

# Land Use Vision, Goals and Policies

## LAND USE VISION

Sugar Land will develop and redevelop to remain a desirable place to live and do business. The city will change in response to long-term shifts in market demands and demographic trends, managing that change to preserve the city's appeal. It will balance different land uses, preserve the character of its neighborhoods, and create new walkable mixed use Regional and Neighborhood Activity Centers with a variety of offices, housing, retail, entertainment, and civic institutions.

## LAND USE GOALS



Preserving Single-family Neighborhoods



Creating Mixed Use Activity Centers



Encouraging Residential Options



A Great Place for Business



Amenities for All



Inviting Outdoor Spaces



Connected Land Uses



Balanced Growth



Fostering Redevelopment



Celebrate Sugar Land

## What is a Vision?

Based on the City's broader Vision and Goals documented in the Comprehensive Plan and community input through the Land Use Plan process, a specific Land Use vision and set of goals were developed to guide land use decisions.

The vision expresses an aspiration of what Sugar Land can be. A city is built by residents, business owners, and developers. Thus, Sugar Land's continued success will be a reflection of their work. This plan is intended to guide the City in enabling and supporting that work.

## What are the Goals and Policies?

There are ten goals that elaborate on the vision, expressing desired outcomes. For each goal, policies provide additional guidance that the City can utilize when making land use decisions to ensure these outcomes.

## Preserving Single-family Neighborhoods

*Sugar Land will preserve its existing and future single-family residential neighborhoods and ensure their long-term value.*

Single-family housing is and will continue to be the predominant type of residential housing in Sugar Land. Quality single-family neighborhoods have been one of Sugar Land's major attractions and a primary reason why its residents enjoy living here. As such, they must be maintained and their quality preserved in order to continue to attract new residents. There are many examples around the region demonstrating that desirable neighborhoods do not automatically remain that way. The turnover of residents, deterioration of infrastructure, decline of adjacent commercial properties, lack of maintenance of homes, and development of newer subdivisions with better amenities and more up-to-date houses can cause a first choice neighborhood to become a second or third choice neighborhood. As Sugar Land ages, preserving the attractiveness of existing single-family neighborhoods must be a major focus.

### a. **Ensure non-residential and new residential development and redevelopment is compatible with adjacent single-family homes.**

Non-residential development provides essential services to single-family neighborhoods, but it can also come with objectionable attributes such as noise, glare, signs, parking areas, and loading docks. City regulations should require screening, reduction, and redirection of such objectionable characteristics adjacent to residential areas. Non-residential service and parking areas should be placed to have the least negative impact on adjacent residential uses.

Infill of residential areas should be consistent with the character of the surrounding neighborhood. There are areas of the City where the housing stock is aging. Original houses are being demolished and rebuilt with new houses that are changing the character of these neighborhoods. For example, one-story ranch-style houses are being replaced with larger two-story houses.

Where residents are concerned about preserving the character of their neighborhoods, the City could adopt specific development regulations that would require new development or redevelopment of existing structures to be in character with the surrounding neighborhood. The City should evaluate the community's interest in pursuing further restrictions on these areas through neighborhood-level planning efforts that involve the community.



**b. Prevent decline of single-family residential areas through proactive programs.**

The attractiveness and aesthetic of an entire neighborhood, the quality of life of its residents, and the value of homes in the neighborhood can be negatively impacted by signs of deterioration and lack of maintenance in part of a neighborhood. The City should be proactive to minimize these issues through the use of code enforcement and other tools. The City should focus on areas where HOAs do not exist or are not active because these areas lack the extra layer of property maintenance oversight.

**c. Maintain the enhanced landscaped character of the City.**

Landscaping is a hallmark characteristic of Sugar Land. The City’s major thoroughfares are lined with trees and many have developed extensive canopies over the course of the last 20 to 30 years. These have become signature routes that distinguish City streets from other streets in the region. Landscaping on private property, such as shrubs that screen parking lots, seasonal flowers in neighborhood entryways, or trees on a single-family lot improves the visual appeal of an area and also lends to the overall aesthetic quality of the City.

Where non-residential areas are near residential neighborhoods, landscaping not only can impact the experience within that commercial center, but also the impression of the adjacent residential neighborhood. The transition from single-family to non-residential uses should be softened with landscaped buffers that include trees, shrubs and other plantings.



The City should continue to require trees to be planted as part of all development and along roadways to soften the look and feel of buildings and provide shade to pedestrians along sidewalks and in parking lots. However, trees should be planted in such a way so as to provide room for growth so they remain viable as they mature. The existing “diamond” planting areas in some older parking lots does not allow room for proper growth and thus undermines the purpose of the trees. Any redevelopment within the city should respect the maturity of and seek to preserve the trees that have taken 20-30 years to grow.

**d. Recognize the importance of schools and religious institutions to the community fabric and locate them in appropriate places so that quality of life for adjacent residents is maintained.**

Schools and religious institutions are located within Sugar Land residential neighborhoods and contribute to a feeling of community. They help define the neighborhoods within which they are located because they are a part of residents’ everyday lives, serve as a central point for gathering, and often attract residents to those neighborhoods. However, they can also have the same negative impacts as commercial uses, such as traffic, noise and lights. It is important for these institutions to remain close to neighborhoods but they should be located and developed to have the least negative impact on the surrounding residential neighborhood. The City should evaluate development regulations to ensure proper safeguards are in place to protect single-family residential areas from negative impacts of these institutions.

## Creating Mixed Use Activity Centers

*Sugar Land will have Regional Activity Centers and Neighborhood Activity Centers that will be mixed use, compact, walkable and bicycle-friendly areas with active public spaces. These Centers will draw people throughout the day, encourage interaction, grow and support business and build community.*

The design of the Regional and Neighborhood Activity Centers focuses on the pedestrian rather than the automobile and contains a mix of uses rather than a single use, which is different than the conventional development style that is prevalent in Sugar Land. These Activity Centers will utilize buildings with common wall construction that are located adjacent to the pedestrian area, creating a compact pedestrian-friendly setting. This compact style of development visually unites both sides of the street through restaurants and office buildings that engage and create an active pedestrian area.

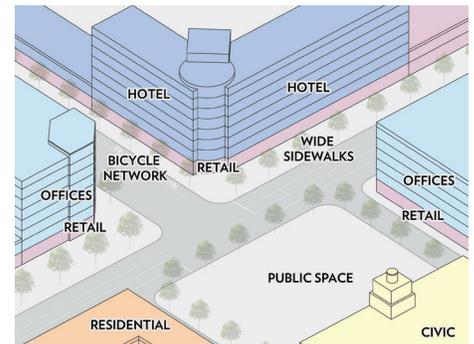
Other pedestrian features – including wide pedestrian walkways, pedestrian-scale lighting, benches, awnings on adjacent buildings, attractive storefronts and building facades, and such – also enhance the pedestrian experience in these Centers. These design guidelines for Activity Centers will make them feel more welcoming to visitors and front doors on pedestrian-friendly streets will encourage the pedestrian traffic flow through them.

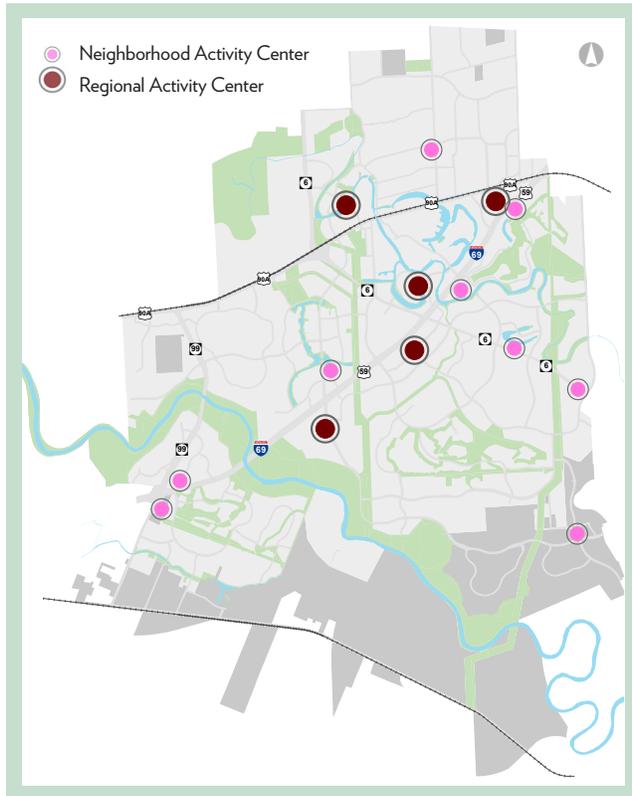
Public spaces will provide areas for people to gather and provide a focal point for the Centers. Seeing people in a space invites more people, thus increasing opportunities for interaction, improving safety and building a sense of community. These Activity Centers will respond to a market demand for reduced commutes and proximity to daily destinations, demand for business spaces in mixed use areas, provision of a variety of residential options, and meet the aspirations of several other goals in this Plan.

