

“DON’T BE AFRAID TO PLAN BIG”

- MAYOR PETE SAENZ



PREFACE

Every Great City Has a Plan

Laredo is looking to the future with a resolve to diversify its economy, increase employment opportunities, celebrate its history and unique culture, improve the health of its residents, improve affordability, and upgrade its quality of life. *Viva Laredo* is a plan created through an inclusive, participatory public process that presents both a grand vision and a practical plan to accomplish those goals.

Diversify the economy and increase employment opportunities. Infrastructure, education, and quality of life are the foundation for long-term economic development. The plan presents public and private approaches to help the city fully leverage its potential as the largest inland port along the United States-Mexican border.

Improve affordability. Well-designed cities are less expensive to live in. The plan seeks to decrease auto-dependence, increase access to parks and neighborhood amenities, and streamline the development process for projects that provide a variety of housing options at a range of prices.

***Viva Laredo* is a living plan.** Planning is an ongoing conversation about the future. The conversation that *Viva Laredo* began does not end with the plan's adoption. The conversation is the most important part. A city's needs evolve continually and just as the plan for one's own life must be allowed to evolve as opportunities and challenges change, so must the city's comprehensive plan. For review and modification process, see Laredo City Charter, Article IX Planning and Zoning, Section 9.3 Comprehensive Plan.

Border Towns Can Be the Best of Both Worlds

Laredo has been shaped for over 250 years by forces of all kinds. There is no place like Laredo. There are few places in the world tied as closely to a sister city across a border. The border gives the city its economic purpose in many ways, as well as its history and unique culture.

Location. Laredo is the county seat of Webb County, Texas, and located on the north bank of the Rio Grande in South Texas, across from Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico. It is in the top ten of Texas' most populous cities in the state and third-most populated on the Mexican border. Laredo has a population of over 250,000 but the cross-border Laredo-Nuevo Laredo Metropolitan Area has an estimated population of over 650,000. Laredo's location gives it international importance. Capitalizing on that importance is a large part of the plan.

History. Founded in 1755, Laredo grew from a small village to the county seat and went on to become one of the world's most important inland ports. Border life is not without challenges, however. As a gateway between the United States and Mexico, the city will always have a major role to play in two major economies. The city must continue its role as the entry point and first home for many struggling and poor immigrants. At the same time the city must pursue to provide continued prosperity and energy to the next generations.

Culture. How can Laredo grow and adapt while still remaining the place its residents want it to be? The answer is to be found in the city's cultural and social institutions. The solution has to do with becoming a big city that still retains a small town feel. Increased, not decreased, connections across the river are central to facilitating the city's cultural uniqueness.

HOW TO USE THE PLAN

The city's comprehensive plan provides the basis for public policy in Laredo regarding physical and economic development. *Viva Laredo* establishes priorities for public-sector action while at the same time providing direction for complementary private-sector decisions.

This comprehensive plan provides a flexible framework that can be updated, revised, and improved upon over time to stay relevant to the issues the city must confront, as well as the ambitions the city chooses to pursue. The comprehensive plan's goals and policies serve as a tool to evaluate new development proposals, direct capital improvements, and to guide public policy in a manner that ensures Laredo continues to be the community that its residents want it to be.

Viva Laredo contains illustrative plans, diagrams, maps, and pictures to make concepts clear and accessible to city officials, residents, developers, community groups, and other stakeholders.

The plan is divided into chapters. Each chapter concludes with goals and policies that set a broad policy direction and identifies specific actions that will enhance the city's quality of life, respect its natural environment, and support complementary economic growth and development.

Each chapter is divided into four sections:

1. **Conditions.** A discussion of existing conditions;
2. **Community Concerns.** Consensus concerns expressed by community members as part of the public involvement process of meetings, charrettes, online engagement, focus groups, and interviews that were conducted during the planning process.
3. **Strategies.** Policy discussions and recommendations with illustrative plans and renderings that articulate strategies to be accomplished through city actions and partnerships among local governmental agencies, private sector businesses, community organizations, and neighborhood residents.
4. **Goals and Policies.** Each goal summarizes the desired end-state for a particular subject based on the community's vision. Each goal has a set of policies. Policies identify actions and principles that provide the best course of action for regulations and procedures to achieve stated goals and for the desired actions by the greater community.

Relationship to Other Plans

The City of Laredo should make periodic updates to its comprehensive plan and develop specific plans for the city that deal with a range of issues from transportation to parks and recreation. *Viva Laredo* has been developed in close coordination with existing plans and does not supersede those plans. *Viva Laredo* attempts to integrate social, economic, transportation, aesthetic, preservation, and sustainability goals from a variety of plans and initiatives into one framework.

Plan Implementation

This comprehensive plan is intended to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the city. Here are some practical ways to ensure that future activities are consistent with the comprehensive plan:

Annual Work Programs and Budgets. The City Council and individual city departments should be cognizant of the recommendations of the comprehensive plan when preparing annual work programs and budgets.

Development Approvals. The approvals process for development proposals, including rezoning and subdivision plats, should be a central means of implementing the comprehensive plan. The land development code and subdivision ordinances should be updated in response to regulatory strategies presented in the comprehensive plan.

Capital Improvement Plans. The city's capital improvement plans (CIP) and long-range utility, and transportation plans should be consistent with the comprehensive plan's land use policies and infrastructure recommendations. Major new improvements that are not reflected in the comprehensive plan, and which could dramatically affect the comprehensive plan's recommendations, should be preceded by a comprehensive plan update.

