

# City of Mesquite

## Economic Development Strategic Plan

2023 - 2027

**MESQUITE**  
TEXAS®  
Real. Texas. Business.

Rooted in tradition,  
Mesquite is a  
welcoming city with  
a Texas heart—boldy  
charting new paths  
and embracing fresh  
ideas to build better  
lives and grow  
prosperity for all.

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Situated in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) metroplex, Mesquite is a city that enjoys close proximity to the metroplex while maintaining a small-town charm with its outdoor activities and spectacular attractions. Mesquite has seen a recent uptick in development and business expansions thanks to forward-thinking investments in infrastructure, comprehensive strategic planning, and a strong marketing and branding approach that has celebrated the community's diversity and family-friendly amenities.

The City of Mesquite is home to a robust and diverse workforce pipeline, reflecting the skills and demographics of a multicultural workforce that brings invaluable experience to the industries they serve. As a growing center for advanced manufacturing with access to nearby major educational institutions, the City of Mesquite has the foundation necessary for long-term economic growth and success.

The City is poised for a state-of-the-art economic development strategy that will stake its claim on growth in the DFW region, while ensuring that all residents and enterprises have an equitable opportunity to grow and scale.

A detailed Benchmarking Analysis that compares Mesquite to 15 peers has enabled us to identify the strengths/competitive advantages, weaknesses/challenges, opportunities, and constraints of the City's future economic prosperity. We have also conducted a Target Sector Cluster Analysis for Mesquite to summarize the City's industry clusters (both emerging and retracting). The analysis employed customized industry definitions to precisely measure Mesquite's target cluster concentrations and ensure they can guide future business development efforts. This analysis is the essential foundation for supporting all future business attraction, expansion efforts, foreign direct investment, and incentives, as well as helping to shape a narrative that resonates with new enterprises, site selectors, and talent.



## THE FOLLOWING TAKEAWAYS SUMMARIZE OUR LEARNINGS FROM THE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS:

### 1. Mesquite Is A Welcoming Community.

Mesquite is a city that is welcoming and inclusive—an enjoyable place to live, work, visit, and raise a family. Mesquite’s quality of place, location in the DFW metro, and friendly culture are key advantages to leverage in talent attraction, business growth, and destination development.

### 2. A Diverse And Metropolitan Community, Mesquite Represents The Future Of Texas.

Of Mesquite’s 150,000 residents, three in four are people of color—a share that is nearly 77% higher than the U.S. average. One in five Mesquite residents are foreign-born, up 14% in the last five years. This rate is 2.5 times the U.S. average and 50% higher than the state and can serve as a strength that differentiates Mesquite from other Texas cities.

### 3. Mesquite’s Economy Is Highly Reliant On Retail; A Large Number Of Its Residents Are Also Employed In Service-Oriented Jobs.

Mesquite’s largest employment cluster is retail, employing 4,800 workers (nine times the U.S. average). Nearly 38,000 Mesquite residents work in service occupations across the DFW metro area, earning \$34,000 on average (one-third less than overall median incomes). Mesquite needs to diversify job opportunities and improve awareness of education and training resources.





#### 4. Mesquite Has A Robust Industrial Economy—One That Can Be More Advanced And Tech-Enhanced In The Future, Offering Increased Wages.

Food Processing, Furniture, Chemical Products, Distribution and E-Commerce, and Production Technology collectively employ more than 5,000 workers. In the future, the industrial sector will see an infusion of technology/innovation, automating some jobs but upgrading many. Mesquite will need to facilitate innovative workforce training and prepare to attract new industries.

#### 5. “Not All Jobs Are Created Equal” Is An Important Guiding Principle For Mesquite’s Future Economic Development Efforts.

Mesquite’s community realizes that all jobs aren’t equal. Looking to the future, the City can use its support initiatives and incentives to build a hub of major employers by targeting industries that offer a higher living wage and higher quality jobs.

#### 6. Mesquite Has A Blossoming Entrepreneurial Community Tied To Its Culture: Food, Commercial Markets, And More.

Nine in 10 businesses in Mesquite are small businesses (fewer than 20 employees). With targeted investments—especially for adaptable commercial facilities—technical training, and culturally specific resources, Mesquite can be an entrepreneurial hub in North Texas—a place where anyone can start and scale a business.



## 7. Mesquite Is Primed To Be A Destination.

Mesquite—with 70 community-centered parks, the rodeo arena, a top-notch concert hall, and a revitalizing downtown—has a rich heritage to build upon. The City needs to add entertainment options that attract young professionals to the workforce, tourists to the local economy, and new families to grow the Texas-style culture.

## 8. Mesquite Needs Housing Diversity To Attract And Retain Young Professionals.

There is a budding population of young professionals and career-trained local students concerned about the options for moving to and staying in the City. Mesquite needs to attract a talented workforce as well as retain homegrown community members rather than lose them to other cities that have built diverse and appealing housing options.

## 9. Mesquite's Economic Development Marketing Needs To Improve.

Among its peers, Mesquite ranks near the bottom of city “self-promotion.” What Mesquite has to offer far exceeds market perception. A significant element of economic development is community promotion to various targeted audiences. Mesquite needs to strategically tell its story to the world.







## **MESQUITE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY HAS FIVE GOALS:**

### **1. Quality Jobs For The Future.**

We will attract quality jobs and investment to grow Mesquite's economy and to foster shared prosperity.

### **2. Born And Raised In Mesquite.**

We will grow our diverse small businesses, positioning Mesquite as a premier entrepreneurial community in North Texas.

### **3. Upskilling For Tomorrow.**

We will build a robust skilled workforce to power Mesquite's future.

### **4. A Unique North Texas Destination.**

We will transform Mesquite into a destination that attracts diverse families, talented young professionals, and visitors of all walks of life.

### **5. Intentional, Authentic Storytelling.**

We will promote Mesquite's economic opportunity story.



# Discovery & Engagement





Decision making in the modern world is driven by data. Statistical analysis offers the most objective, informed way to analyze a situation and project the impact of different courses of action. This is certainly true for community economic development. Decision makers in both the public and private sectors rely on data to make decisions. Businesses leverage numbers from federal, state, and local government agencies to decide where to invest their resources. From simple population facts to more sophisticated surveys of household expenditures, data is the best way for companies to forecast revenues and costs in a variety of scenarios. These projections ultimately drive all major business decisions.

As such, a strong economic development strategy is grounded in extensive research that helps City leaders confirm community facts and dispel biases, identify opportunities, allocate resources, and recruit the right businesses to contribute to the city's long-term sustainable economic growth.

The Economic Development Strategic Plan for the City of Mesquite is data-driven, sector-focused and leveraged by deep input and inclusive engagement from a diverse, multicultural group of stakeholders. The sections below present our findings from the Demographic and Economic Analysis and the Stakeholder Engagement phases.



