



4. Economic Development



Overview

The East End’s economic development goals build off the POA’s goals over the next 20 years. The economic development goals include: working to preserve the Vietnamese culture of the Eden Center area by emphasizing culture placekeeping and anti-displacement measures; and supporting economic reinvestment by building upon the area’s economic activity while maintaining the consistent and vibrant local economy.

Economic development can help to achieve these goals by balancing and delivering on these three objectives:

- (1) Center equity in future economic development activities within POA 5
- (2) Expand the area’s market share, and
- (3) Preserve and expand existing economy and culture.

This chapter summarizes the history and current conditions of the area’s economics including ties to past displacement. It then walks through the economic strategies noted in the paragraph above, along with additional ideas on how possibly to achieve these goals over the next 20 years.

Existing Commercial Uses and Employment Profile

The East End consists of unique and wide-ranging commercial uses. The largest uses by land area include Eden Center and BJ’s Wholesale. Eden Center, the largest commercial use in the POA at more than 15 acres, is home to more than 125 retailers. This is the highest concentration of unique commercial uses in the City of Falls Church.

As of 2019, pre-pandemic, the US Census reported that there were approximately 700 jobs in the East End POA. The Eden Center businesses collectively are one of the largest employers in the POA, and are a significant driver of economic activity in the area.

Almost 40 percent of workers in the POA were of primarily Asian descent, and a third of all workers had a high school diploma or less. Employees lived all over Northern Virginia, with high densities in Arlington County, Seven Corners, Annandale, and Tysons. Very few workers lived within walking distance of the East End POA.¹



History of Eden Center: Vietnamese Displacement and the Birth of Eden Center

The Eden Center is the most significant economic driver in the POA. It grew out of economic necessity and desire for community among the Vietnamese population. After the Fall of Saigon, Vietnam, in April 1975, thousands of South Vietnamese emigrated to the U.S., many settling in the Clarendon-Ballston corridor of Arlington. Clarendon became a hub of Vietnamese merchants, known as “Little Saigon.” In the early 1980s, when Metro construction began and land values rose, many Vietnamese businesses were displaced from Clarendon, some relocating to what was then referred to as the Plaza Center Shopping Center in Falls Church. They redeveloped the space as the Eden Center, naming it after Saigon’s Eden Arcade – a popular upscale shopping and retail area in Saigon, Vietnam. The Center has since grown into a hub of Vietnamese and Asian culture for the entire East Coast. For many, it is a critical connection between past and present – a reminder of home.



(Above) Clarendon’s Little Saigon before displacement (Below) Interior of Good Fortune



Recent Property Investments

A number of property reinvestments have occurred in and adjacent to the East End since 2005. The former Syms store along Route 7 was converted to a 24-Hour Fitness center. At the Eden Center, some retail space was reconfigured to create the Good Fortune Grocery store. The Oakwood Apartments were substantially renovated and have been renamed Falls Green. Along Roosevelt Boulevard, the Public Storage facility has been renovated and upgraded. Koons Ford demolished a one-story building for surface parking, which was enhanced with a storm inlet, landscaping and street trees, as well as City street lights and a five-foot sidewalk.

Land Values, Property Taxes, and Business Taxes

Due to the East End’s low density and parking lot coverage, the property tax per acre is significantly lower than recently

redeveloped properties throughout the City. The property tax revenue per acre is about 9 times less than that of 455 Tinner and 301 West Broad, and 3.7 times less than that of the Hilton Garden Inn.

The East End is a significant contributor to the City’s Meals, Sales, Business Personal Property, and Business, Professional, and Occupational License tax revenues. In 2020, The Eden Center businesses paid the City more than \$1.3 million in these taxes. The Eden Center collectively contributes more tax revenue than any other property in the POA. The other East End properties—24 Hour Fitness, Public Storage, Koons Auto, BP Gas, Shell Gas, Vietnam Supermarket, and BJs Wholesale—provided a combined tax revenue of over \$2.5 million.

The table below outlines the total, land, and building values, as well as property tax revenue and acreage for the East End POA and three of the City’s recent redevelopment projects.

