BRAZOS VALLEY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Submitted by Market Street Services, Inc.
www.marketstreetservices.com

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STEERING COMMITTEE

This process will be guided by a diverse Steering Committee comprised of representatives from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. The following individuals have generously volunteered their time to serve the community and this process by providing strategic guidance, input, and oversight throughout the process.

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Phase 1: Stakeholder and Community Engagement (August)
Qualitative feedback is a vital component that will be used to identify strategic priorities for the Brazos Valley. Market Street engaged as many regional stakeholders as possible through an online survey, individual interviews, and multiple focus groups to help identify the community's strengths, weaknesses, challenges, and opportunities.

Phase 2: Regional Assessment (October)
The Regional Assessment provided a detailed examination of the Brazos Valley’s competitiveness as a place to live, work, visit, and do business. The Assessment wove qualitative feedback from phase one with deep quantitative and data findings into a set of “stories” that provide a concise narrative of the region's opportunities and challenges. The Assessment is complemented by a series of scorecards that benchmark the region’s historical performance to that of nine peer or aspirational regions. Market Street also examined data for the Austin and Houston metro areas to add additional context.

Phase 3: Target Sector Analysis (November)
The Analysis takes an in-depth examination of the economic opportunities that have the greatest potential to diversify the economy, create and retain jobs for new and existing residents, spur innovation, increase the local tax base, and raise levels of prosperity throughout the Brazos Valley. Research will focus not only on businesses, but also the occupational concentrations that support them as well as the innovation, infrastructure, and entrepreneurial capacities throughout the region. This will result in the identification of the most promising target business sectors for the region.

Phase 4: Brazos Valley Economic Development Strategy (November – March)
The Strategy represents the culmination of all the quantitative and qualitative research findings and strategic implications. The Strategy will guide the community's collective actions and will be geared towards addressing challenges and capitalizing on opportunities. The plan will be holistic, actionable, and measurable. Examples of best practice programs, policies, and initiatives from communities around the country will be included when relevant.

Phase 5: Implementation Plan (March – April)
The Implementation Plan ensures that the Strategy is activated and sustained for the next five years and beyond. The Plan will formalize timelines for phasing in the Strategy’s multiple actions, identify lead and support implementation entities, determine existing and necessary financial and personnel capacity to drive implementation, propose optimal staffing and governance operations, and confirm performance metrics to track implementation progress and success.
THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Public, private, and non-profit leaders have come together around a holistic economic development initiative that will help the Brazos Valley achieve a more prosperous and successful future. This process has resulted in an Economic Development Strategy that will guide the community’s collective actions for the next five years. This consensus blueprint establishes what the Brazos Valley must do to achieve a more prosperous and successful future. The remainder of this section describes how the Strategy was developed and outlines its structure.

HOW THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK WAS DEVELOPED

The strategic planning process began with the development of two foundational research documents that directly informed the creation of this Strategy. The Regional Assessment and Scorecards examined the competitive issues facing the Brazos Valley by evaluating them through the prism of three critical aspects of a community: its people, their prosperity, and the quality of the place. It was based on in-depth data analysis covering demographic, socioeconomic, economic, and quality of life trends as well as extensive public input gathered through focus groups, interviews, and an online survey that received more than 1,500 responses from community stakeholders. Key findings from research and public input were incorporated into a narrative consisting of seven key stories that help explain the community’s current realities, key successes, and remaining challenges. These seven stories are:

1. Introduction: A Region at an Inflection Point
2. Growth and Change in the Brazos Valley
3. Anchored by A&M: Accelerating Our Economic Evolution
4. Elevating Standards of Living and Preserving Affordability
5. Workforce Competitiveness: Deriving Advantage from Talent Production and Retention
6. Diversifying Our Appeal: Quality of Place in the Brazos Valley
7. Conclusion: Seizing Opportunity Through Collaboration and Cooperation
The Target Sector Analysis identified three target sectors that the community can pursue to achieve job and investment growth over the next five years. These sectors are displayed in the following graphic:

![Target Sectors Graphic]

The key findings from these research documents are presented in Appendix B: Research Summary. Before proceeding, however, it is helpful to recall several key themes from research and input that were of particular importance to developing a strategic framework. Many stakeholders believe that the region is at an inflection point. The Brazos Valley has grown rapidly and passed the threshold of being a “college town” but has not yet developed the kind of vibrant, private-sector economy found in other small and mid-sized regions with top-tier research universities. While challenges remain (and must be addressed through strategic action), the region entered into this strategy creation process with more possibilities to increase levels of prosperity and improve quality of life than at any point in its history. However, stakeholder input also revealed that the region has been held back by numerous internal divisions within the community. Such divisions are not uncommon within regions, but stakeholders noted that the problem has been particularly acute in the Brazos Valley. If the region is to maximize its potential for prosperity and success, the various jurisdictions, institutions, and organizations in the Brazos Valley need to commit to working together better than ever.

The full range of strategic implications identified through research, public input, and the Steering Committee’s guidance about the desired strategic direction for the Brazos Valley directly informed the strategic framework presented on the next page.
THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The research, public input, and Steering Committee feedback summarized on the preceding pages led to the determination of a strategic framework that organizes the efforts that the Brazos Valley will advance in the coming years. The framework is organized around two primary Goal Areas. The first of these is Economic Growth & Prosperity. This section is more programmatic in nature and includes recommendations related to the “three-legged stool” of economic development, consisting of business attraction, business retention and expansion, and entrepreneurship and innovation. These three components closely map to the mission of the region’s designated economic development organization, the Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation (BVEDC), which operates under the slogan, “Launch. Grow. Locate.” The recommendations in the first Goal Area can be led by the BVEDC and/or its key partners, particularly those in the region’s innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem. The second Goal Area is Workforce & Community Improvement. This section includes a mixture of capital investments and programs that are intended to enhance the Brazos Valley’s “product” – its workforce, asset base, infrastructure and connectivity, and quality of place – that influences the region’s competitiveness for talent, jobs, and investment. As discussed in the research phases of this process, making improvements in these areas will be essential if the Brazos Valley is to become a more prosperous and successful place. Efforts in this Goal Area will typically need to be advanced by broad community coalitions, with both public and private partners taking the lead at times. It must be stressed that this framework is interdependent and connected, and the community must make significant progress in both Goal Areas if it is to unlock its immense potential. No single element can, in isolation, advance the Brazos Valley toward a more prosperous and successful future.

Underneath both Goal Areas is an Objective that articulates the ultimate aim of that section of the Strategy. The Goal Areas are supported by six Strategic Pillars, three apiece. Each Strategic Pillar can be activated by multiple Tactical Recommendations. The graphic on the following page provides a visual representation of the strategic framework. It is important to note that while the Goal Areas, Strategic Pillars, and Tactical Recommendations are numbered for the purposes of organization, this order does not imply hierarchy or priority. The Strategy’s Goal Areas and Tactical Recommendations are described in the following pages. Each Goal Area begins with a statement of its corresponding Objective and a short introduction. Tactical Recommendations are then organized into Strategic Pillars and introduced with a brief justification and/or description followed by a summary of the potential actions that could activate the initiative or effort.
Before proceeding, it should be acknowledged that a significant amount of work is already underway in the Brazos Valley related to some of the components of this strategic framework. Some of the Tactical Recommendations in this Strategy correspond to actions that are already ongoing and should be continued, while others are existing efforts that could be enhanced. Others are new efforts entirely. This is by design, as no community can or should start completely from scratch, and in many respects, the Brazos Valley will be “jumping on a moving train” to leverage existing capacity. More can always be done with adequate resources, committed leadership, and a spirit of cooperation.

Before proceeding, it is also necessary to define the regional scope of the Strategy. “The Brazos Valley” is not a political jurisdiction and does not have universally recognized boundaries from a statistical or governance perspective. For the purposes of economic development, however, public and private partners within Brazos County have branded their community as “the Brazos Valley” to stand out to both internal and external audiences. This is evident in the name of the Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation, which is the economic development organization (EDO) for Brazos County and its cities and the convening organization for this process. Unless otherwise specified, for the purposes of this Strategy, “the Brazos Valley” refers to everything within the boundaries of Brazos County. Most of the recommendations within this Strategy are intended to be carried out within this area. That said, there are some issues related to holistic economic development that do not adhere to political boundaries. In particular, issues of workforce development and certain types of infrastructure (e.g. transportation networks) are sometimes best addressed through broader, regional approaches. Accordingly, the Strategy identifies instances in which local stakeholders would be well-served to work with partners outside of Brazos County to serve mutual interests.
Goal Area I: Economic Growth & Prosperity

“Grow a dynamic regional economy and raise levels of prosperity for residents through a balanced approach to economic development.”

For decades, many communities and their economic development organizations have exclusively associated “economic development” with “business recruitment.” While the recruitment of new companies is an important component of any targeted economic development program, it is only “one leg of the stool.” A best-practice effort to grow jobs and investment in a regional economy must also focus upon the needs of existing businesses and promote dynamic innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems. This Goal Area deals with activities related to the three-legged stool of economic development. It contains three Strategic Pillars. Business Attraction focuses on efforts such as economic development marketing and project management. Business Retention & Expansion entails working with firms to ensure that they are able to remain and thrive in the community. It also involves leveraging the community’s existing economic base to grow and attract more jobs and investment. As home to a major research university with an annual research budget nearing $1 billion, the Brazos Valley is well-situated to support an Innovation & Entrepreneurial Ecosystem that supports “growth from within.”

STRATEGIC PILLARS:

1. Business Attraction
2. Business Retention & Expansion
3. Innovation & Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
1. BUSINESS ATTRACTION

1.1 Support a Collaborative, Regional Approach to Business Attraction

While existing businesses and new startups account for the bulk of job creation within regional economies, business recruitment activities are an important part of holistic economic development. The most important factor in attracting outside jobs and investment is a community’s “product” – its workforce, existing sector composition, and place-based assets. Many of these elements are addressed in Goal Area II of this Strategy. That said, a well-designed economic development recruitment program can accentuate a community’s best attributes and produce a positive return by attracting new jobs and investments that otherwise may have located elsewhere. The Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation (BVEDC) was created in 1989 to serve as the region’s single point of contact for managing economic development projects. Partners in the Brazos Valley should continue to embrace this approach to attracting new jobs and investment to the region.

Potential Actions:

- Would reaffirm commitment to designating the BVEDC as the single point of contact for lead distribution and economic development project coordination and management within Brazos County
- Through the BVEDC, continue to convene all relevant economic development partners in the Brazos Valley for regular project update meetings
- Continue to task BVEDC staff with actively marketing the Brazos Valley region for the purposes of economic development (see Tactical Recommendations 1.2 through 1.6 and 3.3)
- Leverage business attraction activities to identify potential candidates for innovation partnerships (see Tactical Recommendation 2.2)
- Through BVEDC staff, maintain strong working relationships with economic development staff and leadership in nearby jurisdictions; when appropriate, work collaboratively on issues of common interest (e.g. infrastructure) to ensure broader regional competitiveness
- Continue to communicate economic development activities and benefits to internal audiences through regular media releases, social media, annual reports, public events, and so on

1.2 Update Economic Development Marketing Materials and Incorporate New Target Sectors

Site consultants and corporate relocation professionals that guide economic development projects typically complete their assessments of potential communities well before short-listing and engaging finalists. Accordingly, a community’s websites and digital marketing materials are frequently where first impressions are made. These marketing tools should be attractive and user-friendly, allowing users to customize data in downloadable formats, geocode that data to mapping outputs, and list all relevant information on development sites and buildings. Staff contact information should be clearly listed and data and other information must be regularly updated so that it is always current. Marketing materials also are an important tool for communicating target sectors and supportive special assets. With the identification of new target sectors through this process, the BVEDC and its partners have an opportunity to update the region’s economic development marketing materials. In doing so, they could
communicate the key regional strengths, including existing scientific and engineering talent, capacity to produce this talent, and numerous research and development institutions, centers, and laboratories – all of which are supportive of not just “traditional” economic development but also of identifying opportunities for innovation partnerships (see potential Tactical Recommendation 3.2).

