

Main Street Matters

SEPTEMBER 2019 • A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE'S REVIVAL OF THE ARTS

Once a thriving commercial district, Downtown Brownsville fell on hard times in the 1980s after the devaluation of the Mexican peso, but downtown is experiencing a resurgence as public investment in historic structures and open spaces is attracting private investment.

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Cameron County Stegman Building - After



Cameron County Stegman Building - New Lobby Area



Cameron County Stegman Building Unveiling Event

DOWNTOWN BROWNSVILLE'S REVIVAL OF THE ARTS



*By Miriam Suarez, Brownsville
Downtown District Manager*

Since 2009, the City of Brownsville has invested over \$55 million in Downtown Brownsville. One Main Street designation and two catalyst projects—the Market Square Renovation which closed Market Square street to vehicular traffic to create a pedestrian-friendly plaza and the rehabilitation of the Stegman Building—helped spark renewed interest in downtown.

Built in 1912, the Stegman Building is located just around the corner from Market Square in the heart of the Main Street District and the newly designated Central Brownsville Historic District. Now serving as the Brownsville Performing Arts Academy, the

newly rehabilitated building will house the Revival of Cultural Arts (ROCA)—a non-profit whose mission is to provide opportunities for the community to experience art, music, and cultural events. ROCA will partner with various local organizations to provide free music and dance lessons to children in the community, particularly the Buena Vida neighborhood—an economically distressed neighborhood adjacent to Downtown Brownsville.

The multi-year \$10.5 million project was funded by the City of Brownsville and HUD's Community Development Block Grant Program. Specialized restoration techniques were implemented to salvage and repurpose original building materials such as the 100-year-old brick and the wood paneling that now adorn the lobby area.

In June, the city hosted a soft opening and over 200 attendees were present to tour the two-story facilities, which include a state-of-the-art 40-member orchestra room, two dance studios, and various music rehearsal rooms. The Brownsville Performing Arts Academy is slated to open its doors in September 2019.



ROCA's Paper Orchestra accompanied the ROCA choir for the big unveiling.



Cameron County Stegman Building - Before Renovations

A TALE OF THREE TEXAS SCENIC CITIES



By Sarah Tober, Executive Director of Scenic Texas

Editor's Note: Scenic Texas, Inc., is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of our state's visual environment, particularly as seen by the traveling public. To become a Scenic City visit www.sceniccitycertification.org or call 713.979.4374.

Ten years ago, Scenic Texas sought to address preservation and enhancement of our visual environment by creating the Scenic City Certification

Program. Because the public right-of-way along streets, roadways, highways, and byways is the state's largest public space, this program established a detailed set of model infrastructure standards for streetscape-related development.

To become a Scenic City does not mean that a community has won the state's beauty pageant, but it is about beautification. The process includes a thorough review and points-based assessment that measures existing municipal ordinances compared to the Scenic City model. Cities can use this certification process as a diagnostic tool to determine what is missing in order to create a more beautiful community that impacts residents' quality of life and the visitor experience.

Official certification is earned by cities that score points in the upper range and meet threshold standards for landscaping, tree planting, and sign regulation. Of course, becoming a Scenic City comes with bragging rights, as well as the challenge of elevating in the categorical levels over time. Here are the stories of a few of our 82 Texas Scenic Cities.

Marble Falls became a Scenic City in 2016, when it earned Bronze level recognition. The Scenic City assessment made note of the city's innovative programs, Historic Downtown Wayfinding and Historic Downtown Landscaping. As a Hill Country hub city, these programs served to integrate streetscape enhancements for the traveling public while honoring the city's heritage.

