



# RECOVERY PLANNING ASSISTANCE TEAMS

## Downtown Rockport: Strength, Vitality, and Resilience

Rockport, Texas  
Final Report | January 2020



**American Institute  
of Certified Planners**

*Creating Great Communities for All*

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For more information on the Community Planning Assistance Teams program: [planning.org/cpat](https://planning.org/cpat)

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*Cover: A vibrant bait shop along Rockport Harbor represents a typical look and feel of downtown Rockport architecture. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, ASLA*

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# The Purpose of the CPAT Program

The purpose of the Community Planning Assistance Teams program is to serve communities facing limited resources by helping them address planning issues such as social equity and affordability, economic development, sustainability, consensus building, and urban design, among others. By pairing expert urban planning professionals from around the country with residents and other stakeholders from local communities, the program fosters education, engagement, and empowerment. As part of each team's goals, a community develops a vision that promotes a safe, ecologically sustainable, economically vibrant, and healthy environment.

APA staff works with the community, key stakeholders, and the host organization(s) to assemble a team of planners with the specific expertise needed for the project. The team meets on-site for three to five days, during which time a series of site visits, focused discussions, and analyses are performed. On the final day, the team reports their results back to the community. A more detailed report is issued to the community at a later date.

## Guiding Values

APA's professional institute, the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), is responsible for the CPAT program. Addressing issues of social equity in planning and development is a priority of APA and AICP. The CPAT program is part of a broader APA Community Assistance Program, which was created to express the value of social equity through service to communities in need across the United States.

Community assistance is built into the professional role of a planner. One principle of the AICP Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct states that certified planners shall aspire to "seek social justice by working to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of the disadvantaged and to promote racial and economic integration." Another principle is that certified planners should aspire to "contribute time and effort to groups lacking in adequate planning resources and to voluntary professional activities."

## Program Background

In recognition of the key role urban and regional planners play in shaping vibrant, sustainable, and equitable communities, the APA Board of Directors established the Community Planning Team initiative in 1995. This initiative resulted in a pro bono effort to assist an economically struggling African American community in the East Market District of Greensboro, North Carolina. APA has continued to develop a pro bono planning program that provides assistance to communities in need.

In 2005, program efforts were increased after Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Coast region to include a number of initiatives, including planning assistance team projects in the affected cities of Henderson Point, Mississippi, and Mandeville, Slidell, and New Orleans in Louisiana. Another Gulf Coast recovery project included the Dutch Dialogues, which brought American planners together with Dutch experts to transform the way that Louisiana relates to and manages its water resources.

AICP broadened the scope of the CPAT program with its 2009 project in Buzzard Point, a neighborhood in Southwest Washington, D.C. Completed projects since the program's official relaunch in 2011, including Matthews, North Carolina; Story County, Iowa; Unalaska, Alaska; La Feria, Texas; Lyons, Colorado; Brooklyn/Baybrook, Baltimore; Belize City, Belize; the Quinault Indian Nation; and others are all important landmarks in the development of the CPAT program as a continued effort. CPAT is an integrated part of APA's service, outreach, and professional practice activities.

APA's Recovery Planning Assistance Teams, a subset of the CPAT program, bring volunteer planners to communities rebounding in the wake of natural disasters.

More information about the CPAT program, including community proposal forms, an online volunteer form, and full downloadable reports from past projects, is available at: [planning.org/cpat](http://planning.org/cpat).

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Rockport has strong assets and a pipeline of projects that have the potential to dramatically shape downtown. The city is a nationally recognized ecotourism destination. The community leaders and residents we met are passionate about the place and want to accommodate change within the context of preserving the best of the past. Business owners in the downtown want to remain even as they struggle to staff operations and deal with tidal rain-related flood events on an ongoing basis. Rockport has done a remarkable job in partnership with a variety of institutions and individuals to accomplish much since Hurricane Harvey, although much remains to be done. Given financial constraints, most major new endeavors will wait until grant funding is available. New initiatives that can be implemented quickly will have to rely on energy and enthusiasm as much as money. To that end, improving communications and the ability to work collaboratively will be integral to future success.

The city has taken actions following Hurricane Harvey to reduce future damages and potential losses of life. The city has also shown a remarkable ability to come together as a community to recover its services, economy, and heritage. Rockport continues its efforts with the knowledge and understanding of remaining vulnerabilities throughout the city, including the Heritage District.

The downtown Heritage District remains principally vulnerable to flooding due to its geographic location and topography. Wind and tornadoes, ground subsidence, and sea-level rise also pose a threat. The city also acknowledges aging buildings and other infrastructure as significant weaknesses. Furthermore, risks associated with sea-level rise will exacerbate flooding over time. Suggestions to mitigate risks to reduce vulnerabilities are included within this report and are identified within current documents such as the city's comprehensive plan and both the county's long-term recovery and floodplain management plans. Impediments to mitigating the Heritage District include funding, repetitive flood losses, age of remaining structures, and codes. Both short- and longer-term action items should be considered.

The city, working with its many partners, is on a strong path to rebounding from Hurricane Harvey. Not many cities have been able to accomplish as much in as short a time. With a strategy that includes mitigation for the downtown Heritage District, the city will continue to be a synergistic destination for the region and the many tourists that come to visit.

Without a strong, vibrant and diverse regional economy, downtown Rockport will not succeed. Conversely, without a vibrant authentic and walkable downtown with thriving local businesses to give it a sense of identity and place, Rockport will be a city without a heart. The region of Rockport-Fulton, the Austin Street corridor, and Heritage District simultaneously complement and strengthen one another. For Rockport to compete with other coastal communities and to be a truly resilient city, it must look beyond just downtown and beyond recovery and develop a more long-term focused vision of its future where both the region and its downtown are thriving.

## **Rockport's Challenges**

Right now, Rockport faces major threats. Without a more diverse and complex economy with a highly skilled and experienced workforce, it is vulnerable to economic instabilities that threaten its future. It lacks a clear long-term strategy for economic development hindering efforts to identify and manage complex long-range economic development issues. Without its own focused economic development entity, it is less competitive than other coastal communities. Without a comprehensive strategy and support from the community, the Austin Street corridor and downtown Rockport are not reaching their full potential as an economic anchor for the community. Damage to housing and infrastructure displaced workers and interrupted businesses creating a cycle of economic instability that requires intervention. Climate change and the threat of future weather-related disasters will continue to threaten economic and social stability for the region.

With a coordinated strategy that capitalizes on the strengths of an authentic, fully supported downtown that anchors a strong regional economy with diverse industries including a thriving ecotourism sector, a quality workforce, and affordable housing for all, Rockport can become a more splendid version of itself. By embracing new approaches, acting boldly to create future opportunities, and staying true to its own identity grounded in the beauty of nature and art, Rockport will become a community that is forward focused, highly resilient economically and environmentally, and continue to be authentic and welcoming to families and visitors of the future. Effective and open communication is a critical element of this process and the city manager and city council are well positioned to lead this charge and set a tone of visionary collaboration for the community.

## **Rockport's Assets**

Rockport is a special place. It has a beautiful coastal setting, is a community that cares, has a culturally rich downtown, and has great potential for the future. Rockport is truly a place apart and its outstanding coastal location provides a point of departure for the work ahead. It is important to recognize that what lies ahead is a long-term undertaking, and while some improvements can be implemented in the short term, while others may take several years to complete.

Plan implementation will consist of a combination of public improvements such as streetscape improvements, creation of public parks, placemaking and public art, new sidewalks, wayfinding and marketing, as well as private investments made by property and business owners. Implementation of the plan will be a public-private partnership between the city, private landowners, and other public and nonprofit agencies that provide resources to assist in the redevelopment, infrastructure construction, and revitalization of downtown.

Noting the fatigue of key players, especially city staff, the team urges the city not to give way to the potentially negative thinking that manifests itself in finding reasons why things can't be done rather than looking for creative

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examples of moving forward, even with limited resources. What is abundantly clear from the work and effort invested in the Rockport CPAT project, and the involvement and support of the local community, is that local leaders and citizens have several key steps to take and distinct opportunities to capitalize on to improve downtown Rockport. Developing and supporting a vibrant downtown is an ongoing effort. But one thing is clear—having a road map to guide the way, and a blueprint that identifies actions and

outcomes—is critical to the success of the recovery and revitalization effort.

Rockport needs a long-term commitment to maintaining a shopping district as part of the Heritage District. The Rockport CPAT has identified many actions, short and long term, that can help achieve the goal of a revitalized downtown. The question for Rockport is whether it has the energy and willingness to collaborate to make this goal a reality. Only Rockport can decide.

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## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

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The study area includes the complete boundaries of the Heritage District in Rockport with a focus on the Austin Street corridor. Google Earth, modified by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP

In the fall of 2017, the APA Foundation (APAF), in cooperation with APA members and other generous donors, began a fundraising campaign to assist communities that were hit hard by hurricanes and other natural disasters. The total raised exceeded \$78,000, and a year later the Foundation announced the recipients of a first cohort of disaster recovery grants. Each of the six recipient communities—in Florida, Puerto Rico, and Texas—used their grants to support post-disaster resiliency and infrastructure projects.

Support for the grant program, including the Rockport project, was provided in part by a grant from the Pisces Foundation, which seeks ways to accelerate to a world where people and nature thrive together. APA's work with Pisces focuses on building back better with green infrastructure after disasters.

The city of Rockport applied in July 2018 to the disaster recovery RFP issued by the APAF. They applied for a CPAT to

assist in preparing a plan for its downtown Heritage District, with an emphasis on the Austin Street commercial corridor. Following review by CPAT program staff and the AICP Community Assistance Planning Services Committee, the APAF board awarded a grant to the Rockport project in September 2018. CPAT program staff began by recruiting a team leader for the Rockport project.

### How We Did Our Work: CPAT Project Process Overview

Carol Barrett, FAICP, agreed to serve as the team leader for the pro bono project. Barrett and Ryan Scherzinger, AICP, an APA staff member responsible for the CPAT program, visited Rockport from January 9–10, 2019, to better understand the proposed project and to determine the types of expertise needed. After the preliminary visit, Scherzinger recruited team members with the specific skills and experience required to suc-



The team engaged with and learned from the community in a variety of ways including a public workshop at the Aquarium Education Center. Photos by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP

cessfully undertake the assignment: Gene Aleci, AICP, AIA (urban design, historic preservation and downtown redevelopment); Richard Amore, AICP, PLA (urban design, landscape architecture, small and historic downtown redevelopment); Eugene Henry, AICP, CFM (floodplain management, disaster recovery, and hazard mitigation); and Kerrie Tyndall, (economic development, strategic planning). Information on each team member is provided in Appendix G.

Rockport city planner Amanda Torres provided electronic copies of background documents which were loaded to a cloud storage site and accessed by the team members. The most significant of the documents studied included:

- [\*\*A Vision for the Heritage District and Downtown Rockport\*\* \(2006\)](#)
- [\*\*Rockport Heritage District Zoning Overlay District\*\* \(2014\)](#)
- [\*\*Aransas County Long Term Recovery Plan and Report\*\* \(2018\)](#)

The team arrived in Rockport on Sunday evening, May 20, 2019, and spent over four days working on the project. The first two days were devoted to reconnaissance and learning the ropes. This included multiple walkthroughs of the downtown area at different times of day and vehicle tours of the larger area focused on environmental resources and challenges. Team members met with stakeholders, including elected and appointed officials, business owners, citizen leaders of volunteer groups, and staff from community and cultural institutions.

During the visit, the team was accompanied by representatives of the Texas Sea Grant Program and Texas A&M University (TAMU). Texas Sea Grant has provided local planning staff to the region. TAMU made a significant commitment to Rockport through its Texas Target Communities (TTC) program. Students prepared a draft comprehensive plan for the city, for example. When the students presented their work to Rockport citizens in April, the team leader attended the community meeting.

The team conducted one public workshop to gather broad community input before developing recommendations. The public workshop was held on the second evening of the visit and was attended by approximately 30 town residents and business and community leaders. After two days of intensive work and planning, the team facilitated a second public meeting on Thursday evening, May 24, 2019, to present preliminary recommendations and solicit additional feedback from the community. Elected and appointed officials attended the team's Thursday evening presentation along with business leaders and the public. A detailed schedule of the four-day program is included in Appendix E.

## About Rockport

Rockport is in the Coastal Bend Region of Texas in Aransas County, 35 miles northeast of Corpus Christi. Rockport is on a peninsula surrounded by several bays. It is the largest incorporated city on the peninsula and is surrounded by unincorporated areas. The 15 square miles of the city include 4.3 miles of water. The city believes the population to be about 10,000 people, an increase of around 2,500 from the 2010 census.

Rockport's economy is tied to ecotourism and recreation and makes up more than a quarter of the Aransas County economy. Outdoor activities include fishing, birding, swimming, boating, and kayaking. The coastal ecosystem that surrounds Rockport offers a haven for endangered species and attracts visitors who come to experience its unique natural beauty. Many of the ecotourists, however, conduct their visits on a budget and therefore do not generate significant revenue.<sup>1</sup> The sport fishers, on the other hand, are a different group. They come in powerboats, stay for tournaments, and seek entertainment options for their families. They pay higher hotel rates and in general add more revenue to the local economy. The arts are also important to tourism and provide a high quality of life for winter residents. And by most local accounts, the winter residents are the biggest spenders.



*Rockport and surrounding region have been in a state of recovery since Hurricane Harvey directly impacted them in 2017. Map courtesy The Weather Channel*

There is a newly established Cultural Arts District downtown, the boundaries of which are coterminous with the previously established Heritage District. The Rockport Cultural Arts Center is on Austin Street along with several art galleries. Arts-related events take place frequently in the downtown.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the importance of boating and sport fishing, the Aransas County Navigation District is, in its own way, an economic engine for the port. The Navigation District is a state entity funded through ad valorem taxes on property. The Navigation District, in addition to building and maintaining docks and boating facilities, hosts the Bay Education Center and the Aquarium. The Navigation District builds facilities for launching boats and jetties for fishing. They also maintain public restrooms. Downtown merchants have asked the Navigation District for more facilities closer to the shopping area.

The amenities—natural beauty, climate, and access to recreation—have all made Rockport a popular second home and retirement area. According to the Census Bureau's Quick Facts, 25 percent of the population is 65 years of age or older. This compares to 10 percent of the population in Houston, 182 miles to the northeast. Many people recently moved to the Texas coast. Despite the threats of hurricanes, chronic flooding, and high winds in this part of Aransas County, the area's popularity has not appeared to wane. In 2019, USA Today ranked Rockport second on its list of "best coastal cities with a population of less than 25,000." The price of housing reflects the limited supply and the high demand. A typical Redfin listing in June 2019 for a home in the Heritage District described a 776-square-foot single-family home priced at \$129,000, or \$166 per square foot. Based on online listings for apartments, one would need a full-time job paying between \$17 to \$20 per hour to afford a one bedroom, one bath apartment.

Natural and man-made changes continue to exacerbate flooding in the streets adjacent to the bay. On several days during high tide, the team members observed water intrusion from the bay in the stormwater conveyance system at a level

high enough to be visible to anyone bending down to look. Any significant rainfall on top of this tidal activity would have resulted in some degree of flooding in downtown, particularly impacting Austin Street.

### **Hurricane Harvey**

Hurricane Harvey made landfall on August 25, 2017. Damage was severe. The destruction caused by Hurricane Harvey stretched over 50,000 square miles of Texas. Approximately 8.8 million Texans were impacted, a third of the state's population. After making landfall, the storm weakened and meandered for days up the Texas coast, triggering the largest rainfall event ever recorded in the U.S. and dumping more than 60 inches on some areas. The storm left more than 90 people dead and caused around \$125 billion in property damage in Texas.

Rockport was at the epicenter. Wind speeds were measured at 130 mph before the observation equipment was destroyed. Damage to the city's infrastructure, housing, and businesses was significant. In Rockport, 1,070 Small Business Administration loans were approved for a total amount of \$86.93 million by June 2018. In the fall of 2018, a year after the storm, sales tax revenue from the downtown was half the previous year. Further data collection by the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce documented a significant decline in hotel/motel tax revenue. The South Texas Economic Development Center estimated that capital losses suffered by Rockport were in excess of \$445 million. The tourism-based economy suffered greatly. The tax rolls declined by approximately 15 percent. Furthermore, the offices of the city of Rockport, Aransas County, and the Appraisal District were all destroyed.

The loss of low-income housing was dramatic. All low-income housing complexes within Rockport were heavily damaged (400 units, many accepting Section 8 vouchers) as well as many older single-family homes that housed lower-income families. Assisted living and care facilities for the elderly were also damaged and unable to serve their clients.

## Harvey's Less-Seen Long-Term Impact

**Service Workers for a Tourism-Based Economy.** With the affordable housing gone, it is not likely that service workers will return without a place to live. Service workers moved on to larger cities like San Antonio where they found housing and employment. Most local businesses are unable to remain open to the extent that their pre-Harvey hours allowed.

**The Emotional Toll.** The impact on a community of a disaster is not only the physical environment, but the psychological one as well. This is especially true of disaster workers like city employees and other community leaders who are confronted with regular ongoing challenges years after the storm. This is also true for businesses on Austin Street dealing with tidal flooding that impacts their normal business activities. Many in Rockport suffer from compassion stress as a natural outcome of knowing about the trauma experienced by others. When compassion stress continues, it can become compassion fatigue. While this is not an across-the-board phenomenon, the team interacted with some individuals who were simply burned out. Considering new ideas and new options was too much of a challenge for them given their overall level of post-Harvey fatigue.

## Environmental Risks of Coastal Living

Scientists see a clear link between Hurricane Harvey's record-setting intensity and climate change. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), studies have found that rising ocean temperatures likely increase hurricane intensity and rainfall by a significant margin. While wind damage, not rainfall, was the primary cause of destruction in Rockport, storm surge—made worse by sea-level rise—also had a significant impact on Rockport's inland-facing subdivisions. All of the coastal areas are impacted by warming oceans which increases the rate at which ocean water evaporates into the air and increases the amount of water vapor the atmosphere contains when fully saturated.

A report from the Bureau of Economic Geology (*Shoreline Movement along the Texas Gulf Coast, 1930's to 2012*) at the University of Texas at Austin found that Aransas County experienced an annual average of 2.49 feet of erosion from 1930 to 2012. This number disregards the biggest accelerator of coastal erosion: extreme weather events such as hurricanes and other tropical storms due to increased winds and tidal forces that can extend hundreds of miles. Long-term or slow rates of erosion are less apparent and are caused by seasonal changes such as El Niño, rising sea levels and human activity.

Despite the increasing risks of natural disasters, the number of Texans living in coastal counties has seen explosive growth. From 2000 to 2016, according to the Census Bureau, coastline counties along the Gulf of Mexico grew by more than three million people, or 24.5 percent.

As a result of climate risks and a growing population, the local economy needs diversification. Existing businesses must become more resilient. And any new growth and development

needs to be storm-hardened and, if possible, located away from the water's edge. When built along or near the water, buildings must be constructed to the very highest standard to withstand wind and water and flooding damage.

## Rockport's Disaster Grant Application

In the grant application to APAF, Rockport calls for aid in directing growth and planning in a sustainable and resilient way that will mitigate the threat of hazards but also ensure economic growth. According to the grant application:

Environmental and economic resilience strategies should be incorporated into the city's comprehensive plan. The Austin Street corridor, the CPAT study area, functions as the heart of the downtown and was severely impacted by Harvey. Flooding, however, is a constant challenge in the low-lying coastal area. Heavy rains, high tides, strong Gulf winds, and storm surges pose a continued threat to the businesses that drive the city's economy. The post-Harvey environment created a spark in the community to work toward needed changes. They seek solutions to alleviate ongoing drainage issues through green infrastructure and other stormwater management methods. To increase economic resiliency, the city also wants to see a more diverse mix of businesses downtown and strategic coordination among merchants to create the potential for new opportunities and more vibrancy in the area.

The grant application also called for the addition of green infrastructure along Austin Street to help mitigate hazards and provide additional shade.

## What We Found

### Austin Street

Much of the news is good. Shops have reopened. Buildings have been repaired or restored. Only a few remain vacant. The age of the commercial buildings, and the fact that few have been updated, has made it more affordable for businesses to reestablish themselves and for new ones to open. However, buildings that were completely destroyed have not been replaced. Major projects are in the pipeline. Grants have been received for the construction of a new and greatly expanded Rockport Center for the Arts at the end of Austin Street. The Center will have a meeting venue and performing arts space. An RFP/RFQ was recently issued with responses due at the end of May 2019. The project description notes that the buildings will incorporate 22,000 square feet to replace a facility destroyed by the hurricane. The project also includes the design of an outdoor sculpture garden and needed green space. This will draw many visitors to the Austin Street corridor and help to strengthen the presence of arts in the downtown. The Center's staff reported that \$4.5 million of the budget was raised locally, a very significant amount.

A new combined city hall/county courthouse complex will be built in the Heritage District within a close walk to the Austin Street core, which will help populate the area with regular employees and many visitors since the county building will include courts. The new government complex will provide



The new city hall/county courthouse complex will be built in downtown Rockport and supply many more daily visitors to the area. Conceptual site plan courtesy Aransas County

an important year-round economic anchor for the downtown. County officials have estimated a need for 55,000 square feet for the courthouse and a cost of \$18 to \$19.3 million for its construction. City officials estimate needing 28,000 square feet at a cost of \$9 to \$10 million.

The Navigation District will develop the property along the waterfront. Although a detailed submission has not been made, city officials anticipate something in the range of a six-story luxury hotel with 120 to 130 rooms. This will help generate important revenues and a transient population to support

the businesses within the Navigation District. The Navigation District has incorporated the concept of a boardwalk along the edge of the property but was unsuccessful in its attempt to secure a grant for the cost of the boardwalk and marina in a recent funding round. The property belonging to the Bass brothers, along the same stretch of waterfront, may be developed with three-story hotel/condos with limited retail. The fact that the property is held by the Bass brothers is very encouraging. Not only is the firm associated with quality projects built for the long term in mind, they work with cities to achieve a shared vision rather than imposing a single corporate perspective. The Bass brothers have also been associated with innovative placemaking activities that can help support many of the recommendations included in this report as well as those in Rockport's original 2006 plan for the downtown.

## Challenges Facing Rockport

### *Strength of community support*

Actual engagement by Rockport stakeholders was limited and no downtown business owners engaged with the team during the presentation of the recommendations. Some of the lack of commitment to the most recent planning endeavor is undoubtedly due to the simple fatigue of long-term storm recovery, especially among downtown business owners who continue to experience intermittent flooding problems.

### *Communications and Collaboration*

Communication among key parties can be significantly improved. It is understandable that, given the pressing needs



New development along the waterfront will have a significant impact on Austin Street and downtown Rockport. Google Earth, modified by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP

Project	Contractor	Planned Date Actual Date	Estimated Actual	MBE/WBE Goal	Scope
Pump Station & In-Line Storage: Gooseneck Arch Sewer	Enerfab/Foley	March 2018 <b>March 2018</b>	\$20,000,000 <b>\$8,543,300</b>	13%/6%	➡
Dry Weather Sewer Line Outfall 056 - Diversion Structures 065 & 073 Consolidation	Pyramid	April 2018 <b>April 2018</b>	\$500,000 <b>\$2,986,600</b>	11%/5%	⬆
Lower Blue River Green Infrastructure	Pyramid	April 2018 <b>October 2018</b>	\$3,300,000 <b>\$569,030</b>	12%/7%	⬇
Neighborhood Sewer Rehabilitation: Northeast Industrial District - Package 1	Blue Nile	June 2018 <b>June 2018</b>	\$10,025,000 <b>\$8,077,500</b>	10%/7%	➡
Neighborhood Sewer Rehabilitation: Northeast Industrial District - Package 2	Kissick	July 2018 <b>August 2018</b>	\$10,025,000 <b>\$9,232,700</b>	10%/7%	➡
Westside WWTP Wet Weather Treatment	Goodwin Construction Bros.	July 2018 <b>July 2018</b>	\$51,740,500 <b>\$39,285,000</b>	13%/5%	➡
Green Infrastructure Demonstration: Turkey Creek/Central Industrial District	TBD	August 2018 <b>November 2018</b>	\$6,830,000 <b>TBD</b>	15%/7%	➡
Green Infrastructure Demonstration: Northeast Industrial District	Kissick	September 2018 <b>October 2018</b>	\$7,680,000 <b>\$3,305,600</b>	10%/7%	⬇
Diversion Structure 068 Storage Basin	TBD	December 2018 <b>TBD</b>	\$8,500,000 <b>TBD</b>	14%/4%	⬆
Neighborhood Sewer Rehabilitation: Turkey Creek/Central Industrial District - Package 1	TBD	January 2019 <b>January 2019</b>	\$9,241,300 <b>TBD</b>	10%/6%	➡
Neighborhood Sewer Rehabilitation: Turkey Creek/Central Industrial District - Package 2	TBD	February 2019 <b>TBD</b>	\$9,214,300 <b>TBD</b>	10%/6%	➡

The Capital Improvements Projects reporting from Kansas City shown here provides an example of a priority list that helps put everyone on the same page and manage community expectations. [Kansas City's Capital Improvements Projects, Fiscal Year 2020](#)

and additional responsibilities amid the recovery process, the downtown businesses are not as well informed about city activities as they might be. The city is busy continuing to respond to basic recovery issues that limits their ability to deal with questions and concerns of the downtown shop owners. During the team's visit, several clear examples demonstrated how people continue to talk at one another rather than with one another.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the miscommunication is the result of different understandings and interpretations of a variety of recovery-related terms. Many residents, as well as the downtown business owners, believe that the 2018 *Aransas County Long Term Recovery Plan and Report* (LTRP) is a blueprint of what will be done. The plan is an excellent reference for identifying which projects would be helpful to have funded, but implementation is largely dependent on finding grants. Some of the downtown stakeholders recognize that a project to address flooding on Austin Street was included among the dozens of top priorities with a projected completion date of Spring 2018. The failure of the project to materialize seems like a broken promise to those who had a very specific, but incomplete, understanding of the LTRP.

A lack of transparency and information sharing contribute to the confusion. City staff continue to make the persuasive case that they are still repairing streets for residents who have

had to wade through mud for almost two years. However, the city's website contains no information on storm recovery that helps explain how and where resources are allocated, nor the status of grant applications. One strategy toward increased information sharing is to create a priority list that shows the amount of funding allocated annually and over a longer period (e.g., five years). A priority list will provide a realistic overview for the public of what can be done and when. The list can also identify the gaps in funding.

Communication issues also arise among those working on the same kinds of projects. Meetings with representatives from the Center for the Arts and the Cultural Arts District revealed unanswered questions about roles and concerns about competition for resources. Communication and collaboration are critical. Moving forward together, as a united front with a strategic vision, will reduce overlap, open more opportunities, and, ultimately, increase success.

#### *The Groundwork Has Already Been Laid*

The themes that emerged from the team's work are remarkably similar to those discussed in the 2006 *Downtown Heritage Plan*. Implementation of that document was carried out in part. Sidewalks were widened on Austin Street, angled parking and curb extensions (bulb-outs) with planters were added.

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Street lighting was installed in the medians. The improvements addressed the need for additional parking for shoppers and created pedestrian-oriented paths. The new look gradually informed how people treated their storefronts. Benches have become a common motif along with planters and some art.

