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Becoming Henderson: How a "Boomburg" Used a Future-Focused Strategic Plan to Become a True Urban Place

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**BECOMING HENDERSON
HOW A “BOOMBURB” USED A FUTURE-FOCUSED STRATEGIC
PLAN TO BECOME A TRUE URBAN PLACE**

Debra A. March,* Stephanie Garcia-Vause,† and Lisa Corrado‡

Dedicated to Robert E. Lang, 1959 – 2021

“Dr. Lang was a public policy leader in Nevada whose deep academic acumen and expertise helped push our state forward over the years in a number of policy areas.”

Governor Steve Sisolak

ABSTRACT

Since its incorporation in 1953, the City of Henderson, Nevada has grown from a sparsely populated, one-industry town into a “boomburb” comprised of numerous nationally recognized master-planned communities with an overarching, future-focused strategic plan. This article is a case study of how this boomburb took advantage of its position in the American suburban landscape to become a true urban place. It also offers a checklist for other communities to consider as they plan for their own futures.

THE BOOMBURB PHENOMENON

In 2007, the Brookings Institution published *Boomburbs: The Rise of America’s Accidental Cities* written by Robert E. Lang and his co-author Jennifer Lefurgy.¹ The term has become a permanent fixture in America’s urban lexicon. Here is how Robert Steuteville characterized both the book and the concept:²

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¹ Robert E. Lang and Jennifer B. LeFurgy, *Boomburbs: The Rise of America's Accidental Cities*, Brookings Institution (2007).

² See <https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/boomburbs-rise-america%E2%80%99s-accidental-cities>. Used with permission.

As America's post-World-War II suburbs become ever larger and more diverse, so do the ways of describing them. In the early 1990s the term "edge cities"—referring to large commercial agglomerations in the suburbs—came into vogue. At the turn of the millennium, we heard about "exurbs"—the ring of low-density McMansions at the edge of most metropolitan regions. Now, thanks to Lang and LeFurgy, "boomburbs" have entered the lexicon.

All of those terms describe aspects of the ever-expanding, automobile-oriented, contemporary American built environment. The term "suburbs" has long ceased to be interesting, so Lang and LeFurgy slice them into clever new categories for our amusement. A boomburb is defined as a municipality of more than 100,000 people that has been growing at a double-digit pace for three consecutive decades and that is not the major city of any metropolitan area. The book offers another category, "baby boomburbs," for places with the above characteristics but a population between 50,000 and 100,000.

Although boomburbs have plenty of office, retail, and light industrial space, few of them contain edge cities. Instead, commercial uses are spread out along highways and adjacent to freeway exit ramps all over town. Examples of boomburbs are Irvine, California; Irving, Texas; Lakewood, Colorado; and Chesapeake, Virginia.

The picture of boomburbs painted by Lang and LeFurgy is not a pretty one. They typically have hundreds of square miles and virtually no urban fabric. They've got little charm or character until you venture into the private realm of trendy restaurants, upscale shops, and magnificent master suites.

The last paragraph characterizes the path Henderson was headed down in the latter half of the last century. Certainly, many characteristics of boomburbs identified by Lang and Lefurgy apply to Henderson today. But to a large extent, Henderson has become a true urban place thereby defying the boomburb stereotype it could have become. This case study identifies key decisions made over the past half-century that moved Henderson from the quintessentially sprawling suburb into an urban place.

We begin with an overview of the historical context and then focus on how planning helped shape the city. We continue with a review of strategic investments

the city had made over the decades to help it become a true urban place. We conclude with a review of accomplishments but more importantly the efforts engaged by Henderson that may be replicated by other boomburbs.

A CITY OF DESTINY³

The area comprising the City of Henderson began as a sparsely populated, one-industry (mining) town in the middle of the Mojave Desert. After several decades of double-digit population growth—growing from 5,715 people in 1950 to more than 330,000 in 2022, it has emerged as Nevada’s second-largest city that continues to attract people and businesses.

Henderson’s success is driven by a long-term commitment to become “America’s Premier Community” that is guided by a comprehensive strategic planning process. Strategic investments consistent with its strategic focus have produced award-winning master-planned communities and parks, high-achieving schools, a diversified economy, and numerous national recognitions. But success has brought new challenges as will be seen in the last section. For now, we offer a brief history of Henderson which will be followed by a discussion of its planning and strategic investments.

The area that became Henderson had its start like many cities in America—a small group of people coming together with a common purpose. Initially, they were homesteaders in search of silver and gold at the turn of the last century.

The area stagnated after the mines played out but then bustled with construction of Hoover Dam which started in 1931. However, when the dam was completed in 1935, the community was left as little more than a federal government installation.

In 1941, the federal government provided funds for Anaconda Copper Company to build the Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI) complex on 2,800 acres to produce magnesium. As the lightest and strongest of all metals, it was needed to build airplanes and other materials crucial to the war effort during World War II. More than 13,000 people were attracted to the Henderson area to work on the project. Indeed, in 1942, the area became known formally as Henderson in honor of U.S. Senator Charles Belknap Henderson, a supporter of efforts to develop the

³ Adapted from Sun Staff, “History of Henderson,” *Las Vegas Sun*, April 16, 2003, <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2003/apr/16/history-of-henderson/>; “Our History,” City of Henderson, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/government/departments/mayor-and-council/our-history>.

