



FALLS FUTURE ONE-YEAR IMPLEMENTATION ASSESSMENT

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Process Overview

In mid-2017, leaders in Wichita Falls embarked on an ambitious initiative to make their community a more prosperous and successful place. The community partnered with Market Street Services to facilitate a nine-month holistic community and economic development planning process. To guide this process, the community empaneled a diverse Steering Committee of public, private, and non-profit leaders who dedicated their time and effort to the betterment of Wichita Falls. Their work resulted in the Falls Future Strategy, a holistic blueprint intended to guide the community's collective actions for five years. The planning process concluded in April 2018, and efforts to implement the Strategy began in earnest within a few months. **As part of the original project scope, Market Street committed to returning to the community once implementation efforts had been underway for a year to review the progress of the Falls Future initiative. This Implementation Assessment represents the culmination of this work.**

Before proceeding, however, it is useful to provide an overview of the strategic planning effort that created Falls Future and the strategic framework around which it is organized. The five-phase process began in August 2017 with **stakeholder engagement** consisting of focus groups, individual interviews, and an online survey that received 3,999 responses from people who live and/or work in Wichita Falls – a total that remains among the highest on any community survey administered through a Market Street-led process. Key findings from this stakeholder input were combined with in-depth data analysis covering demographic, socioeconomic, economic, and quality of life trends to develop two foundational research documents. The **Regional Assessment and Scorecards** evaluated the competitiveness of Wichita Falls as a place to live, work, and do business, while the **Target Sector Analysis and Marketing Review** identified business sectors the community can pursue to drive near-term job and investment growth and identified potential areas for improvement in the community's economic development marketing program.

While research and input revealed numerous strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, **members of the Steering Committee reached a strong consensus that Wichita Falls faced a troubling future if the *status quo* was maintained. Rather than a modest, incremental approach, the community would need to take bold actions to fundamentally re-orient its trajectory.** Accordingly, the Steering Committee settled on a strategic framework organized around a limited set of catalytic efforts with the potential to significantly improve the community's near- and long-term competitiveness. The **Falls Future Strategy** consists of five Community Goals that can be pursued through seven high-impact Catalysts. Each Catalyst was to be activated by pursuing a series of Tactical Recommendations that correspond to actions, programs, and other initiatives. **This strategic framework is represented on the following page.**

If the Falls Future Strategy represents "what" Wichita Falls must do to achieve a more prosperous and successful future, the complementary **Implementation Plan** describes "how" the community will translate its strategic blueprint into action. The Plan formalizes timelines for phasing in the Strategy's multiple actions, identifies lead and support implementation entities, determines existing and necessary financial and personnel capacity to drive implementation, proposes optimal staffing and governance operations, and confirms performance metrics to track implementation progress and success. The implementation activities and "lessons learned" from the first year of implementation will be the focus of this Assessment.

THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

Five overarching Community Goals...

- ∟ Attract and retain residents and businesses
- ∟ Increase prosperity for all Wichita Falls residents
- ∟ Enhance quality of life and quality of place
- ∟ Promote inclusivity and equity
- ∟ Improve internal and external perceptions of Wichita Falls

...that the community can pursue through seven Potential Catalysts...

1. The Wichita Falls Talent Partnership
2. Modern School Facilities
3. A Best-Practice Economic Development Program
4. A Thriving Sheppard Air Force Base
5. An Entrepreneurial 'Maker Hub'
6. A Live-Work-Play Downtown
7. A Bicycle-Friendly Community

...each of which is activated through Tactical Recommendations that correspond to actions, programs, and other initiatives.

Implementation Assessment

This Implementation Assessment offers a high-level evaluation of the initial implementation of the Falls Future Strategy. It begins with a brief overview of implementation activities, inclusive of any significant opportunities, challenges, and changes that have emerged since the conclusion of the strategic planning process. It concludes with a brief set of recommendations that can help stakeholders in Wichita Falls guide subsequent years of strategic implementation.

The overview of implementation activities, changes, opportunities, and challenges is derived primarily from a set of phone interviews with key stakeholders involved with the Falls Future implementation effort. Market Street conducted these interviews in early and mid-July 2019. Interview participants included members of the Falls Future Implementation Committee, Action Team leaders, and key staff members. Market Street also reviewed other materials related to the implementation of Falls Future (e.g. meeting minutes, presentations, etc.) provided by staff at the Wichita Falls Chamber of Commerce, the “coordinating entity” for the initiative.

