

# City of Commerce

## 2024 Strategic Plan





As Commerce looks to the future, several key factors must be acknowledged that will exert great influence on the community's development.

## Population Expansion into Hunt County

Communities all around the DFW Metroplex are experiencing growth, and many communities are seeing record-breaking expansion. The population expansion that is taking place east of Dallas has already overtaken Rockwall County and has begun to roll into Hunt County. Southwest Hunt County, from Royse City to Caddo Mills to Greenville, is seeing rapid development and expansion. This growth places tremendous burdens on public infrastructure, including water, sewer, trash, and roadways.

While the growth has not yet hit Commerce in a significant way, we must be looking into the future to prepare our community in the event growth comes this way. The challenges that come with growth require time and money to overcome, and communities that do not plan will find it hard to ever catch up. Commerce needs to plan and be ready in the event growth comes our way.

## Low Socio-Economic Conditions

According to data from the 2020 US Census Report, the socio-economic profile for Commerce is significant. A 2023 article from [www.theworkersrights.com](http://www.theworkersrights.com) listed Commerce as the fifth-poorest community in Texas among cities over 5,000 in population. They show an unemployment rate of 10.4% and a poverty rate of 36.6%.

## Aging Public Infrastructure

Due to the low socio-economic conditions, the community investment in infrastructure has not kept up with the aging and deterioration of these physical systems. The result is a series of utility and transportation systems that struggle to maintain the reliability and sustainability to serve the current population, much less the approaching growth.

The 2024 Strategic Plan is intended to be the blueprint for taking charge of the community's future.

## WHAT IS A STRATEGIC PLAN?

A **local government strategic plan** is a comprehensive blueprint that outlines the long-term vision and goals of a city or municipality. It serves as a roadmap for achieving desired outcomes and ensuring alignment with the community's needs and aspirations.

It requires a look into the current conditions of the community, the growth or decline pressures on the community, and how those factors will influence the long-term vision for the community.

The Strategic Plan will identify a series of objectives that will be the focus of the organization and then identify strategies and actions that are necessary to accomplish the desired future outcomes.

## VISION – MISSION – VALUES

### BENEFITS OF A STRATEGIC PLAN

**Direction and Focus:** A strategic plan provides a clear direction for an organization or community, outlining its mission, vision, and goals. It helps stakeholders understand where the organization is headed and what it aims to achieve, fostering alignment and focus across the entire entity.

**Resource Allocation:** By identifying priorities and setting specific objectives, a strategic plan helps allocate resources effectively. It ensures that resources such as funding, time, and manpower are directed toward activities that contribute most directly to achieving the organization's goals.

**Decision Making:** A strategic plan serves as a framework for decision-making, providing guidance on prioritizing initiatives, evaluating opportunities, and making trade-offs between competing interests. It enables informed decision-making based on the organization's overarching goals and objectives.

**Accountability:** A strategic plan establishes clear accountability by assigning responsibilities for implementing specific initiatives and achieving defined objectives. It enables stakeholders to track progress, hold individuals and teams accountable for their performance, and ensure alignment with the organization's overall vision and goals.

A **community vision statement** is a forward-looking declaration that describes the desired state or achievements a community aims to reach in the long term. It serves as an aspirational and inspirational guide for the community's growth and development. Think of it as a guiding light that illuminates the path toward the community's future aspirations.

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#### **Vision Statement:**

*The City of Commerce will be a vibrant, self-sustaining community where families can put down roots in the soil and grass of a rural setting, raise their children safely, pursue a quality education, and still have access to the amenities of the DFW Metroplex.*

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Once there is a clear vision that sets the community's future aspirations, the City staff develop an internal Mission Statement and Value Set. These direct the actions, efforts, and outcomes that make the Vision possible.

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#### **Mission Statement:**

*We work together to build and maintain a community of the highest quality for present and future generations.*

#### **Values**

**Responsive:** *Meeting citizen needs in a timely manner*

**Effective:** *Meeting citizen needs completely, the first time*

**Accountable:** *Measuring performance to improve and repeat results*

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## OBJECTIVES

A Strategic Plan begins with a look at current conditions and begins to aspire to a desired future. Then a set of Objectives are drafted that are key issues or challenges that must be faced to accomplish the desired future. Finally, Strategies and Action Steps are established that direct the allocation of resources and assets for the organization to make the desired future possible.

