

# Texas DOWNTOWN

## DOWNTOWN HUMBLE ASSESSMENT REPORT MAY 2023



Ian McConnell

### DOWNTOWN HUMBLE ASSESSMENT TEAM

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## About Texas Downtown

[Texas Downtown](#) was founded in 1985 to connect and serve communities, businesses, and champions of downtowns across the state. Our mission is to provide members with resources, advocacy, education, and connections to develop vibrant districts. Today we represent over three hundred members from cities and towns, economic development corporations, nonprofits including chambers of commerce and business groups, small businesses, and individuals.

## Downtown Assessment Process

Texas Downtown (TXDT) was invited by the City of Humble to complete a multi-day downtown assessment, March 23-24, 2023. Downtown assessments are offered to TXDT members as part of our Downtown Assistance Program and are designed to bring a group of downtown professionals and community leaders into a city's downtown district to assess existing conditions to then offer realistic, attainable recommendations. The process begins with a downtown stakeholder survey, online meeting with stakeholders, and extensive research by the assessment team prior to the site visit.

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

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

Renee Butler, Owner of *Another Time Soda Fountain and Café* in Downtown Rosenberg

Rodney Pool, Owner of *The Corner Pub* in Downtown Conroe

Frank Robinson, Robinson Government Consulting, LLC

Rayna Teicheira, City of Navasota, Economic Development

Shelly Hargrove, Texas Downtown

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Catherine Sak, Texas Downtown

TXDT and the assessment team are committed to working with the City of Humble as the community moves forward with downtown development and revitalization efforts. Please do not hesitate to reach out for further assistance or to get connected to other TXDT members.

## Assessment Sections

1. Initial Observations
2. Stakeholder Feedback
3. Short Term Recommendations
  - Organizational Optimization
  - Design and Beautification
  - Economic Development
4. Mid-Range Recommendations
5. Long Term Recommendations

### Initial Observations

- The most impressionable characteristic of downtown Humble are its trees. Assuming they are safe and well maintained, mature trees are imperative to resilient downtowns in that they provide shade, ambiance, and history. Humble's downtown trees should remain visual focal points and be incorporated into future downtown design.
- Downtown is home to several small businesses; however, there is not a healthy retail mix to support a vibrant downtown economy. Most businesses are service focused and while these business types are imperative to support a healthy retail mix, downtown Humble may benefit from a retail diversity strategy.
- There is a lack of visual cohesion and interest throughout downtown, including Uptown Park and other public spaces.
- There is ample parking throughout all of downtown, including directly off Main Street, and along Avenues A, B, and C.
- Downtown Humble cultivates a hometown feel through showcasing two legendary businesses. The Green Oaks Tavern and Humble City Café are strong downtown partners and generate most pedestrian traffic throughout the daytime and evening.
- Lack of wayfinding, including gateway signage.
- There is a frank distinction between downtown residential and commercial areas. Increased density could offset future revitalization costs and contribute to the downtown culture.
- Traffic is fast and unyielding to downtown pedestrians.
- Downtown has a remarkably high number of churches.

## Stakeholder Feedback

TXDT staff developed a stakeholder survey that included questions geared towards downtown business and property owners as well as residents and partners. The survey also focused on the needs of downtown small business owners only. Survey results are included as attachments to this report – identifying details have been removed.

Stakeholders proved local pride! Local pride is critical to identifying a point of difference and provides a solid foundation to then generate effective wayfinding and gateway signage, tourism product, business development and marketing assistance, downtown branding and marketing campaigns, and even design standards. Respondents repeatedly expressed their affection for their city, the quaint feel of their downtown, and their love of local events, such as Music on Main. Others identified the physical location of downtown as being a strong pro and hope that by generating more awareness of Humble's Main Street through signage and other wayfinding, quality retail development and more foot traffic could follow.

Stakeholders mentioned the lack of parking several times. This is extremely common in downtowns and other commercial districts and can often be mitigated through signage strategies and the publication of downtown parking maps. Others expressed concerns for downtown traffic speeds, while some noted homelessness.