plant and surrounding area.⁴ During the 1940s, Las Vegas was little more than a railroad watering station. The BMI site in the Henderson area was selected for its proximity to Lake Mead that provided water as well as access to power, both products of the Hoover Dam. BMI, however, needed to build a town mostly from scratch including homes, schools, a hospital, retail stores, a post office, a fire department, churches, and water and sewer facilities among others. Water Street, for instance, was named for the water pipeline to the BMI plant, developed to become the commercial and civic heart of the city.⁵ The area where most of these facilities were constructed was called the “Basic Townsite” which later became the center of Henderson. By the end the war, magnesium was no longer in need and the plant was shut down, putting thousands of people out of work, and shrinking the population by about half.⁶ However, new leadership set the area on a trajectory of continued growth and development starting with its incorporation as a city in 1953 with a population of about 7,500 residents. Structurally, Henderson is a council-manager government where each of the council members have key policymaking roles. Henderson was able to annex more than seven thousand acres a few years later. Figures 1 through 3 illustrate what the Henderson area was like before incorporation while Figure 4 is the inauguration of Henderson’s first council and mayor.

⁴ Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, “Charles Belknap Henderson (1873-1954),” accessed March 10, 2021, <https://bioguideretro.congress.gov/Home/MemberDetails?memIndex=h000477>.

⁵ “Henderson Historic Walking Tour,” Water Street District, 2012, https://waterstreetdistrict.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Walking_Tour_Web_FULL.pdf.

⁶ Much of this is adapted from <https://brcrestorationproject.com/index.php/bmi-story.html>



Figure 1
Homes constructed as part of the Basic Townsite
Source: City of Henderson



Figure 2
Early businesses on Historic Water Street
Source: City of Henderson



Figure 3
People lined up to view model home, Henderson, 1951
Source: City of Henderson



Figure 4
Swearing in ceremony of first Henderson City Council, May 27, 1953
Source: City of Henderson

Henderson has seen remarkable growth since its incorporation. In 1954, U.S. Census Bureau figures showed that Henderson was the fastest-growing city in the country, and it was soon pushing its geographic boundaries. It has led the nation in annual growth many times since then. To help sustain its growth, President John F. Kennedy signed the Henderson Land Bill in 1963, granting the city fifteen thousand additional acres, virtually doubling its size. (Through successive annexations, Henderson is now comprised of nearly 70,000 acres—about 106 square miles.) On a trip through Southern Nevada, President Kennedy declared Henderson a “City of Destiny.”

Then, in the 1970s, Henderson once again faced severe economic challenges. Determined city leaders with a future-focused vision decided to sell parcels of land to developers to promote new homes and spur economic growth. Almost five thousand acres were dedicated to the first master-planned community, which later became Green Valley. The evolution continued in the 1980s, shifting Henderson from a factory town to a complete community, and Henderson soon developed a reputation as a delightful place to live. Between 1980 and 1990, its population doubled to sixty-seven thousand, and once again, Henderson was

America's fastest-growing city. The city's destiny as a "boomburb" was set – a term coined by Dr. Robert E. Lang (professor and planning advocate and executive director of both the Lincy Institute and Brookings Mountain West at the University of Las Vegas, Nevada) as a rapidly growing city in the U.S. that remains essentially suburban in character yet reaches populations more typical of urban core cities.⁷

Henderson has had fourteen mayors since its formation in 1953. Dr. Jim French was elected as the town's first mayor in 1953. Mayors Jim Gibson (1997-2009) and Andy Hafen (2009-2017) both greatly influenced Henderson's current vision, the foundations of the strategic plan that it follows and some of the significant decisions that have impacted the success it is enjoying today.

This leadership is continued by Mayor Debra March (one of the authors of this article). March has been a Henderson resident for nearly thirty years including stints as a member of the planning commission and city council before becoming mayor. She also served as executive director of the Lied Institute for Real Estate at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV).

We turn next to the role of planning and strategic investments in shaping Henderson.

A LITTLE PROVIDENCE AND A LOT OF PLANNING

Henderson benefits from being close to a major international airport (as well as having its own Henderson executive airport), Interstate 15 and the new Interstate 11, and being adjacent to one of the world's most recognized tourism destinations—the Las Vegas Strip. However, the city's success is more deeply rooted in its commitment to planning, from its early days to present. While many "boomburbs" did not anticipate becoming big cities—and many do not want to be, Henderson's leaders thought otherwise from its inception.

Henderson is now Nevada's second-largest city, with more than 106 square miles and a population of more than 330 thousand residents. Henderson is also Nevada's largest full-service city, providing police, fire, water, and wastewater services to the families and business who call Henderson home.

After leading development of the Southern Nevada Strong Regional Plan,⁸ the city updated its own comprehensive plan, leveraging policy alignment and opening new funding sources through grant initiatives that seek communities with strong visions and support.

⁷ Robert E. Lang and Jennifer B. LeFurgy, *Boomburbs: The Rise of America's Accidental Cities*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 5.

⁸ Southern Nevada Strong. "Southern Nevada Strong." 2021. <http://sns.rtcnv.com/>.

The Henderson Strong Comprehensive Plan⁹—its current plan as of this writing—is a citywide planning document that communicates the long-term goals and objectives that guide the physical development and orderly management of the city’s growth for the next twenty years (see Figure 5). These goals and objectives cover key areas of city development, including parks, transit, housing, land use, and sustainability efforts. It is instructive to review several key planning efforts. This was framed substantially by Mayor March’s “One Hundred Day Plan,” an initiative developed through her first one hundred days in office (see Figure 6).