Within the Council Retreat in the Summer of 2023, the City Council identified five Objectives that they felt were crucial to the community's ability to create its future... rather than having outside forces determine the future of the community. Subsequently, a series of three Town Hall meetings were held to obtain feedback from community stakeholders. Based on the feedback received during these meetings, the Objectives were reduced to four and they are ranked by the priority established by community stakeholders.

### Develop New Revenue Streams

The socio-economic condition of our community is well below that of the average community in Texas. The median household income for Commerce is \$37,684 per year. (*The median household income considered to be poverty is \$39,900 per year.*) Thirty-six percent (36%) of Commerce households have a total household income of \$25,000 per year or less.

This means that the cost of growth and rehabilitation of existing systems cannot be carried by local taxpayers alone. New revenue streams that simply add to the existing taxpayers' bill will not be sustainable. Revenue from other stakeholders and external sources will be necessary to accomplish the desired future.

### Develop Sustainable Infrastructure

The fundamental infrastructure of a community is the systems needed to provide basic services such as water, sewer, solid waste, and streets. Without these critical services in place, it is difficult for a community to grow and prosper.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Develop New Revenue Streams
2. Develop Sustainable Infrastructure
3. Improve The Appearance Of The City
4. Improve Quality Of Life

## OBJECTIVES

### 1. Develop New Revenue Streams

### 2. Develop Sustainable Infrastructure

### 3. Improve The Appearance Of The City

### 4. Improve Quality Of Life

The current quality of infrastructure should be of sufficient quality to consistently serve the community without repeated interruptions in service. The infrastructure of Commerce has not been up to that basic level of service. Over the past three years, work has been done and continues to be done to rehabilitate existing infrastructure and restore the City's ability to reliably provide these services.

In addition to being able to consistently provide quality services to the community of today, the infrastructure systems should be ready and able to expand and serve new customers and new areas at a high level. This requires detailed planning and analysis BEFORE the expansion is required. If a community waits until expansion is required to start the planning, it will stay behind for years to come.

### **Improve The Appearance Of The City**

"You only get one chance to make a first impression." What do people see and think about our community as they travel into, through, or around the community? What can the City do to improve that experience? How can we incentivize property owners to clear, clean, and improve old properties?

### **Improve Quality Of Life**

Four walls and a roof can make a house, but it does not make a home. The house is the building while the home is the family, the love, and the relationships that exist inside the house. In the same way, a city is a place. A community is made up of the people, the organizations, and the relationships that make it a great place to live, work, and play.

What are the things within Commerce that make it a desirable place to live, work, and play? What is missing? A quality community needs jobs, housing, safety, and recreation. How can we grow in each of those areas?

## OBJECTIVE: DEVELOP NEW REVENUE STREAMS

There continues to be a significant need for investment in the infrastructure of the community. Over the years, the condition of community infrastructure has declined at a greater pace than the investment in maintenance and renewal. Added to this is the economic condition of the community. Commerce is classified as a low to moderate-income community since there is a significant percentage of the community that lives at or below the poverty limit. As the community invests in infrastructure, the impact of this cost on the families within the community should be of great importance.

As a result, it will be a strategic Objective to develop methods and sources of revenue/income from outside of the community. The following Strategies are intended to help achieve that Objective:

### **Strategy 1: Develop meaningful festivals and events at least quarterly. (Etc. Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter).**

These events are intended to draw visitors and vendors into the community. This will provide an economic boom of external dollars in the form of sales and sales taxes. Consider adding a Festival focused on Children in partnership with the Children's Museum.

### **Strategy 2: Research Grant Funding Opportunities & Obtain at least two (2) grants.**

Many of the infrastructure investment needs align with existing State & Federal Grant Programs. When the timing of the investment need allows, the City should pursue ALL opportunities to secure external funding to leverage the local investment.

### **Strategy 3: Promote Economic Development Through Residential, Retail, and Industrial Growth.**

New development will expand the tax base and diversify the economic resources available for infrastructure investment.

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**Strategy 4: Implement the Downtown Master Plan, including the Farmers Market Area.**

Improvement in the infrastructure of the Downtown Corridor (sidewalks, streetscapes, and ADA accessibility) will encourage the development of currently vacant properties and provide enhanced economic activity.

