



Polytechnic Heights Main Street: Small Business Anti-Displacement Workshop Report

Key Findings and Community-Driven Solutions

Workshop was held on June 4, 2025

In early June, the City of Fort Worth's Economic Development Department partnered with Main Street America, the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network, and Fort Worth's two Main Street America Pilot Communities – the Historic Northside District led by the Fort Worth Hispanic Chamber and the Polytechnic Heights Main Street Pilot Program led by Texas Wesleyan University – to host a Small Business Anti-Displacement Workshop.

This interactive, in-person workshop spanned four hours and was facilitated by the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network. The primary goal of the workshop was to bring together small business owners and property stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue and explore strategies to prevent small business displacement within their communities, as displacement was a key concern expressed by both communities during the Main Street Pilot Program workshops and surveys.

The timing of this conversation is crucial. As new investment and development efforts begin to take shape in and around the area, there is a need to ensure that growth does not come at the cost of existing residents or small businesses. This report summarizes the workshop's key findings and identifies community driven solutions to protect and strengthen the small local business ecosystem in the Polytechnic District.

About the Small Business Anti-Displacement Network [The Small Business Anti-Displacement Network](#) (SBAN) is a national initiative housed at the University of Maryland and supported by a coalition of academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and community development leaders. SBAN's mission is to advance strategies that help small businesses stay rooted in their communities amid rising costs and redevelopment pressures.

Operating as a research-based and practice-oriented network, SBAN connects local governments, economic development agencies, business owners, and community organizations to share tools, resources, and models that prevent displacement. Through workshops, technical assistance, and capacity-building efforts, SBAN equips communities with proactive strategies to support small business retention, equitable development, and neighborhood stability.

Their involvement in Fort Worth reflects a growing national recognition of the importance of community-led economic development and the role that long-standing small businesses play in preserving cultural identity and economic resilience.

Workshop Presenters:

- **Willow Lung-Amam:** SBAN Director, Associate Professor, Urban Studies and Planning at the University of Maryland
- **Manuel Ochoa:** SBAN Senior Practitioner, Principal and Founder, Ochoa Urban Collaborative
- **Bobby Boone:** SBAN Senior Practitioner, Founder and Chief Strategist, &Access

Workshop Attendees:

- **Paul Kerpoe**, East Fort Worth Business Association.
- **Dwala Chandler**, Texas Wesleyan University
- **Brian Bulita**, Texas Wesleyan University
- **Reba Henry**, Polytechnic Heights Neighborhood Association
- **Lucas Ruiz**, Property Owner and Developer in Polytechnic
- **Dennis Ruiz**, Property Owner and Developer in Polytechnic
- **Letitia Brown Moore**, City of Fort Worth Neighborhood Services
- **Surya Sherrod**, City of Fort Worth Neighborhood Services
- **Chad LaRoque**, City of Fort Worth Neighborhood Services
- **Dyan Anderson**, City of Fort Worth Neighborhood Services
- **Kay West**, Resident
- **Marc Numez**, Resident
- **Tiffani Floyed**, Resident
- **Megan Henderson**, Near South Side, Inc.
- **Thomas Oliver**, Historic Southside Neighborhood Association
- **Debby Stein**, Embrace the Street, Texas Wesleyan Presidents Advisory Committee
- **Dawnelle Butler**, Resident
- **Kenny Mosley**, Renaissance Heights Foundation, Texas Wesleyan Presidents Advisory Committee
- **Jazmin Gutierrez**, City of Fort Worth Economic Development
- **Martha Collins**, City of Fort Worth Economic Development
- **Phillip Michael Smart**, City of Fort Worth Economic Development

I. Defining the Problem

Workshop participants began the session by reflecting on the core challenges facing small businesses and the broader neighborhood that have the potential to contribute to commercial displacement. Through facilitated breakout sessions, the following issues emerged most frequently:

Small Business Challenges Identified

- Limited access to credit, capital, and financial literacy tools.
- Barriers in applying for permits, licenses, and City-run programs.
- Rising property values driven by outside development.

Neighborhood-Level Challenges Identified

- Persistent homelessness and its negative impact on business viability.
- Aging commercial building infrastructure requiring rehabilitation.
- Difficulty engaging stakeholders across demographic and economic lines.