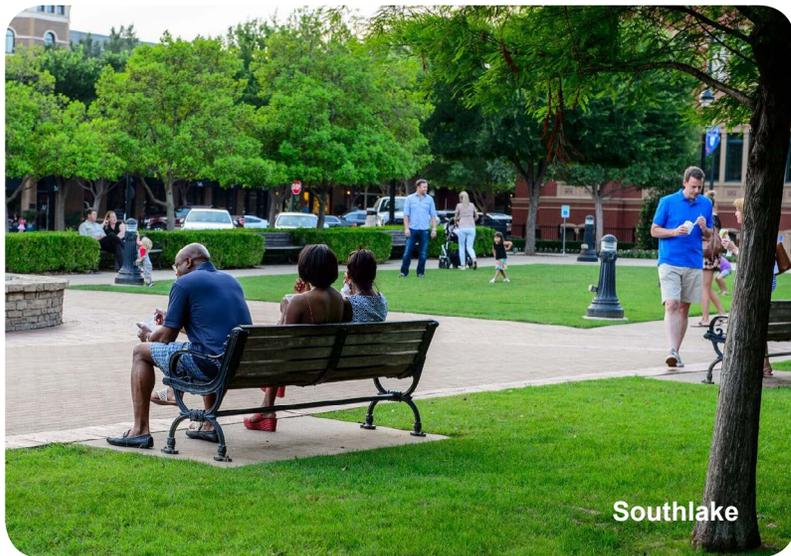
Fostering a distinctive sense of place is a high priority for Southlake, which was first recognized as a Scenic City in 2012 and has since ranked up to Platinum certification in 2017. Through strict adherence to a thoughtful urban design plan, **Southlake** is committed to cultivating the city's unique identity. Enhancing the visual quality of its built environment and scenic areas defines the character of Southlake.



Marble Falls

Cuero is a growing city dedicated to preserving its cultural, historical, and natural character. In 2015, Cuero developed a Unified Development Code to bring its environment in line with the community's long-term vision. Soon after, Cuero gained its first Scenic City certification, earning Silver in 2015. Cuero built on this base to significantly strengthen its Sign Code and earned Gold status in 2017.

This year, 21 Texas cities were recognized in the Scenic City Certification Program run by Scenic Texas and developed in partnership with 17 other organizations including the Texas Historical Commission. Scenic Cities demonstrate that beautification is not a tall tale, but rather the results of an intentional plan that reflects community character, fosters civic pride, and creates economic growth, a path that ultimately leads to a more Scenic Texas.



Southlake



Cuero

TMSP STAFF SPOTLIGHT

CHRISTIAN PRADO PROJECT DESIGN ASSISTANT



1. What is your hometown?

Austin

2. What excites you most about your Texas Main Street staff position?

The desire to enhance life by helping communities to maintain historical values and heritage.

3. What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

The best advice I remember is to give the best of yourself to people, so they get to know you and love you.

4. What's your favorite tip for someone in our economic development/downtown revitalization industry?

There might be many things to say about that, but my favorite tip is probably to never lose hope on yourself and the people of your community to help shape and develop your ideas.

5. Who has been the most influential person in your career?

My father has been a great influence personally and professionally. He shaped my humanity inside and out.

6. What's your favorite inspirational quote?

"You learn more from failure than from success."

7. If you could plan a vacation to anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?

I would go to the Maldives, because of its unique ocean beauty and peaceful environment, it would be a dream come true to spend time over there.

8. What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

I enjoy reading a good book, traveling and getting to know new places and people, watching a good movie, exercising, and meditating among other things.

ECONOMIC VITALITY INDICATORS FOR MAIN STREET COMMUNITIES



By Alan Cox, Economic Development Specialist, TSI, TMSP

Over the next several months, the Texas Main Street Program (TMSP) will be conducting research and analysis on a variety of indicators to help Main Street managers make the case for their local efforts as well as provide additional guidance for where they might be most successful. A review of academic literature about factors leading to the economic vitality of communities reveals that among the most important are relative proximity to a major metropolitan area, presence of an institution of higher education, location in an energy-producing region, and access to amenities—natural or otherwise. Obviously, most of the above factors are beyond your control. That said, we should take note that a vibrant downtown is counted within the amenity category.

Additional research indicates that healthy downtowns have a measurable positive influence in general categories: talent attraction, entrepreneurship, and taxes. The TMSP wanted to test whether these broad factors were also applicable to our participating communities, so we decided to look for indicators that would allow us to compare you to the state as a whole and selected 1) domestic migration, 2) self-employment, and 3) taxable retail sales. So, what did the data tell us?

Talent

Using data from the U.S. Census’ 2012-2017 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, we were able to calculate the total population of our network, as well as the number of persons estimated to have moved to them from

elsewhere in the country, and then compare them to the rest of the state.

