



# Future City

## LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

This Comprehensive Plan section establishes the necessary policy guidance to enable the City of Victoria to plan effectively for future development and redevelopment. Sound land use planning is essential to ensure that the City is prepared not only to serve anticipated public infrastructure and service needs, but also to create and maintain a desired community character.

Land use considerations are integrated with all other components of the Comprehensive Plan. For instance, the transportation network provides access to land, which influences the type and intensity of development. The provision or lack of public utilities can also dictate the location, amount, and timing of development. Similarly, proximity to parks and public facilities promotes public health and safety at specific locations and, as a result, affects the development potential of an area. Site design and development character shape community aesthetics and, thus, the perceptions held by area residents and those considering investment in Victoria.

### KEY ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

Five key issues and considerations related to Land Use and Development were identified through the comprehensive planning process and should be addressed as the City's associated vision, goals, and strategic action priorities for the coming years are pursued.

1. **Inadequate supply of new homes at "starter housing" and mid-range price points.**

- As in other areas of the nation and Texas, Victoria has seen a drop-off in the number of active developers/builders after the U.S. recession years from 2007-2009, with more focus by some builders on higher-value custom homes versus volume production at lower price points – especially in the prime \$150,000 to \$225,000 range.
  - Property tax appraisals have increased in Victoria in recent years as elsewhere
  - across Texas, which is another factor in initial housing costs and ultimate affordability for a home owner.
  - The availability and cost of skilled construction labor is another impediment in Victoria as elsewhere.
- 2. Redevelopment needs and opportunities on the south side** (Council Districts 1-2).
- Victoria sees variations in the costs of providing public services across the

### **VICTORIA NOT ALONE IN ITS HOUSING CHALLENGES**

An article in the Dallas Morning News in November 2015 reported that lower-priced new homes, sought especially by first-time homebuyers, were in short supply in North Texas due largely to scarce construction labor and higher costs for land and building materials. Prices for new homes in the region had risen by more than 10 percent to that point in 2015. According to an area housing analyst:

“That’s our number one issue the builders are facing – affordability and how to keep their prices down. A new house for about \$190,000 is pretty much the bottom rung in the market. It’s getting very difficult for them to find a home lot priced under \$40,000.”

The Real Estate Center at Texas A&M University confirms that land and lot costs are among the largest components of a new home’s price. The Dallas Morning News article also pointed out that many builders abandoned the first-time home market after the late-2000s recession because tougher lending standards reduced the number of buyers. The Real Estate Center cites statistics from the National Association of Realtors that shows less than one-third of U.S. home sales in 2015 had been to first-time buyers, which was a historic low. As a result, the median age of first-time homebuyers nationwide is now above 30.

As the Real Estate Center’s chief economist concludes: “For years in Texas, we have had the most affordable housing for a major metro area. Affordability and workforce housing are going to be a major issue. We are not building enough houses in the \$150,000 to \$200,000 bracket.” Likewise, at the national level, real estate advisory firm RCLCO reported in Fall 2015 that the number of new homes sold in the U.S. priced \$400,000 and above had increased 25 percent over the last year while those priced under \$400,000 had dropped by almost 11 percent. RCLCO cited the following as likely factors:

- higher hurdles facing lower income households in obtaining mortgage financing;
- builders focusing on higher value, higher margin new home segments; and,
- higher land prices and development and construction costs putting downward pressure on homebuilder profitability, which makes the economics of lower-priced product much more difficult.

**SOURCES:** “Buyers driving farther, looking harder for new homes under \$200K,” Steve Brown, Dallas Morning News, November 12, 2015.

“North Texas builders working to meet first-time buyer demand,” Real Estate Center Online News, Texas A&M Real Estate Center, November 13, 2015.

“Mixed Signals in the New For-Sale Housing Market,” Charles A. Hewlett, RCLCO, October 29, 2015.

community, with efficient use of public streets and infrastructure generally to the north offset by underutilized public services and facilities in less vibrant areas generally found in the south, which is then exacerbated by stagnant or declining property values in such areas.

