

DRAFT 11.13.23



Mount Vernon Corridor Strategic Plan



Acknowledgements

MHS Planning & Design, LLC would like to thank the following leaders and volunteers for their input in the development of this plan. A special thanks to invested citizens, the Franklin County Industrial Foundation, Economic Development Corporation, and City Staff for their participation and input during the planning process.

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Mount Vernon Corridor Strategic Plan



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Mount Vernon partnered with MHS Planning & Design (MHS) in 2023 to perform an analysis of the city's northern and southern corridors and make recommendations for future growth. The Executive Summary is intended to briefly explain the process utilized to identify existing conditions, determine the needs of the city, and create a road map to develop a strategic plan that meets the desires of the residents and community leaders. This plan shall serve as a guide for how the City of Mount Vernon can best develop in specific growth areas over the next five years.

The time is now for the Mount Vernon community to cast a vision for the corridors that will positively affect the culture of the area. The city is in an ideal position for local leaders to make decisions that can lead to a well-rounded community as more people are choosing to live here. This is important for current and future residents of the City of Mount Vernon.

Mount Vernon is located along Interstate 30 between Dallas (70 miles west) and Texarkana (70 miles east). It is important to note that the nearby Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex is rapidly growing. This growth can bring new residents and visitors to the community that are accustomed to amenities found in larger urban areas. In addition to the DFW population growth, the City of Texarkana

is making changes which can attract new residents. The effects of these changes can spill over into Mount Vernon. As Mount Vernon experiences this spillover growth and continues to develop, the physical and cultural infrastructure will need to be updated. Investment into civic, office, and commercial amenities should be a priority to the city as accessibility to parks and various retail and restaurant options enhance the quality of life for the community. The investment in the physical infrastructure will provide the city with the capacity for growth.

The Strategic Planning process requires an understanding of the existing physical, social, and economic conditions of the area to make recommendations. Throughout the process, there were meetings with stakeholders, the Franklin County Industrial Board, the Mount Vernon Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and city staff to understand various perspectives of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Mount Vernon. It is apparent that the City of Mount Vernon has many strengths, like its historic charm, lively downtown, and tight-knit community. The city also has the opportunity to prepare for future residential and commercial development. It is important to note that the

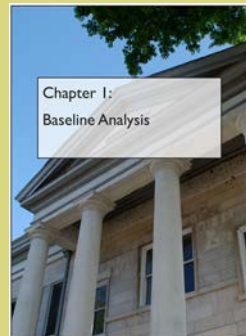
city should address existing weaknesses related to downtown development and land use planning. It is recommended that the city increase the number and types of jobs and housing, develop an upper education pipeline, improve healthcare access, adopt and update land use and road design policies, enhance gateways, and utilize a TIF district to develop a live-work-play neighborhood.

To better understand the needs of the community and stakeholders, a full day was spent with discussions between local residents and community leaders. To continue tracking the progress of the Implementation Schedule and ensure the goals conform to the Strategic Plan, the City of Mount Vernon should review and modify this plan as necessary at a minimum of five years.

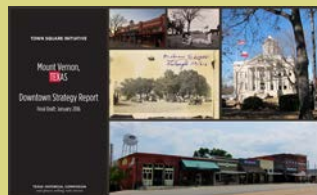
THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO COLLABORATE AND GROW MARKETS AROUND THE EXISTING AMENITIES AND NATURAL ASSETS.



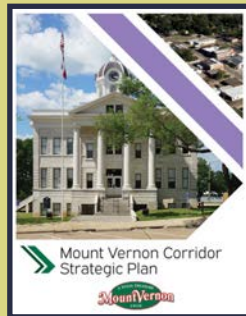
MOUNT VERNON'S PLAN HIEARCHY



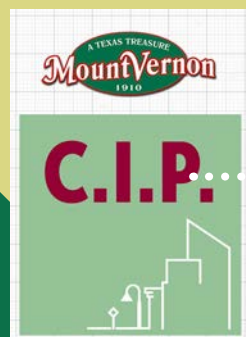
The **2010 Comprehensive Plan** is a document which purpose is to proactively address future socioeconomic changes and development by considering the interconnected influences of land use, housing, economy, environment, etc.



The **2016 Downtown Strategy Report** describes the strategic prioritization of historic preservation to spur redevelopment projects in the Square.



The **2023 Strategic Plan** describes analysis of the public's goals and objectives from previous plans in relation to the potential developable acreage around the Interstate 30/ Highway 37 corridors.



The **Capital Improvements Plan** describes the location, schedule and financing of capital improvements as budgeted by the city. These improvements can include emergency services, Public Works projects, and Parks and Recreation areas.



The City of Mount Vernon is included in the **Franklin County Annual Financial Report**. The audit report describes the municipality's financial health in relation to revenue and debt incurred from the previous fiscal year.

PURPOSE OF THE PLAN

A strategic plan is a document adopted by City Council that serves as a guide on how to best develop the community. These plans are typically more focused compared to a Comprehensive Plan on certain topics, like a community's goals and objectives or a specified area of a city. Building on previous plans' data, the Mount Vernon Strategic Plan envisions a community where all people can call it home, a flourishing downtown that encourages residential, commercial, and recreational activity, and a healthy place that incorporates the three E's of sustainability: Economic, Equity, and Environmental.

everyone. If a city only operates on a year-to-year management strategy, the rapid population growth or rapid population loss can strain municipal services and the quality of life for all citizens, leading to spikes in traffic congestion, crime, or shuttered businesses.

It is crucial for Mount Vernon to anticipate spillover growth from the development boom happening in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metropolitan area. DFW is expected to be the fifth fastest growing large metro area in the country by 2028. Typically, as growth occurs in an urbanized area, populations migrate to the outer suburbs, along major corridors, and around natural features such as lakes. While growth is occurring all around DFW, notable concentrations are happening to the north

Urban economic theory suggests that any city, town, or village is either growing or shrinking - nothing remains stagnant. Influenced by economic and social factors like job opportunities and housing prices, populations constantly move to and throughout cities and regions. As businesses grow and houses are purchased, there are companies, developers, and investors who become increasingly interested and involved in building neighborhoods, offices, and storefronts - all which utilize a city's infrastructure. In anticipation or response, a city should collaborate with and understand the needs of its citizens, study demographic trends, and implement best planning practices. This data-in-action leads to a proactive plan that encourages incremental growth, a minimized cost burden, and a stable living standard for

DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS EFFICIENTLY LEVERAGE ECONOMIC INCENTIVES.

and the east around Interstate 30. This increase in population and development is anticipated to continue, and the impact will most likely be felt in the surrounding communities.

As Mount Vernon is located near Texarkana, it is important to be aware of this community's development. Although Texarkana is not currently experiencing an increase in population, the city is actively making improvements which could spur new population growth. In

