



City of Hutto

Agenda

City Council Work Session

Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 6:00 PM

Executive Conference Room, City Hall – 500 W. Live Oak Street

1. CALL SESSION TO ORDER

2. ROLL CALL

3. OTHER BUSINESS

3.1. Downtown Assessment Report by Texas Downtown (Kristi Barnes)

3.2. Discussion and possible action related to Work Session topics

4. ADJOURNMENT

5. CERTIFICATION

I certify that this notice of the December 5, 2024 Hutto City Council meeting was posted in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act on the City of Hutto website (huttotx.gov) and the City Hall bulletin board (500 W. Live Oak Street) on December 2, 2024 before 5:30 P.M.




Laura Hallmark

The City of Hutto is committed to complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Hutto City Hall is wheelchair accessible. Requests for reasonable special accommodations must be made 48 hours prior to the meeting. Please email the City Secretary's office at Laura.Hallmark@huttotx.gov or call (512) 759-4839 for assistance.

AGENDA ITEM REPORT

3.1.



To: City Council
Subject: Downtown Assessment Report by Texas Downtown (Kristi Barnes)
Meeting: Thursday, December 5, 2024
Department: Community Services & Culture /
Staff Contact: Kristi Barnes

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

This Downtown Assessment Report (completed June 2024) represents the culmination of significant work rooted in the SOAR 2040 Comprehensive Plan, which prioritizes downtown revitalization as a cornerstone of Hutto's long-term vision. Over the past year, input gathered through budget workshops and the community survey process reaffirmed the community's desire to invest in downtown as a vibrant and thriving center for residents and visitors alike.

This feedback was instrumental in guiding the decision to partner with Texas Downtown, aligning with both Council priorities and community aspirations.

The purpose of this assessment is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of downtown's current strengths and identify opportunities for growth and improvement. The ultimate goal is to establish actionable strategies that will support downtown's continued evolution as a welcoming, economically sustainable, and culturally vibrant area.

While the Agenda Item Request (AIR) summary offers a brief overview, the accompanying presentation will provide a more detailed exploration of the assessment's findings and proposed strategies.

About Texas Downtown

Texas Downtown (TXD) was founded in 1985 to connect and serve communities, businesses, and champions of downtowns across the state. The organization will celebrate 40 years in 2025! Today, our mission is to provide members with resources, advocacy, education, and connections to develop vibrant districts. We represent over 300 members from cities and towns, economic development corporations, nonprofits including chambers of commerce and downtown associations, small business, and individuals.

Downtown Assessment Process

Downtown assessments are offered as a Texas Downtown member service as part of our Downtown Assistance Program (DAP) and are designed to bring a group of downtown professionals to a city's downtown district to assess existing conditions and make realistic, attainable recommendations. The process begins with a downtown stakeholder survey, and extensive research by assessment team members prior to arrival in the member community.

AGENDA ITEM REPORT

3.1.



During the day-long site visit, team members explore downtown, visit with business owners, and take notes. Team members are trained to identify opportunities and challenges, and to recommend best practices and strategies to enhance the downtown district and community. Team recommendations are compiled by Texas Downtown staff and include short (present-2 years) and long-range recommendations (5+ years).

Each assessment team is handpicked based on the community's existing needs and challenges. Led by Texas Downtown staff, the Hutto team included the following members:

- Shelly Ashcroft, Marketing & Membership, Texas Downtown
- Kim McAuliffe, Downtown & Tourism Director, City of Georgetown
- Sarah Page, Heritage Tourism Program Coordinator, Texas Historical Commission
- Shane Wilhelm, Director of Membership & Business Development, Texas Travel Alliance

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

N/A

STAFF REVIEW:

FISCAL NOTES:

N/A

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 24-Texas Downtown Assessment_ppt_12.5.24
2. Hutto Downtown Assessment Report_June 2024

CITY OF HUTTO DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT



TEXAS DOWNTOWN...

- Founded 39 years ago in **1985**
- Texas' only statewide organization dedicated to downtowns
- Independent, non-profit
- Open to all members: Cities, Counties, EDCs, Chambers, Downtown Associations, Small Businesses, Individuals
- Offer a Variety of Member Services
- **TexasDowntown.org**





TEXAS DOWNTOWN IS MISSION-DRIVEN:

Texas Downtown provides members with resources, advocacy, education and connections to develop vibrant districts.

DOWNTOWN ASSESSMENT PROCESS

- Starts with a stakeholder survey and researched community before visit
- Day-long visit, team members toured downtown and visited with business owners, taking notes to make recommendations

Hutto team members:

Shelly Ashcroft, *Texas Downtown*
Sarah Page, *THC's Heritage Tourism Program*
Shane Wilhelm, *Texas Travel Alliance*
Kim McAuliffe, *City of Georgetown*





INITIAL OBSERVATIONS:

- Hutto's downtown is in a prime location perpendicular to Highway 79 which leads to the Central Texas manufacturing hub. A high traffic gateway with average daily traffic counts at East Street around **37,489**.
- Historic character and Small-Town charm of downtown Hutto was mentioned as an incredible asset and photos of Hutto's historic downtown buildings are often used on city websites.
- The community-wide adoption of the hippo as a beloved mascot with incredible name recognition and rich history.

