



Economic Development Corporation



2023-2026 Strategic Plan





The restored Wharton County Courthouse is the jewel of downtown Wharton, and the seat of the County government; an important employer in the City of Wharton

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction	2
Background	3
Socio-Economic Conditions of Wharton	4
Goals and Strategies	12
Planning Documents	19
Appendix	24



Agriculture is an important contributor to Wharton's economy, local commodity crops include corn, cotton, and rice.

Executive Summary

This strategic plan is intended to outline Wharton EDC's priorities and the steps needed to implement the organization's goals over the next twelve to thirty-six months. Wharton EDC's primary goal is the implementation of its mission to: "Develop a diverse local economy through a positive business climate that stimulates employment and business growth". Stated differently, Wharton EDC exists to promote creation of jobs and encourage capital investment in the community. To achieve this mission, Wharton EDC will be focusing its efforts on the following five goals and accompanying strategies:

- 1) Bring developable sites to market
 - a. Identify and define prime sites for development (willing seller, infrastructure access, size, etc.)
 - b. Enhance marketing materials & RFI responses, conduct a targeted marketing campaign to the logistics and distribution industry
 - c. Develop public-private partnership for rail-tied industrial
- 2) Recruit retail
 - a. Identify and define prime sites for retail development (willing seller, infrastructure access, size, etc.)
 - b. Develop marketing materials to attract retailers and retail real estate developers to Wharton
 - c. Conduct outreach to retailers and retail real estate developers
- 3) Strengthen the school to jobs pipeline
 - a. Collaborate with local businesses, Workforce Solutions, WCJC, and Wharton ISD to enhance the school to jobs pipeline
 - b. Coordinate the annual Wharton County Job Fair
 - c. Conduct outreach to employers to support their hiring needs

- 4) Invest in infrastructure for economic development
 - a. Research and develop a strategy to finance the infrastructure development of the 1301 corridor
 - b. Implement 1301 corridor infrastructure strategy
 - c. Provide support on infrastructure needs as they arise for existing businesses
- 5) Collaborate in revitalizing downtown
 - a. Research and develop a strategy to finance downtown redevelopment
 - b. Collaborate in the development of the downtown plan with the City of Wharton
 - c. Provide support to existing businesses through common space maintenance and enhancements

Each of these goals and strategies contains actionable items that constitute that will constitute the work of Wharton EDC over the coming years. Wharton is in the process of the creating of three major infrastructure investments: the Army Corps Levee, the I-69 upgrades, and the extension of FM 1301 to the Interstate. These major projects will all be completed within the next four to five years. Each of these projects has the potential to drive commercial development forward in Wharton.

The frontage roads created by the I-69 upgrades will create new opportunities for retail development along the freeway frontage. Similarly, the extension of FM 1301 to Interstate-69 has the potential to open larger tracts of real estate for commercial, residential, and industrial development. Construction of the levee and planned drainage enhancements have the potential to protect the City of Wharton from flooding, reducing the costs of development. The economic development goals have been created to leverage these catalytic infrastructure projects and maximize private-sector investment in the City of Wharton.



Matagorda Bay and beach are a quick drive down the road from Wharton, providing residents with excellent outdoor recreation opportunities.

Introduction

This plan is informed by the planning process conducted September of 2020 in the creation of the 2021-2022 Wharton EDC Strategic Plan and serves as an update to that plan. The previous plan included a SWOT analysis and public participation process. The strategic plan was reviewed by an International Economic Development Council volunteer and strategic planning expert Diane Lupke of Lupke & Associates, Inc. The socio-economic conditions for the

City of Wharton have not significantly changed in the intervening years. However, the economic uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have since resolved. The current Strategic Plan update is based on the socio-economic data, feedback from Lupke & Associates, and in-depth interviews with various community leaders, members of the Wharton EDC Board of Directors, the City of Wharton City Manager, and the Director of Planning and Development..

Background

Wharton Economic Development Corporation

The Wharton Economic Development Corporation is a Type B economic development corporation founded on March 13, 1998, according to Article 5190.6, section 4B of The Development Corporation Act of 1979, as amended. Wharton Economic Development Corporation attained 501(c)3 non-profit status on January 4, 2002. Type B Economic Development Corporations are funded through sales tax contributions; Wharton’s Economic Development Corporation receives a half-cent sales tax to fund its operations.

Mission

Develop a diverse local economy through a positive business climate that stimulates employment and business growth.

Expenditures of the tax revenues are intended for the development of commercial, industrial, and manufacturing enterprises and to promote and encourage employment and public welfare.

Background

The purpose for the corporation includes the following:

- Develop a positive climate for business and industrial growth and investment
- Assist in the creation of jobs
- Increase the tax base of the various taxing entities
- Diversify the local economy to make it more impervious to state and national economic recession
- Make plans and take necessary actions to ensure that essential infrastructure is in place to allow for proper development
- Take necessary actions to stop negative developments from occurring that would denigrate the quality of life in the City or impede future development
- Act as a catalyst for solutions to problems that cross geopolitical boundaries

Representative tasks undertaken by the board may include:

- Develop guidelines and policy recommendations for value-added tax abatements
- Operate the tax abatement mechanism
- Create a task force on fulfilling corporate needs and project
- Push for analysis of City improvements in the infrastructure
- Recruit supporters to complete projects
- Produce economic information used by rating agencies for evaluation of City vitality
- Handle real estate negotiations to establish or expand business opportunities
- Support mobility task force working on the expansion of U. S. Hwy. 59 and FM 1301
- Recommend Tax policy to be enacted by City, County and School District

- Recommend the sales tax for economic development's specific use
- Operate the economic demographic database and publish information on the City
- Operate the marketing programs for the City and Chamber of Commerce
- Produce various publications, films, and maps

Type B Economic Development Corporations

Wharton Economic Development Corporation is a Type B Economic Development Corporation. Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts identifies key elements of Texas Economic Development Corporations:

“The Development Corporation Act of 1979 gives cities the ability to finance new and expanded business enterprises in their local communities through economic development corporations (EDCs). Chapters 501, 504, and 505 of the Local Government Code outline the characteristics of Type A and Type B EDCs authorize cities to adopt a sales tax to fund the corporations and define projects EDCs are allowed to undertake. Type A EDCs are typically created to fund industrial development projects such as business infrastructure, manufacturing, and research and development. Type B EDCs can fund all projects eligible for Type A, as well as parks, museums, sports facilities, and affordable housing.”

The Wharton Economic Development Corporation, as a Type B Economic Development Corporation, is able to invest in both projects that create primary jobs, as well as projects that contribute to quality-of-life initiatives, to enhance the attractiveness of the city to employers and for the benefit of its residents.

Socio-Economic Conditions of Wharton

Economy

The U.S. Census' American Community Survey provides estimates for the size of the 2021 Wharton economy; including the labor force, unemployment rate, median household and family income, poverty rate, and mean commute time.

Labor Force (persons working in the area)	3,894
Unemployment Rate	5.6%
Median Household Income	\$42,555
Median Family Income	\$60,850
Poverty Rate	15%
Mean Travel Time to Work (minutes)	21.9

The American Community Survey also provides its estimates of Wharton's 2019 civilian labor force of 3,675 employees engaged in the following sectors:

Employed civilian pop. 16 years and over	3,675
Management and professional Service	630 17.1%
Sales and office	942 25.6%
Farming, fishing, and forestry	814 22.1%
Construction	97 2.6%
Production and transportation	300 8.2%
	892 24.3%

Agriculture

Wharton County is the number one county in Texas in agricultural sales, valued at \$208,540,000 according to the 2017 USDA Agricultural Census. Wharton County has 1,500 operating farms, averaging 357 acres each, with 535,305 acres in cultivation. The largest number of establishments in the City of Wharton is in the agricultural operations industry, according to the City of Wharton 2018 Comprehensive Plan data.

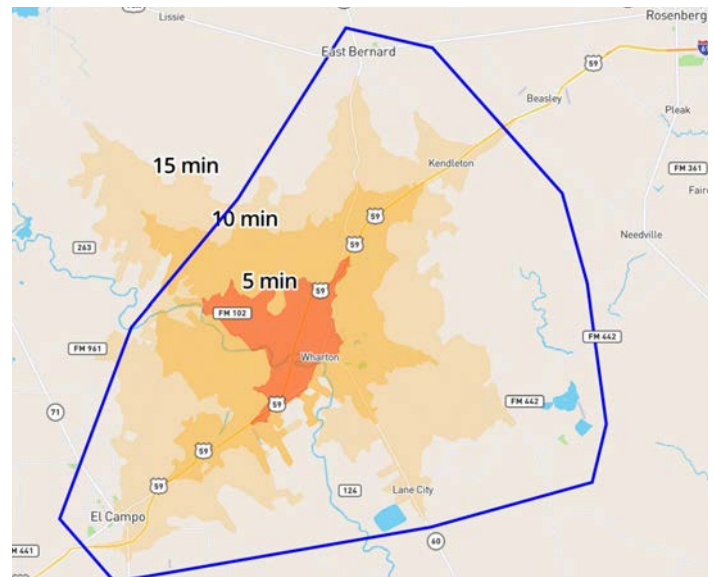
For more information, reference the USDA Census of Agriculture Wharton County facts sheet in the appendix.