**Potential Actions:**

- With BVEDC staff and key partners, ensure that marketing websites, electronic and social media, and digital promotional materials consistently reflect industry-standard design, content, interactivity, and technology; conduct regular reviews to ensure that the region’s online presence is keeping up with industry trends
- Ensure that websites provide user-friendly and target-specific data and information for site consultants and other influential constituencies, including a constantly updated, searchable site and building database with mapping capacity in downloadable formats
- Prominently feature the “applied research brand identity” proposed in Tactical Recommendation 1.3

### 1.3 Build an External Identity for the Brazos Valley as a Hub for Applied Research

Just as companies have long projected a brand identity to define an image to consumers, many regions have sought to develop “community brands,” to align their marketing activities and define themselves to external audiences. Standing out in a crowded marketplace can be difficult and expensive, however, and crafting an image as memorable as “the Music City” or “the Research Triangle” is an unlikely outcome. But regions with special economic development assets can differentiate themselves. One example is the Kansas City Area Development Council’s “KC Animal Health Corridor” branding (see Best Practice #1). This roughly 250-mile corridor is anchored by two of the nation’s top veterinary schools at Kansas State University in Manhattan and the University of Missouri in Columbia and is home to more than 300 animal health companies that account for approximately 56 percent of total worldwide animal health, diagnostic, and pet food sales. The Brazos Valley is home to a major research university and, unlike many similar communities, has assets such as the RELLIS Campus that make it a particularly attractive destination for applied research activities. Stakeholders have previously recognized the region’s core strengths in branding the region as “the Research Valley,” though this name was shared by multiple other regions around the country. Nevertheless, stakeholders said they wish to see the community develop a stronger external identity for economic development, and associating the Brazos Valley with its core research strengths and key assets such as Texas A&M represents the most promising path to do so. Additionally, such an identity would be consistent with the newly identified Applied Research target sector.

**Potential Actions:**

- Bring together the BVEDC, its partners, and key public and private leaders to develop consensus on the potential value of developing an external brand identity focused on applied research
- Evaluate the need to retain a marketing firm or consultant with significant experience in community and economic development branding exercises to create an impactful identity
Develop websites and other digital marketing materials and devise a targeted external communications plan to communicate the brand to target audiences; ensure that the brand is supportive of overall marketing activities and efforts to promote specific research assets (see Tactical Recommendation 3.2)

BEST PRACTICE #1: KC Animal Health Corridor branding initiative (Kansas City region)

1.4 Develop and Sustain Relationships with Site Consultants, Influencers, and “Upstream” Partners

Economic development is a relationship-driven business. Accordingly, it is vital for economic development organizations to maintain strong working relationships with contacts who are involved in various aspects of the site selection process. This includes site consultants and corporate real estate professionals, representatives of “upstream” economic development partners such as state economic development agencies and utilities, and other industry influencers. Economic development staff at the BVEDC should continue to develop relationships with these individuals, including both “generalist” site consultants and national and international specialists in the organization’s specific target sectors and niches. BVEDC staff should work collaboratively with major key funding partners and investors to develop both inbound and outbound marketing events to cultivate and maintain these key contacts. Because site consultants and other industry professionals have busy schedules, interactions should be carefully planned. Partners in the Brazos Valley should develop compelling opportunities for economic development contacts to visit the community and plan outbound marketing trips to coincide with appointments with site consultants whenever possible.

Potential Actions:

- Continue to maintain excellent working relationships with “upstream” partners that provide project leads such as the Texas Economic Development Corporation (TxEDC) and the Governor’s Office of Economic Development and Tourism (EDT)

- Identify key site consultants, corporate real estate professionals, and industry influencers in target sectors and niches to visit on outbound marketing events, industry conferences, and professional association meetings; as with all outbound marketing activities (see Tactical Recommendation 1.5), track the return on investment in the form of leads, prospects, projects, and announcements generated by each engagement with a contact or contacts

- Identify compelling, high-profile opportunities to play host to site consultants and corporate relocations professionals to highlight the region’s competitive assets and introduce influencers to local business executives, elected officials, innovators, and other top leaders; consider developing an annual inbound event around a premier Texas A&M home football game
1.5 Operate a Highly Targeted Outbound Marketing Program

Economic development organizations engage in outbound marketing to demonstrate that they are actively seeking investment and to build relationships with key corporate and professional influencers and decision-makers. Specific activities vary. Many organizations engage in marketing missions where professional economic development staff and key public and private leaders travel to domestic or international markets to meet with targeted companies. These trips are frequently planned to specific markets such as Atlanta, Chicago, and New York where economic development staff can also visit with site consultants and other corporate relocation specialists. Local economic development organizations also seek to join regional and state partners for marketing missions whenever possible. Many communities also attend trade shows, corporate real estate association meetings, and other events. As with marketing missions, economic development organizations should always seek to partner with regional or state organizations and/or tack on additional activities (e.g. site consultant visits). On the whole, marketing missions tend to provide more value than these industry events and should be prioritized as necessary. The goal of outbound marketing is to achieve a return on investment in the form of new relationships, leads, prospects, projects, and, ultimately, locations and investments. BVEDC and its partners should continue to build relationships and establish an external identity for the Brazos Valley through a highly targeted outbound marketing program that results in a positive ROI for funders and investors.

Potential Actions:

- BVEDC staff should begin by assessing recent outbound marketing events, including industry trade shows, corporate real estate association meetings, and other outbound marketing engagements in the current and previous budget year; engagements should be analyzed to determine the return on investment in the form of leads, prospects, projects, and announcements generated by each outbound trip.

- Based on the assessment described in the previous bullet and the community’s updated target sectors and niches, BVEDC staff should identify potential outbound marketing activities for the upcoming year; work in consultation with the IBV to determine outbound events (see Tactical Recommendation 2.2); consider establishing numeric guidelines for outbound events, e.g. two marketing missions and two trade shows per year (one each with state-level partners) and one visit to another top market in Texas.

- Based on the actions in the preceding bullets, establish an annual work plan to formally schedule activities for the upcoming year; task staff with developing quarterly updates on progress and return on investment from outbound marketing events.

- Whenever feasible, outbound marketing trips should include local and regional partners and investors (see Tactical Recommendation 2.2) and leverage the domestic and international marketing programs and budgets of state-level partners.
1.6 Launch an Earned Media Campaign to Strengthen External Perceptions of the Brazos Valley

Earned media is generally coverage that is “won” as opposed to “bought” and is regarded as highly credible – and in many cases more cost efficient than other forms of external marketing. A positive story in a prominent national media outlet (e.g. The New York Times or Wall Street Journal) can prove invaluable to a region seeking to build awareness of its strengths, assets, and identity. In most cases, however, such stories do not happen by chance but are instead seeded by communications and public relations professionals. Regions such as Chattanooga, TN, and Des Moines, IA have utilized earned media strategies to rehabilitate reputations or build national profiles from the ground up. As part of a comprehensive economic development marketing effort, the Brazos Valley should engage in earned media activities to enhance external perceptions of the region.

Potential Actions:

- Designate appropriate resources; develop in-house capacity or contract with a proven national economic development public relations firm to begin developing an earned media strategy
- With the aid of in-house staff or a third-party firm, regularly update national media organizations with information on local assets, activities, innovators, companies, place-based and quality of life developments, and other compelling story ideas
- Coordinate earned media efforts with other community partners, potentially including Texas A&M and the Bryan-College Station Convention and Visitors Bureau to increase effectiveness, efficiently utilize resources, and ensure that the region fully capitalizes on positive coverage

BEST PRACTICE #2: Earned media strategy (Chattanooga, TN)
2. BUSINESS RETENTION & EXPANSION

2.1 Operate a Best-Practice Regional Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) Program

A strong business retention and expansion (BRE) program is an essential component of a holistic economic development effort. BRE involves visiting with, calling upon, and/or surveying existing firms – typically large employers – in an effort to preempt and mitigate any potential closures, relocations, or reductions in employment levels, and to help facilitate expansions. Each visit must be meticulously planned, conducted, and leveraged to maximize the time value of staff and employer representatives. A successful BRE program requires a formal, collaborative approach. No single organization can by itself address the needs and challenges that businesses face. Effective BRE leverages the staff expertise and resources of multiple organizations and partners that can influence the business climate. The ultimate goal is to help identify and reduce barriers to growth in order to help existing firms grow and thrive. BRE efforts can also help shape external marketing efforts by leveraging the knowledge of local firms to identify buyers, suppliers, or networked businesses. The BVEDC operates a BRE program on behalf of the Brazos Valley region. Supporting these efforts and ensuring that they are collaborative and in alignment with national best practices would ensure that the Brazos Valley is in the best possible position to support its existing firms and drive job growth and raise levels of prosperity from within.

Potential Actions:

- Continue to operate a BRE program built around interviews with key regional employers; task professional staff at the BVEDC with conducting annual interviews with all businesses over a certain employment headcount (e.g. 200 employees) as well as other key firms in target sectors and niches
- Ensure that adequate staff resources and tools are available to operate the program; specialized software (such as Synchronist or ExecutivePulse) should be considered to track BRE activities
- Convene the BVEDC, funding partners, and all relevant community, economic, and workforce development partners to ensure that formal protocols are in place for sharing information and responding to opportunities and challenges as they arise
- Leverage findings from BRE activities to potential prospects for business attraction (see Strategic Pillar 1)
- Work with appropriate economic development partners to provide export assistance to Brazos Valley firms and leverage BRE findings to identify opportunities for foreign direct investment (FDI)
- With ecosystem innovation partners, institutional researchers, and other relevant partners, identify opportunities for innovation partnerships or applications of emerging and cross-sector technologies at local firms (see Tactical Recommendations 3.1 and 3.2)
- Ensure that research capacity is sufficient to support BRE and business attraction efforts; seek opportunities to collaborate with economic and market research functions at Texas A&M

BEST PRACTICE #3: Business First (Richmond, VA)

2.2 Leverage Invest Brazos Valley (IBV) to Inform and Support Economic Growth
Many communities engaged in comprehensive economic development efforts empanel “business councils” – deliberate, cooperative, business-driven efforts to maximize an area’s competitive position. Business councils can be generalist or focused on a specific industry sector (e.g. manufacturing), with some communities operating multiple councils to reflect diverse private-sector strengths. Business councils focus on identifying and addressing common issues in order to improve their community's competitive position. Best-practice councils also help create an environment that supports existing, startup, and relocating businesses. Locally, the Invest Brazos Valley (IBV) group is well-positioned to fulfill this role on behalf of the region. IBV is the BVEDC’s “private sector voice” through which public and private leaders work together to “advance the economic development of our community as a single marketplace.” Its members include businesses of all sizes from a variety of economic sectors. Members contribute funds to support economic development efforts in return for benefits such as networking, investor information, lead referral, and participation in site visits and other economic development marketing events. BVEDC and its partners should continue to utilize this model to support a more competitive environment for economic growth.