**a. Support the creation of distinctive Regional Activity Centers through new development and redevelopment. These Centers should contain a variety of uses, serve as destinations for both the City and the region, and have unique identities that distinguish each from one another.**

Regional Activity Centers (RACs) will be new or redeveloped commercial areas that will serve as destinations for both the city and the region. These areas will be developed to vertically integrate various land uses such as commercial and retail buildings, educational and health care facilities, civic buildings, and a residential component.

The majority of parking should be located in shared structured facilities that are integrated into buildings, rather than spread out across large individual parking lots. In addition, Regional Activity Centers will be pedestrian and bicycle friendly and offer a central public space that can be used at various times of the day for various purposes. These will provide increased opportunities for residents to spend time outdoors and help build a sense of community.

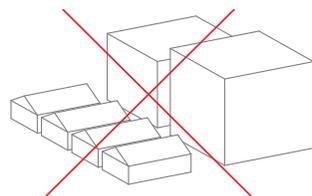




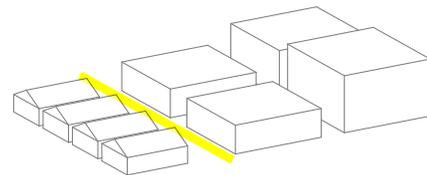
The Future Land Use Map designates five locations as Regional Activity Centers which are further described in the Areas of Change Section of this Chapter. The proposed Regional Activity Centers in this plan already exist in some form, but they can be enhanced through redevelopment and infill development.

These RACs are strategically located along regional highways to ensure intense commercial, retail and other high traffic activities are contained within designated areas and separated from single-family residential areas. These locations also attract visitors from the region and enable reverse commutes to jobs within them.

They should prioritize pedestrian and bicycle connections within and are good candidates for accommodating park and ride and other transit facilities. Lastly, Regional Activity Centers with boundary edges that interact with single-family developments should provide buffers and smooth transitions in order to minimize impact on the neighboring development.



Mid- and high-rises should not be adjacent to existing single-family developments

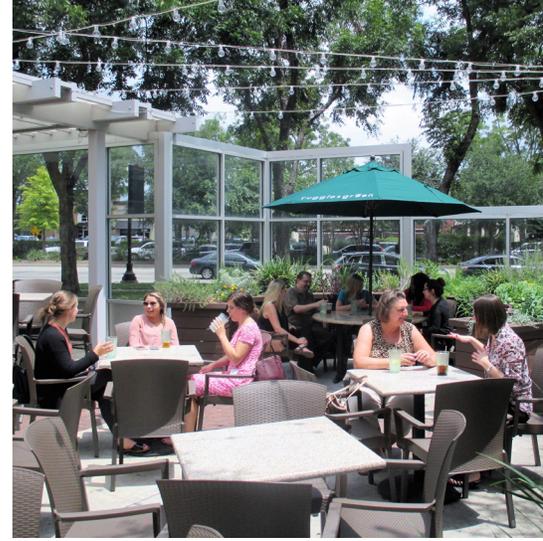


A buffered edge should exist between existing single-family developments and new activity center developments

**b. Encourage the creation of new and transformation of existing retail centers into vibrant pedestrian-oriented Neighborhood Activity Centers.**

Neighborhood Activity Centers (NACs) are smaller scale mixed use developments that will provide amenities to nearby residential neighborhoods. Neighborhood Activity Centers will be new establishments or redeveloped existing retail centers. They will incorporate public spaces, retail, restaurants, small offices, and residential. The majority of these eight areas designated as NACs are existing linear strip centers. In order to encourage redevelopment of these centers into more walkable areas, NACs may include compact residential such as townhomes, senior living, or multi-family (condo ownership or rental). In order to support community stability and further the goals of the Comprehensive Plan, individual ownership of residential units is preferred to rental units. Therefore, residential components should be constructed to have the ability to be individually owned through features such as individual utility meters and enhanced sound insulation between units. Additionally, the mix of uses and location of multi-family within NACs should be determined during the zoning process.





Approximately one third of daily car trips are made to frequented destinations within two miles of home, such as grocery stores, parks and medical offices<sup>1</sup>. Strip centers serve this function currently; however, due to their linear form and parking requirements, they are built at such a low density that residents are required to drive to each destination. Redevelopment into NACs will transform existing strip center retail into denser areas with shared parking to encourage walking and biking from the adjacent existing neighborhoods, and therefore reduce vehicular traffic. Neighborhood Activity Centers should be located on Arterials or above (as defined by the Master Thoroughfare Plan) and be linked with safe pedestrian and bike infrastructure to neighborhoods within a quarter mile. However, NACs should provide buffers and smooth transitions in order to minimize impacts on the neighboring single-family residential neighborhood.

<sup>1</sup>2009 National Household Travel Survey - Short Trips Analysis survey sponsored by American League of Bicyclists and America Bikes

**c. Activity Centers should be evaluated utilizing a multi-modal transportation analysis and school impact analysis.**

A multi-modal transportation analysis will provide a standardized method of gauging the non-vehicular circulation within mixed use centers and connectivity to the area around them. Typical Traffic Impact Analyses (TIAs) only evaluate the vehicular impact of development on the roadway system, and often require the addition of lanes to adjacent roadways. However, multi-lane roadways serve as barriers for pedestrians and bicyclists. A multi-modal transportation analysis would evaluate connectivity and circulation for pedestrians and bicyclists in addition to the more traditional examination of vehicular traffic. The analysis should be based on minimum levels of service for all modes of transportation.

The City should develop a level of service for roads within and adjacent to Activity Centers. The level of service should recognize the city-wide benefits of concentrating activity and improving pedestrian and bicycle access, by allowing a certain level of roadway congestion in order to limit barriers to accessing these centers. The analysis should be based on full build-out and take into account the reduced trips and vehicle miles traveled resulting from adjacent mixed uses, walkability, and transit.

A school impact analysis should be conducted when new residential units are proposed in an Activity Center. The analysis will project the anticipated number of new students generated as a result of the new residential development, and be provided to the school district to help in planning for those students. The school impact analysis should compare the proposed development to similar developments or areas in the region to calculate the projected number of students.

**d. Encourage the use of urban design, common architecture, public art, and signage to give each Regional Activity Center or Neighborhood Activity Center a distinct identity.**

Features that help define Activity Centers may include seating, pedestrian scale lighting, paved gathering areas, stages, water features, lawns, trees, unique signage, kiosks, and artwork and historic artifacts. Each Regional Activity Center having a unique character will encourage regional and local residents to visit each center for its own appeal and can help minimize centers cannibalizing each other. Distinct identities for Neighborhood Activity Centers create a feeling of community among the nearby residents. Public spaces also help define the places they are in through the use of distinct elements.

For example, the character of Sugar Land Town Square is largely defined by City Hall and the adjacent plaza. The traditional architecture of City Hall sets the tone for the adjacent plaza and surrounding development to be formal and structured as exhibited in the landscaping, hardscape, water feature, street furniture, lighting, and such.





- e. **Activity Centers should include multiple public spaces that allow people to gather and share experiences and should be flexible to accommodate various activities throughout the day.**

Public spaces allow people to be outside, interact informally, help businesses and residents by providing amenities, give each Activity Center a unique identity, and build a sense of community. Public spaces should be designed to enable informal gatherings and various organized activities such as events, movies, communal exercise classes, farmer’s markets and concerts.

Each Regional Activity Center (RAC) should include at least one major public space and additional secondary public spaces; each Neighborhood Activity Center (NAC) should include at least one secondary public space. Major public spaces act as a focal point for each RAC and should be at the scale of the Town Square plaza or larger (three-quarters of an acre) in order to accommodate large events and be placed approximately at the geographical center of the RAC. Secondary public spaces should be at least 3,000 square feet in size, be designed for informal gathering, and should be dispersed throughout Activity Centers such that all uses are no more than 1,000 feet (walking distance) from a public space.

It is important to create strong connections between public spaces and their surrounding land uses so people are encouraged to use the spaces spontaneously. Buildings should be placed so that they enclose public spaces, provide architectural interest, and add activity. Front doors of the buildings adjacent to public spaces should be oriented toward the public space.

