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Market Street brings original insights and clarity to the evaluation and revitalization of the places where people live, work and grow. Through honest and informed assessments, *Market Street* can equip you with the tools to create meaningful change. Our solutions successfully merge our experience and expertise with the economic and social realities of our clients. *Market Street's* community clients are successful at creating stronger programs, increasing operational budgets, and creating new quality jobs that improve the quality of life in their communities.

Table of Contents

Introduction I

Acknowledgements 6

Research Summary 9

Strategy Overview 13

 2011-2015 Goals 13

Goal 1: Grow Greater Waco..... 17

Goal 2: Develop Greater Waco’s Workforce 37

Goal 3: Reinforce Positive Perceptions of Greater Waco 44

Goal 4: Improve Strategic Community Areas..... 49

Goal 5: Support a Culture of Implementation 56

Conclusion 61

INTRODUCTION

The national economic meltdown in late 2008 and its resulting fallout in terms of record-level unemployment rates, an overall decline in capital projects across business sectors, and the bottoming out of most regional housing markets has caused leaders at the local, state, and federal levels to rethink economic development to get America's communities back on track.

One thing is certain: the country is in uncharted waters, and what worked in the past is not guaranteed to work today. With new opportunities on the table in terms of green jobs, economic stimulus funds, health care reform, revised corporate tax structures, incentives, and other state and federal priorities, the most competitive communities are using this time to reorganize and plan so they may maximize economic opportunities as we emerge from this recession.

Greater Waco has fared the recession better than many U.S. communities, demonstrated by a comparatively lower unemployment rate, strong capacity in education and health care, favorable cost of living/wage differential, and comparatively fewer home foreclosures and payment delinquencies among its residents. However, as presented in the *Competitive Realities* report, many challenges remain which, if not addressed, will hinder Greater Waco's long-term competitiveness.

Having a strong economic and community development strategy in place has kept area leaders on track and focused on this long-term horizon. With the 2005-2010 *Strategy* continuing through December, developing a new five-year plan, the ***Next Level Strategic Plan for Economic and Community Development***, is an important exercise and a sound investment as this new strategy is implemented through 2015.

This *Next Level Strategy* presents a variety of recommendations ranging from organizational improvements to community development initiatives and marketing. After this *Strategy* was developed, this project's Steering Committee was asked to assist with prioritizing Greater Waco "musts" for the next five years. **While all activities proposed in this *Strategy* are necessary steps toward meeting Greater Waco's long-term goals, a few priorities rise to the top for the region:**

1. **Market Greater Waco.** Strengthening community's image among both internal audiences and target cluster companies is critical to economic development.
2. **Develop the Riverfront and Greater Downtown.** There is resounding interest in investing in the revitalization of Greater Downtown. The Central Texas

Research and Technology Park (CTRTP) is an important cornerstone of Greater Downtown and region wide economic development.

3. **Become a magnet for talent.** Talent development, recruitment, and retention at every level of education is a top priority and ranks among the highest of all five of this *Strategy's* goals.

These priorities should provide direction to the Chamber as it advances forward with implementation. When tough decisions must be made, refer to this list for guidance.

Project Overview

The planning process was begun in 2009 to ensure that a plan and funding would be in place to continue and expand the economic and community development initiatives made possible through the *Challenge Greater Waco* program. The process has engaged the Chamber's Strategic Economic Development Steering Committee, Chamber staff and *Market Street Services*. Its implementation will increase the competitiveness of Greater Waco as a place to live, work, and grow.

The ***Next Level Strategy*** on the entire community to step up its economic and community development initiatives to an unprecedented level. With a solid foundation in place and a track record of strong catalyst projects, Greater Waco is ready to realize its potential as an important city and region in the growing Texas Triangle.

The ***Next Level Strategy*** emphasizes activities that further strengthen the community's fabric and sets pace for world-class development. It challenges the region to make entrepreneurship a higher priority, to create a culture that appeals to talented young professionals, and to implement the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan that has the promise to transform the city and region. It sets forth a more concentrated target industry initiative through local catalyst projects and stronger direct marketing activities.

2005-2010 Progress

Before presenting the strategies and action steps for 2010-2015, it is important to reflect on the great progress that has been made since the completion of *Challenge Greater Waco*. During the past five years, important foundations have been established that provide a springboard for action.

- Collaboration within the region is at an all time high, making more efficient the transition from idea formation to results;

- The community has rallied in support of community and economic development and fueled *Challenge Greater Waco* with financial support and human energy;
- Breakthrough initiatives, such as retaining the VA Hospital, constructing the new Chamber building, and establishing the Education Alliance, to name a few, are significant milestones of successful implementation.

The following presents top action items from the previous strategy along with a brief explanation of the tremendous progress that has been made. This puts into context the tremendous capacity of the Greater Waco Chamber and other community organizations to make rapid, impactful improvements.

- **Win recognition as a green, livable city.** Greater Waco has seen a surge in exceptional green business practices, including LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) buildings and a focus on live, work and play environments. The Greater Waco Chamber's new office is the first LEED certified chamber of commerce building in the nation.
- **Exceed Texas average for growth of jobs, income, and investment.** Greater Waco's economy has performed well despite a national recession and has at least kept pace with other strong Texas markets.
- **Develop and market health care and wellness resources.** Greater Waco's central location and established health care facilities have sparked the growth of new health and wellness businesses. The region can claim a new hospital complex.
- **Realize a billion dollar decade of development.** The new Chamber building was a catalyst project that generated support for Waco Town Square, Heritage Quarters student housing, the Waco Convention Center renovation, and the Roosevelt transformation. Implementing the visionary Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan will continue to advance this initiative.
- **Enhance the Interstate 35 corridor economically and aesthetically, emphasizing the Greater Waco gateways.** The flyover at Highway 6, Hillcrest hospital and new buildings at Baylor will affect perceptions of motorists traveling through Waco. Planning is underway to reconstruct I-35 through Waco, including a signature bridge across the Brazos River. A sign on the north side of Waco welcomes motorists, and another is planned on the south side of the city.
- **Become a magnet for young professionals.** Greater Waco continues to experience vigorous job growth and has taken significant steps toward its goals of having a walkable, densely populated downtown. These changes have resulted in an uptick in the population of young professionals. Long term, Greater Waco's

central location in the Texas Triangle will be attractive to a younger, more qualified, and better educated workforce.

- **Advocate for passenger rail.** The community continues to make its needs known in the initiative to develop high speed rail between San Antonio and Dallas. Its advocacy for the line and for a stop in Waco will pay off. Locally, streetcars and other forms of public transportation are likely to be developed within the next decade.
- **Grow the University Center to 6,000 students.** The McLennan Community College University Center makes earning a higher degree more accessible. It is an invaluable resource to growing Greater Waco's workforce. Establishing the University Center was an important activity in recent years. Enrollment continues to increase.
- **Create a regional brand and engage in a marketing and public relations campaign for economic development and tourism.** The "Waco We Do" brand was established with the assistance of a large number of community players. "Waco We Do" is building momentum, and the Chamber has a solid marketing campaign underway.

Substantial progress has been made on all of these initiatives, but there is still work to be done. This *Strategy* recommends building on these initiatives through 2015 and beyond. The past five years is just the beginning.

The Process

The process of developing this economic and community development strategy has involved months of community input and research which was crafted into a creative and realistic plan that can affect meaningful, sustainable change. It has allowed multiple stakeholder groups to voice opinions and offer suggestions and took into account previous Chamber and community planning and visioning.

Market Street Services served as the facilitator in the process of crafting the ***Next Level Strategy***. The end result is a product of the community, representing the creative thought and vision of local residents, businesses, and civic leaders. The creation of the *Strategy* is taking place over a seven-month period and has involved the following five tasks:

- **TASK 1: Competitive Realities**
Greater Waco (defined as McLennan County) was benchmarked against the state,

nation, and three comparison regions along indicators related to People (demographics and socioeconomic), Prosperity (economic performance and business climate) and Place (quality of life and infrastructure). Interviews, focus groups, and a Chamber-led online survey were utilized to gain the perspectives of stakeholders. This deliverable was presented on December 1, 2009.

- **TASK 2: Target Cluster Review**

This analytical document was based on the *Competitive Realities* report and stakeholder input and incorporated detailed economic data to identify the region's target sectors. The *Target Cluster Review* was presented on January 20, 2010.

- **TASK 3: Marketing Review**

This report included a review of websites, the use of social media tools, brochures, presentations, advertisements, newsletters, events, and other initiatives and gauged their effectiveness. *Market Street* focused on understanding what has worked well for Greater Waco and where there are opportunities to more clearly communicate the region's competitive advantages. It was presented with the *Target Cluster Review*.

- **TASK 4: Next Level Strategic Plan**

The *Strategy* promises to “Take Economic and Community Development to the Next Level” in Greater Waco. It outlines the means by which Greater Waco will build upon the Chamber's successful programs and accomplishments in 2006-2010 with new and expanded goals and objectives to achieve even greater results in 2011-2015. The *Strategy* provides recommendations to increase and enhance capacity and resources to strengthen Greater Waco's competitive position in today's economic development landscape.

- **TASK 5: Implementation Plan**

With the completion and adoption of the *Next Level Strategy*, *Market Street* will work with the Chamber staff to finalize an Implementation Plan. This task will prioritize tasks, develop a five-year budget, and propose organizational changes and staffing.

A clear first-year plan will be presented along with priorities for immediate action. The second to fifth year timetable will also be prepared with specific actions and budgets. New activity measures and outcome benchmarks based on the success of the *Challenge Greater Waco* plan will also be presented.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Economic Development Strategy Steering Committee was established in 2005 to provide guidance and leadership during the development of the *Challenge Greater Waco* strategic plan. The Steering Committee has met quarterly as “the keeper of the goals” to monitor progress and sign off on mid-course corrections.

Beginning in the fourth quarter 2009 additional members joined the Steering Committee to work with *Market Street* and the Chamber staff to develop a new plan for 2011-2015.

The Steering Committee’s oversight ensured that the development of research reports and the *Strategy* itself are reflective of the area’s goals and aspirations and that it will enable the city-region to capitalize on the opportunities identified.

Market Street thanks the following individuals for the time and energy they dedicated to this process:

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RESEARCH SUMMARY

This section presents a summary of findings from the *Competitive Realities*, *Target Cluster Review*, and *Marketing Review* to provide context for the recommendations that follow.

Competitive Realities

The *Competitive Realities* report was the first stage of this *Next Level* planning process. It identified key challenges for Greater Waco to overcome as it seeks to further develop its regional economy, and it also reported on progress made since the 2005 *Strategy*. Comparison of Greater Waco's trends and capacity to three carefully chosen benchmark communities, Texas, and the United States demonstrated that although Waco still has work to do, the community has a dynamic "product" to sell to existing and relocating businesses. Key themes that were clearly delineated from this research include the following:

- Greater Waco has weathered the recession better than many city-regions which should enable future economic development initiatives to focus on jobs that offer upward mobility and higher wages, particularly in professional, technical, and service occupations. Although there has been an increase in jobs in Waco, the recent economic downturn has caused labor force participation to shrink. Stakeholders have also cited a large gap between the availability of high and low wage jobs. These issues are also likely linked to the region's migration dynamics and stakeholder perceptions related to talent attraction and retention.
- Promising improvements in educational attainment and investments in higher education and research capacity have positioned Greater Waco for long-term success. However, regional leaders must continue to improve measures of success in K-12 education including increasing graduation rates to insure that its talent pipeline grows in both number and quality.

Landing Texas Tech University at the University Center at McLennan Community College was a coup, but the Chamber will have to market these affordable college options outside of the county to achieve its stated goal of 6,000 upper level students.

Also needed are new degree programs and expanded continuing education opportunities to increase the percentage of population with bachelor and advanced degrees. If current support for increasing educational and research capacity

continues with vigor, Greater Waco will be in a strong competitive position in the long-term.

- The unemployment rate in Greater Waco is lower than in selected geographies, but labor force participation rates are declining. Workers are facing many challenges related to this economic recession. These issues may cause them to temporarily drop out of the labor market and could potentially include poor job quality, frustration of trying to find adequate employment, or transition of families to a single income earner due to a tight job market. This may compound existing issues related to poverty and lagging per capita income. As is true with many communities, these dynamics may improve as the national economy regains strength and consumer confidence is fully restored.
- Stakeholders agree that continuing to leverage the region's low cost of living and increasing quality of life amenities, such as creating a vibrant downtown and riverfront and increasing retail options, will help to make Greater Waco a more competitive location for businesses and workers.
- During 2006-2010, the Chamber and its partners made great progress to improve downtown. Momentum in this regard has continued through the economic recession, which demonstrates the community's potential and its commitment to enhancing its quality of life assets.
- While Waco's image has improved since 2005, more efforts are needed to battle persisting negative associations and low community pride. Many community leaders feel that this can only be done through internal and external marketing campaigns.

