



Comprehensive Downtown Plan City of Freeport, Texas

Prepared by the Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research
University of Texas at San Antonio
October 17, 2024



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01 Introduction

01 Introduction

Executive Summary

The 2024 Comprehensive Downtown Plan provides the City of Freeport with a clear vision, goals, and actionable initiatives for downtown redevelopment, creating a framework for decision-making through 2045. This plan arrives at a pivotal moment for Downtown Freeport, an area with a rich history that is facing significant challenges related to economic disinvestment, physical decline, and the impacts of a large and controversial downtown land acquisition by the Port of Freeport.

To address these issues, the plan outlines strategic visions and goals in key areas such as economic development, historic preservation, infrastructure, ecology, land use, zoning, housing, and implementation. The plan provides dozens of strategic initiatives to help city leaders and residents turn these ideas into concrete actions. The plan similarly highlights six **Catalytic Projects** and two **Connecting Projects** that will serve as the foundation for downtown’s economic, physical, and cultural revitalization.

To ensure continuity, the plan builds on key principles from earlier studies, such as the City of Freeport’s 2022 Strategic Community Plan, the Texas Historical Commission’s 2022 Main Street Program Report, and the Kendig Keast Collaborative’s 2019 Freeport Strategic Community Plan.

Regional Context

Freeport, Texas, a city with a population of 10,546 (U.S. Census, Quick Facts, 2022), lies in southern Brazoria County along the Gulf Coast, at the confluence of the Brazos River and the Gulf of Mexico. Freeport is located 61 miles southwest of Houston, the fourth most populous city in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2022), and home to the busiest port in the U.S. by tonnage (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2021).

Freeport is accessible from the north via Texas State Highway 288, the Nolan Ryan Expressway, which extends northward for 17 miles to the county seat at Angleton (pop. 19,429). Freeport is accessible from the west via Texas State Highway 36, which extends 15 miles to Brazoria (pop. 2,866). Freeport additionally benefits from its proximity to Clute (pop. 10,604) and Lake Jackson (pop. 28,177), a planned community established in 1940 for Dow Chemical Plant workers. Neighboring tourist destinations like Surfside Beach (pop. 640) and the City of Galveston (pop. 53,089) attract large numbers of beach-goers to the region annually.

Freeport’s identity is inseparable from the bustling Port

Vision Statements

Leverage | Preservation and Construction

Build strong administrative and financial structures, foster a culture of historic preservation, and protect the resources that define Freeport’s unique identity to create a thriving Downtown Historic District.

Expand | Economics and Development

Develop a vibrant downtown identity that leverages local and experiential retail, water recreation, and ecotourism to fuel economic growth within a thoughtfully designed environment that welcomes residents and tourists.

Sustain | Infrastructure and Ecology

Downtown will provide a pedestrian-friendly environment that supports mixed-use development, reestablishes Park Ave. and Memorial Park as a civic spine, leverages public infrastructure to attract private investment, and enhances environmental performance by highlighting local ecosystems.

Develop | Land Use and Housing

Downtown will thrive as a dynamic community where Smart Growth principles, strategic regulations, and incentives drive development, maximize infill opportunities, and ensure diverse housing options for current and future residents.

of Freeport, which ranks 18th nationally in total tonnage and serves as a key conduit for international trade, particularly in petrochemicals and agriculture (Bureau of Transportation Statistics, 2021). This port facilitates the movement of goods to and from Latin America, Europe, and Asia, driving local economic growth through employment opportunities and revenue generation. Notably, the Port also led a large-scale land acquisition which destroyed Freeport’s East End, a historically African-American neighborhood just east of downtown. The acquisition, made to support the Port’s expansion, has caused significant tension and distrust within the community.

The local identity is closely related to the chemical industry. Founded by the Freeport Sulphur Company, today, the local economy is also anchored by Dow Chemical Company’s Freeport facility, the largest integrated chemical manufacturing complex in the Western Hemisphere. The Dow plant is the largest employer in the area. It is also a source of significant concerns related to environmental sustainability

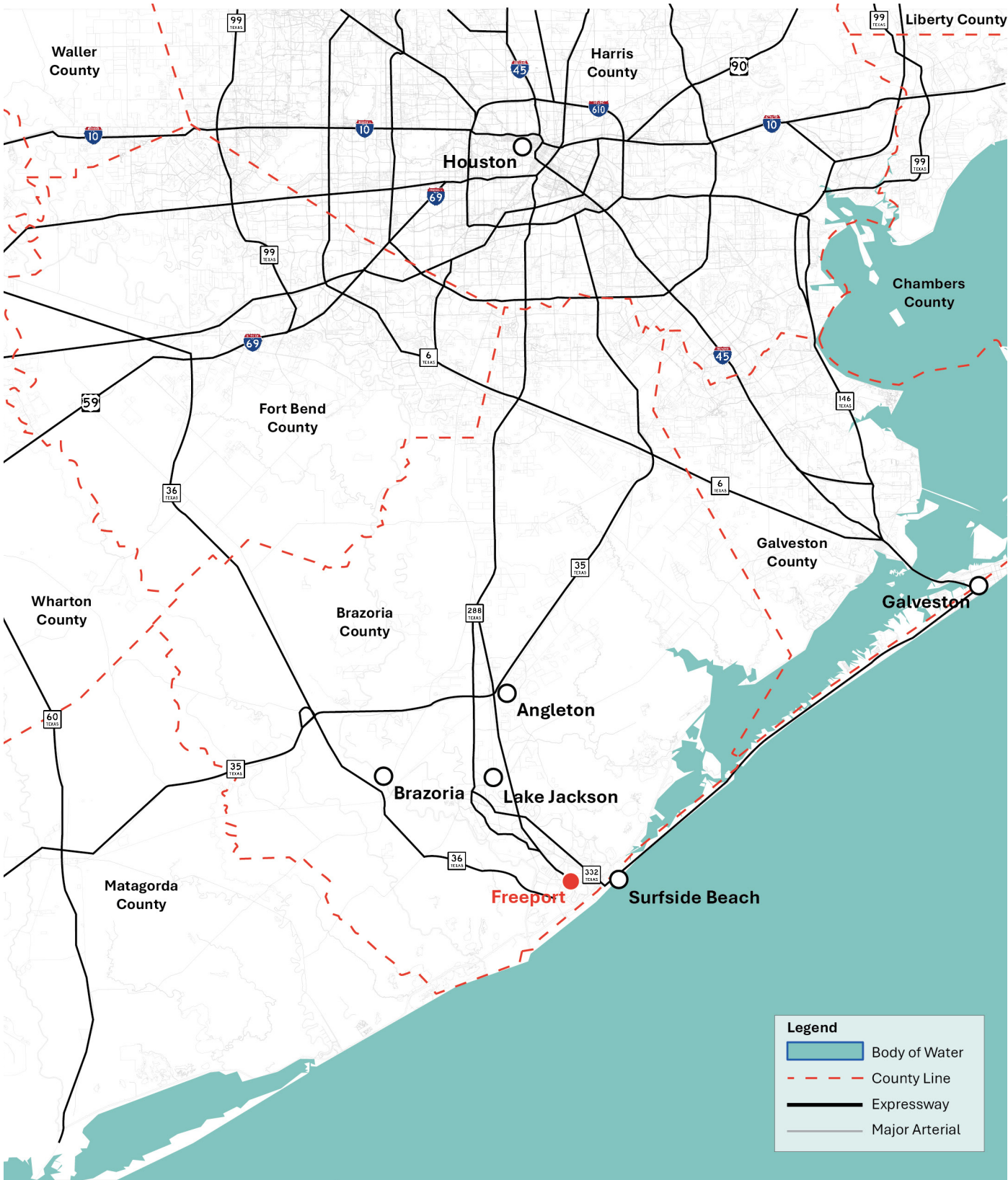
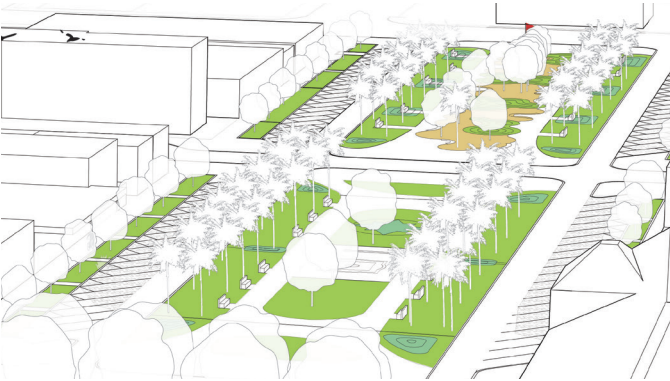


Figure 1.1 | Regional Plan

Catalytic Projects



1 Downtown Historic District

Freeport’s Code of Ordinances empowers the City to designate a local historic district with Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines to preserve architectural character, protect property values, and enhance community identity. This ensures that new developments complement the historic fabric while promoting heritage tourism and attracting investment.

2 Streetscape Package

Streetscape improvements in Freeport will leverage a Complete Streets and Green Streets approach featuring widened sidewalks, street trees, and LID elements like biofiltration areas and permeable pavement. These enhancements will improve safety, environmental performance, walkability, aesthetics, community identity, and business opportunity.

3 Memorial Park Renovation

Memorial Park’s renovation will strengthen its role as a downtown anchor, enhancing its ability to host events and recreational activities. The proposed renovation and reprogramming will also improve pedestrian connectivity, elevate environmental performance, and support business development downtown.

4 Waterfront Site Development

The 5.66-acre Waterfront site, once home to the Tarpon Inn, anchors downtown’s north side. It provides direct links to downtown, the Freeport Marina, and the future boardwalk, making a mixed-use redevelopment with civic space essential for an integrated downtown revitalization.



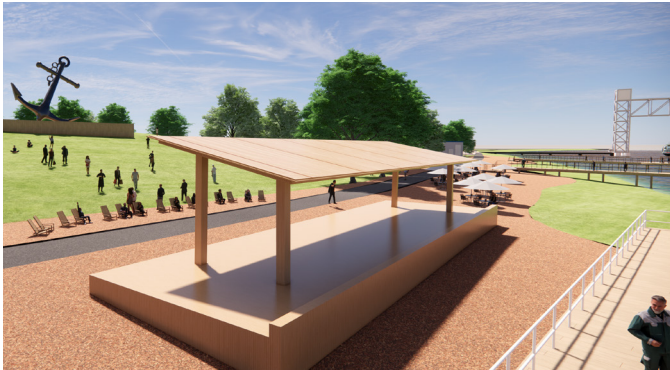
5 Adaptive Reuse of Old City Hall

The Old City Hall building was constructed by Freeport First National Bank in 1970. This three-story building served as Freeport City Hall until spring 2024 and is now vacant. Its high-quality masonry construction, central location and historical significance, make it a prime candidate for adaptive reuse as a civic program.

6 OA Fleming Site Redevelopment

The 32-acre, nine-block site of the former OA Fleming Elementary School offers a prime opportunity to expand downtown Freeport with a walkable, mixed-use development. Its proximity to the historic downtown makes it suitable for a blend of medium-density housing with the potential for integrated civic and recreational programs.

Connecting Projects



7 Boardwalk

The proposed boardwalk in Freeport, Texas, will create a scenic pedestrian path along the Old Brazos River, linking downtown, the Freeport Marina, and the Waterfront site. It aims to enhance access, promote recreation, tourism, and economic growth, highlight local ecosystems, and boost the city’s appeal as a waterfront destination.

8 Freeport Marina

The Freeport Marina enhances downtown programming by providing boaters easy access to the Gulf, boosting waterfront activity, and attracting visitors to Freeport. In the future, the site can support mixed-use development and encourage pedestrian access to downtown, making it a key driver of downtown revitalization and economic growth.

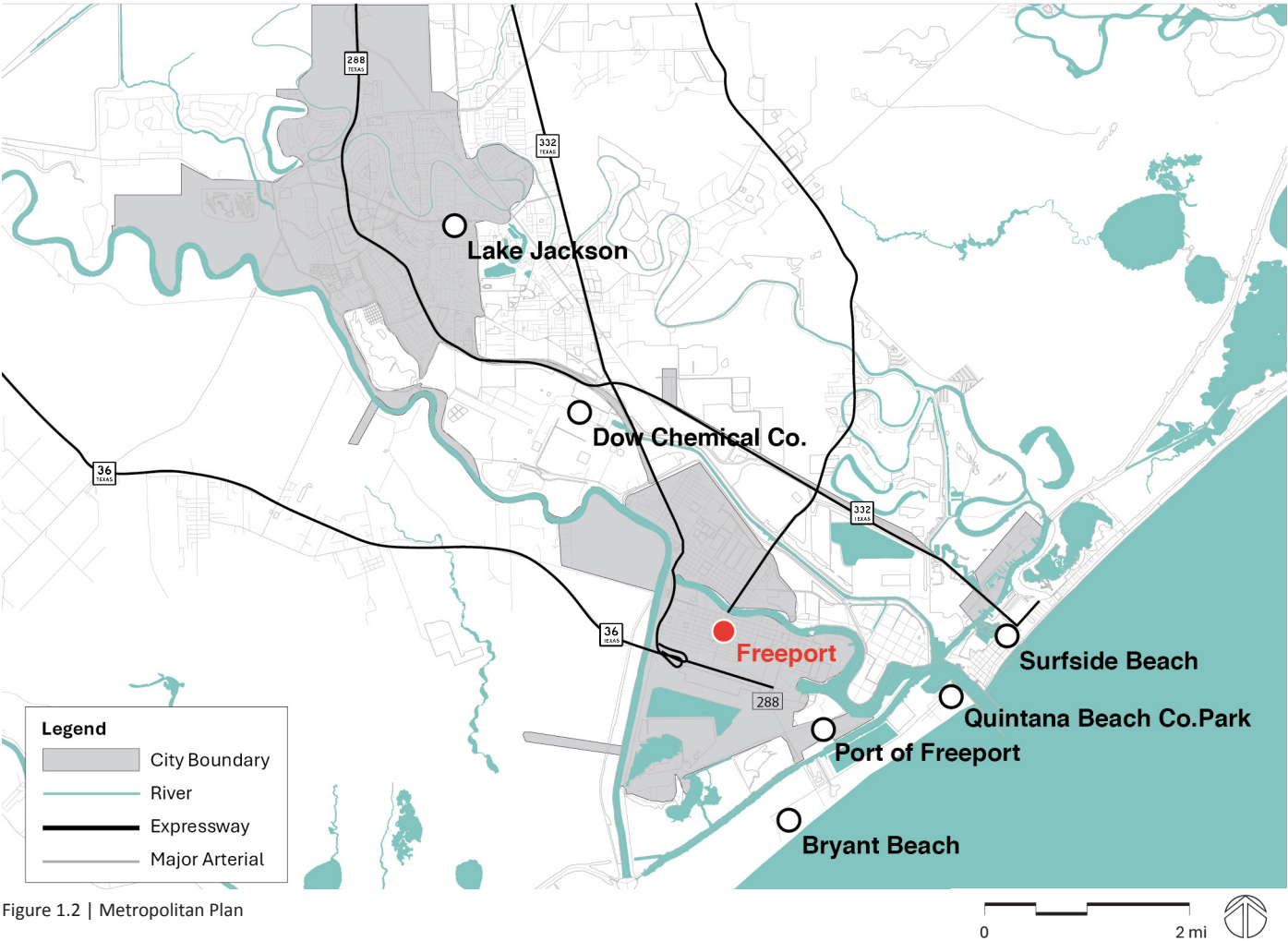


Figure 1.2 | Metropolitan Plan

and public health, as evidenced by the presence of a documented cancer cluster in Freeport (ProPublica, 2023).

A successful Downtown Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines will necessarily ground itself in this existing regional context, taking stock of Freeport’s dynamic locale along the Gulf Coast, rich maritime heritage, robust industrial economy, and proximity to popular tourist destinations. At the same time, this planning effort must project a sustainable future, balancing economic growth with the region’s increasingly fragile ecosystems.

Socioeconomic Profile

The population in Freeport has declined from a high of 13,444 in 1984 to 11,389 in 1990 and further to 10,546 in 2022 (Texas Almanac). Freeport exhibits a diverse ethnic composition, with residents identifying as 54% Hispanic or Latino, 25% White (non-Hispanic), and 20% African

American (U.S. Census 2022, Quick Facts). The median household income in Freeport is \$50,704, well below the state median of \$73,305 (United States Census 2022, State: Texas). About 18% of the population lives below the poverty line, compared to 14% of households in Texas (U.S. Census 2022, Quick Facts). The educational level is also low, with 6.4% of residents holding a bachelor’s degree or higher, significantly below the state average of 32.3% (U.S. Census 2022, Quick Facts). These figures suggest widespread economic hardship and underscore the importance of inclusive urban planning initiatives that address the needs of marginalized populations. Within the context of this downtown plan, access to affordable housing and protection from residential displacement, i.e., gentrification should be a priority.

The housing market in Freeport reflects the larger economic trends in the community: the median home value is approximately \$112,000, and the homeownership

Population Characteristics		
Population	Freeport	Texas
Population, 2010	12049	25,145,561
Population, 2020	10696	29,145,505
(New) Population estimates, July 1, 2022	10546	30,029,848
White alone, percent, 2022	48.3%	77.4%
Black or African American alone, percent, 2022	20.1%	13.4%
American Indian percent, 2022	1.4%	1.1%
Asian alone, percent, 2022	0.2%	5.7%
Two or More Races, percent, 2022	19.5%	2.3%
Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2022	54%	40.2%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent, 2022	24.5%	39.8%
High school graduate or higher, 2018-2022 (age 25+)	79.1%	85.2%
Bachelor’s degree or higher, 2018-2022 (age 25+)	6.4%	32.3%

Housing Composition		
Housing	Freeport	Texas
Home ownership rate, 2018-2022	58%	62%
Median Value (owner-occupied housing units), 2018-2022	\$112,000	\$238,000
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022	\$24,321	\$37,514
Median household income, (in 2022 dollars), 2018-2022	\$50,704	\$73,035
Persons persons in poverty, percent 2020	18.1%	14%

Major Employers		
Rank	Employer	# Employees
1	The Dow Chemical Company	3182
2	Brazosport ISD	2000
3	Turner Industries	1272
4	Olin Corporation	974
5	BASF Corporation	908
6	Wood Group	700
7	ICS, Inc.	593
8	St Luke's Health Brazosport	375
9	Marquis Construction Services	353
10	TDECU	330

City of Freeport Historical Population Growth		
Year	Population	% Change
1990	11,389	
2000	12,708	11.5%
2010	12,049	-5.1%
2019	12,556	4.2%
2020	10,696	-14.8%
2021	10,594	-0.9%
2022	10,546	-0.4%

Source: Texas State Historical Association
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Quickfacts Freeport City Texas
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Quickfacts Texas
Source: Economic Development Alliance for Brazoria County 2024

rate is 58%, significantly lower than the state figures of \$238,000 and 62% (U.S. Census 2022, Quick Facts). Employment in the area is predominantly driven by the petrochemical and construction industries, with major employers such as Dow Chemical, Turner Industries, Olin Corporation, and BASF Corporation. The Brazosport Independent School District is another major regional employer.

A Brief History of Freeport, Texas

Adapted from Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines by Post Oak Preservation Solutions.

The City of Freeport is located near the mouth of the Brazos River where it meets the Gulf of Mexico in southern Brazoria County, Texas. Before Anglo-American settlement, the area was populated by Karankawa Native Americans, a nomadic tribe that lived along the Gulf Coast of what is now Texas. Anglo-American settlement in the area began in 1821 when colonists who had received land grants from Stephen F. Austin arrived and founded Velasco, east of present-day Freeport.

Nearly a century later, the City of Freeport was established by the Freeport Sulphur Company, an enterprise created for the extraction of the large underground sulfur deposits near the mouth of the Brazos River. In 1912, the company formed the Freeport Townsite Company to develop the forested land south of the Brazos River, with lots for sale by November of 1912.

Freeport’s original downtown commercial core consisted of a central, linear park flanked by W. Park Ave. and E. Park Ave. and lined with commercial lots. Serving as the



Figure 1.3 | Aerial view of downtown in 1960 | Nat Hickey



Figure 1.4 | View of Broad St. in 1915 | Brazoria County Historical Museum

focal point of downtown Freeport, The Tarpon Inn was constructed by the Freeport Sulphur Company on a large waterfront lot at the north end of the park. The Houston and Brazos Valley Railway was completed to Freeport less than a year after the town’s founding, and the train depot and railroad office were constructed at the south end of the park at W. 4th St. Freeport was incorporated in 1917, and the commercial district developed steadily during the town’s first two decades.

Businesses were concentrated along the north end of downtown near the Tarpon Inn along W. Park Ave. and E. Park Ave., W. 2nd St., and Broad St. Many of the earliest commercial buildings in Freeport were of wood-frame construction, though a handful of buildings, such as the Freeport National Bank (1913) were constructed of brick. The Freeport Sulphur Company remained the town’s primary economic driver for several decades, and the local population grew steadily.

Several projects in the 19th century sought to deepen the harbor at the juncture of the Brazos River and Gulf of Mexico, where sandbars made the harbor shallow and challenging to navigate. In the late 1920s, a new river channel was dredged and the “old” Brazos River closed off with a dam, enabling the safe passage of ships and allowing for the later successful development of the Port of Freeport. By 1939, Freeport had a population of 4,100 residents and was home to 75 businesses (Kleiner, 1952).

Dow Chemical arrived in Freeport in 1940, purchasing 800 acres of land from the Freeport Sulphur Company and additional acreage from private property owners. The new Dow Chemical plant used electrolysis to extract magnesium from seawater, a structural metal that produced lightweight materials, including aircraft and



Figure 1.5 | View of Tarpon Inn | Brazoria County Historical Museum

automotive parts. The arrival of Dow Chemical set off a short but significant pre-war building boom in Freeport, and at least thirteen extant downtown commercial buildings date to the period immediately following Dow’s arrival (1940-1942). The Dow Chemical plant expanded rapidly in subsequent years and had a tremendous impact on the local economy and growth of the town. Downtown Freeport developed considerably in subsequent decades. By 1943, most of the wood-frame commercial buildings had been replaced with brick or stone structures (in part due to a major 1932 hurricane that damaged many buildings), and new development began to extend further to the west and south (Sanborn Map Company 1943).

In the postwar era, Freeport’s economy was further bolstered by the growth of the local shrimping, fishing, and recreational industries. A significant change to downtown Freeport occurred in 1956 when the Tarpon Inn was demolished to make way for a shopping center along the waterfront parcel, known as Tarpon Inn Village (Brazosport Facts 1956). The following year, Freeport and the neighboring town of Velasco merged to become the City of Freeport.

By 1970, Freeport’s commercial district had expanded outward to consist of six blocks of densely packed commercial buildings, roughly bound by W. 2nd St. to the north, Pine St. to the east, Broad St. to the south, and Oak St. to the west, with additional commercial and civic buildings along the periphery. The First Freeport National Bank, which later became city hall, is one of the district’s most recent historic structures, completed in 1970.

Freeport businesses began to face increasing competition from the nearby Lake Jackson community during the late 20th century. Initially created as a planned residential

community for Dow Chemical employees, Lake Jackson became a shopping hub after establishing a regional mall in 1976, drawing many potential customers away from downtown Freeport. Several downtown buildings were lost during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The waterfront shopping center was demolished by the early 2000s, creating a large vacant lot at the historic focal point of downtown.

In 2006, the historic buildings at 203 and 207 W. 2nd St. were lost to fire, and the remainder of the block was demolished in 2016. The same year, a row of historic commercial structures in the 100 block of W. 2nd St. was demolished. Freeport’s mid-century City Hall building on E. 4th St. was demolished ca. 2019. Additionally, the Port of Freeport demolished the entire East End community, a historically African-American neighborhood situated just east of downtown, over a nearly 30-year span to accommodate its expansion (Hagerty, 2022). This destruction has created significant stress and ongoing distrust within the community, further complicating current revitalization efforts in Freeport.

Today, the historic core of downtown Freeport serves as a tangible symbol of the city’s growth, evolution, and resilience, while also offering significant opportunities for future development. Freeport was recently recertified as a Main St. community in 2021, and efforts to revitalize downtown are underway. The local economy continues to be shaped by the immense presence of the Dow Chemical Company and the Port of Freeport. Although many downtown commercial buildings are currently vacant, the rich historic character of downtown Freeport is a valuable asset to the city and has the potential to become a key element in local economic development and revitalization efforts.



Figure 1.6 | View of Park Ave. in 1948 | Brazoria County Historical Museum

Description of the Downtown Planning Process

Why does Freeport need a Comprehensive Downtown Plan? Like many downtown districts throughout Texas and the United States, Freeport’s Downtown Historic District is experiencing long-term economic, demographic, and physical decline. Numerous structural reasons explain the broader decline of U.S. downtowns, including government subsidies for suburban growth after WWII, the rise of automobile dependency, a shift to big-box retail, perceptions of urban crime, the transition from manufacturing to service jobs, and most recently, the rise of e-commerce. In Freeport’s case, another factor is the Port of Freeport’s decision to relocate residents from the East End—a historically African-American downtown neighborhood—to accommodate expanded operations for the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Department of Agriculture (Saathoof 2021). This large-scale urban renewal project essentially evacuated most remaining residents from downtown. Today, downtown Freeport’s physical fabric remains fundamentally intact, though its retail economy and population are mostly absent.

This Comprehensive Plan provides a strategic roadmap to rebuild downtown, capitalizing on the district’s remaining historic architectural fabric and proximity to the Old Brazos River. The plan establishes a community vision for downtown’s economic development, land use and development, historic preservation, and public infrastructure. The Plan translates community values into specific goals and strategic initiatives, offering residents and City leaders urban policy direction for redeveloping downtown.

What is a Comprehensive Plan and how does it work? A comprehensive plan is a broad statement of community goals and policies that guide a city’s orderly and coordinated physical development. A comprehensive plan allows a municipality to proactively manage its growth rather than reacting to development proposals on a case-by-case basis without considering the long-term vision of the community. The Plan will result in visions, goals, and initiatives that will help Freeport administer development regulations and guide reinvestment and redevelopment efforts. The Plan anticipates change and provides specific guidance for future economic and administrative actions:

- Establishing vision, goals, and initiatives to provide strategic direction for the community in the areas of economic development, land use and development, historic preservation, and public infrastructure.
- Reflecting the results of citizen involvement, technical

- analysis, and the judgment of decision-makers.
- Providing a means of coordinating the actions of multiple departments and divisions within the City to achieve future development.
 - Providing a basis on which to make land use and zoning decisions in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.
 - Becoming a means of support for the Planning and Zoning Commission to allow or refuse a zoning change or development.
 - Serving as a guide for infrastructure development and investment.
 - Offering short- and long-term implementation strategies to translate policies into actionable programs and development activities by the City of Freeport, its residents, and other jurisdictional partners.
 - Continuing a process that must be regularly reviewed, revised, and updated as needed to maintain its applicability to current conditions and established priorities.

What are the City’s most effective planning tools? As Freeport pursues the revitalization of its downtown, it is crucial to use the tools available and concentrate on aspects within the City’s control. So, what can the City control? Freeport can impact zoning, overlay districts, the design of the public realm (including lighting, landscaping, signage, public art, and parks), parking, code compliance, taxes, city budget priorities, branding, land acquisition, and general involvement of residents and the business community. Conversely, the City cannot control property ownership, parcel size, architectural style, market forces, or actions of state and federal governmental agencies (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 62). Freeport can most effectively drive the revitalization process by focusing on controllable factors.

Importance of Establishing Shared Values. The Comprehensive Downtown Plan and Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines result from an 8-month community effort, detailed below. The fundamental purpose of the Plan is to envision a future for Freeport based on shared community values. A successful comprehensive plan establishes these values and outlines the steps necessary to make that vision a reality. To achieve this, the plan must align the community’s vision with tangible public policy, specifically zoning, regulation, and capital investments in public infrastructure. The key phrase here is “shared community values.” Comprehensive plans often fail when they are imposed on communities without local input or buy-in, resulting in plans that sit unread on shelves or city websites due to a lack of local advocacy.

To avoid this pitfall, UTSA’s Center for Urban and Regional Planning Research (CURPR) initiated two public visioning sessions and multiple stakeholder reviews throughout the planning process to ensure the Comprehensive Plan and Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines genuinely reflect the community’s interests and insights. The following description summarizes these activities:

Summary of Public and Stakeholder Outreach

UTSA Presents Contract to Mayor and City Council

- Date: November 6, 2023
- Participants: Ian Caine, Director (UTSA CURPR)
- Location: Freeport, Texas

UTSA Conducts Preliminary Stakeholder Interviews

- Date: November 6, 2023
- Participants: Ian Caine, Director (UTSA CURPR), Tim Kelty, City Manager (City of Freeport); Robert Johnson, Executive Director (City of Freeport EDC); Ana Silbas, Coordinator, Margaret McMahan, Chair, Irene Ocañas, Vice Chair (Main Street Advisory Board); Wade Dillon, Museum Manager (Freeport Historical Museum).
- Location: Freeport, Texas

UTSA Completes Background Assessment

- Date: January 2024
- Description: The UTSA team assembled GIS files, collected socioeconomic data, reviewed existing planning documents, and completed urban analysis drawings.
- Location: San Antonio, Texas

UTSA Conducts Site Assessment

- Dates: February 22-23, 2024
- Participants: Ian Caine, Director and Yaire Padilla, Graduate Assistant (UTSA CURPR); Miyah Lopez (Lake Jackson, Texas).
- Location: Freeport, Texas
- Description: The UTSA team photographed and documented all buildings and landmarks in the downtown district.

Public Visioning Session #1

- Date: March 26, 2024
- Participants: Ian Caine, Director and Yaire Padilla, Graduate Assistant (UTSA CURPR); Megan Worley McDonald (Post Oak Preservation Solutions); Ana Silbas, Robert Johnson (City of Freeport); Irene Ocañas (Design Subcommittee).
- Attendees: 31
- Location: RiverPlace, Freeport, Texas
- Description: Ana Silbas outlined the planning process



Figure 1.7 | Public Visioning Session #1

and schedule. Ian Caine introduced the project team, discussed the parameters of a comprehensive downtown plan, and described topics for the vision session: Public Realm, Historic Preservation, Economics, Programming, and Housing. Participants then broke out into discussion groups to explore these topics in depth. Each group was led by a representative from UTSA or the City of Freeport. After the discussions, the groups reported out their findings to the entire room. Discussion leaders documented the discussions using maps, charts, and sticky notes.

Meeting with Downtown Design Subcommittee

- Date: June 4, 2024
- Participants: Ana Silbas, Robert Johnson (City of Freeport); Melanie Oldham, Irene Ocañas, Betty Lopez (Design Subcommittee); Wade Dillon (Freeport Historical Museum); Ian Caine (UTSA CURPR); Ellis Mumford-Russell, Megan Worley McDonald (Post Oak Preservation Solutions).
- Location: Zoom online meeting.
- Description: UTSA reviewed the project team and schedule and provided a project overview. Post Oak Preservation Solutions (POPS) provided an update



Figure 1.8 | Public Visioning Session #1

on the Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines, focusing on Park Ave. POPS highlighted three key initiatives: establishing a new Freeport Historical Commission, designating a local historic district, and adopting Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines. UTSA described a vision for the public realm, leveraging infrastructure to develop Park Ave., Memorial Park, and the Waterfront Site. Key projects include restoring Memorial Park, enhancing streetscapes, and exploring multifamily housing and event spaces at the Waterfront Site.

Meeting with the Economic Vitality Subcommittee

- Date: June 20, 2024
- Participants: Ana Silbas (City of Freeport); Irene Ocañas, Edith Fischer, Ronnie Martin, Jesse Glatz, Jordan Strother (Economic Vitality Subcommittee); Robert Johnson, Rachael Cohen, Josh Mitchell (Freeport EDC); Ian Caine (UTSA CURPR); Tom Tunstall (UTSA Institute of Economic Development).
- Location: Zoom online meeting.
- Description: UTSA reviewed the project team and schedule, highlighting four historic preservation initiatives: establishing a new Freeport Historical Commission, creating a local historic district, adopting Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines, and applying to the National Register of Historic Places. Public realm initiatives include restoring Memorial Park, developing streetscapes for key streets, and proposing multifamily housing and civic spaces at the Waterfront Site.
- The subcommittee endorsed the preservation and public realm initiatives. UTSA outlined economic development goals: supporting experiential retail, expanding Freeport’s brand, enhancing downtown’s appeal, and prioritizing design. Sixteen initiatives, drawn from previous reports, will consolidate past efforts. The subcommittee recommended examining infrastructure behind Park Ave. and endorsed the economic development vision and goals.

Plan Review with City Manager

- Date: August 21, 2024
- Participants: Lance Petty, Ana Silbas, Wade Dillon (City of Freeport); Robert Johnson (Freeport EDC); Ian Caine (UTSA CURPR); Megan Worley McDonald, Ellis Mumford-Russell (Post Oak Preservation Solutions).
- Location: Zoom online meeting.
- Description: UTSA reviewed vision statements, goals, and selected initiatives for the four primary chapters: Economics and Development, Land Use and

Development, Historic Preservation and Construction, and Infrastructure and Ecology. The presentation covered schematic urban design for Memorial Park, downtown streetscapes, and the Waterfront site.

Public Visioning Session #2

- Date: August 27, 2024
- Participants: Ian Caine (UTSA CURPR); Wade Dillon (Main Street Coordinator), Robert Johnson (Freeport EDC); Irene Ocañas (Design Subcommittee).
- Attendees: 28
- Location: Freeport Historical Museum
- Description. Wade Dillon started the event by introducing the agenda, setting goals, and providing community updates. Ian Caine followed by introducing the project team, outlining the scope and schedule, and presenting the vision, goals, and initiatives for Historic Preservation and Construction and Economics and Development. After his presentation, he paused for 20-30 minutes to allow participants to provide feedback and comments on poster boards.
- Caine then resumed the meeting to present the vision,



Figure 1.9 | Public Visioning Session #2 | Freeport Historical Museum

goals, and initiatives for Infrastructure and Ecology, and Land Use and Housing. He again paused for 20-30 minutes for participant feedback and comments on poster boards. Throughout the event, Ian Caine, Wade Dillon (Main Street Advisory Board), Robert Johnson (Freeport EDC), and Irene Ocañas (Design Subcommittee) were available to receive feedback from participants. Caine informed participants that the UTSA team would take this feedback into account before submitting their final report on October 15.

UTSA Revises Comp Plan and Design Guidelines

- Dates: August-September 2024
- Location: San Antonio, Texas
- Description: The UTSA team made a final round of



Figure 1.10 | Public Visioning Session #2 | Freeport Historical Museum

revisions to reflect outcomes from Vision Session #2 as well as final stakeholder interviews.