To capitalize on these assets, the following recommendations are organized around:

- Organizational City Processes
- Physical Downtown Design
- Economic Redevelopment and Small Business Mix
- Promotion and Special Events

ORGANIZATIONAL CITY PROCESSES



- **Hire a Downtown & Tourism Program Manager** - No one person or entity has managed and focused on downtown Hutto since 2017, which gives the perception that downtown is not a priority for the city. Dedicated and downtown-focused staff is needed to engage with small businesses, work with downtown property owners, and keep up with maintenance needs downtown.
 - Help manage the vision, goals, and responsibilities of Chapter 8's Downtown Hutto Plan of **Hutto's SOAR 2040 Comp Plan**
- **Encourage two-way communication, build trust, and foster community amongst downtowners** - have the city host a quarterly or every other month "Downtown Low Down" type public breakfast meeting for downtown stakeholders and interested citizens from 8:30-9:30 a.m. in a downtown business or location. Include on the agenda each city department head that has downtown projects going on, and request they give a 5–10-minute update so downtown property/business owners are more in the loop and know the progress and timelines of upcoming downtown projects.

ORGANIZATIONAL CITY PROCESSES

With strong school pride in Hutto and having all schools with the same mascot, reach out to **get more Hutto I.S.D. leaders and youth at the “Downtown Table”**.

Get nearby high school students engaged in planning and executing downtown public art and special event projects. You want a downtown that appeals to all ages and generations, and that downtown Hutto and the CO-OP District together are a local and regional dining and entertainment destination





PHYSICAL DOWNTOWN DESIGN

Invest in quality, visible downtown gateway and wayfinding signage along Highway 79 near the East Street entrance to address a lack of directions to landmarks and public parking areas in downtown.

TxDOT is a needed partner to have at the planning table of a wayfinding signage project to learn about wayfinding and interpretive signage opportunities and funding, so that tourists and locals know where amenities are located such as public restrooms, public parking lots, as well as to tell some of Hutto's rich and unique history, including the memorable hippo story.

PHYSICAL DOWNTOWN DESIGN



- Consider becoming a Certified Local Government (CLG) to meet historic preservation standards for your downtown assets. CLG grant funding is also available to provide funding to participating city and county governments to develop and sustain an effective local preservation program critical to preserving historic resources.
- Label on-street parking spaces with **Customer Only Parking from Monday-Friday 8-5 p.m.** on the asphalt and consider a downtown parking ordinance of 3 hours that would be enforced by the city. A parking ordinance would need to be enforced randomly and regularly to create an impact. Create clearly marked public parking areas with signage, native green screens or native blooming landscape screening the lots, so they look safer and appealing to female shoppers. Plant shade street trees throughout public parking lots to provide shade during the hotter months.

ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT & SMALL BUSINESS MIX

- Expand the existing CO-OP District TIRZ to include downtown and Cottonwood districts to generate funding for improvements in all three districts.
- Research successful TIRZ districts in Texas such as the City of Mesquite's [Towne Center TIRZ](#) that set the district boundaries larger than just the downtown district so it would accrue quickly from faster-growing areas of town.





ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS MIX

- Prioritize downtown in the city and EDC's overall economic development strategy and budgets. Make it known that downtown is important and developers and local investment will follow if they consistently see positive downtown public reinvestment projects and high-quality special events.
- Businesses looking to come to Hutto will look at your core business district, if they do not see that the city is maintaining or investing here, they may question what kind of support they would receive if this area is being neglected.

ECONOMIC REDEVELOPMENT & SMALL BUSINESS MIX



- **Concentrate on working with downtown property owners of vacant land on East Street** to encourage appropriate downtown mixed-use infill development – incentivize this effort with a 380 agreement because it could be a game-changer for Hutto. Property value and sales tax values would reflect the ROI for the city with this type of catalyst project.
- Additional focus on **business infill between East Street and CO-OP District on vacant lots**, could include pocket hotels, boutiques, small-scale manufacturing like breweries, wineries and distilleries, restaurants, nightlife, etc.

PROMOTION & SPECIAL EVENTS

- Uniquely, Hutto has a great selection of local and chain restaurants in downtown and in the CO-OP District which make it a dining destination. Visitors and locals will drive for good food and drink, so **take full advantage of marketing all the foodie options between the two districts** that are within walking distance of each other.





PROMOTION & SMALL BUSINESS MIX

Explore ways to support Hutto's brand identity as the **Hippo Capital of Texas**. Is there a list and map of the hippos around town? If not, this could be a fun scavenger hunt for visitors-especially those with kids to find and take pictures with the themed, maintained, and publicly accessible hippo statues.

Look into turning World Hippo Day into a major event in downtown Hutto with lots of media coverage. Build a relationship with Hippolotofus to explore ways to expand Hutto's hippo identity. Research into hosting one of their reunion events, it is a natural fit for Hutto.



“

One thing is certain:
If you do it for the **local**,
the **visitor** will come;
if you do it for the **visitor**,
you will lose the local and
eventually the visitor,
because it is the **local**
that gives a place character.

”

Read Jane Jacobs to fully understand.

~Roberta Brandes Gratz

THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?

Shelly Ashcroft

Marketing & Membership

shelly@texasdowntown.org

TexasDowntown.org





Hutto Downtown Assessment Report



Completed: June 2024

About Texas Downtown

Texas Downtown (TXD) was founded in 1985 to connect and serve communities, businesses, and champions of downtowns across the state. The organization will celebrate 40 years in 2025! **Today, our mission is to provide members with resources, advocacy, education, and connections to develop vibrant districts.** We represent over 300 members from cities and towns, economic development corporations, nonprofits including chambers of commerce and downtown associations, small business, and individuals.