Market Street's research findings were supported by input from community stakeholders. According to stakeholders, top opportunities include the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown development and an even more aggressive economic development program.

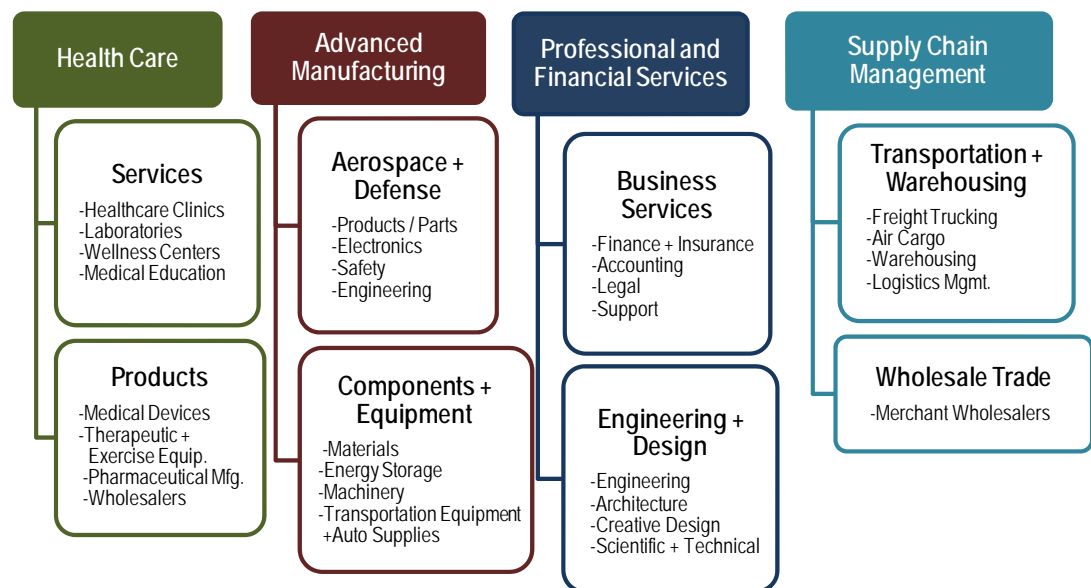
Top challenges include diversity and quality of jobs and wages, direction of leadership/civic engagement, and workforce quality (including the level of skills and the attraction of young professionals).

Since 2005, downtown development has remained a top priority, and diversifying Greater Waco's economy and training a skilled workforce have become even more important.

Target Cluster Review

After considering Greater Waco’s workforce dynamics, analyzing employment and wage growth since 2005, and reviewing the region’s performance against the 2005 targets, *Market Street* recommends the reorganization and adjustment of targets for 2011-2015.

Recommendations did not reflect an overhaul of current economic development targeting efforts, as Greater Waco has had strong success in many of these areas. However, the following target clusters are recommended, with an added focus on higher wage niches within each cluster to leverage new opportunities in the community.



In addition to the target clusters, *Market Street* recommends that the Chamber support three special opportunity areas that will help to strengthen the community fabric and contribute to economic competitiveness in the longer-term. These include:

- Tourism and Downtown Development,
- Young Professionals, and
- Entrepreneurship.

These opportunities should be closely monitored and capitalized upon since they have the potential to enhance the vitality of Greater Waco. *Market Street* believes that these areas warrant investment of local fiscal and personnel resources; however, supporting growth in these areas is approached differently than target cluster development. Clear synergies exist between these opportunity areas and the recommended targets.

Marketing Review

The *Marketing Review* assessed Greater Waco's current marketing initiatives and provides insight into the strengths and challenges of the program. This report includes an examination of the Chamber's website, social media tools, brochures, presentations, advertisements, newsletters, events and other initiatives in order to gauge their effectiveness.

- The Chamber is excellent at responding to prospect inquiries and handling projects once they are on the ground in Greater Waco. Businesses have commented that they appreciate the Chamber's professionalism and speed of response.
- Audience differentiation is an issue across all facets of Chamber marketing activities. Business development initiatives are focused on a general audience of site selectors, industry executives, and real estate brokers. Very little target industry specific activity is underway. Both the website and collateral materials fail to single out specific audiences or provide customized pathways for each.
- Content within marketing materials is organized according to Chamber departments versus Chamber audiences. This inhibits the depth of messaging.
- The Chamber's website, though very good in some respects, is in need of improvement in a few important areas, including navigational structure and layout. The website will require a complete overhaul soon and should be a priority for implementation in year one of the *Next Level Strategic Plan*.
- Printed collateral materials used to promote Greater Waco are extensive. They are well designed and well written. The Chamber has received numerous awards for the quality of its collateral materials.
- Although there is no public relations budget, the communications department does a good job keeping news current on the website and in social media outlets. In the future, a proactive campaign managed by an external agency, individual, or dedicated staff person could greatly benefit the initiative.
- Likewise, the budget for advertising—both locally to generate community pride and nationally for market awareness—needs to be increased in the next cycle.

Now that perception issues are beginning to dissipate, the next objective of the overall campaign should be to build positive buzz about Greater Waco. Activities like constructing the first green chamber building in the country and setting bold 40-year goals for downtown Waco are smart stories that will spark viral conversations about Waco's progress.

STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The purpose of a comprehensive economic and community development strategy such as the one *Market Street Services* is preparing with the Greater Waco Chamber is to provide a roadmap for retaining and creating jobs and investment.

Strategies begin with an in-depth evaluation of the community, both from a statistical and qualitative perspective. Through this analysis, the region's strengths and challenges are identified, and priorities are set for future development. The process then identifies a community's audiences for growth, and concludes with a plan for increasing audience presence in the community.

Action steps are based on ideas that spring from within the community as well as best practices from other places. While most economic development strategies address topics of community development, marketing, and public policy, the weight given to each topic is based on the community's specific opportunities.

Greater Waco has experienced great success in implementing the *Challenge Greater Waco* plan, and the ***Next Level Strategy*** will build on the momentum that has been generated in the past five years.

GREATER WACO'S 2010-2015 ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Greater Waco is committed to a long-term vision that creates an important, world-class community. Chamber and other public and private sector leaders have set a high bar for future development. Above all goals, there is a commitment that quality should permeate all activities moving forward.

Best practices from across the globe serve as Greater Waco's models for growth. While the ***Next Level Strategy*** focuses on the next five years, Greater Waco's focus is on the longer-term horizon. The Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan currently being crafted, for example, looks forward 40 years.

As stated in the Introduction, Greater Waco's long-term economic and community development goals are unchanged from the 2005-2010 *Strategy* but with significantly more challenging objectives that have been adapted to reflect both progress that has been made and new market opportunities.

Although goals are unchanged, the region’s areas of focus will transform. **Three core priorities thread throughout all five goal areas and should be particular areas of emphasis:**

1. **Market Greater Waco** – The *Next Level Strategy* calls for a marketing initiative that is larger and better resourced than ever before. Specifically, it encourages the Chamber to expand its business retention program; advocate for high quality development; launch proactive marketing campaigns tailored to each target cluster; collaborate with area partners to develop the CTRTP and neighboring property; and increase incentives and capital.
2. **Develop the Riverfront and Implement the Greater Downtown Plan** – The *Next Level Strategy* calls on the Chamber to take a leading role in implementing the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan. Activities include finding investors for five or more major downtown real estate projects; advocating for street cars and water taxis; advancing parks, arts, green and urban initiatives; and opening downtown incubators for small businesses, freelancers, and artists.
3. **Become a magnet for talent** – The *Next Level Strategy* calls on the entire community to step up workforce development, attraction, and retention. It focuses on empowering young leaders; ramping up the Education Alliance and early childhood programs; utilizing alumni networks to retain and attract graduates; and providing access to entrepreneurial infrastructure.

Goal 1: Grow Greater Waco

Growing Greater Waco’s economy will be most successful through a balanced approach including business retention, entrepreneurial support, and business recruitment. This is the first goal of this *Strategy* and includes the following four objectives:

- Objective 1: Support the growth and expansion of existing businesses;
- Objective 2: Effectively target and serve the specific needs of a diverse group of local entrepreneurs;
- Objective 3: Attract new companies from expanded target sectors; and
- Objective 4: Engage in a highly targeted proactive marketing initiative.

Goal 2: Develop Greater Waco's Workforce

Access to talent is among the most critical location requirements of any business. Developing a quality workforce has been, and should continue to be, a strategic priority. The three objectives within this important goal are:

Objective 1: Improve public school performance;

Objective 2: Align higher education offerings with the needs of current and projected businesses and global economic trends; and

Objective 3: Empower underserved and emerging workers.

Goal 3: Reinforce Positive Perceptions

Changing the perception of a community takes time but it begins with bolstering community pride. A region's residents can be its greatest marketers. If local attitudes are good, positive messages will radiate through contacts with family, friends, and ultimately to business connections outside of the community. All economic development programs should include internal branding initiatives. For Greater Waco in particular, branding is an especially vital long-term objective.

Objective 1: Generate increased community pride and build Waco's internal brand; and

Objective 2: Strengthen Waco's national and international brand.

Goal 4: Improve Strategic Community Areas

First, as the physical core of the region, vitalization of Greater Downtown and the Brazos Riverfront deserves long-term investment. Second, the region's underserved commercial and residential neighborhoods are visible reminders of the economic challenges still faced by Greater Waco residents. Continued improvements in these two areas will trigger increased prosperity for the entire region.

Objective 1: Take a lead role in implementing the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan;

Objective 2: Market the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown for businesses, visitors and residents;

Objective 3: Advocate for a 21st century streetcar line and other transit options to spur development downtown; and

Objective 4: Develop partnerships to improve declining commercial and residential neighborhoods.

Goal 5: Support a Culture of Implementation

An economic and community development strategy is worth little more than the paper it is printed on unless the community embraces a culture of implementation. The ***Next Level Strategy*** will come to life and produce the desired results when community leaders and leadership organizations rally behind its execution. An unprecedented level of regional collaboration emerged in support of the *Challenge Greater Waco* plan. Today it is just as important as it were five years ago for Greater Waco's economic and community development initiative to be energized by a spirit of cooperation and hard work.

Objective 1: Lead a cohesive and collaborative implementation effort;

Objective 2: Strengthen regional partnerships; and

Objective 3: Pursue resources to support economic development.

Goal 1: Grow Greater Waco

Growing Greater Waco's economy is the first priority of the Chamber's *Next Level Strategy for Economic and Community Development*. For Waco, economic growth will require a three-tiered approach. First, the Chamber should continue assisting existing businesses with retention and expansion by expanding its business retention and expansion (BRE) program. Next should be a focus on entrepreneurship which is an enormous opportunity for Greater Waco that will require cultivating a culture of start-up activity. Finally, recruiting new business investment into the region is critical to raising area wages and providing jobs needed to retain the region's talented workforce. The following section includes recommendations aimed at growing Greater Waco.

➡ Objective 1: Support the growth and expansion of existing businesses.

Between 2006 and 2009, with the Greater Waco Chamber's business retention program operating full time, Chamber staff has conducted more than 400 on-site business retention calls and retained more than 3,000 local jobs.

Action Step: Expand the BRE program and enhance retention-based tools.

Business retention is a top Chamber priority. Since unveiling the *Challenge Greater Waco* plan, the Chamber created a new staff position wholly devoted to business retention and expansion. In addition, the Chamber acquired new software to manage its regional contacts. As the economy recovers, it is certain that other communities will aggressively enhance their business recruitment activities, putting Waco at jeopardy for losing businesses to competing communities. Greater Waco Chamber's Business Retention & Expansion program should work proactively to enhance its ability to assist with retention-based business projects.

- Continue proactive business retention visits. Increase the number of annual on-site company visits above 100 each year.
- Increase visits to headquarters locations of Greater Waco companies. Set a goal of traveling to at least four local target industry headquarters each year, and stay in close contact with executives from headquarters offices.
- More companies are becoming interested in pursuing "green" building practices related to both new construction and existing building retrofits. While these measures can benefit companies over a longer period of time, the initial investment

can be a challenge to the corporate bottom line. Given cost offsets in other areas, businesses may be more willing to pursue these opportunities. Greater Waco Chamber staff should explore “green” development policies for new and existing business projects.

