



# BRIDGE TO SUCCESS

Strategic Plan for the Development  
Corporation of Richmond



**RICHMOND**  
EST. **TEXAS** 1837

**APRIL 2025**

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TIP Strategies would like to thank the staff and leadership of the Development Corporation of Richmond (DCR) for providing the guidance and feedback that shaped this plan. TIP is also grateful to the many stakeholders who shared their thoughts and contributed valuable insights during the interview process.

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**TIP Strategies, Inc.**, is a privately held Austin-based firm providing consulting and advisory services to public and private sector clients. Established in 1995, the firm's core competencies are strategic planning for economic development, talent strategies, organizational development, resiliency planning, and equity initiatives.

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# INTRODUCTION

Richmond, Texas, (the City) is widely known for its rich historical legacy. One of the earliest communities settled by the Old Three Hundred under the direction of Stephen F. Austin,<sup>1</sup> the City holds a pivotal place in Texas's formation. While embracing the past with pride, Richmond is also well positioned for the future. As the county seat of Fort Bend County, the community benefits from serving as the governmental and legal hub of one of the state's fastest growing and most diverse counties. Its relatively low cost of living, favorable schools, and family friendly atmosphere make it a desirable location within the Houston metropolitan area. The community's Historic Downtown (the Downtown), monthly farmers market and movie screenings, and cultural events such as the Pecan Harvest Festival and annual Christmas celebration, draw residents and visitors alike.

Yet despite its many advantages, Richmond also faces a number of challenges. As the seat of county government, the community has an above-average share of untaxable, publicly owned property. Opportunities for generating tax revenues are further constrained by the fact that Richmond is a relatively landlocked community, with few greenfield sites. Furthermore, much of the remaining property is located in the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) and is slated for master-planned residential communities. Vacancies in the downtown and vulnerabilities to flooding also threaten to hamper the City's economic vitality, and it is challenges like these that demand concerted, proactive effort from City leadership over the short, medium, and long term.

## PLANNING PROCESS

In July 2024, the Development Corporation of Richmond (DCR) engaged TIP Strategies (TIP) to prepare a comprehensive strategy to guide the organization's activities over a five-year planning horizon (2025–2029). Using its three-phase planning model—discovery, opportunity, implementation—TIP worked with the DCR to gain an understanding of current economic conditions and identify projects for future growth. The resulting recommendations, outlined in the Action Plan (beginning on page 4), will help position Richmond to capture its share of the region's growth and to attract desirable commercial, industrial, and quality-of-life projects to the area.

FIGURE 1. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

<sup>1</sup> See "[Richmond, Texas.](#)" *Handbook of Texas* (online) for more on the City's founding.

During the project's initial phase, TIP conducted a robust stakeholder engagement effort, illustrated in Figure 1 (page 1). Using a mix of one-on-one interviews, topical roundtables, and a public town hall meeting, many individuals provided input during the planning process. Insights gained from the qualitative outreach were supplemented by an extensive quantitative analysis using multiple datasets from public and proprietary sources. Findings from the stakeholder engagement and analytical tasks culminated in the preparation of an analysis of Richmond's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis). Highlights from the quantitative analysis and a summary of the SWOT analysis are provided in the Planning Context section (beginning on page 13).

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Working closely with the DCR, a framework for the plan emerged organized under the following goal areas.

1. Supporting existing and prospective businesses.
2. Identifying and implementing transformational projects.
3. Enhancing the community's quality of place.

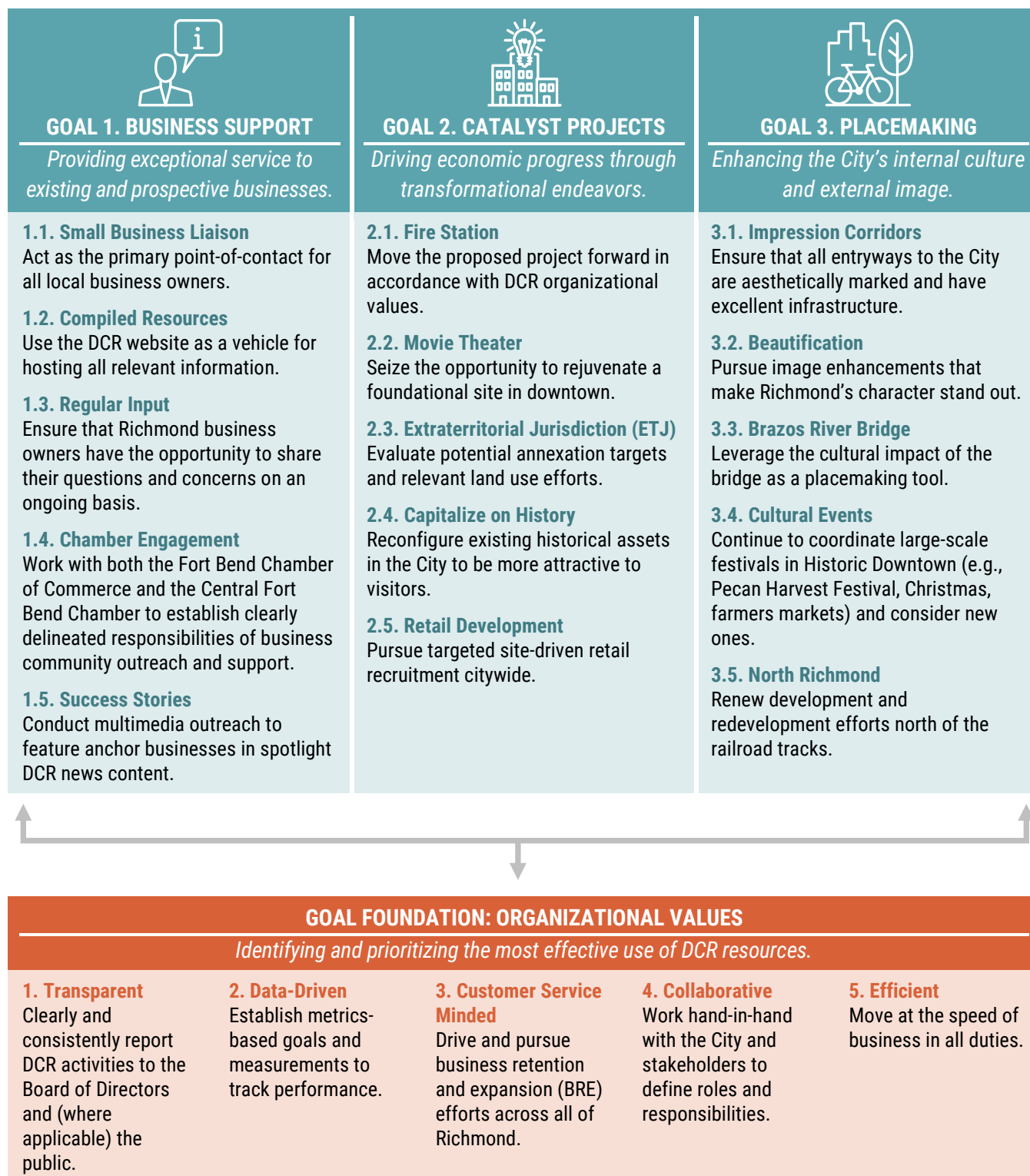
These three goals were then built out using a five-by-five framework, meaning that each goal encompasses five strategies with five action items. A fourth area of consideration that acts as the foundation of the three goals focuses on organizational structure and principles, including establishing priorities and ensuring the most effective use of DCR's resources. The full strategic framework is presented in Figure 2, page 3.

In addition to creating an easily communicated structure, this approach resulted in a work plan that is achievable within the DCR's current resource and staffing levels. To support the plan's implementation, TIP also provided an Excel-based matrix (delivered separately) that will allow the DCR to assign responsibilities, identify potential partner organizations, set timelines, and track the status of each recommendation. With this guide for future action in hand, the City's economy will be able to overcome identified challenges in an effective and efficient manner.

### ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

A thoughtfully designed strategic framework can establish a well-defined, organized, and valuable planning tool for both internal and external audiences. Its structure is intelligible to City and DCR staff, as well as the general public. Executive summaries of this Action Plan can capture the content in an easily understandable format.

FIGURE 2. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

# ACTION PLAN

After gathering the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the Richmond economy, TIP produced the following Action Plan, which includes strategic recommendations to guide the DCR over the next five years. If conscientiously implemented, these actions will drive Richmond forward and set the City up for sustainable success. Within this section, time-frame indicators are included, which note the projected initiation range of each strategy: Year 1, Years 2–3, Years 4–5, or Ongoing.

## GOAL 1. BUSINESS SUPPORT

*Providing exceptional service to existing and prospective businesses.*

Building and maintaining a thriving, business-friendly economic landscape is a fundamental task of successful economic development organizations (EDO) like the DCR. By providing foundational support to businesses, both currently located in Richmond and those considering relocation or expansion in the City, the DCR will ensure that the residents it serves are employed and that its sales tax revenue increases.