While this document is formally titled as a “One-Year” assessment, in reality it covers a slightly longer time period. The Implementation Plan recommended a “formal launch” of strategic implementation on July 1, 2018. According to stakeholders, many implementation activities did indeed begin in earnest soon after this date. But rather than limiting the evaluation to a precise 12-month window, this Assessment instead covers activities that have occurred between the end of the five-phase strategic planning process in April 2018 and roughly early July 2019.

The Assessment consists of three sections, which are as follows:

1. Implementation Progress by Catalyst
2. Discussion
3. Recommendations

The **first section** provides a brief overview of the implementation activities that have taken place related to each of the Strategy’s seven Catalysts. This section includes any major updates, opportunities, challenges, or “lessons learned” related by volunteers in Wichita Falls. The **second section** offers high-level findings from stakeholder input and Market Street’s analysis of the initial progress related to Falls Future. This discussion identifies issues and key takeaways related to the overall approach to implementation, including the organizational and volunteer structures that support the initiative, internal and external communications, and so on. The **third section** provides a concise list of recommendations based on the findings and key takeaways in this Assessment. These recommendations are intended to help guide future years of implementation of the Falls Future Strategy.

The findings and recommendations in this Implementation Assessment will be presented to the Falls Future Implementation Committee at the group’s August 15 meeting.

1. IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS BY CATALYST

This section details implementation progress related to each of the seven Catalysts in the Falls Future Strategy. Its contents were derived from interviews with key staff and volunteers as well as a review of meeting minutes, presentations, and other relevant documents. **This is not intended to be a comprehensive inventory of all actions related to Falls Future, its Catalysts, or the volunteer groups that support them. Instead, this is intended as a high-level overview of progress to-date.** If desired, Falls Future Implementation Committee members and staff can provide feedback to help refine and improve this section.

1. The Wichita Falls Talent Partnership

Research and public input conducted during the initial strategic planning process revealed the need for Wichita Falls to make significant improvement to its educational attainment levels and “homegrown talent pipeline.” This Catalyst seeks to address these issues. Among the Catalysts in the Falls Future Strategy, however, it is relatively less prescriptive when it comes to specific programs and initiatives. Instead, it focuses on adopting a “collective impact” approach based on successful models that have been adopted in other communities around the country. This primarily would entail creating a “backbone committee” of representatives from key entities in the region’s talent pipeline, from education and training providers to businesses and non-profits. This committee would then identify “focus areas” for alignment and programmatic improvements. Critically, this new apparatus would be supported by a full-time professional staff position.

One of the most significant accomplishments of the first year of implementation was resourcing and filling a new staff position: Director, Wichita Falls Talent Partnership. The Implementation Plan did not make a definitive recommendation about the organization in which this position should be housed and instead suggested that relevant partners continue conversations to determine the ideal approach for Wichita Falls. According to stakeholders, these conversations led to the determination that the Chamber is ideally positioned to house the position owing to its role as a “convener” and its business community connections.

In April 2019, the Chamber hired a highly qualified individual to fill the Director position. According to stakeholders, this additional staff capacity has already led to progress in several areas related to talent development. These include the beginnings of a formal, community-wide internship program, enhanced education and awareness around connecting military spouses and partners to employment opportunities, and a revamp of Young Professionals of Wichita Falls to focus on long-term leadership development in addition to social and networking opportunities. The Director has also helped support business retention and expansion (BRE) activities by participating in company visits with Chamber economic development staff, work which stakeholders said is already paying dividends.

While the new staff capacity has been a welcome addition, stakeholders acknowledged significant room for improvement when it comes to engaging volunteers from key community partners. Simply put, there has been little movement toward adopting the “collective impact” model put forth in the Strategy and Implementation Plan. Stakeholders said they see further engaging and aligning community partners

to work together on issues related to workforce and talent will be vital to the overall success of the community, a finding that is consistent with input from the original strategic planning process.