II. Prioritizing Anti-Displacement Strategies

After identifying key issues, participants explored seven strategy areas from [SBAN's Toolkit Strategies](#). Each individual selected the three strategies they felt most relevant for Polytechnic Heights, and the group collectively prioritized the following as their top three strategies:

1. **Place-Based Management:** The process of making places better by having an area-based organization that organizes, addresses, and advocates for the needs of the area's stakeholders, such as residents, small businesses, and other stakeholders. Place-based management models encourage collaborative, holistic, and integrated approaches to preserving a neighborhood's physical, cultural, and social environment.
2. **Tax Credits and Incentives:** Financial tools to encourage economic activity like attracting investment and development and supporting businesses and jobs by reducing the tax burden and payments. Neighborhood small businesses may be eligible for tax credits and incentives, benefit from those given to property owners and developers, or be eligible for programs funded by tax revenue.
3. **Local Hiring and Entrepreneurial Support:** Infrastructure to help local businesses thrive and grow, such as accelerators, incubators, or nonprofit or government agencies providing support to any entrepreneur at any stage of their development.

Neighborhood small businesses with few employees need entrepreneur support systems that support them accessing financial and other resources, finding employees, and navigating municipal codes and regulations.

III. Tool Implementation

Participants then explored specific tools within each strategy area and identified preliminary actions needed for implementation.

I. Place-Based Management

Tool Identified:

A. *Commercial Corridor Organizations:* Commercial corridor organizations support the development and revitalization of commercial corridors (and downtowns). They support small businesses through economic and community development programs that attract investment, customers, and other resources to underinvested areas.

Specific recommendations by the group for this organization were to:

- Revitalize the corridor by improving the aesthetics, infrastructure, business mix, and accessibility of key commercial corridors to meet resident needs, attract visitors, and improve quality of life.
- Facilitate property owner and developer matchmaking and communication to align investment goals with community priorities.
- Future land use and zoning alignment for mixed-use development and small-scale commercial uses in the commercial district.

Actions Identified:

1. Support Texas Wesleyan University's efforts to lead the Main Street program, organizing stakeholders, and funding around this becoming the place-based organization for Polytechnic Heights commercial district and neighborhood and strengthening communication between stakeholders.
2. Partner with local universities (faculty and students) for design, planning, and community-based research.
3. Identify targeted areas for capital investment and rehabilitation.

4. Launch collaborative workgroups focused on land use, transportation, and tenant stability.
5. Organize stakeholders to work towards ensuring zoning supports mixed-use development and small-scale commercial uses as one of the first initiatives by the organization.

2. Tax Credits and Incentives

Tools Identified:

- A. ***Property Tax Abatements:*** Property tax reduction or exemptions offered to small businesses at the municipal or state level. They eliminate or significantly reduce property taxes for commercial property owners based on location, such as historic districts or neighborhoods targeted for revitalization. Abatements can be temporary or long-term, lasting a few months to years or even indefinitely.
- B. ***Real Estate Transfer or Vacancy Tax:*** A real estate transfer tax is a one-time tax or fee imposed by a state or local jurisdiction on the transfer of commercial property. A vacancy tax is a tax on property that has been vacant for an extended period.
- C. ***Public-Private Partnerships:*** Public-private partnership help incentivize development projects that create spaces for small local businesses and deliver clear and measurable community benefits through partnerships between government (takes on risk) and private sector (to provide solutions).

Actions Identified:

1. Work with the City to explore creating a vacancy tax, ordinance, or fees to target vacant and dilapidated properties alongside code enforcement.
2. Engage banks and foundations to expand lending or create grant programs to help businesses and property owners.
3. Provide outreach and education on available tools and resources.
4. Use or develop abatements or credits to support small business retention and expansion.

3. Local Hiring and Entrepreneurial Support

Tools Identified:

- A. *Technical Assistance Programs:* Support services provided to small businesses, such as financial literacy training, mentoring, loan application assistance, marketing, and language assistance. The group identified the need for direct support for business plan development, marketing, operations, and creating mentorship networks to build connections between established business owners and government institutions that have local hiring programs and aspiring entrepreneurs.
- B. *Neighborhood Business Incubators:* Programs that help businesses launch and grow by providing free or low-cost workspace, mentorship, access to investors, and in some cases, working capital.
- C. *Improve Access to Capital:* Improve banking relationships and access to microloans or credit-building products.

Actions Identified:

1. Launch mentorship and training programs in partnership with local institutions.
2. Establish grant and loan programs focused on the needs of Polytechnic Heights businesses.
3. Provide ongoing technical assistance through a City-designated navigator or liaison.
4. Work with Texas Wesleyan University to build up their incubator on Rosedale Street or partner with Center for Transforming Lives' new center.

IV. Conclusion and Next Steps:

The Polytechnic Heights SBAN Workshop established a foundation for sustainable community-led development. In the months ahead, the City of Fort Worth's Economic Development Department will:

- Share these findings with community and City leadership.
- Identify short-term actions that can be supported through existing programs.
- Develop partnerships to explore implementation of one or more priority tools.