- A challenge for new south side investment is identifying “who” locally or outside of Victoria has the vision, energy, and wherewithal to pursue a reinvestment program that will require years of patience and commitment.
- Market realities and negative perceptions, valid or not, must also be overcome. (In discussing obstacles to south side renewal, Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee members cited the relative age and condition of homes and other structures, lack of and distance to shopping, perceived school quality, flooding risk in some areas, ongoing and past industrial activity, and land and development costs relative to return on investment.)

**3. Integrity of existing neighborhoods, and good design and amenities in new residential development.**

- In some areas a transient residential population, in both owners and renters, makes it difficult to maintain an active and effective Homeowners Association.
- When asked about their preferred ingredients for a quality neighborhood, Victoria residents who attended public events for this Comprehensive Plan mentioned green areas (with grass and trees), attractive walkways and walking trails, masonry walls versus wood fencing along major corridors, durability of street surfaces, and curbed and guttered streets. Some attendees cited the importance of overall “first impressions” and indications that ongoing maintenance is occurring within a neighborhood.

**4. Concern for community image and “quality” appearance related to: (1) private site and building practices; and (2) public sites and the “public realm” (i.e., key roadway corridors,**

**community entries/gateways, other public lands, etc.).**

- City officials pointed out that much of the existing development in older areas of Victoria predates most development regulations and standards adopted by the City, so legacy land uses and development will take time to turn over and be upgraded.
- Public discussions for this Comprehensive Plan included repeated mentions about newcomers to Victoria who bring different expectations and want to see higher standards.
- Some public meeting attendees were interested in what “private site and building practices” entails, which is typically site design elements (e.g., landscaping, signs, lighting, screening, driveways and parking areas) plus building architecture and sometimes placement/orientation of buildings on a site and relative to adjacent properties. Some attendees also cited long-term maintenance beyond initial development and construction as a source of community eyesores (e.g., the condition of older wooden fences over time, and lack of mowing outside of private fences along some corridors).

**5. Determining the best ways to promote a vibrant and appealing downtown while growing retail, services, and entertainment options elsewhere in the city.**

- Along with permanent residents who enjoy downtown outings, recognize the local college student population as a built-in demographic that typically seeks the amenities that a traditional and active downtown can offer.
- The City should consider a more formalized approach to encouraging and managing shared parking arrangements among complementary businesses or land uses with different operational/visitation patterns.

## FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

The Land Use and Development framework for action is organized in three tiers: Vision statements, Goals, and Strategic Action Priorities. These topics are intended to mesh with and support the other aspects of this Comprehensive Plan. The Strategic Action Priorities convey tangible actions that will, in the long run, lead to achievement of the Goals in line with the Vision.

A **Vision** is a broad statement of how the community views itself, providing an ideal and unique image of the future based on community values.

### VISION STATEMENTS

**V1:** Victoria is a community with “small-town” conveniences offering “big-city” opportunities.

**V2:** Victoria has safe and quiet neighborhoods with a variety of affordable housing.

**V3:** Victoria is a proud and attractive community with its own unique identity.

A **Goal** is a statement of a desired outcome (“end”) toward which efforts are directed as expressed by more specific objectives and action steps (“means”).

### GOALS

1. Orderly land development patterns.
2. Preserved and enhanced integrity, compatibility, value, and vitality of existing and new neighborhoods.
3. Adequate land areas for industrial parks and other major commercial/industrial developments to facilitate expanded employment opportunities and an increased tax base.
4. Land development that enhances Victoria’s sense of community.

### Housing

5. A variety of housing types and neighborhoods to meet Victoria’s future housing needs.
6. Improved safety, appearance, and livability of existing neighborhoods.
7. Improved entry-level and moderate-income housing options in Victoria.

### Community Image

8. Enhanced appearance of the community by designing future development within the context of the physical environment and nearby development.
9. A strong sense of community identity established.
10. Pride instilled in the community by encouraging citizens to take responsibility for their actions in the upkeep and appearance of private and public property.