Most often mentioned is the downtown retail mix. Stakeholders addressed their concern for the lack downtown businesses, especially destination and experiential retail that both invite and prolong downtown visits. A benefit to their concerns, however, is that most stakeholders identified the need for *resident experiences*. By engaging and sustaining local interest, downtown resiliency becomes much stronger, and it is a great success that Humble stakeholders understand this priority.

## SHORT TERM RECOMMENDATIONS – 1 TO 3 YEARS

### **Organizational Optimization**

#### 1. Merchant Group

While TXDT understands cities' apprehension to incorporating new associations, often some of the most impactful groups are simply organized, invested citizens. Throughout the assessment process, lack of communication was mentioned several times as an opportunity. The formation of a Downtown Businesses Facebook Group or Facebook Chat can be a cost-effective way to spur this initiative. By supporting downtown businesses to gather, discuss, and make decisions and formal recommendations to city staff, even quarterly, Humble is advancing economic development within their downtown districts and creating hubs for further business and entrepreneurial development.

The established merchant group can always make the decisions to formalize, which can provide benefits including the ability to accept outside donations and apply for grants, but the most important step is city lead organization. One city staff member can help to organize quarterly merchant group meetings for one year. This person is charged with meeting with each business owner to establish buy-in, setting the meeting times, dates, and locations, providing city updates to the group, encouraging helpful topics for discussion, and, most importantly, delegating to ensure the group has purpose and means for moving forward.

Lastly, should the city support a downtown merchant group, the city is then agreeing to listen to, participate in, and champion their efforts. The city staff member tasked with organizing the group throughout the first year should establish a strong understanding of roles between city staff and the business community, ensuring that when items are brought to city staff, the items are reasonable. It is then the responsibility of city staff to seriously consider the items and to quickly and respectfully follow up.

TXDT members are fantastic resources for creating and maintaining downtown merchant groups. TXDT staff can also provide helpful resources to Humble city staff to begin this effort.



The City of Navasota does not have an established downtown group, but the merchants have created a Facebook Group, “Retailers of Downtown Navasota” where they can communicate and organize their own events. [Downtown Kaufman](#) has a similar merchant’s group, also.

## 2. Beautification Committee

Humble is in a fantastic position to continue quality enhancement to downtown due to the impact and progress of the Beautification Committee. (The Beautification Committee operates for a different purpose than a merchant group, so the recommendation for a downtown merchant-specific group is still applicable.)

The next step for the Beautification Committee is to be sponsored by the city for membership with [Keep Texas Beautiful](#) (KTB). The cost is extremely reasonable, and KTB provides numerous benefits, such as:

- Beautification and blight reduction grants
- Youth education grants
- Opportunities to partner with school districts and other youth programs on downtown beautification projects that can encourage lifelong personal investment in downtown
- Training for effective trash and recycling programming

- Ongoing adult and student education
- Opportunity to apply annually for the Governor’s Community Achievement Award (GCAA) which is approximately \$180,000 for populations up to 25,000.

KTB is a cost-effective way to maximize impact, get funding, and share winning strategies. [Examples for successful grant funding can be found here.](#)

### 3. City of Humble

- While the City of Humble offers a façade grant program, and numerous businesses have taken advantage, downtown continues to lack cohesive design and signage. Eclectic downtowns are exciting and successful; however, their eclecticism is contrived organically over decades of local pride, stakeholder investment, and public imagination.

For downtown Humble, there is vast opportunity for improved forward facing facades, side walls, and signage. The assessment team encourages the City of Humble to expand their façade grant program to include signage and even landscaping (consider incentivizing native perennials and native plants).