Summary of Recent Plans

2023 Freeport Boardwalk | Gensler

Freeport’s deep-rooted connection with its surrounding waterways, including the Brazos River, Brazos Harbor, Wetlands, and the Gulf of Mexico, forms the backdrop for this proposed boardwalk project. This initiative aims to enhance this historical relationship by blending simplicity and diversity, offering the community a renewed vibrancy and programming. The boardwalk design is characterized by its simplicity, following the river’s natural curves while offering a diverse range of spatial experiences to explore. As a symbol of Freeport’s rich cultural heritage, the boardwalk is poised to celebrate the city’s past while igniting excitement for future growth and revitalization.

The document provides an Existing Plan, Demolition Plan, Proposed Overall Plan, Proposed Phase 1 Plan, Phase 1 Development Plan, Four Phasing Options, Three Sections, and Three Views.

2022 Freeport Strategic Community Plan | City of Freeport

This document includes annual reports and plans for the following topics: Municipal Golf Course, Police Department, Fire & EMS, Building and Code Enforcement, GIS Mapping and Property Management, Main Street and Historical Museum, Finance Human Resources and Customer Service, Public Works Department, and Veolia Water and Wastewater Infrastructure. The following sections summarize the Main Street and Historical Museum programs specifically:

The Texas Main Street Program (TMSP) program envisions positively impacting the economic vitality and thoughtful preservation of historic resources across Texas, aligning with the goals of the Texas Historical Commission.

Through guidance and support, TMSP assists designated Main Street programs in creating economically vibrant town centers with sensitive preservation.

The TMSP’s mission revolves around providing technical expertise, resources, and support to Texas Main Street communities, following the National Main Street Four Point Approach®. This approach emphasizes organization, promotion, design, and economic vitality. By fostering partnerships, marketing the business district, capitalizing on unique assets, and stimulating investment, TMSP aims to revitalize downtown areas.

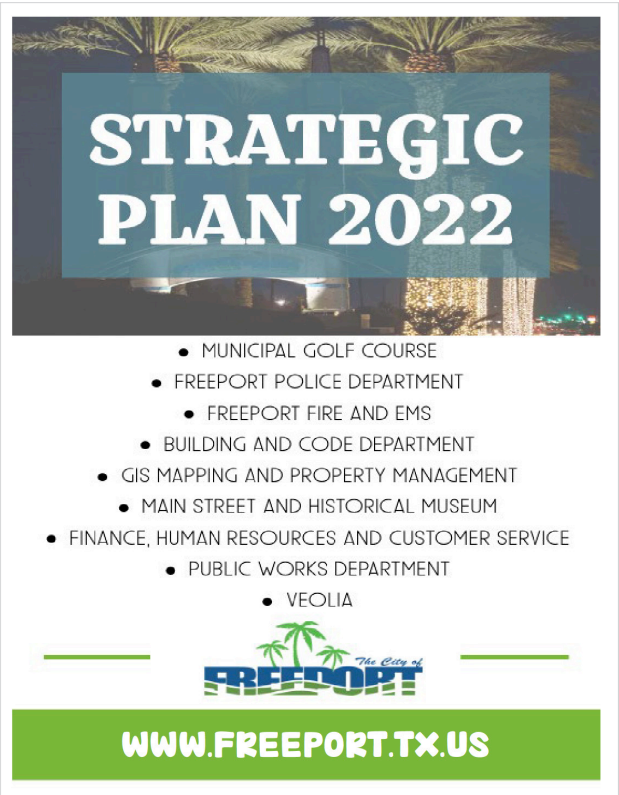


Figure 1.11 | 2022 Freeport Strategic Community Plan | City of Freeport

Currently, there are 90 official Texas Main Street communities ranging in population. These communities have reported over \$4.5 billion in reinvestment, half of which stems from private investment. Moreover, they have contributed 45,000 jobs and 10,500 small businesses to the Texas economy, showcasing the significant economic impact of historic preservation. TMSP staff work closely with designated communities to help them achieve their revitalization and preservation goals. From October 2022 through September 2023, the TMSP sponsored monthly events including markets, festivals, and fundraisers.

The Freeport Historical Museum is committed to educating, interpreting, and preserving the rich coastal history of Freeport, Texas. The museum aims to promote heritage tourism and revitalize Historic Downtown Freeport through engaging exhibits, family-oriented events, and outreach programs. The department focuses on preserving history, supporting local commerce, overseeing museum operations, and coordinating Main Street events. Notably, recent efforts include introducing festive events like the Día de Los Muertos procession and Cinco de Mayo celebrations to attract foot traffic to the downtown area. Plans for future events such as Market Days and Paint & Sip activities require funding for equipment, entertainment, and promotions to continue engaging the community.

2022 Texas Main Street Program | Texas Historical Commission

The 2022 Texas Main Street Program report is a comprehensive guide developed in response to challenges and opportunities identified during the Freeport Resource Team Visit. It builds upon previous studies and aims to provide specific steps for Freeport Main Street over the next three years. The report emphasizes the incremental and strategic nature of the Main Street Approach and offers guidance in selecting a Transformation Strategy, goals, and tasks that are achievable yet impactful for the community.

The report highlights the ambitious expectations of Freeport Main Street participants for downtown revitalization despite significant challenges such as uncertainties from the port’s proximity, limited local spending opportunities, and decades of neglect of downtown buildings. However, stakeholders also recognize significant assets, including renewed enthusiasm for revitalization, walkable central greenspace, proximity to the beach, and an established museum.

Freeport’s entry into the Main Street program signifies a long-term commitment to downtown revitalization. The first three years are crucial, characterized by organizational development, partnership building, and establishing credibility in the community. Recommended actions are categorized under the Main Street Approach’s Four Points—organization, promotion, economic vitality, and design—with each recommendation tagged with a suggested timeline spanning over three years.

Organization. The report suggests forming committees, setting mission and vision statements, and installing roadway signs in the first year to establish a strong



Figure 1.12 | Texas Main Street Program | Texas Historical Commission

foundation. It also emphasizes partnerships with local corporations, civic organizations, and volunteers. Additionally, it recommends creating a framework for recruiting new volunteers and establishing a tradition of thanking them. As the program progresses, it suggests exploring alternative funding solutions, considering a youth council or ambassador program, and continuing to build partnerships with local entities.

Promotion. In the realm of promotion, the report recommends creating a unique Facebook page dedicated to downtown Freeport, separate from Visit Freeport. It suggests hosting a downtown Clean Up day within the first year or second year. The report also advises evaluating current events and festivals for success and leveraging the port/seaside location in branding efforts. As time progresses, it recommends launching retail promotions and weaving the port/seaside location further into branding efforts.

Economic Vitality. For Economic Vitality, the report underscores the importance of building relationships with local and regional economic development partners. It recommends gaining a deeper understanding of market trends and utilizing data from platforms like

DowntownTx.org for property inventory. Collaboration with the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is emphasized, particularly in coordinating efforts for property development. As the program advances, it suggests focusing on assisting small businesses and identifying specific projects to stimulate investment in downtown Freeport.

Design. Regarding Design, the report suggests working closely with Texas Main Street Program (TMSP) design staff to schedule trainings and develop architecture and preservation content for social media. It proposes conducting walking tours to discuss approaches for downtown buildings and clarifying and advertising building improvement grant programs offered by the EDC. The report also recommends prioritizing wayfinding and establishing a Historic Preservation Ordinance in the third year.

The proposed work plan outlines goals and tasks for approximately three years under an overarching Transformation Strategy of building a strong foundation. It recommends four major goals, one for each committee, with tasks outlined under each goal. The board is encouraged to add elements such as measures of success, timelines, budgets, and responsible persons to the work plan.

The next steps include evaluating performance against the work plan annually, making necessary adjustments, and adopting new Transformation Strategies and work plans as needed. Overall, the report provides a comprehensive framework for Freeport Main Street’s revitalization efforts over the next three years.

2020 Downtown Strategic Assessment | Downtown Strategies

This strategic assessment utilizes an asset-based methodology that leverages the community’s existing strengths and potential to evaluate the downtown area. The report focuses on five topics to generate a comprehensive roadmap to revitalization:

Market Analysis. The report begins with an in-depth market analysis examining current market conditions, consumer demographics, and economic trends. It identifies key customer segments and their shopping behaviors, providing insights into the demand for various retail categories. The analysis helps understand the strengths and weaknesses of the existing market and identifies opportunities for new retail ventures.

Policy & Administration. This section covers the administrative and policy framework necessary to support

downtown retail growth. It recommends establishing an overlay for the Downtown District that incorporates Form-Based Code. This would support the creation of a pedestrian-friendly environment downtown. Topics include signage, shape and density of new buildings, bicycle and parking requirements, building setbacks, minimum lot coverage and floor area ratios, upper floor uses, and ground floor uses.

Design. Design focuses on the physical aspects of downtown areas, evaluating the condition of streets, storefronts, pedestrian pathways, and public spaces. The report emphasizes the need for aesthetic improvements, beginning with Complete Streets to accommodate all modes of travel, including pedestrians and bicycles. Complete Streets are good for business, encourage active living, save on transportation costs, and improve public safety.

Tourism & Promotion. Tourism and promotion strategies are crucial for positioning downtown as a vibrant retail destination. The report recommends improving wayfinding, recruiting new downtown retailers, and

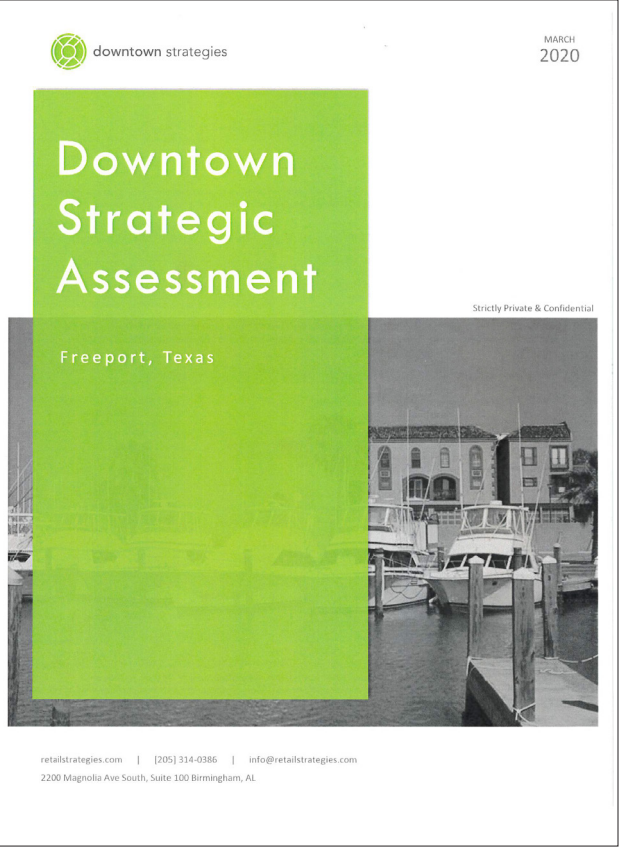


Figure 1.13 | Downtown Strategic Assessment | Downtown Strategies

optimizing the Downtown Facebook Page. Collaborations with local businesses and cultural institutions are suggested to enhance promotional efforts and increase foot traffic.

Economic Vitality. Economic vitality is addressed through strategies aimed at supporting existing businesses and attracting new ones. The fundamental recommendation is to partner with downtown property owners to establish temporary, short-term leases in underutilized storefronts. These “pop-up” locations are experiential, temporary, and inexpensive.

2019 Freeport Board Walk Plan | Insite Architecture Inc

This document provides an earlier vision of the boardwalk plan. The 2019 Insite plan proposes significantly more investment and construction than the 2022 Gensler plan. The plan proposes intensive mixed-use, including condominium housing, a town square, a conference center, retail, and office space.

2019 The Future City Report | Kendig Keast Collaborative

The Freeport Strategic Community Plan lays out a vision for the city’s future, guided by six fundamental principles. First, Freeport commits to being forward-looking, planning for new housing options, quality schools, parks, and a vibrant waterfront. Second, the city prioritizes quality, seeking lasting value in public and private development endeavors. Third, Freeport adopts a collaborative approach to tackle significant issues like stormwater management and transportation, fostering partnerships and participating in regional decision-making.

Fourth, the city pledges to proactively shape its narrative, invest strategically, and enhance its image. Fifth, Freeport emphasizes transparency, setting clear goals through long-term planning and engaging citizens in decision-making. Lastly, the city aims for resilience, building on its strengths while adapting to economic trends and changes.

In terms of land use and growth, Freeport identifies strategic action priorities including maintaining existing housing and neighborhoods, incentivizing new housing development, and updating development regulations to align with community objectives. Regarding transportation and mobility, priorities involve proactive maintenance of infrastructure, integrating complete streets concepts, and planning for future transportation technologies. Additionally, Freeport emphasizes the importance of developing an active transportation network and ensuring resilience in transportation planning.

Growth opportunities are outlined, focusing on preparing

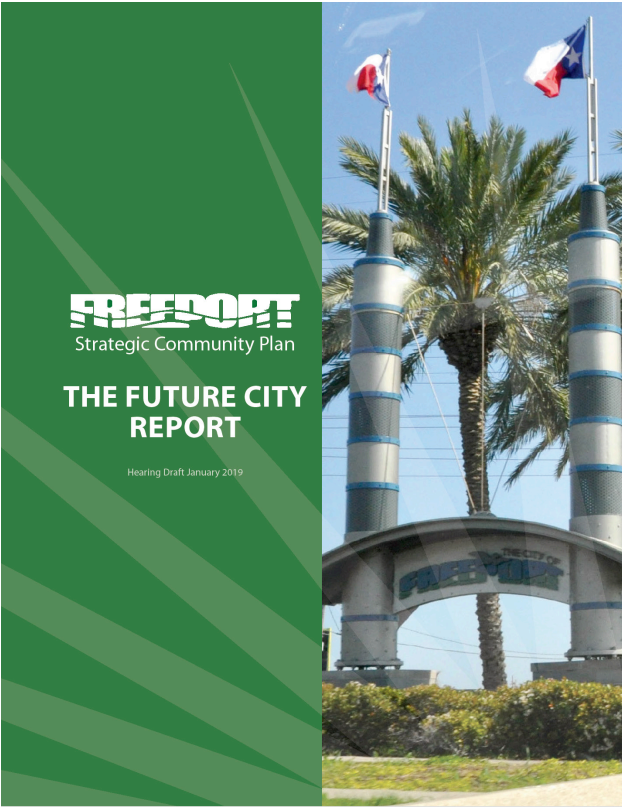


Figure 1.14 | The Future City Report | Kendig Keast Collaborative

utility master plans, conducting assessments for road conditions, and creating mechanisms for residents to report infrastructure issues. The plan suggests the establishment of a Public Works Department and collaboration with partners like Port Freeport to support city growth. Economic opportunities are also highlighted, including marketing initiatives to promote Freeport’s unique characteristics, prioritizing infrastructure upgrades, and supporting local businesses.

The plan addresses land use around the Old Brazos River, emphasizing mixed-use developments and maintaining public spaces. In terms of parks and recreation, strategic priorities include developing sports complexes, completing a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and enhancing waterfront access. The plan also underscores the importance of branding Freeport to improve its image and attract tourism.

Implementation methods encompass capital projects, programs, and initiatives, regulations and standards, partnerships and coordination, and targeted planning studies. The plan advocates for the creation of a Capital Improvements Program to prioritize major projects and emphasizes the role of partnerships in achieving

community goals.

2019 Freeport Market Assessment | City of Freeport

Freeport, situated in Brazoria County, has a population of approximately 13,000, but its regional Primary Trade Area encompasses over 32,000 people. Known for its slogan “Where Fun Happens,” Freeport offers diverse retail opportunities and exciting adventures within the city limits. Renowned for fishing, boating, and boasting world-class beaches along the Gulf of Mexico, Freeport is a top destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

The Primary Trade Area (PTA) methodology involved a customer intercept study conducted by Catalyst in April 2018, which gathered over 3,075 unique samples within a 365-day period from Baywood Foods in Freeport. Common Evening Locations (C.E.L) identified from the samples were geocoded to establish Primary Trade Areas. Catalyst utilized a 70.3% capture rate of the C.E.L. to delineate Freeport’s Primary Trade Area. This study focused solely on samples with two or more visits to depict a realistic “core customer.”

Median Household Income and Average Household Income in the PTA significantly exceed those of Freeport.



Figure 1.15 | 2019 Market Assessment | Courtland Holman

Similarly, Median/Average Home Value and educational attainment levels are significantly higher in the PTA than in Freeport.

The top 10 ranked psychographic segments for Freeport, Texas’ primary trade area, present diverse demographic profiles. “Los Trabajadores” neighborhoods, despite the name meaning “workers,” have a high reliance on public assistance income but also exhibit higher-than-average income levels, predominantly from blue-collar occupations. They are characterized by a young population, with significant levels of children under six and single-parent households.

“Los Novios” neighborhoods boast the highest percentage of married-with-children households, with a youthful demographic profile. “Los Solteros” areas also have high-income levels yet feature predominantly single households with above-average levels of children. “Los Padres” neighborhoods have a substantial presence of children and single-parent households. “Kindred Spirits” comprise middle-class earners, predominantly in blue-collar and white-collar occupations. “Doublewides” areas feature mobile homes, with residents engaged in manual labor jobs. “SM Seeks SF” neighborhoods are predominantly singles seeking marriage with moderate incomes.

“American Knights” areas house young families with above-average incomes from white-collar professions. Finally, “Suburban Singles” neighborhoods feature single-parent households with middle-class incomes but face challenges due to lower educational attainment. “Fertile Acres” areas represent rural communities with high reliance on farming income, characterized by comfortable living standards and an aging population.

Freeport’s major employers include Dow Chemical Company, Wood Group, Brazos Independent School District, Olin Corporation, Fluor, BASF Corporation, and JACOBS.

02 Leverage | Preservation and Construction

02 Leverage | Preservation and Construction

Downtown Freeport is facing an existential crisis, caught in a cycle of economic decline and the steady loss of its historic buildings. Immediate action is needed to stabilize the area, or the ongoing deterioration will continue to discourage investment and weaken prospects for future growth. This chapter proposes financial and administrative, including a Downtown Historic District, to protect what remains. Safeguarding Freeport’s historic fabric is more than just preserving heritage—it’s a critical strategy for revitalizing the area and positioning it as a future hub of economic and cultural activity.

Opportunities

Potential benefits of historic preservation. Communities across the U.S. promote historic preservation because it enhances neighborhood livability, improves quality of life, reduces environmental impacts, and boosts local economies. As Freeport revitalizes its downtown, it must find a way to simultaneously modernize and protect the area’s unique historical character. Preserving existing historic resources will become a vital part of Freeport’s strategy to maintain its community character and livability.

Historic preservation leverages material and cultural connections to the past to help identify the best options for the future. The town’s historic buildings tell the story of the community’s evolution, creating a sense of place for residents and offering visitors a tangible link to its unique heritage. By preserving these resources, Freeport can maintain its cultural identity and promote sustainable, heritage-driven development that benefits the community and the local economy. Here are some of the specific benefits of historic preservation:

Construction quality. Many historic structures in downtown Freeport were built with high-quality materials and craftsmanship. Even the more modest buildings often used well-seasoned, air-dried lumber, which reduced moisture content and improved durability. This lumber was also milled to full dimensions (e.g., a true 2x4), making it denser and structurally stronger than modern lumber, which is cut to smaller, nominal sizes. Masonry walls were carefully constructed to fit together precisely, creating buildings with substantial stability. Additionally, these structures were designed with attention to detail, and their material finishes, such as fixtures, wood floors, and trim, were generally of excellent quality—features that current owners recognize and value. All of these characteristics contribute to the longevity and stability of historic buildings.

Adaptability. Owners often discover that the floor plans of historic buildings can easily adapt to accommodate

modern lifestyles and programs. Even smaller historic buildings are typically located on sites that allow for additions if necessary, offering flexibility without sacrificing the integrity of the original design. This adaptability not only enhances livability but also supports the long-term preservation of these structures, making them valuable assets in historic downtowns like Freeport.

Livability and quality of life. When grouped together, older buildings create a pedestrian-friendly urban fabric that promotes walking and fosters neighborly interaction. The presence of mature trees and distinctive architectural features further enhances the area, contributing to a strong sense of identity often missing in newer developments. These qualities make historic areas more attractive and livable, helping to create desirable places where people want to live and work. By preserving these buildings, communities like Freeport can maintain a higher quality of life, offering environments that encourage social engagement and a unique sense of place.

Environmental benefits. Preserving a historic structure provides substantial environmental benefits by conserving energy and reducing the need for new construction materials. This approach achieves energy savings in four specific ways:

- It avoids the energy consumption required for building demolition, debris disposal, and landfill use.
- It eliminates the energy needed to produce, transport, and assemble new construction materials.
- It retains the “embodied” energy used in creating the original building and its components, maximizing the efficiency of past resource investments.

Reusing older buildings or salvaged materials decreases the demand for new lumber and other resources, minimizing the environmental impact in areas where those materials are harvested. By preserving and reusing historic structures, communities like Freeport can significantly enhance environmental sustainability, reduce their carbon footprint, and preserve architectural character and cultural heritage, all while adding long-term value to the area.

Economic benefits. Preservation often contributes more to local economies than new construction because a higher percentage of each dollar spent is allocated to labor and locally sourced materials. In contrast, new construction typically requires more spending on materials produced outside the local economy and on specialized skills brought in from elsewhere. Studies by organizations like the National Trust for Historic Preservation have shown that rehabilitation projects generate a greater “multiplier

effect,” meaning that more money circulates within the local community, stimulating local jobs and businesses (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2015; Place Economics 2005).

Beyond the direct economic benefits, historic preservation fosters charm and character, which attract visitors and encourage tourism. Many small towns nationwide have successfully leveraged their historic resources to develop profitable tourism-based economies. In communities like Freeport, preserving historic buildings not only strengthens the local economy through rehabilitation but also enhances the town’s appeal to tourists, contributing to long-term economic growth and sustainability.

Defining Downtown Freeport

There are several ways to define Downtown Freeport. Historically, “Downtown” refers to the original commercial area established along Memorial Park after Freeport’s founding in 1912. As the town grew and prospered, the downtown area expanded, particularly to the west and south. This chapter will explore three potential designations for Freeport’s Downtown Historic District (a local historic district), a National Register of Historic Places District, and a Texas Main Street Program boundary.

Local historic district designation. This refers to the proposed Downtown Historic District in Freeport, to be overseen by the Freeport Historic Commission. If enacted, the district would be subject to local regulation to protect its distinctive physical character. Local historic districts typically impose the highest level of preservation oversight, as municipalities with historic preservation ordinances, like Freeport, can review alterations to designated landmarks and buildings within the district. This includes reviewing additions, modifications, and new construction to ensure the projects maintain the district’s historic integrity.

Only buildings within the district’s boundaries undergo review, while non-historic structures or those outside the district remain exempt. The preservation commission should establish clear design guidelines to ensure fair evaluations of proposals, using objective, written standards to maintain consistency and transparency in decision-making.

National Register of Historic Places Designation. This plan proposes that the City of Freeport submit its historic downtown district to the National Register of Historic Places. The city would determine these boundaries in consultation with the Texas Historical Commission. If

approved, this designation would recognize Freeport’s unique architectural heritage while allowing property owners to access State and Federal Rehabilitation tax credits for restoration projects. Although these boundaries might overlap with the local historic district, they won’t necessarily be identical.

Unlike local historic district regulations, a National Register listing does not impose direct restrictions on property owners. However, it does trigger a Section 106 review for any projects involving federal funding or approvals under the National Historic Preservation Act. This review assesses whether the proposed project will negatively impact historic resources. The process involves consultation with the Texas Historical Commission, the National Park Service, and local stakeholders to evaluate potential adverse effects.

Section 106 does not necessarily prevent the demolition or alteration of National Register-listed properties, but it may require mitigation measures. For example, if demolition is unavoidable, the project may need to document the resource through photographs and drawings, which are then preserved in local archives, like museums or libraries, to maintain a historical record. This ensures that even if the resource is lost, a historical record is preserved for future generations.

Texas Main Street Program Designation. This designation refers to the area targeted for revitalization by the Freeport Main Street Program, which is authorized by the Texas Historical Commission. Freeport was previously certified as a Texas Main Street community from 2000-2010. A lack of support from local government officials ultimately led to the program’s dissolution. Freeport re-applied to the Texas Main Street Program in 2022 with vital support from a new administration and the Freeport Economic Development Corporation and was recertified the same year.

Today, the Freeport Main Street Program represents a critical platform to preserve the city’s heritage while driving economic growth and community engagement. Freeport joins 85 other Texas Main Street communities, which range in size and have collectively generated over \$5 billion in reinvestment in their historic downtowns. These communities have contributed more than 48,000 jobs and 12,000 small businesses to the state’s economy, demonstrating the potential impact of historic preservation on economic development (Texas Historical Commission 2024).

To accomplish these goals, the Freeport Main Street Program leverages the National Main Street Four Point



Figure 2.1a | Partial map of downtown historic resources (for a complete inventory see Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines)



01 231 W. 2nd St. Built as a Conoco Service Station which operated well into the 1960s.



02 230 W. 2nd St. Occupied by a series of restaurants since its construction: Ace's Cafe (1951), the Cherokee Inn restaurant (1962), Country Boy Bar-B-Q (1971).



03 200 W. 2nd St. Three-story building constructed by the Freeport First National Bank. The first and second floor served banking functions, while the third floor was leased for private offices.



04 127 W. 2nd St. Built for Brockman & Company, a department store. The C.R. Anthony Company occupied the building from 1951-1968.



05 208-10 W. Broad St. Built by Claude A. Stringer (known as the Stringer Building) and originally housed his Star Dry Cleaners business, as well as Russell's sewing appliance store.



06 120 W. Broad St. Occupied by the Twentieth Century Club in 1955. The awning has been removed and transom is boarded.

Figure 2.1b | Partial inventory of downtown historic resources (for a complete inventory see Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines)

Approach® (Texas Historical Commission 2024):

- **Organization.** Partnerships between stakeholders create a shared vision for downtown revitalization.
- **Promotion.** Efforts focus on marketing the district as the center of community activities, goods, and services.
- **Design.** Preservation-based tools and ordinances help maintain the district's authenticity while enhancing its physical assets and heritage through building rehabilitations and planning.
- **Economic Vitality.** Targeted programs identify new market opportunities, encourage investment, and find new uses for historic commercial buildings.

This comprehensive approach aims to transform downtown Freeport into a dynamic hub for commerce, culture, and community engagement, leveraging the area's historical character to foster long-term economic growth.

Constraints

Historic preservation, particularly in the context of a local historic district, can also present additional obligations and burdens for property owners and municipalities:

Renovation costs. One of the primary challenges for property owners is the potential cost of maintaining or restoring historic buildings to meet preservation

standards. These guidelines often require using specific materials or methods that are more expensive than modern alternatives, which can deter property improvements or lead to financial strain.

Restrictions on property owners. Additionally, property owners may face restrictions on how they can modify their buildings, as alterations must typically align with the district's historic character. This can limit personal or commercial flexibility, making it harder to adapt or expand properties for modern programs.

Administrative burdens. For municipalities, administering a local historic district requires establishing a commission to oversee and enforce preservation guidelines, which can be resource-intensive. This involves staff time, review processes, and potential conflicts with property owners who feel restricted by the regulations. In some cases, there may also be a lack of local expertise or funds for adequately supporting preservation efforts, leading to further burdens on municipal budgets. These challenges must be balanced against the cultural and economic benefits preservation can provide.

Historic preservation is a long-term community investment that enhances cultural continuity, economic



07 101 W. Broad St. The Freeport Pharmacy was one of Freeport's original businesses, occupying a one-story, wood-frame building on the site. The present building was constructed in 1940.



08 224 W. Park Ave. Constructed as a one-story building for the Freeport National Bank. Second story added in 1915 for the Houston & Brazos Valley Railway. A two-story addition was added in 1918.



09 315 E. Park Ave. Built for Parker Motors Company, which sold Lincoln and Mercury automobiles and housed a service department.



10 303 E. Park Ave. The Velasco Masonic Lodge spearheaded the effort to construct the lodge. The first floor was rented out to various businesses as a commercial space with lodging above.



11 215 E. Park Ave. Constructed in 1940 as the Ora Theater, which operated until 1953. It was originally designed with a seating capacity of 550. It later housed the Bargain Furniture Co. during the 1950s and 1960s.



12 201 E. Park Ave. Tobey Hardware Co. was formed in 1917 as both a retail and wholesale hardware store and occupied this building well into the late 20th century.



Figure 2.2 | The razing of Freeport’s East End | Google Earth

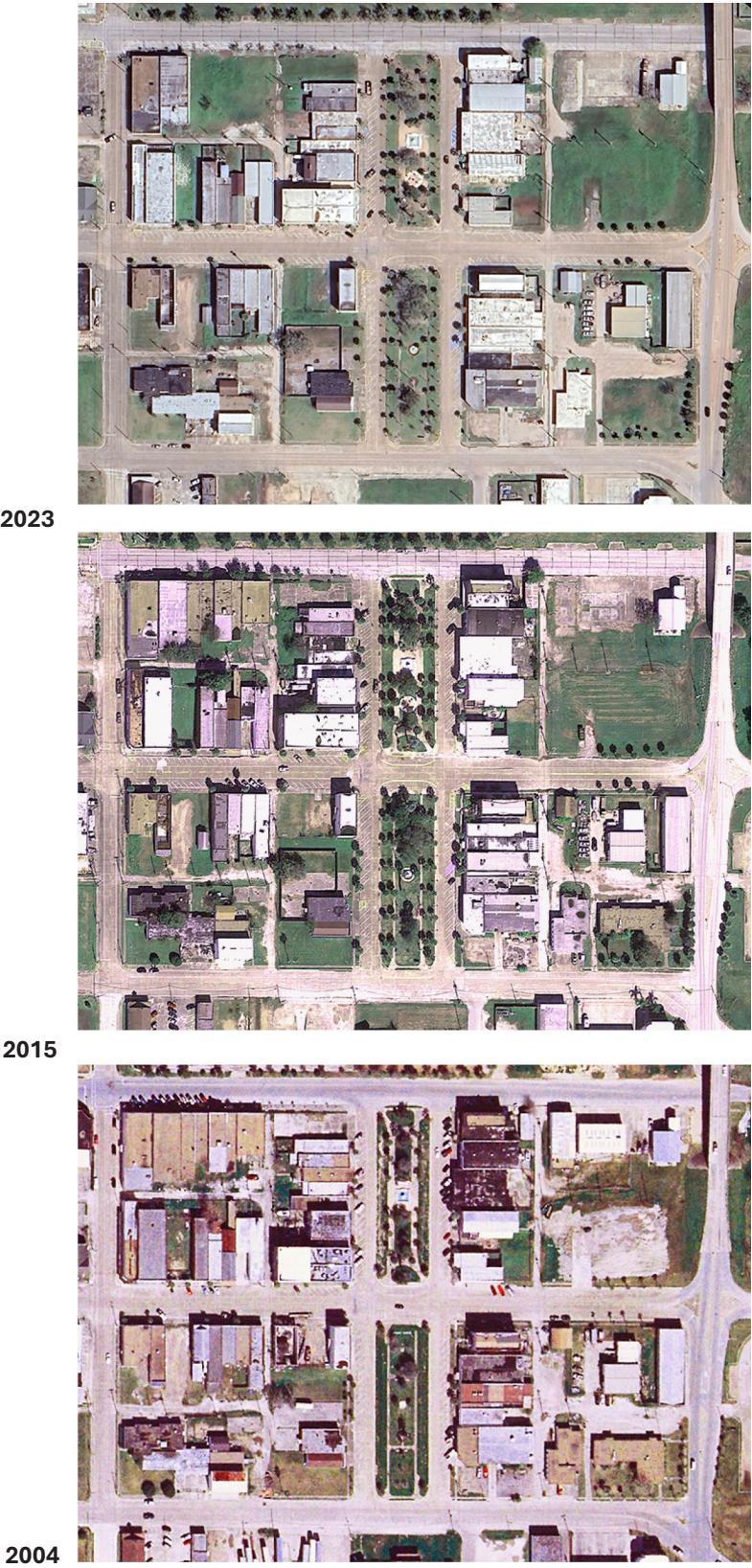


Figure 2.3 | Loss of Downtown historic fabric over 20-year period | Google Earth

vitality, and overall city sustainability. While preservation policies may impose constraints, careful planning can mitigate challenges. Guidelines may restrict alterations or require specific materials, but with adequate preparation, these costs can be managed without overwhelming property owners.

Municipalities play a crucial role by providing technical assistance, grants, or tax incentives to help offset compliance costs. When property owners and local governments plan for these limitations and understand the benefits, preservation strengthens community identity and promotes long-term economic stability. With clear communication, supportive policies, and thoughtful administration, historic preservation provides a practical framework for urban planning, fostering heritage conservation and growth without undue strain on stakeholders.

Razing of Freeport’s East End. The Port of Freeport generated intense controversy in the mid-2000s when it began acquiring land to expand its operations, including twenty-four square blocks of an African American neighborhood east of Freeport’s historic downtown. The Port’s expansion targeted hundreds of vacant and occupied properties, displacing hundreds of homeowners, churches, and businesses. The Port acquired the land through a combination of buyer/seller agreements, deed-for-deed exchange programs, and eminent domain (Saathoff 2021).

Multiple landowners resisted the expansion, eventually filing a Title VI complaint against Port Freeport and the City of Freeport for racial discrimination. In 2022, the non-profit organization Preservation Texas named Freeport the most endangered neighborhood in the state, citing its historical, architectural, and cultural value (Hagerty 2022).

This history has created deep mistrust between the Port of Freeport, local residents, and city government. During a recent vision session, several residents voiced concerns that the Port might use eminent domain again, potentially erasing what remains of downtown Freeport.

Beyond the social and political implications, this scenario has been deeply damaging from a preservation perspective. Continued demolition of historically significant buildings will undermine Freeport’s cultural and architectural legacy, making it impossible to protect the assets necessary to establish a local historic district. The continued loss of resources would further erode the town’s identity, hindering future efforts to use historic preservation as a catalyst for community and economic development. Moving forward, city leaders, residents,



Figure 2.4 | Damage from Hurricane Beryl has eroded historic fabric

and the Port of Freeport must work together to balance economic growth, community integrity, and historic preservation.

Continued loss of downtown urban fabric. Over the same twenty-year period, Freeport’s historic downtown has experienced a significant and steady loss of its urban fabric, driven by demolitions and natural events such as Hurricane Beryl in July 2024. This ongoing erosion of historic structures poses a serious threat to the area’s cultural identity and sense of place. More critically, the continued loss of historic buildings presents an existential threat to future development efforts in downtown Freeport, particularly in establishing a vibrant historic district or a tourism-driven economy.