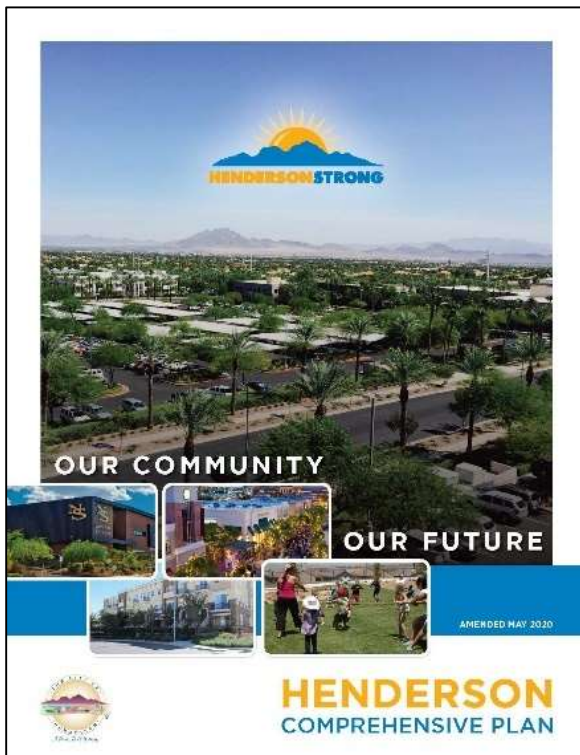


Figure 5
The Henderson Strong Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted in July 2017 and amended in May 2020
Source: City of Henderson

⁹ “Our Community, Our Future,” City of Henderson, 2020, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/home/showpublisheddocument?id=1190>.



Figure 6
Summary page of Mayor March's one-hundred-day plan, presented at the time she took office in 2017

Source: City of Henderson

The city also has a five-year strategic planning process, updated in 2019, that establishes its values and short-term initiatives to focus the efforts of the internal organization.¹⁰ It was purposefully designed to be thematic, with cross-departmental alignment and integrated operations that avoid silos and streamline the customer experience. Working with an outside facilitator, the executive team participated in an intense internal exercise to validate priorities for the next five years and determine what was most important to the culture and future of the organization.

¹⁰ "Strategic Management," City of Henderson, August 7, 2014, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/government/departments/finance/strategic-management>.

The city kept its commitment to the vision to be America's Premier Community by updating its mission statement to provide services and resources that enhance the quality of life for those who live, learn, work, and play in the city. The key priorities of the city's 2019-2023 strategic plan¹¹ include:

- Unwavering commitment to community safety;
- Continued focus on economic vitality;
- Provision of quality education;
- High-performing public service; and
- Providing livable communities in which residents and business can thrive.

Regional and department-specific plans expand on and complement the strategic direction, applying it to specific policy issues and neighborhoods such as the Downtown Henderson Master Plan,¹² Housing and Community Development Strategy,¹³ and City of Henderson Economic Development Strategy.¹⁴

The Henderson Planning Commission, one of 21 advisory committees, also plays a pivotal role in the process by advising the City Council to ensure approved projects fulfill the city's vision for quality communities and adhere to the principles outlined in the comprehensive plan.

A Commitment to Professional Planning

One of the keystones to the city's success as an organization and a community is its legacy of and commitment to strategic planning. That includes a sophisticated staff who analyze data, perform targeted outreach with the community, build coalitions, facilitate processes, and develop consensus-based plans. Henderson employs a data-driven approach to identify current trends and challenges and then responds proactively. A plaque in the mayor's office reminds visitors of the quote from W. Edwards Deming, "Without data, you're just another person with an opinion." Decisions in this organization are founded in data.

¹¹ "2019-2023 STRATEGIC PLAN," City of Henderson, accessed March 10, 2021, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/Home/ShowDocument?id=868>.

¹² "Downtown Henderson Master Plan," City of Henderson, February 18, 2020, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/home/showpublisheddocument?id=1188>.

¹³ "Henderson Housing and Community Development Strategy," City of Henderson, March 2020, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/home/showpublisheddocument?id=1204>.

¹⁴ "Economic Development Strategy," City of Henderson, May 2017, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/home/showpublisheddocument?id=1192>.

The planning profession is by its nature a comparative field and relies upon comparative analyses to generate best practices. A strong commitment to professional planning and membership in the nation's largest professional planning association solidifies the city's commitment to best practices. City council members and city planning directors have prioritized membership in the American Planning Association (APA), recruiting professional planning staff, emphasizing education and master's degrees, and covering professional development costs associated with memberships, including the APA. The city has also encouraged and paid for attendance at national and state planning conferences for more than twenty years for staff as well as the planning commission and members of city council. These commitments to professionalism extend as well to the American Society for Public Administration, the League of Cities, Urban Land Institute, and International City/County Management Association among others.

Regional planning and advocacy

Since its formation, Henderson has found success in working together toward common goals. Henderson's advocacy and lobbying efforts have established it as a leader in the state and the nation, and regional advocacy has been a priority for the organization. Like most communities, important resources are managed at the regional level, and as the city grew, it was important to advocate for its "fair share." Mayor March is now the first female mayor ever to hold the position of chair of the Regional Transportation Commission. This is a result of ongoing advocacy efforts in regional planning and coordination that she spearheaded in her role at UNLV and throughout her leadership at the city. Transportation is a key element of Southern Nevada's economic vitality and quality of life, and the mayor will now guide decisions about the region's mobility. This influence may include improvements for pedestrians, making public transit more viable, maintaining roadways, and integrating transportation planning and land use. Mayor March also serves as chair of the Regional Flood Control District and sits on the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance board of directors. The city has found that working closely with regional organizations and other cities in Southern Nevada, as well as the state and country, is in its own self-interest.

