

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

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## Economic Development

*A program, group of policies and/or department that seeks to improve the economic well-being and quality of life for a community by creating and/or retaining business and jobs that facilitate growth and provide a stable tax base.*

International Economic Development Council

### Executive Summary

Every two years, the City Council meets to review and update their plan for the future. The plan provides a clear vision and goals, serving as the road map for departmental activities, policy direction and budget guidance. In 2019, the City Council reaffirmed the plan's mission statement and nine goals by which to govern.

#### *Mission Statement*

To ensure an exceptional quality of life and long-term viability of North Richland Hills through local leadership and regional cooperation.

#### *City Council Goals*

- Quality Community Development & Revitalization
- Efficient & Effective Transportation System
- Safety & Security
- Financial Stability
- Positive City Image
- Sense of Community
- **Targeted Economic Development**
- Local & Regional Leadership
- Efficient & Effective Delivery of City Services

With these goals in mind, the City developed a Strategic Plan that serves as the conduit to Council's plan for the future. The Strategic Plan includes updates to the City's Land Use, Transportation and Economic Development plans. **The following pages detail the Economic Development plan – specifically, its goals, actions and tactics.**

The purpose of the plan is to provide a framework that prioritizes activities and allocates resources. The recommendations are a result of research and analysis by City staff, with input and validation from City Council, and the Economic Development Advisory and Strategic Planning Committees.

The first Economic Development Plan was adopted in 2003. While the City has evolved, the three original goals remain the same, but are now underwritten by thirteen updated and revised actionable items.

## Economic Development Plan

1. Redevelop & Reuse Vacant & Underutilized Properties
2. Promote a Positive Business Climate
3. Develop & Promote an Attractive, Diversified and Thriving Community

### *Goal #1 – Redevelop & Reuse Vacant & Underutilized Properties*

The City is 90% developed and expected to be built out by year 2030. Therefore, continued growth and progress will be dependent upon the revitalization and redevelopment of functionally obsolete real estate.

### *Goal #2 – Promote a Positive Business Climate*

There are over 1,200 brick and mortar

businesses alongside many more that operate out of a home or post office box. The ability to retain a business is just as important as recruiting a business. On average, each year 100 new businesses open while 80 close, resulting in a net increase of only 20 businesses per year.

### *Goal #3 – Develop & Promote an Attractive, Diversified and Thriving Community*

Significant long-term decisions alongside patience and hard work are bearing fruit. While the City enjoys a distinct yet appealing identity, continued efforts remain within an ever growing region (DFW Metroplex) that contains over 200 cities.

North Richland Hills is a dynamic and attractive City. A central location, strong traffic volumes and abundant points of access reach a large customer base and labor pool. It has an existing and robust infrastructure network that businesses and developers can tap into.

Development standards are quality, but not excessive and allow a property or investment to retain its value over time. The City's development review process is consistent and less time consuming than other cities where staff is hands on, offering creative solutions to connect private sector efforts with City goals.

The City offers a diverse demographic base that is above regional and national averages as it pertains to education and disposable income with strong schools and a community college. Highly rated, our public safety services result in low crime rates, rapid response times and discounts on annual insurance premiums.

The City has a full service Economic Development department dedicated to the business community with an award-winning experienced staff, equipped with real-time city information, real estate data and market intelligence at no cost. **By pursuing these three goals and their following actions, the City stands to realize sustainable economic development.**