## Demographic and Economic Analysis

To support the creation of Mesquite's Economic Development Strategic Plan, Resonance performed a comprehensive demographic and economic assessment that consisted of two main components:

- Competitive Benchmarking Assessment
- Target Cluster Analysis

We learned that Mesquite, the "Rodeo Capital of Texas," is a diverse community with attractive livability assets. Recognized as "Tree City USA" thanks to its more than 70 parks, Mesquite offers its residents an affordability advantage and good quality of life in close proximity to Dallas. Notable strengths in manufacturing include the fast-growing and emerging Furniture cluster. The City's income inequality is low, and its standards of living are improving, with median household incomes growing faster than the national average. Promoting these strengths with placemaking efforts will put Mesquite on the map as an attractive place for young professionals.





The key conclusions of each of the evaluations conducted is presented below.

## COMPETITIVE BENCHMARKING ASSESSMENT

The Competitive Benchmarking Assessment synthesized the demographic and economic trends impacting the city. The analysis compared Mesquite to 15 of its peer communities (both as a city and as a metro area) across six categories: Economic Vitality, Innovation, Talent, Diversity, Equity, and Quality of Place. This part of the research included data for more than 50 metrics and grouped them into key categories that presented a holistic view of the City's comparative advantages. The following are the learnings from this assessment:

- **MESQUITE IS DIVERSE.**

Three in four Mesquite residents are non-White. The share of non-White residents is 77% higher than the national average.

- **MESQUITE IS ATTRACTING IMMIGRANT TALENT.**

The population of foreign-born individuals has increased by 14% in the last five years. This rate is 2.5 times the national average.

- **MESQUITE HAS A STRONG WORKING/PRODUCTION CLASS.**

Almost 23,000 Mesquite residents are employed in working-class occupations, a number that grew by 17% in the last five years. The share of employment in this class is 37% higher than the national average, and growth is almost two times the national average.



- **MESQUITE HAS LOW EARNINGS.**

Median earnings (\$32,000) are \$4,300 less than the national average and \$3,000 less than the state average.

- **MESQUITE'S HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ARE INCREASING.**

Mesquite's median household income has grown by 22% in the last five years. This rate is 9% higher than the national average. Poverty decreased from 15% to 12% in the last five years.

- **MESQUITE IS EQUITABLE.**

The gender wage gap (\$5,000) is half the national average, and the City ranks second among benchmarks for income equality.

- **MESQUITE PROVIDES A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE.**

The City has desirable cultural and recreational amenities but needs more effort to promote its quality of life.



## TARGET CLUSTER ANALYSIS

The Target Cluster Analysis acts as the primary and essential foundation for supporting all future business attraction, expansion efforts, foreign direct investment, and incentives and for helping to shape a narrative that resonates with new enterprises, site selectors, and talent.

In light of the calls for equity and social justice over the last 18 months, our target cluster analysis assessed traded clusters from the lens of equity and resilience—in addition to competitiveness—as opposed to an evaluation that relies solely on an economic growth focus. It also focused on traded (as opposed to local) clusters since they tend to have higher wages and higher levels of innovation, in addition to being more resilient and durable. The following are the key target clusters for Mesquite:

- **FOOD PROCESSING AND MANUFACTURING.**

The Food Processing and Manufacturing cluster is the strongest in terms of competitive advantage. The share of employment in this sector is 17 times the national average. It is also the largest employer of people of color, where 70% of the workforce are non-White workers. Growth in this cluster is also largely attributed to the unique competitive advantage of Mesquite.

- **FURNITURE.**

The Furniture cluster is competitive and has the highest growth rate, growing by 349% in the last five years. It has the second-highest share of Hispanic employees (37%) and the second-lowest share of jobs at risk of automation (41%).

- **CHEMICAL PRODUCTS.**

The Chemical Products cluster is fourth in terms of competitive advantage, employing a share that is 2.5 times the national average. It is also the second-most-productive cluster in terms of Gross Regional Product (GRP) per worker and has the highest share of Black workers (27%).

- **DISTRIBUTION AND E-COMMERCE.**

The Distribution and E-Commerce cluster has the second-fastest growth among all clusters: 67% in the last five years. It is the second-largest employer, employing more than 2,400 workers, and the second-largest contributor to the economy in terms of GRP, generating \$204 million in 2021.

- **PRODUCTION TECHNOLOGY.**

The Production Technology cluster is not competitive except for process furnace and oven manufacturing. It has the third-highest growth rate (64%) as a result of a unique competitive advantage of Mesquite. It also has the highest share of Hispanic employees (40%), and the second-highest share of employees with a bachelor's degree (25%).

- **CREATIVE SERVICES.**

The Creative Services cluster is not competitive except for two key industries: sound recording and graphic design. It is the most productive cluster in terms of GRP per worker, offers the highest earnings (\$110,000 per year), is the largest employer of women (53% of the workforce are women), has the most-educated workforce (55%), and has the lowest share of jobs at risk of automation (17%).

# Stakeholder Engagement

Our team performed targeted outreach to key stakeholders to gather input on strategic priorities, develop a broad sense of plan ownership and collaboration, and create advocates for the plan's goals. Discussions addressed an array of issues: growing an entrepreneurial ecosystem, promoting the City's quality of place, engaging local anchor institutions to drive development, positioning Mesquite as an ideal place for young professionals, and more. We also conducted two surveys—one for residents, and one for businesses. Both surveys were widely distributed with the help of the City's Economic Development Department.

The Stakeholder Engagement complemented the research and provided thoughtful guidance in the development of the Economic Development Strategic Plan. Some of the key conclusions are presented below.

## ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS

More than 100 Mesquite residents, business owners, elected officials, economic development partners, regional stakeholders, and others participated in a series of roundtable discussions.

From these discussions, the following emerged as key themes and takeaways and have helped to build the Economic Development Strategic Plan:

- **THE FRIENDLIEST CITY IN TEXAS.**

The birthplace of world-famous rodeo, the City of Mesquite has a vibrant and diverse community that fosters authentic experiences that attract visitors and locals alike. Residents celebrate being a city that is welcoming, inclusive, and an enjoyable place to raise a family. Mesquite's quality of place, proximity to Dallas, and friendly culture is essential for tourism, attracting and retaining talent, and encouraging intentional economic development.





- **RESILIENCE, REVIVAL, AND READINESS.**

Historically a manufacturing region in a highly accessible geographic area, Mesquite is gradually repositioning itself as a high-opportunity place for major employers across industrial and soft tech industries. Workforce partners are aligning STEM education and training to meet the demands of the local manufacturing cluster—while local economic development leaders prepare the city to attract values-aligned investments to build a strong and diversified education to workforce pipeline.

- **UPWARD MOBILITY FOR THE UNDEREMPLOYED.**

Mesquite's community is embracing the understanding that all jobs aren't equal. There is an acute focus on creating a hub of major employers that offer a living wage and higher quality jobs to ensure Mesquite's workforce has a chance at achieving upward economic mobility. With more strategic alignment between education and industry, Mesquite's workforce will be better prepared for industry shifts and innovation, and their contribution to the economy will be larger and more sustainable.