City of Wharton Major Employers

Firm	Product	Employees
Wharton ISD	Education	393
Wharton Co. Jr. College	Education	362
Wharton County	Government	241
Buc-ee's	Retail	205
HEB	Retail Grocer	173
Wal-Mart	Retail	165
Nan Ya Plastics	Rigid PVC Film	150
City of Wharton	Government	141
J-M Manufacturing	PVC Pipe	128
Oak Bend	Medical	39
TX Dept. of Trans.	Government	36

Retail Trade Area

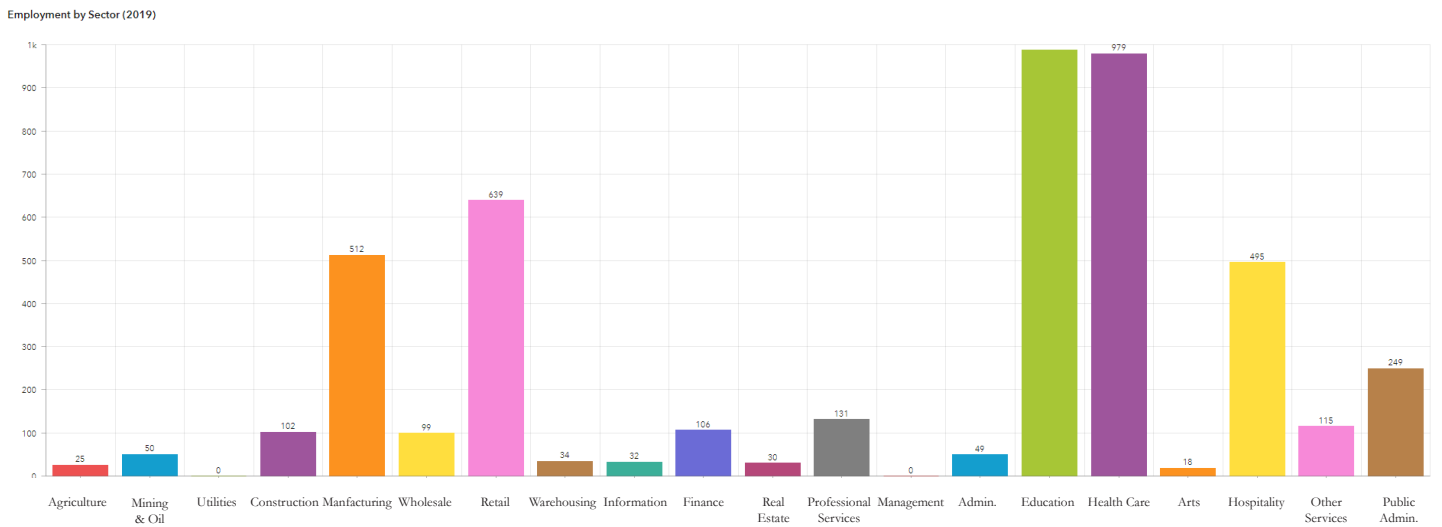
Wharton's retail trade area extends beyond the city's boundaries to households living in Wharton and Fort Bend County who come into the City of Wharton to shop. Wharton's daytime population in its retail trade area is also greater than its population would suggest, at 40,246 individuals. Within 15-minute drivetime of Wharton, there are 20,000 residents and 7,447 households.



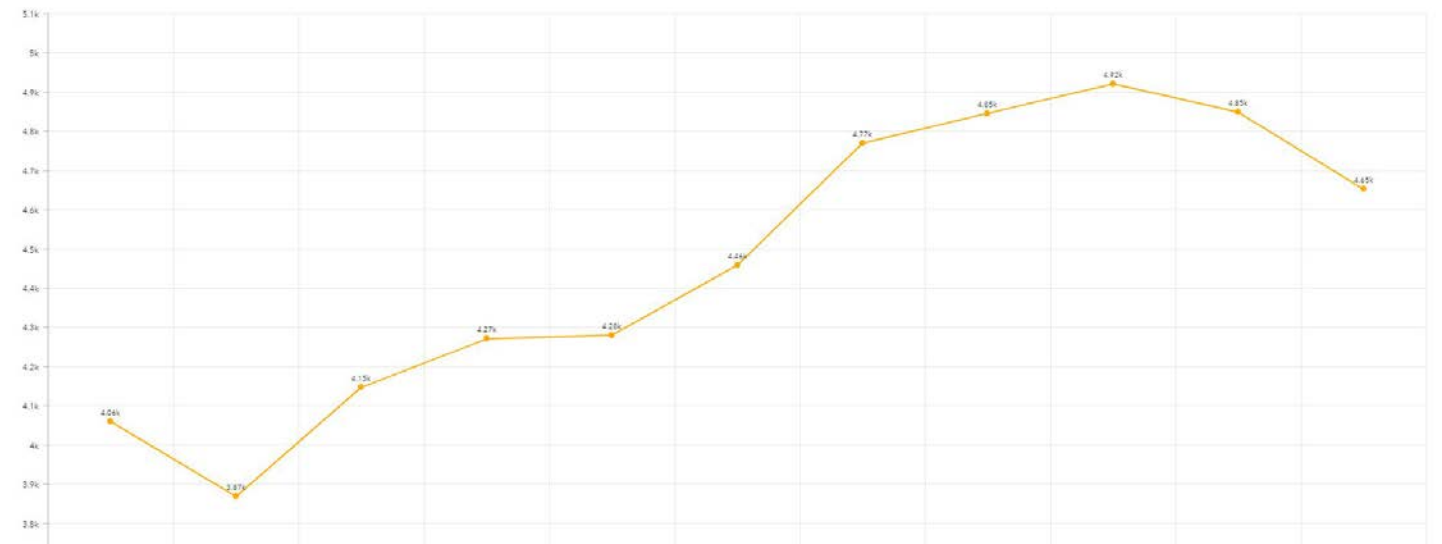
Wharton's retail trade area, the area that depends on Wharton's retailers



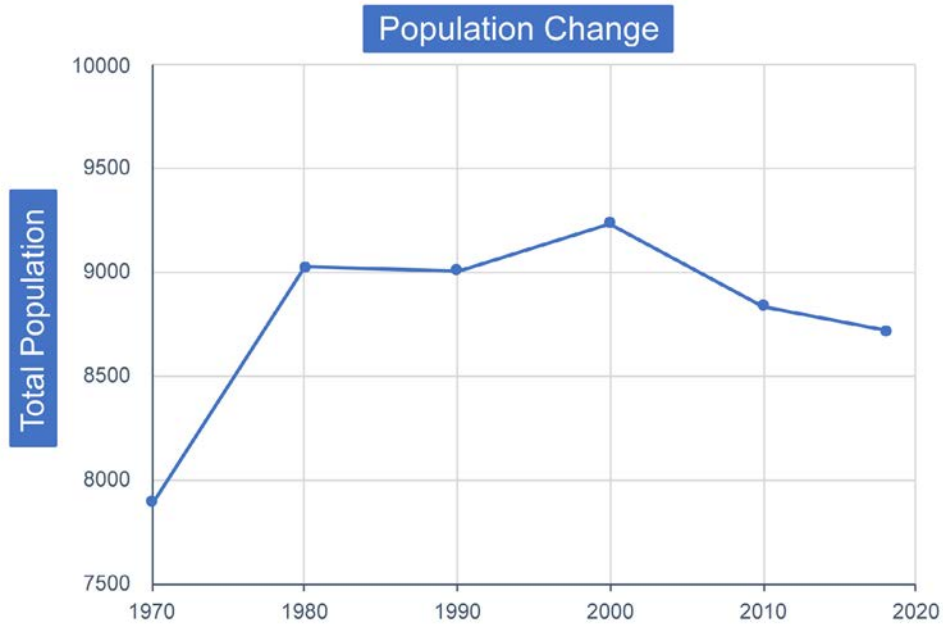
Manufacturing is a key component of Wharton's economy and employment base, with 10% of the City's employment.



The largest share of Wharton's employment by sector is in helathcare and social assistance (22%), education (21%), retail trade (13%) and manufacturing (10%).

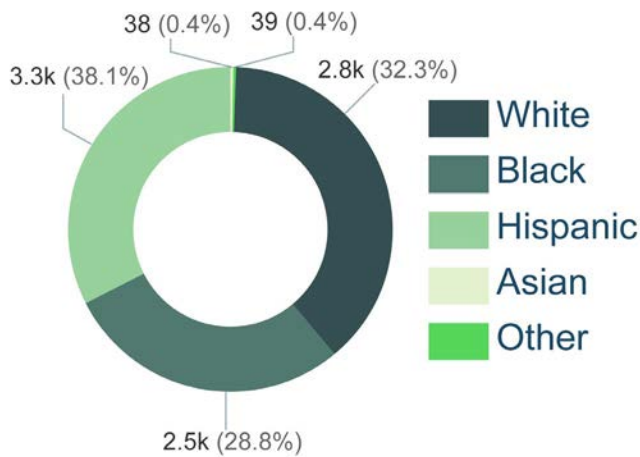


Wharton's employment risen from 4,000 to nearly 5,000 employees over the past decade.

