



Hondo Downtown Assessment Report



Completed: October 2024

About Texas Downtown

Texas Downtown (TXD) was founded in 1985 to connect and serve communities, businesses, and champions of downtowns across the state. The organization will celebrate 40 years in 2025! Today, our mission is to provide members with resources, advocacy, education, and connections to

develop vibrant districts. We represent over 300 members from cities and towns, economic development corporations, nonprofits including chambers of commerce and downtown associations, small business, and individuals.

Downtown Assessment Process

Downtown assessments are offered as a Texas Downtown member service as part of our Downtown Assistance Program (DAP) and are designed to bring a group of downtown professionals to a city's downtown district to assess existing conditions and make realistic, attainable recommendations. The process begins with a downtown stakeholder survey, and extensive research by assessment team members prior to arrival in the member community.

During the site visit, team members explore downtown, visit with business owners, and take notes. Team members are trained to identify opportunities and challenges, and to recommend best practices and strategies to enhance the downtown district and community. Team recommendations are compiled by Texas Downtown staff and include short (present-2 years) and long-range recommendations (5+ years).

Each assessment team is handpicked based on the community's existing needs and challenges. Led by Texas Downtown staff, the Hondo team included the following members:

Shelly Ashcroft, Marketing & Membership, Texas Downtown

Josie Falletta, Downtown Manager/Main Street, San Marcos

Kristen Kopecky, Downtown Coordinator, Victoria

Tania Moody, Executive Director, MSARP, Texas Downtown

Lois M. Rodriguez, Strategic Partnerships Manager, TxDOT – Travel Information Division



Initial Observations

Positive Attributes:

- **Historic Theater:** Consistently offers programming, comfortable seating, and an excellent sound system.



- **Landscaping and Aesthetic Features:** The downtown area is neat, well-cared for, and features many beautiful sidewalks and ADA-compliant ramps.
- **Public Parking:** There is ample parking available downtown, including spaces near public buildings, though it could benefit from clearer striping, signage and handicap spots.
- **Community Spirit:** Local businesses like Pepe's Pizza and El Restaurante Azteca exhibit a strong sense of community and customer care, adding to the friendly atmosphere.
- **Historic Buildings:** Downtown Hondo has an impressive collection of well-preserved historic buildings, which contribute to its character and charm.
- **The "God's Country" Sign:** The iconic highway sign ("Don't drive through it like Hell!") is humorous and has strong marketing potential, akin to [El Arroyo's](#) in Austin.
- **Courthouse Area Potential:** 16th Street near the courthouse offers opportunities for market spaces and events, with minimal disruption to traffic.



Negative Aspects & Areas for Improvement:

- **Lack of Wayfinding and Information:** Visitors have difficulty navigating downtown due to a lack of wayfinding signs, static billboards, and after-hours information. Suggestions include installing kiosks, adding rack cards or brochures, and clearer parking signage.
- **Pedestrian Safety and Accessibility:** Avenue M and US 90 are dangerous for pedestrians due to speeding traffic and a lack of designated crosswalks. Sidewalk gaps, missing tiles, and high steps in front of businesses also limit accessibility.



- **Downtown Definition and Branding:** There is no clear boundary for downtown. Flags and custom branded handrails could be used to delineate the district, improve safety and create a sense of identity. Downtown would also benefit from districting into areas like entertainment, arts, and culture.
- **Vacancies and Storefront Hours:** Many businesses keep limited hours (9-5 weekdays), making downtown feel empty, especially after 5 p.m. and on weekends. Encouraging more flexible hours, especially on weekends, could attract more visitors.
- **Depot and Rail Enthusiast Opportunities:** The train depot on US 90 is an underutilized asset. Enhancing its appearance and adding educational materials for train enthusiasts could turn it into a year-round attraction. Collaborating with the local museum and installing a banner could help draw people into downtown.
- **Signage and Lighting:** While lighting and light poles are well-placed, using them for flags could enhance the downtown atmosphere. Also, some signage needs improvement—such as water-damaged movie posters at the theater—and the iconic "God's Country" sign could be better utilized for marketing. Encouraging more pedestrian signage like La Hacienda could be done with an inexpensive sign grant offering (or application for this project through an Anice Read Grant).



Opportunities for Growth:

- **Location, Location, Location:** Located 40 miles west of San Antonio, Hondo at 6,500 population offers an oasis from "big city life" but with the added convenience and proximity to metro offerings. As part of the I-90 corridor, the river of commerce coming through, via car and rail screams opportunity to pull in visitors and residents to the downtown district.
- **Tourism and Marketing:** Hondo is strategically located near other cities and attractions, but there is a lack of marketing materials to entice visitors. Better marketing campaigns, such as brochures, rack cards, and cross-promotion of attractions like the Medina County Museum, could help.
- **Utilizing Public Spaces:** Hondo has large public spaces that could be leveraged for community events, particularly on 16th Street. With no businesses affected, closing this street for events could foster a sense of community.



- **Revitalization Efforts:** Adding color, landscaping, and filling vacancies with vibrant businesses could breathe new life into downtown. Encouraging more "fun" elements such as flags or colorful signage can set a lively tone.



Specific Business Insights:

- **Pepe's Pizza:** Shows great community spirit by displaying other local businesses' flyers and cards, but their signage could be larger and more pronounced. Better signage could promote more foot traffic and convey they're open and ready to serve.
- **Sorella's and Bonita Ranch Boutique:** Both shops are beautifully arranged and contribute positively to the retail scene, but more businesses are needed to draw in foot traffic.
- **Chateau Claire Bed and Breakfast:** A highly detailed, well-run establishment that adds significant value to Hondo's hospitality industry. Way-faring signage and more precise downtown district maps could tie them in as part of the downtown offerings. They're also great advocates for opening a business in Downtown Hondo.
- **Hondo Beer Market:** Offers a friendly, laid-back atmosphere akin to the show "Cheers," although some feel it might not appeal to everyone, it does lend itself to creating nightlife opportunities for downtown and could be a helpful tie in for theater events across the street and in recruiting more businesses that support later hours.

