

# Vernon, TX

## Community and Economic Development Initiative



Prepared For:  
Business Development Corporation of Vernon  
1614 Main Street  
Vernon, TX 76385  
Contact: Sean Stockard

May 2, 2008

TEXAS ENGINEERING EXTENSION SERVICE  
A Member of The Texas A&M University System





# VERNON - COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Background

In April 2007, Sean Stockard contacted the Technology and Economic Development Division (TEDD) of the Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEX) and expressed interest in some of the technical assistance services featured in TEDD's e-mail newsletter, *ED-Central*, for the city of Vernon, Texas. After an initial consultation with TEEX staff, Mr. Stockard concluded that the baseline study and community development assessment would best meet the collective goals of economic development in Vernon. A Technical Assistance Proposal formalized his request, identifying the project's two main objectives:

1. Identify Vernon's best developmental opportunities for economic, community and tourism prosperity.
2. Educate Vernon's elected leadership about emerging trends and opportunities in economic and tourism development and rally the leadership around a united vision for enhancing prosperity in Vernon.

## Methodology

Immediately upon approval, TEEX began the first project phase: the baseline study. The Baseline Conditions Report, submitted to the Business Development Corporation of Vernon in March 2008, provides a community snapshot of Vernon, showing where it stands economically through four distinct components: demographics, income statistics, industrial profile, and an audit of infrastructure, financial vitality and other characteristics. The baseline study took eight weeks to complete and provided a foundation from which to build an economic development plan and industrial recruitment strategy.

Phase two, the community development assessment, sought to identify economic opportunities in Vernon in order to provide solutions through a community development program formulated specifically to enhance and accelerate Vernon's economic, community and tourism development efforts.

Toward this end, TEEX facilitated a series of workshops, public meetings and planning sessions in Vernon, Texas and in College Station, Texas, on January 31, 2008, March 6-7, 2008, and April 4, 2008. A list of participants can be seen in [Appendix A](#). Through these workshops, TEEX gained significant insight into the dreams, aspirations, concerns and fears of the people of Vernon regarding economic development, tourism, community development and lifestyle preservation in Vernon. The workshops afforded TEEX the opportunity to engage some 40 representatives of the community of Vernon in meaningful discussion of the specific issues facing the community, as well as prospective solutions to identified challenges.

Workshop participants were very forthcoming with their vision for the community and through the course of both community workshops showed relative solidarity in that vision. To ensure information collected through the workshops was indeed reflective of the perspectives of Vernon's stakeholder groups, TEEX collected feedback from workshop participants who agreed to represent stakeholder groups in providing a ranking of the various functions and attributes of the emerging development strategy. Subsequently, TEEX conducted a final workshop and master plan definition session, with Vernon representatives Sean Stockard, Ed Garnett, Greg Tyra, and Gerald Thiele, and TEEX representatives Chad Burke, Liz Ylitalo and Deborah Webb. The group used the feedback results to capture and assess the needs and wants of the intended direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Vernon Economic and Community Development Workshop and Assessment Project.

## Summary of Findings

In summary, it is clear from both the workshops and the surveys that Vernon has the leadership, vision and will to promote itself, leverage its strong western heritage and create a prosperous economy while preserving its sense of community and quality of life. The community's resolve is reflected not only in the insightful and impassioned perspectives provided during the workshops, but also in their individual efforts. Vernon has proactively sought

professional assistance to identify and assess the community's opportunities for economic improvement and appears enthusiastic in the effort to achieve the objectives identified in the workshops and surveys. Overall, community representatives showed solidarity in the following visions for the city of Vernon:

- Implement and support a downtown/Main Street redevelopment program;
- Develop and promote tourism, building on existing heritage assets and local events;
- Create a better quality of life to attract and retain citizens and an improved quality workforce;
- Improve the relationship between local government and community citizens.

To achieve these objectives and more, TEEEX has identified 9 high-priority functions that we consider critical to the success and sustainability of a robust Economic and Community Development Initiative for Vernon.

1. Main Street Program and Downtown Revitalization
2. Local Government and Community Interaction
3. Western Heritage & Coordinated Tourism Efforts
4. Wilbarger Auditorium Optimization
5. Workforce Attraction and Development
6. Covered Events Center
7. Youth Activities
8. Beautification
9. Attract New Industry - Retirement Community

The complete findings and recommendations of this effort are presented in this report as project deliverables in the form of a Resulting Workshop Matrix with priority rankings and a Rankings Map. In addition to these standard deliverables, we have included in this report information regarding the four main action areas we consider critical for the successful implementation of a robust Economic Development Initiative for Vernon, all which are tied together by a crucial component of the overarching recommendations for Vernon: Improved quality of life:

1. Establish and fill recommended key positions
  - Main Street/Downtown Program Director
  - Tourism Director
  - Auditorium Facilities Director
  - Event Center Professional Management/Staff
2. Initiate Texas Main Street program and comprehensive development strategy for downtown
3. Coordinate a community branding and tourism strategy between the city, county, chamber and civic organizations in order to capitalize on Vernon's western heritage
4. Initiate "Leadership Vernon" program and other efforts to engage citizens and open communication between elected leadership and citizens

This report includes an explanation of the stated project deliverables, as well as further discussion of findings and recommendations such that Vernon should, with the conclusion of this project, be equipped with the foundation necessary to implement its plan. TEEEX stands ready to serve Vernon should the community choose to adopt this plan and move forward with implementation.

# BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

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TEEX implemented its Standard Strategy Deployment methodology for Vernon's Economic and Community Development Workshops and Assessment Project. The main objectives of TEEX's Standard Strategy Deployment methodology, specific to Vernon's needs were:

1. To identify Vernon's best developmental opportunities for economic, community and tourism prosperity.
2. To educate Vernon's elected leadership about emerging trends and opportunities in economic and tourism development and rally the leadership around a united vision for enhancing prosperity in Vernon.

As a standard function of all projects, TEEX employs the Master Plan Definition Workshop. In this case, TEEX facilitated a series of community development workshops, public meetings and planning sessions in Vernon, Texas and in College Station, Texas, on January 31, 2008, March 6-7, 2008, and April 4, 2008. Through these workshops, TEEX gained significant insight into the community of Vernon. TEEX then collected priority rankings of the workshop feedback from stakeholders identified by the workshop participants. TEEX conducted a final workshop and master plan definition session, with both Vernon and TEEX representatives. After several weeks of additional research and documentation, TEEX completed the Community and Economic Development Initiative.

## WORKSHOPS

The community development workshop is designed to document the community's perceived strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to prosperity. Through the workshop, we capture dreams, aspirations, fears and concerns of community representatives, using the voice of residents and leaders alike to describe a vision for community development and economic prosperity. During the workshop, we facilitate community representatives' identification and prioritization of projects, functions and tasks that must be completed to realize the vision.

The community development workshop is an ideal tool for creating consensus among entities with divergent views and values, and establishing a direction for economic development activities. Participants are educated about relevant trends in community and economic development, and are guided through the process of identifying strategies and projects that will maximize opportunities for development success. The workshop provides a venue for voicing of issues and aspirations and empowers the community to establish their own vision for and definition of prosperity.

In this case, through a series of public meetings and workshops, and one additional strategy deployment session, we gained significant insight into the vision that the people of Vernon have for their community. A brief review of the project deliverables will set the stage for the discussion of findings and recommendations presented in this report.

## PROJECT DELIVERABLES

### Resulting Strategy Deployment Matrix

The centerpiece of our methodology, the resulting Strategy Deployment Matrix, lists all the perceived wants and needs expressed by the stakeholders identified in the workshops. Each Matrix row denotes a specific function, feature, attribute or policy relevant to the successful implementation of a sustainable economic development initiative. We have incorporated the priority rankings assigned by each stakeholder representative along with specific comments contributed by the stakeholders. The priority section (column) of the Matrix consolidates under a single "User" column. Different user groups can have different "weights" depending on their proximity or "closeness" to the project. In Vernon's case, all the stakeholder groups have the same ranking. Administrative and Development priority columns are provided in order to influence the inclusion of specific elements based on their technical or strategically relevant merits.