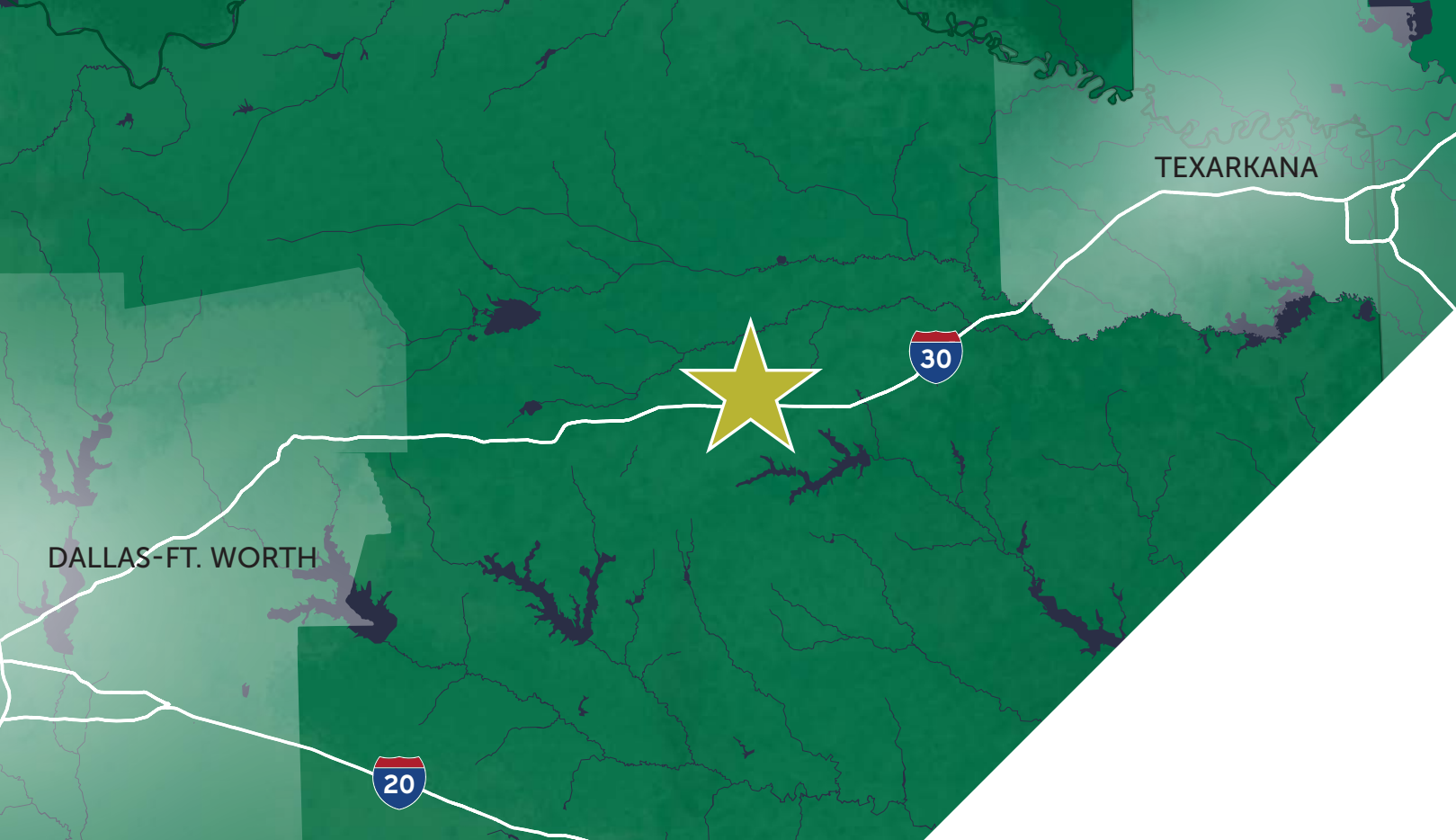


Figure 1: Major metro areas to the east and west of Mount Vernon

November 2022, the residents voted to approve a \$189 million bond package that will go towards improving the Texarkana independent school district (ISD) system. In addition to this approved bond, the Texarkana public transit system (the T-Line) is likely to be improved. The Texas Transportation Commission (TTC) provided nearly \$70 million in additional funding to transit providers throughout Texas in 2022. This funding can be used to improve public transit systems, including the purchase of new vehicles, construction of new facilities, and expanding service areas. While Texarkana will not receive all the TTC funding, some of the funding can be distributed, which can improve the community's transportation system. With the new funding opportunities and commitments set to enhance Texarkana,

there is an assumption that growth will follow. Mount Vernon may experience some of the spillover growth and see an increase in the number of visitors that travel to the community.

The major roadways in Mount Vernon are Interstate 30, Highway 67 & 37. TxDOT is continuously updating Texas roadways, and there have been discussion for improvements like lane widening, landscaping, and safety enhancements to I-30. Major roadway expansions are proposed to help meet the anticipated transportation needs that will arise from the rapid growth in personal vehicles and commercial freight.

Strategic planning helps municipalities and organizations like the Franklin County

Industrial Board and the Mount Vernon Economic Development Corporation, who can capitalize on infrastructure investments by making data-driven decisions and leveraging their economic incentives to help start and grow local industries and businesses. Popular tax mechanisms like the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District and Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) can be utilized to secure funding for infrastructure and business support. Planned mixed-use neighborhoods utilizing a 'live-work-play' design with housing, boutiques, offices, and pedestrian-friendly amenities become a focal point for residents and a tourist destination for the region. These developments have efficient land use

and utility usage, minimizing the cost burden on the taxpayer while meeting the community's various needs.

As a result of the steady growth rate in Mount Vernon along with the nearby presence of the DFW metroplex and Texarkana, it is crucial for the City of Mount Vernon to conduct a Strategic Plan to aim for a healthy and prosperous future. This Strategic Plan incorporates best development practices and research to the benefit of each citizen. With this plan, decision makers can help steer development in an optimized and efficient manner.

Mount Vernon's main street square has a clean, updated streetscape serving stylish storefronts.





MISSION STATEMENT

“Striving to create a unique identity for residents and visitors and installing a strong sense of community.”



VISION STATEMENT

“To create a community for all by ensuring the needs of all residents and visitors are met and providing safe access to promote healthy lifestyles.”

MOTTO

“Preserving the Past, Embracing the Future.”

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This Strategic Plan is intended to build on the City's goals & objectives derived from previous plans. The plan implements best land use practices and theory for the north and south corridors around Interstate 30 and City Lake. The purpose

of this Strategic Plan is to prepare for the growth of Mount Vernon, specifically in the northern and southern corridors, while promoting the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens.

Goal #1: Ensure there is sufficient housing for the community.

Objective 1.1: Create environments that allow for a variety of housing to be developed.

Objective 1.2: Ensure housing types are compatible with current and future land uses.

Objective 1.3: Create opportunities that encourage aging in place.

Objective 1.4: Promote homeownership.

Goal #2: Establish a unique sense of identity and provide a high quality-of-life for the community.

Objective 2.1: Promote pedestrian-oriented development that will encourage alternative transportation options ensuring pedestrians can safely walk to commercial and recreational facilities.

Objective 2.2: Implement design standards to create a cohesive community.

Objective 2.3: Ensure recreational needs of the community are being met.

Objective 2.4: Establish methods to increase civic pride.

Objective 2.5: Provide programming opportunities for all members of the community, regardless of age or ability.

Goal #3: Promote Mount Vernon's assets toward the greater region to increase awareness and stimulate the local economy.

Objective 3.1: Enhance principal gateways & interstate exits with cohesive branding and scenery.

Objective 3.2: Explore partnerships with other organizational entities to develop unique points of interest.

Objective 3.3: Establish methods for historic preservation.

Objective 3.4: Enhance and promote downtown Mount Vernon.



Tour de Cypress has been biking through town over 20 years.

Goal #4: Ensure Mount Vernon has a healthy and resilient business climate.

Objective 4.1: Pursue and encourage business creation and retention, especially local entities.

Objective 4.2: Ensure a diversified tax base through a balance of land uses.

Objective 4.3: Continue to develop higher education access.

Objective 4.4: Continue to leverage economic incentive packages.

Goal #5: Ensure the provision of a balanced park and open space system for the enjoyment of all Mount Vernon residents and visitors.

Objective 5.1: Provide diverse options for active and passive recreational opportunities for all, regardless of age or ability.

Objective 5.2: Encourage the distribution of parkland to assist with meeting National goals of having all residents within a 10-minute walk to a park.

Objective 5.3: Develop a maintenance program which will address maintenance schedules, park equipment, replacement funds, and maintenance for additional parks as they come online.

Objective 5.4: Ensure that all park facilities meet the most current safety guidelines and accessibility standards.

Objective 5.5: Develop trail systems along creeks, floodways, and utility easements that will link public and private recreational facilities, neighborhoods, and school campuses.

Objective 5.6: Identify, protect, and preserve quality natural open spaces for unstructured recreational activities, inherent aesthetic value, and protection of valuable ecosystems.



The historic Henry Clay Thruston House sits next to the Bankhead Highway Visitors Center and Dupree Park & Nature Preserve.

HISTORY

Mount Vernon, a town in Northeast Texas, has a history dating back to the mid-19th century. Known for its hospitality, unique charm, and historical character, Mount Vernon is a blend of the old and the new, where traditional values coincide with modern amenities.

The area where Mount Vernon is currently located was originally inhabited by the Caddo Indians. European settlers, primarily from Southern states, began arriving in the 1840s, attracted by the promise of fertile soil for cotton farming and the lure of vast, untamed wilderness. The town, first named “Lone Star” in 1848, changed its name to Mount Vernon in 1875. The City was allegedly named Lone Star based on George Washington’s Virginia estate, reflecting the settlers’ hopes and aspirations.

The town experienced significant growth after the railroad arrived in 1875. This infrastructure not only made the region more accessible but also facilitated commerce. Mount Vernon quickly evolved into a bustling agricultural hub, with cotton and corn being the primary crops. The presence of the railroad attracted businesses and sparked a boom in the local economy.

The turn of the 20th century brought further developments to the town. Mount Vernon became the county seat of Franklin County in 1912. This designation bolstered the community’s status and prosperity. Around the same time,

the town’s agricultural focus gradually diversified, with dairy farming and ranching becoming prominent.

Mount Vernon endured the hardships of the Great Depression in the 1930s, however, federal relief programs and community resilience helped the town weather this difficult period. Post-World War II, the town benefited from broader economic growth in Texas, diversifying into a variety of industries including manufacturing, retail, and services. Interstate 30 was completed in 1957, connecting several towns across East Texas to the route between DFW and Texarkana, which further bolstered the area’s industries. In the latter part of the 20th century, Mount Vernon began leveraging its rich historical heritage to promote tourism. The town is home to numerous historical landmarks, including the Franklin County Courthouse, which was built in 1912, and the Bankhead Highway Visitor Center, which showcases the history of one of America’s first transcontinental highways.

Although Mount Vernon’s story is deeply rooted in the past, it continues to evolve and grow, welcoming new generations while honoring its rich and diverse history. It is this mixture of heritage, hospitality, and heart that makes Mount Vernon, Texas, a unique and cherished part of American history. The town’s motto, “Preserving the Past, Embracing the Future”, accurately captures its spirit, embodying the town’s steadfast commitment to progress while honoring its past.