By addressing the gaps in wayfinding, accessibility, marketing, and branding while capitalizing on the potential of public spaces and businesses, Hondo can create a more vibrant, welcoming downtown for residents and visitors alike.

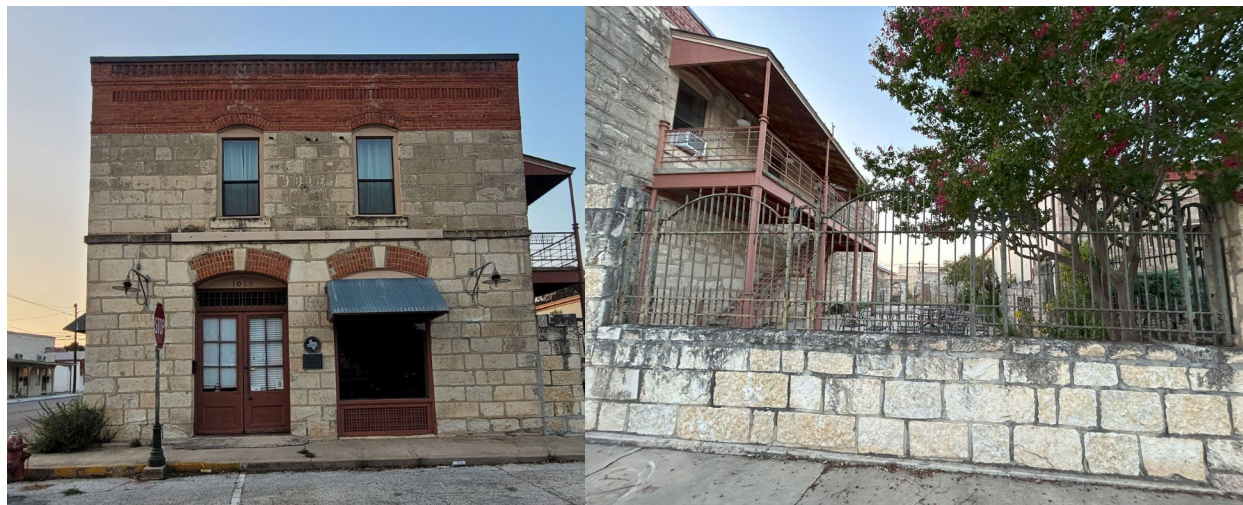
Remember that every downtown goes through three cycles, and they go through them over and over:

- **Catalyst:** that high-excitement startup phase when most people are excited, some are dubious, and communication and knowledge are key,

- Growth: this is the time frame when the vision gels and the first big wins occur,
- Maintenance: this is a brief but glorious period when things are humming and maintaining success is key. But also, key is the knowledge that the program be positioned for the inevitable cycling back to Catalyst and Growth phases over time.

To capitalize on these assets, the following recommendations are organized around:

- Organizational City and EDC Processes
- Physical Downtown Design
- Economic Redevelopment and Small Business Mix
- Promotion and Special Events



Organizational City and EDC Processes Short-term

- **Build Stronger Relationships with Small Business and Property Owners and the Community:**
 - Host monthly meetups with small business and property owners to strengthen ties with the city and county. These meetings will foster communication and help business owners stay informed about projects and opportunities. Reach out on the TXD List-Serv and ask how other downtowns have addressed this. (ie - Downtown LowDowns)
 - Create an e-blast list to efficiently share important updates and information with business owners and residents. Keep everyone informed of downtown revitalization efforts.
 - Encourage business and property owners to voice their opinions at city council meetings and community forums. This will ensure that their concerns are heard and that they are involved in decision-making processes.
 - Make it a priority to build ongoing strong working relationships and get downtown property owners that own many parcels to Hondo's downtown planning table. Create and maintain an inventory that is available in the economic development/city offices of downtown properties with leasable space information on each floor. Provide dedicated funding to downtown economic development incentives, including ones that can help fill vacant spaces like the ones located in prime retail and upper floor locations in the heart of downtown. What customer service assistance or removal of hurdles can the EDC and City assist with to encourage vacant downtown floors and spaces to become

occupied and open? Building strong relationships with property owners will help with communication when owners hit a brick wall and need public sector assistance and guidance.

- **Improve Code Enforcement Perception:**

- Review and improve the code enforcement process to ensure consistency and transparency. Address any perceptions that it is difficult to work with, and if necessary, make changes to ensure a more business-friendly environment.
- Downtown Low Downs can be hosted together with the EDC, city and chamber where departments provide updates on downtown initiatives (events, construction, tax revenue, etc.) to create open lines of communication and ensure everyone is aligned on the goals for downtown revitalization. This can help keep property/business owners in the loop and if there are downtown special events coming up, have different organizations or entities give a brief update and pass out any relevant marketing materials to attendees. This communication will encourage two-way communication, build trust, and foster community amongst downtowners which is needed.
- Review and revise downtown development ordinances to ensure they are aligned with the goals for downtown (i.e., allow use of sidewalks for outdoor dining, allow customers to walk around with alcoholic beverages in non-glass containers, allow small manufacturing like breweries in downtown, a mural or public art ordinance, etc.). Downtown Denison has a Sidewalk Usage Ordinance that includes outdoor dining.
- Educate your local property owners on the codes for downtown Hondo to make downtown redevelopment as flexible as possible for property owners and developers. The IEBC encourages the use and reuse of existing buildings. This code covers repair, alteration, addition and change of occupancy for existing buildings, and historic buildings, while achieving appropriate levels of safety without requiring full compliance with the new construction requirements contained in the other I-Codes.

- **Engage the Community and Cultivate Local Champions:**

- Recruit and empower community members to become advocates for downtown, specifically targeting optimistic leaders who can help change the narrative around revitalization efforts.
- Engage with your local media. People do business with those that do business with them. Make them your best new advocates and cultivate a healthy respect and get them on "Team Hondo." They are downtown, so be sure and include them in your efforts and let them help you communicate your goals.



- To assist with ongoing communication to downtown businesses and stakeholders, train volunteers to pair up with EDC/city staff and become downtown "block captains" who regularly visit assigned sets of small businesses on a regular basis to keep downtown business owners informed, and to dispel any myths or rumors. Without regular communication, rumors will rule the day. Consider starting a Closed Facebook Group to

distribute downtown information to downtown merchants so they become more engaged.