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During the day-long site visit, team members explore downtown, visit with business owners, and take notes. Team members are trained to identify opportunities and challenges, and to recommend best practices and strategies to enhance the downtown district and community. Team recommendations are compiled by Texas Downtown staff and include short (present-2 years) and long-range recommendations (5+ years).

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Shelly Hargrove, *Marketing & Membership, Texas Downtown*

Kim McAuliffe, *Downtown & Tourism Director, City of Georgetown*

Sarah Page, *Heritage Tourism Program Coordinator, Texas Historical Commission*

Shane Wilhelm, *Director of Membership & Business Development, Texas Travel Alliance*



Initial Observations

- Hutto's downtown is in a prime and easily accessible location for locals and visitors being perpendicular to Highway 79. This is a high traffic gateway with average daily traffic counts at East Street around 37,489 leading to the Central Texas manufacturing hub that is anchored by

Samsung in Taylor. And with an intact strip of properties with strong historic architecture, downtown Hutto has potential to be a vibrant downtown destination in Central Texas and the growing Greater Austin Metropolitan Area of Williamson, Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays and Travis counties.

- The historic character and Small-Town charm of downtown Hutto was mentioned as an incredible asset for the community, and it was brought up that photos of Hutto's historic downtown buildings are often used on city websites and other visible spots. Plus, the community-wide adoption of the hippo as a beloved mascot with incredible name recognition and rich history.
- Tell the story of Hutto's unique history. Hutto's connection to the Texas Revolution does not compare to those of Goliad, Gonzales, and Washington-on-the-Brazos, and should not be a main focus of Hutto's story. Find the nuggets in your history that tie directly to Hutto's timeline and make the town what it is today.
- Events, promotions, and marketing help create community pride and build foot traffic for local businesses. Without foot traffic, there are no customers and ultimately no sales, which was brought up by several downtown Hutto businesses. Critical to the success of retailers and restaurants is a vibrant, active downtown luring locals and tourists to their doorstep.
- Downtown Hutto has several opportunities to capitalize on including: future downtown development could be ideal to help support fast-growing population growth including downtown residential, rebuilding the east side of East Street with compatible new development, and compatible infill on Farley Street is needed, Greater Williamson County is considered "local" and is largely supportive of Hutto downtown businesses, and Hutto's 150th Anniversary in 2026 should be a huge downtown celebration and anchor location for anniversary activities throughout the year.
- Remember that every downtown goes through three cycles, and they go through them over and over:
 - Catalyst: that high-excitement startup phase when most people are excited, some are dubious, and communication and knowledge are key,
 - Growth: this is the time frame when the vision gels and the first big wins occur,
 - Maintenance: this is a brief but glorious period when things are humming and maintaining success is key. But also key, is the knowledge that the program is positioned for the inevitable cycling back to Catalyst and Growth phases over time.

To capitalize on these assets, the following recommendations are organized around:

- Organizational City Processes
- Physical Downtown Design
- Economic Redevelopment and Small Business Mix
- Promotion and Special Events

Organizational City Processes

Short-term

- No one person or entity has helped manage downtown Hutto since 2017 which gives the perception that downtown is not a priority for the city or the EDC.
 - Several downtown small business owners expressed some frustration with a lack of support and interaction from the city and incentives available to assist them start and grow their business downtown.
 - Who owns the vision, goals, and responsibilities of Chapter 8's Downtown Hutto Plan of Hutto's SOAR 2040 Comp Plan?

Hire a Downtown & Tourism Program Manager – funding could be part tourism, part economic development fund – dedicated staff is needed to engage with businesses, work with property owners, and keep up with maintenance needs downtown.

- Define the committees needed to support the new staff member and the comp plan deliverables. Share the top priorities of the Downtown Hutto Plan and host a discussion with stakeholders about the future of downtown Hutto. The path forward will require that downtown property and business owners are engaged and on-board with redevelopment and revitalization efforts.
- Have the city host and market a quarterly or every other month “Downtown Low Down” type public breakfast meeting for downtown stakeholders and interested citizens from 8:30-9:30 a.m. in a downtown business or location. Include on the agenda each city department head that has downtown projects going on, and request they give a 5–10-minute update so downtown property/business owners are more in the loop and know the progress and timelines of upcoming downtown projects. Also, if there are downtown special events coming up, have different organizations/entities give a brief update and pass out any relevant marketing materials to attendees. This communication will encourage two-way communication, build trust, and foster community amongst downtowners which is needed.
- Host quarterly or regular pie happy hour meet ups or meetings to collaborate and share information between the leadership of the city's major players including the City of Hutto, Hutto EDC, Hutto ISD, Hutto Chamber, and Hutto small business owners to improve communication and collaboration.



- Make it a priority to build ongoing strong working relationships and get downtown property owners that own the majority of parcels to Hutto's downtown planning table. Create and maintain an inventory that is available in the city/economic development offices of downtown properties with leasable space information on each floor, as well as vacant land that is prime for design-appropriate infill projects.