- The City of Humble should also consider a comprehensive Downtown Revitalization Request for Qualification (RFQ) within the next 18 months. RFQ’s are not complex to administer yet provide ample examples of attainable development prospects that assist downtown stakeholders, including city staff, elected officials, and property owners, in visualizing opportunity, ambition, and success. An RFQ may be administered for the entirety of downtown, including infill, streets, and branding.
- An infill strategy is highly recommended by the assessment team; inactivated public parcels cost the city money and do not contribute to any public initiatives, economic or otherwise. TXDT encourages the City of Humble to utilize its membership for RFP examples and low-cost parcel activation examples, such as food truck parks, pop up retail centers, event venues, public parks, and land lease agreements for brick-and-mortar development. The City of Fate created an award-winning [fiscal analysis model](#) that can be easily implemented when evaluating submissions.
- The State of Texas allows economic development incentives to be individually administered by cities to private developers via [Chapter 380 Agreements](#). Chapter 380 Agreements allow city staff to regulate otherwise unregulatable development

practices, such as building materials, density requirements, use requirements, certificate of occupancy deadlines, and performance incentives, to ensure authentic and responsible development. (Tax abatements are inappropriate when considering the design and integrity of Chapter 380 of the Local Governments Code and should not be considered.)

The City of Humble has utilized Chapter 380 Agreements, currently with the Rankin Road Improvements incentives, yet not to the full extents of which the program is designed to aid in expedited localized development. As the city is aware, Chapter 380 Agreements are made publicly available and further assistance can be provided by TXDT staff based on the needs of the downtown district.

- Many urban communities, such as Humble, implement general obligation bonds to progress their downtown economies. Bond elections are specific to each community and require rigorous fiscal analysis (which can be built upon the results from the Downtown Revitalization RFQ process), but many TXDT members are finding success in general election bonds for downtown improvements. Citizens understand the importance of a healthy, authentic downtown, and generally support initiatives that generate local economic growth and controlled development. With such proximity to population, Humble should consider the impact of downtown revitalization bond to address infill, street improvements, and housing. (Increased density throughout the district is also recommended by the assessment team and is mentioned several times within this assessment.)

#### 4. Events

- Music on Main is a hit! Humble residents love this asset and want to see it grow. [Texas Touring Roster](#) is designed to ensure that all Texans have the ability to enjoy performances by outstanding Texas-based companies and artists in their own communities, and provides booking assistance, education resources, and a grant opportunity. Further, Humble can explore the benefits “[Texas Music Friendly City](#)” designation. Many TXDT communities, such as the City of Bryan and Benham have this designation and use this state program to further promote their downtowns.
- Pop-ups are fast, easy, and effective ways to activate downtown parcels. By recruiting businesses to “pop-up” in Humble’s downtown, the city is saying its open for business and ready to work with quality business owners, while also showcasing property vacancies and a safe, productive business environment.



A “pop-up” is a temporary store front for clothing and jewelry boutiques, art galleries, hand made goods, cottage products, and other mercantile that typically do not exceed 100 sq ft in operating space, include tents and other mobile product displays, and typically operate on public property such as sidewalks, parking lots, parcels, and parks. (More and more private businesses are seeing the benefits of hosting pop-ups and managing cooperative retail space, also.) The most difficult hurdle for this zero-lined activation is typically city or county ordinances, so the assessment team encourages review of permitting processes that may exclude mobile vendors.

Consider requiring a sales tax certificate for zip codes within the City of Humble. This may be challenging for mobile businesses, but could help when prioritizing for larger events, such as the Good Oil Days and the Christmas Parade.



**One award-winning example is Corsicana’s pop up which included a dog park and beer garden seen above. The Baum Dog Park pop up spurred conversations between the community, the City, and Mr. Baum Jr. (the property owner’s son, soon to be executor of the family estate) to negotiate a permanent dog park there. The Biergarten was such a hit, community members were immediately discussing how and when to orchestrate the next one.**

- Dinner on Main and Sip n Sees are other low-cost events (and business recruitment tools) that can be implemented by the city or in partnership with Partnership Lake Houston. When a new restaurant opens, the city can agree to close Main Street to allow the restaurant to erect tables and chairs on the physical street to create a cheap and effective downtown event (these micro events are great ribbon cutting and earned media opportunities, as well).