The 2006 vision for downtown adopted by Rockport was expressed as follows:

- Active and interesting
- Connected to the waterfront
- Elegant and friendly
- Compact
- Accessible by walking and biking
- Accessible parking
- Year-round destination
- Economically sustainable

The 2006 vision still resonates and informed the recommendations within this report. However, the absence of language supporting environmental concerns shows the age of the document and demonstrates a lack of environmental awareness. Also, the economic approach requires a recognition of the importance of partnering with others and having a shared vision. Finally, the word "elegant" seems out of place with the coastal casual, family-oriented themes we heard expressed.

For side-by-side account of the team's take on the 2006 downtown plan's goals and recommendations, see Appendix A. An extensive discussion of design and livability recommendations is included in the "Recommendations" section within the subsection titled "Downtown Design, Vitality, and Resiliency."

#### ***Stormwater and Flooding***

Potential development that may occur along the downtown waterfront offers significant environmental challenges. The city's stormwater requirements do not require on-site stormwater detention (unless the flow exceeds the drainage flow rate indicated on the city's drainage maps). Therefore, any new development in the Heritage District is likely to add to the surface flow—and Austin Street lies in the lowest area. The commercial project proposed by the Navigation District could add to the problems in the area. The Navigation District stated that drainage would be channeled to the bay, which would add to the possibility of high-water flows. Development on the Bass property is likely to produce the same result. On the other hand, the new waterfront development projects may provide the benefit of reducing wave action into the Heritage District.

Several studies are required. First, more detailed information is needed about the drainage system in the Heritage District to manage the stormwater and minimize the backflow from the bay into the streets. Additionally, a study of the stormwater system of sub-basins that drain to the Heritage District is needed to determine the feasibility of detention outside of the project area to minimize the volume of stormwater traveling to the low points within the Heritage District. An examination of best practices should include green stormwater storage. A

more detailed discussion of stormwater and flooding issues occurs in the "Flood Mitigation and Resiliency" subsection of the "Recommendations" section below.

#### **Notes**

1. Our conversations with some of those who traveled to fish on the wharves confirmed this when the fishers complained about the lack of hotel rooms at \$50 per night.
2. According to the Cultural Arts District staff, the arts community is thriving. Events sponsored or hosted by the Rockport Arts Center include an Arts Market on second Saturdays, an Art Walk Night nine times a year, an Annual Arts Festival as well as a Film Festival which includes some activities in the downtown.
3. Downtown shop owners are seeking face time with the mayor and city manager, both of whom are busy and continue to work long hours on day-to-day administration and recovery. Downtown business owners insist that, from their point of view, adoption of the 2006 plan for the downtown obligates the city to install and water trees. The city, however, is reluctant to take on the watering requirements for new trees. Downtown business owners want their streets swept and adequate street lighting for the storefronts. Because of ongoing flooding tied to rain during high tides, some want the city to blockade the street to prevent cars from driving through and creating wave action that exacerbates the high water. None of the activities will be undertaken by the city in the foreseeable future and the elected officials agree. There is a need to deliver the news to the local businesses. The local businesses also need to be better organized. Expecting the city to call meetings of downtown businesses for pulse taking is not realistic. The business owners should reorganize themselves back into a merchants' association and have members available to speak about city proposals as the need arises. Another example of miscommunication involves the replacement lighting in the median on Austin Street. The city secured a grant for lighting and proceeded. Downtown merchants expressed displeasure due to a lack of consultation ahead of the installation. They wanted new and better lighting that included their sidewalks. However, that was not included with the grant. There is a disconnect in that the city feels like it did a good job while downtown business owners are dismayed.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

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## Flood Mitigation and Resiliency

Rockport was approximately “ground zero” on August 25, 2017, for the eye of Category 4 Hurricane Harvey passing just five miles to the east. The city received winds up to 130 mph and storm surge recorded as high as six to 10 feet above ground level in the back bays between Aransas and Copano Bays. The city is bouncing back, a trait endemic to the community. The historical record shows 38 hurricanes have come within 65 nautical miles of Rockport in the past 169 years.

Rockport is engaged in long-term recovery, including the development of mitigation initiatives. Some of the initiatives have been started and many remain to be implemented. The initiatives are well outlined within the 2018 [Aransas County Long Term Recovery Plan and Report](#) (LTPR) and the 2017 [Aransas County Multi-Jurisdictional Floodplain Management Plan](#).

The Austin Street corridor and the surrounding Heritage District are in a recovery phase with many merchants now open for business. As one walks through the downtown, however, vacant lots and unrepainted structures are visible reminders of Hurricane Harvey’s impacts.

### Challenges for Flood Mitigation and Resiliency

With all the response and recovery efforts and untiring work, the Heritage District remains vulnerable to flooding and wind, which will not change. In 2013, the city recognized the vulnerability of the community and enacted Ordinance No. 1604, which modified the construction code to ensure new construction meets higher standards. The new code does not, however, affect the vulnerability of the remaining structures that survived Hurricane Harvey’s impacts.

Flood mitigation is the principal focus in the Heritage District. Flooding is a recurring disaster with impacts to merchants and workers, their families, and the properties themselves. Two definitions for mitigation and resiliency fit well for Rockport as it continues to recover.

- **Mitigation:** Any action taken to prevent or reduce damages (loss of life and property) associated with natural or man-made disasters.<sup>4</sup>



*Hurricane Harvey’s impacts on Austin Street can still be seen, including vacant lots like the one pictured here. Photo by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP*

- **Resiliency:** The ability of a community or its constituent parts to bounce back from harmful impacts of disasters.<sup>5</sup>

Mitigating risks in downtown Rockport is one of the more controversial and central topics to address in long-term reconstruction. Damage from a disaster provides opportunities for a community to change previous decisions that may no longer be desired, such as architectural standards and zoning. However, it is important moving forward not lose continuity in recovery and reconstruction. A vision for the future and a need to become more resilient to disasters are both important.

Making very detailed decisions on where and how to build and rebuild can create conflicts between zoning and building and accessibility codes in which solutions become impractical or too expensive to implement. This is especially true during recovery and redevelopment following a disaster for substantially damaged structures or new structures replacing ones that have been demolished. An example of such a situation exists with Rockport’s implementation of elevation requirements and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance. Meeting both requirements is very difficult due to lot sizes and limitations associated with dry floodproofing. Consider the vulnerability of the area and the ability to become resilient with newer construction and development in future code and zoning updates.

Included within the 2018 LTPR, is a summary of projects (Grants and Funding Matrix) directly related to studying and addressing drainage issues and implementing floodproofing and elevation-mitigation measures.<sup>6</sup> Downtown Rockport projects (inclusive of the Heritage District) included in the matrix have an estimated cost exceeding \$15 million. The full list of projects in the matrix, which includes all of Aransas County, is greater than \$300 million, with an estimated \$41.5 million needed to meet match-funding requirements. Rockport and Aransas County cannot meet such funding needs for all the needed projects without assistance. The matrix also identifies potential funding sources. If funds became available for all projects, the city would need to develop a strategy to implement the respective projects over time. As funding opportunities



*Rebuilding is underway in downtown Rockport after Hurricane Harvey. Photo by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP*

emerge, the team recommends the city continue to involve the community in setting specific priorities.

Risk mitigation cannot be performed by any one entity (such as only by the city) and must be incorporated into a long-range strategy. Otherwise, the city will find that implementing mitigation actions is not economically feasible. As the city implements short- and long-term mitigation actions, it will look to a strategy that uses a combination of pre- and post-disaster funding and implement projects in an incremental fashion. Additionally, the city may take advantage of such funding with future disasters that do not affect Rockport and Aransas County area through the Stafford Act. This may be accomplished if the state offers Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds through a tiered approach, whereby funding not used by communities directly affected may be made available to other communities. There are also pre-disaster funds available to communities, such as Pre-Disaster Mitigation Assistance, Flood Mitigation Assistance, and Community Development Block Grants. The city may take advantage of this process through continued grant applications and working with the state's Division of Emergency Management. It is important that the city recognize the time horizon associated with implementation for projects within the LTRP as well as within this report.

Because of the broad and comprehensive nature of post-disaster redevelopment, there are often many disparate resources that provide a portion of the capacity needed for pre- or post-disaster implementation. Alignment of present and future efforts in the redevelopment of downtown Rockport is important for mitigation efforts and ultimately creating a more resilient city. Competing priorities exist, but the community at-large, working collaboratively at times and independently at others, has definitively established downtown Rockport as a vital part to the continued economic recovery of the community.

## Risks—Vulnerabilities

It is important to emphasize that downtown Rockport remains vulnerable to flooding and wind events (e.g. storm surge, stormwater drainage, wind, tornadoes, sea-level rise, and ground subsidence). Risks from flood and wind are natural hazards identified within the 2017 *Aransas County Texas Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Action Plan* with the greatest consequences for Austin Street and the Heritage District. The area also has the greatest amount of vulnerability due to the flooding and wind damages that accompany storms. The vulnerability is due to Austin Street and the Heritage District being completely situated within the following areas:

- Special Flood Hazard Area
- Storm surge and evacuation zones
- Windborne-debris areas

Another risk will contribute to additional flooding in the future: sea-level rise. According to local NOAA data, the mean

sea-level change over the past 100 years has been greater than 1.8 feet.<sup>7</sup> According to NOAA, sea-level rise for parts of some states along the Gulf of Mexico may see an increase in the still water elevation of bays by seven inches by 2025 and by as much as 1.46 feet within 30 years. This is a risk and it should be accounted for with future designs and modifications to codes for downtown Rockport.

Flood hazard maps for this area can be examined within the 2017 *Aransas County Multi-Jurisdictional Floodplain Management Plan*, which includes the identification of the Special Flood Hazard Area as shown on the Federal Flood Insurance Rate Map and sub-basin drainage maps.

Most discussion thus far has focused on the built environment. However, there will be impacts to many aspects of the community, including natural systems such as wildlife habitats and water quality.

Like all Gulf Coast communities, downtown Rockport has the challenge of balancing market-driven forces to develop desirable coastal land with protecting its residents and property from potential damage. It is possible, however, to create economic opportunities and develop attractive commercial and residential settings while reducing vulnerability to disasters at the same time. The following assessment looks at the vulnerability to flooding (storm surge and drainage) and wind (hurricanes and strong storms).

## Opportunities for Moving Forward

Subjected to repetitive flood and wind impacts, buildings in coastal areas lose their strength and integrity over time. Existing buildings will, through attrition, be replaced over time with buildings constructed to a higher standard. This is the time for the community to strengthen its vision for downtown Rockport far into the future. Other potential impediments to a resilient future include:

- Inconsistent regulations
- Unknown development plans for vacant properties and Navigation District lands
- Funding for mitigation alternatives and actions
- Constraints to remaining buildings in meeting current building standards
- Constraints with stormwater conveyance and drainage
- Choosing correct higher standards
- The ability to continue to live with flooding

The continued vulnerability to flooding is a significant and complex issue with a multitude of contributing factors that need to be addressed, including:

- Repetitive flood-loss structures
- Storm drainage and drainage outfalls
- Sedimentation
- Subsidence
- Changing flood elevations
- Sea-level rise

Additionally, and depending on the growth anticipated for the area, there are significant infrastructure improvements in downtown Rockport including storm sewers, streets, and other lifelines (public and private services, such as potable water, sanitary sewer, communications, and sustainable electricity).

## Courses of Action

The information below highlights and details mitigation for downtown Rockport in the short term to reduce risks to flooding. Also included, for the longer term, are actions that will make downtown Rockport more resilient into the future. The mitigation techniques summarized below will need additional research.

### Codes

Rockport adopted the International Code Council's 2012 Building and Residential Codes. The codes require structures built to sustain impacts as identified by the wind-contour map as well as components that integrate construction with minimum National Flood Insurance Programs (NFIP) standards. For mitigation and resiliency, Rockport has exceeded minimum requirements for new and substantially improved construction.

Staff must review the construction performed with each permit to ensure it meets current code and standards. The review may also include the amount of damage associated with each structure following a disaster. In short, this is a process that examines the amount of work or damage to buildings.

## Codes and Elevations: Potential Mitigation for the Short and Long Term

- The elevation requirement will greatly assist the community in becoming resilient to greater than the one-percent flood event. However, the city is a coastal community susceptible to greater flooding events with a lower probability of occurrence. Moreover, the city is susceptible to sea-level rise, with a projected rise of 1.4 feet within the next 30 years for Gulf Coast states. The next 30 years is also the life expectancy of most new structures and infrastructure. Given the projections, the city should consider increasing the freeboard requirement to increase the resiliency of structures and thereby bolster the current economic value.
- Inconsistencies with the code affect the ability to feasibly meet construction and reconstruction standards. They are more associated with existing structures than newer construction. Current lot sizes, however, may also impede the implementation of codes as currently written for the Heritage District. Examples include the difficulties with achieving elevation requirements and ADA compliance.

Based upon a threshold, buildings may be required to be brought into compliance with elevation standards. The age of many structures is such that elevating or properly dry flood-proofing the property may not be feasible. There are some exceptions such as historically designated structures and/or if code violations have been cited for a building.

### Elevations

The city also adopted an 18-inch freeboard requirement. This means all new or substantially improved structures are required to meet additional elevation requirements and other flood protection measures pursuant to the code and to the city's participation with the NFIP. The lowest floors used for commercial or residential space must be elevated to 18 inches greater than the base-flood elevation pursuant to the Flood Insurance Study and Flood Insurance Rate Maps (commercial space may be dry floodproofed).

## Floodproofing: Potential Mitigation for the Short Term

For existing structures that survived Hurricane Harvey, there may be two possible courses of action.

The first is to conduct a structural engineering study of remaining structures to identify what structures can be retrofitted pursuant to code. For structures that can be dry floodproofed, the property owner may seek design approval and permits to proceed with the flood protection measures. Assistance could be sought through grants identified within the LTRP. Potential federal grant opportunities include Hazard Mitigation Assistance and Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) programs, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Assistance Program, and the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program. If a commercial structure is insured under the NFIP and the structure has flooded multiple times with a significant number of claims paid, the FMA program may be a viable option for assistance for the respective property owner.

For merchants or property owners with structures that cannot be structurally retrofitted pursuant to code, a second possible course of action is to dry floodproof for a lesser amount of flood protection. One example includes small shields placed at doorways to minimize flooding into the building following a concurrent heavy rain event and high tide.<sup>9</sup>

The team recommends the city work with downtown merchants to hire a structural engineer to identify the best manner to install smaller systems to work effectively with the older structures.

### **Floodproofing**

Within the current code, dry floodproofing is an approved construction technique that may be used with new or substantially improved commercial or industrial structures (nonresidential). Dry floodproofing allows construction of the lowest floor below the base-flood elevation or required freeboard, but the structure must be made watertight to prevent flooding to an elevation that is to the freeboard or higher. This includes meeting standards pursuant to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) for dry floodproofing and guidelines established by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).<sup>8</sup> Routinely, dry floodproofing includes the use of flood shields and verifying the structure is not susceptible to effects associated with buoyancy and hydrostatic pressures. If an older commercial or industrial structure is substantially damaged, there is potential to meet elevation requirements through dry floodproofing.

### **Stormwater**

The team received pictures and information regarding the repetitive flooding along Austin and Magnolia Streets. The team also witnessed the tidal influence within the stormwater drains when a high tide pushed into the system up to the edge of streets along Austin and Magnolia Streets. During the visit, strong onshore winds added to the push of the tide.

Current regulations only require drainage for three- or five-year storm events. The flooding issue is compounded with little

or no (on-site or public) stormwater retention or detention. A meeting with the city's engineer and city staff revealed the following issues with drainage in the downtown:

- Low-grade elevations with little slope within a closed sub-basin
- Restricted and constrained conveyance
- Debris within the stormwater drains
- Impervious cover with little on-site or public drainage retention of rainfall or basin stormwater drainage

The downtown drainage issues have an adverse impact to the area's merchants and property owners, including:

- Closing Austin Street and parts of the Heritage District to foot traffic, automobile traffic, and commerce
- Closing merchants' shops
- Flooding merchants' shops
- Establishing an unsafe environment during and after flood events

Downtown Rockport is consistently vulnerable. While regulations will assist in minimizing flooding into structures in the future, existing buildings, especially along Austin Street, remain vulnerable to flooding due to an inadequate stormwater system. Proper stormwater drainage mitigation is critical to maintain the economic vitality of downtown.



Flooding occurs on Austin Street during heavy rain events and high tides due to inadequate stormwater drainage. Photos courtesy a Rockport resident

There are short- and longer-term mitigation solutions, but further research beyond the scope of this study is required to verify the validity and functionality of the mitigation techniques recommended in this report.

#### **Erosion and natural beneficial functions**

Management of the coastal area is a technique to mitigate losses, costs, and human suffering caused by flooding through protecting the natural and beneficial functions of floodplains. It reduces effects from erosion and storm tides. It also reduces degradation to water quality and maintenance around stormwater discharge areas. The coastal area and the natural habitat it provides are important to Rockport's nature-based tourism.

TAMU's work on updating the city's comprehensive plan identifies goals, objectives, and actions specifically associated with mitigating coastal erosion, stormwater control, conservation, and protection of natural resources. This level of concern and establishment of actions through the city and supported by the county are also illustrated within the *Aransas County Multi-Jurisdictional Floodplain Management Plan* and through listed projects within the LTRP.

#### **Lifelines**

Public infrastructure has been restored in Rockport, and the city, including the downtown, is open for business. However, constraints and impediments still exist for the Heritage District. This will affect how the community recovers following future

## **Stormwater**

### **Potential Mitigation for the Short Term**

The configuration of the individual lots and the current stormwater system regulations create impediments to short-term solutions. Mitigation techniques will also not address tidal events where water from the bay traverses the drainage system and also overtops the bank. Tides that overtop the banks will fill the lowest areas first, which includes Austin and Magnolia Streets. However, there are remedies that may assist with smaller rainfall events. Potential mitigation techniques are:

1. Continue participation with the *Aransas County Multi-Jurisdictional Floodplain Management Plan* and participation with the NFIP Community Rating System (CRS). The city has identified structures and areas that have significant repetitive flood losses. This is also performed with the city's participation with the NFIP CRS. The city's work has identified areas that may benefit through potential grants and other programs from conducting projects such as mitigation reconstruction, elevations, floodproofing, and acquisitions. Such projects will assist in having structures removed from repetitive flooding due to flooding events at or less than the one percent flood event. Projects may improve the community's CRS rating, which assists in reducing the cost of federal flood insurance within the community. Although this is identified as short-term mitigation, there are longer-term considerations that the city may examine to identify potential areas of acquisition. A strategy would include targeting individual properties and potentially many properties within the area (an area-wide study to determine the benefit cost).
2. Create rain gardens and bioswales within both the higher and the lowest areas of Austin and Magnolia Streets. Rain gardens and bioswales capture rainfall and stormwater runoff to reduce the volume and accumulation of stormwater. They also filter water and help water quality. They can be integrated on public property. The city should also encourage private property owners to incorporate green infrastructure where possible.
3. Examine the two conveyance pipes to the bay in this area using a camera system to verify pipes (following Hurricane Harvey) remain fully functional. If any segments are not fully functional, the city could request a study to determine the feasibility of bringing the system into full performance. At present, the system is constrained by the grade and lack of slope, the still water elevation of the bay that is aggravated by high tides, and the impervious cover of the area.
4. Examine and test areas of the drainage system for the accumulation of silt and sand. Also, verify that the outlet points into the bay are clear and free of growth. If there is accumulation, equipment (such as a vacuum system) is available to clean the drainage system. If there is an accumulation of silt and sand, the use of a city street sweeper may be used periodically to minimize the accumulation of silt and sand between periodic vacuuming of the system.<sup>10</sup>
5. Examine the functionality of backflow prevention devices on the outlet points for the stormwater drains into the bay. City staff reported that this was explored. However, with the Navigation District's current work around the bayfront, this may be a good time to reexamine respective systems. This is noted because of the elevated marina area property, tidal flood water will enter into Austin and Magnolia Streets from the drainage system (and from areas to the west and east) before the water overtops the bay-front property. The team witnessed tides entering into the streets that did not breach the banks of the bay.

## Stormwater (continued)

### Potential Mitigation for the Long Term

1. Examining the drainage system prior to future development will provide an understanding of existing conditions. It will also provide insight on whether a new development will potentially constrain or damage the current system. New development requests could be conditioned for floodplain management purposes through the land development approval process to ensure the functionality of conveyance systems with respect to potential added impacts that may be mitigated by an applicant. This would be supported through the city's planning process to ensure the floodplain management program meets the needs of new development within the Special Flood Hazard Area and to ensure that new development does not aggravate the current flooding conditions.
2. Establishing a larger common area to manage stormwater could be achieved with transferable development rights (TDR) by identifying sending and receiving zones. TDR is identified in the recent work conducted by TAMU, but additional studies would be required.
3. After the drainage conveyance is examined, it may indicate that the use of a pump system is needed to ensure the continued effectiveness of the drainage of stormwater into the bay. As stated by city staff, the standard pump system may not be feasible due to the costs and size requirements. This requires further examination. The system that Texas City uses was discussed with city staff. This, as understood, is a screw pump and would require further study by the city, including a potential tour of working pumps.
4. The city has identified structures that have repetitively flooded in the past through their participation with the NFIP CRS. The city's work has identified areas of continuous flooding, which may be acquired through potential grants and other programs. Such acquisitions will remove a structure that floods repeatedly and it provides an opportunity to better the community's CRS rating, which will assist in reducing the cost of federal flood insurance. This is also identified within short-term mitigation, but there are long-term considerations that the city may examine to identify potential areas of acquisition. A strategy would include targeting individual properties and potentially an area-wide approach. A review of repetitive-loss properties will identify potential acquisitions that may be made to assist in reducing flooding within the sub-basin (Austin Street and the Heritage District). If acquisitions are performed using federal funds through the FMA program or the Hazard Mitigation Grant program, any future reuse of the property would be limited to uses such as open space, passive parks, and stormwater drainage. These uses are in synchrony with the projects listed within the LTRP and the *Aransas County Multi-Jurisdictional Floodplain Management Plan*.

disasters, and it may constrain how the area confronts the future in building more resilient structures and infrastructure.

The aging and inadequacies of existing structures, potable water and sewage systems, and drainage systems all present significant challenges. Alternative energy is not currently a feasible alternative for merchants. Current communications systems need an alternative. Consistent with the city's comprehensive plan, considerations for a more resilient future in the long term may include the following with reconstruction and with new development:

- Green infrastructure
- Solar energy and other renewable energy alternatives
- Infrastructure improvements on Austin and Magnolia Streets that account for sea-level rise

- Retrofitting and/or updating drainage, sewage, and electric to accommodate redevelopment and new development
- Green spaces that serve floodplain management
- Increasing standards to recognize the extremity of wind and flood risks

The above considerations cannot all be accomplished solely by the city. Adopted plans do not address the potential of exactions that may be used to meet with infrastructure and floodplain management demands created by new development or by redevelopment due to attrition or another major disaster. The city should consider exactions and how they may be used to implement floodplain management mitigation.

## Erosion and Natural Beneficial Functions

### Potential Mitigation for the Short Term

The city and the Navigation District are looking to further promote and develop a walkway that will share not only new development, but also allow for foot traffic so visitors can experience the bay as well as have access to Austin Street and areas to the east and west. To the east is the existing park, Festival Grounds, the beach, and other attractions. To the west is a small shoreline that is currently experiencing erosion and is uninviting. The team witnessed the inundation of the road continuing further west along the shore during the wind-driven high tide. There are considerations for mitigating erosion that may be in addition to those already discussed with merchants, the community through the planning process, and government entities such as the planning commission and city staff.

1. The boardwalk could be designed to incorporate points of interest with a living shoreline, especially around any existing or future stormwater discharge areas. Strategically placed gathering points should allow access from the boardwalk to Austin Street. A living shoreline may include sea grasses, reefs, and different formations or connections with the bay and the Austin Street area. The shoreline may also serve to provide small habitats and should be designed to assist with stormwater runoff water quality. In addition to illustrating the relationship to natural systems, it will serve as a parallel priority in mitigating erosion for supporting stormwater and future infrastructure along the shore.
2. Bioswales and rain gardens will help control loose soil and sedimentation in downtown Rockport. This is discussed in more detail in the design recommendations of this report. Strategic placement will greatly assist with mitigation and also contribute to the overall aesthetics of Austin Street and the Heritage District.
3. Market Street ends at Water Street, which is also the entry to the Navigation District's seawall. The seawall helps protect the Navigation District's property, including the marina. Riprap is in place to prevent erosion. Although this is not very inviting, many visitors still come to enjoy views of the bay. The area needs protection due to a drainage outfall. This is another good area for a living shoreline, as discussed above. A natural area that filters stormwater runoff and acts as an erosion control system could also serve as an observation area to view the water, experience sunrises, and enjoy wildlife. A launch for kayaks and canoes may also be possible.

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## Resilient and Successful Economic Development

### Rockport's Opportunities

There is no shortage of community pride in Rockport, its downtown, the Heritage District and the Rockport Fulton Aransas County coast. Rockportians also want things that all communities desire—health and safety, access to good jobs, quality places to live and raise a family, opportunities to recreate and appreciate nature, and access to amenities that serve basic needs and are authentic and unique to the character of the community.

Rockport has already done much to put the pieces of their community back together following Hurricane Harvey. There has been major progress in the physical recovery of the city and the Austin Street corridor. The city is working with businesses and other civic organizations to get the critical tourism industry back online. The city is also using Harvey's lessons to harden public facilities and iconic cultural venues and is capitalizing on these public investments to create momentum for additional private investment in the future.

However, the threat of future storms and a recognition of this community's dependence on tourism revenues should compel leaders to assess whether doing things in the same way will serve Rockport in the future.

Rockport is facing many barriers to its future success. Hurricane recovery efforts have stretched local government staffing and financial resources to the brink, making it difficult for them to maintain basic services while still trying to address critical community infrastructure needs. There have been short-term but significant decreases in tax revenues needed to fund these urgent community infrastructure repairs. Because of damage to commercial and residential structures, many residents and employees were forced to leave the area. Some have been unable to return due to housing shortages. Priorities compete with one another and there is insufficient capital to meet the needs.

To thrive, grow, and prepare adequately for the economic and environmental challenges that Rockport will face in the future requires a strong regional commitment and shared vision for its economic future. This will not occur without intentional and purposeful changes to how Rockport coordinates, plans, manages, and supports its local economy going forward.

#### *Every community needs a heart*

A thriving downtown is the heart of any community. Downtowns are important to cities and regions because they anchor the surrounding development patterns, they provide opportunity for the critical mass that is essential for efficient use of public resources, and they provide an identity for communities that can be shared by all. Downtowns are natural gathering places for community and culture.

While the focus of this study was the Austin Street corridor and Heritage District, economically it is impossible to separate the success of the downtown from the success of the greater Rockport region. A strong downtown will support and amplify the economic engine of the greater community. A strong

regional economy is necessary for the downtown to thrive and sustain local businesses and community spaces year-round.

### Major Challenges

Hurricane Harvey brought the Rockport community together in many ways, but it also broke down essential communication networks, created leadership fatigue, and led to instances of communication without compassion. Improved communication and compassionate leadership are two overarching needs that impact all other issues and must be consistently applied for this community to have success. This means the quality and frequency of communication across agencies and with stakeholders is essential to the success of other strategies.