Competitive grants to galvanize support for and fund plan implementation

Another factor in the city's success and visibility is the impact of competitive grant seeking and its ability to galvanize support and implement plans. Having robust plans in place has set the city up for success in seeking competitive grants and other supplemental funding.

Since the city was awarded the Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI)¹⁵ grant in 2012 and created the region's first federally recognized regional plan, Southern Nevada Strong,¹⁶ the planning department's reputation was elevated in the region and the state. The city began to develop stronger partnerships with agencies that had not previously been typical partners, such as healthcare stakeholders, academic partners, and non-profit organizations.

The Community Development and Services Department continued to prioritize grant-seeking to execute its plans. Since the SCI, the department also successfully applied for and was awarded an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Brownfields grant, technical assistance support through the EPA Healthy Foods, Healthy Places Initiative, the Invest Health Initiative, a private grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Reinvestment Fund, and recently competed for and was awarded an Emergency Solutions grant from the State of Nevada to address homelessness, a funding source it had never received in the past.

Grant seeking doesn't just provide resources to address an opportunity in the community. It brings agencies together and allows the city to build relationships with potential partners and stakeholders that would also benefit from the coordination that is required when a new resource is available. Grants also encourage partners to align efforts to increase competitiveness for grant seeking, which improves regular coordination and communication on issues of mutual interest.

During the five-year period 2016 through 2020, the city has been able to supplement its budget with almost forty-five million dollars in grant funding. If specific efforts are not successful, the city gathers feedback from funders to strengthen subsequent proposals.

The city gets creative in finding revenue sources beyond grants as well. To meet community safety goals, the city has successfully pursued and supported the passing of two sales tax initiatives, the 2005 Clark County Sales and Use Tax,¹⁷ and the 2016 Clark County Crime Prevention Act.¹⁸ That revenue is separate from the general fund and goes directly toward hiring police officers.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Sustainable Communities, 2021, <https://www.hud.gov/hudprograms/sci>.

¹⁶ "Southern Nevada Strong," 2021, <http://sns.rtcnv.com/>.

¹⁷ A.B. No. 418, 73rd Session (Nev. 2005), <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Session/73rd2005/bills/AB/AB418.pdf>.

¹⁸ A.B. No. 1, 30th Special Session (Nev. 2016), <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/30th2016Special/Bill/4584/Overview>.

To meet its goals for quality education, the city has dedicated revenues from marijuana business license fees and redevelopment area set-aside funds specifically to education. Because of this provision, more than nine million dollars has been invested in Henderson schools since 2015, including a commitment of two hundred thousand dollars to ensure that every Henderson student had access to a Chromebook for distance education during the global pandemic in 2020. To further support distance learning in fall 2020, the city distributed almost seven hundred thousand dollars in set-aside funds to Henderson schools for online learning subscriptions, professional development, materials, and supplies.

In response to the city's proactive outreach efforts, during the last U.S. Census Henderson residents had the largest response rate in Nevada¹⁹ and the fourth-highest response rate among large cities in America.²⁰ This is another factor that can greatly affect the resources available to a city.

The power of competition and recognition

The city values constant self-improvement with a tradition of raising the bar and never being content with the status quo. The city's process includes multi-jurisdictional research to look for best practices throughout the country that can be adopted to meet set goals without reinventing the wheel. Competitive grants and awards also bring attention, which builds momentum and educates internal and external stakeholders of the effort the city is working to advance, and ultimately builds credibility for the organization and team. This third-party validation is important when seeking subsequent partnership opportunities, thus the city's planning leaders have prioritized seeking competitive grants and pursuing awards.

The Community Development and Services Department earned the 2016 National Planning Excellence Award for Public Outreach through the Southern Nevada Strong's outreach effort, a Great Places in America Award for Water Street (Henderson's historic downtown main street) in 2019,²¹ and most recently a Sustainability and Resilience award for its COVID-19 Recovery Plan, Together We Can. This recognition creates communications opportunities to build awareness of the importance of planning and garner support for local efforts and staff.

¹⁹ Brian L. Berman, "Nevada's Self-Response to the 2020 Census," Nevada Legislature, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/InterimCommittee/REL/Document/16132>.

²⁰ Tableau Public, "2020 Census Response Rates," February 3, 2021, <https://public.tableau.com/profile/us.census.bureau#!/vizhome/2020CensusSelf-ResponseRankings/RankingsDashboard>.

²¹ American Planning Association, "Water Street: Henderson, Nevada," 2021, <https://www.planning.org/greatplaces/streets/2019/waterstreet/>.

In 2020, the city's Development Services Center received the Tyler Public Sector Excellence Award which recognizes public sector agencies who demonstrate leadership, innovation, and excellence in developing, deploying, and maintaining solutions in new ways, signifying the sustained innovation of the organization's development services.

The city strives for continuous improvement by benchmarking itself against nationally recognized rating systems, such as LEED for Cities and Communities and previously STAR certification, American Public Works Association, Construction Management Leadership and Environmental Design Systems, and the Southwest Alliance for Excellence assessment. City departments hold numerous accreditations, such as the city's Public Works and Utilities departments which are accredited by the American Public Works Association.

The city is currently working toward achieving the highly prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, the pinnacle of its pursuit of performance excellence. The team began this journey in 2011, implementing a systematic approach to the organization's continuous improvement program.