Without immediate action, the deterioration will undermine any long-term plans for revitalizing the area, creating a cycle of decline that discourages investment and weakens the potential for future growth. To reverse this trend, the City of Freeport must prioritize the stabilization and preservation of its remaining historic assets. This can be achieved through financial subsidies for property owners to restore and maintain their buildings, as well as interpreting codes to emphasize preservation over demolition.

Additionally, the proposed Downtown Historic District will provide essential guidelines to protect what remains, offering a framework that ensures new development complements, rather than erodes, the historical character of the area. Protecting Freeport’s historic fabric is not only a matter of heritage but is vital for positioning the downtown as a destination for future economic and cultural growth.

02 Leverage | Vision, Goals, and Initiatives

Leverage | Preservation and Construction

Vision

Build strong administrative and financial structures, foster a culture of historic preservation, and protect the resources that define Freeport’s unique identity to create a thriving Downtown Historic District.

Goals

A Establish an administrative structure that supports a thriving Downtown Historic District.

B Establish a financial structure that supports a thriving Downtown Historic District.

C Cultivate and expand the culture of historic preservation in the community.

D Protect the physical and cultural resources that create Freeport’s identity.

The following Initiatives are specific actions the City can take towards advancing these Vision and Goals:

Initiative: Separate Freeport Historical Commission and Main Street Advisory Board. (A)

Separating the Freeport Historical Commission from the Main Street Advisory Board is necessary for several reasons. First, the Main Street Advisory Board focuses on promoting downtown businesses, which may lead to conflicts when regulating changes to the historic district. Their focus on business promotion could compromise their ability to enforce preservation standards. Second, since the Main Street Board primarily handles events and business-related activities, its members may lack the expertise needed for design review and may not be equipped to consistently evaluate Certificate of Appropriateness applications.

A dedicated historical commission should include members with relevant expertise, such as an architect, builder, developer, historian, and public representative. Some communities use their planning commission to handle historic reviews due to their experience with design guidelines, but for Freeport to pursue Certified Local Government status, a separate historical commission is essential.

Once established, the Freeport Historical Commission should ensure all commissioners receive training. The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions offers

training programs and free resources to help commissions perform effectively.

This change will require an update to the “Historical Commission and Main Street Advisory Board” ordinance, separating the two bodies (Code of Ordinances, Chapter 2, Article IV, Division 3).

Initiative: Train the First Cohort of Historical Commissioners. (A)

After the Freeport Historical Commission is established, it is essential that all commissioners undergo Design Review training to effectively prepare for their roles in guiding preservation efforts. This training will ensure that the commissioners are equipped to make informed decisions regarding the preservation and development of Freeport’s historic assets.

If Freeport applies for the Certified Local Government (CLG) program, the Texas Historical Commission offers free commission training as part of the certification process, making this a valuable opportunity for foundational education. Additionally, the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC), a highly respected non-profit organization, offers further training options through its Commission Assistance and Mentoring Program (CAMP). This specialized program provides commissioners with advanced knowledge and practical tools for managing local preservation initiatives, including conducting design reviews and understanding preservation laws and guidelines.

By participating in both CLG and CAMP training, the Freeport Historical Commission will gain the skills needed to effectively oversee the preservation of the city’s historical and architectural heritage. These programs not only enhance the commissioners’ capabilities but also strengthen the overall preservation program, ensuring long-term success for Freeport’s historic preservation efforts. Such comprehensive training prepares the commission to confidently manage the complexities of preservation in a growing urban environment.

Initiative: Establish a local historic district. (A)

Section 157.105 of the Freeport Historic Preservation Ordinance (Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, Chapter 157: Historic Preservation) empowers the Freeport Historical Commission to designate local historic districts (LHD) to preserve the historic character of downtown. Establishing an local historic district ensures that all

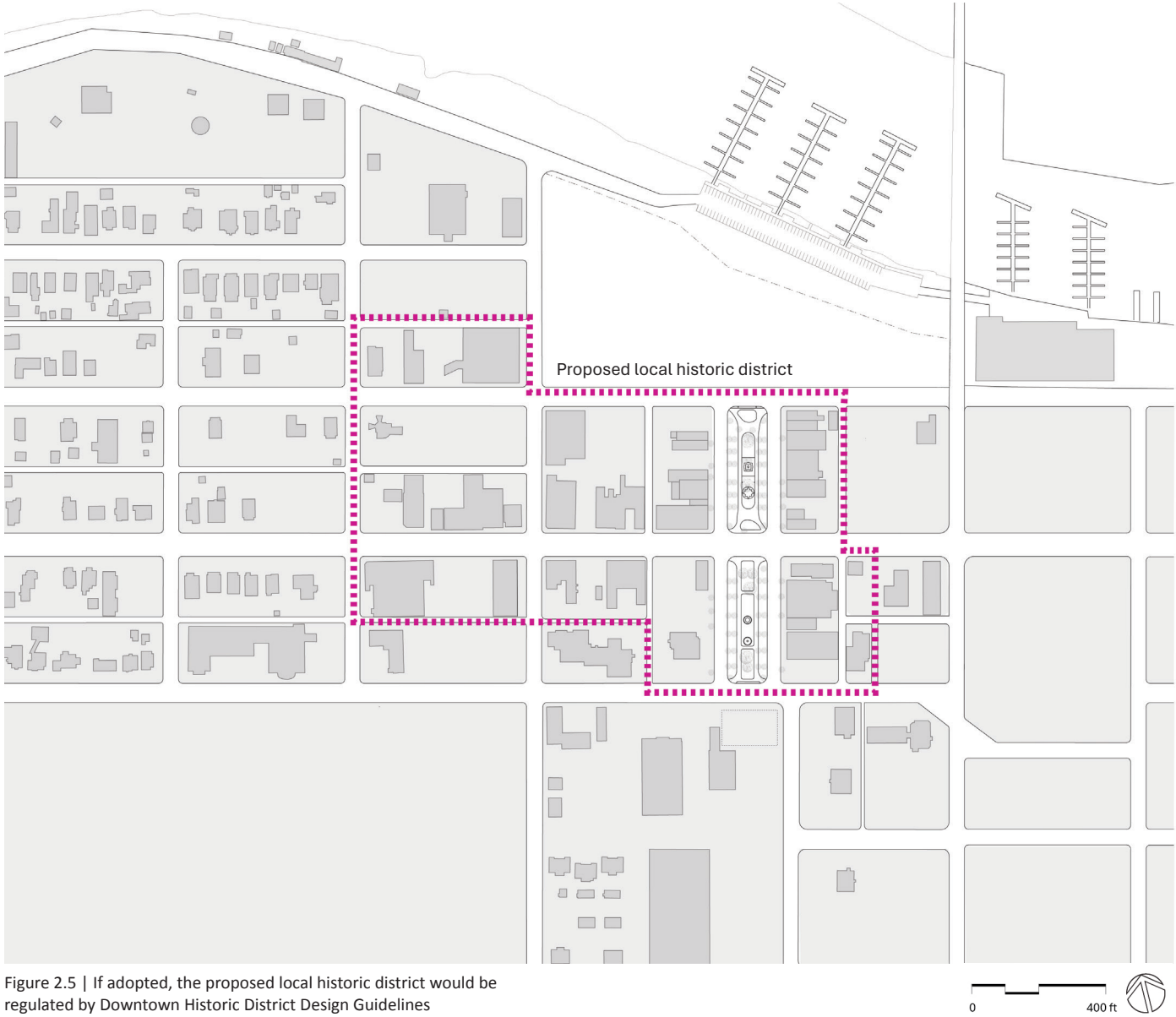


Figure 2.5 | If adopted, the proposed local historic district would be regulated by Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines

major alterations, including demolition, to contributing structures must undergo review by the Commission. This process helps maintain the architectural and cultural integrity of the district. After a survey of downtown Freeport in early 2024, this plan recommends defining the local historic district’s boundaries based on the area with the highest concentration of intact historic commercial buildings. This will allow the district to focus on protecting the most significant resources while encouraging effective preservation and development.

A local historic district is an overlay that is separate from any other existing zoning overlays, which have a different

purpose from historic preservation. A local historic district does not replace or supplant any existing base zoning or overlapping zoning overlays.

The proposed Freeport Downtown Historic District consists of 53 commercial buildings constructed between 1912 and 1970, 38 of which are of historic age and retain sufficient integrity to contribute to the district. Only buildings constructed initially as commercial or institutional buildings were included in the district; churches and single-family residences were intentionally excluded.

To adopt the proposed local historic district, the Freeport

Historical Commission must hold a public meeting, ensuring all property owners within the proposed district receive advance notice. During the meeting, the proposed district boundaries will be presented, followed by an opportunity for public comment. After considering the feedback, the Freeport Historical Commission will vote on whether to recommend the district boundaries. If approved, the recommendation is forwarded to the Freeport Planning Commission, which will also hold a public meeting to review the boundaries. If the Planning Commission approves, they will send their recommendation to the Freeport City Council for final approval and official adoption of the local historic district.

The timeline for adopting the local historic district depends on when the Freeport Historical Commission proposes the district boundaries. Once the Historical Commission makes its recommendation, the proposal must be submitted to the Planning Commission within 30 days. The Planning Commission is then required to hold a public hearing on the proposed district within 45 days of receiving it.

After the hearing, the Planning Commission has another 45 days to make its recommendation to the City Council. Once the City Council receives the recommendation, they must schedule and hold a public hearing within 45 days to make a final decision on adopting the local historic district.

Following the adoption of the local historic district by the Freeport City Council, owners of contributing properties within the Freeport Downtown Commercial District will be required to apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for any major changes to the building.

The following changes require the Historic Commission to issue a COA:

- Construction of a new structure
- Addition to a structure
- Window replacement
- Storefront replacement
- Removal or demolition (in whole or in part) of a historic resource
- Applying a new exterior siding material
- Adding a new window, door, or dormer
- Awning/Canopy replacement or installation
- Creating a driveway or a parking area
- Adding a satellite dish (TV) or other mechanical equipment, solar panel, etc
- Building or enclosing a porch, carport, deck fence, or garage
- The alteration of any exterior features of commercial

structures, non-residential structures, bed and breakfasts, or residential structures used as or changing to non-residential or commercial use

The following changes require a COA and may be brought before city staff for approval (though Staff may request commission review):

- Replacement of materials or features in kind
- The construction of a new sign or changes to an existing sign
- Storefront modification
- Roof repair/replacement
- Lighting
- The following changes do NOT require a COA:
- Routine repairs and maintenance
- Painting and paint colors
- Landscaping
- Interior work
- A/C systems repair
- Temporary features, such as street furniture

Initiative: Adopt Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines by Ordinance. (A)

After the Freeport Downtown Historic District is adopted, the Freeport Historical Commission will present a set of proposed Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines at a publicly announced Commission meeting. These guidelines will guide property owners and Historical District Commissioners through the design review process. Following the presentation, the Planning Commission will review and approve the guidelines before forwarding them to the City Council for a final vote.

Once adopted, the Freeport Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines will become an essential tool for Commissioners in the design review process and serve as a valuable resource for property owners, helping them understand and follow the district’s preservation standards. These Guidelines supplement the United States Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation cited in the historic preservation ordinance (Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, Chapter 157, Section 108).

The general guidance in the ordinance applies to all locally designated landmarks or districts; however, each designated local historic district should have its own set of historic district design guidelines tailored to the unique character of its historic resources.

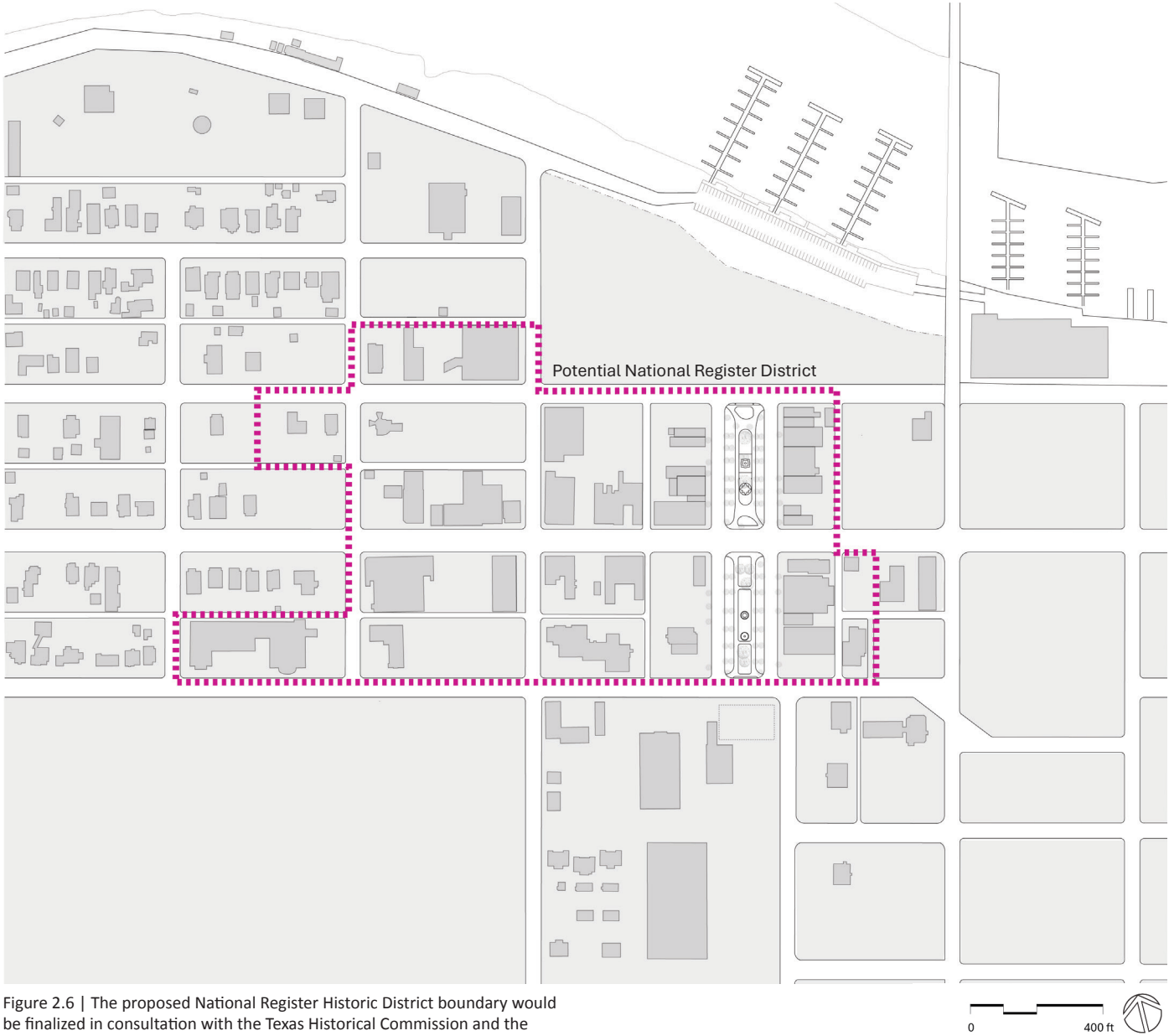


Figure 2.6 | The proposed National Register Historic District boundary would be finalized in consultation with the Texas Historical Commission and the National Park Service

Initiative: Create a National Register of Historic Places Historic District. (A)

The Freeport Economic Development Corporation (EDC) or Freeport Main Street Program is well-positioned to initiate the National Register listing process. Owners of National Register-listed buildings in the Downtown District could benefit from federal and state tax incentives, especially if their properties generate income or house non-profits. By spearheading the National Register

application, the EDC or Main Street Program could help property owners access these valuable tax credits. The City of Freeport, depending on its priorities, might choose to pursue a National Register Historic District before designating a local historic district. Whatever the City decides, it is best to designate the two districts separately to avoid confusion.

The National Register Historic District process begins with a formal inquiry to the Texas Historical Commission, which would also work with the City to establish the district’s boundaries. Since the National Register process

	<i>Applies to</i>	<i>Value</i>		<i>Eligible Uses</i>	<i>Req'd Designation</i>	<i>Investment Threshold</i>	<i>Time limit</i>
TX	Franchise OR Insurance premium tax	25% QREs	Yes	Income producing or non-profit	NR, RTHL, SAL	\$5,000	None
FED	Beach users	20% QREs	No	Income producing	NR	= to value of building	2 or 5 Years

is completely independent from the process to create a local historic district, the boundaries of the two districts can be different. This is a common outcome. The National Register Historic District may encompass a broader area than the local historic district because National designation does not impose any review requirements on property owners and provides financial incentives, making it less burdensome for them. Alternatively, the City may seek to align the National Register Historic District and local historic district for simplicity’s sake. Ultimately, the final boundaries of the National Register Historic District will be determined in consultation with the Texas Historical Commission and National Park Service.

Summary of Benefits. The National Register is an official federal list of sites, structures, objects, and districts that contain significant historical, architectural, archeological, and cultural value and are therefore deemed worthy of preservation. The National Park Service maintains the list, authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. National Register listing confers multiple benefits to property owners, including increased prestige, an incentive to preserve the property, information about historic properties for local and statewide planning purposes, and increased opportunities for tourism and economic development. National Register listing

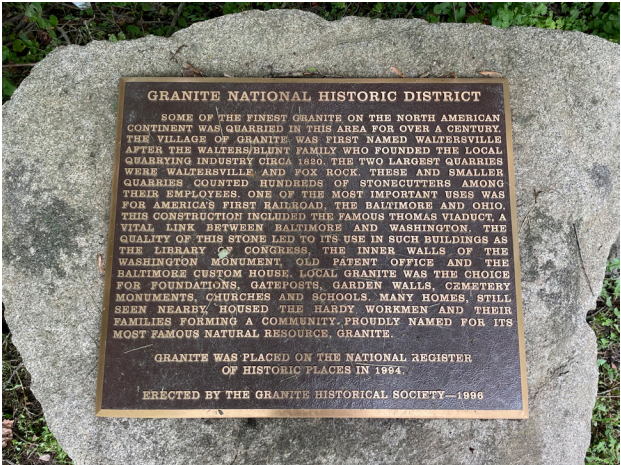


Figure 2.7 | National Register of Historic Places Plaque | JJonah CC 4.0

also incurs valuable financial incentives for owners of contributing properties in the form of State and Federal Rehabilitation tax credits (described below). National Register listing places no restrictions on what property owners can do with their buildings.

While National Register historic districts in Brazoria County largely consist of residential districts, nearby commercial historic districts are located in Wharton (West Milam Street Mercantile Historic District, Wharton County Courthouse Historic Commercial District), Houston (Main Street/Market Square Historic District) and Galveston (the Strand Historic District).

Criteria for a National Register Historic District. For districts, sites, buildings, structures, objects, and districts to qualify for the National Register, they must be at least 50 years old and be associated with significant historical events; associated with the lives of significant historical people; demonstrate distinctive design characteristics; or provide important information about prehistory or history. For Downtown Freeport to qualify as a historic district, it must consist of a geographically defined area and possess “...a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united by past events or aesthetically by plan or physical development (National Archives, “Part 60 National Register of Historic Places”).”

Process for listing a National Register Historic District. To initiate the National Register listing process, one must contact the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), which in Texas is the Texas Historical Commission (THC). The first steps for potential historic districts include conducting a historic resources survey and submitting a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) to the THC. The DOE outlines preliminary information, including the district’s developmental history, areas of significance, proposed boundaries, and photographic documentation. Once the THC approves the DOE, they will provide the necessary forms to start the formal nomination process.

The nomination requires detailed documentation,

including a historic context that explains the district’s significance, a physical description of the area, maps, figures, and current photographs. THC staff review the nomination and typically request multiple rounds of revisions. After completing the final draft, the nomination is presented to the Texas State Board of Review (SBR), which meets three times annually. If approved, the nomination is forwarded to the National Park Service for final certification. The entire process generally takes at least one year, from project inception to certification by the National Park Service. More information is available on the Texas Historical Commission website.

To fund the creation of a National Register Historic District, the City of Freeport can apply for grant funding from a number of sources including the Texas Historical Commission, National Park Service, and National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Obligations or Restrictions for Property Owners. Listing a property or district on the National Register does not impose any restrictions on what owners can do with their property, including alterations or even demolition. While the National Park Service discourages demolishing National Register-listed properties, it does not have the authority to prevent it. In some cities, local ordinances may require a review of changes to National Register properties, but this is not the case in Freeport, where no such local regulations exist. Therefore, property owners in Freeport maintain full control over their buildings without mandatory historic preservation oversight from the city.

Additional Protections for Property Owners. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act requires that any project involving federal funds or permits must assess the impact on properties listed on the National Register. This provides property owners with additional consideration when federal or state-funded projects might affect their property. However, listing on the National Register does not guarantee protection from demolition or other alterations during such projects. While federal agencies must consider the impact on historic properties, Section 106 only mandates a review process and does not necessarily prevent demolition or significant changes.

Initiative: Apply to the Certified Local Government Program. (A)

The Certified Local Government (CLG) program is a partnership between the local, state, and federal governments that supports local preservation programs through training, technical assistance, and grant funding.

To become a CLG, a city must complete the following tasks:

- Adopt a local historic preservation ordinance that meets Texas Historic Commission requirements, including criteria for the designation of historic properties and a minimum 60-day stay of demolition for local landmarks or properties contributing to a local historic district.
- Establish a preservation commission with design review authority.
- Appoint a local Historic Preservation Officer.
- Adopt a local preservation plan (i.e., a statement of goals and objectives for the Freeport preservation program).

Upon certification, Freeport would be eligible for CLG grants, which can be used for the following:

- Surveys
- National Register nominations
- Preservation Planning
- Amending a preservation ordinance
- Design Guidelines
- Research and development of local preservation incentive programs
- Travel and training expenses for hosting a regional preservation-related workshop

Upon certification, Freeport would also be eligible for commission training provided by the Texas Historic Commission at no cost.

Initiative: Offer a Historic Preservation Tax Credit Education Program. (B)

If the application to the National Register of Historic Places is approved, the Freeport Historic Commission, Freeport Main Street Program, and Freeport Economic Development Council can collaborate to host a Historic Preservation Tax Credit Education Program for downtown property owners. This program would be instrumental in helping property owners understand how to leverage available tax incentives for restoring and preserving their historic buildings. The Texas Historical Commission’s Tax Credit Program may also be able to provide a tax incentive workshop, either in person in Freeport or online, depending on their availability.

Alternatively, if the Texas Historical Commission is unavailable, the City could hire a historic preservation consulting firm specializing in tax credits to conduct training sessions for property owners. These sessions would provide detailed guidance on

how to maximize the benefits of state and federal preservation tax credits, offering property owners a clear understanding of the financial tools available to offset restoration costs. This education initiative would be a critical step in empowering local property owners to take full advantage of preservation incentives, ultimately contributing to the revitalization and economic growth of Freeport’s historic downtown.

Initiative: Leverage and expand financial incentives for Historic Preservation. (B)

Currently, Freeport offers limited financial incentives for historic preservation. Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks (RTHLs) are eligible for the Texas state historic preservation tax credit, which allows property owners to offset 25% of qualified rehabilitation expenses for both nonprofit and for-profit uses. At present, the Freeport Bank Building is the only RTHL in the downtown area.

While pursuing the other initiatives outlined in this document, the City of Freeport should consider creating new, targeted financial incentives for historic preservation. Many municipalities have creative incentives that could be effective in Freeport. Examples of successful preservation incentives from other municipalities include:

- Expanding a TIF (Tax Increment Financing) district to cover the historic district.
- Offering grants for signage or facade improvements on historic buildings.
- Relaxing certain zoning restrictions within the historic district to encourage preservation.
- Implementing local tax abatements or freezes for qualified rehabilitation projects.



Figure 2.8 | Local landmarks help preserve and celebrate history

These financial tools can support preservation efforts and encourage investment in the historic character of downtown Freeport.

Initiative: Seek financial assistance from the National Trust Investment Corporation. (B)

In order to procure investment funds for restoration work downtown, Main Street or the EDC can work with property owners to create an investment package to present to the National Historic Trust’s Investment Corporation (NTCIC). This organization supports architectural heritage, community development, and renewable energy initiatives by providing Federal and State Historic Preservation, Low-Income Housing, Renewable Energy, and New Markets Tax Credits. Since the year 2000 they have raised over \$909 million in equity for historic tax credit projects (National Trust Community Investment Corporation). For more information, please see www.ntcic.com.

Initiative: Establish Local Landmarks. (C)

Along with creating a local historic district, the Freeport Historical Commission can designate individual properties as local landmarks if they are considered highly significant but fall outside the district’s boundaries. For example, Girouard’s General Store was frequently highlighted as a key historic resource during Community Visioning Sessions.

Section 157.104 of the Freeport, Texas Code of Ordinances gives the Freeport Historical Commission the authority to designate local landmarks. To begin the process, the Commission must hold a public meeting, notifying the property owner of the proposed landmark beforehand. After presenting the proposed landmark and allowing for public comments, the Commission will vote on whether to recommend it as a local landmark. If approved, the recommendation is forwarded to the Freeport Planning Commission, which will also hold a public meeting to review the designation. Upon approval, the Planning Commission will send their recommendation to the Freeport City Council for final approval and adoption.

Initiative: Create a Preservation Plan. (D)

A preservation plan provides a framework for future historic preservation actions and helps a community identify its goals and priorities. It is required for Certified Local Government (CLG) status and must be updated



Figure 2.9 | Oral histories help preserve and celebrate history | J. West CC 2.0

every five years to remain in compliance with the CLG program. The CLG offers grants to fund the creation of a preservation plan. Preservation Plans include the following components:

- Current state of preservation in the community
- Mission and/or vision statement of the preservation program or preservation commission
- Goals or objectives to advance preservation in the community
- Action items describing how the community will achieve the goals outlined
- Timeline with target dates assigned to each action item
- Resources assigned to each action item — who will be responsible for making sure it gets done?

Initiative: Document oral histories to reinforce Freeport’s living heritage. (D)

The Freeport Historical Museum can help preserve cultural heritage by documenting the stories of local residents in audio recordings housed at the museum, a local library, university, or in a new digital online archive. StoryCorps, a national non-profit organization whose mission is to preserve and share stories, provides training, support, and recording services to help communities like Freeport preserve their heritage. Residents can use StoryCorps’ DIY program, which is available through a free trial.

The Museum can also ask StoryCorps for additional training or partner with them to collect, record, and preserve the community’s oral histories. “Recuerdos de mi Familia,” sponsored by TexasTejano.com, offers a similar

program to share and preserve the stories of Hispanic families, lives, and histories. For more information, please see www.storycorps.org and www.texastejano.com.

Initiative: Document Freeport’s physical heritage with a 3D Lidar Map. (D)

Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) technology uses laser beams reflected off physical surfaces to create highly accurate and detailed surface maps of objects or spaces. This advanced technology is invaluable for documenting Freeport’s critical physical heritage sites, as it provides precise data to support preservation and future development efforts. By utilizing LIDAR, the Freeport Historical Museum can generate digital 3D models of local architectural heritage sites, preserving detailed records that can inform restoration and conservation work.

To fund such an initiative, several options are available. One approach is to apply for Historic Resource Survey Funding through the Texas Historical Commission’s Texas Preservation Trust Fund, which supports projects that document and preserve historical sites.

Another potential strategy is for the City to become a partner in the United States Geological Survey’s 3D Elevation Program, which provides funding for LIDAR data acquisition. This partnership would offer a sustainable source of funding for continued documentation efforts. Leveraging these resources will ensure that Freeport’s historic sites are well-documented and protected for future generations.

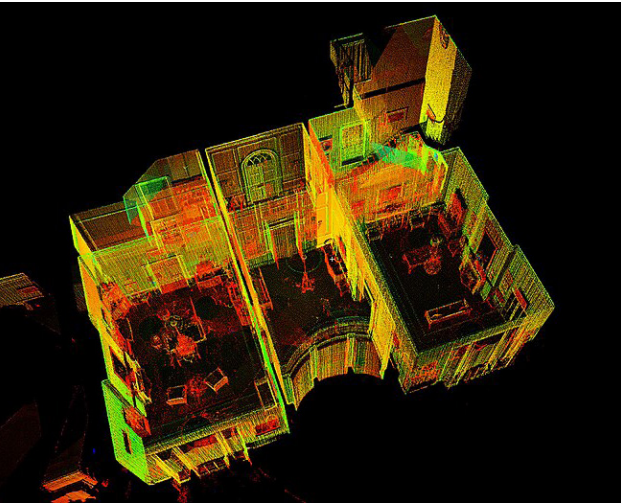


Figure 2.10 | 3D laser scan of a historic structure | CyArk CC 2.0

03 Expand | Economics and Development

03 Expand | Opportunities and Constraints

The following section summarizes critical economic opportunities and constraints downtown, identifying potential areas for development and challenges that may influence the area’s attractiveness for investment.

Opportunities

Projected population growth. According to the 2019 Strategic Community Plan, Freeport is expected to add 1,314 residents by 2040, reaching a total population of 13,467—an 11% increase from 2016. The projected growth presents a significant economic opportunity, requiring approximately 420 new housing units (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 48). This growth will not only necessitate new housing but also create opportunities for broader economic expansion, expanded consumer markets, new businesses and services, an increased tax base, and the stimulation of overall economic activity within the community.

Continued Economic growth. The City of Freeport benefits from a strong and sustained growth trajectory at both regional and local levels. Brazoria County’s economy is robust, as indicated by a Leading Economic Index of 127 (February 2024), up 7.71% from last year. Notably, new single-family building permits surged by 54 %, reflecting a solid housing market, while the average home price increased by just over 6%. The Brazoria County Stock Index also rose by 9%, led by Phillips 66, although retail auto sales declined due to high interest rates. The Current Economic Index increased by more than 1% in February, with employment growing by 2.76% and hotel/motel tax receipts up almost 15%. Despite a 0.66% drop in sales tax receipts, the overall economic indicators suggest ongoing expansion. The Lagging Economic Index, up



Figure 3.2 | Vacant Storefront in downtown Freeport

2.67%, confirms this trend, despite a rise in foreclosure notices. Lower unemployment and steady economic activity highlight the county’s positive economic trajectory (Brazosport College Economic Forecasting Center 2024).

Locally, new employers are establishing new operations in Freeport. For example, Volkswagen recently developed a 120-acre site with two buildings totaling 170,000 square feet, creating 113 full-time jobs and adding 160 positions for laborers from the International Longshoremen’s Association. Additionally, Freeport Warehouse LLC developed a 15-acre facility with a 78,000-square-foot building, which will provide approximately 80 full-time jobs.

Available buildings and land for lease and development. Downtown Freeport, Texas, presents multiple opportunities for urban development, with numerous vacant storefronts ready for immediate occupancy and several large plots available for new construction. Key sites include the 5.66-acre Waterfront site near Freeport Marina, the former OA Fleming Elementary School site, the former Union Pacific railroad site, and potential residential infill locations along Broad St., 2nd St., and 4th St. These strategic sites offer a solid foundation for downtown revitalization, providing the potential to enhance the city’s attractiveness, draw in new investments, and expand both commercial and residential spaces. More details on these



Figure 3.1 | Volkswagen opens new facility in Freeport | Volkswagen Group



Figure 3.3 | Many downtown building facades are in need of upgrades

opportunities can be found in the chapter Develop | Land Use and Housing.

Additional development presents Freeport with an opportunity to increase property tax revenues, which could reduce the municipal government’s reliance on revenue from industrial district agreements to fund its annual operating budget and essential public services. This shift would reinforce the city’s financial position, allowing for a more balanced and sustainable budget while ensuring continued funding for critical public services and infrastructure and resilience against economic fluctuations.

Business Improvement Grant Program. The Business Improvement Grant Program, administered by the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), is designed to promote the development and expansion of new and existing businesses in Freeport, Texas. The program’s overarching goal is to improve the economic well-being of the city’s residents by attracting and retaining businesses, fostering higher employment levels, and maintaining economic stability. The grants support various property improvements, including upgrades to façades, signage, landscaping, and fire suppression systems.

In a typical year, the EDC allocates \$150,000 in total grants. This includes a special “MEGA Grant” of \$30,000, awarded to a downtown business that commits to creating at least one new job with their grant application. However, for fiscal year 2024, the EDC doubled the total available funds to \$300,000 in response to the extensive damage caused by Hurricane Beryl, allowing for expanded support to local businesses.

Best-case and worst-case scenarios for Downtown Freeport. During Vision Session #1, residents were asked to envision the best possible future for Freeport. Many desired the city to evolve into a vibrant tourist destination like Galveston, Texas. They see potential in harnessing Freeport’s water-based assets, such as the Old Brazos River and Bryan Beach, to drive tourism and economic growth. By developing these waterfront areas and promoting recreational activities, Freeport could attract visitors and enhance its appeal, emulating Galveston’s success as a popular tourist spot.

Residents express an existential fear for Freeport Conversely, the most significant concern among residents was the risk of stagnation and decline. They feared Freeport could suffer from continued disinvestment without proactive development and investment, leading to deterioration and potential slum conditions. Multiple residents voiced concern about Port Freeport’s potential



Figure 3.4 | Hotel in neighboring Surfside



Figure 3.5 | Boardwalk in neighboring Galveston Island | K. Bowen CC 2.0

to acquire more land via eminent domain, further undermining the city’s cultural and historical resources. The most extreme version of this fear envisions the Port acquiring all of downtown, effectively erasing Freeport from the map. These fears, whether well-founded or not, highlight the need for the City to develop an approach to redevelopment that safeguards Freeport’s physical and cultural heritage while pursuing growth opportunities.

Programmatic futures for Downtown Freeport. During Vision Session #1, UTSA facilitators asked residents what they wanted to see downtown. Respondents envisioned boutique shopping like antique shops and various bars and restaurants offering a respectable nightlife. They also want downtown to become a destination with a strong sense of place characterized by walkability, attractive building designs, and multiple spending opportunities. Respondents also wanted family-friendly elements like parks for kids, an indoor or outdoor theater for live entertainment, and amenities like benches, trash receptacles, and transit stops. Additional requests included waterfront-oriented businesses, including stores and restaurants, a tackle store, an ice cream parlor, a bodega, and a hotel.

Respondents expressed concerns about the potential influx of certain types of businesses in downtown Freeport. They specifically voiced apprehension about the arrival of liquor stores and pool halls, fearing that these could negatively impact the community atmosphere. Additionally, there were worries about more gas stations and industrial operations, which could detract from the area’s appeal and aesthetic. Finally, residents were concerned about the presence of national chain stores, preferring to maintain a unique, locally-oriented character rather than seeing it become dominated by larger, impersonal retail outlets.