In addition to the issue of compassionate, inclusive communication, there are five major threats to the future success of Rockport that must be addressed for the community to grow and thrive in the future.

- **Economic Vulnerability.** There is a lack of economic diversity and sufficient base employment.
- **Community Buy-In.** Institutional partners and the business community lack a shared vision of an economic future.
- **Prioritization of Economic Development.** There is a lack of a comprehensive and proactive economic development function resulting in a lack of resources and capacity to support essential business development needs.
- **Structural Imbalances.** There are cyclical economic imbalances in workforce, housing, and land-use policy that undermine future growth and recovery.
- **Increasing/Repetitive Environmental Vulnerability.** There are ongoing threats from future flooding and storms.

### Potential Strategies

Outlined below are potential strategies that address the five major economic resiliency threats identified above. Without sufficient population density and a strategic, thriving, and competitive local economy to provide customers, and access to capital needed by downtown businesses, the Austin Street corridor will not reach its potential.

To ensure the focus of this report remains on the study area, sections pertaining to regional or citywide threats will be identified as such, but where appropriate will include a description of specific factors needed for successful economic growth and stability within the Heritage District and any sub-strategies specific to the district.

Additionally, throughout this section, strategies will be identified as either short term or long term. Short term is defined as strategies that should be undertaken and/or completed within a two- to three-year horizon and long term as strategies that may develop and/or be completed within a 10- to 15-year horizon.

### **Resiliency Threat #1: Economic Vulnerability**

Rockport's economy lacks the diversity and critical mass to consistently support the needs of permanent residents for high-quality jobs and housing. This structural economic deficit combined with the community's constant vulnerability to tropical storms and repetitive flooding undermines its ability to attract and retain businesses, support a viable local small business community, and fulfill its vision to be a family-friendly oasis of coastal living and engagement with nature's bounty in beautiful southeast Texas.

Rockport is highly reliant upon tourism dollars as a source of revenue. Many local businesses depend on visitors to maintain employment and sales, making their success extremely vulnerable to seasonality, fluctuations in the national economy, and oceanic weather and environmental factors which are becoming increasingly unpredictable and volatile.<sup>11</sup> Based on estimates from the Aransas County Assessor, the county is projected to experience a 25 to 30 percent decrease in revenue in 2019 due to loss of property and tourism-related business operations. The Chamber of Commerce estimates that \$100 million annually, or \$275,000 daily, in tourism spending is lost revenue until the community's economy is fully back online.

According to a research team from Penn State in a 2016 article entitled **"What makes one economy more resilient than another?"**<sup>12</sup> "Economies with greater diversity experienced a smaller drop in economic growth/employment due to an exogenous shock," and " [while] both diversity and complexity reduce the impact of an exogenous shock, complex economies are much more likely to experience faster recoveries than economies that were more diverse." Additionally, they found that "[r]egions with more experienced workers and higher levels of self-employment may be more protected from a shock." Exogenous shock is defined as a sudden unexpected threat to a system such as a financial shift or natural disaster.

This research shows that for communities such as the Rockport-Fulton region, which are vulnerable to both financial and environmental shocks, a more diverse and complex economy based around an experienced workforce and locally invested entrepreneurs is the best way to ensure sustainable and rapid recovery from future exogenous shocks.

### ***Regional Short-Term Strategy:***

#### ***Identify target sector strengths***

Identifying key industry sectors such as energy/gas with opportunities for growth and expansion in the region is an important first step in working toward a more diversified and complex economic structure that will provide resiliency to the local economy and workforce. Once target industries are identified, regional partners should work together to increase workforce capacity and business resources for identified industries and ramp up regional and local business attraction efforts capitalizing on proximity to natural resources, access to distribution networks, and access to a quality regional workforce.

### **Resiliency Threat #2: Community Buy-In**

Many of the city's long-term planning documents predate Hurricane Harvey and lack strategies to deal with the disruptive nature of a coastal environment prone to flooding and storm damage. Many residents distrust or reject the idea of future growth and instead seek only to preserve the Rockport of their childhood memories, while others seek a "coastal cool" identity. Some stakeholders feel the downtown district is not a priority relative to other community needs given constraints on local financial resources.

A new strategic vision for the future is needed that has broad community buy-in from taxing jurisdictions, permanent residents of a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds and generational perspectives, and businesses and property owners who are seeking to make investments in the community's future.

It is important for the city and the region to clearly identify its economic priorities and align resources and policy in support of those goals. As an anchor for density and place, the downtown can play an important role in the region's economic development ecosystem.

### ***Regional Short-Term Strategy:***

#### ***Undertake/update comprehensive regional economic development strategic plan and engage community partners***

Rockport needs a road map for future economic development, a plan that represents the shared aspirations of the community for future success. Within the Rockport-Fulton region there are multiple taxing jurisdictions and a multitude of business and community stakeholders who must collectively embrace such a plan for the future. Without a shared vision, resources cannot be used effectively, complex long-range issues will not be addressed, and opportunities for growth and success could be missed. A clear and shared strategic direction for future economic development is necessary to align public policy and financial resources and ensure that the community and region are best positioned to capitalize on future investment and accelerate the disaster recovery process.

The city, county, and the Navigation District all face important resource allocation decisions regarding future investments in public facilities and infrastructure and development of publicly controlled property. These policy decisions will have interconnected fiscal and community development impacts for decades into the future. It is important that they have a coordinated strategy. Maintaining the charm and integrity of the Rockport community is achieved only through intentional and coordinated strategies.

Once a new plan has been developed and embraced, it should be updated regularly. Economic development strategic goals should be updated on a rotating five-year basis to ensure they remain relevant to changing economic factors for each organization and are responsive to market dynamics as development progress is made.

### **Resiliency Threat #3: Prioritization of Economic Development**

Thriving communities need to grow and remain competitive to retain businesses and residents and attract future investment. This requires dedicated staffing and a strategic focus on marketing and competitive positioning for the community. Without a Type A or Type B economic development sales tax and/or organization, Rockport is at a competitive disadvantage compared to other coastal cities.<sup>13</sup>

Efforts to rectify this competitive weakness have been met with a lack of enthusiasm and a resistance from governmental entities to partner and devote the necessary resources. Continuing to ignore the importance of promoting community assets will only serve to put the Rockport region further behind other coastal communities that do have coordinated marketing and strategic planning efforts underway.

### **Regional Short-Term Strategy:**

#### **Embrace and rapidly implement the formation of the Aransas County Economic Alliance**

Appropriately funding and staffing a larger comprehensive economic development organization is a significantly unmet need of the community. A focused regional economic development entity is needed to:

- Attract new businesses, new investment, and new talent to the region
- Increase awareness of the region's assets through proactive marketing
- Provide needed skills and capacity to fulfill the community's shared vision for economic prosperity and manage future growth
- Allow for greater community engagement and collaboration across civic institutions on economic development issues

With support from smaller industry and neighborhood-based agencies such as the Center for the Arts and the Rockport Cultural Arts District, the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce has tried to fill this role. However, their resources are already spread thin. The Aransas County Economic Alliance (ACEA), a proposed regional economic development organization, would be better positioned to undertake this role.

Strategic realignment of existing resources in partnership with the city and other organizations serving needs of the downtown is needed to best use the scarce capacity and resources that do exist. Many resources are already being funneled into the downtown and could be leveraged more effectively to maximize impact and meet critical needs of the Rockport small business community.

### **District Short-Term Strategy:**

#### **Pursue Texas Main Street designation and Implement a Main Street Program**

Although there are several eligibility criteria for acceptance into the program including a demonstrated need and proof of historic significance, it is the understanding of the team that the primary barrier to past applications has been availability of city funding and/or staff to meet the requirement for a full-time Main Street coordinator.

According to information provided by the Texas Main Street Program, an applicant must only "demonstrate ability to fund full time main street coordinator." Although this is generally a city employee, it does not have to be. A potential solution to this dilemma is for the executive director of the Rockport Cultural Arts District (RCAD) to be designated as the Main Street coordinator on behalf of Rockport. Since the position is already funded, there would be little to no fiscal impact on the city's budget.

The larger issue is long-range stability of funding the cultural arts district program. One potential strategy for this would be for the city to reappropriate the \$40,000 in hotel occupancy tax revenues allocated to RCAD for two annual festivals and instead use that funding to support an annual salary for the Main Street coordinator. This would allow RCAD to fundraise for those additional events instead of having the uncertainty of funding their executive director salary this way every year.

Having RCAD administer the program on behalf of the city within downtown would align well with the other efforts they are already taking to promote businesses. The Main Street Program would provide essential technical support, capacity building, and state and national resources that would enhance the effectiveness of the RCAD organization.

The purpose of the Texas Main Street Program is to assist Texas communities in the preservation and revitalization of historic downtowns and commercial neighborhood districts in accordance with the national Main Street Approach. See Appendix B for more information about the Main Street Program as it applies to Rockport.

Specific services available to Rockport after it joins the Main Street Program would include:

- A full range of design services
- Technical consultation with business and property owners and on resources for funding projects
- Strategic planning, program capacity building, and organizational management
- Training for staff and volunteers
- Participation in a Main Street listserv and online resource library for professional development and assistance with downtown issues
- Technical assistance on **resources for funding projects** and furthering economic development in the Main Street district

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### **District Short-Term Strategy:**

#### **Repurpose the Rockport Cultural Arts District organization as a more comprehensive business development entity focused on the needs of the district/downtown**

Although the various stakeholder groups within the district (retailers, restaurateurs, property owners, landlords, art galleries, cultural destinations, etc.) express a strong desire to increase business activity and improve the look and feel of the neighborhood, they lack the expertise and resources to manage a professional business development initiative and coordinate efforts across the different groups.

According to the Urban Land Institute (ULI), there are 10 principles necessary for rebuilding downtown neighborhood retail districts such as the Austin Street corridor.<sup>14</sup>

- *Great Streets Need Great Champions.* Someone to initiate the process, fight to ensure it is done right, and follow through to completion. The champion can be a group or an individual.
- *It Takes Vision.* The vision must be shared and face the tough questions up front, making sure everyone understands the realities of the situation, and setting goals that are attainable.
- *Think Residential.* Successful retail depends on successful residential neighborhoods.
- *Honor the Pedestrian.* The first goal for a neighborhood shopping street should be to satisfy the aspirations and enhance the lifestyles of a neighborhood's residents. And, cautions ULI, don't let traffic engineers rule the streets.
- *Parking is Power.* Recognize that parking needs will usually be less along neighborhood shopping streets than in suburban shopping centers. Set lower parking requirements.
- *Merchandise and Lease Proactively.* To achieve higher sales, rents, and land values, landlords along the street need to band together and work with the public sector to merchandise and lease their street in a coordinated and mutually supportive way.
- *Make it Happen.* Communities should be willing to use both carrots and sticks to convince landowners, developers, and retailers that the revitalization efforts are in their interests.
- *Be Clean, Safe, and Friendly.* If a neighborhood shopping street is clean, safe, and friendly, customers will be drawn to their favorite shops even though the street as a whole may still be in transition.

- *Extend Day Into Night.* Identify, plan for, and tap multiple markets to generate income throughout the day and into the night.
- *Manage for Change.* Rebuilding a neighborhood retail street is a long reinvestment process and market realities will undoubtedly continue to change throughout the ongoing life of the street. One-shot or formulaic projects will fail.

A strong and empowered advocate is needed to advance strategies such as these and undertake the important and proactive work of promoting Austin Street, coordinating business activities, supporting the needs of local merchants, creating experiences that attract visitors and customers, and managing the overall needs of the district as a destination.

RCAD is already starting to undertake many of these business management responsibilities. Broadening their role to take on primary business development responsibilities would help to establish a true district champion and more fully utilize the existing talent within that organization to increase its impact. This type of realignment of responsibilities also frees up capacity for the Chamber and ACAE to focus on their other functions for the county and region.

Were RCAD to take on a broader role, the organization should be renamed. Although culture and arts are clearly an important part of the district identity and should remain so, a new name that reflects an expanded focus on business development and administration of a Main Street Program should be developed. RCAD should continue to support the marketing of arts/culture activities but incorporate the needs of other retail, restaurant, and service businesses. A new identity for the organization could help to clarify this new expanded role and leverage other organizations to coordinate and promote arts-specific activities. RCAD could continue to operate as a conduit for grants and donations, but the organization would contract with the city for its organizational support.

The Rockport Center for the Arts is already well positioned to promote arts and cultural activities within the district and given the loss of state grant funding for RCAD, taking on a primary role to coordinate arts activities within the district could broaden its appeal for fundraising purposes, leverage limited resources, and build consensus within the district to achieve collective goals.

### ***Regional Long-Term Strategy:***

#### ***Enhance efforts to attract new business investment and create essential base jobs for the regional economy***

For the district to succeed, a comprehensive business attraction and retention program is needed for the region. This will help to develop essential base jobs needed to stabilize the region economically against future exogenous shocks and to maintain and grow a healthy tax base necessary to support a high quality of life and positive climate for business.

An effective business development program will need to include a strong business outreach effort, regular surveying of business stakeholders, and coordination with governmental entities to ensure that the customer service needs of the business community are met and prioritized. The ACEA could manage and staff this program on behalf of the county and partner with RCAD to support the effort at the district/Main Street level, thus strategically aligning business development efforts throughout the county and making effective use of resources to meet the needs of the business community.

The Heritage District is a sub-market within the broader Rockport-Fulton economy and would also benefit from the business development efforts of a comprehensive economic development function. Regional businesses and residents would generate net new economic activity and increase discretionary spending for restaurants, venues, and merchants located within the district and the Austin Street corridor. The district provides an attractive location for both business investment and residents seeking to live in or near an attractive, walkable community.

A diagram below shows a realignment of the roles and relationships of existing and proposed entities in supporting economic development activities within the broader county.

### **Potential Organizational Realignment**

#### **Legend**

Existing

Proposed or Unmet



Created by Kerrie Tyndall

### ***Regional Short-Term Strategy:***

#### ***Undertake a strategic workforce recovery plan***

Without a stable tourism workforce, businesses in the downtown and in the local ecotourism industry continue to struggle in their recovery efforts. Without the critical jobs that these businesses and industry create, household incomes for residents suffer, leading to population loss.

Communities across the country that have dealt with similar issues have developed innovative strategies to support workers before, during, and after natural disasters. The Chamber of Commerce has kicked off a campaign to "Build Your Resume at the Beach" hoping to encourage applicants.

The International Economic Development Council (IEDC) published *Recreating Destinations: Rebuilding the Tourism Industry after Disaster* in 2013 to guide economic developers in the recovery of the local tourism industry after a disaster. The publication offers a multitude of strategies including assessment of industry assets and needs, community engagement, workforce assessment, partnership opportunities, and crisis communication planning for the tourism industry. The publication is available exclusively to IEDC members, but the annual membership fee could be as little as \$500 and would provide high-quality research and technical assistance materials that could help the city's tourism industry prepare and respond to future events.<sup>16</sup>

### ***District Long-Term Strategy***

#### ***Undertake proactive land management strategies to foster redevelopment within the district***

A strong, walkable downtown is necessary to compete with other coastal tourist destinations and create a sense of place that motivates new residents to put down roots and invest for the long term. Thriving downtown districts depend on a strong sense of place and need a proactive strategy to coordinate efforts and focus attention on bigger picture redevelopment needs of the district. These strategies are discussed in detail in the "Downtown Design, Vitality, and Resilience" subsection of the "Recommendations" section in this report.

## District/Long-Term Strategy:

### Build from areas of strength—block by block

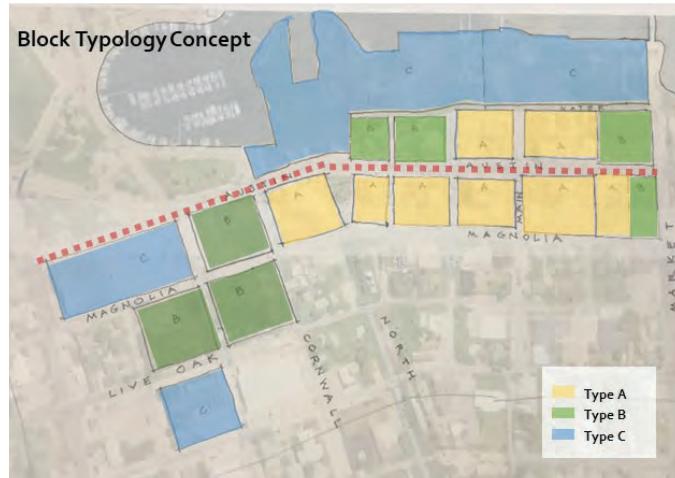
Density and design integrity in the district have been lost. Some blocks remain largely intact, but others are in various stages of blight and/or disinvestment. To rebuild this important urban fabric of the community, multiple strategies will be needed. Existing properties will need support and resources, but other sites may require the use of real estate incentives to encourage redevelopment of land use within the district.

Currently, there seem to be three basic block types remaining in the district: Type A blocks (intact, small scale) that are characterized by one-story neighborhood-oriented retail/commercial spaces closely spaced; Type B blocks (infill needed, small scale) that are characterized by open spaces where previous structures stood and are in proximity to other small-scale commercial sites; and Type C blocks (infill needed, large scale/catalytic opportunity) that are larger scale, often single-owner properties, which have potential for larger scale market-influencing infill development.

The diagram below illustrates the block-type concept more fully but is based only on a cursory knowledge of the development challenges for each block gathered during the team's short visit. Organizations supporting future redevelopment efforts in the district such as the city, RCAD, or others should consider undertaking a comprehensive assessment of current land-use conditions, compiling this information and using it to identify tools and strategies to facilitate the land development process.

Additional land development strategies that the city, ACEA, RCAD, or other economic development stakeholders could undertake include:

- Coordinating responses to future anchor and waterfront development to ensure it is aligned with the strategic direction of stakeholders—think transformational, not transactional
- Encouraging development of supportive residential uses around the district to create critical population massing



The Heritage District can be divided into three block types based on specific characteristics. Source: Created by Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA, and Kerrie Tyndall

- Monitoring development costs/investment potential for infill sites to understand financing deficiencies that may inhibit future development
- Partnering with major property owners to encourage strategic development
- Identifying opportunities for connectivity
- Mapping assets within the district to encourage real estate development—vacant and available property (see examples below)



The map shows vacant versus already improved parcels within the Heritage District (as of July 2019). Map created by Jeewasmi Thapa, AICP, and Kerrie Tyndall using Aransas County Appraiser data on ArcGIS Online



The map shows publicly controlled property within the Heritage District (as of July 2019). Map created by Jeewasmi Thapa, AICP, and Kerrie Tyndall using Aransas County Appraiser data on ArcGIS Online

### District Long-Term Strategy:

#### *Support business clustering and critical mass of related retail establishments within the district*

A critical mass of business operations within the district and an abundant and reliable source of customers is needed for its merchants to achieve and grow sales goals, afford to hire employees, expand business hours and offerings, and to encourage establishment of additional restaurants and retailers within the district.

More activity and population near the waterfront is needed to increase demand for the amenities the community and merchants are seeking. Although an increased seasonal population will help, a healthy permanent market is necessary to ensure year-round economic stability and a district that will also serve the needs and enrichment goals of local residents.

Industry research shows that clustering of related businesses, especially related retail, can be an effective strategy to increase sales and attract new customers. The diagram below shows the current location patterns of a few broad categories of businesses within the district. Already this shows signs of dynamic clustering, which could be reinforced.

Zoning for the Heritage District should concentrate small-scale commercial along limited corridors: Austin Street and Magnolia Street and east-west connectors linking the waterfront to encourage connectivity and walkability.

A dedicated business development entity, as described above, taking advantage of resources and programs through the Texas Main Street Program could encourage future clustering and/or pop-up clustering and foster a level of critical mass needed to spur future investment.



The map shows locations of businesses by classification within the Heritage District. Created in Google Maps by Jeewasmi Thapa, AICP, and Kerrie Tyndall using data from the Rockport Business Directory

### District Short-Term Strategy:

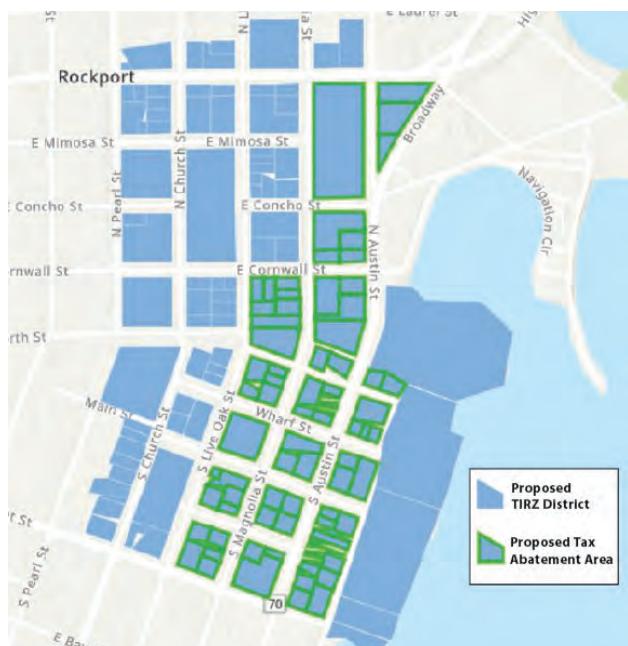
#### *Establish a tax increment reinvestment zone to overlay the district*

Tax increment financing is a tool that local governments can use to publicly finance needed structural improvements and enhanced infrastructure within a defined area. Payments can be made at the discretion of the governing body of the city or county that the governing body finds necessary or convenient to the creation of the zone or to the implementation of the project plans for the zone.

Project costs may also include the cost of economic development programs providing a more long-term stable source of funding for business development needs within the district.

A tax increment reinvestment zone (TIRZ) could be used to encourage new development and growth through funding of critical infrastructure needs within the district and the waterfront. The TIRZ should mirror the boundary of the overall Heritage District including the waterfront to ensure that growth from areas likely to develop sooner can be captured to fund necessary infrastructure.

The TIRZ should be established prior to the completion of the new Center for the Arts and the city/county complex as these investments will lead to increased value for the district. Potential Infrastructure projects that could be funded through TIRZ include bulkheads, boardwalks, pedestrian connections, streetscape enhancements, green infrastructure, greenspace, utility and drainage improvements, and lighting. Larger-scale improvements can be bonded, but this should not be undertaken until catalytic development projects get underway. Smaller projects, however, could be funded on a pay-as-you-go basis as values within the district grow incrementally over time.



Source: Created by Kerrie Tyndall with Aransas County Appraiser Data on ArcGIS Online

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#### *District Short-Term Strategy:*

#### *Provide tax abatement for property owners undertaking flood improvements*

Incorporated cities and counties such as Rockport and Aransas County are allowed under state statute to enter into tax abatement agreements under Chapter 312. A tax abatement zone (focused around the Austin Street corridor) could be established that would be available to property owners within the zone who make certain levels of investment in flood mitigation improvements for their property. The same abatement tool could also be used to support temporary housing by making it available for property owners making rooms, accessory dwelling units and/or other housing units available for rent after fully upgrading to meet the current building code requirements. This could encourage property owners to upgrade facilities in preparation for future storm events.

#### *Resiliency Threat #4: Structural Imbalances*

The shortage of affordable housing, particularly workforce housing, prevents the region from reestablishing its prior workforce, retaining service workers, or attracting anyone other than affluent residents. This workforce shortage leads to less business productivity, lower sales, and the potential for subsequent loss or failure of small businesses. Loss of those businesses leads to further erosion of existing and retained jobs, further loss of residents, and loss of a sustainable customer base. This is a major cyclical issue for Rockport that affects the overall economy and the health of the downtown, which relies heavily on cheap, locally accessible labor.

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#### *District Short-Term Strategy:*

#### *Establish zoning that supports density of a permanent and transient population in proximity to the district*

It is important to maximize density and population in proximity to the downtown. It is an axiom of economic development that "retail follows rooftops." More activity and population near the waterfront and within the district will increase demand and available resources to pay for the amenities the community is seeking. Seasonal population helps create this critical mass, but it is important to have a healthy permanent residential population as well. The current population of Rockport is 8,846 and the population of Fulton is 1,371. The total population including the unincorporated areas of Aransas County is 25,572.

Because land values are very high within the district, only luxury or low-density mixed-use housing may be financially feasible for new residential construction given the current zoning restrictions. This style of housing is misaligned with the desire expressed by many stakeholders to be coastal family friendly. The zoning within the district that would allow for and encourage the development of more hotels, especially on infill lots, would provide needed population and density and a more financially feasible development opportunity for investors provided the lots are large enough to accommodate a larger facility. Basic land economics preclude the development of

small "mom-and-pop" motel operations. Smaller scale hospitality and conversion of properties to short-term rentals could serve as a transitional use as the typology gets more residential to the west of the Heritage District.

Workforce housing could be developed south of Market Street where property values are lower and investors could take advantage of the Opportunity Zone designation to access additional tax benefits for their investment dollars. This is discussed in more detail below. Any new development near the waterfront will be vulnerable to future flooding and storms therefore must be constructed in an environmentally sustainable manner and to the flood mitigation and storm resiliency standards recommended in the "Flood Mitigation and Resiliency" section of this report.

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#### *Regional Short-Term Strategy:*

#### *Rapidly increase supply of temporary housing to stabilize tourism industry*

The city notes the importance of providing housing for the tourist-based workforce and replacing the low-income housing that's been lost, but has no plans in place for making this happen. City officials hope that people will find their way back to Rockport because it is a desirable place to live. Some may, but without serious attention to the need for affordable housing, little will happen. Rockport needs a strategy to rapidly increase the supply of housing units needed for displaced residents and workers.

Below are a few programs that could be explored to more rapidly respond to these needs in the event of future storms.

- Free units for displaced residents/workers*

Airbnb launched a program in 2012 called Open Homes which provides a portal for hosts to list properties that can be used as short-term temporary emergency housing in support of residents displaced through natural disasters. Zoning should allow for short-term rentals, particularly in proximity to the district, but also throughout Rockport. A program such as Open Homes could provide needed short-term housing while workers wait for housing supplies to normalize. Short-term rentals would also provide additional supply of hospitality units until hotel properties are rebuilt or added.

- Habitat for Humanity Core House concept*

Habitat for Humanity responds to natural disasters worldwide and provides solutions to meet emergency housing needs. They have developed "core house," a model small, well-constructed, disaster-resilient structure that can be extended and expanded as a family's circumstances and finances allow. The idea of modifying building standards and zoning to allow for rapid construction of smaller basic units than a parcel could ultimately support to accelerate rebuilding of single-family and/or multifamily units after a large storm could be an effective approach to housing resiliency for the community.<sup>15</sup>

### Regional Long-Term Strategy:

#### Increase supply of permanent workforce and affordable housing.

Prior to Hurricane Harvey, the supply of affordable workforce housing in Rockport was already weak. This has further destabilized the local workforce because there are not enough units affordable for tourism businesses to keep and attract workers. Additional workforce housing is needed to meet Rockport's long-term needs.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 provides a new incentive called Opportunity Zones, which is centered around the deferral of capital gains taxes for private investments in qualified real estate or business investments in low-income areas designated as an Opportunity Zone by governors of each state. The existence of an Opportunity Zone south of the downtown area may provide opportunities for a developer to create more affordable housing options. The Opportunity Zone program could be used to attract needed investment to the area.