The Vernon Matrix, presented in [Appendix B](#) of this report, is sorted listing the highest “User” priority ranked elements at the top. Based on a specific cut-off parameter (better than 6.9 rank) the top elements have been marked with an asterisk (\*) under the “Inclusion” column. For the sake of clarification, following is an explanation of the contents of each column of the matrix starting from the leftmost column.

- The “Main Function” column represents the category/function to be addressed.
- The “Components” column identifies the elements that comprise the Main Function listed in the previous column.
- “Res” represents “Resources” assigned to a given function. These assignments are will be refined if/when the project moves into Phase II Implementation.
- The “Priority” column includes sub-columns representing User, Administrative and Developmental rankings. Ranks provided by each User group provide the rankings for a given function. When an adjusted ranking is required from an administrative or developmental perspective, the two associated columns are used to adjust the ranking.
- The “p(f)” column shows the overall ranking of a given function.
- The “Inclusion” column will show an asterisk (\*) if the function ranked at or above the project cut-off parameter, in this case 6.9 or better.
- The “Method” column contains our suggested implementation approach for each element. The “Notes” column lists all the comments provided by the stakeholder representatives and the initials of the contributor.
- On the last section (to the right of the Matrix) all the user rankings are listed and identified by contributor name and role.

### [Rankings Map](#)

The Rankings Map ([Appendix C](#)) illustrates the correlation between user groups and project components and provides a visual guide to priorities and sensitivities of various user groups. In the case of Vernon, the high ranking of top priorities by most of the stakeholder groups across the board is shown in the Rankings Map by the abundance of maroon (representing a ranking between 8 and 10). The white areas of the map indicate areas that received lower rankings and thus represent topics with less support from the given stakeholder group. The map is particularly useful as a tool supporting project communications, as it shows at a glance areas where there are potential differences in perspective among various project stakeholders and affords project leadership the opportunity to prepare presentations and communications accordingly.

# FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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The people of Vernon and Wilbarger County enjoy a community with a vibrant western heritage that spans multiple generations. Located a short drive west of Wichita Falls, the community hosts a number of amenities greatly sought by other small communities including a community college, numerous cultural heritage events scheduled throughout the year, a cohesive downtown area and a newly restored vintage auditorium. The community is poised to leverage its location to attract visitors and new residents by offering an exceptional quality of life through the enhancement and promotion of existing assets and potential tourism events and attractions.

Every Main Function supports and encourages the success of the others. This section will address each of the Main Functions identified and prioritized by Vernon's citizens, stakeholders and leadership as well as the TEEEX professional staff.

## WATER QUALITY

The top ranked priority for Vernon, as vocalized in the community workshops and in the proceeding stakeholder rankings, was ultimately the concern about Vernon's water quality. Throughout the feedback sessions and various follow-up conversations, it became very clear to the TEEEX team that there was an abundant amount of confusion and irreconcilable explanations as to the foundations of these concerns. It was clear that water quality was a top concern of the community, but it was not apparent as to what the actual problem, and therefore, solution was.

Using its partner resources within the Texas A&M University System as well as seeking clarification from available government resources and research, TEEEX obtained information regarding Vernon's perceived water issue. In the report, "Influences of Natural and Man-Made Sources of Contamination on Water Quality Trends in the Seymour Aquifer: A 2007 Status Report," (<http://www.tgpc.state.tx.us/Seymour%20White%20Paper-4-18-07.pdf>), it is apparent that the issue is not a unique Vernon problem, but with the Seymour Aquifer as a whole. The entire aquifer is high in Nitrates. Although there is no conclusive evidence as to the cause, the best research indicates that it is not from fertilizers used on the farms, but rather the nitrates are naturally occurring in the soil in the region. When farming became prevalent in the 1800's, the annual plowing of the fields released the nitrates and combined with the sandy soil in the region, nitrates were eventually absorbed down into the aquifer.

Furthermore, the program in place to address the high nitrate situation (while the water treatment plant is being repaired) is a state regulatory program implemented to safeguard against health risks to the community. In conclusion, it is true that the city's proactive efforts in relining the water treatment facility tanks is likely the appropriate solution and should circumvent the water quality issue, allowing Vernon to discontinue the bottled water program. According to the research, unless the community and existing industries expand astronomically over the next few decades, future water quantity is not a pressing problem.

In light of the community's concerned perception of water quality issues versus the actual status of the water quality and the city's proactive role in the solution, the recommendation for this Main Function is addressed instead within another Main Function, Local Government and Community Interaction. This issue illustrates the need for better community education and community leadership communication. This will be addressed in the following designated section.

## MAIN STREET PROGRAM AND/OR DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Based on Vernon's Baseline study and ensuing report – the community of Vernon is a perfect candidate for a Main Street program or downtown revitalization strategy, and the ultimate benefits from the ensuing economic impact of such an undertaking.

The very first step of this initiative is to create and commit to a comprehensive revitalization strategy which should include at least one full-time staff assignment (Program Director), a marketing strategic plan and the incorporation of committed resources for funding from the local government as well as state and federal resources.

#### Full-time Program Director

In order to fully and successfully implement an effective strategy, TEEEX highly recommends Vernon participate in the Texas Main Street Program and the hiring of a staff member to oversee and program. This position should be filled based on the following qualifications: professional experience in business and industry development; previous experience in a similar or parallel initiative; knowledge of city zoning and local ordinances; proficiency in applicable financial and economic impact considerations; extensive community event management; professional experience in marketing and promotions; and real estate.

This person should be required to proactively partner with and support other local event and heritage resources such as the auditorium, covered events center, Santa Rosa, the Red River Valley Museum, Waggoner Ranch and other local tourism opportunities in an effort to maximize the entire city's ability to attract tourism and improve upon the community's existing quality of life.

#### Marketing Strategic Plan

In devising a list of key factors for successful community, specifically downtown/Main Street, marketing, we first conducted a review of industry literature, identifying marketing and promotional best practices in general. Second, we drew upon TEEEX's own economic development and community marketing expertise, particularly as it relates to rural community marketing.

Based on both literature review and experience supporting community marketing in rural Texas, it is clear that any consideration of tourism marketing must extend beyond the traditional confines of the marketing mix to include a cooperation among those local entities responsible for community outreach and promotion.

In many Texas communities, the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) leads community promotion efforts, working closely with the local or regional Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development entity and/or municipal offices to establish a sense of place and promote the unique attributes that will attract visitors to the area, and therefore the downtown area and corresponding events. In regards to Vernon, and considering the current leadership structure, it is recommended that the Chamber of Commerce and a full-time Main Street Program Director join forces to manage and promote the downtown revitalization initiative.

We stress the need for aggressive and all-encompassing marketing. Many rural cities are seeing highly increased competition for heritage tourism and community events and therefore approach marketing from all sides. Research of successful community and downtown tourism marketing produced the following tips for a successful marketing strategy:

1. *Focus:* Focus on growing the downtown area – Maintain the professional management and visible support necessary to attract and retain participants in the growth and improvement of the downtown/Main Street area.
2. *Always:* Always be searching; Always be marketing, Always be looking for ways to grow – Particular to Vernon, there needs to be a constant, aggressive appeal to attract new ventures, business, investments and support for the downtown area.
3. *Partner:* Partner with both community organizations and peer event facilities – Enlist the aid of the Chamber of Commerce, local government, non-profit organizations, etc. to market and advertise for you. In addition, partner, promote and combine with other local events and activities in the area to increase the city's visibility and subsequent downtown/Main Street economic sustainability.
4. *Marketing Avenues:* In addition to traditional advertising, be sure to promote the downtown area and all Main Street events and improvements online and maintain a quality, efficient and current Web site.

5. *Management:* Retain a professional and competent marketing and customer service professional to manage the downtown area development, promotions and event coordination.