Action Step: Formalize and strengthen regional BRE partnerships.

Although Chamber staff conducts many on-site business visits throughout McLennan County, there is a large sector of business that receives limited attention. Greater Waco Chamber staff should work to enhance the BRE program through regional partnerships.

- Work with other chambers and/or municipalities to develop formalized BRE programs for the purpose of gathering additional information as well as assisting in enhancing the business climate throughout McLennan County.

Action Step: Provide local companies with market intelligence.

Company visits allow the Chamber to listen and respond to local business needs, but support is limited by the sheer number of hours available for on-site meetings. In addition to BRE visits, the Chamber has an opportunity to assist all area businesses remotely through market intelligence. The better-informed businesses are, the more successful they can be. A best practice program is administered by the City of Littleton, Colorado, which is known for its innovative efforts in “economic gardening.”

- The Chamber offers a wealth of research and information, including custom market reports; community profiles of the region’s 19 cities; the Greater Waco Economy Report; Wacoprosector.com; and the Waco Chamber Weekly. Research is available online and is routinely shared in Chamber publications and at its *Hour Economy* luncheons.
- Further establish the Chamber as the region’s single and best resource for market intelligence. Survey Chamber members to assess current gaps in competitive intelligence. Consider subscribing to competitive information services such as Dun & Bradstreet, Tactician, or Lexis / Nexis to fill information needs.
- Work with the McLennan Community College Small Business Development Center (SBDC) to alert entrepreneurs about the research and online tools available to them through the Chamber.
- Organize a quarterly “Research Lab” during which a Chamber or SBDC representative familiarizes local businesses with the Chamber’s research tools and

instructs them on how to utilize the tools to meet their individual needs.

 **Objective 2: Effectively target and serve the specific needs of a diverse group of local entrepreneurs.**

Increasing entrepreneurship in Greater Waco should be a priority of the *Next Level Strategy* over the next five years and is identified as a special opportunity area.

The community has many of the necessary ingredients needed for strong start-up activity. The presence of a major university, strong community college and technical college is extremely beneficial. The region has a history of successful homegrown businesses. An entrepreneurial climate appeals to young professionals and creative individuals, adding to the community fabric that the Chamber strives to enrich.

Statistics show that an entrepreneurial climate is alive and well in Greater Waco. Currently, 18 percent of residents report self-employment income, which is almost on par with the national average of 19 percent but lags the state average by more than three percent. Entrepreneurship in Greater Waco has been on an uptick in recent years – increasing 1.3 percent in three years – and wages earned by this population are in line with the nation.

Market Street encourages the Greater Waco Chamber to engage in a concerted effort to fill in the region's entrepreneurial infrastructure. A surge in start-up activity will help take the region's economy to the next level. To foster further growth and support existing small business owners, the provision of technical assistance, financial resources, and networking opportunities are vital.

Action Step: Continue strong and active support for the Central Texas Research and Technology Park (Research Park).

Commercialization of university research sparks entrepreneurship, but transitioning technologies from academia into the marketplace requires concerted support.

The Chamber was an active participant in the formation of the Research Park, a collaborative effort between Baylor University, Texas State Technical College, McLennan Community College, McLennan County, City of Waco, City of Bellmead, Waco-McLennan County Economic Development Corporation, Waco Industrial Foundation, Heart of Texas Council of Governments, and the Greater Waco Chamber.

Plans for the \$20 million, 300,000 square foot facility were announced in October 2009. The Park is expected to open its doors in 2011.

- Continue to work with Baylor University to plan the Research Park facilities;
- Assist with attracting support funding for the Research Park’s ongoing operations;
- Work with educational institutions and companies for training and research opportunities;
- Together with the Small Business Development Center at McLennan Community College and the Baylor Entrepreneurship Program, provide assistance needed to transform Research Park research into commercially viable businesses through development of a technology incubator;
- Ensure that Greater Waco has adequate real estate to house companies graduating from the Research Park incubator;
- Attract companies to locate at the Research Park; and
- Establish Greater Waco Technology Neighborhood and Green Business Park.

Action Step: Expand the reach of the Small Business Development Center at McLennan Community College.

The MCC SBDC offers free business consulting services, one-on-one counseling and low-cost training seminars to area small businesses and prospective entrepreneurs. The Center serves a seven-county region that includes McLennan, Bell, Bosque, Coryell, Falls, Hill, and Johnson Counties.

- Continue partnering with the SBDC in the production of the monthly Sunrise Small Business Breakfast Series.
- Engage the SBDC in plans for the creation of a co-sharing facility in Greater Downtown.

Action Step: Establish Alliance for Entrepreneurs.

The Chamber currently has working groups for two target industries—aviation and health care. Similarly, the Chamber should establish a working group for area entrepreneurs.

- Closely link the working group with the SBDC.
- Explore Bootstrap Austin as a model for structuring the small business working group and its activities. Established in 2003, Bootstrap and its 19 subgroups empower entrepreneurs to generate their own start-up capital and nurture ideas

through interactive communities of entrepreneurs with similar interests.
(www.bootstrapaustin.org)

Action Step: Formalize a partnership with the Baylor entrepreneurship program to start-up one permanent student-owned business annually.

Baylor’s John F. Baugh Center for Entrepreneurship has served the Waco community for over 20 years. In 2008, Entrepreneurship Magazine ranked the Center as the 4th best undergraduate entrepreneurship program in the nation out of the 2,300 that it surveyed.

Each year, seniors in the entrepreneurship program work in teams to craft business plans and launch their own small businesses. The hands-on curriculum has produced companies that continue to operate in Waco today.

- These students are searching for new business ideas, and the Chamber could have a role in shaping their direction. Each semester, the Chamber should brief entrepreneurship students on market conditions and opportunities in Greater Waco;
- Provide students with start up business ideas that align with the Chamber’s target industries and fill local market needs; and
- Provide space as an incentive for continuing a student-owned business.

Action Step: Create an incubator space for office businesses.

A needed supplement for Greater Waco’s entrepreneurship infrastructure is an incubator for office businesses. Office incubator models have advanced in recent years, and there are a number of effective Chamber-initiated incubators that should be examined in the planning process. Greenville, SC’s NEXT Innovation Center is a prime example of the new generation of business incubators (www.spinatour.com/next/tour.html).

Incubators and shared co-working space are attractive options for Greater Waco. Co-working

Paducah’s Artist Relocation Program

Artist Relocation Program in Paducah, Kentucky, as a national model for using the arts for economic development comes to mind. A dedicated arts district with dual residential and commercial zoning allows entrepreneurs to have their studio, gallery, dining, entertainment, and living places under one roof. The City provides 100 percent financing for purchase and rehabilitation of existing buildings within the district as well as subsidizes a portion of architectural and design fees. Vacant lots are available for free for new construction. Projects must apply for and compete for incentives, so that the City can control the quality of activity. As a result of the Program, artists from 17 U.S. states have relocated to Paducah.

Source: Greater Paducah EDC
www.gpedc.com/community/quality-of-life/artist-relocation.cfm

spaces provide independent workers and freelancers a convenient and productive alternative to working in coffee houses. For a low fee (typically under \$200 per month), freelancers can rent a desk and share office amenities with other freelancers. Desks can be rented by the hour, day, or month. Collaboration among renters is encouraged. Converted residential properties or small office/industrial buildings make ideal sites. For an example, visit Conjured's website (<http://conjured.com>).

Action Step: Support entrepreneurial arts and entertainment organizations.

Arts and entertainment add to the fabric of the community and should be a focus of the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown's development. Artists and arts organizations are entrepreneurial by nature and require support similar to any start-up business.

- Shared co-working space, as described above, is ideally suited for creative businesses. The model can also be used to create shared studios for artists.
- Dedicate a block of Greater Downtown to cultivating arts and entertainment businesses. (Start with a building!) Provide studio space, galleries, theatres, cafes and classrooms. Bringing professional artists and Baylor, MCC and TSTC faculty and students together in a collaborative venture for the arts would be a winner for Greater Waco and help develop retail downtown. A niche for the block could be sustainable design. A model for merging creativity and economic development is the Create Here program in Chattanooga where fellowships are available for citizens to turn ideas into events, non-profits or businesses.
- The Waco We Do Arts website has good functionality and capacity for supporting area arts organizations. However, event listings are limited. Extend the reach and promotion of the website, encouraging (and even incenting) arts groups to refresh upcoming events on a frequent basis.

Action Step: Increase availability of start-up funding in Greater Waco.

The Baylor Angel Network (BAN) is a seed and early stage investor network that connects University alumni to investment opportunities in start-up business ventures. While the BAN is a successful program, it does not fulfill the complete capital needs of the entire region.

- Try again to establish the Waco Angel Network. Examine the Blue Ridge Angel Investors Network (BRAIN) as model for a successful program (www.brainnc.com).

- Explore the potential to host an ACCION branch in Greater Waco. ACCION Texas is a microenterprise development organization that has developed an innovative "blueprint" for establishing micro-lending programs in new areas around the state. ACCION Texas' network includes offices in Austin, Corpus Christi, Brownsville, Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, El Paso, Laredo, and Edinburg. Through its partners, it serves 200 Texas communities.
- Business & Community Lenders of Texas (BCL) is a microlender with potential to expand in Greater Waco. The mission of the organization is to stimulate the flow of capital and modernization of small businesses in Texas. BCL offers free business development services including financial analysis, loan restructuring, and counseling. In addition, BCL houses SBA lending programs that provide access to real estate and commercial capital loans.
- Develop a locally based pool of funds for start-up and microlending. Work with financial institutions to assist with development and processing.

Action Step: Work with area Independent School Districts to expand entrepreneurial education at the K-12 level.

Entrepreneurship is a topic that should be integrated into K-12 education. Greater Waco area schools have an opportunity to develop these skills at an early age, contributing to the quantity and success of future homegrown entrepreneurs.

- Work with area school districts to develop youth entrepreneurship summer training. The one-week program should be designed to help students explore their areas of interest, identify business opportunities, learn business management skills, and teach the fundamentals of writing a business plan. The training camp could culminate with a business plan competition and provide seed capital to the winners.
- Share stories about successful teen-owned businesses. Invite teen entrepreneurs to talk about their companies at school assemblies.

Summer Program for Entrepreneurship

The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship offers several resources for schools, including a six-week summer program for students, business competitions, and curricula for during the school year.

Source:
www.nfte.com/startaprogram/curriculum/

- There are a number of national youth entrepreneurship programs with substantial online resources available to encourage and support young business people. Examples include YouthVenture.org and IndependentMeans.com. Greater Waco could adopt a similar model to serve the region or connect students to existing quality programs.
- Another best practice to review is the North Carolina Rural Entrepreneurship through Action Learning (REAL) program. More information can be found at <http://ncreal.org>.

Action Step: Develop leadership skills within minority populations, especially among young adults.

There is a proven link between an individual’s leadership skills and his ability to succeed in entrepreneurship. As *Market Street* prepared to develop the *Next Level Strategy*, our conversations with community groups revealed a need to embolden leadership capacity within Greater Waco’s African American and Hispanic populations.

- The Greater Waco Chamber should work with the Centex African American Chamber and the Centex Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to develop in-house leadership development capacity based on the Leadership Waco model.
- Identify Leadership Waco alumni with strong ties to minority communities. Engage those individuals in addressing curricula and recruiting people into the programs. Entrepreneurship opportunity awareness should be engrained in all area leadership programs.
- Establish an “Emerging Leaders of Waco” scholar program. Partner with Baylor to create a service-learning seminar geared toward students who have an interest in staying in Central Texas after graduation. Link seminar attendees to Waco Young Professionals and Leadership Waco to help them extend their networks, skills, and involvement in the community.

CampusCATALYST

CampusCATALYST leverages the talents of undergraduate students at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago to provide pro-bono consulting services to non-profit organizations in the Greater Chicagoland area. Since the organization was founded in 2007, it has focused on providing assistance to non-profits in five areas: housing, youth and education, economic security, health, and arts and culture.

Under the guidance of MBA student mentors and faculty advisors, teams of undergraduate “community analysts” in for-credit university classes help philanthropic groups develop innovative, cost effective solutions for problems in three key areas: (1) Tactical operations, (2) Marketing, communications, and development, and (3) Partnership building.

Additional information about CampusCATALYST may be found in the Appendix of this Strategy or by visiting www.campuscatalyst.org.