When Mayor March took office, she created the Office of Performance and Innovation that is tasked with facilitating the strategic direction that will help the city achieve this goal. With a focus on data, the department has created a framework for transparency and accountability and established processes for achieving the desired outcomes in performance excellence. An important feature is the timely and accurate city-generated data made available to the public through an open data portal on the city website.²²

The Baldrige framework has now been integrated into all parts of the city's internal organization: leadership, strategy, customers, workforce, operations, and results. Key performance indicators are measured and analyzed in each area and compared to other agencies to prove results over a sustained period.

Recognitions by the Southwest Alliance for Excellence over the last several years, including twice winning the Pioneer Award for Excellence, indicate that the city is on the right path. The organization is fully committed to the work required to eventually attain the Baldrige Award.

Effective and ongoing communication, branding and outreach

The city has also maintained a commitment to authentic communications, stakeholder engagement, and public outreach. In 2016, Henderson was awarded the prestigious APA National Planning Excellence Award for Public Outreach for the

²² "Open Data," City of Henderson, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/our-city/open-data>.

work done on the Southern Nevada Strong regional planning initiative. Henderson's latest five-year strategic plan included a six-month collaborative process with extensive community engagement through outreach events, a community survey, and the city's advisory committees. The priorities in the city's strategic plan have been very consistent over time because city leaders have listened and responded to the needs of the community.

Through the SCI, the department was able to build capacity among the staff for effective stakeholder outreach, research methods, and public relations long-term. Outreach and engagement staff partner with planning staff to ensure content is user-friendly and available in Spanish when appropriate, dedicated web pages are available for priority projects, media advisories are sent out when applicable, and planning projects are branded in an attractive and understandable way. A communications plan and messaging are developed for each project. The overall communications effort is integrated at the start rather than at the end of a project to acknowledge the public's interests from the beginning. A variety of tactics are used, such as focus groups, survey methods, questionnaires, stakeholder groups, and committees. This results in a better-informed community, increased support, and more credibility for the resulting efforts.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENT AND INNOVATION

Over the years, the city has made significant investments and applied innovative approaches in five key priority areas of the strategic plan.

Community Safety

Henderson has invested significantly in public safety, building strong, nationally accredited police and fire departments directed by operational plans that tie directly to its community safety priority area.

The Henderson Police Department is accredited by CALEA—the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.²³ And the Henderson Fire Department is one of the nation's only triple-accredited fire agencies – accredited for fire, ambulance, and emergency management services.²⁴

²³ "Home | The Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc," CALEA, accessed April 28, 2021. <https://www.calea.org/>.

²⁴ "Meet the Chief," City of Henderson, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/government/departments/fire/meet-the-chief>.



Figure 7
City of Henderson Police Chief Thedrick Andres and Fire Chief Shawn White
Source: City of Henderson

Quality Education

The city focuses on quality education because it is a priority for its residents. Although Nevada school districts are organized at the county level by law, the city actively seeks ways to meet the community's needs by investing in the schools in its geographic area, working with the Clark County School District and establishing relationships with charter and private school operators.

The city also actively supports higher education. The College of Southern Nevada (CSN) opened its Henderson campus in the 1970s and twenty years ago, the city conducted a comprehensive study²⁵ and developed a master plan²⁶ to help establish Nevada State College (see Figure 8).

²⁵ "College Area Plan," City of Henderson, September 7, 2004, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/Home/ShowDocument?id=1292>.

²⁶ "Campus Master Plan," City of Henderson, March 2010. <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/Home/ShowDocument?id=1268>.



Figure 8
Nevada State College in Henderson

Source: City of Henderson

Since then, the city has attracted almost twenty technical and private colleges, including Roseman University and Touro University, Nevada's largest medical school.

The city also has a commitment to workforce development and is currently building a Henderson Workforce Training Center for Excellence that will provide advanced manufacturing training for the highly skilled jobs available in Henderson.

High-Performing Public Service

The city's ability to innovate in its priority areas depends on a highly skilled workforce committed to best practices, innovation, and ongoing self-improvement. City leaders continually challenge the organization to build the most talented workforce in the state. By recognizing human capital as the city's most valuable asset, the strategic plan includes a focus on quality educational resources, an employee tuition reimbursement program, competitive benefits, and robust recruitment practices.

Livable Communities

The city's first investment in the 1970s with the Green Valley master-planned community became a template for future development efforts, and standards have continued to develop over time. Henderson now boasts some of the best master-planned communities in the nation, including Cadence, Inspirada, Tuscany, Ascaya and others. The city's multiple designations over the years as

America's fastest-growing community is due in large part to the success of its master-planned communities which have set the pace for strong, sustained growth.

Henderson also invests in quality of life, setting the goal to have a park or park amenity within a ten-minute walk of every resident (see Figure 9). Proximity to parks also contributes to community safety.²⁷ The city currently offers almost seventy city parks, eleven aquatic facilities, six recreation centers and two senior centers.