Performance metrics to be regularly tracked and reported for this goal include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Business visitations.
- Businesses assisted.
- Website visits and actions (Google Analytics).
- Sites featured in site readiness materials.
- Business survey responses.
- Business-oriented events held.
- Social media engagement (see the Marketing Audit section).

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

**1.1. Small Business Liaison.** Act as the primary point-of-contact for all local business owners.

- 1.1.1.** Determine whether the responsibilities demanded by this function require a staffed position, an ad hoc contractor, or an extension of existing resources. **YEAR 1**
- Consider a phased approach, in which initial implementation efforts are supported by a part-time contractor, and full-time staffing is reevaluated later.
  - Give preference to individuals who reside in Fort Bend County and know the community.
  - Develop a long-term vision (beyond the five-year range of this Action Plan) for the future of DCR staffing.
- 1.1.2.** Commit to visiting 100 businesses in the Richmond City limits within the first year of implementation. **YEAR 1**
- Use this front-door approach to establish a renewed working relationship and engagement between the DCR and the local business community.

**1.1.3.** Direct interested businesses to all relevant DCR resources and external contacts for needs outside the DCR’s purview (e.g., permitting concerns, grant applications, loans, workforce development).

ONGOING

- Develop standardized workflow procedures to distinguish between internal services and those outsourced to City staff.

**1.1.4.** Leverage the Fort Bend County Small Business Development Center to work together on small business-focused issues and solutions. ONGOING

- Capitalize on the shared office proximity by fostering frequent informal collaboration.
- Enable the flow of incoming business communications to be addressed by the optimal organization.

**1.1.5.** Track all business interactions in a customer relationship management (CRM) software tool.

YEAR 1

- Target 200 customer touchpoints in the first year of implementation.

**1.2. Compiled Resources.** Use the DCR website as a vehicle for hosting all relevant information.

**1.2.1.** Ensure the website’s content is updated regularly, including the latest news items. ONGOING

- Aim for one new piece of content per month.
- Reuse the website news content in shorter social media posts (see Action 1.5.4.).

**1.2.2.** Prominently feature this Action Plan and curated data selections from this plan and elsewhere.

YEAR 1

**1.2.3.** Develop a compressed, all-in-one resource guide PDF that includes a high-level information summary across a range of business support needs. YEAR 1

**1.2.4.** Promote available and developable real estate in a site readiness section. YEAR 1

- Aim for a minimum of 10 sites featured by the end of Year 1.

**1.2.5.** Include the website URL and a QR code that links to the DCR homepage on all printed promotional materials. ONGOING

**1.3. Regular Input.** Ensure that Richmond business owners have the opportunity to share their questions and concerns on an ongoing basis.

**1.3.1.** Design and implement a survey template for Richmond business owners to be distributed and analyzed annually. ONGOING

- Distribute the survey across all digital and physical advertising channels.
- Publish an executive summary of the results.
- Work with City leadership and the DCR Board of Directors to establish shared objectives for each year’s requested input to inform survey structure.

**1.3.2.** Continue to host small business roundtable events (at least quarterly) that serve the dual function of listening sessions and a chance to share DCR projects and initiatives. ONGOING

**1.3.3.** Invite select business owners to DCR Board of Director meetings when relevant information will be discussed. ONGOING

- 1.3.4. Establish in-person, ad hoc, open-door sessions at the DCR office at regularly set times (at least biweekly). **ONGOING**
- 1.3.5. Create an open stakeholder feedback form, hosted on the DCR website. **YEAR 1**
  - Target 100 form submissions in Year 1 and a 50 percent increase each year thereafter.
- 1.4. **Chamber Engagement.** Work with both the Fort Bend Chamber of Commerce and the Central Fort Bend Chamber to establish clearly delineated responsibilities of business community outreach and support.
  - 1.4.1. Commit to meetings held at least quarterly with Chamber leadership. **ONGOING**
  - 1.4.2. Share all relevant data among organizations. **ONGOING**
  - 1.4.3. Leverage the Chambers for potential leads on prospective businesses that could be a fit for Richmond. **ONGOING**
  - 1.4.4. Cohost Fort Bend County business-related events, such as trade shows or networking functions, in Richmond at least annually. **ONGOING**
  - 1.4.5. Partner on advocacy efforts at the state level for infrastructure projects. **YEARS 4-5**
- 1.5. **Success Stories.** Conduct multimedia outreach to feature anchor businesses in spotlight DCR news content.
  - 1.5.1. Promote and participate in the *Born in the Bend* podcast to increase Richmond’s economic development exposure to the general public. **YEAR 1**
    - Empower the cohosts with suggestions for the optimal resources, guests, and discussion topics necessary to facilitate one new episode per month.
  - 1.5.2. Extend the existing relationship with the contracted marketing firm to continue to generate high quality video footage of business owner interviews. **ONGOING**
  - 1.5.3. Publish and distribute a physical newsletter (e.g., included in mailed City bills) that always includes at least one segment featuring an exemplary local business. **ONGOING**
    - Utilize the print newsletter, per Action 1.2.5., as an opportunity to direct residents to the DCR website and social media pages.
  - 1.5.4. Increase and prioritize social media engagement from official DCR channels. **YEAR 1**
    - Target engagement metrics that produce a 25 percent increase in followers year-over-year, given the current activity described in the Marketing Audit section.
  - 1.5.5. Host an annual awards ceremony to honor selected local businesses. **ONGOING**
    - Designate multiple award categories that align with the DCR’s values, such as Best Customer Service, Best Use of Data, and Online Favorite.

## GOAL 2. CATALYST PROJECTS

### *Driving economic progress through transformational endeavors.*

While the ongoing daily tasks of stable economic development are critical, there are certain special projects and initiatives that have the potential to move the needle dramatically for cities like Richmond. By taking full advantage of its downtown and broader historical assets, as well as the opportunities provided by its large ETJ and strong retail sector, Richmond can become a premier destination in Fort Bend County.

Performance metrics to be regularly tracked and reported for this goal include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Developer and prospect interactions for catalyst project sites.
- Public engagement and information sessions held regarding ETJ.
- Land use expansion (both City- and privately acquired).
- Projected tax impacts of City limit expansion.
- Number of historic sites designated and connected.
- Number of outside visitor/tourist traffic at key sites.
- Retail attraction and expansion prospects engaged.
- Retail-focused trade shows/events attended.

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

**2.1. Fire Station.** Move the proposed project forward in accordance with DCR organizational values.

- 2.1.1.** Prioritize timeliness with a target of established occupancy by January 2026. **YEAR 1**
- Set intermediate milestones that must be accomplished to achieve this end target, including identified challenges and potential solutions.
- 2.1.2.** Engage the existing tenant prospect(s) intentionally and regularly (at least biweekly) and identify and assign accountable responsibilities to all involved stakeholders. **YEAR 1**
- 2.1.3.** Work closely with the developer to ensure project hurdles are efficiently handled. **YEAR 1**
- 2.1.4.** Collaborate with City officials to ensure permitting and zoning concerns are fast-tracked. **YEAR 1**
- Advocate for any necessary variance requests that will ease potential business concerns.
- 2.1.5.** Provide public updates on project progress at least monthly, via the DCR's website and social media channels. **YEAR 1**

**2.2. Movie Theater.** Seize the opportunity to rejuvenate a foundational site in downtown.

- 2.2.1.** Present a clear case for redevelopment to the property owner that emphasizes the historical value of the theater and potential long-term positive impact on the Richmond community. **YEARS 2-3**
- Include relevant market data and case studies in the outreach process.
- 2.2.2.** Connect the property owner with adjacent tenants (e.g., Joseph's, The George Foundation) to establish shared goals and values for Downtown. **YEAR 1**
- Facilitate collaborative in-person meetings between relevant parties.
- 2.2.3.** Evaluate and pursue multiple avenues for adaptive reuse (e.g., sale or lease). **YEARS 2-3**
- Provide financial breakdowns of these approaches as viable options to the owner.
- 2.2.4.** Act as a matchmaker between the owner and prospects to find a mutually agreeable tenant. **YEARS 2-3**
- 2.2.5.** Consider offering targeted incentives to accelerate the process. **YEARS 2-3**