- Engage the diverse community by creating events and initiatives that celebrate the different cultures and demographics within Hondo. This helps build pride and creates reasons for locals to brag about their city.
- Encourage volunteer efforts from high school students, retirees, and other community members to assist with fundraising and beautification projects.

- **Support the Chamber of Commerce and Its Staff:**

- Evaluate the staffing needs of the Chamber of Commerce, which currently has two part-time staff managing multiple roles. Consider expanding their hours or hiring additional help to support their workload.
- Clarify and communicate the Chamber's goals clearly to ensure alignment with local businesses and residents. Regular updates on their activities will foster transparency and buy-in from the community.
- Improve the Chamber's online presence to better promote Hondo. Consider adding a dedicated tourism section to their website, focusing on what to see, where to eat, and what to do in Hondo.



- **Tourism Promotion:**

- Work towards achieving the Tourism Friendly Texas Certified Community Program designation. This will help Hondo prioritize tourism as an economic development strategy and access additional state resources.
- Leverage free publicity opportunities from TxDOT's Travel Information Division to promote Hondo and its events. This can include placing brochures in Texas Travel Information Centers and using travel leads to send marketing materials to interested visitors.

- **Downtown Strategy:**

- Hire a professional strategic facilitator to help develop a linked vision along with a downtown strategic plan with downtown's major stakeholders at the planning table. Define the committees needed to support the new staff members and the plan deliverables. Share this plan and host a discussion about the future of downtown Hondo. The path forward will require that downtown property and business owners are engaged and on-board with redevelopment and revitalization efforts.
- No one person or organization currently oversees downtown Hondo. Once the master plan is complete, who will own the vision, goals, and responsibilities? Define the lead organization to focus on downtown, create a well-defined "district" and designate a full-time downtown coordinator/manager to work the plan.
 - Define funding and support to hire or appoint a full-time downtown director.

- The downtown staff member should be funded by the city or EDC
 - Part of the salary could be funded with HOT funds.
- **Potential Funding Sources for Downtown Projects & Programs:**
 - Take full advantage of the [Texas PACE](#) Authority, and educate local bankers, downtown property owners and local contractors regularly on the program to help with ongoing downtown property maintenance and energy efficiency. This can help with gap financing in larger rehabilitation downtown projects.
 - [Texas Downtown's Anice Read Fund](#) – seed funding to support for downtown projects and programs.
 - [Grants, Tax Credits and Funding](#) – preservation and downtown-related project funding sources
 - [Texas Department of Agriculture \(TDA\) Downtown Revitalization/Main Street Program](#) – funds sidewalks and streetscape projects
 - [Main Street America Funding Opportunities](#)
 - [Hotel Occupancy Tax \(HOT\)](#) – can be used for wayfinding and downtown signage, as well as marketing overnight stays
 - Keep Texas Beautiful's [Governor's Community Achievement Awards](#)
 - [GO TEXAN Marketing Enhancement Grant](#) – program is designed to provide grant fund for Tier 2 or higher GO TEXAN product partners to market and promote their qualifying GO TEXAN products
 - [TxDOT Transportation Alternatives Program](#) – bicycle and pedestrian funding during odd years
 - [TPWD Local Park Grants](#)
 - [USDA Community Facilities Programs](#)
 - [AARP Community Challenge Grant](#) – Up to \$50,000
 - [T-Mobile Hometown Grant](#) – Up to \$50,000
 - **Leveraging Industry Partners:**
 - Build strong connections with the downtown directors of successful downtowns in your area like Victoria, Goliad, Cuero, and San Marcos. They have lots of great ideas that you can R&D (rip off and duplicate) and make your own, that is allowed and encouraged! Also, get out of town and take several downtown stakeholders to visit other successful downtowns to gain inspiration and insight of what downtown Hondo can become at its full potential.
 - Take full advantage of Texas Downtown's member listserv to post downtown Hondo's questions to all our members across the state for best practices and recommended downtown consultants/vendors. Don't forget to celebrate your downtown successes statewide by entering downtown Hondo's projects into the annual [President's Awards Program](#), award applications due in late July.

Organizational City and EDC Processes

Mid and Long-term

- **Reevaluate Business Onboarding and Rent Structures:**
 - Streamline the business onboarding process to eliminate unnecessary obstacles and make it easier for new businesses to set up in downtown Hondo. Look at successful models from other cities (e.g., Uvalde) for inspiration.
 - Meet with property owners to discuss reasonable rent pricing and the economic benefits of filling vacant buildings. Educate them on how more businesses can increase the value of their properties and strengthen the local economy.
- **Strengthen City and County Partnerships:**
 - Collaborate with city departments and local organizations on downtown revitalization projects. Regular meetings will help align priorities and share resources.

- Foster better relationships between local officials, the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), and downtown organizations to reduce friction and ensure coordinated efforts on revitalization projects.

- **Hospitality Training and Improving First Impressions:**

- Train city employees and local businesses in hospitality and customer service to ensure that visitors have a positive experience in Hondo. A negative first encounter can damage the city's reputation, so hospitality training is essential.
- Encourage friendly, knowledgeable staff who can share information about local attractions and handle visitor inquiries professionally.



- **Long-term Chamber of Commerce & HOT Fund Management:**

- Ensure proper management of Hotel Occupancy Tax (HOT) funds by keeping them separate from the Chamber's general fund and using them only for authorized categories (e.g., tourism promotion, historical preservation).
- Maintain clear processes for distributing HOT funds and ensure transparency in their use. This will prevent misinterpretation and foster trust within the community.

- **Improve the Online and Marketing Presence of Hondo:**

- Revamp the Chamber and tourism websites to create an intuitive, easy-to-navigate platform that highlights Hondo's attractions. Visitors should be able to quickly find key information (e.g., dining, lodging, events) without sifting through municipal content.
- Utilize social media and newsletters to build Hondo's marketing presence and engage with potential visitors. Capturing emails and engaging with travel leads can expand the city's reach and draw more tourists to the area.