When a retail store opens, the city can agree to allow open containers along Main Street so that all businesses can participate in a downtown shopping event. Sip n See events are incredible opportunities to reintroduce downtown Humble to new and old audiences time and time again. Visitors are able to experience downtown as “open and ready” while of course enjoying a free, small pour of an alcoholic beverage (provided by all participating businesses; commemorative cups are also usually provided). Remember that retail is not the only beneficiary of Sip n See events; service businesses are involuntarily delivered hundreds of potential new clients and should find value in these events, too. (During Sip n Sees in downtown Fate, Texas, a resident lawyer holds a sign reading, “Will argue with anyone,” along with a large stack of business cards.)

### **Design and Beautification**

1. Utilizing KTB grant funding, a downtown waste management program should be a priority for the City of Humble. Trash maintenance should be included in all development agreements, leases, and sales of downtown buildings (including Main Street, and Avenues A-C), and the city should maintain the entirety of downtown as a public park.
2. Another effective use of Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) funds and the existing façade grant program is to include public art and murals, especially on primary side walls such as those found along Avenue B. Public art can add color and grounding to a community as a visual reminder that this place is theirs’ and can quickly activate dead parcels. People genuinely enjoy the sensory experience of visual engagement and are drawn to areas of color, diversity, and originality, and thus Humble should include public art as a marketing and business recruitment tool. Further, window dressings can also contribute to downtown aesthetics and should be discussed among the merchant group.
3. The City of Humble should consider a wayfinding strategy for both Main Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Street; Higgins should be included, but not prioritized. Way finding helps one to find their way and is a critical component of branding strategies, public safety plans, and general economic development initiatives. Wayfinding will identify, direct, inform, and regulate both vehicular

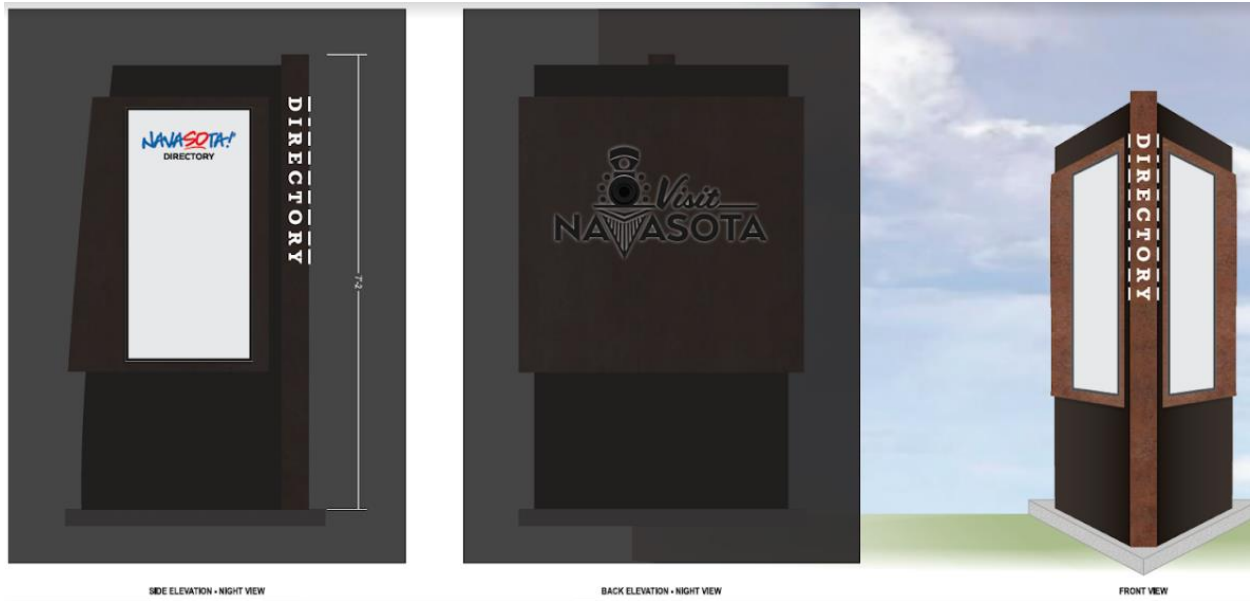
and pedestrian traffic (in Texas, cyclists are included as vehicular traffic). Wayfinding strategies should be professionally contracted and include ample input from downtown stakeholders. Complete strategies show also include gateway signage, such as monument signs at Railroad Avenue and E Main Street facing west to greet visitors and at the primary entrance into downtown from 1<sup>st</sup> Street. Strategies that include direction kiosks should be updated yearly. Wayfinding strategy development and implementation can be included in a downtown revitalization bond package or subsidized by HOT funds [as was done by the City of Brownwood.](#)