2. Modern School Facilities

During the initial planning process, the need for modern school facilities – particularly modern high schools – emerged as perhaps the most important strategic priority for Wichita Falls. Success will ultimately be predicated on the passage of a bond initiative to fund capital improvements in the Wichita Falls Independent School District (WFISD). Because of the inherent complexity and uncertainty with any ballot initiative, stakeholders recognized that in addition to being a top priority, this Catalyst would be among the most challenging aspects of the Strategy to implement. **Implementation activities for this Catalyst can be organized into two categories. The first is the work of the WFISD Board of Trustees toward developing a consensus plan for facility upgrades and formally calling for a ballot initiative. The second is the work of volunteer leaders to prepare a political campaign in support of this initiative. According to stakeholders there has been significant progress in both areas, though the exact way forward is still to be determined.**

One potentially significant development occurred when voters in the WFISD footprint overwhelmingly approved what became known as a tax rate “Swap and Drop” in a June 2019 Tax Ratification Election. While the exact mechanics of this initiative are beyond the scope of this Assessment, the move enabled WFISD to move debt from one account to another in order to leverage additional state funding, thereby allowing for a decrease in the effective school property tax rate for area residents. While this itself has no direct bearing on modernizing school facilities, stakeholders said the combination of a lower “starting” property tax rate and a more optimal leveraging of state funding could lead to a more favorable electoral climate if and when a facilities bond initiative reaches the ballot. As of the writing of this Assessment, the WFISD Board has yet to announce a specific long-range facility plan or timeline for a potential ballot initiative. According to stakeholders and media reports, it is unlikely that an initiative will appear on the ballot in November 2019. Some stakeholders said an initiative in November 2020 would be a preferable, realistic alternative.

Ultimately, the decisions of the WFISD Board will influence when and how a support campaign unfolds. In the meantime, volunteers have remained proactive in their preparations. A key development has been the formation of “Building the Falls’ Future,” a political action committee (PAC) to advocate on behalf of modern school facilities in Wichita Falls. Stakeholders said that this group has achieved promising results in its initial fundraising efforts and is well-positioned to support advocacy efforts when the time comes. The Catalyst is further supported by a separate Action Team under the framework of the Falls Future volunteer structure. According to stakeholders, this group has met several times to receive updates on the establishment of the PAC and briefings on the WFISD Board’s planning progress. Stakeholders said, however, that the conversations in this Action Team have not led to any action items for the group. This is largely due to the fact that there is not yet an active campaign to support, but stakeholders noted that specific planning functions have to this point largely been advanced by the PAC’s leadership. (This includes activities such as engaging a campaign advisor and developing a “checklist” of needed advocacy activities.) **Stakeholders said that volunteers need clarification on the role of the Action Team and how it will complement and interact with the PAC in order to ensure consistent messaging and to avoid any**

potential “splintering” of organized support for modern school facilities. Overall, however, volunteers feel they have “laid the groundwork” to help advance this Catalyst and are mostly ready to mobilize when needed.

3. A Best-Practice Economic Development Program

This Catalyst deals with both direct efforts to attract and retain jobs and investment in Wichita Falls as well as related initiatives and investments aimed at boosting the community’s overall economic competitiveness. Many of these activities are a continuation of efforts that were already underway for years or even decades prior to the start of the Falls Future planning process. Most notably, the Chamber has long provided economic development services on behalf of the community with the support of the City of Wichita Falls’ 4A (formally the Wichita Falls Economic Development Corporation) and 4B sales tax corporations as well as other public and private partners. These activities include economic development marketing, project management, and business retention and expansion (BRE) activities.

Rather than an entirely new approach, the Strategy instead proposed adjustments to these long-running programs. According to stakeholders, many of these adjustments are already underway. As one example, the Chamber’s economic development staff is now using specialized software to gather and manage data and input from BRE visits as recommended in the Strategy. It should also be noted that the Chamber is currently seeking to hire a Vice President of Business Attraction, a critical position on the economic development team. According to stakeholders, this time of transition has temporarily slowed some progress related to an updated approach to business attraction and marketing. But overall, stakeholders expressed optimism about the direction of the community’s economic development programs and the potential for improvement.

The Action Team that convened under the Falls Future Implementation Committee to support this catalyst branded itself as “EDIT,” an acronym for “Economic Development Implementation Team.” This group includes elected officials and staff from the City of Wichita Falls, representatives from the 4A and 4B boards, business leaders, and others. **The EDIT group is particularly notable for its robust level of organization and progress tracking.** The group has developed a “dashboard” spreadsheet to monitor the implementation progress of each Tactical Recommendation within the Catalyst. Among other things, the columns in the spreadsheet identify a “point person” for each recommendation, provide detailed progress notes cataloging various activities, and estimate the percent of work that has been completed in each area. **Stakeholders said they feel this level of organization has been highly effective and suggested that this model or a similar approach could be beneficial for other areas of the implementation effort.**

The group’s detailed reporting reveals that at least some progress has been made in all Tactical Recommendations within the Catalyst. One bright spot has been the creation of a Diversity Business Council, which has spun off from the EDIT group and now convenes separately (as was the original plan). Stakeholders said that while this group is new, it has generated significant interest, with approximately 20 participating members. It is currently working to adopt a custom name and brand identity and to launch a survey aimed at assessing diversity conditions and needs in the Wichita Falls business community.