### Financial Resources

Financial resources that can be applied to implementing a Main Street Program/downtown revitalization project and the corresponding development initiatives and action items include:

1. City-supported policies providing financial incentives for Main Street investments
2. Full-time salary for a Program Director, supplemented either wholly from the city or shared between invested local government and city programs
3. State and federal grants
4. Redistribution of Vernon hotel/motel tax

Some of the specific state and federal resources for Main Street planning and funding can be found online at:

- [www.mainstreet.org](http://www.mainstreet.org)
- [www.thc.state.tx.us/maintreet/msdefault.shtml](http://www.thc.state.tx.us/maintreet/msdefault.shtml)

Other applicable funding resources are comprehensively listed under the Government Resources and Funding Opportunities section near the end of this report.

### Summary

Vital components of a successful, comprehensive Downtown Revitalization Strategy should address the following:

- Financial incentives for Main Street investment
- Support system: an environment that encourages and supports business development through accessible mentor programs, market research, financing and other quality resources
- 24/7 oversight: onsite, downtown housing leads to invested and watchful citizens, creating more ownership of downtown revitalization, contributing to a decrease in crime and ultimately creating a localized community invested in the patronage and success of main street businesses and services
- Occupation diversity: retail, housing, office space, entertainment, government facilities and other varieties of industry lead to a deeper pool of economic vitality in addition to creating a self-supporting financial impact
- Entertainment: activities and functions in addition to stand-alone facilities not only provide a social outlet for the local community, but also serve as incentives for attracting tourism and external investment
- Improvement: refurbishing existing landmark buildings and facilities rather than new construction contributes to the area's visual heritage in addition to saving money and acting in an environmentally conscious manner
- Heritage: utilize and expand upon historical components of the city and downtown area to retain a consistent and quality feel of the small-town values and attractions, which further supports the city's ability to promote itself with a marketable brand

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT & COMMUNITY INTERACTION

Based on feedback voiced during community workshops, leadership issues represent a significant roadblock to successful community and economic development, and as such, need to be addressed immediately in the short-term, as well as with a strategic plan for long-term communication, education and accountability between the local government and leadership, and the citizens of Vernon.

The top three recommended methods of achieving improved local government and community interactions are:

1. Leadership Vernon Program
2. Engage the youth of Vernon in civic opportunities

### 3. Community Issues Education

#### Leadership Vernon

A Leadership Vernon program, entirely managed by the Vernon Chamber of Commerce and wholly supported by the local government and organizations, would serve to recruit, educate and involve a large number of valuable citizens who will in turn work as ambassadors for the city, supporting and promoting local initiatives, community investment and improved government and community relations. We suggest, based on Vernon's population, history and current city/communities relationships, that Vernon initiate this program immediately and publically. For the first year, TEEEX recommends choosing strong representatives from the community's stakeholder groups based on demographics and community involvement. This will encourage an immediate inclusion of the entire community to begin a grassroots educational and public relations campaign. Future years of Leadership Vernon can be based on an application process widely promoted to the entire community.

Best practices of successful city leadership programs focus on the following objectives:

#### **Leadership:**

- Promote, stimulate and foster the development of leadership skills and community leaders for the city – teaching citizens how to be more effective leaders in their companies or organizations; how to become servant leaders and community stewards; and how to prepare for positions of public and private decision-making though leadership skills in areas such as team building, communications, group process and motivating others.

#### **Knowledge:**

- Continue education by acquainting participants with the area's assets, needs and opportunities; helping them gain awareness and understanding of the critical issues facing your area; and fostering increased understanding of the problems, opportunities and issues affecting the community

#### **Communication:**

- Maintain and strengthen communication by providing a forum to discuss community challenges with representatives from the industry, government, the media and human services; creating opportunities to meet and exchange ideas with each other and community leaders; and offering a meaningful and diverse communication network.

#### **Involvement:**

- Foster community involvement and the continued exercise of civic responsibilities by encouraging, motivating and actively assisting graduates in pursuing prominent leadership roles in the community.

#### Engage the Youth of Vernon

The youth are the future of any community, and Vernon is no exception. Engaging the youth of Vernon in the city's growth and operations are beneficial to everyone and incorporates solutions to several of the Major Functions identified by the community. Involving the youth and even young children molds and encourages lasting devotion and commitment to the city and civic activities, leading to the retention of Vernon's youth after high school and college, as these young adults feel compelled to return to the community they know and love. Youth are a tremendous asset for community programs because of their energy and commitment to growth and change.

Several times during the workshops, the severe lack of dedicated volunteers and responsible community members was brought to light. With proper leadership and organized efforts, local youth and children can be taught to appreciate and enhance their own community in a way that improves not only their quality of life, but that of their peers and families.

The success and strength of both the Boys & Girls Club and the Kiwanis was touted during all of the meetings and workshops. These programs need to be commended for their efforts with not only the youth, but also the minority population. Youth organizations should work with the local government and the city to combine forces and work towards creating lasting improvements to the area, whether those projects are education, facility construction (i.e. parks), fundraising, beautification, etc.

Ultimately, the youth, as well as the adult population, need to be held accountable for the city's quality. The city, however, needs to be proactive in providing the venues for such ownership. Youth Leadership Programs have been highly successful in many cities and promote political involvement at an early age.

### Community Issues Education

From both the meetings with local government representatives and the community workshops, it is clear that there is a noticeable divide between the leadership and citizens of Vernon. In addition to recent political turmoil, there is a disconnect between factual information and gossip about past and current community issues. The community wants the local government officials to be held accountable and based TEEEX's observations, they stand ready and willing to be accountable. The key to resolving many perceived issues is better communication.

The first priority and immediate need is to address the concerns about Vernon's water quality and lack of water resources. TEEEX recommends a clear and concise public relations campaign to educate the entire community about Vernon's water to include the water treatment plant, the Seymour Aquifer research and findings, the city's historic and current role, future plans for addressing these issues, and an open door for questions and concerns.

The recommended action steps to minimize community misunderstandings are as follows:

1. Research information and prepare presentation materials (handouts, PowerPoint, etc.).
2. Fully educate all government officials and community leadership.
3. Work with local media to report a comprehensive and clear explanation of the situation(s).
4. Schedule numerous presentations with local cross-sectional organizations, clubs and town meetings to publically educate the public and readily answer questions.

Another area of public dissatisfaction involves the funding and management of those funds related to the firehouse and waterpark. The voiced perception in the workshops is that funds allocated for the waterpark were redirected to pay for cost overages on the construction of the new firehouse, leaving the waterpark without funding and no immediate future. The elected leadership of Vernon must strive to open lines of communication and aggressively educate and involve its citizens in the community's operations in order to dissuade misinformation and discontent. These both work to impede progress and shorten elected terms which in turn also impede long term growth and progress.

## WESTERN HERITAGE AND COORDINATED TOURISM EFFORTS

One of Vernon's most unique assets is its extensive western heritage and small town characteristics. This asset needs to be incorporated into all aspects of the city's community development plan including a comprehensive brand campaign for the city, themed events and activities, branded promotions and advertising, community aesthetics, architecture, cuisine, retail and more. This section addresses several opportunities and recommendations to better capitalize on this important feature.

After analysis of the comprehensive feedback and research and while collaborating on appropriate solutions and opportunities for the objectives as set forward for Vernon's Community Development Plan, two of the Main Functions came to be so intertwined as to need to be merged into one priority. Both the capitalization of Vernon's western heritage and the need for a coordinated tourism effort (i.e. coordinated event development and promotion) are incorporated into one major initiative.

### Tourism Director

In order to adequately create and implement a successful, tourism-based, comprehensive community marketing strategy and Western brand, TEEEX highly recommends the creation and staffing of the position to oversee and direct the Vernon western heritage brand management, event coordination and promotion initiative. The position could most easily be positioned within the Business Development Corporation or the Chamber of Commerce. The Tourism Director position should be filled based on the following qualifications: professional experience in community and tourism marketing; extensive knowledge of brand management and community identity; previous experience in a similar or parallel initiative; knowledge of advertising, public relations and promotional activities; extensive community event management; and the ability to lead and cooperate with multiple agencies, organizations and city initiatives.

This person should be required to proactively lead, support and utilize other local event and heritage resources such as the auditorium, covered events center, Chamber of Commerce, Santa Rosa, the Red River Valley Museum, Waggoner Ranch, the Main Street program and other local tourism opportunities in an effort to maximize the entire city's ability to attract tourism and improve upon the community's brand and maximize event potential. TEEX recommends a very close partnership between this position, the Chamber of Commerce and the Main Street Program Director.

