

PEARLAND PROSPERITY

Strategic Plan





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To view the entire plan and updates, visit www.pearlandprosperity.com.

Prepared by Market Street Services, Inc.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Phase 1: Stakeholder and Community Engagement (July)

Qualitative feedback is a vital component that was used to identify strategic priorities for the city of Pearland with the understanding that much has been accomplished during the implementation of Pearland 20/20. Engagement involved as many community stakeholders as possible through an online survey, individual interviews, and multiple focus groups in order to assess how the city has changed in recent years and identify its emerging strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities.

Phase 2: Community Assessment (July)

The Community Assessment provided a detailed examination of the trends that have shaped Pearland's growth in recent years as well as its competitiveness as a place to live, work, and do business. The Assessment combined qualitative feedback from phase one with deep quantitative data findings into a set of "stories" that provided a concise narrative of the city's opportunities and challenges. When relevant, trends in the Greater Houston region, particularly pertaining to economic diversification, were utilized to identify potential areas of economic opportunity.

Phase 3: Implementation Assessment (August)

The Implementation Assessment provided an evaluation of Pearland 20/20's implementation activities in order to gain a firm understanding of those areas where progress has been made and goals have been met, those areas where clear progress remains to be achieved, and any barriers that have historically impeded effective implementation. The assessment also updated Pearland 20/20's performance metrics to give perspective on the degree to which Pearland 20/20 implementation has made progress towards performance goals.

Phase 4: Economic Development Strategic Plan (September – November)

This Strategic Plan represents the culmination of all the quantitative and qualitative research findings and strategic implications. The Strategic Plan will guide the community's collective actions and will be geared towards addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities. The plan is holistic, actionable, and measurable. Examples of best practice programs, policies, and initiatives from communities around the country have been included when appropriate.

Phase 5: Implementation Guidelines (December)

The Implementation Guidelines will provide an important complement to the Strategic Plan. If the Strategic Plan represents what the city of Pearland and its partners will pursue to enhance its economic development, the Implementation Guidelines will define how the community and its partners can achieve objectives. These guidelines will ensure that the community's current approach to implementation is leveraged and built upon where appropriate, and revised and adjusted where necessary.

STEERING COMMITTEE

This process was guided by a Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. The following individuals generously volunteered their time to serve the community and this process by providing strategic guidance, input, and oversight throughout the process.

INDIVIDUAL

Brandon Dansby (Chair)

Stacy Adams

Dr. Christal Albrecht

Carol Artz-Bucek

Charisse Barry

Dr. Ira Blake

Matt Buchanan

Mona Chavarria

Dr. Daniel Combs

Donna Coneley

John Hare

Dr. John Kelly

Ernest Lewis

J. David Little

John Loessin

John Lyle

John McDonald

Alan Mueller

Luke Orlando

Clay Pearson

Trent Perez

Mark Smith

David Wagner

REPRESENTING ORGANIZATION, TITLE

Chair, PEDC Board of Directors

Commissioner, Brazoria County

President, Alvin Community College

President, Pearland Chamber of Commerce

Barry Insurance

President, University of Houston Clear Lake

President, PEDC

PEDC Board of Directors

Assistant Superintendent, Alvin Independent School District

Chair, Pearland Chamber of Commerce

Vice-President, FloWorks International

Superintendent, Pearland Independent School District

President & CEO, Adult Education Center

Councilmember, City of Pearland

Ace Hardware

PEDC Board of Directors

Director of Community Development, City of Pearland

Vice President, Gromax Development

Councilmember, City of Pearland

City Manager, City of Pearland

Councilmember, City of Pearland

Incoming Chair, Pearland Chamber of Commerce

HCA Houston Healthcare Pearland

THE STRATEGIC PLAN

Public, private, and non-profit leaders have come together around a strategic planning process to make Pearland a more prosperous and successful place. This process has resulted in **Pearland Prosperity**, a new holistic Economic Development Strategic Plan that will guide the collective actions of the Pearland Economic Development Corporation (PEDC) and its partners in the coming years. The remainder of this section describes how this consensus blueprint was developed and outlines the structure of its strategic framework.

HOW THE STRATEGIC PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

The strategic planning process began with the development of two foundational research documents that directly informed the creation of Pearland Prosperity. The **Community Assessment** evaluates Pearland's competitiveness as a place to live, work, and do business. It is based on in-depth data analysis covering demographic, socioeconomic, economic, and quality of life trends as well as extensive public input gathered through focus groups, interviews, and an online survey that received 2,390 responses from community stakeholders. Key findings from research and input are woven together into seven key "stories" that explain the city's current realities, key successes, and remaining challenges. Collectively, they take stock of conditions in Pearland as they presently exist and identify initial areas that may warrant strategic attention. The seven key stories are as follows:

1. Introduction: Embracing a New Phase of Progress
2. A Continued Destination of Choice in Greater Houston
3. Pearland's People: Educated, Young, and Diverse
4. Implications of a Local-Serving Economic Composition
5. Economic Diversification: Opportunities and Challenges
6. Traffic, Transportation, and the Jobs-Skills Mismatch
7. Enhancing a "Sense of Place" in Pearland

This **Implementation Assessment** offers a high-level evaluation of the implementation of Pearland 20/20. It revealed that the overall implementation of Pearland 20/20 was successful in helping to advance work that boosted the community's competitiveness for talent, jobs, and investment. Summaries of key findings from the Community Assessment and Implementation Assessment can be found in the Executive Summaries of the respective documents. **Several key themes stand out, however, as having significant bearing on the type of strategic approach that Pearland should pursue.**

The public input process revealed that many stakeholders believe that Pearland is at an inflection point. Throughout much of its recent history, Pearland has been defined by transformative population growth and developing the infrastructure, services, and systems to accommodate it. While additional work remains, the progress the community has made in recent years "catching up" to this growth has been commendable.

However, stakeholders said they anticipate that Pearland's most rapid population growth is in the past, and recent data supports the idea that the community's growth is indeed slowing.

Accordingly, the question of "what's next?" was a key theme during the public input process. With Pearland having made significant progress toward adding needed infrastructure and services, stakeholders contacted through the input process said that Pearland's residents are beginning to have discussions about the community's future. **These discussions can be synthesized and distilled into a key question: How will Pearland ensure its sustainability and maintain or even improve its status as a highly desirable destination as its era of rapid growth draws to a close and the community begins to mature?**

The public input process and Steering Committee feedback revealed that Pearland has a strong value proposition, with excellent schools, relatively affordable housing, proximity to employment hubs such as the Texas Medical Center, and a highly diverse and educated population. **Supporting these existing assets and advantages will be an important strategic aim, as will continuing ongoing work that emerged from Pearland 20/20 and other strategic planning processes.**

That said, stakeholders understand that maintaining and enhancing Pearland's status as a community of choice will require additional work and investment. For one, competition for jobs and talent is intense, and Pearland is maturing. As one stakeholder put it, "in two decades, some other place will be the shiny new suburb." **Accordingly, Pearland must act with urgency to address several issues that have important long-term competitive implications. One such issue is economic diversification.** Pearland's economy is still largely comprised of local-serving business sectors, and the community has not developed into a dynamic job center with a base of "primary employers" that bring new wealth into a community. To raise levels of prosperity and ensure a broad, sustainable tax base, Pearland must take actions today that can grow and diversify its economy in the coming years.

Another key issue is the development of the type of quality of life and quality of place amenities that talented individuals and families increasingly seek out when deciding where to live. Stakeholders said that relative to other communities in the Greater Houston region, Pearland lacks amenities such as walkable mixed-use built environments and entertainment options. Stakeholders said they feared that if investments are not made in these areas, the community's competitive status could be at risk. Conversely, if investments are made, they can help catalyze a virtuous cycle in Pearland where the community's fiscal sustainability and attractiveness for jobs, investment, and talent increases. **Accordingly, Pearland should pursue a strategic framework that blends the need to build on the successes of recent years while also looking ahead to ensure that the community will maintain its competitive edge far into the future.**

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The research, public input, and Steering Committee feedback summarized on the preceding pages led to the determination of a strategic framework that organizes the efforts that Pearland will advance in the coming years. At the center of the Pearland Prosperity framework are two **Community Goals** that broadly identify the desired outcomes of Pearland's holistic economic development effort. These Goals are:

1. **Economic Growth & Diversification:** Provide opportunities for residents to prosper and enhance Pearland's fiscal sustainability through a holistic approach to economic development.
2. **A Community of Choice in Greater Houston:** Ensure Pearland's quality of life and quality of place continue to attract and retain diverse individuals and families.

These Goals can be pursued through a number of **Strategic Initiatives** grouped into seven high-level **Focus Areas**. Each Initiative corresponds to an action, program, effort, or investment that can help move Pearland toward its desired future. The Focus Areas provide organizational clarity and readily communicate to a wide variety of audiences the issues that Pearland will seek to address through collective action. The relationship between Community Goals and Focus Areas is depicted in the graphic on the opposite page. The circular structure and lines connecting the Focus Areas and Community Goals reflect the interdependent nature of the strategic framework.