Downtown programming and events. Downtown Freeport, Texas, features a vibrant lineup of annual festivals and events that foster community engagement and draw visitors. Key highlights include Kidfest, a family-friendly event with games, activities, and entertainment for children, and Día de Los Muertos, a cultural celebration honoring loved ones with traditional music, dance, and altar displays. The Cinco de Mayo Celebration features live music, food, and cultural performances. These events, primarily organized by Main Street Freeport, underscore the city’s community spirit and provide ample opportunities for residents and visitors to experience and enjoy the vibrancy of downtown Freeport.

Constraints

Negative civic culture. In recent years, the government of Freeport, Texas, has faced legal challenges, including civil and criminal cases involving public officials. These issues have involved allegations of corruption, misuse of public funds, and breaches of public trust. The legal troubles have contributed to a lack of confidence in local leadership, fairly or unfairly, which has complicated efforts to revitalize the downtown area. The situation has been further exacerbated by ongoing disputes and litigation related to governance, which have intensified the negative perceptions of the city and its leadership among residents and stakeholders. Stakeholder meetings conducted by the Texas Historical Commission in 2022 highlighted a negative public perception fueled by unfavorable coverage in local news and social media. These negative views persist today and resurfaced during Vision Session #1 in March 2024. Collectively, these issues are undermining public trust in city leadership and the prospects for downtown revitalization (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 38).

Another common negative perception of downtown stems from long-term disinvestment, vacancy, property neglect, and a perception of crime. These concerns are widespread across many downtown communities in the U.S., where aging infrastructure, economic downturns, and shifts in commercial patterns contribute to visible signs of decline. In Freeport, these challenges are particularly pronounced, with empty storefronts, deteriorating buildings, and a lack of vibrant street activity reinforcing the perception that the area is unsafe or uninviting. The convergence of these issues and the negative civic culture described above has created a complex and deeply ingrained pessimistic image that hinders efforts to attract investment and community engagement. Happily, Freeport also boasts a strong tradition of civic pride and highly engaged residents, providing a valuable foundation for reversing this trend



Figure 3.6 | The Pine St. Bridge is a primary access point for downtown

and revitalizing downtown.

Socioeconomic profile. Freeport, Texas, faces several challenges to achieving economic vitality in its downtown area. As a low-income community, limited resources are available to stimulate growth and investment. Small businesses, crucial for downtown revitalization, often cannot afford building improvements or meet code requirements.

This situation intensified during the continued fallout from Hurricane Beryl in the summer of 2024, as property owners scrambled to finance repairs and overcome lost revenue. Some business owners also contend that city regulations are overly restrictive, making it hard for new ventures to get off the ground. Collectively, these factors make it challenging to foster economic growth in Freeport’s downtown area. Not surprisingly, downtown struggles to define its market, making attracting and retaining businesses challenging (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 38).

Lack of regional automobile access. Access remains a significant challenge in downtown Freeport, Texas. The city lacks direct connections to major interstates, which limits accessibility by car and isolates it from the broader

regional economic network. This poor connectivity negatively affects local businesses and reduces visitor traffic, diminishing downtown’s potential as a vibrant economic and cultural hub. The issue is further compounded by inadequate wayfinding, which makes it difficult for visitors to navigate the area and locate key attractions.

The pending closure, demolition, and reconstruction of FM1495 and the Pine St. Bridge, primary links between downtown Freeport and Surfside Beach, will intensify these challenges (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 38). These routes not only connect residents and tourists to coastal attractions but also facilitate essential commercial activities. During the reconstruction period, disruptions in traffic flow are expected to strain downtown businesses further, making it even more challenging for visitors to reach the area.

Not surprisingly, the downtown area suffers from a lack of pedestrian traffic, undermining the vitality of local businesses. The commercial district struggles to sustain a vibrant atmosphere without sufficient foot traffic. Addressing automobile and pedestrian access and wayfinding issues is essential to improving downtown connectivity, attracting visitors, and fostering economic



Figure 3.7 | Downtown suffers from a lack of pedestrian activity

	2023 Demand (\$)	2023 Supply (\$)	Opportunity Gap/Surplus (\$)
Clothing and Clothing Accessories Stores			
Clothing and clothing accessories stores (NAICS 448)	5,269,083	18,455,294	-13,186,212
Clothing stores (NAICS 4481)	3,578,595	16,889,751	-13,311,156
Men's clothing stores (NAICS 44811)	120,356	154,969	-34,613
Women's clothing stores (NAICS 44812)	639,464	1,877,928	-1,238,464
Children's and infants' clothing stores (NAICS 44813)	259,168	282,543	-23,375
Family clothing stores (NAICS 44814)	2,109,556	14,256,354	-12,146,798
Clothing accessories stores (NAICS 44815)	162,717	103,095	59,622
Other clothing stores (NAICS 44819)	287,334	214,863	72,471
Shoe stores (NAICS 4482)	634,788	255,523	379,265
Jewelry, luggage, and leather goods stores (NAICS 4483)	1,055,700	1,310,020	-254,320
Jewelry stores (NAICS 44831)	715,389	1,104,136	-388,746
Luggage and leather goods stores (NAICS 44832)	340,310	205,884	134,426
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, and Book Stores			
Sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument, and book stores (NAICS 451)	1,744,684	2,782,753	-1,038,069
Sporting goods, hobby, and musical instrument stores (NAICS 4511)	1,493,820	2,782,753	-1,288,933
Sporting goods stores (NAICS 45111)	907,428	2,373,419	-1,465,991
Hobby, toy, and game stores (NAICS 45112)	448,782	409,334	39,448
Sewing, needlework, and piece goods stores (NAICS 45113)	51,101	0	51,101
Musical instrument and supplies stores (NAICS 45114)	86,509	0	86,509
Book stores and news dealers (NAICS 4512)	250,864	0	250,864
Book stores (NAICS 451211)	233,763	0	233,763
News dealers and newsstands (NAICS 451212)	17,101	0	17,101
General Merchandise Stores			
General merchandise stores (NAICS 452)	15,702,717	33,427,111	-17,724,394
Department stores (NAICS 4522)	1,848,866	3,539,208	-1,690,343
Other general merchandise stores (NAICS 4523)	13,853,851	29,887,903	-16,034,051
Warehouse clubs and supercenters (NAICS 452311)	12,560,491	28,785,006	-16,224,515
All other general merchandise stores (NAICS 452319)	1,293,360	1,102,896	190,464
Miscellaneous Store Retailers			
Miscellaneous store retailers (NAICS 453)	2,492,481	2,095,319	397,162
Florists (NAICS 4531)	122,818	0	122,818
Office supplies, stationery, and gift stores (NAICS 4532)	472,754	249,750	223,004
Office supplies and stationery stores (NAICS 45321)	225,411	158,867	66,545
Gift, novelty, and souvenir stores (NAICS 45322)	247,343	90,884	156,459
Used merchandise stores (NAICS 4533)	354,727	154,263	200,464
Other miscellaneous store retailers (NAICS 4539)	1,542,182	1,691,306	-149,124
Pet and pet supplies stores (NAICS 45391)	430,562	770,809	-340,248
Art dealers (NAICS 45392)	219,180	0	219,180
Manufactured (mobile) home dealers (NAICS 45393)	121,708	346,680	-224,972
All other miscellaneous store retailers (NAICS 45399)	770,733	573,817	196,916
Tobacco stores (NAICS 453991)	284,439	66,121	218,318
All other miscellaneous store retailers (except tobacco stores) (NAICS 453998)	486,294	507,696	-21,402
Non-store Retailers			
Non-store retailers (NAICS 454)	21,081,863	1,337,855	19,744,008
Electronic shopping and mail-order houses (NAICS 4541)	20,188,328	992,334	19,195,995
Vending machine operators (NAICS 4542)	115,882	0	115,882
Direct selling establishments (NAICS 4543)	777,652	345,521	432,131
Fuel dealers (NAICS 45431)	445,252	57,200	388,052
Other direct selling establishments (NAICS 45439)	332,400	288,321	44,079
Food Services and Drinking Places			
Food services and drinking places (NAICS 722)	14,750,553	32,375,578	-17,625,025
Special food services (NAICS 7223)	1,094,735	688,744	405,991
Food service contractors (NAICS 72231)	852,598	646,775	205,824
Caterers (NAICS 72232)	218,464	41,969	176,495
Mobile food services (NAICS 72233)	23,672	0	23,672
Drinking places (alcoholic beverages) (NAICS 7224)	429,220	377,645	51,575
Restaurants and other eating places (NAICS 7225)	13,226,598	31,309,189	-18,082,591
Full-service restaurants (NAICS 722511)	6,485,227	15,457,347	-8,972,120
Limited-service restaurants (NAICS 722513)	5,718,069	15,451,043	-9,732,974
Cafeterias, grill buffets, and buffets (NAICS 722514)	145,809	400,798	-254,989
Snack and non-alcoholic beverage bars (NAICS 722515)	877,493	0	877,493

Figure 3.8 | Opportunity Gap by Retail Store Types: Freeport, Texas | SBDC Net | Claritas LLC

growth.

Retail saturation. Retail Gap Analysis is a tool used to identify discrepancies between the current retail landscape and the potential retail environment for a region. It compares retail sales data with market capacity to pinpoint areas where the market is either underserved or saturated. This analysis helps businesses and city planners understand where gaps exist in the retail market. It enables them to develop strategies to attract new retailers, enhance shopping options, and better meet consumer needs. Freeport’s Gap Analysis indicates

a saturation in the retail market, which aligns with a similar analysis completed in March 202 (Downtown Strategies 2020, 23). Collectively, this analysis suggests that residents are well-served by existing retail options. However, this saturation also points to a limited capacity for downtown to develop additional retail opportunities. To address this, future retailers must focus on expanding into niche markets, such as tourism-related segments, or target new housing and resident populations to capture additional market potential.

Retail leakage. Retail spending and sales tax revenue

	2023 Demand (\$)	2023 Supply (\$)	Opportunity Gap/Surplus (\$)
Totals			
Total retail trade including food and drink (NAICS 44, 45 and 722)	145,680,014	298,094,111	-152,414,097
Total retail trade (NAICS 44 and 45)	130,929,461	265,718,533	-134,789,072
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers			
Motor vehicle and parts dealers (NAICS 441)	33,765,246	58,543,883	-24,778,636
Automobile dealers (NAICS 4411)	29,327,111	41,259,225	-11,932,114
New car dealers (NAICS 44111)	26,112,023	33,879,319	-7,767,296
Used car dealers (NAICS 44112)	3,215,088	7,379,906	-4,164,818
Other motor vehicle dealers (NAICS 4412)	2,193,747	4,559,044	-2,365,297
Recreational vehicle dealers (NAICS 44121)	693,409	1,544,015	-850,607
Motorcycle, boat, and other motor vehicle dealers (NAICS 44122)	1,500,338	3,015,029	-1,514,690
Boat dealers (NAICS 441222)	439,523	1,242,314	-802,790
Motorcycle, ATV, and all other motor vehicle dealers (NAICS 441228)	1,060,815	1,772,715	-711,900
Automotive parts, accessories, and tire stores (NAICS 4413)	2,244,388	12,725,613	-10,481,225
Automotive parts and accessories stores (NAICS 44131)	1,421,179	7,481,956	-6,060,777
Tire dealers (NAICS 44132)	823,209	5,243,657	-4,420,448
Furniture and Home Furnishings Stores			
Furniture and home furnishings stores (NAICS 442)	2,541,533	1,037,881	1,503,652
Furniture stores (NAICS 4421)	1,475,511	601,989	873,523
Home furnishings stores (NAICS 4422)	1,066,022	435,893	630,129
Floor covering stores (NAICS 44221)	514,454	107,538	406,916
Other home furnishings stores (NAICS 44229)	551,568	328,355	223,213
Window treatment stores (NAICS 442291)	26,634	20,951	5,683
All other home furnishings stores (NAICS 442299)	524,934	307,404	217,530
Electronics and Appliance Stores			
Electronics and appliance stores (NAICS 443)	1,995,239	1,512,139	483,100
Household appliance stores (NAICS 443141)	432,709	387,926	44,783
Electronics stores (NAICS 443142)	1,562,529	1,124,213	438,317
Building Material and Garden Equipment and Supplies Dealers			
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers (NAICS 444)	9,284,538	6,273,101	3,011,437
Building material and supplies dealers (NAICS 4441)	8,223,398	6,245,755	1,977,644
Home centers (NAICS 44411)	4,606,998	4,070,362	536,636
Paint and wallpaper stores (NAICS 44412)	312,048	617,107	-305,058
Hardware stores (NAICS 44413)	677,455	500,935	176,520
Other building material dealers (NAICS 44419)	2,626,897	1,057,351	1,569,547
Lawn and garden equipment and supplies stores (NAICS 4442)	1,061,140	27,346	1,033,793
Outdoor power equipment stores (NAICS 44421)	227,749	0	227,749
Nursery, garden center, and farm supply stores (NAICS 44422)	833,390	27,346	806,044
Food and Beverage Stores			
Food and beverage stores (NAICS 445)	18,292,635	50,693,005	-32,400,370
Grocery stores (NAICS 4451)	16,521,214	48,204,150	-31,682,937
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores (NAICS 44511)	15,806,574	47,050,877	-31,244,303
Convenience stores (NAICS 44512)	714,640	1,153,273	-438,633
Specialty food stores (NAICS 4452)	475,801	1,477,364	-1,001,563
Meat markets (NAICS 44521)	144,839	912,605	-767,766
Fish and seafood markets (NAICS 44522)	57,073	295,531	-238,457
Fruit and vegetable markets (NAICS 44523)	100,369	232,334	-131,965
Other specialty food stores (NAICS 44529)	173,520	36,894	136,625
All other specialty food stores (NAICS 445299)	80,691	12,930	67,761
Beer, wine, and liquor stores (NAICS 4453)	1,295,620	1,011,491	284,130
Health and Personal Care Stores			
Health and personal care stores (NAICS 446)	7,741,573	32,085,766	-24,344,193
Pharmacies and drug stores (NAICS 44611)	6,692,234	31,016,469	-24,324,235
Cosmetics, beauty supplies, and perfume stores (NAICS 44612)	468,565	468,480	85
Optical goods stores (NAICS 44613)	155,591	258,720	-103,129
Other health and personal care stores (NAICS 44619)	425,183	342,098	83,085
Food (health) supplement stores (NAICS 446191)	150,108	298,637	-148,530
All other health and personal care stores (NAICS 446199)	275,076	43,461	231,615
Gasoline Stations			
Gasoline stations (NAICS 447)	11,017,869	57,474,427	-46,456,558

Figure 3.9 | Opportunity Gap by Retail Store Types: Freeport, Texas | SBDC Net | Claritas LLC

are often “leaking” to Lake Jackson due to its well-established status as a regional center for shopping and services. This shift is compounded by Freeport’s market challenges, including its remote coastal location, smaller population, and lower median income, which limit its purchasing power and economic appeal. Lake Jackson’s more developed retail infrastructure and a broader range of services attract consumers away from Freeport, exacerbating Freeport’s difficulty in retaining and growing its own retail and service sectors (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 62).

These results are consistent with an informal survey conducted during Vision Session #1, which revealed that residents frequently travel to nearby cities for various shopping and entertainment needs. Specifically, they visit Lake Jackson 3-7 times weekly for dining out, grocery shopping, and work. Houston is frequented 1-5 times a week for activities such as school, dining, shopping, recreation, and festivals. Similarly, Pearland is visited 1-5 times weekly for shopping, dining, cultural events, and festivals. In contrast, residents travel to Galveston only 1-2 times yearly, primarily for festivals and entertainment.

03 Expand | Vision, Goals, and Initiatives

Expand Economics and Development
<p>Vision</p> <p>Develop a vibrant downtown identity that leverages local and experiential retail, water recreation, and ecotourism to fuel economic growth within a thoughtfully designed environment that welcomes residents and tourists.</p> <p>Goals</p> <p>A Support experiential retail and locally owned businesses.</p> <p>B Expand Freeport brand to include water recreation and ecotourism.</p> <p>C Enhance Downtown’s appeal to attract new residents and tourists.</p> <p>D Prioritize design and place-making to boost economic development.</p>

The following Initiatives are specific actions the City can take towards advancing these Vision and Goals:

Initiative: Streamline Business Development with One-Stop Permitting. (A)

One-Stop Permitting can offer significant economic benefits to a downtown district by streamlining the business establishment process. By consolidating various permitting and licensing procedures into a single, efficient system, One-Stop Permitting reduces the administrative burden on entrepreneurs and accelerates the timeline for opening new businesses. This efficiency attracts more businesses to the downtown area, fostering a vibrant commercial environment. Additionally, it encourages investment by providing a predictable and transparent process, reducing uncertainties and costs associated with regulatory compliance. The increased business activity leads to job creation, higher property values, and enhanced tax revenues for the local government.

Initiative: Pursue Pop-Up Retail Events. (A)

Collaborate with property owners of vacant buildings to establish a pop-up season with short-term leases. This allows entrepreneurs to test the market, build a customer base, and evaluate the feasibility of starting a business. Pop-Up Retail Events are effective for multiple reasons:

They are experiential. Pop-up retail events are highly

effective due to their experiential nature. Experiential retail is a strategy that enhances engagement, interest, and traffic in physical retail locations. It provides brands with the opportunity to connect with customers through direct interactions in an environment where positive and memorable experiences are created. These interactions often include sensory, educational, and communal elements that evoke emotional connections, thereby associating the brand with powerful memories.

They are Temporary. The temporary nature of pop-up shops is integral to their model. Temporary opportunities are often seen as scarce, creating a sense of urgency among customers. This urgency drives customers to act quickly to avoid missing out, similar to the effect of limited-time sales. Pop-ups leverage this phenomenon by offering unique, time-sensitive experiences that prompt immediate customer engagement.

They are Cost-Effective. Pop-up shops are generally more affordable compared to traditional retail setups. They avoid long-term lease agreements, do not require extensive customization of spaces, and offer flexibility in location. Additionally, pop-ups often involve custom designs or DIY projects, allowing entrepreneurs and brands to experiment with design, materials, and layout in a cost-effective manner. This flexibility enables value engineering to fit within budget constraints (Downtown Strategies 2020, 65).

Initiative: Encourage local and experiential retail and restaurants. (A)

People enjoy a vibrant main street, but the dated appearance and incomplete tenant mix of many smaller downtowns and car-oriented streets hinder revitalization. Small-to-midsize downtowns present significant opportunities and challenges for urban retail in the coming decade. Up until the 1950s, most Americans shopped, sought services, and found entertainment in downtowns of all sizes. However, the rise of strip malls, indoor malls, and big box stores attracted the majority of customers. Many middle-class households relocated to the suburbs, and suburban malls benefited from coordinated tenant mixes and management those historic downtowns lacked. Consequently, main streets and downtowns lost up to 90 percent of their business during the latter half of the 20th century. With the current trend towards urban living, downtowns have the chance to regain some market share if strategically positioned.

Existing Businesses within or near the Business District.

Often, the best leads are close to home. These may include existing businesses seeking more space or a better location within the business district. Surveys of the district’s business owners, ongoing conversations, and personal contacts of the recruitment team, chamber of commerce, and other economic development professionals can help identify these leads.

Emerging Entrepreneurs. Downtowns and business districts are attractive to independent businesses. Leads may include home-based or garage-based businesses seeking more appropriate space and a convenient location for their customers. Potential leads might also include existing business managers looking to start their new ventures. Commercial lenders, business schools, Small Business Development Center (SBDC) counselors, Main Street program business specialists, the Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE), and other public or private small business professionals should be consulted to identify these leads.

Existing Local or Regional Businesses. Local or regional businesses are often excellent prospects, particularly those with branch stores looking to expand. These operators typically understand the market area well and may already have multiple stores. They are often interested in expansion to improve market penetration. During 2022 stakeholder meetings, several Surfside business owners expressed interest in opening a second location in Freeport (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 39).

These leads can be identified through the team’s knowledge of the business mix in other communities in the region and information from local consumer research. Additionally, realtors, commercial brokers, sales representatives, and suppliers working within the region can be helpful. Sometimes, advertisements in regional business, real estate, and lifestyle periodicals can generate leads.

National Chains. Larger national chains can be approached if local or regional businesses are not interested in expanding. It is essential to be realistic about the types of chains that might be interested in a small community, considering their market, store size, and parking requirements. Leads can be identified through directories and private databases listing chain site selection criteria and contacts. Additionally, leads can come from commercial brokers, trade shows, “deal-making forums,” and conferences offered by the International Council of Shopping Centers. (Downtown Strategies 2020, 58-59).

Initiative: Establish a dedicated Downtown Façade Improvement Grant Program. (A)

Revitalizing a neglected commercial district or residential neighborhood often starts with improvements to a single building or storefront. Simple actions, like removing non-historic materials, repairing damage, or adding a fresh coat of paint to highlight original architectural features, can signal positive change and inspire nearby property owners to make similar upgrades. While this process can happen organically, it can be accelerated through community-driven façade improvement programs.

Currently, Freeport’s EDC offers funding for façade improvements citywide through the Business Improvement Grant Program. However, with the creation of a Downtown Historic District and targeted program for downtown property owners would be more effective. Aligning financial incentives with Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines ensures that improvements respect the district’s architectural heritage.

Participants would receive a one-year grant with up to \$10,000 in reimbursement for project costs. More extensive projects could be funded on a case-by-case basis. No matching funds would be required, but all projects would have to receive a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Freeport Historical Commission.

The new program could be funded by existing TIRZ funds and provide financial incentives like matching grants, loans, tax benefits, or design assistance for properties within the historic district. Technical assistance could also help property owners access federal and state tax credits, especially if the Downtown District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Design assistance is crucial to ensure that modifications align with historic preservation guidelines, enhancing the aesthetic and historic value of downtown (Downtown Strategies 2022, 52).

Initiative: Leverage the Brazosport Small Business Development Center to help local entrepreneurs. (A)

The Brazosport Small Business Development Center (SBDC) offers personalized business consulting, helping owners develop strategic plans, enhance marketing efforts, and manage finances more effectively. The SBDC also facilitates access to funding opportunities, including loans and grants, and conducts classes and webinars on essential skills like digital marketing, customer

service, and business management. By leveraging these services, downtown businesses can boost their competitiveness, drive economic growth, and advance a vibrant commercial environment in Freeport. The Freeport Main Street can act as a portal to these services by directing local entrepreneurs to the Brazosport SBDC or convening regular focus group meetings. (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 18)

Initiative: Maximize existing financial and administrative tools. (A)

As the City of Freeport pursues the revitalization of Downtown, it might consider some of the following financial and administrative policy tools to guide strategic growth:

Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Chapter 311 of the Texas Tax Code allows local governments to create TIF Districts to fund infrastructural improvements in designated areas, such as historic downtowns. The City of Freeport could create a Downtown TIF District to promote existing businesses and attract new ones to the area. In this case, the tax revenues generated by improvements in the district could be used to cover the cost of infrastructure improvements and other revitalization projects in the district.

TIRZ. A Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) is a designated area where property tax revenue increases resulting from new development are reinvested back into the zone to finance public improvements. Benefits of a TIRZ include stimulating economic growth, revitalizing blighted areas, and funding infrastructure projects without raising taxes. Operations involve setting a base tax value, and any future increases in property tax revenue (the increment) are allocated to the TIRZ fund.

These funds are used for approved projects such as roads, parks, and utilities, encouraging further development and enhancing the overall value and attractiveness of the area. The City of Freeport established a TIRZ in 2019 (please see Sustain | Infrastructure and Ecology for further discussion).

Municipal Management District (MMD). Local Government Code Chapter 375 allows for the creation of MMDs to coordinate development in areas like historic downtown districts. MMDs can collect property taxes, special assessments, and impact fees to develop and maintain facilities, infrastructure, services, commerce, housing, or tourism. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) must approve any MMD.

Public Improvement District (PID). Local Government Code Chapter 372 permits municipalities and counties to create PIDs to fund infrastructure and promote economic development. The City of Freeport can establish a PID to promote the redevelopment of Downtown. A PID can be initiated by either a city council or downtown property owners.

Clearly defined districts like historic downtowns are especially good targets for infrastructure improvements. Successful PIDs require a concise and realistic action plan as well as an assessment methodology that is agreeable to both property and business owners in the district.

Financial Incentives. Freeport can offer various incentives to attract new businesses to Downtown, such as special tax rebates, development fee reductions, expedited permitting, and targeted tax abatements for specific business types.

Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT). Determine the amount of HOT collected in Freeport and petition to receive a portion for Main Street initiatives. HOT funds must directly promote tourism and the local hotel industry (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 63). Allowable expenditures include funding historic preservation programs, installing signage for tourists, and promoting the arts (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 11).

Event Sponsorship. Seek additional sponsors for special events to reallocate city-allocated funds to other programming (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 11).

Texas Downtown Association's Anice Read Fund. Apply for grants to fund projects such as benches, lighting, signage, and other improvements (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 11).

Texas Parks & Wildlife Grants. Explore larger matching grants offered by Texas Parks & Wildlife for potential funding (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 11).

National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program encourages private sector investment in rehabilitating and re-using historic buildings. For more information, visit <https://www.nps.gov/tps/tax-incentives.htm> (Downtown Strategies 2020, 68).

Boost property tax base. Increase tax base by raising residential values, retail sales, industrial revenue, and hotel occupancy taxes to support investments that improve residents' quality of life.

Initiative: Establish and promote a Shop Local Campaign. (A)

During the public vision sessions, residents expressed concerns about the lack of high-quality shopping options downtown. While downtown Freeport currently doesn't have many businesses, a future Shop Local Campaign could significantly help fledgling businesses gain momentum. A successful campaign would include an easily accessible list of locally-owned businesses, economic incentives for consumers (such as discounts, coupons, and gifts), and a list of benefits for participants. Although national affiliates like citidirect.info run similar programs, a more effective and localized program could be initiated by the Freeport Economic Development Corporation or the Chamber of Commerce, which already has a significant membership directory.

Initiative: Rebrand Downtown to emphasize water-based recreation. (B)

Freeport, historically known for its industrial ties to Freeport Sulfur Company, Dow Chemical, and Port Freeport, has an opportunity to expand this brand and become more visitor-friendly. The branding process helps a community define how it sees and represents itself to the world. Branding benefits city leaders and residents, helping to clarify the type of place their community already is or aims to become and establishing policy priorities to help achieve that vision.

For an urban brand to succeed, it must distinguish a city from its neighbors while projecting a positive image to attract tourists and new residents. This is also true when branding a downtown district.

When developing a brand for the City of Freeport and its Downtown, city leaders must consider the type of experience that people will have there. What is it like to visit Freeport? An essential element of the Freeport experience is water-based recreation. To strengthen this identity, Freeport should actively promote its boating, beach, and fishing attractions, targeting visitors from the Houston area and beyond.

Boating. Boating is a major draw for Freeport. The Marina on the Old Brazos River offers convenient boat storage just minutes from the Gulf of Mexico, making it ideal for offshore fishing, water skiing, and sailing (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 76). The Texas Main Street Program report recommends enhancing downtown Freeport's maritime identity with creative additions. One idea is to



Figure 3.10 | Boating is a major draw in the area



Figure 3.11 | Birdwatching is a major draw in the area | R. Woan CC 2.0



Figure 3.12 | Bryan Beach is a major draw in the area

install a sign similar to those found on Nantucket Island, featuring the names of common destinations for ships leaving the port. Such a sign could quickly become popular on Instagram, organically boosting Freeport's social media presence. A modern approach could include a public installation of a free online VesselFinder app (or a similar tool) that allows visitors to track ships entering and

leaving the port, further highlighting Freeport’s connection to maritime activities (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 13-14).

Beaches. Freeport’s beaches are another key asset. The city has three miles of natural, well-maintained shoreline perfect for camping, cookouts, jet skiing, windsurfing, and shore fishing. Bryan Beach is a quiet, undeveloped spot ideal for fishing, birdwatching, and beachcombing. Nearby Quintana Beach, located on Quintana Island, offers pavilions, picnic areas, and a fishing pier, making it popular for family outings. The EDC estimates that 100,000 visit these two beaches each summer (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 39). Neighboring Surfside Beach, with its restaurants, shops, and vacation rentals, is a favorite for swimming, surfing, and beach volleyball.

Fishing. Fishing is a central activity in Freeport, attracting locals and visitors with diverse options. Thanks to the area’s abundant fish species, anglers can enjoy pier fishing along the Old Brazos River or venture offshore for deep-sea catches. Freeport also celebrates its fishing heritage by hosting several annual tournaments for children and adults, fostering community spirit and enhancing the city’s reputation as a top fishing destination (Kendig Keast Collaborative, 76). Additionally, there are at least seven fishing charters in the area (Flower Garden).

To successfully rebrand Freeport, the city should highlight its water-based assets by enhancing visibility and access to key locations such as the Old Brazos River, Bryan Beach, Quintana Beach, and the Gulf of Mexico. The Economic Development Corporation’s Boardwalk plan aligns well with these efforts. Additionally, enhancing connectivity to Bryan Beach through better signage and reducing conflicts between beachgoers and freight traffic will be essential to strengthening and sustaining Freeport’s new image.

Initiative: Upgrade user experience at Bryan Beach. (B)

The City of Freeport should provide various public facilities at Bryan Beach to create a safe, comfortable, and enjoyable experience for visitors. As new features are added, it’s vital to maintain high design standards to preserve the beach’s visual appeal. Public facilities to consider include the following:

- **Clean and Accessible Bathrooms.** Provide clean, well-maintained restrooms with accessibility features for individuals with disabilities, including ramps, wide stalls, and handrails. Include family or unisex restrooms for convenience, especially for visitors with young



Figure 3.13 | The user experience at Bryan Beach

- children or caregivers.
- **Outdoor Showers.** Install outdoor showers for rinsing off sand and saltwater, ideally near beach exits and restrooms.
- **Changing Rooms.** Provide designated changing rooms or changing stalls for privacy.
- **Picnic and Seating Areas.** Provide picnic tables and shaded shelters for families and groups to gather and eat comfortably. Place benches along walkways and in shaded areas for resting and enjoying the view.
- **Shade Structures.** Install permanent shade structures or rentable umbrellas to provide relief from the sun.
- **Umbrella Rentals.** Consider offering umbrella and beach chair rentals for convenience.
- **Trash and Recycling Bins.** Place ample trash bins throughout the beach area, especially near entrances, restrooms, and high-traffic zones. Include recycling bins for plastic bottles, cans, and other recyclables to promote environmental responsibility.
- **Safety Signage.** Include clear signage about swimming conditions, beach rules, and safety information, such as rip current warnings.
- **Parking Area and Access.** Offer sufficient parking with spaces for cars, bikes, and accessible parking for visitors with disabilities. Ensure accessible pathways and ramps that connect parking areas to the beach, accommodating strollers and wheelchairs.

These facilities would enhance the user experience and help maintain a clean, safe, and welcoming environment for everyone visiting the public beach.

Initiative: Rebrand Downtown to emphasize ecotourism. (B)

So much of the reason people live in and visit the Gulf Coast involves warm weather, lush landscapes, birds, and fish. The economic opportunity here is difficult to overstate: people in the United States spend over \$800 billion on outdoor recreation yearly (Withrow 2019). The market for birdwatching has only grown during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a total economic benefit of 41 billion dollars nationally, with 20 million Americans taking trips to go birdwatching (Fortin 2020; Withrow 2019).

Birdwatching. Freeport enjoys proximity to several excellent bird-watching areas, thanks to the region’s rich biodiversity and strategic location along migratory routes. These areas are renowned for their accessibility and the diverse range of bird species observable throughout the year, attracting casual birders and dedicated ornithologists:

- **Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge.** This refuge is located just north of Freeport and part of the larger Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. It covers over 45,000 acres of coastal prairies, marshes, and woodlands, making it ideal for viewing waterfowl, shorebirds, and a variety of migratory songbirds (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge”).
- **Quintana Neotropical Bird Sanctuary.** Situated on Quintana Island, just south of Freeport, this sanctuary is a prime location for observing migratory birds during the spring and fall. It features birding trails, viewing platforms, and areas where you can spot warblers, tanagers, and other species (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department).
- **San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.** Located southwest of Freeport, this refuge offers diverse habitats, including freshwater marshes, coastal prairies, and hardwood forests. It’s an excellent spot for viewing wintering waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, “San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge”).

Marine Life. The Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, located about 100 miles off the coast of Freeport, Texas, holds significant potential as an ecotourism destination. Renowned for its vibrant coral reefs and diverse marine life, including species like manta rays and whale sharks, the sanctuary offers unique opportunities for diving, snorkeling, and marine

education. Its focus on conservation aligns well with growing ecotourism trends, attracting visitors interested in sustainable, nature-based experiences. Although offshore, Freeport could serve as a gateway for eco-tours, enhancing the region’s appeal as a hub for marine tourism while supporting conservation efforts (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration).

Additional ecotourism programming. In addition to its natural attractions, the region around Freeport offers various ecotourism events at nearby parks, including Brazos Bend State Park and Galveston Island State Park, both located within a 30-mile radius. These parks host a range of activities such as guided nature walks, birding tours, stargazing nights, and wildlife photography workshops, all designed to enhance visitors’ connection with nature and promote environmental stewardship. These programs provide educational and recreational opportunities for visitors of all ages, making them a perfect complement to Freeport’s ecotourism offerings. For detailed event schedules and more information, visit the Texas Parks and Wildlife calendar at <https://tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/near-city/houston-events>.

Freeport can further embed ecotourism into the city’s brand by highlighting local ecologies and bird habitats within the downtown experience. By connecting to the San Bernard Loop, incorporating habitat gardens, tree plantings, native vegetation, and passive stormwater detention along downtown streets, Freeport can create a more immersive and environmentally responsible public realm. These sustainable landscape strategies will foreground the natural environment, support healthy ecosystems, and celebrate the city’s birdlife, ultimately enriching Freeport’s unique sense of place and identity.

Initiative: Market the San Bernard Loop as an ecotourist destination. (B)

The San Bernard Loop, part of the Upper Texas Coast – Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail managed by Texas Parks and Wildlife, passes through downtown Freeport along the Old Brazos River. Freeport can promote this loop, which features four key stops described below, as an ecotourist attraction. Additionally, marketing efforts can extend to the adjacent Matagorda/Rio Colorado Loop, Brazoria Loop, Coastal Plains Loop, and Bluewater Loop to enhance the region’s appeal to ecotourists. For more information, see <https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wildlife/wildlife-trails/utc/san-bernard-loop>.

San Bernard NWR. The 27,414-acre refuge in Brazoria and



Figure 3.14 | Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail | Linda Cobb CC 2.0

Matagorda counties, 12 miles west of Freeport, features coastal prairie, marshes, lakes, and woodlands. Key attractions include the 3-mile Moccasin Pond auto loop and Scissor-tail Trail, ideal for spotting waterfowl, herons, Sprague’s Pipits, and various sparrows. The Scissor-tail Trail woods host Ash-throated Flycatchers in winter. The Bobcat Woods Trail offers elevated views of Cocklebur Slough, attracting spring and fall migrants, Brown Creepers, and Barred Owls.

