

Formulating a Brighter Future for Hitchcock, Texas: Dealing with Food Insecurity and Preserving City Beautification



Texas Southern University — Student Planning Organization

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Hitchcock, TX

Incorporated January 30, 1960

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Texas Target Communities

Service Learning Program and Community Engagement Initiative
College of Architecture, Dept of Landscape Architecture and
Urban Planning and Public Partnership and Outreach at TAMU

Mission

To provide training, tools, and assistance necessary to facilitate the transformation of communities from high risk/low opportunity to equitable, resilient, and adaptive by mitigating threats to the economy, environment, and culture.

(From the website for TTC: ttc.arch.tamu.edu/about/philosophy)

Legacy Project APATX 2018

The Legacy Project, having begun in 2015 at the APA Texas Chapter conference as a hands-on community planning effort to benefit the host community for the foreseeable future, focuses this year on Hitchcock, TX, in an effort to support Texas Target Communities in developing a Comprehensive Plan that promotes community resiliency in the face of outside growth and development as well as its long-term recovery from Hurricane Harvey. Toward this end, each Planning Student Organization has provided a written proposal and a visual element to convey concepts and strategies for topics that range through Housing, Community Facilities, Transportation, Historic Preservation, Coastal Resilience, Food Desert Remediation, and Town Beautification. This document was written in coordination with the presentation given by Texas Southern University's Student Planning Organization.

Which Issues Do We Tackle



Report Objectives

This proposal aims to simultaneously and synergistically mitigate community-wide barriers to healthy food access while materializing a vibrant Hitchcock City Center that builds on existing green spaces and that will feature a beautiful esplanade parallel to the major highway transecting the city.

Facing Food Insecurity

Food insecurity describes disruptions in eating patterns and reduced food intake due to socioeconomic limitations and/or challenges to food access (USDA-ERS). Though food insecurity happens at the household level, oftentimes whole communities can be affected. Moreover, the duration of food insecurity varies between households, at times lasting only several months or, in some cases, over several years. Looking at food access through an environmental lens, one must consider these factors to promote greater access and affordability:

1. Transportation to and from the food retail outlet (i.e. the supermarket)
2. Number of food retail outlets serving the target community (proximity of like businesses will likely keep food prices competitive)
3. Quality and variety of food retail outlets

With a poverty rate of 24% and a limited food environment, Hitchcock possesses indicators of community food insecurity. After Hitchcock's grocery store at Main St and Hwy 6 closed four years ago, and the owners would not sell or lease the property, the city was devoid of a major supermarket, forcing residents to travel to neighboring cities to buy their groceries. Using Stringfellow Orchard as a central marker, the closest grocery stores for residents include:

- Sam's Club in La Marque (5 miles away)
- Wal-Mart in La Marque (5 miles away)
- H-E-B in Santa Fe (6 miles away)
- HEB in La Marque (9 miles away)

In The City of Hitchcock, TX?

Driving these distances to purchase food may only present an inconvenience to most Hitchcock residents; however, for the 10%-15% of the non-driving population, these distances represent an extreme barrier to food access (American Fact Finder). Since Hitchcock does not connect with any transit lines, non-drivers would have to rely on carpooling or walking as means of transportation to the nearest or preferred food retail outlet, which may only be a convenience store. Lastly, dining out options are limited to a few fast food options, making it difficult to eat healthy on the go.