**Downtown Georgetown Wayfinding Signag**



**Downtown San Marcos Wayfinding Maps and Banners**



**Digital kiosk renderings for downtown Navasota. Digital kiosks can be more cost effective long-term, as branding and businesses guides can be easily updated.**

4. Placemaking has become a hot topic in downtown development and the intent can be lost in its many translations. At root, placemaking illustrates the synergy between a person’s physical and social self. If a downtown values parks, it may build around that ideal by preserving greenspace; if a downtown values entrepreneurial craftsmanship, it may create ordinances and incentives to help those industries prosper; if a downtown values history and resiliency, it can honor and educate through art and exhibits.

Rodney Pool of the Humble downtown assessment team said it best, “People are looking for Humble to become a place.” Consider building a place where your friends want to spend time and money, where your own family could make a living, and where children are joyful and safe. Uptown Park has proved to be a valuable asset to downtown but should be optimize through public art and tactical urbanism strategies. Short-term, low-cost human engagement strategies can provide data to propel long-term investments while creating a memorable and positive experience for downtown visitors. (Lack of shade and closed bathrooms were a concern to all when assessing Uptown Park, and again, KTB could provide funding opportunities to address these.)

Murals and public art projects can be implemented by the community via grant funding or private donation, or by the city through a Request for Proposals (RFP) centered on the types of public art downtown stakeholders and residents want to see. Many TXDT members have downtowns dedicated to public art, and others utilize public art to embrace different focuses, such as history and cultural diversity. TXDT members can supply RFP examples.



**Downtown Navasota’s Blues Mural**

5. Design Standards are meant to improve, and protect, and the values, appearance, and functions of a commercial district, and are often tied to incentive agreements such as Chapter 380 Agreements. Humble should explore developing design standards that align with stakeholder' visions for their downtown, and aid to meet the economic development goals of the district. The assessment team recommends design standards include signage and landscaping (with a preference for native plants that provide critical shade) standards, visual descriptions of desired architecture, cohesive façade parameters that included recommended building materials, and inclusive signage requirements through intentional graphic, content, and implementation considerations.

## **Economic Development**

1. Stronger engagement with Partnership Lake Houston can help accelerate Humble in meeting its downtown economic development goals. While Humble takes advantage of some programs and services provided by Partnership Lake Houston, the city often leaves out downtown. Partnership Lake Houston provides a property search database for its members and Humble does take advantage of this valuable resources; however, no downtown properties are listed in the database. Downtown must be understood as a strong economic driver for Humble with the opportunity to meet and exceed economic development and quality of life metrics. Therefore, downtown planning and development should be granted equitable access to public resources and be included in Humble's and Partnership Lake Houston's prioritization strategy.
2. Business recruitment is a common metric for successful economic development strategies. Business recruitment consists of identifying and then successfully recruiting desirable industries to one's desired location. All communities have varied perceptions of desired industries specific to geographical location, population base and demographics, educational services, and infrastructure. Humble's downtown should prioritize a downtown business recruitment strategy immediately. Strategies are inclusive of several business types and include physical improvements, optimal retail mix, incentives and grant programs, workforce and commerce gap analyses, events, awareness and communication plans, and regulatory adjustments conducive towards local and small business development and relocation.

Business recruitment strategies for downtowns may use different metrics than in other focus areas. Number of employees, for example, may not apply to downtown business relocation grant requirements whereas physical improvements to quantify economic productivity per square foot can be deemed essential, as downtown properties are often the most

economically productive areas within the city, including malls, large box stores, and shopping centers.