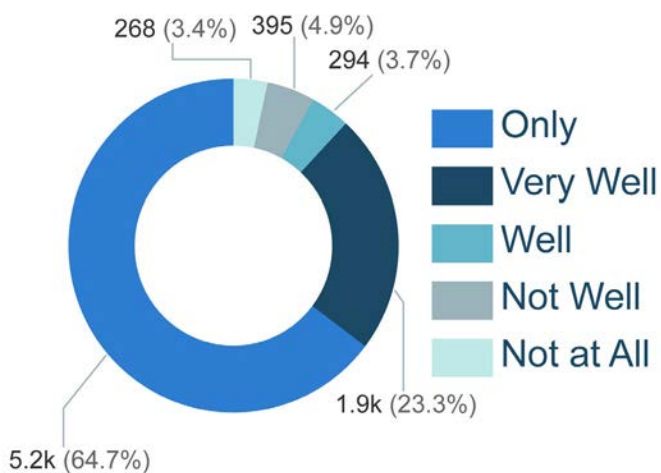


Wharton's population has not grown since 1980, hindering its economic development; growing Wharton's residential population is critical to its future prosperity.

Race



Language



Population

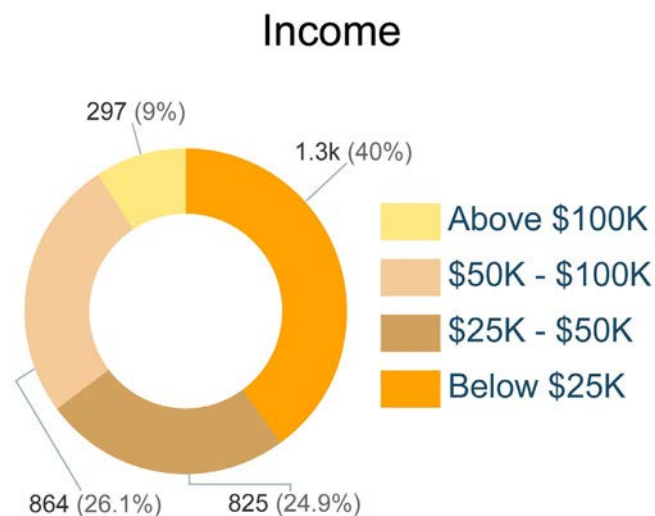
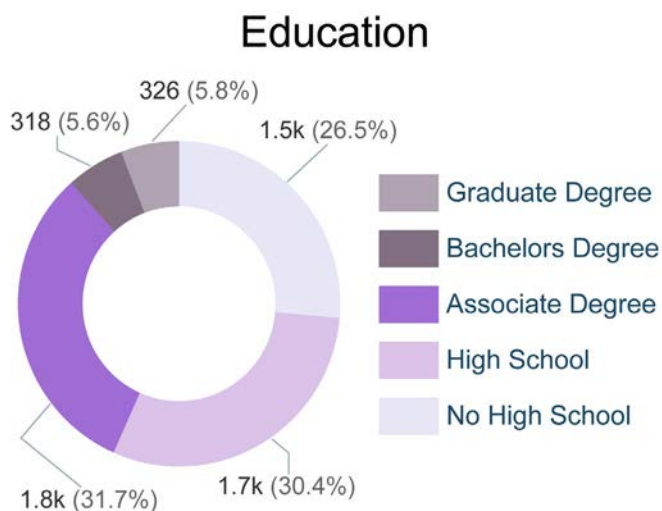
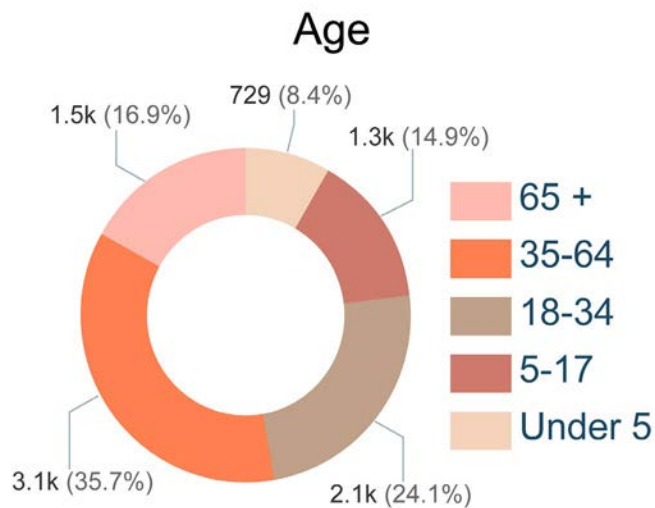
The City of Wharton is home to 8,711 residents in 3,371 households according to the 2019 U.S. Census American Community Survey. The City's population has remained stagnant since the mid-1970's; the lack of growth is a challenge to the City's economic development.

Race

Wharton's Hispanic population is the largest portion of the population with 3,300 (38.1%) residents identifying as Hispanic. The white population is the second-largest segment of the population with 2,800 (32.3%) residents identifying as white. The black population is approximate 2,800 (32.3%). The Asian population and persons who identify as "Other" are the smallest segments of the population with 38 (0.4%) and 39 (0.4%) residents respectively.

Language

Wharton has a significant population with English as their second language. The distribution of English



Language (continued)

The distribution of English speakers in Wharton is as follows: 5,200 (64.7%) persons that “Only” speak English, 1,900 (23.3%) who speak English “Very Well”, 294 (3.7%) who speak English “Well”, 395 (4.9%) who do not speak English well, and 268 (3.4%) who do not speak English at all.

Age

Wharton has an aging population in comparison with the Houston-Galveston region; which has 10.9% of the population over 65 years of age in comparison to Wharton’s 16.9%. The distribution of age is represented in five groups. 1,500 (16.9%) are the age of 65 and up, 3,100 (35.7%) are between 35 and 64 years of age, 2,100 (24.1%) are between 18 and 34 years of age, 1,300 (14.9%) are between 5 and 17 years of age, and 729 (8.4%) are under the age of 5.

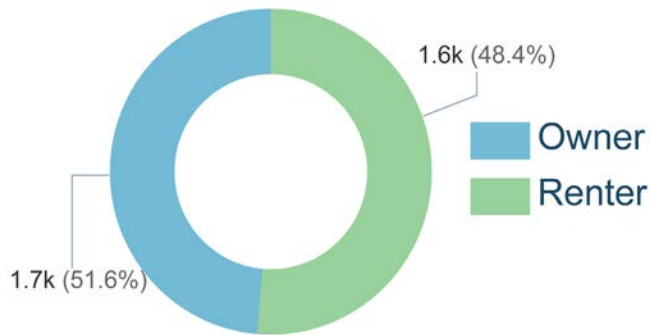
Education

Wharton lags in high school graduates and those obtaining Bachelor’s degrees in comparison with the region. Educational attainment within the population of Wharton, Texas is as follows: 326 (5.8%) persons have attained a Graduate degree, 318 (5.6%) attained a Bachelor’s degree, 1,800 (31.7%) attained an Associate degree, 1,700 (30.4%) attained a High School diploma, and 1,500 (26.5%) did not finish or did not attend high school.

Income

The highest percentage of Wharton’s population earn below \$25,000 a year at 40%. Nearly 65% of the population earn below \$50,000 annually. In comparison, 28% earn \$50,000 or below regionally. An analysis of income in Wharton, Texas reflects 1,300 (40%) persons who earn below \$25,000 per year, 825 (24.9%) earning between \$25,000 and \$50,000 per year, 864 (26.1%) earning between \$50,000 and \$100,000 per year, and 297 (9%) who earn above \$100,000 per year.

Home Ownership



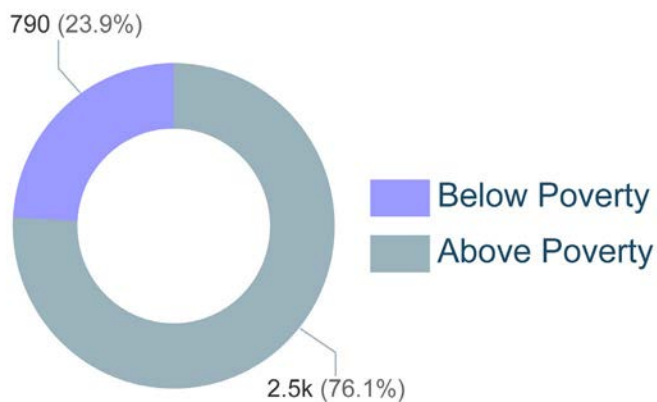
Home Ownership

Wharton has a high percentage of its population residing in rental properties, 1,700 (51.6%) people are homeowners, while 1,600 (48.4%) people rent the property where they reside. Regionally, approximately 40% of the population are renters.

Poverty

Wharton has a larger percentage of its population living below the poverty line than the region. Over twenty percent (23.9%) of residents live below the poverty line.

Poverty



The intersection of U.S. 59 and Farm to Market Road 102 is a retail and employment hub in Wharton.

Transportation

Wharton is strategically located along a major U.S. Highway that is in the process of being updated to an Interstate, and is accessible to rail, ports, and airports.

Rail

Wharton is served by the Kansas City Southern Railway, a Class 1 Railroad with 3,400 route miles connecting Wharton to a dozen U.S. and Mexican



Wharton Regional Airport services Wharton County and is expanding hangars to accommodate aviation related businesses and private storage.

Rail (continued)

Gulf Coast ports and the Pacific Port of Lázaro Cárdenas, Mexico. Wharton is located ten miles south of the Kansas City Southern Intermodal facility at Kendleton, Texas. Wharton service is available for a user with sufficient freight demand.