Lacking a Community Core

The City of Hitchcock is anchored by the

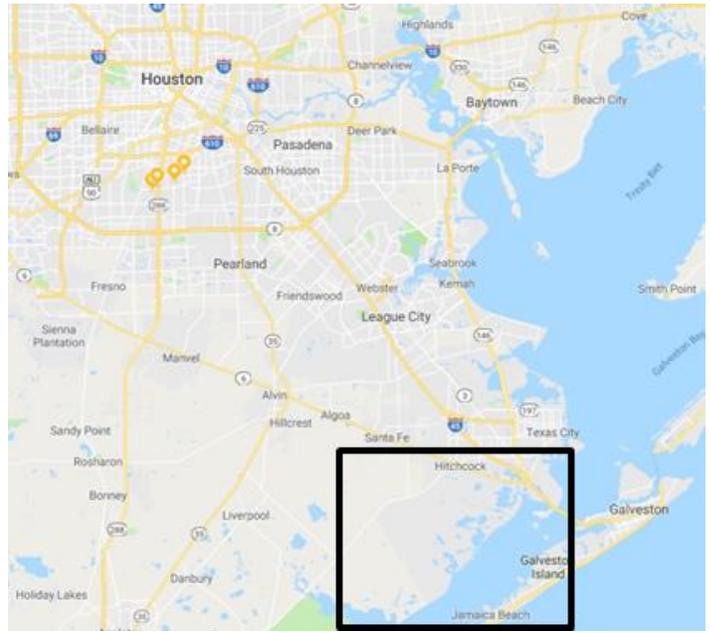
crossing of Highway 6 and Main Street. Located near this intersection are the historic Stringfellow Orchards, the Good Ole Days Fairgrounds, and an under-utilized shopping center. A half-mile southeast of this nexus lies City Hall. If Hitchcock were to claim a community center, this indefinite area would be it. Under these circumstances, residents might sporadically be capable to enjoy the outdoors, walk for leisure or exercise, or to indulge in the aesthetics of their surroundings. Aside from educational services, Hitchcock's major industries--construction and manufacturing--tend to place jobs outside of this central area. Fostering the development of complementary or boutique industries in the city center, would maximize on the human and real estate capital available in this area.



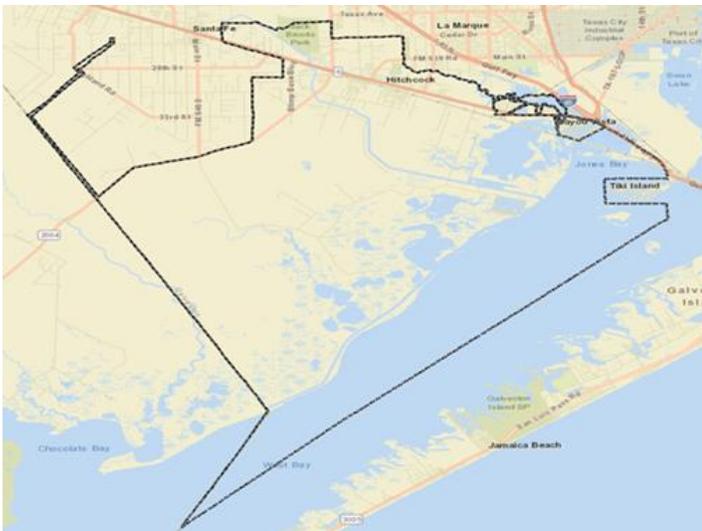
What Is the Identity of Hitchcock?

Hitchcock, Texas - located between Houston and Galveston on HWY 6, east of Santa Fe, south of La Marque - and its residents face food insecurity, a lack of healthy options, and not having its own grocery store. Established in 1982, the Hitchcock Industrial Development Corporation (HIDC) embraces its mission to create a positive business environment, expand economic development, support local businesses, and promote community involvement in Hitchcock.

The Texas Southern University (TSU) Student Planning Organization (SPO) has considered the possibilities of future community development with busi-



Map of Hitchcock (from Texas Target Communities)



Map of Hitchcock (from Texas Target Communities)

ness ownership among residents and the youth, the opportunity to attract and retain consumers by branding the city's quality of life through practical programs and events, and the need for public engagement to discern and build events for food security and community development.

Mayor Dorothy Childress has identified challenges but is very optimistic the city will make it through the current difficult times. In the first few months of her leadership, a significant growth of new and potential businesses has materialized within the city. The city is working with the Hitchcock Economic Development Corporation and Urban Planning and Zoning. Childress has met with potential business developers and owners who will open businesses here and hire residents to manufacture and provide their products and services. Many existing businesses are growing and confident the city's direction will move forward. While Hitchcock may be seen as a "bedroom community," Mayor Childress is confident that it will provide the necessary services needed to sustain the demands of a city (Schwertner 2018).



Stringfellow Orchards from the Front View

Hitchcock is home to Stringfellow Orchards, 9.5 acres of green space with thirty oak trees. This is a community hub for activities that support local culture. For example, on May 6th of this year, Stringfellow Orchards hosted Lemonade Day--a nationwide program that supports youth entrepreneurial opportunities on “how to create your own business.”

The Chamber of Commerce sponsors events at the Good Ole Days Grounds, twelve acres of pear and pecan trees on green space, located just 0.3 miles away from Stringfellow Orchards. The latest event held on August 10th and 11th celebrated the 47th Hitchcock Good Ole Days Festival, with a barbecue cook-off, food and vendor booths, mutton busting, live music, a pageant, bungee jumping, and Sonny the BirdMan.