- *South of Market Street is located within OZ: Opportunity for Affordable/Workforce Housing*  
Rockport should seek to develop permanent workforce housing south of Market Street capitalizing on its recent Opportunity Zone designation. Bruce Katz of New Localism has developed a [white paper](#) on Opportunity Zones and what cities can do to position themselves better to take advantage of this program.
- *Allowing for increased density by right*  
The current minimum lot size of 7,000 square feet could easily support duplex development by right. The city should consider amending the zoning ordinance in the district to allow for more residential development near the downtown.



Green represents the designated Opportunity Zone census tract in the Rockport area. Source: ArcGIS online public data



The designated Opportunity Zone census tract, represented in green, begins just south of Market Street. Source: ArcGIS Online public data



A co-living space with as many as five bedrooms can help reduce living costs and create affordable housing. Source: Muze in Austin, Texas

To meet the need for more affordable service worker housing, adjustments to the zoning code will also be required. Right now, the smallest unit that can be built is 500 square feet. But zoning that would allow smaller microunits could allow for more units per acre and thus facilitate the development of more affordable units. Although smaller, microunits often include quality amenities, making them an attractive option for singles willing to sacrifice space for quality. Reducing minimum lot sizes of 2,200 square feet per unit could also allow for higher density construction that is more economically efficient for workforce housing developers.

Another emerging trend that could help provide options for working families is co-living. In co-living developments, units with private bedrooms share living areas and property amenities. Amenities can be centered on family needs like childcare, transportation, and family enrichment, allowing residents to share resources and create a sense of community. Zoning that allows for the development of co-living projects could be a way to decrease costs, maximize rents, and provide affordable, values-centered living spaces for working families. The example above shows a space where five individuals occupy a unit that would otherwise only accommodate three.

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### **Resiliency Threat #5—Increasing/Repetitive Environmental Vulnerability**

Due to the current topography of the downtown on the waterfront, it faces ongoing threats from future storms and secondary flooding from heavy rain events. This will only be exacerbated by increases in the frequency of storm events due to climate change. This “storm fatigue” has and will create a “hamster wheel” of ongoing recovery for the city and the downtown. Reoccurring flood and storm damage limits opportunities for the community to stabilize. Strategies to help businesses better prepare and rapidly recover are critical for the Heritage District to ensure future success and sustainability.

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#### ***District Short Term Strategy:***

#### ***Assist businesses to better prepare for future flood events and storms and more rapid recovery through development of educational resources***

Rockport and downtown advocates should help to prepare area businesses for future flooding and storm damage in advance of storms, aiming to minimize business interruption and losses and thus speeding up subsequent recovery. Informational materials should be disseminated to businesses throughout the community to help them prepare financially as well as structurally to weather-related threats.

Below are some examples of resources and guides that could be customized to the needs of Rockport and downtown businesses.

- [21-Point Checklist for Preparing for Natural Disasters](#)
- [Establishing a Disaster Recovery Plan for Small Business](#)
- [Vermont Economic Resiliency Initiative \(See chapter six, “Tools You Can Use”\)](#)

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#### ***Strategy: Establish a rapid clean-up program with the city.***

A major complaint of merchants in the downtown was the city’s responsiveness overall and especially after secondary flood events. The city should work with merchants and the expanded/repurposed RCAD organization to pre-deploy sandbags and barricades and store them on-site or near the district. Businesses can access them quickly before and after storms and flood events until additional resources can be deployed from the city. The city should also set up meetings with RCAD and other stakeholders within the downtown on a quarterly basis to discuss merchant issues and to aid in responsive service delivery to these businesses and property owners.

## Downtown Design, Vitality, and Resiliency

In addition to this section of the report, the team also recommends Rockport property owners, merchants, residents, downtown organizations, and all respective leaders make a real effort to review the 2006 *Downtown Master Plan for Rockport*. It is important for the entire community to be reminded of the “vision” that was developed not so long ago by the community to answer the key question:

*‘What do we want downtown Rockport to be?’*

And to be reminded, as well, of the physical improvements and design character that was proposed for the downtown through that planning effort. Notice especially the design work proposed for improvements to the “public realm”—the streets, parking, sidewalks and other pedestrian spaces, trees and landscaping, parks, important visual and physical connections, and the waterfront.

Without direct influence from the content of the 2006 plan, the team independently observed during the visit to Rockport that many similar urban design and development needs proposed in that plan would significantly benefit downtown. In looking again at that 2006 plan, after spending time in Rockport, the team observed that almost none of the public street recommendations and very few of the private property design recommendations proposed then have been carried out 13 years later. The street, sidewalk, parking, planting, and lighting alterations built along Austin Street did not closely conform to the plan’s design intent. A combination of unsatisfactory material and product choices, questionable dimensions used for design and construction, and significant compromises on plantings, lighting, traffic controls, and pedestrian improvements have all held back the basic intent of the plan’s downtown improvements from being realized. Money was spent and construction was done, but the desirable improvements and benefits for downtown were never substantially achieved.

There are, no doubt, plenty of reasons for this, and constructive—not accusatory—conversation is needed to determine how Rockport can go forward with better results. We all have very human and practical reasons for why best intentions and imagined visions for the future may not get realized. It is always easier to plan and imagine preferred results than to accomplish the next challenging steps: determining priorities, finding the money, working diligently and patiently to get the design and construction details right, and then finally executing the work.

Communities are challenged to develop sound plans, to creatively finance those intended improvements, and then to faithfully execute those plans and achieve the intended results. Leadership and political changes, the usual and unexpected economic surprises, and the disruptions of storms and the damage they cause, all tend toward preventing or diluting desired outcomes. For all these reasons, the plan to make a good plan, and then the commitment to fully realizing the intent and results of that plan, must be broadly based and broadly supported across the community. This takes time, conviction, and persistence.

When a plan is broadly based and supported, it becomes more than a set of good ideas and nice images; it becomes the believable and achievable outcome that all community members, public officials, and property owners expect and intend it to be. Again, because the whole community’s resources and shared commitment are needed to follow through to build the improvements desired by the planning process, such plans and projects *must* be developed with a broad base of support from all parts of the community. Without such a shared commitment to building consensus, very few plans ever get realized.

We believe another comprehensive look at the “public realm” improvements proposed in that 2006 plan will be helpful for Rockport. A reevaluation and update of the community’s downtown development needs could indicate some adjustments are due to keep up with new awareness and notions of Rockport’s desirable future. All good and effective plans grow out of an effective planning process that is built around consensus. Building consensus and support for the plan’s goals is as important as building any of the plan’s specific physical solutions and desired improvements. Indeed, plans created in the absence of that consensus and support, if they ever get built at all, are almost always less effective than they could have been.

## Rockport’s Opportunity for Successful Urban Development

This section provides a vision and guide for improvements to public spaces, infrastructure, and buildings that can leverage private investment and economic revitalization of the Austin Street corridor and downtown Rockport. Austin Street is the heart of the city, a place where the community and visitors come together to work, shop, recreate, and live. Rockport is fortunate to have many assets in the downtown that provide a firm foundation for future investment, including a rich variety of attractive historic and coastal buildings within a walkable downtown core, a thriving arts and cultural district, a spectacular natural setting along the Gulf of Mexico, world-class fishing, birding, and recreation opportunities, and locally owned small businesses.

Creating thriving small and mid-sized towns is, of course, no small task. It requires local leaders, business owners, and community residents to come together to identify their assets, strategically situate themselves in their regional economy, and develop a shared vision and identity to sell to the world. Communities make this vision a reality by creating quality public spaces, prioritizing local entrepreneurship, emphasizing production, and supporting downtown housing.

—*The Reality of Main Street*,  
Brookings Institute 2017

Within the downtown, there are opportunities to build on these assets to enhance public spaces, improve walkability, and encourage investment by the private sector that will enhance the economic and social vitality of downtown.

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A vital and attractive downtown is critical to attract further economic investment in the community. The following recommendations build upon local planning efforts, including the 2006 downtown master plan, Rockport's comprehensive plan, and the work of TAMU's TTC program and Texas Tech University students.

This section explains some urban design concepts, urban redevelopment thinking, and offers a bit of city planning and design vocabulary, which can help everyone visualize and think a bit more deeply and practically about how to improve the downtown, and about how to build upon Rockport's physical development potential. These terms are defined with examples within the text that follows.

Urban design and development guidelines can address the community importance and preferred design direction for both "the public realm"—the publicly owned streets, sidewalks, landscapes, lighting, and other public spaces and features between private properties—as well as privately owned buildings and properties. They can prescribe improvements for public streets and the planning and design of public buildings and other spaces between private properties, as well as for improvements to privately owned buildings and properties. If done well, a development plan and guidelines can clarify and create consensus among community members, public officials, and property owners so that all future projects produce better, more design-sensitive renovations, better new building design choices, and better built results.

Rockport could choose not to take on additional urban design and planning. Existing buildings would eventually be renovated in some fashion, and some new buildings would somehow be built. But it is likely that these new investments would not contribute nearly as much benefit to the city than if guided by a well-conceived new urban design and development plan with design guidelines. With a new plan and guidelines in place, the community will be able to more clearly define—and therefore, expect—a higher standard for all future improvements. Benefits achieved in other communities with guidelines confirm that this approach will contribute much greater value to the city's sense of place, character, residential and commercial activity, real estate values, and tax base.

The most successful urban development plans are based first on an understanding of what makes each community unique and distinctive. They are built around comprehensive and unifying themes that will fit each community's and neighborhood's essential and distinctive characteristics. They are developed through a community-engaged, deliberative process of listening and building community consensus and commitment and led by a well-qualified urban design and development consultant.

These plans incorporate specific streetscape and building facade improvements to ensure that the city's physical fabric—its streets and walkways, public spaces, and building exteriors—will all be designed and built to be more attractive, more comfortable, and usable for people.<sup>17</sup> They address the community value and benefits as well as the environmental, re-

source, and energy savings of retaining existing buildings and preserving historic buildings, while encouraging the design of new construction to incorporate mixed uses where appropriate to fit into existing surroundings visually, and the use of locally appropriate construction materials.

A community-wide commitment to urban development principles and architectural design guidelines is also key to successful urban development. These principles and guidelines may vary from voluntary to mandatory. They are generally adopted and administered collaboratively with project owners by community-based review committees. In some jurisdictions, these guidelines may have the force of law and in others they may be advisory or voluntary. In nearly all cases where communities are succeeding in self-enhancement, increasing livability, and growing development success, the design of community appearances, outdoor spaces, and the exteriors of private properties are not left to the random prospect of chance that private owners, designers, or construction contractors will produce satisfactory appearances on their own. Site planning and building design, function, and as-built appearances of development plans matter greatly to every community's ongoing reinvestment potential, livability, and prosperity.

This report identifies major challenges and opportunities, suggests ways of thinking about Rockport's future, and provides direction and steps toward the important long-term work of creating the plan. That work must begin with and be rooted in fully observing and recognizing Rockport's particularly unique and valuable assets and potential.

## **Recognizing Rockport's Existing Assets and Developing its Potential**

Downtown Rockport is rich in assets with the potential to give the city a distinctive sense of place. The physical pieces needed for great success are all in place or beginning to appear at this time. The biggest question we have as planners and urban designers is whether the Rockport community will take the planning and design challenges seriously enough to step up to the quality of thinking, organizing, and constructive communications work necessary to assure the best possible design and development outcome.

The path to an even better future for Rockport depends first on fully recognizing all the physical advantages the community has to work with. The team thinks Rockport is already special and has the key pieces nearly in place to secure its future as an outstanding and vital downtown, uniquely positioned at the seaside.

Beyond this fundamental recognition, the next step to that better future is also key: taking adequate time to properly plan and working with the right design expertise to devise the right development strategies and the best design of physical solutions that will combine effectively to make the most of Rockport's assets. To ensure the most successful results, it is critical that Rockport take the time to be selective in planning its future, to appreciate the difference between real estate

development and actual town planning that will produce the most appropriate development, to identify the right expertise, and choose the right solutions. The best approach to planning will, first, be based in effective and creative community engagement. When moving from planning to implementation, it will also be critical to find the right fit for urban development expertise, which should be well suited to Rockport's scale, character, and needs.

Although Rockport has, and has survived, many challenges, it remains incredibly enriched by its fundamental assets of location, geography, and history. All of these contribute significantly to Rockport's unique urban-seaside sense of place and offer excellent opportunities to maximize its urban development potential because of its Heritage and Cultural Arts Districts and their many activities, its waterfront beach and harbor, its natural and recreational opportunities, its ample and centrally located Festival Grounds, and its many locally owned and operated downtown small businesses.

**What are Rockport's key assets and distinctive characteristics?**  
Visiting any community, we look for the strengths and challenges that local residents, businesses, and institutions must work with. We look for those particulars which tend to produce each community's intangible or "experiential" atmosphere, as well as for the physical characteristics that produce the tangible or physical "sense of place."

The following are key to discovering what particular strengths, challenges, features, and opportunities could lead to a better future:

- What special aspects of place seem to make Rockport's Austin Street corridor "distinctive?"
- What key features seem to combine and contribute to the particular "characteristics" of this area?
- What then are Rockport's most significant "distinctive characteristics" that define the Water-Austin-Magnolia Streets area?

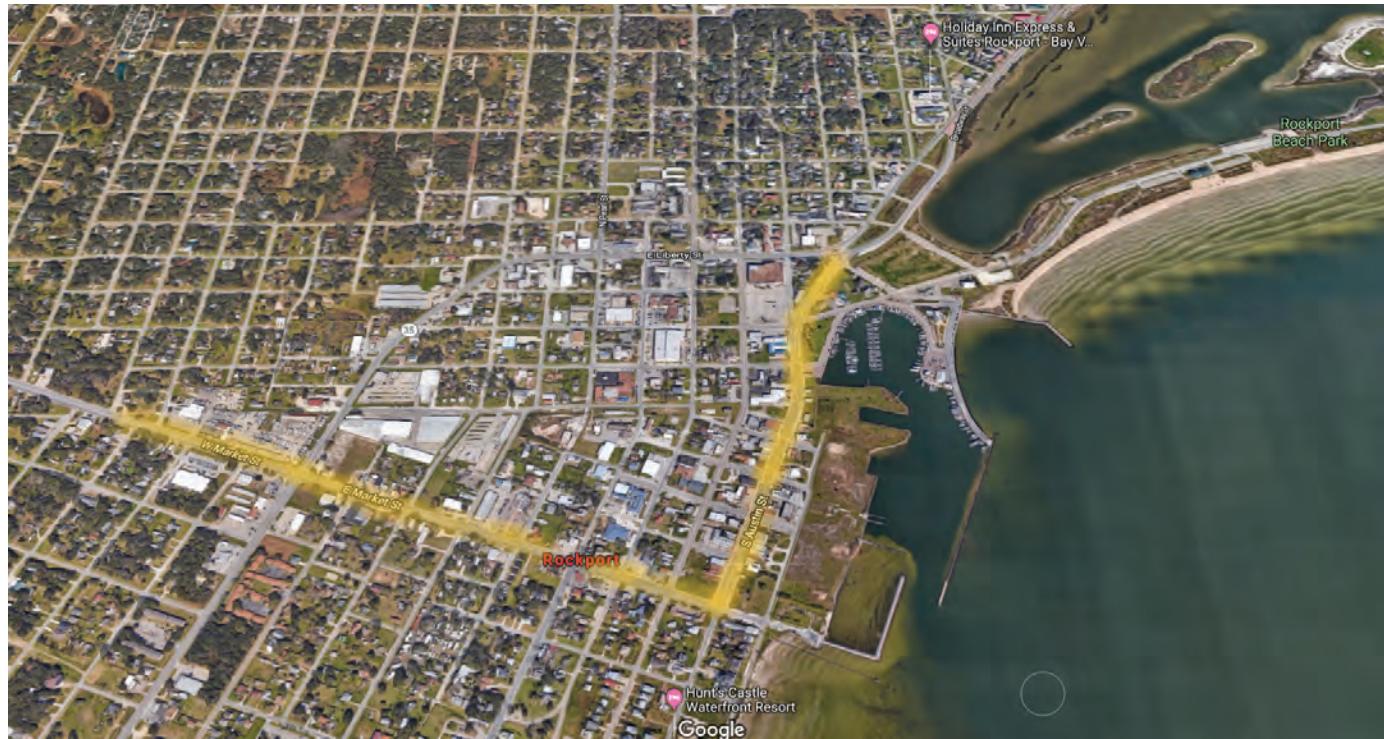
***How can we enlarge and build upon these characteristics?***

Once we have identified these "assets" and "distinctive characteristics," our next question is: How can we work with and build upon these assets and characteristics to help Rockport develop an even greater "experiential" significance as well as a stronger physical sense of place?

**Connecting Assets and Places:  
Creating Linkages and Gathering Spaces**

Noting these "distinctive characteristics" which make Rockport a place with special potential, we also strive to understand how the physical place is organized; how its parts and districts are—or might be—linked and connected, and how these connections might be strengthened to make the community an even more vibrant physical place and a richer, more meaningful experience for residents, visitors, business owners, and workers.

The Water-Austin-Magnolia downtown district encompasses a great array of assets and distinctive characteristics. To maximize the district's urban development potential, all these need to be emphasized, and all could be much more effectively linked together. This linkage of assets and placemaking



Market Street feeds traffic onto Austin Street and the downtown commercial core. Google Earth, modified by Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA



Austin Street is the historic heart of Rockport that holds and connects many existing and planned community assets. Photo courtesy Rockport Cultural Arts District

can greatly strengthen Rockport's central area as the dominant community focal point and core. This will substantially increase downtown's significance.

**Finding and identifying the heart of Rockport:  
Market and Austin Streets form Rockport's axis of arrival,  
a 'causeway' into the core**

Heading toward the waterfront from the local arterials and the Route 35 expressway/bypass, Market Street forms a sort of "causeway" across open, low-lying, or undeveloped land, leading and delivering people directly to the much more densely developed heart of downtown. Terminating just a block from the waterfront, Market Street effectively delivers traffic directly to the commercial portion of Austin Street. With a left turn onto Austin, the roughly one-mile stretch of "downtown Rockport"—the Water-Austin-Magnolia Street commercial corridor—begins.

**Austin Street: Rockport's 'strand'**

Stretching to the northeast along the waterfront edge, Austin Street combines the energy of new and changing shops and businesses with the city's oldest surviving buildings. It also leads to the waterfront, festival grounds, beach, harbor, and related marine amenities. This one-mile stretch both forms and defines the heart of the Rockport Heritage and Cultural Arts Districts and thus captures the experience of being in the historic heart of Rockport. With some physical design reinforcement, this "historic heart of Rockport" experience could be greatly strengthened. Most major amenities and assets align along this mile of the Austin Street corridor. Even more focal point destinations and facilities are about to be concentrated in the area through newly planned urban development that will include relocated centralized government services, an expanded center for arts and culture, and new waterfront development.



Many examples may provide inspiration on how to transform Austin Street using as a model Hastings Street in Noosa Heads, Queensland, Australia. Trees, narrowed car lanes, widened sidewalks and pedestrian areas, and rain gardens separating the cars and pedestrians all enhance the public realm. Public street lighting and trees and storefront and building facade lighting can work together to make a main street seem like center stage. Photo courtesy Hastings Street Association



Given all these characteristics, Austin Street in some other communities might have been called the "Strand" or the "Promenade." These urban place terms usually denote a central or edge street, which is sometimes largely pedestrianized and often parallels a waterway or shoreline. To make Austin Street more prominent, there's no need to change its name, but it is important to think of it as more grand, more central, and more significant; as *the* distinctive place to be in Rockport—a place that speaks to us about its prominence, so we know this is the place, and we're really there. Austin Street may not really quite feel "grand, central, and significant" today, but the team suggests thinking of it this way as an aspiration; what we want and believe Austin Street and its surrounding district could become, while working to strengthen it as the heart of Rockport.

With a strengthened focus on the physical development that could occur here, this stretch of Austin Street and its adjacent waterfront could be broadened into an "urban development district," including the two parallel streets, Water and Magnolia, and connecting cross streets. Both Magnolia and Water Streets are much less developed than Austin, with plenty of open land that could accept new construction without displacing older buildings. Rockport's entire downtown area, approximately two blocks wide by eight blocks long, could be reimagined and developed with some urban design guidance, into a much stronger, much grander focal point for experiencing a more developed "Heart of Rockport."

#### ***Street corners could become 'plazas for people'***

Progressing northward along the Austin Street corridor, a sequence of eight cross streets between Market and Liberty offers a network of intersections which have the potential to



*The existing curb extensions on Austin Street are not inviting to people. The right types of trees and landscaping can shape spaces into outdoor rooms. Movable seating and other furnishings help people feel comfortable arranging spaces as they may choose. Small water features can mask vehicle noise and create a focal point. A well-designed assembly of all these components can transform a stretch of pavement into a "plaza for people." Photos by Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA; Page Southerland Page, Inc.; and Hastings Street Association*

become more prominent places, with the infusion of some well-designed urban improvements. These intersections could be designed and developed to create easily walkable points of orientation and gathering along this key stretch of Austin Street. With more landscaping and the design of more people-oriented, comfortable, and interesting features common to popular gathering places, such as shaded paving and seating, street-oriented kiosks, and open-air vending spaces, these intersections could be much more than street corners; they could become "people plazas"—Rockport's outdoor "living rooms." In the newly designed spaces, people would be much more encouraged to gather, and commercial and community events could be staged in one or more of these plazas.

With the addition of substantial shade trees, comfortable, movable seating, well-selected and positioned public art, new decorative paving materials laid in people-scaled patterns, well-designed ornamental and playful water features, attractive lighting, and other amenities of comfort and interest for people, these street corners would become much more popular and useful. These physical improvements would not only add attraction, they would magnify the area's private reinvestment potential: a place where people want to walk and gather is a place where a vendor will soon choose to rent, and a place where a building owner will choose to reinvest, increasing responsible building maintenance, adding higher-quality material upgrades, and recognizing demand for ongoing architectural improvements and building renovations.

Most of these cross streets either terminate at Austin or extend a bit closer to the waterfront. Beyond their traffic functions, these streets also provide an important visual extension—and potential pedestrian connections—from city streets to the wa-



terfront throughout the downtown district. As newly proposed waterfront development occurs, however, both Water and Austin Streets, as well as each of the cross-street intersections (if properly redesigned for new development) could become much more significant places. Given the adjacent waterfront development proposals, it seems very likely that new high-end, multiunit residential buildings could eventually become a dominant building type along Water Street. It will be very important to guide the design of such development with a well-conceived set of urban design guidelines as described above.

#### ***Updating the Downtown Master Plan to create a new Urban Development Plan with design guidelines***

More specifics on street improvements and linkages of spaces to create a network of significant gathering places for people are included within subsections below. Some foundational steps, however, toward connecting places and creating linkages and gathering spaces should include updating the 2006 *Downtown Master Plan* and developing an urban development plan with design guidelines.

#### **Major New Development Opportunities in Downtown Rockport**

Along the waterfront side of Water Street, the Navigation District has created a several-acre parcel of vacant waterfront land, which is now being studied as a commercial development site. Preliminary plans suggest this area will become a mix of waterfront-oriented uses: a new marina, a boardwalk along the water's edge, hotel(s), and residential buildings, shops and related commercial structures. Austin Street and these water-oriented cross-streets could become increasingly prominent and valuable as this waterfront development is realized.

Equally important, plans are also in the works that will locate Rockport's new city hall and Aransas County's new courthouse-administrative complex just a block west of Austin Street on the open tract at Magnolia and Concho Streets. Further, a new Rockport Center for the Arts is proposed to be built right along this main axis of downtown, at the corner of North Street. Between the new Center for the Arts site and the waterfront, another substantial parcel, owned by the Bass brothers, is poised for new waterfront development.

#### ***Transforming and transitioning from a street to a vital downtown district***

With all this potential in mind, the team reenvisioned this stretch of Austin Street along with its intersections as something more than just a singular street. The area focused on and surrounding Austin Street could become the main commercial "strand" (a place or space where roads or pathways meet and crowds gather), with a sequence of (cross-street) gathering places or "plazas" along the way. The strand of streets and spaces would frame and strengthen the waterfront edge of the downtown – defining both an old town and a future seaside place.

The whole district will incorporate civic centers, shopping places, dwellings, recreational activities and facilities, arts and

#### **Recommendations for the Downtown District**

##### *Short-Term Actions*

- Review and reconsider the described "vision" and illustrated "public realm" improvements proposed in the *2006 Downtown Master Plan for Rockport*.
- Establish an Urban Development and Design Guidelines Task Force composed of a broadly representative balance of downtown merchants, property owners, employers, residents, employees, representatives of business and tourism organizations, the Heritage and Cultural Arts Districts, and public planning officials. This task force needs a clear charge to comprehensively review and reconsider the proposed downtown design plans within the *2006 Master Plan*, and to report its views back to the community on the relevance of that plan, and their suggestions for an update focused on downtown.

##### *Longer-Term Actions*

- Establish a qualified coordinating team of community representatives and planning and design advisors, to update the *2006 Downtown Master Plan* by developing a new Urban Development Plan with design guidelines for the Heritage and Cultural Arts Districts.
- Prioritize and create new design and construction plans for "complete streets" on Magnolia, Austin, and Water Streets and connecting cross streets, and design new intersection improvements that will convert these spaces from vacant street corners to "Plazas for People."
- Prioritize and create new design and construction plans for complete streets on Magnolia, Austin, and Water Streets and connecting cross streets, and design new intersection improvements that will convert these spaces from street corners to "Plazas for People."
- Construct street, curbing, and sidewalk alterations to create complete streets and Plazas for People.
- Periodically celebrate and showcase the revitalizing heart of Rockport, broadening the base of support for all improvement actions.

culture, as well as commercial and community activities. Most of these "parts" are already in place now; an urban design and development plan that will link and pull these parts together into a more coherent place would be a powerful overarching step that could redefine and solidify downtown Rockport as an unforgettable place, a vital downtown right at the seaside, practically unlike any other.

#### ***Rockport's SA&PA 'Greenway': Connecting Residential Areas and the Historic Heart of Downtown***

Where Austin Street bends northward, skirting the harbor, the shift from one historical street grid orientation to another has created a widened open strip of land between North and Cornwall



*The old railroad right-of-way is well positioned to serve as a pathway to Austin Street and the waterfront. Sketch by Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA, and Google Earth aerial modified by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP*

Streets. One of Rockport's most interesting remaining historical-architectural artifacts survives there—the old San Antonio and Port Aransas (SA&PA) Railroad right-of-way and the old wooden freight terminal. A complex of train station structures existed on the site between the 1860s and the 1940s, for passenger rail service to Rockport; freight service continued until 1985.<sup>18</sup> Although just a fragment of the old freight terminal remains in downtown Rockport, it is visually unique and architecturally significant. Largely intact on the exterior, it is quite attractive even as it stands, and could be significantly enhanced. It has potential to become something more with the right approach to reinvestment. Just a short block off of Austin Street, the open V-shaped strip of land and its freight station have high visibility and inherent prominence, positioned in the former railroad right-of-way, and pointing directly toward the waterfront, the future Center for the Arts site, and the future waterfront development site.

#### *A trace of Rockport's history remaining on the landscape*

While much of Rockport's older architecture has not survived, the old railroad right-of-way is one trace on the landscape that remains. The fact that the freight station also survives adds great significance and the position of the land within the heart of downtown suggests a potential role of prominence in the future. The right-of-way extends westward beyond downtown into Rockport's western and southern districts, but it remains to be determined how much land of the old right-of-way remains open. It may someday become available for acquisition or long-term lease for use as a recreational amenity.