Highway

Wharton is located along U.S. Highway 59, which the Texas Department of Transportation is upgrading to Interstate 69. The majority of the City's business is accessible by U.S. Highway 59 Business, which runs parallel to the main highway to the west of town. The City is accessed from the east by the East Boling Highway, Farm to Market Road 1301. Farm to Market Road 102 connects U.S. Business 59 to Highway 90 and Interstate 10 to the northwest. Texas State Highway 60 connects Wharton to Matagorda Bay and Bay City to the south through Hungerford and East Bernard to Wallis in Austin County in the north.

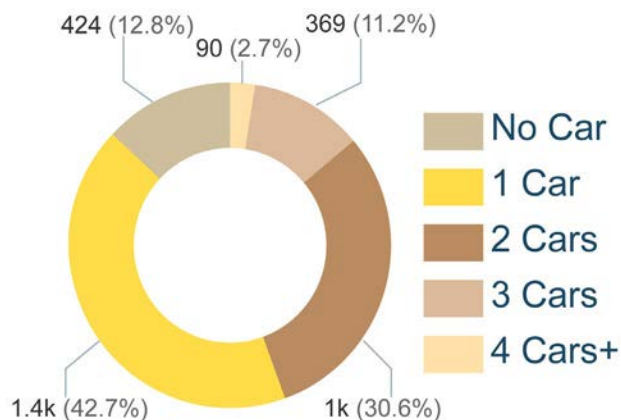
Ports

Wharton is connected through the region's three deepwater Ports, the Port of Houston, the Port of Freeport, and the Port of Texas City via the region's road network. The closest deepwater port to Wharton is the Port of Freeport, 60 miles from Wharton, which is undergoing an expansion and deepening to be able to service Neopanamax ocean freighters. The Port of Bay City is the closest port to Wharton, 45 miles south, which serves as barge port and freight access point to the Intercoastal Waterway.

Airports

Wharton is served by a municipal airport, Wharton Regional Airport, with a 5,000-foot runway and Automated Weather Observation System. Wharton is served by two regional international airports, George Bush Intercontinental Airport (80 miles northeast) and William P. Hobby Airport (65 miles northeast); both of which maintain extensive freight operations.

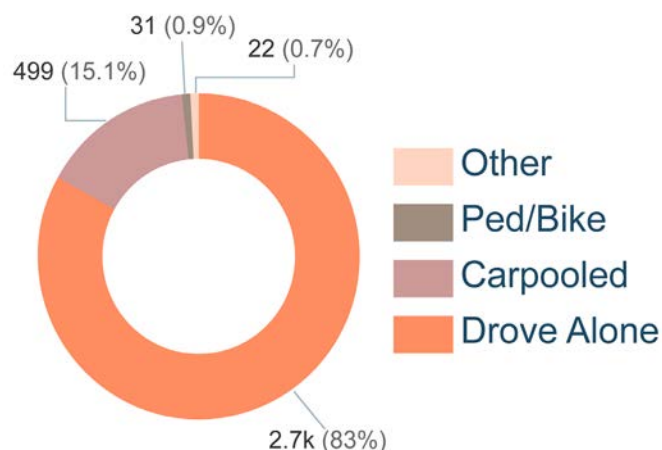
Vehicle Ownership



Vehicle Ownership

An analysis of vehicle ownership shows that 424 (12.8%) persons do not own a car, 1,400 (42.7%) own 1 car, 1,000 (30.6%) own 2 cars, 369 (11.2%) own 3 cars, and 90 (2.7%) own 4 or more cars.

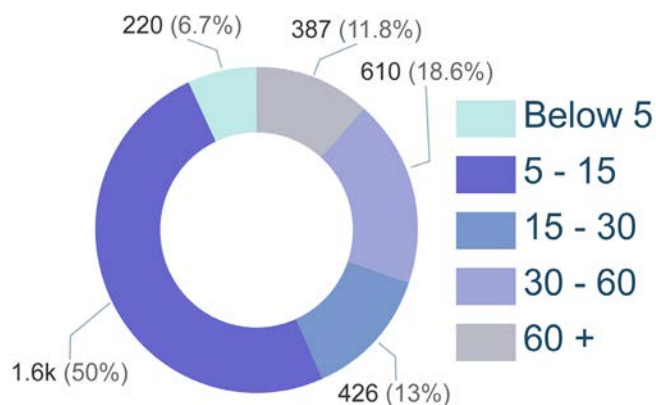
Means of Travel to Work



Means of Travel to Work

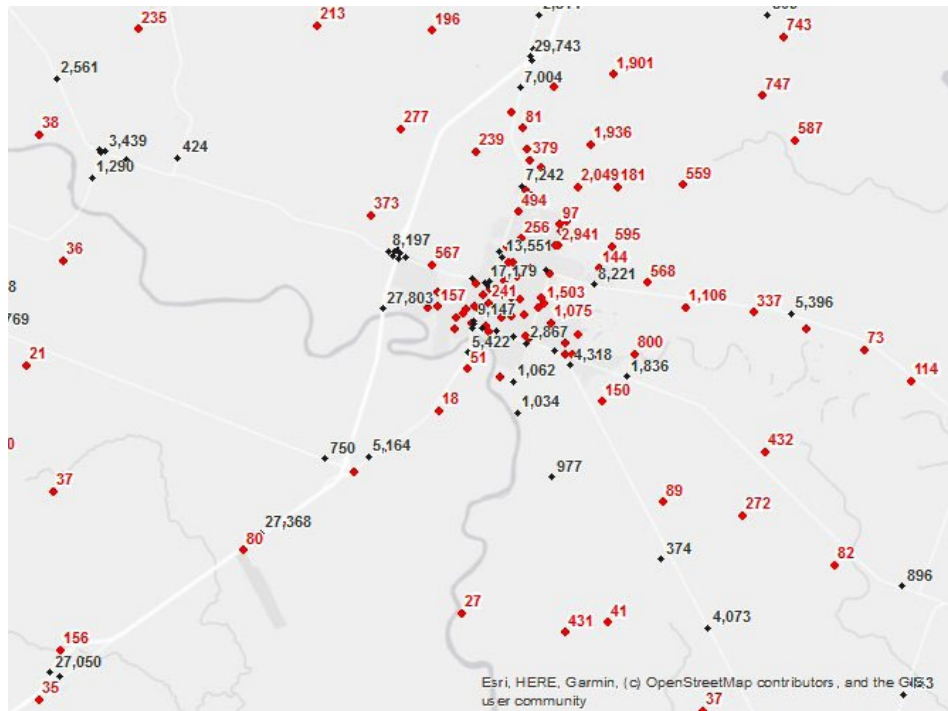
The U.S. Census designates four modes of travel. The population of Wharton utilizes to arrive at work. 2,700 (83%) drive alone, 499 (15.1%) carpool, 31 (0.9%) walk pedestrian pathways or ride a bike, and 22 (0.7%) use "Other" means of travel. This is a large share of carpool users compared to the region.

Travel Time to Work (Mins)

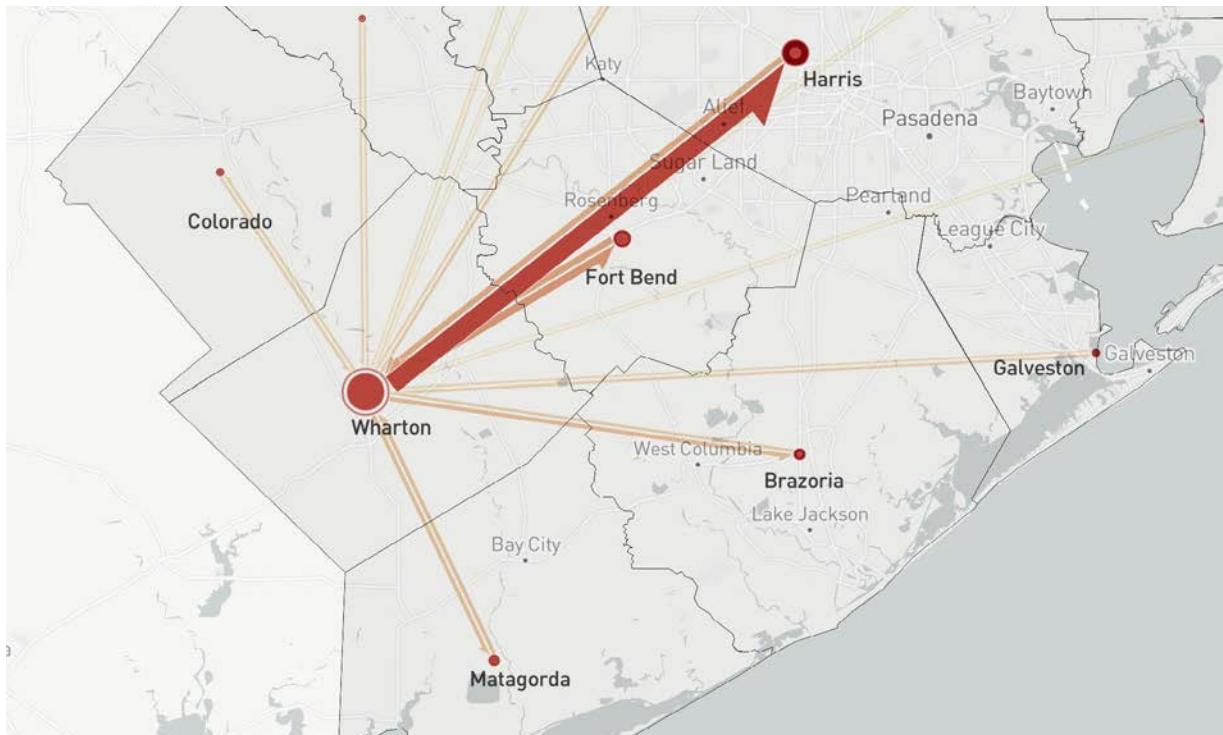


Travel Time to Work

Travel times in Wharton vary between those who work in-town and those who commute outside of town to their jobs. Approximately 220 (6.7%) persons travel for less than 5 minutes to arrive at their workplace, 1,600 (50%) travel between 5 and 15 minutes, 426 (13%) travel between 15 and 30 minutes, 610 (18.6%) travel between 30 and 60 minutes, and 387 (11.8%) travel over 60 minutes.