The assessment team recommends a plan that encourages human engagement and curates an experience for visitors. Small scale manufacturing, once the demises of historical downtowns, has in fact been proven to be key to a downtown's resiliency. Makers, craftsman, designers, and artists exemplify the richness and diverse talent of place's identify; however, these business owners must also generate income, and ideally successfully scale to meet demand. By allowing individualized uses within the downtown core, the City of Humble can even further its economic development goals. The assessment team recommends allowing people to showcase, *and* produce and distribute, all within their downtown location. Utilize the downtown revitalization RFQ process to invite original, and even odd, uses. (Interim use agreements are temporary and provide opportunity to legally sway from development ordinances without altering existing regulations.)

TXDT can introduce economic development training opportunities and supply state-wide best practices for downtown business recruitment strategies and the assessment team recommends a submission to our list serve requesting such information.

3. Infill development can greatly influence the productivity and economic activity of a parcel. Further, infill ensures unique, quality uses by recycling properties for purposes identified by the community. When thoughtful, infill can accelerate downtown investment. The city holds several prime properties in downtown. Ideally, the city can replat these parcels and then subdivide to spur local investment; however, these are long-term economic development initiatives (included) that require clear benchmarks and planning.

In the interim, the assessment team recommends zero-lined activation; essentially, allowing the parcels to be utilized for temporary commerce purposes, such as food truck parks, pop up retail centers, event venues, and public parks. (When ready, the city can explore land lease options for future development should the city not want to lose any real property.)





[Mesquite Food Truck Park](#)

4. While the City of Humble has opportunity to engage further with Partnership Lake Houston, the city can take immediate action to promote their economic development priorities. Currently, the economic development listing on the city’s website is a link to Partnership Lake Houston. While this is helpful, the city should design a simple landing page to promote the city’s economic development agenda (<https://goodoildays.com/> is a great start), including development priorities, such as downtown. The city can list vacant properties, showcase new businesses, host an events calendar, curate a downtown business guide, and more at little to no cost.

One city employee tasked to inventory downtown businesses and buildings would then be equipped to upload the listings to Partnership Lake Houston’s property listing page and other commercial real estate sites such as LoopNet, as well as list them on the city’s economic development landing page. Public event calendars can be delegated to the Beautification Committee or merchant’s group, whereas events should be relayed to the city eight (8) weeks in advanced with the city publicly posting the information within two (2) weeks, and in return giving the potential visitor six (6) weeks advanced notice. Downtown events should also be

included in the city's overall communication strategies, including social media and other media announcements.

Lastly, the city should collaborate with community stakeholders that are not physically located in downtown to publish an annual events calendar. The Charles Bender Performing Arts Center and Humble Civic Center and Arena Complex are great opportunities to begin basic collaboration to leverage downtown investments. A shared calendar can present an active community while cross promoting each organization. Further, the assessment team suggests considering the school district's schedule, such as Homecoming events, in advance. There is ample opportunity to introduce (or reintroduce) Humble's downtown during periods of high, organic student engagement.

5. The assessment team urges the City of Humble to shift its paradigm when addressing downtown business sustainability. Through the intentional design of a self-sustaining downtown business network, businesses can develop a mutually beneficial eco system for shared resources, tools, and other forms of support. Once a merchant group has been established, both the merchant group and Beautification Committee can agree to showcase personal and professional strengths, and then provide these services to downtown businesses at discounted or pro bono rates:
  - Tax firms can administer quarterly tax trainings for downtown businesses while a local café provides free lunches.
  - Marketing or design teams can create, print, and administer promotional material for downtown events at cost.
  - Artists can implement public art projects in partnership with private property owners that may lead to earned media potential to help progress the business's awareness strategy.
  - Downtown churches can offer weekend and event parking and childcare during events.
  - The City of Humble can invite its regional Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to temporarily activate an otherwise vacant property to facilitate new business incubation training or growth strategy workshops for those hoping to scale

Lastly, no matter how resilient a district may appear however, city leadership is always vital. Ordinances and rules change, property ownership changes, businesses cycle in and out, city leadership changes, and programming at the state and federal levels are continuously phased in and out. Historic and neighborhood districts remain strong and active by local activation that includes city leadership and vision. While Humble takes strides to curate a self-sustaining economy throughout downtown, city leadership must include communication strategies and explore programming to continually support the district.