DEMOGRAPHICS

It is crucial for a strategic plan to have an overall analysis of the community. Online resources (including the Decennial Census and the American Community Survey) were utilized to assess and understand Mount Vernon’s demographics. The Decennial Census is conducted every ten years and is a comprehensive analysis of the demographics of the United States. The American Community Survey is an annual study that “fills in the gaps” between each census, and it uses a sample size to estimate an area’s demographics. Both of these surveys are conducted by the Census Bureau; however, the significant differences are the time period for when the study is conducted and the level of detail the survey covers.

The City of Mount Vernon has been continuously growing over the past several decades. The 2020 Decennial Census recorded a total population of

2,780 people. This population grew 4.5% between 2010 and 2020, which is faster than Franklin County in the same time period (-2.3%). This is important to note as even though Franklin County experienced a decrease in population, Mount Vernon is continuing to grow.

Overall, Mount Vernon is a young community, with a median age of 33.5 years old. The median age for Mount Vernon is younger than Texas (34.8 years), and Franklin County (42.4 years). The younger age of this community is important to note as younger communities generally have different needs and lifestyles than older communities. Historically, it has been researched that younger generations are more likely to live in urban areas rather than suburban areas. This is important to be aware of as urban areas typically provide environments where residents can live, work, and play, including

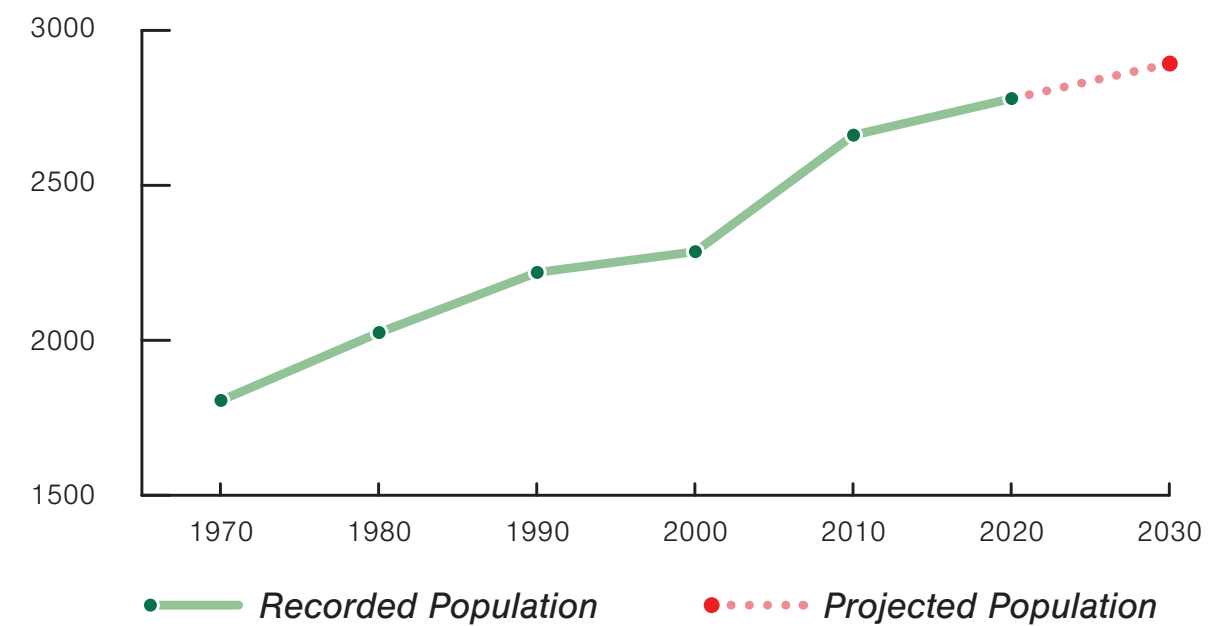


Figure 2: Recorded and projected population growth of Mount Vernon



(Above) The Chophouse is one of the excellent restaurants on the Square created during a season of redevelopment.

(Below) Architecture firm Gensler's render of a new 'urban burb' development in Plano shows invested effort to retrofit a mainstreet to combat DFW's urban sprawl.



concepts such as walkable communities and mixed-use areas. In recent years, it has been observed that while a higher proportion of millennials are living in urban areas, there has been an increase in the number of millennials moving outside of the city center. Millennials have been moving to what is known as "urban burbs." Urban burbs have facilities and amenities typically found in city centers, such as offices, grocery stores, restaurants, and parks all within walking distance to residences. This is important to note because while the DFW area may be expanding, more people will be choosing to live outside of the city - a growing demand that Mount Vernon could experience. Although this trend has been observed among the younger generation, this type of development also suits the older demographics. Market demand could shift to encourage developments that incorporate low maintenance housing within walking distance to a shopping area, restaurant, park, medical facility, pharmacy, etc.

The Census Bureau classifies race according to the U.S. Office of Management (OMB). This classification breaks race down into six categories: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Some Other Race. The population of Mount Vernon predominately identifies as White (74%), then Black or African American (14%) followed by Two or More Races (8%). No

responses were recorded that identified solely as American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. The classification of races identified above separates race from the concept of ethnicity. This is important to note as people of Hispanic ethnicity can identify as any of the above races. Of the 2,780 recorded people in the 2020 Census, 20% identify as being of Hispanic origin.

The median household income for Mount Vernon has been significantly increasing. In 2020 the recorded median household income was \$56,016. While this number is still lower than the median household income of Franklin County (\$59,632) and

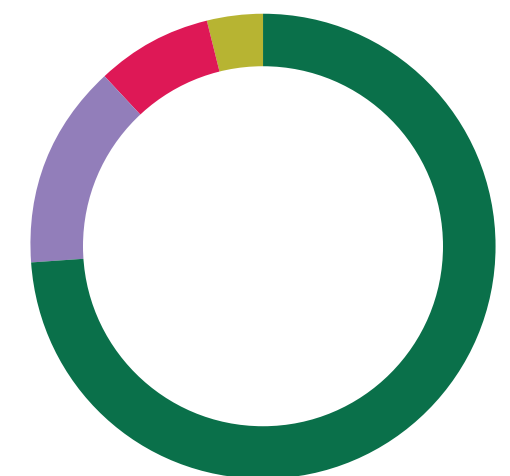
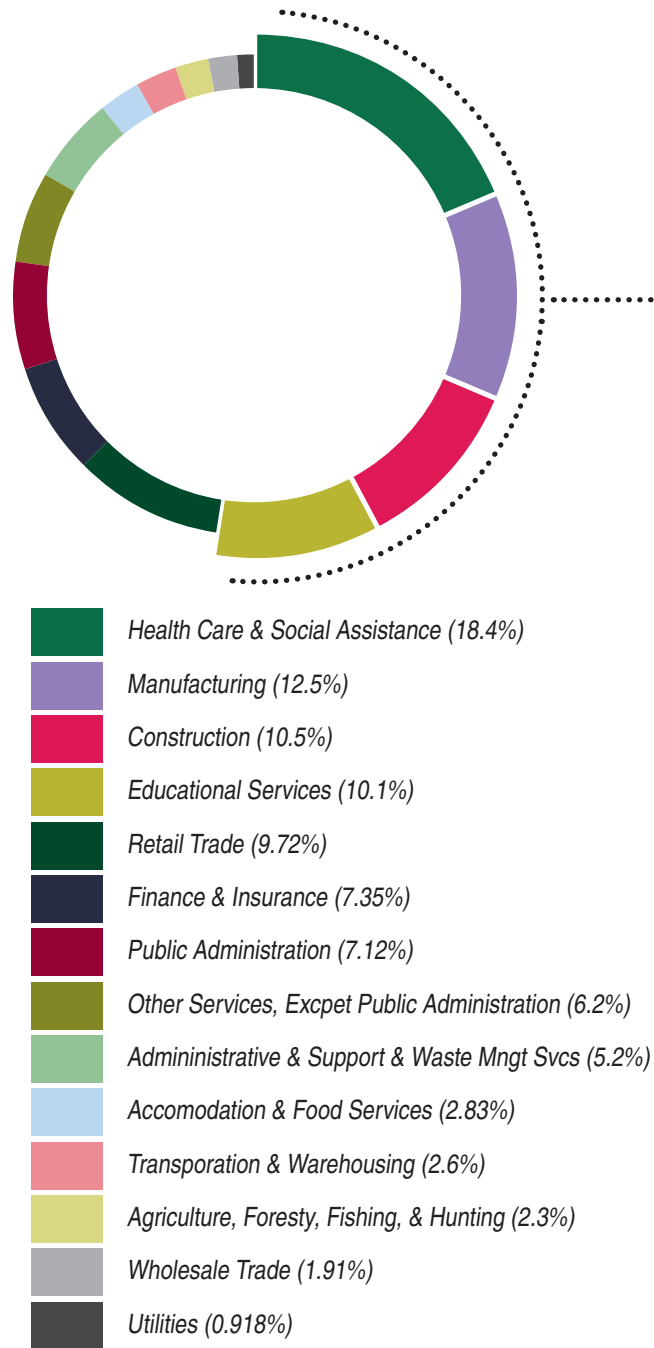


Figure 3: Racial breakdown of Mount Vernon's population

Economic Snapshot



Health Care & Social Assistance

People in Workforce	240
Workforce Growth	33.3% ▲
Median Earnings	\$91,368
Median Earnings Growth	-9.38% ▼

Manufacturing

People in Workforce	164
Workforce Growth	-19.6% ▼
Median Earnings	\$41,710
Median Earnings Growth	-0.724% ▼

Construction

People in Workforce	137
Workforce Growth	23.4% ▲
Median Earnings	\$33,583
Median Earnings Growth	-15.3% ▼

Educational Services

People in Workforce	132
Workforce Growth	5.6% ▲
Median Earnings	\$48,722
Median Earnings Growth	-0.693% ▼

Growth is between 2020 and 2021

Public Administration & Transportation, Warehousing, & Utilities were among the highest paying industries.