Bryan Beach. This undeveloped city beach boasts natural beauty, with flocks of waterbirds populating the sand flats at the river’s mouth. American Avocets, Piping, and Snowy Plovers frequent the area, with Merlins perched on driftwood. The unspoiled condition of Bryan Beach enhances its appeal, offering visitors a chance to observe a variety of bird species in a pristine setting.

Quintana Beach County Park. Migrant songbirds can be found among the salt cedars, while grassy fields host American Pipits and occasional Upland Sandpipers. The Quintana Jetty, accessed via Burnet St. and 2nd St., is a prime spot for observing large flocks of gulls and terns, including rare species. The jetty offers winter views of rare gulls and summer sightings of Magnificent Frigatebirds. Nearby, the pier on 8th St. provides another vantage point for Gulf views, leading to Bryan Beach and the Justin Hurst WMA.

Justin Hurst Wildlife Management Area. This 15,612-acre area features coastal prairie and marshes, with nature trails for public exploration. The Live Oak Loop (0.5-mile improved trail) and Jones Creek Trail (2.5-mile unimproved trail) offer access to oak/hackberry motte and grasslands. The Jones Creek Trail may flood, requiring rubber boots in wet times.

Initiative: Develop a phased and seasonal approach to tourism. (C)

Tourists visiting the Texas Gulf Coast are attracted to the region’s beaches, nature reserves, historic sites, and vibrant coastal cities. Popular destinations include Galveston, Corpus Christi, South Padre Island, Port Aransas, and smaller locales like Freeport, Rockport, and Matagorda. The economic impact of tourism in this region is substantial. In 2022, Galveston welcomed 8.1 million visitors, resulting in \$1.2 billion in tourist spending and \$228.5 million in tax revenue, supporting over 11,800 jobs (Visit Galveston). Similarly, Corpus Christi’s tourism industry generated \$98.6 million in tax revenues in 2021, emphasizing its importance among Texas coastal destinations (Visit Corpus Christi). Across the Gulf Coast region, travelers spent approximately \$25.3 billion in 2023, directly supporting 168,700 jobs and contributing \$2.3 billion in state and local taxes (Travel Texas).

These figures underscore the critical role tourism plays in driving economic growth and supporting Gulf Coast communities like Freeport. Tourism’s benefits extend across multiple scales, including direct spending, job creation, and tax revenue. The multiplier effect further enhances its impact as tourism spending circulates within the local economy, benefiting a wide range of businesses and services.

A Phased Approach to Tourism. To capitalize on this potential, Freeport should adopt a phased approach targeting specific populations (Texas Historical Commission 2022, 15):

- *Old Brazos River and visitors to Bryan Beach.* The initial focus should be on promoting businesses that meet the needs of two primary groups: local residents south of the Old Brazos River and visitors to Bryan Beach. Downtown Freeport can attract these groups by fostering small business development that caters to their needs, such as providing snacks, toys, sunscreen, and dining options.
- *Marina.* Next, Freeport can focus on Marina users,

A Seasonal Approach to Tourism		
Season	Population	Activities
Winter	Winter Texans	Ecotourism
Summer	Beach users	Swimming
Year-Round	Marina users	Boating, fishing

initially day-trippers, and aim for longer stays with the eventual addition of hotel accommodations. The Freeport Marina is primarily used by boaters and anglers, both locals and tourists. It caters to a wide range of marina users, including recreational boaters, sport fishermen, and visitors seeking to explore the Texas Gulf Coast’s waterways.

- *Out-of-town tourists.* Finally, once a solid local and regional presence is established, Freeport can expand its marketing efforts to attract out-of-town tourists, focusing on niche markets such as eco-tourism, fishing, and cultural heritage tourism. One important tourist market in Freeport involves Winter Texans, who visit from the northern United States and Canada. These visitors, often retirees, stay for extended periods and contribute to the local economy through spending on lodging, dining, and leisure activities. Nearby Galveston offers a range of activities and exclusive events tailored for Winter Texans, including discounted stays at RV parks, beachfront vacation rentals, and various cultural and outdoor experiences. While many visitors come for birdwatching and nature tourism, they also need places to shop and eat. Downtown Freeport could become a day trip or longer-term destination for these visitors.

A Seasonal Approach to Tourism. A seasonal tourism strategy for Freeport can leverage different visitor groups year-round, ensuring continuous economic activity. Winter Texans, summer beachgoers, and year-round marina users each have distinct seasonal preferences that complement one another. By gradually enhancing its reputation as a diverse, year-round destination along the Texas Gulf Coast, Freeport can compete with larger coastal cities while retaining its local character. This approach fosters steady, sustainable growth, benefiting residents and visitors, and contributes to long-term economic vitality for the city.

Initiative: Maximize the resources and impact of the Texas Main Street Program (TMSP). (C)

Freeport is fortunate to belong to the TMSP, a network of 88 local communities, including Laredo, Rio Grande City, Harlingen, Brownsville, and Kingsville. The TMSP’s mission is to provide technical expertise, resources, and support to Texas Main Street communities, following the National Main Street Four Point Approach® of organization, economic vitality, design, and promotion. The TMSP aims to preserve historic resources to enhance a community’s economic, social, and cultural vitality. This approach focuses on Organization, Promotion, Design, and

Economic Vitality to drive Downtown Revitalization (Texas Historical Commission 2024, “Current Participants”). These efforts are described in more detail in the chapter Leverage | Historic Preservation and Construction.

Initiative: Provide charging stations and Public Wifi throughout Downtown. (C)

Implementing free charging stations and WiFi is an excellent method to draw people to your community’s public areas. WiFi access supports social interaction during solitary activities, aids communities during emergencies, promotes tourism throughout the town, and allows users to easily research Main Street destinations and access online services at any time (Downtown Strategies 2020, 48).

Initiative: Leverage design and place-making to drive economic growth. (D)

Design and place-making are crucial for the economic development of Freeport’s downtown district. Thoughtful design enhances the visual appeal and functionality of public spaces, making them attractive to residents, businesses, and tourists. City leaders should view decisions about signage, streetscapes, parks, and buildings through a design lens to create a welcoming environment and a strong sense of place. Although this may require higher upfront design fees, it will yield long-term benefits through improved experiences, higher foot traffic, and increased local spending.

Place-making goes beyond aesthetics to create vibrant,



Figure 3.15 | Small acts of place-making | Mich. Municipal League CC 2.0

inclusive spaces that foster community engagement and local identity. Incorporating elements that reflect the district’s unique culture and history strengthens community pride and cohesion. These strategies not only improve quality of life but also drive economic growth. Well-designed, well-used public spaces increase property values, stimulate investment, attract visitors, support local businesses, generate tax revenue, and create jobs.

Initiative: Implement a municipal wayfinding system. (D)

Wayfinding in downtown areas is essential for more than just basic navigation. Elements such as monuments, directional systems, directories, and interpretive and regulatory signs enhance our interactions with downtown environments. In Freeport, wayfinding signage should be strategically placed to guide visitors to and from parks, beaches, boating opportunities, the Downtown Historic District, and other community attractions and amenities. Critical routes for signage include FM 1495, State Highway 288, W. 2nd St., and N Velasco Blvd. Even in the age of smartphones and GPS, physical wayfinding elements and systems bolster brand identity by improving the legibility, navigation, understanding, and accessibility of the environment.

Effective wayfinding signage systems:

- Reinforce an area’s unique history, architecture, and landmarks



Figure 3.16 | Effective wayfinding map | Erica Fischer CC 2.0



Figure 3.17 | Trucks and construction mark the drive to Bryan Beach

- Boost the visibility and attractiveness of less prominent districts and destinations
- Assist the public in locating parking, improve traffic flow, and ease the transition between car, pedestrian, and transit use
- Reduce visual clutter with clear, consolidated, and on-brand information and identity (Downtown Strategies 2020, 57)

Initiative: Work with TXDOT to improve the drive from downtown to Bryan Beach. (D)

As Freeport actively expands its brand by promoting its connection to water-based recreation, it will be critical to ease and maximize access to Bryan Beach, a prime area for swimming, fishing, birdwatching, and beachcombing. Currently, the three-mile drive along FM 1495 (Pine St.) from downtown Freeport to Bryan Beach poses significant challenges for beach-goers who must navigate heavy truck traffic heading to Port Freeport. The stretch of road between E. 8th St. and Old Quintana Rd is particularly difficult, with frequent road construction, overhead power lines, truck congestion, and limited signage making the route feel unwelcoming for residents and tourists.

Although FM 1495 is managed by TxDOT and is a vital route for port traffic, the City should work closely with TxDOT to address these conflicts and enhance the overall user experience. Here are some potential remediation strategies:

- Green Buffers. Use green buffers, such as planted medians or bioswales, to visually separate industrial areas from road and soften the visual impact of industrial buildings.
- Sound Barriers and Fencing. Install attractive sound barriers or artistic fencing to shield drivers, bikers, and

- pedestrians from noise and the sight of heavy trucks.
- Improved Lighting. Install adequate lighting to make the area safer and more inviting at night for both drivers and pedestrians.
- Wayfinding Signage. Add clear, visually appealing wayfinding signs to help guide both pedestrians and drivers, making the area feel more organized and accessible.
- Bike Lanes. Add dedicated bike lanes so people can bike to the beach, separated from both traffic and pedestrian paths where possible.
- Facade Improvements. Work with industrial property owners to enhance building facades with murals, greenery, or improved lighting.
- Public Art. Incorporate public art installations that reflect the area’s character or history, making the environment more engaging.
- Organized Truck Parking. Designate specific zones for truck parking and loading to reduce interference with pedestrian and regular vehicle traffic.
- Stormwater Management. Integrate green infrastructure, such as rain gardens and permeable pavements, to manage stormwater, reduce runoff, and add greenery.
- Pollution Mitigation. Use vegetation barriers or innovative materials that help reduce noise and air pollution from trucks.

Implementing these strategies will help transform a utilitarian industrial road into a more pleasant, safe, and functional space for residents and beach users, enhancing the overall urban environment.

Initiative: Initiate Art in Public Places Program. (D)

Cities gain cultural, social, and economic value through public art. This form of art is a defining element of our public history and evolving culture, reflecting and revealing our society. It adds significance to our cities and distinctiveness to our communities. Public art humanizes the built environment and revitalizes public spaces, creating connections between past, present, and future, as well as across disciplines and ideas. Public art is accessible to everyone.

Cultural Value and Community Identity. American cities and towns aim to be places where people want to live and visit. Having a unique community identity, particularly in terms of the visual appearance of our towns, is increasingly essential in a world where places often look alike. Communities with vibrant public art expressions counteract this trend of uniformity, providing a stronger



Figure 3.18 | Small acts of place-making | Jeremy Bolwell CC 2.0

sense of place and identity. Memorable places are often associated with their iconic landmarks, such as the St. Louis Arch, the totem poles of Vancouver, or the Easter Island heads. These works, created by imaginative individuals, capture the essence of their cultural context. Without public art, our human identities would be diminished.

Social Value and Placemaking. Public art stimulates imagination and encourages deeper engagement with the environment. It fosters learning and contemplation about art, society, our interconnected lives, and the broader social sphere. Public art’s unique accessibility allows people to experience it as part of their daily routines, outside traditional venues like museums or cultural institutions (Downtown Strategies 2020, 54).



Figure 3.19 | Public Art adds character to Downtown Freeport

04 Sustain | Infrastructure and Ecology

04 Sustain | Opportunities and Constraints

The following chapter highlights essential opportunities and constraints related to civil infrastructure and ecology, focusing on critical areas where the city can invest to modernize infrastructure, such as stormwater management, utilities, and street infrastructure. These improvements not only support downtown life but also have the potential to attract private investment. Additionally, the chapter emphasizes the importance of enhancing ecological performance through sustainable practices like improving water management, increasing shade, and reducing the urban heat island effect, all of which will contribute to a more resilient and environmentally friendly downtown.

Opportunities

Historic street grid and building stock. Downtown Freeport benefits from a robust infrastructural framework that provides a strong foundation for revitalization efforts. The city's finely-grained, intact historic street grid is a significant asset, promoting walkability with its well-scaled streets and sidewalks. This walkable layout encourages foot traffic, which is crucial for supporting the expansion of local businesses and the creation of a vibrant downtown atmosphere. This street grid also provides ample parallel and angled street parking, making downtown convenient for locals and visitors who drive, further supporting future economic activity.

Freeport's remaining stock of historic buildings adds a unique sense of character and charm, setting it apart from neighboring towns that lack a similar historic urban fabric. These downtown buildings offer opportunities for adaptive reuse, where historic structures can be transformed into modern shops, restaurants, or cultural spaces while retaining their architectural heritage. This preservation of historical elements not only enhances the downtown's aesthetic appeal but also promotes heritage tourism, attracting visitors who appreciate historic districts. Overall, Freeport's well-maintained street grid and rich building stock can form the backbone of a revitalized downtown, providing both cultural value and an economic foundation for future development.

Park Ave. and Memorial Park. Memorial Park, flanked by E. Park Ave. and W. Park Ave., is an organizing central axis, connecting the downtown core with the Freeport Marina and the Old Brazos River. The park offers a significant public space downtown and a beautiful venue for public events. It features established trees, a fountain, and a splash pad that attracts families and enhances the downtown experience. With these assets in place, Freeport is well-positioned for revitalization, blending

historical charm with practical infrastructure. Investing in further development will allow the city to maximize these strengths and create a vibrant, economically thriving downtown.

Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) Project & Financing Plan. This plan aims to revitalize downtown by supporting public infrastructure investments such as a renovation of Memorial Park, streetscape enhancements, a pedestrian boardwalk, and infill development. Some of these investments can be supported with funds from Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) #1. Established in December 2019, TIRZ #1 spans 560 acres, including historic downtown Freeport, the Marina, and the Old Brazos River's southern bank. Over its 30-year duration, TIRZ funding will support \$21.15 million in public improvements, including \$10 million for infrastructure, \$100,000 for parks, and \$750,000 for economic development.

Constraints

Aging downtown infrastructure. Aging infrastructure in the downtown area poses a significant challenge to the area's functionality and future appeal. While downtown sidewalks, curbs, and streets are currently in passable condition, they show signs of wear and will require upgrades soon. Downtown alleys, most of which are unpaved, are in particularly poor condition, hindering accessibility. Additionally, these unpaved alleys contribute to drainage problems during heavy rain, worsening localized flooding. Addressing these infrastructure issues is essential for improving accessibility, reducing flood risks, and enhancing the overall appeal of the downtown area.

The City has completed a Pavement Condition Assessment, fulfilling a recommendation in the 2019 Freeport Strategic Community Plan. The City should continue to assess and repair pavement defects, failures, and deteriorating sidewalks (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 50). This plan provides schematic guidance for streetscape improvements in the downtown area. For roads outside the City's jurisdiction, coordination with entities such as Brazoria County or TxDOT will be required.

Vision Session #1 participants additionally voiced concerns about unreliable trash pick-up and poor lighting. Unreliable trash service can lead to waste buildup and unsanitary conditions in these alleys. Poor lighting further compounds safety and aesthetic concerns, making the area less inviting for pedestrians and businesses after dark. If left unaddressed, these infrastructure issues could deter new businesses, reduce property values,

and negatively impact the overall economic vitality of downtown Freeport. This plan proposes multiple initiatives to upgrade these critical infrastructural systems, essential for promoting long-term development and creating a vibrant downtown environment.

Downtown Flooding. Fortunately, the Freeport Hurricane Flood Protection Project (HFPP) effectively shields downtown from catastrophic flooding. The HFPP includes approximately 43 miles of levees and wave barriers, one vertical lift gate, eight pump stations, and various drainage structures and gates. This system has been crucial in mitigating flooding risks caused by coastal storms. Currently under evaluation for repairs and upgrades, the recommended improvements include raising twelve miles of levees, constructing six miles of floodwall, and installing navigable gates in the Dow Barge Canal to limit storm surge (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).

Despite this robust protection from the existential threat of flooding, small-scale, localized issues persist. Streets and alleys in the downtown area regularly pool with water, especially during heavy rainfalls. This situation has multiple adverse impacts:

- **Damage to Infrastructure and Property.** Flooding damages streets, sidewalks, buildings, and utilities, leading to costly repairs and disrupting the flow of traffic and commerce.
- **Health and Safety Hazards.** Standing water can create



Figure 4.1 | Unpaved alleys create a maintenance issue downtown



Figure 4.2 | Localized flooding on downtown streets

- hazardous conditions for pedestrians and contribute to the growth of mold, mildew, and other pathogens.
- **Increased Maintenance Costs.** Frequent flooding can degrade public infrastructure, requiring more frequent repairs and maintenance, straining the municipal budget.
- **Decreased Property Values.** Repeated flooding can reduce property values as areas prone to water damage become less attractive to businesses, investors, and residents.
- **Drainage System Overload.** Localized flooding can overwhelm drainage systems, leading to backups, further exacerbating flooding and water damage.

To address localized flooding, this plan proposes site-specific strategies such as stormwater detention, biofiltration, permeable pavements, and rain gardens that enhance water absorption. It also reinforces administrative recommendations from the 2019 Freeport Strategic Community Plan. These localized solutions are critical to preventing flooding in neighborhoods and streets and complement the Army Corps' broader coastal flood control efforts.

04 Sustain | Vision, Goals, and Initiatives

Sustain Infrastructure and Ecology
Vision Downtown will provide a pedestrian-friendly environment that supports mixed-use development, reestablishes Park Ave. and Memorial Park as a civic spine, leverages public infrastructure to attract private investment, and enhances environmental performance by highlighting local ecosystems.
Goals A Develop pedestrian-friendly, walkable infrastructure that encourages mixed-use programming. B Reestablish Park Ave., Memorial Park as the north-south civic spine for Downtown. C Invest public funds in downtown infrastructure to attract private development. D Leverage public infrastructure to improve environmental performance and highlight local ecosystems.

The following Initiatives are specific actions the City can take towards advancing these Vision and Goals:

Initiative: Implement a wayfinding system within the historic downtown. (A)

Wayfinding is an indispensable component of downtown infrastructure, providing three primary benefits: navigation, place-making, and economic vitality.

Navigation. Wayfinding simplifies navigation for the public, making it easier for visitors to explore Freeport. Clear and strategically placed signage efficiently guides people to their destinations. At the downtown scale, the wayfinding system should help visitors navigate between key attractions such as the Marina, the proposed Boardwalk, and Memorial Park while highlighting significant destinations like the Freeport Historical Museum.

This system should also operate at the municipal scale, creating visual portals on downtown’s eastern, southern, and western edges. These portals can be street signage or banners. The wayfinding system would also facilitate movement between downtown and Bryan Beach along Pine St.

Place-making. Effective wayfinding fosters a sense of place, creating a welcoming environment that gives

visitors the impression of being in a unique, well-defined area. This sense of identity encourages exploration and enhances the overall visitor experience.

Economic Vitality. Wayfinding supports local businesses by attracting and retaining visitors. Increased foot traffic and exploration boost economic activity, benefiting shops, restaurants, and other local enterprises.

To fully capitalize on these benefits and transform downtown Freeport into a vibrant, easily navigable space, the City of Freeport should hire an environmental or urban design firm to design and install a system of unique signage, kiosks, and seasonal or event banners. Leading firms often employ architects, graphic designers, urban planners, and environmental psychologists to ensure the wayfinding system is functional and aesthetically pleasing. The goal is to enhance the visual appeal of downtown and strengthen Freeport’s brand identity (see Texas Historical Commission 2022, 22).

Initiative: Pursue a Complete Streets Program downtown. (A)

For Freeport to truly enhance the downtown experience, the City must embark on a comprehensive streetscape improvement program. Currently, Downtown Freeport enjoys intact streets and sidewalks, though the overall level of maintenance remains uneven. The following initiatives focus on improving the primary north-south thoroughfare, Park Ave., and the three main east-west thoroughfares: 2nd St., Broad St., and 4th St. These improvements will include the addition of shade trees, lighting, seating, wayfinding, parklets, curb extensions, and stormwater detention and infiltration.

Complete Streets maximize accessibility, mobility, safety, and connectivity for people of all ages and abilities. They recognize that roadways are for pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, and transit users and aim to reduce motor vehicle-related crashes while improving pedestrian and bicyclist safety (Reynolds et al., 2009). A Complete Streets network incorporates a wide range of elements, including sidewalks, bicycle lanes, bus lanes, public transportation stops, crossing opportunities, median islands, accessible pedestrian signals, curb extensions, modified vehicle travel lanes, and streetscape and landscape treatments (U.S. Department of Transportation, “Complete Streets”).

Benefits of Complete Streets. Implementing a Complete Streets program in Freeport will yield numerous benefits, including enhanced safety for pedestrians and cyclists,

increased aesthetic appeal for residents and tourists, a stronger community identity, promotion of active lifestyles, and improved access to local businesses. The program’s ambition and scope must align with the community’s values and available resources. Freeport should hire a firm specializing in public realm infrastructure to ensure success, typically led by an architect, landscape architect, or urban designer with a consulting civil engineer. The City of Freeport should use this opportunity to upgrade sanitary, sewer, and additional underground utilities downtown.

To ensure a cohesive, inviting, and easily navigable downtown, the Complete Streets package should establish baseline design standards for the following user groups:

Automobiles. In Freeport, as in most communities, the design standards for streets primarily cater to the functional needs of automobiles. However, the best streets ensure safe passage for users of all modes and abilities. Automobiles, being the dominant mode of transportation, often crowd out the needs of alternative transportation modes and pose significant dangers to pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit users. This plan recommends several strategies to enhance street effectiveness for all users, including reducing the number of driving lanes, overall street widths, and speed limits along downtown streets (Washington State DOT 2011, 15).

Pedestrians. Sidewalks are a crucial component of Freeport’s downtown pedestrian system, providing access for tourists and shoppers to businesses, residents to their homes, families to Memorial Park, and everyone to the Old Brazos River. While largely continuous, the condition of the downtown sidewalks is uneven. This plan establishes schematic sidewalk design standards along the primary north-south and east-west downtown streets, recommending pedestrian-friendly strategies such as shade trees, curb bulb-outs, reduced speed limits, accessible crosswalks, and buffer spaces between sidewalks and streets (Washington State DOT 2011, 9). The City can maximize pedestrian mobility and connectivity by applying these design standards in all new street construction and retrofits, as permitted by right-of-way widths.

Bicyclists. Freeport’s compact size, warm weather, and flat topography make it an excellent candidate for cycling. This Plan prioritizes design standards for downtown streets, which are relatively narrow and do not easily accommodate dedicated bike lanes. However, in the City’s next comprehensive plan, Freeport should focus

on adding one- and two-way bike lanes where possible on arterial and collector streets. The City should also incorporate support infrastructure such as bike racks, wayfinding signage, and a bike share program. Initial targets for bike share infrastructure should include schools and parks.

Transit-users. Effective public transit systems provide numerous community benefits, such as reducing automobile accidents, cutting vehicle emissions, improving public health, and expanding accessibility. The Gulf Coast Transit District (GCTD) currently operates demand-response service in rural Brazoria and Galveston Counties, fixed-route service in Southern Brazoria County, and ADA complementary paratransit service within the city limits of Lake Jackson, Angleton, Freeport, and Clute (Gulf Coast Transit District 2024).

Due to the limited transit options in Freeport, it is recommended that the City collaborates with GCTD to expand the number of routes along major roads, increase the directness of routes to key destinations (for example, employment, medical care, and education), and extend service hours into the evening. As the transit network grows, the City should integrate transit access into the design of streets, provide buffered and shaded waiting areas, maintain crosswalks near transit stops, equip transit stops with bicycle racks, explore bicycle on buses options, and consider park-and-ride facilities to encourage transit use and carpooling (Washington State DOT 2011, 13; see also Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 38).

Initiative: Implement a Complete Streets and Green Streets Toolkit. (A)

The following toolkit outlines how adopting a Complete Streets and Green Streets approach would guide the redesign of Park Ave., 2nd St., Broad St., and 4th St. in downtown Freeport.

Park Ave.

Location. Park Ave. between 2nd St. and 4th St.
Primary Function. While Park Ave. is currently underutilized, it has the potential to function as a “main street,” attracting residents and tourists with a diverse mix of activities. Since Park Ave. does not accommodate direct “through” traffic, it can accommodate medium-vehicle capacity and slow speed while providing access to adjacent commercial programs. It must also prioritize pedestrian safety and experience. Park Ave.’s future

success will emerge from its character and ability to elevate the user experience of Downtown.

Strategies.

- Maintain angled parking.
- Add biofiltration strips between the sidewalk and the street.
- Replace existing palm trees with shade trees to maximize pedestrian comfort. Do this on the sidewalk side only, leaving the palm trees in Memorial Park unaltered.
- Add curb bulb-outs and rain gardens at intersections to slow traffic and detain stormwater.
- Maximize pedestrian experience with generous sidewalks, seating, shade trees, short crosswalks, and lighting.
- Leverage native plantings throughout to minimize required landscape maintenance and watering.

2nd St.

Location. Between Oak St. and Pine St.

Primary Function. This east-west street provides primary access to downtown, the old city hall building, and the Waterfront Site. For this reason, 2nd St. must accommodate medium-vehicle capacity and medium speed while supporting adjacent commercial programs and prioritizing pedestrian safety and experience. 2nd St.'s future success will emerge from its character and ability to elevate the user experience of Downtown.

Strategies.

- Maintain angled parking on the south side of the street. Add biofiltration strips between the sidewalk and street to filter stormwater and improve the quality of stormwater runoff.
- Supplement existing street trees with shade trees to maximize pedestrian comfort. Add tree pits as needed.
- Maximize pedestrian experience with well-marked crosswalks, well-maintained sidewalks, shade trees, and lighting.
- Add curb bulb-outs and rain gardens at intersections to slow traffic and detain stormwater.
- Leverage native plantings throughout to minimize required landscape maintenance and watering.

Broad St.

Location. Between Oak St. and Pine St.

Primary Function. This east-west street provides primary access to downtown and supports significant historical commercial building fabric, especially west of Memorial Park. For this reason, 2nd St. must accommodate

medium-vehicle capacity and medium speed while supporting adjacent commercial programs and prioritizing pedestrian safety and experience. 2nd St.'s future success will emerge from its character and ability to elevate the user experience of Downtown. This chapter proposes to create a raised intersection at Broad Street and Memorial Park. The purpose of this traffic-calming measure is to reduce the speed of vehicles, especially freight trucks accessing the Pine St. Bridge. By doing so, it would discourage truck drivers from passing through downtown, encouraging them to use Highway 288 as a more appropriate bypass route, thereby reducing heavy vehicle traffic in the downtown area.

Strategies.

- Maintain angled parking on the north and south sides of the street.
- Add detention ponds at the intersections to hold stormwater and improve the quality of stormwater runoff.
- Supplement existing palm trees with shade trees to maximize pedestrian comfort. Add tree pits as needed.
- Maximize pedestrian experience with well-marked crosswalks, well-maintained sidewalks, shade trees, and lighting.
- Add curb bulb-outs and rain gardens at intersections to slow traffic and detain stormwater.
- Leverage native plantings throughout to minimize required landscape maintenance and watering.

4th St.

Location. Between Oak St. and Pine St.

Primary Function. This east-west street provides primary access to downtown and the former OE Fleming site, which is a potential site for mixed-use housing.

For this reason, 4th St. must accommodate medium-vehicle capacity and medium speed while supporting adjacent commercial programs and prioritizing pedestrian safety and experience. 4th St.'s future success will emerge from its character and ability to elevate the user experience of Downtown.

Strategies.

- Maintain parallel parking on the north and south sides of the street.
- Add biofiltration strips between the sidewalk and street to filter stormwater and improve the quality of stormwater runoff
- Add new shade trees to maximize pedestrian comfort. Add tree pits as needed.
- Maximize pedestrian experience with well-marked



Figure 4.3 | View of Park Ave. with upgraded streetscape design

crosswalks, well-maintained sidewalks, shade trees, and lighting.

- Add curb bulb-outs and rain gardens at intersections to slow traffic and detain stormwater.
- Leverage native plantings throughout to minimize required landscape maintenance and watering.

Initiative: Maximize LID principles to improve stormwater management. (A)

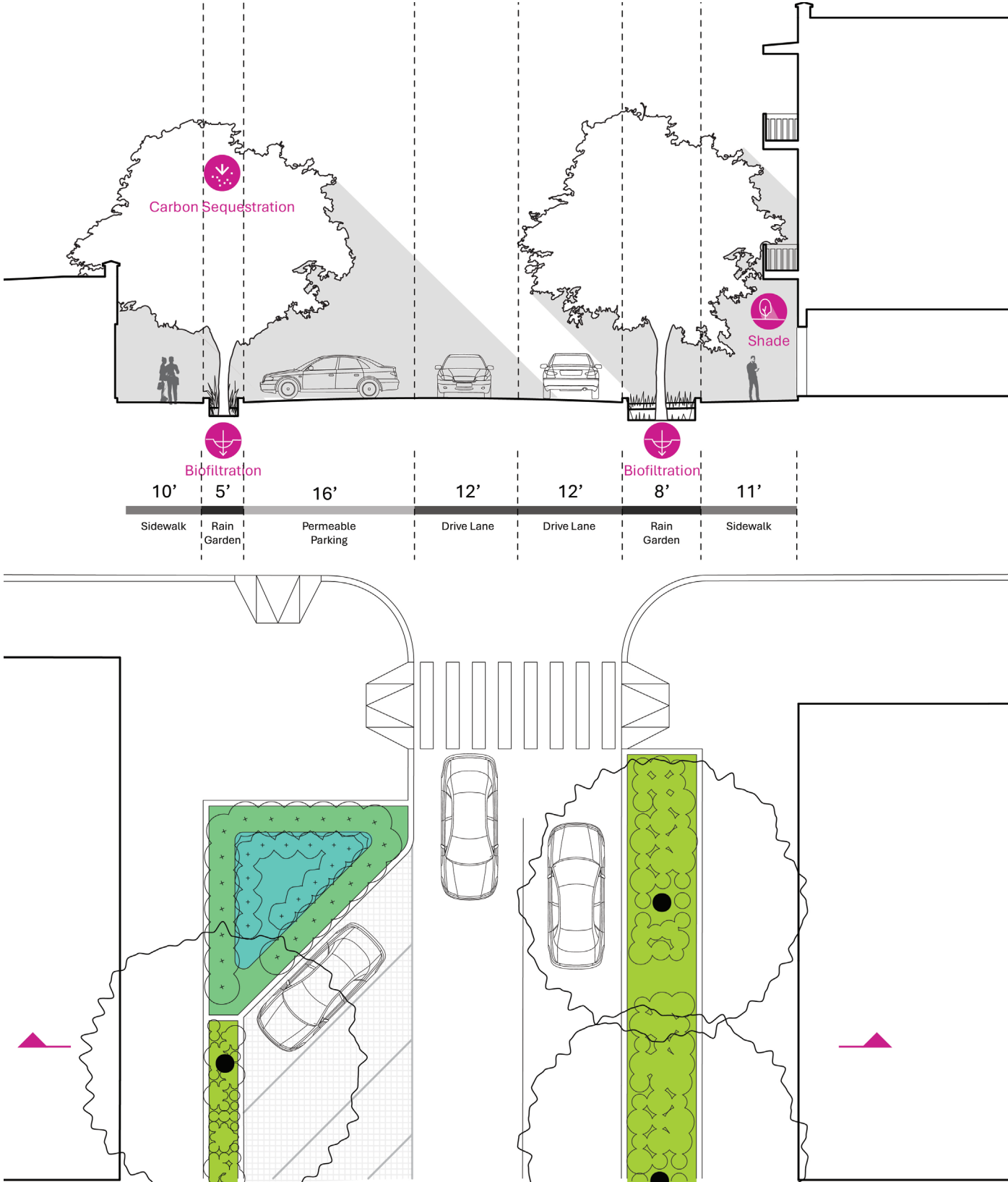
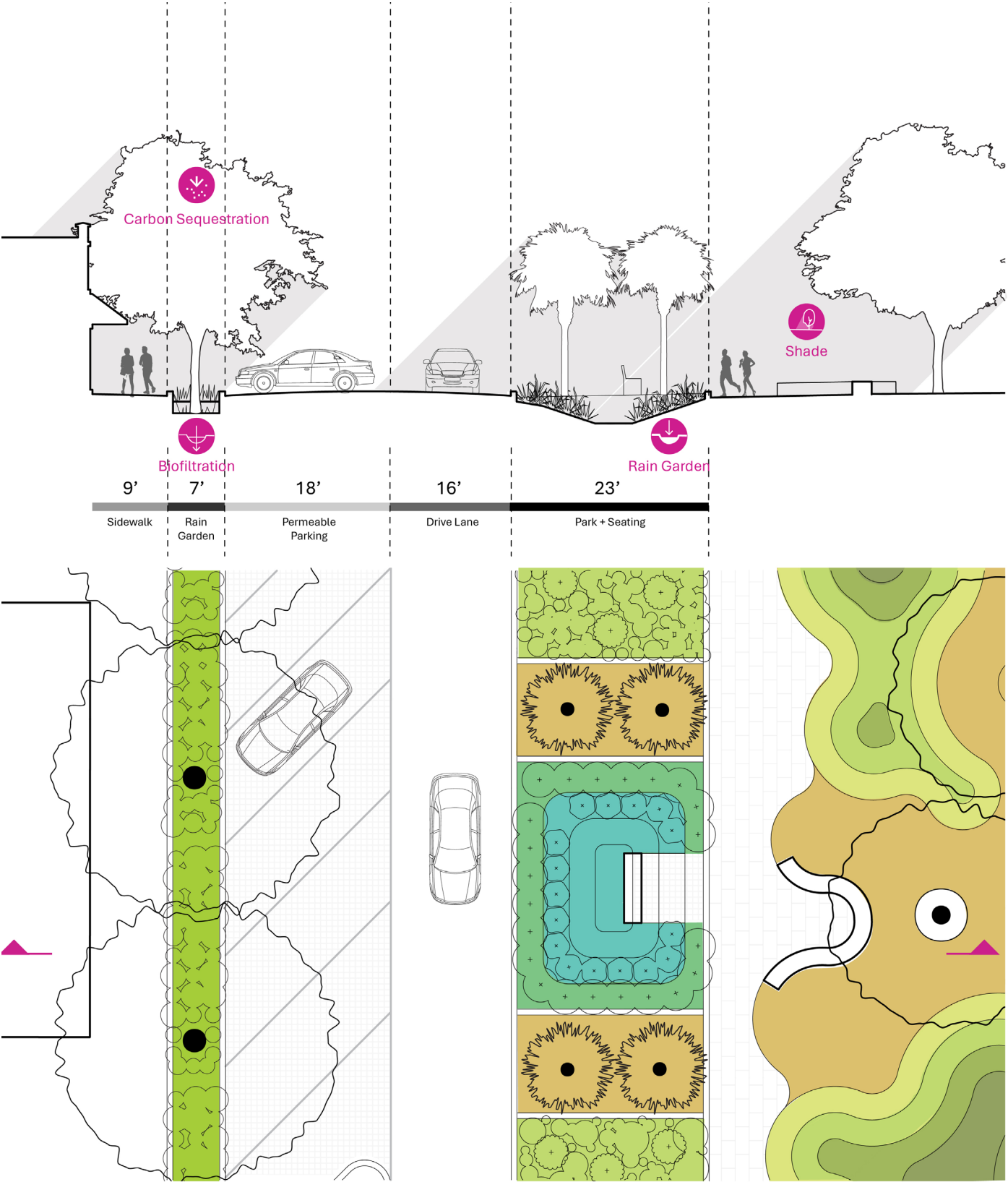
Successful Green Streets programs use Low Impact Development (LID) principles to manage rainfall on-site or as close to its source as possible. LID leverages natural hydrologic processes such as infiltration (moving water from the surface into the soil), detention (temporarily storing water before downstream conveyance), retention (storing water on-site until it evaporates or infiltrates), interception (capturing precipitation with vegetation or buildings), and evapotranspiration (plants absorbing and releasing water into the atmosphere) (EPA 2021, 1-5). Implementing LID principles in downtown Freeport can mitigate the negative impacts of stormwater, reducing adverse effects locally and within the watershed (EPA, “Urban Runoff: Low Impact Development”).