Overall, the EDIT group has viewed ensuring alignment and accountability as its primary purposes for convening in contrast to other Action Teams that have a more tangible program of work. While acknowledging the value of these purposes, stakeholders said that this relatively limited scope can sometimes lead to frustrations, as members of the group tend to be highly motivated individuals who are accustomed to decisive action. This is a fairly common condition in a new holistic economic development effort, and potential options for going forward are discussed in "3. Recommendations."

4. A Thriving Sheppard Air Force Base

Sheppard Air Force Base (SAFB) is vital to Wichita Falls' economy and the community as a whole. In the Implementation Plan, Market Street recommended leveraging the existing Sheppard Military Affairs Committee (SMAC) to guide implementation efforts related to this Catalyst. SMAC has for many years served as the primary advocacy group supporting SAFB. Its work includes maintaining strong relationships with legislative delegations and other state and federal decision-makers and engaging in other planning activities to support overall mission sustainability.

According to stakeholders, SMAC continues to effectively execute this critical advocacy role. But stakeholders said that the initial months of implementation revealed that SMAC is not the ideal entity to support programs outside of this scope. Stakeholders said that other groups or entities must take on these initiatives if they are to be successful. As previously discussed, new professional staff at the Chamber has already begun work to work with relevant stakeholders to better connect SAFB spouses and partners to the local job market. But stakeholders said they feel that Tactical Recommendation 4.5 dealing with physical connectivity between the base and Downtown Wichita Falls is at risk of "falling through the cracks" without more intentional coordination among community partners.

5. An Entrepreneurial 'Maker Hub'

The initial progress in this Catalyst offers a good example of why an adaptable approach to implementation is so important to the overall success of an initiative. The concept of pursuing an integrated "maker hub" as a potential Catalyst emerged early in the strategic planning process as a realistic way to enhance the community's entrepreneurial ecosystem in a way that takes advantage of a mechanically inclined local workforce. As the planning process unfolded, however, stakeholders on the Steering Committee discovered that there was already a nascent private company in Wichita Falls seeking to establish a makerspace. (Since that time, a second private group has also begun work on a related concept.)

Rather than viewing these startups as competition, volunteers saw significant potential. Said one stakeholder, "We realized we had a wonderful opportunity. Our plan was to create our own and develop a community-led makerspace, but we had two for-profit enterprises step up and say 'this is what we were hoping to do.' " Stakeholders quickly realized that pursuing a community-led makerspace in addition to these two private spaces could risk all three facilities failing. **Accordingly, the Action Team convened around this Catalyst shifted its focus to supporting these private entities – Dexter Learning and Crashworks – in creating new makerspace capacity in the community.** Stakeholders said this revised approach has several implications. Stakeholders noted that these private entities have business models that

entail providing services (e.g. education and training programs) that are not directly related to the maker hub as it is envisioned in the Strategy. On the positive side, however, many key questions related to how a facility would be located, funded, and staffed have been answered. Stakeholders said that progress in this Catalyst is much further along than it would have been had the Action Team pursued a community-led startup.

In recent months, the focus has been on helping the two private entities prepare to ask the 4A board to fund the purchase of requisite equipment for a makerspace. According to stakeholders, these efforts have largely been driven by individual volunteers as opposed to the full Action Team; the Action Team will convene next when these pitches are ready. Stakeholders said that some initial conversations have also occurred about how to leverage the makerspace(s) into a more fully realized entrepreneurial “hub” (e.g. by co-locating some activities of the Midwestern State Small Business Development Center with the facility). Overall, however, the focus to this point has largely been on the makerspace component of the broader vision.

Fortunately, the community has a great deal of input from which to draw inspiration going forward. Early in the process, students at Midwestern State developed a survey that the Chamber helped promote to a broad audience. This survey asked respondents what they would like to see in a makerspace. It received approximately 600 to 700 responses and confirmed that there is significant interest in a membership-based makerspace in the community. These and other insights will be invaluable as stakeholders seek to advance this Catalyst.