- **Continuing Education & Networking:**

- Build into the EDC/City's budget, annual [membership](#) for Texas Downtown, as well as attendance for some downtown and chamber stakeholders to attend the [annual conference](#) and [regional roundtables](#) to help develop more professional downtown connections and maintain ongoing professional downtown staff development. This will help downtown leadership become more trained on best practices for downtown redevelopment which can then be shared locally to downtown stakeholders and local leadership.

By focusing on these short-term and mid to long-term organizational goals, Hondo can create a sustainable foundation for downtown revitalization, foster stronger partnerships, and position itself as a welcoming, tourist-friendly destination. Building trust, improving communication, and streamlining business processes will help the city attract new businesses and visitors, ultimately driving economic growth.

Physical Downtown Design

Short-term

- **Greenspaces and Small Wins:**

- Create a greenspace with outdoor seating and public restrooms: Consider closing off streets (like 16th Street) to make room for a large green space with amenities such as shade trees, seating, public restrooms, and art installations. Public spaces encourage community gatherings and events.
- Prioritize downtown landscaping and landscape maintenance by procuring and placing self-watering planters on the sidewalks down the main downtown corridor and/or implement the use of hayrack pole planters like Levelland Main Street and use it as a change to engage your residents and downtown business owners with a "Community Planting Day." Parks provide the plants, seek out partners to donate the soil and mulch and have people "adopt a planter." This can be ongoing with calls for daily watering of the adopted planter or once planted, could be maintained by Parks or subcontracted out. Choose native blooming plants that can withstand extreme weather conditions and add color to make downtown greener.



- Partner with property owners along the gateway corridors into downtown, especially from US-90 to improve the curb appeal of vacant and underutilized properties and make it a more welcoming entrance into downtown. You can only make a first impression once, and you want it to be a positive and lasting one for locals and visitors alike.
- Transform and revitalize the alley near the Chamber of Commerce into a small-scale public art space. Add string lights, seating, shade, and murals. This will serve as a small, easy win to build community excitement ("Owl Alley" with Hondo's mascot).
- Corner Parklet: Consider revitalizing the empty lot next to the movie theater by adding seating, shade, and lighting. This will create a welcoming, inexpensive gathering spot.



- **Public Art:**
 - Engage local art students with mural and cross-walk art, utilizing the Hondo Art League, and professional artists to create murals highlighting Hondo's history, mascot (owls), and heritage. Incorporate painted crosswalks and decals for a vibrant, colorful downtown.
 - Window Paintings and Decals: Enhance storefronts with seasonal or thematic window paintings to create an attractive, lively downtown area.

- **Historic Building Celebration and Preservation:**
 - Improve and Maintain Historic Buildings by focusing on improving historic buildings through façade enhancements and occupancy efforts. Establish a beautification or historic preservation award to incentivize property owners to take pride in their buildings.
 - Trail or Historical Highlights can develop historical trails or markers highlighting Hondo's heritage and landmarks to draw visitors and engage locals with the town's story.

- **Downtown Maintenance:**
 - Improve Landscaping and Lighting by creating a maintenance plan for existing downtown landscaping. Professionally trim trees to enhance visibility of storefronts, add colorful and native plants, and ensure that streetlights and holiday decorations are maintained.
 - Restructure public parking by marking available spaces, creating a digital map, and ensuring clear signage for public parking areas. Encourage business owners to park farther from storefronts to free up prime spots for customers.
 - Work with TxDOT to repaint crosswalks and ensure clear, safe pedestrian paths, especially along major roads like Avenue M and US 90.
 - Produce a sign or static cling decal for downtown business storefronts that designate where current public restrooms are located. Sticker or sidewalk corner signage with QR codes that advertise a downtown Hondo website page with a downtown parking map could also be placed on downtown trash receptacles.



- **Address Vacant Buildings:**

- Help facilitate every downtown boarded up or vacant storefront property to make visual improvements to their curb appeal and have available properties more visually engaging so that customers and visitors want to keep walking downtown to the occupied and engaging storefronts.
- The EDC or city could provide a reimbursement incentive for cleaning windows regularly; adding For Lease/Sale signage at each location listing the current zoning, possible uses and property owner/realtor contact info; applying vinyl window photo/image of what businesses are coming soon; or creating window displays that show other downtown small business products, promote special events, or display public art exhibits.



- Work with the contracted trash company to schedule downtown on the same trash pickup route and discuss options to relocate or minimize the impact of trash cans on downtown sidewalks and dumpsters. Look into the certification program and consider becoming a [Scenic Texas City](#) to increase Hondo's standards for high quality public spaces downtown and city wide.
- Join and become active as a Keep Texas Beautiful (KTB) Community to take advantage of awards offered by their Governors Community Achievement Awards (GCAA). The [award amounts](#) are substantial - for populations up to 25,000 it's \$180,000. 2025 GCAA applications will be open from January – February. Schedule a "Downtown Fall Clean" before major downtown events to make sure it is tourism ready. Register your cleanup and submit free supply requests a minimum of three weeks before your event date to be fulfilled.
- Consistent enforcement of building, sign, and property codes is important to encourage property maintenance and reinvestment. Blight and neglect in one property adversely impacts all of the properties around it.

- **Gateway and Wayfinding Master Plan:**

- Consider investing in a downtown gateway signage and a wayfinding master plan to address directional signage to all landmarks and public parking areas in downtown. TxDOT is a needed partner to have at the initial planning table of a wayfinding signage project.

- Build a strong working relationship with Hondo's TxDOT Area Engineer and Hondo Railways' and partners Union Pacific Railroad to learn about wayfinding and interpretive signage opportunities and funding, so that tourists and locals know where amenities are located such as public restrooms, public parking lots, as well as to tell some of Hondo's history.
- Also, investigate pedestrian amenities such as benches under shade trees to encourage shoppers to spend time downtown.