The remainder of this document describes this framework in greater detail. Each Focus Area begins with a brief introduction that establishes its connection to research and input and support for the Community Goals. Strategic Initiatives are introduced with a brief justification and description, followed by a bulleted list of Potential Actions that can activate each program, effort, or initiative. While the Community Goals, Focus Areas, and Initiatives are numbered for the purposes of organization, **this order does not imply hierarchy or priority. The Pearland Prosperity framework is interdependent and connected, and no single element can in isolation advance the community toward a more prosperous and successful future.**

It should be noted that a significant amount of work is already underway in Pearland related to many elements of Pearland Prosperity. When relevant, this document references and incorporates these ongoing efforts. This is by design, as no community can or should start completely from scratch, and in many respects, Pearland will be "jumping on a moving train" to leverage existing capacity. Yet, more can always be done with adequate resources, committed leadership, and a spirit of cooperation. Additionally, while some portions of this document touch on how a given program or initiative might take shape, **this document is not intended to formally establish how things will be done or who will do them. Those issues are addressed in the accompanying Implementation Guidelines document.**

THE PEARLAND PROSPERITY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



1. Business Development

Thanks to proactive efforts from the PEDC, the City of Pearland, and their partners, Pearland's base of large private employers has grown significantly in recent years. Between 2009 and 2018, firms such as Kelsey Seybold, Kemlon, Lonza, Dover Energy, Merit Medical, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries have added nearly 1,900 combined jobs and provided numerous economic and fiscal benefits to the community. But data reveals that Pearland's economy is still largely comprised of local-serving business sectors such as government, retail trade, and food services. Unlike some peer communities, Pearland has not developed into a dynamic job center with a large base of "primary employers" that export goods and services to other domestic and foreign markets, thereby increasing local prosperity. This economic composition has numerous implications. Among them is the fact that Pearland's tax base is heavily dependent on residential property taxes and retail sales taxes. This poses a potential long-term risk as the community's housing stock ages and the national bricks-and-mortar retail sector faces an uncertain future.

With its rapid growth in recent years, Pearland's development pattern has largely been established as an attractive "bedroom community" for individuals seeking proximity to other major employment centers. But, even marginal increases in economic diversity can have a variety of positive impacts, including improved fiscal sustainability, more demand for retail, dining, and entertainment options, the opportunity for shorter commutes for some Pearland residents, and a strengthened local business community that can support a stronger civic culture. Accordingly, Pearland should build upon the location and expansion success of recent years and pursue the growth of primary jobs within its borders through a holistic approach to economic development.

For decades, "economic development" was often synonymous with "business recruitment." But, best-practice communities understand that job growth and diversification actually comes through three different avenues: business attraction and marketing, business retention and expansion (BRE), and entrepreneurship. This Focus Area addresses efforts to grow primary jobs through business attraction and marketing and existing business care; entrepreneurship is addressed in the next Focus Area. Growing primary jobs is essential to diversifying Pearland's economy and ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability. However, it also should be noted that retail sales are crucial to the community's existing tax base. Accordingly, this Focus Area also encompasses support for a thriving retail sector that can balance the local tax digest and provide desired amenities to residents and businesses.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

1.1 Engage in a targeted approach to business attraction and marketing

While data suggests that existing businesses and new startups account for the bulk of job creation within most communities, business recruitment remains an integral part of a balanced approach to economic development. The most important factor in attracting outside jobs and investment is a community's "product" consisting of its workforce, existing sector composition, location, infrastructure, sites and buildings, place-based assets, and other factors. Other Focus Areas within Pearland Prosperity focus on improving and leveraging Pearland's competitive position with regard to these factors.

That said, best-practice communities also proactively pursue new primary jobs and capital investment through a variety of activities including marketing, relationship building, project management, project support, the provision of incentives, and so on. Since its formation in 1995, the Pearland Economic Development Corporation (PEDC) has provided these services on behalf of Pearland. The PEDC and its partners have strengthened the community's business attraction and marketing efforts in recent years and have achieved strong outcomes. This Initiative focuses on continuing and enhancing this work.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Through the PEDC, continue to manage economic development projects throughout their lifecycle and, if needed, through post-project assistance
- ∠ Continue to position the PEDC as the primary point of contact for prospective businesses and work collaboratively with the City of Pearland's Community Development team to connect businesses to local government
- ∠ Regularly evaluate economic development incentives to ensure that they support primary job growth and deliver a positive return on investment for Pearland; consider the potential to create targeted incentives that support other Initiatives in the strategic framework (e.g. activation of mixed-use districts)
- ∠ Task economic development professionals with continuing to build and maintain strong relationships with all relevant economic development partners, including but not limited to Team Texas and Texas One, the Greater Houston Partnership, the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region, the Economic Development Alliance for Brazoria County, industry and real estate trade groups, and brokers
- ∠ Advance recommendations related to the Targeted Communications Campaign articulated in Pearland's brand strategy to communicate Pearland's brand and value proposition to key decision makers and prospective businesses in the Greater Houston region and beyond
- ∠ Outreach to key contacts in target business sectors (Health & Life Sciences, Energy, Manufacturing, and Business & Professional Services) through targeted digital communications, attendance at high-value industry events and meetings, and other outbound marketing activities (e.g. participating in state-led trade delegations or site selector events)

1.2 Help existing businesses grow and thrive through a collaborative, action-oriented approach to business retention and expansion (BRE)

Communities of all types engage in business retention and expansion (BRE) programs aimed at helping existing businesses grow and thrive. In Pearland, BRE activities are carried out through the BizConnect program, a partnership between PEDC and the Pearland Chamber of Commerce. BRE is about more than conducting regular visits and maintaining positive relationships with key local employers. A successful approach requires a formal, collaborative program involving multiple organizations that can influence the business climate and respond to employer needs. A best-practice BRE program should seek to understand the challenges and opportunities that existing businesses face, building up a "knowledge base" of issues, opportunities, and threats to specific firms and/or the community's overall business climate as a whole. Partners must then work collaboratively to alleviate barriers to competitiveness, identify and support

businesses with plans or potential to expand, prevent existing businesses from relocation elsewhere, and respond to opportunities for business recruitment based on relationships with local firms. This Initiative focuses on continuing this work and ensuring that Pearland is leveraging findings from BizConnect to actively assist existing employers and enhance the overall local business climate.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue to conduct regular on-site interviews with key local employers through the BizConnect program
- ∠ Leverage BizConnect activities to build up a “knowledge base” of issues, opportunities, and threats from interactions with employers; utilize a standard battery of questions and software to track activities as well as assign and manage follow-up tasks for partners
- ∠ With a core collaborative team consisting of representatives from the Chamber, PEDC, the City of Pearland, and any other key partners, meet regularly to address any competitive issues or assistance opportunities that require supportive action; develop protocols for immediately responding to major challenges and/or planned or suspected closings or relocations
- ∠ Complement economic development marketing and business attraction activities by seeking to identify opportunities for business expansions and/or locations through BRE efforts; work with existing businesses to determine whether suppliers or other connected firms could benefit from locating in Pearland
- ∠ Develop an annual online business survey for all Pearland businesses regardless of size or business sector to understand the needs of small businesses that cannot reasonably be contacted through in-person interviews geared toward primary employers and other large firms
- ∠ Using relationships established through BRE activities, enlist executives and other key representatives from existing businesses to support business attraction efforts (e.g. assistance during site visits)

BEST PRACTICE #1: Business First (Richmond, VA)

1.3 Support a vibrant retail sector in Pearland

Attracting primary employers that export goods and services to other markets is essential to growing and diversifying Pearland’s economy. But as previously discussed, it is important to note the impact that the retail sector has in supporting the community’s fiscal sustainability. In recent years, stakeholders in Pearland have worked with retailers and retail developers to expand shopping and dining opportunities and grow the local tax base and enhance amenities and social offerings for residents. The public input process revealed that stakeholders in Pearland believe the time is right to take an even more proactive approach. Stakeholders noted that the future of the national “bricks-and-mortar” retail climate is uncertain. At the same time, input participants said they expected that Pearland’s “market area” will continue to add population as new residential developments come online in and around the community, particularly in rapidly growing areas to the south. To help guide its actions, Pearland should conduct additional market research and pursuing opportunities that are underrepresented or missing from the community.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Conduct regular assessments of the retail climate in Pearland and/or the local market area, including demand, leakage, demographics, etc.; the assessment should include a public survey component to solicit feedback about residents' habits and desired retail options
- ∠ Based on the assessment, identify gaps in the local retail landscape and engage relevant stakeholders (e.g. corporate real estate professionals and brokers) to explore options for locations and expansions
- ∠ Ensure that the initial retail climate assessment examines how an entertainment district could support and be supported by catalytic "anchor" amenities, namely an indoor sports facility and hotel/conference center (see Initiatives 6.1 and 6.2); ensure that the City of Pearland's Convention & Visitor's Bureau (CVB) is engaged as a key partner in this research
- ∠ Leverage findings from the assessment to support creating an optimal climate for local small businesses (see Initiative 2.1)
- ∠ Ensure that Pearland is well-networked within regional and national organizations focused on retail trade and commercial real estate

1.4 Proactively communicate the economic development value proposition to the Pearland community

In Market Street's experience, successful communities view economic development as a "team sport" where individuals and organizations from the public, private, and non-profit sectors work together to advance a common agenda. A critical aspect of this work is ensuring that all key partners and the general public understand the importance of the various programs, initiatives, and investments outlined in an economic development strategy and how these actions will have a positive impact on the community's success, prosperity, and quality of life. Stakeholders in Pearland understand the importance of a collaborative, coordinated approach to economic development. That said, stakeholders also said the community would benefit from an increased emphasis on communicating specific goals, initiatives, and metrics to internal audiences. This Initiative focuses on taking a proactive approach to communicating the importance of economic development activities and their return on investment (through job growth, fiscal impact, etc.) to key community partners and the community's residents.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Maintain regular dialogues with elected and appointed officials from the City of Pearland and other relevant public entities on economic development and strategy implementation activities
- ∠ Prepare monthly or quarterly one- or two-page summaries of highlights related to economic development activities and strategy implementation for distribution to key partners in the public, private, and non-profit sectors; when relevant, highlight progress on key metrics that will be provided in the Implementation Guidelines phase of the strategic planning process
- ∠ Communicate progress to the general public through quarterly updates, annual reports, regular social media posts, earned media (e.g. story placements in *Community Impact* and other local sources), etc.