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Lead Contributors</b>	<b>Milestones (Deadlines)</b>
<b>Develop meaningful festivals and events</b>	<b>Mayor Teddy Reel</b> ACM Molly Jacobsen Fire Chief Chris Bassham Chamber of Commerce Downtown Alliance TAMU-C Children’s Museum Brick Row Music	Review the Bash (Sept 24)  Event Ideas & Seasons (July 4, 2024)
<b>Research grant funding opportunities; Obtain at least two grants</b>	<b>ACM Jamie Campbell</b> CM Howdy Lisenbee Grant Consultants Engineers	DRP (April 24) EPA (April 24) SAFER (April 24) HOME (May 24) Parks (Dec 24) USDA (Dec 24) TAP (2025)
<b>Promote economic development: Residential, Commercial, Industrial</b>	<b>EDC Director Bonnie Hunter</b> CM Howdy Lisenbee Jon Harper The Retail Coach	Covidien/Nexii Bldg (Dec 24) Industrial Recruit Trips (Dec 25) Retail Trade Shows (Dec 25)
<b>Implement Downtown Master Plan</b>	<b>CM Howdy Lisenbee</b> Cory Arrington Engineers	Design Downtown (Spring 25) Identify Funding (Spring 25) Construction (Spring 26)



## OBJECTIVE: DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

As population migration continues to move into Texas and the areas surrounding the DFW metroplex, many communities are finding their infrastructure unable to keep up with the growth. This is true primarily of water, sewer, and transportation infrastructure.

### **Strategy 1: Complete a Water Master Plan, Identify a Long-Term Water Source, & Develop a Multi-Year CIP.**

In anticipation of how the population of Hunt County and Commerce could grow, the City has employed a professional engineering firm that specializes in system expansion options to accommodate and sustain growth.

### **Strategy 2: Complete the Renovations to the WTP Necessary to Restore Production Capacity.**

Due to age and deferred maintenance, the Water Treatment Plant (WTP) has not been capable of producing its full capacity of water for the community. The project to restore this capacity was begun in 2023 and is slated to be completed in 2024. The existing WTP has the capacity to meet current demands and near-term growth.

### **Strategy 3: Complete the Renovations to the WWTP Necessary to Restore Treatment Capacity.**

Due to age and deferred maintenance, the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) has a reduced treatment capacity for existing sewer and stormwater flows. The current capacity meets current demands but is not able to handle near-term growth. The Restoration Project will return the WWTP to full capacity AND provide significant energy savings.

### **Strategy 4: Continue the Street Maintenance and Street Reconstruction Programs.**

In Fiscal Year 2021, the City began to fund the Street Reconstruction Program to focus on major traffic routes. In Fiscal Year 2023, the City began the Street Maintenance Program to focus on

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maintenance activities throughout the street network. Both programs provide funding and guidance to begin the long overdue task of updating and improving the traffic infrastructure of the community.

### Strategy 5: Re-establish the Recycled Trash Program.

The City previously had a recycled trash program in partnership with the Texas A&M University-Commerce campus. This program was discontinued because of changes in the recycled trash market as well as improper utilization and load contamination. Multiple citizens expressed interest in finding a sustainable way to bring the recycled trash program back to the community.

Strategy	Lead Contributors	Milestones (Deadlines)
<b>Complete the Water Master Plan &amp; Corresponding CIP</b>	<b>PW Director Timothy Jones</b> <b>CM Howdy Lisenbee</b> Engineers	Water Master Plan (Summer 25)
<b>Complete WTP Renovations</b>	<b>PW Director Timothy Jones</b> CM Howdy Lisenbee Blake Spinks Engineers	Filters (May 24) Clarifiers (July 24) Ground Storage (Dec 26)
<b>Complete WWTP Renovations</b>	<b>PW Director Timothy Jones</b> CM Howdy Lisenbee Blake Spinks Engineers	Fine Screens (Aug 25) Aeration (Dec 26) RAS/WAS (Dec 26) Sludge (Dec 26) SW Storage (Dec 27)
<b>Street Maintenance &amp; Reconstruction</b>	<b>CM Howdy Lisenbee</b> PW Director Timothy Jones Engineers	Maintenance Plan (Dec 24) Maintenance (Annually 2025) Reconstruction (Annually)
<b>Recycled Trash Program</b>	<b>CM Howdy Lisenbee</b>	Spring 25

## OBJECTIVE: IMPROVE THE APPEARANCE OF THE CITY

“You Only Get One Chance To Make A First Impression.” The appearance of the City as people drive through or around is a major component of the identity or reputation of the community. Providing effective incentives for property owners to clean, clear, and invest in their properties benefits the entire community.