An aerial study of street configuration and Rockport's history reveals that the old railroad line extended to the waterfront in the still vacant strip of land between the harbor and the site of the new Center for the Arts terminating at the water where a large mooring slot remains today. The slot was



*The old railroad right-of-way, including the historic terminal building, could serve as a new greenway that connects downtown with residential areas of Rockport. Map by Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA, and bike path visualization by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA*

probably the site of a marine terminal or pier where goods were transferred between ships and train cars on extended rail sidings lining the pier. Today, the alignment suggests Rockport may have an opportunity to create a significant new public use space on the land at the waterfront terminus. The site could become an activity, recreational, and commercial use space as well as an important focal point for a new greenway or rail-trail park. Sunrise in late May and early June falls nearly in line with this waterfront mooring slot and the railroad right-of-way. A special public space, "Sunrise Plaza," might someday be created right at that point where the sun rises near the harbor, aligning with the terminus of the greenway.

#### *The social and economic value of better connectivity between residents and the historic heart of Rockport*

Some merchants wonder whether locals care about supporting the downtown because it seems they tend not to visit, shop, go to restaurants, and attend civic activities there. In turn, some residents feel downtown merchants tend to cater mainly to visitors. We also observed some data suggesting that residents may not be able to find affordable housing or commercial attractions near downtown.

A public-use greenway following the trace of the old rail line could provide a very appealing link to the heart of downtown for locals. People who prefer to live in more remote neighborhoods, whether because of personal preference or for reasons of affordability, may choose to use a greenway as an alternative route to downtown for daily biking and walking to work. Providing residents an affordable,

convenient means of accessing the heart of Rockport could also help bring locals and merchants into closer contact. With some well-designed heritage-oriented maps and interpretative display panels placed along the greenway, locals and visitors alike could find an improved, landscaped, and attractive historical greenway at the heart of downtown. This would be a great new way to experience Rockport, and to learn about its maritime-railroad industrial heritage, its geography, natural environment, wildlife habitats, and landscapes.

#### **A New Network of Green Spaces— Taking Advantage of Scattered Open Parcels**

Downtown Rockport's streets as presently built were designed for vehicle traffic, so they seem excessively wide for pedestrians while the sidewalks in some areas seem inadequate. In many places, sidewalks were never built, so even a pedestrian who might choose to experience downtown without moving and parking a car all along the way would in many cases be walking in the street or crossing over private properties.

The community-wide greenway described above could link more people and parts of the region so they could more easily reach the heart of Rockport. Within the downtown district, however, a network of smaller "pocket parks" could provide a thread or pathway of natural greenery, shade, and user facilities. Small parcels are currently available across the downtown, which could be developed into this type of linked urban green space. With a coherent strategy for acquisition and design, these parcels might become an appealing network of useful green community spaces. Here, visitors, residents, and downtown workers could spend lunchtime outdoors, enjoying the environment, walking pets, taking part in community gardening, and allowing children to play in public spaces.

#### **Recommendations for the Greenway**

##### *Short Term:*

- Prepare a preliminary greenway concept plan based on the necessary research for property acquisition and/or easements over private properties, as necessary to assemble a continuous strip of land along the former right-of-way.
- Identify and recruit community enthusiasts who might help promote the concept and work with the city to determine how best to create the greenway.

##### *Longer Term:*

- Identify available parcels and begin a program of parcel and easement acquisition to build the greenway.
- Construct and landscape portions of the greenway and eventually link them all together.
- Design and install maps and historically oriented interpretive panels to explain the rail line's role in Rockport's history and development and its natural and recreational features.

#### **Recommendations for Pocket Parks**

##### *Short Term:*

- Identify available parcels and begin a program of acquisition of parcels and connecting easements where contiguous parcels can't be acquired.
- Develop a program of pocket park uses, activities, functional, landscaping, and facility requirements to guide a design agenda.
- Design a possible network of pocket parks" along with an attractive and consistent system of fixtures, furnishings, wayfinding graphics, and lighting.

##### *Longer Term:*

- Design and construct land improvements and install facilities to create pocket parks.
- Add new parks as acquisition opportunities arise.
- Update graphics so users can find new parks.



Miniparks can vary in size from 200 square feet (the size of a house porch) to a few acres of land. Some small footprints can be built on land that may remain privately owned with permission and easements on private properties. Larger parcels might also remain privately owned or might become public property. Many different features can be assembled to make a minipark where people will want to spend a few minutes for lunch or as part of their walks or bike rides. Substantial shade in the Texas climate is vital; informal seating among substantial trees and landscaping makes even a fragmentary parcel seem like a special place. Map (at top) by Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA; photos by Maggie Lin, Ilene Jacobs, and Jerry Peek

## Understanding and Valuing Rockport's Heritage and Architectural Character: Past, Present, and Future

Rockport has a long and interesting history: from early settlements, fishing, seafood, and shipbuilding industries and the cattle industry to the arrival of the railroad in the late 19th century and waves of Victorian-era seaside visitors and grand hotels, to today's more specialized forms of tourism and commerce like ecotourism, women's fishing tournaments, and more.

The community rightly sees the value in promoting Rockport's heritage in all planning and urban development decisions. Yet very little of Rockport's historical physical history remains present. Architecturally, not very much has survived. Coastal Texas has some of the most difficult climate for older buildings, with constant exposure to high wind-driven water, high humidity, torrential rains, and flooding. The harsh environment makes the actual surviving historic structures all the rarer and deserving of special status and special consideration in planning and development decision making.

There is frustration at the city level with the current Heritage Overlay Ordinance and its administration. While there may have been broad support for the ordinance at the time of its adoption among the community and elected officials, that no longer remains the case. See Appendix C for a more detailed discussion of the Ordinance.

The team encourages ongoing appreciation and reverence for Rockport's history and heritage, along with continuing research and special care for Rockport's fragmentary remains. When work is proposed on genuinely historic buildings, preservation review and standards should continue to be reasonably applied. Equally important, Rockport should recognize that for most people who own "not-so-historic" buildings, and for those who want to build new where no historic buildings exist, the protection and future treatment of those "not-so-historic" buildings and new buildings need not be determined by the preservation standards that would apply to the town's truly historic architecture and other urban fabric.

## Valuing Rockport's New Architecture and Building Renovations to Create a Future Heritage

Along with historic preservation for Rockport's truly historic buildings and structures, the community rightly seeks to encourage high-quality architectural design for renovations

and new construction. However, in most of Rockport, very little historic architecture remains, so reliance on a high-standard preservation approach has limited value for guiding the overall improvement and new construction needs of most properties and the community as a whole.



Twelve historic structures remain in downtown Rockport, including the Fulton-Bruhl House, the Smith Hoope's House, the Sorenson Stair building (now Estelle Stair Gallery), the Richard Henry Wood House, the Woman's Club of Aransas County building, and the Moore House. Photos by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA; Ryan Scherzinger, AICP; and the Rockport Cultural Arts District

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To achieve better non-historic property design and construction results, a series of downtown design guidelines should be developed and adopted. Texas law enables the establishment and enforcement of historic preservation standards only within state-designated historic districts. Although Rockport refers to an area of the downtown as the "Heritage District," this was never authorized as historic by state designation.

#### *Voluntary design guidelines*

Voluntary design guidelines can be developed and administered, but if they are to be effective, they must be properly defined in delineated areas and must be developed in concert with community engagement and strong support of private property owners. They must also be administered by a qualified and community-representative review committee, supported by a well-qualified design advisor who can review and advise the review committee on fairly and effectively evaluating proposals.

There are many examples of design guidelines and review board structures, some voluntary, some supported by municipal or state laws. Some examples include:

- Annapolis, Maryland—[\*\*Historic District Design Manual, 2011\*\*](#)
- Charleston, South Carolina—[\*\*Design Review Board\*\*](#)
- Ocean City, Maryland—[\*\*Downtown Design Guidelines, 2003\*\*](#)
- Pensacola, Florida—[\*\*Urban Design Standards and Guidelines, 2018\*\*](#)
- Sanibel, Florida—[\*\*Architectural and Site Planning Design Standards, 2008\*\*](#)

These examples contain very applicable content, including a vision statement, goals, objectives, and policies for commercial development, illustrated discussion of historical and contemporary architectural design styles, green and sustainable design, and architectural and site planning design standards and guidelines.

- Santa Barbara, California—[\*\*Urban Design Guidelines, 1999\*\*](#)

This example provides good illustrations and discussion of local design patterns, and architectural and street design principles.

*Noticing Rockport's architectural characteristics and adapting desirable local architectural appearances to new construction*  
In conversations about design appearances appropriate for Rockport's Heritage and Cultural Arts Districts, the community voiced concerns that some new buildings were using metal panels, plastics, prefabricated, and other modern materials in ways bearing no relationship to the district's prevailing appearance, scale, and architectural character. This is a challenging discussion because few examples of Rockport's actual historic architecture survive and some of those older buildings were built in ways using materials that would not be practical today.

Yet there remains a general "sense of place" appearance in the downtown area that can be recognized and might be described as "it looks like Rockport and not like Anywhere, USA." Two words that architectural historians and preservationists use to identify this character are "vernacular" and "indigenous."

- *Vernacular*: Building forms that are primarily concerned with functional needs rather than designed to have public or monumental appearances. Vernacular buildings were typically built by local builders and not based on specific designs by architects.
- *Indigenous*: Structures naturally originating or occurring in a particular place, "local" or "native."

For common discussion, the architectural appearance in Rockport is best captured by the word "coastal."

Examples in Rockport exhibiting the "coastal" character include the tiny wood-framed Bait Houses at the harbor, some of the smaller and older commercial buildings, and a few newer buildings along Austin Street. The simple overall forms are relatively small in scale, just one or two stories high, with building widths, straight walls, and sloping roof lines extending horizontally in planes of not more than about 30 to 40 feet. Some roof lines are slightly ornamental in their shapes with raised pediments, walls, or gabled edges, and some are quite box-like and shed-like. Many have overhanging front porch roofs or entry canopies, which offers some shelter to the immediate outdoor space as well as shade over front pavements, window glass, doorways, and front wall surfaces. Most could be described as modest in form with little or no ornamental design beyond the basic structural needs. Colorful paint schemes are common. This architecture may also be referred to as "working waterfront"—not elegant or grand, just functional with a simplicity of form grown out of a response to climate, built with basic wood framing and straight, right-angled masonry walls in some cases.

Like many older structures, Rockport's vernacular buildings have a verticality and smallness of scale and width that make them distinctive compared with today's typically single-story, wider and more horizontal building forms. Like their overall forms, their window and door openings are also usually more vertical than horizontal. The verticality distinguishes them as "urban." The narrower footprints (shorter widths) and more vertical (taller) forms were more typical of an era when buildings were concentrated in centers and most people walked to their errands carrying their necessities or used horses and wagons. In-store inventories were generally small by today's standards so they could be concentrated in a very human-sized space. Climate control was not mechanical or power-operated, but instead based on structural forms that would overhang or create a screen against undesirable sun, wind, and water. The forms would also admit daylight and ventilation to keep things dry and cool whenever possible.



Most of downtown Rockport's architecture is best described as coastal or working waterfront. Photos by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

#### *The challenges of new construction in Rockport's heritage and cultural arts districts*

When modern buildings are planned today, horizontal distance is viewed very differently than in the past, given the availability of trucks and other power-operated conveyance. Inventory handling and storage today has become at least as costly as the manufactured inventory products themselves, so bigger storerooms are aimed at accommodating more inventory at any given time to reduce repetitive deliveries, storage, and handling. Additional storage space is usually extended horizontally today, rather than vertically on upper or lower stories for reasons of spatial convenience. Structural steel or engineered wood frames can span much greater widths than the conventional wood framing of older buildings, so wider spaces are more common today. This can produce building widths along streets that may seem unending and repetitive. Long walls may also be featureless and monotonous, often devoid of any windows, as today's interiors rely more on electricity than natural daylighting. Walking on the street along such long walls is a boring, taxing experience for people, especially on a hot street without shade.

Design guidelines encouraging attention to architectural design and details, however, can shape a long wall and roof line into smaller-scaled segments to better relate to the smaller scale of older architecture and to add interest and life to building walls that also define street appearances. Urban design guidelines can require or encourage building overhangs, flexible canopies, and walls shaded by landscaped trellises. Strategically placed shade trees and well-landscaped walkways can transform a street where no one will walk today into a place where people will congregate next year.

#### *New development will greatly influence Rockport's long-term appearance*

The new city-county administrative center planned for the tract at Concho and Magnolia Streets and the new Center for the Arts being planned at Austin and North Streets will have a great deal of influence on Rockport's future design appearances. The new marina, hotel(s), and residential build-

ings proposed for the Navigation District land and the Bass brothers' property will have just as much effect on Rockport's overall architectural atmosphere. Protecting the east-west street views to the bay is of particular importance with regard to the new waterfront developments. Furthermore, as new development is designed on the waterfront, it will be critically important to avoid designs that "turn their backs" on the downtown. The buildings will have front facades oriented toward the water, but should also have comparable facades—not blank or utilitarian rear walls—facing the Heritage and Cultural Arts Districts.

As prominent and larger-scale new architecture, ensuring design attention to these structures will be critically important to Rockport's future. Engaging highly skilled urban design-oriented architects will be key to design success, but even high-quality design architects should have direction from host communities if those communities expect their architectural and design concerns to be taken seriously. Truly skilled architects and their developer clients will not object to informative, well-developed guidelines. They will usually appreciate the guidance and make the most of it. A full set of design guidelines would help define the most important aspects of design responsiveness for these large projects, but those guidelines are not yet in place. This presents a real risk for Rockport's urban development future with the major waterfront projects on the horizon.

To provide some sense of what design guidelines might address, below are preliminary thoughts on site planning, development, and architecture that will help Rockport produce preferred results for the projects.

#### **Recommended General Design Guidelines for New Architecture and Development**

These general guidelines are a starting point that should be applied to the planning and design of new projects. Rockport should quickly develop its own design guidelines within an overall urban design and development plan to assure new construction is designed and built to add to (and not detract from) Rockport's coastal character.<sup>19</sup>

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1. Retain and work with historic and existing buildings whenever possible.
  - a. Always avoid demolition of significant historic buildings in planning any new construction.
  - b. Identify new active uses for older buildings so they are continually integrated into the life of the community, can become self-supporting, and are not left as empty, unsustainable structures.
  - c. Carefully place and shape new buildings to strengthen the significance of nearby historic buildings.
  - d. New buildings may incorporate older buildings into their plans, but this should always be done carefully so that old and new complement each other. How new buildings relate and make physical contact with historic buildings is an important consideration deserving careful design and competent design review.
  - e. New construction should be designed to have some compatible physical relationship to nearby older buildings.
  - f. Always avoid attempts to duplicate the character or appearance of older architecture with new construction. The best new buildings are designed to achieve both a compatible relationship with older architecture while not duplicating it, and to present a fresh and innovative architectural appearance that is a product of the new building's own time period in a community's history.
2. Keep east-west cross streets open-ended to maintain views and public access to the bay.
  - a. Avoid placing new construction where it will wall-off the waterfront from the city street grid.
3. Carefully place waterfront buildings to minimize any reduced waterfront access and views from city streets.
  - a. Plan site development to allow for maximum public access at all possible points.
  - b. Design building massing (heights and volumes) to keep as much waterfront visibility and seaside atmosphere as possible connected to city streets.
4. Protect native species of plants and trees where existing, and use natives for new landscaping
  - a. Always retain existing historic trees, especially surviving natives like live oaks whenever possible, and avoid non-native "exotic" landscaping like tall palms and lawns.
  - b. Use native ground covers and other indigenous plants that will resist disease and demand minimal care, water, and maintenance.
5. Locate vehicle access and on-site parking subordinate to the architecture and screened from view.
  - a. Place off-street parking and loading/unloading requirements on-site where they will not dominate the street-level land use or visual appearance of the building.
- b. Locate parking behind buildings, away from street faces, beneath buildings where practical, and out of dominant view from around the site. Use architectural and landscape screening devices to conceal and shade vehicles.
- c. Place vehicle entry points and design any site access drives, if required, to minimize street curb-cuts, conflicts with pedestrian walks, and street frontages. Prioritize pedestrian access over vehicle convenience.
- d. Require dense landscape screening for all on-grade parking to minimize vehicle visibility.
- e. Minimize building footprints by building multiple stories vertically and expanding less horizontally.
- f. Minimize amounts of open land covered with paving and use permeable paving whenever practical.

6. Place buildings right at street frontage or facade lines.
  - a. Place new buildings along established street frontage and aligned with nearby building facade lines.
  - b. Place building sections taller than three or four stories so they are set back from the street facade line and design building massing so that four-story or lower portions will align with the street facade line.
7. Carefully design ground levels and entrances to enrich quality of pedestrian experience along all streets.
  - a. Place main building entrances along street-aligned sidewalks rather than set away from streets in parking areas.
  - b. Design all street-oriented facades with windows wherever possible. Avoid extensive solid or blank walls along streets.
  - c. Design canopies or overhangs that will shade and shelter all entrances.
  - d. Include shade-providing street trees along all streets and also on interiors of sites whenever possible.
8. Carefully design building facades and surfaces and avoid synthetic materials.
  - a. Always include plenty of windows on building facades facing front streets and side streets.
  - b. Design windows architecturally to be protected from excessive solar exposure while positioned to admit as much natural daylight as possible for building interiors.
  - c. Design any long horizontal walls so they will be visually interrupted by creating structural bays or visual subdivisions of wall massing not more than 20 to 30 feet apart to give buildings visible scale and detail.
  - d. Design building envelopes to express multiple floor levels and avoid uninterrupted ground-to-sky massing for buildings taller than two stories to help maintain a sense of human scale.
  - e. Design building massing, roofing, and exterior envelopes to maximize environmental benefits and minimize energy use, including materials and design techniques which may be available to generate on-

site energy for the building, green roofs, stormwater control, and greater on-site water detention.

- f. Organize and design building faces with ratios of solid wall to open or glass area that are similar or related to Rockport's most significant surrounding buildings. Avoid all-glass or all-solid wall appearances.
- g. Generally, an expressed orthogonal (square or rectangular) structural organization is best with windows and doors aligning vertically and horizontally rather than any excessively curvy or shape-shifting forms. However, in this unique seaside setting and especially at the waterfront, some buildings might be appropriately less conventionally shaped.
- h. Select materials for appropriateness with the seaside setting. This could allow many possibilities, but mainly it suggests building surfaces should be planar (flat) and smooth, and colors should be light and reflective. Materials more typical of a high-rise urban center city business district, like glass curtainwalls, mirrored glass, brick, and synthetics (artificial, or made to look like something else) may not be appropriate. Smooth stucco or concrete forms, and possibly ceramic or metal panels with glass, may be more appropriate to the relatively low-rise, small city, seaside setting.

## **Enhancing the Experience: Improving the Streetscape**

Streets can function as both a connection and a social space by establishing a relationship to the places where people live, work, and play. Rockport should welcome the complete streets design philosophy as an approach to enhance current streets in the downtown (and citywide) by enabling safe, convenient, and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and all abilities, regardless of their transportation choice. Complete streets and walkable places provide opportunities to improve public health through increased physical activity, provide a safer environment, help facilitate social interactions to build social and civic capital, support increased economic activity by attracting visitors and future residents, raise property values, and improve the quality of life of residents.

### *Create an active and beautiful public realm in downtown Rockport*

The public realm is comprised of the streets, sidewalks, parks, and trails that connect the buildings, attractions, and districts within downtown. The long-term vision for downtown Rockport is a cohesive public realm that invites residents, downtown employees, and visitors to easily and enjoyably walk among destinations. Streetscape improvements such as sidewalks, lighting, and landscaping can improve walkability in the downtown, signaling to residents and the business community that their experience of the public realm is valued. Parks and open space can also serve community residents in several ways, providing gathering space, recreational opportunities, or access to the natural world.



*A well-designed downtown streetscape can inspire residents and visitors alike. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA*

Nearly every example in this section emphasizes the importance of a well-designed public realm, new parks and public spaces, and lively street life atmosphere. Design interventions in the public realm can inspire residents to stay, tourists to visit, and attract future investment. Downtowns and main streets are where residents gather, have casual interactions, and develop the foundation for a community.

This section recommends that Rockport explore and incorporate the recommendations that follow. Resources and funding opportunities appear in Appendix D.

### *Sidewalks, bike lanes, and pedestrian safety*

Sidewalks are the most fundamental element of the walking network. They provide a dedicated space for pedestrian travel that is safe, comfortable, and accessible. The team recommends improving and expanding sidewalks in downtown Rockport including:

- **Austin Street:** Expand and fill in the gaps of sidewalks north along Austin Street, on the east and west side of the street, fronting Veteran's Park, connecting to the former HEB grocery site, and to the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce.
- **East Concho Street:** Expand sidewalks along both sides of the street to connect to the future city hall and courthouse site (downtown anchor site) to Austin Street.
- **Veterans Memorial Drive/Seabreeze Drive:** Expand and fill in the voids for sidewalks along both sides of the street, connect the Chamber, Veterans Park, the Festival Grounds, and Rockport Beach to Austin Street and downtown.
- **Bike Lanes:** Provide on-street bicycle lanes along Austin Street connecting to the Festival Grounds, Veterans Park, Rockport Beach, and to the Aransas Pathways biking trails.<sup>20</sup>

## Bikes and Pedestrians Recommendations

### Short Term:

Conduct a pedestrian/bicycle plan (scoping study) for Austin Street and downtown Rockport to identify gaps, destinations, alignments, and costs of the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.

### Long Term:

Systematically construct sidewalks and bike lanes along Austin Street, first filling in the gaps and then expanding sidewalks and bike lanes to connect downtown to the beach and city hall/courthouse property.



An existing crosswalk at Austin Street and St. Mary's Street. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

## Traffic calming and intersection improvements

Several modest enhancements can be made throughout the Austin Street corridor to help calm traffic and provide a safer and more appealing pedestrian environment. Maintaining slower motor vehicle speeds and reducing traffic along Austin Street where pedestrian and bicycle traffic is regularly expected can greatly improve comfort and safety for pedestrians and increase business vitality. Crosswalks accommodate pedestrian access and mobility, and if well designed and appropriately placed, they can also increase pedestrian safety and comfort.

To increase accessibility, crosswalks should be paired with curb ramps, detectable warnings, and where appropriate, pedestrian countdown signals.

- Improve crosswalks with visual contrast, public art, and lighting.
- Enhance the identity of Austin Street and improve pedestrian safety. A stamped or brick pattern could be utilized in the intersections and contrasting pattern could be used for the crosswalks. Patterns should reflect stone, stamped concrete, or brick to reflect the character of Rockport.

## Crosswalk Recommendations

### Short Term:

Restripe crosswalk stripes on Austin Street to improve visibility of crosswalk. Add public art murals on crosswalks.

### Long Term:

Implement intersection improvements, including crosswalk treatments, improved bulb-outs, brick pavers/stamped concrete, raised intersections, street trees, and lighting. Intersection and crosswalk improvements should be made in close coordination with new public or private development (i.e. the opening of the Arts Center).<sup>21</sup>

## Street trees and landscaping

Urban forests and street trees provide a wide range of benefits and services to a community, and a robust tree canopy is one of the greatest contributors to a healthy and livable downtown. Street trees can help Rockport with stormwater management,



A stamped brick pattern on a street in Seaside, Florida, provides an example of a type of treatment that could help provide additional character to Austin Street. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA



More live oaks in the downtown area could provide many benefits to the downtown including shade and cooling, noise reduction, and aesthetic character, among others. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

enhance the character of the downtown, provide shade for pedestrians, calm traffic, improve air quality, and reduce noise and light pollution. The emphasis in Rockport should be on using large canopy trees (live oaks) wherever possible, as they make the most visual impact (while allowing for unobstructed sight lines underneath the canopies) compared to the sparsely planted palm trees currently along Austin Street. Live oak trees can provide cooling, offer shade, help to reduce the scale of streets, and provide street definition when architectural frontage is not continuous.

### Street Trees and Landscaping Recommendations

#### *Short Term:*

Develop a Tree Master Plan to use as a framework to help guide tree planting within public and private property. A tree inventory of the community would be a useful project to begin the master plan effort.

#### *Long Term:*

Provide strategic live oak tree plantings along Austin Street, at key intersections, on vacant lots, and along the streetscape to provide shade, visual appeal, and help capture stormwater. Planting live oaks downtown is possible through using urban forestry best practices and close coordination with underground utilities and Rockport's public works department.<sup>22</sup>

### *Improve lighting downtown*

Appropriately scaled street lighting can provide downtown Rockport a safer, more visible, and more inviting environment for Austin Street. This may encourage businesses to keep later evening hours and ensure that visitors know that downtown is "open for business." Pairing pedestrian-scaled street lighting with other improvements, such as street trees, helps alert motorists to the potential presence of pedestrians and bicyclists.

Lighting improves visibility for both pedestrians and motorists, particularly at intersections.

Pedestrian-scaled lighting should be used in areas of high pedestrian activity and lighting placement should not impede pedestrian traffic. Lamp fixtures should be placed at a height of 12-14 feet and poles should be spaced approximately 50-100 feet apart, depending on the intensity of lights. Lamp fixtures should project light downward in order to provide enough illumination of the sidewalk while limiting excess light pollution. Illumination should be warm and moderate rather than dim or glaring, and should provide a balanced coverage of the corridor and surrounding area for comfort and security.



Nighttime lighting along Austin Street sidewalks comes only from storefronts that have installed their own lighting. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

The existing median lighting along Austin Street does not provide enough lighting for pedestrian safety and visibility. Some of the individual property owners and storefronts provide lighting for the sidewalks and buildings in downtown Rockport, but it is not consistent or sufficient.

## Lighting Recommendations

### Short Term:

- Encourage (and financially support/incentivize) businesses to leave porch/facade lights and window display lights on in the evening hours to help enliven the downtown, particularly when restaurants are open and patrons are walking to and from their cars.
- Provide mini-grants to businesses to add building facade and awning lighting to illuminate the sidewalks at night.

### Long Term:

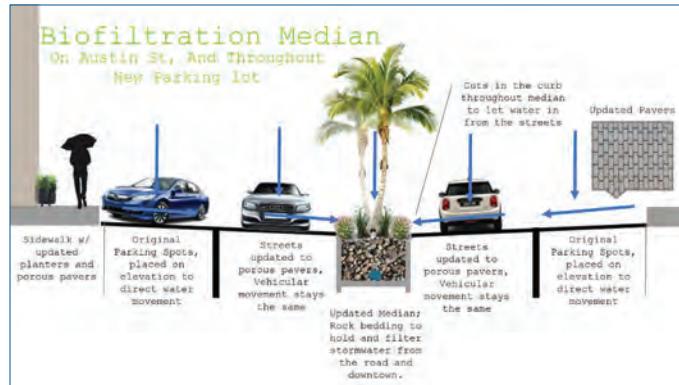
- Incorporate pedestrian scale lighting into future streetscape engineering and design plans along the Austin Street corridor.
- Construct pedestrian scale lighting along the east and west sides of Austin Street along the sidewalks connecting to Veterans Memorial Park and Market Street.