### Events

Community events and activities should incorporate the local heritage and build upon each other to create a more prominent and successful brand for Vernon. Local events with a western theme can include western cuisine such as BBQ, equestrian events and competitions, historical reenactments, etc. Participatory Western activities that can be promoted for weekend or day trips can consist of horseback riding, hiking, hunting, demonstrations, historical tours and more. By having the event managers, facility directors, Chamber of Commerce and city leadership working together to promote and market these events, the city will be able to maximize visibility to the public as well as better using advertising funds and venues.

Events such as Doan's Picnic, parades, festivals, cook-off's, concerts, Cruise Night, etc. need to be logistically coordinated to maximize marketing, attendance and usage of facilities. By coordinating these events and activities, the city can gain from each as opposed to acting in competition with each other or suffering from poor planning.

### Waggoner Ranch

While understanding that Waggoner Ranch is privately owned and not within the city's operations, it is imperative that the city continues to approach the owners with a strategic and profitable plan to utilize its unique and historic characteristics. Although it would be ideal to offer tours on the property and other city attractions (i.e. Santa Rosa, Red River Valley Museum, etc.), it may not be possible in the near future. However, there are other ways to capitalize on the attraction. The historical significance of Waggoner Ranch can be heavily marketed online on the city's, Chamber of Commerce's, Downtown, other retail Web sites as well as in general Western heritage advertising and brand management.

An excellent example of ways to utilize Waggoner Ranch's assets is the King Ranch in Kingsville, Texas. Kingsville benefits greatly from the tourism involved with King Ranch. King Ranch employs the following successful marketing and operational tactics:

- A professional, comprehensive Web site and presence
- Year-long tour opportunities (birding, hunting, horse riding, local heritage, specialty, etc.)
- Retail (online and onsite)
- Museum & Visitor's Center

### Red River Valley Museum Expansion

There is immense community support and approval for the museum's current operations and future plans for expansion and growth. The museum should continue in its efforts, and should take a more proactive role in partnering with and encouraging participation with other local heritage entities.

### Retail

The western heritage theme should carry through into all aspects of Vernon's retail industry, including lodging (bed & breakfasts), dining facilities and retail opportunities such as boots, leather, cowboy clothing, etc.

### Western Trail

The utilization of the Western Trail was mentioned often in community discussions, but online research did not provide much information or detail as to how other cities are taking advantage of this historical route through promotions and events. There is an obvious opportunity to build upon this history and the unique landmarks within

Wilbarger County and Vernon. Vernon should capitalize on its existing resources and history while also working with other communities to jointly promote and market this tourism attraction.

#### Auto-Related Tourism Opportunities

Along with Vernon's western heritage, it also has a unique automotive related history. A strategic plan should be implemented to accentuate Wilbarger Street or "Gasoline Alley" by restoring the buildings (auto dealerships & service stations) and incorporating them into the Summer's Last Blast" weekend.

## **WATER RESOURCES**

Although water resources surfaced as a prioritized concern of the citizens and stakeholders of Vernon, subsequent research of this issue did not suggest an immediate need to procure more resources. While certainly a necessary and vital resource for any community, and one that needs to be strategically managed over time and with future considerations, it is not the immediate need as perceived by the community. Just as with the water quality situation, the solution to this problem is one of community education and government public relations as opposed to the need for an aggressive accumulation of surface water. Please note the inclusion of this Major Function under the previous section, Local Government and Community Interaction.

## **AUDITORIUM**

The Wilbarger Auditorium is another incredible asset the community has. However, its beauty and functionality is largely being underutilized currently. The county has shown the forethought and commitment in the renovation of the auditorium, and now must put it to use. This facility has the potential to add more to Vernon's quality of life than any other single facility. The ability and necessity of facilities to book and market themselves effectively and profitably has led to an influx of professional private companies being hired to manage and market facilities. An alternative to subcontracting the marketing and management duties, and the option that TEEEX highly recommends for Vernon's auditorium, is to hire a key employee with relevant, professional experience and proven track records of success as the auditorium's Facilities Director. The most important factor in maximizing the economic impact and quality of life a facility can have is optimizing facility usage by booking the right quantity and quality of events. Professional and efficient marketing and management of the auditorium are vital to attracting, retaining and expanding the number of profitable events the facility will book and host.

## **WORKFORCE**

There is a substantial and credible community concern about the recruitment and preservation of a quality workforce – one consisting of capable, competent, high-skill professionals who will maximize the workforce's economic impact to the community. Ultimately, industry representatives, local citizens and government leadership all agree that the solution to this dilemma is to provide a better quality of life for current and prospective employees.

Some of the necessary components of the quality of life as relevant to Vernon's workforce include an attractive location (as addressed by the Beautification section), training and continued education opportunities, housing, and social and entertainment outlets.

#### Training

In Vernon Community College, Vernon has an incredible resource for customized industry training and occupational continuing education. The city, local industries and the college need to work together to not only identify training needs, but also viable opportunities and solutions. With such valuable industries in Vernon such as the Wilbarger General Hospital, Tyson, Rhodia, the mental health and juvenile delinquency facilities, the college, and more – Vernon already has a strong foundation to work from and strong partners to work with. In addition, there are numerous state and federal organizations, such as the Workforce Resource (based in nearby Wichita Falls), that can lend resources and efforts in this area.

## Housing

Available real estate and quality living opportunities are vital to a city's quality of life and therefore its ability to attract new industry and the accompanying professional workforce. In addition, it is important to offer attractive local housing so that the workforce is not inclined to commute; affording those workers' economic impact to the outlying cities rather than to Vernon.

Community leaders in rural Texas and TEEX recognize that housing types (brick and mortar or 'log' as compared to mobile/pre-fabricated) will affect the community's appeal to prospective industries and the people that work in them.

Rural communities statewide are facing challenges in meeting their housing needs due to declining housing conditions and limited access to affordable new construction. Optimizing in-fill housing opportunities is one of the best mechanisms to meet housing needs and limit rural sprawl.

It is also important to note that the reason single family housing is so important at this time is not only because of the obvious high demand and very low supply; it also has to do with the opportunity that additional housing affords to the community in the form of increased tax base, the prospect of more students for its school district and the fact that good quality housing increases the appeal of the community to those young families looking to relocate (not to mention prospective new 'knowledge workers' looking for small communities to relocate). The following main housing attributes that Vernon needs to considered are as follows:

- Affordability
- Quality Construction
- Rapid Availability
- Properly Themed Architecture

We recommend that Vernon evaluates three separate housing initiatives in tandem:

1. Develop a small scale planned community concept with land owned by a public entity, managed by a private entity, and lots leased by home owners and investors; with all landscaping done by the management company. Sell Model "Park" homes ranging in price from an 'authorized' list of models.
2. Create incentives to encourage infill construction projects (i.e. Termed Tax Freeze, Micro 'Service' Grants).
3. Consider designating a residential development area in or near downtown.

After local leaders have had an opportunity to consider the options listed above, it may be best to proceed with a hybrid approach combining components 1 and 2. Our proposed strategy addresses residential revitalization in general and specifically seeks to reduce the number of 'low end' trailer homes in favor of new model homes or brick and mortar buildings in town as follows:

- Focus on in-fill housing.
- Utilize rezoning as a way to discourage less desirable housing and encourage high-end real estate.
- Allow the market to drive the process.
- Empower a non-profit Community Development Foundation to acquire lots to build new homes or renovate existing buildings.
- Employ a geographic information system (GIS) to digitize zones of priority and focus efforts on areas of the community that will affect the quality of the "Local Experience."
- Examine funding and financing programs available from HUD and other state programs.
- As appropriate, and perhaps under a separate effort, initiate innovative community housing projects (e.g. Habitat for Humanity, Youth Build, etc.).