### **Strategy 1: Focus on the Effective Use of Code Enforcement and Building Inspections.**

The City Council sets the regulatory environment for code enforcement and building codes regarding unsafe and unsanitary conditions on properties around the community. Effective application of those regulations can produce positive changes in the appearance of the community.

### **Strategy 2: Research Vacant Building Registration Ordinances.**

Vacant residential and commercial properties become a target for criminal activity as well as unsanitary public health conditions. Property owners who choose to leave structures vacant contribute to the risk to neighbors and neighborhoods. Vacant Building Registration is a process allowed under Texas Law and can contribute to improvements to vacant buildings.

### **Strategy 3: Research City Gateway Improvement Options.**

When someone drives into or through our community for the first time, what do they see and what greets them? Are there improvements that can be made to the entrances to the City that establish a reputation or identity?

### **Strategy 4: Provide Incentives or Enforcement Action to Improve the Live Oaks Apartments @ 2224 Live Oak St.**

This property has been a blight, a public health hazard, and a significant detractor from the appearance of the community. The property changed ownership within the past couple of years and the new owner is working to build the capital to demolish and rebuild the property.

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## Strategy 5: Research and Consider Locations for Public Art Exhibits.

With the presence of TAMU-C, Commerce ISD, and talented local artists, there is a great opportunity to create public spaces that allow for art and sculpture exhibits. Outdoor art exhibits can enhance their surroundings by breathing life into otherwise mundane spaces. They can become local landmarks that draw attention and create a sense of identity. Finally, they can promote creativity and inspiration.

Strategy	Lead Contributors	Milestones (Deadlines)
<b>Focus on the effective use of code enforcement and building inspections</b>	<b>ACD Director Jon Harper</b> Billy Relford Bridgette Camposan Jesse Gorzynski	CO Certification (Dec 24) Combo Inspector Licenses (Spring 25)
<b>Implement a vacant building registration program</b>	<b>ACD Director Jon Harper</b> Jesse Gorzynski	Vacant Building Inv (July 24) Ordinance (Sept 24) Implement (Oct 24)
<b>Research city gateway improvements</b>	<b>Stephanie Muller</b> ACD Director Jon Harper Louise Drake Garden Club	Location selection (July 24) Funding needs (Nov 24) Funding resources (2025) Construction (2025-2026)
<b>Provide Development Incentives or Enforcement Action at 2224 Live Oak Apartments</b>	<b>CM Howdy Lisenbee</b> ACD Director Jon Harper Jesse Gorzynski	Site Clean-Up (July 24) Site Security (July 24) Development Plan (Sept 24) Enforcement Plan (Oct 24)
<b>Research and consider locations for public art exhibits</b>	<b>Stephanie Muller</b> ACD Director Jon Harper Commerce ISD TAMU-C	Location selection (July 24) Funding needs (Nov 24) Funding resources (2025) Construction (2025-2026)

## OBJECTIVE: IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE

A community is so much more than a collection of infrastructure investments. “Great Streets Should Lead To Great Places” captures the essence of this point. A house is just a building while a home is the people who live there. A city is a location that has infrastructure. A community is the collection of people that live and work there, and their combined experiences.

Commerce should be a desirable destination for residential migration as well as commercial and industrial development. Quality of Life amenities are a considerable factor in these evaluations. However, the cost of these Quality-of-Life improvements and the impact on current residents should be considered.

### **Strategy 1: Complete the Parks Master Plan.**

A component of an effective Comprehensive Plan is a dialogue with the community stakeholders regarding the wants/needs of Parks & Recreation Facilities. This will provide direction for the next investments in Public Parks and Recreational Facilities.

### **Strategy 2: Actively Recruit for Entertainment and Related Retail.**

The City is currently engaged with The Retail Coach for market analysis and recruitment of retail development within Commerce. They also have contacts with entertainment and social activity national chains. Commerce can also support local entrepreneurs who want to break into this commercial space.

