



# 1. Land Use Patterns

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

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

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

**Policy 1.1.1:** City policies and programs should encourage the rehabilitation of upper stories of existing downtown buildings as office, retail, entertainment, and residential space. Financial incentives should be considered to encourage investment from the private sector.

- 1. The City administers a Neighborhood Empowerment Zone (NEZ) Program in Districts 1,2,3,4 & 8 (inclusive of Downtown) through which building permit fees are waived and tax abatement is provided for 5 years for residential application or 5 to 10 years on commercial application depending on the investment amount. The City's Economic Development Board is working to update the NEZ Program to encourage the development of housing in downtown.**
- 2. The Iturbide "IT" program provides for the reimbursement (over a 5 year period) of the Sales Tax (1 %) with a cap equal to the start-up investment together with the waiver of building permit fees for rehabilitation of existing buildings within the Downtown Arts and Entertainment District along Iturbide from Juarez Avenue to Santa Ursula Ave.**

**Policy 1.1.2:** The city encourages new multi-story mixed-use buildings with windows and doors facing all sidewalks to be constructed on vacant lots. The city should not require any on-site parking for buildings downtown.

**Policy 1.1.3:** Large new downtown complexes such as a downtown mall, convention center, museums, or recreational facilities should fit urbanistically within the downtown. As large new uses are added, updated, or replaced, they should be integrated into Laredo's original street network and other land uses rather than being isolated in large complexes of civic buildings.

**Plans are underway to relocate the City's Visitor and Conventions Bureau Office from its current location at 501 San Agustin to El Portal located at 1600 Water. Council has further authorized the creation of a Police Substation at the San Agustin location due to the increasing nightlife traffic in the area.**

**Policy 1.1.4:** Downtown redevelopment strategies will include new and improved civic buildings and civic spaces, plus shared parking for residents, employees, and visitors.

**The City has recently constructed a new parking facility at Convent and Matamoros.**

**Policy 1.1.5:** The city's historic design guidelines should be expanded and made mandatory to highlight downtown's architectural heritage, to avoid unnecessary damage to this valuable resource, and to ensure that new buildings maintain and improve this historic character.

## Inner City Neighborhoods

The inner city neighborhoods could host greater business creativity, non-profit entrepreneurs, and

**Goal 1.2:** The City of Laredo highly values the historic neighborhoods that were laid out in a grid around the downtown and will maintain and improve their highly walkable character, transit

<p>economic diversity, while providing an attraction for visitors, seniors, and young talent.</p>	<p>accessibility, diverse mix of land uses, and historic building stock.</p>
<p><b>Policy 1.2.1:</b> The city should maintain and strengthen the historic landmark status of San Agustin, Old Mercado, and El Azteca neighborhoods.</p>	
<p><b>Policy 1.2.2:</b> The city will actively consider historic landmark status for additional qualifying neighborhoods such as El Cuatro, Fort McIntosh, the Heights, Jarvis, St. Peter's, El Tonto, and the Heights.</p>	
<p><b>Policy 1.2.3:</b> Vacant and underutilized parcels in and around the city's traditional historic neighborhoods can be excellent locations for redevelopment that adds housing, shopping, employment, entertainment, and recreational options for nearby residents. Redevelopment of such sites should mesh with the scale and character of these existing neighborhoods rather than imposing a suburban or high-rise model on traditional neighborhoods. The city's zoning and development regulations should be modified accordingly. Additional infill incentives should be considered by the city.</p>	
<p><b>Policy 1.2.4:</b> The city shall coordinate its land development regulations and zoning regulations to create a unified development ordinance to make development more predictable and easier to navigate the development process.  <b>The update of the Land Development Code to codify the vision and goal identified by the Comprehensive Plan is underway.</b></p>	
<p><b>Policy 1.2.5:</b> The city shall explore the use of tax increment financing (TIF) to improve targeted areas such as the downtown and inner city neighborhoods. A TIF district essentially reallocates funds from property taxes to encourage investment within the district. Any increased tax revenues collected as a result of an increase in property values then go into the TIF fund and can be used by the city for a wide range of purposes within the TIF to promote redevelopment.  <b>The Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone #1 in Downtown was created for this purpose.</b></p>	
<p><b>Policy 1.2.6:</b> The city shall look for opportunities to partner with private entities to enable and encourage development within the inner city neighborhoods.</p>	
<p><b>New Neighborhoods</b></p>	<p><b>Goal 1.3:</b> The city wishes to augment conventional development pattern with strategic suburban retrofits or urban infill where practical.</p>
<p><b>Policy 1.3.1:</b> The city's zoning and land development regulations should be reviewed and amended to encourage new neighborhoods to have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Greater interconnection of internal streets;</li> <li>b. Provision of small parks, community gardens, and civic functions within neighborhoods;</li> <li>c. A greater variety of housing types within each neighborhood;</li> <li>d. Protection of natural features such as stream beds and flood zones;</li> <li>e. Mixed-use zoning;</li> <li>f. Form-Based Code.</li> <li>g. Designated subdivision for agriculture and livestock estates.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The award of a professional services contract to update the Land Development Code to codify the vision and goal identified by the Comprehensive Plan was awarded to Able City, Laredo, Texas in May 2019.</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>Extraterritorial Jurisdiction &amp; Annexation</b></p>	<p>Goal Policy Responsible  <b>Goal 1.4:</b> The city will use the limited authority granted by Texas law to regulate the subdivision of land within its ETJ in order to shape future growth in accordance with <i>Viva Laredo</i>.</p>

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

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

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

- a. Must be contiguous with the existing city limits;
- b. The landowners must agree to build all local, collector, and arterial roads at their expense and must submit a general development plan for the area; and
- c. The landowners must pay water and sewer impact fees plus an additional per unit annexation fee toward fire, police, libraries, and recreation centers.  
**The City does charge water & sewer treatment capacity fees as part of the annexation agreement.**
- d. Permit a lower impact threshold when new development meets higher standards for complete, compact, connected neighborhoods.
- e. Require a Transit Impact Development Fee (TIDF) levied on new development to offset new development's impacts on the transit system. Revenue generated by the fee is directed to El Metro and is to be used to fund capital and operations. This annexation policy should require creating a commitment to mixed use development on the larger tracts in the development agreements that accompany formal annexation. The city may use economic incentives for landowners where it deems appropriate to accomplish the vision of the plan.

## Industrial Lands

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

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

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

**As directed by the Plan, staff discourages access to industrial development through residential areas.**

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

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

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

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

## Future Land Use Map

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

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

## Application of *Viva Laredo*

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

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

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

- a. The proposed zoning district's effect on development or redevelopment of the property, particularly whether the rezoning will further or at least not conflict with specific policies listed under other goals of *Viva Laredo*.
- b. Whether the property is in a Regional Mixed-Use Center or Neighborhood Mixed-Use Center, defined in *Viva Laredo*. For instance, these areas:
  - i. Are preferred locations for higher density development and redevelopment;
  - ii. Are ideal for a balance of housing, jobs, shopping, recreation, and civic uses;
  - iii. Will be served by walkable thoroughfares; and
  - iv. Are suitable for zoning districts that would orient most buildings toward streets.
- c. The proposed zoning district's effect on the property and surrounding property, after evaluating the following factors:
  - i. The physical context of the property and surrounding properties, including recent or anticipated changes to that context,
  - ii. Any historic district or other special designations that may be applicable,
  - iii. Potential adverse effects that might be caused by approval or denial of the requested rezoning,
  - iv. Anticipated effects on the natural environment,
  - v. Whether the area is stable (low vacancy rates and units that are not for sale) or in transition, and
  - vi. Any changed social, economic, or physical conditions that make the existing zoning no longer suitable for the property.



## 2. Downtown & Inner City Revitalization & Historic Preservation

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

### General

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

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

### Downtown Public Realm

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

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

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

**A professional services contract to update the Land Development Code was awarded May 2019.**

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

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

**Goal 2.3:** Improve downtown's streets until they become Laredo's premier public spaces

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

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

- a. Downtown streets, particularly within the Central Business District, are to be maintained first and foremost for pedestrians, transit vehicles, and deliveries. Private automobiles will be accommodated to the greatest extent possible consistent with this priority.
- b. Streets should not be permanently closed or dead-ended or converted to one way traffic except in cases of overriding public necessity or to allow the creation of pedestrian-only public spaces.
- c. Seek opportunities to reopen former streets to bring more economic vitality to surrounding properties.
- d. Convert one-way streets back to two-way streets to increase the economic viability of businesses and to make downtown more intuitively navigable for residents and visitors as per the Proposed Downtown Circulation Pattern found in this chapter.

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

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

- v. Timing of traffic signals to reward managed steady vehicular speeds  
**Downtown traffic lights have been synchronized.**
- b. Provide on-street parking on at least 50% of all downtown streets.  
**Parking on Downtown street exceeds 50%.**
- c. Redesign downtown streets using pedestrian-friendly thoroughfare section assemblies from the thoroughfare plan in the Mobility Chapter. Design arterials using guidance in the ITE recommended practice, *Designing Walkable Urban Thoroughfares: A Context Sensitive Approach*.
- d. Turn traffic signals to four-way stops in off-peak times when long red wait times on empty streets discourage downtown visitors.

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

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

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

## Lighting, Signs & Utilities

**Goal 2.5:** Streets and spaces are safe and inviting with adequate lighting and clear signage.

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

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

**Utilities Dept. is working with landowners to place meters not on sidewalk, however, in most areas of downtown, there is no space to install the meter between the sidewalk and the building.**

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

## Downtown Buildings

**Goal 2.6:** Revitalize downtown first.

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

**The City has Neighborhood Empowerment Zones inclusive of the Downtown that provide for the waiver of building permit fees and provides tax abatements for 5 years, for residential application, and 5 -10 years for commercial application depending on the amount of investment.**

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

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

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

**Policy 2.6.5:** Create a Vacant Building Ordinance to encourage the use of existing structures instead of allowing them to sit vacant, detracting from a vibrant downtown environment.  
a. Monitor the performance of the Vacant Building Ordinance to ensure that the intended goals are being achieved. If it is found that the ordinance results in degradation or insensitive changes to historic buildings, take measures to address them, such as:

- i. Designate historic buildings that are not currently protected and could be insensitively altered as a result of the Vacant Building Ordinance.
- ii. Work with the Building Department to adjust the terms of the Vacant Building Ordinance to require the sensitive repair and maintenance of buildings older than 50 years of age

**The City's Building Inspectors help to identify distressed buildings which are then reviewed and acted upon by the City's Building Standards Commission. Pending is the development of a Vacant Building Ordinance' however, City staff have conducted preliminary research in coordination with the TIRZ #1 committee.**

**Goal 2.7:** Facilitate reinvestment in the downtown.

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

**City has adopted Building Codes, and for liability purposes would recommend to keep codes as is or make stricter.**

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

**The Historic District/Landmark Board has the authority to designate districts or buildings through the current ordinance as does City Council.**

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

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

**City staff is currently working with the Technical Review Board Ad-Hoc Committee to reduce setback requirements in residential zones. The award of a professional services contract to update the Land Development Code was awarded to Able City, Laredo, Texas in May 2019.**

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

**The re-sizing of the lots and parking requirements shall also be reviewed through the new Development Code, The award of a professional services contract to update the Land Development Code was awarded to Able City, Laredo, Texas in May 2019.**

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

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

**Policy 2.8.2:** Expectations for downtown buildings include:

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

**Plans are underway to relocate the City's Visitor and Conventions Bureau Office from its current location at 501 San Agustin to El Portal located at 1600 Water. Council has further authorized the creation of a Police Substation at the soon to be vacated San Agustin location due to the increasing nightlife traffic in the area.**



- b. b. Building façades that face sidewalks should not have more than 30% of their length or 30 feet, whichever is less, as blank walls (without doors and windows).
- c. Sidewalk-level retail, office, and service uses that face a public space should be designed to have clear glass on at least 60% of their façades between 3 and 8 feet above grade.
- d. Sidewalk-level retail, office, and service windows should be kept visible (unshuttered) at night.
- e. Sidewalk-level retail, office, service, and live-work spaces should comprise at least 60% of the street-level façade.
- f. Design new downtown buildings to have at least 70% of the total linear frontages of mixed-use and non-residential building façades within one foot of the sidewalk.
- g. All businesses and/or other community services on the ground floor should be accessible directly from sidewalks along a public space, such as a street, square, paseo, or plaza.
- h. Design new downtown buildings which have ground floor dwelling units such that at least 50% of those units have an elevated finished floor no less than 24 inches above the sidewalk grade.
- i. i. Sidewalk-level dwelling units should be elevated at least 24 inches above the sidewalk.

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

1. **The City administers a Neighborhood Empowerment Zone (NEZ) Program in Districts 1,2,3,4 & 8 (inclusive of Downtown) through which building permit fees are waived and tax abatement is provided for 5 years for residential application or 5 to 10 years on commercial application depending on the investment amount. The City’s Economic Development Board is working to update the NEZ Program to better encourage the development of housing in downtown.**
2. **The Inturbide “IT” program provides for the reimbursement (over a 5 year period) of the Sales Tax (1 %) with a cap equal to the start-up investment together with the waiver of building permit fees for rehabilitation of existing buildings within the Downtown Arts and Entertainment District along Inturbide from Juarez Avenue to Santa Ursula Ave.**
3. **The City has aggressive plans to replace or rehab the existing water and sewer infrastructure within the next five years with a capital investment of over \$10 million to provide adequate water pressure to meet the fire protection of this redevelopment.**

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

**Discussions are being had with the Economic Development Board on how to update NEZ to encourage housing development in Downtown.**

## Historic Resources

**Goal 2.9:** Preserve the City of Laredo’s valuable historic resources

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

**Policy 2.9.2:** Begin a “blitz” campaign to document existing historic structures. Development

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

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

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

**Plans are underway to relocate the City's Visitor and Conventions Bureau Office from its current location at 501 San Agustin to El Portal located at 1600 Water. Council has further authorized the creation of a Police Substation at the San Agustin location due to the increasing nightlife traffic in the area.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Planning Staff works with the state government agency on the review of best practices within historic districts or landmarks on a regular basis.**

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

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

- a. Create neighborhood associations to focus on the advancement and interests of the neighborhood.
- b. Create master plans for each neighborhood to act as a guiding document for the neighborhood association.
- c. Provide a historic preservation resource group that consists of the neighborhood association leaders for each historic district and set up a regular schedule of meetings.
  - I. Use this group to disseminate new information and resources as they are available and to hold training and education programs.
  - II. Use this group to track the performance of each of the individual historic districts and to provide advice to city leaders as challenges arise.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Parking

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

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

***A Comprehensive Downtown Parking Study was completed June 2019. The Study prepared by Walker Consultants in partnership with Redline Architecture, highlights the necessary strategies and tools to address and improve the user parking experience downtown as well***

*as ensure that downtown parking assets are managed in a way that reflects the primary goals and needs of the community. Public input was sought through a series of public workshops and an online community survey. The study reported that the City does not need additional parking infrastructure at this time, but rather vigorous parking management through adjustments to the City's current parking policies.*

*As a result of the study's findings, parking meter operations were extended to 9:00 p.m., and a parking meter increase was implemented within certain streets downtown and at the Iturbide and Farragut parking lots. The purpose of this policy change, which took effect August 16, 2019, was to encourage parking turnover and availability at the curb and the use of off-street parking for longer parking stays.*

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

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

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

## **Downtown Public Facilities**

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

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

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

# 3. Urban Design

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

## Urban Design Best Practices

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

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

**Land use is as per the Future Land Use Map**

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

**The City continues the construction of sidewalks within inner city neighborhoods and the planting of trees as funds are made available.**

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

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

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

**The City continues to implement and enforce policies that provide for compact blocks and lots in adherence with this policy.**

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

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

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

**The City Flood Plain Management web site identifies the requirements for new construction within the 100-year flood plain.**

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

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

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

**City staff is currently reviewing/researching process related to Minor Plats in order to streamline the small development process. The City is working to make process paperless to facilitate communication with customer.**

**Goal 3.3:** Make Laredo city staff experts in best practices for community development.



**Policy 3.3.1:** Require all city staff to become accredited in New Urbanism best practices through the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNUA).