Potential Actions:

- To complement BRE efforts (see Tactical Recommendation 2.1), position the IBV as a solutions-oriented, regional business council focused on fostering a more competitive environment for economic growth and working together to identify and address common issues

- Continue to ensure that IBV is supported by professional staff to ensure its effective operation and to establish a firm connection between the group’s work and economic development efforts

- Leverage the IBV and its members to serve as community “ambassadors” by facilitating networking and development opportunities for existing firms, identifying potential recruiting targets, travelling with professional and economic development staff to tradeshows and targeted marketing missions, and assisting with inbound marketing events

- Ensure that the IBV is well-networked with the Business Education Partnership proposed in Tactical Recommendation 4.1; specific options for integration will be discussed in the Implementation Plan
3. INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM

3.1 Pursue a “Commercialization Nexus” at Texas A&M to Reduce Barriers to Bringing Ideas to Market

Escalating expectations that major universities demonstrate economic and job-creation value from their research activities have forced a paradigm shift in how research institutions view and perform this function. Public and societal benefit from institutional and sponsored research is increasingly being weighed against economic impact when decisions are made to fund and sustain research. As budgets become strained, it has indeed become incumbent on research institutions to pursue resource development through sponsored grants, private-sector partnerships, and royalties from licensed intellectual property.

The challenge in optimizing the fiscal benefits of institutional research is that most innovation does not follow a clear, direct path to the marketplace. Research institutions that have built the capacity to maximize the potential for proprietary research to reflect market demand, attract private investment, and create jobs have become lynchpins in driving regional economic development from knowledge-based sectors and contributing to the critical mass of talent, capital, infrastructure, and awareness that builds globally recognized innovation ecosystems.

Accordingly, some institutions have sought to create collaborative innovation hubs to strengthen these ecosystems. These hubs can provide intellectual property assistance to researchers, faculty, and staff, centralize and streamline connections to private-sector partners and funding, and complement incubators and accelerators. Without question, the Brazos Valley is blessed with numerous institutions, innovation support services, and commercialization entities. While too numerous to name in this space, each plays a distinct role by activating ideation, assessing new technologies, protecting intellectual property, and preparing technologies for market. To maximize their impact, Texas A&M and its partners could seek to create a “Commercialization Nexus” to connect research to private enterprise and help firms navigate the various entities, programs, and protocols of Texas A&M’s ecosystem.

Potential Actions:

- Convene stakeholders within Texas A&M’s innovation ecosystem, economic development professionals, private businesses, and other partners to establish a Commercialization Nexus to help translate technologies developed through research into viable private enterprises based in the Brazos Valley; could be modeled after a similar existing initiative
- Carefully consider potential business plans and funding options and establish a physical location for the initiative, potentially co-located with an existing innovation district (see Tactical Recommendation 3.3)
- Develop and make available a comprehensive “map” of all innovation support services, organizations, institutes, and centers and classify the supportive role they fill within the ecosystem
- Explore the potential to obtain partial funding for the Nexus through the Economic Development Administration’s i6 Challenge; would require commitments from the private sector to provide one-to-one community match funds
- Create a “one-stop” website that catalogues all research and development programs, resources, and assets available to entrepreneurs and small business owners in the Brazos Valley; add state and federal resources
if desired; consider an “open source” model that would allow community stakeholders to aggregate and update the web portal’s contents

- Establish “contact protocols” to elevate inquiries received through the virtual front door to the appropriate organizations and individuals

**BEST PRACTICE #4: University of Washington CoMotion (Seattle, WA)**

### 3.2 Leverage Economic Development Activities to Identify Private Sector Partners for Innovation

Unlocking the economic potential of university-based scientific research requires connecting innovations with private-sector partners to bring ideas to market. Research universities have long sought to license marketable intellectual property to private users around the world, and companies with resources to invest in research and development are increasingly seeking to locate such operations near universities to develop partnerships, to solve problems, and to hone new products or processes. Economic development professionals have a role to play in this process. The BVEDC should work with Texas A&M and its various innovation entities to determine how they can best support the goal of identifying potential private enterprises and capital to connect with university researchers and foster IP licensing and technology commercialization.

**Potential Actions:**

- Task economic development professionals with engaging administration and faculty of Texas A&M and its research entities to learn about the areas of applied research that have the best potential to create marketable innovations; utilize these findings to inform activities related to the Applied Research target sector (see Tactical Recommendation 1.2) and regional economic development branding (see Tactical Recommendation 1.3)

- With the best opportunities identified, leverage all business attraction and BRE activities to identify potential candidate firms for innovation partnerships

- Leverage the International Gateway program to identify opportunities for foreign direct investment (FDI) connected to innovation in the Brazos Valley

### 3.3 Collaboratively Promote and Enhance Innovation Districts

The process of innovation can be messy and confusing, and in many cases, a clear path to an important discovery is evident only in hindsight. Given this complexity, communities seek to establish multiple physical spaces where ideas can be shared, tested, measured, honed, and changed. Innovation districts are emerging throughout the country to secure and preserve space for innovation. By creating a critical mass of ideas and resources, these districts build social capital. In today’s technologically advanced society, innovation and breakthrough technologies increasingly rely on a network of researchers, scientists, engineers, and entrepreneurs. The Brazos Valley has two distinct districts that serve as a nexus for ideation and collaboration: the BioCorridor, a partnership between the City of Bryan and the City of College Station, and the RELLIS Campus, the Texas A&M University System’s $300 million transformative research and education facility. The Brazos Valley should bring together a “coalition of champions” to continue to support and promote these assets that leverage prior investments and regional research strengths.
Potential Actions:

- Ensure that business attraction marketing collateral and programs executed by the BVEDC, Texas A&M, RELLIS, and their partners highlight emerging opportunities at RELLIS and the BioCorridor (see Strategic Pillar 1)

- Position existing innovation districts as “soft landing pads” for satellite offices of larger corporations that would benefit from having a presence near Texas A&M and/or hubs of similar economic activity

- Ensure that the region’s innovation clusters are well-connected to the proposed commercialization nexus (see Tactical Recommendation 3.1)

- Seek to enhance quality of place and create walkable, mixed-use environments in and/or around innovation districts in order to competitively position the Brazos Valley for top talent (see Potential Tactical Recommendation 6.1); could draw inspiration from national successes such as the Wake Forest Innovation Quarter in Winston-Salem, NC and Cortex in St. Louis, MO;

- Expand place-based infrastructure according to the needs and desires of organizations, companies, and entrepreneurs within a given innovation cluster; could include community-serving amenities (e.g. bike paths) or 5G-enabled utility poles that support business development

- Continually assess the “mix” of each innovation cluster and build complementary platforms or capacity to advance competitiveness; for example, some communities have pursued supercomputing centers to aid activities that require significant computation and data storage capacity such as genetics research

- Seek to leverage Texas A&M’s proposed public-private business incubator as a hub for entrepreneurship in the Brazos Valley; seek a location for the facility that would be conducive to networking, socialization, and fostering additional entrepreneurial and innovative activity

3.4 Launch a “Smart City Initiative” to Leverage Innovations Emerging from Texas A&M and RELLIS

Urban areas throughout the world are pursuing “smart city” concepts that utilize advances in information and communications technology, internet-connected infrastructure, and the data these advances provide to enhance the delivery of public services, improve efficiency, and enhance quality of life. There are numerous definitions of what constitutes a “smart city” or a “Smart City Initiative,” and it is not possible to provide a full overview of emerging technologies and processes in this space. But given its research strengths and asset base, the Brazos Valley has the opportunity to engage in an initiative focused specifically on implementing, testing, and showcasing new infrastructure and transportation technologies. Examples could include, but are not limited to, real-time traffic monitoring and monitoring via remote sensors, new autonomous vehicles and other technologies that aid their implementation (e.g. AV-friendly lane markings and other signs), and so on. An infrastructure- and transportation-focused Smart City Initiative would leverage key Texas A&M research strengths, the RELLIS Campus, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute, and other key research assets. It would also help to establish the Brazos Valley as an innovative leader in these fields, which could, in turn, help generate public-private research partnerships, spin-offs, and business attractions. Because of their transformative potential, these technologies demand thoughtful policies that hasten adoption and ensure the health, safety, and public welfare. By adopting a Smart City Initiative,
the Cities of Bryan and College Station could help test and implement new technologies developed in the region and improve quality of life in the Brazos Valley.

**Potential Actions:**

- Convene municipal leaders from the Cities of Bryan and College Station and officials and innovators from Texas A&M, RELLIS, and related entities to enter into agreements governing one or more pilot “technology trials” related to transportation or other infrastructure.

- Identify high-value locations to test transportation or infrastructure innovations and work with relevant partners to ensure that physical infrastructure is in place to support testing activities; could consider developing special regulations and codes that cover specific technologies or testing areas—they could follow a special district overlay model commonly used in urban planning.

- Formalize a data-use and protection policy describing what information will be collected and how long that information will be stored in smart city databases owned or operated by municipal governments in the Brazos Valley or third party suppliers.

**BEST PRACTICE #5: Smart Columbus (Columbus, OH)**

**3.5 Pursue Opportunities for Government Laboratory Facilities and Other Research Partnerships**

The foundations of many technologies that are driving various technological revolutions have their roots in government funded research or other forms of financial support. For example, the initial underpinnings of Google’s internet search empire stemmed from research funded by the National Science Foundation’s Digital Library Initiative. The Department of Defense and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration were early adopters of technologies from Texas Instruments and Silicon Valley semiconductor manufacturers, thereby providing critical early sources of revenue. A federal government research institution such as a national laboratory or research facility can afford a local innovation ecosystem with special opportunities not available in other communities. A government research facility’s capital is relatively patient, its time horizon is long, and it is willing to fund novel ideas that may not yield any direct revenue but could result in immense public benefit. Playing on the region’s existing research strengths, the Brazos Valley should seek opportunities for a government laboratory facility to be located in the region, which could catalyze significant private-sector expansion in related business sectors.

**Potential Actions:**

- Establish a coalition consisting of representatives from Texas A&M University, the University System, elected officials, and other public and private leaders to identify gaps or needs in the current innovation ecosystem and prioritize desirable government research facilities to pursue; advocate for and pursue identified opportunities.

- Explore partnerships with other nearby metropolitan areas or research institutions to create a critical mass of support, assets, and intellectual capacity in order to enhance competitiveness if required.

**3.6 Establish the Aggie Venture Fund to Expand Access to Capital and Mentoring**
As discussed in the Regional Assessment, entrepreneurs and small business owners identified access to capital as a major competitive challenge for the Brazos Valley. The same could likely be said for all but a handful of regional economies. Finding creative ways around this barrier will be critical for the Brazos Valley as it seeks to grow a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem. Two factors add to the region’s challenge. First, its geographic proximity to larger markets with comparatively large venture pools (e.g. Austin) means that the competition to retain startups in the region will be intense. Second, given the fact that the Brazos Valley is a hub for scientific research, it will likely need more patient investment capital compared to other innovation economies like Silicon Valley. While many have promulgated the Silicon Valley model in nearly every region in the United States – its particular funding model is ill-suited for many industry sectors (like biotechnology, infrastructure, autonomous vehicles, and hypersonics) whose path to profitability is measured in years and decades rather than weeks and months. That said, input revealed that Aggie investors both within and outside the community could be interested in supporting enterprise creation in the Brazos Valley. Additionally, the wealth of knowledge possessed by these Aggies and other alumni who have returned to the Brazos Valley could unquestionably assist startups and entrepreneurs as they navigate the vagaries of owning and operating a business and, at the same time, ensure that they remain attuned to the strategic vision that will achieve growth and scale. Accordingly, the community could seek to establish a regionally focused venture fund with connected mentoring services to grow and sustain new enterprises in the Brazos Valley.