2. Business Formation & Early-Stage Growth

The preceding Focus Area in this strategic framework includes recommendations related to business attraction and business retention and expansion (BRE). These activities constitute two-thirds of the “three-legged stool” of economic development. The third component of a holistic approach to economic development is the “entrepreneurial ecosystem.” An entrepreneurial ecosystem consists of the individuals, organizations, institutions, and programs that encourage and support the formation and growth of new businesses. During the public input process, stakeholders said they would like to see an increased emphasis on supporting startup activity and growth in Pearland. Stakeholders noted that Pearland has several advantages that could be supportive of such activity, namely a highly educated and diverse resident population and a nascent group of businesses engaged in research and development and innovation activities. This Focus Area offers a realistic approach for enhancing the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to note three important considerations that influence the proposed strategic direction of this Focus Area. First, there are many different types of entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses. Because of these differences, one new venture might have very different needs than another. For instance, a small firm that has developed a new piece of technology with high growth potential will likely require executive expertise and access to significant amounts of capital in order to grow and thrive. On the other hand, a sole proprietor running a boutique store or lawn care business might instead require assistance with crafting an initial business plan or navigating local business licensing requirements.

Second, while Pearland has significant resources to invest in various economic development activities through the PEDC, by law these funds must be used to grow primary employment and supportive amenities. Accordingly, the PEDC is not the appropriate entity to directly assist non-primary employers. The PEDC can support these non-primary employers indirectly, however, by bringing new jobs and wealth into the community that can in turn lead to increased sales and new customers for local-serving businesses.

Third, encouraging the formation and development of high-growth firms works best at scale and with the backing of significant intellectual capital and investment. The Greater Houston region already boasts a well-developed entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem consisting of dozens of incubators, accelerators, university research centers, venture funds, seed and angel investors, and related organizations. When considering how to support new business formation in Pearland, stakeholders should seek to connect to and complement this system rather than attempt to duplicate existing resources or offerings.

Given these factors, the following strategic approach is proposed as a realistic yet impactful way for Pearland to promote business formation and growth in the context of Greater Houston’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. It involves ensuring that Pearland has an optimal business climate and support services to aid business formation and growth. Such optimization would also benefit all types of business regardless of size, longevity, or primary/non-primary status. It also entails creating a physical “hub” to serve as a focal point for entrepreneurship in Pearland, expanding programing to help businesses scale locally, and enhancing incentives and capital availability. Through such actions, Pearland can position itself as an attractive destination for entrepreneurs and new and growing firms in the Greater Houston region.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

2.1 Ensure that Pearland's business climate and support services are optimized for enterprise formation and growth

All businesses regardless of size, type, or longevity must comply with the regulations of the jurisdiction or jurisdictions in which they operate. But for entrepreneurs, startups, and small businesses, navigating regulatory processes related to business licensure, permitting, and so on can represent a significant challenge. This Initiative is premised on making Pearland an optimal place to start and grow a business. This entails continuing work to make the permitting and regulatory processes as easy to navigate as possible and promoting existing resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Regularly review regulations and permitting processes to ensure they are easy to understand and conducive to business formation; leverage the City's Development Services Manager to assist entrepreneurs and small businesses in this process
- ∠ Conduct pre-development meetings for prospective developments and redevelopments
- ∠ Promote existing resources for entrepreneurs and small businesses, including the San Jacinto College Small Business Development Center (SBDC) and support services offered through the Adult Education Center
- ∠ Develop a "one-stop" website with excellent mobile functionality to serve as a "virtual front door" for starting or expanding a business in Pearland; promote the website through social media and search engine optimization and devote staff resources to ensure that it is regularly updated with relevant information
- ∠ Develop a targeted online marketing campaign highlighting the ease of doing business in Pearland; utilize social media, paid social media, and earned media to reach entrepreneurs and small business owners in Greater Houston and connect individuals to the appropriate points of contact

2.2 Establish a hub for entrepreneurship to concentrate local services and connect to the regional ecosystem

Greater Houston is home to a robust entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem. Houston Exponential (HX), a non-profit organization created to accelerate the growth of the region's innovation ecosystem, identified dozens of organizations, entities, and assets that support the formation and development of high-growth businesses. Many (but certainly not all) are clustered in the "Innovation Corridor," a branded geographic area that encompasses Downtown and Midtown Houston and the campuses of Rice University and the Texas Medical Center. While competition exists within the region's ecosystem, collectively, its many components offer a supportive environment for innovation and entrepreneurship.

Input participants suggested, however, that there is untapped potential for startup activity in Pearland. The community has a highly educated and diverse population, is located within relative proximity to major research centers, and has a growing number of businesses engaged in research and development and/or

high tech activities locally. Accordingly, Pearland is likely home to numerous “prospective entrepreneurs” with ideas for high-growth businesses. To tap into this latent potential, this Initiative proposes that partners work collaboratively to evaluate the feasibility of a physical “hub” for entrepreneurship and small business assistance in Pearland. Such a facility could serve as a gathering space, a focal point for services, and a conduit to the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem. The Pearland Chamber of Commerce is currently in the process of evaluating one potential approach to creating such a hub. The Chamber recently commissioned a feasibility study for an entrepreneurial community in partnership with The Cannon, a Houston-based co-working environment backed by Work America Capital.¹

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue the Chamber-led study to evaluate the viability of an incubator or entrepreneurial community in Pearland; evaluate the need to research additional business models or approaches
- ∠ With research complete, convene partners from the public sector, business community, and regional ecosystem to determine options for resourcing and operating a physical hub; create a development plan that includes a range of desired initial programming and potential opportunities for expansion, an operation structure, an assessment of physical space and resource needs, facility branding, and an initial budget and resource development strategy
- ∠ Design new programming so that it supports startups for a sufficient period (likely two to three years) to maximize the chances for success; ensure that companies based at the hub have access to other supportive services such as the new revolving loan fund (see Initiative 2.3)
- ∠ If feasible, co-locate the entrepreneurial hub with existing assets that could be supportive of business formation and growth (e.g. the UHCL Campus)
- ∠ Create an “interim access point” for entrepreneurship utilizing existing office and meeting space; program this interim space with offerings such as “office hours” for the SBDC and other partners, volunteer mentoring from professionals and/or college and university faculty, and “entrepreneurial education” classes for individuals seeking to learn business skills and principles
- ∠ Ensure that any new programs or investments are not duplicative of established services and operations in Greater Houston; engage partners in the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem to connect Pearland entrepreneurs to established networks

BEST PRACTICE #2: Tech Alpharetta Innovation Center (Alpharetta, GA)

¹ Witthaus, Jack. “\$70M mixed-use project to start construction near I-10 and the Beltway.” *Houston Business Journal*. November 3, 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.bizjournals.com/houston/news/2017/11/03/70m-mixed-use-project-to-start-construction-near.html>

2.3 Establish a revolving loan fund (RLF) to incentivize primary business formation and growth

Competition for startup business with high growth potential is understandably intense. Additionally, these firms often co-locate in close proximity to one another and to supportive resources such as research universities and established entrepreneurial networks. That said, communities such as Pearland could be attractive to startups seeking to grow their operations. By making incentives available to startups with strong potential to grow jobs in primary business sectors, Pearland could become an attractive destination for new firms in the Greater Houston region that are “off the ground” but have yet to scale. One potential way to assist such firms is through a revolving loan fund (RLF). Such funds are typically used to issue relatively small loans (e.g. ranging from \$25,000 to \$200,000) at competitive interest rates to entrepreneurs and small businesses to make initial capital investments, support the development of new products, and test market viability. Loan funds can be especially helpful to businesses with established ideas and models that have yet to generate revenue needed to secure traditional financing. While some risk is inherent in any form of lending, RLFs are, as the name suggests, intended to be self-replenishing, with repayments from initial recipients providing the capital for additional loans.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Bring together economic development and entrepreneurship professionals, local financial institutions, foundations, and other potential funding partners to identify options to evaluate the feasibility of an revolving loan fund (RLF) to attract startups with the potential to grow primary jobs in Pearland
- ∠ Establish criteria and loan terms, define acceptable uses of monies, and establish a loan review committee; require companies that receive funding to seek guidance from the region’s small business and entrepreneurial assistance services
- ∠ Establish relationships with entrepreneurs and startups in the Greater Houston ecosystem to raise awareness about the RLF and other available incentive offerings and encourage firms with high growth potential to locate their operations in Pearland
- ∠ Base the RLF at the proposed entrepreneurial hub (see Strategic Initiative 2.2) to ensure strong connectivity to the community’s entrepreneurial community

BEST PRACTICE #3: Revolving Loan Fund program (Pharr, TX)

3. Site Development

One important aspect of a community's economic development "product" is the availability of readily developable land. In order to accommodate many competitive business locations and expansions, communities must have suitable sites that are available for acquisition and development on a tight timeframe; such sites are sometimes referred to as being "shovel ready." This Focus Area involves ensuring that Pearland has a competitive, highly visible supply of shovel-ready development sites. Part of this work involves effectively marketing prime districts and ensuring that sites are well-served by needed infrastructure and desirable amenities, topics that were addressed in the Pearland 20/20 Strategic Plan.