- Provide dedicated funding for downtown economic development incentives, including ones that can help fill vacant spaces like the ones located in prime retail and upper floor locations in the heart of downtown. What customer service assistance or removal of hurdles can the city remove to streamline the permitting, incentive application and redevelopment process to encourage vacant downtown floors and spaces to become open and activated? Building strong relationships with property owners will help with communication when owners hit a brick wall and need public sector assistance and guidance.
- With lots of school pride in Hutto and having all schools with the same mascot, reach out to get more Hutto I.S.D. leaders and youth at the "Downtown Table". Include educational representatives and students to grow broad reaching buy-in for downtown since this is Hutto's future workforce and leaders. Get nearby high school students engaged in planning and executing downtown public art and special event projects. You want a downtown that appeals to all ages and generations, and that downtown Hutto and the COOP District together are a local and regional dining and entertainment destination.



- Take full advantage of the [Texas PACE](#) Authority since Williamson County is a an adopted TX-PACE service area, and educate local bankers, downtown property owners and local contractors regularly on the program to help with ongoing downtown property maintenance and energy efficiency. This can help with gap financing in larger rehabilitation downtown projects.
- Be sure to use Texas Downtown's member listserv to post downtown Hutto questions to all our members across the state for best practices and recommended downtown consultants/vendors.
- Don't forget to celebrate your downtown successes statewide by entering downtown Hutto projects into the annual [President's Awards Program](#), award applications due in late July.

Organizational City Processes Mid and Long-term

- Review and revise downtown development ordinances to ensure they are aligned with the goals for downtown (i.e., allow use of sidewalks for outdoor dining, allow customers to walk around with alcoholic beverages in non-glass containers, allow small-manufacturing like wineries and breweries in downtown, a mural or public art ordinance, etc.).
- Consider adopting the [International Existing Code \(IEBC\)](#) for downtown Hutto to make downtown redevelopment as flexible as possible for property owners and developers. The IEBC encourages the use and reuse of existing buildings. This code covers repair, alteration, addition and change of occupancy for existing buildings. and historic buildings, while achieving appropriate levels of safety without requiring full compliance with the new construction requirements contained in the other I-Codes.

- Build into the City's budget, annual [membership](#) for Texas Downtown, as well as attendance for some downtown stakeholders to attend the [annual conference](#) and [regional roundtables](#) to help develop more professional downtown connections and maintain ongoing professional downtown staff development. This will help downtown leadership become more trained on best practices for downtown redevelopment which can then be shared locally to downtown stakeholders and local leadership.
- **Potential Funding Sources for Downtown Projects & Programs:**
 - [Texas Downtown's Anice Read Fund](#) – seed funding to support downtown projects and programs.
 - [Grants, Tax Credits and Funding](#) – preservation and downtown-related project funding sources
 - [Texas Department of Agriculture \(TDA\) Downtown Revitalization/Main Street Program](#) – funds sidewalks and streetscape projects
 - [Main Street America Funding Opportunities](#)
 - [Hotel Occupancy Tax \(HOT\)](#) – can be used for wayfinding and downtown signage, as well as marketing overnight stays.
 - Keep Texas Beautiful's [Governor's Community Achievement Awards](#)
 - [GO TEXAN Marketing Enhancement Grant](#) – program is designed to provide grant fund for Tier 2 or higher GO TEXAN product partners to market and promote their qualifying GO TEXAN products.
 - [TxDOT Transportation Alternatives Program](#) – bicycle and pedestrian funding during odd years
 - [TPWD Local Park Grants](#)
 - [USDA Community Facilities Programs](#)
 - [AARP Community Challenge Grant](#) – Up to \$50,000
 - [T-Mobile Hometown Grant](#) – Up to \$50,000

Physical Downtown Design Short-term

- Partner with property owners along the gateways into downtown, especially along Hwy. 79, to improve the curb appeal of underutilized properties and make it a more welcoming entrance into downtown. The current Hutto Autoplex on the East Side of East St @ 79 would be an incredible long-term redevelopment opportunity as a “gateway” project to downtown like a Visitor Center and Downtown/Tourism office. Work with property owners of 101 East Street to paint a new “welcome to Hutto” mural on the building to replace faded mural. Fund from Tourism and do a call for art to attract high-caliber artists to the project. You can only make a first impression once, and you want it to be a positive and lasting one for locals and visitors alike.



- Invest in quality, visible downtown gateway and wayfinding signage along Highway 79 and near the East Street entrance to address a lack of directions to landmarks and public parking areas in downtown. TxDOT is a needed partner to have at the initial planning table of a wayfinding signage project. Build a strong working relationship with Hutto's TxDOT District Engineer to learn about wayfinding and interpretive signage opportunities and funding, so that tourists and locals know where amenities are located such as public restrooms, public parking lots, as well as to tell some of Hutto's rich and unique history, including the memorable hippo history. Hutto is located in the [Austin District](#).
- Design a three-sided visitor kiosk to be placed at the intersection of East & Farley Street to provide a downtown map and business directory, a schedule of events, and an area to showcase local history and images of historic Hutto.
- Address gaps in downtown infrastructure between downtown and the COOP District including sidewalks, lighting, interpretive signage, and landscaping so pedestrians don't have to walk in the streets. Prioritize downtown landscaping and landscape maintenance in empty downtown flower

beds and on city-owned green properties downtown. Trees and landscaping need to be replaced when they are dead. Trim trees along Farley Street to elevate the canopy and to uncover street lighting. Remove Christmas lights from trees in the off season to prevent the trees from growing into the lights. Make sure all streetlights are in working condition.