Physical Downtown Design Mid and Long-term

- **Create Opportunities and Protections for the Future:**
 - Since Hondo is not an active Texas Main Street City, consider becoming a [Certified Local Government \(CLG\)](#) to continue meeting historic preservation standards for your downtown assets. [CLG grant funding](#) is also available to provide funding to participating city and county governments to develop and sustain an effective local preservation program critical to preserving historic resources.
 - Create a small working group/task force through the city's planning and zoning commission to investigate the creation of design guidelines and the potential of creating a historic overlay to the downtown district or other zoning protections. Utilize knowledge from other communities who have created protections and guidelines for their historic downtown. Explore McKinney, Georgetown, Elgin, and others.
- **Long-term Greenspace Development:**
 - Partner with Medina County to close 16th Street between Avenues M and K to create a large public improvement area. This could include a splash pad, skate park, large shade trees, public restrooms, and art sculptures like a Hondo owl sculpture.
 - Equip the greenspace with electrical outlets for holiday lighting and event stages to support festivals and large gatherings.
- **Wayfinding and Traffic Calming:**
 - Install wayfinding signs both within downtown and along highways (US 90 and Avenue M) to guide visitors and slow down traffic. Consider consolidating outdated highway signage to improve visibility and provide clear directions to downtown attractions.
 - Work with TxDOT to add banners, holiday lights, and additional street lighting to create a more pedestrian-friendly downtown. Ensure visible, well-marked pedestrian walkways, particularly near the railroad tracks and along high-traffic streets.
- **Shade and Weather Resilience:**
 - Invest in street trees along key pedestrian routes that can withstand extreme weather and provide shade during hot Texas summers. Trees should be strategically planted along major walkways, such as between 18th Street and Avenue M, to increase comfort for pedestrians.
- **Public Art Expansion:**
 - Work with local artists to create a large owl-themed mural or sculpture as a symbol of the town, reinforcing Hondo's brand and identity. This could be a key piece of public art in the proposed greenspace or near downtown landmarks.

By focusing on these short-term and mid to long-term physical design goals, Hondo can transform its downtown area into a vibrant, visually appealing, and historically rich destination for both locals and visitors. Enhancing public spaces, improving accessibility, and celebrating the community's unique heritage will support long-term growth and revitalization.

Economic Redevelopment:
Short-term:

- **Incentives for Business Owners:**
 - Offer façade and building improvement grants, and utility assistance to help local businesses upgrade their buildings.
 - Develop a façade and sign reimbursement grant program for downtown businesses to enhance curb appeal with historically appropriate canopies and awnings for pedestrian shade and lighting.
 - Offer better rental rates from property owners, ensuring that they align with the market.
- **Utility Pricing Structure Review:**
 - Investigate high utility costs and evaluate the pricing structure to prevent pricing out small businesses.
- **Database/Inventory of Available Spaces:**
 - Create a publicly accessible database for available downtown spaces for rent or sale, like DowntownTX.
- **Communication and Collaboration:**
 - Build better relationships between the city, EDC, County, and community partners to encourage property development.
 - Improve communication between the city government and small business owners with monthly meetups or newsletters to keep everyone informed.
- **Training and Education:**
 - Train local EDC board and city council members regularly on economic development topics. Partner with Texas Municipal League (TML) and Texas Economic Development Council (TEDC) for workshops on understanding economic development.

Mid to Long-term:

- **TIRZ DISTRICTS:**
 - Research successful TIRZ districts in Texas such as the City of Mesquite's [Towne Center TIRZ](#) that set the district boundaries larger than just the downtown district so it would be accrue funds quickly from fast growing areas of town. Downtown Denison also has a successful TIRZ district that surrounds their downtown.
 - Establish a TIRZ to incentivize redevelopment, create funding for public improvements, and attract private investment in downtown.
- **Activation of Vacant Buildings:**
 - Use a "carrot and stick" approach, offering both ordinances and incentives to encourage property owners to activate or restore vacant buildings. This could include façade improvements or incentives for business development.
 - People want to be where they can see other people having fun and is well lit. Encourage downtown revitalization and new construction projects to include rooftop bars and patio/sidewalk dining, which will encourage the density and vibrancy of the district. Downtown Navasota and Tyler have award-winning rooftop bars that add another level of activity and visibility from the sidewalk and streets to help make downtown a hot spot.



- **Economic Development Toolkit:**
 - Prioritize downtown in the city and EDC's overall economic development strategy and budgets. Make it known that downtown is important and developers and local investment will follow if they consistently see positive downtown public reinvestment projects and high-quality special events. In partnership with the EDC, this toolkit should be used to support the renovation and historic preservation of downtown properties.
 - Incentive programs should support the overall goal of saving and preserving the historic infrastructure of the community and align with approvals from the city.
 - Downtown incentives can be designed to fill the financial gap of an approved/desired project. Ideally tie all incentives to proper "city approved" design guidelines. A design toolkit can include creating a low-interest loan pool with banks, having information regarding the State of Texas and Federal historic tax credits among other things. The program might consider including consultation with a preservation architect and/or requiring the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation for the façade improvements to historic buildings. The Standards are simple and easy to follow and will ensure appropriate methods are used to rehabilitate the historic buildings.
 - State and Federal tax credits and PACE funding are often used as funding sources for large historic rehabilitation projects.

- **Relocation of EDC to Downtown:**
 - Relocate the Hondo EDC office to downtown, preferably near the Hondo Chamber of Commerce, to create a one-stop-shop for potential businesses. A co-op small business incubator could be developed in a rehabilitated downtown building to offer resources and office space.

- **Upper Floor and Rooftop Development:**
 - Incentivize building owners to make all floors ADA accessible and develop rooftop spaces for potential residential, office, or restaurant use. Example: Rail & Rye rooftop bar in Navasota.

- **Downtown Farmers and Artisan Market:**
 - Start a downtown farmers and artisan market to create a small business incubator for downtown. The Hondo train depot or a space along the railroad could serve as a visible location for this event.