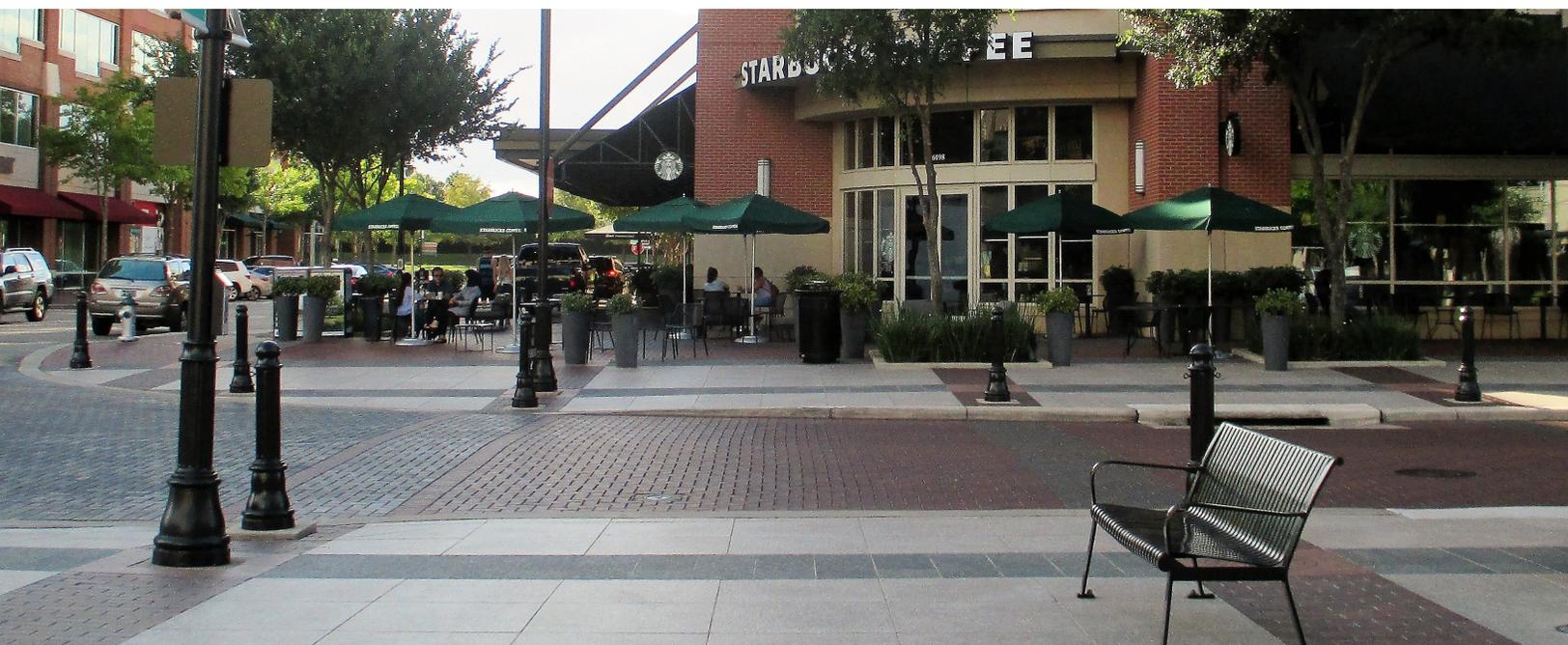
Public spaces can also be provided in unconventional ways, such as through rooftop gardens and terraces. These provide additional gathering spaces for residents of Activity Centers.



*Publicly accessible spaces may be privately or publicly owned.*

**f. Design streets and access ways within Activity Centers so they emphasize pedestrians over vehicles.**

Streets within Activity Centers should be welcoming and provide convenient access to pedestrians. Wide streets with fast speed limits act as barriers to pedestrians. Streets that are comfortable for pedestrians are designed with narrow lanes and on-street parking in order to minimize the length of pedestrian crossings and slow traffic. They also use contrasting pavement, pavers or different textures, and frequent intersections to create as many pedestrian crossings as possible. Streets adjacent to public spaces should have well-defined pedestrian crossings and be designed to slow vehicular traffic with narrow lanes and other traffic calming features.



## Encouraging Residential Options

*Sugar Land will offer a mixture of residential options in a variety of settings to appeal to a wide range of people.*

Sugar Land's predominant residential type is traditional suburban single-family, but changing regional demographics and shifting trends have created a need for alternative housing types in a variety of settings. While some townhomes, urban homes and condos exist in the City, the quantities of these alternative housing types are limited. Single-family homes will continue to be the primary type of housing option available and should be approximately 88% of the housing mix in Sugar Land and the ETJ. However in response to these broader trends, it is important for the City to encourage a variety of housing options to remain competitive in the Houston region.

*Sugar Land should provide housing opportunities to meet the needs for people of all ages and in all stages of life.*

Sugar Land should provide housing opportunities to meet the needs for people of all ages and in all stages of life. For example, young professionals seek out residential options that are smaller and better connected to work places, retail and entertainment than typical suburban single-family neighborhoods. Employers that want to attract these young professionals look for locations that offer these options.

Seniors desire to remain in their community while downsizing to a home that provides convenient access to shopping, dining, and other entertainment. New options that may fulfill these demands may include small-lot homes in quiet neighborhoods, townhomes within or adjacent to Neighborhood Activity Centers, and multi-family (condo ownership and rental) in vibrant mixed use Regional Activity Centers.

Additionally, multi-generational families are looking for homes better suited to their needs, such as single-family homes with a secondary dwelling unit. Other people desire to work close to home and not spend time commuting every day, and may seek out live-work townhomes to fulfill their needs. Sugar Land should provide housing opportunities to meet these needs for people of all ages and in all stages of life.

In Resolution 10-21, the City acknowledged these alternative housing types should be integrated into their surrounding environments and provided general guidelines for their development. Building on community input, this Plan further refines and replaces the guidelines established by Resolution 10-21.



*Townhomes*



*Cottage/Court style single-family*



*Urban Homes*

**a. Promote walkable neighborhoods through development of more compact forms of single-family residential.**

There is a demand for smaller single-family homes in walkable neighborhoods, such as townhomes, small-lot detached, or cottage/court style single-family homes. New compact single-family residential development could take place through redevelopment of commercial or residential properties. These new smaller scale single-family options should be located adjacent to or part of Regional or Neighborhood Activity Centers and serve as a transition between the activity in these Centers and existing single-family homes. In some cases, existing single-family homes that are located within a quarter mile of a Regional or Neighborhood Activity Center could be redeveloped into a more compact form of single-family residential, which would require a change in land use category from Suburban Neighborhood to Medium Density Single-Family Residential. New compact single-family residential areas that abut Activity Centers should provide for pedestrian connectivity between the uses.

**b. Allow single-family homes to accommodate the needs of a variety of family types and customs, such as extended family households and styles of living, such as live-work preferences.**

The majority of single-family homes in Sugar Land were designed with a traditional nuclear family in mind. The design of these homes may not effectively accommodate changing family dynamics. With varying customs, decrease in household size, and the aging population, there is a need for flexibility in the design of standard single-family homes. For example, a family with aging parents or a recent college graduate returning home could benefit from having an accessory dwelling unit on the property. The Development Code permits accessory dwelling units under certain parameters that could offer an option for extended family households to live in close proximity while maintaining some independence.

Additionally, there is an increasing demand for two kitchens in single-family homes. Two kitchens can accommodate certain cultural practices or preferences of having a kitchen for cooking and a kitchen for entertaining. In addition, some professionals prefer to conduct their business within their home but have a separate dedicated space and entrance; a live-work townhome unit accommodates this lifestyle preference.



## Multi-family Background

Multi-family residential has been a contentious topic for community discussion in Sugar Land. Though most of the existing multi-family complexes were brought into the City through annexation, the multi-family that has been developed in the City sparked significant public debate and discussion on the topic.

The 2004 Land Use Plan recognized the need for a variety of housing types including multi-family, townhomes, and condos. Its policy direction limited the density and concentration of stand-alone multi-family complexes in order to limit their number and disperse them throughout the community. The Plan also provided for Planned Residential and Mixed Use categories, which have been implemented through the Planned Development zoning process and has allowed for significant Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council review of plans for these areas. In 2010 City Council approved Resolution 10-21 which provided direction for the design of multi-family development.

Many of the components of Resolution 10-21 are incorporated and further expanded upon in this Plan's policies.

- c. Locate new multi-family units in vertically mixed use settings that are appropriately scaled to their surroundings and are designed to retain their value over the long-term.**

In the future, the City should not approve new stand-alone single-use multi-family residential complexes. Any new multi-family units (condo ownership or rental) should be located in a mixed use area designated as a Regional or Neighborhood Activity Center, or a Medium Density Mixed Use. Vertically mixed-use buildings<sup>1</sup> are the preferred architectural style for multi-family in order to maximize pedestrian activation and use integration. However, these can be achieved in other ways. For example, pedestrian interest can be created by placing a multi-family's fitness center and leasing office on the first floor, or including front porches and stoops for those units along the pedestrian area. Additionally, integration within a mixed use development could be achieved if the multi-family component was part of an integrated, pedestrian-friendly, mixed use development application. In this example, phasing protections should be included to ensure the remainder of the project is built at the same time or prior to the multi-family. When additional multi-family is proposed in a mixed use development, a school impact analysis should be completed to evaluate the expected impact on schools.

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**Design and quality of space influence the experience of a place regardless of the number of units per acre.**

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Design and quality of space influence the experience of a place regardless of the number of units per acre. Multi-family residential should be integrated within mixed use developments that provide easy pedestrian access to goods and services, employment, and public spaces. In order to ensure cohesion with adjacent uses, multi-family buildings should not have perimeter fences. Parking for multi-family should not be in surface level parking lots, but rather in integrated structured parking garages. Parking should be connected to the residential portion of the building and wrapped to minimize visibility from adjacent streets and access ways. Architectural features and building finishes on multi-family buildings should add to the pedestrian-friendly quality and cohesiveness of the mixed use development. In order to ensure their long-term durability, buildings should utilize high quality building finishes.