Vernon should consider simple, manageable housing strategies with consideration of the following key factors:

- Affordability - The ability to keep unit costs within appropriate market value
- Aesthetics - Units should be nice, neat and architecturally supportive of the city's "Western/Texas" brand.
- Environmental Adequacy - Landscaping must not rely on heavy water consumption or high maintenance components.
- Quality versus quantity - Smaller units that look and 'feel' better

- A Robust Risk Management Strategy - Scale on demand, transfer upkeep burden to the resident

## MULTI-PURPOSE COVERED EVENT CENTER

TEEX staff collected information from industry experts, relevant facilities managers, online research and industry publications, concluding that the most successful event centers shared the following common practices and attributes:

1. Professional Management/Staff
2. Multi-use/Multi-functional Space
3. Aggressive Marketing Strategy

### Professional Management/Staff

As mentioned before, the ability and necessity of facilities to book and market themselves in an effective multi-use capacity has led to an influx of professional management personnel in the event industry.

Being that cities and counties are not typically in the business of event management and rarely have employees trained in industry specific duties required to optimize such facilities, there is an immediate need in Vernon for the marketing and management duties to be undertaken by a professional staff member with relevant experience and proven track records of success. Just as with the auditorium, the most important factor in optimizing a facilities performance is maximizing facility usage by booking the right quantity and type of events. Just as important as properly marketing the facility, is the experience attendees have while at the site. A friendly, professionally-run event with well-organized event staff will be the greatest asset in retaining and expanding the number of events a facility will book and host.

### Multi-use/Multi-functional Space

The top priority and characteristic of successful venues in the fairgrounds and event facility industry is a multi-use, multi-functional space. This allows fairgrounds to produce revenue on a year-round basis through off-season events, community and civic group activities, hobby shows, religious events, traveling exhibits, etc. While the number and type of these events and activities vary depending on the region, demographics and facility capacity, the underlying trend is that of multi-purpose buildings and space, and the diverse and aggressive marketing capabilities to fill a year-round event schedule. This event center should have the capacity to host a variety of events: equestrian, rodeos, sports, concerts and community activities.

An audit of events held at event complexes throughout the nation, state and region demonstrates the wide variety of event segments that Vernon and its event facilities could be and should be marketing to. Those industry trends and opportunities have been consolidated into the following list:

- |                           |                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Antiques/Collectibles   | • Livestock             |
| • ATV                     | • Marina/Boat           |
| • Auctions                | • Meetings/Seminars     |
| • Auto Racing             | • Miscellaneous         |
| • Automotive              | • Pet                   |
| • B2B                     | • Receptions/Parties    |
| • Bridal/Family/Lifestyle | • Religious             |
| • Community               | • RV Rallies            |
| • Computer                | • Science & Technology  |
| • Craft Shows             | • Sport/Outdoor/Fitness |
| • Cultural/Ethnic         | • Track                 |
| • Equine                  | • Trade/Industry Shows  |
| • Flea Market             | • Youth                 |
| • Gun & Knife             | • 4H                    |

## Aggressive Marketing Strategy

The most modern facilities available will fail to provide the desired quality of life and economic impact if not professionally marketed and therefore booked. This requires full-time, industry-experienced staff following a focused strategic plan based on the stated goals of the facility. They must have the ability and resources to implement an aggressive and professional marketing strategy. Multi-use/multi-functional facilities, in order to survive, must constantly and consistently search and actively recruit new business by promoting not only the facility itself, but also the city and surrounding community. As in the other recommendations, this marketing strategy should partner with and support the overall community tourism efforts in order to maximize its success.

## YOUTH ACTIVITIES

Throughout the workshops, many citizens commented on the lack of facilities and opportunities the youth of the community have for entertainment and recreation. This issue, like many of the others discussed in this report, deals directly with the quality of life offered in Vernon. A key consideration for many young professional couples when considering a move to Vernon hinges upon the setting in which they can raise their children. This includes the opportunities offered through sports, entertainment, recreation, education and church. A sense of community must be fostered in order to create an atmosphere where parents feel their children are safe and enjoying ample opportunities to grow and develop. The city and county can play a key role in offering some the venues that make life appealing to the youth of the area. Parks, swimming pools, skate parks, sports complexes, jogging trails and more can all be part of the city and county effort to provide the youth safe venues to enjoy while growing up.

## BEAUTIFICATION

A positive visual appeal in a community creates pride in its citizens while also functioning as a selling point for visitors. The decision to stay and spend money or continue driving can be often made with one trip down a main street. The appearance of a town is the face of that town. An appealing and clean community sends the message to visitors that it is a safe and enjoyable place to visit. Communities can use any number of programs to effect beautification. Listed below are programs currently being used around the country:

**Business & Residential Beautification Awards** – Encourage beautification efforts of citizens of the County by recognizing those who make significant efforts toward cleaning or beautifying their small part of the world. Winners are recognized with a sign for their yard/property, in the media and on the web site. Nominations are received for Business Landscape Beautifications Awards and for Residential Beautification Awards.

**Youth Awards (named award for sponsor)** – Designed to improve community's environment by demonstrating youth leadership that instills pride and creates a positive and sustainable impact on the community. Topics include: Litter Prevention and Cleanup; Beautification (planting trees, landscaping project; xeriscape project; etc.); Waste Minimization and Recycling. Projects should be documented with measurable results (bags/pounds of litter picked up; number of people participating/hours of service; number of trees/plants planted)

**Memorial Trees Program** – Symbolizes life, growth and hope for the future. The gift of a tree can be given in memory or in honor of a life well lived and as a symbol of everlasting affection. Celebrate a graduation, wedding, anniversary, retirement, birthday, holiday or any special occasion. Trees are planted in a city / county park or other public area and are selected for adaption to the region. Identify partner(s) such as Rotary Club, Kiwanis, etc.); seek donations from businesses, individuals/organizations to support beautification efforts. Donors are recognized (book at the CBV, chamber offices) and receive acknowledgement of the gift.

**Don't Mess with Texas Trash-Off** – Engage volunteers to help clean litter and trash dumped illegally during Don't Mess with Texas Trash-Off, usually held between March and May. Use the media to announce the event weeks in advance. Appreciation party can follow the event. Door prizes, free T-shirts, etc. can be provided as incentives. Get individuals/businesses to compete (most unusual trash, most volunteers, etc.).

**Arbor Day Celebration** – Keep Vernon Beautiful invites you to celebrate Arbor Day by planting a tree. Seedlings will be available FREE OF CHARGE (while they last) to the public

**Great American Cleanup** – Chunk-A-Junk Car Program in collaboration with a wrecker service

**Great American School Campus Cleanups** – sponsored by *Youth Advisory Board* (to be established in Vernon) to clean up school campuses in town.

**Earth Day** – The Planet Earth Celebration is a community wide public environmental education event held annually on the Saturday of Earth Day in April. The event is free to the public and is targeted for families and students, young and old EVERYONE that lives on the Planet Earth.

Representative businesses, city services, and service organizations from the area will provide information, educational demonstrations, and displays on: Composting, Energy Conservation, "Green" Building, Illegal Dumping/Littering, Recycling, Tree Planting, Waste Reduction, Water Quality, Wildlife Preservation, and many other environmental topics. The event will have a Kid's Zone with fun and educational activities and games for all ages as well as a T-Shirt Drawing Contest for the 2008 Planet Earth Shirt.

**Blanket the County with Wildflowers** – Sow wildflower seed mix on area roadways and parks. Cost of seed is \$30/pound. Sponsors of seeds can designate the planting site (with donations of 5 pounds of seed or \$150).

**Texas Recycles Day** – One example: partner with food pantry or other organization to help benefit their drives. *Twin City Mission* received coats and blankets from area schools and other organizations. Prizes donated by area restaurants, city/county offices; other sponsors. *Christmas Tree Roundup*, *Salvation Army Clothing Recycling & Collection*

**Youth Advisory Board** – To be established by Keep Vernon/Wilbarger Beautiful; members represent schools in the city/county. Some are chosen by their principals or teachers and others volunteer to serve because of their interest in the environment, recycling, or beautification. YAB members act as a liaison between their schools and Keep Warner Robins Beautiful. The group meets monthly throughout the school year to work on special projects, attend field trips, or have general meetings. YAB members stay busy during the school year working on projects of their own or along side members of Keep Vernon/Wilbarger Beautiful. Members can take an active part in the Great Christmas Tree Round-Up in January. To celebrate Arbor Day, YAB members can give away seedlings. Participate in other beautification celebrations.