## Resilience and green streets

Green infrastructure (GI) and low-impact development (LID) offer an environmentally friendly approach to managing urban stormwater. If installed in appropriate locations and maintained over time, GI and LID can be a viable supplement or replacement of conventional stormwater drainage infrastructure. GI systems are designed to slow, absorb, and filter stormwater at or near its source, thus decreasing the quantity and improving the quality of urban stormwater runoff. In addition to flood storage capacity and water quality benefits, GI can also help achieve aesthetic, educational, and biodiversity goals, especially when native plants are used. Incorporating a diversity of GI systems into downtown Rockport's streetscape will enable the city to sustainably manage stormwater, improve streetscape aesthetics, create memorable downtown gateways, provide educational opportunities, and calm traffic.

GI infrastructure solutions for Austin Street and the surrounding streets could include: permeable pavement on sidewalks and parking lots; rain gardens, bioswales, and planter boxes in streetscapes and in parking lots; street trees (along with Silva Cells or structural soil) that provide on-site stormwater management; green roofs that can reduce volume and velocity of stormwater runoff; and rain barrels or cisterns to help capture excessive stormwater from roofs.

TAMU's TTC program and the Texas Tech University's graduate research have extensively explored and offered sound recommendations to improve green infrastructure along the Austin Street corridor and throughout downtown Rockport. The students'



A TAMU student's work (top) illustrates proposed improvements along Austin Street. Courtesy the TAMU TTC program. The illustration (bottom) shows a stormwater planter along Main Street in Montpelier, Vermont. Photo courtesy of Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

recommendations include bioswales, stormwater planters, permeable pavement, and other stormwater management best management strategies to improve the resilience of downtown Rockport.

The team recommends building upon TAMU and Texas Tech's recommendations and strategically incorporating green infrastructure in downtown Rockport including:

Explore installing stormwater planters along Austin Street sidewalks and center median. Austin Street has ample room to incorporate green infrastructure best practices like stormwater planters along the sidewalk, center median, and parking areas. The diagonal parking, extremely large bulb-outs, and vacant and undeveloped lots offer opportunities to incorporate stormwater management strategies. Stormwater planters are narrow, flat-bottomed, often rectangular, landscape areas used to treat stormwater runoff. They are a popular choice for downtown environments. Their most distinguishing features are the vertical side walls that create greater storage volume in less space than a swale.

Stormwater planters are easily incorporated into retrofit conditions like Austin Street and in places where space is limited since they are highly versatile in shape and size. Stormwater planters are a good candidate for Austin Street due to flexibility with siting and shape and a small footprint. They can fit between curb cuts, utilities, trees, and street furnishings commonly found in downtowns. Planters can be a very good choice for streets that require on-street parking, but thought-

ful design must accommodate pedestrian circulation. Because planters have no side slopes and are contained by vertical curbs, it is best to use plants that will grow at least as tall as the planter's walls to help soften the edges. Planters can be used in both relatively flat conditions and in steep conditions if they are appropriately terraced. Because they tend to have small footprints, they are best used to control small volumes of water and should not be installed where heavy runoff flows are likely.

### **Green Infrastructure Recommendations**

#### *Short Term:*

Develop a streetscape plan that includes green infrastructure best practices along Austin Street to include stormwater planters, street trees, and other low-impact development strategies to help absorb stormwater and improve downtown resilience.

#### *Long Term:*

During the next repaving or reconstruction of Austin Street, strategically incorporate green infrastructure along the streetscape, including a continuous center median stormwater planter and strategically placed stormwater planters along the sidewalks.

Retrofit existing and build new bulb-outs to include GI and street trees. Austin Street and downtown Rockport currently lack street trees except for a random palm tree or the live oaks in Veterans Park. Street trees can slow stormwater by intercepting rainfall in their leaves and branches and to reduce the volume of stormwater by absorbing water through their root systems. In downtown areas like Austin Street, street trees are often confined to tree pits under the sidewalks, which significantly constrain the amount of space, water, and air available to a tree's root system. Soil compaction is a major threat to tree survival in urban areas. To address the constraints of the downtown environments, street trees should use subsurface structures, such as Silva Cells or structural soils. These subsurface modifications suspend pavement systems over soils, significantly increasing the volume, aeration, and water storage capacity of soils, while also accommodating utilities and traffic loads. Regular watering is required in the first few years following installation. As the tree becomes established, maintenance frequency can be reduced.

Explore incorporating vegetated stormwater swales along Magnolia Street. Magnolia Street has a wide street right-of-way and offers plentiful opportunities to incorporate green stormwater best practices like stormwater swales. Vegetated stormwater swales are long, narrow landscaped depressions with slight longitudinal slopes. They are primarily used to convey stormwater runoff on the land's surface while also providing water quality treatment. As water flows through a vegetated swale, it is slowed by the interaction with plants and soil, allowing sediments to settle out. Pollutants are entrapped

### **Tree Planting Recommendations**

#### *Short Term:*

Develop a Tree Master Plan and GI Plan to use as a framework to help guide tree planting within public and private property. A tree inventory of the community would be a useful project to begin the master plan effort.

#### *Long Term:*

Retrofit bulb-outs and provide strategic live oak tree plantings along Austin Street, at key intersections, on vacant lots, and along the streetscape to provide shade, add visual appeal, and help absorb stormwater.

by vegetation or broken down by microbial action, rendering the water cleaner. Some water is taken up by plants, and some infiltrates through well-drained soil. Vegetated swales are designed to be shallow (12 inches or less), with gently sloping sides (no more than 3:1), to transport runoff only a few inches deep in the bottom of the channel. They can be planted in with any type of vegetation, from mown grass to a diverse palette of groundcovers, grasses, sedges, rushes, shrubs, and trees.

### **Low-Impact Development Recommendations:**

#### *Short Term:*

Develop a streetscape plan that includes green infrastructure best practices along Magnolia Street to include stormwater swales, street trees, and other LID strategies to help absorb stormwater and improve downtown resilience.

#### *Long Term:*

During the next repaving or reconstruction of Magnolia Street, strategically incorporate GI along the streetscape, including a stormwater swale and strategically placed stormwater management practices on surrounding properties.

### **Parking areas and new development**

Incorporate permeable pavement where applicable in the downtown. Permeable pavements are paved surfaces with pores or spaces that allow stormwater to infiltrate. These pavements are composed of unit pavers, concrete, or asphalt that overlay a subsurface layer of crushed stone and gravel. The permeability of subgrade soils is also an important consideration because well-draining soils will have a greater capacity to store and infiltrate stormwater. Routine maintenance to remove sediment and debris that accumulates in the pores and spaces of the permeable pavement is critical to ensure a high level of performance is maintained. Pervious paving is primarily used on parking lots and roadways with low-traffic speeds and volumes, but there are successful examples of pervious asphalt employed on high-traffic streets. Pervious paving should not be used in situations with known soil contamination or high



*Rain gardens in parking lots, like the one shown above in Burlington, Vermont, are effective in helping control stormwater, reducing heat island effect, and adding beauty to an otherwise drab area. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA*

groundwater tables as the stormwater entering the subsurface could migrate pollutants.

Rain gardens are also effective tools in parking lots because they can be designed to manage large amounts of stormwater runoff when sized appropriately. For retrofits, several parking stalls can be converted into one large rain garden or a center median can be added to capture sheet flow from parking areas. The example below shows a center median in a parking lot with a rain garden. Introducing more landscaping and trees within large urban parking lots also keeps asphalt surfaces cooler and helps reduce the urban heat island effect.

### Permeable Pavement Recommendations

#### Short Term:

- Incorporate permeable paving into the design and construction of new development, including the City Hall/ courthouse downtown anchor project, the Rockport Center for Arts, Aquarium, Convention Center, and other new private and public investment.
- Update the city's land and development ordinances and add requirements about green stormwater management best practices in parking lot and site design standards.

#### Long Term:

- During the next repaving or reconstruction of downtown streets, strategically incorporate permeable paving along the streetscape, including in parking areas, sidewalks, and other areas where appropriate.

### Amenities and beautification

Site furnishings and beautification efforts are critical to create a socially and economically vibrant streetscape accommodating a wide range of needs and activities. Providing benches and chairs at key rest areas and viewpoints encourages people of all ages to use the walkways by ensuring that they have a place to rest along the way. Bike racks accommodate bicyclists traveling to their destinations. Trash and recycling receptacles promote cleanliness and sustainability. Accessible and convenient public restrooms are needed in the downtown. Landscaped planters and movable furniture offer aesthetic and placemaking benefits to the sidewalk.

### Amenities and Beautification Recommendations

#### Short Term:

- Remove grass and weeds from curb and sidewalk cracks. This is a relatively simple task with private property and business owner support, but will make a strong visual impact.
- Mobilize local volunteers and community members to start a volunteer clean-up program where volunteers walk through downtown once or twice a week and pick up trash.
- Continue to explore opportunities to build upon Rockport's successful flower program and identify new opportunities for flowerpots and planting beds. Additionally, work with private property owners to encourage them to incorporate window boxes and flowering boxes on their own properties to supplement those within the public realm.
- Remove large concrete planters from the bulb-outs and sidewalks. The large planters (five- to six-feet high) are out of scale, unsightly, and create visual obstacles for safety and security, obstruct storefronts, and impact lighting. Replace large planters with a smaller collection of low (two- to three-foot-high planter pots) with landscaping along sidewalks and bulb-outs.
- Install bicycle racks at strategically placed locations along Austin Street, including key destinations, businesses, and public spaces.

#### Long Term:

- Activate Austin Street daily by providing moveable tables, chairs, and umbrellas. Movable furniture provides maximum flexibility by allowing users to sit alone, in groups, in sun, or in shade. If there are concerns of theft, chairs and tables can be secured with long locked cables that still allow movability within a certain distance. Ideally, the tables and chairs would only be secured overnight.
- Develop and provide public restrooms in any public park improvements, marina and waterfront development, and public buildings downtown. Explore creative mechanisms to develop public restrooms downtown to serve visitors and residents alike.



Many of the businesses along Austin Street have added to the beautification of downtown by decorating their storefronts with landscape planters, benches, and art. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

The streetscape along Austin Street in downtown Rockport displays various landscaping efforts including small and large planters, benches, umbrellas, and other pedestrian amenities. The team recommends building on these landscaping efforts and provide opportunities to be consistent in landscaping, planters, and improving the overall aesthetic.

### **Telling the Story: Marketing Rockport as Part of a Dynamic Region**

#### *Downtown identity and destination*

Rockport has several identity opportunities and challenges. For many years, Rockport has used a variety of graphic messages with no overarching marketing plan. Rockport has much to offer as a place to live and visit. It is an authentic coastal commu-



A local volunteer group called the "Trash Tramps" picks up trash in downtown Montpelier, Vermont. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

nity that is quintessential Texas. Rockport benefits from great organizations and dedicated group of volunteers through the Cultural Arts District, the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce, Heritage District, and all its partners that work hard to ensure the success of the community. New marketing strategies and efforts will further these endeavors.

No better example exists of the strength of the community than the way it came together in the wake of the destruction of Hurricane Harvey. The recovery from the storm showed that the community works together to help its neighbors in trying times and has a resilience that exemplifies what living in a small community is all about.

Currently, an opportunity exists for Rockport to seize control of its downtown image and identity. To do so will take many partners and a cohesive strategy to brand Rockport in an authentic way. The term "community brand" is often difficult to understand. A community brand is much more than a logo, a typeface, or a tagline. It is a promise a place makes with people. Unlike companies that have centralized control of their brand message, communities must have an identity system that is compelling enough to convince residents, stakeholders, and decision makers to buy into this identity. This large task and Rockport has risen to the occasion by establishing a brand for the Rockport-Fulton area led by the Chamber of Commerce that can built upon for downtown Rockport and the Austin Street corridor.

Often overlooked, consistent marketing and branding can go a long way in reinforcing the design of a community. Community branding is an essential part of fostering the sense of place that keeps residents interested in downtown and that makes the community an attractive destination for visitors, potential residents, and investors.

Good community branding can have several positive impacts. It can increase exposure for existing businesses and be a recruitment tool in building a more complementary business mix. It can also boost retail traffic and attract residents to the downtown area. Successful branding can aid downtown and community organizations, increasing both volunteerism and giving, by amplifying the credibility of revitalization efforts. A well-crafted community branding system can promote downtown Rockport and support its vitality.



The current brand and logo for the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce could be the base from which to create additional branded messages. Courtesy Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce

Downtown Rockport should build off the Rockport-Fulton branding campaign and create logos, taglines, and environmental graphics such as wayfinding signs and gateways that are consistent with the larger regional brand to be informative for downtown residents and visitors for downtown. Individual businesses can cultivate their own brand with thoughtful storefronts, well-crafted signs, and inviting places to welcome customers.

### ***Marketing tools and partnerships***

The success of Rockport's downtown doesn't happen by accident. It is the result of a collaborative effort among many partners including city leadership and volunteer boards, the Chamber of Commerce, Cultural Arts District, the Heritage District, the Navigation District, and regional and state entities. The team finds there could be better opportunities to coordi-

### ***Branding Recommendations***

*Short Term: Build upon Rockport-Fulton brand and logo and deploy into downtown Rockport.*

- Expand upon the Rockport-Fulton brand and align into the downtown marketing efforts. Deploy the downtown Rockport brand in coordination and collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce's efforts.
- Incorporate all existing paper collateral maps/marketing efforts online and into Google Earth. The existing Aransas Pathways hard copy map destinations could be added to Google Earth to make destinations easy to find online. Other existing efforts and maps (Chamber, Cultural Arts District, etc.) could be uploaded to Google Earth or other online platforms.
- Develop and design Rockport collateral pieces. The brand identity for the larger area Rockport-Fulton and the downtown are similar but have different and distinct uses. Downtown Rockport should consider reinforcing the regional destination identity system through its own adoption of a new logo for the downtown itself including wayfinding signage, gateways, and web and print material. The distinctive typefaces and color scheme will clearly show that the Rockport-Fulton area is promoting the destination of downtown Rockport. Additional logos for downtown events and campaigns can be developed using the same typefaces and color schemes. Each organization and event can maintain as unique an identity as it wishes, yet remain "in the family."
- Develop and deploy a Downtown Dining and Shopping Guide. Work with downtown merchants, businesses, and the Chamber of Commerce to develop a downtown dining and shopping guide to orient and inform visitors of what the downtown offers.

*Long Term: Implement a wayfinding system and incorporate marketing efforts into streetscape enhancements.*

- Use logo on banners and signage. Signs and banners should be installed throughout the Austin Street corridor to showcase the overall brand and celebrate the community and orient the visitor to the downtown.
- The wayfinding signs are likely to be a multiyear project with many different goals and objectives. Rockport should pursue funding for wayfinding as a critical need to direct visitors to the downtown and to amenities throughout the Austin Street corridor. The pedestrian signs are designed to be casually implemented signs that direct visitors to additional shopping, dining, parks, and gathering spots in downtown Rockport. The different types of gateway and wayfinding signs to deploy into downtown are:
  - **Gateways:** Use identity and wayfinding signage to mark the north and south gateways into the Heritage/Cultural Arts District along Austin Street.
  - **Trailblazers:** Trailblazers are the directing signs leading motorists to the main attractions in the area. These should have between three and four locations per sign and should carry motorists from gateway to parking lot. Colors can be used to distinguish between different districts and can become smaller as the scale and speed of the roadway narrows.
  - **Building Markers:** The markers can be either wall mounted or monument style and denote important landmarks in the downtown district.
  - **Parking Signage:** Identifying parking is important in creating a parking system in downtown. Visitors are more likely to walk a block or two to shop if the signage system leads them directly to a public parking lot and tells them how to proceed. The parking markers can be by themselves or as attachments to trailblazer signs.
  - **Information Kiosk:** The final piece of the signage is the informational kiosk, which serves as the transition point for vehicular traffic to pedestrian traffic. These kiosks should be located at major public parking lots or intersections and should include a map and the shopping and dining guide, along with the walking tour brochures.

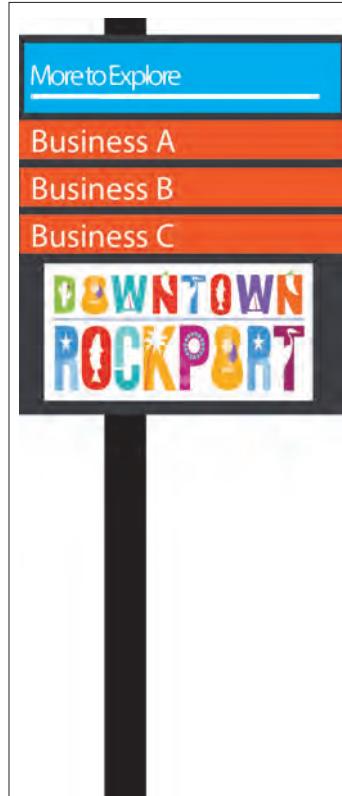
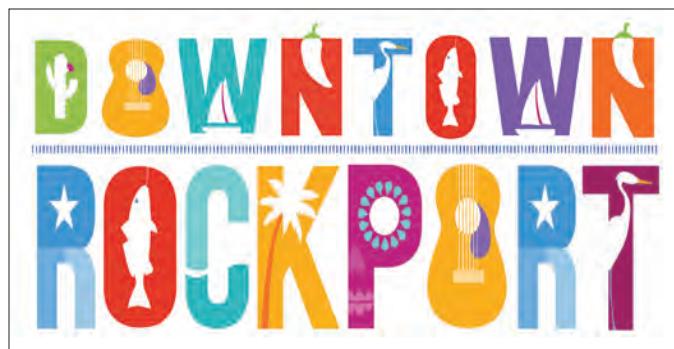
nate and collaborate to better position downtown Rockport for success. Rockport could embrace Texas's Main Street Program to support Austin Street and downtown Rockport. The Cultural Arts District and the city could lead this effort and support obtaining Main Street designation through the Texas Main Street Program. The Texas Main Street Program follows the national Main Street approach.

#### *The 'Main Street' approach*

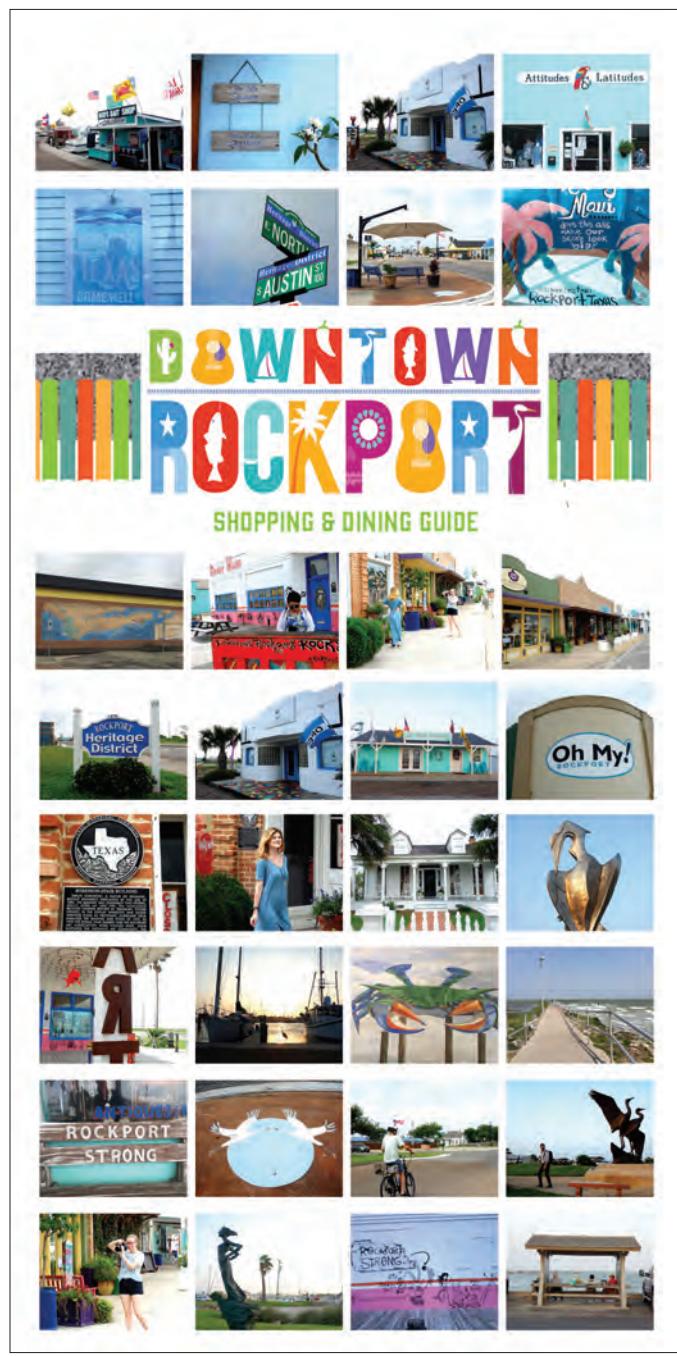
Main Street organizations can be leaders in a community by encouraging and promoting quality design in their

downtown through education and outreach. Education can take many forms and provides a way to engage the public, property owners, investors, and shopkeepers about the importance of design in making a vibrant downtown and village center.

Rockport's future Main Street organization, as already discussed above in the "Resilient and Successful Economic Development" section, could play a pivotal role in community appearance. Main Street committees, working hand in hand with partners, can have a critical influence on quality of downtown improvements working on beautification projects, managing



*This proposed brand and logo for downtown Rockport was created using the Chamber of Commerce's brand with some alterations. Consistent branding includes an array of possibilities for downtown. Created by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA, using the branding alphabet provided by the Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce*





Temporary pop-up eateries on vacant lots, like this one in Brattleboro, Vermont, help activate underused areas downtown. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

facade improvement programs, or commissioning design studies and championing overall plans.<sup>23</sup>

### Celebrating the Arts, Placemaking, and Lighter, Quicker Approaches

Arts, cultural heritage, and creative placemaking are essential to capitalizing on downtown Rockport's distinctive identity. They each play a vital role in supporting community cohesion and well-being by enhancing community pride, fostering economic development, and increasing tourism. Arts and cultural heritage provide a vital economic engine for Rockport and the Texas economy. The arts generated \$5.5 billion in the state's economy last year, and brought in \$343.7 million in state sales tax. Arts, cultural heritage, and creative placemaking can spark downtown revitalization, create jobs, build social capital, and boost tourism.

Rockport is fortunate to have several cultural and art assets in the downtown which provide a firm foundation for future investment, including a thriving arts and cultural scene that consist of the Rockport Center for the Arts, Rockport Cultural Arts District, numerous galleries, museums, cultural events, and creative residents. Bringing the arts more into downtown will support their efforts and further these endeavors.

Creative placemaking offers the explicit recognition that arts and artists, when fully engaged with local stakeholders, are often a catalyst toward sustained community better-

ment and economic growth. Rockport should embrace the creative economy whereby artists, creative entrepreneurs, and creative for-profit and nonprofit businesses produce impact, benefits, and value to the downtown. They achieve this by providing goods, services, and entertainment that enhance the region's economy, generate jobs, income, and tax revenue, and support and sustain a community where people want to live, work, visit, and play.

Placemaking is a way to make downtown Rockport a better place to live and work by transforming underused public spaces into vibrant community places. As a place becomes more desirable and welcoming, property values increase, businesses thrive and vitality returns. Turning a parking lot into a farmers market or food truck rally. Attracting people to a little-used park to gather, play or listen to music. Brightening up a vacant lot or underutilized space. Envisioning how a block can be revitalized or how a parking space can become a parklet. This is placemaking. Placemaking is a community and economic development strategy that capitalizes on local assets to create appealing and unique places.

Downtown Rockport and the Austin Street corridor offers many short- and longer-term opportunities to expand upon and incorporate the arts, the creative economy, and placemaking into downtown through lighter, quicker, and cheaper approaches.<sup>24</sup>

## Placemaking Recommendations

### Short Term:

- Deploy lighter, quicker, and cheaper approaches in downtown Rockport.
  - Paint and incorporate public art in crosswalk and intersections on Austin Street to improve visibility and help calm traffic.
  - Activate vacant buildings, parking lots, and vacant lots with art, events, and food.
  - Pilot temporary improvements and demonstration projects to inform future long-term capital improvements such as temporary bike lanes, pop-up parks, pop-up retail, etc.
  - Create more opportunities for flexible seating options, shade, and community gathering spaces.
- The Rockport Center for the Arts could lead a community public paint day to paint the flower planters, trash cans, and other infrastructure.
- Partner with an elementary school and the Center for the Arts to have local children involved in public art downtown to animate Austin Street to foster connections to downtown for the youth and families.
- Allow and support food trucks, food vendors, and artists and farmers markets to happen downtown on vacant lots or through temporary street closings, and potentially pursue a festival or food crawl event focused on attracting food trucks from around the region.

### Long Term:

- Develop a plan and construct a public park downtown to showcase community art projects that are interactive, engaging, and provide a gathering place downtown.
- Develop a downtown parklet program allowing a certain number of parking spaces downtown to be used for parklets or miniparks. A parklet is an extension of the sidewalk over an on-street parking space that serves as a small public park. Parklets include seating, trees, landscaping, umbrellas, bike parking, and lighting that creates a space for people to gather or relax downtown.
- Explore developing a one percent-for-art-ordinance in Rockport. A “one percent for the arts” program specifies that one percent of eligible city capital improvement project and private development funds be set aside for the commission, purchase, and installation of artworks, including art-related events and creative placemaking in the Cultural Arts District and downtown Rockport.



Lighter, quicker, and cheaper approaches to placemaking can take many shapes and forms and involve all members of the community, including children. Photos by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA, and Ethan Kent

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## Notes

4. This is the definition of "mitigation" provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
5. Hicks, Jaimie H, et al. 2014. Planning for Community Resiliency, A Handbook for Reducing Vulnerability to Disasters. Washington, D.C.: Island Press.
6. The "Grants and Funding Matrix" referred to can be found in Appendix A of the LTRP.
7. The NOAA data is collected from their station in Rockport, Station 8774770. For more information, go to: [https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/slrends/slrends\\_station.shtml?id=8774770](https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/slrends/slrends_station.shtml?id=8774770).
8. For more information, see **Highlights of ASCE 24 Flood Resistant Design and Construction** and FEMA's **Technical Bulletin #3, Non-Residential Floodproofing Requirements and Certifications**.
9. At high tide, waters fill the storm drains in parts of downtown Rockport and keeps stormwater from flowing out to the bay. Heavy rain events that coincide with high tide often cause flooding in properties closest to the bay.
10. The team learned during its visit that the street sweeper is currently not operational; this assumes it will be in the future.
11. In July 2019, multiple news outlets reported that increased freshwater flow into the Gulf of Mexico, which scientist attribute to increased inland rainfall due to warming temperatures, had created a massive toxic algae bloom. This led to the closing of all 21 of Mississippi's beaches, which decimated the area's summer tourist economy.
12. See the article, **"What makes one economy more resilient than another."**
13. The Development Corporation Act of 1979 gives cities the ability to finance new and expanded business enterprises in their local communities through EDCs. For more information on Type A and Type B EDCs, visit the **Texas comptroller website**.
14. Urban Land Institute. 2003. "Ten Principles for Rebuilding Neighborhood Retail." Pp.2, 4, 6, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22.
15. Watch this video for more information on Habitat for Humanity's Core House concept.
16. The white paper is restricted to IEDC members. To access, contact **IEDC**.
17. Usable designs incorporate increased shelter and weather protection in the urban environment, such as sun shading and wind breaks, sustainable, low-maintenance, native plantings that require minimal maintenance over the long term, variable types of paving appropriate to varying uses and conditions, and comprehensive stormwater management.
18. State Historical Marker Number: 4522.
19. See Appendix C regarding current Heritage Overlay Ordinance, which should be retained until the community can work together to frame new guidelines more respectful of coastal character.
20. Rockport may want to consider a bike sharing program to encourage use of bike lanes, decrease motor vehicle traffic, and provide more recreation options. Many different models exist. The city should conduct research to select the appropriate model and company.
21. For more information on raised intersections, see the National Association of City Transportation Official's (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide.
22. The city should consult an arborist or other landscaping professional to understand tree and plant selection that helps reduce the needs for and costs of maintenance.
23. The Main Street Program is also discussed in the section on economic development above and more information on the Texas Main Street Program is included in Appendix B.
24. Also see Appendix D for more on "cheaper, lighter, and quicker approaches" to public improvements. Also, learn about the "Power of 10+," a framework based on the idea that any great place needs to offer at least 10+ things to do, or 10+ reasons to be there.