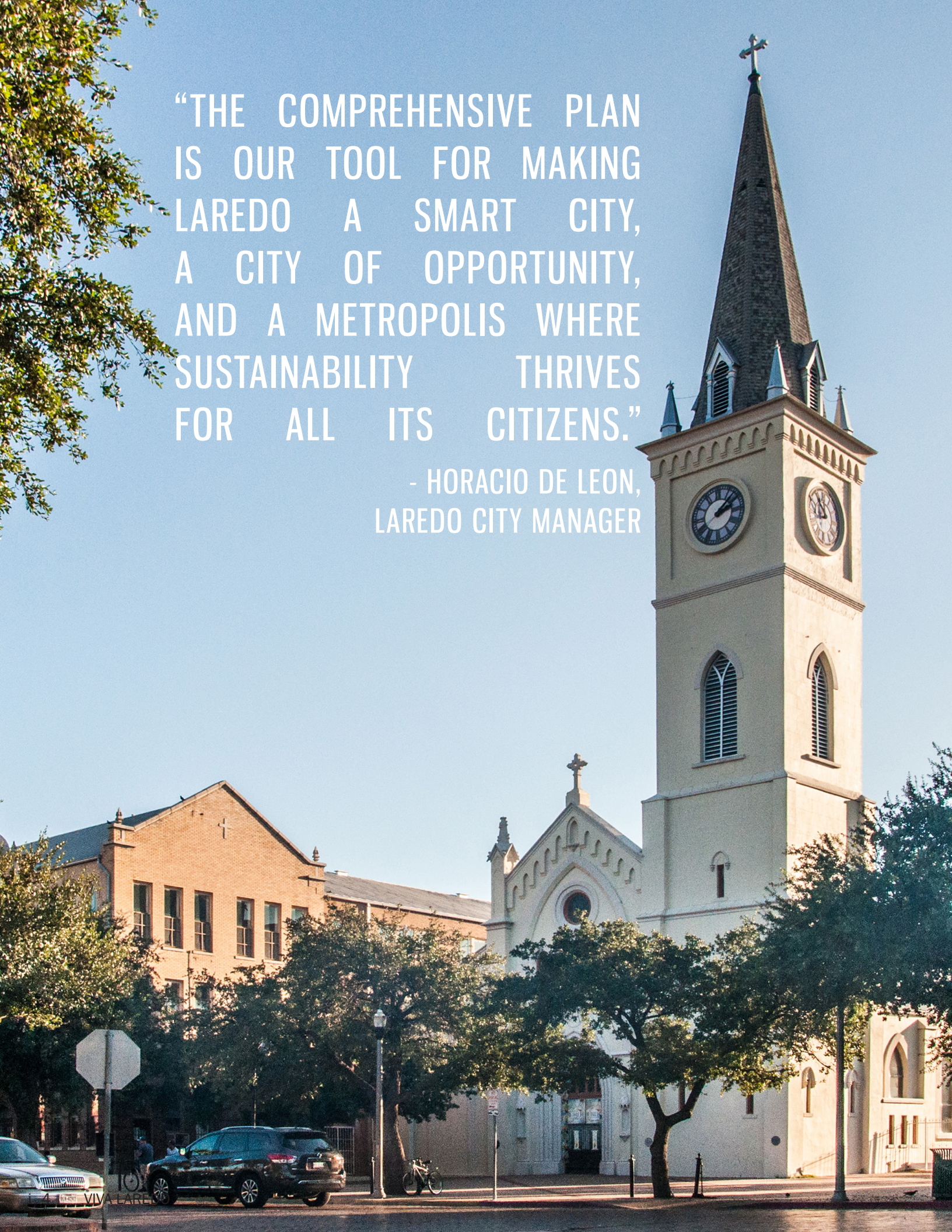
Economic Incentives. Economic incentives should carry out comprehensive plan goals and policies.

Private Development Decisions. Property owners and developers should consider the strategies and recommendations of the comprehensive plan in their own land planning and investment decisions. Public decision-makers will be using the comprehensive plan as a guide in their development-related deliberations.

Future Interpretations. The City Council may call upon the Planning and Zoning Commission to provide interpretation of major items that are unclear or are not fully addressed in the comprehensive plan. In formulating an interpretation, the Commission may call upon outside experts and other groups for advice. Minor items that require interpretation should be handled by the appropriate agency as it follows the comprehensive plan.

“THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
IS OUR TOOL FOR MAKING
LAREDO A SMART CITY,
A CITY OF OPPORTUNITY,
AND A METROPOLIS WHERE
SUSTAINABILITY THRIVES
FOR ALL ITS CITIZENS.”

- HORACIO DE LEON,
LAREDO CITY MANAGER



PLAN VISION

Through the charrette process and meetings with public officials, the following vision has been formulated for the City of Laredo:

Make The Downtown Great

The downtown should be the economic center and engine for the rest of the city. It is the international connection to Mexico and so much of Laredo's history. Making the downtown great will take effort from numerous angles in order for it to prosper as it once did.

The new mall that is being developed should be leveraged to enliven the surrounding streets. The mall will help to bring people downtown; events like the artwalk or other social events can help to draw people into the rest of the downtown.

A wayfinding program for locating convenient pools of parking will make getting to and staying in downtown feel more convenient and eliminate a mental barrier in many people's minds. As the downtown fills with new businesses, offices, and residents, additional parking may need to be created, but should not be tied to individual businesses or buildings.