The map above demonstrates Texas Department of Transportation 2023 traffic counts for the City of Wharton.



The map above demonstrates Wharton County residents' commuting patterns in the region, the majority of workers commuting outside the county drive to the employment centers in Harris County..



A strong workforce is critical to attracting manufactures to Wharton, and aiding in their expansion.

Goals and Strategies

1. Bring Developable Sites to Market

Wharton has significant tracts of undeveloped agricultural land, also known as raw land or greenfield. Much of this land lacks the infrastructure necessary for development, such as water, sewer, or broadband internet. Much of this land is not actively being marketed as for-sale. Retail and industrial developers are seeking properties that are served by utilities and available for sale. Wharton EDC will work with area landowners to market their properties to developers.

A. Identify and define prime sites for development (willing seller, infrastructure access, size, etc)

Location is paramount in real estate; Wharton is well positioned on a major USMCA trade corridor (I-69) at metropolitan Houston's outer growth boundary. Wharton EDC needs to bring 'product' to market, land that is well located for commercial development, for sale, and served by utilities. Prime sites are located on major transportation corridors and are appropriately sized for the intended development. Defining these sites consists of gathering data on the lands characteristics and salable points.

These listings need to be updated and Wharton's real estate development community needs to be engaged in maintaining them. Properties with high economic development value will be prioritized and further marketing collateral developed.

Action 1Ai: Identify and define a minimum of three prime sites for development per month

Metric 1Ai: Number of sites identified and defined

B. Enhance marketing materials and RFI responses, conduct a targeted marketing campaign to the logistics and distribution industry

Once prime sites for development have been identified and defined, the sites need to be promoted to potential customers in a targeted fashion. Wharton EDC partners with the State of Texas and the Greater Houston Partnership to respond to Requests for Information (RFIs) where employers seeking to locate in the Texas Gulf Coast transmit their requirements to Economic Development Organizations in the region.

Wharton EDC responds to every RFI it receives when it meets the qualifications. Wharton EDC will enhance its RFI responses, revise existing marketing materials and create new marketing materials as needed.

Action 1Bi: Host a panel of EDC marketing experts to review and refine the organization's RFI responses and other marketing materials and develop a list of enhancements need for Wharton EDC marketing materials

Metrics 1Bi: Panel hosted, yes or no; list developed yes or no

Action 1Bii: Implement improvements to Wharton EDC's RFI responses and marketing materials, and create new marketing materials as recommended

Metrics 1Bii: List of enhancement implemented, yes or no; number of new marketing materials created

Action 1Biii: Develop and implement a targeted marketing campaign to the logistics and distribution industry

Metrics 1Biii: Targeted marketing campaign developed, yes or no; number of logistic and distribution industry companies contacted; number of direct inquires received

C. Develop public-private partnership for rail-tied industrial development

Wharton's competitive advantage is its location along the prime USMCA trading corridor, the combined Interstate 69, and Kansas City Southern/Canadian Pacific Railway corridor. Its location just outside of metropolitan Houston's urban growth boundary, within ten miles of a multimodal facility at Kendleton makes it an ideal location to attract logistics and distribution jobs. Logistics and distribution is a growing sector as manufactures are looking to re-shore their manufacturing facilities to North America given the recent history of disruptions to global supply chains. This is a longer-term goal, the development of a rail-tied industrial park will take several years even when the partners, site and financing are identified.

Action 1Ci: Identify and conduct outreach to area landowners with developable holdings along the rail corridor to determine their interest in developing their property for a rail tied industrial park

Metrics 1Ci: Inventory of developable rail corridor sites created, yes or no; number of property owners contacted

Action 1Cii: Identify and conduct outreach to rail-tied industrial developers

Metrics 1Cii: Number of industrial real estate developers contacted; number of direct inquires from industrial developers

2. Recruit Retail

The opening of frontage roads along Interstate 69 and the extension of Farm to Market Road 1301 will add new raw land accessible by roadway. These corridors will be prime sites for retail development. Retail development tends to follow residential construction but can also be sited based on traffic counts of vehicles passing by a particular location. Like the industrial land needs as identified in Goal 1, Bringing Developable Sites to Market, Wharton EDC has a role to play in bringing prime retail sites to market.

A. Identify and define prime sites for retail development (willing seller, infrastructure access, size, etc)

Retail real estate developers are not incentivized to invest capital in providing utilities to retail sites. Wharton EDC will identify sites that have high daily vehicle travel counts and are served by utilities that have potential for retail development.

Action 2Ai: Identify and define a minimum of six prime sites for development per year

Metric 2Ai: Number of sites identified and defined



Parks and recreation space are an important part of a town’s quality-of-life. Hased House of Wharton is located in the City’s Dinosaur Park, which will be expanded with the construction of the levee.

3. Recruit Retail (continued)

B. Develop marketing materials to attract retailers and retail real estate developers to Wharton

Once sites are identified and defined, these sites need to be captured in collateral materials in order to be marketed to retail developers. Marketing materials can include online and print collateral.

Action 2Bi: Develop marketing materials for sites as they become available for development

Metrics 2Bi: Number of marketing materials created

C. Conduct outreach to retailers and retail real estate developers

Wharton EDC has engaged a retail consultant in both 2022 and 2023 to enhance its ability to market its potential to retail developers. Wharton EDC will continue to participate in International Council of

Shopping Centers (ICSC) events. Wharton EDC will leverage its retail consultants and its ICSC membership to conduct a targeted marketing campaign to retail developers. It must be recognized that the development of the Interstate 69 infrastructure will take several years, it is not anticipated that the corridor will be completed before 2027; and it is unlikely that retail will develop while the corridor is under construction.

Action 2Ci: Develop and implement a targeted marketing campaign to retail real estate developers

Metrics 2Ci: Targeted marketing campaign developed, yes or no; number of logistic and retail development companies contacted; number of direct inquires received



The view of Wharton's downtown from south of the Colorado river across U.S. Business 59

3. Strengthen the School to Jobs Pipeline

A. Collaborate with local businesses, Workforce Solutions, Wharton County Jr. College, and Wharton ISD to enhance the school to jobs pipeline

Local employers are finding it difficult to find the talent they need to grow and develop their business. This is not unique to Wharton, employers across the country are facing the most competitive hiring market in generations. The nation is undergoing a demographic shift as the “baby boomer” generation ages out of the workforce, and its full impact has not yet been felt. The region has rebounded from the unemployment experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, but few employers are able to obtain the human resources they need to grow. Wharton EDC has collaborated with Wharton Independent School District (Wharton ISD), Wharton County Junior College (WCJC), the City of Wharton, Workforce Solutions, and the Wharton Chamber of Commerce on an Education Taskforce to create a clear pathway for students from school to employment opportunities in Wharton.

Action 3Ai: Continue to participate in the Education Taskforce

Metrics 3Ai: Number of meetings attended with WCJC, Wharton ISD, and the Education Taskforce

Action 3Aii: Create internships and apprenticeship programs for WCJC and WISD students to gain on the job experience while earning.

Metrics 3Aii: Number of apprenticeships and internships created

B. Coordinate the annual Wharton County Job Fair

The Wharton County Job Fair is the county's largest annual hiring event and is coordinated by Wharton EDC, El Campo CDC, and Workforce Solutions with assistance from the County Chambers of Commerce. The event is hosted in El Campo and Wharton on alternating years. In addition to adult job seekers, the job fair hosts dozens of high school seniors seeking post-secondary opportunities, such as the Armed Forces or vocational and college education. Wharton EDC will continue to provide this service to local employers and job seekers.

3. Strengthen the School to Jobs Pipeline (continued)

Action 3Bi: Continue to host and promote the Wharton County Job Fair

Metric 3Bi: Number of employers, number of job seekers participating in the Wharton County Job Fair

C. Conduct outreach to employers to support their hiring needs

Wharton EDC's relationship with area employers will be crucial to engaging the labor force potential of WCJC and WISD students along with Workforce Solutions candidates and adult jobs seekers within the community. Wharton EDC needs to be aware of the employment needs of local employers to coordinate meeting their needs with institutions from across the region.

Action 3Ci: Conduct outreach to Wharton's largest 25 employers, identify their employment needs, and identify areas where Wharton EDC can provide assistance

Metric 3Ci: Number of outreach contacts conducted, number of employment needs identified, number of identified employment needs met

4. Invest in Infrastructure for Economic Development

One of the primary functions of Wharton EDC is the provision of infrastructure for economic development; extending the utilities that businesses need to operate to them. Recent examples of Wharton EDC collaborating to provide infrastructure include participating in the financing of Farm to Market Road 1301, the upsizing of the water lines along Armstrong Road, and the provision of storm water protection for the buildings at 3010 North Richmond.