- 2.3. Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ).** Evaluate potential annexation targets and relevant land use efforts.
- 2.3.1.** Evaluate business recruitment and expansion implications of potential annexation. **YEARS 4-5**
- Catalog existing businesses within the ETJ that are sales tax generating (e.g., retail and food service).
- 2.3.2.** Utilize the existing City fiscal analysis model to conduct economic impact studies on annexation of target communities. **ONGOING**
- Generate preliminary estimates of tax base increases created by certain City limits additions.
  - Identify potential expansions piecemeal, based on evolving City priorities for annexation.
- 2.3.3.** Collaborate with the Boards of Directors of existing municipal utility districts (MUDs). **YEAR 1**
- Work through impacts on their jurisdictions and the bond packages and user fees associated with the current infrastructure support.
- 2.3.4.** Collaborate and advocate for utility and transportation projects of mutual interest. **YEARS 2-3**
- 2.3.5.** Work with the City to establish and maintain clear lanes of responsibility and influence. **YEAR 1**
- Support the City in outreach efforts to ETJ residents (e.g., listening sessions, events, etc.).
- 2.4. Capitalize on History.** Reconfigure existing historical assets in the City to be more attractive to visitors.
- 2.4.1.** Work with the Historic Richmond Association (HRA) and the Richmond Historical Commission on all potential projects with historical and cultural focus. **ONGOING**
- 2.4.2.** Design and market a cohesive packaging of local assets (cemetery, museum, train depot, other landmarks) to promote the legacy of the City. **YEAR 1**
- 2.4.3.** Engage with the Texas Historical Commission’s Texas Main Street Program to receive technical expertise, resources, and support for leveraging sites in the Historic Downtown. **ONGOING**
- 2.4.4.** Consider launching a coordinated branding campaign promoting Richmond’s history, targeted at increasing degrees of geographical separation, starting with neighboring communities, Fort Bend County, and the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land metropolitan statistical area (Houston MSA), followed by a statewide effort. **YEARS 2-3**
- 2.4.5.** Involve all legacy businesses that have a vested interest in historical preservation in project and initiative planning. **ONGOING**
- 2.5. Retail Development.** Pursue targeted site-driven retail recruitment citywide.
- 2.5.1.** Complete commercial development plans for the proposed 50-acre parcel of the River Pointe Church campus along the US Highway 59 corridor. **YEARS 2-3**
- Ensure that the mixed-use zoning of the site allows for significant sales tax generating retail business tenants, utilizing planned industrial districts or other overlay district designations.
  - Evaluate the need for tax increment reinvestment zone (TIRZ) or bond-related considerations and pursue accordingly.
  - Work with the developer to determine optimal prospect types and begin site selection efforts.
  - Set a target date of 2027 for at least 50 percent occupancy.
- 2.5.2.** Utilize a “pre-vitalization” approach to leverage small spaces and temporary business pop-up areas into potential brick-and-mortar expansion. **YEAR 1**

- 2.5.3. Pursue a dual approach of attracting chain franchise locations (e.g., Starbucks) while also encouraging expansion of area businesses (e.g., Gino’s Italian Joint). **ONGOING**
- 2.5.4. Renew previously completed gap analysis with available data and Richmond market information to determine retail categories that are currently underrepresented and could provide strong opportunities. **YEARS 2-3**
  - Use existing leakage report to inform retail development decision-making.
- 2.5.5. Attend regional (Houston MSA) and state trade shows with a retail focus, such as regional events held by the International Council of Shopping Centers (e.g., [ICSC Local Houston](#)). **ONGOING**

## GOAL 3. PLACEMAKING

### *Enhancing the City’s internal culture and external image.*

Quality of place is often a key factor influencing whether future residents and businesses choose to move to a community—or whether current ones decide to stay. While not everything related to placemaking is within the purview of EDOs, there are certain actions the DCR can take to enhance the brand and image of Richmond, making it more attractive to those inside and outside of Fort Bend County. The external and internal perception of the City will help determine the course its economy takes over the next five years.

Performance metrics to be regularly tracked and reported for this goal include, but are not limited to, the following.

- Capital investment in impression corridor improvements.
- Façade Improvement Grant applications and recipients.
- Public art projects produced.
- Volunteer days hosted.
- Brazos River Bridge maintenance and design feature expenditures.
- Pedestrian activity at the Brazos River Bridge.
- All DCR-sponsored cultural events.
- Attendance at these events.
- North Richmond residents engaged.
- Redevelopment investment activity in North Richmond.

## STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

**3.1. Impression Corridors.** Ensure that all entryways to the City are aesthetically marked and have excellent infrastructure.

- 3.1.1. Consider a small-scale bond package to fund the improvement of signage, landscaping, and road quality. **YEARS 2-3**
- 3.1.2. Ensure that all updated signage adheres to a consistent thematic design (colors, text, etc.) **ONGOING**
  - Consider using the DCR’s branding for design purposes, with the input of the City.

- 3.1.3.** Work with the City Planning and Zoning Department to produce an evaluation of all roadway entrances into Richmond and identify challenging areas. **YEAR 1**
- Ensure City limits entryways from East and West US Highway 90-A include custom high-quality welcome signs.
  - Extend efforts to I-69 connection intersections, such as FM-762 and Richmond Parkway.
  - Dedicate resources to wayfinding that directs incoming drivers specifically to the Downtown.

- 3.1.4.** Install low-cost decorative lighting at entry points. **YEAR 1**

- 3.1.5.** Purchase billboard space near Brazos Town Center to market Richmond to Rosenberg shoppers and tourists. **YEARS 2-3**

- Reassess the efficacy of this investment after six months and evaluate additional billboard locations.

**3.2. Beautification.** Pursue image enhancements that make Richmond’s character stand out.

- 3.2.1.** Fund and promote Façade Improvement Grants for local businesses to update the aesthetics of their storefronts. **YEARS 2-3**

- Leverage downtown businesses for support and sponsorship for a targeted campaign to fund this initiative.
- Establish tiered funding based on project scope, with a maximum of \$10,000 per grant.
- Set one-to-one matching fund requirements for eligibility of recipients.

- 3.2.2.** Fund and promote public art projects (e.g., murals) to beautify key landmarks and buildings. **YEAR 1**

- Support continued efforts for Traffic Signal Box Art Wrap projects by local artists.
- Leverage social media to generate public input about potential artists and themes.
- Feature interviews of the selected artist(s) on the DCR’s online platforms.

- 3.2.3.** Organize civic responsibility volunteer days to encourage public participation in activities like trash clean-up. **ONGOING**

- Collaborate with Lamar Consolidated Independent School District (ISD) to recruit students for field day participation in these efforts.
- Engage food truck businesses to be present at established volunteer headquarter points.

- 3.2.4.** Collaborate with the Garden Club of Richmond to initiate beautification projects with a small-scale landscaping focus. **ONGOING**

- 3.2.5.** Evaluate current permitting and zoning regulations to determine if targeted sidewalk enhancements in the downtown area are possible. **YEARS 4-5**

**3.3. Brazos River Bridge.** Leverage the cultural impact of the bridge as a placemaking tool.

- 3.3.1.** Ensure all necessary structural maintenance and updates are completed in a timely manner and to the highest standards. **ONGOING**

- Facilitate and review annual structural reports on the bridge performed by the Texas Department of Transportation.

- Maintain coloration on an as-needed basis.
- 3.3.2.** Explore new attraction-oriented sites and activities adjacent to the river, such as sponsored trail runs, fishing spots, or kayak launch points. **YEAR 1**
- Hold at least one bridge-centered event in the first six months.
- 3.3.3.** Install targeted decorative lighting to make the bridge stand out at night. **YEARS 2-3**
- Solicit public input, such as using online voting to weigh in on design options.
  - Contract with a Richmond-based small business to conduct the installation.
- 3.3.4.** Install informational signage (e.g., a plaque) that describes the importance and impact of the bridge to Richmond. **YEAR 1**
- Collaborate with the HRA to create the content for the feature.
- 3.3.5.** Continue to highlight the bridge in photographic marketing materials, both from the DCR and the City. **ONGOING**
- 3.4. Cultural Events.** Continue to coordinate large-scale festivals in the Downtown (e.g., Pecan Harvest Festival, Christmas, farmers markets) and consider new ones.
- 3.4.1.** Include at these events designated food truck areas, serving products from locally operated businesses (to include wider Fort Bend County). **ONGOING**
- 3.4.2.** Launch an inaugural cultural event, called Experience Richmond, focused on the rich history of Richmond with free walking tours of important sites. **YEAR 1**
- 3.4.3.** Host regular buy local events to encourage residents to make purchases from Richmond businesses, extending beyond food and drink offerings. **ONGOING**
- 3.4.4.** Collaborate with neighboring communities to host a Fort Bend County event in Richmond. **ONGOING**
- 3.4.5.** Ensure all events are accessible by offering free or low-cost activities. **ONGOING**
- 3.5. North Richmond.** Renew development and redevelopment efforts north of the railroad tracks.
- 3.5.1.** Collaborate with nonprofits, churches, and residents to establish joint coordinated efforts. **ONGOING**
- Engage Habitat for Humanity to ensure proactive and positive alignment on low-income development issues.
- 3.5.2.** Engage leadership and planning professionals to create a short-, medium-, and long-term plan exclusively for North Richmond redevelopment and City support. **YEARS 4-5**
- Consider pursuing larger-scale capital improvement fund projects in future years.
- 3.5.3.** Advocate for increased or improved street lighting for public safety. **ONGOING**
- 3.5.4.** Increase public communications and input to raise broader awareness of North Richmond challenges and opportunities.
- Integrate North Richmond in all City historical and cultural efforts. **ONGOING**
- 3.5.5.** Assist as needed with title resolutions that would impact commercial land use. **ONGOING**