➡ **Objective 3: Attract new companies from expanded target sectors.**

Business recruitment is the third component of Greater Waco's *Next Level Economic and Community Development Strategy*. This objective calls on the Chamber to concentrate on creating an environment, infrastructure, and marketing campaign tailored to each Greater Waco target industry. The following section describes catalyst projects that will spur growth within each target industry.

Action Step: Ensure that Greater Waco can compete with available buildings and ready-to-build sites throughout the region.

Greater Waco has a shortage of Class A office and industrial buildings, which has been a detriment to economic development efforts.

Availability of land, however, is not an issue. There are 11 business parks with 15,000 acres throughout the region, which can accommodate Class A industrial and office buildings. In addition, there is more than 15 million square feet of vacant or underutilized land in Greater Downtown.

During the next five years, additional Class A buildings must come online to meet the demand and expectations of the more advanced targets identified in the *Strategy*.

- Educate area developers on the desperate need for spec commercial buildings and Class A office and industrial buildings. Invite area developers to a brainstorming session to share ideas regarding how Waco can improve its real estate offering.
- Future construction must be of high quality. Stakeholder feedback observed that Greater Waco would not achieve its vision of being a world-class community by “growing cheap.” The Chamber should identify buildings and spaces that represent the quality and style of construction that is desired such as many owner-occupied buildings. Share these examples with area developers as well as with prospects considering locating in Greater Waco.
- Identify buildings and sites within the region that are well suited for each target cluster. Certify buildings and sites as being, for example, “healthcare-targeted” or “advanced-manufacturing targeted.” Indicate these tags within WacoProspector.com as well as in industry specific marketing materials.

Action Step: Support and create an Alliance for each target cluster.

In addition to physical infrastructure, Greater Waco should assemble leadership to support each target cluster. Currently, the Chamber has an Aviation Alliance and a Healthcare Alliance, and both groups are highly active. The Chamber should create similar groups to support Logistics, Professional and Financial Services, and Advanced

Manufacturing. (Note: a previous recommendation suggests forming an Alliance for Entrepreneurs.)

- Cluster Alliances should be comprised of industry executives;
- A primary goal of Alliances should be to identify and address issues impacting the cluster's ability to grow in Greater Waco;
- The Alliances will encourage workforce, supplier and support linkages within the cluster; and
- Alliance members will help sell Greater Waco to businesses considering locating here.

Action Step: Expand Greater Waco's Healthcare cluster.

Greater Waco should engage in a concerted effort to build workforce and infrastructure resources to support growth of the healthcare industry. Work with the Healthcare Alliance to foster select projects that promise to have a big impact on the industry's future in Greater Waco.

- Advance healthcare training resources so that local educational institutions meet the needs of a diverse healthcare community and Greater Waco becomes a hub of talent within this field.
- A collaborative effort is needed to fill the pipeline of talent, from associate degree nurses to classroom instructors.
- Encourage the MCC- University Center partner institutions to actively participate in planning and delivery of degree programs that serve regional healthcare industry.
- Texas Tech's participation in the University Center may be just evolving, but it has long-term potential to supplement the region's higher education needs. The Chamber and Healthcare Alliance should work with Texas Tech and MCC representatives in sculpting future curricula to meet the region's needs.
- From a training perspective, there is high demand for healthcare practitioners but a shortage of instructors. The region needs to graduate Bachelor and Masters Degree students in healthcare fields, particularly nursing, to fuel educational needs for associate degree graduates.
- Baylor University's nursing degree program is currently housed in Dallas. Encourage Baylor to expand the program to Waco so that students may begin and complete their entire degree within the region.

- The debate regarding the future of healthcare in the country continues at the federal level. The Healthcare Alliance should remain at the forefront of the conversation and proposals under consideration. Greater Waco is fortunate to have individuals from Central Texas leading national organizations. The Alliance should address the impacts on healthcare delivery and pursue actions that enhance the specific needs of the Greater Waco community.
- The development of the Baylor Research Innovation Collaborative and Research Park provides an opportunity for Greater Waco to consider life sciences as a development opportunity. The Chamber and Healthcare Alliance members should explore niche opportunities for Greater Waco in attraction and entrepreneurship in the life sciences sector.
- Baylor University announced in March 2010 what will be the largest gift in the university's history, an estimated \$200 million estate provision to benefit medical research with a focus on aging. Although the donation will not be consummated until the donor's death, it provides an opportunity to plan for programs and research projects in the College of Arts and Sciences, the School of Social Work and other areas. The Healthcare Alliance members should work with Baylor representatives, as requested, to leverage this significant gift to establish a world-class facility and advance the opportunities for life-science research and activities in Greater Waco.

Action Step: Expand Greater Waco's Advanced Manufacturing cluster.

For Greater Waco, Advanced Manufacturing includes two niche segments: aerospace and components and equipment manufacturing. The industry ranges from start-up companies emerging through commercialization of research activities to full scale manufacturing operations. Greater Waco must be prepared to serve the full range of their business life cycles.

- Building and site availability for these businesses is critical. Ensure Greater Waco offers Class A land and buildings for advanced manufacturing. Enumerate the location requirements of a typical advanced manufacturing operation, and collaborate with the real estate community to design and develop properties that support those criteria.

- The Research Park’s focus on engineering and niches such as aviation and composite materials is an ideal starting ground for businesses in the advanced manufacturing industry. It will house applied research activities and technical training from multiple institutions as well as a commercialization incubator.
- Space in the Baylor Research Innovation Collaborative, the anchor facility in the park, has limited expansion capacity for incubator graduates and for companies desiring a location near research activities.
 - Designate land near the Research Park to serve as a “Greater Waco Technology Neighborhood” for advanced and emerging technology companies. Explore the model of the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research (CU-ICAR) in Greenville-Spartanburg, S. C., as a model for designing a highly effective and well-designed technology park that ranges from university research to international business. (www.cuicar.com)
- In addition to composite materials and aviation, solar, energy storage, and battery technologies should be targets of the Greater Waco Technology Neighborhood. These sectors align with the region’s and state’s goals of targeting green technologies as well as compliment the research activities of the Park.

Action Step: Expand Greater Waco’s Professional and Financial Services cluster.

Professional and Financial Services is an ideal target industry for Greater Waco based on the region’s educational output and young professional retention goals. However, the region currently lacks the quality of office space needed by these businesses.

- As discussed earlier in the *Next Level Strategy*, Greater Waco needs an office incubator and or co-sharing space to foster young companies in this field. Entrepreneurship is key to embedding Professional and Financial Services companies in Greater Waco.
- Baylor University’s Business School graduates approximately 800 business majors each year. Most of these individuals move away from Waco following graduation. The likelihood of retaining graduates will increase if they experience business start-up opportunities and internships as students.
- Greater Waco has several excellent resources to assist entrepreneurs including the Small Business Development Center at MCC, the Baylor Entrepreneurship program and successful local business people. The Chamber should develop a program to actively assist new entrepreneurs utilizing the local resources. A

suggested program is a mentorship based on the Circles of Seven program in Bloomington, Illinois, where a seasoned business person works with six new entrepreneurs on key issues during a year-long program.

Action Step: Expand Greater Waco's Supply Chain Management cluster.

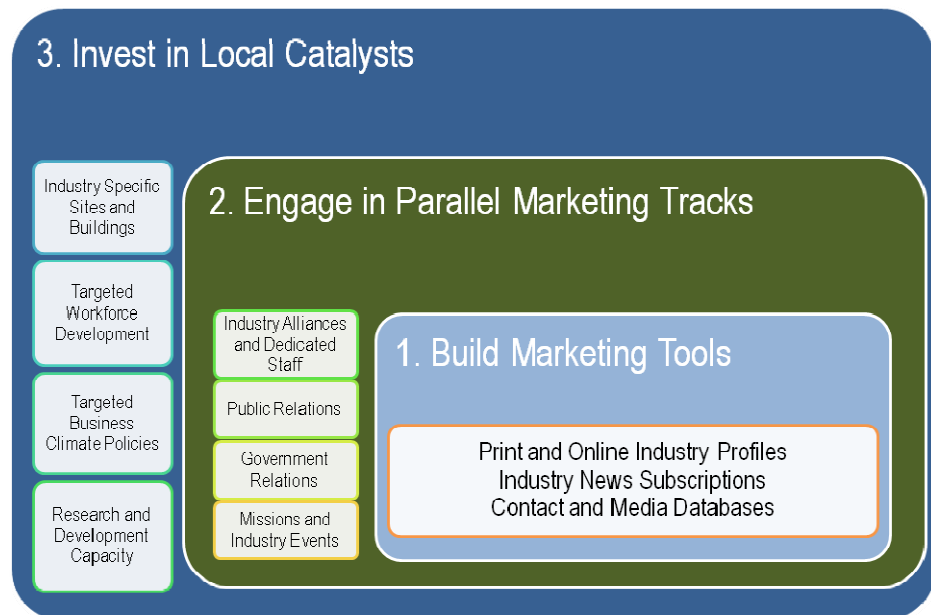
Supply chain management is a target that will benefit all areas of the Greater Waco region, particularly more suburban and rural areas that have sites available for large facilities. There is a strong base of supply chain management-related educational programs in the region, and there is an opportunity to strengthen connections between their activities. Texas State Technical College is leading the way with its institute for radio-frequency identification (RFID) chips. Baylor's Hankamer School of Business has established a supply chain management specialization.

- Explore the possibility of establishing a Greater Waco Institute for Supply Chain Management that blends technical education with business management applications. Focus students on creating process software and hardware that streamlines distribution of goods. Look at Georgia Tech's Supply Chain and Logistics Institute as a model.
- Work with partner cities in McLennan County to identify potential sites for logistics companies. Determine infrastructure needs to make these sites shovel ready. Create a plan and budget for upgrading sites so that they are prepared for development.
- Increase utilization of the Texas State Technical College Airport. The Airport's primary runway is an all-weather, asphalt runway that can handle wide-bodied jets weighing up to 450,000 pounds. The parking apron covers approximately 3 million square feet. Expanding businesses and cargo operations to this site is a competitive advantage for the region. It has the capacity to provide high-quality aircraft maintenance and modification services and other operations such as air cargo, parcel post, freighters, U.S. military, and corporate and private aircraft.

➔ **Objective 4: Engage in a highly targeted, proactive marketing initiative.**

As stated in the *Marketing Review*, Greater Waco’s 2005-2010 marketing campaign accomplished its goals. During the past five years, the Chamber has established the tools and organizational structure needed to support a national marketing campaign. With the necessary resources in place, it is time to take marketing to the next level.

The following graphic illustrates the tiers that comprise a targeted marketing initiative. At the core, Greater Waco will refine the tools needed to sustain marketing – collateral and online materials, industry news, and contact databases. The second tier includes activities that will place staff in direct contact with industry executives, site selectors, or influencers, such as state officials who determine policy and lead distribution. The third tier, which was addressed in Objective 3, encompasses the larger scale community initiatives that support business by guaranteeing infrastructure and policy issues are addressed, workers are prepared, and research activities seed new growth.



The following section offers recommendations related to tiers one and two of the targeted campaign.

Action Step: Establish the Chamber as Greater Waco’s economic development marketing leader.

While cities within McLennan County may have their own economic development departments, the Greater Waco Chamber serves as the lead organization in marketing the region. Site selectors and corporate decision makers are accustomed to working with regional chambers and economic development corporations. They expect that marketing and information flows from these groups.

- As revealed in the *Marketing Review*, the City of Waco currently has a dominant web presence. This confuses external audiences. It is unclear whether the City or Chamber is the main point of contact.
- The Chamber should be the information clearinghouse for the region, including both county- and city-specific data.
- The City of Waco’s website should present information about the City’s economic development services and support, but direct visitors to the Chamber’s website for data about the region.
- The Chamber’s graphic design standards should be shared with other organizations and cities in the region. Strive for a consistent look throughout the County. Greater Waco will appear more unified if simple steps are taken to coordinate image, for example, using the same color palette and fonts or incorporating the “Waco We Do” logo into websites and collateral.

Action Step: Refine and build marketing tools.

Marketing tools include any printed or online materials that convey information about the Chamber and economic development.

- Invest in a new website that is modeled after the very best chambers and economic development organizations in the country. The *Marketing Review* provides a detailed critique of the current website and offers numerous improvement suggestions. Among the top recommendations are:
 - Adopt a new format for the economic development portion of the site. The current section is based on a chamber of commerce template, which interferes with information flow.
 - Change the homepage interface to be audience-centric (e.g., chamber members, Waco residents, economic development prospects). Make it easier for visitors to navigate directly to the information that they most desire.