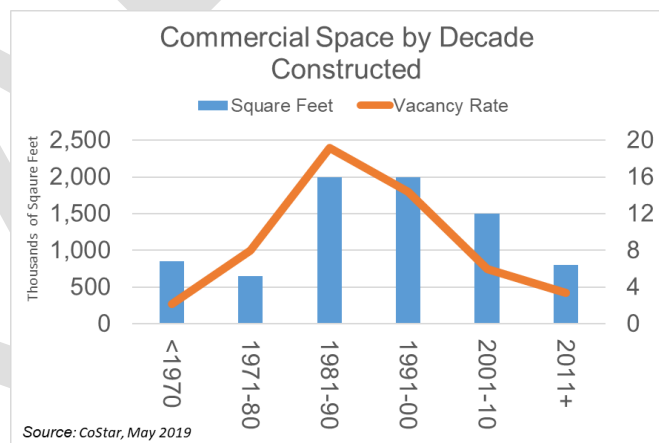


## Redevelop & Reuse Vacant & Underutilized Properties

### Background

As of 2019, the City has approximately 7.7 million square feet of commercial space, 5.5 million in retail and 2.2 million in office space. In the world of marketing, a product goes through numerous lifecycles: introduction, growth, maturity and decline. Marketers do everything they can to avoid the decline stage by improving or replacing their product. The 20 year period between 1980 and 2000 would be considered North Richland Hills' *growth* stage as over 50% of commercial space was developed during this period.

In 2001, the City entered the *maturity* phase as the volume of new commercial slowed and a large portion began to show age, some toward the *decline* stage. Case in point, property constructed between 1980 and 2000 has a 16% vacancy rate while property constructed after 2000 is 5%. Since it is estimated that only 1 square mile of undeveloped property remains zoned for commercial use, redevelopment and reuse of vacant property becomes more and more important with time.



Recognizing the issue, the City set forth long term plans and projects that would either alter future development or trigger catalytic events that encourage challenged commercial property to consider demolition, redevelopment or revitalization.

Looking back to recent history, there are numerous noteworthy examples that altered future development or triggered a catalytic event. The closure and subsequent demolition of North Hills Mall removed a half million square feet of retail space from the City's base. The North Tarrant Express widening prompted the relocation of the City's municipal complex and recreation center, making way for redevelopment and reuse along Loop 820. Most recently, the rezoning of two separate areas into Transit Oriented Development (TOD) districts are triggering redevelopment and reuse of properties around two new commuter rail stations.

## Action #1 – Revitalize and Reinvest in Existing Commercial Properties

Given the trend that older property has a higher level of vacancy, additional time, resources and creativity are needed. This is further complicated as these properties typically require costly upgrades to meet current building code and site standards. According to the IRS, the typical use and utility of a commercial property is roughly 39 years, reinforcing the notion that a property's quality declines over time. Currently 1.6 million square feet of commercial is 40 years of age or older (17% of the total). Although numerous examples of this activity exist around the City, the opportunity is to replicate and facilitate more, including older office space.

*Former Action – Target Reuse of Vacant Retail*

*Council Goals – Quality Community Development & Revitalization, Targeted Economic Development*

## Action #2 – Re-energize Mature Transportation Corridors

Previously targeted for Boulevard 26 south of Loop 820, the opportunity exists across all corridors. There are 23 miles of roadway that are 6 lanes or more with 25,000+ vehicles per day. Most are TxDOT owned and operated where roughly 40% lack standard streetscape elements such as curb, gutter, sidewalks or streetlights. Often these corridors coincide with property in need of revitalization, and therefore align with Action #1. The addition of streetscaping further increases scope, complexity and cost, thus the need for City involvement.



*Former Action – Redevelop South Grapevine Highway*

*Council Goals – Quality Community Development & Revitalization, Positive City Image*

## Action #3 – Develop City Point into a Vibrant Urban Village

Five years after North Hills Mall was demolished (2007) a citizen-led committee recommended the relocation of the City's municipal complex to the property, which prompted the renaming to City Point. The decision to relocate a new facility has become a catalyst for redeveloping the 60 remaining acres into an urban village. The purpose of this action is to expedite, influence and enhance the quality of development versus waiting on the market to determine when, how and what develops.