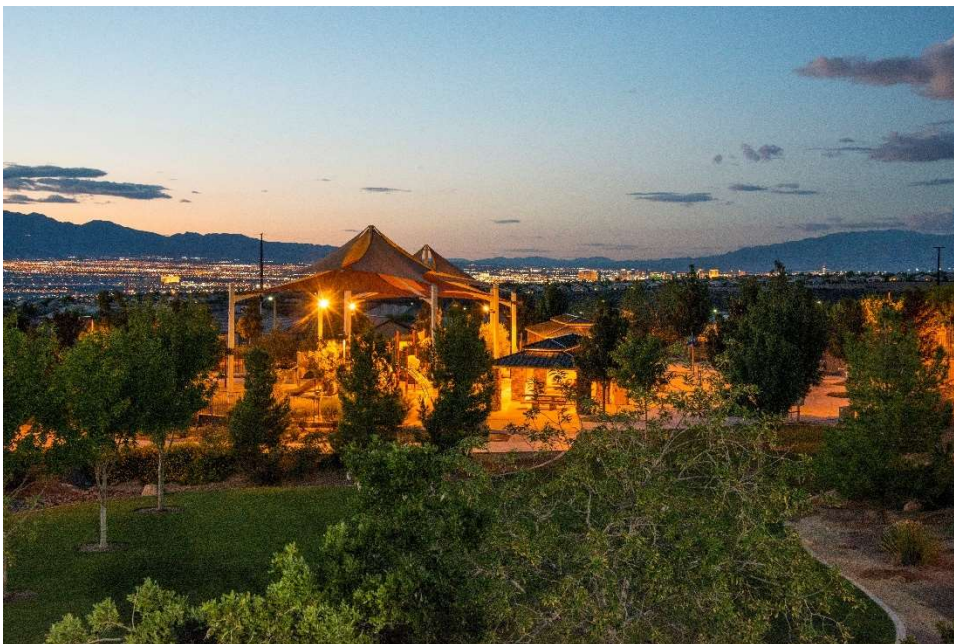


Figure 9
City of Henderson's Madeira Park, with a view of the Las Vegas Strip
Source: City of Henderson

The city has been able to make strategic investments and maintain its premier services, programs, and amenities with the lowest tax rate among any major city in the state, only seventy-seven cents per one hundred dollars of assessed valuation.

²⁷ "How Cities Use Parks to Create Safer Neighborhoods," American Planning Association, January 1, 2004. https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/Parks-Creat-Safer-Neighborhoods.pdf.

Economic Vitality

Henderson's early beginnings led it to become Nevada's chief industrial center. Southern Nevada later evolved into a gaming and tourism destination, which generated most of its growth in the last century. However, after the previous economic downturn in 2008, city leaders realized that they could not be overdependent on gaming revenue alone and set out to build a more diverse, and thus more stable, economy.

Focused efforts to attract businesses in key target areas have resulted in significant diversification in a short time. The city has specifically targeted a range of industries to attract more and better-paying jobs to the area, including:

- Advanced manufacturing and logistics;
- Healthcare and life sciences;
- Corporate headquarters and global finance; and
- Technology.

As with many other "boomburbs," the city has been successful in attracting a number of corporate headquarters. As part of the region's growing sports economy, Henderson is now home to the AHL Henderson Silver Knights, the city's first professional sports team, and is one of only thirty-two U.S. cities to be the home of an NFL team, with the brand-new headquarters and state-of-the-art performance center for the Las Vegas Raiders (see Figure 10). The city also will soon welcome the WNBA Las Vegas Aces team and a new Indoor Football League franchise, the Vegas Knight Hawks.

Pro-sustainable-growth policies and an active construction sector have contributed to the city's development over time.²⁸ Many impactful projects in Henderson are helping to diversify the economy of Southern Nevada. In recent years, Henderson has welcomed world-class companies like the Raiders, Amazon, Google, FedEx, Haas Automation and Vegas Golden Knights. These well-known brands will help the city to attract additional high-caliber businesses looking to expand or relocate.

The City of Henderson also prioritizes efforts to revitalize maturing neighborhoods through redevelopment efforts. Currently, the city has five redevelopment areas, including the historical heart of Henderson where those early homes of Basic Township were built in the classic one-story-ranch style of mid-

²⁸ Robert E. Lang and Jennifer B. LeFurgy, *Boomburbs: The Rise of America's Accidental Cities*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), viii.

century suburbs,²⁹ and where City Hall is located today. Millions of public dollars have been invested into infrastructure improvements to position the historic Water Street District for private investment to take place (see Figure 10).



Figure 10
City of Henderson's Water Street District
Source: City of Henderson

A PREMIER COMMUNITY

Through city leadership's commitment to their vision, its goal of being America's Premier Community has become reality. In just over twenty years, the city has seen another transformation from an industrial suburb and bedroom community of Las Vegas to a leader in economic development where residents and businesses can thrive.

A commitment to planning combined with focused investment has reaped rewards in each of the strategic priorities. Henderson is home to highly ranked schools, award-winning parks and trails, a strong and diversified economy, top-rated staff, and a community that is recognized as one of the safest in America. The

²⁹ Robert Lang, Jennifer LeFurgy, and Arthur C. Nelson. "The Six Suburban Eras of the United States." *Opolis* 2 no. 1 (2006): 68, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/739425j0..>

city has also maintained the Standard and Poor's AA+³⁰ and Moody's Investors Services AA2³¹ bond ratings, the highest bond ratings of any city in the state.

More than one hundred construction projects were initiated in Henderson in just the past year, including corporate headquarters, medical parks, apartment complexes and factories. These companies bring jobs, investment, and tax revenue that will be reinvested into enhancing public safety, supporting education, and assisting with other Henderson priorities.

Henderson was first recognized as one of America's "50 Safest Cities" in 1997 and in 2021, the city was ranked as the second safest large city in America by both MoneyGeek³² and Advisorsmith.³³

Henderson is also recognized as a top workplace in Nevada.³⁴ The city's surveys consistently indicate that it is significantly outpacing other local government groups and even the private sector in terms of employee engagement.