6. A Live-Work-Play Downtown

As noted in the Falls Future Strategy, stakeholders in Wichita Falls felt their community must improve its social offerings and quality of place in order to become more attractive destination for talent and, by extension, jobs and investment. Because resources are limited, the Strategy recommended targeting quality of place investments in Downtown Wichita Falls given the area’s abundance of existing infrastructure, walkable character, relative density, and burgeoning momentum. From an organizational perspective, the area has been represented by a private group, Downtown Wichita Falls Development (DWFD). (The organization is in fact two separately incorporated yet closely aligned non-profit organizations.) According to stakeholders, DWFD’s core competencies are marketing and event planning, and with some exceptions, the organization focuses primarily on these areas. As noted in the Implementation Plan,

“...stakeholder feedback revealed that there is a need to complement the aforementioned organizations and entities with new capacity focused on advancing economic development in downtown Wichita Falls. Tactical Recommendation 6.2 recommends the creation of new “economic development staff capacity” to pursue private investment and enhance quality of place in the district. This would entail promoting new development and redevelopment, pursuing the development of new housing and supportive neighborhood retail, and working with existing and prospective businesses to expand the employment base and enhance social and retail offerings in the district.”

The Implementation Plan recommended the creation of a new staff position, the Downtown Economic Development Director, to be housed within the Chamber with potential funding from the City of Wichita Falls and/or its 4A or 4B economic development corporations. This position would complement the marketing and events capacity of DWFD. According to individuals contacted for this Implementation Assessment, some stakeholders began to rethink this arrangement soon after the completion of the Falls Future planning process. Stakeholders said that the thinking at the time was that DWFD would be a more logical place to house a staff position focused on downtown economic development, thereby putting all downtown functions “under one roof.”

According to stakeholders, this led to a long-running string of discussions about creating a development-focused staff position to represent Downtown Wichita Falls. These discussions involved numerous staff and volunteer leaders from organizations involved in downtown and/or community and economic development, including but not limited to DWFD and the Chamber. Stakeholders said these discussions quickly became fraught with difficulty and led to widespread frustration among those involved. Stakeholders said the topic of where to house the position has led to heightened tension among various organizations in the community and downtown stakeholders. Stakeholders said they feared that these tensions could undermine the potential of Downtown Wichita Falls at a time when the district has otherwise enjoyed strong momentum.

Ultimately, stakeholders in Wichita Falls should continue to seek consensus and unity on key issues impacting the community’s overall competitiveness, success, and prosperity. This includes but is not limited to needed staff support for Downtown Wichita Falls. That said, stakeholders contacted for this Implementation Assessment said that the discussions around the development-focused downtown staff position have revealed that the position is unlikely to find a home in the DWFD. **Accordingly, stakeholders said they would like to see the Chamber take on the position as originally proposed in the Implementation Plan.**

Stakeholders said the disunity related to downtown development staffing has led to a relative lack of progress in this Catalyst. **This is not to say that positive things have not occurred in Downtown Wichita Falls since the completion of the Falls Future process.** Stakeholders said the district’s “organic” momentum has continued to be strong. Additionally, the Downtown Development Steering Committee (DDSC), an official City of Wichita Falls committee, has proposed and/or brought about numerous regulatory changes impacting downtown development, including but not limited to sidewalk improvements, tree ordinances, and zoning actions. With many objectives achieved, this group has reduced its meeting schedule from monthly to quarterly but remains an important agent for change in Downtown Wichita Falls. But stakeholders ultimately said they believed that if Downtown Wichita Falls is to maximize its potential, it must be supported by professional staff focused specifically on promoting new development and redevelopment.

7. A Bicycle-Friendly Community

According to stakeholders, this Catalyst stands out as one of the most important success stories in the first year of the implementation of the Falls Future Strategy. As discussed in the Strategy, there was already a

strong association between Wichita Falls and cycling, most notably through the renowned Hotter’N’Hell Hundred race. Leaning into this identity offered a way to improve quality of life and place in the community and increase Wichita Falls’ notoriety outside of North Texas, two concerns that emerged through public input. The Catalyst accordingly focused on a wide variety of programs and investments aimed at helping the community to achieve a Bronze-level Bicycle Friendly Community designation from the League of American Bicyclists. Unbeknownst to the Market Street team during the initial strategic planning process, there was already significant momentum around these issues, and stakeholders had previously sought a Bronze-level designation several years prior to the development of the Falls Future Strategy. **Since the completion of the planning process, stakeholders have made significant progress toward harnessing and/or reigniting energy to make Wichita Falls a more bicycle-friendly community.**