Potential Actions:

- Seek investors, financial institutions, and others interested in starting a fund focused on equity investments in pre-seed or early-stage ventures based in the Brazos Valley; could emulate similar models from around the country
- Support firms with marketable ideas resulting from innovation activities taking place at Texas A&M, RELLIS, and the proposed Commercialization Nexus (see Tactical Recommendation 3.1)
- In addition to fund investors, identify and engage Aggies with executive experience who live in or have returned to the Brazos Valley to mentor entrepreneurs and advise startups in the Brazos Valley; seek to connect startups and growing companies to former executives who may wish to take on a full-time role in helping a firm scale in the Brazos Valley
- Engage Texas A&M University alumni throughout the world and communicate the fund’s objectives, social impact value, and investment potential

Goal Area II: Workforce & Community Improvement

“Invest in the region’s workforce and quality of place to strengthen our competitive position and enable new economic opportunities.”
The economic development programs and activities described in Goal Area I are important for growing jobs and investment in a community. But a community’s true economic competitiveness is derived from its talent, quality of place, and other assets. The three Strategic Pillars in this Goal Area are focused on investments that make the Brazos Valley a more competitive place to live, work, and do business. The first is Workforce & Talent. In the modern economy, talent is perhaps the key driver of economic success and prosperity. The availability of a skilled and educated workforce is a top factor influencing location decisions across many business sectors, and at the individual level, educational attainment is strongly correlated with earning potential and personal well-being. Accordingly, the Brazos Valley must focus on growing, retaining, and attracting talent if it is to become a more prosperous and successful place. The region has indeed grown rapidly in recent years, and as this has happened, residents have become concerned about diminishing quality of life resulting from infrastructure struggling to keep pace. Mobility & Infrastructure focuses on upgrading infrastructure to accommodate past and future growth, enhancing multi-modal transportation opportunities internally, and enhancing connections to other larger markets to open up additional economic opportunities. Finally, just as talent is a top consideration in economic development, a community’s quality of place is increasingly a paramount consideration for skilled and educated people making choices about where to live. The Quality of Place Strategic Pillar focuses on developing in-demand live-work-play environments and place-based amenities.

STRATEGIC PILLARS:

1. Workforce & Talent
2. Infrastructure & Mobility
3. Quality of Place
4. WORKFORCE & TALENT

4.1 Create an Action-Oriented Business Education Partnership to Enhance the Local Talent Pipeline

The Brazos Valley is clearly a major producer of highly educated people. But research and public input revealed several challenges related to the region’s “homegrown” talent. A wide variety of stakeholders identified a need for the region’s businesses, education and training providers, and related partners to work more closely together. Input participants identified specific challenges or gaps (e.g. connecting students to internship and employment opportunities) that could be addressed through a coordinated effort. There is also evidence that many PK-12 students are struggling in school, which poses a challenge for the community’s long-term workforce competitiveness and prosperity. Stakeholders in the Brazos Valley should establish a Business Education Partnership dedicated to enhancing the region’s “talent pipeline.” The Partnership should be an action-oriented group dedicated to devising, coordinating, and/or operating programs that align the business education communities and help build a highly competitive workforce in the Brazos Valley.

Potential Actions:

- Convene key stakeholders from the business community, education and training partners including Independent School Districts (ISDs) and higher education institutions, and other relevant service providers (e.g. education non-profits and social services) to establish an action-oriented Business Education Partnership dedicated to strengthening the region’s continuum of “cradle to career” education and training

- Given the regional nature of labor sheds and workforce development work, consider securing the participation of education and training providers and/or major employers from a broader region outside of Brazos County

- Support programs at Bryan ISD and College Station ISD that prepare all PK-12 students for college and careers and seek to boost internal and external perceptions of public education

- Ensure that the Partnership is adequately supported by dedicated professional staff; develop “action teams” within the Partnership to advance one or more programs or “focus areas” and ensure that activities are aligned among various partners

- Task staff and partners with devising a set of accountability metrics built around student-level data to measure progress and gauge the efficacy of programs; would require the development of protocols for safeguarding student privacy

- Develop an annual “talent scorecard” based on accountability metrics to communicate progress to internal and external stakeholders

BEST PRACTICE #6: Greater Wichita Partnership Business Education Alliance (Wichita, KS)

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1 Further details: ttp://www.strivetogether.org/sites/default/files/StriveTogether_Student_Data_Privacy_Best_Practices.pdf
4.2 Promote and Expand Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs

During the public input process, employers and other input participants stressed the importance of career and technical education (CTE). CTE programs provide students with the technical skills, knowledge, and training in a wide variety of subject areas in order to prepare them for career, particularly those with pathways to promotion and lifelong success. Between the region’s higher education institutions, ISDs, organizations such as Workforce Solutions Brazos Valley, and other providers, Brazos Valley has strong resources to prepare residents for in-demand careers. Input participants especially praised recent developments such as BISD’s new CTE-focused Mumford Road facility and the potential for workforce training collaborations between Blinn College and the RELLIS Campus. Through the Business Education Partnership established in Tactical Recommendation 4.1, partners in the Brazos Valley should seek to promote and expand CTE programs in the Brazos Valley.

Potential Actions:

- Through the Business Education Partnership established in Tactical Recommendation 4.1, seek additional opportunities to expose students to career opportunities as early as elementary school through online and hands-on learning experiences, in-class presentations, off-site travel, and other programs

- Launch a parent education initiative to make families aware of CTE opportunities

- Work with education and training partners to ease the burden of dual enrollment programs (e.g. scheduling conflicts and transportation issues)

- For in-demand and emerging careers, develop “career ladders”; identify necessary credentials and entrance points and work with relevant private-sector partners to provide training, marketing, and supports for students and schools within the ladders

- Continue to work with all relevant partners to ensure that CTE programs are well-suited to employment demand; leverage BRE findings and IBV to identify education and training needs (see Tactical Recommendations 2.1 and 2.2) and, if necessary, work with education and training providers to expand programming

- Ensure that programs and entry points are open to adults engaged in the proposed “upskilling” initiative (see Tactical Recommendation 4.3)
4.3 Expand Access to Training and “Upskilling” for Adults

Relative to other university-centered regions with dynamic economies, the adult population in the Brazos Valley is relatively less educated, and nearly 37 percent of residents aged 25 and over have never attended college. Educational attainment is strongly correlated with economic success and prosperity at both the individual and community levels. And as the economy continues to become more knowledge-intensive, even traditional “blue collar” jobs will require more advanced skills and training. The Target Sector Analysis further revealed that while workforce availability and capacity is a challenge for the region, many workers in service sector jobs are likely to possess skillsets that could translate into more lucrative careers in sectors such as manufacturing provided they are able to access necessary training programs. To strengthen its workforce and improve opportunities for residents, the Brazos Valley can develop an “upskilling” initiative to help residents access education and training programs. Programs can be targeted to a wide range of adult residents, including recent high school graduates or dropouts, individuals marginally or not attached to the workforce, and workers who could benefit from additional skills or training.

Potential Actions:

- Work with PK-12 school systems, higher education institutions, Workforce Solutions Brazos Valley, foundations and philanthropic groups, the business community, and other partners to lower barriers and to promote education and training opportunities for adults
- Develop public, private, and philanthropic resources to fund incentives and assistance for adults seeking to access education and training programs; could include grants, fee waivers, and free or subsidized tuition
- Work with employers to offer workers incentives to complete high school equivalencies and enroll in and/or complete certificate and degree programs, including flexible work hours around class schedules, guaranteed raises upon employment, etc.; explore opportunities to form direct partnerships between large employers and higher education institutions around specific degree or certificate programs (see Best Practices #9)
- Work with education providers to re-engage former students who did not complete diploma or degree programs; could pursue a “Reach Out to Dropouts” program aimed at engaging young people who did not complete high school and/or are not in the workforce

BEST PRACTICE #7: Graduate!Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA)

BEST PRACTICE #8: University of Florida Employer Pathways (Gainesville, FL)
4.4 Strengthen Connections to Internships to “Attach” Students and Graduates to the Region

The Brazos Valley is an immense producer of college-educated talent. In the 2016-17 academic year alone, Texas A&M awarded 11,654 bachelor’s degrees and 4,660 graduate or professional degrees. By design, the vast majority of these graduates leave the region upon completing their education. If the Brazos Valley could retain even a slightly larger proportion of its college graduates each year, the cumulative benefits to the workforce over the long-run would be immense. Stakeholders understand that doing so will require a holistic approach and that success ultimately hinges on developing a more robust private-sector economy that can offer more attractive entry-level employment opportunities. Communities around the country have developed programs to better connect college students and recent graduates to opportunities for experiential learning (internships, etc.) and employment. A 2018 survey of businesses conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers found that nearly 46 percent of interns ultimately accepted an offer of full-time employment with the company where they completed their internship. Such an approach could be especially beneficial in the Brazos Valley, as stakeholder feedback revealed that some major employers in the region have a significant number of unfilled positions that require college degrees. This suggests a possible “disconnect” between employers, students, and education and training providers. To address this issue, the Brazos Valley could seek to develop a collaborative program to connect businesses with education and training providers and engage college students and recent graduates in internships and other experiential and employment opportunities that can “attach” them to the region. Doing so could provide immediate aid to existing firms and improve the community’s workforce and economic competitiveness over the long run.

Potential Actions:

- Formally connect Brazos Valley businesses with education and training providers to devise and implement programming and provide an easy “entry point” for Brazos Valley firms that do not have experience working with higher education institutions

- Challenge the business community to expand the number of internship opportunities available to college students and recent graduates; work with higher education institutions, including representatives from relevant colleges or departments at higher education institutions, to ensure that students are well-connected to these opportunities

- Develop a formal pledge for local employers that establishes their commitment to internships; encourage companies to make internships paid and part-time and to connect opportunities to “career ladders” or opportunities for future advancement for high-performing interns

- Develop an online clearinghouse to serve as a resource for companies offering job shadowing, internship, and apprenticeship slots with interested students and graduates; ensure that the clearinghouse is easy to use, allowing employers to quickly add and remove postings

- Leverage existing “4-plus-1” degree programs that allow students to enter their chosen field with a graduate degree to identify and connect high-performing students to local firms

- Work with higher education partners and representatives of the business community to promote the online clearinghouse widely to potential employers and employees
Continually evaluate top models from around the country to inform the development of the online clearinghouse and identify potential new programs (e.g. enhanced “one-stop” career fairs, etc.)

Consider targeting promotion of the internship program to students who grew up in the Brazos Valley and other smaller communities in Texas who may feel a stronger connection to the region and may be more inclined to remain relative to individuals from larger metro areas with more plentiful employment opportunities.

BEST PRACTICE #9: Greater Grads (Oklahoma City, OK)

4.5 Assist Trailing Spouses and Partners with Finding Employment

The Brazos Valley has a relatively low unemployment rate. But public input revealed that many residents of the community are “underemployed.” According to stakeholders, well-educated, highly skilled residents often have no choice but to accept a position that does not fully leverage their abilities and, accordingly, do not allow them to reach their full earning potential. Input participants said underemployment is a particular problem for the trailing spouses or partners of individuals who move to the Brazos Valley for work. This is a particular challenge for Texas A&M faculty and staff who are likely to have highly educated spouses and partners. Stakeholders said these conditions create a significant barrier to recruiting top talent. One obvious solution to address issues of underemployment is to grow more high-quality jobs over time. In the interim, partners in Brazos Valley can seek to develop programming that assists the trailing spouses and partners of employees who are relocating to the Brazos Valley, thereby also easing recruitment efforts for local employers. Initially, such a program could also help address the “disconnect” described in Tactical Recommendation 4.4 where some employers have reported unfilled job openings that have high skill and education requirements.