Public input also revealed that Pearland should take a more proactive approach to increasing the supply of development-ready sites. Pearland is by no means "built out" and there are tracts of land that could be suitable for commercial or industrial development or redevelopment. Many of these sites are located in prime areas for development such as the Lower Kirby District and the SH 35 corridor. However, stakeholders with knowledge of local real estate conditions said that many of these sites face barriers to development such as fractured ownership that would make them challenging to assemble and/or prepare for prospective end-users working on a tight timeline. To remedy these issues and to maximize its chances of economic growth and diversification, Pearland must adopt a proactive approach to site development. Specifically, Market Street recommends that the PEDC acquire and prepare prime shovel-ready development sites. Because of the inherent challenges and risks associated with site assembly and preparation, this approach will require careful research, planning, and commitment on the part of the PEDC and community leaders. A more proactive approach is needed in order to ensure the community's competitiveness and "unlock" sites that may not be activated in the near term through market forces alone.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

3.1 Position the Lower Kirby District and the SH 35 Corridor as priority areas for development

Through extensive research and the development of the Lower Kirby Urban Center Master Plan and the SH 35 Corridor Redevelopment Plan, the PEDC and its partners have identified several prime sites for commercial and/or industrial development in Pearland, namely the Lower Kirby District and two areas along the SH 35 commonly referred to as "North Main Business Park" and "South Main Business Park." Market Street recommends that the PEDC and its partners continue to position these districts as priority areas for development and redevelopment.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Utilize all relevant channels to market the Lower Kirby District and areas along the SH 35 Corridor such as the proposed North Main Business Park and South Main Business Park as destinations for development in Pearland; when possible, seek opportunities for public-private partnerships to further development in these areas
- ∠ Through the PEDC, seek opportunities to develop Class A office space in the Lower Kirby District, along the SH 288 corridor, and other prime office development sites

- ∠ Implement recommendations in the Lower Kirby Urban Center Master Plan and the SH 35 Corridor Redevelopment Plan that increase the competitiveness of these areas for development
- ∠ With the City of Pearland and PEDC, evaluate potential uses for the city-owned property near the UHCL Campus
- ∠ Ensure that these areas have shovel ready sites and are served by competitive infrastructure and amenities (see Initiatives 3.1 and 3.2, respectively)

3.2 Proactively assemble and prepare sites to eliminate burdens related to acquisition and development

Certain conditions can make sites less well-suited for time-sensitive economic development projects or otherwise difficult for private-sector actors to develop alone. For instance, sites with fractured ownership can be difficult to acquire in a short timeframe given the need to negotiate and coordinate with multiple parties. Sites that lack needed infrastructure such as sufficient road or highway access, water/sewer, or utilities are also not considered to be shovel ready. Additionally, some sites have conditions such as drainage challenges or environmental conditions that require some form of mitigation before they are ready to accommodate development. As previously referenced, stakeholders with knowledge of real estate dynamics in Pearland said there are numerous sites in the community, including those in prime areas such as the Lower Kirby District and the North and South Main Business Parks, that face such challenges. In order to more competitively position the community for economic development projects and the fiscal benefits associated with them, Pearland should leverage its economic development resources to take a proactive approach to site assembly and preparation.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Through the PEDC, convene public and private stakeholders to examine potential development sites in Pearland and identify those that have the highest potential for development in the next 5-10 years; prioritize sites located in the Lower Kirby District and SH 35 Business Parks (see Initiative 3.1)
- ∠ Potentially with the assistance of a neutral real estate services firm or site consultant, evaluate the conditions at each potential development site and identify barriers such as fractured ownership and missing infrastructure; determine whether a proactive approach is necessary and appropriate in order to make a site viable for near-term development
- ∠ When appropriate, leverage the PEDC and/or other resources to assemble sites with fractured ownership; leverage the PEDC and potentially other tools such as Management Districts to provide needed infrastructure or mitigation for prime sites
- ∠ Proactively market shovel-ready sites through the PEDC

3.3 Ensure that best-in-class infrastructure and amenities are in place to support site development

High-quality infrastructure is an important pre-requisite for site development. As previously referenced, sites must have sufficient road and/or highway access, water/sewer capacity, utilities, and drainage in order to be marketable. Additionally, many businesses and prospective “end users” are increasingly evaluating a site’s quality of place and access and proximity to desirable amenities such as restaurants and retail, walkable mixed-use centers, trails and multi-use paths, parks, and so on. Stakeholders in Pearland have recognized this trend. For example, the PEDC and its public sector partners have been pursuing a regional stormwater detention strategy in the Lower Kirby District in order to make the area viable for development. As part of this approach, partners have sought to integrate parks and trails in order to leverage drainage ditches and detention ponds as amenities rather than mere afterthoughts. Stakeholders said this approach has already begun to pay dividends as employers in the area have cited these planned and ongoing developments as factors that influenced their location decisions. Accordingly, Market Street recommends that Pearland continues to promote and invest in quality of place amenities in proximity to key development sites in order to make them more competitive.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue to leverage the PEDC and other resources to ensure that development sites are well-served by required infrastructure; continue to ensure that entrances to development sites are attractive, well-maintained, and effectively branded
- ∠ Implement recommendations in the Lower Kirby Urban Center Master Plan and the SH 35 Corridor Redevelopment Plan (see Initiative 4.1) related to beautification and amenity development and seek the advancement of mixed-use districts proximate to development sites (see Initiative 6.1)
- ∠ Ensure that opportunities for park, trail, and sidewalk development in the Lower Kirby District and the SH 35 Corridor are represented in the Parks and Multi-Modal Master Plans (see Initiative 6.3)
- ∠ Leverage the PEDC, the Lower Kirby Pearland Management District, the Pearland Municipal Management District No. 1, and other resources to include park and trail amenities

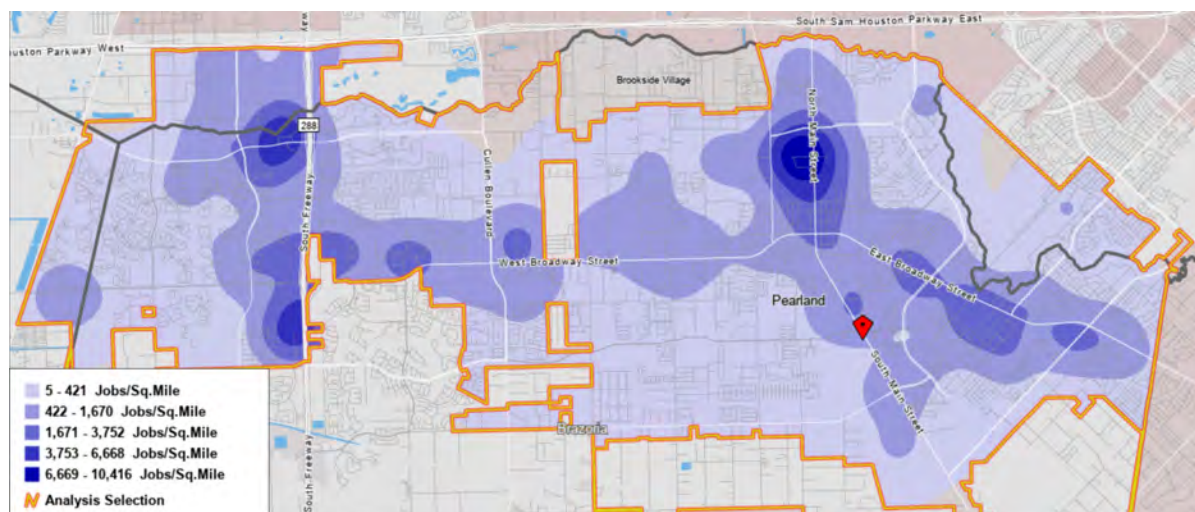
4. Corridors

As Pearland seeks to grow and diversify its economy and ensure a broader tax base, its primary corridors will play a vital role. The bulk of the community's available development and redevelopment sites suitable for commercial and/or industrial development are concentrated around three primary corridors: SH 288, FM 518/Broadway, and SH 35. Additionally, as shown in the below map, many of Pearland's existing jobs are already clustered along these corridors. Simply put, Pearland must invest in its key corridors to ensure that they are efficient, aesthetically pleasing, and well maintained in order to ensure that they are attractive destinations for jobs and investment.

As part of the implementation of Pearland 20/20, the PEDC, City of Pearland, and other stakeholders have significantly advanced efforts related to quality corridor development and redevelopment. The nearly completed widening of SH 288 and related beautification efforts were cited by stakeholders as one of the community's key successes in recent years. The community created the Pearland Municipal Management District No. 2 (PMMD No. 2) to advance landscaping, maintenance, streetscaping, and "landmark" features along the corridor. Stakeholders in Pearland have also carried out master planning activities for the SH 35 corridor and are in the process of doing the same for FM 518/Broadway. This Focus Area recommends continuing to plan for and implement corridor improvements that increase the community's competitiveness for jobs, talent, and investment.

Figure 1: Employment Density by Location in Pearland for All Jobs in 2017

Source: United States Census Bureau OnTheMap



STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

4.1 Implement the 288 Corridor Master Improvement Plan

As part of the implementation of Pearland 20/20, stakeholders developed the 288 Corridor Master Improvement Plan that called for long-term improvements to the corridor including hardscaping, landscaping, and other aesthetic improvements along the corridor. In recent years, the PEDC and its community partners have implemented numerous recommendations from this plan in conjunction with Brazoria County and TxDOT's widening and reconstruction of the highway. As previously referenced, stakeholders contacted through the public input process frequently cited these enhancements as major positive additions to the community and expressed a desire to see the master plan fully implemented.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Implement proposed enhancements along the length of the 288 corridor (see Initiative 4.4); work with PMMD No. 2 to resource maintenance and upkeep of aesthetic enhancements in the corridor
- ∠ Coordinate with TxDOT and other relevant entities to ensure the advancement and smooth integration of needed road upgrades (see Initiative 5.1)

4.2 Implement the SH 35 Corridor Redevelopment Plan

The Pearland 20/20 Strategic Plan identified the need for a plan to guide redevelopment efforts along SH 35, the principal north-south corridor on the community's east side and an area with significant potential for commercial and/or industrial development. The PEDC and its partners commissioned a redevelopment master plan for SH 35 that was completed in 2016. The plan envisions the corridor as "a high-quality and consistently designed employment and business environment with compatible land uses and supportive amenities." It is built around five catalysts: northern gateway streetscape improvements; Business Park North; Business Park South; a Restaurant and Entertainment Destination including main street design elements in southeast Old Town; and an Old Town Esplanade and a new neighborhood-oriented development on the former Alvin Community College Campus site directly south of Zychlinski Park. This Initiative focuses on continuing to implement these catalysts for change along the corridor. (It should be noted, however, that leveraging the Alvin Community College campus may need to be put on hold indefinitely as it was recently purchased by a private party that will utilize the facility as a school.)