**Small Business Mix:
Short-term:**

- **Incentivizing Visitor-Facing Businesses:**

- Encourage the opening of more restaurants and retail spaces downtown. Focus on creating an environment for forward-facing, visitor-centric businesses. Provide incentives or fast-track processes to ensure these businesses can open quickly and succeed.
- **Assisting Landmark Businesses:**
 - Help long-standing businesses like El Restaurante Azteca gain recognition through the Texas Treasure Business Award to increase their visibility and bring attention to downtown. A celebration or block party could also draw visitors.
- **Partnership with James Avery Artisan Jewelry:**
 - Host quarterly workshops for local small business owners on visual merchandising and store design. This could encourage the creation of attractive window displays, improving downtown aesthetics.
- **Downtown Small Business Resource Guide:**
 - Develop a resource guide for small businesses, like Georgetown's Main Street Small Business Resource Guide, to help navigate the local business landscape.

Mid to Long-term:

- **Survey for Business Recruitment:**
 - Conduct a community-wide survey every few years to identify the types of businesses locals want and will support. Use the results to create a "Top 10" downtown small business recruitment list and make that public through the local media and on the EDC, city/chamber websites so if anyone in the area is thinking about opening a small business in downtown, they know what is requested and in demand locally.
 - While small, downtown Hondo has a good business mix to build upon. Adopt a data-driven approach to decision-making "for" downtown. Help determine Hondo's market position by better understanding your current demographics, psychographics, what are the household income ranges and ethnicities to know what types of products and services are in demand to offer in downtown stores.
 - Have a retail leakage study done by your regional council of government to see what locals are buying out of town and post that info near the "Top 10" businesses requested for downtown. These are the top target businesses you want to recruit downtown if they are the right fit.
- **Smooth the Way for New Businesses:**
 - Streamline the permitting and approval processes to make it easier for new businesses to set up downtown.
 - Review and adjust any ordinances perceived as unfriendly to new businesses to remove barriers to success.
- **Vacant Building Rehabilitation and Business Incubation:**
 - Work with the EDC, City, and County to incentivize vacant building rehabilitation and establish a co-op small business incubator to support new businesses and drive downtown traffic.
- **Historic Preservation and Awards:**
 - Encourage more historic businesses to apply for recognition awards like the Texas Treasure Business Award. Promoting these awards will bring media exposure and create an event-driven atmosphere in downtown.
 - Create a Historic Walking Tour highlighting your historic markers and places.



By implementing both short-term strategies (like improving communication, incentives, and utility pricing) and mid to long-term projects (like TIRZ creation, activating vacant buildings, and fostering a small business incubator), Hondo can enhance its downtown area, create a supportive business environment, and capitalize on existing opportunities for growth and redevelopment.

Promotion and Special Events

Short-term

- **Texas Treasures:**
 - For downtown landmark businesses that have been open for 50+ years, look into the [Texas Treasure Business Award](#) through the THC. By acknowledging local businesses while they are still in operation, we honor them as places of living history, and we can record their stories and ensure their legacy for generations to come. These can make great newspaper, radio, and social media advertising opportunities and get state-wide recognition.
- **Activate the Courthouse Lawn and Public Spaces:**
 - Use the courthouse lawn for city-partnered events like community picnics, seasonal markets, or small gatherings. These semi-regular events foster community engagement and make downtown feel welcoming.
 - Add Christmas lights to downtown facades, trees, and flowerbeds, creating a warm and festive atmosphere. Collaborate with businesses to ensure year-round decorative lighting.
- **Utilize Street Pole Banners and Signage:**
 - Create specific street pole banners for year-round use, ensuring that street poles are never left bare. Banners can showcase local pride and support branding efforts.
 - Explore TxDOT signage opportunities to increase visibility and attract highway traffic, such as tourist-oriented directional signs, logo signs, or city pride signs along US 90.



- **Increase Event Frequency:**
 - Plan more frequent events at the train depot, transforming it into an active space for markets, historical storytelling events, and train watching. A year-round US 90-facing banner can invite passing drivers into downtown.
 - Introduce ghost tours, historical tours, and a Christmas card trail to showcase Hondo's history, heritage, and landmarks. These low-cost events can draw locals and tourists alike.
- **Food Truck Park Development:**
 - Establish a food truck park at a corner like 17th and Avenue M or near the train depot. This can supplement local dining options and attract both locals and visitors, especially during weekends or special events.
 - Streamline the food truck application process to encourage vendors to set up during peak times.
- **Engage with the Community and Local Businesses:**
 - Encourage downtown businesses to create shop small initiatives, such as discounts or special offers, to promote local shopping.
 - Implement social media strategies using official hashtags to increase the visibility of events and local businesses. Encourage businesses to tag the city or relevant promotions in their posts for broader outreach.
 - Consider managing social media platforms like "Visit Hondo" to separate Chamber business promotions from citywide marketing, creating a unified voice for promoting the downtown experience.
 - Are any EDC, chamber or city staff members currently hitting the lunch speaking program circuit to discuss downtown at the local clubs and organizations like Chamber, Rotary, Lion's Club, Women's Clubs, to get the word out, etc.? If not, do outreach to let them know staff are available and willing to talk about downtown priorities and upcoming projects to keep locals informed.
- **Leverage Free TxDOT Resources:**
 - Make use of TxDOT's free publicity resources (e.g., travel information centers, Texas State Travel Guide, Texas Highways Events Calendar) to promote Hondo's events and tourism to a broader audience.
- **Regional Marketing:**
 - Take advantage of the promotional and marketing opportunities of being in the [Texas Hill Country Trail Region](#) of the Texas Heritage Trails Program (THTP). The program is an economic development initiative operated through the Texas Historical Commission

(THC) that encourages partnerships to preserve and promote Texas's historic and cultural resources. And your Texas downtown is the perfect resource to preserve and promote to visitors! Your successful local efforts combined with marketing and assistance from THC's heritage trail regions can help increase visitation to your downtown, and ultimately more dollars to your community and local businesses.