Texas (\$67,321), Mount Vernon could catch up quickly to the County and State with strategic plans in place based on the proposed growth.

The employment sector in Mount Vernon is fairly diverse. This community consists of white-collar and blue-collar industries. There is not one specific industry that has a majority of the population employed, however there are a few sectors that are more predominate than others. The three largest industries include: Manufacturing (16%), Retail Trade (14%), and Healthcare & Social Assistance (14%). The breakdown of the employment industry is important as it can be used to determine how to best economically develop the community. There are generalist communities which offer a wide variety of employment opportunities, and then there are specialized communities which have a small variety of industries driving the local economy. Currently, Mount Vernon resembles a generalist community.

The job occupations were analyzed to determine how people in Mount Vernon were employed. The most common job occupations include Production, Construction, Healthcare, Education, and Office Administration. This information reinforces the idea that Mount Vernon consists of white-collar and blue-collar workers.

The City of Mount Vernon is a community where the majority (68%) of residents own the home they live in. This is in line with State (62%) and National (64%) trends, but it is significantly lower than homeownership rates in Franklin County (83%). This is important to note as not everyone may be able to afford or desire to own their own home. Having a variety of housing options such as single-family, multi-family, and middle housing (duplexes, townhouses, courtyard buildings, etc.) can ensure all community members can have their housing needs met.

INDUSTRY IS THE TYPE OF ACTIVITY AT A PERSON'S WORKPLACE; OCCUPATION IS THE KIND OF WORK A PERSON DOES TO EARN A LIVING.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



Contextual image caption

MHS met with the Franklin County Industrial Foundation board multiple times throughout the development of this strategic plan. An initial kick-off meeting was conducted on June 1, 2023. This meeting laid out the foundation of the strategic plan, generated enthusiasm for members in the community, ensured all members understood the purpose and scope, and outlined the steps necessary to complete this plan. Stakeholder interviews were performed on July 7 at City Hall with key stakeholders and various on-line interviews following that date. The general audience of the stakeholder meetings consisted of community leaders, business owners, realtors, educators, and retirees.

The significant discussions at the stakeholder meetings and the data gathered at the site visits provided an understanding of the present conditions of the city along with short-term and long-term needs and desires. The public input was studied through a needs analysis which identified the community's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). The needs analysis was considered alongside national best planning practices to develop the Strategic Plan's planning analysis, recommendations and implementation schedule chapters.

Public input envisions the city becoming a vibrant, modern, and rural bedroom community to the DFW metropolitan area while maintaining historical values and

local charm. The mentioned goals include providing recreational opportunities, especially for the younger population and retirees, maintain current citizen population base and increase working professional population, attract an anchor business to draw in regional and local shoppers, and market the Square as an event area for festivals, cook-offs, music in the park, etc. Citizens desire to maintain the community's identity of the Piney Woods, historic, and exceptional culinary experiences.

Current industries in Mount Vernon include distribution, food manufacturing, light industrial, healthcare, and welding. Another large employer is the Mount Vernon ISD and its affiliated schools. The stakeholders voiced an interest in growing the existing industries and increasing the number of IT jobs.

The stakeholders view Mount Vernon's proximity to Interstate-30 as a crucial catalyst for growth. The public consensus for the North Corridor is to enhance the I-30 gateway with a visually appealing, small scale commercial frontage that builds on the community's historical charm. Behind the commercial land would be residential neighborhoods consisting of a variety of housing types geared towards working professionals and retirees. These homes are desired to be primarily owner-occupied.

The public consensus for the South

Corridor is to focus planning on City Lake. The land use components discussed included a walkable low density residential development around the lake, commercial (including a hotel) along TX-37, and sports tourism facilities in the nearby open space. Enhancing the I-30 gateway with wayfinding signage to tie into the north corridor is also desired.

In addition to the desired land uses within the city's northern and southern corridors, the stakeholder and public input expressed a desire to include a retirement community. According to the discussion, people want to retire and have

A VARIETY OF HOUSING OPTIONS CAN MEET THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF RESIDENTS IN ANY SEASON OF LIFE.

amenities associated with the community. These amenities include a clubhouse with recreational opportunities, restaurants, walking and biking trails, and other common social spaces that can facilitate community connection. Other preferred items include a gated garden home-style neighborhood with a Home Owner's Association. This neighborhood would allow for safe and slow travel with golf carts as a viable mode of transportation. While this land use helps achieve the objective of aging in place, most of these elements can be integrated into general neighborhood design.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

The Needs Analysis is based on the stated desires from citizens, the Franklin County Industrial Foundation Board, the Mount Vernon EDC, city staff, current conditions, demographic data, and the consultant’s professional opinion. This Needs Analysis is the basis for the remainder of the Mount Vernon Strategic Plan, and the needs will influence and determine the priorities, recommendations, and implementation process. Through the Needs Analysis, staff can identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Mount Vernon.

THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO COLLABORATE AND GROW MARKETS AROUND THE EXISTING AMENITIES AND NATURAL ASSETS.

Mount Vernon’s notable strengths include its education system, community pride, perception of safety, and proximity to regional amenities. Mount Vernon ISD historically scores higher than the region and state average across all subjects (Texas Education Agency), and it had an overall ‘A’ rating in the region in 2022. Citizens are proud of the “small-town feel,” they support local businesses, and they view the area as safe. A standout detail from field observations is the significant number of homes that have yard signs indicating the original homeowner and

date of construction. The community has direct access to major transportation and shipping corridors of Interstate 30 and Blackburn Railroad rail line. I-30 connects Dallas through Arkansas to major shipping airports like Memphis, TN (FedEx headquarters) and Nashville. Data from a recent traffic study reflects this dynamic, as over 50% of the 38,000 daily vehicle trips are classified as distribution while 50% are residential traffic. In comparison, I-20, which lies 50 miles south and connects Dallas to Louisiana and the majority of the Southeast US, consists of 30% distribution and 70% residential trips. It is important to note that I-30’s connection to major production and distribution points can be appealing to companies that create large product volume. Input also views Mount Vernon’s proximity to Lake Cypress, the Mount Pleasant Regional Airport, DFW and Texarkana as one of its greatest assets.

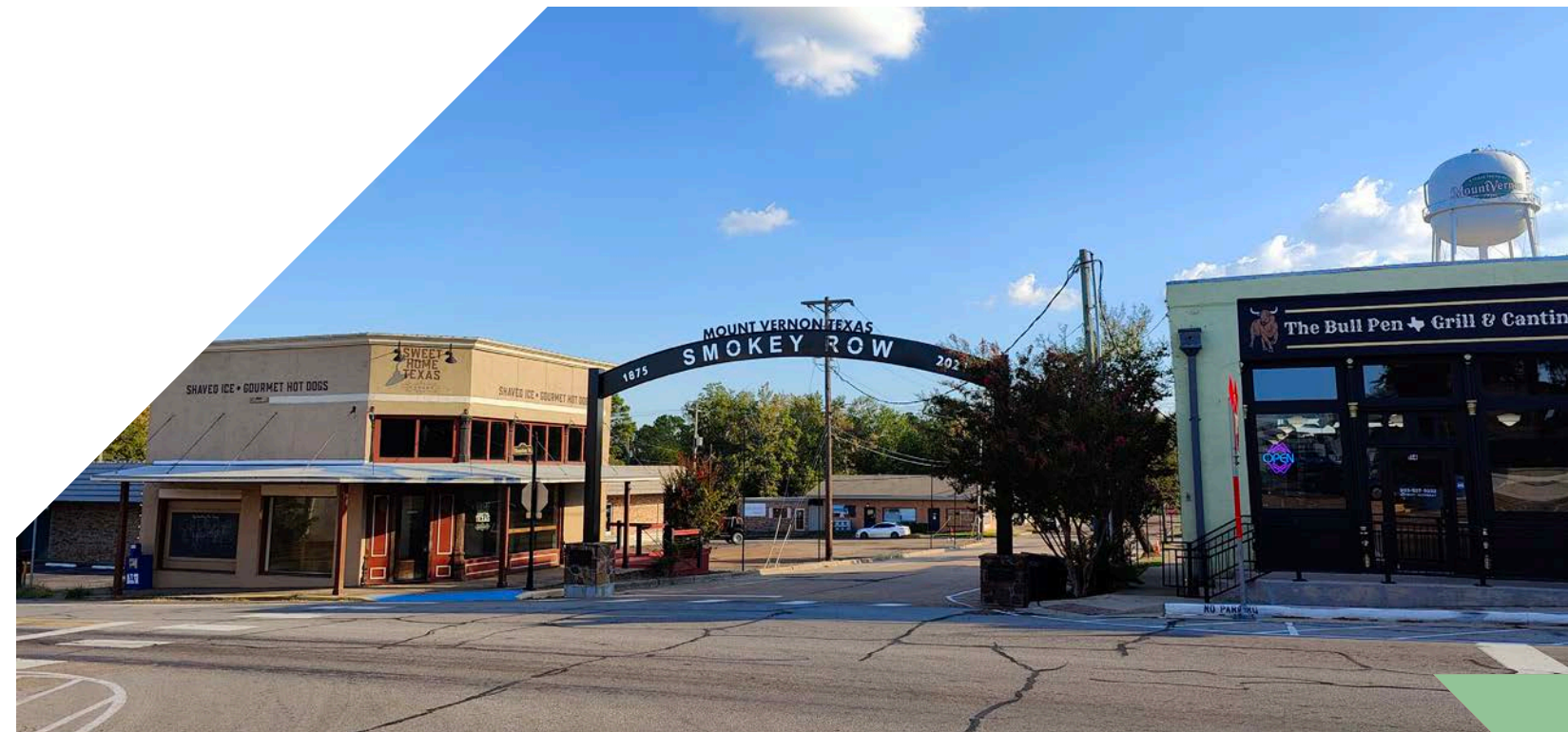
Mount Vernon’s weaknesses appear to be its underutilized interstate frontage, underutilized square, housing shortage, and limited visibility of amenities. Citizens commented the city lacks an attractive gateway or frontage that can draw traffic from I-30 to the Square. Assets like the Square and City Lake are farther from the major thoroughfare and not visible from other highways due to obstructions. While the Square has been greatly enhanced, it still lacks diverse and tax-