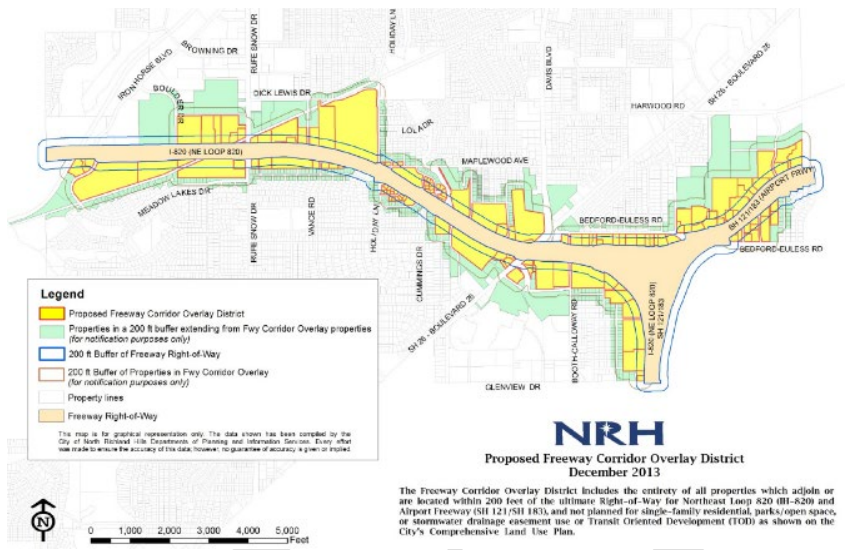
*Former Action – Redevelop North Hills Mall*

*Council Goals – Quality Community Development & Revitalization, Positive City Image, Targeted Economic Development*



## Action #4 – Implement the Freeway Corridor Overlay Plan

In 2013, the City adopted the *Freeway Corridor Overlay District* plan just before 2014's completion of the North Tarrant Express. The taking of right-of-way along Airport Freeway and Loop 820 created a catalytic event for the City to facilitate redevelopment and reuse opportunities. The plan created a 200-foot buffer along the highly visible corridor with amended landscape and hardscape requirements, alongside an update of allowable land uses. Roughly 25% of the corridor's frontage has transitioned to the new standards, highlighted by *Babe's Chicken Dinner House*, *Huggins Honda* and the *Legend Bank* building. However, 75% of the opportunity remains as future properties change use or redevelop.



*Former Action – Evaluate Highest and Best Land Use of Loop 820 Area*

*Council Goals – Quality Community Development & Revitalization, Positive City Image, Efficient & Effective Transportation System*

## Action #5 – Redevelop Existing Neighborhoods

A key strength of NRH is the quality of life for residential living. Because of this, the demand for additional housing continues although the City is 90% built-out. On top of the limited space, 45% of the existing single-family homes are 40 years of age or older prompting the need for renovation in order to meet today's standards. This action is two-pronged: to promote mature home renovations and identify underutilized residential areas that can accommodate additional single-family.

*Action #5 – No change*

*Council Goals – Quality Community Development & Revitalization, Positive City Image*



## Goal #2

## Promote a Positive Business Climate

### Background

The City is home to over 1,200 brick and mortar businesses, employing roughly 30,000 people. Primarily a single-family suburb, 60% of the City's property tax base comes from single-family residential property. The need to reduce this reliance can only be achieved by diversifying the mix of land uses with an increasing share from the business base.

Primary employers, those that produce or provide services beyond the City, are a significant source of job creation, sales tax and property tax revenues. Furthermore, while 90% of these employees live outside City limits, they support business around their place of employment.

The City has a full-service Economic Development department dedicated to the business community with an award-winning experienced staff, equipped with real-time city information, real estate data and market intelligence at no cost. City leaders are also open to creative tactics and strategies to recruit and retain targeted businesses and developers.

Since it is estimated that only 1 square mile of undeveloped property remains zoned for commercial use, it is imperative that the City pushes the limits of existing commercial development, while protecting the little that remains available.

### Action #1 – Retain and Foster a Quality Business Environment

While the City on average welcomes 100 new businesses per year, it only nets an increase of 20 businesses. Further, it is much more difficult to recruit a new business than retain a business. The City recognizes that the ongoing needs of an existing business are different, but just as important as recruiting a new business.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

To foster a quality business environment, the City's development review process is consistent and less time consuming than other cities. Staff is hands on, offering creative solutions to connect private sector efforts with City goals. Development standards are quality, but not excessive, allowing a property or investment to retain its value over time. While not a suitable environment for certain types of business, the City is fair, equitable and even rewarding for those who endeavor to invest, develop or conduct business within its borders.