To advance LID principles, this chapter proposes the following strategies for downtown streets, alleys, and parking lots:

Bioretention Areas. Sometimes called “rain gardens,” bioretention areas are shallow depressions filled with soil, mulch, and dense vegetation that absorb stormwater. These areas use phytoremediation to treat stormwater before it infiltrates the ground or discharges off-site. As stormwater flows into the bioretention area, pollutants are filtered by the soil and absorbed by the plants.

During storms, bioretention areas can also function as detention areas. In regions with low soil permeability or high flood risk, a perforated underdrain can help direct excess water to a storm drain system. Bioretention areas require minimal maintenance (Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection). Using native plants and soils minimizes the need for fertilizers and chemicals.

Bioswales. Bioswales are open, linear, vegetated channels designed to infiltrate, retain, treat, and convey stormwater. Unlike bioretention areas, which focus on infiltration, bioswales use conveyance to treat stormwater and typically feature a trench depth of 12 to 24 inches. They



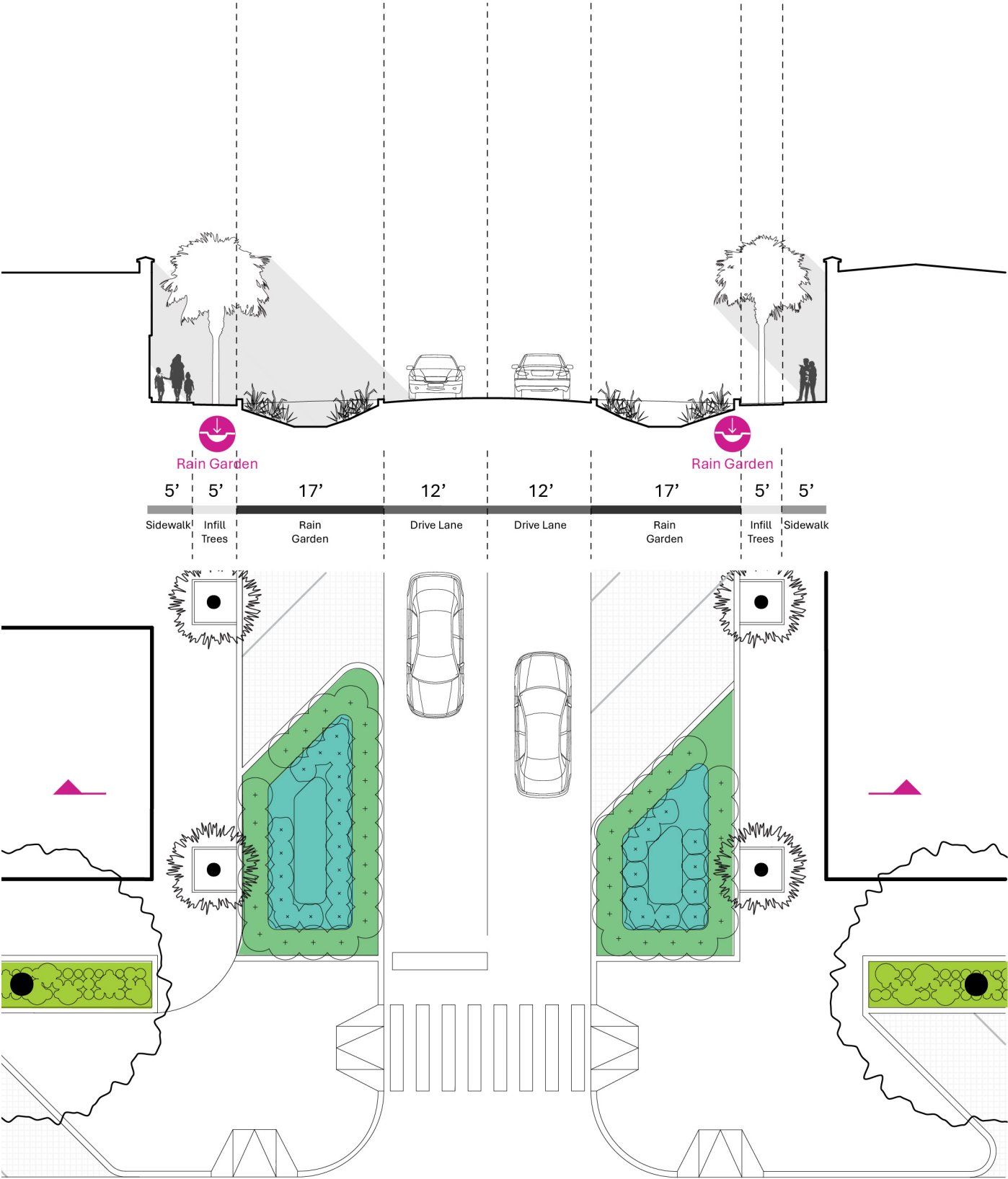


Figure 4.6 | Typical Plan and Section at Broad St.

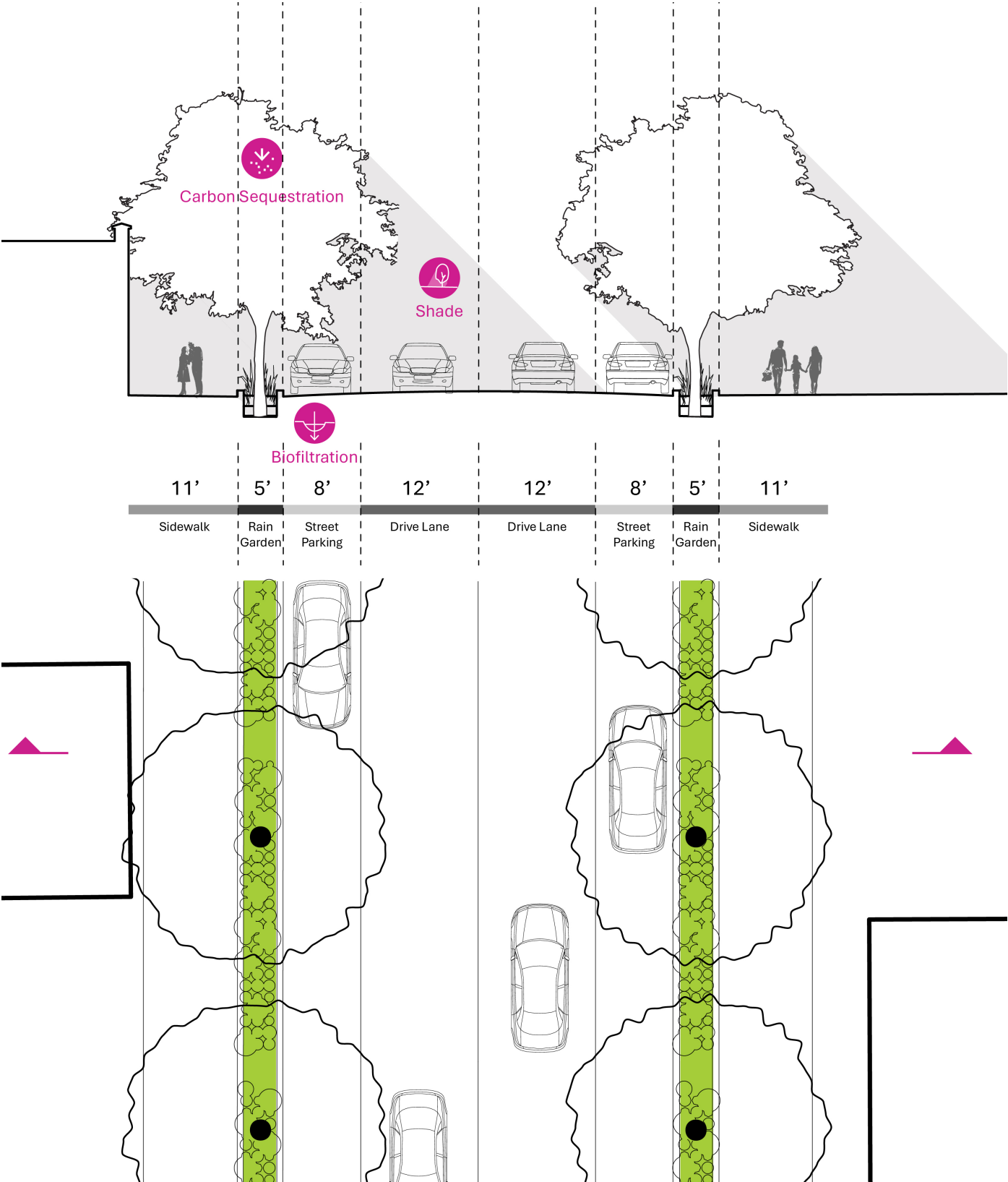


Figure 4.7 | Typical Plan and Section at 4th St.

are effective when placed adjacent to streets, driveways, or parking lots. To receive runoff from these impervious surfaces, bioswales need curb cuts, gutters, or similar mechanisms to direct stormwater. In areas with low soil permeability, bioswales may also require underground detention systems (UACDC 2010, 182-183; EPA 2021, 6-2).

Stormwater Curb Extension. Stormwater curb extensions, also known as bulb-outs, are typically installed at street intersections to shorten crosswalks, reduce turning radii for cars, and slow down traffic. They can also be placed midblock to slow traffic further. The curb extensions typically incorporate bioretention strategies—absorbing, filtering, and detaining stormwater on site before it reaches gray infrastructure (NACTO, Stormwater Curb Extension). Vegetation, such as shrubs or trees, can be incorporated into the design, depending on location, budget, and visibility requirements.

Stormwater Planters. Stormwater planters are small, walled planted areas designed to collect and treat stormwater through bioretention. They filter stormwater using layers of mulch, soil, and plant roots, which absorb surface pollutants such as bacteria, heavy metals, oil, and grease. The treated water then infiltrates the ground. Stormwater planters require less space than bioswales, making them ideal for sidewalk zones or narrow rights-of-way. Additionally, they offer significant aesthetic benefits by supporting native flowers, grasses, shrubs, trees, and wildlife habitats (NACTO, Stormwater Planter).

Street Tree Systems. Street tree systems consist of a coordinated arrangement of trees or shrubs, bioretention soil, and an underground gravel reservoir designed to intercept and detain stormwater. Common types include tree pits and tree trenches. These systems typically use curb cuts to receive stormwater and catch basins to detain it. They improve water quality by filtering and absorbing stormwater, reduce peak runoff through subsurface storage, and decrease overall stormwater volume through uptake and evapotranspiration (EPA 2021, 6.5).

Infiltration Trenches. Infiltration trenches are linear ditches designed to collect local stormwater runoff and allow it to infiltrate the ground. These trenches improve stormwater quality by capturing surface pollutants that would otherwise flow across impervious surfaces and into local streams and rivers. They are a relatively low-cost solution and work well when placed parallel to streets or at the perimeter of parking lots.

Curb alternatives. Standard curb designs collect and channel stormwater to catchment areas, where untreated



Figure 4.8 | Bulb-outs reduce runoff and slow traffic | CBP CC 2.0



Figure 4.9 | Biofiltration reduces and cleans runoff | A. Volkening CC 2.0



Figure 4.10 | Permeable pavers reduce storm runoff | City of Warrenville



Figure 4.11 | Rain Gardens reduce runoff and add color | Wilsonius CC 2.0

water is held and conveyed off-site. However, Low Impact Development (LID) projects use curb cuts, flush curbs, or no curbs to redirect water to adjacent bioswales, rain gardens, or similar on-site detention areas. This LID approach reduces runoff, increases on-site detention, and provides opportunities for water treatment (UACDC 2010, 94-97).

Permeable pavement. Permeable pavement systems allow stormwater to infiltrate rather than run off. They are particularly effective for parking lanes, driveways, parking lots, biking lanes, sidewalks, and road shoulders. Once stormwater passes through the permeable pavement surface, it enters an underground detention basin before infiltrating into the ground. Permeable pavement can improve water quality by absorbing and filtering pollutants, and it can also reduce overall stormwater volume and peak discharge (EPc 2021, 6.8). Permeable surface materials can provide void spaces ranging from 15% to 90%. Typical systems include porous asphalt, permeable concrete, interlocking pavers, gravel, and “grasscrete” (UACDC 2010, 78-79).

Initiative: Upgrade utilities in parallel with street infrastructure. (A)

When upgrading streets, municipalities should take the opportunity to improve essential utilities beneath the roadway to prevent future disruptions and enhance overall infrastructure efficiency. Key utility improvements include:

- **Water and Sewer Lines.** Upgrading aging or undersized water and sewer pipes can prevent leaks, breaks, and backups, ensuring reliable service and better drainage.
- **Stormwater Management.** Installing or upgrading stormwater drainage systems, such as larger pipes,

permeable surfaces, and retention systems, helps reduce localized flooding and water management.

- **Gas Lines.** Replacing or repairing outdated gas lines enhances safety, reduces the risk of leaks, and meets modern demand for service reliability.
- **Electrical and Telecommunications.** Burying power lines or upgrading existing underground electrical and fiber-optic cables can improve service reliability, reduce outages, and prepare for future technological needs.
- **Smart City Infrastructure.** Installing fiber-optic networks, sensors, and smart traffic systems can improve connectivity and traffic management, supporting modern urban initiatives.
- **Grease traps.** Installing or upgrading grease traps might be a smart investment when upgrading streets, especially in areas targeted for future commercial development, such as restaurants. Grease traps help prevent fats, oils, and grease from entering the municipal sewer system, reducing the risk of blockages, backups, and costly maintenance issues.

Initiative: Align codes with Complete Streets and Green Streets programs. (A)

As Freeport undertakes Complete Streets and Green Streets programs, it will be critical for city leaders to make sure that local codes and enforcement support program implementation (UACDC, 2010, 194). This will require a comprehensive review of the Code of Ordinances and water district policies. Some of the more common administrative obstacles to LID and Green Streets programs include (UACDC 2010, 196-203):

- excessive building setbacks, which require longer driveways and increase impervious surfaces
- prohibitions on permeable parking surfaces, which can increase storm runoff
- excessive parking requirements, which increases impermeable surfaces and storm runoff
- inadequate requirements to detain stormwater on-site
- lack of tree protection, especially “heritage” trees
- lack of a wetland protection policy
- restrictions on sidewalk materials, which can specify concrete sidewalks only
- prohibition of vegetation near an intersection, which can prevent curb bulb-outs
- prohibition of LID facilities in the public right-of-way
- prohibition of pervious materials in the public right-of-way
- prohibition of stormwater conveyance in the public right-of-way



Figure 4.12 | Aerial view of Memorial Park with upgrades



Figure 4.13 | The Stringfellow Fountain in Memorial Park

- minimum street widths, which increases storm runoff
- zoning requirements for low-density land use, which increases infrastructure costs, maintenance, and storm runoff
- requirements for street curbs, which prevents alternative strategies for stormwater conveyance
- state highway statutes that prohibit landscaping, trees, and overall ecological functioning
- lack of requirements for street trees

The City of Freeport should identify, assess, and consider revising or eliminating policy impediments to Complete Streets and Green Streets programs.

Initiative: Restore the North block of Memorial Park. (B)

Memorial Park is a programmatic and cultural anchor for Freeport’s historic downtown. It provides a central space for community events and gatherings, fostering social interaction and civic pride. As a critical north-south axis, the park enhances pedestrian connectivity and offers potential access to the Old Brazos River. Its green space not only boosts the area’s aesthetic appeal but also encourages foot traffic that supports nearby businesses. The following proposals envision a revitalized and reprogrammed park that continues to contribute to the physical and mental well-being of Freeport’s residents and visitors.

Historically, the north block of the park was more ornate and thoughtfully landscaped, mainly due to its proximity to the Tarpon Inn. Paved sidewalks curved toward each of the park’s four corners, guiding pedestrians to the main downtown intersections. Circular concrete planters were positioned along the pathways at each corner, with a central, quatrefoil-shaped planter at the park’s center. The

landscaping featured flat grassy areas, formal flower beds, low shrubs, and palmettos, creating open, unobstructed views across the park until the 1970s.

Elements to be maintained and restored:

- Restore historic pathway configurations
- Renovate circular planters in the park’s north section
- Reburish the quatrefoil-shaped centerpiece, which initially served as a planter and now functions as the base of the fountain
- Preserve the Stringfellow Fountain, dedicated in 1962 during Freeport’s Golden Anniversary in honor of local citizens R.E.L. Stringfellow and Alice Delaney
- Recondition marble pedestal and bronze plaque recognizing the role of the Freeport Sulphur Company in the city’s creation (also dedicated in 1962)
- Maintain existing palm trees within the park, with infill of new palm trees where gaps exist
- Preserve existing drainage and topography, which crowns from the park’s center to the street edge
- Install rain gardens along the park’s outer edge to improve stormwater management
- Add mid-block crosswalks



Figure 4.14 | The historic hurricane warning pole can be restored

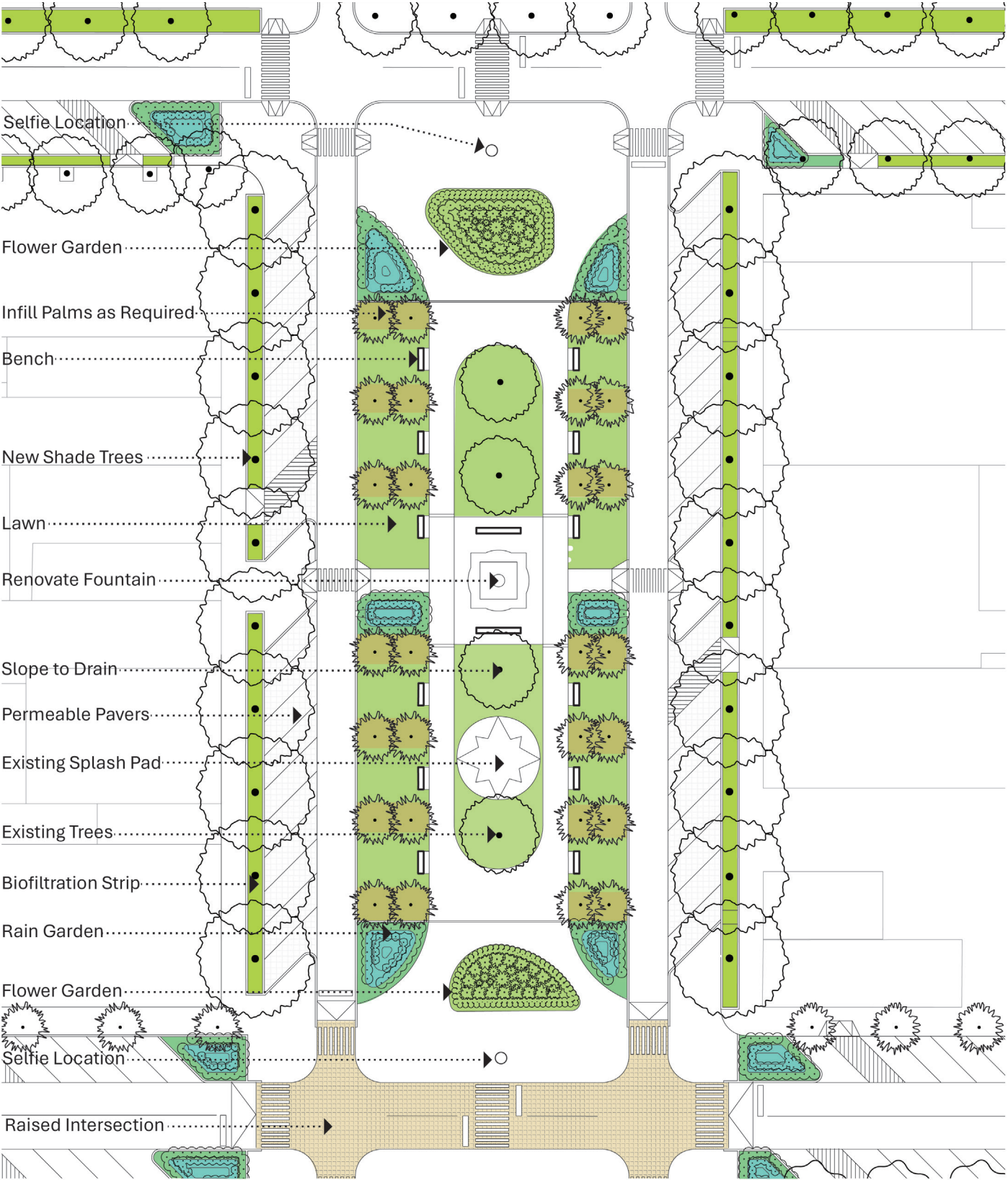


Figure 4.15 | Proposed restoration for the north block of Memorial Park

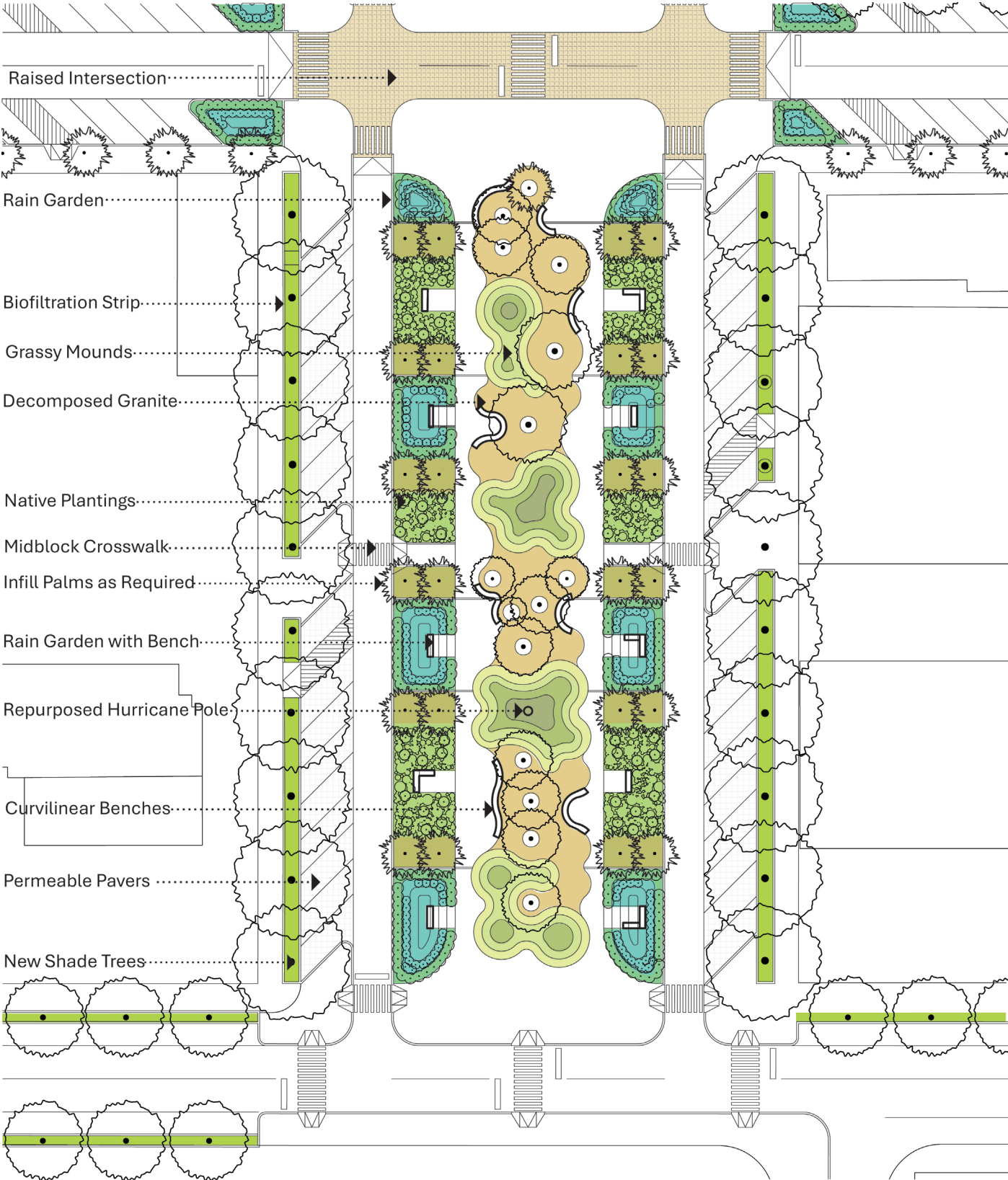


Figure 4.16 | Proposed redesign for the south block of Memorial Park



Figure 4.17 | View of a reimagined south block at Memorial Park

Initiative: Reimagine the South block of Memorial Park. (B)

Historically, the south section of Memorial Park was simpler in design, featuring large open grassy areas and straight pathways. Despite its minimal design, it played a critical role in the community. A tall flagpole near the southern end served as Freeport’s hurricane warning system, with flags flown to alert residents when evacuation was necessary as hurricanes approached.

Elements to be Restored and Reimagined for the South Block:

- Preserve the existing shade trees at the center of the block
- Maintain the palm trees along the outer edge, infilling new palms where needed
- Retain the existing drainage system, which crowns from the center of the park to the street
- Install rain gardens along the block’s perimeter to improve stormwater management
- Add bench seating along the outer edge of the block
- Restore the historic hurricane warning pole with an artist commissioned to create an interpretive public landmark

- Incorporate native plantings throughout the park
- Introduce curvilinear bench seating for added comfort and aesthetics
- Create grassy mounds to serve as a natural playscape
- Add mid-block crosswalks for improved pedestrian access

Initiative: Raise the grade at the intersection of Broad St. and Memorial Park. (B)

During Vision Session #2, residents raised concerns about trucks speeding through downtown along Broad St. to access FM1495. This situation creates hazards for pedestrians using Memorial Park and future downtown shoppers. One potential solution is to raise the grade at Broad St. between E. Park Ave. and W. Park Ave. This traffic-calming measure would slow or deter truck traffic by encouraging drivers to use Highway 288 as a bypass, diverting heavy vehicles from downtown. Slower truck speeds would make the area safer for pedestrians while creating a more welcoming environment for future visitors and residents, enhancing overall walkability and the appeal of downtown spaces.

Raising the street grade would establish an at-grade pedestrian connection between the north and south



Figure 4.18 | Raised intersections and crosswalks support walkability and pedestrian safety | Northeastern Delft CC 2.0

sections of Memorial Park, creating a seamless and more cohesive park experience. This improvement would enhance the park’s usability and walkability, making it easier and safer for pedestrians to navigate the space. As a traffic-calming and pedestrian-friendly solution, it would not only improve public safety but also contribute to a more vibrant downtown environment, supporting future commercial development and attracting visitors.

Initiative: Leverage TIRZ #1 to fund future streetscape and park improvements. (C)

Established in December 2019, the Downtown Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ) #1 allows TIRZ funding to support public streetscape and infrastructure improvements. The TIRZ #1 covers approximately 560 acres comprising the historic downtown, the Freeport Marina, and the southern bank of the Old Brazos River west of downtown. The TIRZ has a 30-year duration, anticipating significant investments in infrastructure to catalyze redevelopment.

The projected spending includes \$10 million for infrastructure improvements, \$100,000 for parks and streetscape enhancements, and \$750,000 for economic development grants, among other allocations, totaling \$21.15 million. The City of Freeport, Brazoria County, and Brazosport College contribute 50%, 40%, and 40% of their incremental tax revenues, respectively. These contributions will finance public improvements like water, sewer, stormwater, roadway enhancements, and public transportation. The plan’s economic feasibility is based on revenue forecasts assuming a 2.5% annual inflation rate for construction costs and a conservative estimate of \$500,000 in new taxable property value per year (TXP Inc. 2022).

Initiative: Work with Brazoria County, TxDOT, and MPO to improve FM 1495. (D)

The future quality and efficiency of FM 1495 will be crucial to the successful redevelopment of downtown Freeport. FM 1495 provides access to downtown Freeport from both directions: from the north via the Pine St. Bridge and from the south to Bryan Beach and Quintana Beach. While the road also provides access to Port Freeport, the percentage of truck traffic remains relatively low at 8% (Statesman Journal). The City of Freeport is interested in making FM 1495 comfortable for automobiles, pedestrians, and bicyclists while maintaining the road’s efficiency for trucks. This will require significant coordination with TxDOT and the Houston-Galveston Area Council Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO).

In Texas, road improvements are typically funded through city and county budgets, local government bonds, and state and federal funds via the MPO). Freeport can leverage state funding to improve roads like FM 1495 through the Transportation Improvement Program, managed by the Houston-Galveston Area Council MPO (see Kendig Keast 2019, 38 for more discussion). These funds usually require a 20% contribution from state and local sources and can be applied to construction and related transportation projects but not to land purchase and design fees.

Additional MPO programs can help municipal governments fund street improvements. For example, the Green Ribbon Landscape Improvements Program funds landscaping in areas with air quality issues (RGVMPO, 13). Grapevine, TX (2019 population 53,317) received \$500,000 to plant over 350 trees and enhance medians with shrubs, grasses, irrigation, and pavers. (Grapevine Parks & Rec 2019). Similarly, the Transportation Alternatives Program supports pedestrian, bicyclists, and non-motorized transportation projects. Texarkana, TX (2019 population 36,688) received \$2.31 million for the Kennedy Lane Bicycle & Pedestrian Improvements (TXK Today 2021).

Finally, federal-aid highway funds help states construct and improve highways and bridges on eligible routes. These funds also support special-purpose programs and projects through the Federal Lands Highway Program, which aims to improve access to National Forests, National Parks, Indian Lands, and other public lands. A guide is available to help stakeholders understand the scope of Federal-Aid programs and projects (U.S. Dept. of Transportation 2018).

05 Develop | Land Use and Housing

05 Develop | Opportunities and Constraints

The following section outlines critical development opportunities and constraints related to land use and housing, focusing on areas with potential for revitalization. It identifies key sites suitable for infill development, where vacant or underutilized parcels can be transformed into vibrant residential or mixed-use projects. It also highlights opportunities for the adaptive reuse of existing buildings, preserving historical structures while repurposing them for modern needs such as housing, retail, or office space.

Opportunities

Available land for development. One of the most efficient and cost-effective ways for cities to grow is by maximizing underutilized urban infrastructure. Infilling empty lots embodies this strategic approach by capitalizing on existing resources, promoting sustainability, and enhancing the economic and social vitality of communities. Instead of expanding into undeveloped areas at the urban periphery, the City of Freeport should focus on intensifying mixed-use redevelopment along existing streets and utility networks that have already been established and funded by taxpayers.

The Freeport Strategic Community Plan estimates that nearly 40 percent of land in Freeport is owned by either the City, Brazosport ISD, or Brazoria County (excluding additional land owned by Port Freeport). (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 49). This suggests a tremendous opportunity for strategic land development in the downtown area.

Downtown Freeport, Texas, offers numerous opportunities for urban development, including several large plots of land available for new projects. Key sites include the 5.66-acre waterfront site adjacent to the Freeport Marina; the 32-acre, nine-block site, home of the former OA Fleming Elementary School; the former Union Pacific railroad site, and numerous potential residential infill sites along Broad St. These locations provide a strategic foundation for revitalizing the downtown area, offering the chance to enhance the city's appeal, attract new investments, and support the growth of both commercial and residential spaces. These projects are discussed in more detail in the initiatives below.

The City's Strategic Community Plan recommends creating an infill development program to actively market and potentially incentivize developers to build on city-owned vacant lots. It advises adopting design standards for infill development to ensure high-quality, compatible outcomes (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 52). The proposed Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines will accomplish this goal, ensuring that infill development



Figure 5.1 | The Waterfront site has potential to connect DT to the Marina

advances larger urban design goals for downtown.

Successful infill development offers significant economic and urban planning benefits that can contribute to the vitality and resilience of Freeport's downtown area:

- *Increased Tax Revenue.* Infill development will increase property tax revenues, reducing Freeport's reliance on revenue from industrial district agreements to fund its annual operating budget and essential public services. This shift would help stabilize the city's financial position, allowing for a more balanced and sustainable budget while ensuring continued funding for critical public services and infrastructure and resilience against economic fluctuations.
- *Increased Property Values.* Developing vacant lots raises nearby property values by making neighborhoods more attractive and in demand.
- *Boost to Local Economy.* Infill development can stimulate the local economy by attracting new businesses, creating jobs, and increasing tax revenues. It also supports existing businesses by bringing more residents and customers into the area.
- *Efficient Use of Infrastructure.* Building out vacant lots allows cities to leverage existing infrastructure, such as roads, utilities, and public services, more effectively. This reduces the financial burden on municipalities and developers.
- *Sustainable Land Use.* Higher density, infill development minimizes land consumption, aligning with sustainable planning practices.
- *Reduced Urban Sprawl.* Infill development helps to contain urban sprawl by focusing growth within existing urban areas. This promotes more compact, sustainable communities and preserves open space



Figure 5.2 | Vacant downtown land presents development opportunities

- and agricultural land on the urban periphery.
- **Improved Walkability and Connectivity.** Filling vacant lots enhances walkability and connectivity, encouraging pedestrian activity.
- **Revitalization of Underutilized Areas.** Infill projects can revitalize neglected or underutilized areas, transforming them into vibrant, active neighborhoods. This can lead to reduced crime rates, improved public safety, and a stronger sense of community.