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue streetscaping work at key gateways and along the length of the SH 35 corridor (see Initiative 4.4)
- ∠ Coordinate with TxDOT and other relevant entities to ensure the advancement and smooth integration of needed road upgrades (see Initiative 5.1)
- ∠ Advance work to activate the North Main Business Park and South Main Business Park (see Initiative 3.1) and promote a restaurant and entertainment district in Southeast Old Town (see Initiative 6.1)

- ∠ Consistent with the vision of the SH 35 corridor as a “high quality and consistently designed” district, work with the City of Pearland, the business community, and other partners to ensure that zoning and other development controls are in place to create a welcoming and attractive gateway to Pearland

4.3 Develop the FM 518/Broadway Corridor Development Plan (SH 288 to SH 35)

In 2019, the PEDC entered into an agreement with a planning firm to examine potential mobility, infrastructure, and economic development improvements along the FM 518/Broadway corridor. Recommendations from this process are expected to advise TxDOT as it prepares to upgrade and widen FM 518 between SH 288 and SH 35. The ongoing planning process will be built around extensive stakeholder feedback, with input gathered from workshops and interviews, meetings with TxDOT and other key agencies, a committee meeting, and an online community survey. The final plan is expected to include a road reconstruction and widening impact analysis, concept layouts of reuse/redevelopment target areas, a conceptual plan to connect a reconstructed Veterans Drive north to Mykawa Road, and a corridor development plan. The plan is also expected to evaluate the potential to increase capacity and efficiency by utilizing “one-way pair” configuration with Walnut Street.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Develop the FM 518/Broadway Corridor Development Plan; prepare to work with TxDOT and other stakeholders to implement recommendations as appropriate
- ∠ Ensure that all strategic interests outlined in this and other plans are considered as part of the process; ensure that issues related to aesthetics, pedestrian infrastructure, high-quality development standards, and other factors that are important to Pearland’s overall economic competitiveness and quality of life are prioritized in the process
- ∠ Engage all relevant partners to ensure broad stakeholder participation in the process to generate buy-in for concepts in the plan

4.4 Beautify Pearland’s corridors and gateways

The primary transportation corridors and entry points or “gateways” into a community play an important role in shaping internal and external perceptions of a place. Gateways and major corridors are typically the areas that potential residents, businesses, and investors first see when they arrive in a community and are thus the references from which they form their first impressions of a community. Accordingly, many communities recognize that attractive gateways and corridors are integral to holistic economic development. Stakeholders in Pearland have recognized this fact and have engaged in efforts to beautify corridors and gateways as part of redevelopment plans and other efforts. This Initiative involves continuing this work.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue beatification efforts at key gateways and corridors as outlined in various existing redevelopment plans, including the City Gateways Strategy, Lower Kirby District Beautification Strategy: Gateways & Corridor Enhancements document, the SH 35 Corridor Redevelopment Plan, and the 288 Corridor Master Improvement Plan

- ∠ Work with TxDOT and other relevant partners to ensure that future road and highway projects include aesthetically pleasing elements including landscaping, wayfinding signage, high-quality lighting, art installations, etc.
- ∠ Support Keep Pearland Beautiful, the City of Pearland, and other Partners in their upkeep and cleaning of key corridors in Pearland

5. Infrastructure & Mobility

During the public input process, issues related to traffic and mobility emerged as major challenges in Pearland. This is supported by the latest data from The National Citizen Survey, which collected a representative sample of views held by Pearland residents in 2017 and revealed that issues related to traffic and mobility received the least positive ratings from respondents. A variety of data indicators provide insight into why these issues figure so prominently into residents' feedback. The vast majority of Pearland residents who are employed commute to work via car, and for many of these individuals, commutes are long and getting longer. Issues such as traffic congestion and long commute times can be difficult to address, particularly for a municipality that is part of a large metropolitan area. However, Pearland has made significant progress in recent years on a variety of road and highway projects aimed at improving internal mobility within Pearland and easing commutes to key job centers. Stakeholders said continuing this work will be crucial to maintaining the community's attractiveness for jobs and talent.

This Focus Area recommends advancing high-priority road and highway projects and advocating for and developing additional resources needed to fund them. It also includes an Initiative that seeks to advance options for expanding transit connectivity to major employment centers, which could boost Pearland's attractiveness to prospective residents. It should also be noted that enhancing walking and biking capacity could help address mobility issues in Pearland by allowing residents to make more trips (e.g. a short journey to a nearby restaurant or store) without accessing a car. Enhancing multimodal connectivity within Pearland is addressed in Initiative 6.3 "Develop and implement the Parks and Multi-Modal Master Plans."

Finally, this Focus Area also includes recommendations related to infrastructure and public works projects that address stormwater drainage. According to input participants, conversations related to natural disaster preparedness and resiliency have been at the forefront since Hurricane Harvey and other recent rain events. Stakeholders praised the community's recent efforts to improve drainage and stormwater management and said they would like to see investments continue in these areas.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

5.1 Advance the planning, design, and construction of priority road and highway projects

Pearland has made significant progress in recent years on major road and highway projects. Stakeholders praised the widening of SH 288 and the extension of McHard Road as significant "wins" for the community. Since the inception of Pearland 20/20, the City of Pearland and the PEDC have worked with partners to secure more than \$180 million in county, state, and federal funding to advance projects on Bailey Road, Mykawa Road, and the SH 288 northbound Frontage Road, among others. In addition to completing work underway or near completion, stakeholders expressed a desire to see Pearland continue to advance projects that enhance road and highway capacity and connectivity within the community. This Initiative identifies priority projects that emerged through conversations with stakeholders in the community.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Work with TxDOT and all relevant partners to advance priority state-led projects, namely the reconstruction of FM 518 from SH288 to the Galveston County line, SH 35 south of FM 518, and FM 1128 south of Broadway
- ∠ Advance local priority projects that enhance connectivity within Pearland, including the following in no particular order:
 - The extension of Kingsley Drive from Clear Creek to Beltway 8
 - The extension of Reid Road (formerly Max Road) north to Beltway 8
 - The extension of Pearland Parkway from Dixie Farm Road to the Galveston County line
 - The extension of Dixie Farm Road/CR 100 from SH 35 to FM 1128
 - Reconstructing Veterans Drive between Bailey Road and Broadway with a connection to Mykawa Road to the north
- ∠ Consistent with stakeholder input and the community's overall commitment to enhancing its primary corridors, emphasize the importance of aesthetic upgrades, pedestrian infrastructure, and high-quality development in all transportation projects (see Initiative 4.4)

5.2 Pursue federal, state and local funding for transportation projects

Transportation infrastructure improvements are among the most resource-intensive projects a community can pursue. Much of the work required to advance them involves identifying and securing needed funds. This frequently entails engaging regional, state, and federal officials to pursue and advocate for available monies. According to stakeholders, Pearland has been highly successful in recent years securing outside funding for a variety of road and highway projects. However, stakeholders said they anticipated that state and federal funding will not be available for all priority transportation needs in Pearland. Accordingly, educating and informing voters about the need for infrastructure upgrades and the bond initiative(s) required to fund them will be an important consideration. Overall, advocating for and securing local, state, and federal funds will be essential to enhancing mobility and connectivity within Pearland and achieving other key strategic aims including corridor redevelopment and economic diversification.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue to build and maintain excellent relationships with key elected and appointed officials; engage all relevant partners to identify and secure state and federal funds to advance priority road and highway projects in Pearland
- ∠ Ensure that messaging among community partners with public policy and/or advocacy agendas (e.g. the Chamber) is aligned so that Pearland "speaks with one voice" on issues of infrastructure

- ∠ Maintain ongoing dialogues with elected and appointed officials and other relevant partners in neighboring communities and throughout the Greater Houston region to explore possibilities to advance multi-jurisdictional transportation projects
- ∠ Engage a wide variety of community partners to create a multi-faceted campaign to educate and inform Pearland residents about the potential need to raise local funds to resource transportation projects

5.3 Pursue near- and long-term options to expand transit connectivity to major employment centers

During the public input process, stakeholders cited Pearland's proximity to job centers such as the Texas Medical Center (TMC) as a key competitive strength. Various data sources indicate that thousands of Pearland residents commute to TMC for work, underscoring the importance of this proximity for attracting and retaining residents. Input participants said they further expected managed toll lanes on SH 288 to help ease car commute times to key office markets such as TMC and Downtown Houston. Many stakeholders said they would also like to see transit links between Pearland and these key job centers to provide additional options to out-commuters and enhance the community's overall competitiveness. Accordingly, Market Street recommends that stakeholders in Pearland engage the Metropolitan Transit Authority (METRO) and other key partners in a dialogue about the long-term future of regional transportation in Greater Houston. Pearland should also seek near-term opportunities to enhance transit connectivity. This includes support for a pilot Park & Ride program that launched in 2019. The program is a partnership between the City of Pearland and a private operator that offers weekday rush hour express bus service between the Shadow Creek Ranch Sports Complex, TMC, and Downtown Houston.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Work with METRO, regional partners, elected and appointed officials, and other key stakeholders to encourage a dialogue about the future of transit in the Greater Houston region and opportunities to expand service (e.g. express busses) to suburban communities
- ∠ Work with METRO to explore options to create express bus or other transit service linking Pearland to the TMC and the Fannin South Transportation Center, a transit hub served by the METRORail Red Line and several bus lines located just off SH 288 approximately six miles north of Beltway 8
- ∠ Continue to support the pilot Park & Ride program and seek opportunities to pursue federal funds to help sustain its operations
- ∠ With all relevant stakeholders, identify strategies to maximize ridership and ensure the fiscal sustainability of the program; develop a multi-channel marketing push to promote the Park & Ride service to coincide with the opening of managed toll lanes on SH 288 in 2020; highlight the fact that buses will be able to access the managed lanes thereby significantly shortening commute times