- The Chamber produces a wealth of printed materials, and most are aimed at a general audience. Depth of copy and consistency of message could be improved across the board. With the exception of the economic development newsletter, collateral serves both internal and external audiences, which in turn dilutes the message to both and is not allowing for in-depth content around specific topics. During the next five years, the Chamber should refine its printed marketing materials by the following actions:
 - Conduct a side-by-side evaluation of all current materials – including magazines, newsletters, brochures, and direct mail pieces. Consider frequency of use and results generated. Eliminate or combine duplicative information.
 - Create a printed marketing piece and online “micro-website” for each target cluster. These tailored materials should include data, sales points, and site information specifically aimed at the cluster. Develop online target cluster profiles within the new Chamber website. Refer to the Charleston Regional Development Alliance, Metro Denver EDC, and New Mexico Partnership’s websites for examples of layout, content, and messaging.
 - Consider developing an annual report that summarizes the Chamber’s activities and successes for the year.
 - Create design standards to ensure consistency of appearance of all marketing materials. Develop Word and PowerPoint templates that allow for uniform proposals and presentations.
 - Continue producing an e-newsletter for economic development. Publish the newsletter on a consistent basis, whether monthly or quarterly.
 - The *Waco Chamber and Business Quarterly* magazine is attractively designed and well written. It is currently distributed to both local audiences as well as economic development prospects. The publication could be improved by adopting a standard outline of content. For example, each issue should include articles related to each target sector. Organize the economic development and industry news, allowing the economic development department to pull the section into a stand-alone marketing piece as needed.
- Build positive internal buzz about the Chamber’s economic development accomplishments by posting economic development announcements on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

- Fully embrace the “Waco We Do” brand. Significant time and energy went into developing the brand. It is smart and adaptable, but is barely visible within current marketing materials. Use the brand identity to inspire design standards for all collateral and web-based marketing.



Action Step: Organize parallel marketing tracks tailored for each target cluster.

The next step in Greater Waco’s marketing initiative is to customize campaigns for each target cluster. The Chamber’s sales initiative should include a series of activities aimed at communicating Greater Waco’s message directly to industry executives while establishing relationships with decision makers and influencers. Each campaign should include the following core elements:

- Media relations – Engage either an external media relations consultant and/or dedicate a full time staff person to proactive public relations. Create a media database comprised of editorial contacts for both general business and target industry specific publications.
- Government relations – Have consistent involvement in State government and legislative initiatives affecting the industry’s viability in Texas. Ensure state officials are aware of Greater Waco’s target industries and its keen interest in policies that support those industries.
- Texas One – Participate in Texas One events in geographies containing high concentrations of target industries. Use target industries as a screen to determine which Texas One marketing missions to attend.
- Professional associations – Ask the Chamber’s Industry Alliances to identify their top regional and national professional associations. Join target industry associations. At a minimum, these groups’ publications will ensure a stream of current industry news and member lists. Look for opportunities to attend professional events with

Wake County’s Textiles Campaign

A report published by the Research Triangle Regional Partnership noted that to fully leverage the region’s universities (Duke University, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, and North Carolina State University), they must be incorporated into all economic development strategies.

This regional goal spurred the Wake County EDO to build a direct mail campaign around NC-State’s world-renowned College of Textiles and the region’s textile business cluster. Students and faculty at NC-State helped develop lists of targeted in four sub-fields of advanced textiles: non-woven materials, biomedical textiles, medical textiles, and nanofibers.

Then priority companies were identified based on companies that have existing connections to the region, through the university or supplier firms. These companies received direct mailers. Concurrently, the organization ran print advertisements in select trade magazines and launched a textile-specific website. In February 2006, MeadWestvaco announced it would invest \$14 million in a Center for Packaging Innovation in Wake County, creating 200 jobs.

local executives. For example, if a local company (or educational institution) is speaking at an industry event, sponsor a networking reception following the presentation.

Action Step: Increase awareness of Greater Waco as a business destination to students and visitors.

In addition to the target cluster campaigns, the marketing initiative should reach out to general audiences who are either familiar with Waco or who travel to Waco. Within these groups are business influencers, company executives, and entrepreneurs. On a larger level, focused outreach can influence perceptions of Greater Waco and spread awareness that the region is open for business. Three specific opportunities are described below: Baylor parents and alumni, sports-related tourists, and other visitors.

- Market Greater Waco to Baylor students, parents and alumni. As past part-time residents and supporters of the University, Baylor families and graduates are familiar with the community and its strengths. However, most of these individuals have never been asked to consider Greater Waco as a permanent home. Many are not aware of the rich amenities offered outside of campus life, or the strong business climate.
 - Host “Get to Know Greater Waco” receptions for incoming freshman families and graduating seniors;
 - Go on the road to present Greater Waco business information at alumni association chapter events in major U.S. markets;
 - Share community information with Baylor students through the campus newspaper and online news services; and
 - Familiarize students and their families about the larger community by speaking at Baylor freshman orientation and parent weekends.
- Market Greater Waco to visitors coming to Waco to participate in sporting events. Due to its central location, Waco plays host to a number of statewide and regional tournaments each year. For example, the State’s 1A-4A football championships take place at Baylor’s Floyd Casey Stadium. Regional junior golf, baseball, and track and field tournaments take place in Waco. The first annual Waco Triathlon, TriWaco, attracted hundreds of participants from across the state and nation.
 - Identify ways to promote Greater Waco to attendees of sports events. Examine opportunities to sponsor and co-host receptions for participants;

- Work with area hotels to include Waco relocation information in guest rooms and in-room television channels. Include business information about Waco in event materials;
 - Waco We Do Sports provides an online directory of sporting events happening in Greater Waco. This initiative could be elevated to serve a larger sports-related marketing role for the region. Proactively promote Greater Waco as a venue location to state and regional leagues. Strategically communicate Greater Waco’s strengths as a place to live and do business to event attendees; and
 - Develop a plan to guide Waco We Do Sports’ marketing efforts and better position sports as an engine for economic development. Establish a Greater Waco Sports Commission to support the campaign.
- Market Greater Waco to visitors of other area attractions. Waco is home to many outstanding attractions, including the Texas Ranger Museum, Texas Sports Hall of Fame, Cameron Park, Cameron Park Zoo, Dr. Pepper Museum, Mayborn Museum Complex, and the Waco Mammoth Site. Hundreds of thousands of tourists are drawn into Greater Waco each year.
 - As with sports-related marketing, ensure that tourist venues offer collateral material that touts Greater Waco as a good place to live and do business;
 - Ask venues to include a link to the Chamber’s website within their own websites; and
 - Work closely with the Waco Convention and Visitors Bureau to identify other ways of integrating an economic development message into tourism marketing.

Action Step: Streamline internal Chamber processes related to marketing and communications for consistency of message.

As the marketing initiative ramps up, it is important that internal channels for marketing and communications are as efficient as possible. Evaluate the budget and staff responsibilities.

- The Chamber President, senior staff and the communications department should meet monthly to insure consistency of message;
- Develop an internal request form for all communications services to facilitate scheduling, consistency of theme and integration of the “Waco We Do” brand into all products;

- Additional staff may be needed to support an expanded campaign. Within the Communications Department, for example, a new staff person dedicated to economic development support could be needed; and
- Public relations is currently handled in-house. Although content is consistently updated, the initiative is reactive. As recommended earlier in the *Strategy*, the Chamber should either engage a public relations consultant or dedicate a full time staff member to leading proactive media initiative.

Goal 2: Develop Greater Waco's Workforce

Greater Waco's capacity to provide employers with quality talent and ability to prepare its population for future careers is the pinnacle of community development. Companies will not be able to expand, nor will they be interested in Greater Waco, if they do not feel they can find the workers they need. To provide the skilled workers that companies are looking for, the region will have to optimize its Pre-K to 16 pipeline to the labor force, particularly as it relates to priority target business sectors.

This goal focuses on the workforce development needs of Greater Waco, from the public school systems to two- and four-year degree programs and beyond.

➡ Objective 1: Improve public school performance.

The quality of a community's PreK-12 school systems is related to its overall economic competitiveness. Business relocation decisions are tied to the performance of PreK-12 systems. Typically, communities that succeed in educating their children have a strong workforce and are more competitive in the global economy.

Greater Waco is served by 21 school districts, with Waco ISD, Midway ISD, and La Vega ISD serving the largest percentage of area students. While good progress has been made in recent years, there remains room for improvement in the region's school performance.

Educating the community's children is made more difficult because so many are economically disadvantaged. Fifty-five percent of the student populations in Texas school districts are considered economically disadvantaged. In Waco, 83 percent of Waco ISD and La Vega ISD students are economically disadvantaged.

Improving public school performance is a long-term economic and community development objective. The following action steps are aimed at improvements during the next five years.

Action Step: Support the Greater Waco Education Alliance and its tactical plan.

The formation of the Education Alliance in 2008 represents a significant step forward in addressing local public education needs. The Alliance's purpose is to provide a structure within which the work of eleven stakeholder groups will be concentrated. It has been conducting informal operations for the past two years and has gained

substantial traction. Sponsors have supported the 2008 and 2009 Summits, and an underwriting of Alliance activities has emerged from among initial funders.

It is time to establish permanence for the Greater Waco Education Alliance. Staffing needs have been identified and initial Alliance administrative direction has been undertaken. The Alliance Board is set to be formed in 2010. The Planning Team that has been coordinating the activities will continue its central leadership and daily role.

The Chamber should take a lead role in supporting a permanent Education Alliance and actively assist the Alliance with implementing the eight goals and tactical plan that it recently completed.

The Alliance's plan includes specific action items and timing. The Chamber should fully support its implementation, as well as work with the Alliance to finalize its strategy related to poverty and education.

- Where appropriate, reach out to regional public and private partners to capitalize the Education Alliance;
- Seek state and federal grants to augment public education through the auspices of the Education Alliance; and
- At Chamber programs and in publications, promote opportunities to donate to or volunteer for Education Alliance events.

Action Step: Continue to support the annual Greater Waco Education Summit.

Organized by the Greater Waco Education Alliance, the annual two-day Greater Waco Education Summit brings education and industry leaders together to examine best practices and discuss improvements to the region's educational system. In 2009, more than 1,000 people attended the event that raised \$100,000 for area educational initiatives.

Action Step: Increase involvement of local business community in area schools.

The involvement of industry in area schools is a priority for the Chamber and the Education Alliance because it has proven so impactful in school districts across the nation. As the Alliance considers ways to further incorporate the private sector into Waco area school districts, *Market Street* offers the following recommendations:

- Support the development of job shadowing programs for students in grades 9 to 12, and involve a wide range of local employers;

- Build on the growing business and community support for the school districts by providing high school students with internship opportunities at local businesses during summer break;
- Offer high school teachers externship opportunities with local industries to enhance their practical knowledge and ability to prepare students for future careers;
- Create lines of communication between area career academies and Greater Waco’s target industry clusters; and
- Explore the Leader in Me program of the Decatur, Alabama Chamber and Decatur City Schools. It is an interesting approach that uses the book *7 Habits for Highly Effective People* with students, teachers and administrators with successful results.

Action Step: Strengthen literacy programs for pre-kindergarten aged children.

Developing literacy begins at birth, and children who enter kindergarten with a foundation of reading skills are more likely to succeed in school. Strengthening Greater Waco’s early childhood educational programs will result in long-term improvements in public school performance.

- Create a volunteer reading and book donation service aimed at stemming early childhood literacy problems.
- Examine the Parent Child Development Center in Houston, Texas, as a potential model program.

➡ Objective 2: Align higher education offerings with industry needs and global trends.

With 12.3 college students per 100 residents, Greater Waco benefits from the presence of Baylor University, McLennan Community College, the University Center at MCC, and Texas State

**Parent Child Development Center
Houston, Texas**

The Parent Child Development Center (PCDC) is a two-year program that focuses on families with children ages 2 months to 3 years. In the first year of participation in the program, paraprofessional educators have 25 in-home visits with each family to teach a series of infant development topics. Small groups of families meet on weekends for workshops on communication, decision making, and other topics of interest to the participants. The program provides basic services, such as transportation to program-related activities, resource referral and education, family planning information, and public health education.

The second year provides center-based activities four mornings a week for mothers and their children. The group discussion topics are continued in more depth with an emphasis on child care management – primarily authoritative parenting and problem behavior management. Home management training instructs mothers on budgeting, meal planning, and other requested topics.