A focus on historic preservation and fixing and repurposing existing buildings will help to enliven the streets and fill them with different types of retail, restaurants, cafés, and entertainment venues at the street level. The upper stories of these revitalized buildings could hold a mix of offices to create a central employment center as well as opportunities for housing. Attracting a vibrant mixture of uses in downtown will generate activity at all times of the day making downtown and Laredo more sustainable.

Create a trolley that runs from the border through the downtown; perhaps the trolley could even cross the border one day.

Create Attractive, Walkable Destinations

Laredo should become a network of connected walkable mixed-use destinations. Walkable destinations are places where people want to spend time. They provide a reason to stop, not just drive by on your way somewhere else.

As an example, downtown, should be the central walkable area that connects to a series of other central walkable areas. Each destination should be distinct and have its own reason for being, either based on the local micro-cultural heritage, or other unique reason for existing.

One of the first considerations in achieving a walkable destination is to ensure that a mix of housing, retail, office space, civic institutions, and public open space are located within a five-minute walk of one another.

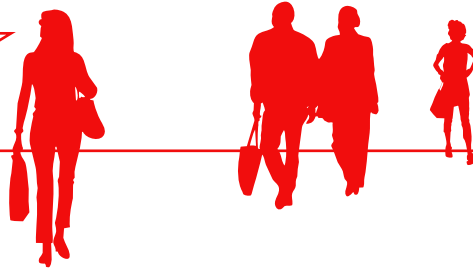
The second step is to ensure that an interconnected street system binds these uses together, so that pedestrians can choose the most convenient path. Sidewalks should be wide to allow for pleasant strolling and outdoor dining while pedestrians are shaded by regularly-spaced street trees and awnings above shopfronts.

Third, the streets that connect these various destinations must be designed for pedestrian use, with generous sidewalks, shade trees, protection from passing cars, and street-oriented buildings rather than parking lots.

Finally, multi-story buildings within a mixed-use environment help create the spatial definition necessary for a place to feel relaxed and well-proportioned. People should feel like they are walking through a series of beautiful and properly-sized outdoor rooms.

Each walkable area should be connected to other walkable areas through dignified transit services such as trolleys loops, light rail, or convenient bus service.

Forget the 1992 plan, take a look at the 1964 plan. It's simple, but it's a good start for innovation.



If we could implement all of the ideas discussed at these workshops cohesively, it would make Laredo a great city.

Complete the Streets

Completing the streets means that streets should be planned, designed, operated, and maintained to enable safe, convenient and comfortable travel and access for users of all ages and abilities regardless of their mode of transportation. Rather than just defining a street from within its curbs, complete streets stretch farther out to incorporate the entire space between buildings which can include outdoor dining, street furniture, landscaping, art, and lighting, to name a few.

Progressive transportation engineering understands the important role that the public right-of-way plays in moving and connecting people so communities can truly thrive. A roadway is not a place solely for cars to move efficiently.

Complete streets do not have a “one size fits all” approach. How a roadway fits into the overall network and the purposes it serves can change the function and makeup that the right-of-way should ultimately take.

For Laredo this means enabling modes of transportation besides just the personal vehicle. It begins with walkable streets which include wide, shaded sidewalks in walkable, well-lit destination areas including safe connections from neighborhoods to schools. Enhancing the bike infrastructure throughout the city on both off-road and on-road systems will make the city more livable and affordable for those who cannot afford to drive as well as provide recreation for those that want to bike recreationally.

Moving vehicles and transit efficiently should remain a priority, it should just not be the only priority for streets. Traffic flow can be improved with better coordination of lights as well as providing a network of alternate routes.

Plan New & Improved Public Spaces

Laredo should be home to many different types of parks and recreational opportunities including small plazas, indoor soccer venues, dog parks, an amphitheater, linked trails, and neighborhood parks, among others.

The city has a system of formal plazas in the downtown and a series of parks and trails around the waterways. However, as development has occurred, adequate park space has not been provided for all types of uses. As new development occurs, different types of parks for different uses should be created. This may include creating new neighborhood parks, pocket parks, and setting space aside for more active regional parks. The city can introduce more gathering places by generating a network of safe, comfortable and well-connected civic and shared open spaces.

Some existing parks and spaces that exist can be enhanced and better activated and publicized. Lake Casa Blanca and the Lake Casa Blanca State Park are underutilized amenities that should become a highlight for the community. An integrated trail system should connect along the edge of the Rio Grande and through the city along the waterways to Lake Casa Blanca. The trail system can be activated with trail heads that provide bike repair stations, bike rentals, kayak rentals, and refreshments. Existing spaces can be activated with regular activities like food truck rallies, concerts or art walks.

Every home should be within a five to ten minute walk from a park. The unique neighborhoods of Laredo should be knit together with tree-lined streets that are safe for everyone. Public spaces throughout Laredo should serve residents of all ages with safe, well-maintained, and innovatively programmed places to play, exercise, relax, and connect with nature.

A Prosperous (But Still Affordable) City

Creating a prosperous and affordable city can mean many things. At its simplest, it means ensuring all Laredoans, with a wide range of incomes, should be able to live in safe and healthy housing. That can mean keeping Laredo affordable by focusing to provide a range of building types that cater to a variety of age groups, household sizes and configurations, and income levels.

