



4. Economic Development



Eastern Gateway / 7 Corners Planning Opportunity Area 5



Economic Development

Overview

The East End’s economic development goals build off the POA’s goals for the area over the next 20 years. These goals include: supporting economic reinvestment by building upon the area’s economic activity and maintaining the consistent and vibrant local economy.

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

- (1) Expand the area’s market share and
- (2) Preserve and Expand Existing Economy and Culture.

This chapter summarizes the history and current conditions of the area’s economics. 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

With the exception of the Fairfax County Water Tower, the East End consists of unique and wide-ranging commercial uses. The largest uses per square acre include Eden Center, Vietnam Supermarket, and BJ’s. 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 is one of the largest employers in the East End POA, and is therefore a significant driver of economic development in the area.

Almost 40 percent of workers 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 live in walking distance of the East End POA.¹

History 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 in April 1975, thousands of South Vietnamese emigrated to the U.S., many settling in 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 left Clarendon, some relocating to the Plaza Center Shopping Center. They redeveloped the space as the Eden Center.

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.

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



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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 has been 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 compared to other properties throughout the City. The property tax revenue per

acre is about 21 times less than that of 455 Tinner and 301 West Broad, and 8 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 alone, The Eden Center paid the City more than \$1.3 million in these taxes. The other East End properties—24 Hour Fitness, CubeSmart Self Storage, Koons Auto, BP Gas, Shell Gas, Vietnam Supermarket, and BJs—provided a combined tax revenue of over \$2.5 million. The Eden Center contributes more tax revenue than any other property in the POA. The largest contributors, after Eden Center, include Koons Auto, Vietnam Supermarket, and BJ’s.

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 largest projects.

Area/Properties	Total Assessed Value ²	Assessed Land Value	Assessed Building Value	Property Tax Revenue (Buildings Only) ³	Acres	Property Tax Revenue (Buildings Only) per Acre
Entire POA	\$167,793,900.00	\$99,037,400.00	\$68,756,500.00	\$914,461	43.3	\$21,119
Hilton Garden Inn	\$16,191,400.00	\$2,139,200.00	\$14,052,200.00	\$186,894	1.14	\$163,942
301 W Broad	\$77,633,200.00	\$5,531,300.00	\$72,101,900.00	\$958,955	2.12	\$452,337
455 Tinner	\$76,890,100.00	\$5,513,800.00	\$71,376,300.00	\$949,305	2.11	\$449,907

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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, land owners, developers, and business owners can work together to support equitable economic development in the East End.

Strategy: Enhance Placemaking Efforts

This POA would benefit from a placemaking strategy to expand the Eden Center’s already vibrant identity into the rest of the POA. Enhancements like a cohesive and culturally relevant design, street naming, and programming could help expand the area’s cultural identity and reach. All placemaking efforts should connect to the POA’s existing cultural heritage.

Strategy: Invest in Infrastructure

Infrastructure improvements help preserve and improve walkability and consumer experience. Since the early 2000s, private and public investments throughout the City have updated storm-water and sewer infrastructure, widened sidewalks, and planted new trees. Similar improvements are needed in the East End. Larger redevelopments are expected to improve streetscape and utilities on their site. City funds programmed through the CIP can address area-wide needs and missing pieces.

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

Strategy: Protect and Enhance Existing Buildings

Commercial façade improvements can help increase sales by improving the look of existing businesses. These improvements can be pursued independently by property owners and business owners. Some communities establish grant and loan assistance programs to assist with commercial renovations⁴.

Applying for the National Register of Historic Places designation is another way of preserving the area’s culture and history. The area must meet eligibility criteria including that it is considered old enough to be considered historic, and has proven significance to events, activities, or developments in the past. Approval offers new opportunities like federal financial incentives for preservation and rehabilitation⁵.

Strategy: Repurpose/Infill Underutilized Parking Lots

Existing surface parking lots in the POA, like those at BJ’s and Eden Center, could support additional economic activity without requiring the demolition of existing buildings. Infill development such as a hotel or senior 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. Parking lots also have potential as open, public space for events and community gatherings. Bringing the community together through activities is a promising way to encourage shopping and lingering onsite.

⁵ [How to List a Property - National Register of Historic Places \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](http://nps.gov)



Strategy: Food Programming and 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 the locally published Falls Church News Press. In addition to any marketing run by property and business owners, the City should continue to reference the Eden Center in City-wide marketing efforts.

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 at the same time 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;
- other uses mentioned throughout this chapter and the land use and zoning chapter.

⁶ [Legacy Businesses Preservation Programs – Small Business Anti-Displacement Network \(SBAN\) \(antidisplacement.org\)](http://www.sban.org/)

⁷ <http://www.greatcommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/2007%2011%20Preventing%20Displacement%20Policy%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>

Strategy: Legacy Business Preservation Programs

Legacy business preservation programs can help preserve the existing economy and culture by offering incentives, such as grants or other in-kind financial support. Many jurisdictions define a 'legacy business', based on longevity, history, identity, and/or character in community⁶. A program such as this could help preserve the area's long-lasting establishments and help preserving the area's cultural heritage.

Strategy: Build Economic Resilience

Tools like literacy, marketing, and financial training help businesses survive market shocks, therefore preserving the existing small business economy and culture.⁷ Training programs can help tenants better understand their rights, federal and state grants, marketing tools, and financial opportunities for insuring their business future.

Strategy: Limit Displacement of Small Businesses

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.⁸ Special exception (SE) criteria promote the City's desired design, development, and community benefits for projects that exceed

⁸ Jan, Tracy. A new gentrification crisis. The Washington Post. July 31st, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/07/31/ethnic-enclaves-gentrification-coronavirus/>



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'by-right' allowances under the zoning code. The current SE criteria emphasize the importance of walkability, urban design, and supporting small, local businesses. These sections should be given special attention for all projects within the East End POA. Particular emphasis should be given to how new projects can support, rather than displace, existing small businesses.

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 work sessions and public meetings, special attention should be given to public noticing of any proposed redevelopment applications. This could include creative and new solutions for expanded noticing, such as yard signs in multiple languages and hosting pop-up meetings onsite to provide information and answer questions.