A. Research and develop a strategy to finance the infrastructure development of the 1301 corridor

Wharton EDC has committed to providing over \$9 million in construction financing for the extension of FM 1301 to Interstate 69 in an equal partnership with the City of Wharton. The FM 1301 extension costs do not include the water and sewer extensions that will be needed by businesses to locate along the corridor. Wharton EDC in partnership with the City of Wharton, needs to determine a strategy to finance infrastructure for the FM 1301 Corridor

Action 4Ai: Collaborate with the City of Wharton and impacted landowners to develop a strategy to finance the infrastructure development of the FM 1301 Corridor in the next 12 to 18 months

Metric 4Ai: A clearly delineated and executable financing strategy for the FM 1301 Corridor

B. Implement 1301 corridor infrastructure strategy

When the financing strategy has been articulated, Wharton EDC will collaborate with the City of Wharton and landowners along the corridor to secure financing and participate in the development of utilities for the FM 1301 corridor.

Action 4Bi: Seek financing for the infrastructure along the FM 1301 Corridor

Metric 4Bi: Financing obtained in the partnership with the City of Wharton for provision of infrastructure on the FM 1301 Corridor

Action 4Bii: Coordinate with the City of Wharton and landowners to execute the development of infrastructure along the FM 1301 Corridor

Metric 4Bii: Infrastructure deployed in the FM 1301 Corridor, buildings constructed in the FM 1301 Corridor



With nine technical education programs, Wharton County Junior College is an important institution for the development of Wharton’s workforce.

4. Invest in Infrastructure for Economic Development (continued)

C. Provide support on infrastructure needs as they arise for existing and new businesses

Wharton EDC can provide economic opportunities to businesses by subsidizing the cost of infrastructure development in Wharton. The City of Wharton has a demonstrated track record of proactive development of utilities, but the demands on the City of Wharton exceed its resources. Wharton EDC can provide resources for infrastructure development when it furthers the development of the local economy.

Action 4Ci: Coordinate with businesses and the City of Wharton to enhance infrastructure to new and existing businesses

Metric 4Ci: Dollar amount invested in infrastructure, capital investments made due to Wharton EDC infrastructure investments

5. Collaborate in Revitalizing Downtown Wharton

Wharton’s downtown core differentiates the community from others in the region with its historic architecture and community institutions such as the Hesel House of Wharton, Wharton County Farmers Market, and The Plaza Theater. Wharton’s downtown is an underutilized asset that has been underinvested in for decades. Wharton’s identity and quality of life are negatively impacted by the limited commercial vitality. Wharton EDC needs to take all possible measure to attract downtown investment and revitalization.

A. Research and develop a strategy to finance downtown redevelopment

Wharton’s downtown needs significant enhancement to the building stock to be economically viable. Nearby cities such as Columbus and Navasota have invested in their downtowns and have reaped the benefits from enhancing the public sphere.

Action 5Ai: Develop an actionable plan to finance the redevelopment of downtown Wharton

Metric 5Ai: Assessed property values in downtown Wharton, number of operating businesses in downtown Wharton



Downtown Wharton is the historic core of the community

5. Collaborate in Revitalizing Downtown Wharton (continued)

B. Collaborate in the development of the downtown plan with the City of Wharton

The City of Wharton has invested in the creation of a downtown master plan, that will begin in 2023. Wharton EDC participation in the planning process and its ability to leverage local businesses will be critical to developing a plan that can enhance future economic outcomes.

Action 5Bi: Participate in Downtown Master Plan process

Metric 5Bi: Number of meetings attended, public participation in the process garnered by Wharton EDC

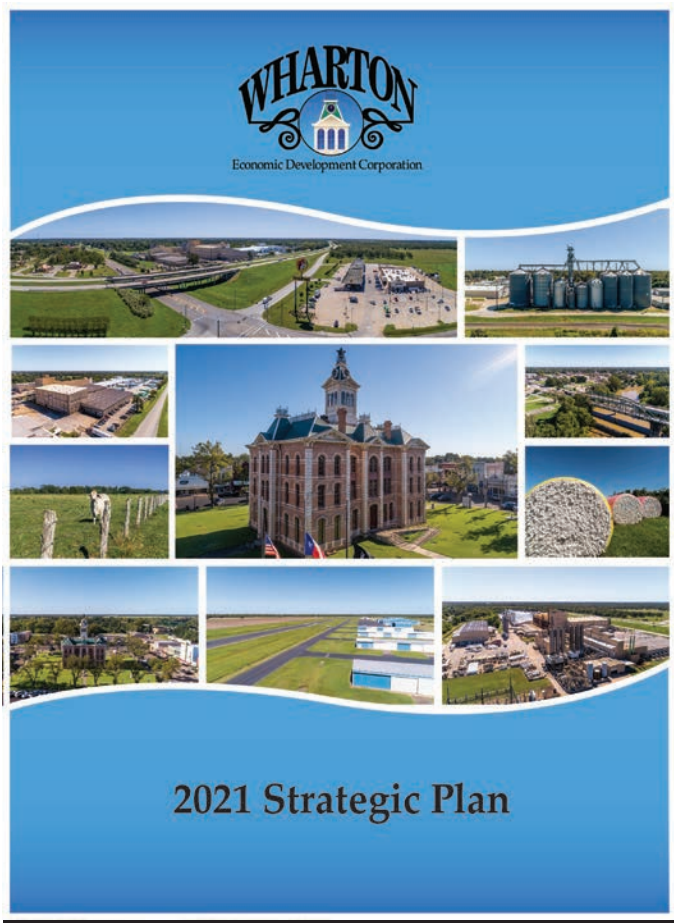
C. Provide support to existing businesses through common space maintenance and enhancements

Wharton EDC can improve the downtown retail environment by coordinating with the City of Wharton and private contractors to enhance the downtown's maintenance and amenities. The Downtown Master Plan process will identify items that the downtown needs to be a more welcoming and productive downtown environment. Wharton EDC can be part of the process for implementing the identified improvements.

Action 5Ci: Provide enhanced maintenance for Downtown Wharton and identify and procure items that will enhance the retail environment

Metric 5Ci: Funding expended, list of public enhancements

Planning Documents



The cover of Wharton Economic Development Corporation's 2021 Strategic Plan

Wharton Economic Development Corporation 2021 Strategic Plan

The Wharton Economic Development Corporation 2021 Strategic Plan was created during the COVID-19 Pandemic, many of the challenges identified have since resolved.

The 2021 Strategic Plan identified the following goals:

1. Recruit Manufacturers and Entrepreneurs

- Create build to suit options for manufacturers
- Market vacant real estate to recruit businesses and entrepreneurs
- Market Wharton as a business-friendly location for entrepreneurs, with a focus on retail recruitment of home improvement and apparel to reduce retail leakage

2. Business Retention and Expansion

- Expand customer relationship management software (Synchronist)
- Provide technical assistance and support for local business needs, with a focus on agricultural enterprises
- Collaborate with the City and Chamber of Commerce to support local businesses

3. Support Infrastructure Development

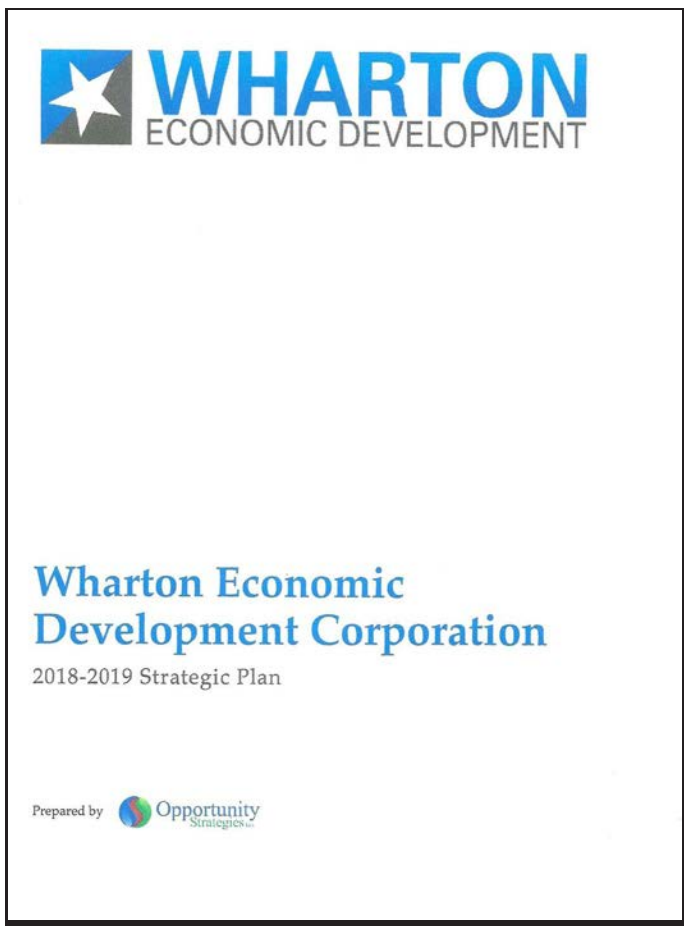
- Support transportation infrastructure development, including the FM 1301 and I-69 expansions
- Support the development of high-speed internet
- Support the development of parks and drainage infrastructure

4. Revitalize Downtown

- Implement the Texas Downtown Association recommendations for Wharton, including the creation of a special district
- Create a detailed plan for the rehabilitation of dilapidated buildings downtown
- Conduct retail recruitment/entrepreneurial support for downtown vacant properties

5. Workforce Development

- Collaborate with Wharton County Junior College and Wharton Independent School District on the school to jobs pipeline, with a special focus on Career and Technology
- Collaborate with Workforce Solutions on employer openings and job fairs
- Encourage employers to take advantage of workforce development incentives



The cover of Wharton Economic Development Corporation's 2018 Strategic Plan

Wharton Economic Development Corporation 2018-2019 Strategic Plan

The Wharton Economic Development Corporation 2018-2019 Strategic Plan was created in the wake of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Harvey.