Keeping Laredo affordable to the community can also mean supporting local businesses and artists as well as a range of commerce opportunities. A variety of commercial spaces can support small and emerging businesses and non profits, as well as anchor employers. Better jobs and opportunities can attract additional businesses and foster entrepreneurship.

Affordable living and better economic opportunities can create an environment where young people want to stay or return.

Creating real transportation choices can help to level the field for creating a prosperous city. Investing in transit, biking, and walking (not just roads) will benefit the lower sector of Laredoans who are less mobile, both physically and financially, who do not have the ability to have access to cars.

Government and decision-making processes should represent the full racial, socioeconomic, cultural, political and demographic diversity of the population, as the city actively seeks the public's voices to guide policy. City government and new development should address the infrastructure and effects of decisions and should proactively support equity and the quality of life for all residents when making land use, resource allocation, project implementation and other planning and policy decisions.



A new neighborhood is created at the Kansas City Southern Rail Yards.

EXISTING PLANS

Numerous plans and studies have been created for the city that present compelling ideas concerning future improvements throughout the city. It is important to highlight some of the main concepts that have been proposed in the past and that are still supported, and have the potential for continuing to improve the quality of life for the residents of Laredo.

Comprehensive Plan of Laredo Texas, Adopted August 26, 1991

The previous comprehensive plan for the City of Laredo was adopted in 1991. Although the plan provides a mandate that it should be reviewed and updated once a year, no updates to the comprehensive plan have been made. The vision in the plan had a horizon of 2010. Some of the broad visions within the plan have been partially realized, but not necessarily to the extent hoped for. Some of these key ideas that are still relevant today include:

- Become a key center of world goods;
- Focus on cultural sophistication and economic opportunity reflective of the international community that Laredo is;
- Increase community pride and the physical appearance of the city;
- Combine school and park sites to become the focus of neighborhoods and bring people together;
- Create a linear park system along the creeks and Rio Grande;
- Create a center for warehouses and the industrial sector of the city along Mines Road; and
- Focus on the downtown in the Central Business District.

Viva Laredo picks up on many of these visions and lays the groundwork to take the next steps in realizing that vision.



1995 Historic Preservation Plan

The plan discusses historic district designations within the downtown and the importance of preservation for the revitalization of downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods. The plan functions as a preservation guide and policy statement on proposed and adopted preservation strategies. The plan concludes with a set of review standards for designated local historic districts.

The plan identifies four additional historic districts for the El Cuatro, Fort McIntosh, El Azteca, and Heights areas. Since the adoption of the plan, only the El Azteca neighborhood received recognition as a National Register Historic District which occurred in 2003.

1997 Urban Design Standards for Historic Districts, Historic Properties and Properties within A&E District (Revised 2010).

This report is an assessment, inventory and proposed set of guidelines for historic structures in the San Agustin, Old Mercado, and proposed Jarvis historic districts in downtown Laredo totaling a forty square block area.

2008 San Bernardo Avenue, Renovation and Restoration Project

The plan looks at the historic San Bernardo corridor, a destination where people go to shop, live and work. Multiple street sections were developed in order to transform the aging fractured corridor into a cohesive, amenity-filled corridor that enriches the surrounding community.

Of the options presented in the plan, the community prefers the option that keeps San Bernardo a two way street with on-street parking when possible and a center median planted with trees.

2008 Parks and Open Space Master Plan

The plan states several purposes:

- Provide the structure for systematic and consistent planning and development for the next decade;
- Provide detailed research regarding the community and the roles of the Laredo Parks and Recreation Department;
- Provide direction in the area of acquisition and development of park land within the city limits as well as in the Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) as growth continues;
- Establish priorities and implementation time lines based on documented research and a community-based needs analysis; and
- Conform to the Texas Parks and Wildlife guidelines for local Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plans.

The plan looks at a variety of park space types, sizes and uses. It tries to balance land currently owned by the city and developed; owned by the city and not developed; and the need for future acquisitions. The need for each park to have its own design and character is encouraged to meet the needs of the surrounding community and provide diversity throughout the park system.

2008 Rio Grande Vega Lands Master Plan

This plan lays out a concept for the redevelopment of Laredo's riverfront to promote tourism, job creation, and downtown revitalization. The plan promotes the active use of the waterfront through the downtown and connecting to trails to both the north and south of downtown, providing a consistent greenway for people throughout the city.

This plan has numerous ideas that have been incorporated into *Viva Laredo*. The Vega Lands Master Plan had two key concepts that should be highlighted. The first is the identification of the Kansas City Rail Yards as a potential redevelopment site. *Viva Laredo* expands on that concept by illustrating what development could entail in that location. The second is the widening of the Rio Grande to create an elevated promenade, making a "wall" that goes down to the river instead of being built up into view. As national demand for a border wall weakens and grows, the merit of this plan should be remembered.