Potential Actions:

Create a program to assist trailing spouses and partners with finding employment and aiding local employers in recruitment efforts

Leverage existing employment resources of Texas A&M and its related entities and seek to create a unified, regional “one-stop” service for trailing spouses/partners and employers; secure commitments from the region’s largest employers to utilize recruitment and job placement services

Develop a resume-matching database (potentially using tools established in Tactical Recommendation 4.4) and offer trailing spouses/partners access to hiring agents and priority consideration for interviews when permissible

In order to sustain operations, devise a fee structure wherein employers pay into the program upon a successful job placement

BEST PRACTICE #10: Connect Sixty-Four (Kalamazoo, MI)

4.6 Leverage the Texas A&M Alumni Network to Recruit Experienced Professionals and Executives
With the thousands of college graduates it produces every year, the Brazos Valley has more than enough potential to provide an entry-level workforce. But with an economy still heavily concentrated in services, the pool of mid-career professionals and executives with high-level private-sector experience is relatively limited. According to stakeholders, recruiting top talent from other markets comes with a significant time and financial cost. This is especially challenging for startups and growing firms that need to scale quickly and cannot rely on internal promotions. Fortunately, there are numerous Aggies residing in other markets who have the requisite skills and experience to fill executive-level positions at firms in the Brazos Valley. And, according to input participants, many Aggies would love to return to the region if they could find the right job. To address these challenges and opportunities the Brazos Valley could develop a highly targeted program to recruit the kind of executive-level talent needed to help local companies grow and thrive. This can be accomplished by working with Texas A&M’s alumni association, The Association of Former Students of Texas A&M, to identify experienced alumni who may be interested in returning to the Brazos Valley.

**Potential Actions:**

- Through the Business Education Partnership established in Tactical Recommendation 4.1, develop a partnership around a program that could connect experienced Texas A&M alumni with openings

- Identify a single business sector or field to develop a pilot program to test the recruitment concept; if the concept proves successful, expand the program to include other sectors

- Ensure that the availability of assistance for trailing spouses and partners is prominently featured in the recruitment program to lower potential barriers for relocation (see Tactical Recommendation 4.5)

- In recruitment efforts, consider the prioritization of candidates who grew up in the Brazos Valley and have moved away, as these individuals may have stronger personal connections to the region

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2 Though as other portions of this Strategy discuss, unlocking this potential will require better connecting students to local internship and employment opportunities and making quality of place improvements to make the region more attractive to young professionals.
5. INFRASTRUCTURE & MOBILITY

5.1 Improve Internal Connectivity and Mobility Options Within the Brazos Valley

Stakeholders in the Brazos Valley recognize that their region will likely continue to add residents in the coming years. For many, this expectation comes with an apprehension that the community’s quality of life will diminish on account of increased traffic congestion, which has plagued other regions that have undergone rapid growth. In Market Street’s experience, many stakeholders in such regions wish their communities had made earlier commitments to a greater range of mobility options and mixed-use development patterns. Providing alternatives to driving, even for some trips, can help regions accommodate growth while maintaining a high quality of life; these investments can become more expensive and politically difficult as a region grows and matures, however. Research also suggests that many talented individuals, particularly those from younger generations, are drawn to communities that offer a variety of transportation options and live-work-play environments. Additionally, the Brazos Valley has a very large student population, a group that is more inclined to prefer and/or require alternatives to driving. This Tactical Recommendation focuses on upgrading infrastructure and transportation options in the Brazos Valley. In contrast to the “external” transportation infrastructure linkages discussed in Tactical Recommendation 5.2, these upgrades are largely within local control and can begin in the near-term.

Potential Actions:

- Continue to pursue the establishment of the Brazos Regional Mobility Authority (BRMA) that could raise revenues through vehicle licensing fees and leverage other government funding sources to support the development of transportation infrastructure such as highways, bikeways, transit hubs, etc.
- Continue to advocate for and support investment in needed basic infrastructure including roads, streets, water/sewer, etc.
- Engage key partners such as local governments, Texas A&M University Transportation Services, the Brazos Transit District, and the Brazos Valley Council of Governments to support policies that promote multimodal transportation options including transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and so on; ensure that work is aligned with advocacy agendas
- Develop a multi-media awareness campaign communicating a “business case” for investment in transportation alternatives and its importance to the community’s competitiveness; conduct outreach through social media, a speakers bureau, op-ed pieces, etc.
- Invest in sidewalks, protected bike lanes, multi-use paths, and other “active transportation” infrastructure that promote transportation alternatives and enhance quality of place; focus on utilizing flood plains, recreational facilities, and underutilized public right-of-way to develop a network of multi-use paths
- Work with all relevant partners to evaluate the need for a multi-jurisdictional active transportation master plan to build on and update previous planning efforts such as the City of College Station’s 2010 Bicycle, Pedestrian, and Greenways Master Plan
- Support the development of additional transportation alternatives and infrastructure as part of the Midtown Area Plan (see Tactical Recommendation 6.3)
Evaluate the feasibility and desirability of promoting shared “micro-mobility” alternatives such as electric scooters, which have become popular alternatives to short trips by car, walking, or biking, particularly in hot-weather regions of the United States.

To best leverage transportation alternatives, ensure that enhancements connect trails, parks, and greenspaces and service live-work-play developments where appropriate (see Tactical Recommendation 6.1); work with Texas A&M and other large employers and institutions to incentivize commuting alternatives.

5.2 Support Enhanced Transportation Connections to Nearby Regions and Large Markets

The Brazos Valley is located within the famed “Texas Triangle,” a region that is home to some of the nation’s most dynamic, competitive metropolitan economies. But, as discussed during the research phases of the process, the Brazos Valley has not historically had strong “external” transportation links to these nearby regions and other large markets. Stakeholders noted, however, that highway connections have improved in recent years, and there are multiple opportunities on the horizon to further enhance external linkages. Many input participants said the region should continue to push for additional expansion of controlled-access highways, especially the completion and designation of Interstate 14. The region may also seek to leverage ongoing or proposed improvements to freight and passenger rail infrastructure. In January of 2018, the Union Pacific Railroad began construction on the Brazos Yard in nearby Robertson County. The $550 million project—the largest investment in the railroad’s history—will “function as a classification yard where rail cars are separated and sorted by destination before being assembled into new trains headed across the country.” This investment is expected to increase rail traffic through the Brazos Valley, which could be appealing to certain types of manufacturers. However, the Brazos Yard will not be an intermodal facility that would facilitate the transfer of goods from rail to truck or vice versa. Accordingly, the community could pursue additional investments to maximize the impact of the Brazos Yard on local economic competitiveness. On the passenger rail side is the Texas Central Railway Company’s proposed Texas Bullet Train, which would connect Dallas and Houston with a stop in nearby Grimes County. If it comes to fruition, local partners should seek to take full advantage of its presence by establishing strong transit connections between the proposed station and key points in the community. (The station would be approximately 26 miles by road from Texas A&M’s College Station Campus.) Finally, non-stop air connectivity is an important site selection factor, particularly in professional services and corporate and regional headquarters operations. The Brazos Valley’s relatively small population and proximity to major hub airports could mean that securing additional air service would be difficult even if local subsidies could be made available. Despite these challenges, stakeholders said they would like to see the community continue to pursue additional scheduled air service to Easterwood Airport.

Potential Actions:

5 At present, Brazos Valley is linked by commercial air service to Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) and Houston’s George Bush Intercontinental Airport (IAH), with multiple daily departures to each from Easterwood Airport. Air service is heavily tied to market demand within a given “catchment area” around an airport.
Continue to work with local, regional, and state-level partners – including elected officials, the Bryan/College Station Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Bryan District of the Texas Department of Transportation, and so on – to plan and advocate for transportation connectivity enhancements that benefit the Brazos Valley and its neighbors.

Continue to support expansion of controlled-access highways connecting the Brazos Valley to nearby large markets; continue to advocate at the state and federal levels for the completion of infrastructure and formal designation of Interstate 14 (see Tactical Recommendation 5.2).

Work with railroad officials, state and local government officials, and other partners to identify opportunities for an intermodal rail facility in or near the Brazos Valley to complement the Brazos Yard and expand opportunities for manufacturing activities.

Task economic development professionals with engaging Union Pacific officials to understand how the Brazos Yard classification facility will handle and prioritize traffic; this knowledge would inform business attraction and economic development marketing efforts to best-promote existing rail-served industrial development sites; if demand proves sufficient, local partners should seek to work with railroads to identify and prepare additional development sites with potential for rail access.

If the Texas Bullet Train becomes a reality, work with local governments and agencies, Texas A&M University, and the Texas Central Railway Company to establish high-quality fixed-route transit between the planned Grimes County station and key points in the region; explore options to enhance “last-mile” connectivity to the station via transit, rideshare, or other means as part of an overall strategy to improve multimodal mobility (see Tactical Recommendation 5.2).

Continue working with Easterwood Airport and all relevant public and private partners to evaluate options for enhancing regional air service; if desired, commission a market study to identify potential opportunities as well as any needed subsidies to support additional service.
6. QUALITY OF PLACE

6.1 Support and Catalyze Live-Work-Play Environments in Bryan and College Station

Public input revealed that stakeholders desire more “live-work-play” areas in the Brazos Valley that offer a walkable built environment and a mixture of residential, office, retail, and recreational uses. Residents praised recent and ongoing developments such as Century Square, Jones Crossing, and Midtown City Center in College Station, the Lake Walk Town Center and ATLAS corporate campus in Bryan, and the revitalization of the region’s primary historic downtown district, Downtown Bryan. Stakeholders expressed a desire to see more such developments and redevelopments in the future, which is consistent with national trends. Based on both survey data and “revealed preference,” Millennials are relatively more likely than older generations to prefer living in mixed-use environments where they can walk to amenities, opportunities for socialization, and potentially even jobs. As Millennials become the backbone of the nation’s workforce, communities across the country are seeking to promote mixed-use developments by ensuring that their zoning and regulatory frameworks are predictable, responsive, and conducive to high-quality development. Some communities are going further, by actively incentivizing mixed-use developments in an effort to boost economic competitiveness. In addition to ongoing efforts, the cities of Bryan and College Station and their public and private partners should continue to support additional live-work-play environments throughout the region.

Potential Actions:

- Ensure that zoning and development regulations are optimized for high-quality live-work-play development and redevelopment
- Convene public sector officials, economic development staff, private sector representatives, etc. to create an inventory of potential development and redevelopment sites in the Brazos Valley that would be best suited to live-work-play uses; consider establishing regulator frameworks that strongly encourage or require walkable, mixed-use built forms in these areas
- Support local governments in evaluating potential development incentives and/or public-private financing mechanisms to defray development costs related to hardscapes, parking infrastructure, utility upgrades and/or relocations, and so forth on qualified projects

6.2 Continue to Establish Downtown Bryan as a Regional Destination and Cultural Hub

As discussed in the preceding Tactical Recommendation, public input revealed that stakeholders desire more “live-work-play” areas in the Brazos Valley. Input participants also said they want more opportunities for non-students to relax and socialize in areas that are not immediately proximate to Texas A&M, a common dynamic in university-centered regions. The region’s primary historic downtown, Downtown Bryan, provides the region with a special opportunity to deliver these quality of place enhancements. Historic downtowns throughout the country have been revitalized in recent decades. Much of this phenomenon can be attributed to shifting lifestyle preferences and increased market demand, but many of the most successful communities have benefitted from a proactive, organized, and professional approach to downtown revitalization. The City of Bryan, the Downtown Bryan Association, and their public and private partners have made a serious commitment – financial and otherwise – to revitalizing the region’s historic downtown. This work has paid off, as stakeholders praised the district’s
An economic development strategy is described, highlighting the significance of recent changes in the region and the potential actions that could be taken to further enhance the area. The text outlines several potential actions, including:

- Supporting the City of Bryan and the Downtown Bryan Association in their efforts to enhance the downtown.
- Building upon the initial success of the “First Friday” event to develop and program more activities, solidifying the district as a destination.
- Expanding the availability of residential housing and supportive neighborhood retail, considering statutory tools and opportunities for public-private partnerships.
- Expanding the presence of Innovation Underground and positioning the district as a destination for startup businesses.