The 2018-2019 Strategic Plan identified the following goals:

1) Business Retention & Expansion

To design and implement a robust Business Retention & Expansion Program

2) Workforce Development

To develop a reliable skilled workforce to retain and attract quality employers in Wharton

3) Disaster Recovery

To serve as a resource and partner in Wharton's disaster recovery process

4) Business Recruitment/Attraction

To attract businesses and industry that diversify and enrich Wharton's employment base

5) Leverage Health Care

To leverage new opportunities related to Hospital opening

6) Physical Connectivity

To help maximize Wharton's connectivity

The plan identified strategies for each goal, such as "Leverage our non-attainment status" for the Business Recruitment/Attraction goal. In addition to strategies, metrics are identified for each goal; for the Business Recruitment/Attraction goal metrics include the number of new businesses announced each year, the number of visits, and the dollar amount of grants Wharton Economic Development helps obtain. Overall, the plan is a straightforward statement of the organization's priorities.

City of Wharton Comprehensive Plan

The City of Wharton Comprehensive Plan is an in-depth examination of the City of Wharton. It includes a study of the community's goals and objectives, a population analysis, a housing study, a land-use study, a water supply and distribution study, a wastewater collection & treatment system study, a storm drainage system study, a street system study, a thoroughfares study, a recreation & open space study, and an analysis of the capital improvement plan. The sections of the City of Wharton Comprehensive Plan of most relevance to the 2021 Strategic Plan are the Economic Development and Central Business District sections.

The Economic Development section identifies the highlights of Wharton's economic development, the historic development, community input, previous studies, conditions, forecast, largest industries, characteristics of workers, skills, wages, unemployment, regional competitiveness, and key economic development strategies.

These strategies include the following:

1. Continue to enhance marketing efforts
 - Strengthen the city's brand
 - Increase regional presence and collaboration
2. Focus on business growth and recruitment
 - Existing business support
 - Entrepreneurial support
 - Company recruitment
 - Rural outsourcing
 - Agritourism
3. Prioritize the quality-of-life improvements that promote economic growth
 - Housing
 - Infrastructure systems
 - Park frontage
4. Make Wharton more of a college town
 - Student housing
 - Encourage Wharton County Junior College to offer bachelor degrees
 - Apprenticeships/internships
 - Align course offering with local business needs
5. Continue to Invest in Downtown
 - Downtown improvements

Chapter twelve of the City of Wharton's 2018 Comprehensive Plan focuses on Wharton's Central Business District. The chapter contains highlights, context, community input, inventory, existing conditions, land uses, buildings, occupancy, amenities, aesthetics, transportation infrastructure, circulation patterns, parking, pedestrian & bicycle facilities, curb cuts, and driveways. The plan identifies key Central Business District considerations, including the following:

1. Leverage historical buildings and character to project a unique image
 - Branding
 - Design standards
 - Ordinances
 - Voluntary agreements and incentives
 - Business improvement district

2. Increase residential density within and in areas surrounding the Central Business District

3. Ensure existing historic structures in Monterrey Square and along Milam Street are occupied

4. Connect Monterrey Square with Riverfront Park through the pedestrian mall and increased commercial uses along the north side of Elm Street

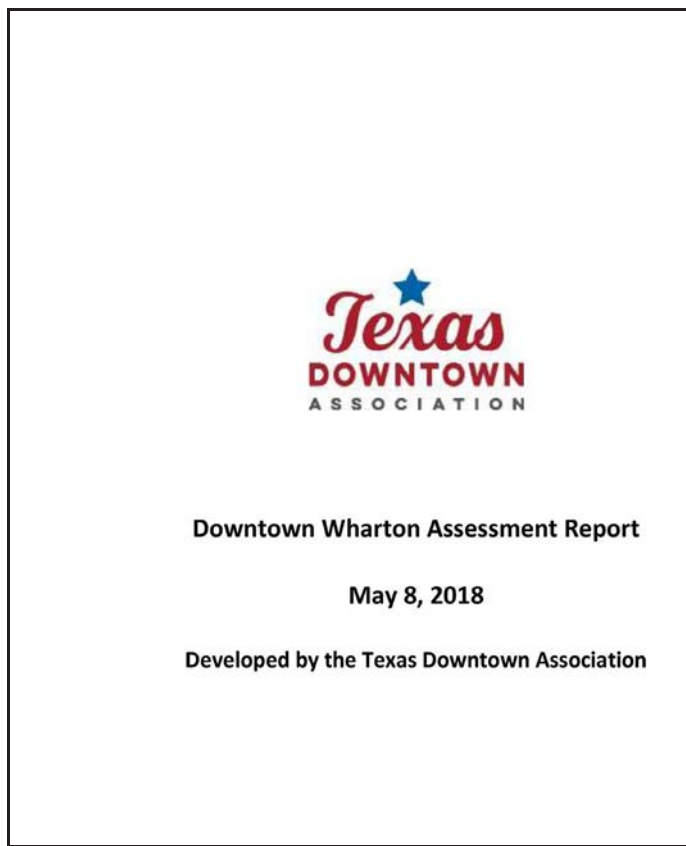
- Improvements to Riverfront Park
- Create pedestrian mall between Courthouse and Riverfront Park

5. Improve the Central Business District experience by investing in pedestrian and bicycle facilities

- Pedestrian facilities, bicycle facilities, and lighting
- Sidewalks
- Other pedestrian facilities
- Bike lanes
- Connect Santa Fe Trail to Riverfront Park
- Supporting facilities
- Lighting
- Signs

6. Coordinate funding and community efforts to include continuous upkeep of downtown area so that opportunities can be taken to support great projects as they arise.

Both the economic development and the Central Business District sections contain an implementation plan for how the various goals should be implemented over



The cover of the Texas Downtown Association 2018 Downtown Wharton Assessment Report

Texas Downtown Association Downtown Wharton Assessment

The Texas Downtown Association is an association of public and private organizations that promote all aspects of downtown revitalization. The Texas Downtown Association conducted a downtown assessment on Wharton in May of 2018. The purpose of the assessment is to bring a group of professionals downtown, talk about challenges and issues, tour the downtown district, meet with stakeholders, and provide a report with recommendations for the different stages of revitalization - short term, mid-range, and long-term. The Texas Downtown Association assessment identified the following recommendations for Wharton:

Short-Range Goals

- Define the Downtown District boundaries
- Establish a stand-alone Downtown Association
- Create partnerships with stakeholders
- Enhance communications with stakeholders and the public
- Create a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone

· Use zoning, ordinances, and permits to enhance the downtown including:

- Downtown overlay district
- Permitted uses
- Streamlined permitting

Mid-Range Goals

- Register of Historic Places
- Implement minimum property standards
- Enhance pedestrian safety
- Provide small business development
- Invest in cultural resources and opportunities
- Host more events downtown
- Address Downtown banners
- Create a Shop Local campaign
- Engage in placemaking

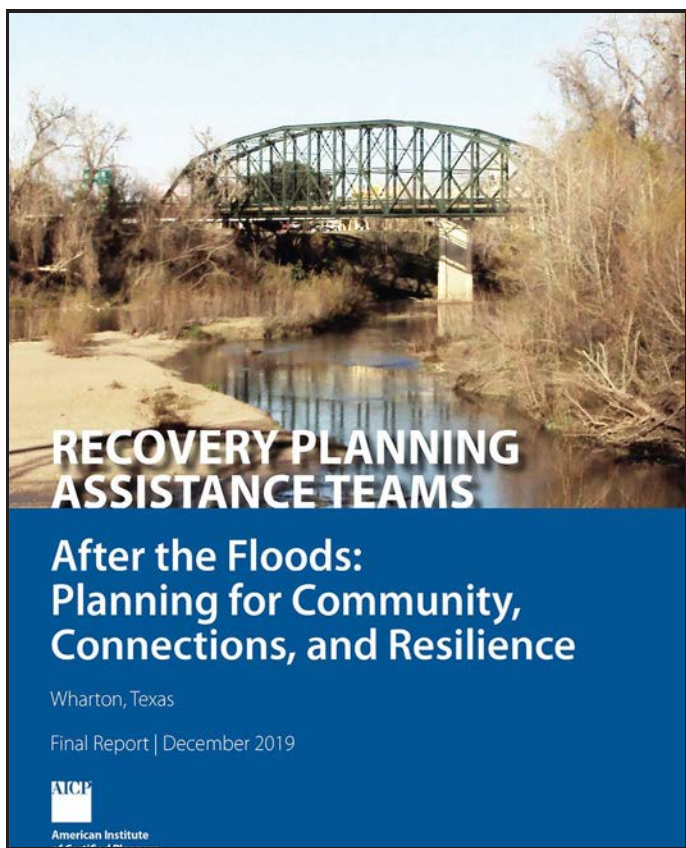
Long-Range Goals

- Enhance connectivity
- Create recreation opportunities
- Increase the number of residential housing units
- Encourage and leverage registration on the National Historic Register

After the Floods: Planning for Community, Connections, and Resilience

Wharton Economic Development Corporation requested assistance from the American Planning Association Recovery Planning Assistance Team after Hurricane Harvey in 2017. This plan provides ways of integrating the newly funded flood protection system with city plans and projects. The study includes recommendations for the entire City of Wharton but focuses on the parts of the city most impacted by the flood protection system. The recommendations include:

- Coordinate with USACE flood control project managers to use recreational and educational opportunities within USACE processes to transform the levee projects into community assets
- Plan for flood control maintenance activities to ensure the levee system and associated amenities are maintained and remain functional.
- Integrate cultural resources programming into city programs to take advantage of the levee projects and attract visitors.