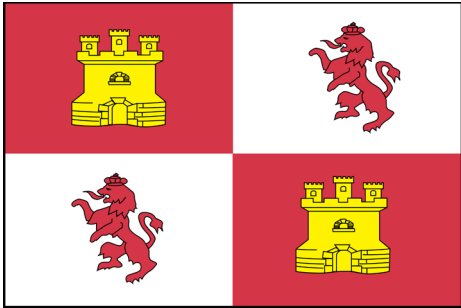
Laredo 2020 (not adopted)

This plan for the downtown lays out a thorough understanding of the existing conditions found within downtown Laredo. The plan lays out some critical goals and potential projects to help revitalize the downtown, many of which have been expanded upon as part of *Viva Laredo* including:

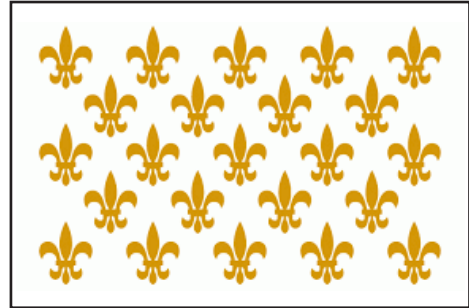
- Create a downtown regulatory and revitalization mechanism / entity;
- Revive and expand tourism in the downtown;
- Redevelop the inner city areas with a greater mix-use density;
- Embrace the perennial values of Laredo's historic and cultural landscape;
- Development of a convention/business center;
- Revitalization of the Plaza Theatre;
- Streetcar System; and
- Link to Laredo Community College.

LAREDO'S HISTORY

Laredo Under Seven Flags



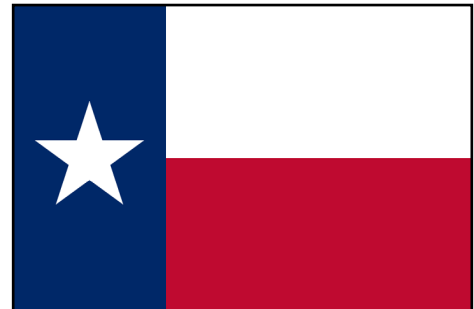
Spain
1519 - 1685; 1690 - 1821



France
1685 - 1690



Mexico
1821 - 1836



Texas
1836 - 1845



Republic of the Rio Grande
1840



United States of America
1845 - 1861; 1865 - Present



Confederate States of America
1861 - 1865

* Laredo's History section adapted from, and used at the courtesy of, the Webb County Heritage foundation and the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum.

The Founding of Nuevo Santander and Laredo

Nuevo Santander, one of the last northern provinces of New Spain, was established by José de Escandón. Upon receiving a commission to conquer this northern frontier, Escandón organized an entrada of 1,750 soldiers that resulted in the founding of 20 towns and 18 missions between 1749 and 1755. By occupying this territory, comprised of what would become Tamaulipas, a piece of Nuevo León, and a portion of South Texas, New Spain hoped to convert the indigenous people to Christianity and to discourage French and English expansion.

The Spaniard, José de Escandón, born in 1700, served in a mounted regiment at Mérida, Yucatán. Later he conquered the native inhabitants of Sierra Gorda for New Spain. As Lt. General, he received a commission to inspect the land between the San Antonio River and Tampico known as the Seno Mexicano. Appointed governor, Escandón was responsible for settlements along the Rio Grande (Río Bravo): Camargo, Reynosa, Dolores, Revilla, Mier, and Laredo. Laredo is the only remaining Spanish colonial settlement on the northern bank of the Rio Grande.

Laredo was founded on May 15, 1755, when Captain Tomás Sánchez, with three families, was granted permission to settle 15 leagues of land near an Indian fort on the Rio Grande. Sánchez lived across the river from Dolores, and journeyed to Revilla to petition for a new villa. Born in 1709 in Nuevo León, Sánchez was a military veteran and had managed a ranch in Coahuila. The Sánchez estate ran cattle, sheep, goats, horses, mules, and oxen.

In 1767, Juan Fernando de Palacios, the governor of Sierra Gorda, officially designated the settlement as a villa and christened it San Agustín de Laredo, after a town in Escandón's native Santander, Spain. A central plaza was laid out, and land grants fronting the river were issued to the heads of households. Plots of land facing the plaza were surveyed for a church, a captains house, and a jail.



Map of Sierra Gorda and Costa del Seno Mexicano from Queretaro - circa 1747

Signature of Tomás Sánchez



Look at what Latin American cities are doing in terms of comprehensive plans.



I have long envisioned Laredo as the Star of the Rio Grande. Unique in its culture, unmatched in its history and traditions, and so perfectly poised to be the Gateway of the Americas.

Los Mexicanos - Tejanos

Thirty-four years after its founding, Laredo boasted 800 inhabitants, including Spaniards, natives, and mixed-race. In this stratified society, prominent Spanish landowners were granted the title of don and doña. *Mulatos* and *indios* occupied the roles of servants, shepherds, and stock handlers.

Ranching and trading became the sustenance of the colony. Products were hauled from the Mexican interior through Laredo to San Antonio de Bexar and La Bahía. Cattle hides and wool were traded south in exchange for food and household necessities.

The Texas cowboy, or *vaquero*, had his roots in Spanish-Mexican ranching traditions. During the Spanish colonial period, the city government regulated round-ups to insure the proper distribution of wild cattle. Spanish brands, many resembling Moorish and Indian designs, were publicly registered. Located near springs and creeks, family-operated ranches such as Los Ojuélos, Dolores, and San José de Palafox developed into small communities.

Laredo was struggling to survive the raids of Comanche and Apache Indians in 1821, the year Mexico gained its independence from Spain. To gain prestige and reap the spoils of war, the nomadic Plains Indians waged hit and run warfare against the Mexicans. The Indians wiped out nearby ranches as the pleas for additional garrison troops were ignored.

Carrizo Indians, a group of Coahuiltecan peoples, lived in thatched huts and practiced a hunting-gathering existence using the bow and arrow. Reduced by disease and warfare, the Carrizos became Christians and slowly assimilated into Spanish culture.