generating businesses. Civic events located at the Square are also lacking due to limited staffing and programming. Citizens do not think there is a strong and cohesive city-wide identity. The housing market is in a lull, partially due to high interest rates. Mount Vernon lacks starter homes, and existing properties are slightly more expensive compared to surrounding communities; homes valued at \$180,000 to \$250,000 are difficult to find. Housing demand outweighs supply, yet there are no evident signs of new housing being built. Outside of the Square and the historic neighborhoods, there is a shortage of charming amenities and buildings. The stakeholders perceive that the younger population are leaving and not later returning to the community,

which is commonly referred to as “Brain Drain.”

Public input believes the community’s opportunities are spurred by the potential residential, commercial, and industrial growth from interstate and rail access. Improvements to public infrastructure increase utility capacity for all types of development. Expansions to public infrastructure can attract new businesses and residents. It has been observed that the younger generations (millennials to generation alpha) prefer having amenities often found in urban areas. Expanding public infrastructure can create environments that allow these urban amenities to exist. There are opportunities to grow the rodeo, lake community, and

‘Smokey Row’ is both a wayfinding tool and a historical reference to the commercial area lost largely due to a fire.



SWOT ANALYSIS

During the discussions, stakeholders were asked to evaluate their community. From these evaluations, the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) for the city were identified. It is important to identify the SWOT of a community so that development recommendations are rooted in community input and best industry practices. The following section summarizes the findings:

✓ STRENGTHS

- Education
- Community Pride
- Safety
- Proximity to Amenities

✓ OPPORTUNITIES

- Untapped Infrastructure Capacity
- Transportation and Shipping Industries
- Organizational Collaboration
- Land Use
- Civic Programming
- Millennials / Gen Z

✓ WEAKNESSES

- Housing Stock
- Aesthetics
- Programming
- Visibility
- Medical Service Access
- Youth Leaving Town

✓ THREATS

- Cultural Shifts
- Increased Cost of Living
- Construction Costs
- Zoning

Mainstreet markets through collaboration of various public and private organizations and sponsors.

The public expressed their desire for new developments to grow from the city's existing culture and not conflict with it. The community does not want future retail and restaurants to be too expensive and strain the current population's cost of living, yet they are also worried about being exposed to the mass development of fast food and big-box retailer chains due to lack of zoning protections. Other noted concerns were the unease regarding growth and increase in taxes, along with the already existing strained housing market.

Based on the SWOT analysis, the community needs consist of new developments, retained populations, enhanced branding, and updated programming. The city needs additional housing units at various price points for current and future residents. This necessitates increasing the number and payroll level of jobs. The city needs to adjust zoning, land use, and development policies to encourage incremental growth

and discourage sprawl. The city needs to enhance its civic infrastructure to retain its existing population and improve the quality of life for all citizens. The need to sustain the existing cost of living is vital. This need is not unique to Mount Vernon as many communities throughout the state have similar apprehensions. The purpose of the plan is to alleviate and strategically address these items through the recommendations.

THE CITY NEEDS TO ENHANCE ITS CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL CITIZENS.



PLANNING ANALYSIS

The following Planning Analysis & Recommendations expand on the previous Needs Analysis and align with the Values, Goals, and Objectives stated in earlier chapters. These are based on public input, discussions with the EDC and Industrial Foundation board, city staff input, and the consultants' professional opinion. The corridor analysis and recommendations also consider the layout of existing roads, structures, and topography when determining potential locations for growth.

Influenced by the sociodemographic data and analysis, it is suggested that the recommendations be considered for implementation over the next three to five years. The recommendations should be implemented to ensure Mount Vernon meets the needs of the citizens, visitors, and city staff in the future and encourage sustainable growth.

It is recommended that the City of Mount Vernon:

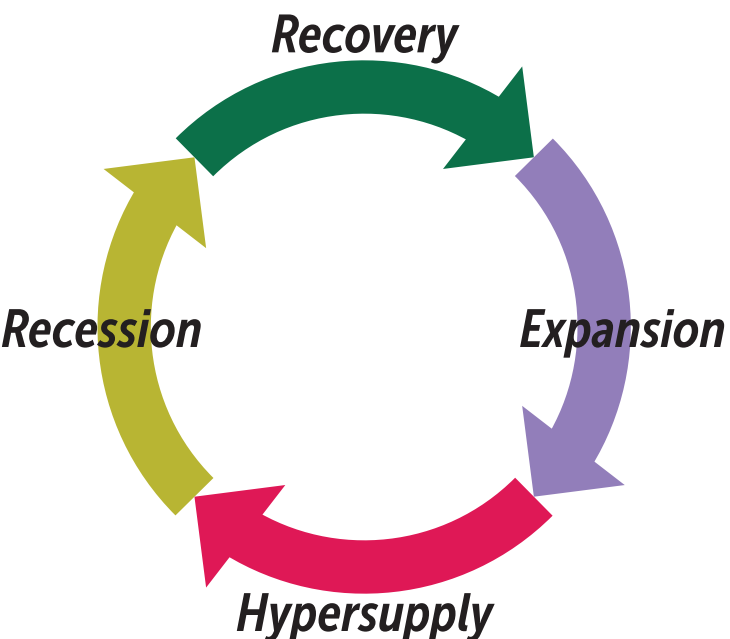
- Prepare for Housing Growth*
- ✓ *Attract and Promote Businesses*
- ✓ *Establish an Upper Education Pipeline*
- ✓ *Improve Healthcare Access*
- ✓ *Incorporate Complete Streets & Traditional Neighborhood Development Policies*
- ✓ *Encourage a 'Live-Work-Play' Development*
- ✓ *Create a TIF District*
- ✓ *Enhance Community Quality of Life*
- ✓ *Assess Brand and Develop Placemaking Materials*
- ✓ *Update the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan*

The following sections support the recommendations list by elaborating on best planning practices in light of local conditions, specifically the need for a 'live-work-play' neighborhood.

Prepare for Housing Growth

The Strategic Plan has been created with the anticipation of spillover population growth from DFW, Texarkana, and any unspecified metropolitan areas. This aligns with the community's desire for more housing, as identified in the Need Analysis. Mount Vernon's housing inventory appears to be limited, and traditional real estate theory suggests it is in the Recovery Phase of the real estate cycle. The real estate cycle occurs in four phases - Recovery, Expansion, Hyper Supply, and Recession. As the name suggests, Recovery follows a Recession, and the economy recovers as the average citizen is slowly able to

grow more spending capacity. While the rental population is high and home sales stagnate during this phase, existing stock is likely to experience renovation or replacement. Lack of supply with growing demand typically leads to higher house prices and undeveloped land values due to comps and speculation. Recovery rolls into the Expansion Phase, and the housing economy's supply/demand level approaches an equilibrium as new homes are added to the market. The general public starts to regain confidence in the economy, job growth strengthens, companies are able to increase payroll, and families can buy more or build wealth. Expansion transitions to Hyper Supply when the supply of houses exceeds the demand. This saturation is due to a variety of reasons, commonly from overbuilding or homeowners defaulting on mortgages. This results in a 'seller's market', and property owners either sell out of fear of their home becoming unsold and vacant, or they buy and hold onto properties until the market recovers. A Hyper Market crash leads to a Recession, where the supply far exceeds the demand, citizens have weakened buying power. Techniques like lowering interest rates, offers tax breaks and incentives, and conducting public-private-partnerships are commonly used to spur growth. **Mount Vernon is in the Recovery phase, so it is recommended to identify and provide market information to developers and investors to spark interest in the**



area ahead of rapid growth. It is also recommended to revise the zoning and subdivision ordinance to create code that is both developer-friendly and protects residents. This includes allowing for Homeowners Associations (HOAs) to create and enforce deed restrictions.