**Policy 3.3.2:** Require all city staff to become certified in LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED ND).

## Neighborhood Patterns

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

**Policy 3.4.1:** City officials should consider the following neighborhood patterns when evaluating rezoning or development requests and also when locating and designing development on public land, seeking to achieve voluntary compliance with as many patterns as practical. While the land development code and state law ultimately dictate what shall be approved by the city, all design approaches that could increase the function, aesthetics, sustainability, marketability, and livability of projects should be discussed as part of the land development process. A variety of approaches to development should be added and permitted by the code. The illustrative plans in various elements of *Viva Laredo* demonstrate the application of these design principles to a variety of sites within Laredo

**A professional services contract to update the Land Development Code was awarded to Able City in May 2019.**

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

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

- a. Each new neighborhood should have a primary civic space such as a square or green near its physical center.
- b. Commercial and office uses at intersections should have direct paths to greens and squares.
- c. When edges of neighborhoods lie along major roads, smaller lots can be placed facing the arterial road to accommodate attached dwelling units.
- d. When edges of neighborhoods lie along natural features, larger lots can be placed there to increase the variety of the neighborhood's housing.

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

- a. Ideally, 50% of new residences will be within a ¼-mile radius of at least 4 diverse uses such as community-serving retail, services, civic/community facilities, and food retail.
- b. New neighborhoods of 300 units or more on an arterial road should provide a viable location for a corner store.
- c. Home offices and accessory dwelling units should be allowed on every lot.

## Building Types & Placement

**Goal 3.5:** New development should incorporate local building types and public spaces, including the historic plazas found throughout historic Laredo.

**Policy 3.5.1:** New buildings should create an interesting street frontage, with parking hidden from view, typically located in the rear of the building or below ground. Setbacks requirements should be changed such that this is encouraged.

**Policy 3.5.2:** The relationship between the fronts and the backs of buildings should ensure that public spaces have natural surveillance; the fronts of buildings should face the primary street adjacent to the property.

a. Fronts of buildings should face the fronts of other buildings, or the sides where necessary; fronts should never face the backs of other buildings.

**Policy 3.5.3:** Large-format buildings and uses should be developed within a traditional street and block network. Large parking fields typically associated with large-format uses can be located within the interior of a block structure adjacent to the use. The block and street network will allow on-street parking to be used to meet some parking needs, as well as allowing for passenger loading zones and parking directly in front of retailers.

**Downtown area has parking in front of retailers and loading zones.**

**Policy 3.5.4:** Local building types that have proven to react well to local climatic and weather patterns will be encouraged.

**Energy code updates increase insolation requirements.**

**Policy 3.5.5:** The historic plazas should be incorporated into new and retrofitted neighborhoods; plazas and smaller green spaces should be used to accommodate additional uses that supplement the larger public spaces.

**Policy 3.5.6:** Residences may face minor and major arterials to avoid presenting blank walls. Alleys can be provided by either the city or on private land to create a vehicular entry to the lots instead of vehicular access directly from arterials. Alleys should be either paved or gravel.

**Policy 3.5.7:** Semi-public building elements such as porches and balconies add to the congeniality of neighborhoods and should be encouraged within front setbacks. This applies to porches, stoops, bay windows, and balconies on residences.

**Policy 3.5.8:** Outdoor dining should be allowed on city sidewalks provided that chairs and tables are placed in a manner that allows a minimum three foot clear path for pedestrian movement.

## Parking

**Goal 3.6:** Incorporate adequate parking into new development while providing infrastructure for alternative modes of transportation, bike parking, transit or trolley access, and comfortable pedestrian access.

**Policy 3.6.1:** Parking should be located so that it is hidden from the street, either located behind the building or screened from view.

**Policy 3.6.2:** The careless placement of off-street surface parking lots can blight surrounding properties and public spaces. This blight can be avoided by using the following principles:

a. Non-residential and multi-family buildings should have their surface parking lots placed at the side or rear of buildings.

**The Casa Verde Apartments New Development implemented this concept.**

b. Buildings should have no more than 20% of their lots devoted to surface parking lots, with no individual lot larger than 2 acres.

c. Parking lots should be designed for pedestrians as well as cars with pathways with double allees of trees.

**Policy 3.6.3:** In non-residential and mixed-use developments, businesses and other community services on the ground floor should be strongly encouraged to be accessible directly from sidewalks along a public space, such as a street, square, paseo, or plaza, instead of accessible from a parking lot.

**Policy 3.6.4:** A majority of the principal entries to buildings should face public spaces such as streets, squares, parks, or plazas instead of facing parking lots.

**Policy 3.6.5:** New developments should place buildings close to streets using the following principles:

- At least 80% of the total linear feet of building façades should be within 25 feet of the sidewalk, and at least 50% of mixed-use and non-residential building façades should be within one foot of the sidewalk.
- Buildings should have functional entries an average of every 75 feet along nonresidential or mixed-use buildings or blocks.

**Policy 3.6.6:** Encourage a reduction in the percentage of building walls that face streets that contain garage doors or service bays. A maximum of 20% of front walls containing garage doors or service bays should be encouraged.

**Policy 3.6.7:** Awnings, balconies, arcades, galleries, and colonnades (privately maintained) should be allowed to extend into the right-of-way of city streets provided that adequate clearances are provided for pedestrian movement and for right-of-way maintenance.

## Street Design Principles

**Goal 3.7:** The City of Laredo wishes to create complete networks of multimodal streets with ample shaded sidewalks and frequent on-street parking.

**Policy 3.7.1:** Street networks should contain multiple paths for vehicular movement and should be designed using the following principles:

- New neighborhood streets should connect to the existing street network in all adjoining areas when practical
- Bend new streets with restraint. Bending streets creates deflected vistas, but exaggerated curves are disorienting and difficult to connect to adjoining street networks.  
**Street design is as per Subdivision Ordinance following American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines**
- Challenging intersections can calm traffic, such as pinwheel intersections, small roundabouts, triangular intersections, and staggered intersections.  
**Street design, traffic calming devices are as per Subdivision Ordinance following American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) guidelines**
- Dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs should be allowed only when required by topographic or geographic constraints or when conditions on adjoining property prevent existing or future connections.

**Policy 3.7.2:** Street networks should be designed using the following principles:

- Limit average block perimeters in new development to no more than 2,000 linear feet.  
**As per the current Subdivision Ordinance, block lengths shall not exceed one thousand two hundred feet (1,200) or be less than three hundred (300) feet, except as may be required by the Commission in the proper projection of existing major thoroughfares and on existing platted blocks.**
- Provide rear alleys for access to mid-block parking spaces, to provide an out-of-sight location for utility equipment, and to allow the fronts of buildings to be free of garage doors and parked cars.  
**Street and alley design is addressed in the Subdivision Ordinance.**
- Limit driveway crossings to no more than 10% of the length of sidewalks
- Limit driveway crossings to no more than 10% of the length of sidewalks

**Policy 3.7.3:** Street spaces should be designed to create prominent public spaces with a comfortable sense of enclosure using the following principles:

- a. Provide street trees on both sides on at least 60% of streets, between the travel lanes and sidewalk, at intervals averaging no more than 40feet.  
**As per Subdivision Ordinance, double frontage/ reverse frontage lots, should be avoided except where essential to provide separation of residential development from traffic arteries or to overcome specific disadvantages of topography and orientation. A planting screen easement of at least ten (10) feet, or a fence at the property line, and across which there shall be no right of access, shall be provided along the line of lots abutting such a traffic artery or other disadvantageous use. Tree spacing is every 30 feet maximum.**
- b. Provide 90% of streets with sidewalks at least 8' wide on retail or mixed-use streets and 5' wide on all other streets.
- c. Provide on-street parking on at least 70% of both sides of all new and existing streets.  
**Residential areas have on-street parking on both sides.**

**Policy 3.7.4:** Neighborhood streets should be designed for pedestrians and bicyclists by moderating the speed of motorized vehicles:

- a. 75% of new residential-only streets should be designed for a maximum target speed of 20 mph

## Civic Space Principles

**Goal 3.8:** The City of Laredo wishes to supplement its neighborhood and regional park system with small civic spaces that are accessible to all citizens and are memorably placed in all new neighborhoods and mixed-use developments.

**Policy 3.8.1:** Civic buildings achieve prominence by strategic placement at the ends of streets, across greens, or at the center of greens, and by having grander proportions and materials than surrounding buildings. Civic buildings should be embedded within communities or on the edges of communities.

**Policy 3.8.2:** Civic spaces are outdoor gathering places for public use. Civic spaces can be defined by a combination of physical factors including their size, intended use, landscaping, and the character of their edges. New neighborhoods should be designed around optimal locations for civic spaces. Civic spaces should not be designated in awkward locations on residual tracts of land that are left over during the subdivision process.

- a. A civic space, such as a square, park, or plaza, of at least 1/6 acre in size should be within a ¼-mile radius of 90% of dwelling units and non-residential building entrances.
- b. Scale civic spaces comfortably for users, avoiding civic spaces that are too large.
- c. Enclose most civic spaces with building fronts to create a comfortable sense of enclosure; 75% of the perimeter of civic spaces should have a minimum building height to street width ratio of 1:6 (a minimum of one foot of building height for every 6 feet of width of the street that circumscribes the civic space).

**Policy 3.8.3:** Encourage or even incentivize home owner's associations (HOA's) to purchase lots from developers for parks.

**Policy 3.8.4:** Require new developments to provide adequate park space.

**Park space is being provided to the City as per Parkland Dedication Ordinance. A consultant hired by the City of Laredo is developing the Open Space Master Plan.**

**Policy 3.8.5:** Make a Parks Ordinance addressing the Civic Space Principles.

## Lighting, Signs & Utilities

**Goal 3.9:** Streets and spaces are safe and inviting with adequate lighting and clear signage.

**Policy 3.9.1:** Adequate and pedestrian-scaled lighting should line each street in Laredo.

**Street lights exist at every intersection for safety and visibility.**

**Policy 3.9.2:** Utilities should not be located on the sidewalk, allowing clear access for pedestrians between destinations.

**As per the Ordinance regarding Front Lot Utility Easements, the developer of a residential (single family R-1, R-1A, R-1B or R-1MH) subdivision, may, in his/her sole discretion, choose to locate utilities (electric, gas, telephone and cable) within the front yard setbacks of the lots within the subdivision in an easement that is six feet wide being no less than four feet from the front property line and no more than ten feet from the front property line of each lot.**

**Policy 3.9.3:** Install clear signage throughout Laredo, directing residents and tourists to downtown, parking facilities, cultural destinations, and natural environments.



# 4. Mobility

**Overall Goal:** Create a multimodal transportation network throughout Laredo that provides access to opportunity, improves public health, reduces carbon emissions, and provides civic recreational opportunities while efficiently moving pedestrians, cyclists, transit, motor vehicles, cargo, and freight.

## Land Use and Transportation Coordination

**Goal 4.1:** Create a coordinated, efficient, and more affordable multimodal transportation system that supports, complements, and meets the needs of different types of places throughout the city. Land use patterns and connections among different land uses are key elements defining the form and character of places.

**Policy 4.1.1:** Transportation planning and development, expansion, and investment in transportation facilities should be coordinated with the growth in the region.

**El Metro is currently working with the plans and objectives as set forth in the 2016 Transit Development Plan (5 year) as funded and approved by the MPO and adopted by City Council, pertaining to fleet replacement, modification of low performing routes, automated bus pass system, bus top improvements, one bus Wi-Fi, new transit services including cross town service, and neighborhood circulators.**

**Policy 4.1.2:** New and modified thoroughfares will match the existing or proposed character of land along their paths as well as serving their essential functions in the regional road network.

- a. In urban areas, multimodal transportation design will become the norm to enhance neighborhood character, safety, and walkability. Character and function will be more important than capacity, and the street network will be sized to yield smaller blocks with greater “people moving” capacity.
- b. Existing suburban areas are likely to maintain a predominately automobile dependent development pattern. Thoroughfares will have sidewalks, and bike lanes will be provided where travel speeds are higher.

**Policy 4.1.3:** Safe and attractive transportation choices among all modes should be encouraged through street patterns that consider multimodal transportation alternatives and access to and circulation between adjacent neighborhoods, parks, and commercial and employment nodes.

**Policy 4.1.4:** New roadways and widening of existing roadways should utilize context-sensitive design to minimize impacts on historic buildings, neighborhoods, parks, and sensitive natural areas.

**Policy 4.1.5:** Comprehensive transportation impacts, including parking and impacts on all modes of transportation, should be identified and addressed before a development or redevelopment is implemented. Considerations should not assume that all travel is by personnel vehicle.

## Complete Streets

**Goal 4.2:** Laredo’s thoroughfares will form a well-connected network of complete streets that support driving, walking, bicycling, and public transit.

**Policy 4.2.1:** Street design standards should provide safe, accessible, and meaningful travel choices – driving, walking, bicycling, and public transit.

**Policy 4.2.2:** Where optimal street connectivity cannot be or has not been provided, non-motorized connections should be added to reduce walking and bicycling trip lengths.

**Policy 4.2.3:** In urban areas, walkability will be prioritized with wide sidewalks, shade, alleys, and street-facing access to adjacent land uses.

- a. Widen sidewalks where appropriate and feasible.
- b. Plant regularly spaced drought-tolerant trees along streets.
- c. Provide streetlights that improve safety for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians while maintaining a dark sky.
- d. Curb radii should be small to discourage drivers from turning corners quickly and to shorten pedestrian crosswalk lengths.
- e. Alleys should be included when possible so that buildings may be serviced from the rear, driveways and curb cuts can be minimized, and parking can be consolidated at mid-block locations.
- f. Provide safe and convenient crosswalks at intersections and at mid-block crossings where feasible and needed.