Additional content includes a best practice example from NewTown Macon and a section on the establishment of College Station’s Midtown City Center and Midtown Business Park.
6.4 Advance and Implement the Midtown Area Plan

In addition to its long-running efforts to revitalize its downtown, the City of Bryan has also engaged in a community planning process to promote sustainable redevelopment in and unlock the potential of Midtown. In November 2018, the City announced the creation of the Midtown Plan Advisory Committee (MPAC), a group of public, private, and neighborhood leaders who will guide the planning process. MPAC is working with a multi-disciplinary consultant team to conduct a master-planning process in a roughly two-square-mile area bordered by South College Avenue and Finfeather Road between the Bryan/College Station city line and Downtown Bryan. The process envisions the area as, “a premiere landscape that can accommodate growing demand for quality housing, commercial services, restaurants and entertainment offerings while enhancing the existing neighborhood fabric along this important corridor.” Given the aforementioned desire among regional stakeholders for more live-work-play environments, partners in the Brazos Valley should support this effort to enhance the community’s quality of place.

Potential Actions:
- Support the work of the City of Bryan and the MPAC to create and implement a proactive master plan that promotes high-quality live-work-play development and redevelopment in Midtown
- Support the development of increased or enhanced multimodal connectivity in the Midtown area connecting Downtown Bryan and Texas A&M University (see Tactical Recommendation 5.1); encourage collaborative work with College Station and other relevant government entities to seek complementary infrastructure developments across jurisdictional lines

6.5 Promote Resident-Driven Quality of Place Enhancements

As previously discussed, the Brazos Valley will likely need to make significant investments to upgrade its infrastructure to accommodate past and future growth. Because resources are limited, quality of place enhancements may fall lower on the priority list. Improving a community’s appearance and vibrancy does not, however, always require a significant capital expenditure. Communities across the country have embraced a do-it-yourself or “DIY” approach to improving public spaces in which community members implement low-cost, temporary measures such as art installations, pop-up shops, creative street furniture installations, low-cost “complete streets” improvements, and so on.7 The Brazos Valley could adopt a similar approach with a community-driven program to improve quality of place in the region’s neighborhoods.

Potential Actions:
- Convene groups of volunteers at the neighborhood level to find creative low-cost and/or mostly privately funded solutions to improving quality of place in communities throughout the region

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Engage an organization such as the Better Block Foundation to effect low-cost, temporary quality of place enhancements such as pop-up businesses, enhanced lighting, art installations, café seating, temporary bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and so on.

Leverage staff capacity from local governments to support these activities and seek to build support for more permanent, long-term enhancements to quality of place.

Evaluate whether to temporarily “target” public services such as police, building inspection and code enforcement, engineering, public works, parks and recreation, economic and community development, emergency management, etc. in areas where temporary treatments are taking place.

Seek to identify funding from foundations and other private sources to promote public art through the initiative; could establish a grant program for local artists to make art installations.

**BEST PRACTICE #12:** Better Block Program (New Kensington, PA)

**BEST PRACTICE #13:** Quad Cities Big Table (Quad Cities, IA-IL)

**CONCLUSION**

As discussed in the Regional Assessment, the Brazos Valley entered into this Strategy creation process with more possibilities to increase levels of prosperity and improve quality of life than it has ever had. Unlocking this potential, however, will require that the community work collaboratively. The Economic Development Strategy represents a consensus blueprint through which the Brazos Valley can grow a more dynamic economy, invest in its “asset base” to raise levels of prosperity, and improve quality of life. But even the best strategy requires a plan to ensure its successful activation. Upon Steering Committee approval of a final Strategy, the process will formally move into its final phase – the development of an Implementation Plan. The Implementation Plan will formalize timelines for phasing the Strategy’s multiple actions, identify lead and support implementation entities, determine existing and necessary financial and personnel capacity to drive implementation, propose optimal staffing and governance operations, and confirm performance metrics to track implementation progress and success. This final step will ensure that the Strategy is activated and sustained in order to make the Brazos Valley a more prosperous and successful place.
APPENDIX A: BEST PRACTICES

#1: ANIMAL HEALTH CORRIDOR (KANSAS CITY, MO-KS)

[kcanimalhealth.thinkkc.com](http://kcanimalhealth.thinkkc.com)

Supported by the Kansas City Area Development Council, the Animal Health Corridor is a branding initiative that communicates the benefits of locating along a 245-mile corridor between Manhattan, KS, home of Kansas State University, and Columbia, MO, home of the University of Missouri. Along with a promotional website, the Animal Health Corridor holds a number of events that foster connection among animal health companies located along the corridor as well as other domestic and international firms. These events include a Market Insight Seminar which educates participants on the current state of the animal health industry and changing industry trends, a Homecoming Dinner that celebrates global industry successes and growth, and the KC Animal Health Investment Forum where early and middle stage animal health companies present their vision and business plan to potential investors. Underlying the success of the corridor is a diverse, highly concentrated set of assets that strengthen the Kansas City Area Development Council’s marketing initiative including over 300 animal health companies and numerous institutions focused solely on animal health research. In recent years, the Department of Homeland Security identified Manhattan, KS as the destination for its National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility – a $1.25 billion project likened to a Center for Disease Control (CDC) for animals. While numerous factors contributed to the successful attraction of the facility, Homeland Security officials stated that the multijurisdictional coordination and collaboration fostered by the Animal Health Corridor was an important decision factor in the selection process.

#2: EARNED MEDIA STRATEGY (CHATTANOOGA, TN)

Ever since Walter Cronkite called Chattanooga the “dirtiest city in America” in the 1970s, the community has been focused on changing both its local realities and also external perceptions. Beginning in the 2000s, the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce, partnering with the region’s Convention and Visitor’s Bureau, contracted with a national public relations firm to try to change the outside perceptions of Chattanooga as a declining industrial city with few modern assets for companies, talent, or visitors. Focusing on strengths such as its revitalized downtown, America’s first city-wide gigabit fiber network, emerging entrepreneurial climate, and other assets, the public relations (earned media) strategy has seen notable success. Since implementing the strategy, the Chattanooga region has been featured in hundreds of business media placements with more than 1 billion impressions worldwide in a wide range of national, regional trade and online outlets including The Wall Street Journal, New York Times, The Economist, Fortune, CNN, Fox Business News, CNBC, and The Huffington Post. The tourism and visitation campaign was also effective, with nearly 1 billion impressions showcasing Chattanooga in outlets such as ABC News, Birmingham Parent, Baltimore Sun, Chicago Tribune, Delta SKY, Forbes.com, Georgia Magazine, National Geographic Weekend, Preservation, and Southern Living.
#3: BUSINESS FIRST (RICHMOND, VA)

[Business firstrichmond.com](http://businessfirstrichmond.com)

Launched in 2006, Business First is a collaborative, regional, existing business retention and expansion (BRE) program of the Greater Richmond Regional Partnership (GRP) and its local government partners. Professional economic development staff and trained volunteers from the business community interview CEOs and other top company officials to fully understand the company’s competitiveness and its long-term prospects for growth. Interviews cover a wide range of topics and findings, including hiring prospects for the next year, perceptions of the regional workforce and specific skill shortages, projected sales, and business climate issues. The data allows the GRP to gauge the health of the regional economy, develop an early warning system to foretell potential future layoffs, and provide targeted solutions to existing businesses. Typical services offered through Business First visits include:

- Expansion support
- Connection to state and local incentive programs
- Workforce recruiting and training
- Financing
- Business planning
- Coordination of municipal services
- Downsizing prevention and management

#4: UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON COMOTION (SEATTLE, WA)

[comotion.uw.edu](http://comotion.uw.edu)

In 2017, the University of Washington (UW) was named the most innovative public research institution in the U.S. by Reuters and the nation’s seventh best university for technology transfer by the Milken Institute. CoMotion is the university’s collaborative innovation hub dedicated to developing and connecting to local and global innovation ecosystems. CoMotion helps innovators achieve the greatest impact from their discoveries. To initiate a project, research faculty submit a Consultation Request so that they can be matched with an Innovation Manager knowledgeable in their area of research. During the engagement phase, the researcher consults with his or her Innovation Manager to discuss the innovation, determine next steps, and collaborate on possibilities. Before launching a new technology company, a UW startup works with CoMotion to prepare a market strategy, strengthen its startup team, identify key milestones towards securing customers or investors, and build prototypes to support these milestones. Through CoMotion, the University of Washington has generated 79 startups and spinouts from UW technology and created upwards of 3,230 jobs by Washington-Based startups licensing UW technology.
#5: SMART COLUMBUS (COLUMBUS, OH)

smartcolumbusos.com

As the U.S. Department of Transportation’s first-ever Smart City Challenge winner, the Columbus region was provided a $50 million grant, in conjunction with $90 million raised from private sources, to transform its transportation system and become a fully-integrated city that leverages the power and potential of data, technology, and human creativity. To achieve its objectives, leaders throughout the Columbus region established the following three strategic pillars of activity and investment:

- Our Foundation: This strategic initiative focuses on the basic building blocks that will allow the smart city initiative to operate efficiently and collaboratively across ecosystem partners. Elements of the strategic pillar are centered on the development of a holistic, collaborative smart city operating system, modernization of its electrical power grid for regional electric vehicle chargers, and preparation for a state of the art, connected vehicle environment.

- Technology Trials: In this strategic initiative, the Columbus region will establish itself as the ultimate test bed for smart city technologies including autonomous vehicles, truck platooning, smart mobility hubs, and prenatal trip assistance.

- Our New Way of Life: Smart City technology ultimately relies on local resident’s desire to adopt new technologies and new ways to interact with their surrounding environment. This strategic pillar focuses on policies and programs aimed at shifting resident and consumer preferences through permissive electric vehicle regulation, multimodal trip planning and payment, and policies that grow the sharing economy regionally.

The Smart City initiative is already showing impact on residents’ daily lives. Through the Smart Columbus Operating System, the Central Ohio Transit Authority is able to show bus locations in real time, while app developers have used real time data feeds in a number of innovative ways such as apps that assist truckers as they search for safe spots to rest and improve mobility for residents aged 65 and over.

#6: GREATER WICHITA PARTNERSHIP BUSINESS EDUCATION ALLIANCE (WICHITA, KS)

greaterwichitapartnership.org/about_us/business_education_alliance

The Business Education Alliance was created in 2012 and brings together businesses, public school districts, nonprofits, and local colleges and universities to align education and business “to cultivate a globally competitive workforce for the region.” The program’s mission is “aligning education and business communities to ensure a productive workforce needed for sustained economic growth for the region.” The organization’s 2016 Action Plan is directed at the focus areas of Literacy; Workforce Development; Workforce Readiness; Certificate and Degree Attainment; and Policy.
#7: GRADUATE!PHILADELPHIA

graduatephiladelphia.org

Graduate!Philadelphia seeks to increase the number of adults completing college in the Greater Philadelphia region through the engagement of business; higher education; government; organized labor; workforce, economic, and community development organizations; social service providers; and college graduates. By engaging with these partners, Graduate!Philadelphia aligns resources, removes barriers, and creates new pathways for adults desiring a college degree. Through collaboration and partnerships, Graduate!Philadelphia implements two key programs aimed at improving college attainment:

- **Back to College**: This program assigns an advisor to an adult and supports them until graduation. Along the way, the degree-seeking adult obtains various forms of assistance such as help finding the right college and program, filling out financial aid applications, getting academic support, and maximizing usage of on-campus resources.