- **ESTABLISHING WORKFORCE TRAINING.**

Leadership from manufacturing and furniture clusters struggle to find local talent for entry-level and middle management jobs. To improve and strengthen Mesquite's workforce pipeline, the local school district and workforce development practitioners have established workforce training programs to ensure students have exposure to trade jobs, especially within the advanced manufacturing industry. Greater alignment between industry cluster leadership and educational institutions will be important to ensure workforce training curriculum meets current and future industry demands.

- **ENCOURAGING INNOVATION.**

With the rise of automation and robotics, manufacturing and furniture clusters are exploring new technology integration and workforce training to ensure they remain competitive and lead with efficiency. A few local companies have already adopted automation technology and have begun to unsurface new workforce training needs as they redesign jobs and processes. Mesquite has a unique opportunity to co-create an industrial innovation hub that attracts larger advanced manufacturing companies and creates living wage jobs.



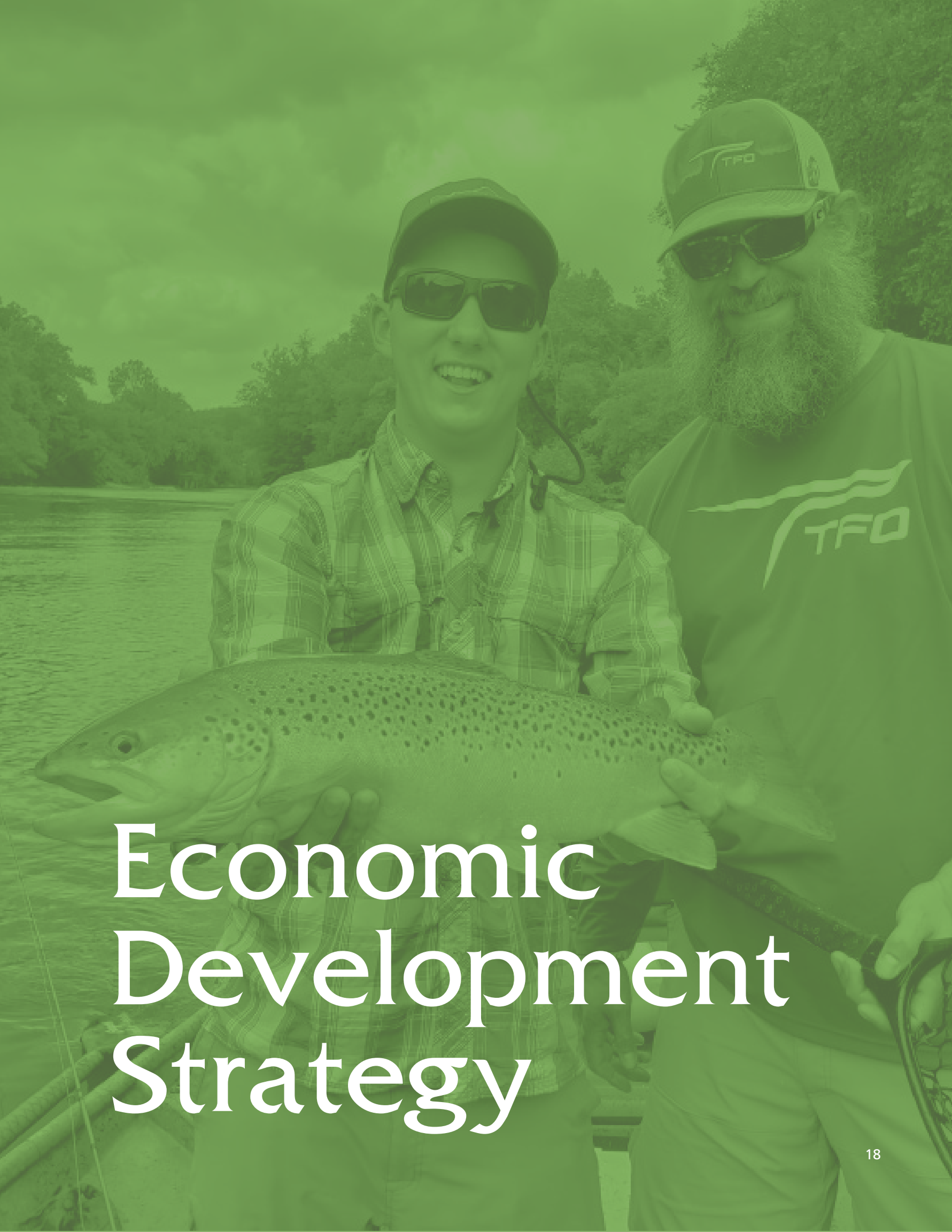
## QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY

The City conducted a quality of life survey that was answered by 868 respondents—93% living in Mesquite. Community members identified the natural environment, restaurants, and shopping as the top three reasons why they have chosen Mesquite as their home. Analyzing results from the survey, we were able to conclude that Mesquite’s strengths are its parks and outdoor activities, while there exists opportunities in further developing the entrepreneurship scene and the local arts and cultural scene, as well as the downtown character. Safety, housing affordability, and quality of schooling are also important factors in choosing a place to live, and investments in these areas would improve quality of life in Mesquite.

## BUSINESS SURVEY

The City conducted a business owner survey that was answered by 26 respondents—65% have been operating a business in Mesquite for 11+ years, 23% for less than 5 years, and 12% have had their businesses in operation for 6-10 years. The respondents expressed that the availability and quality of labor are the most challenging factors for doing business in Mesquite. Almost four in 10 (38%) of the respondents think labor support programs—such as employee training, development opportunities, and continuing education programs—are needed to bolster their businesses.





# Economic Development Strategy

## Economic Development Strategy

Ever-changing economic conditions continuously test the resilience of a city's economic development strategy. But while the strategy must be flexible enough to respond to opportunities and challenges as they arise, it cannot be primarily reactive. Instead, the strategy must be anchored by Mesquite's core values and principles, which will ultimately drive long-term economic success.

Advancing its economic development priorities will require strong relationships with both new and existing partners. Key public and private stakeholders must align with the City's vision, values, opportunities, and objectives. Together, they can develop a plan that enables Mesquite to identify and respond to emerging opportunities.

The clearly defined goals, objectives, and tactics of the economic development strategy will position all stakeholders, big and small, to understand their specific roles. Collectively, their actions will come together under the broader strategy to create a prosperous economic future.

The economic development strategy cannot be static. It should be examined annually to identify deficiencies and opportunities resulting from Mesquite's growth and the rapid pace of change in the economy. Further, it should be updated as City leadership changes, to ensure it is in alignment with the mayor's and council's overarching goals.

Using best practices in economic development, the following plan lays out the guiding principles for this analysis. The plan includes five broad goals, supporting each with specific evidence of its importance and key priorities. Appendix D lays out an implementation plan that includes suggested action items, key partners, and metrics.

# Vision

Rooted in tradition,  
Mesquite is a  
welcoming city with  
a Texas heart—boldy  
charting new paths  
and embracing fresh  
ideas to build better  
lives and grow  
prosperity for all.



# Guiding Principles

FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES SERVE AS A FRAMEWORK TO STRUCTURE THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRATEGY:

## 1.

### QUALITY JOBS FIRST

Mesquite will support businesses that create quality, family-supporting jobs in the community.