Henderson's housing market has surged in recent years, with the highest average home value in Southern Nevada, roughly 20 percent higher than the regional average, with a year-over-year increase of 8.6 percent according to Zillow.com.³⁵ Henderson is also a top community for first-time homebuyers.³⁶

³⁰ "S&P Global Ratings: Henderson, Nevada; General Obligation," City of Henderson, May 21, 2021, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/home/showpublisheddocument?id=3140>.

³¹ Patrick Liberatore and Matthew B. Jones, "Research: Rating Action: Moody's Assigns Aa2 Rating to City of Henderson, Nevada's Limited Tax General Obligation Bonds," *Moody's*, June 4, 2012, https://www.moody.com/research/Moodys-assigns-Aa2-rating-to-City-of-Henderson-Nevadas-Limited-PR_247628.

³² Deb Gordon, "The Safest Cities in America," *MoneyGeek*, February 9, 2021, <https://www.moneygeek.com/living/safest-cities/>.

³³ Adrian Mak, "Safest Cities in America," *AdvisorSmith*, October 5, 2021, <https://advisorsmith.com/data/safest-cities-in-america/#large>.

³⁴ Buck Wargo, "No. 1 Nevada Top Workplaces Announced," *Las Vegas Business Press*, October 6, 2020, <https://businesspress.vegas/top-workplaces/no-1-nevada-top-workplaces-announced-25339/>; "Top Workplaces Nevada Announces Winners; Specific Rankings to Be Released Later This Year," *Las Vegas Business Press*, May 5, 2020, <https://businesspress.vegas/economy/small-business/top-workplaces-nevada-announces-winners-specific-rankings-to-be-released-later-this-year-23488/>.

³⁵ "Henderson Home Values," Zillow, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.zillow.com/henderson-nv/home-values/>.

³⁶ Adam McCann, "Best & Worst Cities for First-Time Home Buyers," *WalletHub*, July 6, 2020, <https://wallethub.com/edu/best-and-worst-cities-for-first-time-home-buyers/5564>.

The city continues to receive national recognition for its master-planned communities. Cadence was recently ranked in the top ten master-planned communities in the nation (see Figure 11), with the Inspirada community not far behind.³⁷ And Henderson has the number one position and six out of the top ten best neighborhoods to live in Nevada.³⁸



Figure 11
City of Henderson's Cadence master-planned community
Source: City of Henderson

Henderson is consistently recognized for its premier parks and trails and is a two-time Gold Medal winner for the nation's best parks and recreation system, as awarded by the National Recreation and Park Association.³⁹ In 2020, the city was once again a Gold Medal finalist.

³⁷ Buck Wargo, "Three Las Vegas Master Plans Make Nation's Top 10 List." *Las Vegas Review Journal*, January 15, 2021, <https://www.reviewjournal.com/homes/new-homes/three-las-vegas-master-plans-make-nations-top-10-list-2254054/>.

³⁸ "2021 Best Places to Live in Nevada." Niche, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.niche.com/places-to-live/search/best-places-to-live/s/nevada/>.

³⁹ "Parks and Recreation," City of Henderson, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/government/departments/parks-and-recreation>.

The city has also received awards and recognition in emergency preparedness from the International Association of Emergency Management – Public Awareness, Federal Emergency Management Agency Individual and Community Preparedness Award and The United States Conference of Mayors City Livability Award.

The notable economic development in recent years further enhances the city's reputation as a Premier Community.

REPLICATING THE CITY OF HENDERSON'S SUCCESS

Can these efforts be replicated by other boomburbs and for that matter all other communities large and small? We would hope so and offer the following checklist to be adapted elsewhere.

Recruit and develop professional planning staff

The planning process is an effective approach to addressing any topic, which is why a strong planning department has contributed to the city's overall success. However, one must be mindful that students in planning programs throughout the United States are still overwhelmingly white. Offer internships and work opportunities for students in high school and undergraduate students of color who may not be familiar with the field and may be drawn to less traditional programs than typical recruitment targets. A strong education is important, but not everyone needs to come through the field in the same way to bring sophistication to your organization, especially given the location of planning programs in the United States (in less diverse, less populated areas) and the importance of diverse experiences and backgrounds in the planning field. Make sure your planning department reflects the demographics of your community and/or is consciously targeting outreach efforts to gather targeted input and is also trained in implicit bias and how to counteract it.

Pay for professional development for staff and planning commission and encourage leadership roles in the field, not just in the organization

Membership in professional organizations, attendance at conferences, and leadership roles in other organizations are worth the investment and will yield returns for your organization in terms of innovation, collaboration with other communities that may come in handy for national legislative platforms, funding opportunities, and peer exchanges.

Measure yourself against your peers and the nation

Comparative analysis breeds innovation and best practices. Infuse all projects with multijurisdictional research and any indicators you use for

performance measurement should be compared to regional, state, and national peers.

Use grants, funding opportunities, and legislation to bring departments and organizations together

Be proactive about grant seeking, advocacy efforts, and pooling resources. Bringing departments and other partners to the table for mutually beneficial reasons facilitates alignment and builds relationships that leverage efforts.

Develop sophisticated messaging, branding, communications, and outreach capacities

Planning can be difficult to explain, and benefits are often long-term and thus hard to prove in the moment. Maintain a consistent emphasis on communications efforts, stakeholder engagement, and outreach. This will educate the community, build advocates for your work, and demonstrate implementation, which will build trust and credibility as the community sees you follow through on ideas and commitments.

