funding helps communities rehabilitate historic courthouses and complete improvements that address critical structural, operational and safety needs.		■	■			
TEXAS PRESERVATION TRUST FUND (TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION) Funding is used to acquire, restore, and/or study sites designated as state or federal landmarks.			■			
FEDERAL PROGRAMS						
COMMUNITY FACILITIES GRANTS (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE) Funding helps rural areas and small towns construct, enlarge and/or improve community facilities for healthcare, public safety, and other public services.		■				
RURAL BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY GRANTS (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE) Funding supports different types of economic development initiatives, including business incubators, feasibility studies, and training programs.				■		
FARMERS' MARKET PROMOTION PROGRAM (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE) Funding helps local governments and non-profits promote locally-produced agricultural goods at farmers' markets, agri-tourism operations, and other direct producer-to-consumer marketing opportunities.						■
TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM (U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION) Funding supports projects that improve the appearance and functionality of downtowns, such as streetscape improvements (sidewalks, lighting, etc.) and renovations to historic transportation facilities. Depending on the jurisdiction, funding allocations are made by the Texas Department of Transportation or H-GAC.	■		■			

LA GRANGE

Using History to Attract Tourists



La Grange's downtown retains much of its historic character, creating a unique destination for people interested in learning more about Texas history and culture. The downtown area is anchored by the Fayette County Courthouse which was built in 1891 and restored in 2005 with funding from the Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. This iconic structure sits in a central square surrounded on all four sides by commercial buildings. Since La Grange became an official Texas Main Street City in 1996, many buildings near the courthouse have also been rehabilitated. Most were restored using private funds, although the City of La Grange has some grant programs that can help offset the costs of exterior improvements. The city's Historic Preservation Ordinance ensures these improvements reflect the historic character of the area. To further improve the appearance and accessibility of downtown, sidewalks were replaced using Texas Capital Fund grants.

A mix of businesses, including boutiques and restaurants, are located downtown, offering locals and visitors a unique shopping and dining experience. The Texas Quilt Museum, a major tourist draw, opened in 2011 in two nineteenth-century buildings. To accommodate tourists, most businesses have expanded their hours and are now open six days a week.

Festivals and other events attract out-of-towners and locals alike. La Grange Uncorked, an annual wine and food festival, drew 600 people in 2014, about 60% of which were tourists. A year-round farmers' market draws people downtown on Saturday mornings. La Grange's Main Street Program continues to plan and promote events aimed at attracting out-of-towners. Ongoing events include Trick of Treat on the Square, Schmeckenfest (an annual Christmas and wassail-tasting event), and Summer Movie Nights on the Square.

POPULATION (2010): 4,641

Nearest Major
City: AUSTIN

**64
MILES**

AREA

3.6

SQUARE MILES

1850

YEAR
INCORPORATED

NACOGLDOCHES

Building Partnerships to Promote Downtown



Known as the “Oldest City in Texas,” Nacogdoches was first laid out in 1779. Due to the cooperative efforts of public and private entities, Downtown Nacogdoches retains much of its historic character. Visitors can see well-preserved buildings that date to the early 1800s. The city has partnered with the local convention and visitors bureau, chamber of commerce, economic development corporation, school district and Stephen F. Austin State University to preserve these buildings and create a vibrant, attractive downtown.

Historic buildings accommodate a mix of businesses, including antique shops, art galleries, boutique clothiers, jewelry stores, and restaurants. New residential units are also being added, creating a mixed-use environment. As development and redevelopment occur, the city’s historic preservation ordinance protects historic buildings from demolition and prevents alterations incompatible with their architectural character. Several local initiatives, such as the Main Street Planter Box Program, make downtown streets more appealing to residents and visitors.

A variety of events are held downtown, which attract visitors year-round. Many events highlight the city’s historic and natural assets. One of the largest events is the Texas Blueberry Festival, which draws about 20,000 people annually (many of whom are out-of-town visitors). The city works with Stephen F. Austin State University to promote downtown businesses during student orientation, parents’ weekends, and alumni events. The Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce (in partnership with other entities) encourages students, locals and visitors to patronize local businesses through its Shop Nac First program. These partnerships maximize the impact and efficiency of the city’s revitalization efforts.

POPULATION (2010): 32,996

Nearest Major
City: HOUSTON

142
MILES

AREA

27.0
SQUARE MILES

1779

YEAR
INCORPORATED

SULPHUR SPRINGS



Creating a Unique Destination Using Local Funding Sources

Sulphur Springs has made significant improvements in its historic downtown, creating a vibrant environment using primarily local funding sources. A Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) was created, supporting streetscape improvements that made the area more attractive and walkable. A parking lot surrounding the restored Hopkins County Courthouse was converted to a park, which hosts hundreds of public events each year. The park has a variety of amenities, one of which has become a major attraction. Two all-glass restrooms were constructed; one-way mirrors create privacy, but allow users to see outside. These unique restrooms have been featured in Texas Monthly and other publications.

There are few vacancies downtown, as most buildings are occupied by shops, restaurants and professional offices; there are even some residential lofts. The city adopted policies and incentives to encourage the restoration of historic buildings. A public grease collection line and grease trap were installed downtown; restaurant owners can connect to this system instead of constructing their own, saving them up to \$20,000. In the past, the city offered façade improvement grants to those restoring building exteriors. Increased code enforcement encourages property owners to fix and maintain their buildings, while the city's adoption of the International Existing Building Code makes rehabilitation easier and more economical.

These improvements have made Downtown Sulphur Springs an attractive tourist destination. Many visitors come from the Dallas-Fort Worth area, which is about an hour west via Interstate 30.

POPULATION (2010): 15,449

Nearest Major
City: DALLAS

**80
MILES**

AREA

**21.0
SQUARE MILES**

1854

**YEAR
INCORPORATED**

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