

# DEFENDING GREAT PLACES



The region will be more resilient to economic downturns and natural disasters by creating and maintaining great places.

The region was largely developed after the advent of the automobile, and much of the built environment was developed with a focus on convenience for automobile users. Strip centers, tract housing, and low-density development are common. Often these places lack a sense of identity, and while affordable to develop, these communities can decline in value over time.

A community's economic resilience is enhanced when thoughtful investments are made in a concerted and coordinated manner. Creating the drainage infrastructure or levees needed to defend communities from flooding are more affordable when communities are compact rather than sprawling. Low-density development can have a lower taxable value per-square-foot and can prove costly over time as the costs to maintain a more extensive system become burdensome as the infrastructure ages.

Great places are those that are safe, convenient, and attractive and are more economically resilient, attracting and retaining residents and employers.

Great places are vibrant, walkable, mixed-use places with recreational opportunities and open space; their physical fabric reflects the community's unique history and identity.

Great places have attractive streetscapes with pedestrian improvements, landscaping, lighting, street furniture, and public art. They are comfortable and foster a sense of place.

Great places merit ongoing investment and improvements and have a concentration of employment, residences, and activities.

Great places demonstrate economic vitality, attract skilled workers and new businesses, and provide a competitive advantage through the differentiation in the quality of their environment.

Great places have sufficient infrastructure not only to prevent extensive damage from flooding but also have sufficient infrastructure to support business development and a livable environment.

Great places can be defended through implementing the following Best Practices:

## Best Practices for Defending Great Places

**Create an actionable plan to coordinate development**

**Invest in the infrastructure needed to spur development**

**Attract employers through creating a vision for a community**

# DEFENDING GREAT PLACES: BEST PRACTICES

## Create an Actionable Plan to Coordinate Development: Bay City North Downtown Plan

Bay City, the county seat of Matagorda County, is a rural community on the Texas Gulf Coast between Houston and Victoria. Bay City has attracted several large industrial facilities and is seeking to enhance its livability to attract those employees to live in town, instead of losing them to other counties where there is a greater availability of newer housing stock and retail amenities. In 2013, the City of Bay City developed the Bay City North Downtown Plan to serve as a catalyst to stimulate public and private investment in the 12-block area immediately north of downtown Bay City. A market analysis, as part of the Bay City North planning process, indicated that there is demand for single-family housing, infill small lot housing, and apartments. The plan outlined strategies to transform the area into a high-quality, mixed-use district; generate interest from developers and prospective residents; assess the phasing of infrastructure improvements; and identify funding mechanisms to implement the plan. Since the completion of the plan, Bay City has developed and adopted a form-based code for the district, established a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ, a mechanism that finances redevelopment without directly raising taxes), and created a 380 agreement (an authorization allowing districts to offer development incentives) to allow private development of multifamily and townhome projects in the area on formerly publicly held land. Three speculative homes are currently under construction in the district.



As part of the development of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (Our Great Region), the Houston-Galveston Area Council worked with local sponsors and consultants to develop the Bay City North Downtown Plan to set forth a specific vision for North Downtown - a high quality, mixed-use housing district that complements the commercial and civic activity of Downtown

# DEFENDING GREAT PLACES: BEST PRACTICES

The Greater East End Management District study investigated how the neighborhood could enhance parks and amenities along the Buffalo Bayou to enhance the neighborhood's character while keeping critical facilities out of the floodway. The study identified the need for pedestrian linkages and connections to the bayou.



## Invest in the Infrastructure Needed to Spur Development: East End

Houston's East End is one of the oldest residential neighborhoods in the city, immediately to the east of downtown. The neighborhood faces the challenges of aging infrastructure, a low-income and declining population, a lack of pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure, and a jobs-housing imbalance in which over 90% of East End residents work outside of the area. The Greater East End Management District (GEEMD), with support from H-GAC, funded a series of planning studies to identify the extent of these challenges and offer solutions through capital improvements. Following-through on its study recommendations, the GEEMD secured over \$31 million in infrastructure investments, leveraging local, state, and federal partnerships to bring in \$5 for every \$1 of GEEMD money spent. To guide its ambitious investment goals and build local economic resiliency, the GEEMD Board of Directors embraces a clear vision of place-based improvements for the East End to create more walkable and mixed-use spaces with local destinations for residents and visitors. Its \$31 million of improvements funded 35 miles of sidewalk, nearly 800 trees, four parks, almost 400 pedestrian lights, 90 benches, 14 bike racks, and an iconic urban street market that pays homage to the neighborhood's Latino heritage. Intentional investments in walkability and quality of life create a more resilient East End by building upon its strengths while answering multiple local challenges.

## Attract Employers through Creating a Vision for a Community: Waller Livable Center Study & Daikin Plant

Waller, population 2,767, is a small town located on the border of northwest Harris County and northeast Waller County, on the U.S. 290 corridor and metropolitan Houston's fringe. In 2009, Waller participated in the Houston-Galveston Area Council's Livable Centers initiative and created a plan to address future development, preserve the community's identity and sense of place, and enhance economic development. The plan forges a common vision of the town's intentions and desires for the future through the coordination of public infrastructure investments and private development and led to \$1,600,000 in public investments.<sup>6</sup> The City of Waller created the plan to make the community a more appealing place to live, work, and play. Waller's efforts paid off by attracting the \$417-million-dollar Daikin H-VAC manufacturing facility. The 4.1 million square-foot manufacturing facility (second in size only to Boeing as the nation's largest industrial building) employs 6,000 workers and is expected to generate \$3.9 billion in annual economic impact for the Houston region.<sup>7</sup> Daikin's investment has spurred the development of a master-planned community and a multifamily community in the Waller area and has attracted manufacturers that seek to supply Daikin, such as Broad-Ocean Motor Company.