**Policy 4.2.4:** In urban areas, most new streets should have on-street parking in order to increase access to properties while calming traffic. Except on multiway boulevards, medians should be limited to short segments so that vehicular access to properties is not overly restricted.

**Policy 4.2.5:** New streets and redesigned streets should be two-way (unless they are designed as a narrow, slow speed, one-way streets).

**Policy 4.2.6:** The city wishes to achieve high levels of landscaping and other aesthetic improvements on all thoroughfares, including those maintained by the county and state.

**Policy 4.2.7:** Continually update the city-wide plan that establishes priority locations for sidewalks, sidewalk repairs, and sidewalk improvements, prioritizing areas near schools, parks, transit stops, mixed residential and commercial districts, and other areas with high or potentially high levels of pedestrian activity.  
**The construction of sidewalks within inner city neighborhoods continues to be supported to improve walkability and ensure pedestrian safety. Constructed within the last year were 36 blocks of sidewalks in the proximity of Alma Pierce Elementary School and Tilden and Eistetter Streets.**

City of Laredo will improve its thoroughfares over time as opportunities are found to increase transit service and improve connectivity, walkability, bikability, and economic benefits to surrounding areas.

<b>Street Conversions</b>	<b>Goal 4.3:</b> The City will improve its thoroughfares over time as opportunities are found to increase transit service and improve connectivity, walkability, bikability, and economic benefits to surrounding areas.
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**Policy 4.3.1:** The city will consider multi-way boulevards for major travel corridors to balance regional through traffic, local traffic, other travel modes, and access to adjoining land.

**Policy 4.3.2:** The city will study and implement the conversion of downtown’s one way street couplets to two-way operation.

**Policy 4.3.3:** The city will consider the use of roundabouts at intersections to calm traffic, increase safety, eliminate traffic lights, and create sites for public art and monuments on local and collector streets.  
**Completed was the construction of the San Isidro Round About at the intersection of International Blvd and San Isidro Blvd at a cost of \$264.128. The much needed traffic improvement has effectively reduced the number and severity of conflict points and helped to lower vehicle speeds in the area.**

**Policy 4.3.4:** The city will incorporate “green infrastructure design” and similar light imprint and low-impact principles for stormwater management and landscaping in streets that it builds and requires others to build.

## Improve Connectivity

**Goal 4.4:** Reduce service disparities and achieve equitable access to all types of facilities and transportation modes.

**Policy 4.4.1:** Gaps in the street system should be eliminated by providing for network connectivity. The existing grid network should be preserved and extended where feasible to increase overall connectivity.

**Policy 4.4.2:** New residential, commercial, and mixed-use developments that require construction or extension of roadways should include a multimodal network. The use of cul-de-sacs and dead-end streets and local residential loops should be minimized.

**Policy 4.4.3:** New development should be encouraged to connect to the existing street network through collector streets, which should tie into the existing network at multiple points to improve trip distribution and emergency access. Street stubs for future connections should be required.

**Policy 4.4.4:** Access management strategies should be applied based on the functional characteristics of the roadway, surrounding land uses, and roadway users. Curb cuts along public streets should be minimized. Internal connections between parking lots should be encouraged.

**Policy 4.4.5:** When considering closure of public streets, alleys, and other rights of way, affected city departments and utility providers should consider the integrity of the city's street network, pedestrian and vehicular safety, emergency access, the ability to provide utility services, impacts on health and safety, and the welfare of the community.

**Policy 4.4.6:** Adding lanes to increase traffic capacity should be considered only after the street exceeds an established threshold of full capacity and all other alternative approaches have been considered. Improvements to the street network should increase vehicle dispersion and circulation.

**Policy 4.4.7:** Ongoing regional transportation planning efforts should be supported to coordinate planning, operations, and funding priorities and to identify existing and future transportation corridors that should be linked across jurisdictional boundaries.

**Policy 4.4.8:** New roadway projects and major reconstruction projects should preserve desirable existing trees where possible or plant new street trees where necessary. Multi-lane roads should be enhanced with landscaped medians when possible.

**Policy 4.4.9:** Bridge monitoring, maintenance, and rehabilitation should be coordinated with the TxDOT and the Federal Highway Administration. Bridge improvements, including provisions for all travel modes, should be considered when roadway investments are being pursued.

## Future Thoroughfare Plan

**Goal 4.5:** Implement the Future Thoroughfare Plan that integrates all major travel modes and carries out the goals and policies of *Viva Laredo*.

**Policy 4.5.1:** The City of Laredo will use the Future Thoroughfare Plan that appears in *Viva Laredo* as the city's official Thoroughfare Plan.

**Staff considers the Future Thoroughfare Plan as identified in the Comp Plan when deliberating on all proposed zone changes and platting submittals.**

**Policy 4.5.2:** Laredo's future transportation network will shape the city and its inhabitants. The network must meld all viable modes of transportation and carry out the goals of *Viva Laredo*.

**Policy 4.5.3:** Capacity and redundancy should be created by a densely interconnected network rather than by achieving high capacities on individual arterial streets.

**Policy 4.5.4:** Economically vital cities require multiple transportation modes and cannot hope to maintain free flowing traffic during all peak periods.

**Policy 4.5.5:** The character of each thoroughfare should be based on the physical context the thoroughfare is passing through in addition to its role in the larger network.

**Policy 4.5.6:** Limited-access freeways disrupt the healthy functioning of cities and should be the thoroughfare type of last resort when planning the city's network.

**Policy 4.5.7:** The regional transportation network must respect the human and natural environment and minimize or eliminate negative impacts such as bisecting or isolating communities, inducing suburban sprawl, or interfering with arroyos and other natural systems.

**Policy 4.5.8:** Implement a public announcement and mandatory waiting period for the deletion of any road appearing in the future thoroughfare plan.

## **Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation**

**Goal 4.6:** Enhance and connect the bike and pedestrian circulation system throughout Laredo.

**Policy 4.6.1:** Bicycle and pedestrian circulation, access, and safety should be enhanced, especially along corridors, downtown, in activity and employment centers, within densely-developed areas, at transit stations, and near schools, libraries, and parks.

- **As a means of promoting alternate, economical, and more environmentally friendly modes of transportation, the creation of bike lanes continues to be promoted. Bike lanes have now been implemented on Casa Verde Road, San Bernardo Avenue, Santa Maria Avenue, Convent Avenue, along Zacate Creek, the Father McNaboe Neighborhood, Spur 400, Loop 20, Country Club Drive, and San Eduardo Avenue.**
- **Laredo garners Honorable Mention as Bicycle Friendly Community. The League of American Bicyclists, in response to an application submitted by the City, received honorable mention as a Bicycle Friendly Community based on the City's current initiatives.**
- **In support of El Metro Transit's Walk, Bike, Ride Initiative, 9 Bike & Ride Plazas have been constructed and additional bike racks have been installed at bus stops.**

**Policy 4.6.2:** A continuous bicycle and pedestrian network should be provided within and between existing and new developments to facilitate safe and convenient travel. New subdivisions, mixed-use developments, and large-scale commercial developments should include safe pedestrian walkways or multiuse paths that allow direct links between roadways and major destinations, transit stops, and schools.

**Policy 4.6.3:** New development, redevelopment, street reconstruction, and resurfacing projects should include bicycle and pedestrian facilities as appropriate for the roadway character. Existing development should be retrofitted with connections where possible.

**As a means of promoting alternate, economical, and more environmentally friendly modes of transportation, the creation of bike lanes continues to be promoted. Bike lanes have now been implemented on Casa Verde Road, San Bernardo Avenue, Santa Maria Avenue, Convent Avenue, along Zacate Creek, the Father McNaboe Neighborhood, Spur 400, Loop 20, Country Club Drive, and San Eduardo Avenue.**

**Policy 4.6.4:** Where possible, and especially where pedestrians are prioritized, tools such as protected left turns, pedestrian head start, raised crosswalks, curb extensions, medians, pedestrian refuge islands or mid-block crossings, and restricted right turns on red should be used to improve pedestrian and bicycle movements and safety

**Policy 4.6.5:** Safe and convenient pedestrian and bicycle facilities should be maintained and should be universally accessible, adequately lit, and properly designed to reduce conflicts between motor vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians.

**Safe Routes to School Program is a federal program that was implemented to encourage bicycle and pedestrian safety. It provides funds for pedestrian and bicycle improvements, including those related to safety education. The City recently submitted two applications for funding assistance, one which was strictly for infrastructure improvements.**

**Policy 4.6.6:** Pedestrians and bicyclists should be accommodated on bridges, interchanges, and over- and underpasses, where permitted by law. Bicycle lanes and wide sidewalks should be included in all new bridges, and over- and underpasses.

**Policy 4.6.7:** The city's greenways and trails network should be treated as part of the city's transportation network and connections should be planned for accordingly.

**Greenways and trails are recognized as part of the City's transportation network. Hike and bike trails have been constructed along Chacon, Manadas, Zacate Creeks. Recently completed was the construction of a bike trail along a utility easement that runs parallel to Del Mar Blvd. and extends from Springfield Avenue to Eden Lane. Additionally, the design of a trail along the River Vega is currently under design.**

**Policy 4.6.8:** Infrastructure that encourages students to walk or bike safely to school should be supported. The city should continue to coordinate with the Laredo MPO to partner with schools, the Laredo Police Department, Webb County and the TxDOT to identify funding and opportunities to enhance walking routes to school.

- 1. During the past 3 years, staff in coordination with the FHWA, has provided free workshops to local stakeholders to educate them on the importance of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and safety.**
- 2. Safe Routes to School Program is a federal program that was implemented to encourage bicycle and pedestrian safety. It provides funds for pedestrian and bicycle improvements, including those related to safety education. The City recently submitted two applications for funding assistance, one which was strictly for infrastructure improvements.**

**Policy 4.6.9:** Primary building entrances should front onto publicly accessible, easily discernible, and Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant sidewalks that lead directly from the street to the building entrance without parking lots in between.

**Policy 4.6.10:** Roadways and rail corridors should be retrofitted with bicycle and pedestrian facilities such as multi-use paths, cycle tracks or bike lanes, bike boxes, and bike detectors.

**Policy 4.6.11:** The city should continue to coordinate with the Laredo MPO to work with partners to identify creative funding solutions for bike and pedestrian infrastructure, including partnerships with the Webb County, Webb County-Laredo Regional Mobility Authority, and the TxDOT, parks and recreation partnerships, and public-private partnerships.

## **Bike Plan Network**

**Goal 4.7:** Vigorously expand bicycle facilities throughout Laredo to create a full network of connected, safe, and attractive bikeways and supporting facilities for both transportation and recreation

**Policy 4.7.1:** Continue developing and maintaining a system of bicycle lanes, bicycle routes, and multi-use pathways in accordance with *Viva Laredo*.

**Policy 4.7.2:** Investigate the possibility of a local bicycle share program in the city that places bicycles for rent at automated stations at key areas beginning with the downtown and university areas.



**Policy 4.7.3:** Fund a bicycle and pedestrian coordinator position to be the steward of the bicycle master plan and all of its individual components.

**The City created a pedestrian coordinator position to serve as the steward of the bicycle master plan and related actions.**

**Policy 4.7.4:** Use best practices in physical design (i.e. bikeway width, type, signing, and advanced bicycle facility types) to create safer bikeways. Train select city staff to design bikeways.

**Policy 4.7.5:** Enhance the safety and visibility of the bicycle network through the implementation of safety and way finding signage improvements along all current and future bikeways.

**Policy 4.7.6:** Continue the regular street sweeping program, with priority given to bicycle lanes and primary bicycle routes.

**Policy 4.7.7:** Bicycle facilities such as secure racks, personal lockers, and showers should be encouraged in new and redeveloped office and employment centers to facilitate bicycling and walking as viable alternative modes for commuting to work.

## Bicycle Outreach

**Goal 4.8:** Encourage increased bicycling by promoting health, recreation, transportation, tourism opportunities, and environmental benefits.

**Staff from various City Departments attend monthly meetings of the Bike Laredo group.**

**Policy 4.8.1:** Make Laredo a safer city for bicycle riders through measures such as:

- a. Work with the Laredo Police Department to address bicycle-vehicle safety measures through increased awareness of bicycle-related traffic laws and enforcement of existing and new laws.
- b. Provide on-going training for City of Laredo police officers regarding bicycle safety laws and issues.
- c. Advocate for bike safety as a prominent part of state driver's requirements.

**Policy 4.8.2:** Create and distribute print and online versions of the Laredo Bike Master Plan on an annually updated basis, to include way finding, safety, and facility type information.

**Staff is in the process of developing a Bike Master Plan regarding necessary bicycle related infrastructure, feasibility, and costs.**

**Policy 4.8.3:** Develop a Laredo bicycle programs website to store and disseminate all bicycle-related information, including bicycle traffic statistics.

**Policy 4.8.4:** Identify the most common conflicts between bicycle and motor vehicle users and create strategies to educate all roadway users.

**Policy 4.8.5:** Increase awareness of bicycle options and safety through trainings, public events, public service announcements, educational materials, and partnerships.

**Policy 4.8.6:** Promote bicycling for commuting, running errands and other short trips and socializing through social media/web-based communication tools and traditional communication outlets to position bicycling as a viable option for people who are interested in bicycling, but concerned about safety.

**Policy 4.8.7:** Continue to foster and implement Safe Routes to School programs.

1. **Safe Routes to School Program is a federal program that was implemented to encourage bicycle and pedestrian safety. It provides funds for pedestrian and bicycle improvements, including those related to safety education. The City recently submitted two applications for funding assistance.**

## Street Design, Complete Streets, and Age-friendly Design

**Goal 4.9:** Ensure safety for users of all transportation modes, with attention to the most vulnerable users, including people with disabilities, those using mobility devices, the young, and the elderly.

**Policy 4.9.1:** The majority of the city's streets should be designed as public spaces that are scaled for pedestrians and should be enhanced with appropriate street trees and landscaping.

**Policy 4.9.2:** Complete street design standards that provide mobility for all types of transportation modes and users should be promoted on all streets.

**Policy 4.9.3:** New roadway projects and major reconstruction projects should provide appropriate and adequate right-of-way for safe and convenient movement and amenities for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, and motorists.

**Policy 4.9.4:** When reviewing traffic impact analyses for infill and redevelopment, level of service measurements should consider all modes of transportation, including bicycles, pedestrians, and transit, in addition to automobile level of service.

**Policy 4.9.5:** Complete street amenities should be designed with all users in mind, with multimodal amenities appropriate for the type of roadway.

**Goal 4.10:** Support a safe, multimodal transportation network for all users, and include consideration of traffic calming, bike and pedestrian crossings, and crash analysis.

**Policy 4.10.1:** Safe routes for motorists, transit riders, bicyclists, and pedestrians should be provided. The city should work with its partners to improve the multimodal system to enhance safe transportation options across modes.