- What the THTP Can Do for Your Downtown:
 - Promotion on TexasTimeTravel.com and other regional advertising efforts
 - Representation at trade and consumer shows and the State Fair of Texas
 - Consultation and/or assessment of heritage tourism sites, programs, or products
 - Connection to other tourism organizations in your region
 - Ways to Partner:

There are many ways to partner with your Texas Heritage Trail Region. But first and foremost, you need to get to know your regional Executive Director Joanne Nelson, 830-739-1362, 39350 IH-10 West, Suite 3, Boerne, TX 78006, and keep them informed about what's going on in your downtown. Other ways include the following:

- Attend a regional board meeting or volunteer to host one in your downtown
- Join a task force or serve on the board
- Make full use of TexasTimeTravel.com to promote your downtown and your community
 - Monitor your community's city page and individual heritage site pages and provide updated content
 - Provide hi-res photos
 - Submit your downtown heritage events to the events calendar
 - Create content about your downtown's interesting history or traditions (or create an itinerary or walking tour) for the blog

Promotion and Special Events

Mid and Long-term

- **Branding and Identity Development:**
 - Establish Hondo's identity with a cohesive brand, possibly centered around its mascot (the owl), vintage signage, and historical roots. Incorporate this branding into public spaces, signage, and community activities. Figure out your brand identity, catch phrases, and tag everything. (ie: "Hondo's a Hoot," "Hoo, Hoo, Hoo ❤️ Downtown?" "Hondo is for the Owls!")
 - Print and distribute Hondo Owl flags for downtown businesses to display during the school year, fostering community pride and creating a sense of unity.
 - Avoid generic terms like "gateway" or "unique." A well-defined brand will attract tourism and make Hondo stand out in regional marketing.
 - Integrate Hondo's history and assets (e.g., the train depot, historical landmarks) into the brand. Embrace iconic elements like the "God's Country" sign and use the train depot as a central promotional element.
 - Develop professional-quality photographs and videos of downtown to support promotional efforts and use them on websites, brochures, and social media.
- **Establish Larger Annual Events:**
 - Build or upgrade a major annual event that can draw vendors from across the state and attract regional attention. Use locations like the train platform and downtown square to create a seamless, walkable experience for visitors.
 - Expand the already popular Christmas event by adding professional lighting to downtown trees, the train ramp, and storefront areas. Partner with HEB or other local sponsors to support this initiative, creating a regional holiday attraction.
- **Ongoing Special Events and Partnerships:**

- Partner with big-name sponsors like HEB to fund and promote key events. These collaborations can boost visibility and resources for larger-scale community celebrations.
 - Work with the local historical commission to create an interactive downtown walking tour. Use QR codes to provide historical information, which appeals to heritage tourists who tend to spend more.
- **Create a Consistent Event Calendar:**
 - Establish a regular calendar of smaller events (e.g., movie nights, markets, First Fridays) to keep downtown active and attract consistent foot traffic. These should be simple, low-cost events that occur frequently to remind the community that downtown is a lively and welcoming space.
 - Encourage local businesses to collaborate on these events, sharing responsibilities and benefiting from increased traffic.
- **Strategic Marketing Plan:**
 - Create a strategic five-year Downtown Marketing Plan to spread the word about downtown Hondo and its assets to locals and tourists in the Greater DFW area and statewide. Work with EDC and chamber to create professional downtown marketing materials such as a downtown map that is updated twice a year. Make sure the downtown promotional materials are at all surrounding hotels, Airbnb's, and event rentals, and offer quarterly trainings of retail, restaurant, and hotel front line staff for customer service in [Texas Friendly Hospitality](#) through Texas A&M Extension. Celebrate when downtown and local staff become certified!
 - Local colloquialisms and noteworthy signage could be utilized in a retail friendly way. Check out programs that allow for a downtown-wide gift card program like Yiftee and MiConex. They are great ways to connect your retailers and to give your community one card to purchase for gifts that they can use in any business downtown.



- **Tourism Infrastructure Development:**
 - Invest in public amenities like public restrooms, shaded seating, and additional lighting in key downtown areas. This improves the visitor experience and makes downtown more accommodating during events.
 - Over time, develop pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, such as clear crosswalks and walking paths, to make downtown more accessible and visually appealing.

By focusing on these short-term and mid to long-term promotional strategies, Hondo can establish its downtown as a vibrant hub of community life and economic activity. Consistent branding, increased event frequency, community partnerships, and leveraging local history will help create a positive image that showcases Hondo's unique personality and draws in both locals and visitors.

Partners and Partnerships

- **Tx-DOT District Engineer:**

- Reach out to, and stay in regular contact with, your designated TxDOT engineer to explore Hondo's options for creating safer traffic patterns for motorists and pedestrians, such as speed limits and crosswalks.

Frances T. Merecka, P.E.
Hondo Area Engineer
Hondo Office: (830) 741-8024
Pleasanton Office: (830) 569-2584
Cell: (210) 776-2986

- Directs planning, location, design, construction, operation, and maintenance of highways, tollways, bridges, structures, airports, public transit systems, and roads.
- Directs development of work programs to meet transportation needs, including traffic control; and the operations requirements for short- and long-range projections.
- Directs preparation of funding, planning, right-of-way, construction, maintenance, and operation agreements with cities and counties.
- Directs operations of a regional surveillance, communication, and control center that involves local agency partnerships and manages highway and street operations.
- Administers state and federal grant programs, traffic safety programs, and transportation enhancements for transportation and public transit systems.
- Recommends staffing and funding for district activities. Supports, develops, and monitors quality management initiatives and activities and the administration of performance monitoring measures, and participates in the development of the strategic plan.
- City Pride Sign Program





Learn More About Tourist Oriented Business Signing

A TOD (Tourist Oriented Directional) Sign shows travelers your business is a tourist destination. The eye-catching blue signs direct motorists to your location and let any traveler know your location is safe, clean, and meets State standards.



Learn More About Logo Guide Signs

LOGO Guide Signs (LOGOS) are the eye-catching blue Specific Service Signs located on major highways that alert motorists to services such as gas, food, lodging, camping, and 24-hour pharmacies. The signs direct motorists to the correct exit for your business and effectively direct them right to your entrance.



Learn More About Major Shopping Areas Guide Signs

Major Shopping Area Guide Signs (MSAGS) highlight malls and other major shopping areas around Texas. These structures are located just before major highway exits to safely and effectively direct motorists to the designated shopping area.