#### Funding Opportunities

##### Sponsors

- Governmental partners (council of governments, city /county)
- College
- Hospitality industry (hotels/B&Bs)
- Insurance companies
- Banks
- Waste/recycling business
- Keep Texas Beautiful
- Keep America Beautiful
- County Extension / AgriLife Extension

In one community, the Community Beautification Program was established with funding from the Hotel Room Tax Fund, an additional 5% tax paid by guests at County hotels, motels and B&B's to fund local tourism initiatives.

## ATTRACT NEW INDUSTRY - RETIREMENT COMMUNITY DESIGNATION

In rural Texas, towns statistically have much more success at attracting tourism and capitalizing on existing resources than attracting large employers (>100). While every effort should be continued to keep Vernon attractive to potential new businesses, alternative methods of attracting solid tax paying citizens should be sought. One such resource is undoubtedly Vernon's potential as a successful retirement community.

TEEX recommends researching and pursuing the GO TEXAN Certified Retirement Community Program (CRC). A fairly new program, instated in 2006, the CRC program was implemented by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) to help Texas communities attract the retiree population. The program was established to promote Texas communities as a retirement destination; assist Texas communities in effective marketing to the population; assist in developing these communities for economic development purposes in addition to providing potential workforce opportunities; and encouraging tourism to Texas.

In order to procure the CRC designation, Vernon will need to complete applications and assessments of a variety of community characteristics such as demographics, tax structure, local housing availability, safety, employment opportunities, health care services, public transportation, continuing education, leisure living and recreational areas and sports. The certification application also requires local community support, a marketing plan and long-term strategic goals and planning.

Even if Vernon does not obtain a CRC certification or *until* Vernon is officially designated as an official Texas retirement community, Vernon should immediately begin focusing on those aspects that create the quality of life attractive to retirees and committing resources to achieve those appealing benefits to the aging population.

For more information on the GO TEXAS CRC Program, please visit [www.retireintexas.org](http://www.retireintexas.org).

## PAVED ROADS

While Vernon's roadway policy currently requires the citizens to pay for a portion of the cost of paving residential roads, TEEX strongly suggests that the city reevaluate this standard operational policy. Typically, cities provide the funding for such projects as an effort to improve and maintain quality of life for its citizens. For smaller cities with less extensive budgets for such repair, local governments can approach the issue strategically – by addressing the problem incrementally. If for example there are ten residential roads that need to be paved, it should be a priority to budget at least one road each year for ten years. By incrementally attacking the problem each fiscal year, the city is able to effect improvements that are readily apparent to the citizen. There are government assistance programs available that provide grants to assist with infrastructure projects, specifically the Community Development Block Grant program. While these grants are competitively sought after and qualifications must be met, some of the money is specifically earmarked for rural communities.

### CDBG Funds:

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), one of the longest-running programs of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, funds local community development activities such as affordable housing, anti-poverty programs, and infrastructure development. CDBG, like other block grant programs, differ from categorical grants, made for specific purposes, in that they are subject to less federal oversight and are largely used at the discretion of the state and local governments and their subgrantees.

CDBG funds are allocated to more than 1,100 local and state governments on a formula basis, at \$4.7 billion in FY2005. Larger cities and urban counties, called "entitlement communities," are required to prepare and submit a "Consolidated Plan" that establishes goals for the use of CDBG funds. Grantees are also required to hold public meetings to solicit input from the community, ensuring that proposed projects are aligned with the community's most urgent needs.

Proposed CDBG projects must be consistent with broad national priorities for CDBG: activities that benefit low- and moderate-income people, the prevention or elimination of slums or blight, or other community development activities to address an urgent threat to health or safety. CDBG funds may be used for community development activities (such as real estate acquisition, relocation, demolition, rehabilitation of

housing and commercial buildings), construction of public facilities and improvements (such as water, sewer, and other utilities, street paving, and sidewalks), construction and maintenance of neighborhood centers, and the conversion of school buildings, public services, and economic development and job creation/retention activities. CDBG funds can also be used for preservation and restoration of historic properties in low-income neighborhoods.

When Congress re-authorized CDBG in 1978, they instituted a dual formula to strengthen controls on how money was spent and to better serve communities with different types of problems. Formula A (based on poverty rate, population, and overcrowding) typically benefits rapidly growing cities with high poverty that lack affordable housing. Formula B (based on age of housing stock, poverty rate, and growth lag) tends to benefit older cities with large amounts of old and deteriorating housing. HUD calculates both formulas for all entitlement grantees and awards the larger amount, but Congressional appropriation has ultimate determination on program funding. The 1978 re-authorization also required HUD to award a "rural set-aside" of at least 30% of all CDBG funds to states for projects in rural areas. (<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/>)

## JAILHOUSE

Though not ranked high on the list of priorities, the jailhouse is definitely an underutilized resource and viable tourism attraction. The facility could be renovated into an educational and/or retail opportunity such as a museum or art gallery as well as being restored and designated as a historical marker. It is an opportunity that can be taken advantage of privately or by local government, but it should be maximized by cooperating with and supporting the downtown revitalization process as well as the city of Vernon's Western identity.

Funding for historical facilities is available from many federal and state sources (see Government Resources and Funding Opportunities).

# ACTION PLAN

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The priorities outlined within this report and related project deliverables comprise a staged approach to economic, community and tourism development that leverages opportunistic events and builds on success. The approach reduces a complex set of functional components to a set of action areas vital to moving the process forward. By focusing on prioritized objectives as outlined in the project matrix, Vernon will realize early successes and quickly begin to build its reputation for offering residents and travelers alike with a warm, welcoming and memorable experience.

Ultimately, this report provides the foundation for and insight on priority activities that need to be immediately addressed. The following next steps will establish a strong basis for moving forward and implementing Vernon's Community and Economic Development Initiative.

## NEXT STEPS

1. Establish and fill recommended key positions
  - Main Street/Downtown Program Director
  - Tourism Director
  - Auditorium Facilities Director
  - Event Center Professional Management/Staff
2. Initiate Texas Main Street program and comprehensive development strategy for downtown area
3. Coordinate a community branding and tourism strategy between the city, county, chamber and civic organizations in order to capitalize on Vernon's western heritage
4. Initiate "Leadership Vernon" program and other efforts to engage citizens and open communication between elected leadership and citizens

## GOVERNMENT RESOURCES & FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In order to fully and effectively implement a successful Community and Economic Development Initiative, Vernon would benefit greatly from researching and utilizing available government resources and funding opportunities. The grant application preparation time and submission deadlines should be taken into account when finalizing a strategic implementation timeline. Pursuing such funds needs to be approached in a united and coordinated manner. Below are six key departments or organizations which offer resources and funding applicable to Vernon's recommended initiatives.

US Department of Agriculture – Rural and Community Development ([www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov))

- Home Financing in Rural Areas
- Water-Environment Programs
- Community Facilities Loans and Grants
- Essential Utility Services
- Infrastructure and Rural Development Policy
- Rural Energy Loans and Grants
- Rural Development State Office
- Rural Economy

Texas Department of Agriculture - Texas Capital Fund ([www.agr.state.tx.us/agr/index](http://www.agr.state.tx.us/agr/index))

- Texas Capital Fund:
  - Infrastructure and Real Estate Programs (deadline: June 9, Sept. 9 and Dec. 2, 2008)

- Main Street Program (deadline: September 9, 2008)
- Downtown Revitalization Program (deadline: July 15, 2008)
- Rural Economic Development (small town revitalization and rural tourism)
- GO TEXAN Certified Retirement Community Program
- Rural Affairs (agricultural diversification, certified retirement communities, Texas Yes! Programs)

Texas Department of Housing and Urban Development - ([www.hud.gov/local](http://www.hud.gov/local))

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)  
([www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/](http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/communitydevelopment/programs/))

“CDBG funds may be used for community development activities (such as real estate acquisition, relocation, demolition, rehabilitation of housing and commercial buildings), construction of public facilities and improvements (such as water, sewer, and other utilities, street paving, and sidewalks), construction and maintenance of neighborhood centers, and the conversion of school buildings, public services, and economic development and job creation/retention activities. CDBG funds can also be used for preservation and restoration of historic properties in low-income neighborhoods.”

