

“Is This A Thing?” (Episode 9)
Taped 10/17/18 at The Stella Hotel, Bryan, Texas

Jay Socol:

Okay, so this is not something that past classes has experienced. You are the guinea pigs for it. If it goes poorly, it's Jeremy's fault. If it goes wonderfully, then it's totally my idea. So we are going to be shooting video of this. You are the live, enthusiastic audience, so we need you to be the live, enthusiastic audience. We're just going to see how this goes. Natalie and I have not done this before in this sort of format. We have a podcast that we do in my office from time to time, so this is a brand new scenario. We'll see how it goes and if it goes horribly, we'll just fix it in post, right? We'll just edit all the bad stuff out.

So Johnny and Chad, you guys ready? All right. So here we go.

So welcome to “Is This A Thing?” I'm Jay Socol. We're recording this podcast at the Stella Hotel and we're doing it for the very first time in front of an audience, and our audience's Leadership Brazos class of 2019. Let's hear you.

Okay, so for those who don't know, “Is This a Thing?” is a podcast that we do in College Station, and it focuses on economic development, and the whole idea is there's so many things that you hear about, but you're not sure if they're true, and the idea is to separate fact from fiction and rumor from reality and that's how we approach it, so this podcast, this edition of the podcast is going to be very different, so let me introduce the folks up here with me.

My first guest is co-founder and the actual star of Is This a Thing, so please welcome College Station Economic Development Director, Natalie, “Please stop asking me about Pappadeaux's” Ruiz.

My second guest, going all the way over to the other side here, is Bryan Economic Development Specialist and the pride of Baylor University, give a warm welcome to fellow introvert, Todd McDaniel.

And my third guest is chairman-elect of the Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation and a very reluctant participant in this whole thing, say hello to Bobby Gutierrez.

So we're going to visit a little bit with our guests and then we're going to open it up to you, so you can ask questions to these panelists. So be thinking about what you'd like to ask them, and we'll get to you in just a little bit. First, I'm going to start with Natalie because this is your show, so I'll start with you. We are doing this in the fourth quarter of the year and so I'm curious, do seasons matter when it comes to economic development? Does the time of the year matter when you're going after business and industry?

Natalie Ruiz: The time of the year around the holidays, you're not going to do as much recruitment as you would through the rest of the year, but retail is very different from primary job growth. I think the short answer is yes, it matters, but you're still pushing through all 12 months of the year and recruiting folks, but the timing is very different. So in the retail market, when you're recruiting someone, they move much more quickly than primary business. They typically run on a 12-month cycle on retail. They don't do a lot of construction and starting new projects in the fourth quart of the year. It typically goes into the first quarter.

Now, primary job growth, you don't see them on a 12-month timeframe. It's a much longer recruitment process and they're much more deliberate in where they're going to expand and focus and you typically see those run more on a three to four-year cycle as well.

Jay Socol: So what are the kinds of things that you are doing right now? Are you making a lot of calls? Are you fielding the calls? What is your day to day activity like?

Natalie Ruiz: Every year, there's a group called ICSC, the International Council of Shopping Centers, and they put on a state conference as well as national conferences throughout the US and the one for the Texas area, the Red River area which includes Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas, those will all be included in January, so what we're doing now is preparing for that, reaching directly out to retailers and site selectors to plan visits with those groups in January, make sure we're on their calendar before we actually get to the event.

Jay Socol: Okay. So, Todd, I'm going to move to you. Considering that Kevin Russell also does economic development for the city of Bryan, you guys are doing remarkably well and that was supposed to be a joke. Sorry. If you don't know Kevin, then that didn't make any sense to you at all, who is an excellent guy. But in the economic development standpoint, here's a question for you. What do you do about Texas Avenue between say about Villa Maria and downtown? How are you guys approaching that long-term strategy? Talk about that.