*Former Action – Retain Existing Business*

*Council Goals – Positive City Image, Efficient & Effective Delivery of City Services*

### Action #2 – Support a Regional Approach to Business Recruitment

The DFW Metroplex represents almost 8 million people within 13 counties and over 200 cities. North Richland Hills is an attractive place for business, with a central location, strong traffic volumes, and abundant points of access that reach a large customer base and labor pool. In certain cases (i.e. Amazon HQ national search) it is in the best interests for a region, be it formal or informal, to band together due to an opportunity's broad economic impact. Likewise, it is normal and acceptable for cities to cooperate regionally yet compete with one another for specific opportunities (a term Economic Development practitioners call *co-opetition*). For example, a particular city may not have a location or be targeting a specific business, but a neighboring city is. A new business can impact multiple jurisdictions - the city directly where the business is located, other cities indirectly (i.e. job creation, related businesses). Regardless, business recruitment is paramount and should be focused to those industries that align with Council goals and the City's comprehensive land use plan.

*Former Action – No change*

*Council Goals – Targeted Economic Development, Local & Regional Leadership*

### Action #3 – Provide Infrastructure Capacity for Economic Growth

The City has an existing and robust infrastructure network that businesses and developers can tap into. A common issue for accommodating growth is not only the developer's cost of public infrastructure (water, sewer, drainage, roads), but the potential cost for connecting an isolated site. It is common for suburban and exurban areas to lack connectivity, where equipping and connecting a site to existing public infrastructure can be cost prohibitive (the further away, the more cost). There are two benefits of being 90% built-out. First, public infrastructure exists within close proximity, or on-site. Second, under a redevelopment scenario, public infrastructure may already exist reducing time and cost. The ability to quickly inventory what exists and what else is needed, if any, is vital when recruiting business.



*Former Action – Facilitate Street Construction Projects*

*Council Goals – Efficient & Effective Delivery of City Services, Efficient & Effective Transportation System*

## Goal #3

## Develop & Promote an Attractive, Diversified and Thriving Community

### Background

While NRH has enjoyed the status of being the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest city in Tarrant County for quite some time, it is expected to be supplanted by Mansfield due to their abundance of available land. This does not mean the City will cease to grow and age in place. Rather, it will grow at a slower pace, with opportunities for redevelopment and revitalization will become more common.

The business community (businesses, developers, investors, lenders) wants to locate where they will be most successful. There are numerous factors that determine where a business chooses to locate or relocate. It's important to understand what goes into the site selection process and determine why a business will choose one location, one city, over another.

The process to successfully recruit a business may require merely one email, while another may take several years. While the primary audience of this goal is intended for the business community (specifically on the merits of locating in NRH), a secondary audience is the community itself, so as to support NRH businesses, both existing and new.

Meantime, not every business interested in coming to NRH will be able to identify a location that aligns with the Economic Development Plan, or the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Economic Developers usually become very popular during the *feasibility* stage of the site selection process, requiring communication that the proposed use doesn't align.

North Richland Hills is one of few cities in the Metroplex that owns a golf course, waterpark and tennis center. Additionally, it is one of a few that offers commuter rail and 30 miles of bike trails as an alternative to the automobile. The purpose of this goal is not only to effectively communicate and promote strengths, but also provide clarity of what to anticipate when doing business in the city.

### Action #1 – Maintain Quality Development Standards

Mentioned previously, the City's development standards are quality, but not excessive, allowing a property or investment to retain its value over time. Some communities facilitate development that is short lived, functionally obsolete or poorly constructed. Since 10% of the City remains available for new construction, it has to be selective in the type of uses and quality of the construction.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN

As discussed in Goal #1, Action #1, the quality of a property is tested by time. Dwellings, commercial or residential, can be built and/or redeveloped using a variety of materials and design standards. The opportunity is to encourage and adopt standards that assist a property or development to retain its value, use and utility over time.