Area / Properties	Acres	Total Assessed Value ¹	Building Value to Land Value Ratio	Property Tax Revenue (Buildings and Land) ²	Property Tax Revenue per Acre	Use Tax Revenue ³
East End POA	43.3	\$167,793,900	0.69	\$2,273,607	\$52,508	\$3.9 million
Hilton Garden Inn	1.14	\$16,191,400	6.57	\$219,393	\$192,450	Data Not Available
301 W Broad	2.12	\$77,633,200	13.04	\$1,051,930	\$496,193	Data Not Available
455 Tinner	2.11	\$76,890,100	12.95	\$1,041,861	\$493,773	Data Not Available

¹ Based on 2020 Property Assessment

² Based on the 2020 property tax rate of \$1.355 per \$100 of assessed value

³ Combined BPOL, Sales, Meals and BPP Taxes



Economic Development Strategies

The following strategies leverage existing City policies and introduce new concepts to help achieve the POA's economic development goals. These strategies offer ways the City, business owners, land owners, developers, and the community can work together to support equitable economic development and limit displacement in the East End.

The Anti-Displacement Toolkit

Displacement can be particularly concerning for historic cultural centers like Eden Center, as small businesses in the retail and restaurant sectors can be the most vulnerable to market shifts. The strategies explored below apply specifically to the Eden Center area with the intention of preventing displacement of businesses and preserving the Vietnamese culture in the area, which could be disrupted by redevelopment within the POA. Successful implementation of these strategies will require collaboration among the City of Falls Church, community groups, and property and business owners.



(Above) Image from Clarendon's Little Saigon before displacement



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Strategy: Legacy Business Conservation at Eden Center

As a general rule, public dollars cannot be spent to further a particularized private interest. However, some avenues may exist to support legacy businesses indirectly, through investment in the public infrastructure surrounding those properties, or through activities authorized under economic development legislation. While not expressly allowed in Virginia, legacy business conservation programs can help preserve the existing economy and culture by offering incentives, such as grants or other in-kind financial support. Where those programs are authorized, grant money is often used for business or property improvements – including interior remodeling, utility upgrades, or improved point-of-sale systems. Financial support can also aid in activities that ensure businesses’ long-term stability including technical, marketing, and promotional assistance. Many jurisdictions define a ‘legacy business’, based on longevity, history, identity, and/or character in the community.² A program such as this - if ever authorized under Virginia law - could help preserve the East End’s long-lasting establishments within the Eden Center and help with preserving the area’s cultural heritage.

The City should explore available methods for providing support to legacy businesses in the POA.



1986 and moved to Eden Center in 1992 (Right) Original 7 Corners Shopping Center signage



Strategy: Provide Technical Assistance, Educational, and Counseling Opportunities for Businesses

Tools like literacy, marketing, and financial training help businesses survive market shocks.³ Such programs can provide counseling so that tenants can better understand their leases and rights; help to apply for grants, licensing and housing; teach marketing tools; and assist with financial planning like accounting and filing taxes.

The City previously partnered with state or regional organizations to run periodic small-business training events.

Strategy: Supply Resources for How to Find and Apply for Loans and Grants

Small businesses, particularly those that are minority owned, can struggle to survive due to difficulties securing funding. Compiling a guide for small businesses that shares different sources and ways to apply for grants and other assistance could ease some of that risk and encourage more entrepreneurship within the City. These resources could lead to new small businesses opening and help existing businesses survive economic shifts or seek improvements. Resource examples could include U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, the Program for Investment in Micro-Entrepreneurs (PRIME), and the Minority Business Development Agency.

Strategy: Enhance Existing Buildings

Commercial façade improvements can help increase sales by upgrading and improving existing businesses. These improvements can be pursued independently by property owners and business owners. The City should explore whether it is can establish grant and loan assistance programs to assist with commercial renovations.⁴



(Above) Edén Center façade (Below) Interior of Edén Center



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Strategy: Vietnamese Speaking Outreach Services

The City of Falls Church has traditionally used contracted services for both interpretation and translation. The Eden Center is home to a large number of Vietnamese-speaking people with whom the City engages across many departments. A Vietnamese-speaking outreach specialist as part of the City team either as a contracted service or as a member of City staff could help promote stronger relationship building and engagement with the Eden Center community. Vietnamese outreach services could help City staff and community members work together to realize the goals and strategies identified in this Small Area Plan.

Strategy: Establish List of Registered Community Organizations

Establishing a list of Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) can lead to more productive community engagement and increased connection of the East End with the rest of the City. There are differing requirements for RCOs; however, they commonly constitute a group of residents and stakeholders of a specific area who meet regularly and publicly (ex. Small Business Alliance). The RCO's can give feedback, advocate for community benefits, and generally ensure the neighborhood is preserved.

Strategy: Encourage Studies that Explore History, Culture, and Anti-Displacement

The City of Falls Church has successfully partnered with universities such as Virginia Tech, the University of Virginia, and George Mason in the past for student-led studies of various areas of the City. Student studies have often led to the creation

of valuable policy guidance. The East End is a deserving candidate for a study exploring themes such as equitable planning, legacy business preservation, and cultural placemaking efforts. A cultural landscape report is recommended for the area.