Sombre la Huella, by Theodore Gentilz, 1848



Carrizos Indians, by Lino Sánchez y Tapia, 1828-1834



"Marqueta" by Theodor Gentilz, 1848

The Republic of the Rio Grande

On November 5, 1838, Antonio Canales, a prominent lawyer, issued a proclamation in Ciudad Guerrero calling for the re-adoption of the federalist constitution of 1824 and opposition to the centralist government. By February 1839, the citizens of Laredo had joined the cause. Helped by the French blockade of Mexican ports, the Federalists were able to capture several towns. By March, 1839, however, the French had made peace with Mexico. Between May and September of 1839, Centralists captured Saltillo, Tampico, Monclova, and Laredo. Antonio Canales and his chief Lieutenant, Antonio Zapata, retreated to the Nueces River and sought the support of Mirabeau B Lamar, President of the Republic of Texas. Lamar officially remained neutral; however, he did allow the recruitment of Texians into the Federalist armies.

On January 7, 1840, the Republic of the Rio Grande was proclaimed by constitutional convention and Laredo was named its capital. Officers and a general council were elected to the new republic. Jesus Cardenas, a lawyer from Reynosa, was chosen President. Antonio Canales was named Commander-in-Chief of the army. Delegates were selected for Tamaulipas, Coahuila, and Nuevo Leon. Colonel Antonio Zapata served as commander of the cavalry.

The Republic's forces embarked on a series of battles with Centralist forces. After a disastrous defeat at Santa Rita de Morelos in Coahuila, Federalist survivors of the battle were court-martialed, found guilty, and shot. Antonio Zapata's head was cut off and displayed on a pike for three days as a warning to others.

The armed struggle for the border villas continued and by the fall it was clear that the Federalists could not prevail. On November 6, 1840, Canales surrendered his troops at Camargo, and President Cárdenas and his forces stacked their rifles and arms in Laredo. The Republic of the Rio Grande was no more. The Laredo area was the only portion of Texas to have served under seven flags.



Republic of the Rio Grande Poster

War on the Rio Grande

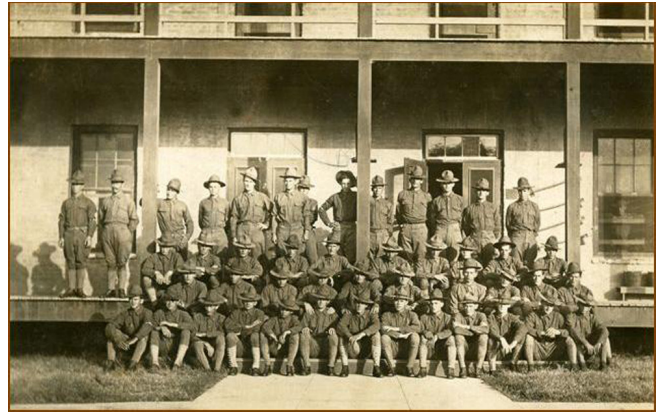
The annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845 led to the declaration of war against Mexico. Zachary Taylor's victories around Monterrey and the fall of Mexico City brought an end to Mexico's claim to Texas. In the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Rio Grande was declared the boundary, and Mexico received \$15,000,000 for 529,019 square miles of lost territory. Under this treaty, Laredo became a part of Texas in 1848.

Mirabeau B. Lamar assumed command of the town during the war and denied a petition by Basillio Benavidez, José María González, and José María Ramón, prominent Laredoans, to remain a Mexican town. Mexicans who wanted to retain their citizenship moved across the river. This area, previously settled as part of Laredo, became the town of Nuevo Laredo in 1848.

During the Civil War, Laredo was a transfer point on the Confederate cotton route to Mexico. On March 18, 1864, Major Alfred Holt led a Union army of about 200 men from Brownsville to destroy 5,000 bails of cotton stacked at San Agustín Plaza. Colonel Santos Benavides rose from his sick bed and, with 42 men, repelled three Union charges at Zacate Creek. This became known as the Battle of Laredo.

Camp Crawford, one of a line of U.S. forts along the Rio Grande, was established March 3, 1849. It was renamed Ft. McIntosh after Lt. Colonel James S. McIntosh, who perished in the Mexican War at the battle of Molino del Rey. The fort provided protection from the Native Americans and the defiant Mexican Juan Cortina. Abandoned during the Civil War, it was reoccupied later and operated until 1946.

The tumultuous Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 brought a flood of immigrants to Laredo. In 1914, the *carranzista* army attacked Nuevo Laredo and sections of the city were burned. Ft. McIntosh was reinforced with 10,000 National Guard soldiers for World War I.



5th and 12th Cavalry at Ft. McIntosh



Colonel Santos Benavidez Ramon

Public Institutions

Webb County, named for James Webb, Secretary of the Treasury for the Republic of Texas, was organized in 1848, and Laredo became the county seat. A courthouse was constructed in 1882 for \$40,000. Early county officers were the chief justice, commissioners, treasurer, sheriff, and hide inspector.