<sup>1</sup>A vertically mixed use building contains multiple uses, such as retail or restaurant on the ground floor and residential or office on the upper floors.



Individual units should only be accessible through interior enclosed climate-controlled corridors. Buildings should also incorporate green building practices and components supporting owner occupancy. High quality residential construction adds long-term economic and aesthetic value to the neighborhood and is environmentally sustainable. All of these elements improve the long-term value of multi-family residential.



While multi-family is an appropriate use in Regional Activity Centers and Neighborhoods Activity Centers, it should not be the dominant use in these areas. Therefore, the Areas of Change section of this Plan enumerates a recommended mix of land uses for each Regional Activity Center and a general guide on the number of multi-family units in Regional and Neighborhood Activity Centers to ensure they are dispersed throughout the city. In contrast, Medium Density Mixed Use areas will contain residential as the predominant land use. Redevelopment of these areas could include the redevelopment of multi-family (condo ownership or rental) or the introduction of Medium Density Single-Family units.



In order to preserve the nature of Sugar Land's single-family neighborhoods and at the same time ensure an appropriate mix of housing options is available, this Plan envisions an 88% single-family housing / 12% multi-family housing ratio for the foreseeable future. This ratio can be reevaluated during the next Land Use Plan update if the community and the market determines it is appropriate.



It is important that buildings in mixed use developments, including those containing multi-family, be compatible with any nearby single-family residential. Buildings should be similar in height to adjacent single-family homes, and building heights should transition from lower to higher as they extend away from the single-family residential.





## A Great Place for Business

*Sugar Land will be a regional employment center that is a great place to do business, a premier address for corporate offices, and a community that fosters small businesses.*

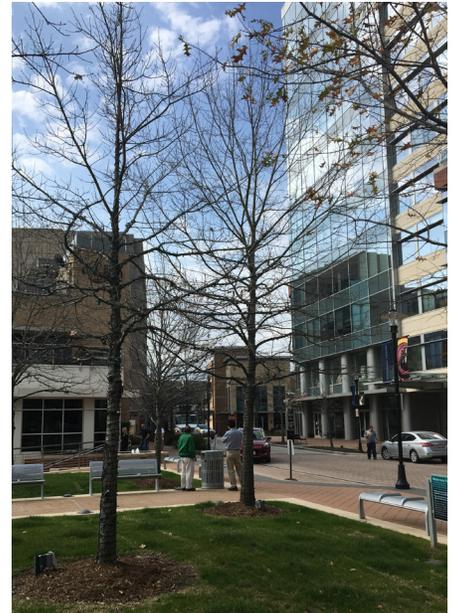
Providing a variety of employment opportunities not only makes living in Sugar Land more desirable for people who want to live closer to work, but also invites commuters from the region and increases activity and sales tax revenue in the city.

- a. Locate new corporate offices within Regional Activity Centers where support services are within walking distance. Where offices exist outside of Regional Activity Centers, encourage support services to be located within walking distance.**

Support services such as hotels, meeting spaces, business-to-business services, restaurants, and retail make the city a more attractive place for business by making it easier for businesses to operate and by helping them attract and retain employees. Locating these within walking distance (quarter mile) of offices provide employers and employees easier access to these support services. The added convenience provides the opportunity for employers and employees to spend their money locally, rather than outside the City.

Regional Activity Centers provide amenities to corporate offices that cannot be found in other parts of the City, such as walkable streets, easy access to restaurants and shopping, and public spaces. These amenities will attract employers and employees to an area and increase the City's employment base. Although some corporate offices may be appropriate in the business parks, most new corporate offices should be targeted in Regional Activity Centers.

For those areas that have existing offices, the City should encourage the location of support services nearby. For example, the City should consider expanding the permitted uses in the Business Office zoning district. Though this is a departure from previous policy to preserve office zoning primarily for office uses, the end goal of attracting top tier businesses remains the same. Providing a variety of uses mixed with offices responds to the trend for corporate offices to locate in mixed use areas.



**b. Preserve areas for limited industrial uses in order to attract and retain target industries and to grow the local employment base over the long-term.**

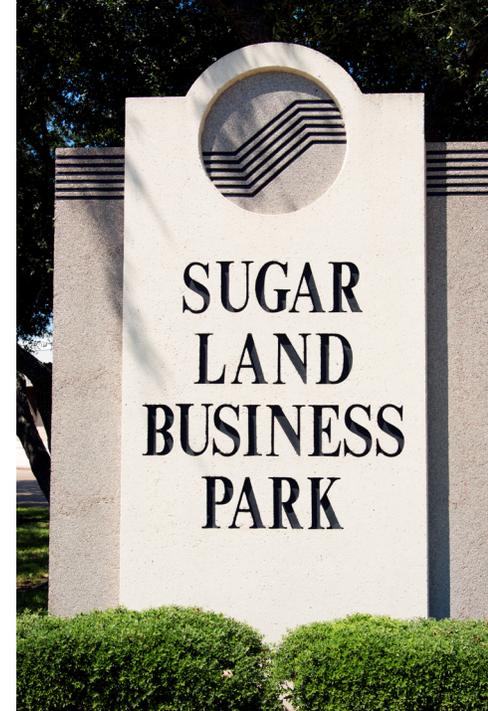
The City's Comprehensive Plan Goal I is to be a Regional Business Center of Excellence. The City recognizes that light industrial uses are an important component of the City's overall land use mix and contribute to meeting this goal. As such, the City maintains a list of targeted industries to attract to the City, such as scientific and advanced technology research and development. However, as the city is built out, the availability of appropriately zoned sites becomes a challenge to attracting these target industries. Therefore, sites designated for these limited industrial uses should be preserved and not developed for other uses that may render a quicker return on investment, such as single-family residential.

**c. Continue to support the Sugar Land Regional Airport as a first rate executive and general aviation destination by ensuring compatible uses are developed around the airport.**

The airport is an amenity for Sugar Land as it is an advantage for employers looking to travel in and out of the city for business. Supporting it means avoiding encroachment into flight paths and avoiding placement of uses in close proximity that could present conflicts with airport noise. For example, residential uses should not be placed directly adjacent to the airport. The City's efforts to support the airport will ensure it maintains its ability to provide excellent services to the businesses in and around the City.

**d. In new development and redevelopment, encourage the inclusion of storefronts, offices, and live/work spaces for small businesses and entrepreneurial start-ups.**

The presence of small businesses helps build civic identity and authenticity. Small entrepreneurial businesses can grow into larger corporations that add many jobs to the local economy. However, small businesses have different space needs than large corporations. Small businesses may seek out storefronts or small offices in Neighborhood Activity Centers. Entrepreneurial start-ups may look for a business incubator or co-working space in a Regional Activity Center where they can grow their business and stay in the same general location while also having access to supporting amenities. Live/work spaces in townhomes can also provide an efficient use of space for small business owners that wish to live and work in close proximity.





*Sugar Land will have amenities in appropriate locations that make it a prominent place to live and work and is attractive to visitors and tourists.*

Sugar Land is a city that strives to have amenities that provide convenient access for residents and destinations that draw people from around the region. The City should have amenities such as retail, restaurants, hotels, cultural institutions, parks, entertainment venues and recreational destinations. Locating these amenities within the City allows residents to enjoy them without leaving the City and also attracts visitors and tourists, including leisure travelers, meeting attendees, and sports groups. However, these destinations can negatively affect the surrounding area and therefore should be located and designed in such a way to minimize these impacts.

**a. Locate destination retail, entertainment, sports, and cultural arts in appropriate places to maintain quality of life for residents.**

Having destinations such as these improves the quality of life for city residents and increases the tax base for the city. Potential negative impacts of such facilities include increased traffic and noise. For this reason, appropriate locations are restricted to Regional Activity Centers, with appropriate buffers from residential neighborhoods, and on highways for easy vehicular access. The City should establish a public engagement process that would occur during the planning phases for new destination venues. The process would allow the City to receive stakeholder input on proposed locations, site design, and compatibility with adjacent uses.



# 6



## Inviting Outdoor Spaces

*Sugar Land will preserve and develop connected high quality parks, trails, waterways, public spaces and open spaces.*

Excellent parks and open spaces enhance the quality of life and draw people to Sugar Land. Parks provide space for recreation, venues for gatherings, and opportunities to relax and appreciate nature. Land uses such as parks, plazas for group exercises and farmer’s markets, and pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure provide the opportunities for citizens to lead a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, community gardens and rooftop gardens can provide nearby access for residents to grow their own food. This Plan encourages the inclusion of these elements in order to offer convenient, readily accessible options to citizens to access the outdoors. These policies should be implemented in coordination with those established in the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Master Plan and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan.

**a. Ensure connectivity between neighborhoods and Neighborhood Activity Centers through and to parks, trails, and open spaces.**

Utilize parks, trails, and open spaces to connect neighborhoods to adjacent Neighborhood Activity Centers. This connectivity enables residents to have direct access without driving and provides employees in NACs access to parks, trails, and open spaces on foot. These connections can add value to the neighborhoods and create a network of greenways that link adjacent neighborhoods and Neighborhood Activity Centers to the major parks and open spaces along the Brazos River and Oyster Creek greenbelts.