- **Hondo Railway (HRR) and Union Pacific Railway:**
 - Build a strong relationship with Hondo Railway (HRR) and Union Pacific to determine future plans for the tracks that run through downtown. Research establishing Quiet Zones from other downtowns that have created them like [Terrell, Texas](#).
- **Medina County:**
 - Partner with Medina County to work together on economic development opportunities for downtown Hondo and beyond and consider adding a county-wide grant coordinator position that could apply for grant funding for cities in Medina County. Lockhart's county seat, [Caldwell County](#) has been successful in hiring a grant writer to go after EDA and other grant funding.
 - Partner with the county to create a user agreement to program and activate the courthouse lawn and possibly other county facilities for larger annual special events. Downtown San Marcos has been successful in doing this with Hays County.
- **Hondo EDC:**
 - Work with local partners like the City of Hondo, Hondo Chamber of Commerce, Hondo Art League, and the Hondo Garden Club to become a top Keep Texas Beautiful (KTB) affiliate community in the state of Texas and take full advantage of the program for downtown and community-wide beautification and ongoing maintenance. KTB has several grant/funding sources such as the Governor's Community Achievement Awards (GCAA), which Hondo would be eligible for a \$130,000 landscaping award in their Category 3 population (5,501 - 9,000). There is also the Our Texas, Our Future Grant with H.E.B. that opens in mid-August through late September. In addition, they have free resources like Community and TxDOT Cleanup Kits available for the annual Don't Mess with Texas Trash-off in April and Fall Sweep from September - November. An annual KTB conference and youth programs are also available to keep community and youth leaders engaged and informed.
 - Ten percent (10%) of annual revenue in the Hondo EDC budget can be used for marketing purposes and can be rolled over each year if it's not spent. Budget for the full 10% for marketing each year and invest it in marketing downtown Hondo as a pitstop and hub-and-spoke location to other destinations in the region to drive sales tax revenue.



- **City of Hondo:**

- Work with the City of Hondo to make it as easy as possible for investors to spend money in downtown. Fully train and educate code enforcement employees on a regular basis so that they are well versed and consistent in what is required for the private sector to make downtown building improvements.
- Look into adopting the IEBC to allow more freedom when redeveloping historic downtown properties. Streamline the downtown permitting process so that an applicant only has to click or fill out online permitting forms less than six times to complete what is required. A city liaison needs to be a helpful and readily available resource to downtown property and business owners to help navigate downtown owners through the city permitting process.
- Adopt a “Clean and Safe” mantra at the city for the heart of downtown Hondo. Regular patrolling by police of alleys and areas of concerns of downtown businesses when it comes to the unhoused and recently released inmates. Partner with the county and other regional homeless centers to provide resources for the former inmates so they have options for their next steps besides trying to survive in downtown Hondo alleys. Police should also regularly enforce the speed limits along Ave. M from 12th through 18th Streets to slow down traffic to provide more pedestrian safety in the district.

- **Local Real Estate Professionals/Developers:**

- Partner with local real estate professionals and developers to start an “[Imagine the Possibilities Tour](#)”, similar to the Texas Main Street Program's in the spring and fall that showcase available downtown properties, including vacant upper floors. This will help raise awareness with regional real estate agents and developers of downtown opportunities. Look into partnering with one of the area's real estate organizations to hold their monthly or quarterly meeting downtown with a giveaway at the end of the tour to keep attendees present.

Opportunities and Potential:

- **Public Art and Event Calendar:**

- Hondo has the infrastructure in place to support the creation of a public art scene and a more consistent event calendar. These elements will help create a buzz around the downtown area and make it a destination for both locals and visitors.

- Signage is necessary to direct traffic into downtown, especially to encourage travelers to cross the tracks and explore what lies beyond. Although the traffic counts are high, without clear direction, many just pass by the city.
- **Poised for Growth:**
 - Hondo is poised for growth due to its location and the presence of progressive-thinking leaders in place. The community can thrive if this growth is properly handled, allowing Hondo to cultivate a strong identity that can shape its future.
 - Leadership and communication are critical to success. There is positive feedback about Sean Patty at the EDC, who is seen as an open communicator and capable leader. Ensuring he has the necessary support to continue his work is important for the city's progress.

Challenges and Obstacles:

- **Resistance to Change:**
 - Some community members fear or resist growth and change. It's crucial for these individuals to set aside personal feelings and focus on what's best for the community. Sticking to the status quo is part of why Hondo has struggled in the past, and this approach won't bring the solutions needed for future success.
 - Growth is inevitable, but how that growth is managed will define the future of Hondo. The city has an opportunity to assert a strong identity, but only if it's cultivated thoughtfully.
- **Lack of Unified Effort:**
 - One of the biggest challenges is the perception that responsibility for downtown revitalization lies with others. Different groups (City, County, business owners, property owners, Chamber, EDC, etc.) each believe it's someone else's responsibility to take the first step.
 - In reality, everyone needs to invest in downtown success. No one group can do it alone. All stakeholders must come together, align their goals, and collaborate on where and how resources are directed. The first step toward revitalization requires a unified, collective effort from all these parties.

Recommendations:

- **Foster Collaborative Leadership:**
 - Ensure that the new leadership in place has the support, resources, and backing to lead Hondo toward its potential.
 - Engage all stakeholders in discussions and encourage everyone to take responsibility for downtown revitalization. Creating an understanding that downtown success benefits the entire community is key to overcoming the "someone else's problem" mindset.
- **Invest in Identity and Marketing:**
 - Strengthen Hondo's identity as a community poised for growth. This includes deliberate branding efforts, clear signage, and marketing that highlights downtown as a vibrant, appealing place to visit and explore.
 - Develop an organized public art initiative and regular events to showcase what makes Hondo unique, encouraging both local pride and attracting visitors.
- **Overcome Resistance to Change:**
 - Encourage those hesitant to embrace growth to consider the long-term benefits for the community. Remind them that change can be positive, and holding onto old methods may continue to hinder the city's progress.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging its potential, Hondo can position itself for growth, revitalize its downtown, and create a community that both residents and visitors are proud to support. A coordinated, collective effort from all sectors is essential to achieving this transformation.



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/CityOfHondo>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/cityofhondo/?hl=en>

Linked In: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/city-of-hondo/>



Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HondoEconomicDevelopmentCorp>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/cityofhondoedc/>

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