*Former Action - Promote Quality Development Standards*

*Council Goals – Quality Community Development & Revitalization, Positive City Image*

### Action #2 – Maximize the Benefits of Commuter Rail Service

On January 8, 2019, a catalytic event occurred where TEXRail, the 27-mile long commuter rail service opened for business connecting Downtown Fort Worth and DFW Airport, with two separate stations in NRH. Built over the historical Cotton Belt Line, the railroad right-of-way existed prior to City incorporation. The long term strategic plan for the City not only includes commuter rail, but the development of two transit oriented development (TOD) districts. Each district is over 150-acres in size, offering existing property owners the opportunity to take advantage of their change in land use. Meantime, as the regional population grows, congestion will increase, whereby commuter rail offers a convenient alternative to the automobile.

Focusing growth around transit stations provides many benefits such as:

- The revitalization of neighborhoods
- Economic returns to surrounding landowners and businesses
- Congestion relief and associated environmental benefits
- Improved safety for pedestrians and cyclists through non-motorized infrastructure

*Federal Transit Administration*

*Former Action – Promote Commuter Rail Service*

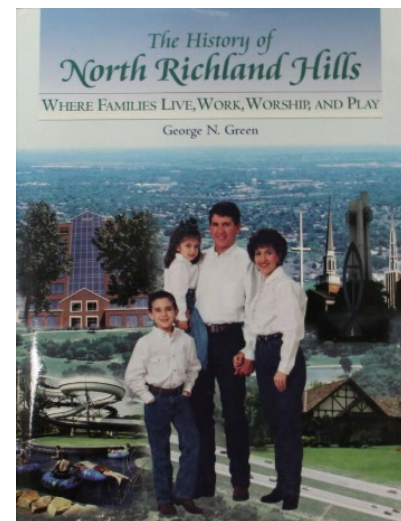
*Council Goals – Quality Community Development & Revitalization, Efficient & Effective Transportation System*

### Action #3 – Promote Awareness of the Historical Areas of NRH

The City was incorporated in 1953; however its history goes back to the 1840's. Rich with documents and imagery of the past, a committee was formed in 1996 to research, interview and collect information. In 1998, *The History of North Richland Hills*, a 502 page book was published. The City has a colorful legacy that should be shared not only with its residents, but promoted to visitors and businesses interested in celebrating its history. From buildings of historical significance, to the Smithfield Cemetery, to Evel Knievel's record jump at Green Valley Raceway in 1974; a tremendous amount of unlocked potential exists.

*Former Action – Promote the Smithfield Historical Area*

*Council Goals – Positive City Image, Sense of Community*



## Action #4 – Promote Tourism, Hospitality and Entertainment

Tourism, Hospitality and Entertainment bring large amounts of income to a local economy in the form of payment for goods and services from those who visit. This income is a boost not only to local business, but to the City in the form of taxable income for the provision of quality public services. It is important that the City and the Economic Development Department find ways to grow the local tax base and support local businesses by seeking and welcoming those who visit. Travel and tourism is a critical component of the economy. For



Texas, direct travel spending in 2018 was estimated at 80 billion dollars, which generated an additional 84 billion dollars in secondary impacts for an economic impact of 164 billion dollars. In the same year, the Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism (Travel Texas) estimates that 51 million in tourism dollars were spent in the City, helping to employ 630 people. In comparison, Grapevine, located at the north entry of DFW Airport, generated 1.9 billion tourism dollars, employing 21,750 people.

*Former Action – Promote Tourist and Entertainment Venues*

*Council Goals – Positive City Image, Targeted Economic Development*

## Action #5 – Continually Market to Enhance the Image of NRH

The City has worked hard to develop, maintain and communicate a positive image. While most cities place an effort on their image, the volume of city image information and marketing is diluted due the sheer size of the Metroplex (8 million people) and the number of cities (over 200). Add in advances in technology - specifically social media - the level of importance and required resources to maintain and enhance the City's image continues to increase. NRH enjoys a very positive image - surveys from our residents demonstrate this. From an Economic Development perspective, this message needs to expand beyond City borders toward those looking to spend time, invest money or conduct business.