A **Strategic Action** is aimed at seizing a special opportunity or addressing a particular challenge one faces, recognizing that a broader agenda of new or ongoing activities will also be pursued in the meantime.

### STRATEGIC ACTION PRIORITIES

#### >> Measures to support production of new single-family housing at key price points.

- In general, any potential public action must be aimed at reducing upfront development costs while still ensuring that expectations for quality dwellings, neighborhoods, and amenities are not lowered. For municipal governments themselves – or entities they establish to engage and collaborate with the private real estate and development communities (e.g., non-profit development corporations) – some options are “at arm’s length” (e.g., tax or other financial incentives, cost-sharing arrangements for utility infrastructure



The Colonies residential development in Amarillo offers an example of addressing the need for quality, new single-family homes at price points viable for the local market while also seeing them developed within an amenity-filled neighborhood context. Creating a Public Improvement District as a financing mechanism made it all possible.

SOURCE: Kendig Keast Collaborative

and/or streets) while other strategies require very direct involvement (e.g., land acquisition/assembly, direct provision of street or utility infrastructure, neighborhood park improvements, etc.). Some Texas cities have extended the use of Public Improvement Districts (PIDs) to new residential development, enabling private development to deliver new, desirable housing units at a lower price point.

- On the demand side of the housing market, any public action must be aimed at making a home purchase viable upfront and in the early years of ownership (e.g., down payment assistance, property tax relief, utilities assistance, payment of Homeowner Association fees, etc.).
- As a policy matter, the City must evaluate how it can best support non-profit efforts to address low-income housing needs, building on lessons learned from past partnership efforts.

**>> Strategies to support a south side revitalization focus.**

- Pursue a holistic approach to revitalization that encompasses infrastructure rehabilitation, public services, code enforcement and property maintenance assistance, housing programs, redevelopment and infill incentives, and special district and financing tools to spur redevelopment (where feasible).
- Explore the use of neighborhood protection districts, tax increment reinvestment zones, or other special district mechanisms that carry the option of applying land use and development standards within a defined area rather than citywide. As with any type of development regulation, greater predictability of outcomes is a prime benefit, specifically for purposes of south side revitalization, along with the assurance that private investments will be protected and development and redevelopment will proceed “on a level playing field” subject to defined expectations. All of these factors help mitigate the risk of committing private resources to a submarket with definite

challenges and disadvantages relative to others in the area.

- As highlighted in the Land Use and Development section of the Existing City Report, steer private investment activity toward “anchor” land uses that already are or potentially can be hubs of neighborhood activity and interaction, such as the vicinity of the Community Center, Youth Sports Complex, and Stroman Middle School.
- Continue an “education first, then enforcement” approach to code compliance that focuses punitive steps on repeat violators and property owners who do not respond to initial notifications and resolution efforts.

**>> Measures to promote “quality development” in Victoria.**

- Continue to evaluate viable regulatory options that would enable Victoria to address a wider spectrum of factors that contribute to development quality. All such strategies should incorporate incentive-based measures that encourage and reward desired outcomes (e.g., enhanced building design and/or materials). Purely incentive-driven guidelines may be pursued in areas where new or expanded regulation is not feasible.
- The strategic action item later in this section related to a unified Land and Site Development Ordinance points out how this approach promotes “more holistic consideration” of development standards that must be met. The process for transitioning to a unified development ordinance can also be used to highlight and fill regulatory gaps that are leading to development outcomes that fall below community expectations (e.g., commercial site and/or building design, landscaping and screening, buffering and greater separation between incompatible uses, etc.).
- As a community that is seen mostly from the private automobile, Victoria should focus its enhancement efforts on development conditions and redevelopment needs along major

roadway corridors and at high-profile “gateways” as identified elsewhere in this Comprehensive Plan. The action items in this Land Use and Development section related to special area planning, use of geographically targeted regulatory tools versus citywide regulatory tools, and corridor beautification should be pursued in concert with:

- the corridor enhancement planning referenced in the Mobility and the Recreation and Amenities sections;
- the emphasis in the Growth Capacity and Infrastructure section on using the City’s capital investments as another means for corridor beautification; and,
- the focus on “quality of place” enhancements in the Economic Opportunity section, and incentive-based methods for steering new development and reinvestment to areas in need.