6. When one first arrives in downtown, there is an obvious distinction between commercial and residential areas. Increased density and housing within the commercial areas could offset future revitalization and development costs while contributing to the downtown identity and culture.

While reviewing stakeholder surveys, noise was mentioned by downtown residents as a primary concern when contemplating the long-term revitalization of downtown. Much like parking, noise concerns are common among residents of growing downtowns, and it is the primary, although not sole, responsibility of the city to educate elected officials and effected stakeholders on the importance of continuous activity within a downtown district.

Downtown residents should expect safety, cleanliness, reasonable accounts for parking (such as a resident permit program) and clear expectations for noise (such as sound ordinances) yet should also be fully aware of *their implied supportive role for successful downtown development and ongoing success*. For example, sound ordinances may be temporarily altered to support evening, weekend, and event commerce, and these critical adaptations should not be a surprise or point of contention for the downtown resident; further, real laws may change to progress the impact of the commercial district, such as open container laws, and should also be developed and implemented as to not surprise or shock the resident. (Engagement is always a great first step, and with the creation of a merchant group and the bolstering of the Beautification Committee, Humble will be adequately equipped to expand communications strategies to include downtown residents.)

- Education for what drives vibrant and successful neighborhood commercial districts, such as Humble’s downtown, can start now. Work with planning services to explore the numerous downtowns mentioned by stakeholders during the in-person stakeholder meeting. Exploring a downtown can include in-person visits, discovery calls, online presentations, and the sharing of resources, tools, and successful development plans.

Desirable downtowns mentioned include:

- Laurel, Mississippi
- Granbury, Texas
- Fairhope, Alabama
- Fayetteville, Arkansas
- Fulshear, Texas
- Brenham, Texas
- Rice Village located in Houston, Texas
- Fredericksburg, Texas

- When exploring downtown, review density requirements, development ordinances (ask whether ordinances have been reviewed by a third party to identify the types of development patterns incentivized by the ordinance), and then review the implementation process from start to end, i.e., what conversations needed to happen to change minds, what education was presented and to whom, what was the public response at various touch-points throughout the process?

## MID-RANGE RECOMMENDATIONS – 2 TO 5 YEARS

1. The assessment team noted concerns for current on street parking. Due to Humble’s ample downtown parking, the assessment team recommends removing on street parking to widen sidewalks. To mitigate speed, chicanes can be effective for Humble as chicanes add visual appeal, reduce vehicular speeds, and increase wayfinding impact (note that wayfinding strategies are only as good as their public visibility, therefore high driving speeds reduce impact and can deflate overall investment). Street trees are also successful speed reduction mechanisms and can be implemented when widening sidewalks.

Further, the assessment team encountered several irritated, rushed drivers when attempting to cross Main Street, and so further consideration for pedestrian crosswalks visibility should be considered, as well as continued education and awareness to Humble residents on perceiving *downtown as a destination*, not a strip mall along another busy city street.



**Chicanes increase the amount of public space available on a corridor and can be activated using benches, bicycle parking, and other amenities. ([Image c/o nacto.org/](https://www.nacto.org/)).**

2. The merchant group and Beautification Committee will go a long way in downtown’s revitalization and resilience efforts; however, it is in the best interest of the city to support the creation of an FTE position for downtown.

Once the downtown revitalization RFQ process is complete and the city begins visualizing the true impacts of a successful revitalization plan, it should also include the human capacity needed at the city level to support the process. An FTE for downtown can reinforce other city initiatives, create region-wide strategic partnerships, and provide the necessary foundation for a long-term, successful investment.