According to stakeholders, a highly engaged Action Team has convened around this Catalyst, with meetings typically drawing between 15 and 20 attendees. The group’s primary focus has been on working with the City of Wichita Falls to prepare the application for Bronze-level status. The City submitted this application to the League of American Bicyclists in early August, approximately three years ahead of schedule going by the timeline established in the Implementation Plan. Stakeholders said the application is comprehensive. Stakeholders also believe the application is stronger relative to the previous attempt thanks to the work of the Action Team and community partners on issues related to bicycle events, marketing, education, and new city bicycle-friendly ordinances. Stakeholders said that the community may not have enough physical bicycle infrastructure (e.g. protected bike lanes) in place to receive a Bronze designation on this attempt. **Though bicycle infrastructure tends to be far cheaper on a per-mile basis relative to infrastructure for motor vehicles, developing it still takes time and significant resources. Accordingly, it would be unreasonable to expect Wichita Falls to have made significant progress on new infrastructure in a year’s time. That said, stakeholders clearly acknowledge that enhanced infrastructure will be critical to the success of this Catalyst going forward.**

Overall, stakeholders viewed the progress in this Catalyst as a highly visible source of optimism and pride. As will be discussed later in this section, some stakeholders said that an initial challenge related to the overall Falls Future initiative has been sharing information between Action Teams and the general public. That is, some volunteers said they are relatively unaware about the progress on Catalysts with which they are not directly engaged. **But numerous volunteers who are not directly involved with the push for a more bicycle-friendly community cited this Catalyst as a strong point in the initial implementation of Falls Future. With such excellent initial momentum, Wichita Falls may even have an opportunity to expand its ambition in this area in the coming years.**

2. DISCUSSION

Stakeholders in Wichita Falls should be proud of the progress the community has made in the first year of implementing the Falls Future Strategy. The preceding section details numerous accomplishments that would not have been possible without the concerted efforts of numerous organizations and volunteers in the community. Beyond tangible accomplishments, stakeholders said that the strategic planning process that created Falls Future and the subsequent early wins have helped the community become more intentional and proactive in its community and economic development efforts. Said one stakeholder, Falls Future “lit a fire under some people to get the community better overall.” Stakeholders said that this has helped contribute to enhanced collaboration among key partners and a more positive overall mood in the community.

What disappointment stakeholders did convey was generally related to the fact that some Catalysts have seen relatively little activity since the conclusion of the strategic planning process. **As previously discussed, the relative lack of progress related to building economic development capacity for Downtown Wichita Falls was the primary source of frustration among stakeholders contacted as part of the Implementation Process.** There is indeed significant room for improvement related to the activation of the downtown Catalyst, and specific recommendations are offered in the next section. **But when implementing a strategic plan as ambitious as Falls Future, challenges are to be expected. Many communities that have advanced holistic economic development efforts have found that one or more initiatives struggle to gain traction in the early phases of implementation.** This is especially the case in communities implementing a truly holistic strategy for the first time, as is the case in Wichita Falls. This is not to say that stakeholders in Wichita Falls should be complacent or satisfied with a lack of progress in any area. **But leaders and volunteers must also not be discouraged by initial challenges and instead keep working to find solutions. By all indications, leaders in Wichita Falls understand this reality. Overall, with a handful of exceptions, the recommendations in the next section are mostly minor adjustments to build on initial successes as opposed to major course corrections.**

Before moving on to these recommendations, however, it is necessary to cover key findings related to the overall Falls Future effort, including feedback received from stakeholders about the organizational and operational functionality of the initiative. In general, stakeholders feel the overall approach to implementation has been successful. Stakeholders said that the Chamber has continued to embrace its role as a “convener” organization supporting the effective implementation of the Strategy, and volunteers generally described their experience serving as part of the Falls Future Implementation Committee or Action Teams in positive terms.

