

After much study, discussion, and debate, the major stakeholders came together and developed a strategic plan, “Wichita Falls—Vision 20/20, City of Wichita Falls,” in July 2008. The vision statement: “A Vibrant Regional Center, Attractive to Talent and Investment” had three goals:

1. Develop, retain, attract, and engage talent,
2. Diversify and grow the economic base, and
3. Promote and enhance Wichita Falls’ quality of place.

The Plan focused on development of four key areas and was supported with specific strategies. The key areas of focus were the downtown (central business district), attracting talent, business development, and image and marketing. First, the downtown area was badly in need of revitalization. Changes in commercial development patterns in conjunction with a weakening of the city’s oil sector had resulted in decline and decay of a once thriving downtown commercial center. Second, attracting and nurturing talent was perhaps the most fundamental issue facing the city in its efforts to create a long-term sustainable economic vitality. Third, the assessment of industry considered the full complement of economic activities, ranging from traditional industrial employers to services, as well as the physical infrastructure and the business climate to support those activities. Opportunities for expansion of existing companies, the potential of entrepreneurship, and the importance of the service sector were recognized as building blocks for sustainability and growth. Finally, there was a need to improve the community’s image—both internally and externally. It was difficult to draw people to Wichita Falls, but it was soon recognized that if they liked it when they visited, they would come again or even relocate.

Table 1 shows the strategies that were designed to support each of the key areas of concern.

All of these activities resulted in the completion of the “Vision 20/20 Plan” in July 2008—naming Wichita Falls “The Gateway to Texas.”

TAKING INVENTORY AND LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR INCREASED TOURISM TRAFFIC

Although there is little in the way of natural beauty or urban amenities to attract visitors, the city had a number of features that could be developed as attractors:

- The city’s downtown baroque architecture (built during the 1930’s oil boom) could be revived and utilized,
- The people of the city, with training and confidence in what there is to see and do, could serve as ambassadors,
- There is a lake, hiking trails, a wildlife refuge and parks (all still needed further development), and
- There are many events and gatherings.

Of particular importance to tourism development was the large number of events held throughout the year as shown in Table 2.

Wichita Falls is also home to Midwestern State University, which hosts a number of cultural and athletic events, and the city also hosts the WildCats, a National Hockey League minor league team. In addition, visitors will find a water park, including a Wichita Falls Water Falls (built with Niagara Falls rock), and a variety of museums and historic buildings. While in Wichita Falls, visitors can choose from 26 lodging properties with a total of 2,200 rooms. Wichita Falls is mainly a drive market, but the city has minimal and improving air service.