Todd McDaniel: Well, Texas Avenue is very important to our entire market, not just to Bryan. As an example, we have a program called our Texas Avenue Beautification Partnership Grant. It's a program that allows a property owner and/or the tenant to pursue a façade improvement, do things to the outside of the building, et cetera that would help to facilitate. We're also engaged directly with the property owners where we're looking to hopefully try to facilitate some redevelopment there. So Texas Avenue and of course, South College, which is the other priority initiative related to our midtown, so that's just one example of the types of things that we're doing for Texas Avenue. But if you look at it, it's kind of a push. If you think about the university being the epicenter, it's really a push and so if you've seen the development with Café Eccell and as it continues to move basically north towards downtown, so it's that connectivity between downtown, the university, again with both Texas Avenue and South College.

Jay Socol: But do you try to work with and incent the property owners to clean up, to beauty their existing properties or are you going to try to work through, I don't know, some rezoning? Is there some different strategies, some overlays, to try to reshape things going into the future?

Todd McDaniel: Both and in the case of Texas Avenue again, you've already got the zoning classifications in place. So there, it's really more about trying to reach out directly to tenants and it's really interesting because obviously, you've got a situation with commercial where you have tenants that may not necessarily own the property. So their interest in reinvestment in the property is whether you own your own home or not. If you own your own home, you're much more likely to reinvest it, so that's one of the challenges of Texas Avenue. But I think at the end of the day, again it's a very important corridor for our market and it's an all-the-above kind of initiative and then again, tying that in with South College, if you think about the parallel to it and with our super park initiative, et cetera. So it all fits together, but it's a comprehensive strategy.

The plan that we're looking at right now for midtown, if you will, doesn't quite make it all the way over to Texas Avenue, but we certainly are mindful that the Texas Avenue connection is critical to it as well.

Jay Socol: For those not familiar with your reference to midtown, can you give a little description of that?

Todd McDaniel: Well, midtown, just so you know, is basically what we define the geography from the university city limits, up South College, all the way to downtown and then Finfeather over. So it's that area where, if you think about the old Bryan Municipal Golf Course which we transitioned to Phillips, that piece of property is currently under master plan design for a super park. And Joey Dunn, by the way, I don't know if you recognized him or not, our Deputy City manager, but the super park initiative is very important because it will be, in our opinion, a significant catalyst for that entire area. That particular plan, we expect, will be presented to our mayor and city council at the November meeting this November. That's the geography that we're talking about.

So you think about the old college and South College, this kind of push. Again, similar to what's happening on Texas Avenue. You think about Century Square, which we think is fantastic and pushing it all the way up as you just continue to see that redevelopment and hopefully, significant reinvestment by property owners and public/private partnerships, et cetera in that particular area in our city.

Jay Socol: Okay Bobby. When the cities really screw things up, the EDC is there to swoop in and save the day, right?

Bobby Gutierrez: Yeah. Exactly.

Jay Socol:

So explain what the role is, the Brazos Valley Economic Development Corporation?

Bobby Gutierrez:

Well, the Brazos Valley [inaudible 00:08:58] is the catalyst. You have the city. Well, you have both cities. You have Bryan. You have College Station. Now, we have Texas A&M University, and we have the county that all get together collectively and facilitate growth, development, new jobs, retail, kind of anything and not only that, but they're there to help at any process, so anything that the city needs. If anything that Natalie needs to take a project, that if she gets project in, and she needs a team to help her with her team, she can call up VBDC and just go, "Hey. We need some help with this. We have people coming in. There's people scheduled over here. Can you bring your team in and help facilitate this idea? Same thing with Bryan, same thing with the county, and same thing with Texas A&M. It's a place where collectively, we can get everybody together at the time.

I don't know if you guys know from the long history of things, but not always did we play good in the sandbox together, and it's not always been the kind of relationship we have today where we can pick up the phone. Natalie and I are very good friends as is all the staff and everybody else. We work very good as a community now. Wasn't always like that and to that point, the state of Texas is going, "You know what? We're not sending you guys any more stuff. We're not going to send you contacts over there any more because you're going to say this about this city and that city is going to say this about that, and the county is trying to get everybody together, and we're going to send them somewhere else. So that was why, at that time as the RVP was set up to help facilitate that.