- Continue to work toward opening up large areas of contiguous, developable land for new private investment as one potential program, among others, to attract larger-scale, master-planned developments that impose on themselves high expectations and standards for quality design and appearance and lasting value.

**>> Community image/appearance initiatives in conjunction with expanded tourism promotion.**

- Focus beautification resources and energy on potential signature streets/corridors. When attendees at a public workshop for this Comprehensive Plan were asked to identify locations on a city map “you consider a major entry point or gateway into the city,” the entry from Business US 59 (Houston Highway) was most often chosen. The north and northwest entries via US 77 and US 87, respectively, were next highest and rated relatively equal, while the SH 185 entry from the south was also cited by some. Drawing much less response was the western entry into the city and downtown via Business US 77.

- Expand the use of water-saving, drought-tolerant landscaping in strategic locations around the city given lower maintenance requirements and attractive streetscape outcomes. Also pursue partnership arrangements with businesses, community organizations, homeowners associations, or others who have a direct stake in the appearance of their area and can further relieve the maintenance burden on City resources.
- Explore initiatives or regulations that reduce the “visual clutter” of billboards and obsolete signage along gateways and corridors.

**>> More “user friendly” development regulations by transitioning to a unified Land and Site Development Ordinance.**

- In recent years, many cities across Texas and the nation have migrated toward Unified Development Ordinances or Codes (UDOs, UDCs) to achieve a better coordinated set of development-related regulations, standards, and procedures. A UDC typically yields the following benefits:
  - Consolidates all development-related regulations into one document (e.g., subdivision, site plan, development and design standards, signs, landscaping, lighting, parking and loading, parkland dedication, streets and utilities, circulation and access management, storm water and floodplain management, etc.). This helps to ensure consistency among the different components and promotes more holistic consideration of subdivision and site plan requirements and standards by both applicants and the City.
  - Makes the regulatory specifics easier to navigate and comprehend (i.e., more “user friendly”) for the development, real estate, and consultant communities versus dispersed and uncoordinated provisions within an overall municipal code. A single consolidated index and better cross-referencing across code sections helps to ensure that

all relevant provisions are taken into account pertaining to any particular development issue or proposal.

- Condenses into one code section all administrative procedures and considerations, helping to streamline and clarify the roles and responsibilities of each official and decision-making body.
- Offers a consolidated list of definitions, helping to prevent inconsistencies and questions of interpretation between codes.
- Greatly improves the City’s ability to track the total development process because various components are organized and coordinated in a logical, sequential order.
- Itemizes all development-related fees in one place so applicants are well informed of process costs.
- Streamlines the process for future code amendments and enhancements.

Given these potential benefits, it is usually best to pursue significant code upgrades immediately after a Comprehensive Plan is adopted. This approach capitalizes on momentum from the planning process and builds on discussions already started about regulatory issues and methods.

**OTHER ACTIONS**

Along with the short list of Strategic Action Priorities outlined above, this section captures other potential action items discussed through the long-range planning process. These items are compiled in five categories that are the main ways Comprehensive Plans are implemented:

- (1) Capital Investments
- (2) Programs and Initiatives
- (3) Regulations and Standards
- (4) Partnerships and Coordination
- (5) Targeted Planning/Studies

## CONNECTING WITH NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH SPECIAL EVENTS

Examples from cities across the nation illustrate the multiple ways to maintain communication links to neighborhood leaders and representatives. Establishing a community-wide association or network of neighborhood councils can also lead to annual gatherings and/or other periodic meetings and seminars on issues of interest to all neighborhoods. Such forums can prove valuable for inviting “grass roots” input into, and notice of, capital improvement priorities, park and public facility upgrades, street and infrastructure projects, pending major developments, crime prevention activities, code compliance initiatives, etc. Some communities also host high-profile annual events focused on the interests and needs of neighborhoods including:

- The annual CityLinks conference between the City of Dayton, University of Dayton and other partners, with a recent theme of “Moving Dayton Forward: New Ideas, New Initiatives.”  
[http://www.udayton.edu/artsscience/fitzcenter/community\\_progs/citylinks/](http://www.udayton.edu/artsscience/fitzcenter/community_progs/citylinks/)
- The annual Neighborhood Conference in Riverside, California, hosted by the City’s Neighborhoods Division.  
<http://www.riversideca.gov/neighborhoods/neighborhoods-conference.asp>
- The annual Neighborhoods Conference in Hillsborough County, Florida, hosted by the County’s Office of Neighborhood Relations.  
<http://www.hillsboroughcounty.org/index.aspx?NID=3769>



### Capital Investments

- A. Place a high priority on infrastructure improvements for infill areas to encourage their development as well as areas that are prime for industrial development.
- B. Continue to use the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to prioritize infrastructure projects that determine the direction of future growth.



### Programs and Initiatives

- A. Analyze the feasibility of providing financial incentives for infill development and the efficient utilization of existing infrastructure, including possible tax incentives and reduced or waived development and building permit fees.
- B. Use GIS to maintain an inventory of properties that are appropriate for industrial development.
- C. Identify and implement other methods of minimizing urban sprawl and strip commercial development.
- D. Empower neighborhood associations and residents to participate in revitalization

through an aggressive public participation program.

- E. Consider hosting an annual neighborhood-focused community event.
- F. Support incentives to promote beneficial downtown reinvestment, including the development of residential uses on the upper floors of downtown buildings and more housing, retailing, and restaurants overall in the downtown area.
- G. Encourage the rehabilitation of residential structures of historic value in the downtown area.
- H. Utilize incentives for restoring historic buildings consistent with the downtown design standards.
- I. Utilize One-half Cent Sales Tax Corporation funds and other available sources and finance tools to fund downtown revitalization programs.
- J. Designate additional historic districts.
- K. Encourage in-fill housing that is architecturally consistent with historic neighborhoods.

- L. Actively promote annual neighborhood cleanup campaigns.
- M. Provide public information and outreach regarding property maintenance codes.
- N. Create incentives for the development of new affordable housing on existing vacant lots.
- O. Encourage the rehabilitation or removal of abandoned and dilapidated structures.



**Regulations and Standards**

- A. Explore whether a petition-based approach to enable individual neighborhoods to request a higher level of neighborhood conservation measures through the City would be favorably considered in Victoria, based on the model used within the City of Houston to empower individual neighborhoods while avoiding “top-down,” across-the-board regulatory measures.
- B. Evaluate the use of historic district standards and design guidelines as another means for achieving neighborhood protection and development quality objectives within targeted areas of the city, where residents and property owners often already have higher expectations.
- C. Offer flexibility in subdivision and development regulations to encourage innovative developments and site designs that are conducive to infill, redevelopment, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, and livable neighborhoods with lasting value.
- D. Review existing utility extension ordinances/policies for necessary revisions and/or adopt new policies that discourage sprawl and leap-frog development patterns.
- E. Review the existing oversized utility reimbursement provisions of the Subdivision and Development Ordinance to ensure consistency with this plan and other proposed policies.
- F. Continue to apply the City’s subdivision regulations and subdivision improvement/design standards to new development in the ETJ.