- 2. In January of 2019, City Council passed Resolution 2019 R-08 providing for the adoption of a Vision Zero Program and campaign which resolves to reduce traffic fatalities and severe injuries to zero within a 10 year period. The program embraces principles of systematic safety inclusive of speed control and separation, functional harmony, predictability and simplicity, forgiveness, and awareness.**
- 3. Safe Routes to School Program is a federal program that was implemented to encourage bicycle and pedestrian safety. It provides funds for pedestrian and bicycle improvements, including those related to safety education. The City recently submitted two applications for funding assistance.**

**Policy 4.10.2:** Traffic calming measures should be incorporated into the design of new or retrofitted local and neighborhood streets, within schools and parks, and around pedestrian-oriented business areas. Pedestrian and bicyclists should have safe, convenient, well-marked means to cross streets.

**Policy 4.10.3:** Feasible solutions to lessen the impacts of major street improvements on local streets should be developed with neighborhoods on an individual project basis.

## Transportation Demand Management

**Goal 4.11:** Establish demand management procedures as a cost-effective alternative to increasing capacity. A demand management approach has the potential to improve the natural environment, public health, place making, and economic development that also extends the life of transportation infrastructure.

**Policy 4.11.1:** Incentivize a mix of uses at key nodes of activity, including downtown, the universities and new development sites.

**Policy 4.11.2:** Programs that increase vehicle occupancy should be encouraged. Employer-based transportation demand management programs should be supported.

**Policy 4.11.3:** An integrated, multimodal transportation system that offers safe and attractive choices among travel modes should be promoted.

**Policy 4.11.4:** Conduct El Metro Ridership Survey regularly.

**The Metropolitan Planning Organization regularly funds the performance of EL METRO ridership surveys.**

## Air Quality

**Goal 4.12:** Improve the region's air quality through more sustainable and energy-efficient transportation and land use practices

**Policy 4.12.1:** Encourage compact land uses and urban design patterns that increase travel choices, reduce reliance on single-occupant vehicle travel, and reduce the overall number of vehicle-miles traveled.

**Policy 4.12.2:** Invest in bus service, rapid transit service, and high-capacity transit to reduce pollution and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions while better serving the traveling public.

**Policy 4.12.3:** Take steps that can reduce the travel frequency, distance, and duration of single-occupant vehicle trips.

**Policy 4.12.4:** Implement intelligent transportation systems (ITS) to reduce congestion and facilitate cross-border travel.

- 1. The City has contracted with Lockwood, Andrews and Newnam, Inc, to implement signal synchronization improvements along 7 corridors, including Mines Road from Flecha Lane to Pan American; Loop 20 from Shiloh to Sinatra Parkway; McPherson from Bustamante Ave. to Loop 20; Hwy 359 from EG Ranch to Dorel Drive; Business Interstate 35; Interstate Highway 35 frontage roads and Hwy 83 from Chihuahua/Guadalulpe to Riverhill Drive. The latter three remain pending completion.**
- 2. Staff through the MPO has developed a congestion management process and has realized funding through the Policy Committee for congestion management plan projects.**

## Parking Management

**Goal 4.13:** The city will strategically manage the amount, location, and physical form of on-street and off-street parking To help achieve the goals of *Viva Laredo*.

**Policy 4.13.1:** The effective supply of parking can be increased by building more spaces or by reducing demand.

- Where parking supply needs to be increased on valuable land, parking garages may be constructed provided they are lined with habitable or storefront space to shield the garage from view and to provide a safe interesting environment for pedestrians.
- As part of a long-term strategy, land devoted to surface parking lots in existing developed areas should be reduced through shared parking strategies, reduction in parking demand, and infill development on unneeded parking lots.

**Policy 4.13.2:** As part of the development and redevelopment process, the following policies should be followed:

- a. Shared on-street parking spaces are preferred to separate parking lots for each user.
- b. New parking lots should be placed behind or on the side of buildings instead of between buildings and the street.
- c. Do not provide more parking than is likely to be needed.
- d. Provide suitable loading zones for deliveries.

**Policy 4.13.3:** The amount of land devoted to surface parking should be minimized through measures such as parking decks and underground parking, shared parking, flexible ordinance requirements, improved parking standards, the implementation of transportation demand management plans, and provision of public transit to reduce parking needs.

**Policy 4.13.4:** Parking and development that encourages multiple destinations within pedestrian-connected areas should be encouraged. This will decrease single purpose trips for the user, saving time and miles driven and increase the economic potential for businesses located near other businesses.

**Policy 4.13.5:** A parking program and management strategies should be established at existing and planned transit stations.

**Policy 4.13.6:** On-street parking and drop-off areas should be located adjacent to sidewalks and building frontages to maximize on-street parking turn-over and for customer convenience. Excessive parking between sidewalks and building fronts should be discouraged.

**Policy 4.13.7:** Shared-use parking should be encouraged for land uses where peak parking demands occur at different times of the day, reducing the overall total number of spaces needed. Parking lots should be sized and managed so that spaces are frequently occupied.

**Policy 4.13.8:** Parking lots should include vehicular and pedestrian connections between and through lots. Parking facility quality should be considered equally with quantity of parking spaces. Parking lot design should minimize pedestrian conflicts, make use of appropriate landscaping, and properly manage stormwater.

**Policy 4.13.9:** The capacity of existing parking facilities should be optimized through tools such as small vehicle, motorcycle, and bicycle spaces, allowing motorcycles to share spaces, reducing the minimum parking space area requirement for low turnover spaces such as residential and employee parking, and removing equipment and storage from parking spaces.

**Policy 4.13.10:** Single-occupancy automobile trips should be discouraged through parking supply and/or pricing strategies in areas where supply is limited and alternative transportation modes are available.

## Public Transportation

**Goal 4.14:** Make a Metro Transit Master Plan and turn it into the most used citywide transit system in Texas.

**Policy 4.14.1:** Review routes and operations to plan for the future and ensure El Metro Transit is meeting the needs of the community in the most efficient way possible.

**El METRO administration works in conjunction with City Council and responds to recommendations from residents. This communication/coordination has prompted the implementation of several route extensions.**

**Policy 4.14.2:** Promote quality transit services that enhance mobility options, meet the needs of city residents and visitors, focus on transit-dependent households, and incorporate age-friendly elements.

**El Metro proactively responds to call for funding opportunities as made available through District priority funds, MPO, and the Federal Transit Administration.**

**Policy 4.14.3:** Where opportunities exist, right-of-way for future transit should be reserved. New development and redevelopment should provide transit easements for planned alignments, rail stations, and bus stops within existing and planned transit corridors as appropriate.

**Policy 4.14.4:** Local and regional bus service along key corridors should be enhanced. Transit efficiency, including improved frequency of routes and transfer time, should be promoted within the EI Metro Transit system.

**Policy 4.14.5:** Bus shelters, seating, lighting, trash receptacles, and related elements should be provided at transit stop locations. New developments located within planned transit corridors should coordinate with EI Metro Transit to provide bus stop facilities at appropriate locations.

**As supported by City Council District identified priority funds, over 200 bus stop improvements including shelters, concrete boarding pads, benches, bike racks, solar lights, and waste receptacles have been installed/completed.**

**Policy 4.14.6:** The use of transit facilities should be encouraged through enhancing the bike and pedestrian network near transit stops and sufficient sidewalk infrastructure should be installed near all transit stops. Where necessary, enhancements to make sidewalks compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should be prioritized.

**EI METRO actively partners with organizations that promote walkability, biking, reducing environmental footprint and traffic mitigation initiatives such as Bike Laredo and Ride Laredo.**

**Policy 4.14.7:** Features such as traffic signal priority, queue jumps, and exclusive transit lanes to improve transit reliability should be encouraged, where possible

**Policy 4.14.8:** Transit-oriented development should be encouraged. Planning for transportation, transit stop locations, public spaces, density, and land use should be coordinated, and high-density, mixed-use development patterns should be encouraged around express bus lines, the transportation center downtown, and any future transit stations.

**Policy 4.14.9:** The possibility of returning the downtown streetcar to Laredo should be considered.

## **Commercial Transport & Port Freight Mobility**

**Goal 4.15:** Enable the safe and efficient movement of goods via rail, truck, and air. A reduction of the impacts of rail and truck operations on adjacent neighborhoods and sensitive lands is also important

**Policy 4.15.1:** The safe and efficient movement of truck traffic in, around, and through the city via designated truck routes should be properly managed.

**Policy 4.15.2:** Infrastructure improvements and the use of emerging technologies that facilitate the clearance, timely movement, and security of trade, including facilities for the efficient intermodal transfer of goods between ships, trucks, rail, and air modes, should be supported

**The Laredo International Airport Master Plan and Airport Layout Plan as approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) supports infrastructure improvements and capital improvements for facilities, hangars & air cargo warehouses.**

**Policy 4.15.3:** Roadway and railway design and retrofit, to include complete streets upgrades, should balance the needs of freight movements along with the needs of all other types of transportation.

**City staff have completed a draft of a Complete Streets Ordinance and will present for City Council approval upon finalization.**

**Policy 4.15.4:** The city encourages the expanded use of railroads for regional and international shipment of goods due to the fuel-efficiency of rail transport and the heavy burden that trucks place on the system.



**Policy 4.15.6:** Preserve the ability and opportunity to transform any abandoned and underused railroad rights-of-way for other valuable uses.

**Policy 4.15.5:** The relocation of major rail yards away from intensely developed areas could allow that land to be reclaimed for redevelopment, drainage improvements, parks, and civic spaces.

**Policy 4.15.7:** The city should explore all opportunities for intercity passenger rail to other metropolitan areas such as San Antonio, Austin, and Corpus Christi.

**Policy 4.15.8:** The city should create a port master plan including a study of the port's economic impact to be updated yearly.

## Global Trade and Airport

**Goal 4.16:** The Laredo International Airport will increase its role as a welcoming gateway for passengers, as an intermodal hub for incoming and outgoing goods, and as a center for related economic activities that serve the city and the region.

**Various media outlets and trade shows (newspaper, magazines, billboard, TV, etc.) are utilized to promote passenger air travel and air cargo trade both domestic and international.**

**In addition, City Management and Airport Management continue to meet with passenger commercial airlines to expand and establish new flight routes. Airlines that have been approached include legacy carriers, low-cost carriers, and international airlines for flights to Mexico.**

**Air Cargo development continues to be a major component of air operations at Laredo International Airport. Operations increased 37% in 2017 over 2016 making LRD 5<sup>th</sup> in Texas for air cargo, surpassing El Paso and Austin, and. The Airport's national ranking moved up by 11 slots to #42. In 2018, air cargo has increased by approximately 12%. The City of Laredo and Airport have been working with U.S. and Mexico Customs to expand the existing Dual Customs Pre-Inspection program at the airport. Improvements to program will result in expedited processing of international trade between U.S. and Mexico.**

**Policy 4.16.1:** Utilize and improve El Metro Transit connections to the airport to improve passenger access to the airport and maximize the value of airport property for related purposes.

**Policy 4.16.2:** The city supports new mixed-use development and redevelopment on and around airport land.

**The Laredo International Airport Master Plan and Airport Layout Plan as approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) support infrastructure improvements and capital improvements for mix use facilities to include hangars & air cargo warehouses.**

**Policy 4.16.3:** Incorporate the Laredo International Airport Plan into the Port Plan

## Ports of Entry

**Goal 4.17:** Strengthen multimodal connections with Nuevo Laredo for bi-national mobility, commerce, economic development, familial bonds, tourism, and convenient routine travel between the two cities and countries.

**City participates in binational meetings with Nuevo Laredo city officials, trade, and federal authorities.**

**Policy 4.17.1:** Continue to manage the Ports of Entry as an integrated network to balance traffic flow and travel needs (employment, commerce, and tourism) while minimizing traffic in surrounding areas.

**Policy 4.17.2:** Provide meaningful alternatives to single-occupant vehicles at all Ports of Entry, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and restoration of public transit.

**Policy 4.17.4:** Support the creation of additional public rest areas with bathrooms and showers where truck drivers can rest during federally mandated rest periods between shifts.

# 5. Housing

**Overall Goal:** To provide varied housing opportunities for Laredoans with diverse economic backgrounds and housing preferences while at the same time creating strong regional housing markets that include a robust urban core and infill strategies that balance the need for new affordable housing and complete, healthy, and accessible communities throughout all of Laredo.

## Downtown Redevelopment

**Goal 5.1:** Revitalize downtown by creating new housing opportunities

**Policy 5.1.1:** Create a list of potential properties to redevelop and develop and adopt an infill development master plan.

**Policy 5.1.2:** Create elderly housing opportunities like at the Hamilton Hotel.

**The City continues to move forward with efforts to increase the availability of affordable rental housing for elderly within the City's Downtown. Ongoing is the renovation and conversion of the building located at 820 Convent, which when completed will feature 15 studio apartments to be made available to qualifying elderly, low income tenants. The project is funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development at a cost of \$2.13 million with Community Development Block Grant and Home Investment Partnerships Program funds. Construction began February 2019 and is estimated to be completed January 2020. The benefits of this project are twofold in that it promotes much needed affordable housing opportunities and encourages the rebirth of Laredo's Historic Downtown.**

**Policy 5.1.3:** Create a residential parking permit program.

**Policy 5.1.4:** Explore the opportunity for artist housing through the ArtSpace model.

**Policy 5.1.5:** Ensure that market-rate housing is developed to encourage a mix of incomes.

**Policy 5.1.6:** All new public infrastructure and facility investments should be concentrated downtown.

**Within the last 2 years the City has invested approximately \$2.5 million in water and sewer line replacements and enhancements in Downtown. The plan is to continue to make necessary infrastructure improvements until all lines have been replaced at an estimated cost of \$5 to \$8 million. The majority of the work will continue to be done in house by City crews to maintain costs.**

**Goal 5.2:** Develop a robust infill strategy to redevelop existing neighborhoods and provide affordable housing choices.

**Policy 5.2.1:** Create an infill incentive policy that includes property tax rebates, waiver of permitting fees, parking reductions, and sales tax rebates, among other possibilities.

- The City administers a Neighborhood Empowerment Zone (NEZ) Program in Districts 1,2,3,4 & 8 (inclusive of Downtown) through which building permit fees are waived and tax abatement is provided for 5 years for residential application or 5 to 10 years on commercial application depending on the investment amount.**
- The Community Development's Municipal Housing Division restored a city owned property located in the Azteca neighborhood at 419 Zaragoza "A". This rental of this two- bedroom unit will be dedicated for use by an elderly low income resident.**

**Policy 5.2.2:** Redevelop the Mercy Hospital area into a mixed-used, mixed income development.

**Policy 5.2.3:** City can identify all existing vacant parcels of land by developing a comprehensive map and list and pursue the purchase of these properties, when possible, for affordable housing units. Or use city parcels to create public-private partnerships.