Native blooming plants can withstand extreme weather conditions and add color to make downtown greener. Consider green screening downtown vacant lots and parking lots with native trees that provide shade for pedestrians and colorful native bushes inside the sidewalk that provide a buffer and urban edge. Work to create partnerships with Keep Hutto Beautiful to elevate beautification efforts downtown.



- Add to downtown Hutto's public art scene and look at painting or wrapping all silver utility boxes near downtown with public art to emphasize the downtown gateways for placemaking and traffic calming purposes. This type of project could allow Hutto students and local artists to contribute to the downtown streetscape and increase community pride and ownership.
- Downtown Hutto has enough current parking, the issue is a lack of management or enforcement of parking. Take an inventory of downtown Hutto parking spaces in the district so downtown stakeholders are aware of how many total spaces are available to the public and where they are located. The city and chamber should work together to make sure their

employees are parking in designated employee parking lots so that convenient on-street parking spaces are for active downtown customers. Organize and produce a digital downtown parking map to post on the EDC, City of Hutto and Hutto Chamber websites and distribute printed copies quarterly to downtown business/property owners so they can educate their customers online and in person of where best to park to patronize their small business. Downtown property/business owners and employees should also be parking behind their buildings/properties, leaving prime, on-street parking for active customers. Consider a downtown parking management study to address needs for downtown Hutto 5-10+ years down the road.



- Produce a sign or static cling decal for downtown business storefronts that designate where current public restrooms are located. Sticker or sidewalk corner signage with QR codes that advertise a downtown Hutto website page with a downtown parking map could also be placed on downtown trash receptacles.



- Help facilitate every downtown vacant storefront property to make visual improvements to their curb appeal and have available properties more visually engaging so that customers and visitors want to keep walking downtown to the occupied and engaging storefronts.

The city could provide a reimbursement incentive for cleaning windows regularly; adding For Lease/Sale signage at each location listing the current zoning, possible uses and property

owner/realtor contact info; applying vinyl window photo/image of what businesses are coming soon; or creating window displays that show other downtown small business products, promote special events, or display public art exhibits.



- Partner with Keep Hutto Beautiful to take full advantage of statewide awards offered by their Governors Community Achievement Awards (GCAA). The [award amounts](#) are substantial - for populations up to 40,000 it's \$210,000. 2025 GCAA applications will be open from January – February. Work with KHB to schedule a “Downtown Fall Clean” before major downtown events to make sure it is tourism-ready. Register your cleanup and submit free supply requests a minimum of three weeks before your event date to be fulfilled.
- Capitalize on Hutto's rich and memorable history and develop more public art around it for visitors to visually step into the local stories. Design an interpretive sign panel for the hippo story to be placed by Henrietta as a way to share this fun story with visitors. Begin a downtown public art program address the “art desert”. Consult with Scot Wilkinson, Director of Arts and Culture with the City of Round Rock to learn their best practices. Be sure to not directly paint on brick that has never been painted, but public art can be treated like a small billboard and either painted or printed on a UV-rated canvas that is then installed in the mortar joints of the wall to protect the brick. Also, consult with the City of Georgetown and the City of Round Rock about creating regular arts-related events, especially those with music as the key component. This will bring Hutto residents downtown.



See Georgetown (Red Poppy Capital of Texas) and Elgin (Sausage Capital of Texas) examples below.



Physical Downtown Design Mid and Long-term

- Consider becoming a [Certified Local Government \(CLG\)](#) to meet historic preservation standards for your downtown assets. [CLG grant funding](#) is also available to provide funding to participating city and county governments to develop and sustain an effective local preservation program critical to preserving historic resources. Create a small working group/task force through the city's planning and zoning commission to investigate the creation of design guidelines and the potential of creating a historic overlay to the downtown district or other zoning protections. Utilize knowledge from other communities who have created protections and guidelines for their historic downtown. Explore examples from McKinney, Georgetown, Elgin, and others.
- Update zoning for appropriately designed downtown infill to close any gaps of the "missing teeth" spaces on downtown's main corridors. Komatsu Architecture in Fort Worth, for example, has designed several notable examples of compatible new construction in downtowns such as the Lampasas County Annex buildings and the free-standing downtown Taylor Fire Station.



- Downtown incentives can be designed to fill the financial gap of an approved/desired project. Ideally, tie all incentives to proper design guidelines. A design toolkit can include creating a low-interest loan pool with banks, having information regarding the [State of Texas](#) and Federal tax credits among other things. The program might consider including consultation with a preservation architect and/or requiring the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation for the façade improvements to historic buildings. The Standards are simple and easy to follow and will ensure appropriate methods are used to rehabilitate the historic buildings.

- Create walkable corridor with a network of sidewalks that link all three districts on the north side of Hwy. 79



- Consider providing design services by a qualified preservation architect through the city's and/or EDC's downtown incentives or a companion program. A program could be set up to provide a walk through with a preservation architect and an engineer familiar with historic buildings (**a must**). This program could help property owners understand any maintenance issues with their buildings before they start a rehabilitation and give them an understanding of "best practices" which will save them time and money in the long run. The result will be better quality rehabilitations of the downtown buildings, preserving them for future generations while remaining functional.



- Label on-street parking spaces with **Customer Only Parking from Monday-Friday 8-5 p.m.** on the asphalt and consider a downtown parking ordinance of 3 hours that would be enforced by the city. A parking ordinance would need to be enforced randomly and regularly to create an impact. Create clearly marked public parking areas with signage, native green screens or native blooming landscape screening the lots, so they look safer and appealing to female shoppers. Plant shade street trees throughout public parking lots to provide shade during the hotter months.