(Above) Clarendon's "Little Saigon" before Vietnamese business displacement



Strategy: Eden Center Chamber of Commerce or Small Business Alliance and Peer Advocacy Group

Businesses within the POA, particularly the small businesses within the Eden Center, should consider joining the Falls Church Chamber of Commerce, or forming organized groups to meet regularly and advocate for the collective interests and needs of the tenants. Such groups having elected leadership representing tenants can provide tenants with increased input in discussions with groups like the City, property management, and neighboring jurisdictions.



(Above) Banh Cuon Saigon established in 1996 an example of a legacy business



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Strategy: Leverage Special Exception (SE) Criteria to Enhance Community Benefits and Promote Cultural Preservation

Special exception (SE) criteria promote the City’s desired design, development, and community benefits for projects that exceed ‘by-right’ allowances under the zoning code. So that any redevelopment in the East End supports rather than displaces, existing small businesses, particular attention should be given to following criteria:

- Primary Criteria 1(a) – *The resulting development conforms to the City's adopted comprehensive plan, small area plans, and design guidelines*
- Secondary Criteria 2(a) – *The resulting development is compatible with surrounding land uses and planned land uses in size, bulk, and scale*
- Secondary Criteria 2(g) – *The resulting development includes and encourages local or independent businesses*

Strategy: Construction Disruption Assistance

Construction as a result of reinvestments and infrastructure projects in the area can cause disruption, changes, and challenges for small businesses. Construction disruption assistance can mitigate the burdens associated with construction through the provision of technical signage, rerouting, and enhanced access to small businesses.



(Above) Construction disruption assistance signage



Place Keeping, Marketing, and Branding

This section explores the opportunity to establish the East End as a cohesive neighborhood focused on the Vietnamese culture. Such strategies include place-keeping, marketing, branding, and heritage tourism.

Strategy: Establish A Cultural District

This area would benefit from a placemaking strategy to organically over time expand the Eden Center to other areas of the POA. The establishment of a formal cultural district would recognize the national prominence of the Eden Center as the largest Vietnamese hub on the East Coast. The name “Little Saigon East” received a substantial amount of community support and should be considered as a potential name for the district.

This designation should be accompanied by enhancements like a cohesive and culturally relevant design, street naming, and programming to help highlight the area’s cultural identity. Placemaking efforts should celebrate the POA’s existing cultural heritage.

Strategy: Honorary Renaming of Wilson Boulevard to “Saigon Boulevard”

To create a gateway to the Eden Center area, the portion of Wilson Boulevard located in Falls Church should receive the honorary designation of Saigon Boulevard. The renaming would honor the Vietnamese culture that has created a positive impact in the region. Coordination with the Virginia Department of Transportation and Fairfax County will be required to rename and dedicate the street.



(Left) Celebration for Tet at Eden Center (Right) Little Saigon streetcar stop in Seattle, Washington



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Strategy: Cultural District Branding

Branding should be created around the cultural district through banners on streetlights, public art, and wayfinding signage. Such cohesive design elements that incorporate Vietnamese themes recognizing the neighborhood would provide visual cues that this is a culturally significant area. Similarly, any marketing around this neighborhood and programming that occurs should feature the neighborhood's name and design cues to help reach a wider audience. Design elements throughout the district should be reflective of the area's Vietnamese influence. Spaces should be activated with art and elements that emphasize the culture. Flags denoting the neighborhood's name could fly on light poles. Artful planters or bike racks could decorate the area. A history and culture walk could be incorporated into park spaces.

Strategy: Pursue Historic Designations

Applying for Virginia Landmarks Register and National Register of Historic Places designation is another way of honoring the area's culture and history. The area must meet eligibility criteria including its age, and proven significance to events, activities, themes, or developments in the past. Approval offers new opportunities like federal financial incentives for preservation and rehabilitation. Historic dedications for the Eden Center Clock Tower and Lion's Gate should be pursued. These design elements were specifically intended to recall building elements from the Ben Thanh Central Market Complex and similar iconic public architecture in old central Saigon.

The Virginia Department of Historic Resources administers the two programs cited above. Both programs encourage the continued preservation of historic and cultural places. In

coordination with the property owners, Eden Center should be evaluated for eligibility and should be listed in the Registers.