Texas Association of Community Development Corporations - ([www.tacdc.org](http://www.tacdc.org))

Preserve America – ([www.preserveamerica.gov](http://www.preserveamerica.gov))

- Matching Grant Program
- Save America’s Treasures
- National Endowment for the Humanities

Economic Development Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce - ([www.eda.gov](http://www.eda.gov))

## **CIVIC OPERATIONS AND ORGANIZATION ASSESSMENT**

At the outset of this planning effort, the TEEX team identified a major concern with the lack of coordination of economic, community and tourism development activities among various entities in the community, in addition to confusion of roles and responsibilities.

While a full-scale operations and management assessment is outside the scope of this project, TEEX strongly recommends that following this report, the city of Vernon seek assistance in assessing and analyzing the existing operational structure of the community.

Specifically the Chamber of Commerce will benefit from visiting benchmark cities and their chambers, identifying and emulating their best practices and operational successes. The Chamber should strive to become self sufficient through fundraising events that create value for its members and an improved quality of life for all Vernon’s citizens. It should also play an integral role in publicizing all community events and activities, paying special attention to promoting the Western heritage tourism.

## APPENDIX A: WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

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There were three workshops, held on January 31, March 6 and March 7, 2008. Attendees included the following:

Name	Affiliation
Jose Cardenas	Retired Engineer
Tra Cardwell	City Commissioner
Keith Carlton	Real Estate
Brenda Copas	Office of Rural Community Affairs
Robert Crews	Herring Bank
Jimmy Dennis	Tyson Foods & BDC Director
Bob Ferguson	Seed / Elevator Manager
Ed Garnett	Mayor
Ridley Gibson	Santa Rosa Joint Venture
Jalayne Goss	City Commissioner
Carolyn Grimes	Downtown Property Owner
Paul Hawkins	Previous City Manager
Meg Heatly	Housewife
Esparanza Huerta	Restaurant Owner
Richard Jacobs	County Commissioner
Misti Jacobs	TYC-Victory Field
Melinda Lemans	Beautification Committee Member
Amy Lorance	Texas Department of Agriculture
Mike Lytle	State Rep. Hardcastle staffer
Ben Macklin	Preacher
Dan Masarro	Restaurateur
Mary Ann McCuiston	Red River Valley Museum Director
Phil McCuiston	City Commissioner
Maria Medina	Boys & Girls Club
Sheri Morriss	Chamber of Commerce Executive Director
Jennifer Newsom	College Student / Single Mom
Stacy Ragland	American Red Cross
Carolyn Randel	BDC Director
Dan Richardson	Used Car Dealer / Bail Bondman
Randy Riggins	Oil / Gas / Agriculture
Sandra Ross	North Texas State Hospital
Gary Streit	Retired County Judge & Former Mayor
Horace Tabor	Bank President
Gerald Thiele	BDC Board Chair
Steve Thomas	Vernon College President
Greg Tyra	County Judge
Jonathan Voekel	Hospital Administrator
Daryl Wall	Retail / Retired Teacher / Owner-Operator B&B
Tom Woody	VISD Superintendent

## APPENDIX B: WORKSHOP MATRIX

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Water Resources	Support lobbying efforts to secure additional water resources		7.44		7.44	*			1 -- In addition to searching for new sources of water, begin local campaign to raise public awareness & provide incentives to conserve existing water resources. Encourage planting native & adapted landscape plants (see www.growgreen.org) 4 -- The local industries of Vernon are the largest users of water. Water is a precious commodity in which communities need to be sure they have secured enough to handle the future of the community. 5 -- Water is such an important aspect but it should be handled in a fair and ethical manner.	7	8	6	9	8	3	9	9	9	8
Wilbarger Auditorium	Professionally managed and marketed		6.56		8	7.28	*		1 -- Important for "Western Trail," "Downtown," & "Auto Tourism" programs. 5 -- It is important that the person responsible for promoting Vernon be trained in marketing and represent the town in an appropriate and effective manner. They should be able to "think outside the box" and meet the public and express views effectively. 7 -- All resources need this DEV: This is an opportunity for early success toward Tourism Development & Quality of life enhancement, should be pursued short-term	6	6	9	3	8	5	7	6	5	8
Better workforce	Ability to attract and retain quality employees, Quality of life attractive to recent graduates, Keep High school and VCC graduates in town		7.22			7.22	*		1 -- Recruiting & training high school & VC students for "Downtown/Main Street," "Covered Arena," and "Western Trail" programs too. 7 -- Ask employees what keeps them here. Same think might attract others. Family ties are important 10 -- Not just the ability to retain the employees and graduates, but also the ability to bring new families and that will be able to stay so our town will grow in all aspects	7	6	6	9	7	5	9	9	5	9
Coordinated tourism effort	Maximize and coordinate area tourism activities and events, collaborate regionally		7.11			7.11	*		1 -- Important for "Western Trail," "Downtown" 5 -- Many exciting things are possible if communities would work together to coordinate their efforts (example: Doans May Picnic has been going on for 125 years - Crowell has scheduled their Cynthia Ann Parker Days the same week-end). If they would work together both groups would benefit. 7 -- Need to hire a full time professional for this job	6	5	9	5	9	5	9	6	7	9
Covered Events Center (aka Arena)	Host equestrian events		7.06			7.06	*		1 -- Consider public/private partnership in building facility on Santa Rosa grounds. Review owners existing plans for covered arena & other facilities. Potential national Register of Historic Places site with tax incentives for rehabilitation of existing rodeo facilities. Expand city limits to south of SR grounds for additional city revenue for all activities. This location is more appropriately located on Western Trail route. 3 -- Also other events: concerts, Summers Last Blast Car Show, etc. 5 -- Vernon currently hosts 13 equestrian events and more would be a strong possibility with proper facilities. The new owners of the rodeo grounds are making a concerted effort to clean up and repair the rundown facilities. They also seem very interested in working with the community and bringing more events to town. We need to support their efforts as well. Both facilities would be very beneficial providing they will work together. 7 -- High visibility - great potential	8	5	9	4	9	4	9	6	5	9