Despite the optimism and green space, though, it is easier to buy Jack-in-the-Box and Subway than to find a fresh fruit or vegetable in the community. The city is missing farm-raised and organic pears, peaches, figs, peppers, herbs, and mustard and collard greens that are affordable and locally grown (Gibbs 2010). Based on nearby cities’ success stories, community gardens at Stringfellow Orchards and Good Ole Days Grounds would provide much-needed locally-grown produce. This also provides

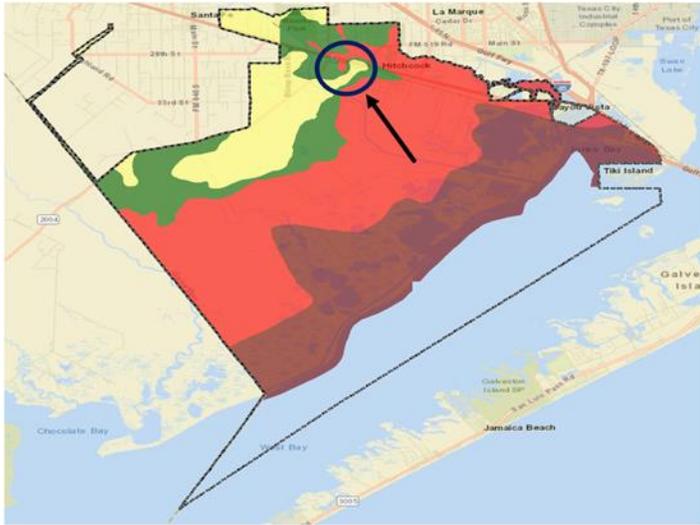
possibilities of entrepreneurial activities through Hitchcock High School; Career Technology Education (CTE); Crosby Middle School; and local Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs with youth engagement and involvement for community development.

When Steven Spillette, President of Community Development Strategies (CDS), spoke at the Houston-Galveston Action Council’s “Future of Retail” (HGAC 2018) event on retail in small cities, he emphasized that their unique lifestyles will enhance cultural desires for consumer preference and market support, thereby creating better development with a wide range of services and products (Spillette 2018). Brad Stafford, City Manager of Navasota, spoke on taking advantage of the strengths of Navasota, a small city located south of College Station and Texas A&M University. According to Stafford, their own revitalization, beautification, and downtown improvement projects have increased business, growth, and support of the community with investments and capital growth (Stafford 2018). Ideally, TSU would like to bring the lessons and opportunities learned from examples like these to bear on the future of Hitchcock.