5.4 Advance infrastructure projects that improve drainage and stormwater management in Pearland

As previously referenced, the public input process revealed that stakeholders in Pearland wish to see the community and its partners continue to invest in drainage and stormwater management improvements in order to ensure that the community is prepared for future rain events. Stakeholders praised recent work by the City of Pearland and other public partners to address these issues and noted the need to continue supporting this work. In particular, input participants expressed support for a planned U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) project to improve Clear Creek to enhance drainage in significant portions of Pearland. This Initiative focuses on continuing these and other efforts.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue to work collaboratively with all relevant public and private partners to plan, resource, and implement drainage improvement projects
- ∠ Continue to support the planned reconstruction of Clear Creek for drainage purposes led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and with the involvement of the Harris County Flood Control District, Brazoria County Drainage District No. 4, the City of Pearland, and others
- ∠ Prioritize projects in the Master Drainage Plan that can help ensure that sites are shovel-ready in priority areas for development (see Initiatives 3.1 and 3.2)

6. Quality of Life & Quality of Place

A prominent theme to emerge from the public input process is that issues related to quality of life and quality of place are important to Pearland residents. Stakeholders in particular said they would like to see their community expand and enhance its supply of mixed-use environments to complement the Pearland Town Center. Stakeholders said they desire vibrant, walkable, environments that blend restaurants, retail, residential, commercial uses, and potentially other amenities. Such environments can offer the kind of entertainment options and “every day” places to gather and socialize that Pearland stakeholders value.

Expanding mixed-use environments and quality of place amenities is also important from a competitive perspective. Research from the Urban Land Institute reveals that a generational shift is occurring when it comes to community preferences, with younger residents increasingly desiring to live in cities or suburbs that can offer city-like amenities such as walkability. Research from the Knight Foundation further reveals that “social offerings” – e.g. entertainment options and places to meet people – are an important factor that “attaches” individuals to a community. Pearland has been successful in its recent history in attracting talented individuals and families, and the community’s overall population remains relatively young. But, highly successful suburbs around the country, including some in the Houston region, have or are creating the kind of walkable, mixed-use activity hubs that are now needed to attract talent and, accordingly, jobs and investment. This Focus Area includes recommendations related to advancing mixed-use developments and catalytic quality of place amenities that can help Pearland maintain its status as a community of choice within Greater Houston. It also covers other additional issues that emerged from the public input process related to quality of life and quality of place.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

6.1 Pursue the development of dynamic, walkable mixed-use districts

As previously discussed, during the public input process, stakeholders in Pearland expressed a desire for the community to create walkable, mixed-use districts to serve as “focal points” for gathering, socializing, and recreating. Market forces play an important role in determining the quantity and type of social amenities available in a given place. But many communities have successfully leveraged public-private partnerships and developed enhanced programming to attract new private developments and business activities that help make vibrant and attractive places. There are a variety of approaches that communities have used to create vibrant districts. In older communities, historic downtowns serve this function. Newer suburbs without historic downtowns have sought to create mixed-use developments that combine retail and residential components along with other uses such as offices, hotels, government buildings, etc. Because resources are limited, these types of investments must be targeted. Accordingly, it makes sense to focus resources on areas with the best chance for near-term development.

Over the years, stakeholders in Pearland have identified several areas that show promise as potential mixed-use destinations. The eastern third of the Lower Kirby District (the areas south of Bass Pro) and the Ivy District represent prime sites for a development incorporating residential, retail, entertainment, and commercial uses. A portion of the Old Town area was identified in the SH 35 Corridor Redevelopment Plan as a potential site

for a “restaurant and entertainment district.” Stakeholders said the intersection of FM 518/Broadway and Cullen Boulevard could be an attractive destination for future investment. Finally, the Pearland Town Center, already home to a mixture of uses, has additional opportunities for development and redevelopment. Given Pearland’s location, household incomes, educational attainment levels, and diversity, the community would likely be an attractive destination for investment. By proactively pursuing investment in support of a dynamic mixed-use district, the community can take an important step toward increasing its economic competitiveness and enhancing quality of life for residents.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Continue to work with the private owners of sites on the eastern third of the Lower Kirby District and the Ivy District to advance opportunities for mixed-use developments; identify potential public-private partnerships that could catalyze development in the area while delivering a positive return on investment for the community
- ∠ Seek to advance projects that could catalyze development in Lower Kirby, such as transit service (see Initiative 5.3) or a catalytic anchor amenity (see Initiative 6.2).
- ∠ Advance recommendations in the SH 35 Corridor Redevelopment Plan to activate Old Town as a center for dining and shopping; work with all relevant partners to improve the environment for pedestrians and pair redevelopment in Old Town with strategies to support housing (see Initiative 6.4)
- ∠ Through the development of the FM 518/Broadway Corridor Development Plan, examine options for mixed-use developments around the intersection of FM 518 and Cullen Boulevard, including potential uses for publicly owned sites in the area
- ∠ Continue to work with representatives from Pearland Town Center to identify high-quality development options for remaining undeveloped parcels; evaluate long-term opportunities to deck parking to allow for the redevelopment of surface parking lots at Pearland Town Center to create a larger walkable environment
- ∠ Convene the business community and other stakeholders to pursue and advocate for the repeal of the 51/49 rule in Pearland to ease regulatory restrictions on alcohol sales within the Brazoria County portions of Pearland; ensure that zoning and other regulations are in place to continue to disallow uses and business establishment types that are incompatible with existing development in Pearland

6.2 Advance catalytic “anchor” projects to support vibrant mixed-use districts in Pearland

The desire among stakeholders in Pearland for major quality of place amenities is not new. During the public input process for Pearland 20/20, stakeholders in Pearland expressed a strong desire to see significant investment in cultural and lifestyle amenities in their community that could serve as gathering places, points of community pride, and catalysts to generate “built-in market for restaurants, retail, and other establishments” in surrounding areas. That said, there was a lack of consensus about the exact type of amenity or amenities that Pearland should pursue. Accordingly, Pearland 20/20 proposed that the community study options for a “multi-use events center.” Since that time, the PEDC and its partners have conducted significant research and planning activities in support of this recommendation.

In 2017, the PEDC partnered with a consultant, CSL, to study market demand, supportable programs, and financing options for a variety of concepts that could fit within the multi-use events center framework. The consultant considered multiple facility types including an arena, a standalone convention/conference center, a hotel/conference center, an expo-multipurpose venue, a performing arts/cultural arts venue, an amphitheater, and indoor and outdoor amateur sports facilities. Through the study, stakeholders determined that an indoor sports facility and a hotel-based conference center would be the most viable options for Pearland to pursue.

Since that time, neither concept has advanced beyond the conceptual stage. Stakeholders in Pearland elected to postpone issuing an RFP related to a new hotel/conference center while waiting for market conditions to improve and pending the identification of a potential opportunity for a public-private partnership. For the indoor sports facility, stakeholders in Pearland commissioned a follow-up study by Sports Facilities Advisory. This study, completed in 2019, determined that an indoor sports facility would be viable in Pearland. The study noted, however, that while the facility would generally be profitable from an operating perspective, public funding would be required to cover the debt service on construction costs. In June 2019, the Pearland City Council decided to postpone the consideration of an indoor amateur sports facility.

Building consensus around major investments is not always easy, especially when public subsidies are required to make a project viable. But in many cases, these costs can be far outweighed by other economic and quality of life benefits that such investments can bestow on a community. Additionally, if Pearland is to remain a highly desirable community in the future, it must consider how it is appealing to a wide variety of current and future residents. Accordingly, Market Street recommends that Pearland continue to pursue the development of a hotel/conference center and indoor sports facility. In order to maximize their economic impact and chances for success, these facilities would ideally be co-located with existing or proposed mixed-use developments if feasible and economical.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Advance the development of a hotel/conference center and an indoor sports facility; if feasible, seek to develop these facilities in walkable proximity to existing or planned mixed-use centers and development sites, potentially including the area immediately south of Bass Pro in the Lower Kirby District and the Pearland Town Center
- ∠ Pursue private partners to build and operate facilities; consider leveraging economic development resources and/or public-private partnerships to advance amenity development
- ∠ As development of “anchor” amenities proceeds, formalize master development plan(s) to ensure that these amenities are well-integrated into dynamic, walkable mixed-use districts

6.3 Develop and implement the Parks and Multi-Modal Master Plans

During the public input process, Pearland stakeholders praised the recent advancement of parks and trails projects as significant positive additions in the community. In recent years, Pearland has advanced numerous aspects of the 2015 Parks Master Plan, including renovations to Independence Park and the first phases of Shadow Creek Ranch Park and the Hickory Slough Sports Complex. Trail improvements have included the first phase of the JHEC Nature Trails, connectivity improvements from Centennial Park to Independence Park, and the Shadow Creek Ranch Trail from Nature Park to Kirby Drive. Pearland is now taking the next step by developing new Parks and Multi-Modal Master Plans that will provide a blueprint for the city's parks, trails, and sidewalks. Preliminary plans and recommendations will be presented to the public in early 2020. The community is also developing the Clear Creek Trail Master Plan and planning for additional upgrades to Independence Park, among other projects. This Initiative focuses on advancing the development and implementation of existing and forthcoming plans and ensuring that Pearland continues to make progress on signature parks and trails.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Develop the Parks and Multi-Modal Master Plans and prepare for implementation upon completion of the process
- ∠ Advance the development of signature parks including the second phases of Independence Park, Shadow Creek Ranch Park (which is being funded through a TIRZ, with design underway and construction expected to begin in FY 2020), the Hickory Slough Sports Complex and, potentially, an indoor sports facility (see Initiative 6.2)
- ∠ Complete the Clear Creek Trail Master Plan and begin implementation of recommendations to incorporate existing and planned trails to ultimately create a signature continuous 21-mile trail connecting the east and west ends of Pearland; ensure that the project connects to Pearland's existing trail networks, Harris County parks and trails, etc.
- ∠ Advance other key trail and bicycle/pedestrian connectivity projects identified in the updated master plans; for all trail and bicycle/pedestrian projects, seek to promote connectivity to existing and potential retail and entertainment districts
- ∠ Prepare to resource needed improvements to Pearland's parks and trails; work with public and private partners to educate and inform key stakeholders and the general public on the need for recreation amenities that are critical to attracting jobs and investment
- ∠ As park and trail improvements are realized, promote these enhancements through social media, earned media, and other means in Pearland and the Greater Houston region

BEST PRACTICE #4: Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure (Carmel, IN)

6.4 Diversify and maintain Pearland's housing stock

Among the many factors that influence quality of place, housing plays an important role when it comes to attracting and retaining residents. Communities that feature high-quality housing options that appeal to a broad range of current and prospective residents will likely be at a competitive advantage for talent, particularly as consumer preferences evolve over time. Pearland recently experienced a decades-long building boom that substantially increased the community's housing supply. But as the community matures and large residential sites dwindle, some Pearland stakeholders said the community must consider new approaches to housing.