**The City has completed the construction of 4 studio apartments for the elderly at 1806 Juarez as a means to address the need for affordable housing and promote the revitalization of the city's older neighborhoods. Previously, this property was vacant, substandard and blighted. This new construction project was made possible through the donation of the property by the Fernando A. Salinas Trust and \$405,000 in HOME Program funding from the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development.**

**Policy 5.2.4:** Continue and enhance the "Operation Crackdown" program.

**For the past five consecutive years, the City has worked in partnership with the Texas National Guard and the U.S. Border Patrol to remove substandard/ dilapidated structures that served as safe havens for criminal activity. The demolition of these structures has eliminated neighborhood gangs, drugs, and associated activities that previously affected the adjacent neighbors and further serves to promote the redevelopment of inner city neighborhoods.**

**Policy 5.2.5:** Allow micro housing as residential use within an existing residential lot and on vacant lots with increased density and decreased home size. Distinguish between home on slab and home on wheels, allowing both.

**Staff assisted with the development of zoning district R-1B with a smaller lot size (3000 sq ft); SUP (Special Use Permit) created for micro housing. Staff has already processed its first SUP intended for micro housing.**

## **Invest in Legacy Neighborhoods**

**Goal 5.3:** Develop a "Legacy Neighborhoods Program" to ensure that historic and culturally significant communities thrive.

**Policy 5.3.1:** Create boundaries for these communities and work with neighborhood associations to create study area plans and implement preservation through zoning overlays.

**Policy 5.3.2:** Develop an incentive policy to encourage development in these areas.

**Policy 5.3.3:** Encourage more public art such as murals, gateway signage, and landscaping corridors that serve to beautify these areas while creating a unique sense of place.

**Policy 5.3.4:** Main streets in each of these areas should be encouraged, ensuring a good balance of housing and neighborhood retail.

**Policy 5.3.5:** Provide resources for residents to organize and for neighborhood planning toolkits.

**Policy 5.3.6:** Create incentive programs for developers to include permanently reserved affordable housing units within new developments. Affordable housing to be integrated and indistinguishable from market priced housing.

## **Build Complete and Healthy Communities**

**Goal 5.4:** Create walkable neighborhoods to help improve the health of Laredo citizens.

**Policy 5.4.1:** All new subdivisions will maintain Laredo's street grid.

**Policy 5.4.2:** Develop parks and open spaces within a five-minute walk of all new homes.

**Policy 5.4.3:** New schools will implement Smart Growth Schools policies and design standards

**Policy 5.4.4:** Where available, new neighborhoods should utilize the open streams

**Policy 5.4.5:** New subdivisions will have 5 foot sidewalks and 5 foot parkways.

## Address Homelessness Concerns

**Goal 5.5:** Create a comprehensive social service model.

**Policy 5.5.1:** Increase CDBG funding to nonprofit housing corporations.

**Policy 5.5.2:** Work with the Laredo Homeless Coalition to identify areas in the city where homeless shelters can be located in close proximity to other services such as transportation, social services, and health care..

**Policy 5.5.3:** Fund and develop a comprehensive One Stop Shop for homeless services.

**Policy 5.5.4:** Develop the capacity of existing housing social service agencies through additional training, resources, and funding allocation. **In partnership with the Fernando A. Salinas Trust and Serving Children and Adults in Need, Inc. (SCAN, the City of Laredo recently completed the rehabilitation and conversion of an existing residential structure at 1517 Washington Street to serve as transitional housing for homeless youths. The property was donated by the Fernando A. Salinas Trust and rehabilitated with \$200,000 in Community Development Block Grant funds. The shelter, which can accommodate 12 youths, is operated by SCAN.**

**Policy 5.5.5:** Convene a citywide summit of housing advocates to develop a comprehensive homelessness plan.

## Other Housing Policies

**Goal 5.6:** Review existing development codes and modify to match 21st century best practices.

**Policy 5.6.1:** City should hire consultant to revise the city's development codes  
**Able City, Tx was awarded a professional services contract to update the City's Land Development Code in May 2019.**

**Policy 5.6.2:** Create an affordability index to ensure a balance between housing and transportation costs.

**Policy 5.6.3:** Discourage "Leapfrog" Development.

**Policy 5.6.4:** If needed, create financial policies such as impact fees that ensure new growth pays for itself without existing communities subsidizing the cost of new developments.

**Policy 5.6.5:** Explore various funding sources to create affordable housing and mixed-use/mixed income communities. These can include:

- Texas Department of Housing & Community Development Affairs programs such as tax credits, bonds, and loans.
- Leveraging the Community Reinvestment Act resources from the various banks.
- The Laredo Housing Finance Corporation can serve as a magnet for new investments.
- Allow Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP's) for affordable housing and mixed use developments through Low Income Housing Credit, Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, and New Markets Tax Credit.

**Policy 5.6.6:** Through the city's grants office, apply for housing and community development grants at the state and federal levels

**Policy 5.6.7:** Pursue affordable housing redevelopment in partnership with the LHA and HUD through rental assistance demonstration and similar project-based assistance programs. Laredo Housing Authority will ensure that all available federal funds and programs are being implemented

**Policy 5.6.8:** Allocate New Urbanism training across city departments and key development and housing stakeholders. This will ensure city-wide coordination of *Viva Laredo Comprehensive Plan*

**Policy 5.6.9:** Make city properties data available for possible investment

**Policy 5.6.10:** Make a City Department in charge of Neighborhood Associations to provide education, advice and empowerment.

**Policy 5.6.11:** Create an investment trust fund to grow through different venues.



# 6. Sustainability

**Overall Goal:** Ensure that environmental resources are conserved and properly managed in Laredo so that future generations may experience an improving environment that is more resilient than that of the previous generation.

## Sustainable Buildings

**Goal 6.1:** Create new and revitalize existing sustainable architecture throughout the city.

**Policy 6.1.1:** Implement programs and utilize best practices for efficient energy use in new buildings, such as LEED or other lifecycle costing initiatives.

**Policy 6.1.2:** Implement programs to use energy more efficiently in existing buildings.  
**City has updated the Energy Code which addresses energy efficiency in regard to air conditioning and lighting components.**

**Policy 6.1.3:** Enhance energy efficiency measures in local government operations.

**Policy 6.1.4:** Embrace technological responses to the green building challenge.

**Policy 6.1.5:** In addition to technology, embrace low-tech response to the green building challenge. Develop standards to encourage buildings to be designed with inexpensive components, including passive solar design, climate responsive architecture and vernacular design that is adapted to Laredo.

**Policy 6.1.6:** Implement programs that utilize best practices for sustainable site development.

**Policy 6.1.7:** Promote behavioral changes and consumption patterns that conserve energy, including energy efficient building systems, fixtures and appliances.

**Policy 6.1.8:** Promote weatherization techniques such as adding weather strips on doorways, caulking, sealing and insulating doorways.  
**Energy Code requirements on homes include Manual J reports and testing to assure no air leakage on homes.**

**Policy 6.1.9:** Promote durable materials and architectural designs with a long life.  
**This item would need to coordinate with professionals to assure durable material is designed.**

**Policy 6.1.10:** City government should lead the way in new construction and remodeling with green building principles.

**Policy 6.1.11:** Promote education programs, especially in schools, which stress the responsibility of each person to conserve energy resources.  
**The City's Environmental Services Department regularly visits local schools to promote environmental sustainability and energy conservation. Additionally, the importance of recycling continues to be taught and encouraged at a young age. The Laredo Solid Waste Department hosted the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Recycles Day fair event on November 15, 2018. The event was attended by 550 school students from UISD and LISD. Students and teachers are invited to participate in a day filled with fun activities and practical lessons on recycling and waste management.**

## Civic Spaces

**Goal 6.2:** Provide a wide variety of neighborhood parks and recreational programs that are integrated with neighborhoods and accessible to most residents and visitors to Laredo.

**Policy 6.2.1:** The city shall strive to create extraordinary parks that express the natural beauty and cultural diversity of Laredo and fund the park system at a level that corresponds to its significant importance to Laredo residents.

**Policy 6.2.2:** The city will provide a balanced parks system with a variety of park sizes and facilities, including trails, open spaces, and indoor recreation facilities.

**Policy 6.2.3:** The city will regularly update and manage a park system plan.

**Policy 6.2.4:** The city will continue to require improved neighborhood greens or parks when land is subdivided, with adequate regulations (a minimum of 10 acres for every 1,000 residents) that ensure they will become important features in the new neighborhood:

- a. The edges of small greens and parks are critical to their success; the fronts and sides of buildings, not the backs, must face the park to provide natural surveillance and a well-maintained edge.
- b. Greens and parks must be separated from private buildings with a street or public path.
- c. c. Drought-tolerant shade trees should define the edges of parks and greens

**Policy 6.2.5:** Create partnerships for the future success of the park system, involving every governmental entity, the school systems, the county, and the state. Recreational facilities at schools should be integrated into Laredo parks system for the mutual benefit of schools and the community. Stormwater detention areas can often be integrated with parks.

**Policy 6.2.6:** Incorporate stormwater detention facilities in an interconnected network of civic spaces.  
**Stormwater detention is already required by ordinance. Regional detention is strongly recommended, but this works only when private developers are willing to communicate and invest together.**

**Policy 6.2.7:** Create trails, greenbelts, and linear parks for their inherent value and to provide connections between other parks, schools, neighborhoods, and natural open spaces.  
**The City has implemented this policy and has constructed hike and bike networks throughout Chacon, Manadas, Zacate Creeks and is currently working on the design of trails on the River Vega.**

**Policy 6.2.8:** Update the current landscaping ordinance to integrate the goals of this plan.  
**Xeriscape is an ordinance that was promoted but failed. Recent request has been brought up to revisit this item.**

## Habitat and Biodiversity

**Goal 6.3:** Protect and enhance ecologically sensitive areas, plants and wildlife resources

**Policy 6.3.1:** Allow high-density land uses and cluster developments that protect ecologically sensitive areas. Encourage "light imprint development" where development cannot be avoided adjacent to or within ecologically sensitive areas.

**Policy 6.3.2:** Encourage retention of land that is in a natural, undisturbed condition. Plan new parks and open spaces to preserve ecologically sensitive areas.  
**The City's Environmental Services Department is responsible for the enforcement of the City's Green Space preservation ordinance which provides for the environmentally sound use of Laredo's land. The ordinance establishes minimal acceptable requirements for the design of buffers to protect the streams, wetlands and floodplains and ultimately protects the water courses, reservoirs, lakes, and other significant water resources and the riparian and aquatic ecosystems.**

**Policy 6.3.3:** Use the existing and future recreational connected park systems along creeks to interconnect potential development sites with complimentary land uses for park goers.  
**The City has implemented this policy and has constructed hike and bike networks throughout Chacon, Manadas, Zacate Creeks, and is currently working on the design of trails on the River Vega.**

**Policy 6.3.4:** Incorporate the expansion and creation of wetlands into park systems in order to compliment urban design and enhance parks and natural habitat.

**The City funds and promotes wetland enhancement such as the wetland enhancement at Killam Lake, North Central Park, and at Chacon Creek.**

**Policy 6.3.5:** Encourage the establishment and maintenance of wildlife and nature preserves.

**In support of the City's Green Space Preservation Ordinance and in partnership with the U.S. Corps of Engineers, the City of Laredo completed a 77 acre nature preserve in the river bend area South of Laredo College. Restoration of the River bend area was completed at a cost of \$2.44 million and included cleaning and removing exotic plant species; stabilizing major areas of erosion; reforestation with native trees and shrubs; and excavating the gravel pits.**

**Policy 6.3.6:** Assure preservation of natural habitats for wildlife and protect Services threatened/endangered species of plants and animals

**The City seeks to preserve natural habitats for wildlife and protect threatened/endangered species of plants and animals through the enforcement of the City's Green Space preservation ordinance.**

**Policy 6.3.7:** Enhance and enforce a citywide tree preservation ordinance.

**Through the Citizens' Environmental Advisory Committee (CEAC), the City has crafted a Heritage Tree Ordinance that is currently being reviewed by the Technical Review Board Ad-Hoc Committee.**

**Policy 6.3.8:** Establish a tree planting and maintenance campaign throughout the city.

**In coordination with Council Members, various tree planting events have been held. Additionally, \$75,000 has been earmarked for the purchase and planting of trees along the City's Right of Way.**

**Policy 6.3.9:** Encourage the conservation, creation, or restoration of native habitat in urban areas such as public parks and publicly or privately owned lots.

**Policy 6.3.10:** Require that the majority of plants used on private lots, rights-of way, and un built portions of developments be native species, appropriate to the ecosystem viable for the particular site. Native shade trees should be prioritized; yet use of some acclimated species might be necessary under certain conditions.

## Energy and Atmosphere

**Goal 6.4:** Develop Laredo in a way that requires less automobile use for access to daily needs, which will help to reduce the prevalence of greenhouse gases. Strive to continue to meet the national ambient air quality standards for all pollutants.

**Policy 6.4.1:** Promote new development that encourages a sustainable lifestyle such as walking, cycling, the use of public transit, and reducing the dependence on automobiles.

**Policy 6.4.2:** Consider the energy efficiency of proposed development when land use and development decisions are made. This would include energy consumed by buildings and their users as well as energy used by commuting and vehicle trips generated due to new development.

**Policy 6.4.3:** Emphasize infill and higher density development located in walkable areas and areas served by public transit, to reduce dependency on automobiles.

**Policy 6.4.4:** Promote the concepts in the program for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) as a tool for evaluating development proposals.

**Policy 6.4.5:** Promote the adoption of on-site, low-carbon footprint (such as natural gas), and renewable energy sources by households, government and businesses.

**Policy 6.4.6:** Promote the use of renewable energy sources that reduce demand on fossil fuels such as: solar, wind, and geothermal.

**The Environmental Services Dept. has installed a 38.5kW photovoltaic system as well as a 2.8kW wind generator that supplies up to two-thirds of the Department's energy requirements.**

**Policy 6.4.7:** Promote citywide car and van pooling systems and implement other forms of transit to connect major destinations, such as downtown or the universities.

**Policy 6.4.8:** Meet or exceed federal air quality standards for green house gases and other common pollutants.

**Policy 6.4.9:** Promote research and education that focuses on improving air quality.

**Policy 6.4.10:** Promote both roof and non-roof strategies to mitigate the urban heat island effect.

**Policy 6.4.11:** Secure sufficient energy resources to meet present and future community needs without degrading local, regional or global ecology.

**Policy 6.4.12:** Promote architecture that exhibits sustainable design and technological innovations that conserve or generate energy.

**Policy 6.4.13:** Consider an increase of local gasoline tax to be earmarked for funding El Metro and improving El Metro's level of service.

**Policy 6.4.14:** Direct additional and new environmental impact fees to El Metro.

**Policy 6.4.15:** Plan for adequate and sustainable solid waste management practices such as city-wide composting, landfill gas harvesting, and expanding of recycling capacity.