### **Strategy 3: Research and Evaluate Options for a Community – Civic – Recreation Center.**

Commerce does not have a public meeting space with the capacity to hold community-wide events. While the University does have space, it must be rented, and the cost is becoming prohibitive.

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### **Strategy 4: Get Back Into the Federal HOME Grant Program.**

There are federal dollars available to rebuild single-family homes for qualified applicants. Commerce left this program several years ago. Adequate housing is a major component of quality of life, and participation in the program can be life-altering for families.

### **Strategy 5: Evaluate Commerce Police Department Staffing and Equipment to Influence Crime**

Quality of Life requires public safety. Law Enforcement is an important component of maintaining quality of life, and it requires a significant investment in operational budgets. We can't cut into Law Enforcement budgets to fund other quality-of-life improvements.

### **Strategy 6: Identify Workforce Development and Job Skills Programs**

Quality of Life also includes the ability of families to improve their job skills and income-earning potential. Commerce has industrial community stakeholders who are always looking for quality and qualified job applicants.

### **Strategy 7: Develop a Fire Apparatus and Equipment Replacement Plan.**

As a community grows, the capacity of the local Fire Department to provide adequate coverage for fire and life safety events is critical. Several important pieces of fire apparatus are nearing end-of-life ages and will need to be replaced to ensure public safety for current and future growth.

### **Strategy 8: Complete Phase 1 of the Fire Training Field Expansion Project.**

In addition to effective fire equipment, the Fire Department Staff must stay caught up and trained in emergency response. The City does not currently have a training field that provides full training opportunities. Staff must travel to other departments to perform training exercises.

## Strategy 9: Conduct a Full Inter-Agency Emergency Management Tabletop Event.

Community Infrastructure also includes the ability of Emergency Management teams from multiple agencies to have the equipment and ability to effectively collaborate in the face of an active emergency management situation. Tabletop exercises provide each agency with an opportunity to determine their state of readiness and identify weaknesses BEFORE they impact the community in a live event.

Strategy	Lead Contributors	Milestones (Deadlines)
<b>Complete a Parks Master Plan</b>	<b>ACM Molly Jacobsen</b> Parks Advisory Board	Parks Master Plan (Summer 2025)
<b>Recruit for entertainment and related retail</b>	<b>EDC Director Bonnie Hunter</b> ACD Director Jon Harper The Retail Coach	Identify needs (Dec 24) Target recruitment (2025)
<b>Research and evaluate options for a community center</b>	<b>CM Howdy Lisenbee</b> ACM Molly Jacobsen Cory Arrington	Identify locations (Sept 24) Research size (Dec 24) Funding Sources (Dec 24) Phase 1 Recommendation (Mar 25)
<b>Reinstate Federal HOME Grant Program</b>	<b>ACM Jamie Campbell</b> ACD Director Jon Harper Jesse Gorzynski	Grant Admin (Apr 24) Apply (May 24) Establish Program (Aug 24) Take Applications (Oct 24)
<b>Evaluate Commerce Police Department staffing and equipment to influence crime</b>	<b>Police Chief Kalei Beelitz</b> <b>CM Howdy Lisenbee</b> ACM Jamie Campbell ACM Molly Jacobsen	Evaluation (Dec 24) Recommendation (Apr 25) Funding Needs (Apr 25) Development Plan (Apr 25)

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Strategy	Lead Contributors	Milestones (Deadlines)
<b>Identify workforce development and job skills programs</b>	<b>EDC Director Bonnie Hunter</b> PJC TAMU-C Texas Workforce Commission	Identify specific job skills gaps (Sept 24) Plan training event (Dec 24) Conduct event (2025)
<b>Develop a fire apparatus and equipment replacement plan</b>	<b>Fire Chief Chris Bassham</b> ACM Jamie Campbell	Current Inventory Assessment (Sept 24) Develop Plan (Apr 25) Funding Needs (Apr 25) Implement (2025-2026)
<b>Conduct a full inter-agency emergency management tabletop event</b>	<b>Fire Chief Chris Bassham</b> <b>Police Chief Kalei Beelitz</b> <b>ACM Molly Jacobsen</b> Agency Partners	Pre-Planning Meeting (Sept 24) Planning (Oct 24 – Mar 25) Conduct tabletop (Apr 25-Dec 25)