## 2.

### CLUSTER-DRIVEN

Industry clustering drives the competitiveness and innovation that lead to economic growth. Years of economics research have revealed the importance of building on the strengths of industry clusters to promote economic diversification and growth. Mesquite will focus on its industry strengths to attract investment and create new jobs in the city.

# 3.

## SUPPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Mesquite will support businesses that create quality, family-supporting jobs in the community.



# 4.

## EQUITABLE APPROACH

Mesquite will ensure that all residents and businesses can thrive.



# 5.

## ENGAGING FOR MESQUITE'S FUTURE

Mesquite residents, businesses, investors, and more are eager to support a unified vision for the City's economic future.



# Goals

**MESQUITE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY HAS FIVE GOALS:**



## **QUALITY JOBS FOR THE FUTURE.**

We will attract quality jobs and investment to grow Mesquite's economy and to foster shared prosperity.



## **BORN AND RAISED IN MESQUITE.**

We will grow our diverse small businesses, positioning Mesquite as a premier entrepreneurial community in North Texas.



## **UPSKILLING FOR TOMORROW.**

We will build a robust skilled workforce to power Mesquite's future.



## **A UNIQUE NORTH TEXAS DESTINATION.**

We will transform Mesquite into a destination that attracts diverse families, talented young professionals, and visitors of all walks of life.



## **INTENTIONAL. AUTHENTIC STORYTELLING.**

We will promote Mesquite's economic opportunity story.

The following report describes Mesquite's Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan and includes the Community Competitive Assessment (Appendix A), the Target Cluster Analysis (Appendix B), and the Stakeholder Engagement Summary (Appendix C).





GOAL 1

# Quality Jobs for the Future



## GOAL 1

# We will attract and retain quality jobs and investment to grow Mesquite's economy and to foster shared prosperity.

Even the most successful economic development strategies are not infallible. Few were able to withstand the unprecedented impact of the recent pandemic, which left cities, governments, and businesses scrambling to change course in response. To cushion the blow of such unpredictable events, cities need equitable communities with resilient economies. An economic development strategy that includes diverse, high-growth sectors will enable the City to adapt to ever-changing and unexpected conditions.

Mesquite's established clusters are strong. Collectively, these clusters—Food Processing and Manufacturing, Furniture, Chemical Products, Distribution and E-Commerce, Production Technology, and Creative Services—provide a solid foundation for a resilient economic strategy. Individually, each sector provides jobs across the income and education spectrum, from large employers that anchor the economy to the many small businesses that enliven the community. Sector strategy focuses on not just one firm or subsector but rather on the larger business ecosystem. When businesses of all shapes and sizes are given a place to grow, social equity and upward mobility grow, too. The result is a local economy that is competitive and dynamic.

## THE EVIDENCE

Mesquite's cluster strategy—for expansion as well as retention—should be centered on six sectors: Food Processing and Manufacturing, Furniture, Chemical Products, Distribution and E-Commerce, Production Technology, and Creative Services. These sectors are competitive, allow Mesquite to utilize technology and build on its strengths in Manufacturing, are supported by Mesquite's educational institutions and have shown growth in recent years.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **NEW BUSINESSES BY CLUSTER**—Tracking the number of new businesses in Mesquite by industry cluster
- **EMPLOYMENT BY CLUSTER**—Tracking employment levels by industry cluster
- **SITE SELECTORS ENGAGED**—Counting the numbers of site selectors contacted and engaged
- **NEW DEVELOPMENTS**—Counting the number of new developments in the City
- **ECONOMIC IMPACT**—Tracking the economic impact (revenue, wages, jobs, etc.) of new investments in the City

## STRATEGY

# 1.1

## Grow Mesquite's business retention and expansion program.

To support existing businesses, Mesquite needs a business retention and expansion program that is focused on its strong clusters. It must do this while also attracting new companies, by utilizing a value proposition that illustrates the City's economic competitiveness. Additionally, to better understand its interactions with community businesses, Mesquite should host a series of roundtable discussions—with major existing employers as well as policymakers. All players should come together to establish initiatives and strategies that promote, measure, and reevaluate cluster growth and engagement.

### ACTIONS:

- Continue to expand the efforts of Mesquite's Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) partnership, including business support, events, workforce development, and survey initiatives.
- Conduct a formal business visitation plan for Mesquite's businesses, interviewing at least 24 major employers annually.
- Host bi-annual cluster working groups to identify specific industry needs (starting with one or two clusters in the first year).
- Convene quarterly CEO and entrepreneur breakfast networking sessions.

Partners include BRE Partnership (Dallas College, Mesquite Independent School District (ISD), Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas, Mesquite Chamber of Commerce), and major employers.

## STRATEGY

# 1.2

## Develop a business attraction initiative.

Mesquite's economic strategy must be specific and intentional. Economic development efforts must focus on the investments that are most likely to succeed, in both new business attraction and redevelopment opportunities. This can be done within a framework that specifies target sectors, expands on best practices, and enhances collaboration among City departments and private-sector partners.

### ACTIONS:

- Strengthen internal processes (staffing, information flow, and packaging), regional partner strategy (Dallas Regional Chamber), and state partner strategy (Texas EDC and governor's office) for responding to incoming RFIs.
- Identify annual goals by cluster and market.
- Explore and identify future sites for commercial development along IH-20, Trinity Pointe, and in the ETJ.
- Create cluster industry marketing and attraction materials. Profiles should be made available to regional and state partners in print, presentation, and web/electronic formats.
- Conduct a bi-annual paid qualified lead-generation campaign to generate meetings in key attraction markets and industry sectors/real estate products (retail, commercial, industrial).
- Host appropriate inbound city visits, tours, and trade missions with target companies and investment representatives.
- Participate with the Dallas Regional Chamber, Texas EDC and other partners on sales trips to target regions.

Partners include Dallas Regional Chamber, Texas Economic Development Corporation, Texas Economic Development Council, Governor's Office of Economic Development and Tourism, site selectors, and real estate brokers.

## STRATEGY

# 1.3

## Target small business and retail development throughout Mesquite with a focus on downtown and underserved corridors.

Small businesses contribute to upward mobility and wealth creation for all residents and bring equity to a city. Mesquite's small business presence is solid. Retail establishments make up 18% of the City's businesses, compared to 14% on state and national levels. Arts and entertainment, accommodation, and food service companies represent 10% of the City's businesses, a share that is 4% higher than the state average and 8% higher than the national average.

Mesquite will support its small businesses via networking opportunities, education, and other resources. Placemaking and programming comprise the software that makes a city lovable, ensuring that residents become engaged in their communities. It is a vital component of quality of place.

### ACTIONS:

- Attend trade shows targeting entertainment, hospitality, and retail brands.
- Host small business training, coaching, and mentoring in Mesquite's underserved corridors for diverse retail enterprises: enterprises of color, women-owned and veteran-owned/HUB businesses. (Deliver content and programming in English and Spanish.)
- Formalize, expand, and promote place-based incentive programs for Mesquite's target corridors.
- Promote Mesquite's Façade/Building Improvement Program; expand to corridors outside downtown.