These data indicate that Main Street cities did attract new residents at a higher rate than the remainder of the state, which is an impressive feat given that Texas has been one of top destinations for new residents over the past decade. What the numbers say is that for every 1,000 residents living in a Texas Main Street community, about 68 of them moved to town during the comparison period. At the same time, only 59 out of 1,000 residents living outside the Main Street program were recent domestic migrants, which shows there was a significant gap between our communities and all the rest.

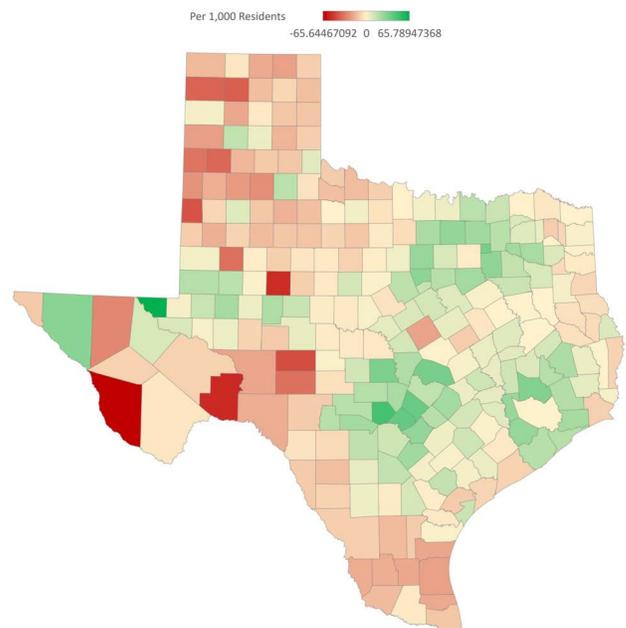
Figure 1: Migration Rate Comparison

	Population	Domestic Migration	Migration per 1,000
Main Street cities	3,427,776	234,427	68.4
Texas (minus TMSP)	23,615,853	1,388,190	58.8

Source: U.S. Census - American Community Survey

While not a perfect comparison, we also wanted to look at the more recent estimates from the Census at the county level, which is calculated by a separate program to provide a better idea of where domestic migration is occurring at the most rapid pace, which supports several of the growth factors listed above, such as proximity to natural amenities and large population centers.

Figure 2: Domestic Migration Rate, 2010-2018



Source: US Census Bureau - Population Estimates Program

Entrepreneurship

Also using the ACS 5-Year Estimates, the TMSP wanted to compare the growth in entrepreneurship in our communities versus those in the rest of the state (Note: While the ACS is not the most widely used source for employment figures, it is the only one that provides these specific figures at the city or ZIP code level).

It is certainly no secret that since the recovery from the Great Recession, Texas has been a job-producing machine. This is thanks to continued growth in energy, technology, and logistics among other industries and is reflected in the 11 percent statewide employment growth rate (6.1 percent nationally). Employment growth among our Main Street cities was not quite as fast as the rest of the state, but it still increased at a very strong 10 percent rate.

Where our Main Street communities really shined was in the increase in the number of self-employed persons. From 2012 to 2017, the Census estimates that self-employment increased 10.4 percent in our network, which almost doubles national and statewide growth.

Figure 3: Employment Growth Comparison



Source: U.S. Census - American Community Survey

Retail

Finally, we decided to examine taxable retail sales in our network versus the rest of the state, as well as the number of retail outlets. Here, we found that taxable sales grew faster outside the Main Street network,

Figure 4: Change in Retail Sales and Stores, 2013-2018



Source: Texas Comptroller's Office

increasing 16.2 percent compared to a healthy 11.3 percent jump within the network.

While that might offer some discouragement, it should also be noted that the growth in the number of retail stores was faster in Main Street communities (8.6 percent) than areas outside of them (6.5 percent). This would imply whatever growth in sales that is occurring is being spread more widely among various stores than outside the network.

Conclusion

Over the past few years, communities that participate in the Texas Main Street network outperformed the rest of a rapidly growing state based on domestic migration, new self-employed residents, and increase in the number of retail outlets. None of these data alone show that the Main Street program is solely responsible for these indicators of economic vitality. However, taken together, they provide tantalizing evidence that there is at least a positive correlation between community development efforts that focus on enhancing the amenities, such as downtown, and overall economic vitality.

The TMSP will continue to monitor these indicators but will also explore other data on an ongoing basis to help you, our partners, in building support for your program and uncovering insights that might enhance your chances for local success.



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