In follow-up evaluations of children who participated in the program, increases in IQ and cognitive ability were reported as well as improved interactions between child and mother. Similar PCDC programs have also succeeded in Birmingham, AL and New Orleans, LA.

Technical College. All of these schools have expanded since 2005; and they, along with other partners, are currently embarking on the Central Texas Technology and Research Park, which is expected to greatly increase Waco's innovation capacity.

Action Step: Identify and communicate target cluster skill requirements to local high schools, colleges and workforce development providers.

The *Target Cluster Review* contains an occupational analysis for each of Greater Waco's industry targets. The analysis provides a table listing occupational categories that comprise the target cluster, as well as current employment, location quotient, and average salary for each.

- Compare the occupational category list against current high school, technical college, and university program offerings in the region. Highlight gaps between what is currently available and what Greater Waco's target industries will demand. A location quotient below 1.0 indicates that concentration of individuals in that occupation is below the national average – a tip that additional training resources for that field need to be made available. Share these findings with TSTC, MCC, Baylor, and the University Center and its participating institutions. Identify specific pathways for narrowing the gap between industry needs and program offerings.
- Also share findings with career counselors at area high schools and colleges. Provide counselors with a marketing piece that they may distribute to students. The handout should showcase Greater Waco's "occupations of the future" and encourage students to pursue training in those fields.
- Examine successful career academy models in Waco and other communities. Consider expanding career academies to new schools in Waco area ISDs. Montgomery Public Schools, for example, has 350 students participating in five career academies. Students enrolled in the academies take up to seven courses in that field during their high school career to prepare them for both college and jobs in those areas. The academies are schools within schools designed around a career theme. The Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce's Career Academies Task Force worked with Montgomery Public Schools and the business community to develop the Career Academies.
- Continue to increase enrollment and capacity at the MCC-University Center, keeping sights set on the Chamber's goal of 6,000 students. Current enrollment is approximately 1,000. Expand dual enrollment and Two-Plus-Two opportunities for

high school across McLennan County and beyond. Create a scholarship program to offset the cost for qualified individuals.

- Identify and support the development of advanced training labs and programs at TSTC to meet the needs of target industries, such as the Texas Aerospace Center.

➔ **Objective 3: Empower young professionals and underserved and emerging workers.**

Greater Waco needs to nurture young professionals and those segments of the workforce that are underserved and emerging, particularly minority populations.

Action Step: Retain and recruit young professionals to Greater Waco.

A frequently cited stakeholder concern was the region’s challenge retaining and recruiting young professionals. While this population segment of 25-34 year olds has grown in recent years, the percentage of young professionals living in Greater Waco (13.7 percent) is lower than the state average (14.7 percent).

The community recognizes that Waco may not have the types of jobs or salary levels that appeal to young talent. Several of the target clusters recommended in the *Strategy*, however, should address this issue. Professional and financial services, for example, should generate local jobs for local business graduates. Increasing entrepreneurial resources should also help – starting a local business guarantees a young professional will stay in Greater Waco.

Lifestyle amenities are a major contributor to a young professional’s choice of residence. As Dr. Richard Florida’s *Rise of the Creative Class* and *Who’s Your City* point out, quality of place, not availability of jobs, determine where young, creative individuals choose to live. Greater Waco realizes this connection and has adopted a long-term vision that includes a vibrant downtown core, riverfront parks, and world-class cultural amenities.

- Continue a strong commitment to implementing the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan and investing in quality of life amenities.
- Strengthen entrepreneurial infrastructure, including education, capital access, and space.

Columbia, S.C. Talent Attraction Program

EngenuitySC is a public / private partnership focused on building the knowledge economy in Columbia, SC. One of the program’s primary areas of focus is talent attraction and retention in the new economy. The group’s Talent Magnet Program aims to connect university students to the business and civic communities, as well as recruit young workers to the region. (www.engenuitysc.com) Similarly, the Columbia Opportunity Resource (COR) program is dedicated to fostering a greater sense of civic and community involvement in the region through social, political and cultural education, communication, development and action. COR members receive leadership training and board involvement opportunities.

Source: www.ourcor.org

- Focus on target industries that provide job opportunities for young professionals.

These three recommendations will generate a climate in which young professionals thrive, but these changes will take time to implement. In addition, Greater Waco should engage in a talent recruitment campaign to address the short-term issue.

- Create a talent recruitment campaign that draws young professionals into Greater Waco.
 - Talent recruitment can take the form of a marketing campaign, which integrates online resources (www.WacoYP.com, Facebook, Twitter, for example) with print publications (e.g. direct outreach marketing at college career fairs). Leverage alumni lists from local high schools, colleges, and universities.
 - Talent recruitment campaigns blend well into larger knowledge economy/ entrepreneurship initiatives. Examine EngenuitySC (www.engenuitySC.com) and model a similar program for Greater Waco.
- Retain college students after graduation.
 - Boost civic engagement of area college students. Involve Waco Young Professionals in creating a pipeline that funnels students into YP membership upon graduation. College students who are civically engaged are more likely to continue to live in Greater Waco following graduation.
 - Involve students in the development of the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan, for example, and involve them in crafting and tracking a scorecard to monitor progress.
 - Focus attention on students of Baylor’s Entrepreneurship program. As discussed in Goal 1, providing these students with market information and business ideas, as well as connecting them with resources to

NewCity Morehead Initiative

The NewCity Morehead Initiative began in 2006 when the NewCities Institute, a non-profit corporation formed to research, study, educate communities about civic engagement, assisted Morehead and Rowan County civic leaders in engaging citizens from diverse populations in conversations about what they wanted for their community in the 21st century. For several months, hundreds of citizens and civic leaders met at community forums to discuss their values and express their hopes and fears.

NewCity engages students through classroom study. Morehead State’s Institute for Regional Analysis and Public Policy, created a course focused on the NewCities’ 12 Principles of Community Building and the process of the NewCity Morehead Initiative.

Another feature of the program is student involvement with a Local Initiative Committee. Student representatives are invited to participate with the Morehead City Council, the Rowan County Fiscal Court, the Morehead-Rowan County Chamber of Commerce, and the Morehead-Rowan County Economic Development Corporation. Students attend meetings and provide their perspective to the community’s leaders.

support their startups, will greatly increase the likelihood that their businesses succeed. Owning a thriving local business will almost guarantee that a student will stay in Waco following graduation.

- Continue strengthening Waco Young Professionals (Waco YP), whose current membership is 450. The mission of the organization is to “shape and promote Waco's quality of life to attract and retain a labor force of educated 25 to 35 year-olds by establishing partnerships, leadership and creating communication.”
- Share the *Next Level Strategy* with Waco YP. Charge the group with getting actively involved in implementing one or more action steps.

Action Step: Integrate the *Strategy* into Leadership Waco’s curriculum.

Involve Waco’s next generation of leaders in the Chamber’s economic and community development initiatives. Educate Leadership Waco participants about the objectives and planned action steps of the *Next Level Strategy*. Integrate strategic objectives into the program’s curriculum and training exercises. Engrain economic and community development into the program’s structure.

Action Step: Engage minority populations in economic and community development and empower them as leaders.

Greater Waco is a diverse community. It boasts a greater proportion of minority residents than the nation (39.1 percent versus 34.4 percent). Growth in the region’s Hispanic community has contributed significantly to the region’s overall growth since 2005.

As discussed in Goal 1, the Chamber should assist the Centex African American Chamber and the Centex Hispanic Chamber with creating in-house leadership training programs. Involve Leadership Waco alumni in creating the curricula and recruiting participants. Look for examples in other communities such as the Alexander E. Briseño Leadership Development Program in San Antonio or the Fort Worth Metropolitan Black Chamber of Commerce’s PATHS Forward.

Goal 3: Reinforce Positive Perceptions of Greater Waco

In 2005, a major issue addressed in the *Challenge Greater Waco* plan was Waco's image. It was found that Waco's overall internal and external perceptions needed improvement.

Today, community leaders believe that the internal perception of Waco has changed in the past five years. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "Much Worse" and 5 being "Much Improved," online survey respondents gave Greater Waco's current internal perception of itself versus five years ago a 4.1. The success of the *Challenge Greater Waco* plan is a significant contributor to this improvement. According to local leaders, the plan resulted in a synergy that is "bringing in more awareness of the whole community."

While progress has been made, Greater Waco's image is still a key issue to community stakeholders. The "Waco stigma" that "Waco is not as good as other big cities" still pervades. Many stated that residents have low community pride and are uncomfortable advocating the City to outsiders. External perception problems continue to pervade.

➡ Objective 1: Strengthen Waco's national and international brand.

Nationally, Waco is best known for the Branch Davidians and Baylor University. Over time, the association with the Davidians will go away. Waco will always be associated with Baylor and can build on the Baylor-Waco partnership in many areas including,

- Central Texas Research and Technology Park;
- Entrepreneurship and programs in the business school;
- Museums, museum studies and partnership with Waco Mammoth Site; and
- Baylor athletics.

Another opportunity to differentiate Waco could be the development and implementation of the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan. The idea that, by 2050, Waco could attract half of the county's population and job growth to its central business district and close-in commercial and residential neighborhoods has the potential to be a major urban development story and could generate national attention to the city.

Market Street recommends significantly increasing funding for an economic development marketing campaign to raise awareness of Greater Waco and to promote

the region to its target industries. Greater Waco's business environment should strive to be ranked by national publications among the top 10 mid-tier U.S. metros by 2015.

Finally, the reconstruction of I-35 will improve the appearance of the city to 100,000 motorists each day and this will affect perceptions of Waco.

Action Step: Focus on media relations and placement of positive news stories about Waco in national or regional news outlets.

As discussed in Goal 1, the Greater Waco Chamber should retain a public relations consultant or in-house public relations manager. The Chamber does a good job responding to media inquiries and posting news on its website and social media channels. However, it lacks a proactive, strategic approach to long-term media awareness and interest in Waco stories. A proactive media relations campaign will make a significant improvement in external perceptions and should involve the following:

- Implement a media relations strategy, including a calendar of key project or organizational benchmarks, essential news and notable dates of interest;
- Develop a news/benchmark angles that will be of interest to targeted media;
- Regularly distribute focused news releases or pitch to reporters on topics of interest to media, clients or the public;
- Disseminate news or a pitch to key media and conduct follow-up to secure inclusion of and coverage about Greater Waco, its key players and its marketing points;
- Top 10 rankings by national publications;
- Monitor the content of user-controlled websites (e.g., related to tourism, entertainment, dining) to ensure that Greater Waco is well represented; and
- Carefully review Waco-based websites to ensure that written copy sheds positive light on the region. Reword statements that may sound defensive—for example, those regarding public safety or educational performance.

Action Step: Improve I-35 visibility and attractiveness.

According to the Texas Department of Transportation and the McLennan County Metropolitan Planning Organization, more than 100,000 vehicles pass through downtown on I-35 in a 24-hour period. That translates into well over 100,000 impressions of Waco on drivers and passengers on any given day. The community's

appearance along the Interstate must be improved or it will always be an impediment to Waco's external brand.

Fortunately, planning is underway to reconstruct I-35 through Waco including a signature bridge across the Brazos River. The Chamber has been represented on the I-35 Working Group to make the design work for the community and the businesses along the route.

The highway flyover bridge at Highway 6, Hillcrest hospital and new buildings at Baylor will affect perceptions of motorists traveling through Waco. A sign on the north side of Waco welcomes motorists and another is planned on the south side of the city.

- Keep Waco Beautiful now has a \$150,000 grant for I-35 improvements. Coordinate their activities with the Chamber's I-35 Committee and 1000 Friends of Waco. This is a good start, but more funding will be needed to make a substantial impact.
- The Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan includes both sides of I-35. Ensure that the Plan includes suggestions to enhance the appearance of the Downtown area from the Interstate.
- The I-35 Corridor through the Waco District is 94 miles in length, and construction north of Waco is expected to begin soon. The plan is to increase capacity initially by one lane in each direction, which, according to the Department of Transportation, will take 10-12 years to complete. This is an opportune time to engage in construction projects that improve the appearance of Waco in the area abutting I-35.
- 100,000 trees in Greater Waco is an initiative of the *Strategy*. This goal should include plantings along the I-35 route, supplementing landscaping that will be included during the upcoming interstate construction and repairs.

➡ **Objective 2: Enhance community pride and Waco's internal brand.**

An internal marketing program should be utilized to inform citizens and business leaders about the *Next Level Strategy* and to encourage citizens to vocalize their pride in their community. The campaign should also build support for the Chamber's economic and community development initiatives.