**b. Preserve land along the Brazos River to create a regional greenbelt and protect the floodway from inappropriate development.**

The Brazos River is the 11th longest river in the United States and the third longest in Texas. It is also the heart of the first American settlements in Texas and its natural beauty is a unique asset to Sugar Land.

The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan and the Brazos River Park Master Plan provide guidance for improvements to and investments in the land along the river. This includes providing outdoor recreational spaces, nature trails and other outdoor learning opportunities. In order to accomplish these goals, land along the river must be preserved. The City should retrofit connections from the city-wide pedestrian and bicycle network to provide non-vehicular access to the Brazos River greenbelt.

The extensive floodway and associated federal regulations severely limit the ability to develop the remaining land along the Brazos River in a similar manner to other areas in Sugar Land. The floodway should be protected from intense development and preserved for low impact uses such as agriculture, low-density rural residential and passive open space. The City should explore the use of conservation easements through the Development Agreement process in order to protect the Brazos River floodway from inappropriate development.



**c. Preserve natural spaces, such as wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas for passive use and encourage development to incorporate natural areas and other man-made features within, rather than “turning its back” on these areas.**

Natural spaces and man-made features can provide multiple benefits for the community. They provide habitat for native plants and wildlife, preserve nature, benefit the quality of life, and serve to enhance the identity of the neighborhood. During the Development Agreement process, the City should consider requiring developers to identify existing wildlife habitat and provide adequate buffers adjacent to natural areas. In order to achieve this, these spaces, designed as amenities, should be able to be enjoyed by the general public. These features should be publicly accessible rather than being incorporated into individual lots.

Man-made features should be amenitized with trails, natural landscaping and have the appearance of a natural area rather than a man-made detention facility. Ideally, natural or man-made features should be a focal point for the development, but at a minimum, building facades facing a feature should be visually appealing and not be the unpleasant back of a building.

# 7

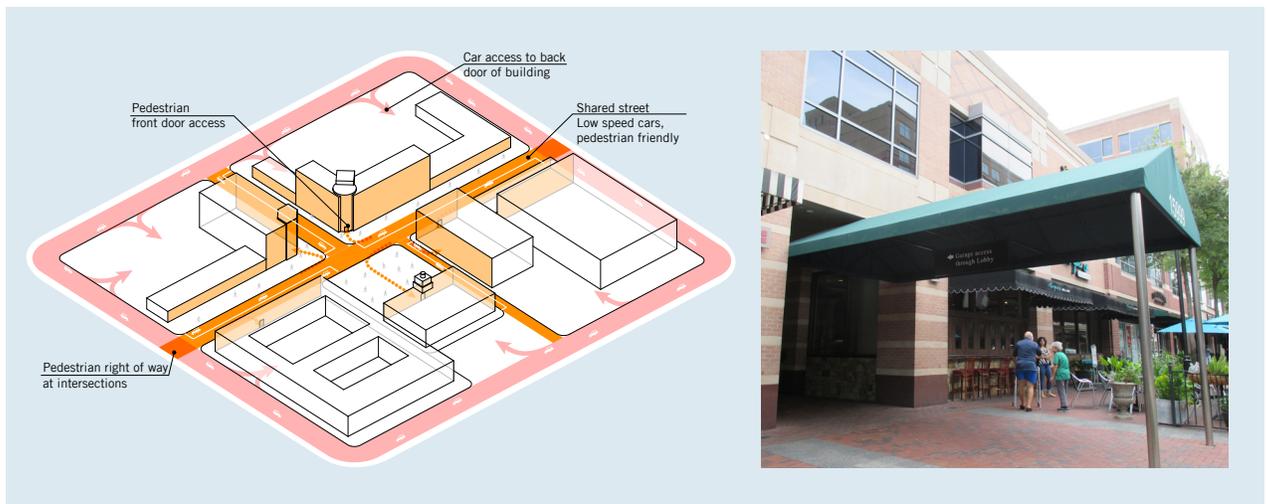
## Connected Land Uses



*Sugar Land will have inviting connections between land uses so that people can not only drive, but could also choose to walk or bicycle to their destinations.*

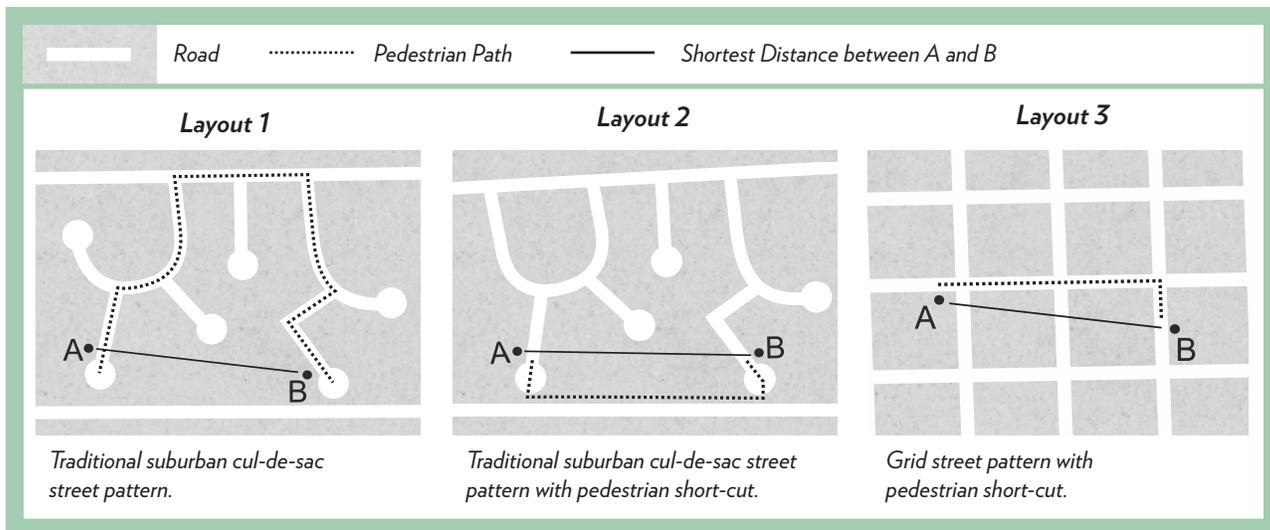
Many Sugar Land residents want to have the choice of walking or biking for short trips, and all residents would benefit from the reduction in car trips that would result in less congested streets. However, walking and biking will not be an attractive option for Sugar Land residents unless the design of the built environment supports it. A safe, connected, appealing pedestrian and bicycle network is critical. Any obstacles or additional time required decreases the likelihood that someone will walk or bike rather than drive to their destination. Pedestrian routes should be clear and direct and take into consideration that every quarter mile adds 5 minutes to a pedestrian's trip. The pedestrian's experience is equally important. The connections should feel safe and comfortable, being well-lit, buffered from vehicular traffic, inclusive of rest areas (benches) and visually pleasing.

- a. Buildings should be planned so that the pedestrian connection from the public right-of-way to the “front door” is primary over the vehicular connection. Buildings should be near the street and large parking areas should be located behind buildings.**



People take for granted that, when driving to a Sugar Land shopping center, they will have a continuous vehicular access route from the surrounding roadways, a place to park, and a direct path from the parking lot to the front door. Though not currently provided at many sites, pedestrians and bicyclists would benefit from similar accommodations. With continuous access routes and direct paths, walking or bicycling to a destination becomes more attractive, convenient and safe. For example, the buildings within Sugar Land Town Square are near the street and adjacent to a robust pedestrian area while the majority of the parking is located in garages behind and wrapped by buildings. This provides an easy walk to the front doors of these buildings while limiting vehicular and pedestrian interaction. Contrastingly, conventional big box developments provide large parking lots in front of the main entrance of the building, making it less appealing to bike or walk. Although people may be more likely to drive than walk to certain uses, such as a large format home improvement store, these sites should still be designed to provide direct and safe pedestrian and bicycle paths from the right-of-way, through the parking lot, to the front door of the building.

**Figure 19: Options for Pedestrian Connectivity**



- b. New development should be designed to provide multiple direct connection points to the citywide pedestrian and bicycle network to minimize circuitous trips. Where possible, additional pedestrian and bicycle connections should be retrofitted into existing development.**

Development patterns shape the pedestrian and bicycle network and its usefulness for trips. Sugar Land has developed in a traditional suburban pattern with homes lining cul-de-sacs that often limit pedestrian and bicycle connectivity to other uses. However, the City has focused on enhancing the network through the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan.

New developments should be required to provide direct, convenient and safe connections to the overall network (see Figure 19). For example, some areas have direct pedestrian connections from the end of cul-de-sacs to an adjacent trail. Another way to accomplish effective pedestrian and bicycle connectivity is through the use of a grid street pattern rather than cul-de-sacs and collector roads. Since the majority of the City is developed, connecting these areas to the pedestrian and bicycle network will likely rely on City initiative. The City should continue to implement the Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan in order to improve pedestrian and bicycle connectivity in developed areas.