That said, stakeholders identified room for improvement when it comes to communications. Some stakeholders said they would like to see broader public awareness of the initiatives’ successes. Others noted that building awareness among the general public is a challenge no matter the issue and the Chamber has made efforts to communicate all significant developments (e.g. new staff, major events, etc.) to the community as a whole. **Stakeholders agreed, however, that “internal” communications within the volunteer structure of Falls Future and the key partners that support it must improve.** Stakeholders said they would like to see the Chamber be more intentional about regularly briefing partners such as the City

and the 4A board specifically on developments related to Falls Future. Stakeholders also said that there is an opportunity to better update volunteers on the progress of the initiative as a whole through regular e-mails or electronic newsletters. Stakeholders said Action Teams in particular are sometimes “working in silos,” effectively advancing actions in their Catalyst but having little understanding of activities occurring related to other aspects of Falls Future or how all the pieces fit together. Said one stakeholder, **“There is lots of communication within each Action Team, just not outside of them. There are things going on behind the scenes, such as the creation of the diversity business council, where you wouldn’t know what was going on unless you were working on it directly or were in Chamber leadership.”** Overall, stakeholders generally agreed that “ramping up reporting and monitoring” related to Falls Future was the most pressing need not directly tied to a specific Catalyst.

Finally, it should be noted that the Falls Future process is not the only strategic planning exercise with relevance to community and economic development to have taken place in Wichita Falls in the last year. The Chamber recently completed an organizational planning process, while the 4A board commissioned an evaluation of its practices and policies and the overall effectiveness of its investments. According to stakeholders, the latter analysis is expected to lead to a set of strategic recommendations for the 4A entity that will help the organization operate more efficiently within clear guidelines. Stakeholders said these planning processes have been complementary to and supportive of the Falls Future initiative. Stakeholders said they hope and expect that the work will result in two stronger organizations with better, more clearly defined expectations for the community’s economic development program. **Stakeholders noted, however, that the Chamber and its partners will soon be charged with overseeing or directly implementing recommendations from three different strategic visions and must be proactive in ensuring that these efforts remain well-coordinated and complementary.**

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings identified in the first two sections of this Assessment, Market Street has developed the following set of recommendations that can help stakeholders in Wichita Falls in subsequent years of implementation of the Falls Future Strategy. These recommendations include potential adjustments to the Strategy and updates to the overall approach to implementation. **It should again be emphasized that the initial implementation of Falls Future has generally been a success. Many of the recommendations herein are tweaks to an already successful initiative. That said, stakeholder input revealed some areas where significant changes are needed, particularly with respect to staffing for the “A Live-Work-Play Downtown” Catalyst and communications between various aspects of the Falls Future initiative.**

The recommendations are divided into eight subsections – one for each of the Strategy’s Catalysts and a section focusing on potential enhancements to the ways in which the overall initiative is supported.

1. The Wichita Falls Talent Partnership

- ∟ Wichita Falls has made excellent progress in establishing a professional staff position in this Catalyst but has thus far made little movement toward adopting a collective impact approach; the Action Team convened around this initiative should, with the support of staff, recommit to implementing Tactical Recommendations 1.1 and 1.2 in the second year of implementation
- ∟ The Strategy highlights potential models for the community to emulate, including Strive Partnership and Alignment; partners should begin by investigating these models to determine whether they are an appropriate fit for Wichita Falls
- ∟ Stakeholders said that it will be critical to leverage and align the resources of education and training providers with engagement from other key partners such as non-profits and private businesses; regardless of the specific model the community chooses, seeking this alignment should be the focus of all relevant partners

2. Modern School Facilities

- ∟ Stakeholders must clarify the roles and responsibilities of the PAC and the Modern School Facilities Action Team; Market Street recommends that the PAC continue to be the primary entity guiding fundraising and resource-intensive efforts such as advertising as well as overall campaign strategy;
- ∟ Market Street recommends the Action Team focus on planning for and mobilizing a volunteer-driven effort to promote a bond initiative when the time comes; this could include readying a speakers’ bureau and enlisting volunteers to carry out such labor-intensive activities such as door-knocking and phone-banking
- ∟ With a ballot initiative likely to come in 2020 at the earliest, the PAC and the Action team should begin preparing for specific activities and determining how they will “tell the story” of why modern school facilities are needed in Wichita Falls

3. A Best-Practice Economic Development Program

- ∟ As the Chamber seeks to hire new economic development staff, its volunteer and staff leaders and community partners such as the 4A board should continue to work collaboratively to ensure that economic development programs are highly competitive and effective
- ∟ Based on stakeholder feedback, as more items get “checked off the list,” the EDIT group should work with the Falls Future Implementation Committee and economic development partners to determine whether the Action Team should carry on into the future
 - The group could continue as a standing group focused on alignment and coordination and responding to opportunities and challenges that emerge; alternatively, it could opt to wind down as recommendations from the Strategy come online