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## **IMPLEMENTATION**

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Policy Implementation Matrix								
Page #	Actions	What actions must be completed to implement the policy?						
		Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership	Timeframe	Budget/ Budget Source	Status
<b>Hazard Mitigation</b>								
19	Increase the freeboard requirement	X			City of Rockport	Short-Term	\$	In progress
19	Correct inconsistencies and feasibility threshold in the building codes	X			City of Rockport	Short-Term	\$	Not started
19	Work with downtown merchants to hire a structural engineer to identify dry floodproofing system options	X			City of Rockport	Short-Term	\$	Not started
21	For structures and areas with significant repetitive flood losses, conduct projects such as mitigation	X			City of Rockport and Aransas County	Short-Term and Long-Term	\$\$\$ (grant and program funding available)	Areas and structures in city identified but no projects started
21	Create rain gardens and bioswales on Austin and Magnolia Streets	X	X		City of Rockport and private property owners	Short-Term	\$\$	Not started
21	Examine conveyance pipes to the bay for functionality with camera system	X			City of Rockport	Short-Term	\$	Not Started. May consider cost-feasible pump system depending on results.
21	Examine and test drainage system for silt and sand accumulation	X			City of Rockport	Short-Term	\$	Not Started
21	Examine the functionality of backflow prevention devices on the outlet points for the stormwater drains into the bay.	X			City of Rockport	Short-Term	\$	Not Started
22	Include examination of drainage system within the planning process for new developments	X			City of Rockport	Short-Term	\$	Not Started
22	Potential: Use TDR and identify sending and receiving areas to establish large common area for stormwater management	X			City of Rockport	Long-Term	\$\$\$	More studies needed
23	Include living shoreline with new boardwalk development and existing sea walls	X	X		City of Rockport and Navigation District	Short-Term	\$\$\$	Not started
<b>Economic Development: Resiliency Threat #1 – Economic Vulnerability</b>								
25	Identify Target Sector Strengths			X	Option 1: Aransas County Economic Alliance (if created); or Option 2: Chamber of Commerce	Short-Term (Regional)	\$\$	Not started
<b>Economic Development: Resiliency Threat #2 – Community Buy-in</b>								
25	Undertake comprehensive regional economic development strategic plan and engage community partners.			X	Option 1: Aransas County Economic Alliance (if created); or Option 2: Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce with engagement of both cities, county, Navigation District, RCAD, CAC, and community stakeholders	Short-Term (Regional)	\$\$ or \$\$\$	In progress. Needs formal plan.

Policy Implementation Matrix								
Page #	Actions	Implementation Details						Status
	What actions must be completed to implement the policy?	Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership	Timeframe	Budget/ Budget Source	
<b>Economic Development: Resiliency Threat #3 – Prioritization of Economic Development</b>								
26	Embrace and rapidly implement formation of the Aransas County Economic Alliance.			X	City of Rockport and Chamber of Commerce	Short-Term (Regional)	\$\$\$	In progress
26	Pursue Texas Main Street designation and implement a Main Street program.		X	X	City of Rockport	Short-term (District)	\$	Not started
27	Repurpose the Rockport Cultural Arts District organization as a more comprehensive business development entity focused on the needs of the district/downtown.			X	City of Rockport	Short-term (District)	\$	Not started
28	Enhance efforts to attract new business investment and create essential base jobs for the regional economy.			X	Option 1: Aransas County Economic Alliance (if created); or Option 2: Chamber of Commerce	Long-term (Regional)	\$\$ or \$\$\$	In progress
28	Undertake a strategic workforce recovery plan.			X	Option 1: Aransas County Economic Alliance (if created); or Option 2: Chamber of Commerce	Short-term (Regional)	\$\$	Not started
28	Undertake proactive land management strategies to foster redevelopment within the district.		X	X	City of Rockport with engagement from repurposed RCAD and property owners, businesses and residents within the district	Long-term (District)	\$\$\$\$	In progress
29	Build from areas of strength – Block by Block		X	X	City of Rockport with engagement from repurposed RCAD and property owners, businesses and residents within the district	Long-term (District)	\$\$\$\$	Not started
30	Support business clustering and critical mass of related retail establishments within the district.		X	X	Repurposed RCAD/ business development entity for downtown	Long-term (District)	\$	In progress
30	Establish a tax increment reinvestment zone to overlay the district.		X	X	City of Rockport	Short-term (District)	\$\$	Not started
31	Provide tax abatement for property owners undertaking flood improvements.	X		X	City of Rockport or repurposed RCAD/ business development entity for downtown	Short-term (District)	\$\$	Not started

Policy Implementation Matrix								
Page #	Actions	What actions must be completed to implement the policy?						
		Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership	Timeframe	Budget/ Budget Source	Status
<b>Economic Development: Resiliency Threat #4 – Structural Imbalances</b>								
31	Establish zoning that supports density of a permanent and transient population in proximity to the district.		X	X	City of Rockport	Short-term (District)	\$	Not started
31	Rapidly increase supply of temporary housing to stabilize tourism industry.			X	City of Rockport, area residents, and short-term rental property owners/operators	Short-term (Regional)	\$\$	Not started
32	Increase supply of permanent workforce and affordable housing.		X	X	City of Rockport (marketing/supportive incentives/RFPs); and private developers (investment capital, vertical development)	Long-term (Regional)	\$\$\$\$	In Progress
<b>Economic Development: Resiliency Threat #5 – Increasing/Repetitive Environmental Vulnerability</b>								
33	Assist businesses in being better prepared for future flood events and storms and more rapid recovery through development of educational resources.	X		X	Repurposed RCAD/business development entity for downtown	Short-term (District)	\$	Not started
33	Establish a rapid clean-up program throughout the city.	X		X	City of Rockport with assistance from repurposed RCAD/business development entity for downtown	Short-term (District)	\$	Not started
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Active, Interesting and Friendly Downtown</b>								
38	Create new design and construction plans for "Complete Streets" and new intersection improvements to convert street corners to "Plazas for People."		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, and selected urban design consultants	Long-Term	\$\$	Not started
38	Construct street and intersection alterations – Austin, Magnolia, Water and cross-streets.		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, selected greenway/urban design consultants, and construction contractors	Long-Term	\$\$\$\$	Not started
39	Preliminary Greenway Concept Plan – Identify supporters to work with city to develop best plan.		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, and selected greenway/urban design consultants	Short-Term	\$	Not started

Policy Implementation Matrix								
Page #	Actions	What actions must be completed to implement the policy?				Timeframe	Budget/ Budget Source	Status
		Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership	Short Term/ Long Term	How much will it cost to implement the action? (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$, \$\$\$\$) Where will the funding come from?	Is the action not started, in progress, or complete? This column can be used to prepare updates for the community.
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Active, Interesting and Friendly Downtown</b>								
41	Identify parcels, begin land and easement acquisition, and develop Greenway Design Plan.		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, and selected greenway/urban design consultants	Long-Term	\$ - \$\$	Not started
41	Construct and landscape portions, and link together.		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, and selected greenway/urban design consultants	Long-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$	Not started
41	Design and install interpretative panels along Greenway.		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, selected greenway/urban design consultants, and construction contractors	Long-Term	\$\$ - \$\$\$	Not started
52	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove large concrete planters from the bulb-outs and sidewalks. The large planters (5-6' high) are out of scale, unsightly, and create visual obstacles for safety and security, obstruct storefronts, and impact lighting. Replace large planters with a smaller collection of low (2-3' planter pots) with landscaping along sidewalks and bulb-outs</li> <li>Continue to explore opportunities to build upon Rockport's successful flower program and identify new opportunities for flowerpots and planting beds. Additionally, work with private property owners to encourage them to incorporate window boxes and flowering boxes on their own properties to supplement those within the public realm.</li> </ul>		X	X	City of Rockport with support from Cultural Arts District, local merchants, and the Heritage District	Short Term	\$	
52	Develop and provide public restrooms in any public park improvements, marina and waterfront development, and public buildings downtown. Explore creative mechanism to develop public restrooms downtown to serve visitors and residents alike.		X	X	Navigation District and city of Rockport with support from Cultural Arts District, Heritage District, and local merchants	Long Term	\$\$\$	

Policy Implementation Matrix								
Page #	Actions What actions must be completed to implement the policy?	Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership Who is responsible for the action?	Timeframe Short Term/ Long Term	Budget/ Budget Source How much will it cost to implement the action? (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$, \$\$\$\$) Where will the funding come from?	Status Is the action not started, in progress, or complete? This column can be used to prepare updates for the community.
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Active, Interesting and Friendly Downtown (continued)</b>								
49	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage and financially support and/or incentivize businesses to leave porch and facade lights and window display lights on in the evening hours to help enliven the downtown, particularly when restaurants are open, and patrons are walking to and from their cars.</li> <li>Provide mini grants to businesses to add building facade and awning lighting to illuminate the sidewalks at night.</li> </ul>	X	X	City of Rockport with support from the Cultural Arts District, Navigation District and Heritage District	Short Term	\$		
56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deploy lighter, quicker, and cheaper approaches in downtown Rockport.</li> <li>Paint and incorporate public art in crosswalk and intersections on Austin Street to improve visibility and help calm traffic.</li> <li>Activate vacant buildings, parking lots, and vacant lots with art, events, and food.</li> <li>Allow for and support food trucks, food vendors, and artist and farmers market to happen downtown on vacant lots, or through temporary street closings and potentially pursue a festival or food crawl event focused on attracting food trucks from around the region.</li> <li>Pilot temporary improvements and demonstration projects to inform future long-term capital improvements, e.g., temporary bike lanes, pop-up parks, pop-up retail, etc.</li> <li>Create more opportunities for flexible seating options, shade, and community gathering spaces.</li> </ul>	X	X	Cultural Arts District, Rockport Center for the Arts, and city of Rockport with support from local merchants, Heritage District, and Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce	Short Term	\$		
56	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Cultural Arts District and the Center for the Arts could lead a community public paint day to paint the street planters, trash cans, and other infrastructure.</li> <li>Partner with elementary school and the Center for the Arts to get local children involved in public art downtown to animate Austin Street and foster connections to downtown for Rockport youth and families.</li> </ul>	X	X	Cultural Arts District and Rockport Center for the Arts with support from the city of Rockport, Navigation District, Heritage District, and local merchants	Short Term	\$		
56	Explore developing a one percent for the arts ordinance in Rockport. A one percent for the arts program specifies that one percent of eligible city capital improvement project and private development funds be set aside for the commission, purchase, and installation of artworks, including art-related events and creative placemaking in the Cultural Arts District and downtown Rockport.	X	X	City of Rockport with support from Cultural Arts District and Rockport Center for the Arts	Short Term	\$		

Policy Implementation Matrix									
Page #	Actions	What actions must be completed to implement the policy?							
		Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership	Timeframe	Budget/ Budget Source	Status	
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Connected to the Waterfront</b>									
38	Plan, design, and construct street and intersection alterations for Austin, Magnolia, Water and cross-streets with extensions toward the waterfront.		X	X	Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, selected urban design consultants, and selected construction contractors	Long-Term	\$\$\$\$	Not started	
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Compact Development</b>									
46	Implement new pedestrian and parking improvements for streets and intersections.		X	X	Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, and selected urban design consultants		\$\$\$\$	Not started	
39	Create a new greenway.		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, selected urban design consultants, and selected construction contractors		\$\$\$	Not started	
41	Create a new network of "pocket parks."		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, selected urban design consultants, and selected construction contractors.	Short-Term	\$\$\$	Not started	
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Accessible by Walking and Biking</b>									
39	Create a new greenway and network of pocket parks.		X		Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, selected urban design consultants, and selected construction contractors	Short-Term	\$\$\$ -\$\$\$\$	Not started	

Policy Implementation Matrix								
Page #	Actions What actions must be completed to implement the policy?	Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership Who is responsible for the action?	Timeline Short Term/ Long Term	Budget/ Budget Source How much will it cost to implement the action? (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$, \$\$\$\$) Where will the funding come from?	Status Is the action not started, in progress, or complete? This column can be used to prepare updates for the community.
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Accessible by Walking and Biking</b>								
47	Conduct a pedestrian/bicycle plan (scoping study) for Austin Street and downtown Rockport to identify gaps, destinations, alignments, and costs of the bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.		X	X	City of Rockport with support from Cultural Arts District, downtown merchants, Navigation District, Heritage District, and Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce	Short Term	\$ Note: State and federal grants can support bicycle and pedestrian planning and typically is 80% funded by state/federal grants with 20% city match required.	
47	Systematically construct sidewalks and bike lanes along Austin Street by first filling in the gaps and then expanding sidewalks and bike lanes to connect downtown to the beach and City Hall/courthouse property.		X	X	City of Rockport with support from Navigation District	Long Term	\$\$\$\$ Note: State and federal grants can support bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and typically is 80% funded by state/federal grants with 20% city match required.	
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Accessible parking</b>								
27, 46, 50, 54, 56	Implement new pedestrian and parking improvements for streets and intersections.		X	X	Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, and selected urban design consultants		\$\$\$\$	Not started

Policy Implementation Matrix								
Page #	Actions What actions must be completed to implement the policy?	Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership Who is responsible for the action?	Timeframe Short Term/ Long Term	Budget/ Budget Source How much will it cost to implement the action? (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$, \$\$\$\$) Where will the funding come from?	Status Is the action not started, in progress, or complete? This column can be used to prepare updates for the community.
<b>Rockport 2006 Plan Goal: Economically sustainable and in partnership with others (underlined language added by CPAT)</b>								
53	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand upon the Rockport-Fulton brand and align into the downtown marketing efforts. Deploy the Downtown Rockport brand in coordination and collaboration with the Chambers efforts.</li> <li>Develop and Design Rockport Collateral Pieces, including downtown and dining guide, web and print marketing material, and wayfinding signage.</li> </ul>		X	X	City of Rockport and Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce with support from Cultural Arts District, Heritage District, and local merchants	Short Term	\$\$	
53	Implement a wayfinding system and incorporate marketing efforts into streetscape enhancements, including installation of wayfinding signs, banners, gateways, building markers, and information kiosk(s).		X	X	City of Rockport, Navigation District, and Rockport-Fulton Chamber of Commerce with support from the Cultural Arts District, Heritage District, and local merchants	Long Term	\$\$\$	
<b>CPAT Added Downtown Goal: Environmentally Resilient</b>								
50	Develop a streetscape plan that includes green infrastructure best practices along Austin Street, Magnolia Street, and parking areas to include stormwater planters, street trees, and other low-impact development strategies to help absorb stormwater and improve downtown resilience.	X	X		City of Rockport with support from the Cultural Arts District, Aransas County, and other water conservation groups and environmental nonprofits	Short Term	\$	
50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During the next repaving or reconstruction of Austin Street and Magnolia Street, strategically incorporate green infrastructure along the streetscape, including a continuous center median stormwater planter and stormwater planters along the sidewalks.</li> <li>Retrofit bulb-outs and provide strategic live oak tree plantings along Austin Street and Magnolia Street at key intersections, on vacant lots, and along the streetscape to provide shade, visual appeal, and help absorb stormwater.</li> <li>During the next repaving or recon-struction of downtown streets, strategically incorporate permeable paving along the streetscape, including in parking areas, sidewalks, and other areas where appropriate.</li> </ul>				City of Rockport with support from the Cultural Arts District, Aransas County, and other water conservation groups and environmental nonprofits	Long Term	\$\$\$	
50	Update the city's land and development ordinances and add requirements about green stormwater management best practices in parking lot and site design standards.				City of Rockport, planning commission, and city council	Short Term	\$	

## Policy Implementation Matrix

Page #	Actions What actions must be completed to implement the policy?	Addresses flooding	Addresses design and vitality	Addresses economic development	Leadership Who is responsible for the action?		Timeframe Short Term/ Long Term	Budget/ Budget Source How much will it cost to implement the action? (\$, \$\$, \$\$\$, \$\$\$\$) Where will the funding come from?	Status Is the action not started, in progress, or complete? This column can be used to prepare updates for the community.
<b>CPAT Added Downtown Goal: Build Awareness, Buy-in and Build Consensus for Future Downtown Plans, Goals and Actions.</b> (No plan succeeds without this.)									
34	Review, reconsider described "vision" and "public realm" improvements proposed in 2006 master plan.		X	X	City of Rockport, city planning officials, community interest organizations, downtown property owners, and interested residents	Short-Term	\$	Ready to start	
34	Establish urban development and design guidelines task force (short term) with clear charge to review, reconsider, suggest downtown-focused updates to 2006 master plan.		X	X	City of Rockport, city planning officials, and community interest organizations	Short-Term	\$	Not started	
34	Establish new urban development coordinating team (long term) to produce new updated urban development plan with design guidelines.		X	X	Urban development and design guidelines task force, city of Rockport, and city planning officials	Short / Long-Term	\$	Not Started	
34	Complete, promote, adopt, and publish urban development plan with design guidelines.		X	X	Urban development coordinating team, city of Rockport, city planning officials, and selected urban design consultants	Long-Term	\$\$\$\$	Not Started	

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## APPENDICES

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## Appendix A: Rockport's Adopted 2006 Downtown Master Plan and Commentary by the Rockport CPAT

2006 Downtown Master Plan Issue	Commentary by CPAT (2019)
Downtown is now characterized by galleries, specialty stores, and restaurants. It lacks diversity.	Specialized retail is a strong focus for downtown and should be encouraged. While everyday serving retail is requested by residents who say they would come downtown if they could meet more shopping needs, this is not a realistic proposal. First, retail in general is struggling. Second, the everyday retail needs are well met along the 35-business corridor. Tourist-oriented retail is a good thing to have in the downtown and should be nourished. Clustering of related retail uses may help to create critical mass and synergy for business development within the Austin Street corridor. More retail of similar types (i.e., restaurants near other restaurants) offering diverse products encourages visitors to visit more than one establishment. The city should identify a place for food trucks to gather for weekends and special events to further encourage people to walk the few blocks between the Festival Grounds and downtown.
Austin Street and Magnolia Street are underused and could be reconfigured to make them more pedestrian friendly.	True. See design recommendations. Work was done after the 2006 plan was adopted. More remains to be done.
Two one-acre tracts of land at the northwest and northeast corners of Market Street and Austin Street have significant commercial exposures, and they will not be fully used until the waterfront is developed.	True. The price of land in Rockport is based on the assumption of future major waterfront development, which will then raise the price of adjacent property. There is no incentive for property owners to sell now.
The old HEB building at the corner of Magnolia and Austin Streets has been vacant since 2003 and has significant harbor front redevelopment potential.	True. The price of land in Rockport is based on the assumption of future major waterfront development. There is no incentive for property owners to sell now. According to <a href="#">Loopnet</a> , this 3.46-acre site is priced at 2.95 million dollars. A key economic development strategy would be finding ways to capture the incremental growth in property values and reinvest in the Heritage District in the form of public improvements. This should be done early before imminent catalytic development (city/county office building) begins to shift the market.
Buildings are not consistent along Austin Street, creating a sense of raggedness.	True. Given the flooding issues along Austin Street, and the current inability of the city to address them, and the absence of ordinances addressing 100% on-site stormwater management requirements for new development, the lack of infill development can be characterized as a positive outcome. Further, lot sizes are relatively narrow so pedestrians can easily see the next shop or destination and don't necessarily lose momentum.
Because of storm damage, older buildings have been replaced with quickly constructed, nondescript structures. They are poor fits for the area and a return to a cohesive building pattern is needed to change the downtown.	The problem remains and with recent changes in state law, precluding metal buildings is no longer a permitted option. <sup>23</sup> However, requiring elevation to new flooding standards will make it less likely that temporary buildings will be constructed.
Signs that use fluorescent lighting should be excluded.	Appear to be permitted per the standards of the Heritage Overlay. Lighting is desirable, but cold-white, blue-white, and yellow-green lamp colors and glare from exposed lamps do not enhance the downtown experience. Sign appearances can and should be controlled with properly stated technical standards as part of design guidelines for storefronts, streetscapes, and signage..
Art should be a key part of any revitalization plan. Murals can add character to otherwise bland buildings.	Agreed. A well-informed community-based process is needed to select artists and artworks so they will add suitable visual character to the downtown and be made durable for the outdoor environment.
Awnings and sidewalk coverings are popular and, along with potted plants, contribute to the character of downtown structures.	Agreed. However, the scale of some of the pots and the bulb-outs as built is problematic.
The almost total separation of the downtown from the waterfront is a significant issue that must be addressed through the preservation of sightlines	Agreed. This is one of the reasons for preserving elements of the Heritage District Overlay Ordinance.

<b>2006 Downtown Master Plan Recommendations for Austin Street</b>	<b>Commentary by CPAT (2019)</b>
Trees, pavers, and crosswalk can be used to add interest to Austin Street.	Still true. See design recommendations.
The single most significant action that can benefit downtown is the development of waterfront properties. Public space along the waterfront will be a key feature drawing pedestrian traffic to and from the waterfront.	Still true, but in moderation. Pedestrian traffic drawn to the waterfront because of new development may not choose to visit downtown/Austin Street. Also, rents may go up, forcing long term tenants out in favor of shops generating higher revenues. Arts-related uses, which lend so much character to the downtown, may be particularly vulnerable in the long term.
Pedestrian connectivity was to be increased along Pearl Street to the waterfront. Specifically, the plan called for sidewalks 6' wide on both sides of the street, street trees, and brick paving enhancements at intersections.	Sidewalks have been widened to 12 feet on Austin Street. Street trees were not planted nor are intersections enhanced with brick pavers. See design recommendations for less expensive but colorful ideas for enhancing intersections. Sidewalk paving in the remainder of the Heritage District remains limited.
A continuous waterfront boardwalk is to be provided.	The Navigation District appears to be including this in their project on the water side of their development. Grant funds are being sought by the district. Issues of access to the boardwalk and links to downtown remain to be addressed.
Austin Street to be converted from four lanes to one lane in each direction with 60-degree angle parking. Put parking islands mid-block and at intersections. Parking space 18'. Travel lane 14'. Median to remain 4'.	Angle parking was added. The width of the travel lane was reduced and the narrow median remains at 4'. However, the angle parking stalls are very long, allowing for other uses of the right-of-way. See design recommendations-related other uses. Design enhancements with better paving materials, landscape plantings, and green infrastructure should be incorporated into roadway, curb, and sidewalk changes.
<b>2006 Downtown Master Plan Implementation Strategy</b>	<b>Commentary by CPAT (2019)</b>
While the city's role is to bring people together, primary responsibility for plan implementation lies with the private sector and individual property owners. The city can use zoning or reimbursement incentives to encourage implementation. The city should implement guidelines for new buildings and existing structures. Resident and property owner participation is needed.	Still true. However, the 2006 report envisioned a "go it alone" approach for the downtown area in terms of working with other entities and considering other interests. More effective economic development, the kind that can be sustained over time, will require the city to work in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, the county, and others focused on economic resiliency.

## Notes

23. Citation to State Law. HB 2439. Signed by the governor June 14, 2019; effective September 1, 2019.

## Appendix B: Information on the Texas Main Street Program

The National Main Street Center has developed the Main Street Four Point Approach as a grassroots approach to downtown revitalization that provides a framework to build community pride, foster investment in downtown, and encourage partnerships for ongoing success. The Main Street Four Point Approach uses the following:

- *Organization* involves creating a strong foundation for a sustainable revitalization effort, including cultivating partnerships, community involvement, and resources for the district.
- *Economic Vitality* focuses on capital, incentives, and other economic and financial tools to assist new and existing businesses, catalyze property development, and create a supportive environment for entrepreneurs and innovators that drive local economies.
- *Design* supports a community's transformation by enhancing the physical and visual assets that set the commercial district apart.
- *Promotion* positions the downtown or commercial district as the center of the community and hub of economic activity, while creating a positive image that showcases a community's unique characteristics.

### Benefits of Main Street Designation

- A full range of design services from a professionally trained Texas Main Street Program staff that includes licensed architects to help downtown property owners undertake effective rehabilitation, restoration, and adaptive reuse projects.
- Additional, as-needed technical consultation with business and property owners on a variety of topics.
- Strategic planning, program capacity building, and organizational management for the Main Street organization.
- Individualized, on-site training for Main Street managers, boards, and other Main Street participants.
- Two statewide, Main Street-specific trainings/professional development opportunities annually for any volunteers or staff of participant communities, plus an annual downtown revitalization conference in partnerships with the [Texas Downtown Association](#).
- Product development, such as design reports for specific properties, strategic planning reports to help drive the Plan of Work, and other technical reports based upon the community's individual needs.
- Comprehensive city planning and economic development technical assistance through Main Street and its affiliated [Town Square Initiative](#).
- Participation in a Main Street listserv and online resource library for professional development and assistance with downtown issues.

- Technical assistance on [resources for funding projects](#) and furthering economic development in the Main Street district
- Comprehensive resource reports for new programs to drive a multiyear plan of action
- Access for nonentitlement communities to a Main Street-specific pool of improvement funds through the [Texas Capital Fund](#) of the Texas Department of Agriculture

### Application Options

Rockport would be considered a "small city applicant" based on the following definition:

- "Small City Applicant: A Main Street city with population of 50,000 people or fewer based on the most recent decennial census."

Rockport could also pursue designation as a "Texas Main Street Affiliate," which is defined as:

- "Texas Main Street Affiliate: A city or commercial neighborhood district that has been accepted by the Commission to participate in the program as an affiliate with fewer responsibilities, benefits, and services than a Texas Main Street City. The designation of affiliates is subject to available Commission resources and may be limited based on population or other factors."

### Estimated Annual Cost to Rockport for Membership

Main Street Small City annual fee	\$535
Training Fee (If required, 1st year only)	\$500
TOTAL	\$1,035, (\$535 annually thereafter)

Additional costs for the program could include travel and programming expenses, but since RCAD is already fundraising for similar expenses, these could easily be absorbed into the organization's existing budget or added with minimum additional fundraising and/or applications for scholarships through the Texas Main Street Program.