## GOAL FOUNDATION: ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

*Identifying and prioritizing the most effective use of DCR resources.*

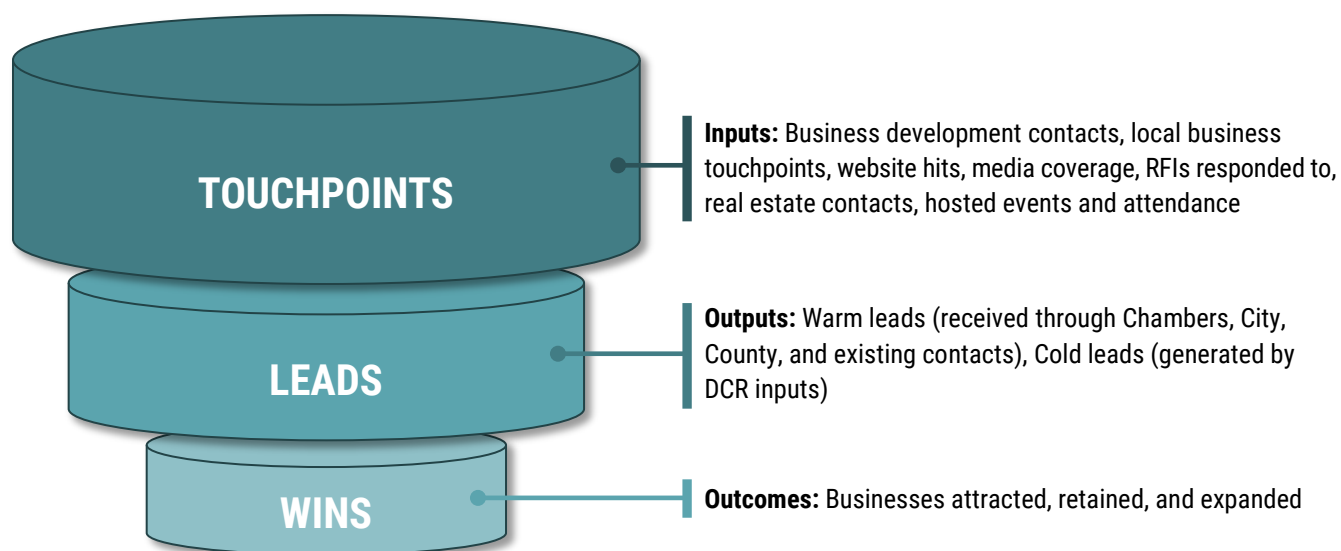
Underpinning the strategies and actions that the DCR should take over the next five years are the driving principles of the organization. The five values described here are the result of extensive qualitative feedback about the organization that was gathered during the stakeholder engagement process. These core values should support and guide everything the DCR strives to achieve in the Richmond community. As the implementation of this Action Plan unfolds, leadership should refer to these foundational characteristics to assess the success or failure of projects and initiatives pursued. Staff and the Board of Directors need to keep these values top of mind while making decisions about how to expend the DCR's time and resources.

1. **Transparent.** Clearly and consistently report DCR activities to the Board of Directors and (where applicable) the public.
2. **Data-Driven.** Establish metrics-based goals and measurements to track performance.
3. **Customer Service Minded.** Drive and pursue business retention and expansion (BRE) efforts across all of Richmond.
4. **Collaborative.** Work hand-in-hand with the City and stakeholders to define roles and responsibilities.
5. **Efficient.** Move at the speed of business in all duties.

The Director of the DCR should adhere to the structure suggested in Figure 3 to report the activities and functions performed by DCR staff during the periods covered by Board meetings. The focus should be on compiling measurable, concise information to describe the progress made from the top of the funnel to the bottom, ultimately producing tangible results for the organization and the City. Although agendas and reports will vary, this format should be standard.

### FIGURE 3. REPORTING STRUCTURE

Information delivered by Director



Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

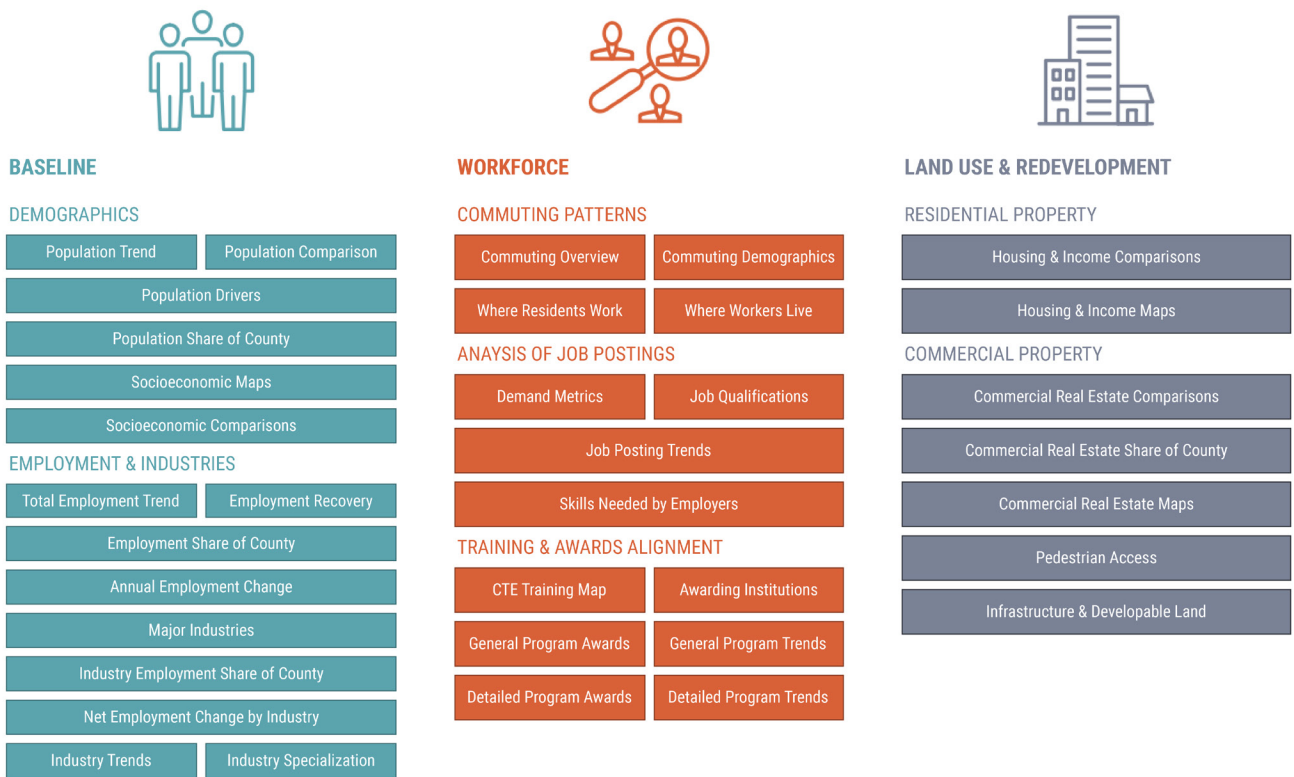
# PLANNING CONTEXT

Qualitative and quantitative input from the planning process provided critical insights into Richmond’s competitive position and uncovered insights that shaped the recommendations. This section presents highlights from the engagement, along with a summary of the analysis of strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats (SWOT analysis) prepared as part of the project’s initial phase.

## STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

TIP conducted a strategic analysis of Richmond’s competitive position with comparisons to the Houston metropolitan area, Texas, and the US, as well as a selection of peer communities where applicable. Initial data collection began in July 2024 during TIP’s discovery phase and the analytical work continued into the final phase of the engagement. An in-depth *Strategic Analysis* was delivered to the DRC as an interactive data visualization, the menu of which is shown in Figure 4. Findings from this work are highlighted in this section and were used to guide the strategic planning process.