*Former Action – Actively Market to Improve the Image of NRH*

*Council Goals – Positive City Image, Targeted Economic Development*

### *Former Actions*

- » *Enhance Davis Boulevard – merged with Goal #1 Action #2 Re-energize Mature Transportation Corridors*
- » *Support City Image – merged with Goal #3 Action #7 Continually Market to Enhance the Image of NRH*
- » *Promote the HomeTown Development – merged with Goal #2 Action #1 as HomeTown is nearing completion*

## Implementation Matrix

## Goal #1 Redevelop &amp; Reuse Vacant &amp; Underutilized Properties

Goal #1 - Redevelop & Reuse Vacant & Underutilized Properties		Council Goals								
Action Items	Timeframe	Quality Community Development & Revitalization	Efficient & Effective Transportation System	Safety & Stability	Financial Stability	Positive City Image	Sense of Community	Targeted Economic Development	Local & Regional Leadership	Efficient & Effective Delivery of City Services
<b>1. Revitalize &amp; Reinvest in Existing Commercial Properties</b>										
1.A. Adopt and promote policies that facilitate property improvements	Ongoing	•						•		
1.B. Identify alternatives and opportunities that encourage improvements	Ongoing	•						•		
1.C. Selectively market and promote façade improvement program	Ongoing	•						•		•
1.D. Consider and implement economic development tools to advance the action	Case by case	•						•		•
<b>2. Re-energize Mature Transportation Corridors</b>										
2.A. Participate in the identification of street capital improvement projects	Ongoing	•	•			•		•		
2.B. Promote projects that exemplify the City's vision and goals	Ongoing	•				•		•		
2.C. Market and administer the pole sign removal and monument grant program	Case by case	•				•		•		•
2.D. Adopt and promote policies that facilitate streetscape improvements	Ongoing	•				•		•		
2.E. Consider and implement economic development tools to advance the action	Case by case	•				•		•		•
<b>3. Develop City Point into Vibrant Urban Village</b>										
3.A. Promote area to business, broker and development communities	Ongoing	•				•		•		
3.B. Maximize the commercial tax base and individual business performance	Ongoing				•			•		
3.C. Consider and evaluate economic development tools to advance the action	Case by Case	•			•			•		•
3.D. Support the negotiation and implementation of agreements and plans	Short	•	•		•	•				•
3.E. Evaluate and monitor adherence to agreements and plans	Proposed	•			•					•
<b>4. Implement the Freeway Corridor Overlay Plan</b>										
4.A. Carry out the plan to advance adoption as opportunities arise	Ongoing	•				•		•		
4.B. Market and promote projects that exemplify the plan's vision	Ongoing	•				•		•		
4.C. Consider and implement economic development tools to advance the action	Case by case	•				•		•		•
<b>5. Redevelop Existing Neighborhoods</b>										
5.A. Market and promote projects that exemplify the City's vision and goals	Ongoing	•				•		•		
5.B. Identify and introduce underdeveloped residential property	Ongoing	•				•		•		
5.C. Redirect tax foreclosures toward renovation or reconstruction with owner occ.	Ongoing	•				•		•		