- **In order to assure adequate and long term solid waste management and disposal alternatives for the City, efforts are currently underway to evaluate several alternatives such as expansion of the current landfill, siting of a new landfill, and the possible purchase of an existing landfill. Either one, or a combination of these alternatives, could ensure disposal capacity for several decades into the future.**
- **At the request of the City, the State Energy Conservation office performed an evaluation of the City's landfill and the possibility of the development of some form of landfill gas to energy program and in January of 2019, provided a report entitled *Facility Preliminary Energy Assessments and Recommendations*. The report concluded that there may be merit in pursuing a more extensive evaluation of landfill gas flow rates and quality, as well as market prices assumptions for the produced gas in order to determine the sustained financial viability of such a project. They also offered a set of *Recommended Third Party Review Guidelines* for the City to use in the case of contracting an independent third party to provide a technical review in order to avoid the types of problems encountered in past efforts to develop a gas to energy system. Efforts are continuing.**
- **The current recycling facility has excess processing capacity. The major focus in recycling has been in education of the residents in order to reduce contamination and increase the volume of recycled material collected. The Solid Waste Department continues to perform community outreach in the schools and public forums. With over 80 such outreach events in the last year, city staff educated residents and their children on the effects of contamination and the benefits of recycling. Additionally, advertising on Social Media, Television, and Print enhances this endeavor.**

## Water Management

**Goal 6.5:** Continue to develop policies that promote water reclamation, conservation, stormwater

management, and access to a sustainable water supply.

**Policy 6.5.1:** Develop cost effective processes to re-use and reclaim water; use new technologies to expand capacity.

**Policy 6.5.2:** Develop policies that promote and incentivize the development of surface water treatment, conveyance, and reclamation

**Policy 6.5.3:** Implement the re-use of wastewater treatment plant effluent to initially combat Lake Casa Blanca's fluctuating water levels; this will ultimately decrease Laredo's reliance on the Rio Grande.

**Policy 6.5.4:** Pursue active and passive water harvesting techniques, including small-scale techniques, such as rain barrels or cisterns.

**Policy 6.5.5:** Maximize the use of native and drought resistant species in required landscaping policies.

**Policy 6.5.6:** Maximize the use of permeable surfaces where they can replace impermeable surfaces, such as conventional asphalt or concrete

**Policy 6.5.7:** Continue to implement the existing water conservation program.

**Policy 6.5.8:** Recognize that climate change will affect water supply, stormwater management and conservation and that the annual flows of the Rio Grande will be affected, resulting in needed adjustments to local ordinances, specifically related to properties that are in flood zones.

**Policy 6.5.9:** Protect the community from floods and reduce the risk of flood damage  
**The City funds drainage projects to reduce flooding as well as has funded, developed and submitted the Chacon Creek Feasibility Study to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. When funded by Congress, this project will provide \$52 million in flood control, ecosystem enhancements, and recreational opportunities to the Chacon Creek watershed.**

**Policy 6.5.10:** Locate development outside of flood plains and instead dedicate these spaces for suitable uses, such as recreational, agricultural, or open spaces.

**Policy 6.5.11:** Design necessary flood control facilities to blend with and enhance surrounding areas.

**Policy 6.5.12:** Create a unified drainage ordinance that considers the initiatives outlined in this plan.

**Policy 6.5.13:** Develop a Future Water Resource Plan.

# 7. Health

**Overall Goal:** Improve the overall physical and mental health of Laredo citizens by increasing the quality of life in the region.

## Regional Collaboration

**Goal 7.1:** Address the health needs of all residents in the region through collaboration and coordination among local, state, and binational entities.

**Policy 7.1.1:** Partner with local, state, and binational entities to prevent health related problems through prevention programs and policies.

- a. **City Health Director continues to serve as Vice Chair of the Texas Border Public Health Task Force partnering with all of the local public health department from El Paso to Brownsville and the Texas Department of State Health Services to develop policies, programs, and provide guidance on local public measures to improve prevention, wellness, environmental health, maternal child health and disease control services with adequate resources.**
- b. **The Health Director continues to serve on the State, Territorial, Local and Tribal Health office to provide guidance on border health service to the Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
- c. **The Health Director was appointed in February 2019 to the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) for the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Border Cooperation Actions between US/Mexico and Canada.**
- d. **Binational Council Meetings (*Consejo Binacional de Salud*) are ongoing and have expanded into epidemiology and public health preparedness and response to exchange communicable disease information and respond to a public health emergency. Meetings regarding tuberculosis binational cases also continue. Recently created was a chat group via the WhatsApp platform with pertinent public health personnel to exchange disease information instantaneously.**

**Policy 7.1.2:** The Planning Department should educate developers, neighborhood associations, and other building permit applicants for major projects on the connection between the built environment and public health.

**The Health Department works continuously with the Planning, Traffic, Parks and Police Departments, as well as the private sector, including Bike Laredo and Mayors Active Living Council, on hike, bike, and walking trails to improve the built environment in parks and make Laredo more health conscious by promoting physical activity.**

## Environmental Risk Factors

**Goal 7.2:** Reduce exposure to environmental risk factors.

**Policy 7.2.1:** Reduce risk of injury and fatality due to vehicular accidents.

- a. Lower design speeds on existing and proposed streets and highways.
  - i. Retrofit streets to be more pedestrian-friendly.
  - ii. Include on-street parking and street trees as barriers between pedestrians and moving travel lanes and which increase visual friction to discourage speeding.
  - iii. Include wide sidewalks and narrower travel lanes.
- b. Convert signalized or geometrically complex intersections to modern roundabouts or fully-circulating intersections in order to reduce or eliminate turn-lanes, slow traffic while improving flow, and reduce the incidence of broadside and head-on collisions.
- c. Increase the frequency of crosswalks and increase signal time in favor of pedestrians crossing streets, especially multi-lane arterials and other major streets.



- d. Minimize crossing distance at intersections with pedestrian refuges, bulb-outs, speed tables, and other strategies.
- e. Promote the use of woonerfs, shared spaces, curbless streets, and stripe-free zones as ways to create very traffic calmed residential streets that need less right-of-way than conventional streets.
- f. As silent hybrids and electric vehicles become more common, expand the city's use of Audible Pedestrian Signals (APS) to assist blind pedestrians at intersections and crosswalks.

**Policy 7.2.2:** Reduce exposure to air pollution.

- a. Minimize VMT through increased walking, cycling, and transit usage. Strategies to accomplish this are found in the Land Use Patterns, Mobility, and Urban Design Chapters.
- b. Work with federal entities to reduce bridge congestion, especially by means other than road widening which would increase polluting idling.

**Policy 7.2.3:** Reduce exposure to excess ultraviolet rays.

- a. Provide for shade along sidewalks and pedestrian pathways with one or more of the following: high degree of spatial enclosure formed by buildings and narrow right-of-way, street trees, canopies, awnings, colonnades, arcades, and galleries.
- b. Provide shade devices for playgrounds to protect children from sunburn and increased risk of skin cancers.
- c. Educate citizens on the importance of sunscreen, clothing, and avoiding peak sunlight hours for outdoor activity as a first line of defense against melanoma and other skin cancers.
- d. Educate citizens on the need for adequate exposure to sunlight in order to avoid Vitamin D deficiencies and how to achieve this without damaging the skin.
- e. Plan to tackle tree attrition and replacement by conducting a tree/canopy survey of parks and other public spaces, with annual updates.

**Policy 7.2.4:** Increase access to safe water.

- a. Continue to monitor water for contaminants.
- b. Continue to educate citizens and visitors on practices that reduce groundwater pollution, such as proper disposal of medicines, chemicals, batteries, and hazardous materials.

**The City maintains a Household Hazardous Waste Collection Center at the City's landfill which is open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. To further encourage the proper disposal of household hazardous waste, the City's Department of Environmental Services biannually conducts hazardous waste collection events at a central location site. During the last event held in May 2019, the City collected over 53,546 pounds of hazardous waste.**

**Policy 7.2.5:** Reduce infectious and communicable diseases and infection.

- a. Coordinate with the Department of Public Health and its efforts to combat the spread of infectious diseases.
- b. Map disease clusters.
- c. Coordinate with governmental entities south of the border to identify and prevent pathogens that may spread in either direction across the border.
- d. Support efforts to immunize the uninsured and underinsured population of Laredo and the surrounding areas and to prevent the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases in all ages.
- e. Support efforts to educate and test for HIV, syphilis, and other STDs, in addition to education and provision of contraceptives.
- f. Support efforts to halt the spread of tuberculosis.
- g. Support dental care programs for children.

**Policy 7.2.6:** Reduce exposure to heavy metals, radon, lead, and mercury.

1. Embrace clean, renewable energy generation.
2. Monitor levels of radon and educate households on how to test for and mitigate radon gas.
3. Educate households, contractors, and real estate professionals on how to identify, remove, or stabilize lead-based paints and other sources of lead in construction.

**Policy 7.2.7:** Reduce risks associated with the electrical grid.

- a. Support the electric company's instructions on how to respond to downed power lines.
- b. Strengthen the electrical distribution grid.
- c. Locate electrical wires at rear property lines or in alleys or rear easements in order to lessen conflicts between street trees and electrical infrastructure while reducing the blight caused by overhead wires.
- d. Provide incentives for the relocation of existing above ground electrical wires underground.
- e. Reduce exposure to electromagnetic fields by locating residences at a safe distance from high voltage transmission lines and easements.

**Policy 7.2.8:** Continue to develop animal care and control services including education and animal population control practices accessible to the public.

## Physical Activity

**Goal 7.3:** Encourage physical activity through the design of the built environment.

**Policy 7.3.1:** Study existing neighborhoods for deficiencies.

- a. Determine if residents can easily walk to retail, especially a grocer, where they may obtain daily necessities.
- b. Determine if residents are less than a five-minute walk from public facilities such as schools, parks, libraries, and transit stops.
- c. Work with communities to increase density, connectivity, and completeness (mixture of uses).

**Policy 7.3.2:** Adjust land development regulations and zoning policies in order to make neighborhoods more complete, walkable and connected.

**Policy 7.3.3:** Improve existing and new streetscapes so that traffic speeds are reduced and pedestrians' and cyclists' comfort and safety are increased. Utilize the Complete Streets approach to pedestrian and bike accommodation

**Policy 7.3.4:** Design new neighborhoods to be amenity-rich, mixed-use, interconnected, dense, and compact. Neighborhoods should be able to supply most of life's daily necessities on foot or on bike, with easy access to transit service. Streets should be designed with low-design speeds.

**Policy 7.3.5:** Integrate walkable neighborhood design according to techniques and policies described in Land Use Patterns and Urban Design Chapters.

**Policy 7.3.6:** Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department, and TxDOT where appropriate, to increase pedestrian and cyclist connectivity across natural and manmade barriers such as freeways, ravines, river beds, canyons, and arroyos. Provide a shorter and more convenient route for non-motorized traffic across barriers.

**Policy 7.3.7:** Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department, and TxDOT where appropriate, to invest in a recreational infrastructure that provides not only recreational walking, jogging, and cycling, but also may provide an alternative to car trips. Such infrastructure may include trails (multi-use, hiking, equestrian, jogging), cycle tracks, bike lanes, parks, and restored or conserved wild areas. Use the Rio Grande and stream networks as a multi-use recreational amenities.

- **The City has implemented this policy and has constructed hike and bike networks throughout Chacon, Manadas, Zacate, and is currently working on the design of trails on the River Vega.**
- **Seven (7) new bike racks were bought with Health Department funding and were installed at various Parks to facilitate alternative modes of transportation that incorporate physical activity.**

**Policy 7.3.8:** Work with Parks and Leisure Services Department to integrate fixed, durable outdoor fitness equipment in parks that allow for flexibility and resistance training.

- **The City installed “QR-Fit” stations at four parks that provide 12 workout sessions at each station. Users have free access to professional fitness guidance. The QR-Fit Station further provides a link to a mobile app that participants can use to monitor their individual progress.**
- **The City Health Department implemented “Make Laredo Your Gym”, a social media campaign to promote physical activity around the city and encourage the community to incorporate exercise around typical daily tasks.**

**Policy 7.3.9:** Encourage workplace fitness by including fitness centers within or in close proximity to employment centers.

**Policy 7.3.10:** Encourage employers to remove subsidies for parking and provide financial incentives to cycling, transit, and walking as a commuting alternative.

**Policy 7.3.11:** Encourage the inclusion of showers, lockers, and changing areas at places of employment.

**Policy 7.3.12:** Create “visitable” building types for the disabled that also satisfy the goal of creating walkable street frontages.

**Policy 7.3.13:** Create safe routes to school using mapping tools, the planning of street networks, and walkable and multimodal street designs.

**Policy 7.3.14:** Encourage schools to provide open campuses. At a minimum, recreational fields should be open to the community after school hours and on weekends.

## **Obesity & Chronic Illnesses**

**Goal 7.4:** Help reduce obesity and the chronic illnesses associated with obesity, such as Type 2 Diabetes, cancers, and heart disease.

**Policy 7.4.1:** Create recommendations to improve nutrition, increasing physical activity, and making policy recommendations toward obesity prevention.

**Policy 7.4.2:** Map citywide prevalence of diabetes and examine where diabetes related services (such as dialysis, insulin, and diet counseling) are needed.

**Policy 7.4.3:** Map cancer clusters in order to identify anomalies and environmental factors such as carcinogens.

## **Basic Nutritional Needs**

**Goal 7.5:** Create a food system in which city residents can meet their proper nutritional needs.

**Policy 7.5.1:** Encourage local groceries and convenient stores to stock nutritional food across all stores.

- **The City Health Department offers nutrition services through the Women Infants and Children (WIC) Nutritional Supplemental Program and actively works with the Mayors Active Living Council, the Food Policy Council, local grocers, farmers market vendors and the City’s Parks and Recreation Department to promote better and healthier food choices.**
- **The City encourages cultivating homegrown fruits and vegetables by providing training and hands on gardening experience to the community at the Canseco House and other community gardens.**
- **When the Downtown HEB closed its doors, a great void was created in meeting the nutrition and grocery needs of the residents of Downtown and neighboring areas. The City of Laredo entered into partnership with New Vision Church by renovating and making available the space at the former Southern Hotel in which the organization could provide food pantry and**

**market services to the general public. Benefiting from this service are the elderly, many of whom reside in Downtown and have limited transportation.**

**Policy 7.5.2:** Initiate research, policies, and programs that increase food security, improve health outcomes, and create social and economic opportunities to attempt to ensure that every resident has access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

- a. Perform Community Food Assessments to determine where “food deserts” exist in Laredo. Target food deserts as areas to start focusing food production, farmers’ markets, and small community-based grocers.
- b. Ensure that schools have access to organic and unprocessed whole food products. Incorporate cultivation plots on school grounds for the education of students and to potentially supply schools, food banks, needy households, and local retailers with fresh produce.
- c. Ensure that Homeowner’s Associations do not prohibit food production and the growing of crops such as fruits, vegetables, and herbs in front, back, or side yards.
- d. Encourage Parks and Leisure Services Department efforts to integrate food gardens into parks.
- e. Encourage development of community food gardens through grant or partner funding.
- f. Improve access to direct or wholesale buying for low-income and limited mobility residents.
- g. Remove barriers to the raising of poultry on private lots in suburban areas.
- h. Continue to ensure that food service establishments and grocery stores are inspected by a registered sanitarian at least twice each year.
- i. Continue to support the Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to improve the nutrition of vulnerable members of the population.