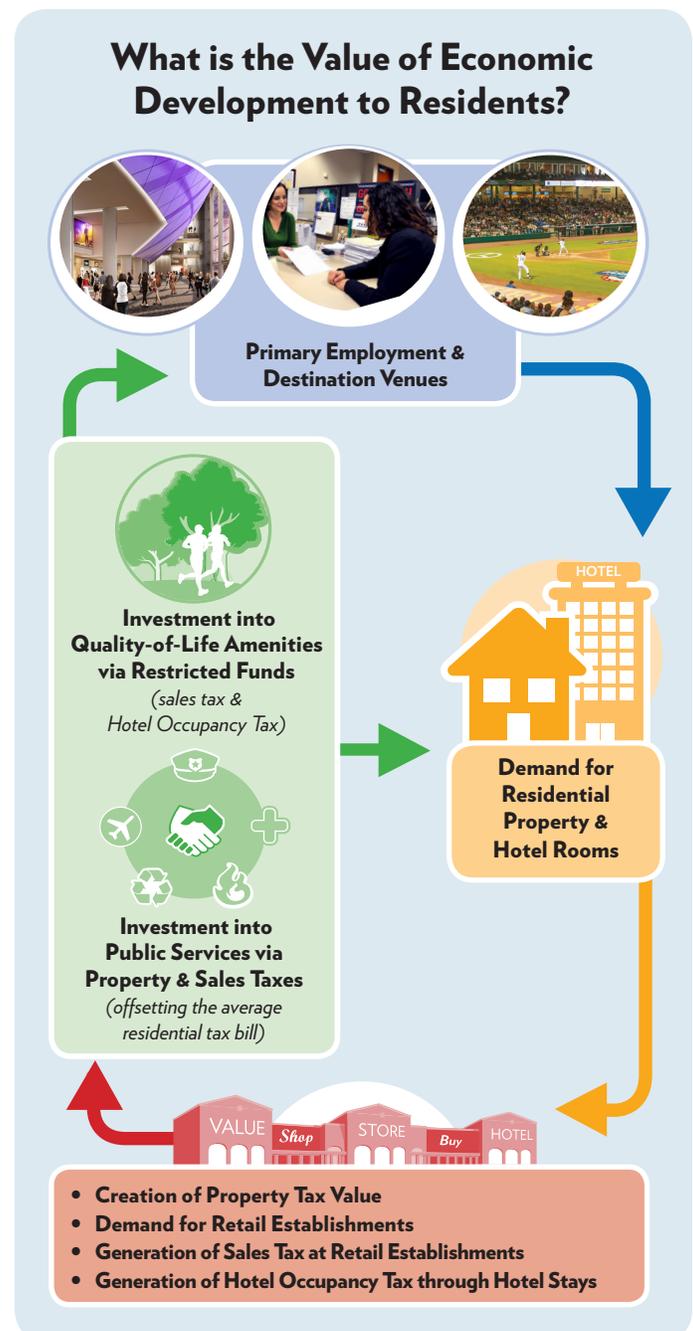


*Sugar Land will develop and redevelop in a way that maintains the long-term fiscal health of the City.*

The City provides a high quality of life and excellent services to its residents and businesses. The City's strong fiscal health enables the City to continue to invest in its parks, infrastructure, and other public amenities. This is due in part to the sound financial decisions made over the years, including ensuring the development of a balance of land uses, installing long-lasting infrastructure, holding development to high standards, and strategically utilizing tools to manage growth such as annexation, development agreements, strategic partnership agreements, and ETJ boundary adjustments.

- a. **Continue to promote a balanced mix of residential, commercial, and employment land uses to ensure a sustainable tax base and continue to strengthen the fiscal health of the City.**

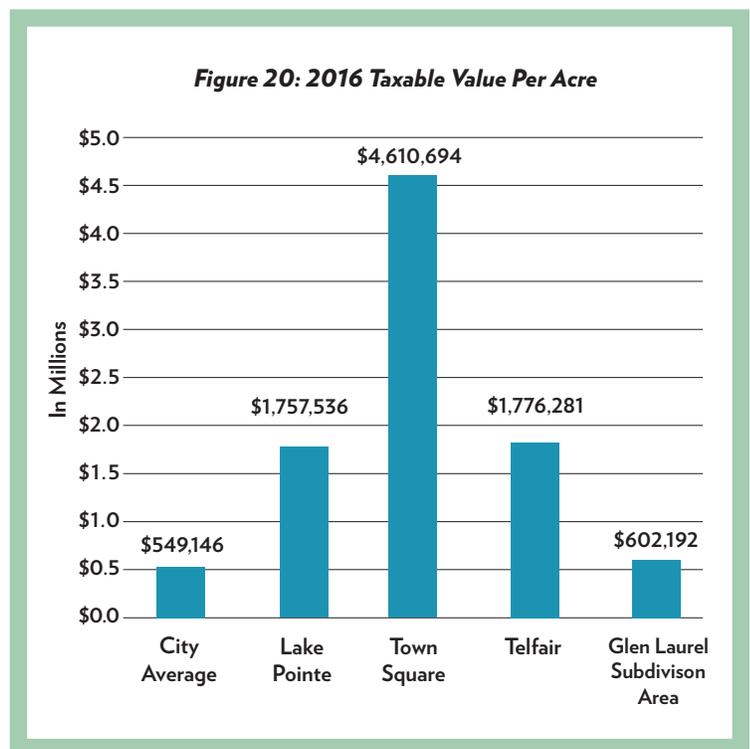
The City's overall objective for land use balance is documented in Chapter 5 of the Comprehensive Plan in Goal J – "Balanced land use (70% residential/ no less than 30% commercial, retail, office) and tax base (60% residential/ 40% commercial, retail, office) within city." The Future Land Use Map shows areas for industrial & employment opportunities in order to achieve this goal. Since there is limited vacant land left in the City and ETJ, it is important that these areas be preserved for non-residential uses as indicated on the Map. Commercial property provides both sales and property tax revenues that form the core of the City's budget. Without these revenues, residents would have to pay higher property taxes to maintain high quality services. Having an appropriate amount of non-residential property has enabled the City to lower the property tax rate over time, and maintain one of the lowest property tax rates (for cities our size) in the state.



The current land use mix is a result of decades of intentional city planning for development; previous Comprehensive Plans and associated Future Land Use Maps have identified areas for non-residential uses. Developers in the region often prefer residential uses because they typically have a shorter development timeframe and lower risk for return on investment. As a result, the City must be proactive to preserve areas for non-residential uses to ensure the significant residential component of the City is balanced with non-residential uses.

- b. Consider the impact of all new development on the city’s long-term revenue and expenses evaluating the “opportunity cost” of that development by comparing the impact to alternate development scenarios. Encourage new development and redevelopment of existing commercial centers into compact high quality mixed use centers that result in a higher value per acre than linear strip centers.**

Since there is a limited amount of land in the City, it is prudent to ensure that development and redevelopment yield the maximum long-term financial benefit to the City and its residents. Developers are responsible for the initial costs associated with new development such as installing roads, utilities, and parks and are interested in the short-term profit of a development. However, the City must consider the long-term costs of providing services such as police and fire, as well as ongoing maintenance of the public facilities installed by developers. When evaluating proposed development, it is important to ensure what is built on vacant and redeveloping property is high in value and creates economic resiliency so that the value created covers the costs of serving the development.



Being smart about growth produces high value development and having an appropriate amount of non-residential property allows the City to have a diverse tax base. However not all non-residential properties produce the same financial impact. High quality, compact, mixed use centers are unique destinations that draw people in and produce a higher value per acre than linear strip development which is low density and contains fewer businesses on the same amount of land. For example, Sugar Land Town Square has the highest value per acre in the City, over ten times the City average taxable value per acre. Additionally, maintenance of infrastructure around compact mixed use centers is less costly because they utilize infrastructure more efficiently.



**c. Build all new infrastructure to standards that ensure it will be long lasting and minimize maintenance.**

When installing infrastructure, it is attractive for developers and the City to save on upfront capital costs by utilizing products with a shorter lifespan but sometimes that leads to increased maintenance costs in the long term. In order to avoid those long term costs, new and reconstructed infrastructure should be made of durable materials, adequately sized, and include design features that minimize maintenance. For example, the City should encourage the use of low impact design for storm water management.

**d. Consider the availability of natural resources, including raw water supplies, in approving new development and redevelopment.**

Constrained water resources and water infrastructure capacity will impact development and redevelopment. For example, redevelopment of land into denser mixed use centers may require increased water volumes and stress infrastructure capacity.

When a development is proposed, especially a high water use development, such as a golf course, water park or industrial user, the City should ensure the land use meets broader City goals and brings an overall benefit to the City. In addition, the City should consider proposed water demands and use (domestic, amenity, irrigation, etc.), as well as water supply availability and the capacity of existing infrastructure when evaluating proposals for new development and redevelopment. Developers should consider low impact design and improved water efficiencies to reduce a proposed development's impact on the City's water supplies and infrastructure. Untreated surface water or reclaimed water (if suitable and accessible) may be a potential alternative to supply landscape irrigation and amenity use and reduce a development's demand on the potable water system.