FIGURE 4. MENU OF THE INTERACTIVE DELIVERABLE



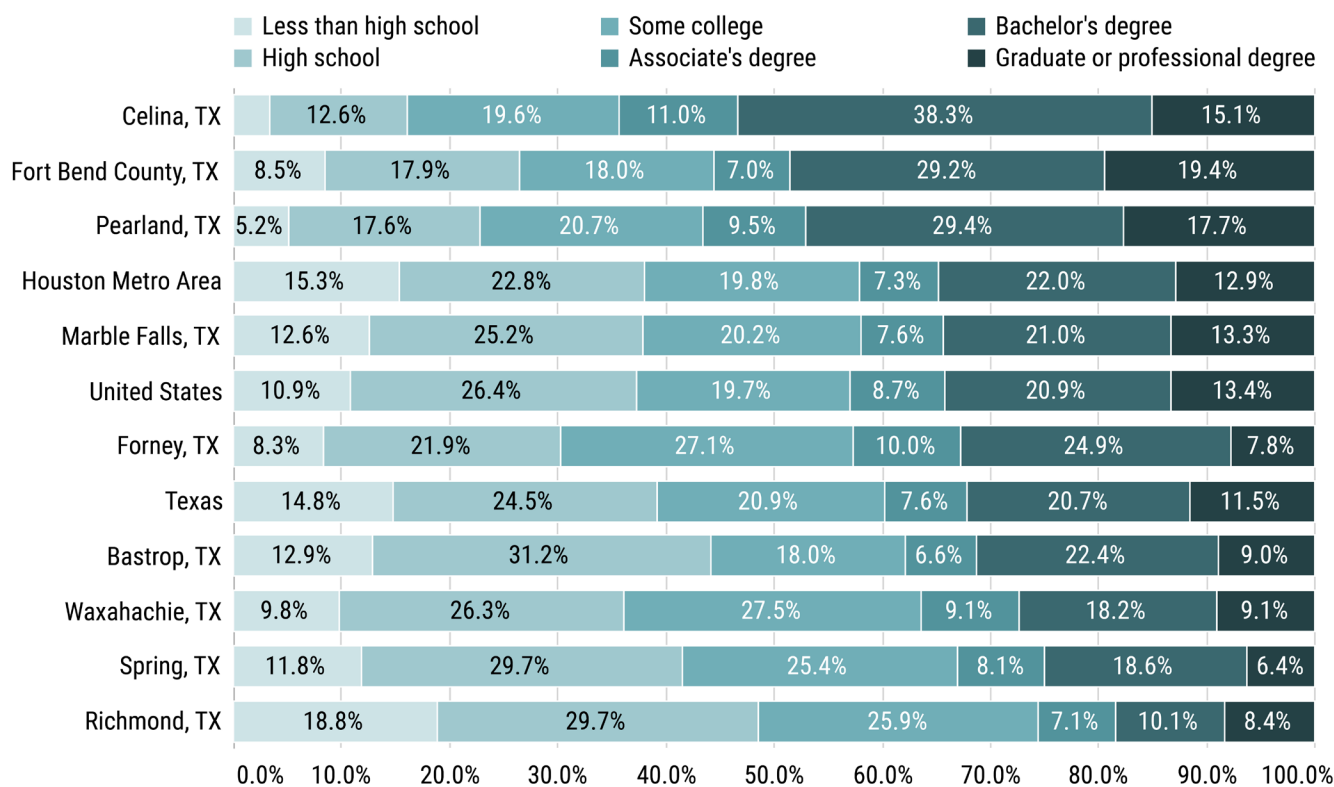
Source(s): TIP Strategies, Inc.

### Cultivating a skilled workforce will allow Richmond to better support existing and future businesses.

Although Richmond’s workforce has steadily increased alongside rapid population growth countywide, its labor force is largely young and under-skilled. When looking at residents within incorporated City limits, more than one-half of Richmond’s population is under the age of 34, and only one-quarter of its residents have at least a bachelor’s degree (Figure 5). This represents the lowest educational attainment among Richmond’s peer communities, while the City also demonstrates a smaller labor force participation rate (less than 60 percent) than any of its peers. Richmond also has the highest share of residents below the federal poverty level (17.1 percent) and the lowest median household income (\$51.8K) among its peers. As the City strives to better support its existing businesses while marketing itself to prospective firms, opportunities exist to upskill the local workforce to meet growing labor needs. Lamar Consolidated ISD offers more than two dozen career and technical education (CTE) programs, designed to help students gain vocational skills in a career-focused setting. Additionally, local campuses for Wharton County Junior College, Texas State Technical College, and the University of Houston at Sugar Land connect Richmond residents to higher education programs that can better allow the local workforce to meet the education requirements of higher-paying jobs. Upskilling a large and underutilized workforce can allow Richmond to build a talented labor pool that the City can leverage for continued business attraction.

**FIGURE 5. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2022**

Resident population 25 years and older



Source(s): 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.

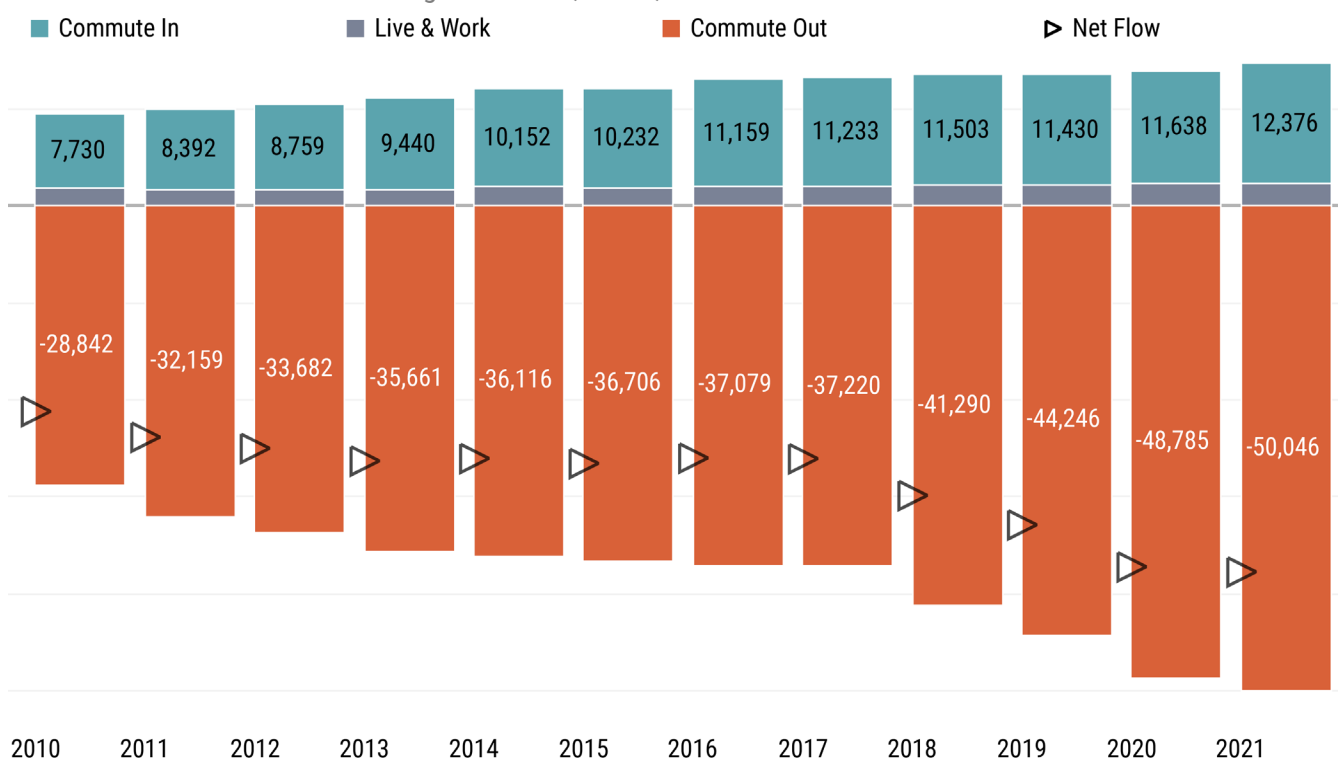
Note(s): Educational attainment only measured for population 25 years and older. High school includes equivalency. Some college indicates no degree was received. Graduate degree includes professional degrees and doctoral programs.

**Traded cluster expansion can improve retention of Richmond’s outward commuting workforce.**

Richmond’s relationship with Houston serves as a major asset for the community, driving the City’s population growth and its ability to attract businesses that wish to establish or expand a presence in one of the nation’s largest metropolitan markets. Like many Houston area suburbs though, this proximity also characterizes Richmond as a bedroom community that is a net exporter of labor in every industry sector. In fact, more than 95 percent of residents within Richmond’s 77406 and 77469 ZIP Codes commute out (Figure 6), with most of these residents working for employers based in Houston, Sugar Land, or Rosenberg. As the City pursues business recruitment through catalyst projects and increased engagement with regional employers, targeted business attraction efforts will allow the City to increase local jobs and better capture its vastly outward commuting workforce.

Several of Richmond’s largest industries have seen rapid employment gains in recent years. As the local population has grown, so has employment in the Accommodation & Food Services and Local Government industries,<sup>2</sup> while climbing enrollment in Fort Bend ISD and Lamar Consolidated ISD has coincided with a rapidly growing Education industry. Since 2001, comparative growth in these sectors has far exceeded that of Fort Bend County, while employment in the Business Services industry cluster has steadily risen to become Richmond’s largest traded cluster, serving outside markets. Despite this, there are only two traded industry clusters in which Richmond demonstrates an employment concentration higher than the national average: Electric Power Generation & Transmission and Construction Products & Services. Improvements to Richmond’s business climate and local identity will allow the City to continue to attract traded cluster employers and carve out an important role within the Houston metro area.