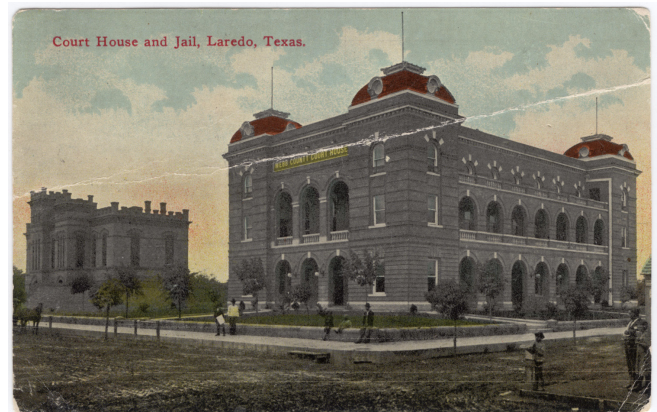
Laredo incorporated as a city under Texas law in 1852. In 1882, the City of Laredo established a water works; however, water was delivered by water vendors to parts of the city as late as 1922. In 1889, a foot and wagon bridge was constructed across the Rio Grande. The Laredo Improvement Company built the first electric street cars west of the Mississippi.

Education in Laredo dates to 1783 when a Spanish order was issued that all children up to the age of twelve be sent to school. Reading, writing, arithmetic, and catechism were mandatory subjects. The first city-sponsored school opened in 1821. Later La Escuela Amarilla was built in the 1870's. In 1882, the Laredo Independent School District was created and administered by the city council. In 1910, the Central School was constructed on the site of Escuela Amarilla and retained the original name. The first high school was held at the old council house. Laredo High School was built on that same site in 1916.

The explosive growth of the city in the 1880's led to the development of two political factions: the Botas (Boots) led by Raymond Martin and C.M. MacDonell, and the Guaraches (Sandals), led by Darío González. Both parties vied for control of the city council. Political speeches, parades, excessive consumption of alcohol, and the shooting of firearms at anvils characterized the campaigns. On April 6, 1886, the election was won by the Bota candidates who led a mock funeral parade for the Guaraches the following day. The parade developed into a street battle that left possibly 30 dead. The 1888 election helped to mend differences, and members of the two factions joined the Independent Club in later years.



Aerial View of Laredo with Electric Trolley Line, 1892



Postcard with View of Laredo Courthouse and Jail, 1912



Water Delivery Cart in Laredo

Religious and Social Life

Religious institutions played a major role in the development of Laredo. The first church of San Agustín, one the oldest congregations in Texas, was conducted in a hut in 1767. Built of stone in 1778, the second church faced the river. The present Gothic Revival church was completed in 1872, and served as a cathedral under bishop Peter Verdaguer at the turn of the century.

Founded in 1868, the Ursuline Academy provided Catholic education to girls. Saint Augustine Parochial School was built in 1927, serving 500 youths in its first year. Laredo's first hospital, operated by the Sisters of Mercy, opened in 1894 and relocated to the Steffan residence on Jarvis Plaza in 1899.

German and Anglo-American immigrants established Protestant and Jewish congregations in the 1880s. The Laredo Seminary was founded in 1882 by the Methodist Episcopal church. It was later renamed the Holding Institute in honor of Nannie E. Holding.

Mexican holidays such as Cinco de Mayo and Dieciséis de Septiembre were traditionally celebrated in Laredo. The George Washington's Birthday Celebration originated in the 1860s and was revived by civic leaders in the Yaqui Tribe of the Improved Order of the Red Men to promote American patriotism. In 1923, the George Washington's Birthday Celebration Association formed to produce a night pageant depicting a colonial ball. A Fiesta Noche Mexicana was added in 1925.

Community organizations provided avenues for socializing, political achievement, mutual aid, and service. These include: Hijos de Juárez, the Mariano Ecobedo Lodge, Sons of Hermann, Woodmen of the World, Masonic Lodge, Knight of Pythias, Knight Templar and Miriam Chapter. The Knights of Columbus Council 2304 promoted education and charity and provided burial insurance to its members.



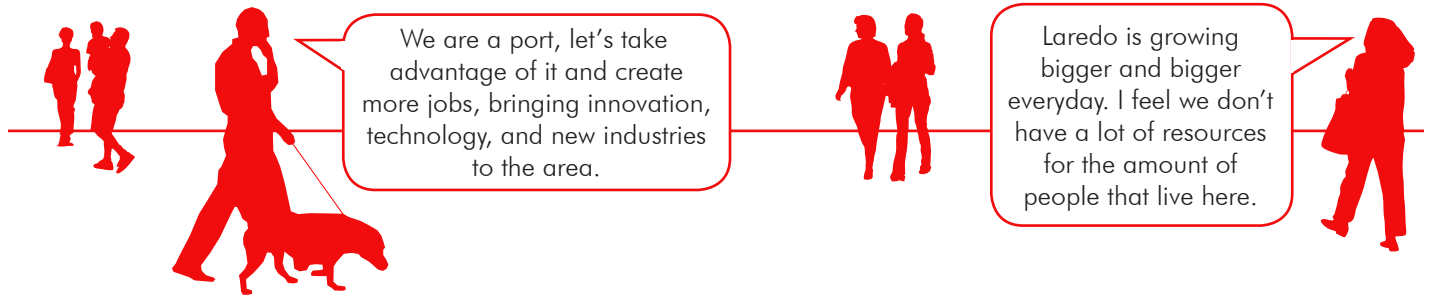
Ursuline Academy Graduating Class of 1900



First Mercy Hospital at 1320 Rosario Street



Masons in Laredo



Early Industries

Ranching has been predominate throughout Laredo's history. As early as 1757, 11 families owned 100 cattle, 125 mules, 712 horses, and 9,089 sheep and goats, according to a Spanish inspection report. One of the largest Spanish ranches was Dolores, owned by José Vásquez Borrego. Over 9,000 animals were run on a 29,000 acre grant.