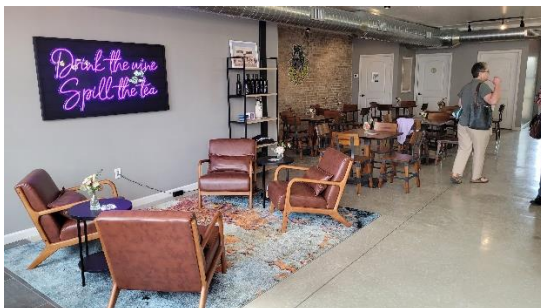
Economic Redevelopment and Small Business Mix

Short-term

- Develop a resource guide for doing business in Hutto with specifics related to opening in the historic district – the [City of Georgetown](#) has a good brochure example.
- Expand the existing COOP District TIRZ to include downtown and Cottonwood districts to generate funding for improvements in all three districts. Research successful TIRZ districts in Texas such as the City of Mesquite's [Towne Center TIRZ](#) that set the district boundaries larger than just the downtown district so it would accrue quickly from faster-growing areas of town.



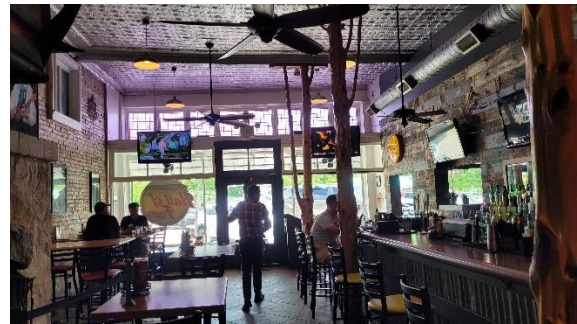
- Prepare for the influx of South Korean residents from Samsung and show them Texas-friendly hospitality by welcoming them to downtown Hutto:
 - Post QR codes that offer South Korean translation of signage, websites, etc.
 - Develop a South Korean culture class to offer to employees of restaurants, retail, downtown businesses, and city employees to provide them with a welcoming environment and appropriate interactions.
 - Consider increasing downtown lighting since we were told that light equates to a safer environment in South Korean culture.
 - Develop outreach to Samsung families to encourage entrepreneurship and small business development specifically in downtown.
- With a successful new wine bar in downtown Hutto, capitalize on the opportunity to recruit complementary new businesses like a local cheese and meat shop/market. Downtown restaurants are already partnering with the wine bar to offer food at their location down the street, but more cross-promotion of downtown businesses is needed to keep shoppers downtown longer to spend more money. Target other “destination retail” to make downtown a regional draw. Ensure that there are day and nighttime businesses. Work with downtown businesses to ensure that some of the daytime businesses have hours of operation after 5 p.m. for resident commuters.



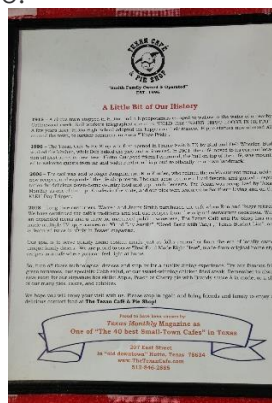
- Identify needs that are currently unmet by residents in and surrounding downtown (i.e., groceries, more downtown lighting for keeping downtown safe and clean, after-hour

restaurants/bars, alcohol, services, special events, etc.). Conduct an online survey of downtown and city-wide residents every other year to determine needs and how downtown residents prefer being communicated with, i.e., websites, social media platforms, texts, etc. The City of Georgetown, Texas does this to help set annual city council budget priorities. Consider working with the EDC on targeting types of businesses where leakage has been identified. Tools like Placer Ai and Buxton can show where residents are going to find products that meet their needs rather than shopping in Hutto, this can help to further identify gaps in the market.

Find out what downtown residents and locals would like to see and will support downtown that is currently missing. Use this info to develop a "Top 10" target list of small businesses you'd like to see in downtown and make that public through the local media and on the EDC, city/chamber websites so if anyone in the area is thinking about opening a small business in downtown, they know what is requested and in demand locally.



- Utilize the EDC's geo-fencing data to determine Hutto's visitor origin markets, their demographics, and Hutto's most visited sites. Adopt a data-driven approach to decision-making for downtown. Help determine Hutto's market position by better understanding current demographics, psychographics, what are the household income ranges and ethnicities to know what types of products and services are in demand to offer in downtown stores. Have a retail leakage study done by the Capital Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) to see what locals are buying out of town and post that info near the "Top 10" businesses requested for downtown. These are the top target businesses you want to recruit downtown if they are the right fit.
- For downtown landmark businesses that have been open for 50+ years, look into the [Texas Treasure Business Award](#) through the THC. By acknowledging local businesses while they are still in operation, we honor them as places of living history and can record their stories and ensure their legacy for generations to come.