**FIGURE 6. COMMUTING PATTERNS, TREND**  
Flow of workers and residents through Richmond, Texas, 2010–2021



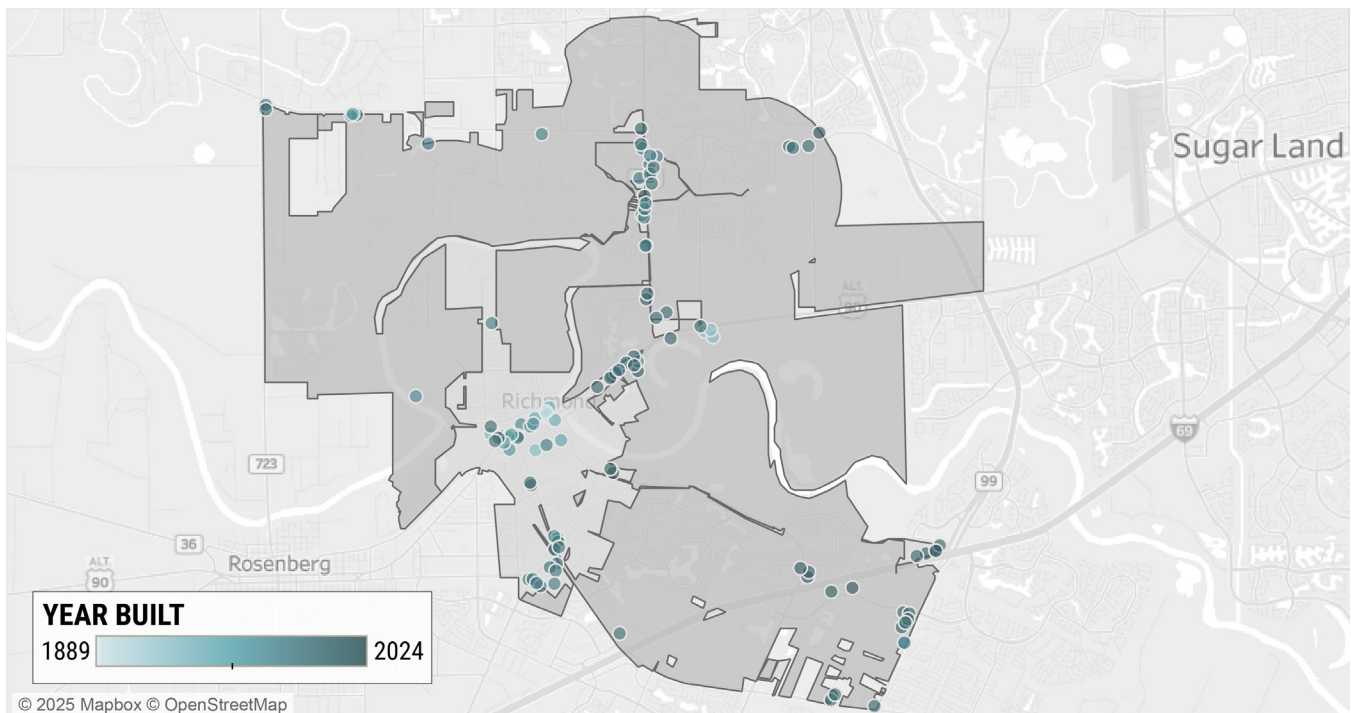
Source(s): Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD), Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (LODES); TIP Strategies, Inc.  
Note(s): Richmond, Texas, is approximated by ZIP Codes 77406 and 77469. Only includes residents and workers in Texas.

<sup>2</sup> Industry names used in this section are capitalized when they align with federal classification systems.

## *Two of Richmond's greatest real estate assets lie in its historic downtown and its large ETJ.*

Downtown Richmond serves as one of the City's greatest assets and strongest elements of its identity, hosting many of the City's oldest office and retail properties (Figure 7). The district allows Richmond to stand out from its neighbors, with the Downtown area hosting small businesses and community events that draw in visitors from surrounding communities. In seeking improved City branding and aesthetics, Richmond can continue to benefit from Downtown's historical assets. Seeking to become more business-friendly while developing a high-skill workforce, Richmond has opportunities to utilize high vacancy office and apartment properties to meet the real estate needs of employers and workers. Other placemaking efforts like improved bike and pedestrian infrastructure, public art, and coordinated efforts to revitalize Richmond's underserved neighborhoods can further a local sense of community and quality of life that appeals to potential businesses and residents. As it has grown, Richmond has sought to encourage development along key infrastructure, with some of the City's newest office and retail properties located along the I-69 corridor. This corridor-based growth strategy represents a way for Richmond to strategically utilize City land and provide shovel-ready real estate that can advance business attraction. The City has also historically pursued annexation of its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Richmond's ETJ is largely characterized by low-density, heavily residential communities, with some of the City's most affluent census tracts heavily overlapping with its ETJ. Because of this character, annexation of the ETJ represents a way to increase the City's tax revenue while also adding to the inventory of developable, vacant land that is scarce within Richmond's existing City limits.

**FIGURE 7. RETAIL AGE, RICHMOND, TEXAS**



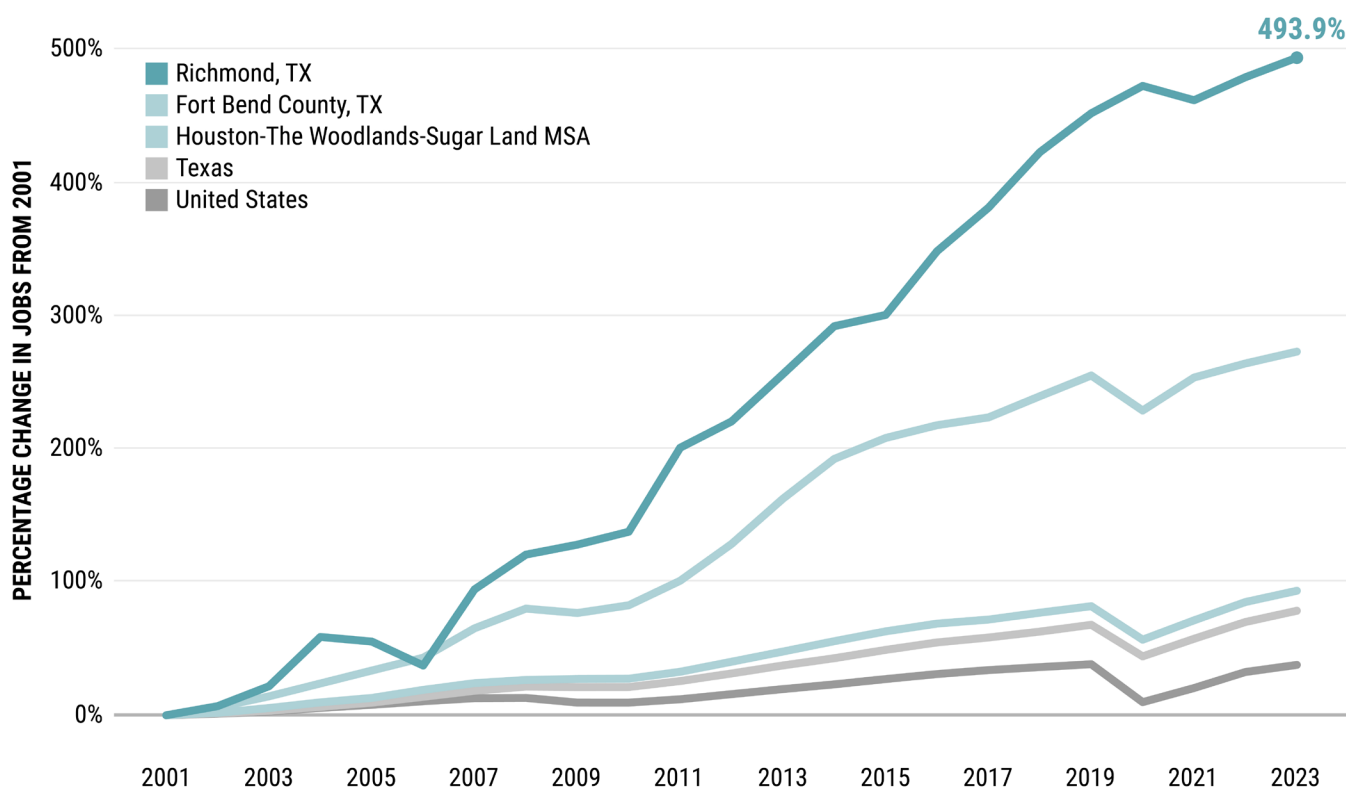
Source(s): City of Richmond; CoStar Group; Fort Bend Central Appraisal District; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Properties shown have a Richmond address in ZIP Code 77406 or 77469 and are located within Richmond's city limits or its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Darker teal colors indicate newer buildings. All data are estimated by CoStar as of early August 2024 and represent a snapshot in time.