(Top Left) "Little Saigon Stories" community arts program outdoor visual storytelling exhibit in San Diego; (Left Below) Artful mosaic planters in San Diego's "Little Saigon"; (Right) Street banners in San Diego's "Little Saigon"



Strategy: Arts and Culture Focused Placekeeping

Vietnamese culture should be celebrated through arts-and-culture-focused placekeeping. The practice of place keeping actively involves community members in placemaking measures. Creative placemaking elements such as murals and artful crosswalks that are reflective of Vietnamese culture could be painted by local cultural groups. Partnerships with local and nationally acclaimed Vietnamese artists could also be explored.

Strategy: Heritage Tourism

The East End serves as a major attraction for visitors of the City and region. The Eden Center attracts considerable heritage tourism from across several states due to its status as the foremost Vietnamese hub on the East Coast. The City should continue to encourage this tourism through establishing the cultural district, increasing advertising and programming at the Eden Center, and celebrating the history and culture through placekeeping efforts. Consideration of logistics such as parking access and tour bus accommodations should accompany this effort. Virginia Tourism is an appropriate partner in the POA's heritage tourism efforts together with the property owners. Additionally, the City alongside neighboring jurisdictions should work with the Virginia Tourism to explore creating an AAPI (Asian America and Pacific Islander) cultural trail.



(Above) Community painting mural in Philadelphia (Below) Completed mural



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Strategy: Food Programming & Marketing

One of the POA's strong assets is its diverse food options. Eden Center restaurants are regularly recognized in the "Best Of" awards in many regional publications. The City should work with the Eden Center to promote existing events and schedule additional programming, like a night market, to celebrate this strength. A night market could also increase customer traffic on week nights when there is typically less business.



(Above) Little Saigon Night Market, Orange County, California



Future Reinvestment in the East End

Reinvestments must occur to support and enhance continued economic vitality throughout the East End. Investments should be made in existing infrastructure to work towards safe, walkable streets, sustainability, an improved streetscape, and upgraded utilities. As reinvestments occur in the East End, complementary uses and spaces, as well as creativity, should be encouraged when repurposing underutilized lots. Community engagement and benefits should be emphasized throughout future reinvestment endeavors.

Strategy: Invest in Infrastructure

Infrastructure improvements help preserve and improve walkability and consumer experience. Private and public investments are needed to update and maintain stormwater and sewer infrastructure, widen sidewalks, and plant new trees in the East End. Larger redevelopments are expected to improve streetscape and utilities on their sites. City funds programmed through the CIP can address area-wide needs and missing pieces.

Strategy: Business Ownership Opportunities

If future new development occurs in the POA, ownership opportunities such as condominium office and retail space should be considered. This creates more opportunities for small business owners to build equity and wealth.

Strategy: Repurpose/Infill Underutilized Parking Lots

Existing surface parking lots in the POA, like those at BJ's Wholesale and Eden Center, could support additional economic activity without requiring the demolition of existing buildings.

Infill development in the area with uses such as a hotel, cultural center, and housing would support existing commercial uses by allowing more visitors to stay in the POA and expanding the area into an 18-hour-a-day locale with ongoing economic activity.



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Strategy: Encourage Complementary Uses and Spaces

New retail should support and build upon existing businesses in the area. Building on existing strengths increases economic activity while also supporting existing businesses. Examples of complementary uses include:

- Additional restaurants, a food-hall, or other incubator space for small food business
- Spaces for civic engagement and business education, such as language classes, exercise classes, or a Vietnamese cultural center and library
- Makerspaces for local and visiting artists, and
- Other uses mentioned throughout this chapter and the land use and zoning chapter such as senior housing and affordable housing options.



(Above) Opening of Vietnamese American Community Center in San Jose, California (Below) La Cosecha Latin Food Hall in the Noma Neighborhood of Washington, D.C.



Strategy: Community Engagement During Application Reviews

Due to the generally low participation rate of POA business owners and visitors in traditional community engagement forums, such as evening work sessions and public meetings, special attention should be given to how public notice is given for any proposed redevelopment applications. This could include creative and new solutions for expanded public notice, such as yard signs in multiple languages and hosting pop-up meetings onsite to provide information and answer questions. Developers should also be encouraged to distribute multilingual flyers for activities occurring within the East End.



(Above) City Staff at East End Small Area Plan pop-up event



Footnote Citations

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2019).

² [Legacy Businesses Preservation Programs – Small Business Anti-Displacement Network \(SBAN\) \(antidisplacement.org\)](http://antidisplacement.org)

³ <http://www.greatcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/2007%2011%20Preventing%20Displacement%20Policy%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

⁴ [Commercial Façade Improvement Programs – Small Business Anti-Displacement Network \(SBAN\) \(antidisplacement.org\)](http://antidisplacement.org)