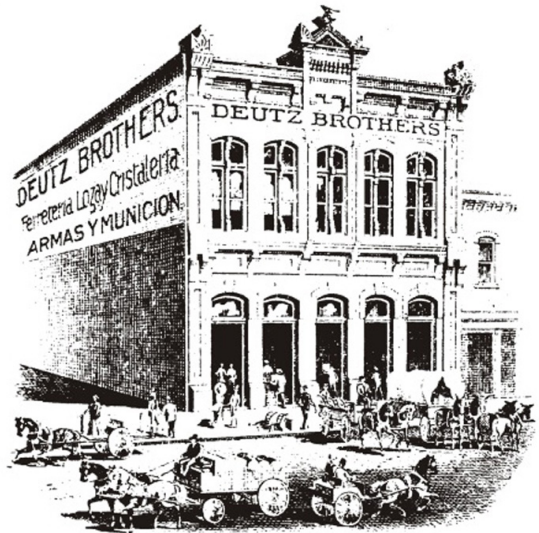
In the 1870's, cattle were driven to area rail heads for shipment north. Barbed wire fences brought an end to open range ranching in the 1880's, but the windmill fostered large spreads throughout Webb County.

Laredo became a major thoroughfare for trade between the United States and Mexico. The city's population of 3,512 in 1880 grew to 11,319 in 1890. Emigrants from Germany, France, Ireland, Italy, Scandinavia, and all parts of the United States moved to Laredo seeking employment and business opportunities.

Known since Spanish times, coal deposits located 27 miles upriver were mined by Refugio Benavides and Charles Callaghan as early as 1873. By 1900, the mines shipped 23,000,000 pounds of coal to Laredo and kept the railroads operative.

Onion Agriculture was practiced on a large scale in 1898 by Thomas C. Nye on irrigated acreage north of the city. The 1917 Souvenir Album of Laredo boasted, "The Laredo area is foremost in the world in the production of Bermuda onions."

A second boom resulted with the discovery of gas and oil. In 1921, Oliver Winfield Killam drilled the first commercial well of the Mirando Oil Company and later established Misko Refineries Company. Numerous fields were discovered, making the area a major center of oil and gas production.



Deutz Brothers, 1890



Market Plaza and Flores Ave, 1907



Bermuda Onion Field, 1916

CITY PROFILE



28.3
MEDIAN AGE

**based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*

252,309

PEOPLE
LIVE IN LAREDO

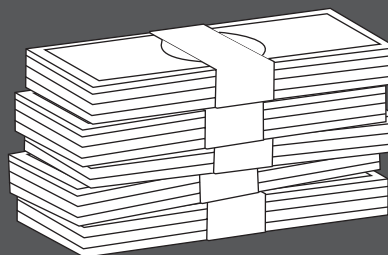


**based on 2014 Population Estimates*

Laredo is the largest inland port in the United States, and Nuevo Laredo the largest in Latin America. Located on the southern end of I-35 close to manufacturers in northern Mexico, Laredo's economy is based on international trade.

ABOUT

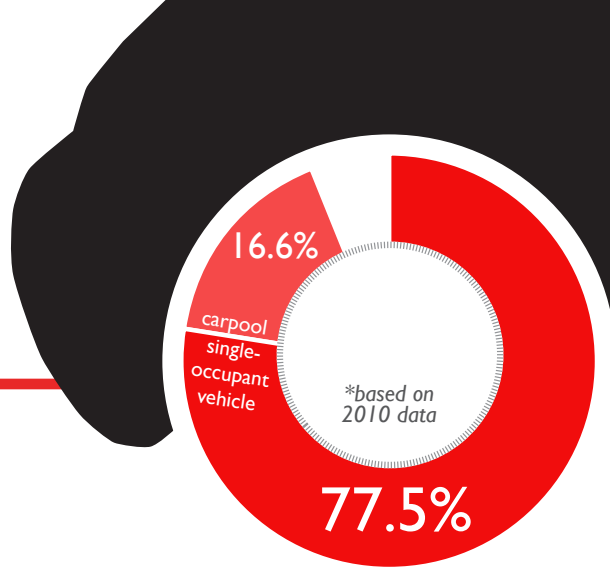
\$39,408



Median
Household
Income
in Laredo

**based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*

Laredo
travels
primarily
by **CAR**.



70,439



total housing units

**based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*

\$173 billion

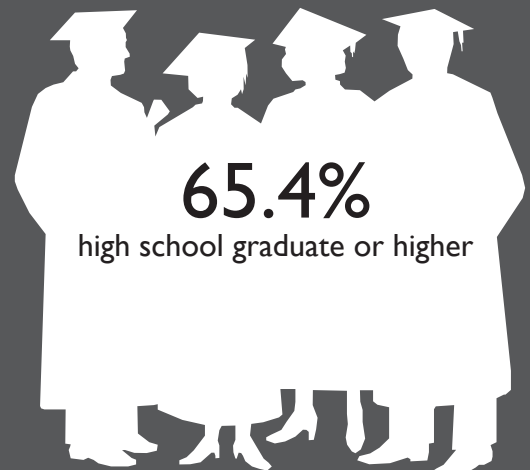


**based on 2010 data*



31.2%

of individuals
live below **poverty level**
in Laredo



65.4%

high school graduate or higher

**based on 2010-2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*