But as evidenced in the *Marketing Review*, the brand's implementation is surface only. The brand's potential to bolster community pride and unify Greater Waco's image has not yet been realized. Over the next five years, the Chamber should fully embrace the brand, using it to inspire an internal marketing campaign.

- Greater Waco is home to numerous organizations whose own marketing influences the region's external image. The chambers, area cities, the County, the CVB, sports teams, and colleges, for example, all produce logos and marketing materials that convey messages about Greater Waco. Greater Waco's internal branding campaign must strive to coordinate the image and message generated from regional groups. A single strong message will build local enthusiasm that will ultimately impact perceptions in the outside world.
 - Begin by developing a "Waco We Do" toolkit. As discussed in Goal I, Objective 4, the toolkit should include brand guidelines that dictate proper use and placement of the "Waco We Do" logo. It should also include high-resolution electronic files of the logo in color and black and white format and requirements for communicating the brand in written copy.
 - Create a 1-year internal marketing plan outlining campaign activities. Ask marketing and public relations executives from Chamber member companies to contribute ideas.
 - Share with them the Chamber's commitment to the brand and discuss the desire to strengthen the brand within an internal marketing campaign. Brainstorm about ways other community organizations can participate in the campaign and utilize the brand identity in their own marketing efforts. Provide participants with the "Waco We Do" toolkit so that they are armed and ready to take action.
 - Assign a Chamber staff member to managing the internal campaign and serving as a point person for participating organizations.
- Continue to utilize *Waco Chamber & Business Quarterly Magazine* to share news about economic progress. In addition to dedicating quarterly articles for each target cluster, as recommended in Goal I, allocate space for a "points of pride" piece that highlights positive news and statistics about the region (e.g., The Atlantic Monthly's "The Nation in Numbers" article that runs in each issue).

Action Step: Celebrate the completion of the *Next Level Strategic Plan* by sharing the *Strategy* with the larger community.

Reinforce the community pride campaign with visible progress. Begin by working with local media to produce a series of reports about the *Next Level Strategy* following its completion. Inform residents of the region’s five-year goals and the breakthrough initiatives set forth in the *Strategy*. Keep local media informed as progress is made throughout the 2010-2015 campaign.

Make available the *Strategy*’s executive summary in print and online formats through the Chamber and other outlets. Provide residents with a system for providing feedback and asking questions.

Action Step: Solicit continuous feedback.

Develop an online survey that allows residents to share their personal reasons for living in Greater Waco. Work with Waco YP to promote the survey among its membership, as it is especially interesting to know why young people choose to reside in the region. Within their candid answers, the Chamber will find sales messages that go beyond traditional statistics and truly define the character of the community.

Action Step: Celebrate Greater Waco’s philanthropic organizations.

Greater Waco has robust philanthropic activity. The number of nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations in Greater Waco per 1,000 people is 2.8, and nonprofit revenue per resident of \$10,690.

The level of charitable giving in Greater Waco came as a surprise to this project’s Steering Committee and is a little known strength of the region. Greater Waco is a generous community, which should be a point of pride that is communicated back to residents.

- Share news of Greater Waco’s philanthropic activities with the general population. Work with the *Waco Tribune Herald* to create a series of articles that inform readers of Waco’s charitable giving rates. Publish profiles of area nonprofits.
- Create an insert for inclusion in a City utility bill that highlights Greater Waco’s philanthropic success and thanks the community for its generous giving.
- Explore opportunities for attracting headquarters of philanthropic organizations as an adjunct to the professional services target cluster.

**Solicit Community Feedback:
Houston It’s Worth It**

Several years ago, a group of entrepreneurs in Houston created the website, “Houston It’s Worth It,” to provide residents with an outlet for explaining why they love living in Houston despite its many quirks. The website contains original photos and honest rebukes to standard complaints about the city (e.g., “the humidity,” “the traffic,” the “sprawl.”) This is a humorous but sincere and direct approach to countering issues that may impact community perceptions.

Source: www.houstonitsworthit.com

Goal 4: Improve Strategic Community Areas

Strategic community areas are those places within Greater Waco that impact the condition of the entire community. The *Next Level Strategy* focuses on three topics of critical importance to the future of economic and community development: the Brazos Riverfront, Greater Downtown, and underserved neighborhoods throughout the region.

The Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan represents a significant leap forward for the region. It is based on the “big idea” that hundreds of citizens and a team of nationally acclaimed planners could develop a visionary plan for the central business district and close-in commercial and residential neighborhoods that would attract half of McLennan County’s projected population and job growth through 2050.

The study area covers some 5,000 acres of land bordered by Highway 77 (La Salle Avenue), 17th/18th Streets, and Cameron Park. It encompasses downtown Waco, Baylor University, I-35, and the commercial and residential neighborhoods north and south of the Brazos River.

The Chamber was the initial advocate for the plan and has provided leadership with the City of Waco and other public and private sector leaders throughout the planning process. More than 350 residents have participated in the planning workshops.

The community-wide acceptance of the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan is likely a result of the many positive changes that have occurred since the Chamber’s *Challenge Greater Waco Strategic Plan* included a commitment to revitalize strategic community areas as one of five major goals.

The Chamber’s \$4.2 million “first green chamber building in America” became a source of community pride and was followed by the Waco Town Square retail and residential development, the Heritage Quarters student housing complex, renovation of the Hilton Hotel, redeveloping the Roosevelt office building and many restaurant, retail and office improvements along Austin Avenue.

Between 2006 and 2009, \$150 million in new construction occurred downtown, a \$150 million bond package was passed to support City of Waco projects (many of which in the Brazos River Corridor), and the Chamber boldly established a goal for a “\$1 billion decade” downtown.

➔ **Objective 1: Take a lead role in implementing the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan.**

Action Step: Find businesses and investors to develop the first five or more building projects proposed in the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan.

Identify breakthrough projects contained within the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan, and lend the Chamber's full support and leadership to their implementation. Pull together a team, pursue funding, and commit to completing each project.¹

Action Step: Identify and promote sites and buildings within Greater Downtown and along the Brazos Riverfront that are best suited for target industries.

Greater Downtown has the capacity to house a wide variety of target industry business operations, and businesses should be offered an option to expand and locate downtown. Designate sites and buildings within Greater Downtown as target industry destinations.

To accomplish the Billion Dollar Decade objective, the Chamber's economic development staff should help package and promote downtown locations to appropriate target industries. The presence of target industries in the core of the region will help accelerate the development of the area.

Action Step: Incorporate cultural arts and the artistic community into implementation efforts.

Strengthening cultural arts within a community has economic benefit, particularly when concentrated in a downtown environment. According to a 2003 study by the Urban Institute, the arts has a role in economic development because (1) active cultural participation builds a stronger community, (2) strengthening cultural communities

¹ Following the completion of the Greater Downtown Plan, revisit this Strategy and incorporate additional action items as needed to support the Plan's implementation.

Can Art Save A Mall?

Can a failed mall bring a neighborhood to life? That is the hope in suburban St. Louis, where a huge shopping mall was scheduled for demolition. Once a prime shopping destination, half of its stores stand empty.

ArtSpace was born in an effort to save the space. It offers more than 200,000 square feet of mall space to artists. Mall owners contacted the St. Louis Regional Arts Commission for help. The first open house attracted more than 200 artists. The deal worked out was simple. Any artist can rent space for just \$100 a month, plus the cost of the utilities. A number of artists across a variety of genres – performing and visual arts – have made ArtSpace home.

The idea is growing. Some shopping centers, including a sister mall in St. Louis, are adopting the idea, renting space to artists on a smaller scale. Beyond the malls, whole towns have been revitalized as artists claim empty downtown storefronts in places like Pittsfield, Mass., and Philadelphia, and residents look forward to the art openings that dot local calendars.

Source: www.parade.com/news/2009/11/22-can-art-save-a-mall.html

creates economic value, and (3) the value created by cultural activities can be harnessed for economic growth. There are numerous examples nationwide of communities whose arts and culture drives economic vitality. With its historic downtown and waterfront setting, Greater Waco's potential as a cultural destination is tremendous.

- Goal 1 presents an action step that calls for Greater Waco to create shared co-working spaces for freelance offices and artists' studios. Both types of spaces should be located in downtown locations and reuse an existing residence or commercial building(s);
- Preserve the Hippodrome Theater building as a cornerstone of the community with appropriate programming;
- Examine the feasibility of a new performing and visual arts center downtown or on the riverfront with the cooperation of arts organizations and patrons;
- Incorporate more public art into Greater Downtown and Brazos Riverfront design;
- Invite area cultural arts leaders to participate in the Chamber's implementation of the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan and create an ongoing Arts Alliance to coordinate assets, activities and planning;
- As the Downtown arts scene evolves, regularly schedule studio tours or an annual "Art Week" to introduce area residents to Waco artists. The likelihood of people purchasing and participating in local arts is heightened when they have had a personal introduction to the artists; and
- Work with local arts organizations, Baylor, MCC, and TSTC to develop information and events designed to make the arts and art collecting less intimidating to the general public.

 **Objective 2: Market the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown for businesses, visitors and residents.**

As Greater Downtown and the Brazos Riverfront continue to improve, the Chamber and other community organizations should elevate marketing of these two great assets.

Goals 1 and 3 of the *Strategy* contain marketing action steps for increasing Greater Waco's visibility among its target clusters as well as improving internal and external perceptions. In all future marketing activities, special concentration should be focused on Greater Downtown and the Brazos Riverfront.

Action Step: Create a plan and resources for marketing Greater Downtown and the Brazos Riverfront.

The Chamber and other community organizations should agree to a specific course of action to disseminate stories about new Downtown and Riverfront developments. The audiences for these stories range from the local population to tourists and target clusters.

- Involve the Chamber’s public relations consultant in developing a process for sharing information about area improvements.
- Develop and continually update a list of available Downtown buildings and sites, as well as suggested uses for each. Include this list on the Chamber’s website.
- Create marketing tools that specifically focus on Greater Downtown and the Brazos Riverfront. Expand the “Downtown Development” section of the Chamber’s website so that it may be used as a standalone marketing piece.
- Document the implementation of the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Plan. Collect professional video footage and photography of the Plan’s launch, new construction projects, landscaping, public art installations over several years. Meld this footage into a documentary film about Waco’s transformation. At a minimum, the film can be utilized by local organizations for marketing purposes. It has the potential, however, for much larger distribution within commercial film channels and festivals.

➡ Objective 3: Advocate for a 21st century streetcar line, water taxis, and other transit options to spur development downtown.

Action Step: Advocate for a streetcar line linking downtown and Baylor University or another high-priority corridor for development.

This is important for multiple reasons: Cities are experiencing a return on investment of \$10 to \$30 of private investment for every \$1 invested in streetcars; transit will extend the reach of pedestrians downtown; and a fully developed urban transit system will make Waco a more viable stop on the San Antonio-Austin-Dallas leg of the high-speed rail line since it will be possible for passengers to get around after disembarking from the train.

- Innovative public transit linking either side of I-35 to campus and Waco’s urban core should be a part of the Brazos Riverfront and Greater Downtown Waco Plan.
- Following completion of the Plan, develop a timeline for implementing public transit investments.
- Solicit bids from engineering firms and vehicle manufacturers, and develop an estimated budget for each phase of the project.
- Work with the City of Waco to identify potential financing and finalize a course of action.
- Ensure that local transit planning includes connection to a transportation oriented development / hub location for a future Central Texas high speed rail line.

Action Step: Develop and implement a plan for water taxis on the Brazos River.

There are a number of tourist attractions, Baylor athletic event venues, and entertainment and recreational activities located along the Brazos Riverfront. Greater Waco needs to encourage use of the river. A company, system or program to connect the venues and get people on the river offers a lot of benefits. The Chamber should work with the public and private sector to design and engage a company, system or program to connect the venues and get people on the river.

➡ Objective 4: Develop partnerships to improve declining commercial and residential neighborhoods.

Neighborhoods that have perpetual issues related to blight, crime, and poverty often require a catalyst project to spark change. In North Waco, for example, the presence of the Waco Family Health Center and Mission Waco has turned around area neighborhoods. In East Waco, the Greater Downtown Plan is expected to spur revitalization.

The growth of McLennan Community College will compel its surrounding areas to examine land use and ways to accommodate student housing. These are all important movements that are bringing neighbors together. Transition will take time, but the Chamber and other area leaders should pay attention and lend support, as it is needed.

With or without catalyst projects in place, Greater Waco can engage in activities that provide ongoing, incremental improvements.

Action Step: Work with the cities in McLennan County to review existing building, housing, and zoning codes and ordinances.