**Industry retention and expansion must be focused on sales tax generating sectors.**

As noted previously, Richmond is a primarily suburban bedroom community, with much of the City’s area occupied by single-family residences. While population continues to grow and residential developments increasingly characterize much of its incorporated land and ETJ, the City must pursue ways to increase sales tax revenue. Focusing business retention, expansion, and recruitment efforts on sales tax generating land uses can reduce the tax burden placed on property owners. High demand industries within Richmond, like retail and food services, represent opportunities for such growth. Richmond’s Accommodation & Food Services industry has seen rapid employment gains in recent years, experiencing a nearly 500 percent increase in jobs from 2001 to 2023, growing from just over 350 jobs to nearly 2,100 (Figure 8). Employment in the Retail Trade sector has also seen precipitous growth, adding more than 2,100 jobs during the same period for an increase of over 230 percent.

**FIGURE 8. ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES, CUMULATIVE CHANGE**  
Comparative change for Accommodation & Food Services since 2001

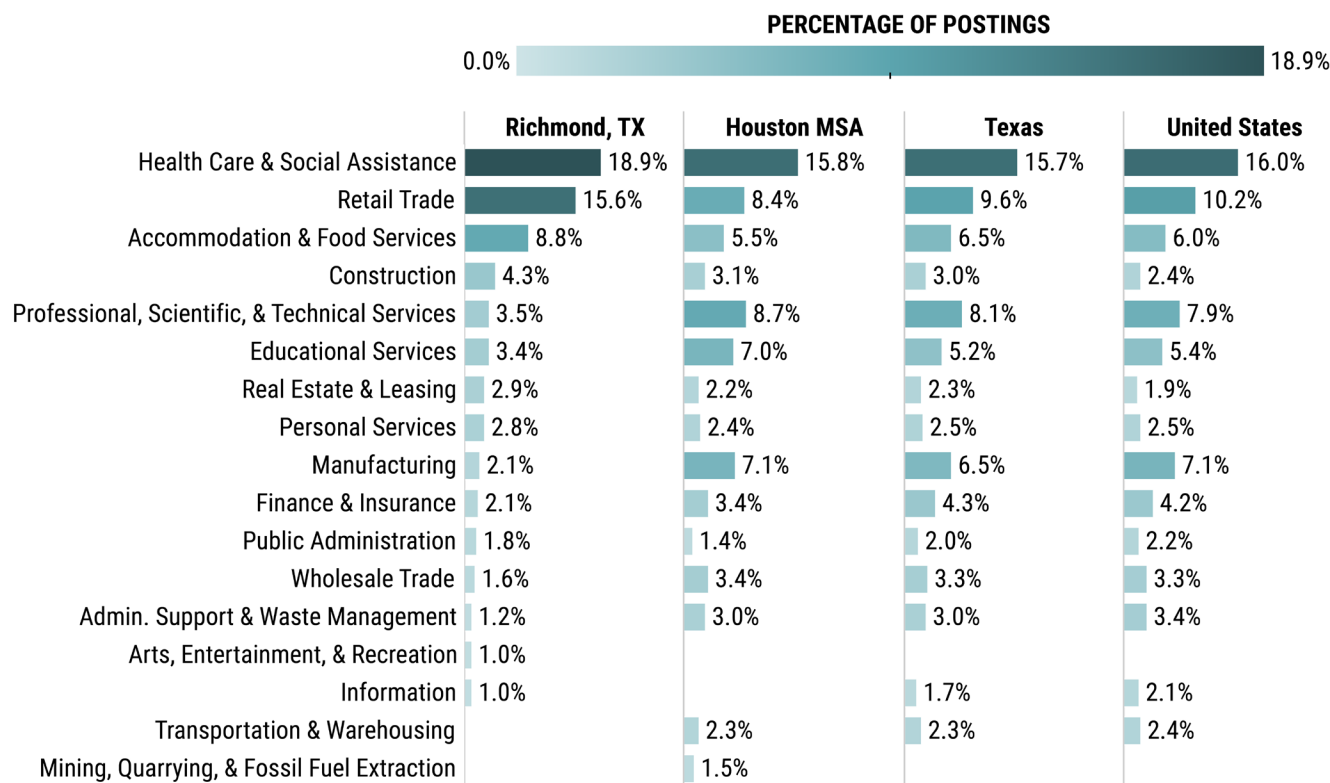


Source(s): US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Lightcast 2024.2—Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.  
Note(s): Richmond, Texas, is approximated by ZIP Codes 77406 and 77469.

The recent growth in these industries is reflected in local job postings. In the study period of 2023 and 2024, Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services represented Richmond’s second and third most in-demand industries by percentage of job postings, respectively (Figure 9, page 18). Both represented a higher share of local job posting for their corresponding industry than any of the City’s geographic benchmarks—the Houston MSA, Texas, and the US. Demand for retail- and food-related jobs is further reflected at the occupational level. Sales & Related make up the highest share of job postings locally (13.5 percent), while Food Preparation & Serving Related rounds out the top five (8.5 percent).

**FIGURE 9. JOB POSTINGS ANALYSIS, DEMAND BY INDUSTRIES**

Based on an analysis of two years of job postings, January 2023–December 2024



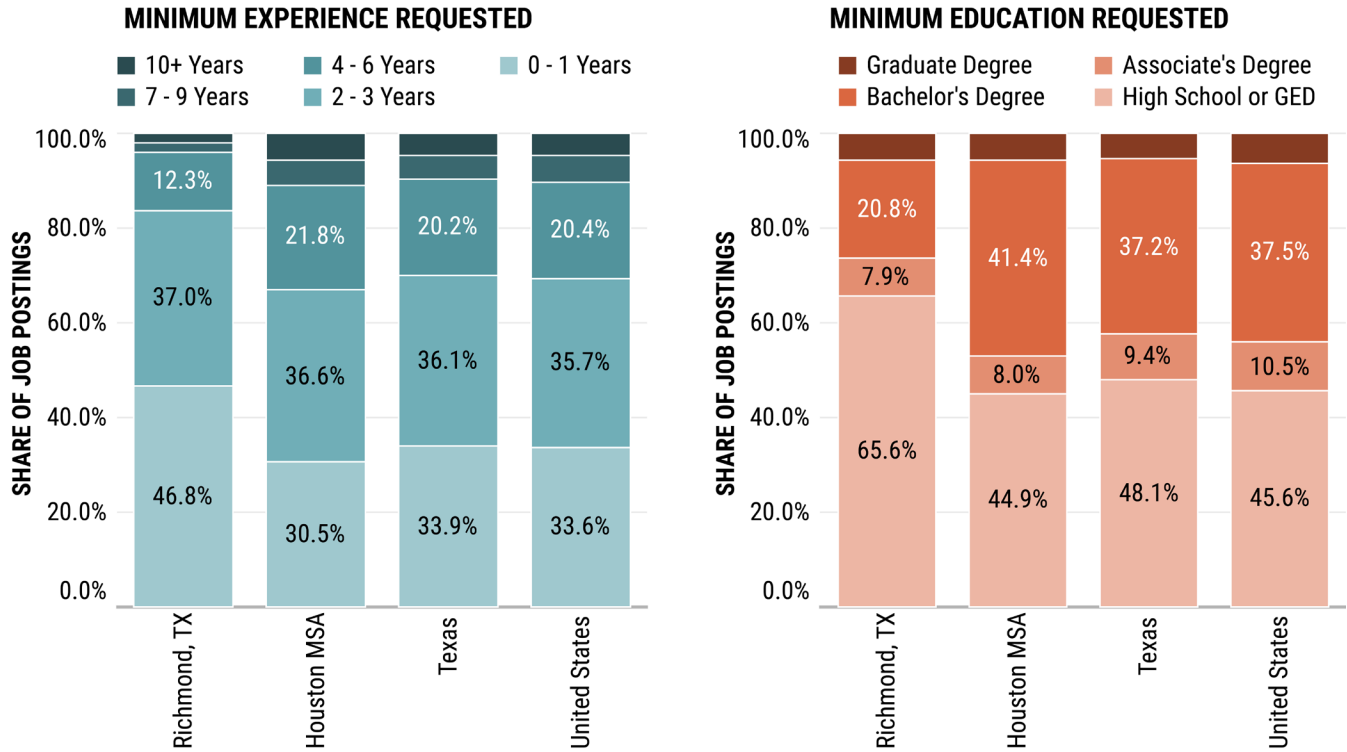
Source(s): BLS; Lightcast 2024.3–QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Bars show percentage share of unique job postings each region by industry sectors. Job postings include non-staffing, unique, newly posted job postings for full-time, part-time, and flexible positions, excluding internships, between January 2023 and December 2024.

Job postings in Richmond generally have a low barrier to entry. Nearly one-half of all job postings within the City over the study period required no previous related experience, and nearly two-thirds required only high school-level educational attainment (Figure 10, page 19). Employment in these in-demand, sales tax generating industries specifically represents jobs with a low barrier to entry, providing positions that are easily accessible to a wide range of Richmond residents.

**FIGURE 10. JOB POSTINGS ANALYSIS, QUALIFICATIONS**

Based on an analysis of two years of job postings, January 2023–December 2024



Source(s): BLS; Lightcast 2024.3–QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.  
 Note(s): Job postings include non-staffing, unique, new posted job postings for full-time, part-time, and flexible positions, excluding internships, between January 2023 and December 2024.