### Additional Resources

- [Texas Main Street Program Fact Sheet](#)
- [Presentation slides: "Becoming a Designated Main Street community & establishing a local program"](#)
- [Becoming a Main Street: The Benefits and Application Process](#)

## Appendix C: Heritage District Overlay Ordinance

During an advance visit by the team leader and APA staff in January 2019, in a meeting with city officials, CPAT was advised that some city officials disliked the Heritage Overlay Ordinance for a number of reasons. The reasons most cited were that the ordinance:

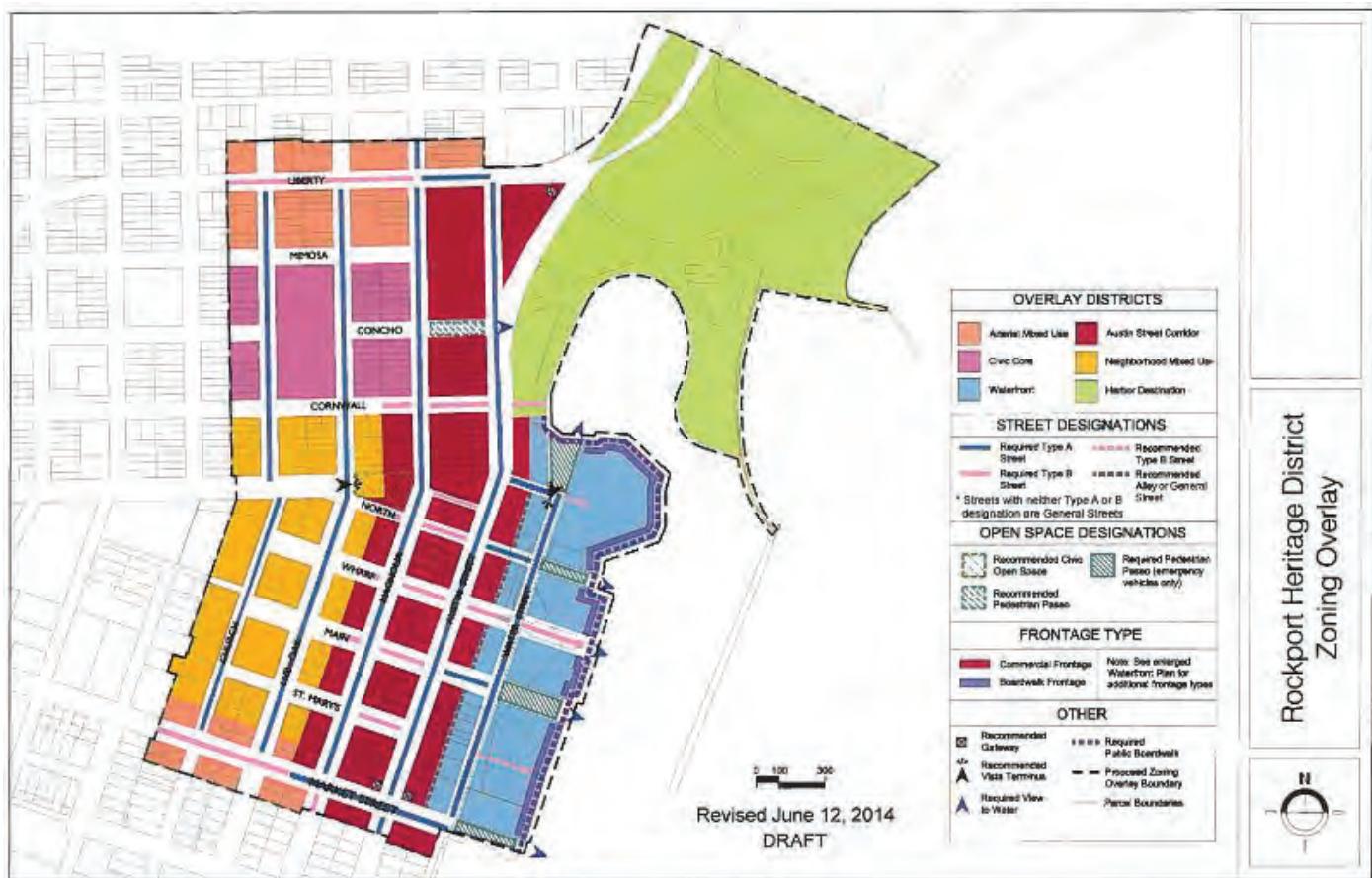
- Is difficult for staff to administer. Mistakes have been made leading to frustration among the members of the Heritage District Advisory Board.
- Is even more difficult for the community to understand.
- Exhibits a lack of design options for “coastal living” themed architecture already found in the area.
- Poses difficulty in securing variances when requested. This is especially significant given the detailed nature of the ordinance requirements. For example, all buildings fronting on an “A” street shall have, on the ground floor transparent storefront windows covering no less than 60 percent of the facade area.<sup>24</sup> A church building sought a variance which was ultimately approved by the city council.

Team members heard from some community members who value the ordinance and feel it is an important tool in preserving and enhancing the character of the Heritage Overlay District. As a result of the issues identified by city staff, the Rockport Heritage District Board was dissolved and the city council is performing all the duties of the board and hearing all requests for variances and exceptions to the Heritage Overlay Ordinance.

Some provisions of the Heritage District Overlay Zone have already been rendered moot by recent action of the Texas State Legislature. HB 2439<sup>25</sup> which has been signed by the governor and became effective September 1, 2019, provides that:

...governmental entity may not adopt ... an ordinance...that prohibits or limits the use... of a building...material... if that material is approved for use in a national model code.

What is particularly significant about the loss of ability to control building materials is that one of the main reasons for the original adoption of the ordinance was the desire of the community to limit the construction of metal buildings. However, certain elements of the ordinance, if retained, would limit



Source: [City of Rockport website](http://City of Rockport website)

the use of metal buildings. This includes requirements related to massing, rhythm, and roof pitch. It should also be noted that the limitations on the use of materials does not apply to Historic Structures or to prevent windstorm or hail damage if that is a requirement for the building. But in general, prohibitions on building materials are no longer valid.

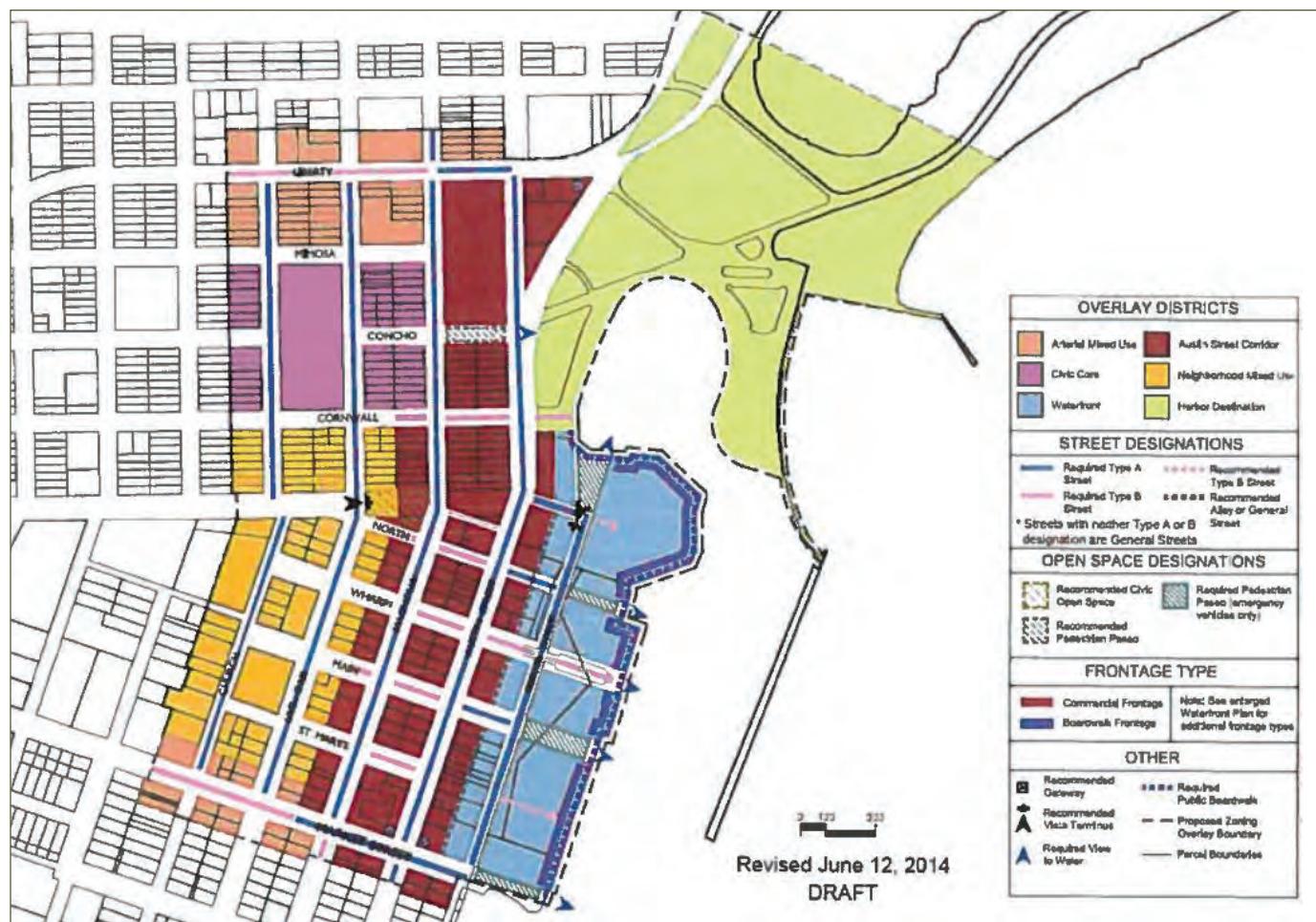
The Heritage District Overlay Ordinance, as drafted, was prepared with the assistance of members of the community, a consultant, and was adopted by city council so it must have reflected community desires at the time. However, within the ordinance are issues not identified by the community that were clear to members of the team including:

- The requirement to build a mixed-use building with ground floor retail and residential above, with a three-story limitation is the most expensive form of construction, likely exceeding \$200 per square foot. Rents in Rockport will not, in the foreseeable future, justify this level of expenditure.
- Without planners trained in the use of form-based code ordinances, implementation is a significant challenge requiring a commitment to training for staff and the development of user-friendly explanations.

- Experience with mixed-used development suggests that larger (four- to five-story) buildings will cluster at major intersections, and that a cap of three stories is too low for some intersections and too high for mid-block development.

As a result of the concerns noted above, as well as the change in state law, the Heritage Overlay Ordinance should be revised with an eye toward:

- Simplifying the ordinance. Six character overlay districts may not be required. See illustration from the Overlay Ordinance below. Fewer development standards may be needed.
- Eliminating emphasis on creating new buildings that mimic historical forms.
- Adding more provisions for recognizing the community's support for "coastal architecture."
- Shifting from mandatory elements to guidelines. Design guidelines that allow for greater flexibility in implementation by staff may better suit Rockport.
- Providing more allowances for coastal living architecture.
- Not requiring ground floor commercial on all "A" streets. Such a requirement makes more sense in the Austin Street



Source: [City of Rockport website](http://City of Rockport website)

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corridor and the waterfront overlay, and perhaps the civic core. Otherwise, the marketplace should determine ground-floor uses.

- Recognizing the real challenge of flooding, which needs to be addressed in the ordinance to include limitations on the construction of off-street parking and use of permeable paving materials which such parking is required; making sure that when new impervious cover is constructed, all stormwater is detained on-site rather than adding to the downtown flooding problems.

Some individuals may wonder about the alternative of simply reverting to the underlying zoning. That option is not without challenges. Again, too much property is zoned commercial. If the city is serious about creating a vital shopping district in the Austin and Magnolia Streets corridor, it should reduce the amount of land zoned for retail uses. This should be done as an effort to better focus retail on key corridors rather than having it splayed through the Heritage Overlay District.

Concentration of retail results in a more compact form and makes it possible to park once and shop on foot.

It should also be noted that, in general, the demand for retail space will continue to trend downward as online shopping becomes increasingly popular. Also, the office/residential zone where the new city/county building is proposed to be located might not allow the type of commercial development that will likely spin off as a result of the new daytime workers.

It makes better sense, from an economic development perspective, to refine the types of uses permitted in the Heritage Overlay District to encourage live/work space, especially for artists, galleries, and food-related cottage-type businesses that all help to build the economic base within the framework of the existing structures.

## Notes

24. Heritage District Overlay Ordinance, 7.3.3, page 49.

25. <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/History.aspx?LegSess=86R&Bill=HB2439>.

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# Appendix D. Tools, Resources, and Funding Opportunities for Creating an Active and Beautiful Public Realm in Downtown Rockport

## Resources and Funding Opportunities

### *Sidewalks, Bike Lanes, and Pedestrian Safety*

- [Texas Department of Transportation Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Programs](#)
- [U.S. Federal Highway Administration Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Opportunities](#)
- [Texas Parks and Wildlife Recreation Trails Grant Program](#)
- [Texas Municipal League Funding Opportunities](#)
- [Texas Community Development Block Grant Program](#)
- [Texas Historical Commission Town Square Initiative](#)

### *Traffic Calming and Intersection Improvements*

- [Texas Department of Transportation Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Programs](#)
- [U.S. Federal Highway Administration Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Opportunities](#)
- [Texas Department of Transportation Country Transportation Infrastructure Fund Grant Program](#)

### *Street Trees and Landscaping*

- [Texas Urban Forestry Council Microgrant Program](#)
- [Texas A&M Forest Services Resources for Local Government](#)
- [U.S. Forest Service Grant Opportunities](#)

### *Improve Lighting Downtown*

- [Texas Department of Transportation Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Programs](#)
- [U.S. Federal Highway Administration Bicycle and Pedestrian Funding Opportunities](#)
- [Texas Department of Transportation Country Transportation Infrastructure Fund Grant Program](#)

### *Resilience and Green Streets (Incorporating permeable pavement in parking areas and new development where applicable downtown)*

- [Texas Commission on Environmental Quality Nonpoint Source Grants](#)
- [Texas Department of Transportation Stormwater Management Program](#)
- [Texas Water Development Board Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund](#)
- [Texas General Land Office Coastal Management Program Grants](#)
- [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Green Infrastructure Funding Opportunities](#)

### *Amenities and Beautification*

- [Keep Texas Beautiful Grant Opportunities](#)
- [Texas Main Street Program](#)
- [Texas Department of Agriculture Main Street Improvement Grants](#)
- [Texas Downtown Association Anice Read Fund Grants](#)
- [Texas Downtown Revitalization and Main Street Program Grants](#)
- [Texas Historical Commission Town Square Initiative](#)

### *Downtown Identity and Destination*

- [Texas Main Street Program](#)
- [Texas Department of Agriculture Main Street Improvement Grants](#)
- [Texas Downtown Association Anice Read Fund Grants](#)
- [Texas Downtown Revitalization and Main Street Program Grants](#)
- [Texas Historical Commission Town Square Initiative](#)

### *Celebrating the Arts, Placemaking, and Lighter, Quicker Approaches*

- [Communities Foundation of Texas](#)
- [Texas Commission on the Arts](#)
- [Texas Cultural Trust](#)
- [National Endowment for the Arts Grants](#)
- [America for the Arts Funding Resources](#)
- [National Association of Realtors Placemaking Grant Program](#)
- [Levitt Foundation AMP Grant Program](#)
- [Kresge Foundation Funding Opportunities](#)

## Tools and Resources

### **The Power Of 10+**

The Power of 10+ is a concept that illuminates the importance of having a high volume of interrelated uses and spaces across several scales. It is not enough to have just one great destination in the downtown—you need several of them to create a truly lively place. Any great place itself needs to offer at least 10+ things to do, or 10+ reasons to be there. These reasons to visit can be as simple as a place to sit, but can also include playgrounds to enjoy, art to touch, music to hear, food to eat, history to experience, and people to meet. Ideally, some of the activities are unique to Rockport and interesting enough to keep people coming back.

The Power of 10+ offers an accessible and inclusive framework that motivates residents and stakeholders to actively participate in revitalizing downtown and shows that by starting efforts at the smallest scale you can accomplish big



Photo courtesy Project for Public Spaces

things. The Power of 10+ can be a critical tool for creating a vision and framework that are truly place-led. By identifying the most important public destinations throughout the downtown and establishing what the challenges and opportunities are for those specific places, downtown Rockport can create a true framework for action that can be revisited and updated over time without losing coherence.

#### ***Cheaper, Lighter, and Quicker Approaches***

Between the planning and implementation phases of major public improvements, there is an opportunity to test ideas in



A downtown street transformation and activation in Salisbury, Massachusetts. Photo courtesy Project for Public Spaces

a temporary way, both to demonstrate the power of public realm improvements and to inspire support for long-term change among Rockport's residents, policy makers, and funders. Known as lighter, quicker, cheaper (tactical urbanism), these interventions can include bicycle lanes, public spaces, traffic calming, colorful crosswalks and intersections, and pop-up parks. Temporary in nature, they can range from a day to a month and even a year. Lighter, Quicker, and Cheaper approaches get planning off the computer screen and into a community. It engages residents in not only the planning process, but the designing and building process as well. It's a



Temporary demonstration projects, like the one shown here for a pedestrian bulb-out and crosswalk enhancement in Enosburg Falls, Vermont, allows communities to test ideas before they commit additional resources. Photo by SE Group and Vermont Better Connections Program

mechanism that works well for inspiring support and demand for community-informed projects. Rockport residents can sweep a sidewalk, hammer a temporary bench together, or create a bicycle lane with paint to highlight what they value and demonstrate to others the importance of a strong public realm. The end results help residents experience how downtown Rockport might be different, provide stronger attachment to place, and build support for the downtown from locals and visitors alike. Examples like one pictured below in Enosburg Falls, Vermont, demonstrate the potential to visualize change with low-cost, temporary materials.

***Sun, Sand and Sidewalks: Transforming Salisbury, Massachusetts, by Project for Public Spaces***

Salisbury went through a creative placemaking project that transformed their coastal downtown through public art, public gathering spaces, and lighter, quicker, and cheaper approaches. This included narrowing the travel lanes downtown, revamping the central park by adding new Adirondack chairs, string lights, giant building blocks and children's games, and a carousel. The Salisbury case study shares a great example for Rockport on what streets can be and how streets can be reimagined for people.

***Places of Possibility: Public Art and Placemaking Toolkit for Small Communities by Jackson Hole Public Art***

This toolkit contains resources for best practices, planning, community engagement, funding, launching, installing, and amplifying art and placemaking activities.



*Even mundane features such as utility boxes can become interesting.*  
Photo courtesy Jackson Hole Public Art

## Appendix E: Rockport CPAT Schedule

ROCKPORT CPAT SCHEDULE: May 19–24, 2019		
Day/Date	Times	Activity
<b>Sunday, May 19</b>	Afternoon	Team arrives in Rockport
	6:30 p.m.	Team dinner
<b>Monday, May 20</b>	8–9 a.m.	Meet with city staff at City Service Center (CSC)
	9–10 a.m.	Downtown walking tour
	10–11:30 a.m.	Meet at Chamber of Commerce
	11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.	Lunch with Mayor and Mike Donoho (director of building and development) @ CSC
	12:30–2 p.m.	Meet with Mike Henry (retired building & development director) @ CSC
	2–3:30 p.m.	Meet with Jim Urban (city engineer) @ CSC
	3:30–5 p.m.	Meet with Cultural Arts District representatives @ CSC
	5–6 p.m.	Q&A with Planning & Zoning Commission
<b>Tuesday, May 21</b>	8:30 a.m.	Meet with downtown merchants @ Apple Dumpling Deli
	10:30 a.m.	Meet with Center for the Arts staff @ Center
	noon	Lunch
	1–3 p.m.	Meet with City Council @ CSC
	3:30–5 p.m.	Meet with Navigation District
	5–6 p.m.	Public meeting set-up
	6–7:30 p.m.	Public meeting @ Aquarium Education Center
<b>Wednesday, May 22</b>	8:30 .am.–noon	Team working session @ CSC
	noon–1 p.m.	Lunch
	1–11 p.m.	Team working session @ CSC
<b>Thursday, May 23</b>	9 a.m.–noon	Team working session
	noon–1 p.m.	Lunch
	1–5 p.m.	Team working session
	5–6 p.m.	Public meeting set-up
	6–7:30 p.m.	Final presentation to public @ Aquarium Education Center
	8 p.m.	Dinner with TAMU and Texas Sea Grant representatives
<b>Friday, May 24</b>	9 a.m.	Debrief @ CSC Clarify final report assignments and next steps
	10:30 a.m.	Brunch with city staff
	11:30 a.m.	Team departs

## Appendix F: Picture Gallery

The following are additional photos captured during the Rockport CPAT project.



Rockport and the surrounding region is a haven for birds. Hundreds of species live there year-round, but October/November through March is extra special when migratory birds arrive. The bird sanctuary on the west side of Rockport Beach hosts rosette spoonbills, blue herons, egrets, and more. Whooping cranes, the largest birds in America, can also be seen in the area. In early September, tens of thousands of hummingbirds pass through Rockport, which (since 1988) the community celebrates with its annual HummerBird Celebration. Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA

*Photo by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA*



The Rockport CPAT met with downtown merchants at the Apple Dump-Deli on Magnolia Street downtown, once during the preliminary visit in January 2019 and again when the full team returned in May.



Rockport hosts lots of great events. One of them is the annual Babes on the Bay fishing tournament, the largest, one day unrestricted all-women's fishing tournament in the United States. The tournament is hosted by the Texas Aransas Bay chapter of the Coastal Conservation Association, based in Rockport, and was created to help educate women about the sport of saltwater fishing with a conservation-minded approach. It's a fun-filled event as one might gather from some of the team names such as "The Happy Hookers," "Nauti Nurses," and "Miss Kitty's Purrfect Catch." Photo by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP



Once a part of the Rockport Center for the Arts campus, a statue garden is now on the east side of the harbor for the community to enjoy. The Rockport Center for the Arts will build a new facility on Austin Street and plan to incorporate the statues on the new campus, which will be a great addition to downtown Rockport. Photos by Richard Amore, AICP, PLA, and Ryan Scherzinger, AICP



Texas A&M's Texas Target Communities program worked on an update to Rockport's comprehensive plan at the same time the Rockport CPAT focused on the downtown. A couple of TAMU classes also worked with Rockport during the same period, a law class and a landscape architecture class. The Rockport CPAT learned from and drew from their work where applicable, some of which is included in this report. Representatives from Texas Sea Grant, which is based at TAMU, also supported the CPAT project. Pictured here, although not a complete picture of all those involved from the TTC and Texas Sea Grant programs, from left to right is: Kate deGennaro, Texas Sea Grant planning specialist; Jeewasmi Thapa, AICP, TTC program coordinator; Ashley Bennis, Texas Sea Grant planning specialist; Jaimie Master-son, AICP, TTC associate director; Amanda Torres, CFM, Rockport city planner; Heather Wade, Texas Sea Grant senior associate director for planning and extension; Carol Barrett, FAICP, Rockport CPAT team leader; and Ken Hurst, TAMU assistant lecturer in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Urban Planning. Photo by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP



The team posed for a picture in front of the "Rockport Strong" sign on the wall of Rowdy Maui on Austin Street. The sign is a symbol of the city's recovery following Hurricane Harvey and has become a popular spot for photos. From left: Rockport city planner, Amanda Torres, CFM; volunteer Rockport CPAT team leader, Carol Barrett, FAICP; and Rockport CPAT volunteers Kerrie Tyndall; Richard Amore, AICP, PLA; Eugene Henry, AICP, CFM; and Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA. Photo by Ryan Scherzinger, AICP

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## Appendix G: Meet the Team

**Carol D. Barrett, FAICP | Team Leader**

Carol Barrett has worked in smaller cities around the United States for the past four decades with an emphasis on places with historic downtowns. Her experience includes working as a senior professional in Annapolis, Maryland; Berkeley, San Gabriel, and Burbank, California, as well as San Marcos, Texas. She has written and implemented a variety of development ordinances and served as staff on historic preservation commissions. Barrett recently returned to Texas after a decade of planning work in California. While there, she served as president of the California Planning Foundation, which raises funds for planning student scholarships. Barrett served on the American Planning Association Board of Directors and is a past president of the Texas Chapter. APA awarded her its Distinguished Service Award. She was inducted into the AICP College of Fellows as part of the inaugural class in 1999.

**Eugene Aleci, AICP, AIA | Team Member**

Eugene Aleci has been an architect, planner, urban designer, and historic preservation and downtown development consultant for more than 40 years. His firm, Community Heritage Partners, combines these disciplines with real estate development strategies to spark regeneration, livability, well-being, and vitality in smaller cities and towns. Based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, since 1985, its work ranges across Pennsylvania and from Charleston, South Carolina, to Portland, Maine. As a Lancaster City Council member in the 1990s, Aleci helped reestablish public responsibility for city planning, achieving the city's first comprehensive plan in over 50 years. A decade later, 14,000 buildings in Lancaster's core commercial, residential, and industrial districts were designated one of America's largest National Register Historic Districts. With numerous award-winning projects, the firm has secured grants for urban development planning and adapting older buildings to new uses. Its study of the Lancaster Central Market received APA's 2013 National Planning Excellence Award for Urban Design.

**Richard Amore, AICP, PLA | Team Member**

Richard Amore is a certified planner, urban designer, and community builder who blends his experience in community design and placemaking to spark downtown and neighborhood revitalization. Amore has over 15 years of experience in private and public practice across the country leading community-driven initiatives that builds local capacity through placemaking, urban design, and downtown revitalization. His experience in urban planning, community development, and landscape architecture gives him the ability to connect place-based initiatives with local and statewide economic development efforts. Amore is an AICP certified planner and an NCI certified charrette planner. He serves on the executive board of Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Council and is a guest lecturer at the University of Vermont. Amore holds a BS in Environmental Design, a Master of Landscape Architecture, and a Master of Community Planning from Auburn University.

**Eugene Henry, AICP, CFM | Team Member**

Eugene Henry is the hazard mitigation manager for Hillsborough County, Florida. Henry is an AICP-certified planner and certified floodplain manager with the Association of State Floodplain Managers. Since 1983, he has worked in the public and private sectors in floodplain administration, comprehensive planning, and emergency management. His experience includes administration of programs in areas of hazard mitigation and floodplain management, post-disaster redevelopment planning, permitting and construction, land-use allocation, capital improvements programming, and large-scale developments. Henry has worked in implementing a 911-addressing program, served on disaster-assessment teams, and implemented components of a comprehensive emergency management plan.



### **Kerrie Tyndall | Team Member**

Kerrie Tyndall serves as the assistant city manager for economic development and the director of the Office of Economic Development for the City of Kansas City, Missouri. Tyndall is an experienced leader with over 20 years of expertise in city management, including 15 years in economic development, community development, and business development. She has extensive experience in developing economic development policy and utilizing a wide variety of incentive tools including tax abatements, tax increment financing, tax credit programs, and other economic development financing programs. Tyndall worked previously as a business development officer for the Economic Development Corporation of Kansas City. Prior to that, she worked in a leadership capacity in the city manager's office for Blue Springs, Missouri; Olathe, Kansas; Bryan, Texas; and the Woodlands Community Service Corporation.



### **Ryan Scherzinger, AICP | Project Manager**

Ryan Scherzinger is programs manager for APA's professional practice department and is based in Chicago. He manages and has worked extensively on the Community Planning Assistance Teams program, providing direct technical assistance to communities around the country and abroad with multidisciplinary teams of experts. He has managed myriad programs and special projects for APA since 2007, including community workshops, case studies, federal grants, symposia and lecture series, study tours, international events, allied outreach and coalitions, and interactive public exhibits.



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