And going back to what Todd said just a second ago on this redevelopment of everything else, you're asking our own house attires and what does that have to do with anything at all as far as economic development or anything. But I'm also Chair-Elect of that. I'm also on the Bryan Business Council. I'm also on the BVDC and Chairman of Planning and Zoning, so exactly what Todd is talking about, where all these things that we work as a city of Bryan that we're seeing, we're fighting with each other within our own organization. So within our own organization, we're trying to get everybody together, align with the vision of council, who are elected officials and what they want to get done. So our appointments on the different board, different commission, should push that agenda, whatever it may be.

Right now, we have the midtown area plan going on, which we started that on the P&Z level. The plan is only we're trying to figure out what we're going to do north of Northgate and how we're going to develop all that stuff with the new Aggie Shacks or detach your own house or whatever you want to call them. How that's going to develop and still preserve some of our neighborhoods. Then we got through into the super park right after that and how is that going to develop and how is that going to tie in with what we already have going on, which is our downtown. So that whole corridor, South College like Todd was saying, is extremely important to the city of Bryan. How it develops. How it looks.

So now, you have the BVC investment, the BVEC investment into it ... not investment but oversight of what we're doing, engagement in it and then you have the planning and zoning who has to implement those changes. What we want it to look like going forward. So there's a lot of different things going in within the city of Bryan and hopefully, we all get together and make it work.

Jay Socol:

Okay Natalie, back to you. You and I have talked before in past editions of the podcast about the Amazon effect and how that has had such a chilling effect on brick and mortar coming to invest in our community, but we're starting to pull out of that. You've also mentioned to me how there is starting to be a marriage between these online and brick and mortar retailers. Talk a little bit about that. What does that look like, especially as we head into the holiday season?

Natalie Ruiz:

Right. Well first, I want to talk a little bit about sales tax and why is that so important to our communities. Both Bryan and College Station rely heavily on sales tax to help fund basic functions. Fire, police, basic city services. I know Maryellen Leonard, our finance czar is in your group this year. But when you look at what that finance is in the city of College Station, it's about just roughly over 40% of our annual income, so Texas Cities really live and die by their sales tax. So that's why there's a real focus on retail as part of all our ED efforts and getting more retail in.

What we have seen was I've been back with the city now for about four years and that first year, we were seeing a ton of interest in big boxes, a next power center, a larger grocer, maybe some national names that we hadn't seen before. I mentioned the ICSC conference. I went to my first national one about 18 months on the job and man, retail just shut down. We went around and visited with the folks that we're going to build here, that we're going to expand here and everyone said, "No. The Amazon effect. It's already impacting our business in a negative way. Folks aren't coming to our stores as much, so everyone just shut down for a while and we're starting to finally climb out of that a bit from the standpoint that ... I'll use At Home as an example.

We have a Gander Mountain building, which is about 73,000 square feet. They moved out and we immediately started putting it in front of other retailers. We first hit the list and said, "Okay. Who could take all of it and move in fairly quickly that's expanding in Texas?" Well, you can count them on one hand who those would be. We reached out to At Home and they said, "No. We won't do anything less than a 100,000 square feet. Thanks, but no thanks," and so we kept moving along and staying in contact with them and they finally ended up saying, "You know what? We're realizing that we're going to need to shrink our brick and mortar locations. The online purchase power is extremely high and we need to compete in that area, but we don't need the 100,000 square feet." So we were able to work down to an 83,000, maybe 85,000, that we ended up with at that location.

So we're starting to see a renewed interest in brick and mortar. Jay had mentioned, in terms of delivery, there's a thing in retail that's called the last

mile and that's your delivery. You know that Amazon has the ... I love my prime account where they'll deliver in two days, but what we've seen over the last few years with the HEBs, the Targets, the Walmarts, you can order online. As of this year, you can even get same-day delivery and so you're seeing a renewed interest in the brick and mortar locations because instead of a two day, we're starting to expect a same-day delivery and you can't do that when your facilities are hundreds of miles away. You have to have that local presence.