# Implementation Matrix

## Goal #2 Promote a Positive Business Climate

Goal #2 - Promote a Positive Business Climate		Council Goals								
Action Items		Quality Community Development & Revitalization	Efficient & Effective Transportation System	Safety & Stability	Financial Stability	Positive City Image	Sense of Community	Targeted Economic Development	Local & Regional Leadership	Efficient & Effective Delivery of City Services
Timeframe										
<b>1. Retain and Foster a Quality Business Environment</b>										
1.A. Facilitate and guide business through City policies and procedures	Ongoing					•		•		•
1.B. Provide site feasibility assistance (market, financial and legislative)	Case by case					•		•		•
1.C. Connect and introduce network of local business resources	Case by case					•	•	•	•	
1.D. Promote businesses and projects that exemplify the City's vision	Ongoing	•				•		•	•	•
1.E. Provide business planning assistance and real estate research	Case by case					•		•		•
1.F. Monitor local business performance and industry trends	Ongoing	•			•	•		•		•
<b>2. Support a Regional Approach to Business Recruitment</b>										
2.A. Proactively engage targeted industries to drive local opportunities	Ongoing	•				•		•	•	•
2.B. Consider and implement economic development tools	Case by Case	•						•		•
2.C. Provide support and guidance to the site selector and broker communities	Ongoing	•				•		•	•	•
2.D. Participate in commercial real estate organizations and events	Ongoing	•				•		•	•	•
2.E. Advance and guide the success of regional organizations (Chamber, NLF)	Ongoing					•	•		•	
2.F. Remain engaged in regional and national economic development organizations	Ongoing					•		•	•	•
2.G. Influence and monitor legislation related to taxes, business and development	Ongoing	•			•			•	•	•
2.G. Understand, align and support adjacent communities on regional opportunities	Case by Case	•				•	•	•	•	
<b>3. Provide Infrastructure Capacity for Economic Growth</b>										
3.A. Organize, evaluate and promote traffic and ridership counts	Ongoing	•	•			•		•		•
3.B. Participate in the identification of infrastructure capital improvement projects	Ongoing	•	•			•		•		•
3.C. Communicate and promote existing public infrastructure	Case by Case	•				•		•		•
3.D. Align and support City departments to administer the Transportation Plan	Ongoing	•	•			•		•		•
3.E. Identify, connect and engage private utility partners	Case by Case	•				•		•	•	



## Implementation Matrix

Goal #3 Develop &amp; Promote an Attractive, Diversified &amp; Thriving Community

Goal #3 - Develop & Promote an Attractive, Diversified & Thriving Community			Council Goals									
Action Items		Timeframe	Quality Community Development & Revitalization	Efficient & Effective Transportation System	Safety & Stability	Financial Stability	Positive City Image	Sense of Community	Targeted Economic Development	Local & Regional Leadership	Efficient & Effective Delivery of City Services	
1. Maintain Quality Development Standards												
1.A. Adopt and promote policies that facilitate quality development	Ongoing	•					•		•			
1.B. Consider and implement economic development tools to advance the action	Case by case	•					•				•	
1.C. Align and support City departments that administer standards	Ongoing	•					•		•			
1.D. Collaborate with adjacent communities to align standards	Ongoing	•					•		•	•	•	
2. Maximize the Benefits of Commuter Rail Service												
2.A. Engage targeted properties and developers to facilitate new development	Ongoing	•							•			
2.B. Protect and defend TOD property best suited for commercial use	Case by Case	•							•			
2.C. Pursue commercial development and business occupancy	Ongoing	•					•		•			
2.D. Promote and support targeted businesses that embrace TOD	Ongoing						•	•				
2.E. Consider and implement economic development tools for commercial uses	Case by Case	•							•		•	
2.F. Align and support City departments to administer TOD regulations	Ongoing	•							•		•	
2.G. Identify alternatives and opportunities that encourage TOD development	Ongoing	•					•		•	•	•	
3. Promote Awareness of the Historical Areas of NRH												
3.A. Inventory historical areas and determine level of significance	Proposed						•	•				
3.B. Explore a program and/or initiative to market and recognize locations	Proposed						•		•			
3.C. Encourage the business community to celebrate NRH history	Proposed						•	•	•			
3.D. Leverage archives from local residents, businesses and organizations	Proposed						•	•	•			
4. Promote Tourism, Hospitality and Entertainment												
4.A. Pursue and support businesses that capture non-resident disposable income	Ongoing	•					•		•			
4.B. Proactively target new hospitality uses that exemplify the City's vision	Ongoing	•					•		•			
4.C. Promote existing NRH attractions through regional marketing channels	Ongoing						•					
4.D. Consider and implement economic development tools to advance the action	Case by case	•					•		•		•	
5. Continually Market to Enhance the Image of NRH												
5.A. Maximize technology (internet, social media) as a means for communication	Ongoing						•	•	•		•	
5.B. Ensure awareness within the regional business and development communities	Ongoing						•	•	•	•		
5.C. Leverage citizen surveys, feedback and input to shape direction	Ongoing						•	•				
5.D. Identify new or alternative means of effective communication	Ongoing										•	
5.E. Provide timely and accurate responses to inquiries	Ongoing						•			•	•	