**The newly renovated Santo Nino Community Center now serves as a neighborhood site to provide health services through the Women infants and Children’s (WIC) Program. Women with children 5 years of age and younger who are of low income are provided supplemental foods, health referrals and counseling. This project consisted of the rehabilitation of a city owed building at a cost of \$365,000.**

**Policy 7.5.3:** Promote responsible parenting and family planning including nonpharmaceutical-based methods

## **Psychological Well-Being**

**Goal 7.6:** Encourage psychological and emotional well-being.

**Policy 7.6.1:** Coordinate with the health care providers, psychologists, and researchers to provide therapy for sufferers of stress, depression.

**Policy 7.6.2:** Seek to reduce commuting times to maximize quality time with friends and family.

**Policy 7.6.3:** Seek to improve sleep by reducing light and acoustical pollution.

- a. Enact a Dark Sky Ordinance in the city.
- b. Erect acoustical barriers and implement sound mitigation.
- c. Locate residential areas at a safe distance from major sound and light polluters or limit hours and levels of illumination to allow for a period of darker skies between midnight and sunrise.
- d. Discourage commercial uses that have intrusive levels of lighting from locating adjacent to residential land uses

**Policy 7.6.4:** Encourage residential building types that accommodate extended or non-conventional households.

**Policy 7.6.5:** Encourage small schools embedded within the neighborhood fabric rather than large drive-only campuses.

**Policy 7.6.6:** Strengthen extended support networks by reducing land use patterns that lead to social isolation.

**Policy 7.6.7:** Integrate assisted-living facilities into neighborhood fabric and design them as dignified home-like facilities.

**Policy 7.6.8:** Continue to educate patients and family members of patients on the symptoms, therapy, rehabilitation, and medications associated with mental health disorders.

## **Substance Abuse**

**Goal 7.7:** Discourage substance abuse.

**Policy 7.7.1:** Work on policies to discourage retailers of alcohol and tobacco products within the sight of school entrances or access points.

**Policy 7.7.2:** Expand no-smoking zones to outdoor public spaces that are owned by the city.

**Policy 7.7.3:** Enforce existing laws related to sale and use of tobacco and alcohol to minors.

**Policy 7.7.4:** Collaborate with local and binational entities to discourage and prevent the trade of drugs and arms across the border.

**The City's Health Dept. hosts monthly meetings of the Drug and Alcohol Commission and actively participates in collaborative planning efforts between the City and Webb County to establish a Detox Center and in educational efforts to discourage substance use. The City along with other community stakeholders is working to develop a response plan and crisis intervention efforts including seeking additional funding for these in support of these efforts.**

**Policy 7.7.5:** Encourage programs focused upon drug counseling, rehabilitation, and sobriety.

**The City's Health Department is working with City Council and City Attorney's Office to establish a Chapter 351 commission to address, fund, and establish a detox facility. The Department also serves as city staff liaison for the Drug and Alcohol Commission and assists in initiatives set forth by members for efforts to reduce and/or prevent substance use and abuse and in collaborating community efforts to create and sustain a detox facility long term.**

**Policy 7.7.6:** Support efforts to educate and prevent the use of tobacco.

## **Access to Health Care**

**Goal 7.8:** Improve access to medical care.

**City is implementing a Health Information Exchange (HIE) to improve health care access for all, especially for the uninsured. City staff met with local providers and other health agencies to encourage participation in this exchange and has received a favorable response. Participation in this effort will ensure the timely and accurate share and access of health information, city wide. The partners include Hospitals, Gateway Community Health Center, Border Region Behavioral Health and Mercy Ministries.**

**Policy 7.8.1:** Distribute primary care offices, clinics, and laboratories, amongst the various districts and neighborhoods that make up the city. Encourage consolidation of major medical facilities to create efficiencies in providing care.

**Policy 7.8.2:** Locate medical care providers and human services at transit locations. Encourage medical providers to locate at stations or bus stops with reduced parking footprints

**Policy 7.8.3:** Allow access by emergency response vehicles without sacrificing walkable, traffic-calmed street designs.

**Policy 7.8.4:** Achieve a sufficient medical provider-to-patient ratio.

- a. Collaborate with private, non-profit, and other governmental entities to establish and implement a method for recruiting and retaining medical providers.
- b. Increase quality of life and housing options throughout the city as a means of attracting health care practitioners.

**Policy 7.8.5:** Engage the philanthropic and private sector to develop and sustain the expansion of the health care industry.

**Policy 7.8.6:** Complete the development of the laboratory response network at the Laredo Health Department for local, regional, and international disease control.

**July 2019: State licensing agency for Clinical Laboratory Improvements Amendment (CLIA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are conducting inspections of the City's laboratory to fulfill Laboratory Response Network (LRN) requirements. The City continues to seek funding to sustain LRN.**

**Policy 7.8.7:** *Promote the integration of disease self-management and behavioral health screening, and education into primary care.*

**The City's Health Department continues to conduct Disease Self-Management (DSM) education and early access to Primary Care, including providing awareness and prevention of degenerative diseases such as Parkinson's, dementia and Alzheimer's disease management and treatment. The Department is licensed to teach the Diabetes Empowerment Education Program (DEEP) Curriculum, from the University of Illinois at Chicago as well as train Peer Educators in the community to disseminate this information and engage the community in self-management practices to reduce the risk of Diabetes and co-morbidities. In further support of this initiative, the Health Department has increased its social media presence and DSM promotion and has added a night session that consistently enrolls over 30 people for each eight (8) week session. A hundred and twenty persons (120) have participated to date.**



# 8. Parks

**Overall Goal:** A parks system that is valued by the local communities it serves and one that strives to address the recreational demands for all of Laredo's Citizens.

## Park Development

**Goal 8.1:** Development of future parkland and improvements to the existing park system to meet the needs of the residents of Laredo.

**Policy 8.1.1:** The city shall strive to create extraordinary parks that express the natural beauty and cultural diversity of Laredo and fund the park system at a level that corresponds to its significant importance to Laredo residents

**Policy 8.1.2:** The city will provide a balanced parks system with a variety of park sizes and facilities, including trails, open spaces, and indoor recreation facilities.

- 1. The City of Laredo continues providing parks and recreational facilities in accordance to its existing Parks and Open Space Master Plan as well as the Park Dedication Ordinance. The Parks Department has been working on the extension of trails such as Shiloh trails, and the trails at our Father McNaboe park and the ones behind the Municipal Golf Course along the Rio Grande River. New park developments include Las Flores, Las Misiones, and Divine Mercy.**
- 2. Completed in 2019 was the construction of the Sisters of Mercy Water Park within the Freddy Benavides Sports Complex located at 2201 Zacatecas Street. This lazy river water feature is characteristic of a resort styled-pool that consists of a self-contained, shallow, slow moving current on which a user can ride along on a water flotation device. It is anticipated that this new facility will provide hours of entertainment to children and adults alike and much needed respite from Laredo's hot summer temperatures. The cost of the project totaled \$750,000.**

**Policy 8.1.3:** The city will continue to update, and implement the parks master plan to refine strategies for oversight and development of parkland. This plan should meet with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department guidelines to ensure grant fund eligibility. As such, it is recommended that the City continue with the plan structure of a 10 year plan timeframe, with a subsequent 5 year update.

**The City of Laredo is currently working with Halff and Associates as the consultant for update of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan document.**

**Policy 8.1.4:** The City should continue with its parkland dedication requirements. The City should routinely review and update regulations as necessary to ensure that park land dedication ordinances compliment development impacts

**The City of Laredo continues reviewing and enforcing park land requirements per Ordinance 2008-O-058.**

**Policy 8.1.5:** Create partnerships for the future success of the park system, involving every governmental entity, the school systems, the county, and the state. Recreational facilities at schools should be integrated into Laredo parks system for the mutual benefit of schools and the community.

**The City of Laredo supports the development of partnerships between the various governmental agencies and educational institutions to leverage and maximize available park system resources through shared use agreements. Prime examples include but are not limited to the Freddy Benavides Sports Complex, Sanchez-Ochoa Park, D.D. Hachar Recreation Center and Walking Trail, and Ryan Elementary School Recreational Enhancements, all of which represent an investment of City recreational infrastructure on land owned by the Laredo Independent School District and available for use by the general public.**

**Policy 8.1.6:** Formalize any relationships with school districts or other groups where land is being integrated into the park system, as this will strengthen the ability of utilizing grant funding for park improvements.

**Policy 8.1.7:** Create task forces as part of the next parks planning effort to evaluate and provide recommendation for sports complexes to meet the respective needs for hosting different athletic tournaments.

**The City has entered into various Memorandums of Understanding with school districts which allows for shared use of land.**

**Policy 8.1.8:** Establish mechanisms that allow for the collection of park land development fees for the build out of metropolitan parks. These can be used to help implement the recommendations found in the Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan, as this will benefit all residents of the City of Laredo.

**Policy 8.1.9:** The City should consider the inclusion of a staff landscape architect within the Parks and Leisure Services Department to oversee the design, drainage, and use of parks, park ponds, and drainage facilities throughout the City. The goal of the landscape architect should be parks and park facilities that are artful, recreational, and functional. **The City of Laredo's Parks and Recreation Department has recently hired a landscape architect that oversees the landscaped areas as well as the tree planting events throughout the parks system.**

**Policy 8.1.10:** Facilitate the conversion of undeveloped land such as drainage easements, vacant lots, and flood zones adjacent to existing and new neighborhoods that lack nearby parks.

**Policy 8.1.11:** Collaborate with HOA's to advance the goals and policies of the plan.

**Policy 8.1.12:** Promote the use of the Rio Grande River for recreational purposes by development of public river access facilities along the river such as docks and boat ramps included within river park programs. **The City is currently pursuing the acquisition of land along the Rio Grande River to develop these kind of facilities. Other efforts include promoting events that include the use of kayaks, and the development of the SOLA South Laredo Nature Center.**

## Park Access

**Goal 8.2:** Ensure that residents have access to recreational opportunities through the equitable distribution of parkland and open space.

**Policy 8.2.1:** Increase the application of proximity level of service standards for each respective park classification as deemed appropriate.

**Policy 8.2.2:** Acquire parcels for the assembly of interconnected greenways as a way to increase community access to open space.

**Policy 8.2.3:** Promote community garden programs as means to increase park offerings to economically disadvantaged areas. This may include acquisition of small tracts of land to accommodate garden plots. **The City has developed three Community Gardens: Northeast Hillside Rev. Center, Canseco Home, and at the Fasken Rec. Center.**

**Goal 8.3:** Promote parks that provide offerings and accommodations for persons of all ages and abilities

**Policy 8.3.1:** Ensure that new park facilities and renovations meet accessibility requirements. Identify ways to include the variety of sensory engagement offerings into park design to make parks more inclusive. Communicate and develop reference materials so the general public is educated on the opportunities that exist. **Recent improvements to parks include wheel chair swings at Fr. McNaboe park and Cigarroa park as well as inclusionary playground equipment at De Llano park. The City is currently working on the**

**installation of merry-go-round for individuals in wheel chairs at Martha E. Villarreal park (Sanchez-Ochoa)**

**Policy 8.3.2:** Emphasize ways to accommodate park facilities, programs, and recreation opportunities for youth with an emphasis on teens, specifically outside the realm of organized sports.

**A new skate park is to be built at John Valls at North Central Park. Budget for this project is \$350,000.**

**Policy 8.3.3:** Create an aquatic facilities plan to increase the overall access to water based recreation. This includes a strategy to meet any facility levels of serve standards for splash parks, community swimming pools, and aquatic centers/ waterparks.

**Policy 8.3.4:** Encourage cross department dialogue as a means to promote the use of parks for hosting city and community wide events. With established fee mechanisms, this can create a source of revenue and may encourage visits by residents who don't use parks for recreation purposes.

**Goal 8.4:** Ensure parks are safe and comfortable environments for all park users.

**Policy 8.4.1:** Continue with the application of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, as identified in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.

**Policy 8.4.2:** Identify and evaluate potential hazards in the park system. Develop a plan to systematically reduce or remove their threat review and update annually.

**Policy 8.4.3:** In upcoming park planning efforts, evaluate the need for a system wide lighting standards and implementation program.

**Trails, Linear Parks, and Greenways**

**Goal 8.5:** Increase park connectivity, recreation offerings, bicycle and pedestrian networks through the development of Trails Master Plan.

**Policy 8.5.1:** Develop a Trails Master Plan for the City; include ETJ as part of the planning area. Work with neighboring communities to identify opportunities for collaboration.

**Policy 8.5.2:** The Trails Master Plan should not only connect existing parks and open space to residential areas, but be integrated into other bicycle and pedestrian planning efforts. This should encourage and promote the connection to key destinations, like schools.

**Policy 8.5.3:** Modify park land dedication ordinance to include trail system dedication requirements to correspond with the design criteria for shared-use paths.

**Policy 8.5.4:** Define "proximity" criteria in the trail system dedication requirements for purposes of creating a City Trail System Fund for the implementation of trail projects. Amend development regulations to provide connections to existing and proposed trails found in a Trials Master Plan.

**Policy 8.5.6:** Adopt design standards for multi-use trails building upon the trail classes established in the 2008 Parks Master Plan.

**Maintaining Parks**

**Goal 8.6:** Strive for the efficient use of City resources while promoting aesthetically pleasing and functional parks and park facilities.

**Policy 8.6.1:** Continually refine maintenance approaches to reflect the industry current best management practices. This includes establishing practices for routine tasks, nutrient management plans, mowing guidelines, integrated pest management, facility upkeep, and landscaping and tree pruning guidelines.

**Policy 8.6.2:** Identify parks that require disproportionate amount of hours for maintaining and solicit ways from staff to reduce those demands. This includes looking at parks where only one or two sports fields is located and assess if they should be repurposed.

**Policy 8.6.3:** Establish water conservation program that includes a variety of methods for irrigation reduction, including acreage irrigated reductions and infrastructure that allows for more efficient applications. This may include identify areas for xeriscaping and native plantings in both neighborhood and community parks.

**Policy 8.6.4:** Promote park maintenance and conservation approaches as part of a community wide education effort. Focus on changing the way citizens view parks as manicured lawns to a more dynamic part of the built environment and natural ecosystem.

**Policy 8.6.5:** Develop a tree planting program to increase tree diversity geared to creating a more resilient urban forest and larger tree canopy in City parks. A tree planting program should include the addition larger caliper trees, not just saplings. It would be appropriate to complement this tree planting program with a strategy to preserve existing trees.

**The City as spearheaded by City Council members and assisted through community volunteers has sponsored several tree planting events throughout the year, specifically at B.P, Newman Park, De Llano Park, McNaboe Park, Wyoming street, Divine Mercy and Arturo Benavides park (formerly known as Eastwoods Park)**

**Policy 8.6.6:** Identify standards and approaches to where parkland and other open space can integrate storm water detention facility into a network of green spaces.

**Policy 8.6.7:** Create multi-faceted strategies for maintaining an increase in smaller and more dispersed parks by requiring the use of lower maintenance native vegetation, more durable materials, and promote the public care and vigilance of the facilities through good urban design which faces home fronts toward neighborhood parks. Restructuring city budget to account for added maintenance should also be considered.