Sign in front of Good Ole Days Grounds

Constraints for New Town Center



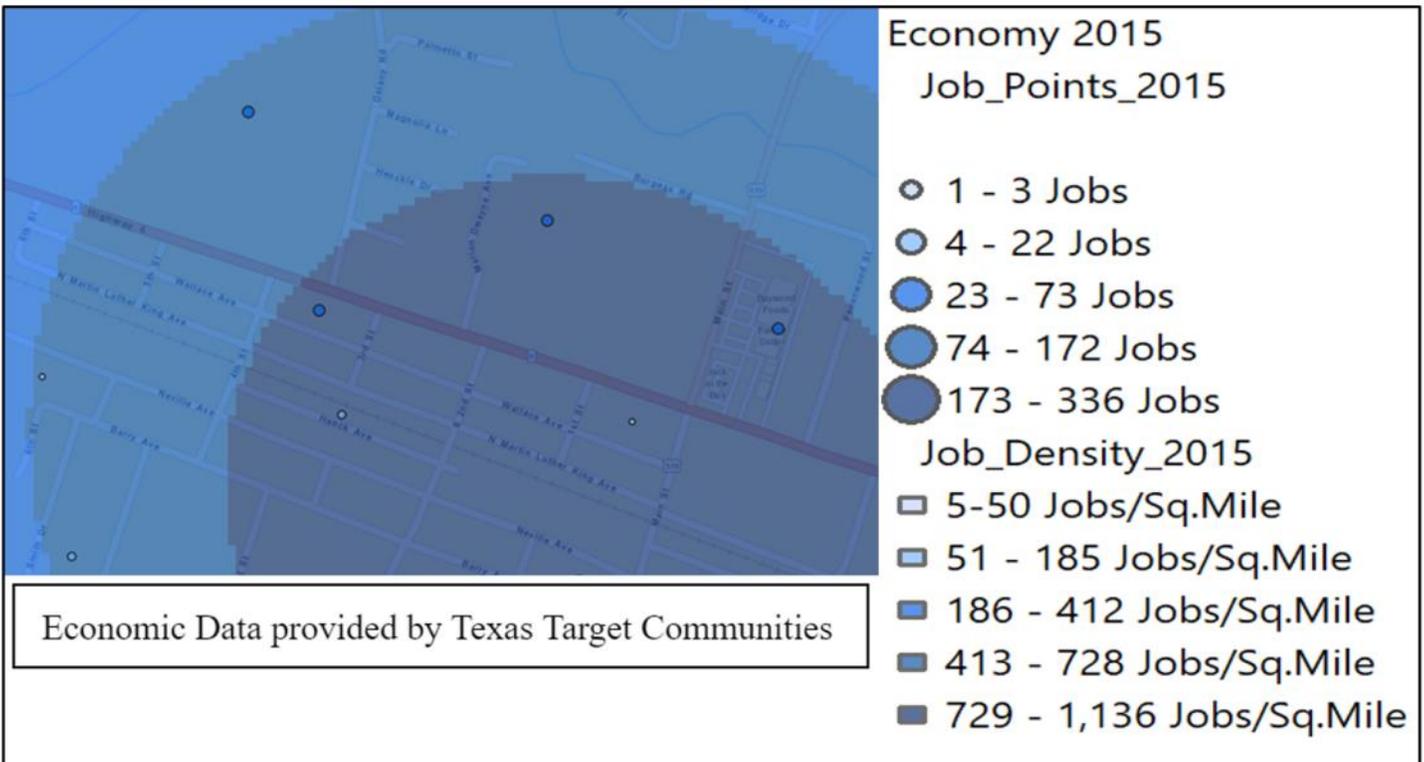
Flood Zones in Hitchcock, TX

Development is recommended for the area with less flooding risk, meaning the areas in yellow (outside the 500-year floodplain) and green (0.2% annual flooding risk); the areas in red and dark red (both with 1% annual flooding risk) should be avoided. The area circled overlaps with HWY 6 and the main local economic concentration and is recommended for local food options to be located.