I had mentioned earlier that a friend of mine that ordered bikes from Santa, this last year for her children, they were delivered at the local Walgreens because FedEx had partnered with them and they didn't deliver them to her house. She went to Walgreens to pick those up, so you're starting to see more and more hubs for that last mile delivery to pick those up.

Jay Socol:

Okay Todd. So we've seen huge growth over the years. Obviously in downtown, traditions, Atlas, Miramont, new hotels, new restaurants for the city of Bryan. Things have been going extremely well. You and Bobby both mentioned the super park that will be developing in Bryan and I know that you can't talk in specifics about what may be on the ground at the super park, but talk about looking 10 years out, what effects ... with tangible effects, what will we see emerging around that area from an economic development standpoint?

Todd McDaniel:

Well, let me say two things. I think first and foremost, let's go back to Spencer's point about vision. That's what really interests me. I think when you think about the future of the city, the future of the market, what is the vision of that market? And for me in serving this community as long as I have, it's about world-class. I believe that Texas A&M University and this community should represent itself as world-class. So the types of projects that I want to be involved in are those that are going to bring world-class benefit to our market. So you think about the super park. Our mayor referred to the super park as a 100 year project. I think he was spot on. I think if you think about the future of our community, the geography of that particular location, 150 acres. Think about the central parks of the world, I mean, you're dealing with real opportunity. Our strategy is a little bit different from College Station's. And the reality is that unlike College Station, our retail market is almost entirely absorbed. We don't have that home space, we don't have the academy space, Sears, which is vacated the market. I mean those are great opportunities for our collective community because in many cases, we are one-store market. In some cases we're two-store, three-store market, whatever. But in the large, big box stuff, in particular, we're much a one-store market.

So our approach is really more about visions for how we can catalyze commercial retail, residential, economic development in various parts of the city. So, we mentioned the super park as an example, I mean you're starting to look at our University Drive East, Miramont, that entire area. Today people would not appreciate the critical mass that's there now. Most people would not understand that within the three mile radius of University Drive East, basically,

Miramont area, there are now close to 30,000 people, which is a very important number in the retail game. That just gives you an example.

For us, it's more about visioning, focusing on targeted areas, whether it's championing, being a strong support of the university system for the RELLIS campus, our Texas Triangle Park, focused on how we can catalyze primary job development, allow the BBDC to do their thing. And working with the city of Bryan and the county. The super park, in particular, to answer your question, again thinking about vision. That's the beauty of this midtown plan. And the push from our planning and zoning commission, and certainly our city council. But the big idea is to see a redevelopment of that area, that accommodates world class. It accommodates the university system. It accommodates the market, as we continue to see population growth, which is our reality. We are going to grow. Where are people going to live at, what do they want. If you look at our market today, I mean to give you some perspective, we are very much now in an international market. We are an international community.

As we think about that, how do we become a welcoming community, a community that's going to continue to embrace the type of change that the university system and university wants. So for us, it's about vision and it's about focusing on some targeted areas. Try to catalyze. Talking to developers. Yes, we do talk to retailers, but a lot of our engagement these days is really, kind of, developer-orientated. Because again, we don't have that big box solution, and I mean, if a big box retailer comes to us today, we can't show them the academy space. We can't put them, say, "Here is the Sear's space."

That's one of the differences between of how we approach it. The other thing that we do, which is different is that, it goes back good life, Texas style, City of Bryan, so it's really about promoting small businesses. I mean we want to be the best place to do business in the Brazos Valley. So for us, it's about how do we promote small business. How do we promote restaurateurs, entrepreneurs, really grow the economy organically as much as through recruitment, which is an important part of the game. But I think growing organically is also important too.

Bobby Gutierrez: Jay, can I expand on that, just for a second, to your actual question?

Jay Socol: Go ahead.

Bobby Gutierrez: Okay so. And Todd and I-

Todd McDaniel: Did I not answer the question?

Bobby Gutierrez: ... we're very good friends.

Todd McDaniel: I didn't answer your questions?