- G. Identify potential revisions to the existing sign code to reduce the number of signs and billboards within the City.
- H. Create historic overlay districts to protect historic resources from encroachment by incompatible development.
- I. Identify ways to encourage improved perimeter fencing and landscaping, entry features, pedestrian circulation, the preservation of mature trees and natural areas, and other neighborhood amenities.
- J. Identify ways to encourage or require subdivision designs that include adequate open spaces in either private yards or common areas to partially provide for residents’ open space and recreation needs.
- K. Develop programs and incentives to encourage home ownership.
- L. Review, update, and enforce codes and ordinances related to weedy lots, junk vehicles, minimum housing standards, and other aspects of property maintenance.
- M. Review existing City codes and revise as necessary and appropriate to facilitate historic preservation.
- N. In cases where codes allow for flexibility or interpretation, and life/safety matters are not involved, apply a common sense approach that does not create barriers to historic preservation.
- O. Prepare design standards for buildings in the downtown area.
- P. Review existing ordinances and revise as necessary to strengthen enforcement mechanisms.
- Q. Increase enforcement of laws and ordinances pertaining to littering.

**Partnerships and Coordination**



- A. Identify opportunities for public/private partnerships to assist in the provision of infrastructure improvements to serve infill development.

**INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CITIES  
AND HOMEOWNERS ASSOCIATIONS**

Some cities provide advice and support to local homeowners associations (HOAs), and sometimes connect them with businesses that provide HOA management services. HOAs can also provide a means for maintaining “grass roots” communication on City services, security, and capital improvement needs. In some communities, small grants are available from the City for HOAs to use as seed money for neighborhood initiatives (e.g., beautification of vacant lots, landscaping, entry treatments, etc.). HOAs contribute to the stability and appearance of residential areas as they are typically responsible for: (1) enforcing private deed restrictions; (2) maintaining common areas including open drainage areas, landscaping, signs, and any pool and recreational facilities; (3) maintaining perimeter walls and landscaping including open space between subdivision walls and street rights-of-way; and (4) maintaining private roads, street lights, and sidewalks, where applicable.

- B. Foster partnerships with residents, business owners, schools, social service providers, and other stakeholders in neighborhood revitalization efforts.
  - C. Promote the establishment or continuation of homeowners associations (HOAs) for residential developments, including tenant associations for rental communities, to ensure a direct, cooperative means for residents of an area to maintain neighborhood standards, pride, and property values.
  - D. Support the efforts of the Victoria Housing Authority to provide housing for the elderly, disabled, and other special needs populations.
  - E. Utilize incentives and partnerships to encourage area builders, developers, and non-profit housing providers to meet the demand for entry-level housing and low- and moderate-income housing.
  - F. Facilitate and coordinate grant applications for local housing-related agencies.
- Targeted Planning/Studies** 
- A. Following adoption of this updated city-wide Comprehensive Plan, pursue more detailed and area-specific planning for particular neighborhoods, districts, and corridors within Victoria (building on the Ben Wilson Corridor Study, for example). More focused planning efforts of this sort also provide an opportunity to coordinate more closely with key partners and entities, as well as to obtain public input at a “grass roots” level. Candidate areas cited during the comprehensive planning process include, among many other possibilities:
    - The Houston Highway portion of Business US 59.
    - The Laurent Street corridor as the potential focus for a broader south side planning effort.
    - Key segments along Navarro Street, especially near Victoria Mall and the high-profile Loop 463/Navarro interchange.
    - Victoria’s higher education cluster around the Victoria College and University of Houston-Victoria campuses.
    - Victoria’s central medical cluster around and between Citizens Medical Center and DeTar Hospital Navarro.
    - The Loop 463 corridor and nearby developed and undeveloped areas of northeast Victoria.
    - Downtown Victoria and its surrounding residential and mixed-use neighborhoods.
    - The Main Street corridor north of downtown to Loop 463.
    - The US 87 gateway into Victoria, and the broader area around the Victoria West High School and Harold Cade Middle School campuses.
  - B. Prepare and adopt a Downtown Master Plan.
  - C. Prepare and adopt a Historic Preservation Plan.

- D. Continue to monitor downtown parking capacity and utilization through the Main Street Program.
- E. Complete and implement a Corridor Enhancement Plan, which will provide a template for improving the major transportation corridors that lead into and through the city. It should include such features as bike lanes, sidewalks, landscaping, lighting, median designs, and other aesthetic and engineering improvements. It should also incorporate a streetscape design theme.

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