Partners include Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Small Business Administration (SBA), property owners, developers, and brokers.



## STRATEGY

# 1.4

## Enhance the site-selector engagement plan.

Promoting City-partner relations is an important component of a successful economic development strategy and business attraction plan. Mesquite can promote local investment opportunities by developing positive relationships with site selectors—particularly those conducting location searches for knowledge-based companies and global headquarters—who influence which cities will make the shortlist.

### ACTIONS:

- Incorporate site-selector engagement with all targeted market visits and campaigns.
- Partner with the Dallas Regional Chamber, state partners (TxEDC and Governor's Office), and others on site-selector and RFI initiatives.
- Build a target site-selection list and develop bi-annual community outreach.
- Host bi-annual site-selector visits to Mesquite to showcase the City's quality of place, including new commercial and industrial development space.

Partners include Dallas Regional Chamber, Texas Economic Development Corporation, Texas Economic Development Council, and Governor's Office of Economic Development and Tourism.

## STRATEGY

# 1.5

## Create and utilize incentive programs to attract quality jobs and investment.

Promoting, encouraging, and enhancing the creation of jobs and capital investments in the City is critical to Mesquite's economic success. In order to diversify the tax base, the City must foster an entrepreneurial environment—one that creates new opportunities while also retaining existing businesses. Further, it must attract fresh industries that will expand the local business base and create higher-wage jobs. Mesquite must utilize and expand the incentive programs in its target clusters—incentive agreements with Ashley Furniture, Bloomfield Homes, and Elements International are already in place—to encourage job creation and promote overall growth.

### ACTIONS:

- Coordinate Mesquite's financial incentive programs, targeting programs for the highest and best use (i.e., quality job creation and impactful development/redevelopment). Ensure incentives have appropriate job creation and investment goals.
- Deploy statewide incentive programs to support local incentives packages.
- Consider formalizing and expanding place-based incentive policies/programs to support development in underserved commercial corridors.
- Evaluate Mesquite's incentive programs for impact and advise City Council on policy enhancements and outcomes.

Partners include Mesquite Economic Development Advisory (MEDA) Board.

## STRATEGY

# 1.6

## Enhance a systematic real estate services practice.

One of the oldest cities in Dallas County, Mesquite is showing its age, particularly in the north. This part of the City has seen significant development over the years, and existing structures are beginning to wear down. While some of the southern portions of the City are still untapped, Mesquite's overall amount of available land for new development is limited. By enhancing a systematic real estate services practice as part of the economic development strategy, the City can focus on redeveloping and reinvigorating older areas of the City and infilling available areas. This positions Mesquite to take advantage of existing resources, ensure older areas are being maintained, and promote economic development.

### ACTIONS:

- Assemble an advisory committee, including City officials/directors, developers, site-selection consultants, and business leaders, to identify needs and gaps in Mesquite's real estate support services, policies, and approval process.
- Examine the real estate/redevelopment services of peer cities in North Texas, drawing from lessons learned and best practices and understanding in-house expertise and capabilities.
- Serve as a trusted advisor to businesses and investors on new real estate/commercial development and redevelopment transactions.
- Develop a formal real estate service guideline within City government, offering clear direction on policies, approval processes, and resources needs.

Partners include developers (especially those with redevelopment expertise,) real estate professionals, and various City departments.





GOAL 2

# Born and Raised in Mesquite



## GOAL 2

# We will grow our diverse small businesses, positioning Mesquite as a premier entrepreneurial community in North Texas.

Over the last three decades, companies that are less than one year old have created an average of 1.5 million jobs per year. Mesquite is among the communities that are rich with entrepreneurs—many of the City’s largest companies began as a small business, in a backyard garage or as a sketch on the proverbial restaurant napkin. In other cases, university research or the expansion of an existing industry cluster result in traded-sector startups in the community. The people who open these businesses often do so where they live, where they have connections and access to local or regional resources. But startups also have growing pains—limited numbers of workers or inadequate physical space. Mesquite must do all it can to provide these companies with the tools and resources they need to grow and thrive.

### THE EVIDENCE

- Mesquite has a concentration of small businesses: 89% of businesses in Mesquite have fewer than 20 employees. This share is 84% in Texas and 85% on the national level.
- Local entrepreneurs and small business owners reported feeling broad support from the Mesquite community; local residents enjoy and take pride in buying from nearby shops and family-run businesses. Micro and small business owners primarily receive education and technical assistance from Mesquite’s Downtown development program, and are strategically woven into organic entertainment programming like weekly markets, pop-up events, and annual festivals. Small businesses would benefit from expanded focus across city commercial neighborhoods, as well as paid and organic advertising, facilitated by the City of Mesquite or Visit Mesquite, to increase awareness and deepen community support and investment.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **NEW BUSINESS FORMATION**—Tracking the number of new businesses in Mesquite by location and background
- **SMALL BUSINESSES SUPPORTED**—Counting the number of small businesses promoted and supported by the City
- **INVESTMENTS**—Tracking the investment dollars made in the City
- **LOANS GRANTED**—Tracking the loan dollars granted to businesses
- **SUSTAINED NEW BUSINESSES**—Tracking the longevity and growth of new businesses

## STRATEGY

# 2.1

## Develop a customer-oriented business service system within City government.

Although we often talk about people in the city as “citizens” or “residents,” they are, in fact, customers. As such, the City of Mesquite has to deliver the best customer service to its small businesses in order to support them and encourage entrepreneurship, creating a more business-friendly city.

### ACTIONS:

- Evaluate and improve the small business journey/pathway through City of Mesquite services: economic/business development, permitting/development, health/fire inspections, and more.
- Refine Mesquite’s “How to Open a Business” guide; make it available in multiple languages and formats (print/electronic).
- Host an annual workshop with City staff to refine and evaluate the process.
- Offer monthly “How to Open a Business” programs in Mesquite for prospective business owners.

Partners include Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Small Business Administration (SBA), Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, and various City departments.

## STRATEGY

# 2.2

## Provide Mesquite small businesses with technical training and networking opportunities.

Local governments can better meet the needs of small businesses by opening the lines of communication. City leaders must provide access to information that is designed to improve the capacity of business owners. By connecting entrepreneurs to mentors and training opportunities, Mesquite can create a supportive ecosystem where small businesses can thrive.

### ACTIONS:

- Host BRE's annual Entrepreneurs Day, offering training, networking, and a celebration of success.
- Support and promote the small business resources and trainings offered by the BRE Partnership and various economic development partners.
- Expand reach of programming to communities/entrepreneurs of color. (Ensure resources are available in Spanish.)
- Offer 1-1 small business coaching (business plans, marketing plans, and succession plans) to downtown businesses. With additional resources, scale to other commercial neighborhoods.
- Utilize farmer's markets to target outreach to Mesquite's micro businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Explore the creation of community-based support organizations for entrepreneurs.

Partners include BRE Partnership, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Small Business Administration (SBA), Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, and various City departments.