With the continued growth of the Houston MSA and Fort Bend County, Richmond’s sales tax generating industries will need to grow evenly relative to the County level to support local competitiveness. In 2023 and 2024, job postings in Richmond made up less than 1 percent of all job postings MSA-wide (Figure 11, page 20). Richmond employment in the Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services sectors each only make up about 8 percent of the County’s employment in either industry, a lower-than-average share across all sectors. The City’s development along strategic commercial corridors has allowed it to keep pace with countywide retail real estate growth, with Richmond slowly representing a greater share of the county’s retail footprint (growing from 6.2 percent of countywide inventory in 2007 to 9.1 percent in 2024).



## MARKETING AUDIT

As part of the qualitative assessment of the DCR's effectiveness, TIP analyzed the organization's existing marketing efforts, with a particular emphasis on online outreach. The outlets considered are the DCR website, email contacts, LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. As referenced in the Action Plan section, the DCR also supports a podcast called *Born in the Bend*, which is available on all major audio content platforms (see Action 1.5.1). The podcast features long-form guest interviews and contributes to public awareness of what Richmond has to offer.

This section includes key takeaways regarding the efficacy of each outlet. The findings and recommendations were informed by preliminary results of a third-party survey of Richmond residents about perceptions and preferences of the general public being conducted as part of an ongoing marketing and branding strategy for the City. Interim results of this survey aligned closely with the opinions gathered during the stakeholder engagement conducted as part of the strategic plan outreach. While not described in this plan, the feedback the City receives will impact the DCR's implementation as it concerns the evolving prioritization of activities.

### WEBSITE AND EMAIL

As the primary online destination for any DCR-related search, the homepage of the organization's website is paramount to the promotion of its mission, vision, projects, and general information. The website was recently redesigned, including high quality images and video footage, along with improvements to navigation. However, there are some simple steps the DCR could take to improve it.

- The website has been the primary channel for broadcasting the DCR's rebranding efforts, as evidenced in the Develop Richmond logo and headlining banner, as well as in the URL of the site itself. Making a final decision on the organization name and using it consistently across all channels and materials will be a pivotal part of the success of any marketing efforts.
- Since the renovation in 2024, the contact submission form on the website has only received 56 entries. This form should be more prominently featured on the homepage, as opposed to being accessible only via the Contact subpage that requires additional user navigation.
- The DCR is in the process of setting up Google Analytics, a powerful tool for tracking the online traffic and information about website visitors. This step is not especially resource-intensive and should be completed immediately.
- The website's News feature should be updated more frequently. For example, as of the release of this Plan, the most recent news item was posted in June 2024. The DCR should strive to include press releases and public information on at least a monthly basis.

Email marketing is the main source of online outreach for EDOs, and the DCR is performing well in this avenue. Using the email marketing platform Constant Contact, it has built a database of nearly 3,000 addresses, including over 1,000 added just in the past year. Furthermore, recipients open the DCR emails at an estimated rate of 59 percent, which is well above the [average open rate for all industries of 37 percent published by Constant Contact](#).<sup>3</sup>

- The DCR should consider issuing a monthly email blast, containing preferably brief content, such as organizational news and activities. Maintaining regular email contact with thousands of recipients is a powerful tool in an EDO's repertoire.

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<sup>3</sup> Open rates are updated regularly. Number shown (37.27 percent) is for all industries as of December 2024.

- All in-person events and all printed promotional materials should be used as avenues for gathering email addresses to add to Constant Contact. Care should be given to comply with email marketing best practices, including obtaining consent from recipients (opt-in), offering clear unsubscribe/opt-out options, and limiting the frequency of contacts.

## LINKEDIN

LinkedIn engagement is typically the strongest value-add of the social media outlets for reaching a wide audience of professional organizations and individuals. However, just like with more informal social media platforms, the strategic use of content can heavily influence the site's effectiveness.

- The DCR's overall LinkedIn metrics are mixed. In the past year, the organization's account has garnered over 37,000 impressions (views), but lackluster engagement: 573 reactions, 37 comments, and 64 reposts. However, in that time, the DCR has gained 238 new followers, a nearly 50 percent increase.
- In order to boost its reach and audience engagement, the DCR should endeavor to post content that includes photos, tagged individuals and organizations, links, and hashtags. Improvement in this approach will lead to consistent follower growth and account activity.

## YOUTUBE

The DCR is in a unique position with its active YouTube account. The organization currently hosts over 100 videos, which is an unusually high number relative to other City-level EDOs. Many of these videos are high quality, both in production value and type of content, including interviews with prominent local businesses. Still, there is significant room for improvement.

- First and foremost, despite the volume of hosted content, the DCR's YouTube engagement is lacking. The account (awkwardly named developmentcorporationofri4633) has only 10 subscribers, and many of the individual videos have been viewed fewer than 10 times. The DCR should consider rebranding its YouTube under a new account.
- Videos should be integrated with other online outlets. The DCR should link to or embed its YouTube content on its website and other social media posts and should encourage cross-functional engagement whenever possible.

## FACEBOOK AND INSTAGRAM

Although traditionally associated more with personal content, Facebook and Instagram can bring some attention to major events and news items. Generally speaking, these outlets tend to attract a predominantly female audience. In the DCR's case, its followers on both Facebook and Instagram skew nearly three-quarters women. The age range is a bit counterintuitive, with the vast majority of the organization's following being 35 to 54 years old, compared to the more youth-focused nature of the applications. The highest percentage of followers are based in Houston, which is perhaps not surprising given the DCR's geographic location.

- The DCR should not spend significant resources on these two forms of social media. Although it can be effective to cross-post (copy content from another outlet like LinkedIn), it is simply not an efficient use of time to generate original content for Facebook and Instagram specifically.
- Press releases of important news items or images such as one-page posters associated with upcoming Richmond events, organized or sponsored by the DCR, are examples of the type of material that should be broadcast on these channels.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

During the discovery phase of the project, the consulting team gathered qualitative input from stakeholders concerning local economic development issues. In addition, TIP conducted quantitative data analyses to understand Richmond’s competitive position in the region. The results of these efforts informed the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis summarized in Figure 12.

The four components of a SWOT analysis can be defined as follows.

- **Strengths:** Assets and resources that can be built on to grow, strengthen, and diversify the local/regional economy.
- **Weaknesses:** Liabilities and barriers to economic development that could limit economic growth potential.
- **Opportunities:** Competitive advantages and positive trends that hold significant potential for the attraction of new businesses, investments, and skilled workers.
- **Threats:** Unfavorable factors and trends (often external) that could negatively affect the local/regional economy.

FIGURE 12. SUMMARY OF SWOT ANALYSIS FOR RICHMOND, TEXAS

 <h3>Strengths</h3>	 <h3>Weaknesses</h3>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical legacy (Jane Long, the Old 300, cemetery).</li> <li>• Proximity to Houston.</li> <li>• Lamar Consolidated ISD.</li> <li>• Family friendly.</li> <li>• Comparatively low cost of living.</li> <li>• Brazos River and Brazos River Bridge.</li> <li>• Effective City leadership.</li> <li>• County seat (foot traffic and legal industry).</li> <li>• Nonprofit and community groups.</li> <li>• Cultural events (Pecan Harvest Festival, Christmas celebration, farmers markets).</li> <li>• Downtown anchor businesses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively landlocked.</li> <li>• Downtown building vacancies.</li> <li>• Insufficient walkability.</li> <li>• Not keeping pace with Fort Bend’s population growth.</li> <li>• ETJ mostly master-planned residential communities.</li> <li>• No tax revenue from County land/buildings.</li> <li>• Marginalized/underserved neighborhoods (north).</li> <li>• Vulnerable to flooding.</li> <li>• Signage at key entry points.</li> <li>• Traffic bottlenecks.</li> <li>• Community-oriented amenities.</li> <li>• Utilities/infrastructure issues.</li> </ul>
 <h3>Opportunities</h3>	 <h3>Threats</h3>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Downtown revitalization.</li> <li>• Developing clear vision and marketing/branding.</li> <li>• Expanding sales tax base (retail and restaurants).</li> <li>• Building on “hidden gem” character, maintaining small town feel.</li> <li>• Increased civic engagement.</li> <li>• Enhanced small business support and development.</li> <li>• Increased engagement with outside businesses.</li> <li>• Fire Station project.</li> <li>• Additional amenities.</li> <li>• Façade Improvement Grants.</li> <li>• Impression corridors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued brain drain.</li> <li>• Complacency regarding Downtown plans.</li> <li>• Losing competition with neighboring cities.</li> <li>• Perception that existing processes are not business friendly.</li> <li>• Structural decay of infrastructure and buildings.</li> <li>• Zoning and permitting challenges, including the Unified Development Code.</li> <li>• Train track issue persisting.</li> <li>• Lack of strong industry.</li> <li>• Insufficient focus on future generations.</li> <li>• Rising property taxes.</li> </ul>



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