**e. Prioritize capital investment in areas near Regional Activity Centers and Neighborhood Activity Centers (where redevelopment is desired).**

Mixed use centers yield higher values per acre than typical low density development. The City can invest the same amount of money on infrastructure around low-density development as it does around a mixed use center but the return on investment is higher in a mixed use center because of the higher value per acre. The City should review the criteria utilized for prioritizing CIP projects and consider adding a factor that weights proximity to Regional and Neighborhood Activity Centers as part of the evaluation.

**f. Manage growth in a prudent manner by considering the short- and long-term impacts of corporate city limits expansion and the use of ETJ agreements.**

The strongest way for the City to manage growth is by annexing property into the corporate city limits. However, there are various reasons a City may not do so, including limitations by State Law and costs associated with serving newly annexed areas. The City has and should continue to utilize development agreements to ensure that development in the ETJ is consistent with the character of the City by applying land use control and requiring regional utilities. Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPAs) provide a tool for annexing developed Municipal Utility Districts (MUDs) and the City should consider entering into SPAs with all ETJ MUDs to ensure that the timing of annexation is mutually beneficial. The City should also continue to utilize non-annexation agreements for agriculturally exempt land to protect it from future undesirable development.

When considering annexing an area, the City should evaluate the short- and long-term costs associated with serving the area. Historically the City has focused primarily on the financial impact of annexation. For example, ensuring current residents do not pay for any outstanding debt associated with the annexed areas, ensuring current residents do not pay for costs associated with annexation, and ensuring there is no impact to services or increased taxes for current residents.

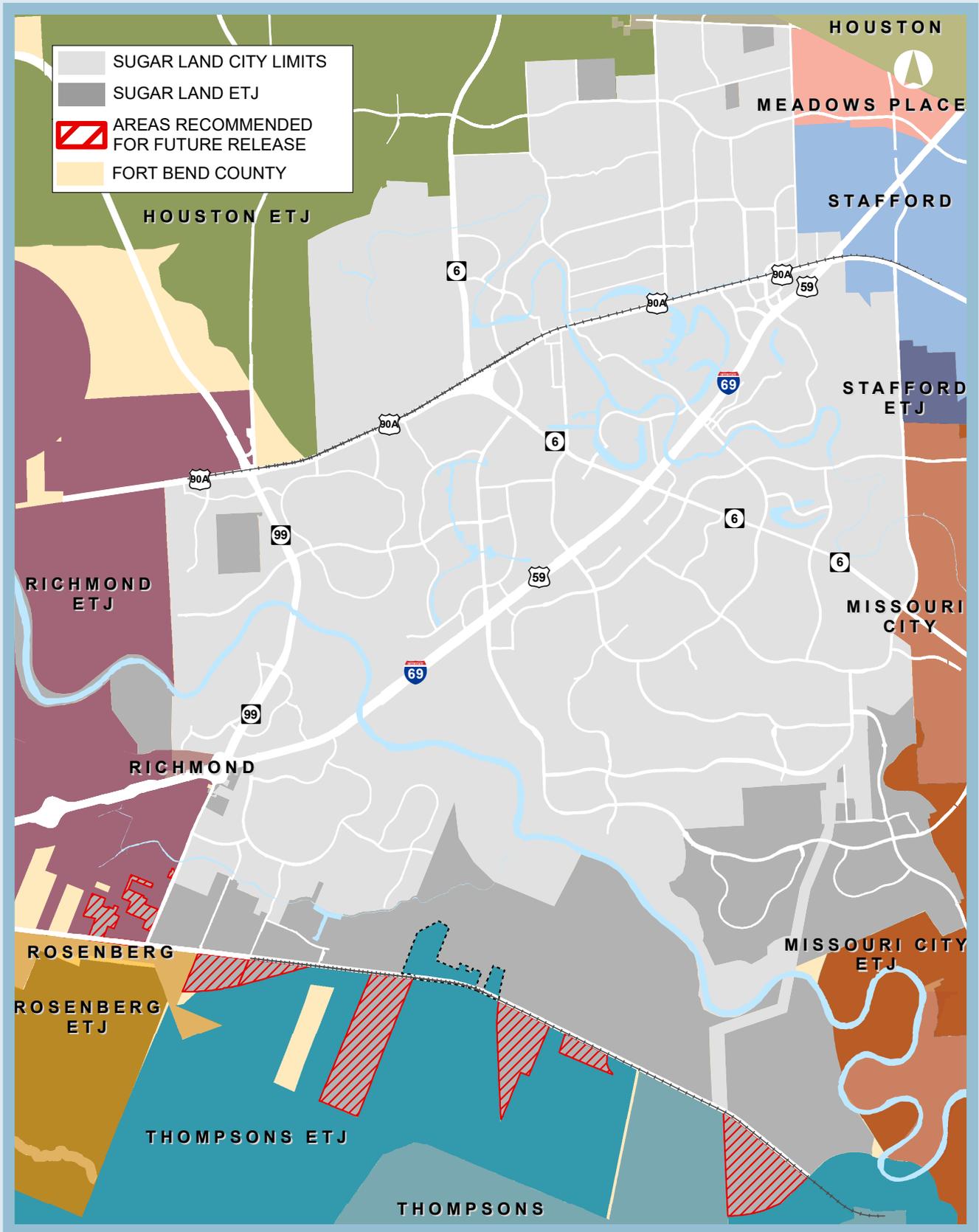
While these financial factors are important, the City should also consider the intangible costs of inaction. Areas that are not developed to Sugar Land standards typically will not improve over time, but will continue to decline. Therefore, in the long-run it may be better to annex a distressed or blighted area in order to establish land use controls, code enforcement, and ultimately to move them into more productive use.

**g. Establish and adjust the ETJ limits to ensure the ultimate City limits provide logical and feasible service delivery boundaries.**

Under Texas State law, the only area the City may annex into its corporate limits is its ETJ and ultimately, the City of Sugar Land will annex all areas in its ETJ. Therefore, it is important that the ETJ boundaries reflect logical future boundaries utilizing major roadways, physical features or landmarks that provide clarity for future residents, service providers and service recipients. The boundaries should also reflect the City's financial and physical ability to provide full municipal services to the area.

Other jurisdictional city limit or ETJ boundaries surround the City on all sides (See Figure 21). Therefore, any changes to the City's ETJ boundary will require coordination with adjacent cities. The 2012 Future Land Use Map designated areas as "Recommend for Future Release from ETJ to Another Jurisdiction" and "Recommend for Future Inclusion in ETJ" to accomplish this goal. The Future Land Use Map in this Plan reflects the same areas. The City should only consider relinquishing the areas designated for future release to a jurisdiction with the capability to provide similar municipal services as would be available through the City of Sugar Land. However, the City should be open to considering other boundary modifications should an adjacent city wish to pursue a boundary adjustment.

**Figure 21: Sugar Land City Limits & ETJ**



*This map represents Sugar Land city limits and ETJ as of December 12, 2017 including the annexation of the Greatwood and New Territory communities. Surrounding cities' boundaries are shown for informational purposes and represent the approximate location of these boundaries. Contact the appropriate jurisdiction to verify boundary locations.*

## Fostering Redevelopment

*Sugar Land will promote redevelopment that supports the goals of the City and is respectful of the surrounding community.*

Over the last five decades, Sugar Land has been in a phase of growth, and development has largely occurred on vacant land. With few large tracts of vacant land remaining in the City and with development of tracts in the ETJ presenting unique challenges such as extensive floodplain and fragmentation, any new development will likely occur on declining or underutilized property.

The City should prioritize redevelopment of declining or infill of underutilized areas in the City over property in the ETJ to prevent decline of the surrounding area, to sustain and improve the tax base, and to promote the efficient use of land and existing infrastructure systems. All of these influence community perception by current residents, visitors, and potential residents and businesses that are considering moving to the City.

Redevelopment has the potential to reverse or prevent decline while enhancing quality of life and ensuring the community remains economically competitive by responding to shifts in consumer tastes. For example, redevelopment, over time, can enhance a community's quality of life by offering improved connections to local destinations and providing a walkable option.

There is a broad range of potential City involvement in redevelopment (see Figure 22). In the past, the City utilized tools at all levels, but most are classified under the limited to moderate end of the range. For example, in most redevelopment efforts, the City is not the developer. These should continue to be predominantly private efforts; however, in the future, the City should be more pro-active and explore utilizing additional tools on the extensive end of the range. For example, the City should evaluate enacting new zoning regulations to encourage redevelopment. Additionally, the City may facilitate discussions, promote redevelopment areas to developers, and seek out development partners in order to encourage redevelopment. Priority should be given to those areas identified as Redevelopment Areas on the Areas of Change Map in this Plan.