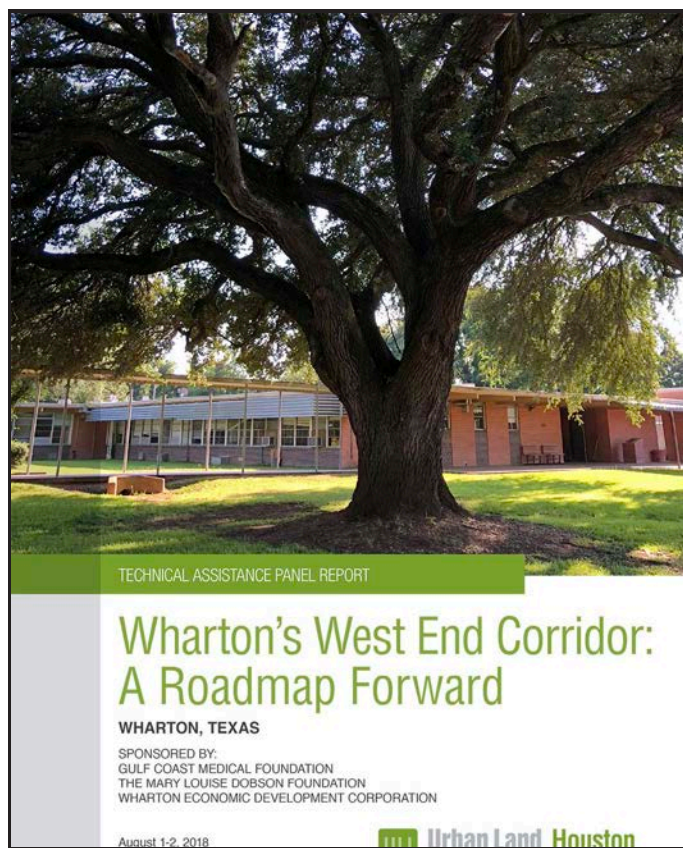
*The cover of the American Planning Association report **After the Floods: Planning for Community, Connections, and Resilience***

After the Floods: Planning for Community, Connections, and Resilience (continued)

- Create an active transportation program and plan to tie the city together, providing safer roads and places for people to walk and bike.

Wharton's West End Corridor: A Roadmap Forward

The Urban Land Institute conducted a study on Wharton's West End. Nearly half of the homes in its West End neighborhood were damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Harvey. Residents were forced to move elsewhere because no other housing options existed. Wharton's West End Corridor: A Roadmap Forward is a comprehensive report of the history and current challenges Wharton is facing and offers a strategy for residents and local leaders as they consider their options for outlining Wharton's future.



*The cover of the Urban Land Institute report **Wharton's West End Corridor: A Roadmap Forward***

Challenges:

- Insufficient housing to meet demand
- Reduction in population
- Difficulties with titles/deeds

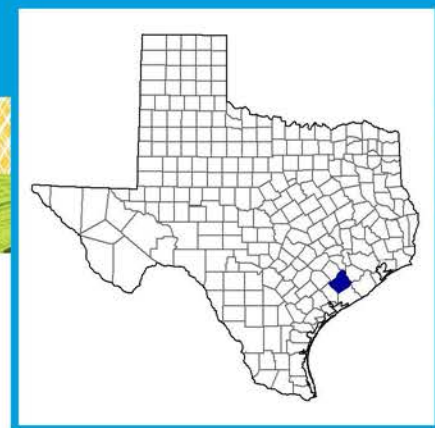
Opportunities:

- Federal funding for levee is secured
- City-owned property
- High-potential for retail
- Dedicated community

Recommendations:

- Investing in the West End
- Addressing Housing in the West End
- Incorporating placemaking
- Active community involvement
- Hiring paid and volunteer staff

Appendix



Wharton County Texas

Total and Per Farm Overview, 2017 and change since 2012

	2017	% change since 2012
Number of farms	1,500	-3
Land in farms (acres)	535,305	-19
Average size of farm (acres)	357	-16
Total	(\$)	
Market value of products sold	208,540,000	-44
Government payments	14,777,000	+8
Farm-related income	9,719,000	-57
Total farm production expenses	176,474,000	-43
Net cash farm income	56,562,000	-45
Per farm average	(\$)	
Market value of products sold	139,026	-42
Government payments (average per farm receiving)	26,867	+61
Farm-related income	20,248	-42
Total farm production expenses	117,649	-41
Net cash farm income	37,708	-43

1 Percent of state agriculture sales

Share of Sales by Type (%)

Crops	86
Livestock, poultry, and products	14

Land in Farms by Use (%) ^a

Cropland	61
Pastureland	33
Woodland	5
Other	2

Acres irrigated: 56,668

11% of land in farms

Land Use Practices (% of farms)

No till	4
Reduced till	4
Intensive till	14
Cover crop	1

Farms by Value of Sales

	Number	Percent of Total ^a
Less than \$2,500	548	37
\$2,500 to \$4,999	179	12
\$5,000 to \$9,999	164	11
\$10,000 to \$24,999	192	13
\$25,000 to \$49,999	91	6
\$50,000 to \$99,999	108	7
\$100,000 or more	218	15

Farms by Size

	Number	Percent of Total ^a
1 to 9 acres	152	10
10 to 49 acres	483	32
50 to 179 acres	419	28
180 to 499 acres	204	14
500 to 999 acres	92	6
1,000 + acres	150	10



Market Value of Agricultural Products Sold

	Sales (\$1,000)	Rank in State ^b	Counties Producing Item	Rank in U.S. ^b	Counties Producing Item
Total	208,540	22	254	486	3,077
Crops	179,249	2	253	194	3,073
Grains, oilseeds, dry beans, dry peas	74,447	3	232	543	2,916
Tobacco	-	-	-	-	323
Cotton and cottonseed	49,444	16	174	28	647
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, sweet potatoes	1,359	35	188	662	2,821
Fruits, tree nuts, berries	1,030	48	225	467	2,748
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, sod	49,275	4	155	62	2,601
Cultivated Christmas trees, short rotation woody crops	-	-	43	-	1,384
Other crops and hay	3,695	54	251	690	3,040
Livestock, poultry, and products	29,291	103	254	1,352	3,073
Poultry and eggs	112	82	235	1,021	3,007
Cattle and calves	23,219	86	254	697	3,055
Milk from cows	(D)	78	94	(D)	1,892
Hogs and pigs	(D)	(D)	216	(D)	2,856
Sheep, goats, wool, mohair, milk	34	172	247	1,959	2,984
Horses, ponies, mules, burros, donkeys	259	107	254	806	2,970
Aquaculture	5,123	3	79	64	1,251
Other animals and animal products	(D)	37	229	(D)	2,878

Total Producers ^c	2,431	Percent of farms that:	Top Crops in Acres ^d	
Sex				
Male	1,631	Have internet access	Cotton, all	80,643
Female	800		Corn for grain	69,499
			Rice	30,369
Age			Forage (hay/haylage), all	25,779
<35	242	Farm organically	Sorghum for grain	18,383
35 – 64	1,317			
65 and older	872			
Race				
American Indian/Alaska Native	6	Sell directly to consumers		
Asian	18			
Black or African American	215			
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	-			
White	2,175	Hire farm labor		
More than one race	17			
Other characteristics				
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origin	197	Are family farms		
With military service	221			
New and beginning farmers	730			
			Livestock Inventory (Dec 31, 2017)	
			Broilers and other meat-type chickens	627
			Cattle and calves	57,475
			Goats	436
			Hogs and pigs	133
			Horses and ponies	1,580
			Layers	7,670
			Pullets	34
			Sheep and lambs	700
			Turkeys	38

See 2017 Census of Agriculture, U.S. Summary and State Data, for complete footnotes, explanations, definitions, commodity descriptions, and methodology.

^a May not add to 100% due to rounding. ^b Among counties whose rank can be displayed. ^c Data collected for a maximum of four producers per farm.

^d Crop commodity names may be shortened; see full names at www.nass.usda.gov/go/cropnames.pdf. * Position below the line does not indicate rank.

(D) Withheld to avoid disclosing data for individual operations. (NA) Not available. (Z) Less than half of the unit shown. (-) Represents zero.



Economic Development Corporation

Wharton Economic Development Corporation
1944 North Fulton St., Wharton, Texas 77488
www.whartonedc.com
(979) 532.0999