3. Way finding has been mentioned throughout this assessment several times. The assessment team recommends the implementation of a wayfinding strategy within 3 years.
4. To help implement wayfinding and other strategies, the assessment team encourages the City of Humble consider bond packages centered on downtown revitalization. Once the RFQ process for downtown is complete, the findings should be married with the city's downtown wayfinding and infill strategies to compose a comprehensive and fiscally responsible bond package to present to Humble citizens. There are many reasons for incurring public debt that contribute to the general well-being of a place and its residents, but all debt consideration should be spearheaded by resiliency and long-term socioeconomic impact. Many TXDT members are leading the nation in sound fiscal analysis of redevelopment, including ongoing economic productivity and maintenance costs. With such great population in and around Humble, a bond package is a reasonable mechanism to help downtown reach its goals, and while a short-term goal is to *explore* this option, the assessment team recommends bond implementation within 5 years. Should a bond not be an option at this time, the assessment team recommends redirecting HOT funds to downtown initiatives.
5. A principal element of downtown resiliency is preserving while amplifying the identity of a place and the people who live there. Place branding is a common and substantial investment. Many of the communities listed by stakeholders as desirable downtown examples exemplify place branding in that they have crafted the public perception of their area so well, that even times of economic and societal hardship cannot disrupt its reputation. Place branding can tell people whether you are open for business, ripe for infill, inclusive of people and a variety of business types, committed to beautification and public spaces, and even whether a place is safe for the public.

As with all economic planning, place branding requires time, resources, and considerable effort to “get right.” But those who have made the effort, reap the rewards every day. Place branding is conveyed through signage, development standards, downtown ordinances, the use and design of public spaces, retail mix, and tourism product development. Humble may hold strong to its roots in oil, in which downtown signage could include oil rigs and other imagery to support this rich history. (Historic walking tours, such as an infrastructure tour of

downtown centered on the impacts of oil, could be a great compliment to Good Oil Days.) The assessment team recommends further conversation of Humble’s past, present, and future to determine if oil remains a relatable and inclusive identify for downtown, or whether there are more stories to tell.



[Civic Brand conducted a case study of place branding in downtown Burleson.](#)

## LONG TERM RECOMMENDATIONS – 5+ YEARS

1. When examining long term strategies for downtown and Humble’s more general economic development planning, consider extending the downtown commercial areas to include 1<sup>st</sup> Street, essentially strategically building a robust downtown core between Main Street and 1<sup>st</sup> Street, and along the Avenues. This area can support increased density while preserving surrounding historic neighborhoods.
2. Adaptive reuse and infill development has become a strong argument when considering city wide sustainability planning. Within 5 years, the assessment team recommends a strategy that both preserves the character of downtown while remaining adaptive to ever changing economic and social impacts, including increased density and city population growth (infill specifically helps to aid in increased density, and these requirements should be included in future development agreements).

While the assessment team understands the administrative challenges that arise when constructing significant architecture that remains vague in use, cities should recognize the benefits of incentivizing this type of economic development-based revitalization; it is more efficient and environmentally conscious to redevelop older buildings closer to urban cores, where infrastructure, such as water, sewer, and roads, already exists. Lastly, adaptive reuse and infill improvements can generate mixed use development to address housing concerns, increase property productivity, and encourage further economic development throughout the district.

3. When engaging in the downtown revitalization planning process, consider the strategic relocation of city buildings. While it is not advised for cities to occupy otherwise retail-worthy spaces in downtown, the assessment team encourages the City of Humble to consider a new downtown courthouse or city hall. When establishing new district borders between 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Main Street, consider the erection of a downtown courthouse or city hall facility that can act as the anchor for downtown happenings. If placed in downtown, the building should serve its new home by providing public restrooms and air-conditioned rest areas during events, unrestrictive and free parking, encourage permanent and temporary murals and public art installations, seating and other outdoor furniture, potentially house a visitor center or visitor area with downtown maps and brochures, and have capacity to be included on architectural tours and other downtown projects and promotions. (TXDT encourages Humble to utilize its membership when developing a visitor center to address funding, design, and volunteer management.)