Partner with local or regional academic organizations

It is important to recruit potential interns and leverage student projects for planning issues, but also to recruit subject matter expertise on multiple topics that may be addressed in your work, from the real estate market, to housing to public health. Academic partners are often neutral and can be great spokespeople.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Almost seventy years have passed since its incorporation, and the City of Henderson has burgeoned into a mature, vibrant, and sophisticated city. While much has changed, Henderson is still a community of people with shared goals. And as the city is reaping the benefits of decisions made years earlier, the plans and decisions it makes today will define the Henderson of the future.

As Nevada's second-largest city, Henderson continues to be one of the fastest-growing cities in America, now surpassing St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh in size. The city welcomes more than ten thousand new residents each year⁴⁰ who are drawn to an exceptional quality of life, award-winning parks and trails, and expanding economic opportunities. Henderson is one of the Valley's

⁴⁰ Bryan Horwath, "Census Report: Henderson among Fastest-Growing Cities in America - Las Vegas Sun Newspaper," *Las Vegas Sun*, May 25, 2019, <https://lasvegassun.com/news/2019/may/25/census-report-henderson-among-fastest-growing-citi/#:~:text=Henderson%20from%20July%201%2C%202017,Las%20Vegas%20%E2%80%94%20by%20about%201%2C800>.

most desirable communities and projections show it will welcome approximately one hundred thousand new residents by 2036.⁴¹

Henderson is home to the most engaged residents in Nevada.⁴² More engaged residents have greater demands, thus response to their needs must continue to advance. Henderson also boasts the most educated population in Nevada (almost 95 percent of its residents have graduated from high school and more than 35 percent have attained a bachelor's degree or higher), and the highest income earners with a median household income of more than eighty thousand dollars.⁴³

Henderson will celebrate its centennial in just over thirty years. The community is evolving, and its racial and ethnic diversification has outpaced most cities.⁴⁴ Waves of new residents are transforming the racial and ethnic makeup of the city, bringing an increasing number of foreign-born residents. Henderson will likely also continue its political evolution: Clark County, including Henderson and Las Vegas, makes up almost three-fourths of the state's total population and has led the state to select the Democratic presidential candidate in the last four elections. While Henderson still has remnants of the region's previous Republican stronghold, it is more purple these days than red.⁴⁵

What Henderson has been is not what the city will be in the future, as it continues its evolution from rural outpost to suburb to urbane metropolis. City leaders will navigate this shift by continuing their commitment to engage with the community, understand priorities, and remain responsive to shifting needs.

Education has long been and will likely continue to be a top priority for the community. This is also a critical factor in attracting new residents and new businesses. Henderson must continue to champion the need for quality education,

⁴¹ "Economic Development Strategy," City of Henderson, May 2017, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/home/showpublisheddocument?id=1192>.

⁴² Berman, "Nevada's Self-Response to the 2020 Census."

⁴³ "Henderson, NV," Census Reporter, 2021. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US3231900-henderson-nv/>.

⁴⁴ Deidre McPhillips, "How Racially and Ethnically Diverse Is Your City?" *U.S. News and World Report*, January 22, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2020-01-22/measuring-racial-and-ethnic-diversity-in-americas-cities>.

⁴⁵ David F. Damore, Robert E. Lang, and Karen A. Danielsen. *Blue Metros, Red States*, (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), 366.

exert its influence within the current county organizational structure, and seek ways to continue investing in the schools within its boundaries.

Henderson will also continue to focus on economic development and diversification. The city's economic development team is working with the Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development and the Las Vegas Global Economic Alliance to aggressively target new business and will continue efforts to acquire additional land to build infrastructure.

Finding solutions for the region's environmental and transportation challenges will be critical in the coming years as the city prepares for another period of incredible growth. The city must continue to lead in this area, focusing on moving people rather than moving cars. This will encourage more conservation-minded development, raise awareness of the impacts of climate change, and pursue innovation in carbon sequestration techniques to reduce urban heat island effects and energy costs. The city will continue to partner with the private sector to seek solutions to the complex challenges it faces.

While pursuit of the Baldrige Award is a near-term initiative, the city's focus on societal responsibility will be a long-term effort. Maintaining a high quality of life and achieving the goals the city has set for the future requires the wise management of natural resources upon which the community depends. The city has a deep commitment to sustainability marked by significant successes in this area,⁴⁶ and will continue that commitment.

The city must also consider the organizational structure and sophistication of its city government. Set strategies are purposefully thematic to encourage cross-departmental collaboration and that work must continue to overlap and intersect.

⁴⁶ Sustainability Report Card," City of Henderson, accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.cityofhenderson.com/our-city/initiatives/sustainability>.

The city must continually look at its operations and evaluate how best to organize to meet the community's needs. It must also grow strategically and continue attracting and retaining the brightest employees in the region, with a mindset of continuous improvement. The city was founded on the miracle metal of World War II but will be defined by the mettle of its team as it strives onward.

The city's success did not happen by chance, nor did it happen overnight; Henderson has become what it is today through a focused commitment to a vision and the thoughtful execution of a strategic plan to reach set goals. The city's motto, "A Place to Call Home," still reflects its commitment to provide the high quality of life that its 330 thousand residents have come to expect with a very large share in master-planned communities (see Figure 12). Through this commitment, Henderson will remain a Premier Community and continue to evolve according to its aspirational culture built on a foundation of planning, strategic investments, and patience for many generations to come.



Figure 12
Aerial view of present-day Henderson
Source: City of Henderson