## STRATEGY

# 2.3

## Establish a plan to create and offer adaptable commercial facilities.

The concept of adaptive facilities—created by transforming shopping malls to mixed-used spaces, converting warehouses to breweries, or using distribution centers for indoor agriculture, for example—is becoming a key factor in the real estate ecosystem. Existing but vacant properties can be transformed for entirely new uses, giving a fresh lease on life to neighborhoods and boosting the local economy.

### ACTIONS:

- Cultivate leads and create inventory documents for downtown and other commercial neighborhood spaces to support pop-up retail.
- Explore the feasibility of a maker space and/or entrepreneur business center in Mesquite, providing best practices, business models, and needed resources.
- Explore the feasibility of commercial shared kitchens in Mesquite, providing best practices in other cities, business models, and needed resources.

Partners include property owners, developers, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Small Business Administration (SBA), and various City departments.



## STRATEGY

# 2.4

## Develop a community culture of support for local small businesses.

Without “buy local” campaigns, many businesses would not have survived the pandemic. Mesquite can build on this with a citywide “buy local” initiative that encourages residents to support retail establishments, restaurants, and other businesses in their community. Beyond the economic benefits, such an initiative will invigorate the City’s brand and instill an even greater sense of local pride.

### ACTIONS:

- Convene a task force of Mesquite businesses to evaluate the promotional efforts for buying locally.
- Evaluate buy local campaigns from other communities, taking lessons learned and applying them to Mesquite.
- Develop a systematic, measurable approach/plan that can be sustained and monitored over time.

Partners include various City departments, Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, and local businesses.

## STRATEGY

# 2.5

## Celebrate Mesquite's entrepreneurial success stories.

A thriving community celebrates its own. Mesquite, along with its economic development partners, must promote local businesses of all shapes and sizes, shouting their diversity and successes from the rooftops. In doing so, the City encourages a new array of enterprises and entrepreneurs to make Mesquite a place where they want to do business.

### ACTIONS:

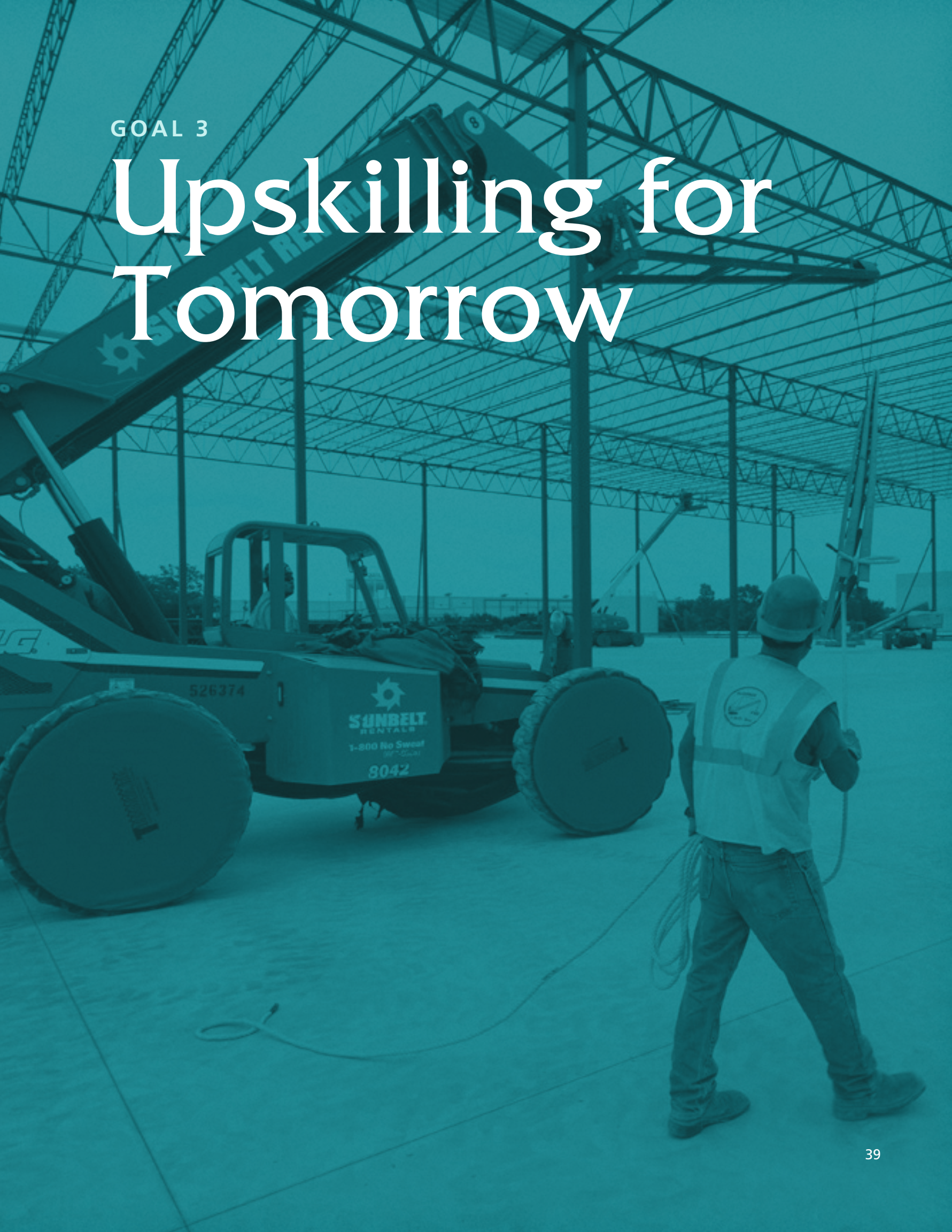
- Develop—in partnership with Downtown Mesquite, the Mesquite Chamber of Commerce and others—a systematic approach to identify diverse enterprises and startups in Mesquite.
- Promote Mesquite's successes across multiple communication platforms: websites, blogs, social media, and direct emails.

Partners include local businesses, BRE Partnership, Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, and various City departments.



GOAL 3

# Upskilling for Tomorrow





## GOAL 3

# We will build a robust skilled workforce to power Mesquite's future.

A company's location decision is highly reliant on talent. A deep well of highly skilled workers creates continuous cycles of new business formation and attraction, which in turn brings in still more talented workers. The growing move toward remote and hybrid work means that white-collar professionals have options when choosing where to locate. They're looking for urban amenities and quality of place, and Mesquite must highlight its unique strengths to attract these workers. Also essential to talent development is the collaboration between government and the private sector—working together, they can develop a strategy to attract or train precisely the types of workers the local economy needs.