- **Employer Talent Solutions**: The Employer Talent Solution program is aimed at adults already in the workforce, but who desire a college degree. Assistance services are offered to self-identifying employees or employees identified by managers for the degree completion program. Services provided to these employees are similar to those offered under the Back to College program, however, advisement services are offered onsite.

Since 2005, Graduate!Philadelphia has provided more than 6,200 adults with initial one-on-one advising services with over 2,500 adults choosing to pursue a college degree. Over 1,000 two or four year degrees have been conferred to Graduate!Philadelphia participants.

#8: UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA EMPLOYER PATHWAYS (GAINESVILLE, FL)

https://ufonline.ufl.edu/admissions/employer-pathways/

In 2018, the University of Florida unveiled its Employer Pathways program through a partnership with Walmart. Born out of enlightened self-interest, Walmart executives recognized that the personal and professional success of its employees directly impacts the future success of Walmart as an organization. Through the Employer Pathways, Walmart employees are able to pursue degrees in business administration via the University of Florida’s online degree program for as little as $1 a day. Additional costs such as tuition, books and fees are subsidized by Walmart and its associates do not pay any upfront costs to enroll in the program – removing a significant barrier to degree attainment for many. Since its announcement, other companies have followed suit including The Walt Disney Corporation and Discover Financial Services.

#9: GREATER GRADS (OKLAHOMA CITY, OK)

greatergrads.com

Greater Grads is an initiative of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber’s Education and Workforce Development division. It launched in 2006 to build Oklahoma City’s talent base by connecting Oklahoma graduates – a vital
component of the City’s future workforce – with employers in the Oklahoma City region. These connections will help Oklahoma City’s flourishing economy, creating even more opportunities in the years to come. Upon recognizing that the Oklahoma City region was experiencing brain drain and that it is home to over 120,000 college students every year – with regional higher education enrollment as large as Boston or Philadelphia – the Chamber launched a targeted effort necessary to focus those students on opportunities available locally.

The program consists of three parts:

- **InternOKC summer program:** Interns can be enrolled in this four week series that includes a kick-off session and four lunch sessions that highlight the benefits of living and working in the Oklahoma City region. This fosters peer networking and provides resources to help students transition from college to career.

- **Greater Grads Career Fair:** The career fair is held each spring with more than 100 recruiters from local companies. A link on the Greater Grads website provides attendees with resume and interviewing tips to maximize their success and efficiently utilize the time of participating employers.

- **Website for graduates and employers:** This website focuses on promoting Oklahoma City to recent college graduates and young professionals and connecting them with jobs available at local businesses.

Greater Grads is one of the primary programs of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber’s Education and Workforce Development department and a direct tactic of the Chamber’s economic development strategy. It is staffed by a full-time manager of education and outreach programs.

#10: CONNECT SIXTY-FOUR (KALAMAZOO, MI)

[connect64.com](http://connect64.com)

The result of a collaboration of business organizations along a 64-mile corridor between St. Joseph and Battle Creek, Michigan, the Connect Sixty-Four program provides qualified “trailing spouses” of top job candidates with a “VIP Pass” that allows them exclusive exposure to the area’s hiring agents and priority consideration for interviews. All of the Fortune 500 companies with headquarters or divisions in the corridor have signed up for the program, including Stryker, Eaton, Kellogg’s, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Whirlpool. Résumés of trailing spouses and job openings are organized and matched by Connect Sixty-Four staff. When the service is offered to a job recruit, a career consultant will meet with the trailing spouse to assess their career aspirations and begin identifying and facilitating employment opportunities. There is no fee for trailing spouses participating in Connect Sixty-Four, though there is a $5,000 charge for employers upon hiring a candidate identified through the program. Often, Connect Sixty-Four services are offered as a relocation benefit to the prospective employee.

#11: NEWTOWN MACON GAP FINANCING PROGRAM (MACON, GA)

[newtownmacon.com/loans](http://newtownmacon.com/loans)

NewTown Macon is a placed-based initiative that seeks to attract, leverage, and invest in self-sustaining transformation in Downtown Macon. In order to advance its mission, NewTown Macon recognized a need to improve capital availability and created two programs for real estate and place-based investment. Through a joint
venture with Urban Development Concepts, NewTown Macon offers gap financing for real estate projects via public/private partnership backed bonds. For projects that do not meet the requirements of the bond issue, NewTown Macon also offers loan financing for projects that grow jobs and resident populations or strengthen a sense of place in downtown Macon. According to The Telegraph, Newtown Macon’s loan program has spurred $30 million in reinvestment in downtown Macon including a number of loft projects which have increased the vibrancy and economic health of downtown Macon.

#12: BETTER BLOCK PROGRAM (NEW KENSINGTON, PA)

betterblock.org

Borrowing from core principles developed by the Better Block Foundation, community residents of New Kensington held their first Better Block event in May 2015. The inaugural event hosted a wide array of activities including live entertainment, pop-up shops, food and street vendors, and special events in existing commercial space. According to Better Block New Kensington, approximately 2,000 individuals visited the downtown area of New Kensington during the inaugural event. While the event is held on a single day of the year, Better Block New Kensington has had a lasting impact on the city’s downtown area. Since its first event in 2015, 10 new businesses have opened in downtown storefronts, attracted by the renewed excitement and attention that downtown New Kensington received due to the Better Block program. The Better Block Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to educating, equipping, and empowering communities and their leaders to reshape and reactivate built environments in order to promote healthy and vibrant neighborhoods.

#13: QUAD CITIES BIG TABLE (QUAD CITIES, IA-IL)

quadcitiesbigtable.com

As they transitioned from strategic planning to strategic implementation, a group of community and business leaders throughout the Quad Cities area desired a greater community voice as they made decisions and advanced strategies to create cool places; attract, retain, and develop creative people; engender a connected region; and support a thriving, prosperous economy. The Quad Cities Big Table was forged from this desire. Envisioned as a forum to elevate civic conversation, foster new relationships, and inspire collaborative action, the Quad Cities Chamber with a partner organization held the Big Table event in a two-day period in April 2018. Over these two days approximately 5,000 people of diverse backgrounds, neighborhoods, and interest groups participated in more than 500 one-hour discussions to imagine the future of the region. In order to maximize community input, leaders also released a survey that garnered over 1,700 resident responses.

Although feedback covered a variety of topics and ideas, it was continually filtered through the lens of Q2030 – a holistic community and economic development initiative sponsored by the Quad Cities Chamber of Commerce. Survey questions, Big Table discussions, and brainstorming sessions were structured so as to ensure that community feedback could support the overarching vision and objectives outlined in Q2030. As a result, community and business leaders responsible for realizing the community’s vision received clear direction on which issues to tackle first and which strategies to prioritize along with innovative ideas that were outside of Q2030’s original scope.
APPENDIX B: RESEARCH SUMMARY

Regional Assessment

The Regional Assessment and Competitive Scorecards document represented the first step in the Brazos Valley Economic Development Strategy planning process. It evaluated the region’s competitive position and the issues that it faces in an increasingly competitive environment for new jobs, talent, and corporate investment. The Assessment was built on analysis of demographic, socioeconomic, economic, and quality of life data indicators that uncover key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges that must be leveraged and addressed to support a more vibrant future. This quantitative analysis was complemented by community input received from interviews, focus groups, and a public survey. In total, more than 1,500 individuals who live and/or work in the Brazos Valley shared their opinions to inform the Assessment and the Economic Development Strategy.

The Assessment presented the quantitative and qualitative research through the lens of seven stories, each containing important insights that should influence the Brazos Valley's strategic priorities as they relate to community, economic, and workforce development. These seven stories are as follows:

1. Introduction: A Region at an Inflection Point
2. Growth and Change in the Brazos Valley
3. Anchored by A&M: Accelerating Our Economic Evolution
4. Elevating Standards of Living and Preserving Affordability
5. Workforce Competitiveness: Deriving Advantage from Talent Production and Retention
6. Diversifying Our Appeal: Quality of Place in the Brazos Valley
7. Conclusion: Seizing Opportunity Through Collaboration and Cooperation

Supplementing these stories are a series of scorecards that evaluate the region’s competitiveness in five key areas: economic performance, workforce sustainability, innovation and entrepreneurship, business environment, and quality of life and place. The next two pages highlight the Key Strengths and Opportunities and Key Challenges and Threats that emerged from the Regional Assessment and Competitive Scorecards.

KEY STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES

✔ The “stars aligning” as new opportunities emerge: With rapid population growth and the increasing stature of Texas A&M, the region has more opportunities for economic success than ever before; though work is needed, cooperation and collaboration among partners is greatly improved

✔ An elite public research university: Texas A&M is an economic engine that is growing in stature and producing ever more opportunities for innovation and commercialization

✔ The “Aggie Spirit”: Many students and alumni form an intense affinity for Texas A&M; this creates a special regional culture that can be leveraged to promote talent attraction and retention, support for Aggie-led startup businesses, and so on

✔ A young, educated workforce: Though the student population impacts topline numbers, the Brazos Valley is generally a young and well-educated place in comparison to the nation as a whole

✔ A diversifying population and a global outlook can help attract jobs and talent: The region, led by Texas A&M, has attracted talented people from around the world and the region is becoming more diverse, a quality that younger generations find attractive

✔ Growth in professional, scientific, and technical services hints at much larger potential: Certain export-oriented, higher-wage subsectors are gaining momentum and adding jobs at a rate that exceeds their historical rates of growth and/or that of the overall regional economy; such is the type of growth that has occurred for many years in other dynamic small regional economies anchored by an elite research university

✔ Additional investments can tap into potential for innovation and entrepreneurship: Though stakeholders acknowledged that there has been a historical lack of “spinoff” and “spin-in” activity around Texas A&M, there was broad agreement that the region has vast potential to support innovation with investments such as a physical incubator space and increased emphasis on capital formation; various indicators also suggest a strong climate for small businesses and entrepreneurs
✓ An emerging place-based asset in Downtown Bryan: Stakeholders praised the revitalization of Downtown Bryan as one of the most positive changes in the region in recent decades and recognized the district’s potential to fulfill many community needs with respect to quality of place and offerings for non-students.

✓ A special growth opportunity at the RELLIS Campus: The newly formed RELLIS Campus is a one-of-a-kind opportunity to transform the region’s workforce training capabilities and attract businesses to conduct applied research and technology development in fields such as transportation, engineering, manufacturing, defense, etc.
KEY CHALLENGES AND THREATS

- Talent retention and competition with large Texas Metros: Though no region can retain all of its college graduates, the Brazos Valley is struggling to compete with large markets in Texas for talent, particularly young professionals.

- A better value proposition for young professionals is needed: The Brazos Valley is an attractive region for people at various stages of life, but input participants broadly agreed that more is needed to attract and retain young professionals.

- An economy heavily concentrated in government and services: The Brazos Valley has not yet developed the kind of dynamic, export-oriented economy capable of generating new wealth that is present in some small university-anchored regions; employment is heavily concentrated in government and local-serving sectors such as retail and food service.