Input participants discussed the potential to diversify the community's housing stock by encouraging the development of products such as townhomes and high-end condominiums and multifamily residences. It should be noted that there was not consensus on the topic, with some residents expressing opposition to diversifying the community's housing supply. Proponents noted, however, that a broader variety of options could enhance the community's appeal to a wider range of prospective residents, including young professionals. These stakeholders noted that housing products such as townhomes could make efficient use of smaller sites that are not conducive to large-scale single-family residential development, thereby helping to sustain the community's tax base in the long run.

Another issue raised by stakeholders during the public input process was the need to maintain the attractiveness of Pearland's existing neighborhoods and housing stock as the community matures. Input participants noted that in the coming years, other communities in Greater Houston will be able to boast newer homes. To remain a community of choice and ensure that property values remain stable, Pearland should pursue actions to support the community's existing housing supply. Accordingly, Market Street recommends that Pearland seek to both maintain its existing housing and encourage a broader range of high-quality housing options.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Convene public and private partners to identify areas in Pearland that would be well-suited to residential products such as townhomes or high-end multifamily dwellings; ensure that land use plans and zoning allow for the desired uses and that regulations are in place to require high development standards
- ∠ Promote high-quality residential development mixed-use development sites such as Lower Kirby
- ∠ Leverage community development and planning staff capacity to investigate and implement strategies to ensure that Pearland's existing single-family and multifamily housing stock remains in good condition; where applicable, utilize Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and other state and federal monies to assist with housing rehabilitation, neighborhood development, and other approaches to stabilization
- ∠ Evaluate the feasibility of creating or engaging a non-profit development entity to buy, refurbish, and sell older homes in areas that are beginning to show signs of distress

7. Workforce & Talent

In the modern economy, access to an educated and skilled workforce is the most important factor driving location decisions for businesses. Accordingly, it is also a key determinant of a community's success and prosperity. Pearland is a highly educated community that boasts excellent PK-12 public schools and proximity to numerous higher education institutions and training providers. Pearland is also a highly desirable community within the Greater Houston region, one of the nation's premier "talent magnet" metros that is attracting new residents from around the country and world. That said, the public input process revealed several opportunities to further leverage Pearland's advantages with respect to talent development and address outstanding workforce and training needs. This Focus Area encompasses actions that public, private, and non-profit partners in Pearland can take to further enhance the community's workforce and, by extension, its competitiveness for jobs and investment.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

7.1 Connect and enhance Pearland's talent pipeline through a collaborative approach

Pearland is served by excellent education and training resources. The two public PK-12 school districts that serve a majority of the community's residents, Alvin ISD and Pearland ISD, were widely regarded as exceptional by stakeholders during the public input process. Stakeholders viewed continued support for these assets as vital to the community's status as a community of choice within Greater Houston. Pearland is also served by multiple higher education institutions, including Alvin Community College, San Jacinto Community College, and the University of Houston-Clear Lake at Pearland. Additionally, Pearland is part of a large, dynamic regional labor market that has numerous higher education institutions and programs that enhance the region's talent base and competitiveness for jobs and investment.

Simply put, Pearland's education and training resources stand out as significant competitive advantages, particularly when viewed in the context of the community's strong existing talent base. But stakeholders also identified a need to better connect aspects of the local talent pipeline and ensure that Pearland's business community is well-networked with education and training providers in Pearland and throughout the Greater Houston region. This can be accomplished by regularly convening representatives from education and training providers, private businesses, non-profits, and other relevant partners to work collaboratively to improve individual outcomes and ensure that current and prospective employers in Pearland have access to the workforce they need to grow and thrive.

Part of this work will entail building connections between local businesses and existing talent and workforce development efforts in Greater Houston. It will also involve enhancing partnerships among Pearland's businesses and the education and training providers that directly serve the community. Stakeholders from the business community said this is important because they have a far easier time attracting and retaining workers who live in or near Pearland as opposed to other parts of the region given the shorter commute times; accordingly, local partnerships make sense. This Strategic Initiative is focused on supporting a formal framework aligning Pearland's talent pipeline and connecting employers to existing education and training resources in and around Pearland.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Bring together representatives from the business community, education and training providers, relevant non-profits, and other key partners in a formal framework dedicated to strengthening Pearland's talent pipeline and ensuring that employers have access to a competitive workforce; leverage the Pearland Chamber of Commerce's existing Workforce Council to support collaboration²
- ∠ Ensure that the Workforce Council is action-oriented and provides strong value to businesses by identifying near- and long-term strategies to address workforce needs; further leverage findings from the community's business retention and expansion (BRE) program (see Strategic Initiative 1.2) to further inform these discussions
- ∠ Identify opportunities to assist adults without high school diplomas and/or college degrees to further their education and acquire new skills; work with employers to offer assistance such as flexible work hours around class schedules, guaranteed raises upon employment, etc. and leverage non-profit organizations to identify grants and other monies to support "upskilling"
- ∠ Work with Turner College and Career High School, the JB Hensler College and Career Academy, Alvin Community College, San Jacinto Community College, and the University of Houston-Clear Lake at Pearland to identify opportunities for expansion or enhanced promotion of degree and certificate programs
- ∠ Sustain support for high-quality public PK-12 education in Pearland; when applicable, convene public, private, and non-profit stakeholders to educate and inform the public about the importance of continued investment in schools and school facilities
- ∠ Reach out to the Greater Houston Partnership and any other relevant entities to engage the Pearland community in regional workforce and talent initiatives such as UpSkill Houston; seek opportunities to connect local businesses to internship programs, college fairs, ambassador initiatives, etc. and extend relevant programming to Pearland

BEST PRACTICE #5: Greater Wichita Partnership Business Education Alliance (Wichita, KS)

7.2 Leverage Pearland's special diversity and promote a culture of inclusion in Pearland

As previously discussed, a talented workforce is the most important factor driving the location decisions of businesses. Additionally, many businesses are seeking to grow diverse workforces to expand viewpoints and perspectives within their company and to better reflect and serve a diversifying customer base. Accordingly, Pearland's highly educated, highly diverse population stands out as a competitive advantage for jobs and investment that few communities in the country can match. As noted in the Community Assessment, of the more than 300 cities in the United States with at least 100,000 people as of 2017, Pearland is just one of 17 where Asian, black, Hispanic, and white non-Hispanic categories each make up at least 10 percent of the total population. During the public input process, stakeholders said they viewed Pearland's diversity as a major

² Note: while the Chamber's Workforce Council would serve as the venue through which partners could come together for alignment, the Chamber itself would not necessarily provide any workforce or training services.

community strength. That said, stakeholders said that they would like to see both public and private sector institutions and businesses be more intentional in their efforts related to diversity and inclusion. Additionally, research from the Knight Foundation suggests that “openness” or the ability for all types of people to build networks and thrive is an important factor for “attaching” residents to a community. This Initiative focuses on promoting a culture of inclusion in Pearland and its business community through the creation of a Diversity Business Council.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ Work with major employers, PEDC, the Pearland Chamber of Commerce, and other public and private partners to form a Diversity Business Council; could be modeled after successful initiatives such as the Greater Des Moines Partnership Inclusion Council
- ∠ Seek broad participation in the program; establish connections to existing employee resource groups (ERGs) and encourage firms without ERG programs to start them (ERGs are affinity groups for employees to join together in a workplace based on shared characteristics or experiences)
- ∠ Task the Council with promoting diversity on local boards of directors and establishing an annual workplace inclusivity survey for Pearland employers to identify and measure local diversity and inclusion efforts; publish findings in an annual report
- ∠ Establish an annual diversity summit to raise the profile of the community’s commitment to creating opportunities and increasing prosperity for all residents

BEST PRACTICE #6: Greater Des Moines Partnership Inclusion Council (Des Moines, IA)

BEST PRACTICE #7: Madison Region Economic Development & Diversity Summit (Madison, WI)

7.3 Engage Pearland’s young professionals and emerging leaders

Pearland is home to a large population of relatively young individuals. According to Census data, there were nearly 29,000 individuals in Pearland between the ages of 25 and 40 as of 2017, accounting for roughly 23 percent of the community’s population. Ensuring that these individuals are engaged in and attached to their community will be vital to Pearland’s future success. Stakeholders contacted through the public input process also said that they would like to see new arrivals become more involved in Pearland’s civic life and culture. Many communities seek to strengthen ties with future leaders and volunteers through “leadership programs” that introduce these individuals to community institutions and peer networks. Some best-practice programs go even further, emphasizing community initiatives and service projects and helping program participants build lasting connections with local organizations and efforts. Partners in Pearland can emulate such a program in order to help attach talented young residents to their community. This emerging leadership program would be differentiated from other leadership programs in its focus on preparing participants for community involvement and service on local non-profit boards. It would also complement an existing leadership program at the Pearland Chamber of Commerce that is geared toward more established professionals. While exact enrollment parameters could vary, the program would ideally be geared toward emerging leaders in their late 20s and 30s who are established in the workforce but have not yet advanced to senior leadership positions in business or the community.