Downtown Land Use. The character of Park Ave. is primarily defined by commercial use, with occasional civic uses like the Freeport Historical Museum providing variety. Memorial Park bisects the historic downtown, forming a central axis lined with retail functions, although most of the storefronts are empty. A light industrial zone lies south of downtown. The zone is anchored by the former rail depot, whose redevelopment will play a crucial role in shaping downtown’s future. The plan recommends that the City encourage civic use for the northern part of this lot. The Port of Freeport has acquired the entire east end of downtown, which will likely transition from residential to industrial use. The area west of downtown consists mostly of single-family residences. This plan proposes a medium-density, mixed-use redevelopment for the former OA Fleming Elementary School site.

Downtown Zoning. Most of downtown is zoned DT, allowing a variety of institutional, commercial, and light industrial uses, with residential use limited to lofts and short-term rentals. Northern lots along the Old Brazos River are zoned W-1, permitting hotels, restaurants, entertainment, and waterfront activities but prohibiting residential development. The City may consider rezoning some W-1 properties to support future residential projects. West of downtown, the OA Fleming site is zoned R-2 for single-family and duplex housing. This plan suggests rezoning part of it to MF for multifamily development, particularly on the eastern side near downtown and adjacent to existing MF zones.

Adaptive reuse opportunities. Adaptive reuse involves repurposing existing buildings for new functions, offering cities multiple advantages. By utilizing older structures, cities can economically revitalize neighborhoods, reduce environmental impact, and enhance community cohesion. Freeport has several promising adaptive reuse opportunities. One is the old city hall building at 200 W. 2nd St. This three-story building, approximately 41,000 sf building, is a “contributing structure” in the proposed local historic district and enjoys excellent proximity to the historic downtown, Freeport Marina, waterfront, and proposed boardwalk. Another historically notable



Figure 5.3 | The former Ora Theater presents an adaptive reuse opportunity

structure is 215 E. Park Ave., an Art Deco building constructed in 1940 as the Ora Theater. Post Oak Preservation Solutions completed a Resource Inventory, which revealed at least thirty additional vacant structures in the proposed Downtown Historic District. This data is available as an appendix to the 2024 Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines.

While adaptive reuse can involve significant upfront costs for property owners, listing the downtown district on the National Register of Historic Places would provide financial incentives, such as State and Federal Rehabilitation tax credits, for owners of contributing properties. These tax credits can offset renovation expenses, making adaptive reuse more financially feasible. Additionally, the successful reuse or reoccupation of these structures can boost property values, attract investment, increase tourism, and enhance the overall economic vitality of the downtown area, creating a more vibrant and sustainable community. These benefits are detailed below:

- **Access to federal and state tax credits.** Adaptive reuse can allow property owners to leverage tax credits to renovate vacant or underutilized buildings.
- **Economic Revitalization of Underutilized Areas.** Adaptive reuse breathes new life into vacant or underused properties, attracting businesses and residents. This process can stimulate local economies by creating jobs and increasing tax revenues.
- **Cost Savings Compared to New Construction.** Reusing existing buildings often cost less than constructing new ones from scratch. It reduces the need for extensive site preparation, foundations, and infrastructure, resulting in significant financial savings.
- **Environmental Sustainability Through Waste Reduction.**



Figure 5.4 | Existing Downtown Land Use



Adaptive reuse minimizes construction waste by preserving existing structures and materials. It also reduces the demand for new resources, lowering the environmental impact associated with producing and transporting building materials.

- **Lower Carbon Footprint from Reduced Construction Activities.** By reusing existing buildings, cities can significantly reduce the carbon emissions associated with demolition and new construction. This approach supports cities’ sustainability goals and helps combat climate change.
- **Preservation of Historical and Cultural Heritage.** Repurposing historic buildings maintains the city’s architectural legacy and cultural identity. This preservation enhances community pride and can attract tourism, providing social and economic benefits.
- **Creation of Vibrant, Mixed-Use Neighborhoods.** Adaptive reuse projects often incorporate mixed-use elements like housing, retail, and community spaces, fostering dynamic neighborhoods. This integration promotes walkability, social interaction, and a lively urban atmosphere.
- **Enhanced Community Engagement and Identity.** Repurposing familiar buildings can strengthen community ties by preserving landmarks that hold historical and emotional significance. This approach encourages community engagement and helps foster a shared sense of place.

Ample public parking. A parking study conducted by the City of Freeport found that downtown has abundant parking, with 548 total spaces and the potential to expand to 634 (City of Freeport 2023). The majority of the parking is concentrated in the central downtown area bounded by Cherry St., 4th St., Pine St., and 2nd St. This count includes marked City and public parking spots, street



Figure 5.6 | Downtown has large amounts of available street parking

parking, and potential City-owned surface lots. These findings suggest that downtown Freeport has ample parking to support future commercial and institutional growth. Therefore, for the foreseeable future, the city can focus on promoting a walkable, mixed-use downtown environment that prioritizes pedestrians over cars.

Freeport Boardwalk Project. In recent years, the Freeport Economic Development Corporation (FEDC) secured 8.8 acres of land adjacent to the Old Brazos River, northwest of the Freeport Marina. This acquisition provides the city with a valuable opportunity to capitalize on this waterfront asset, ensuring continued public access to the river while enabling the pursuit of new civic and economic ventures. The FEDC is collaborating with Gensler Houston to develop a pedestrian boardwalk concept for this linear site. This project builds on earlier master planning efforts



Figure 5.7 | Preliminary images of proposed Boardwalk | Gensler Houston

and aims to establish Freeport as a prime destination for water-related attractions. By capitalizing on the proximity of Bryan Beach, it seeks to boost tourism and enhance the city’s appeal (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019, 59).

The proposed Boardwalk, which runs along W. Brazos St. and is bound by Hickory St. to the west and Cherry St. to the east, represents an essential element in the downtown network of spaces and programs. It provides a western counterpart to the civic space of Memorial Park, with the Waterfront Site serving as a potential linchpin in the overall design. Programmatically, the boardwalk extends the Old Brazos River promenade, which begins at the Freeport Marina, an additional four blocks to the west. As the boardwalk and Waterfront Site projects move forward, it will be essential to coordinate public spaces, circulation routes, and programming, ensuring that vital public features such as amphitheatres and markets are not duplicated unnecessarily.

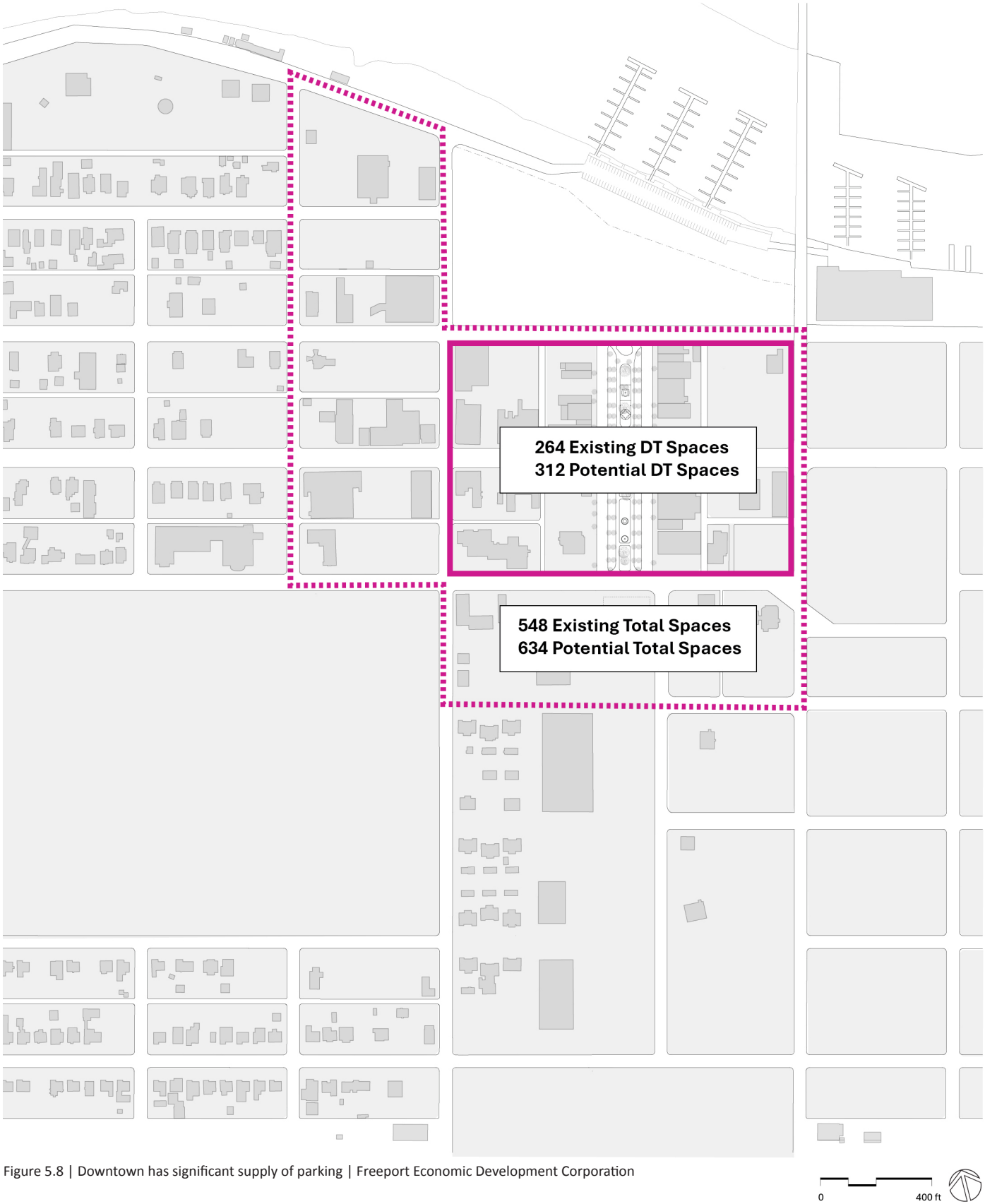


Figure 5.8 | Downtown has significant supply of parking | Freeport Economic Development Corporation

Constraints

Negative feedback loop for investors. Continued disinvestment, loss of historic buildings, and high vacancy rates in downtown Freeport, Texas, are creating a negative feedback loop that discourages private investment. As historic structures are demolished or neglected, the area’s unique character and appeal diminish, making it less attractive for developers seeking to capitalize on the charm and authenticity that often drive successful downtown revitalizations. Increasing vacancies further exacerbate the issue, signaling declining economic activity and reducing foot traffic, which are critical for sustaining local businesses and drawing new investment. Without a vibrant, preserved downtown core, developers face uncertainty about demand and returns on investment. This environment of economic decline and neglect also raises concerns about long-term stability, increasing the risk for investors. To foster future development, Freeport must prioritize stabilizing its historic assets, encourage infill projects, and create an inviting environment that re-establishes confidence among private developers looking for growth opportunities.

Lack of multifamily housing options. Prior to the 1940s, communities across the United States regularly built multifamily housing—such as duplexes, fourplexes, cottage courts, and courtyard buildings—within traditional neighborhoods, even in areas primarily composed of single-family homes. These small-scale multifamily structures blended well with the surrounding neighborhood fabric, and today, most passersby likely wouldn’t distinguish them from single-family homes except for additional front doors, mailboxes, or gas meters (Parolek 2020, 1).

Since the 1940s, however, communities like Freeport have



Figure 5.9 | Freeport needs more Middle Density Housing | Opticos CC 2.0



Figure 5.10 | Freeport needs more Middle Density Housing | Sightline CC 2.0

zoned small-scale multifamily housing out of existence. The shift toward neighborhoods exclusively zoned for single-family homes has reduced housing choices and increased prices by limiting the overall housing supply. In 1968, 70% of all U.S. households were married couples with at least one child; by 2018, that number had dropped to less than 30%. Today, fewer than half of U.S. children live in households with two married parents in their first marriage. Additionally, as the population ages, households headed by individuals over 65 are projected to increase from 26% in 2018 to 34% by 2038. Surveys show that three in four Americans over 50 prefer to age in place (Loh 2020).

These shifting demographics should shape Freeport’s future housing strategies. During Vision Session #1, residents revealed a desire for more urban housing prototypes. Currently, households in Freeport that seek alternatives to single-family homes have limited options. To support a diverse population with varying family sizes, incomes, ages, and lifestyles, Freeport must promote the development of housing types that cater to all stages of life. For Downtown Freeport to thrive, it needs to attract more residents, which means increasing housing options, such as multifamily and rental units, alongside existing commercial uses. A key challenge is promoting infill housing while preventing residential displacement.

The following initiatives aim to expand housing options while minimizing the risk of displacing current residents. Together, these efforts present a strategic opportunity to add new residential units, diversify Freeport’s housing stock, and align with the city’s long-term goals for downtown revitalization.

05 Develop | Vision, Goals, and Initiatives

Develop | Land Use and Development

Vision

Downtown will thrive as a dynamic community where Smart Growth principles, strategic regulations, and incentives drive development, maximize infill opportunities, and ensure diverse housing options for current and future residents.

Goals

A Prioritize and pursue key downtown infill and development opportunities.

B Promote Smart Growth principles throughout downtown.

C Codify regulations and incentives that reflect desired land use and design outcomes.

D Encourage diverse housing options and prevent displacement.

The following Initiatives are specific actions the City can take towards advancing these Vision and Goals:

Initiative: Encourage a mixed-use program for the Waterfront Site. (A)

The Waterfront site is a privately owned 5.66-acre area anchoring downtown’s north side. Historically, between 1912 and 1956, it housed the Tarpon Inn, a hotel operated by the Freeport Sulphur Company for its executives. From the 1960s to the early 2000s, it served as a medical equipment manufacturing business. The site has been abandoned since the early 2000s and is currently part of a brownfield remediation grant application to the Environmental Protection Agency. As one of the largest and most prominent sites in downtown, its development is key to the overall success of the area’s revitalization efforts. The site also presents an opportunity to enhance connectivity with the Freeport Marina and the planned boardwalk along the Old Brazos River, making it a pivotal element in creating a cohesive and vibrant waterfront district.

The City of Freeport should encourage mixed-use development for this site to maximize its potential benefits, including improved walkability, diverse activities, and support for small businesses. By integrating residential, commercial, and civic spaces nearby, the development would reduce reliance on cars, promote walkability, and create a lively street environment that

strengthens the community. A mixed-use development will also support small local retailers, providing opportunities for local entrepreneurs to benefit from steady customer flow and community support. This blend of larger and smaller enterprises will help create a resilient and dynamic downtown district.

Strategic Re-Zoning. The site is currently zoned W-1, which permits hotels, restaurants, entertainment, and waterfront-related activities but prohibits residential development (City of Freeport 2024). While this zoning limitation restricts specific development options, most notably residential, it also presents a strategic opportunity for the city. By incorporating rezoning into site development negotiations with potential developers, the city can leverage its position to shape the area’s future. This strategy allows the Planning Commission and City Council to articulate their vision for integrating civic functions and mixed-use programming, ensuring that proposals reflect community priorities. By strategically aligning the rezoning process with negotiations, the city can balance developer needs with long-term city goals, fostering a development outcome that benefits both investors and the community.

Initiative: Reimagine Waterfront site as a connector between Downtown and River. (A)

The City of Freeport should promote the inclusion of a civic landscape and public programming on the Waterfront site to enhance its overall viability. Although these civic elements may not directly increase the developer’s bottom line, they can attract tourists, increase foot traffic for retailers, and establish an accessible pedestrian connection between downtown and the Marina. The following two schematic design options explore ways the Waterfront site can integrate a civic landscape within a private development, thereby promoting economic growth, community engagement, and sustained growth for downtown Freeport.

Scenario A: Multifamily housing, Event Space, and Public Lawn.

This option envisions a four-story mixed-use development on the west side of the site, featuring three levels of residential units above first-floor retail. The development would include over 200 housing units, 20,000 square feet of retail space, and structured parking for both retail and residential use. At the center of the site, a Public Lawn aligns with Memorial Park. This lawn would be large enough to host festival events on weekends and

Catalytic and Connecting Projects

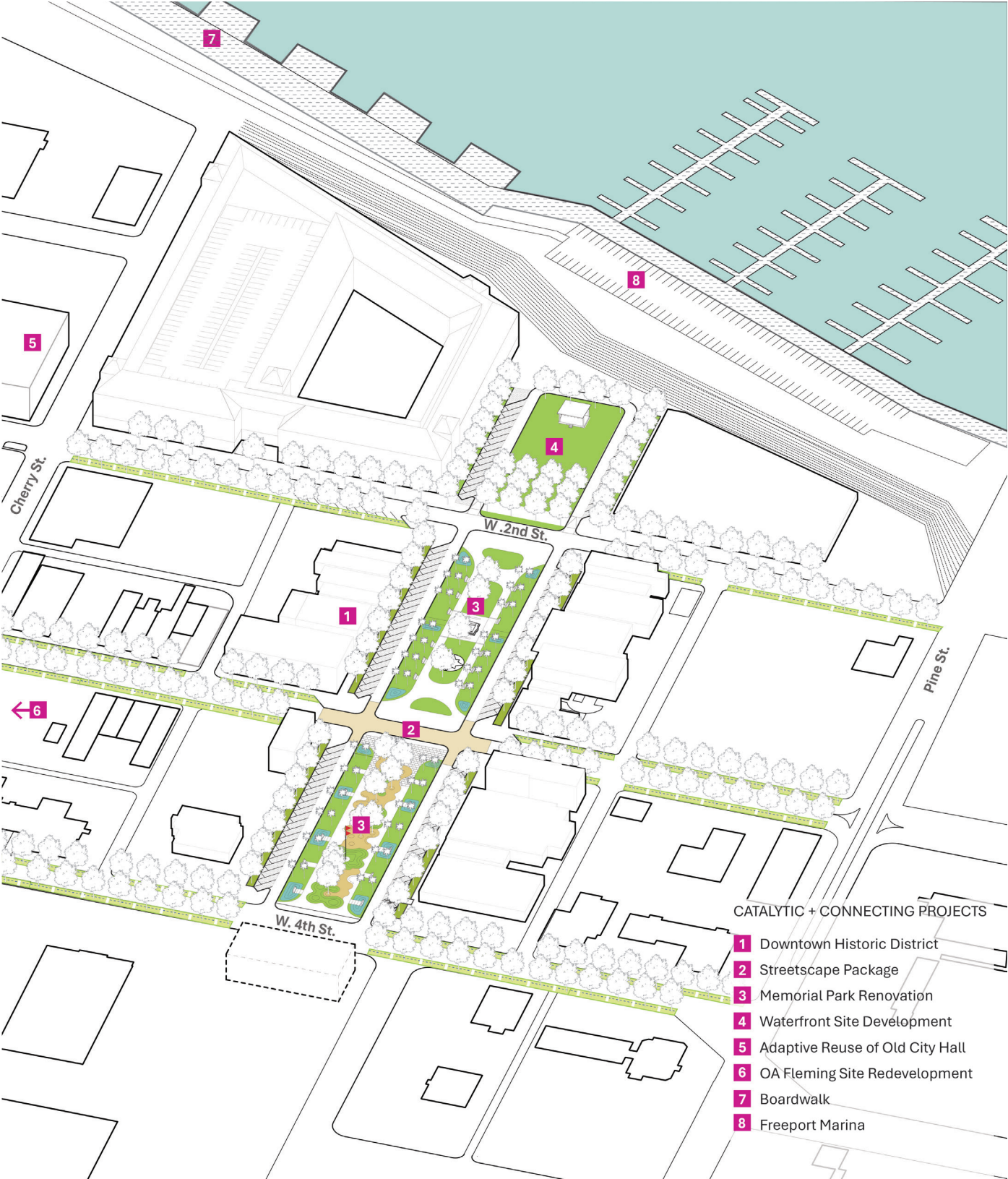


Figure 5.11 | Catalytic and Connecting Projects in Downtown Freeport

Scenario A: Public Lawn



Multifamily housing can deliver a significant number of units without compromising the scale of the street, as long as required parking is buried on the interior of the block.



The public lawn at the Pearl in San Antonio provides a 75x100 sf public lawn that hosts festivals, outdoor markets, and passive recreation. A similar space fits the Waterfront site.



A 30k sf restaurant, event space, or food hall would be a great addition to the public lawn and nearby housing, while also catering to visitors and users of the Freeport Marina.

Figure 5.12 | Scenario A: Public Lawn (with Multifamily Housing and Event Space)

Scenario B: New Tarpon Inn



Multifamily housing can deliver a significant number of units without compromising the scale of the street, as long as required parking is buried on the interior of the block.



Programmatic comparisons include the Gage Hotel in Marathon (20k sf), Paisano and (40k sf) and Hotel Saint George in Marfa (74k sf), and Cotton Court in Lubbock (90k sf).



Grass terraced seating built on the old levee would serve as a venue overlooking the Old Brazos River, offering space for informal recreation as well as organized concerts.

Figure 5.13 | Scenario B: Hotel (with Multifamily Housing and Terraced Seating)



Figure 5.14 | The old levee could accomodate terraced seating at the Marina

holidays and provide space for passive recreation year-round, creating a programmatic connection to downtown and a visual link to the Marina. The site’s east side can accommodate a 30,000-square-foot event space or restaurant, which would front onto the Public Lawn.

Scenario B: Multifamily Housing, Hotel, Restaurant, and Redesigned Levee.

This option envisions a four-story mixed-use development on the west side of the site, featuring three levels of residential units above first-floor retail. The development includes over 200 housing units, 20,000 square feet of retail space, and structured parking for both retail and residential use. At the center of the site, a new hotel rises on the footprint of the former Tarpon Inn. The new hotel is flanked by two allées providing pedestrian passage from downtown to the Marina. The former levee is reimagined as a stepped viewing platform overlooking the Marina, offering river access via stairs and ramps. This platform can also accommodate small performances with the Old Brazos River as a backdrop. The east side of the site can accommodate a 30,000-square-foot event space or restaurant.

Initiative: Repurpose Old City Hall as a Downtown Civic Anchor. (A)

Scenario A: Freeport Historical Museum, City Hall, and Community Event Space.

The Old City Hall building today. The Old City Hall building at 200 W. 2nd St. is a New Formalist masonry structure constructed by Freeport First National Bank in 1970. This three-story building, approximately 41,000 sf, features 117 x 117 ft floor plates, each offering 13,667 sf. It served as Freeport City Hall until spring 2024 and is now vacant. Located within the proposed local historic district, the building is listed as a “contributing structure,” indicating significant historical value. It also falls within the proposed boundary for the National Register of Historic Places.

While the building is in poor repair on the inside, its high-quality masonry construction, central location, historical significance, large size, and clear structural spans make it a prime candidate for adaptive reuse, particularly for civic programs requiring large spaces. The City has hired iAD Architects to develop a scope of work and provide preliminary pricing for a full renovation of the building (Hanson 2024). The following adaptive reuse plan proposes repurposing the building, placing the Freeport

Historical Museum on the first floor, City Hall on the second floor, and a rentable community space on the third floor.

Ground Floor: Freeport Historical Museum. The Freeport Historical Museum, established in 2009, is downtown Freeport’s key physical, cultural, and economic anchor. The museum, which hosts approximately 4,000 visitors annually, presents over 300 years of Freeport’s history through original artifacts and models. It highlights key periods, from the Spanish colonial era to the city’s founding in 1912 to Freeport’s rise as the Shrimping Capital of Texas. The exhibits provide a comprehensive look at the city’s rich cultural and economic past, offering visitors a deep understanding of its historical significance.

Currently, the Museum occupies approximately 13,000 sf in a triple storefront on E. Park Ave. Relocating it to the ground floor of the former City Hall would provide larger floor plates and taller ceiling heights, significantly enhancing curatorial and economic potential. Administrative functions could move upstairs to maximize exhibition space on the ground floor. This move would enable the museum to display a broader range of exhibits, including large-scale and interactive installations, boosting visitor engagement and repeat visits. The additional space would support special events, educational programs, and temporary exhibitions, increasing attendance and revenue. A more extensive gift shop or café would further enhance income, while improved storage and workspace would optimize artifact preservation and operational efficiency, transforming the museum into a dynamic cultural hub for Freeport.

Second Floor: Freeport City Hall. Before its relocation to N Avenue H, the City of Freeport occupied both the first and second floors of this building, sharing space on the second floor with the EDC and Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Air quality issues following Hurricane Nicholas forced all offices to move to the third floor.

Returning City Hall to the second floor would restore its historic role and serve as a strong symbol of the City’s commitment to revitalizing the downtown area. This move would signal a renewed focus on supporting the economic and civic vitality of the district, attracting investment, and fostering downtown as a center of activity. Increased foot traffic from city employees and visitors would boost local businesses, while the central location would improve public access to government services, reinforcing the community’s connection to its historic core.

Third Floor: Community Event Space. Offering some of the best views in Freeport, the third floor could be

repurposed into spillover space for the city and an ample, rentable event space. This versatile venue would host public events, private functions, and community gatherings, attracting local and out-of-town groups. Its proximity to City Hall would enhance civic engagement and accessibility while driving foot traffic and supporting local businesses. The space could generate steady rental income, boost downtown vibrancy, and catalyze further economic development and investment in Freeport’s historic downtown.

Scenario B: Downtown Conference Center

An alternative adaptive reuse scenario envisions transforming all three floors of the old city hall building into a Downtown Conference Center, expanding Freeport’s capacity to host conferences and public and private events and attract tourists. This would provide a total of 41,000 sq. ft., enabling the venue to compete with other medium-sized event centers across Texas. The building’s central location, adjacent to the historic downtown, Marina, Waterfront site, and proposed Boardwalk site, makes it an ideal spot for a conference center, turning these facilities into essential economic and cultural assets for Freeport.

Conference centers typically cater to business events, such as annual meetings, trade shows, seminars, and small business conventions. They offer large meeting and banquet areas and smaller rooms with dedicated audiovisual capacity. Conference centers differ from event centers, which host smaller events like weddings, parties, bridal showers or larger gatherings such as concerts, depending on their size. Currently, the premier local venue is Freeport RiverPlace, which provides about 8,000 sq. ft. of space and can accommodate up to 400 people.



Figure 5.15 | The old city hall building can again become a civic anchor

Conference Center Comparison			
City	Population	Venue	Size (sf)
Mission	83,567	Mission Event Center	40,000
New Braunfels	57,740	New Braunfels Civic Conv. Center	50,000
Cleburne	29,337	Cleburne Conference Center	17,856
Paris	25,171	Love Civic Center	13,000
Eagle Pass	26,248	International Center for Trade	20,000
Coriscana	23,770	IOOF Event Center	20,000
Palestine	18,712	Palestine Civic Center	25,000
Freeport	10,560	Proposed Conference Center	41,000

The proposed Downtown Conference Center would likely require a new hotel nearby to support its operations and attract regional business events, allowing it to extend beyond serving just local programs. Freeport currently has four small hotels, all rated three stars or less. One initiative in this plan proposes a hotel for the Waterfront site directly adjacent to the proposed Downtown Conference Center. The synergies between these two potential developments are substantial, with the hotel serving both conference attendees and tourists looking to stay in the Downtown area.

Figure: Regional Conference Center Comparisons

Initiative: Redevelop OA Fleming Site as residential, mixed-use neighborhood. (A)

The 32-acre, nine-block site of the former OA Fleming Elementary School offers a prime opportunity to expand downtown Freeport with a walkable, mixed-use development. Its proximity to the historic downtown makes it suitable for a blend of medium-density housing with the potential for integrated civic and recreational programs. This may involve rezoning a portion of the site from R-2 to MF to allow for multifamily redevelopment to occur. This would be especially appropriate on the

eastern edge of the site adjacent to existing MF zones and to historic downtown. Regardless of the eventual decision regarding zoning, the City of Freeport should pursue development that advances the following urban design principles and elements:

Medium-density housing typologies. To grow Freeport, it will be critical to expand downtown housing stock beyond single-family homes. The former school site can support medium-density housing at 15-20 units per acre, introducing townhomes, duplexes, triplexes, courtyard apartments, and small multifamily buildings. These options respect the neighborhood’s existing scale urban character while offering the market a greater variety of options. The homes will target diverse demographics, including young professionals, families, and seniors, fostering a mixed-income community. Expanding housing choices will add residents, increase activity, and create a vibrant, lively downtown that supports local businesses and community life.

Mixed-use programming. Land use restrictions in Freeport’s current Code of Ordinances make mixed-used developments difficult to achieve in residential areas. Still, a mixed-use development that combines housing with commercial, civic, and recreational elements will help create a vibrant, functional neighborhood just west of downtown. A reimagined OA Fleming Elementary School and athletic field could support various mixed-use options. The 2019 Strategic Community Plan suggests developing a multi-purpose sports complex on the former Fleming Elementary School campus superblock (Kendig Keast Collaborative 2019). This plan imagines baseball, soccer, football fields, concessions, restrooms, and other ancillary improvements. Additionally, the proposal explores repurposing existing school buildings for municipal functions, such as a relocated library, community center, or youth center, to maximize the site’s community benefit.



Figure 5.16 | The OA Fleming site can accommodate multifamily a residential and mixed-use development

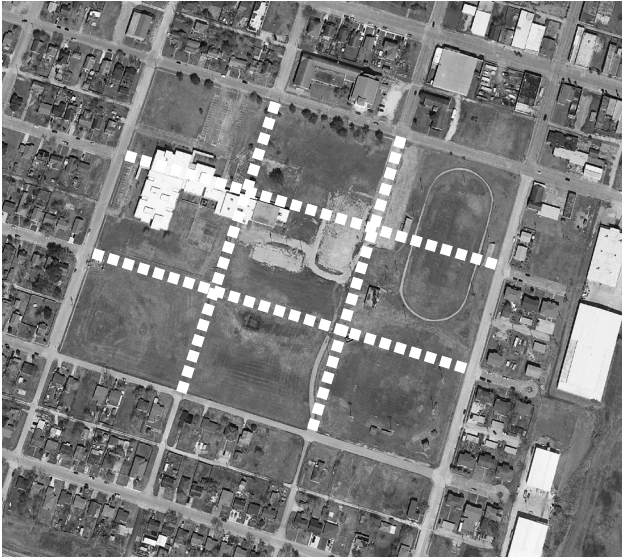


Figure 5.17 | The former OA Fleming Elementary site can support a future mixed-use neighborhood that integrates with the surrounding street grid

Street infrastructure. New street infrastructure should align with the adjacent street grid and block structure to ensure a harmonious transition between the old and new. Incorporating green infrastructure elements like bioswales, rain gardens, and permeable pavement will help manage stormwater, improve environmental resilience, and enhance the quality of life for residents.

Green Infrastructure and Public Spaces. If the existing school building and ballfields are removed, the design can intersperse pocket parks, communal gardens, and green space throughout the housing. These areas would provide residents with accessible outdoor spaces for recreation, relaxation, and social interaction, enhancing the overall quality of life and fostering community connections.

Walkability and Human-Scale Design. Designing the site with a strong emphasis on walkability is crucial. Streets should feature wide, shaded sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, and traffic-calming measures to ensure a safe and inviting environment for walking. Housing should be oriented towards the street with minimal setbacks, promoting an engaging streetscape where front porches and stoops encourage neighborly interactions. Integrating pedestrian paths and bike lanes will connect residents to the historic downtown, local parks, and other amenities, reducing reliance on cars and enhancing overall connectivity.

Contextual Architecture and Urban Design. New buildings should respect the architectural character of the adjacent neighborhood while integrating contemporary and

sustainable design elements. Medium-density housing should be designed to complement, not replicate, existing structures, allowing for increased height and density that fulfills urban growth objectives. The use of materials should reflect the local context to maintain visual continuity. This approach ensures that new developments enhance the neighborhood’s aesthetic and cultural values while introducing innovative design solutions that meet contemporary needs and sustainability goals.

Economic and Social Impact. Developing medium-density housing at 15 units per acre efficiently uses land and can significantly contribute to the local economy. By attracting a diverse mix of residents and supporting local businesses, the development can catalyze broader downtown revitalization. The increased residential presence will support downtown shops, restaurants, and services, creating a self-sustaining cycle of growth and investment.

Initiative: Repurpose the Old Rail Depot site for a civic function. (A)

The former Union Pacific site is an 11-acre property lies along the southern edge of Memorial Park, spanning from 4th to 8th St. Abandoned since 2002, the site now houses old railroad tracks, a building slab, a warehouse, and trailers. The exact ownership of the site remains unresolved. It is currently zoned in the Downtown District.

This northern portion of the site holds significant symbolic value due to its location at the southern end of Memorial Park, forming a natural linear axis with the Waterfront Site. Together, these two sites bookend the Downtown Historic

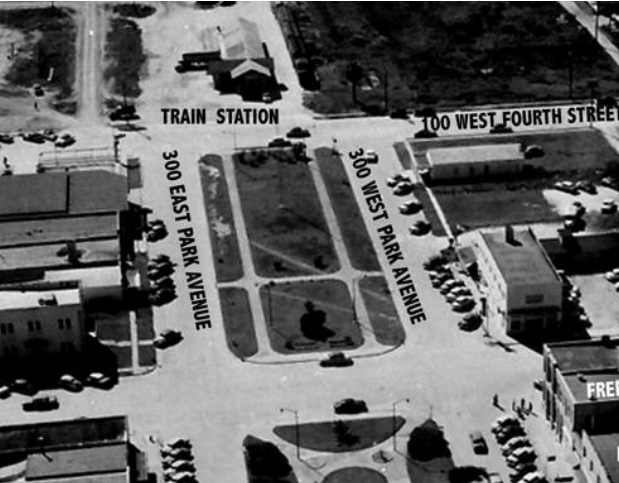


Figure 5.18 | View of historical train depot in 1960 | Nat Hickey

District. As such, redeveloping the Old Rail Depot site as a civic program would represent the highest and best use, reinforcing this key axis while enhancing downtown’s public realm. A civic function—such as a library, museum, community center, government office, or school—would provide long-term value, fostering public engagement and anchoring the downtown core.

By contrast, commercial or office development would be less impactful, though acceptable. The city should resist industrial use, storage, or continued abandonment, as all will diminish the site’s symbolic and civic potential. Redeveloping this site as a civic hub would not only honor its historical significance but also strengthen the downtown area as a center for community life.

Initiative: Support people before cars. (B)

Downtown Freeport has the potential to evolve into a dynamic metropolitan center that supports a broad spectrum of urban functions, including retail, employment, housing, entertainment, and services. Achieving this vision requires strategic land use and infrastructure initiatives that enhance the intensity of use. Downtown is in a good position to support intensified use because the area already has an abundance of public parking, with 548 total spaces and the potential to expand to 634 (City of Freeport 2023).