Bobby Gutierrez:

In the planning zone that we looked at, I guess, 12 different RFPs. 12 different proposals. To kind of look at what we're going to do around our super park area, that whole area. As a business man, when you tell me, we're looking at a plan, right off the bat that's a red flag. We're going to spend x amount of dollars. We're going to do this. We need to have an RFP for this. We're going to go out and do it. But this is one, specifically, that we ask for in PNZ, because we were going to do this. Right about that time we were doing our overlay district, what we talked about earlier, for the South College and the transitioning in downtown. I said okay, let's see if we can combine everything. Didn't really want to combine it. We did two separate plans. But looking at it and I'm sure, Natalie, all of you guys see this thing, from the PNZ level we look at zoning districts. We look at what's going to go around, how it's going to development and different things like that.

Specifically from the business standpoint, I want to go, look anybody can go, here is the yellow and this is going to be commercial. And this is red and it's going to be residential. And this is green and it's going to be so and so. So I'm like, I can do that, pay me the money and I'll just go write and do the colors and we'll do that. But we actually got some really good plans. Some very, very good, we went from twelve to four. So from twelve different ideas down to four. And being on that subcommittee was really cool because you get to see all these different ideas, what we can be when we grow around that area. And so and if around that area we start looking at them, so okay, this is going to be red. I want to know specifically within this area of red commercial, what do we need to do there. What is exactly that we need.

I don't need to know that this is commercial. Do we need a Walgreen's there? Do we need a convenient store there? Do we need a bike shop there? What is it that we need because we have the professionals within Bryan, within College Station, BBDC, within all the areas we have. We have those professionals who can go out there and look for these things. But specifically if we want to get buy-in from the community, the owners of these business, now you add some values to them. Okay. You have a red house here, but potentially it can be the next whatever, dream big and hopefully it'll all happen. Being align within city, within PNZ, within BBDC, within all the areas, everybody being align for one common goal, we can make this thing happen. 10, 15, 20 years sooner than we can if everybody just have a red here. This is red. This is commercial. So that's kind of what we're looking for, so if and around there, you know obviously, we're going to look for density.

If you look at Central Park in New York, and it still amazes me. I was looking at a deal last night, it did an overview of view of Central Park. All the buildings around it. The highest and most expensive real estate. not only in the country, but in the world. Right around there. So if you want to live around that super park, you want it to be something special. And we're trying to, right now it's very good mix of actual park, and it'll be a good mix of space that can be utilized for income producing stuff and for the kids. So hopefully the vision that comes through, there should be a talk on that, what, next month?

Todd McDaniel: Yeah.

Bobby Gutierrez: Next month. The final plans, and it'll come back to PNZ, so we can implement the changes that we need to make. And then we start that reinvestment and redevelopment. So it's going to be great.

Jay Socol: Okay. Before we turn it over to our audience for their questions. One final thing for you Bobby, aside from interstate, a larger airport, and more business parks, what does this community need to secure more jobs and more industry?

Bobby Gutierrez: That's a good question. Aside from all the things that we need-

Jay Socol: Yeah.

Bobby Gutierrez: ... what do we need? Help me out Todd.

Todd McDaniel: I would say economic diversity. We need to continue to grow the market, again whether it's organically through small businesses development, through the attractions of companies like Viasat, Nutrabolt, Fuji, Access Piping Tube and you know, keep on going down the list. I think the economic diversity is a big thing, because one of the challenges we have, especially if you think about specifically industry types, they're very much like to cluster. That's a challenge because when you have a university system. So think about it, I've used this example in the past. So the Texas A&M University system has close to 40,000 employees in Bryan County, Texas. I mean it's basically the Apple of Cupertino, California. I mean it is the economic development gorilla in our market and the economic driver. How do you capitalize on that to see the economic diversity?

Because economic diversity means more jobs. It means more sells tax. More abnormal taxes. It means growth and that growth is going to continue to be what's going to drive, I believe, the success of our market. And so our geography, we can talk all day about the challenges, but there's a whole lot of opportunities. So I think if you look at it and kind of take the cup is half full approach. I mean its only time and opportunity to really capitalize on that. Economic diversity would be my answer.