Economic Redevelopment and Small Business Mix Mid and Long-term

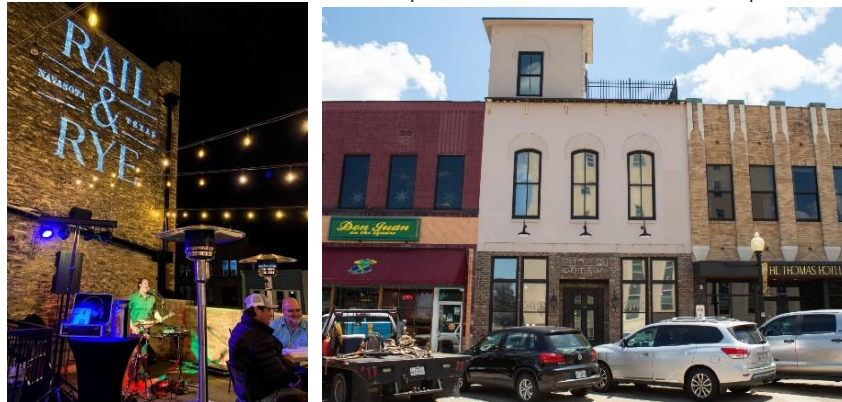
- Prioritize downtown in the city and EDC's overall economic development strategy and budgets. Make it known that downtown is important and developers and local investment will follow if they consistently see positive downtown public reinvestment projects and high-quality special events. In partnership with the EDC, create a toolkit to support the renovation and historic preservation of downtown properties. Incentive programs should support the overall goal of saving and preserving the historic infrastructure of the community and align with approvals from the city. Businesses looking to come to Hutto will look at your core business district, if they do not see that the city is maintaining or investing here, they may question what kind of support they would receive if this area is being neglected.



- Concentrate on working with downtown property owners of vacant land on East Street to encourage appropriate downtown mixed-use infill development – incentivize this effort with a 380 agreement because it will be a game-changer for Hutto. Property value and sales tax values would reflect the ROI for the city with this type of catalyst project. Additional focus on business infill between East Street and COOP District on vacant lots, could include pocket hotels, boutiques, small-scale manufacturing like breweries, wineries and distilleries, restaurants, nightlife, etc.
- Schedule site visits to other communities that have similar characteristics as downtown Hutto to inspire staff and council to see what downtown could be if properly invested in.
- Create an incubator/co-op space for small retail businesses in a downtown building. Think of a subdivided “antique mall” concept with temporary walls to delineate spaces for each business. This could be a launching pad for new businesses that will ultimately occupy individual space in downtown. An arcade or entertainment option for students and young adults was mentioned due to nearby schools.
- Currently, there are just a few upper-floor residential units in downtown, the city needs to triple its efforts to incentivize and facilitate mixed-use development in downtown with upper-floor residential or lodging so first floors can be used for restaurants, retail, and small-scale

manufacturing. Help develop new downtown residential opportunities with townhomes, condos, and multi-family in vacant properties between downtown and the Co-Op District. Consult the City of Round Rock about their new downtown residential infill projects.

- In general, hotels and lodging are needed in and within walking distance to downtown Hutto and the COOP District, so incentivize developers with vacant downtown city properties, when possible, to increase the walkability and accessibility of the district for visitors. State and Federal tax credits and PACE funding are often used as funding sources for historic rehabilitation hotel projects. Ensure that any new downtown lodging development includes a proportional amount of meeting space, i.e. 140 Guest Rooms w/8,000 square feet of meeting space. Look at downtown Fredericksburg's Albert Hotel being built.
- People want to be where they can see other people having fun and is well lit. Encourage downtown revitalization and new construction projects to include rooftop bars and patio/sidewalk dining, which will encourage the density and vibrancy of the district. Downtown Navasota and Tyler have award-winning rooftop bars that add another level of activity and visibility from the sidewalk and streets to help make downtown a hot spot.



- Rather than a history museum, consider a gallery space on the ground floor in the new Chamber of Commerce building. This will help address the art desert, as well as provide a much-needed shopping opportunity downtown (plus revenue for local artists).

Also, find more locally crafted products to feature in boutiques rather than the same socks, jewelry, handbags, etc. that are in every boutique in every downtown. This could help differentiate downtown Hutto shopping from other boutiques in the region and create a more local feel.



Promotion and Special Events

Short-term

- Add major downtown events to the city's events calendar (Old Tyme Days and the Crawfish Festival are missing). Promote the Hutto Silos Farmers Market at the Gin and the Hutto Market Days to the broader Williamson County area.
- Build a database of high-quality downtown and COOP District photos to use in marketing and advertising.
- Design and install new lamppost banners for seasonal use in conjunction with shop local efforts and major downtown signature events.
- Uniquely, Hutto has a great selection of local and chain restaurants in downtown and in the COOP District which make it a dining destination. Visitors and locals will drive for good food and drink, so take full advantage of marketing all the foodie options between the two districts that are within walking distance of each other.



- Host a semi-annual workshop working with Texas Travel Alliance (TTA) on the proper use of hotel occupancy tax (HOT) funds for city council and those associated with Hutto's tourism industry to assess how funds are being spent and establishing a better grant process to support more events and marketing efforts.
- Explore ways to support Hutto's brand identity as the Hippo Capital of Texas. Is there a list and map of the hippos around town? If not, this could be a fun scavenger hunt for visitors- especially those with kids- to find and take pictures with the themed, maintained, and publicly accessible hippo statues. Scavenger Hunt brochures could be distributed to/through downtown businesses. Look into turning World Hippo Day into a major event in downtown Hutto with lots of media coverage. Build a relationship with Hippolotofus to explore ways to expand Hutto's hippo identity. Research into hosting one of their reunion events, it is a natural fit for Hutto.