## THE EVIDENCE

- The share of Mesquite residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is 46% lower than the national average, and educational attainment is experiencing very slow growth. While more than half of the city's population has some college education, the largest group—based on highest level of education—is high school graduates at 30%. The share of White and Black residents with a bachelor's degree or higher is roughly comparable (22% and 19%, respectively), but the share of Hispanic residents is only 10%.
- The share of employment in working-class occupations is 37% higher than the national average and growing at a rate almost double that of the national average. Working-class jobs employ around 23,000 Mesquite residents. More residents are employed in service-class occupations (38,000), but the number of these jobs has declined by more than 12% over the last five years.
- Mesquite is supported by Dallas College, Mesquite Independent School District (ISD), Workforce Solutions Greater Dallas, and other educational/training institutions. To improve and strengthen Mesquite's workforce pipeline, the local school district and workforce development practitioners have established workforce training programs to ensure that students have exposure to trade jobs, especially within key industry clusters.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**—Measuring Mesquite's higher-educated workforce
- **INDIVIDUAL INCOMES**—Tracking the increase in individual incomes, especially among men versus women, and monitoring the gender wage gap
- **SHARE OF RESIDENTS 25-34 YEARS OF AGE**—Tracking the growth in attracting young talent



## STRATEGY

# 3.1

## Work with area partners to grow career pathways and training in Advanced Manufacturing, Technology, Creative Services, Entrepreneurship, and Healthcare.

As it develops skills and training programs for the City, Mesquite must focus on the needs of its target clusters. Because these target industries are technical, close collaboration between public- and private-sector partners is needed to align worker training with the precise needs of local companies. Dallas College will be a key partner in this effort.

### ACTIONS:

- Through the BRE Partnership, engage Mesquite's workforce development organizations and private-sector employers quarterly to discuss needed training programs.
- Conduct a survey to uncover training gaps in Mesquite, especially those supporting the growth of the City's traded sector and innovation economy.
- Explore the creation, sourcing, and promotion of new training offerings tied to Mesquite's target clusters: certificates, badging, and executive education.
- Evaluate Mesquite's childcare ecosystem to better understand gaps and needs.

Partners include major employers, BRE Partnership, Mesquite and Forney ISD, Dallas College and Trinity Valley Community College, and other higher-ed and training centers.

## STRATEGY

# 3.2

## Convene a network of local manufacturing mentors.

Experience is the best teacher. A formal Manufacturing mentoring program will help connect the younger generation with experienced professionals in the Manufacturing sector. These connections will facilitate the passing on of industry knowledge and promote guidance on career goals and aspirations. In a sector where technology is thriving and always evolving—and in a city where Manufacturing remains a dominant sector—it's important to attract the younger generation to this high-growth industry to ensure a strong and continuous workforce pipeline.

### ACTIONS:

- Convene an advisory committee of Mesquite's manufacturing employers to understand talent and workforce needs.
- Develop—with guidance from the advisory committee and the support of workforce partners like Dallas College and Vanguard High School—a pilot mentoring initiative. Test the program with one or two manufacturing employers.
- Scale, with appropriate funding, the programs to other manufacturing companies in Mesquite (targeting City residents and high school students).

Partners include BRE Partnership and major Manufacturing employers.

## STRATEGY

# 3.3

## Create and promote a Mesquite Young Professionals initiative.

Mesquite has what young professionals want: a small-town vibe, location advantage, and relative affordability within the Dallas Metroplex. It's time to promote these desirable assets beyond the City in an effort to appeal to and attract this key population to the Mesquite community.

### ACTIONS:

- Convene a working group of young professionals to shape the future of Mesquite's talent attraction and networking initiatives.
- Support and activate recommendations from the working group, including hosting networking functions, creating volunteering opportunities, and more.
- Explore, in concert with Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, the design of a Mesquite "Top 20 under 40" program initiative.
- Actively promote the successes of young professionals in Mesquite.

Partners include Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, Dallas College and Trinity Valley Community College.



## STRATEGY

# 3.4

## Invest in coworking spaces to support remote work.

Remote and hybrid work routines are more than just a passing trend. Mesquite can anticipate that 25% of its workforce will choose to work remotely, while another 25% will be given the option to do so. This presents an opportunity for the City to leverage its desirable amenities and quality of place to attract new and retain existing talent. As cities compete for talent, Mesquite's economic development strategy must include mechanisms to increase social capitalism along with a way for incoming and existing talent to connect with one another.

### ACTIONS:

- Convene a community advisory group to help shape Mesquite's efforts to support remote work.
- Administer a survey to understand the needs and wants of Mesquite's remote workers.
- Develop—in partnership with Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Mesquite, and others—a networking group for remote workers.
- Ensure that the needs of Mesquite's remote workers are considered in the continued development and redevelopment efforts in the City, advocating for third spaces and co-working venues.

Partners include Dallas College and Trinity Valley Community College, Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, and various City departments.

GOAL 4

# A Unique North Texas Destination

## GOAL 4

We will transform Mesquite into a destination that attracts diverse families, talented young professionals, and visitors of all walks of life.

Tourism is an important part of Mesquite's economy. There are the direct impacts of visitor spending at hotels, restaurants, and other businesses. The less-obvious benefit of tourism traffic is the opportunity for the City to present itself to prospective residents and entrepreneurs: positive tourism experiences can attract both businesses and talent to Mesquite. Tourism also generates a strong sense of community among existing residents, which in turn enhances the City's brand. Mesquite can ramp up tourist traffic by enhancing the promotion of its proximity to Dallas and other major population centers.

### THE EVIDENCE

- Mesquite has a range of amenities for residents and visitors to enjoy: Town East Mall, Market East Shopping Center, AMC Theater, Super Target, Celebration Station, Mesquite Golf Club, Mesquite Arts Center, Mesquite Symphony Orchestra, and Mesquite Community Theater.
- A certified Tree City USA, Mesquite boasts 70+ parks.
- Mesquite has more than four miles of walking trails and 12 recreation centers.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **ANNUAL VISITORS**—Measuring Mesquite's efforts in attracting more visitors
- **ANNUAL VISITOR SPENDING**—Measuring the economic impact of tourism
- **POPULATION GROWTH**—Tracking the growth of Mesquite residents by race and ethnicity
- **PLACEMAKING EVENTS**—Counting the number of events hosted in downtown and other neighborhoods
- **NUMBER OF REAL ESTATE AND REDEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND DOLLARS**—Tracking the number of new projects and the size of investments
- **NEW ENTERTAINMENT AND HOSPITALITY INVESTMENTSS**—Tracking investment dollars and number of projects in entertainment and hospitality



## STRATEGY

# 4.1

## Attract an array of entertainment and hospitality offerings.

Quality of life and location decisions are intricately connected. Talent can choose where they want to live and work and increasingly seek out amenity-rich communities that are vibrant, attractive, safe, and accessible. The continuous cycle further enriches the location: Businesses attract talented workers who seek quality places, and quality places attract new businesses, jobs, and residents. Unsurprisingly, when residents have a strong attachment to a place, the GDP growth of that place exceeds the national average.

### ACTIONS:

- Attend national trade shows targeting entertainment, hospitality, and retail brands.
- Annually update Mesquite's investment portfolio/pitch for entertainment and hospitality brands.
- Continue to develop relationships with site selectors who represent entertainment and hospitality enterprises and brands.
- Implement the strategies outlined in the Mesquite Hotel Study.
- Target and support real estate development/new construction and redevelopment that support spaces and venues for entertainment and hospitality businesses.

Partners include real estate developers, site selectors, and various City departments.