Potential Actions:

- ∠ With the Pearland Chamber of Commerce and other partners in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, develop an emerging leadership program framework; could be based off of successful programs such as Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders
- ∠ Develop a board service certification program and events that educate and engage members and make a positive impact on the community
- ∠ Work with businesses and non-profit organizations in Pearland to identify promising emerging leaders for enrollment in the program; work loosely with non-profits in and around Pearland to connect participants with near-term opportunities for board service upon "graduation" from the program
- ∠ Ensure that participating non-profits reflect Pearland's diversity in terms of geography, race/ethnicity, and so on

BEST PRACTICE #8: Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders (Rogers-Lowell, AR)

APPENDIX: BEST PRACTICES

#1: BUSINESS FIRST (RICHMOND, VA)

businessfirstrichmond.com

Launched in 2006, Business First is a collaborative, regional, existing business retention and expansion (BRE) program of the Greater Richmond Regional Partnership (GRP) and its local government partners. Professional economic development staff and trained volunteers from the business community interview CEOs and other top company officials to fully understand the company's competitiveness and its long-term prospects for growth. Interviews cover a wide range of topics and findings, including hiring prospects for the next year, perceptions of the regional workforce and specific skill shortages, projected sales, and business climate issues. The data allows the GRP to gauge the health of the regional economy, develop an early warning system to foretell potential future layoffs, and provide targeted solutions to existing businesses. Typical services offered through Business First visits include the following:

- ∠ Expansion support
- ∠ Connection to state and local incentive programs
- ∠ Workforce recruiting and training
- ∠ Financing
- ∠ Business planning
- ∠ Coordination of municipal services
- ∠ Downsizing prevention and management

#2: TECH ALPHARETTA INNOVATION CENTER (ALPHARETTA, GA)

www.techalpharetta.com/startups/

Alpharetta, Georgia is a suburban community located roughly 25 miles north of downtown Atlanta on Georgia 400, a key highway transportation corridor. The community has long been home to a thriving technology sector, with more than 700 tech companies located within its relatively small footprint. Leaders in the community recognized, however, that Alpharetta had relatively limited capacity to support startups and entrepreneurs in comparison to the "intown" areas of the Atlanta region. In 2012, the City of Alpharetta responded by creating the Alpharetta Technology Commission, a strategic advisory board of local tech executives charged with identifying and pursuing key investment opportunities and policy decisions for local technology companies. Soon after, the organization transformed into a 501(c)(6) and launched an incubator in 2015. (The organization rebranded as Tech Alpharetta in 2017 to reflect its broader focus.) The Tech Alpharetta Innovation Center is a startup incubator located in a city-owned building in downtown Alpharetta; the center is also located in close proximity to Avalon, a new walkable mixed-use development. Tech

Alpharetta is supported by membership fees and an annual \$100,000 operating subsidy from the City of Alpharetta. According to published reports, the center is home to 50 startups. Since its founding, it has graduated nine technology companies that have created 350 jobs in the city.³

#3: REVOLVING LOAN FUND PROGRAM (PHARR, TX)

pharr-tx.gov/business/revolving-loan-fund-program/

Communities across the country have successfully utilized revolving loan funds (RLFs) to further a variety of aims such as downtown redevelopment and small businesses growth. According to the Council of Development Finance Agencies (CDFA), an RLF is, “a gap financing measure primarily used for development and expansion of small businesses. It is a self-replenishing pool of money, utilizing interest and principal payments on old loans to issue new ones.” RLFs represent flexible tools that can be used in combination with more conventional tools such as loans that can be obtained on the private market. (Some RLFs, however, are designed specifically to support individuals who cannot access traditional sources of capital.) Typical uses for RLF loans include operating capital, acquisition of land and buildings, machinery and equipment, startup costs, and so on.⁴ An example of a revolving loan fund in Texas may be found in the City of Pharr, where the Pharr Economic Development Corporation operates an RLF designed to assist small and emerging firms with gross revenues of less than \$1 million and that employ 50 or fewer employees.

#4: BICYCLE AND PEDESTRIAN INFRASTRUCTURE (CARMEL, IN)

carmel.in.gov/living/fun-things-to-do/bike-carmel

Carmel, Indiana is a city of approximately 91,000 located just north of Indianapolis. A highly desirable suburb, the community boasts educational attainment rates that are well above the national average and offices of corporations such as Geico and CNO Financial Group (formerly Conseco). It has been recognized as the #1 best place to live in America by CNNMoney and Niche. The community has long placed an emphasis on alternative transportation and walkable mixed-use developments. It employs an alternative transportation director in its Planning & Zoning department and operates programs such as a bike share and bike safety classes. But the most significant investment the community has made has come in the form of infrastructure such as multi-use paths. In 2008, the city designated Carmel Access Bikeways, a network of bike routes and loops that connect various amenities and neighborhoods throughout the community. The community is recognized as a Bronze Level Bicycle Friendly City by the League of American Bicyclists. In addition to bicycle infrastructure, Carmel has also implemented infrastructure that promotes walking while making conditions safer for both pedestrians and motorists. As an example, in 2017 it approved a \$13.4 million upgrade that reduced the number of automotive travel lanes and added roundabouts to a key road through its downtown. It also added multi-use paths, protected bike lanes, and highly visible pedestrian crosswalks.

³ Ibata, Dvaid. “Alpharetta Oks \$200K for city’s technology incubator.” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. August 30, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/alpharetta-oks-200k-for-city-technology-incubator/DF2M1FriStnwJ8K2gPOItN/>

⁴ For additional information from the CDFA, see: <https://www.cdfa.net/cdfa/cdfaweb.nsf/pages/revolving-loan-funds.html>

#5: GREATER WICHITA PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS EDUCATION ALLIANCE (WICHITA, KS)

[*greaterwichitapartnership.org/about_us/business_education_alliance*](http://greaterwichitapartnership.org/about_us/business_education_alliance)

The Business Education Alliance was created in 2012 and brings together businesses, public school districts, nonprofits, and local colleges and universities to align education and business “to cultivate a globally competitive workforce for the region.” The program’s mission is “aligning education and business communities to ensure a productive workforce needed for sustained economic growth for the region.” The organization’s 2016 Action Plan is directed at the focus areas of Literacy; Workforce Development; Workforce Readiness; Certificate and Degree Attainment; and Policy.

#6: GREATER DES MOINES PARTNERSHIP INCLUSION COUNCIL (DES MOINES, IA)

[*dsmpartnership.com/growing-business-here/business-resources/inclusion*](http://dsmpartnership.com/growing-business-here/business-resources/inclusion)

The Greater Des Moines Partnership is the economic and community development organization serving the Greater Des Moines, Iowa region. One of the Partnership’s many initiatives is an Inclusion Council that seeks to promote a diverse and inclusive community. The Council is comprised of representatives from the region’s businesses, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions. It seeks to act as a “catalyst to mobilize the business community toward a broad economic development vision that incorporates all people as valued contributors and valuable customers.” Its program of work includes quarterly multicultural receptions, webinars, an inclusion-focused magazine, and support for an international talent strategy.

#7: MADISON REGION ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & DIVERSITY SUMMIT (MADISON, WI)

In 2013, the Madison Region’s Economic Partnership (MadREP) and the Urban League of Greater Madison (ULGM) partnered to host a joint event on diversity and economic development for Madison Region businesses and community leaders. Now in its third year, the annual Summit focuses on the community’s collective commitment to advancing talent, opportunity, and prosperity for all of its residents. Participants include hundreds of representatives from the eight-county Madison region and range from HR professionals and hiring managers to educators, entrepreneurs, elected officials, and emerging leaders. Recognizing the link between diversity and economic growth and that thriving communities embody, embrace, and encourage diversity, Summit participants are committed to tackling economic, workforce, and community development issues in the Madison region. Each year, conversations held at the Summit focus on diversity and economic development, with the goal of molding the region to become a model for economic inclusion. Recent breakout session topics included “Building Business through Supplier Diversity,” “Combating Implicit Bias in the Workplace,” “Entrepreneurship in Communities of Color,” and “Immigration and the Madison Region Workforce & Economy.”

#8: NORTHWEST ARKANSAS EMERGING LEADERS (ROGERS-LOWELL, AR)

nwaemergingleaders.com

Realizing the need to connect to the young professionals and future leaders of the community, the Chamber developed the Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders (NWAEL) in 2008. Membership and participation in the program is open to anyone in the area that is looking to get involved in the community and strengthen their leadership skills. Membership has increased significantly since the formation of the program, with the number of members growing from approximately 100 in 2009 to nearly 450 in 2013.

One of the strengths of the program is that rather than simply teaching leadership principles through educational sessions, as some traditional leadership programs do, NWAEL Leaders aims to develop leadership skills through experience by actively engaging the members in workgroups, projects, and programs. There are five workgroups – legacy, political and government affairs, sustainability, greenways and trails, and community enrichment – that members can be a part of based on their individual interest. Each workgroup meets monthly and is charged with developing programs that will benefit the community.

Over the past several years, the organization has hosted dozens of events and programs aimed at educating and engaging the members and making a positive impact on the community. Such projects include *Lunch with a Leader*, a *Board Service Certification Program*, the *Bike to School Initiative*, a *Voter Registration Drive*, and the creation of a *Recycling Alliance*. The Greenways and Trails Workgroup also helped to develop a Community Bike Program, which provides free bikes for the public to use on the city's network of trails. The program provides valuable opportunities to its members and as a result, is helping the members to strengthen their leadership skills and knowledge, grow their careers, and expand their networks. The education and support provided to these members is invaluable in helping to build a stronger future generation of leaders in the Northwest Arkansas region.