For the foreseeable future, Freeport can prioritize promoting a walkable, mixed-use downtown that favors pedestrians over cars. This involves enhancing walkability, developing mixed-use spaces, and increasing housing diversity. The aim is not to overcrowd downtown but to make better use of it by attracting a more comprehensive range of activities and visitors. A dynamic urban



Figure 5.19 | Streets are for people and cars | Urban Design Forum CC 4.0

environment that supports various functions will naturally draw more people, creating a lively and economically resilient downtown without compromising its sense of space. To pursue these goals, the City of Freeport should adopt the following urban planning strategies:

Enhance Walkability. Downtown Freeport must improve the pedestrian experience for residents, workers, and tourists. Preserving the original block structure and the existing network of sidewalks helps maintain an extensive and connected pedestrian experience. By implementing streetscape improvements, as outlined in the Sustain | Infrastructure and Ecology chapter, Freeport can create a more inviting and functional public realm for pedestrians. Enhancing walkability not only benefits pedestrians but also stimulates business development, generating a positive feedback loop of public and private investment.

Prioritize people before cars. To increase downtown’s vitality, it is essential to ensure that unbuilt land is developed to its highest and best use. Surface parking lots, while sometimes necessary, should not dominate the urban landscape. Instead, downtown Freeport should prioritize developments that support human activity, economic productivity, and programmatic diversity over car storage. While convenient parking remains important, the focus should shift toward designing pedestrian-friendly spaces that encourage visitors to park once and stay longer. High-density, mixed-use developments help achieve this by clustering amenities close together, making it easier for people to explore the area on foot. This approach enhances the pedestrian experience and supports small-scale retail, which are essential for creating a lively and thriving downtown.

Minimize the impact of structured parking on the street. To support downtown Freeport’s growth and revitalization, integrating structured parking facilities might eventually become necessary, particularly in areas with significant new developments such as the Waterfront site or the former OA Fleming Elementary School. However, it is crucial that these parking structures are thoughtfully designed and located to minimize their impact on the pedestrian experience at the street level.

From an urban planning perspective, structured parking should be situated on the interior of blocks rather than adjacent to the street. This approach ensures that the first-floor level of adjacent buildings remains active, vibrant, and pedestrian-friendly, enhancing the overall urban environment. The design of these parking structures should avoid blank facades and ideally integrate commercial or other active uses on the ground floor

adjacent to the street. This strategy helps maintain a continuous and engaging urban fabric that supports the pedestrian experience and promotes a lively street life, essential for a thriving downtown area.

Preserve downtown’s historic street grid. Preserving and restoring the downtown street grid is crucial for maintaining Freeport’s historic character and enhancing urban functionality. The historic block structure embodies original design principles prioritizing walkability, connectivity, and pedestrian scale while contributing to a unique sense of place. By reinforcing and expanding the historic street grid, the city can foster a pedestrian-friendly environment, reduce car dependence, and support vibrant mixed-use development.

Preserving the street grid and avoiding block consolidation or street removal keeps neighborhoods connected, ensures accessibility, and strengthens economic vitality. The grid structure enhances land use efficiency, facilitates easy navigation, and promotes active transportation. Maintaining the historic street grid is vital to creating a dynamic, livable, and economically resilient downtown that honors Freeport’s past while supporting future growth.

Initiative: Maximize the efficiency of future parking infrastructure. (B)

If it becomes necessary to add parking infrastructure in the future, here are some additional urban design strategies that will minimize the negative impacts on the character of downtown:

Implement Shared Parking Agreements. This land use and development strategy reduces parking requirements for adjacent tenants that generate their highest parking demands at different times. For example, an office building and a comedy club rarely experience peak parking loads simultaneously. By allowing developments to pursue shared parking agreements, cities can help reduce parking redundancies, lowering construction and maintenance costs (Smith 2020).

Consolidate Downtown parking options to maximize redevelopment opportunities. While cars are necessary in contemporary cities, excessive parking requirements and surface lots can hinder the creation of compact, mixed-use, and walkable environments. As Downtown Freeport fills in, adding people, programs, and infrastructure, it will need to increase parking capacity. However, the community must prioritize supporting people and programs over cars. This balance promotes both business

development and quality of life. The following policies have helped other communities achieve this balance:

Meter on-street parking. As demand increases, meter street parking in desirable areas. This approach allows the market to prioritize users who value the parking infrastructure most. The highest-and-best use of a public street parking space is rarely the employee who parks all day but rather the tourist who visits downtown to spend money. The ideal price for parking is the lowest one, which leaves one or two spaces open on each block. Demand and supply can reliably establish this dynamic (Schoup 2011).

Spend parking revenue from meters on public services. Allocate parking meter revenue to public services. This demonstrates to the community that parking fees positively impact the area, making demand-based parking fees more popular (Schoup 2011).

Reduce or remove off-street parking requirements. Allow a market to emerge for surface and structured parking, enabling developers and businesses to determine how many parking spaces to provide for customers and at what cost (Schoup 2011).

Allow on-street parking to fulfill parking requirements. This strategy works well in areas with high-intensity mixed-use, as peak parking times rarely align (Tachieva 2010, 230).

Reserve the best parking spaces for the intended users. Prioritize short-term shoppers, people attending doctor’s appointments, and business professionals for the best parking spots. In parking garages, reserve the lower level for customers while employees park above.

Promote high design standards for parking infrastructure. Encourage the use of permeable concrete or pavers for surface lots and screen them with trees or buildings. Consider these lots for civic events. As structured parking becomes necessary, require street-level retail and design floor plates and heights to accommodate future inhabitable programs as transportation technologies evolve (Tachieva 2010, 230).

Designate locations for future parking infrastructure. Recognize parking infrastructure as an essential part of the civic landscape. Designate future infrastructure locations in planning documents and fund them similarly to streets and utilities (Tachieva 2010, 230).

Initiative: Address absentee ownership. (C)

Redeveloping vacant urban sites is often challenging, particularly when absentee property owners hold the

land. These challenges intensify when a single absentee owner controls a key property or when multiple absentee owners hold adjacent properties. Such owners may be unresponsive, difficult to locate, or unwilling to sell, creating a fragmented landscape that disrupts cohesive development and impedes revitalization efforts.

The City can play a vital role in addressing these challenges by facilitating site assembly, which involves consolidating contiguous parcels of land under a single ownership or coordinated development plan. By helping private developers contact and negotiate with property owners, whether they own single properties or multiple adjacent parcels, the City can streamline the process, making it easier to assemble larger, more viable development sites. This support may include legal, financial, or logistical assistance, as well as mediating negotiations between property owners and developers.

Through strategic site assembly, the City can unlock



Figure 5.20 | The City should continue to acquire and assemble vacant or underutilized properties for development | Gary Knight CC 4.0

the potential of vacant and underutilized land, paving the way for projects that bring significant community benefits, attract investment, and foster sustainable growth. By proactively addressing the challenges posed by absentee property owners, the City can turn obstacles into opportunities for coordinated redevelopment that drives urban revitalization and enhances the quality of life for residents.

Initiative: Clean up and develop brownfield sites. (C)

A brownfield is a property where redevelopment may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates



Figure 5.21 | The City should continue to pursue funding to clean up and develop brownfield sites | Thomas Nugent CC 4.0

there are more than 450,000 brownfield sites in the U.S. Redeveloping these sites can grow the local tax base, create jobs, leverage existing infrastructure, slow the consumption of open land, and protect the environment (EPA, Overview of EPA's Brownfield Program).

Brownfield and greyfield sites often present different challenges than greenfield sites, requiring significant cooperation between city officials and private developers. The City of Freeport can support brownfield redevelopment by helping developers access significant federal funding for environmental assessment, cleanup, and job training. When addressing brownfield sites, policymakers must create conditions that are sufficiently positive to attract private investment. The Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is already making grant applications, positioning the City to utilize these resources effectively. By facilitating the cleanup and reinvestment in brownfield sites, Freeport can turn environmental challenges into opportunities for growth and revitalization.

Initiative: Use strategic code enforcement to preserve existing buildings. (C)

Proactive and consistent code enforcement is essential for supporting urban development and redevelopment, but it should be viewed as a preservation tool, not a punishment. Neglected and unattractive buildings can lower surrounding property values, reduce an area's appeal, and deter new investment. Left unaddressed, these conditions can trigger a cycle of decline, where disinvestment leads to further neglect, making redevelopment even more challenging to achieve.

To break this cycle, the City should adopt a proactive code

enforcement approach that upholds property standards while aligning with broader urban planning goals such as stabilizing vulnerable buildings, preserving historic fabric, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing community aesthetics. By focusing on preservation, the city can create a more cohesive and appealing environment that attracts investment and revitalization.

This approach should prioritize helping property owners repair and stabilize their buildings to prevent blight. Code enforcement should serve as a tool to support revitalization, not punishment. Regular monitoring and outreach can encourage maintenance, while legal action should be reserved for severe cases. Demolition should only be considered when life-safety issues cannot be resolved through repair. By prioritizing stabilization and preservation, the City can protect its urban fabric, foster reinvestment, and promote a cohesive, vibrant community.

Initiative: Convert second-story spaces into Downtown Lofts. (D)

Freeport's location next to the Port, Dow Chemical, and proximity to Mexico continues to position the community for strong demographic and economic growth. The recent additions of companies like Volkswagen, Del Monte, and Freeport Warehouse LLC will only increase Freeport's economic prospects. To capture the benefits of these circumstances, the City of Freeport must continue to add, reinforce, and diversify housing options throughout the city, including downtown.

Historically, one way that downtowns increase housing supply is by placing apartments, condominiums, and offices to second stories above street-level storefronts.



Figure 5.22 | Second story loft conversions can increase housing options for residents who want to live downtown | Eric Petschek CC 4.0

The Code of Ordinance allows property owners to locate Downtown Lofts on the second floor of buildings while prohibiting ground-floor residential (City of Freeport 2024). The compromise makes sense, allowing property owners to utilize the upper levels for residential use while maintaining the lower floor for institutional or commercial programs, which is a higher and better use of the street level. Several downtown property owners have already begun the second-story conversions, a trend that should continue.

Initiative: Reinforce existing residential fabric adjacent to Downtown. (D)

Most buildings along Park Ave., 2nd St., Broad St., and 4th St. are single-story, limiting the potential for upper-level apartments or condominium developments in the downtown area. Therefore, reinforcing the existing residential fabric adjacent to downtown is essential. The Freeport Strategic Community Plan highlights various neighborhood revitalization strategies focused on improving housing, beautification, safety, and promoting homeownership (Kendig Keast 2019, 69):

- *Homeowner rehabilitation programs.* These programs offer no- or low-interest loans, historic preservation efforts, home improvement loans, emergency repair assistance, and energy efficiency upgrades.
- *Beautification.* These efforts include Adopt-A-Block and Adopt-A-Street programs, lawn mowing assistance for seniors, street tree planting initiatives, public art projects, and community gardens.
- *Safety and enforcement strategies.* Promote Neighborhood Watch programs, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), and stricter building and property maintenance codes.
- *Infill.* These programs focus on demolishing unsafe buildings, registering and managing vacant properties, and land banking for redevelopment.
- *Homebuyer and developer financing.* These programs provide first-time homebuyer assistance and resources for new homeowners, fostering long-term community investment and growth.

Initiative: Pilot an ADU Program in the area west of Downtown. (D)

Accessory dwelling units (ADU) are small, auxiliary residential dwelling units that exist as converted zones of existing homes, additions to existing homes, or as new detached structures on the same lot, typically behind



Figure 5.23 | ADU's increase housing choices for residents | Snap ADU CC 4.0

the primary residence. Some of the more common arrangements include (BuildinganADU):

- Detached new construction ADUs, sometimes called granny flats or casitas
- Garage conversion ADUs
- ADUs above garages or workshops, sometimes called garage apartments or carriage houses
- ADUs that are attached to a primary residence
- Basement conversion ADUs, sometimes called basement apartments or mother-in-law units
- Internal ADUs, which occur when part of the primary house is zoned separately for an ADU

Whether ADUs are internal, attached, or detached, the addition of ADUs to Freeport would offer multiple benefits to residents (AARP). ADUs generate rental income, helping homeowners, especially seniors on fixed incomes, cover mortgages and avoid displacement. ADUs also provide affordable rental options in single-family neighborhoods and allow live-in landlords to offer stable or discounted rent, especially for family members. In terms of housing choices, ADUs accommodate various household types and life stages, offering affordable spaces for young people, expanding options for growing families, and allowing seniors to downsize while staying close to family. Environmentally and financially, ADUs are cost-effective to build, maintain, and heat, while utilizing existing infrastructure and minimizing urban sprawl. Their incremental addition to neighborhoods also avoids the

need for large, less popular developments like multistory apartments.

Currently, the City of Freeport permits Accessory Dwelling Units as “Limited Use” in R1, R2, MH, and W-R (City of Freeport 2024). This ordinance imposes the following minimal parameters:

- either the principal or accessory unit must be occupied by the property owner
- the accessory dwelling must have a floor area of at least 400 square feet but not exceed 50 percent of the gross floor area of the principal dwelling
- the ADU meet all setback requirements for the zoning district where it is located

The area between S Velasco Blvd and Cherry St., just west of Downtown, has residential lots typically 150 x 50 feet—large enough to comfortably accommodate Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Additionally, these blocks have alleys, which provide convenient access for ADUs. This area is within a one-mile walk or drive of Downtown, and similar conditions exist between S Velasco Blvd and Dix Drive. While some homes seem to have ADUs, the area as a whole is underutilized for this purpose. This presents a missed opportunity to expand housing options for renters and generate additional tax revenue for the city. To encourage homeowners to build ADUs, the City of Freeport could consider the following strategies:

- *Streamlined Permitting Process.* Simplify and speed up the application and permitting process for ADUs, reducing bureaucratic delays and costs for homeowners. Offering online permit applications can also make the process more accessible.
- *Waiving or Reducing Fees.* Cities can reduce or eliminate certain fees, such as impact fees, utility connection fees, or building permit fees, to lower the cost of constructing ADUs.
- *Financial Incentives.* Provide financial incentives such as grants, low-interest loans, or tax rebates for homeowners to build ADUs. These programs could target homeowners in areas with high housing demand or offer funds for energy-efficient or affordable ADU construction.
- *Educational Campaigns.* Launch public outreach efforts to educate homeowners about the benefits of ADUs, the process for building them, and available financial resources. This can include workshops, online resources, or partnerships with local builders.
- *Pre-Approved ADU Plans.* Offer a set of pre-approved ADU designs that meet local building codes. This can lower design and approval costs for homeowners and

Aerial View of Downtown



Figure 5.24 | Aerial view looking south over a restored Downtown Freeport

- *accelerate construction.*
- *Tax Abatements or Exemptions.* Provide tax incentives to homeowners who construct ADUs, such as property tax reductions for a certain number of years after the ADU is completed, especially if the unit is rented affordably.
- *Incentivizing Affordable ADUs.* Offer additional incentives, such as higher subsidies or bonus

- allowances, for homeowners who commit to renting their ADU at affordable rates for low- or moderate-income tenants.
- *Technical Assistance.* Provide direct support for homeowners interested in building ADUs, such as design consultations, assistance navigating local building codes, or guidance through the construction process.

Initiative: Encourage short-term rentals west of Downtown. (D)

As Freeport aims to boost Downtown tourism, it must also expand convenient lodging options for visitors. Currently, Freeport has four small hotels, all rated three stars or less, none within walking distance of Downtown Freeport. One proposed initiative envisions a hotel at the Waterfront site adjacent to the planned Downtown Conference Center. However, to increase tourism revenue, Freeport must offer more attractive lodging within walking distance of Downtown, allowing visitors to extend day trips into overnight stays and weekend getaways.

Given Downtown’s significant residential housing stock and limited buildable land, short-term rentals (STRs) offer a practical solution. According to Freeport’s Code of Ordinances, an STR is any residence rented for fewer than 28 days, excluding motels or hotels. STRs are allowed in R-1, R-2, W-R, and DT zones, subject to minimal Limited Use Standards (City of Freeport 2024).

Airbnb typically lists 5-8 STRs in Freeport on a given night, with only a few located downtown. This represents a missed opportunity, both in terms of lost tax revenue from visitors who usually stay in bed-and-breakfasts and the underutilization of the housing stock west of Downtown, particularly the area between S Velasco Blvd and Cherry St., which is within a one-mile walk or drive from Downtown. To encourage homeowners to add short-term rental units, the City of Freeport could consider the following strategies:

- **Streamlined Permit Process.** Streamline the procedure to obtain a City’s Short-Term Rental Permit Ordinance.

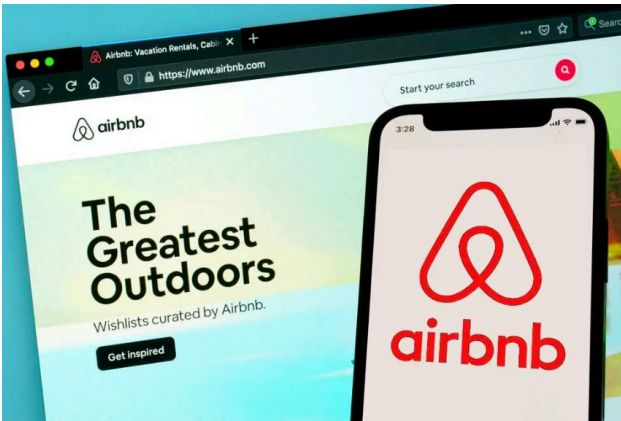


Figure 5.25 | Short Term Rentals can provide more housing options for visitors and support ecotourism | FMT CC 4.0

Clear guidelines and easy registration can attract more property owners to participate.

- **Tax Incentives.** Offer tax breaks or reduced fees for property owners who list their properties for short-term rentals, especially in targeted areas the city wants to revitalize or develop.
- **Marketing Support.** Collaborate with platforms like Airbnb to promote the city as a desirable destination, highlighting the potential earnings for property owners who offer short-term rentals.
- **Education and Support Programs.** Provide workshops or online resources for property owners on how to manage short-term rentals effectively, including information on local regulations, taxes, and best practices.
- **Financial Incentives for Upgrades.** Offer grants or low-interest loans for property improvements, encouraging owners to upgrade their homes for short-term rental use, which can enhance property value and appeal.
- **Pilot Programs.** Start a pilot program that offers additional benefits, like reduced utility rates or city-sponsored advertising, for property owners who opt into offering short-term rentals in designated areas.

Initiative: Pursue public policies that combat residential displacement. (D)

The City of Freeport is considering several initiatives to advance Downtown development, including improving pedestrian infrastructure, expanding multifamily housing options, adding a boardwalk, and applying to list Downtown on the National Register of Historic Places. While increased development can improve the quality of life and financial prospects for residents, tourists, and business/property owners, it may also have unintended negative effects, such as residential displacement. Displacement occurs when rising real estate values, county appraisals, and property taxes force residents to sell or vacate their homes. To mitigate this, Freeport must pursue parallel strategies that preserve and expand affordable housing while fostering development. This dual approach is essential for maintaining the cultural and physical character of Downtown for both current and future residents. Three types of displacement typically occur in redeveloping neighborhoods (Kay 2019, 5):

Direct displacement. This refers to situations where rising housing costs force residents to leave their homes. Causes include non-renewal of leases, evictions, eminent domain, or deteriorating conditions that make homes uninhabitable. These factors often lead to redevelopment, attracting higher-income residents.



Figure 5.26 | As the City grows, it can pursue policies that minize residential displacement | Images Money CC 4.0

Indirect displacement. This occurs gradually as rents and property prices rise, causing low-income residents to move out and be replaced by higher-income individuals. Discriminatory policies, such as restrictions on housing vouchers, can accelerate this process.

Cultural displacement. This occurs when retail and services shift to cater to wealthier new residents, altering the neighborhood’s character. Long-time residents may feel disconnected even if they remain in the area.

City officials have several policy options to combat direct, indirect, and cultural displacement. Common strategies include:

Freezing or capping property tax increases on residents who are vulnerable to displacement. U.S. cities are exploring tax programs to help retain low-income, senior, or disabled homeowners in gentrifying neighborhoods. Texas offers homestead exemptions for seniors and disabled residents, which can apply to school district or county taxes (Comptroller.Texas.Gov, Taxes).

The City of Freeport could further reduce tax burdens for low-income or senior residents by funding senior home repair programs, particularly in gentrifying neighborhoods. For example, San Antonio’s Under 1 Roof Program replaces damaged roofs with energy-efficient ones for qualifying homeowners who meet income requirements (City of San Antonio).

Building more affordable housing. The most effective way to increase access to affordable housing is by building more of it. To meet demand and prevent displacement, Freeport can simplify the process for developers to construct various housing types across the city, including Downtown.

The Comprehensive Plan outlines several initiatives to support this goal, such as identifying locations suitable for new multifamily housing. The City can consider additional strategies to prioritize developers committed to building middle-income and affordable housing, including initiating Public Improvement Districts and/or Tax Incremental Reinvestment Zones. More information about both mechanisms is available in Expand | Economics and Development.

Leverage Brazoria County resources. The Brazoria County Department of Housing and Urban Development manages multiple housing programs targeting low-income families. For example, the Brazoria County Community Development Home Program offers financial assistance for home rehabilitation or reconstruction through a forgivable loan, available to homeowners who have lived on the property for five years, have current property taxes, and meet income limits. The loan is forgiven after 5 to 20 years, based on the amount. Additional programs, including a list of housing complexes with assisted rents, are available on Brazoria County’s website.

Additionally, Freeport’s designation as an Opportunity Zone, specifically Census Tract 6643, provides tax incentives to attract private investment in affordable housing. These incentives encourage long-term investments, helping developers reduce costs while increasing housing options for 5,700 residents in the tract. Covering 3.1 square miles, this tract is one of six Opportunity Zones in Brazoria County, offering a unique opportunity to address housing needs and promote economic growth in Freeport.

06 Implement | Roles and Tracking

06 Implement | Roles and Tracking

How to use the Comprehensive Plan

The Comprehensive Downtown Plan is not a final destination but a dynamic tool to help Freeport achieve its vision for downtown. By following the initiatives outlined in this Plan, the community can make coordinated and strategic progress in economic development, land use, zoning and development, historic preservation, infrastructure, and public realm improvements. To remain effective, the Plan must adapt to changing circumstances. This requires regular modifications and updates as the community evolves. The City should commit to revising the Downtown Plan every five years, ensuring that the objectives outlined in the Plan provide consistent guidelines and policy direction over time.

City leaders must engage citizens and key stakeholders to implement the plan, fostering widespread participation and support. This includes keeping the community informed about the City of Freeport's progress and actively involving them in the ongoing development and enhancement of the downtown area. Adaptability and community involvement are crucial to ensure the Plan continues to guide Freeport's growth and development effectively.

Roles and Responsibilities

City Council. The City Council, as the community's elected officials, should take the lead role in implementing the plan. Their key responsibilities include establishing priorities, setting timelines for actions, and determining the budget for implementation. They must work with the City Manager to ensure effective coordination among various groups responsible for executing the plan's strategies.

The Council's specific tasks involve adopting and amending the plan based on recommendations from the Planning Commission, championing the plan, setting implementation priorities and timelines, approving necessary funding, adopting or amending land development regulations, approving intergovernmental and development agreements, and providing final approval of projects and their costs during the annual budget process. Additionally, they provide policy direction to the Planning Commission, other appointed boards and commissions, and City staff.

City Staff. City staff should manage the day-to-day implementation of the plan and support capital improvement planning efforts. They are responsible for drafting new or amended land development regulations, conducting studies, and developing special-purpose or

area plans. They review land development applications for consistency with the Strategic Community Plan, negotiate intergovernmental and development agreements, and administer collaborative programs. Additionally, they ensure open communication with various implementation partners, maintain an inventory of potential plan amendments for periodic review, and generate an annual report on implementation progress for the Planning Commission and City Council.

Planning and Zoning Commission. The Planning Commission should ensure that recommendations to the City Council align with the plan's goals, priorities, and action strategies. They should prepare and present annual reports to the City Commission. The report should identify the past year's accomplishments and new goals for the coming year. City leaders should use the annual report to help identify priorities in the City of Freeport's yearly budget. This process will translate goals into accomplishments.

Economic Development Corporation. The Freeport Economic Development Corporation should coordinate with city staff to host the education initiative, periodically obtaining public input to keep the plan current through various community outreach methods. They assist city staff in implementing plan elements related to economic and, occasionally, housing development. Additionally, they help generate and present the annual report on plan implementation progress and serve on the City's interdepartmental plan implementation committee.

Historical Commission. This to-be-established commission will be responsible for preserving, protecting, and promoting the historical and architectural integrity of the Downtown Historic District. Commission members will bring relevant expertise and experience in architecture, construction, development, and history. All commissioners should receive commission training from an organization like The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions, which offers this training and extensive free materials on their website. The commission's duties will include:

- Reviewing and Approving Changes: Evaluating and approving Certificates of Appropriateness for buildings, structures, and sites within the historic district to ensure they are in keeping with the area's historical and architectural character. This includes renovations, demolitions, and new constructions.
- Guiding Preservation Efforts: Providing guidelines and recommendations for preserving, restoring, and rehabilitating historic properties. They may offer

technical assistance and resources to help property owners maintain their buildings' historical integrity.

- Public Education and Outreach: Educating the public about the historical significance of the district through workshops, lectures, tours, and publications. They aim to raise awareness and appreciation for the district's historical and cultural heritage.
- Advising on Policy and Regulation: Advising the City on policies, ordinances, and regulations that affect the historic district. They may help draft and recommend regulations that protect and enhance the district's historic character.
- Maintaining Historical Records: Keeping detailed records of the district's historical assets, including an inventory of historic buildings and sites. They may also document changes and alterations to these assets over time.
- Grant and Funding Assistance: Helping property owners and the community secure grants and funding for preservation projects. They may assist in identifying funding opportunities and guiding the application process.
- Enforcing Preservation Standards: Ensuring compliance with local, state, and federal preservation standards and regulations. They may have the authority to enforce preservation laws and take action against violations.
- Fostering Community Involvement: Engaging the community in preservation efforts by involving residents, businesses, and organizations in the decision-making process. This can include forming advisory committees and hosting public meetings.

Main Street Advisory Board. As an affiliate of the Texas Historical Commission (THC), this Advisory Board will play a significant role in guiding and supporting the Main Street Program, which focuses on revitalizing Freeport's historic downtown. The board's responsibilities include:

- Historic Preservation Advocacy: Promoting the preservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings and structures within the Main Street district to maintain the area's historical integrity.
- Strategic Planning and Guidance: Providing strategic direction and advice on policies, initiatives, and programs that support the revitalization goals of the Main Street Program.
- Economic Development Support: Assisting in efforts to boost economic development by attracting new businesses, supporting existing businesses, and encouraging local shopping to enhance the economic base of the Main Street district.
- Community Engagement and Outreach: Encouraging

community involvement and support through outreach activities, organizing events, and fostering partnerships with local stakeholders, including residents, business owners, and civic organizations.

- Resource and Fund Allocation: Helping to identify and secure funding sources, including grants, donations, and sponsorships, and advising on the allocation of resources to various projects and initiatives within the Main Street district.
- Program Promotion and Marketing: Promoting the Main Street district as a vibrant and attractive place to live, work, and visit through marketing and promotional campaigns, events, and other activities.
- Performance Monitoring and Evaluation: Monitoring the progress and effectiveness of the Main Street Program, evaluating outcomes, and recommending improvements or adjustments to ensure the program's success.
- Collaboration with Texas Historical Commission (THC): Working closely with the THC to align local Main Street initiatives with state-level goals and resources, ensuring compliance with THC guidelines and leveraging THC expertise and support.

Potential Benefits of Adding an Urban Planner to Staff

Adding an urban planner to city staff can support the successful implementation of this downtown comprehensive plan by streamlining short-term initiatives and ensuring that long-term goals are achieved. This position might be a cost-effective investment for the city, as it reduces reliance on external consultants and enhances the city's ability to secure significant grant funding, potentially offsetting the planner's salary costs. Here are some additional potential benefits:

- Expert Coordination and Management. An urban planner can facilitate coordination among city departments, stakeholders, and consultants, ensuring cohesive progress on all aspects of the comprehensive plan.
- Focused Implementation. A dedicated planner keeps the city focused on achieving the plan's goals, adhering to timelines, and prioritizing tasks, avoiding delays and keeping projects on track.
- Grant Writing and Funding. Planners are adept at identifying funding opportunities and writing grant applications, which can bring in state, federal, or private funds to support plan initiatives.
- Community Engagement. An urban planner can lead outreach efforts, gathering public input and building community support, which is crucial for project success and helps address concerns early.



Figure 6.1 | A staff planner would help with coordination, management, grant writing, and implementation | Christoper Mardorf CC 4.0

- **Regulatory Navigation.** Planners are experienced in navigating zoning codes, land use regulations, and environmental requirements, which can streamline the approval processes and reduce bureaucratic hurdles.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation.** An urban planner can track progress, evaluate outcomes, and make data-driven adjustments to the plan as needed, ensuring that it remains effective and responsive to changing conditions.

Overall, adding an urban planner to city staff is a strategic move that not only facilitates the successful implementation of a downtown comprehensive plan but also proves to be cost-effective by improving efficiency, securing funding, and driving economic growth.

Tracking Milestones

The Comprehensive Plan’s initiatives are organized into short-, intermediate-, and long-term implementation milestones. This chart will assist city leaders in identifying and prioritizing policies, programs, and development activities that collectively create a clear path toward achieving the Plan’s long-term goals.

The Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council can use this format to develop annual and five-year updates to the Downtown Plan. City officials can prioritize activities based on the following criteria:

Short-term milestones. Actions that do not require significant budget obligations and can be completed within 0-5 years.

Medium-term milestones. Actions that require moderate budget obligations and can be completed within 6-10 years.

Long-term milestones. Actions that require substantial

budget obligations and can be completed in 11 years or beyond.

This structured approach ensures that city leaders can systematically track progress and make informed decisions to effectively achieve the Plan’s long-range goals.

Updates to the Comprehensive Plan

Annual updates. Annual plan amendments allow for minor updates and revisions to reflect changes in land use, implementation policy, city ordinances, and municipal regulations. These changes should be documented as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan to acknowledge modifications officially. The approval process includes public hearings, dialogue, and actions by both the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council, with amendments adopted by resolution.

Elected and appointed city officials, staff, and the community should use the Plan as a tool for daily, weekly, and monthly decision-making. This ensures that routine decisions, such as applications for rezoning, align with the community’s fundamental goals and strategies. The City has various tools and programs to implement the Plan, including:

- Zoning policy
- Zoning enforcement
- Historic district review and enforcement
- Housing and building codes
- Housing and economic development programs
- Capital improvement programs for streets, transit, parks, and trails
- Annual budget reviews
- Tax reinvestment zone funds

Five-Year updates. The Planning and Zoning Commission and the City Council should collaborate on major updates to the Plan every five years to ensure it reflects current development scenarios. These periodic updates will require city officials, staff, and the community to review and revise goals, objectives, and implementation strategies. The community, having contributed to the Plan’s goals and initiatives through public forums, should continue to be involved. This can be achieved through annual open forums that update the community on progress and provide an opportunity for public feedback.

Chapter 2 Initiatives: Preservation and Construction	Begin Initiative	Complete Initiative	Notes
	(0-5 years)	(6-10 years)	
Separate Freeport Historical Commission and Main Street Advisory Board.			
Train the First Cohort of Historical Commissioners.			
Establish a local historic district.			
Adopt Downtown Historic District Design Guidelines by Ordinance.			
Create a National Register of Historic Places Historic District.			
Apply to the Certified Local Government Program.			
Offer a Historic Preservation Tax Credit Education Program.			
Leverage and expand financial incentives for Historic Preservation.			
Seek financial assistance from the National Trust Investment Corporation.			
Establish Local Landmarks.			
Create a Preservation Plan.			
Document oral histories to extend Freeport’s living heritage.			
Document Freeport’s physical heritage with a 3D Lidar Map.			

Chapter 3 Initiatives: Economics and Development	Begin Initiative	Complete Initiative	Notes
	(0-5 years)	(6-10 years)	
Streamline Business Development with One-Stop Permitting.			
Pursue Pop-Up Retail Events.			
Encourage local and experiential retail and restaurants.			
Establish a dedicated Downtown Façade Improvement Grant Program.			
Leverage the Brazosport SBDC to help local entrepreneurs.			
Maximize existing financial and administrative tools.			
Establish and promote a Shopt Local Campaign.			
Rebrand Downtown to emphasize water-based recreation.			
Upgrade user experience at Bryan Beach.			
Rebrand Downtown to emphasize ecotourism.			
Market the San Bernard Loop as an ecotourist destination.			
Develop a phased and seasonal approach to tourism.			
Maximize the resources and impact of the Texas Main Street Program.			
Provide charging stations and Public Wifi throughout Downtown.			
Leverage design and place-making to drive economic growth.			
Implement a municipal wayfinding system.			
Work with TXDOT to improve the drive from downtown to Bryan Beach.			
Initiate Art in Public Places Program.			

Chapter 4 Initiatives: Infrastructure and Ecology	Begin Initiative	Complete Initiative	Notes
	(0-5 years)	(6-10 years)	
Implement a wayfinding system within the historic downtown.			
Pursue a Complete Streets Program downtown.			
Implement a Complete Streets and Green Streets Toolkit.			
Maximize LID principles to improve stormwater management.			
Upgrade utilities in parallel with street infrastructure.			
Align codes with Complete Streets and Green Streets programs.			
Restore the North block of Memorial Park.			
Reimagine the South block of Memorial Park.			
Raise the grade at the intersection of Broad St. and Memorial Park.			
Leverage TIRZ #1 to fund future streetscape and park improvements.			
Work with Brazoria County, TxDOT, and MPO to improve FM 1495.			

Chapter 5 Initiatives: Land Use and Development	Begin Initiative	Complete Initiative	Notes
	(0-5 years)	(6-10 years)	
Encourage a mixed-use program for the Waterfront Site.			
Reimagine Waterfront site as a connector between Downtown and River.			
Repurpose Old City Hall as a Downtown Civic Anchor.			
Redevelop OA Fleming Site as residential, mixed-use neighborhood.			
Repurpose the Old Rail Depot site for a civic function.			
Support people before cars.			
Maximize the efficiency of future parking infrastructure.			
Address absentee ownership.			
Clean up and develop brownfield sites.			
Use strategic code enforcement to preserve existing buildings.			
Convert second-story spaces into Downtown Lofts.			
Reinforce existing residential fabric adjacent to Downtown.			
Pilot an ADU Program in the area west of Downtown.			
Encourage short-term rentals west of Downtown.			
Pursue public policies that combat residential displacement.			

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