- Research codes and ordinances using the American Planning Association and other resources. Modify current codes based on modern best practices from the most innovative cities.
- Work with local police departments to identify impediments to enforcing zoning codes and ordinances. Provide recommendations for overcoming impediments. Frequently update police officers about changes to codes.

Case Study: Weed and Seed Program

Plagued with the persistent problem of an open-air drug market and related crime, the neighborhood of Central East Austin wanted not just to eradicate the current crime issues and drug abuse but also create sustainable success through collaborative community services. In 2006, the community, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice, created a five-year strategy called Weed and Seed to “weed” out criminals and substance abusers and “seed” local organizations to provide necessary social services.

The goal of the program is to go beyond the resources of local law enforcement by leveraging citizen involvement in concrete and proactive actions to sustain their neighborhood’s safety and quality of life. The Austin Police Department, local businesses, non-profits, and churches in the community coordinate through Weed and Seed to focus on four key areas: youth and family programs, neighborhood restoration, public safety, and ex-convict re-entry programs.

A Neighborhood District Attorney, under the supervision of the Travis County District Attorney’s office, organizes and enforces the initiatives of the Weed and Seed program, reviews crimes and cases that occur within the Weed and Seed district, identifying and targeting repeat offenders, and collaborating with community organizations to keep citizens educated on their rights and responsibilities as neighbors.

In its first two years of operations, Central East Austin’s Weed and Seed program has received three grants from the DOJ totaling \$500,000.

Action Step: Identify neighborhoods on which to concentrate community involvement and special initiatives.

- All improvements to target neighborhoods should incorporate a “green” objective that not only enhances public safety and attractiveness, but also to result in places that are environmentally sound and healthy;
- Set a goal of stabilizing a specific number of vacant lots within those neighborhoods. Work with the cities and volunteer teams to landscape unsightly properties, cleaning up trash, planting native grass, trees, and installing attractive fencing;
- Select one property in each target neighborhood to invest in as a signature green space. For these properties, install xeriscape landscaping or a commercially viable urban garden and improve building structure(s) using environmentally sustainable techniques;
- Involve community organizations in volunteering to maintain the properties after they are stabilized;
- Create a “green neighborhood” or “green commercial corridor” designation program that rewards improvement; and
- Examine Austin, Texas’ “Weed and Seed” program as a case study for tackling criminal activity within underserved neighborhoods.

National Vacant Properties Campaign

The National Vacant Properties Campaign exists to provide everyone – individuals, advocates, agencies, developers, non-profits, and others – with information resources, tools, and assistance to support their vacant property revitalization efforts. The Campaign captures model practices, shares them with other communities, and helps inspire creativity and leadership in communities nationwide.

Source: www.vacantproperties.org

Action Step: Plant 100,000 trees in Greater Waco in 10 years.

This action step extends beyond blighted neighborhoods to include other targeted areas, such as Greater Downtown, the Brazos Riverfront, and the I-35 corridor. New development should be a target for encouraging or requiring additional landscaping.

Tree-planting programs have significantly impacted quality of life and perceptions within numerous other cities. Trees For Houston is a non-profit organization that has planted over 360,000 trees along public rights of way; Trees Atlanta has planted and distributed more than 75,000 shade trees and cared for more than 100,000 trees; and Million Trees NYC intends to plant and care for one million new trees across the New York City's five boroughs over the next decade.

Goal 5: Support a Culture of Implementation

Embracing a culture of implementation is the final and arguably most important goal of the *Next Level Strategic Plan for Economic and Community Development*. It requires an alignment of activities across all community organizations toward accomplishing strategic objectives. Collaboration and communication are key ingredients. The Chamber will take the leading role in organizing and setting the pace for implementing the plan, but it cannot achieve the larger economic and community development goals without the full support of the community.

The roots of a culture of implementation formed during the activation of the 2005-2010 *Strategy*. It must be even further enriched throughout the implementation of the *Next Level Plan*.

➔ **Objective 1: Lead a cohesive and collaborative implementation effort.**

The continuation of the Strategic Economic Development Steering Committee as the “keeper of the goals” and leader of the initiative is necessary for the plan’s success. In the next five years, the Chamber should also increasingly involve other cities in McLennan County in implementation efforts, as well as lend staff time and resources to support other community organizations.

Action Step: Continue to engage the Steering Committee.

The Strategic Economic Development Steering Committee should continue to meet quarterly to receive information on implementation progress and provide input on the Chamber’s priorities. The Committee was expanded to lead the *Next Level Strategic Plan* and should continue working as an advisory body throughout the 2010-2015 implementation.

Action Step: Closely work with the cities in McLennan County.

Many of the recommendations provided in the *Next Level Strategy* require cooperation between the Chamber and the City of Waco, and other partner cities in McLennan County. In the past five years, the relationship between the Chamber and City of Waco has strengthened, and the two entities have worked in concert with each other to accomplish the objectives of the first plan.

- In May 2010, the City of Waco will elect a new Mayor. Strive for a relationship of equal strength and cooperation as with the current administration;
- Extend the Chamber's working relationships into other cities in McLennan County. Meet individually with local mayors and city managers to discuss ways that the Chamber can support their plans, as well as how they fit into the *Strategy*; and
- Address the implications of future growth on all cities in McLennan County. As infrastructure is improved in cities outside of Waco, smaller towns face the prospect of rapid residential development. Now is the time to help partner cities adopt policies that enable them to preserve their character and maintain balanced tax bases through the long term horizon.

Action Step: Continue to participate in programs of other community organizations.

Chamber members and staff participate on the boards and committees of numerous other community development organizations whose mission supports the Chamber's mission

- Goal 4 includes recommendations for revitalizing strategic areas of Greater Waco, including underserved neighborhoods. The Chamber should participate in groups that are newly forming within these key areas and others. Participate in the ground floor of grass roots initiatives; and
- Reach out to other area chambers of commerce to identify ways to work together and discuss each group's role in Greater Waco's national economic development campaign.

➡ Objective 2: Strengthen regional partnerships.

Greater Waco's reach extends beyond the boundaries of McLennan County. Waco businesses draw workers from the larger region, for example, and our hospitals, colleges and businesses draw patients, students and customers from the surrounding counties. Likewise, companies and institutions in adjacent counties benefit from residents of McLennan County.

As the metropolitan area with the largest city between Austin and Dallas, Greater Waco should play a leadership role in coordinating economic development efforts within the Central Texas region.

Action Step: Provide local cities and economic developers with tips for positioning themselves within the larger Chamber initiative. The *Next Level Strategy* aims to generate economic development for all communities in McLennan County, and it is important that cities understand their role within the initiative.

Meet with City officials from across the County to share the *Next Level Strategy* and Implementation Plan. Review the *Strategy* with them, and identify action steps that require their assistance and benefit their own local efforts.

- Help area cities select which Greater Waco target clusters are best suited for their communities. Encourage them to align local resources and make improvements that enhance their capacity for supporting those clusters. The better prepared they are, the easier it will be for the Chamber to meet the needs of prospects.
- Most area cities do not employ economic development professionals. Ensure that they know what support services are available through the Chamber. Assign a staff member to serve as a community liaison to area cities so that they have a single point of contact when assistance is needed.

Action Step: Work with neighboring metros to develop information tools that position the “Central Texas Triangle” for economic development.

Work with economic development officials from Temple, Killeen, Belton and Bryan-College Station to conduct a Central Texas labor force analysis. The three communities (as well as the cities located in between) could benefit from better understanding the workforce resources shared within their smaller “Texas Triangle.”

Action Step: Greater Waco should actively support the development of a Central Texas high-speed rail corridor as a long-term solution to mobility in Texas.

Greater Waco should have a visible presence with other Central Texas metros for a high-speed rail corridor that connects Waco to Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, and Houston. The *Next Level Strategy* calls for a government relations initiative, and high-speed rail should be among the top priorities of state and federal lobbying efforts.

Objective 3: Pursue resources to support economic development.

The Greater Waco Chamber raised \$7.4 million to construct the new Chamber building and to implement the *Challenge Greater Waco Strategic Plan* during 2006-2010; the Total Resource Campaign raised \$960,000 for Chamber operations in 2009; and Waco, McLennan Community College and six independent school districts have passed

bond issues since 2006. These successes show that the community—both public and private sector—are willing to invest in Greater Waco’s future.

Action Step: Raise funding to implement the *Next Level Strategic Plan* for Economic and Community Development.

The Economic Development Strategy Steering Committee, Chamber Executive Committee, Chamber Board of Directors and Waco Industrial Foundation recommended retaining *Market Street Services* to help develop a new strategic plan for implementation in 2011-2015.

The stepped-up programs of economic and community development begun with the *Challenge Greater Waco* program—proposed in this plan to be taken to the next level—will require additional funding.

Market Street will assist the Chamber staff in developing a budget to implement the Next Level Strategic Plan in the 2011-2015 cycle. Current and additional Challenge Fund investors will be required.

Action Step: Increase funding and improve access to incentives.

Greater Waco has difficulty competing in the incentives arena, and research shows that incentives availability is less than in other competitive communities in Texas. The City and County do not necessarily require economic development sales tax funding to bring business to town, but they do need to increase funding and improve flexibility in offering incentives. Remember that Greater Waco must invest to obtain a return.

The presence in Texas of the economic development sales tax has created an “uneven” playing field. Those cities with the tax have a competitive advantage over those that cannot qualify or choose not to hold a referendum. There is also the reality that the state level incentives in Texas are weak when compared to many states across the nation.

- Achieve support for annually increasing economic development grant funding to a point that equals the amount that an annual half-cent sales tax would generate.
- Incorporate a sliding scale into the Waco McLennan County Economic Development Corporation desired annual rate of return that is tied to the metrics and goals of the *Next Level Strategic Plan*. The current desired return might be too conservative for most target industries when compared with competitive communities. A solution would be to lower the return requirement for high wage target sectors that are not capital intensive. Because the program is based on

property tax generation, it does not allow incentives for businesses that, for example, pay above average wages or locate in the Greater Downtown area.

- With more than 15 million square feet of vacant and underutilized property in Greater Downtown, the City is missing out on significant potential tax revenue and funding for incentives. Additional incentive programs may be needed to focus development on these sites.

Action Step: Position Greater Waco to receive federal funding.

Greater Waco needs to ensure it receives its fair share of federal funds and position itself for a potential second round of stimulus.

- Partner with other Central Texas communities to acquire federal funding for critical projects related to transportation infrastructure, workforce development, and research and development. Multi-city collaboration is appealing to federal agencies and will increase the likelihood of success. Pooling resources and political capital will also boost possibilities.

CONCLUSION

The one certainty of the current recession is that the nation's economy will look differently than in the past with sustainability being a common denominator. Principles of economic development should likewise be expected to change. Innovation and entrepreneurship will be the keys of survival in the new economy. While communities that proactively adopt this mindset will thrive, others will be left behind.

Market Street has offered a series of bold initiatives in the ***Next Level Strategic Plan for Economic and Community Development*** that will help to facilitate Greater Waco's transformation into a nationally competitive region. **The themes of talent development, Greater Downtown, and marketing run throughout all five goals of the Strategy.** As discussed in the Introduction, the community is especially interested in prioritizing the following:

- Talent development, from Pre-K through adult workforce development;
- Transforming Greater Downtown into vibrant, youthful, and entrepreneurial environment;
- Advancing investment in Greater Waco's target clusters through new business start-ups, local business expansion, and new business recruitment;
- Expansion of the Central Texas Research and Technology Park as a cornerstone of cluster development and entrepreneurship;
- Committing to high quality, green development across the region;
- Engaging in a proactive marketing campaign that starts at home with bolstering community pride; and
- Fully embracing the "Waco We Do" brand and incorporating its spirit into all activities.

Flexibility in implementation will be important. No one can predict with full accuracy what economic conditions will be five years from now. Greater Waco must be willing to review and update the ***Next Level Strategy*** on a regular basis to adapt to the changing environment. It is the responsibility of the Chamber staff and Steering Committee to monitor progress and make adjustments to the *Strategy* as needed.

Greater Waco's potential is limitless. Continue to set high standards and make quality development a top priority. Create a culture of collaboration among regional

organizations. The Greater Waco Chamber should take the leading role as facilitator of local cooperation and marketing representative to the outside world.

The fifth and final document of this strategic planning process will be an Implementation Plan that sets the timing, budget, and metrics for the next five years. While this report presents the action steps to be taken during the campaign, the *Implementation Plan* will specifically state how and when activities should occur.