- Underemployment and a lack of high-quality jobs: Input participants said that many well-educated, highly-skilled residents are accepting positions that do not fully leverage their education and skills due to a lack of high-quality jobs that pay wages that match qualifications.

- Wages lag behind across various sectors and skill levels: Relative to the nation and other university-centered economies, wages are low in the Brazos Valley; this is not purely a result of having a large student population or heavy concentration of service-sector jobs, as wages lag behind in even the most well-paying and skills intensive business sectors and occupations.

- Increases in housing costs are blunting the impact of real income gains: While incomes in the Brazos Valley have been growing faster than inflation, housing costs are rising even faster, which is eroding some of the region’s cost of living advantage.

- The struggle to keep up with rapid growth: As the region has grown quickly, input participants noted that some infrastructure (e.g. roads, sewers) has struggled to keep up.

- Educational attainment rates are far below top-performing metros: While educational attainment rates are high relative to the state and nation, the Brazos Valley has proportionally fewer residents with two- and four-year degrees relative to some other small regions with top-tier research universities (e.g. Ann Arbor) and the nation’s top “talent magnet” metros (e.g. Austin).

- A stronger, more connected talent pipeline is needed: Data reveals that many PK-12 students in the Brazos Valley are struggling in school and many adults in the region could benefit from additional education and training; input participants said partners in the region must unite to connect and strengthen the local talent pipeline.

- Divisions and internal competition within the community pose a major threat: Though conditions have improved, the Brazos Valley has been held back by community divisions – between jurisdictions, institutions, organizations, and so on; better cooperation and collaboration is essential to capitalizing on the region’s promising opportunities.
Target Sector Analysis

Communities across the country are pursuing differentiated economic development strategies that seek to support the development of “targeted” business sectors which may benefit from specific competitive advantages afforded by the community, its location, and its asset base. The practice of “targeting” has grown as communities have witnessed the advantages that come from directing finite resources toward the development of such “targeted” business sectors. Identified “targets” are those that have the most potential to bring and grow jobs and investment in the region and are a critical function of a region’s community and economic development efforts. The second phase of this comprehensive strategic planning process identified and profiled those sectors which possess the greatest potential to elevate prosperity through job and wealth creation in the years and decades to come.

KEY CONCEPTS RELATED TO TARGET SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

CLUSTERS: Agglomerations – or “clusters” – represent groups of interrelated businesses that choose to co-locate for one reason or another. The historical growth of clustered economic activity in areas such as the Silicon Valley, Route 128 in Massachusetts, and the Research Triangle Park in North Carolina are oft-cited and well developed case studies for other regions across the nation as they strive to develop similar agglomerations of related businesses. But there are countless examples of such clusters around the country and the world. While the factors that have led to clustering vary tremendously by region and sector, such agglomerations occur over time because a location has an asset base that affords the sector and the companies that operate within it some form of competitive advantage. The competitive advantages derived by these firms often result in comparatively high potential for employment growth and wealth creation.

TARGETS: Even so, many communities and economic regions choose to strategically target sectors of economic activity that may not currently be characterized by a strong agglomeration – or “cluster” – of related businesses. A targeted sector – or simply a “target” – is any type of business activity that is strategically pursued by an economic development organization and its partners for growth and development. That is to say, a “target” is an area where financial and staff resources, and the programs and policies they support, are specifically focused. “Targets” are often those segments of an economy where competitive advantages exist, prospects for future growth are greatest, and return on investment is likely highest.
UNDERSTANDING YOUR ASSET BASE: Strategic targeting is predicated upon a solid understanding of a community’s strengths and weaknesses, specifically as they relate to the needs of specific business sectors and the companies that operate within these sectors. The factors that medium to large companies consider when evaluating a community as a potential location for a new facility are often referred to as site location factors, site selection factors, or site considerations. These factors vary tremendously by sector. For example, data center operations typically seek locations with low natural disaster risk, affordable and abundant water necessary for cooling, and redundant and exceptional fiber-optic, broadband infrastructure, among other attributes. Corporate headquarters typically seek locations with a well-educated workforce, exceptional passenger air connectivity, and abundant amenities. Accordingly, communities that are able to offer such characteristics are better positioned to attract these kinds of operations. Understanding the community’s asset base – inclusive of a wide variety of these potential site location factors – is critical to understanding the community’s competitiveness for various business sectors. Likewise, an understanding of its deficiencies in terms of such site location factors will help the community identify areas that need further investment if the community wishes to transform such deficiencies into future assets.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH: Target business sectors reflect existing agglomerations of establishments with similar business activities that have likely flourished in a community because of an asset base that aligns with that sector’s primary site location considerations. Other sectors that share similar site location factors may not currently be concentrated in the community, but the aforementioned asset base could make the community an attractive location for these new activities. Accordingly, such sectors represent opportunities where the community may have a particularly high chance for success in marketing and recruitment efforts that seek to attract new corporate investments or relocations that would benefit from the community’s existing asset base.

For decades many communities and their economic development organizations have exclusively associated “economic development” with “business recruitment.” While the recruitment of new companies is an important component of any targeted economic development program, it is only one leg of the stool. The growth of regional economies and their target business sectors are overwhelmingly driven by existing businesses and entrepreneurs. A variety of studies have shown that between 70 percent and up to 95 percent of the country’s job creation over various time periods has been attributable to the expansion of existing companies. While new investments generate ribbon cuttings and headlines, existing businesses and entrepreneurs are creating the majority of jobs in our country. Accordingly, any effort to develop target sectors and nurture employment growth within them must focus upon the needs of existing businesses as well as entrepreneurs.
RECOMMENDED TARGET SECTORS

Based on an extensive analysis of Brazos Valley’s economic composition and assets, Market Street recommended the following three target sectors for the community to pursue over the next five years. A brief summary of each recommended sector is provided following the graphic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Applied Research and Development</th>
<th>Professional and Technical Services</th>
<th>Engineered Materials and Components</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> The applied research and development target captures business operations that produce novel, innovative materials, devices, products, or processes for end-users.</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Professional and technical services are the connective tissue of the economy. The target captures legal, accounting, and engineering services among others.</td>
<td><strong>Description:</strong> Engineered materials and components manufacturers transform metals, chemicals, and other raw materials into industrial and consumer-grade products for downstream markets.</td>
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<td><strong>Specialization</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>▪ Aerospace and Defense</td>
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<td>▪ Autonomous Systems and Infrastructure</td>
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<td>▪ Human Health and Biosecurity</td>
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**Applied Research and Development**

In a globalized economy increasingly driven by creative destruction – a cycle of continual rebirth and renewal – businesses and entrepreneurs must stay ahead of the technology curve if they are to survive. Whereas basic scientific research plants the seeds of innovation, it is applied research and development that readies novel ideas for market adoption. Applied research and development typically uses basic scientific research as a starting point. It then explores whether the novel idea is commercially viable, technologically feasible in a production setting, and/or displays sufficient market demand all while overcoming hurdles along the way. Given the breadth of basic and applied scientific research conducted at Texas A&M University, the applied research and development target is defined broadly. Community and economic development stakeholders must remain flexible in terms of the programs and policies they pursue in order to attract and expand applied research and development companies. However, the region does show sufficient comparative advantages in a handful of technology areas that can serve as a starting point for strategic intervention. Centers and institutes housed at Texas A&M University and strategic hires made through the Governor’s University Research Initiative (GURI) underscores potential areas of regional specialization including:

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*Given the breadth of the Applied Research and Development and Engineered Components and Materials targets, Market Street also provided guidance regarding niche areas of potential specialization and competitive advantage.*
Applied Research and Development within the Brazos Valley is unquestionably supported by two existing cluster development strategies: the BioCorridor and RELLIS campus. Both display locational advantages for distinct types of applied research and development companies – continuing to improve these clusters is critical to target sector competitiveness. Similarly community and economic development stakeholders can further support growth within the target by more strongly supporting a collaborative entrepreneurship ecosystem and engendering an environment where startups can achieve scale in the Brazos Valley.

**Professional and Technical Services**

Limited economic development resources need not always be directed toward areas of existing strength. In fact, many communities choose to leverage constrained resources to support the growth of sectors of their economy that serve broader community objectives. Throughout public input, stakeholders identified two key challenges faced by the community: widespread underemployment among young, recent Texas A&M University graduates and limited job opportunity for highly educated, highly skilled trailing spouses and partners. Each issue can be addressed by expanding professional and technical services opportunities locally. In a global environment where talent is increasingly scarce, this target sector is an important source of career opportunities for recent college graduates – the expansion of such opportunities are central to the region’s capacity to attract and retain talent.

As the connective tissue of the economy, professional and technical services companies support many other business sectors. Given the target’s horizontal reach, growing professional and technical services capacity in the Brazos Valley strengthens regional competitive advantages in other targeted sectors: particularly among emergent applied research and development startups. While target activity is broad, the Brazos Valley exhibits areas of specialization. Existing workforce concentrations, talent pipelines, and sectoral growth trends indicate that the community displays specialization in the following areas:

- Engineering Services
- Regional Offices
- Information Technology
- Computer Systems Design
- Customer Care Facilities

Because talent drives competitiveness in the sector, place-based amenity development in the Brazos Valley – whether through downtown revitalization, new mixed used developments across the region, and school system improvements – expand competitiveness. Better linking recent or soon-to-be graduates to regional career
opportunities can further ensure that the target sector is well supplied by the talent it needs to expand. Yet the highly competitive environment for talent within the Texas Triangle is a core challenge. Whereas lower cost of living may have historically made the region an attractive destination, lower relative wage rates – even after accounting for cost of living differentials – translate to an earnings potential reduction for professionals or recent college graduates in the Brazos Valley. Expansion of “high wage” job opportunities within the target sector is a key consideration as a result.

**Engineered Materials and Components**

Advanced manufacturing is the bedrock of a community’s export base. And, while many communities use the term “advanced manufacturing” as a catchall to denote any type of goods-producing activity, a community’s true competitive advantages often lie within a narrow slice of advanced manufacturing. Existing manufacturing activities in the Brazos Valley are concentrated in labor-intensive, low-technology sectors such as food processing, apparel manufacturing, and building materials. However, the region’s research and development assets, improved rail capacity, proximity to aerospace and defense, automotive, chemical, and semiconductor production hubs throughout the Texas Triangle, suggest that community and economic development stakeholders in the region could carve out an engineered materials and components manufacturing niche.

Engineered materials and component manufacturers transform metals, chemicals, and other raw materials into industrial or consumer-grade products. These manufacturers develop more durable, heat resistant metals; produce nanotechnologies that improve material tensile strength, or add new capabilities such as self-cleaning properties to existing products to name a few possible lines of business. Along with relatively strong concentrations among science, engineering, and mathematics workers, the Brazos Valley’s greatest competitive strength is its central location within the Texas Triangle. According to economic impact data provided by EMSI, the four Texas Triangle metros (Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio) purchased $201 billion worth of engineered materials and components in 2016 – roughly 46 percent of these goods were imported.

Although the target displays strong potential for growth, insufficient workforce pools and comparatively less advantageous transportation networks relative to nearby metros, limit the types of manufacturers who will find the Brazos Valley a suitable location for their operations. However, manufacturers with a blurred line between factory floor and research laboratory, those that serve multiple industry sectors or markets, those of moderate size, or those that receive and ship products primarily by rail may overlook the region’s shortcomings. Community and economic development stakeholders can also enhance the region’s attractiveness through amenity development. A multi-modal facility in the Brazos Valley could further complement rail capacity expansion and undercut its transportation disadvantages. At the same time, repositioning an abundant retail trade and food service workforce through upskilling programs could greatly expand capacity to support product operations regionally.