Figure 22: Range of a City's Role in Redevelopment

## EXTENSIVE



- City may initiate a “Catalyst” capital project to entice private investment in a target area
- Modify existing or create new zoning regulations to facilitate redevelopment
- Establish clear vision and character for each site
- Actively purchase or facilitate land acquisition for future redevelopment
- Establish and initiate a specific redevelopment plan
- Form partnerships with private sector to implement projects

## MODERATE



- Target specific areas, establish a more detailed vision for redevelopment of each area
- City outlines potential policy tools to encourage redevelopment
- Conducts site specific studies
- Provide financial incentives (grants, TIF/TIRZ, PID, tax relief)
- Small grants or incentives to facilitate aesthetic improvements to aging retail centers
- May actively seek out patient capital and initiate conversation with private sector
- Fee reduction/waivers for redevelopment
- Create and maintain a retail inventory and database

## LIMITED



- Comprehensive plan encourages redevelopment
- General idea of potential redevelopment sites
- City monitors condition of retail centers
- Little to no formal effort by City to initiate redevelopment process
- General vision for redevelopment
- City may commission a retail study to better understand the market



*Before*



*After*



*Before*



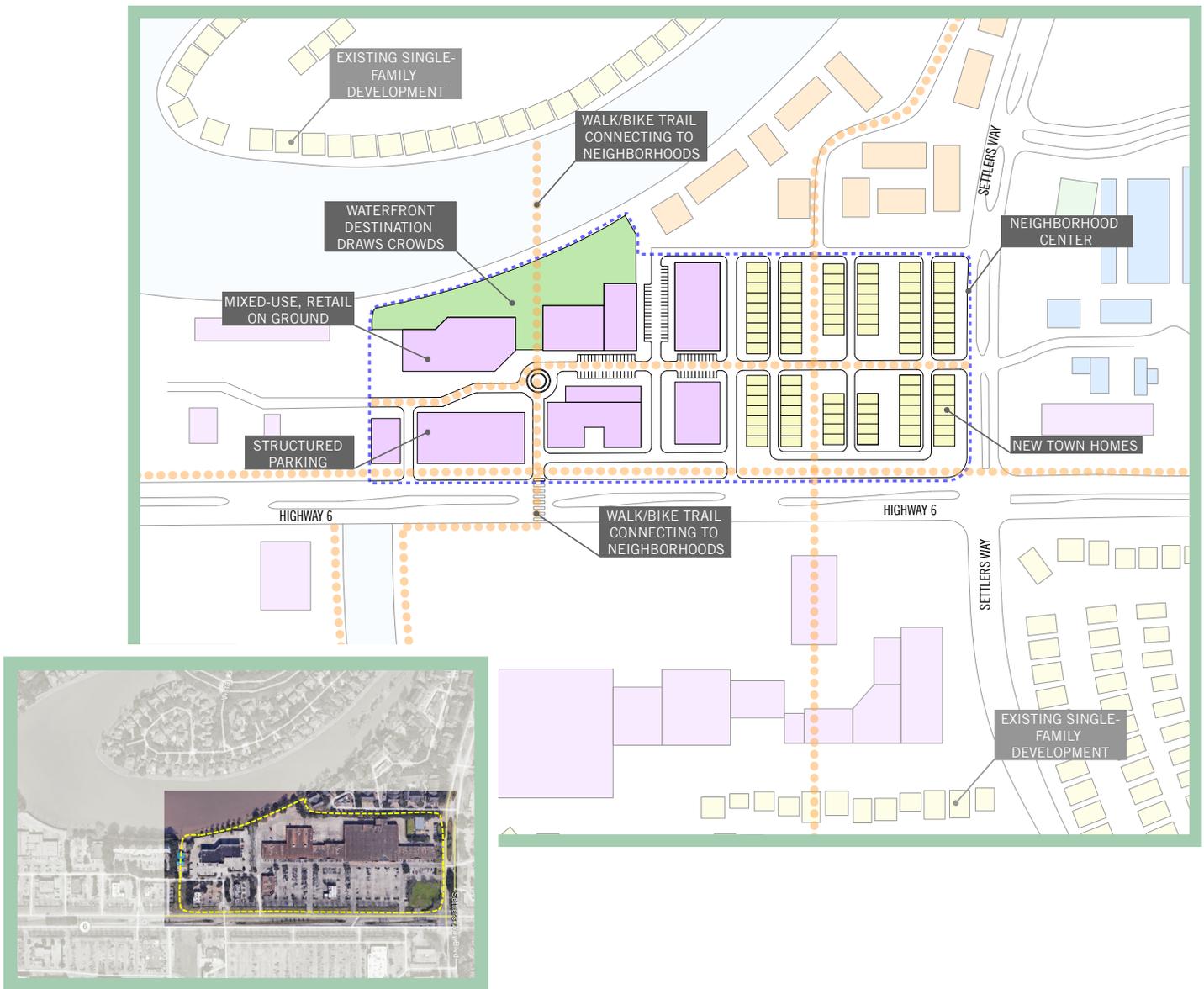
*After*

Depending on the level of private sector interest, incentivizing redevelopment may be required since declining, but occupied, retail can be seen as profitable for its owners without redevelopment. In addition to traditional incentives, such as tax rebates or grants, the City could also incentivize redevelopment through the zoning process by including additional land uses or reducing required parking. Since redevelopment occurs on land within existing neighborhoods, any redevelopment of property should be sensitive to the surrounding single-family neighborhoods by considering appropriate uses and scale of buildings. Redevelopment of commercial areas should focus on creating an enhanced quality of life, better sense of place, less blight, and strong economic growth. The City should prioritize redevelopment opportunities and evaluate the use of incentives in order to achieve desired outcomes.

**a. Support rehabilitation and redevelopment to prevent retail centers from declining.**

The decline of retail centers in other parts of the region has shown that it can have significant civic impacts, including a loss of tax revenue, potential for increased risk of crime, community deterioration, reduced investor confidence, and foster negative perceptions about the community. These impacts can also extend to the surrounding area and neighborhoods and lead to reduced property and home values in adjacent residential areas. The City should monitor property values, identify trends that indicate potential decline and focus on rehabilitation and redevelopment of commercial properties within these retail areas. However, the City's involvement in rehabilitation efforts should be carefully scrutinized to ensure that it would not be postponing redevelopment, which would have a more lasting impact. As a general rule, the City should prioritize redevelopment over rehabilitation in order to effect the most significant change.

**Figure 23: Example of Potential Redevelopment of a Neighborhood Activity Center as shown in Sugar Land Comprehensive Mobility Plan**



**b. Support infill development of underutilized properties in Redevelopment Areas.**

There are commercial areas of the City that were developed in the 1960s through the 1980s with single-use buildings, large surface parking lots, and minimal landscaping. The single-use development on these properties no longer meets current market demands for mixed use walkable centers. Though these areas may not be in decline, the City should utilize the redevelopment tools (see tools listed in Spectrum) to influence more creative use of the land within these targeted areas. In some cases, a single property could be further developed by adding structured parking and new buildings. In other areas, vacant property still exists that could be developed to enhance the walkability and mix of uses in an area.



## Celebrate Sugar Land

*Sugar Land will celebrate its unique character, its history, and its diversity*

Preserving historic areas and buildings, providing space for public art and historic education, and providing spaces for community gatherings celebrates Sugar Land as it was in the past and what it has become.

**a. Preserve or creatively reuse buildings of historic significance. Ensure reuse respects the historic significance of the building.**

Preservation of historic structures builds identity and character of a city, making it a place people relate to and remember. Examples of historically significant buildings include the Imperial Sugar Char House, Imperial Three-Bay Warehouse, the Sugar Land Auditorium, the Central State Farm Unit and the Central Unit prison. Though enacting an historic preservation ordinance is a common means of preserving historic buildings, it is not the only tool available. Other tools, which the City has already used, are financial incentives, development agreements, acquisition, and voluntary deed restrictions that preserve buildings.

**b. Develop public spaces and venues to host civic celebrations and cultural events.**

Public spaces and venues provide an opportunity to bring Sugar Land's diverse community together to celebrate its past and present. Examples of public spaces include existing Sugar Land Town Square plaza, Constellation Field, the Smart Financial Centre at Sugar Land and adjacent plaza, and the City's Festival Site.

Sugar Land Town Square plaza is an example of a successful public space that has created a focal gathering place for the local community, and helped Sugar Land become a destination city through hosting events such as the New Year's Eve Celebration, Christmas Tree Lighting, iFest, and Halloweentown. Cultural events, including the cultural kite festival, the dragon boat race, and others, are held at a variety of venues throughout the City.





**c. Educate the public about the story of Sugar Land.**

Learning about the history of the city gives residents a sense of pride and belonging that builds community and commemorates the people who built Sugar Land and laid the foundation for becoming the city it is today. Sharing Sugar Land's authentic history with visitors distinguishes it from other Houston suburbs that began as bedroom communities.

**d. Preserve the character of Company Town neighborhoods.**

Preserving the character of the older Sugar Land neighborhoods allows residents and visitors to see a glimpse into the past. Neighborhood character is defined by similar architectural styles, home sizes, setbacks, landscaping and use of common building materials, among others. They vary by neighborhood and preservation of character should stem from a planning process with public input. Neighborhood character can be preserved through the use of new overlay zoning or new standard zoning districts.