Attract And Promote Businesses

The Demographics Chapter identified that Mount Vernon is a generalist community with primary industries consisting of Manufacturing, Retail Trade, and Healthcare & Social Assistance. The Needs Analysis revealed that the community wants to grow by having a large and diverse job selection. It is recommended that the city maintain a diverse, but clustered economy. A clustered economy is a geographic concentration of competing and collaborating firms. Other economic theories like Agglomeration Economies and Economy of Scale state that having a concentration of similar and complimentary industries leads to efficiency, innovation, and increased levels of production, which result in job growth and higher employee payroll. To become more resilient to economic shocks such as market crashes and rapid inflation, it is recommended to have multiple clusters of various industries (healthcare & social assistance, educational services, manufacturing, etc). Additionally, the creation of new jobs will create the demand for additional housing.

Previous studies performed by local organizations and boards on behalf of the city have shown that 50% of traffic on Interstate 30 is commercial, which is 20% higher than traffic on Interstate 20 to the south. Commercial traffic typically consists of semi-trucks and other large vehicles. The high volume of commercial traffic is primarily due to I-30 having high-capacity roads that connect distribution centers (origin) and retail centers (destination). **It is recommended that the city continually grows the supply chain industry - with job sources such as Lowe's distribution along with supportive truck businesses such as Duke's and Love's travel centers - while simultaneously growing other professional and service-orientated**

HAVING A CONCENTRATION OF SIMILAR AND COMPLIMENTARY INDUSTRIES CAN LEAD TO JOB GROWTH AND HIGHER WAGES.

sectors.

Business attraction can be enhanced using strategies such as offering wider utility access, upgrading utility lines, and encouraging business locations in designated areas. A common land use strategy is to develop a business park that has the infrastructure capacity for multiple companies. Fiber optic telecom has rapidly become a necessity for most industries, and the Needs Analysis identified the need for IT and hybrid/remote jobs. While some cities have provided fiber optic as a

public utility, it has become increasingly evident that private companies are more suitable to own, operate and maintain this distribution equipment due to high upfront costs of installation and long-term liability. Businesses often look for areas with high vehicle or pedestrian traffic counts (like highways and neighborhoods) because this increases their public presence and client- and customer-base. Professional and service-oriented businesses are drawn to high-quality designed districts. Architectural facades that use a variety of materials with similar (but not uniform) style enhance design quality and give a space a unique sense of place without having to utilize expensive materials. **It is recommended to identify and partner with developers that incorporate these techniques. In addition to the above recommendations it is recommended to identify and attract an internet service provider (ISP) to distribute and manage a fiber network, to update the municipal zoning map to locate businesses around the main street district and major roads, and to update the zoning ordinance to incorporate minor design guidelines.**

Business retention and payroll growth is facilitated by having an engaged business community and supportive customer base. Mount Vernon has an active Chamber of Commerce, which is a popular entity to manage and grow the area's business culture. The Stakeholder Engagement and Needs Analysis Chapters reveal that Mount Vernon's citizens are very supportive of local businesses. **Recommendations include establishing collaboration among businesses, workforce training, and education centers, creating unique and consistent branding to instill local pride, and hiring dedicated staff for civic event planning.**

Establish an Upper Education Pipeline

Economic growth has historically been rooted in agricultural and mineral extraction. Over time, it shifted to mass-production manufacturing, and now economies are predominately driven by knowledge. Technological advancement over the last 100 years in robotics has automated manual labor processes and drastically reduced the number of jobs for agricultural and mass-production manufacturing. The knowledge economy hinges on the talent and education of people rather than machinery.

Mount Vernon has signs of the agricultural, manufacturing, and knowledge-based economies. While all three economies are valuable and can be simultaneously maintained, it is recommended to invest more in the knowledge

AN UNDERINVESTED PORTION OF THE EDUCATION PIPELINE LIES BETWEEN HIGHSCHOOL AND COLLEGE, A SPACE WHICH MOUNT VERNON CAN FILL.

economy to prepare for a shift in the emerging job sectors. This investment would appear as enhancing and expanding the education-pipeline, which is a term describing the levels from preschool through college. A strong pipeline means all students have access to quality education that result

in a high percentage of graduates. An underinvested portion of the pipeline lies between high school and college, a space which Mount Vernon can fill. Summer bridge programs have proven to be effective in increasing retention rates and the GPA of unprepared high school students. Another type of transitional program involves partnership with a local or regional company. BMW, whose US headquarters is in northwest South Carolina, offers the 'BMW Scholars Program'. This two-year program allows students to work part-time at BMW while attending class full-time at the local community colleges to pursue an associates degree. The student gains vital hands-on experience and tuition assistance from BMW, and they become viable candidates for full-time positions. **Mount Vernon has highly rated primary schools compared to the region, and the development of a community college with an industry-specific bridge program or trade school**

would capitalize on this strength.

Improve Healthcare Access

The Needs Analysis revealed citizens' desires for an emergency services medical facility, especially for persons 65

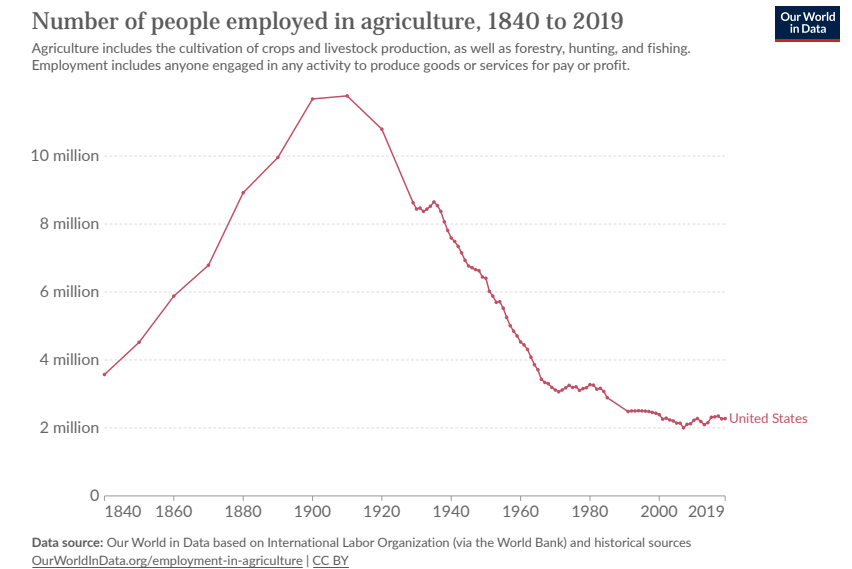


Figure 4: The rise and fall of employed agricultural workers

years and over, which account for 22.5% of the total Franklin County population. This aligns with Goals & Objectives concerning quality of life and aging in place. Having local access to medical care, especially rapid ambulatory response, provides a sense of peace for older adults and may reduce health insurance costs for businesses. According to data from the School of Public Health at UT Health Houston, Mount Vernon is in a zip code whose medical costs are 18% higher than the state average. There are two medical