Flooding Data provided by Texas Target Communities

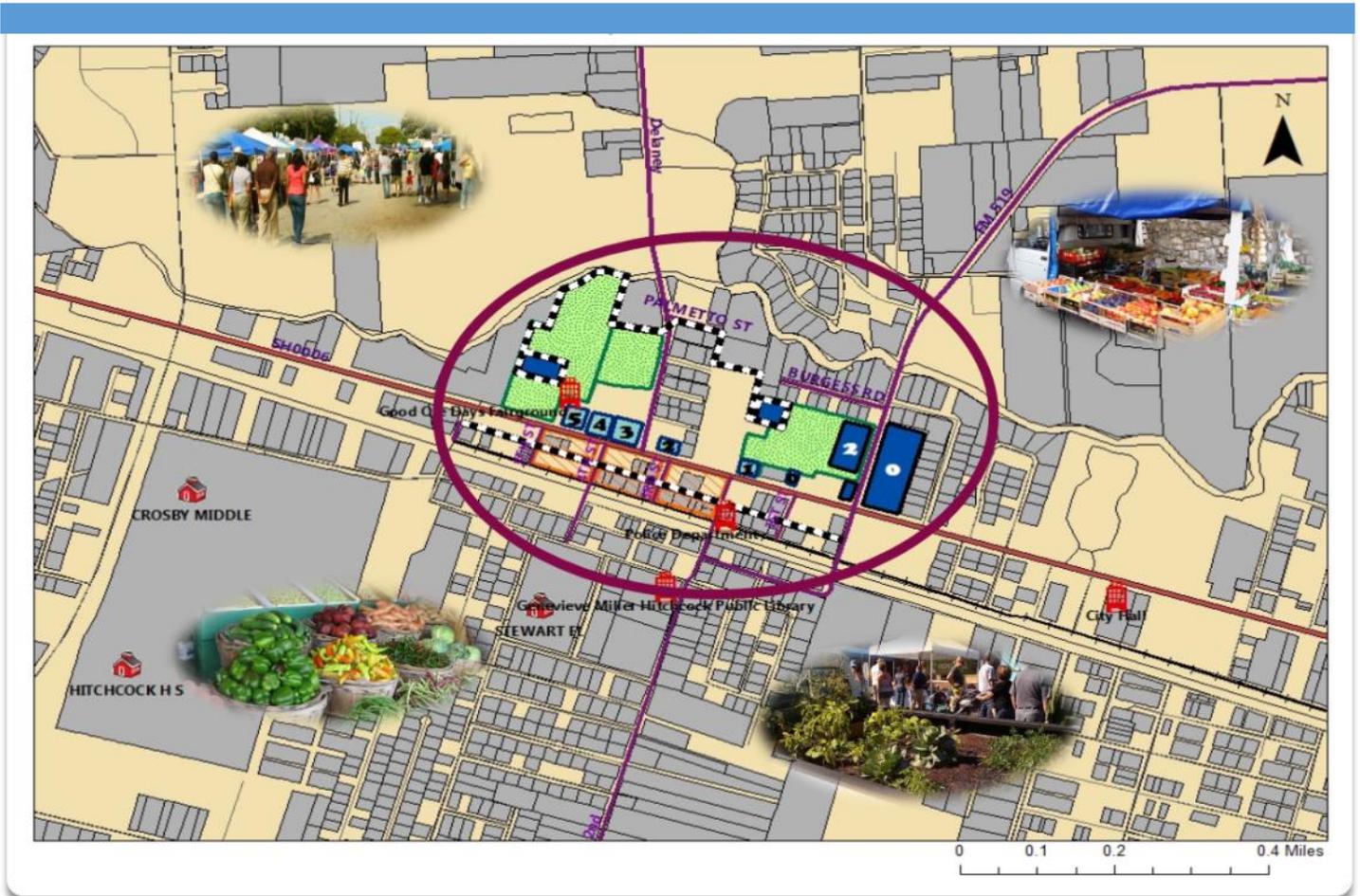
Economic Concentrations Along Highway 6

Based on data provided by Texas Target Communities at Texas A&M University in College Station, TX, this area being identified for development and food opportunity expansion is already the center of economic activity in Hitchcock, making it a prime location for this project and the natural town center.