YOUTH ACTIVITIES	Skate park, water activities, community involvement opportunities	7.00		7.00	*		1 -- Nice but lower priorities. 3 -- Create an entire family activity center at the current Country Club 4 -- Youth facilities are an important tool at creating a positive quality of life for citizens of the community. Features such as youth facilities might draw new families to a community and increase the labor pool industries can pull from. 5 -- The community needs a good swimming pool. There was an AdHoc committee with representatives from the various segments of the community and after numerous meetings and much discussion a location was chosen that would benefit all. Now, because of personal agendas the city leaders are trying to change that location and have delayed the progress of a pool. 7 -- Plans are being considered at present - needs more work. 10 -- It will be good for our youth, because they will have something to look forward to after school or week ends. The more activities that we can find that will be applied to them, the better it will be for them to stay away from problems.	2	7	7	7	8	9	8	8	3	9
BEAUTIFICATION	city support, funding, enforce zoning codes, incentives, strategic plan, City entry ways, Landscaping public areas, i.e. schools, hospital, parks, nursing homes, etc.	6.83		6.83			1 -- Incorporate streetscape plan with "Downtown" program. special encouragement for North & South Main Street on Western Trail route. Also see notes on "Water quality." 4 -- A clean community is a very important tool needed to draw new families to a community and increase the labor pool industries can pull from. 5 -- The beautification committee should be more than just a few citizens trying to do everything by themselves. There should be a coordinated effort with a strategic plan that is agreed upon and followed. There is not a way one can come into Vernon and find it an attractive town. There has been a good start with the TXDOT signage on the East side of town but much more needs to be done. Coming into town from the West and on Hwy 70 from Crowell are both more attractive than from the North and South on 283 entrances. 7 -- This is underway at present. Needs more work. Some restraints because of TXDOT right of ways	6	6	7	7	9	5	8	5	6	9
ATTRACT NEW INDUSTRY	Professional jobs	6.78		6.78			1 -- Always keep looking for new industries but don't overlook small businesses, including professional jobs that will develop through investment in "Downtown," "Western Trail," & Covered Arena" programs. 4 -- Although new industry is important to the growth of a community we have to ensure we have an adequate labor pool to fill positions without taking away from existing industries in the community. 7 -- Good idea - not easy to do 10 -- Not just the ability to retain the employees and graduates but also the ability to bring new families and that will be able to stay so our town will grow in all aspects.	5	6	7	5	8	4	7	9	7	9
RED RIVER VALLEY MUSEUM EXPANSION	City and Regional fundraising support for planned expansion, facilities, programs	6.28		6.28			1 -- Yes, but...The Western Trail Museum should be located downtown rather than at the facility on Vernon College campus. It should be ON the Western Trail in the downtown historic district, & visitors driving the trail will expect to find it there. Two addresses on Main Street would be potential locations: (1) 1306-1314 Main Street, Old Wright Corporate headquarters 13,200 sq. ft, asking price is \$98,800. (2) 1423 Main Street, Old WTU Building, 10,000 sq. ft., asking price is \$100,000. 5 -- The museum is located on Hwy 70 near the junction of 287 and will bring people to Vernon and then bring them back again and again. Museums in Duncan OK and Kilgore TX are prime examples. Kilgore had a million visitors the first year. The tourist dollar is important to the survival of small towns, not only will they come to see the Western Trail Heritage Center but they will buy gas, eat meals, stay in our hotels, shop in our stores and most importantly, they will tell others of the "interesting and friendly" place that they visited. 7 -- More long term & regional planning	8	5	9	2	9	3	6	5	5	8

Waterpark		5.89		5.89
Paved Roads		5.61		5.61
Capitalize on Auto related tourism opportunities	Wilbarger Street - Gasoline Alley, Restore Auto dealerships and service stations	5.33		5.33
Airport	Further development and utilization of available acreage	4.78		4.78
Jailhouse	Renovate and turn into tourism attraction	4.33		4.33

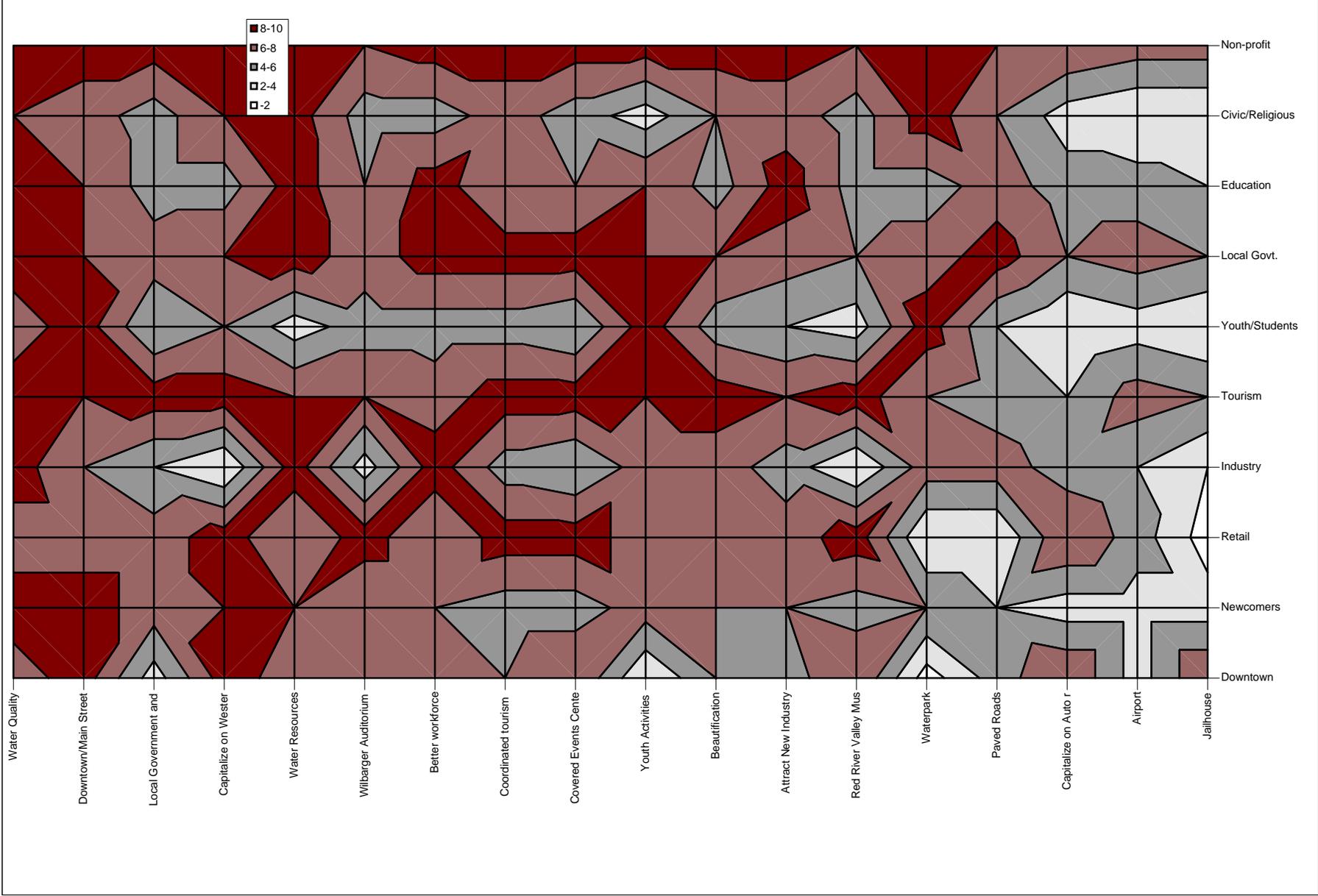
		1 -- Building a waterpark is a waste of both water & fiscal resources. I suggest that the City create a permanent program with Vernon College to share their excellent, underutilized indoor swimming pool. See also notes on "Water Quality." 4 -- A waterpark might draw new families to live in our community and increase the labor pool industries can pull from. 5 -- A really nice pool, like the one planned for Orbison Park would be a great asset for Vernon 7 -- May need bond issue to fund 10 -- We do need a water park with an inviting atmosphere
		1 -- This reflects on the civic pride of the town. It is long overdue. It also relates to "Beautification" of Vernon. 4 -- paved roads increase the quality of life in the community and this might draw new families to this area which might increase the labor pool industries can pull from. 5 -- It would be good to have all streets paved but the residents need to take some responsibility for making it possible and not just sit back and expect it to be provided. It is hard for some to understand that the money has to be allocated in specific ways as mandated by the state, county & city government and only certain funds can be used for this 10 - There are a large number of streets that need to be worked on, and I think that some of the home owners that live on those streets may be willing to help
		1 -- This will begin with work of "Downtown" program & expand east & west on Wilbarger Street. 4 -- Restoration of buildings and opening new buildings are important tools needed to draw new families to a community and increase the labor pool industries can pull from.
		1 -- Refocus on central town then expand development as needed in 5-10 years. 4 -- Although a larger airport would be a benefit to industry as far as making it easier for visitors or corporate management to arrive in Vernon, I do not see a larger airport making a financial impact to industries bottom line. 5 -- Vernon has a very nice facility which can accommodate larger planes. 7 -- Need a plan
		1 -- Especially opportune for resident Preston Cary's extensive collection of Vernon memorabilia. 7 -- This would require some county/city cooperation

1	6	2	7	6	9	7	5	9	9
5	4	2	7	5	4	9	7	6	8
8	3	8	5	4	2	6	5	3	8
3	3	5	4	7	3	7	5	2	7
8	3	1	2	6	2	6	4	2	7

## APPENDIX C: RANKINGS MAP

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