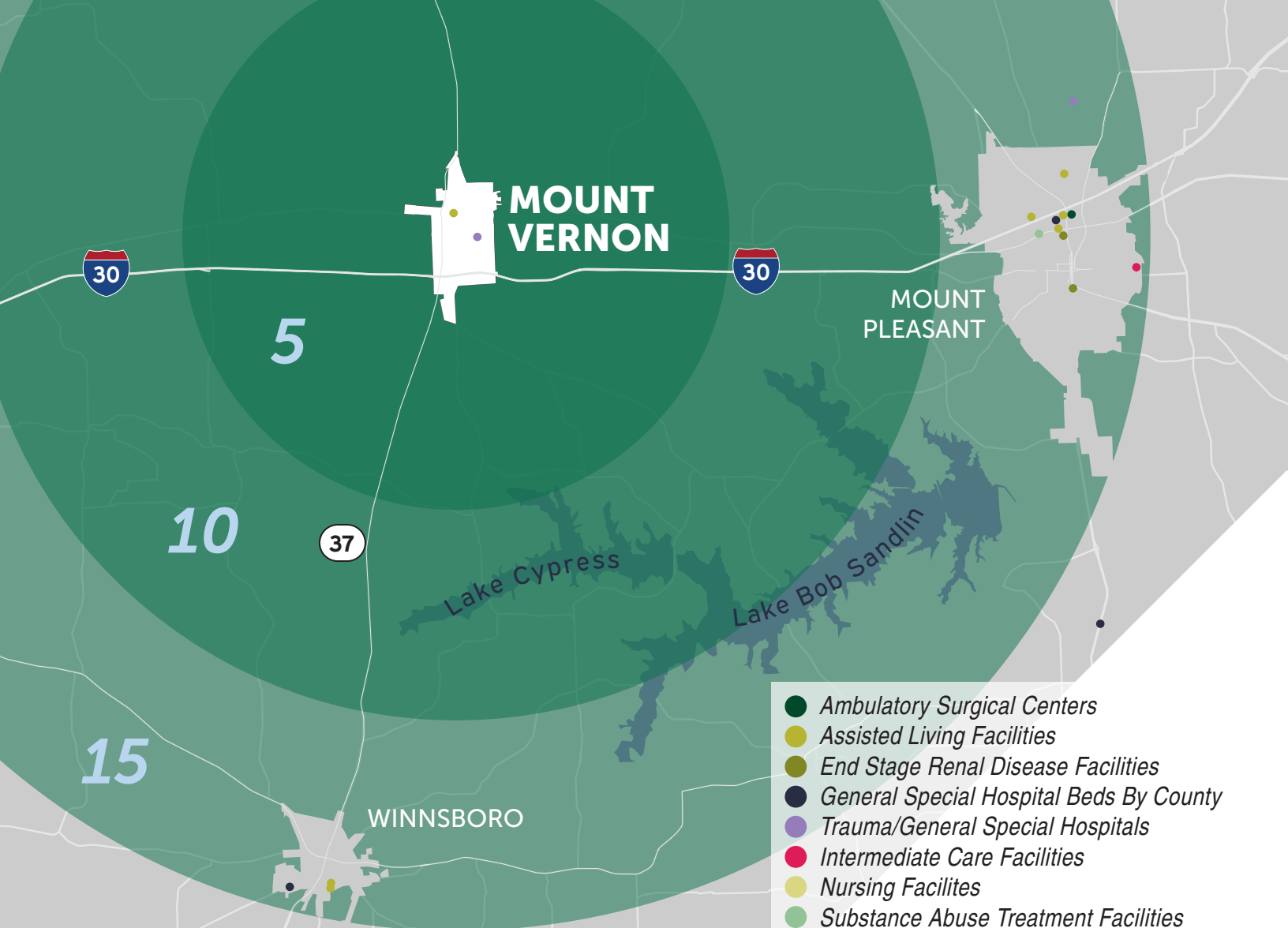


Figure 5: Healthcare access in and around Mount Vernon Proximity (in miles)

facilities within a 25-minute driving radius of Mount Vernon. Titus Regional Medical Center in Mount Pleasant is 15 minutes east and has departments for emergency care, cardiology, family medicine, imaging services, neurology, orthopedics, TitusFIT wellness center, urology, and women's health. CHRISTUS Mother Frances Hospital in Winnsboro is 25 minutes south and has departments for emergency care, diabetes, digestive care, and imaging. **Due to the proximity and suite of**

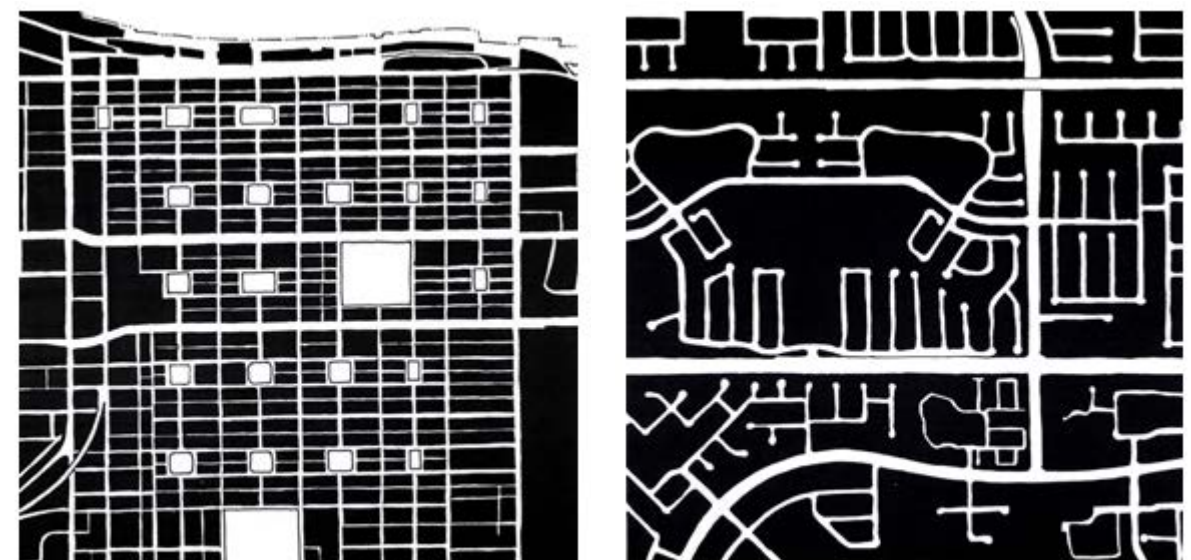
services provided by the Titus Regional Medical Center in addition to the above-average medical costs for the region, it is recommended that Mount Vernon pursue a small-scale medical facility that focuses primarily on emergency care.

Incorporate Complete Streets & Traditional Neighborhood Development Policies

Complete Streets is a design philosophy that considers both vehicles and pedestrians in its road network and design profile. The two primary elements of a road network are mobility and accessibility. Mobility is determined by the amount of time it takes to move from A to B, which is often influenced by the posted speed limit. Accessibility is determined by the amount of land that is accessible between A and B, which is influenced by the number of intersections and driveways. Urban planning theory recommends a 'Traditional Neighborhood Development' (TND) road hierarchy using boulevards, avenues, and streets instead of the conventional arterial, collector, and local categories. The TND road hierarchy adjusts the design specifications for traffic volume and encourages curvilinear and gridded design to maintain mobility and

accessibility without adding traffic lanes. Typical design profile elements include divided medians, sidewalks, marked crossings, street lights, bike lanes, and shade trees. **It is recommended for the city to develop and utilize a Complete Streets network & design and a Traditional Neighborhood Development road hierarchy when efficiently and safely facilitating vehicle and pedestrian traffic.**

Commercial vehicles are a vital part of the commercial supply chain for local and regional businesses. However, the nature of these vehicles potentially creates challenges and negative externalities. Large vehicles shorten the lifespan of paved surfaces, increasing the ongoing maintenance costs. Their presence in mixed traffic increases the risk of vehicle



Traditional Network

Conventional Network

Figure 6: Comparison of road hierarchies



Patrick Square is a residential-centric Live-Work-Play neighborhood in Clemson, SC.



Mainstreet in Mountainview, CA has a lively, walkable, streetscape and mix of residential, retail, and office spaces.

and pedestrian accidents due to prevalent blind spots and limited movement. They produce loud noises and pollution, and they require a larger turning radius for navigation. These factors often influence roadway design to have wider traffic lanes and intersections, which creates a non-pedestrian friendly environment. **Because of this, it is recommended that commercial traffic be limited to the interstate corridor and any future designated bypass roads.**

Encourage a 'Live-Work-Play' Master Plan Development

Several factors and strategies identified in the previous sections support the recommendation for a 'Live-Work-Play' master planned development. The location of the development is crucial for its success. While the development should be positioned along the existing highways and interstate, it is not recommended to be centered on a highway due to the presence of commercial vehicles in mixed traffic. **Instead, it should be centered around**

a planned boulevard that connects existing highways. This will increase the likelihood of generating volume of through-traffic without commercial vehicles.

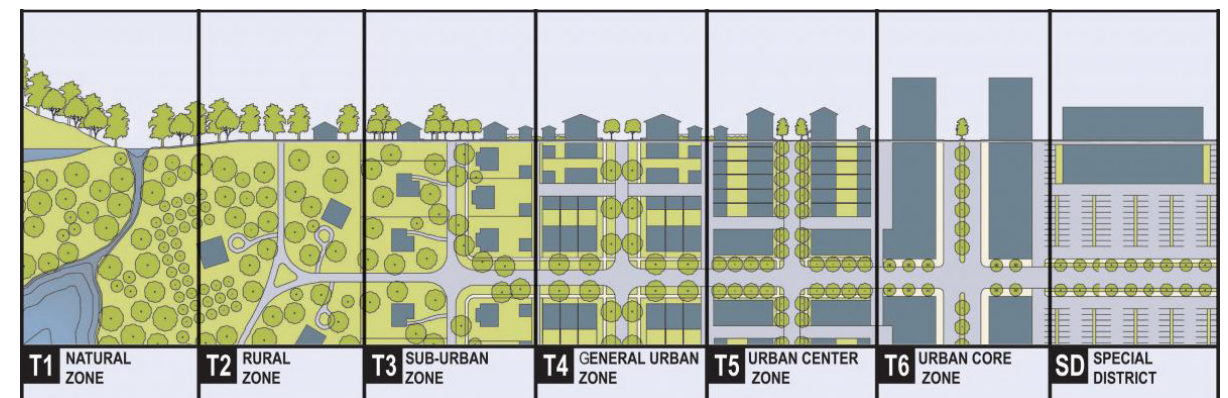
Higher density developments typically have a fiscally efficient infrastructure capacity. While utility line diameters may need to be wider to sustain pressure and flow, having shorter lengths of lines to more businesses is significantly less expensive for city maintenance budgets and taxpayers overall.