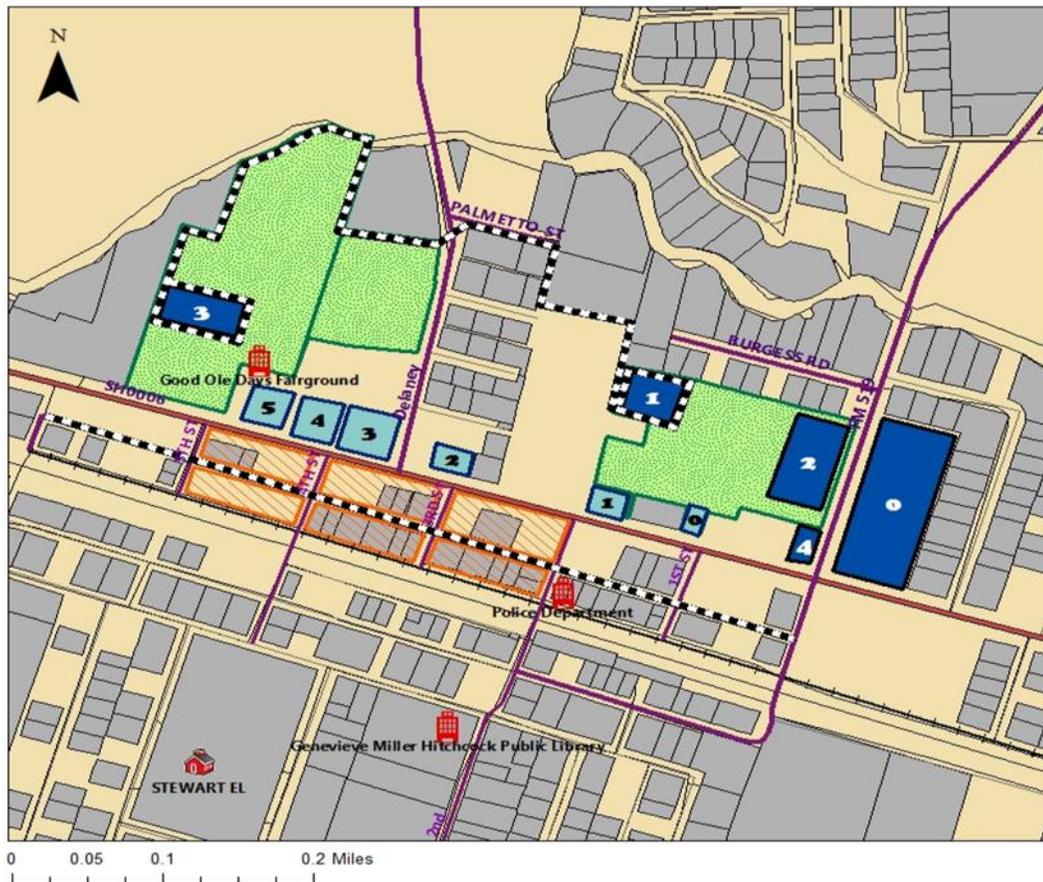


Economic Data provided by Texas Target Communities

Hitchcock Town Center Location



Recommendations for the Hitchcock Town Center



Hitchcock, TX
Town Center



Opportunity Zones (Dark Blue)

- 0 - Grocery store strip center
- 1 - Stringfellow Community Garden
- 2 - City Hall new location
- 3 - Good Ole Days Community Garden
- 4 - Power MART

Existing Business Partnerships (Light Blue)

- 0-Stringfellow entrance
- 1-D&D Liquor Store
- 2-Cheaper Choices
- 3-Texas 1st Bank
- 4-United States Postal
- 5-Prosperity Bank/Chamber of Commerce

Bike trail between green spaces and around community gardens (dashed line)
Esplanade – 2nd to 5th Streets on Wallace (along lower straight dashed line)

Community Garden Partnerships



Blodgett Urban Gardens across from Texas Southern University

Stringfellow Orchards and Good Ole Days Grounds stand as two solid centerpieces in the center of Hitchcock. Community garden partnerships with Stewart Elementary, Crosby Middle School, and Hitchcock High School would not only provide the community with fresh produce grown by its own residents, but also stand as the basis for creating new school curricula and projects to be developed and run at the gardens.



How to work with Urban Harvest

1. Provide Urban Harvest with up-to-date contact information for our database, including:

- Garden address and full name
- Garden leader and contact information
- Whether or not your garden is looking for additional volunteers
- What day(s) and time(s) members/volunteers meet regularly to garden at the site

2. Schedule a visit with the Community Gardens Committee to come see your garden.

3. Complete the Affiliate Garden Survey.

4. Purchase a Community Garden Affiliate sign for your garden. For more information or to order a community garden sign please contact:

Emily Foxman

emily@urbanharvest.org

— Information provided by
Urban Harvest

Cooperation with Banks, Credit Unions, Chamber of Commerce

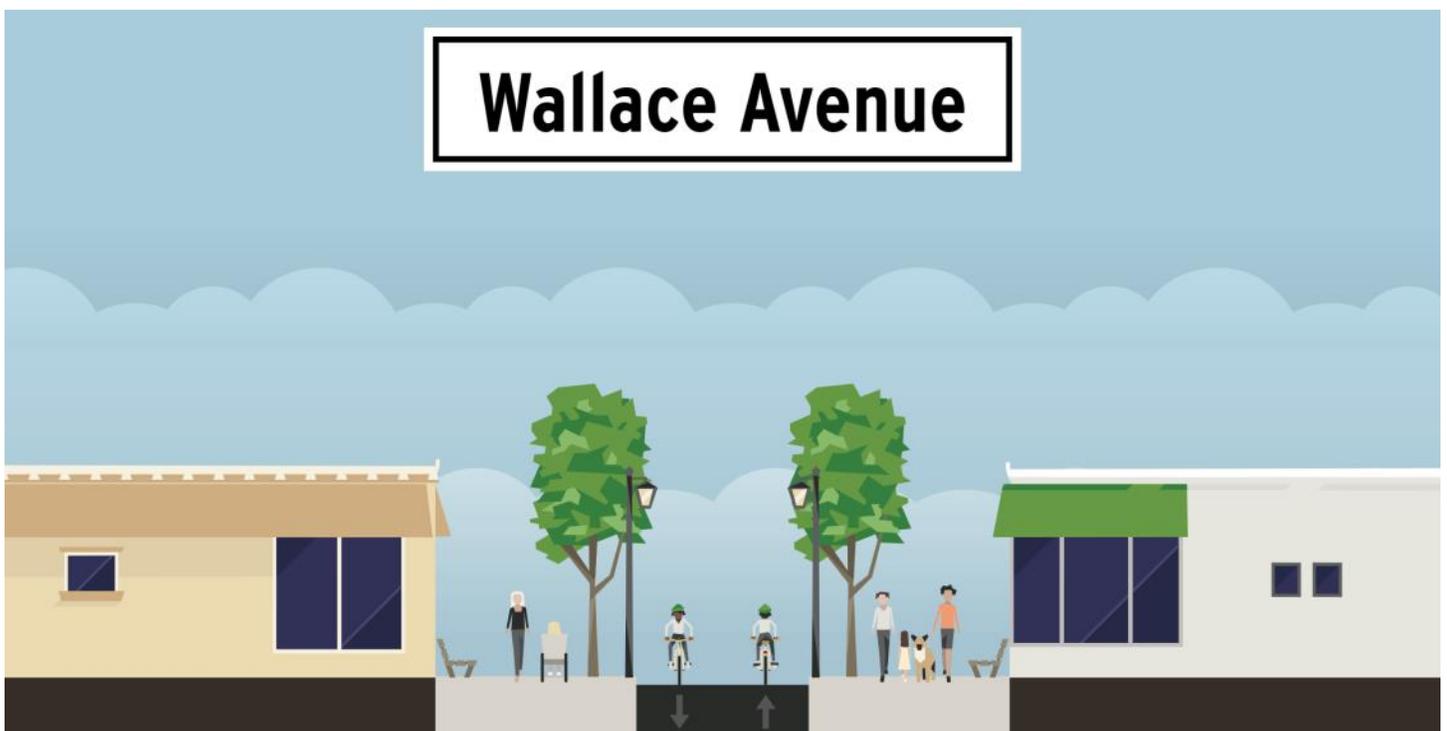
The Hitchcock Chamber of Commerce, Associated Credit Union of Texas, Prosperity Bank, and Texas First Bank would be key components for creating tax and business incentives and offering loans for local entrepreneurs to start up local businesses with employment for residents. Ideally, this would provide enough foot traffic along the economic corridor to justify bringing grocery stores into the immediate community, particularly within the Town Center.



Esplanade along Wallace Avenue



The Hitchcock Esplanade along Wallace Avenue would begin as a place on the weekend for community farmers and craftspeople to bring their produce and other goods in temporary stands to sell and for tourists to wander and shop. Over time, these temporary stands could be replaced by more permanent shops and restaurants. In addition, Cheaper Choices along HWY 6 may also be a good place to carry local produce due to its being on the same side of the highway as Good Ole Days and Stringfellow.



Recreational Use for Bike Trails, Hiking Trails, Prayer Tree Maze

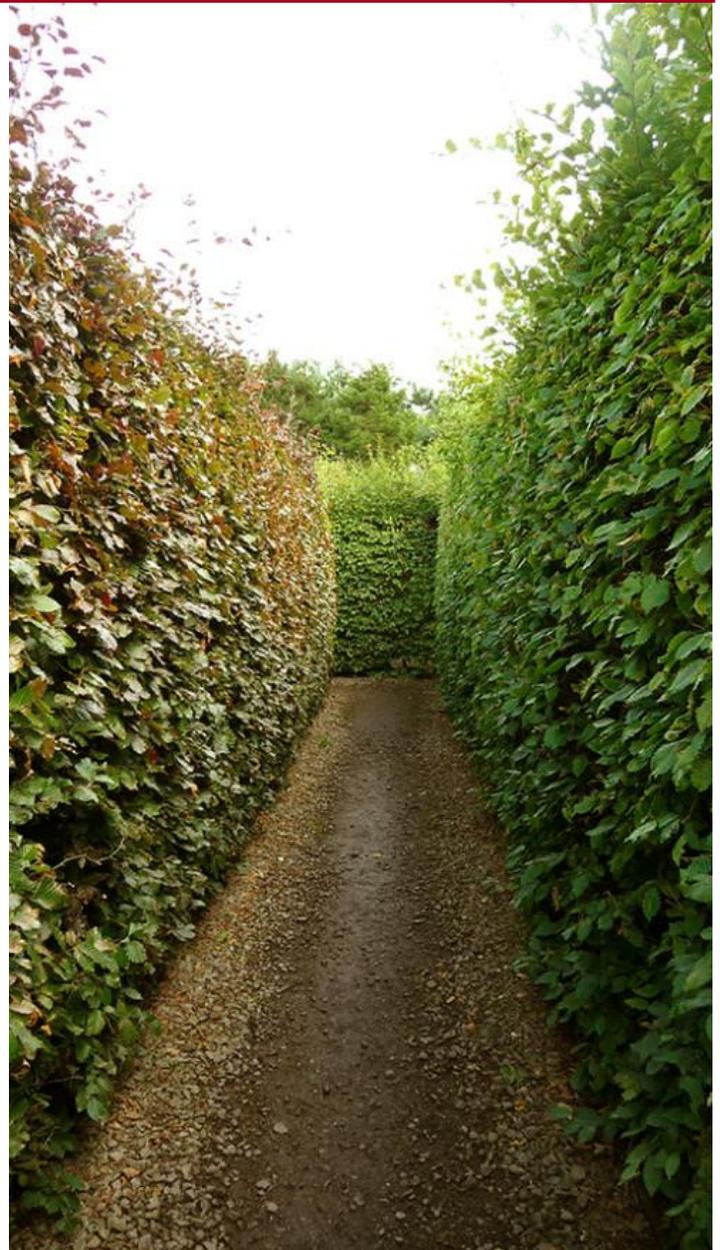
Along with establishing community gardens at Good Ole Days Grounds and Stringfellow Orchards, the community could benefit from a one-mile bike trail that goes between the two venues, an accompanying hiking mile marker, and a Prayer Tree Maze for enjoying the outdoors and the local flora and fauna.



Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail, Austin, TX



Prayer Labyrinth at Carlton College, Northfield, MN



Tree Maze in Norfolk, UK



Converting D&D Liquor Store into Beer Garden with Outdoor Music



While D&D Liquor is currently on HWY 6 with a straightforward design for selling liquor quickly and efficiently, one of the ways to transform this area is to create more outdoor music venues that are welcoming. So instead of a liquor store, why not create a beer garden? By moving the entrance to the side of the building and establishing a beer garden on that side for eating, drinking, and outdoor music, it would become a destination along HWY 6 that would attract restaurants and other local eateries.



Independence Beer Garden in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Sponsorship Campaign, Future Development Along FM 2004

To move forward with this endeavor, it is important to create and implement a Sponsorship Campaign. Leveraging the shareable resources of nonprofits, local for-profits, and public entities would enable success for the aforementioned recommendations. The following organizations and their resources would be great as potential partners:

- a. Farmers Market Technical Assistance: Urban Harvest, Galveston's Own
- b. Urban Food Production: Finca Tres Robles Farm, SE Houston Community Garden
- c. Loans & Capital Assistance: Associate Credit Union, Hitchcock Chamber of Commerce
- d. Volunteers & Champions: Hitchcock High, Crosby Middle, Hitchcock ISD

While all of these ideas focused on the Central Business District of Hitchcock, TX, being the Town Center along HWY 6, it was noted during the CHARM session of the American Planning Association—Texas conference that a mixed use development along FM 2004, south of HWY 6, would be beneficial in getting more traffic along HWY 6. This could include apartment complexes, large retail stores, and other mixed use developments.

Image Acknowledgements

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Page 6 GIS Maps courtesy of Texas Target Communities

Page 7 Stringfellow Orchards Photo by Sam Collins via Twitter

Page 7 Good Ole Days Grounds Photo from Fairs and Festivals via <https://www.fairsandfestivals.net>

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Page 10 GIS Map by Stephania Alvarez

Page 11 Blodgett Urban Gardens Photo taken from

<https://communitygarden.org/find-a-garden/gardens/third-ward-community-farm>

Page 11 Community Garden Photo taken from Urban Harvest via

<http://urbanharvest.org/volunteer-in-a-community-garden>

Page 13 Photo of Wallace Avenue courtesy of Google Earth via <https://www.google.com/earth>

Page 13 Drawing of Wallace Avenue Simulation courtesy of <https://streetmix.net>

Page 14 Photo of Ann and Roy Butler Hike and Bike Trail in Austin, TX, taken from

<https://www.austintexas.org>

Page 14 Photo of Norfolk Tree Maze taken from <https://www.experiencenorfolk.uk>

Page 14 Photo of Carlton College Prayer Maze taken from <https://www.carleton.edu>

Page 15 Photo of Food Truck taken from <https://www.tripadvisor.com>

Page 16 Photo of D&D Liquor taken from <https://www.yelp.com>

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