# 9. Economic Development

**Overall Goal:** Build greater industry diversification, increase access to good-paying jobs, and enhance the capacity for entrepreneurship through a commitment to utilizing economic development tools and further private sector engagement

## Proactive Economic Development

**Goal 9.1:** Increase the capacity for and ability to pursue investments and opportunities for job growth.

**Policy 9.1.1:** Hire an Economic Development Liaison.

*Mr. Tecló Garcia, has joined the City's ranks as the City's First Economic Development Director. With an extensive background in governmental, legislative and public affairs, as well as in economic development, Mr. Garcia stands ready to promote the City as a business destination and work with community stakeholders to create job growth opportunities and move the City forward. (August 2019)*

**Policy 9.1.2:** Utilize a well-communicated and transparent framework for incentives.

**Policy 9.1.3:** Utilize Tax-Increment Financing districts and business improvement districts to spur development.

**Policy 9.1.4:** Conduct annual surveys of businesses.

**Policy 9.1.5:** Identify challenges found in these surveys and promote improvements

**Policy 9.1.6:** Conduct annual visits to major employers with a team of local partners.

**Policy 9.1.7:** Hold semi-annual meetings with development community.

**Policy 9.1.8:** Promote awareness of workforce development programs to employers on a semi-annual basis.

**Policy 9.1.9:** Package logistics and supply chain management degrees as "seamless" educational offerings.

**Policy 9.1.10:** Cultivate stronger relationships and goal alignment between educators and employers

**Policy 9.1.11:** Participate in economic development and site selection conferences.

**Policy 9.1.12:** Attend trade shows and conferences related to target industries.

**Policy 9.1.13:** Organize "SWAT" teams to aggressively market the city to potential employers.

**Policy 9.1.14:** Develop an effective web site catered to site selectors.

**Policy 9.1.15:** Review and grade progress on an annual basis.

## Promote Regional Cooperation

**Goal 9.2:** Allow for a more coherent vision of the region to be developed

**Policy 9.2.1:** Create a leadership group to discuss regional economic development priorities on an annual basis.

**Policy 9.2.2:** Build a regional marketing plan for business recruitment.

**Policy 9.2.3:** Create regional business data hub at TAMIU.

**Policy 9.2.4:** Develop communications strategy to build public support for economic development issues through allied community organizations and social media.

**Policy 9.2.5:** Seek partnerships with cities in the broader region to cooperate on economic development initiatives.

**Policy 9.2.6:** Utilize “SWAT” team of industry experts to promote economic development.

## Spur Entrepreneurship

**Goal 9.3:** Provide the necessary environment for local, regional, and international entrepreneurs to find success in Laredo.

**Policy 9.3.1:** Support global business incubator/accelerator specialized in logistics and associated technologies.

**Policy 9.3.2:** Organize an Angel fund to support entrepreneurs.

**Policy 9.3.3:** Create a regional young professionals/entrepreneurs group.

**Policy 9.3.4:** Strongly promote entrepreneurial education at K-12 and institutions of higher education, with connections to target industries.

**Policy 9.3.5:** Create or attract a coding school.

**Policy 9.3.6:** Build presence of Laredo at industry trade shows and conferences.

**Policy 9.3.7:** Market existing innovative companies and startups.

**Policy 9.3.8:** Hold an annual global conference on innovations in logistics.

**Policy 9.3.9:** Consider new developments or redeveloping properties adjacent to border crossings as mixed-use, free-trade commercial centers.

**Policy 9.3.10** Encourage the development of higher bandwidth networks throughout the city, especially those servicing the target industries identified herein.

## Cultivate a Vibrant Community

**Goal 9.4:** Strengthen the quality of place and build greater community engagement.

**Policy 9.4.1:** Provide greater support for downtown projects, especially those that encourage downtown living, mixed-use development, and “smart growth” ideals.

**Policy 9.4.2:** Continue to fund façade improvement grants, NEZ, TIRZ, and MMD that help business owners maintain market and buildings.

**Policy 9.4.3:** Promote downtown businesses and events that help to create a “sense of place”.

**Policy 9.4.4:** Leverage downtown HEB site and create development plan.

**Policy 9.4.5:** Consider offering free Wi-Fi in downtown.

**Policy 9.4.6:** Fund major improvements through “Quality of Life” bonds.



**Policy 9.4.7:** Consider developing a Community Land Trust to lower the cost of homeownership and support development of micro housing.

**Policy 9.4.8:** Revise development code to incentivize development of mixed-use, walkable, neighborhoods and to encourage rehabilitation of underutilized buildings.

**Policy 9.4.9:** Ensure proper flexibility in code an occupancy limits to allow residents to rent out portions of their homes.

**Policy 9.4.10:** Partner with private sector to set up a community affordable housing fund.

**Policy 9.4.11:** Develop a new infill incentive policy to encourage “smart growth”.

**Policy 9.4.12:** Create a community drive toward quality.

**Policy 9.4.13:** Direct incentives to applied, performing, and culinary arts businesses through fee waivers and fast track permitting.

**Policy 9.4.14:** Create and support an arts and culture board.

**Policy 9.4.15:** Work to expand existing festivals and sporting events.

**Policy 9.4.16:** Look into attracting development of artist housing, such as Artspace.

**Policy 9.4.17:** Encourage art in public places and in businesses.

# 10. Art, Culture & Education

**Overarching Policy:** Establish by ordinance a Department for Education, Art and Culture, to include an Education Liaison, and an Arts and Culture Liaison, as well a Commission of Arts and Culture, with close integration with the Department of Economic Development.

## Education

**Goal 10.1:** Support the improvement of the Education system of Laredo through coordination of efforts across all agencies.

**The Public Library works with Literacy Volunteers of Laredo to provide ESL classes. Some Library employees are certified to be instructors and hold classes at their Branches. The City has an MOU with Webb County Head Start to provide library services to students and parents.**

**Policy 10.1.1:** Establish the Commission on Education for the purpose of accelerating Plan initiatives in education as they relate to talent retention and business growth. The Commission would be governed by persons from the four primary investment sectors of the community; public, private, academic, and philanthropic.

**Policy 10.1.2:** Support and coordinate curriculum alignment across all education agencies and grade levels. Special focus should be placed on aligning curriculums that support target industries.

**Policy 10.1.3:** Enter into partnerships with the school districts and the institutions of higher education to increase educational opportunities and improve student performance.

**The City's Public Library works in close partnership with local institutions of higher education including Laredo College and Texas A & M International University, local school districts including UISD and LISD, and local non-profit organizations by hosting, supporting, and/or participating in child development and literacy programs; adult learning classes including ESL, GED and Citizenship; and K-12 school programs including "Beat the Heat" summer reading program, the Accelerated Reader Program, and various student projects including science fair and debate projects.**

**Policy 10.1.4:** Coordinate with educational and business sector to promote and support quality early education, child care, and after school programs for all residents, while working to foster potential and increase retention of citizens.

**The Public Library offers numerous Early Literacy programs (story time, 1-2-3 Play with me, Family Place Library, etc.) and offers different afterschool programs at the different Library Branches (Art, STEM, homework help, tutoring, etc.). The City has an MOU with Webb County Head Start to provide library services to students and parents. The Public Library also works with Literacy Volunteers of Laredo to provide ESL classes. In fact, some Library employees are certified to be instructors and hold classes at the various library branches.**

**Policy 10.1.5:** Promote Food Sustainability Curriculum for grades K-12.

## Arts and Culture

**Goal 10.2:** Recognize local and regional arts and culture as the foremost indicator of the community's unique identity and support its development to cultivate civic pride and identity and as an essential component to economic development and attracting and retaining talent.

**Policy 10.2.1:** Establish a Commission on Arts and Culture. The Commission would help realize the goals of the Public Arts Plan.

**Policy 10.2.2:** Create a Public Art ordinance to establish a 2% for the arts program, setting aside 2% from every Capital Improvement Project budget for the acquisition of art for municipal property.

**Policy 10.2.3:** Promote Higher Education in the Arts.

**Policy 10.2.4:** Support creative and professional growth of the arts community.

**Policy 10.2.5:** Support economic growth of Heritage Tourism by investing in the Historic Streets of Laredo and in Historic Architecture.

**Policy 10.2.6:** Enhance the experience visitors have of Laredo by investing in wayfinding signage and apps and support the creation of a Tourism Bus / Trolley Route.

**Policy 10.2.7:** - Promote Laredo as a unique place, community, and destination.

**Policy 10.2.8:** Make Arts and Culture the cornerstone of Laredo's identity by encouraging and growing our cultural arts base, film and art festivals, theater, and other artistic projects.

**Policy 10.2.9:** Promote Children's Art Programs.

**The Library offers numerous art programs including Children's Art for ages 10 and under in the evenings every other month; Toddler Art and "Let's Make Music" for ages 1-3 in the mornings on alternating months; and Poetry Workshops for Teens.**

**Policy 10.2.10:** Promote the creation of an art incubator studio, exhibition, performance and office space for arts organizations, artists, and creative industry businesses.

**Policy 10.2.11:** Create a standard policy for selection of artists for public art through RFQ's and paid competitions to encourage the development of the industry and to help the recruitment of more artists into the local community.

**The Fine Arts & Culture Commission and Mural Arts Grant Program was established by City Council in July 2017. In order to encourage the exhibit of public art to beautify areas and create a sense of place and in response to proposals received, two mural painting grants of \$10,000 each, were awarded local artists, Mauro C. Martinez and Gilberto Rocha. The interactive mural by Mauro C. Martinez, "No Dejes de Soñar (Don't Stop Dreaming), inspires a message of hope and is proudly displayed on a large wall at the Outlet Shoppes adjacent to the parking area. The second mural painted by Gilberto Rocha catches the eye of travelers along Bartlett Avenue at 2121 Travis in that it is visually stimulating, complex in meaning, and open to interpretation.**

# 11. Global Initiatives

**Overall Goal:** Build greater industry diversification, increase access to good-paying jobs, and enhance the capacity for entrepreneurship through a commitment to utilizing economic development tools and further private sector engagement

## Laredo Regional Economic Development Zone (LREDZ)

**Goal 11.1:** Create a Binational Council to promote the interests of LREDZ with representatives from both cities, states.

**Policy 11.1.1:** The cities' Binational Council should promote the interests of LREDZ with representatives from both cities, states.

**Policy 11.1.2:** Bi-national Council should foster complementary cultural experiences throughout the region, enhancing both cities existing programs as well as promoting new intercultural facilities and venues.

**Policy 11.1.3:** Bi-national Council should support awareness of the existing programs among the Region and provide the venue and resources for these entities to meet on a regular basis to promote innovative educational alignments.

**Policy 11.1.4:** Continue to gather input from the city's Binational Council for further expansion of global initiatives.

## Planning in Both Laredos

**Goal 11.2:** Maintain alignment between both cities' Comprehensive Plans.

**Policy 11.2.1:** Implement a plan for downtown revitalization programs and include them in an international historic corridor.

**Policy 11.2.2:** Create a plan for a Cross-Border Heritage Tour of both cities.

**Policy 11.2.3:** Encourage the addition of a bi-national committee to the Metropolitan Planning Organizations and its counterpart in Nuevo Laredo.

**Policy 11.2.4:** Provide input on international crossing facility planning on the Federal level to promote pedestrian-friendly approaches to duty free shopping areas, nearby local restaurants, and shaded public rest areas.

**Policy 11.2.5:** Develop a bi-national conference, thus building upon both cities' vision of improvement and revitalization

**Policy 11.2.6:** Organize Bike Plan programs that envision bi-national routes.

## Trade

**Goal 11.3:** Participate in the support of innovative strategies for alleviation of long border wait times, infrastructure improvements, public safety, economic development, border inspection and national security at the international border.

**Policy 11.3.1:** Create a Laredo Chapter of the World Trade Center Association.

**Policy 11.3.2:** Research possible future trade zone designations that leverage Council advanced security and chain-of-custody technologies.

**Policy 11.3.3:** Foster trade opportunities with regional trade partners through an international incubator such as a “Global Street” workspace for investment and talent retention.

**Policy 11.3.4:** Facilitate synergistic interaction between the Region’s Incubator Programs such as Mile 1 (International Business Assistance Center) and the Instituto Municipal de la Juventud de Nuevo Laredo (IMJUVE).

**Policy 11.3.5:** Develop an Airport Modernization Plan of the Laredo International Airport which accommodates global cargo carriers services and implement compatible land use in properties surrounding the Laredo International Airport.

**Policy 11.3.6:** Develop a Laredo Port Plan and Plan Implementation Commission to include railroad, airport, bridge, and port connectivity expansion studies together with Nuevo Laredo. Include a supply chain management study and port economic development and diversification strategy.

**Policy 11.3.7:** Improve the World Trade Bridge traffic signal phasing and timing.

**Traffic Signalization project is ongoing.**

## Education

**Goal 11.4:** Create a Binational Council Branch on Education to plan joint education programs that reach beyond the border.

**Policy 11.4.1:** Create a binational education fund to allow talent to study abroad in areas related to Laredo’s success as an inland port, a historical tourist destination with commitment to return for a specified timeframe and provide expertise into the Region’s home community.

**Policy 11.4.2:** Create a liaison between school districts and the CREDE (Regional Education Development Center, Tamaulipas State institution for education) in Nuevo Laredo to create an “adopt a school” program.

**Policy 11.4.3:** Become a member of the World Affairs Council (an educational support venue).

**Policy 11.4.4:** Engage and associate with NAFSA (Association of International Educators-nonprofit), become a member and help guide both cities’ education professionals in providing high-quality international education

## Regional Image

**Goal 11.5:** Create data-based joint regional branding together with our regional partners

**Policy 11.5.1:** Support a recreational and cultural agenda to promote the Region

**Policy 11.5.2:** Enhance and foster the Region’s rich historical heritage.

**Policy 11.5.3:** Encourage a common vision for the Rio Grande.

**Policy 11.5.4:** Create a communication plan that celebrates the Region.

## Health and Environment

**Goal 11.6:** Establish infrastructure for healthy region and sustainable environment.

**Policy 11.6:** Establish infrastructure for healthy region and sustainable environment.

**Policy 11.6.1:** Develop a binational plan to curb the carbon footprint of the Inland Port.

**Policy 11.6.2:** Develop yearly binational summits to create a joint set of goals regarding environmental impact and quality.

## **Regional History, Arts and Culture**

**Goal 11.7** The proposed Laredo Arts and Culture Commission should coordinate arts and culture programming with the Centro Cultural Mexicano de Nuevo Laredo with funding mechanisms considered a priority in both city's budget.

**Policy 11.7:** The proposed Laredo Arts and Culture Commission should coordinate arts and culture programming with the Centro Cultural Mexicano de Nuevo Laredo with funding mechanisms considered a priority in both city's budget.

**Policy 11.7.1:** Support the creation of a comprehensive historical landmark tour on both sides of the Border.