## STRATEGY

# 4.2

## Devise a city-wide placemaking and programming strategy.

The longstanding mantra “location, location, location” has evolved to include the importance of “quality of place.” Mesquite is competing with cities around the world for skilled workers, entrepreneurs, and investors. Promoting its robust amenities and rich quality of life positions the City as a place that’s ripe not only for new talent, new businesses, and new investment but also one that provides a supportive environment in which existing businesses can grow and expand.

### ACTIONS:

- Catalog underutilized spaces throughout Downtown Mesquite and other targeted commercial neighborhoods/corridors, understanding ownership, potential uses, and limitations.
- Create a systematic placemaking program that includes selection criteria, funding plans, and marketing approaches.
- Pilot a placemaking program, evaluate its impact, and scale accordingly.
- Activate additional placemaking strategies throughout Mesquite including wayfinding and signage.

Partners include Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, MEDA board, and various City departments.

## STRATEGY

# 4.3

## Conduct a housing study to better understand needs and uses.

A housing study will provide City staff, elected officials, and the community a better understanding of the housing market, housing challenges, and current and future unmet needs. It is intended to provide information on existing housing conditions and identify strategies to advance the future of housing in the community. It should consider ways to manage change and balance community needs—while embracing Mesquite’s story, history, and heritage—to ensure that, moving forward, there are sustainable housing opportunities for everyone.

### ACTIONS:

- Assemble a diverse steering committee—City officials, residents, developers, and business and community leaders—to help guide the City’s housing study.
- Explore past housing studies of peer communities in an effort to devise an effective RFP.
- Hire a firm to evaluate the City’s housing opportunities and challenges and to make recommendations on future initiatives and programs.

Partners include various City departments and community members.



## STRATEGY

# 4.4

## Evaluate the uses and zoning ordinances/overlays of downtown, special districts, and underserved corridors in Mesquite.

Zoning is a fundamental element in successfully creating jobs and attracting new economic investment. Zoning affects the location of manufacturing activity, commercial uses, residential areas, population density, and polluting facilities. Evaluating zoning ordinances/overlays will help the City better understand market conditions, and it will also help business owners understand how zoning could encourage entrepreneurship in Mesquite.

### ACTIONS:

- Convene a task force of business owners, City officials, residents, developers, and Planning representatives to systematically evaluate zoning throughout Mesquite.
- Evaluate and address the overlay challenges that prevent redevelopment and investment.
- Develop and provide systematic expertise within the City to support adaptive reuse and flexibility in redevelopment.
- Promote user-friendly maps to explain zoning and update property availability for Downtown Mesquite and other commercial corridors.

Partners include various City departments and real estate stakeholders.

## STRATEGY

# 4.5

## Leverage the Mesquite Downtown Visitors Center.

Nearly half of the world's international travel takes place in cities. Cities are hubs of economic activity that drive growth and innovation. And as they grow, cities attract still more new talent and residents who want to live and do business there. Developing a formal strategy to attract visitors to Mesquite will allow the City to showcase its quality of life to grow not only its tourism but also its talent and business bases.

### ACTIONS:

- Develop a strategy for the Mesquite Visitor Center that positions it as a community, visitor and business collaboration hub.

Partners include Mesquite Chamber of Commerce, destination attraction businesses, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), Small Business Administration (SBA), and various City departments.



GOAL 5

# Intentional, Authentic Storytelling



## GOAL 5

# We will promote Mesquite's economic opportunity story.

Mesquite has a wonderful story to tell. As part of its economic development strategy, the City can create a brand identity (beyond the logo and tagline) that attracts businesses and capital investment, new talent, and prospective residents. Competing with other cities in the Dallas Metroplex and North Texas region, Mesquite must make an elevated effort to position itself as a more desirable place to live, work, invest, and grow.

### THE EVIDENCE

- Branding helps communities, cities, and destinations distill and articulate their unique strategic positioning and differentiating characteristics. A strong brand identity will help Mesquite compete in the global marketplace. Promoting unique characteristics is important to attracting investment, people, and capital to the City.
- A well-articulated place-branding strategy strengthens a community's sense of place because it aligns with the language and messages created for and by businesses, communities, and visitors.
- In its natural environment and outdoor activities, Mesquite has important strengths to promote; however, its promotional efforts on social media pale in comparison to peer cities.

The following metrics should be tracked to assess impact:

- **UNIQUE VISITORS**—Measuring interest in Mesquite's websites
- **SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT**—Tracking interest in Mesquite as a destination to live, work, and visit
- **VISITORS**—Counting the number of visitors to Mesquite

## STRATEGY

# 5.1

## Develop marketing campaigns to support Mesquite's economic development.

What is Mesquite's economic development value proposition for investment, talent attraction, and resident engagement? Do potential residents, talent, investors, and businesses understand why they should choose Mesquite? A marketing campaign based on the City's "Real. Texas. Flavor." messaging will play up Mesquite's unique attributes and differentiate the City from its peers. The campaign should be deployed via multiple platforms with messages that target each specific audience.

### ACTIONS:

- Refresh Mesquite's economic development marketing campaign/pitch; reflect updates on website and social media sites.
- Create cluster industry marketing and attraction materials for Mesquite's target sectors. Profiles should be made available in print, presentation, and web/electronic formats. Ensure economic development partners have updated materials.
- Expand and execute quarterly email newsletters highlighting the City's wins to Mesquite's business, economic development, and community partners and elected officials.
- Create an annual report that celebrates Mesquite's economic development successes.

Partners include various City departments and BRE partnership, real estate and investment stakeholders.



## STRATEGY

# 5.2

## Continue to invest in campaigns to attract visitors to Mesquite.

The availability of airlines, travel websites, travel agents, and transport options have made getting around easier than ever and given travelers a world of destination options. This means that cities, towns, and regions are competing with one another to attract similar people with similar interests. An enhanced and expanded City marketing strategy will enable Mesquite to spotlight the unique qualities and amenities that make it preferable to other destinations. The increased activity around the City's hotels, restaurants, and retail businesses will help boost the local economy.

### ACTIONS:

- Support investments to market Mesquite, including coordination of marketing campaigns in targeted destination development and site-selection publications and social media efforts with an enhanced digital focus.
- Annually refresh Mesquite's marketing collateral, both digital and print, to reflect the changing dynamics in the City's economy.

Partners include various City departments.



## STRATEGY

# 5.3

## Promote a culture of community support for social media experiences.

Communities are incubators of inspiration because they encourage members to share their own stories, which can create connections and inspire others to action. By encouraging the community to share on social media platforms, Mesquite will showcase the amenities and quality of life it offers and will raise awareness for the “Mesquite brand.”

### ACTIONS:

- Activate plan to engage community members and Ambassadors to update destination review sites and social media such as: TripAdvisor, Yelp, Instagram, and Facebook.
- Host a Mesquite Ambassadors “training” workshop for Mesquite businesses and engaged community members on tactics for promoting and supporting Mesquite via social media and more.
- Partner with Mesquite CVB to develop tourism and destination development features for blog posts, social media, and direct communications.
- Annually commission updated photography and video of Mesquite’s destination assets for promotional use.

Partners include various City departments and community members.

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**MESQUITE**  
T E X A S®  
Real. Texas. Business.