4. A Thriving Sheppard Air Force Base

- ∟ Wichita Falls should continue to advocate on behalf of SAFB through SMAC; the other recommendations in the Catalyst should be supported and advanced primarily by other entities
- ∟ The Talent Partnership and/or the new Chamber staff position is well-positioned to coordinate activities related to Tactical Recommendation 4.4 dealing with connecting military personnel, spouses and partners, and others to employment opportunities in the community; staff have already forged initial connections in this area
- ∟ Tactical Recommendation 4.5 dealing with enhanced connectivity between SAFB and Downtown Wichita Falls does not have an obvious home among any existing organization or group; if deemed necessary and appropriate, partners could convene a working group around this issue
 - In contrast to other Action Teams, this working group would have a very narrow focus
 - Members of the working group could include representatives from SAFB, the City of Wichita Falls and other local government entities, the 4A and 4B boards, the Chamber, and others; the group should include at least some overlap with the Falls Future Implementation Committee to ensure coordination and alignment
 - If a working group is deemed to be unnecessary, activities for this recommendation could be advanced by City staff in cooperation with all other relevant partners

5. An Entrepreneurial ‘Maker Hub’

- ∟ Given the emergence of private firms seeking to develop makerspace capacity, partners should continue to be flexible in their approach to establishing a Maker Hub in Wichita Falls, which may involve deviating from the specific recommendations in the Strategy

- ∟ That said, partners should not lose sight of the overarching theme of the Catalyst, which calls not just for a makerspace but rather a “hub” of activity that can enhance the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and, ultimately, support the creation of new businesses and product ideas
- ∟ As makerspace facilities continue to progress, members of the Action Team should seek to develop and enhance programs and services that can enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem and explore options to add physical amenities to a hub location, potentially including co-working and event spaces that can help the facility serve as a true “focal point” for entrepreneurship

6. A Live-Work-Play Downtown

- ∟ Partners in Wichita Falls should create and resource the Downtown Economic Development Director position at the Chamber
- ∟ Wichita Falls should consider creating an advisory board of downtown stakeholders and other relevant partners to support this professional staffer and provide guidance on strategic direction; the advisory board should be well-networked with the Falls Future Implementation Committee
- ∟ All stakeholders with an interest in a strong Downtown Wichita Falls should continue to work toward consensus on the best way to ensure the district’s success

7. A Bicycle-Friendly Community

- ∟ The initial progress related to this Catalyst has been impressive and if anything the original timeline for implementation of some recommendations may have been far too conservative; should the community receive a Bronze-level designation years ahead of schedule, there could be an opportunity to think bigger about what comes next
- ∟ That said, there are numerous recommendations in the Strategy that have yet to see significant progress while the focus has been on a Bronze-level designation (e.g. a new bicycle master plan); the community should continue to pursue these recommendations in subsequent years of implementation
- ∟ Stakeholder feedback also revealed a clear need to enhance infrastructure in order to maximize its potential for a Bronze-level designation and make bicycling safer and more attractive for a wide range of potential users
 - Partners should continue to seek ways to resource best-practice infrastructure through a variety of avenues, including grants and private donations, incorporating bicycle infrastructure into regularly scheduled street maintenance, and identifying low-cost solutions (e.g. buffered bike lanes and traffic calming measures) in appropriate contexts

Support for the Overall Falls Future Initiative

- ∟ Chamber staff and Falls Future stakeholders should work collaboratively to standardize a process for tracking and reporting implementation progress across volunteer groups; potential methods could include the following:
 - Emulating the tracking approach utilized by the EDIT group
 - Providing regular (likely monthly) e-mail updates to all Falls Future volunteers about progress and accomplishments across the entire initiative
 - Maintaining an online repository of all implementation progress throughout the initiative's history
- ∟ Chamber staff should also work with partners such as the 4A board to develop protocols for regularly sharing information with key external partners, likely through quarterly briefings
- ∟ To enhance the visibility of the Falls Future initiative to the general public, stakeholders should consider featuring Falls Future at an annual summit, perhaps as a part of or in conjunction with the Chamber's annual meeting
- ∟ In the long-run, leaders at the Chamber may wish to consider expanding the organization's marketing staff capacity to free up existing staff to spend more time supporting economic development marketing and the Falls Future initiative