Road efficiency has historically been measured by the level of service, which focuses on the number of vehicles passing through a location per hour. However, like with freight traffic, roadway design that only focuses on this metric tends to be wider and not pedestrian-friendly. In addition to traffic counts, a factor to consider is the density of businesses along a roadway. This can be measured by dividing the annual property and sales tax generated by each business per foot of its road frontage. Higher lot density

typically has a higher the dollar per foot of generated tax revenue along a roadway. This means the public infrastructure is being maximized, which is beneficial to the city and its citizens.

Live-work-play developments can support a wide variety of housing types and densities with equitable access. These developments are usually shaped and positioned intentionally to maximize natural assets and minimize negative externalities. The transect development pattern is a common layout. Various land uses occur on a spectrum radiating from a

geographic core. The core (historically the 'Texas Square') is a dense concentration of apartments and townhouses, office space, and retail. Vertical mixed-use structures, anchor commercial tenants, and on-street parking are encouraged here. Bounding the core is a ring of townhouses, small lot single-family homes, and office units. The outer areas of the development should be large lot single-family homes. Urban design strategies - which incorporate walkable infrastructure, including shade, seating, sidewalks, and park space - should be utilized to enhance the pedestrian experience.



The Rural-to-Urban Transect (by Duany Plater-Zyberk & Co) shows the development spectrum in relation to density and nature.

Live-work-play developments encourage a healthy and sustainable tax base by generating both property and sales taxes with housing and jobs. The national average commuting time is approximately 30 minutes. This commuter threshold is well beyond Mount Vernon's city limits, which increases the likelihood for commuter citizens. Solely providing houses would only turn Mount Vernon into a bedroom community for a larger metropolitan economy. This would place too much risk on the housing market to

sustain the municipal budget and hinder the quality of services the city could provide its citizens. **It is recommended to develop a mixed-use neighborhood to diversify the land use and type of revenue.**

Create a TIF District

A Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District is a popular funding mechanism that local governments can use for infrastructure improvements to draw private investment



Figure 7: Schematic Layout of a live-work-play neighborhood in the northern corridor of Mount Vernon.

to an area. A TIF is tied to a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (TIRZ), which is a spatially-bound zone in a city as determined by a city council. A TIF is not a tax rate increase or an additional tax for residents or the properties within the TIRZ. Properties within the TIRZ can have some of their ad valorem tax redirected to pay for improvements in the zone. One of the best applications of a TIF is on undeveloped property because its current state is not generating a significant amount of property tax for the general budget compared to its improved state. While a TIF does not dedicate all of its tax revenue for the general budget, once it expires, a city could have a new community asset that is generating more taxes to fund public services without financially burdening each resident. **It is recommended to create a TIRZ to fund projects like a live-work-play master planned development.**

Enhance Community Quality of Life

Quality of life is a comprehensive term that considers how effectively a citizen's needs are being met, and it is influenced by the factors and strategies previously mentioned in the Strategic Plan. **It is recommended to make civic investments like hiring dedicated programming staff and creating and improving public parks and facilities to enhance the quality of life of citizens.**

Quality of life can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively. For

example, Census Data and Geographic Information System (GIS) software can be used to determine citizens' access to various necessary assets and recreational opportunities. A Community Satisfaction Survey can be used to determine citizens' overall satisfaction and opinion of specific assets. **A Community Satisfaction Survey is recommended to assist civic agencies with understanding the needs of the community in a measurable manner.** The survey should be brief (10

A TIF DISTRICT IS NOT AN ADDITIONAL TAX AND SPURS PRIVATE INVESTMENT THROUGH A PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP.

questions) and the content should be consistent so that any change in opinion can be quantified and tracked. This data can lead to the effective creation, budgeting, and implementation of strategies for growth.

Assess Brand and Develop Placemaking Materials

A strong brand cleanly and clearly communicates and carries the identity and vision of a city. A brand assists with catalyzing economic development by encouraging civic collaboration, ownership, and pride. While branding is typically associated with a city's logo and slogan, it can be utilized for placemaking to personalize specific districts (like the 'Smokey Row' sign in the Square). A



Figure 8:

sign package provides a suite of sign designs (ex. monument, pole) that are applied to various settings around town but fit within the overarching style of the brand. **It is recommended that Mount Vernon assess its current brand for revision and partner with local citizens and developers to create placemaking elements.**

Update the Comprehensive Parks,

Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan

Public parks are necessary for enhanced quality of life, as they provide opportunities for recreation and transportation. They

create safe spaces for children to play, youth and adults to participate in walking, biking, and local sports leagues, and communities to gather for events. Parks have been attributed to improving the health and wellness of communities. Parks provide opportunities for physical activity, which can help reduce risks for various diseases. They are also important regarding environmental benefits. Parkland provides flood control measures to detain and/or retain water, it sustains habitats for local birds, insects, and wildlife, and it preserves and enhances regional biodiversity. The presence of park space has been known to improve the local economy. Park users are drawn in, and they can spend money in local shops and restaurants. Parks are also known to increase property values of surrounding properties.

An updated Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan can provide the city an analysis of its current park inventory, citizen desires, and current state and national trends to help determine future municipal investments. **It is recommended to update the Parks Master Plan and include a Trail Master Plan section to promote the implementation of a trail network throughout the city for enhanced pedestrian transportation and recreation.**

Additional Recommendations for Consideration

The research and planning process have revealed items that are recommended for future consideration to enhance citizens' quality of life and economic growth. These recommendations include investigating the feasibility of a retirement neighborhood, incorporating historic preservation guidelines, incorporating parkland development fees, and continuing to implement the action items outlined in the 2016 Downtown Strategy Report. These items are necessary but should be considered later once higher

PUBLIC PARKS ARE NECESSARY FOR ENHANCED QUALITY OF LIFE, AS THEY PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR RECREATION AND TRANSPORTATION.

priorities are accomplished. However, these priorities should be adjusted if the Council or community believes there is an emerging need or if an opportunity (i.e. grant funding, interested developer, etc.) presents itself.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The following Implementation Schedule presents action items that are based on the City's goals and objectives, needs analysis, planning analysis, and recommendations found in previous chapters. The aligned City Goal is listed under each Implementation item. The purpose of the implementation schedule is to provide a framework to assist with future city planning. The implementation schedule is intended to be a flexible guide for the growth over the next five

years and into the future. The city, in partnership with Industrial Foundation and EDC should evaluate and change the order of implementation if necessary or take advantage of any unforeseen opportunities that may arise as long as it fits within the recommendations of this plan.

Primary Area of Focus: 1-2 years
Supporting Priority: 1-5 years
Future Priority: 6 - 10 years

Develop Northern Corridor - Primary Area of Focus

Goal 1, Goal 2, Goal 4, Goal 5

- Acquire land or collaborate with landowners
- Ensure zoning and future land uses are compatible
- Establish a TIF District
- Partner with a developer to create a 'Live-Work-Play' Site Master Plan

Develop Southern Corridor - Primary Area of Focus

Goal 1

- Ensure zoning and future land uses are compatible
- Partner with a developer to create a lake-centric Site Master Plan

Prepare for Housing Growth - Supporting Priorities

Goal 1

- Conduct a housing study to determine growth projections and housing types
- Collaborate with a developer to build houses
- Ensure zoning and future land uses are compatible with single-family and multi-family housing opportunities
- Educate the public regarding HOA deed restrictions
- Grow the number of young professionals and families living in the community by 10% by 2030
- Engage in community discussions and assess feasibility of adopting a parkland dedication ordinance

Attract and Promote Businesses - Supporting Priorities

Goal 3, Goal 4

- Revise local economic development incentive packages based on current assets and the regional marketplace
- Identify and adopt a recruitment strategy for the development of a business park
- Identify and pursue companies based on existing and desired industry clusters
- Increase foot traffic and retail sales in the mainstreet commercial districts by 10% by 2030
- Continue to support business community organizations like the Franklin County Industrial Foundation, EDC and Chamber of Commerce through frequent dialogue and collaboration

Enhance the Community's Quality of Life - Supporting Priorities

Goal 2, Goal 5

- Create and distribute an annual or biennial Community Satisfaction Survey; within six years, achieve a 15% increase in respondents who are "satisfied" or "very satisfied"
- Hire staff for civic programming (festivals, evening & weekend shows, etc.)
- Identify properties to be developed as community parkland

Assess Brand and Develop Placemaking Materials - Supporting Priorities

Goal 3

- Create sign standards
- Create brand strategy

Update the Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan - Supporting Priorities

Goal 5

- Add a Trails Master Plan section

Incorporate a Complete Streets & Traditional Neighborhood Development Policy - Supporting Priorities

Goal 2

- Establish road standards for the development of complete streets
- Revise the zoning code and subdivision ordinances

Establish an Upper Education Pipeline - Future Priorities

Goal 4

- Identify and adopt a recruitment strategy for a technical college
- Develop a bridge program connecting high school graduates to a nearby technical college, community college, junior college, or university

Improve Healthcare Access - Future Priorities

Goal 2, Goal 4

- Develop and execute a recruitment strategy for an emergency medical provider





Mount Vernon
Corridor Strategic Plan