- Create a strategic five-year Downtown Marketing Plan to spread the word about downtown Hutto and its assets to locals and tourists in the Greater Austin area and statewide. Look into the future of HOT funds to fund professional downtown marketing materials such as a downtown map that is updated twice a year. Make sure the downtown promotional materials are at all surrounding hotels, Airbnb's, and event rentals, and offer quarterly trainings of retail, restaurant, and hotel front line staff for customer service in [Texas Friendly Hospitality](#) through Texas A&M Extension or through a Texas Heritage Trails Regional Executive Director (Hutto is located in both the [Brazos Trail and Hill Country Trail regions](#). Celebrate when downtown and local staff become certified!
- Develop a tourism website to inform and attract visitors to Hutto. One of our favorite examples of a well-done tourism website is <https://visitbrenhamtexas.com/>. This structure could easily be scaled to represent Hutto's tourism offerings.
- Consistently build on quality annual downtown events and retail shop small/local campaign to help drive pedestrian traffic. Start a Shop Local marketing campaign to promote small businesses. **Small Business Saturday**, the Saturday after Thanksgiving, and **Artists Sunday** the next day, should be celebrated annually downtown. Consider starting a local retail holiday shopping month campaign after Halloween or Thanksgiving where all downtown retailers/restaurants consistently stay open later one night, preferably a Thursday or Friday evening, so it could help extend the weekend for visitors and overnight stays in Hutto.
- Are any city staff members currently hitting the lunch speaking program circuit to discuss downtown at the local clubs and organizations like Chamber, Rotary, Lion's Club, Women's Clubs, to get the word out, etc.? If not, do outreach to let them know staff are available and willing to talk about downtown priorities and upcoming projects to keep locals informed on the downtown progress on the Downtown Hutto Plan.
- Take advantage of the promotional and marketing opportunities of being in the [Texas Hill Country Trail](#) and [Texas Brazos Trail](#) of the Texas Heritage Trails Program (THTP). The program is an economic development initiative operated through the Texas Historical Commission (THC) that encourages partnerships to preserve and promote Texas's historic and cultural resources. And your Texas downtown is the perfect resource to preserve and promote to visitors! Your successful local efforts combined with marketing and assistance from THC's heritage trail regions can help increase visitation to your downtown, and ultimately more dollars to your community and local businesses.

What the THTP Can Do for Your Downtown:

- Promotion on TexasTimeTravel.com and other regional advertising efforts
- Representation at trade and consumer shows and the State Fair of Texas
- Consultation and/or assessment of heritage tourism sites, programs, or products
- Connection to other tourism organizations in your region

Ways to Partner:

There are many ways to partner with your Texas Heritage Trail Region. But first and foremost, you need to get to know your regional Executive Directors and keep them informed about what's going on in your downtown. Other ways include the following:

- Attend a regional board meeting or volunteer to host one in your downtown.
- Join a task force or serve on the board.
- Make full use of TexasTimeTravel.com to promote your downtown and your community.
 - Monitor your community's city page and individual heritage site pages and provide updated content.
 - Provide hi-res photos.
 - Submit your downtown heritage events to the events calendar.
 - Create content about your downtown's interesting history or traditions (or create an itinerary or walking tour) for the blog.

Promotion and Special Events

Mid and Long-term

- Create a new downtown event during the summer (e.g., Old Tyme Days Festival, Crawfish Festival, Santa Claus Crawl) so that there is at least one main event downtown for each season. These create foot traffic and drive sales for local businesses. Also, find local organizations to host their special events downtown that can be marketed by the tourism office/downtown manager rather than actively run by them. With a large Hispanic population (we were told over 40% in HISD) consider adding special cultural events around holidays such as Cinco de Mayo or Hispanic Heritage Month
- Also, consider partnering between Hutto I.S.D. and small businesses to host a downtown Back-to-School progressive retail event to introduce or re-welcome teachers and staff to downtown Hutto as a local destination throughout the school year and summer where they are welcome to shop and dine local. Offer free tastes and drinks in different participating businesses after one of their required teacher in-service days to show thanks and spread more Hutto Hippo pride before the school year kicks off.
- Explore South Korean traditions that could be used to create a new downtown event or events that celebrate the culture of Hutto's newest residents (and those of the surrounding area). And be strategic, if downtown is interested in recruiting a South Korean restaurant or eatery, start a South Korean Food & Drink Festival and invite popular Texas-based South Korean food trucks and restaurants to participate.
- Partner with local real estate professionals and developers to start a tour similar to the "[Imagine the Possibilities](#)" tour hosted in Texas Main Street cities in the spring and fall. The tour should include available downtown properties, including vacant upper floors, to help raise awareness with regional real estate agents and developers of downtown opportunities. Look into partnering with one of the area's real estate organizations to hold their monthly or quarterly meeting downtown with a giveaway at the end of the tour to keep attendees present.

- Create a “walking museum” using placards, kiosks, and QR codes to tell the history of downtown buildings, and episodes of Hutto's history to create foot traffic.

AGENDA ITEM REPORT

3.2.



To: City Council
Subject: Discussion and possible action related to Work Session topics
Meeting: Thursday, December 5, 2024
Department: City Council /
Staff Contact:

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

SUMMARY OF REQUEST:

STAFF REVIEW:

FISCAL NOTES:

ATTACHMENTS:

None