- Continue engaging local stakeholders to ensure their voices shape future planning efforts.

It is important to note that the City of Fort Worth and the Main Street Pilot Program's Polytechnic Heights District are already working on strategies for small business anti-displacement that are identified by SBAN. These strategies include:

Place-Based Management: Through partnerships with Main Street America, the City Fort Worth is piloting place-based revitalization efforts in the Polytechnic Heights area with Texas Wesleyan University. This program empowers local leaders to guide development efforts that reflect the community's vision and priorities.

Zoning and Formed Based Code: The City of Fort Worth has designated Polytechnic Height's commercial corridor as an Urban Village, which focuses on infrastructure and planning to improving walkability, public space enhancements, and mixed-use development for Polytechnic.

Tax Credits and Incentives: The City of Fort Worth offers targeted incentives such as tax abatements and fee waivers to support business investment and property improvement in designated zones like Northside including Façade Improvement Program Grants, Neighborhood Empowerment Zone, and 380 Grants for Catalytic Projects.

These efforts demonstrate the City of Fort Worth's commitment to community focused growth. However, as new challenges arise and investment continues, the city remains focused on adapting its tools, building partnerships, and responding directly to the needs identified by residents and small business owners in neighborhoods like Polytechnic Heights.

V. Summary

This SBAN workshop reaffirmed the Polytechnic community's commitment to shaping a future rooted in resilience and opportunity.

The work ahead will require coordination, creativity, and sustained investment but the groundwork has been laid for a movement focused on community ownership and long-term impact.

ACTION MATRIX:

The Action Matrix on the following page, developed during the Polytechnic Small Business Anti-Displacement Workshop, presents a unified, community-led vision to prevent small business displacement. After the participants identified and prioritized the top tools and actions for the Polytechnic Heights commercial district, each representative had an opportunity to help turn ideas into action by reflecting on their role in implementation – they and/or their organization can play to either implement (or explore implementation feasibility), support, or be a connector.

The matrix below summarizes this final exercise and the workshop’s findings.

Strategy Area	Tool/Action	Implementers (Committed Parties from Workshop)	Key:
Place-Based Management	Tool A. Commercial Corridor Organization (with focus on revitalizing corridor, facilitating property owner and developer matchmaking, and zoning alignment)	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth, Neighborhood Association, Local Stakeholders	Green: Implement
	Action 1. Catalyze this organization via the Main Street Program	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth, Local Stakeholders	Orange: Support
	Action 2. Partner with university for design, planning, and research support	Polytechnic Main Street, Texas Wesleyan University, (UTA Urban Institute)	Purple: Help Connect
	Action 3. Identify target areas for investment	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth, Neighborhood Association	
	Action 4. Launch working groups (land use, transportation, and tenant stability)	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth	
	Action 5. Organize stakeholders for zoning and land use alignment	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth, Neighborhood Association	
Tax Credits and Incentives	Tool A. Property Tax Abatements	City of Fort Worth, Texas Wesleyan University, Polytechnic Main Street, Neighborhood Association	
	Tool B. Real Estate Transfer or Vacancy Tax	City of Fort Worth	
	Tool C. Public-Private Partnerships	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth, Property Owners, and Developers	
	Action 1. Explore Real Estate Transfer or Vacancy Tax, Fees or Ordinance	City of Fort Worth, Polytechnic Main Street	
	Action 2. Engage Banks and Foundations to Expand Lending or Create Grants	City of Fort Worth, Texas Wesleyan University, Polytechnic Main Street, Banks	
	Action 3. Education and Outreach for Existing Programs	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth, Neighborhood Association	
	Action 4. Use or Develop Abatements or Credits for Small-BRE	City of Fort Worth	
Local Hiring and Entrepreneurship	Tool A. Technical Assistance Programs	City of Fort Worth (BAC), Texas Wesleyan University, Banks/CDFIs, Non-Profit Organizations,	
	Tool B. Neighborhood Business Incubator	Texas Wesleyan University, City of Fort Worth, Polytechnic Main Street, Banks/CDFIs	
	Tool C. Improve Access to Capital	Polytechnic Main Street, City of Fort Worth, Banks/CDFIs	

	Action 1. Launch Mentorship and Training	Polytechnic Main Street, Texas Wesleyan University, City of Fort Worth
	Action 2. Neighborhood Business Incubators	City of Fort Worth, Texas Wesleyan, CDFI, Neighborhood Association
	Action 3. City Navigator	City of Fort Worth (Economic Development, Development Services, Communications: Community Engagement)
	Action 4. Develop Neighborhood Business Incubators	City of Fort Worth, Texas Wesleyan, CDFI, Neighborhood Association

Disclaimer

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