Bobby Gutierrez: Yeah? And, I'm sorry-

Natalie Ruiz: No, no, no.

Bobby Gutierrez: Go ahead, go ahead.

Natalie Ruiz: I was just going to add to that. That's a really important point. When you look at our community, most of our jobs are in the government sector. So traditionally we're insulated more from the national economy here because of the government jobs. But if we stay in that realm, in my mind, from an economic diversity standpoint, we need to have just as many jobs in the private sector as

we do in the government sector. Both city, county and university, and traditionally those jobs don't have the higher wages. So when you're recruiting and you're looking at the current wages and recruiting businesses to locate here. They'll look at that and at that wage and see that as a big gap. So I think Todd is spot on from this standpoint that we do need to have economic diversity but that's why it's so important to bringing jobs in the private sector than from the government realm.

Bobby Gutierrez:

I would say the same thing. What we look at when we're looking at economic development, when we try to bring a company here. The first thing these guys look for is, do we have a work force, do we have workers. We are very, very low unemployment here. Not only we're low on unemployment, but we have inexpensive labor because we have 65000, 75000 students here willing to work for beer money. They'll do those jobs, because our parents or they're on scholarships, or whatever it is. All they need money is to have fun that their parents don't know what they're doing. I mean I know cause I was one of those kids.

We have a very unique community so when we're attracting businesses over here just to say we have a coffee manufacturer he's going to come over and make coffee and it's going to do his stuff. And we're bringing all the big leagues come in and we're going to have all those stuff but the spouses. What are the spouses going to do? Because at that point, let's just say, \$100,000 job. Spouse comes over, she's very qualified or he's very qualified, but there's no jobs for him other than the \$20,000, \$30,000 jobs. Until you guys as the leaders, what are we going to do to expand that and make sure we're paying good wages to make sure that everybody has a place.

It's going to be hard for everybody to track some of those dual income families. Because now they're looking at do we want to live here? Yes, it's a great place to live. Cost of living is, you know, that's, you don't know. Try to find a house around here and you know the supply and demand is very hard. Houses are very expensive. You know when I was in college here it was \$350 for a three bedroom house split that 3 ways. Now it's \$600, \$700, \$800 per room on a three bedroom house. Now you have a 5 x 5. Do the math, into that housing market. We are not a cheap place to live.

Jay Socol:

Okay, so now it's your turn. There aren't microphones out in the audience so shout out a question. I may restate it just so we can have the audio on camera. And then we'll see if we can answer it. So who's got a question? Yes?

Speaker 1:

This is a question for Bobby. I know you can't talk specifics but can you give us an idea what companies or industries you're trying to recruit?

Jay Socol:

We'll restate her question real quickly before you answer.

Bobby Gutierrez: Okay. Oh so what companies we're trying to recruit? I know there's some we can and some we can't talk about. We have the new bio I guess it's just being announced. Let's see how many jobs are they going to bring in? 300? Forget the number, whatever the number is those jobs are \$75,000 apiece. I know it's just a deal the mayor has been working on. We just had dinner last night and was asking him and Keen about different stuff we can talk about because a lot of the stuff it's always secret. And you know until it gets out there, at that point if a new company is coming in and we're trying to attract a new company, real estate values all around that, once it gets out, then it's not good for anybody. Except for the people around it after it comes out.

College Station has the density. They have the retail, a lot of the retail is going in that direction. Everything else. We're more into the main warehouses. We did a lot of manufacturing, we're trying to get more manufacturing in, we have projects. We have three different projects going into Texas Triangle Park that we potentially going to land here really quick. Some good stuff. We're looking at, you want to bringing good quality of living, so we talk about pay scale. We don't want to have a bunch of \$30,000, \$40,000 jobs. We want to have \$50,000. \$60,000 \$70,00 on up. Because that helps not only the school district but the tax structure. We're looking at different things like that. Great question.

Jay Socol: In the back.

Jay Socol: Restate the question.

Natalie Ruiz: So I think the question is multi family. What are we doing as a city about the multifamily that's going in and rent by the bed. That's really something that's impacting both communities. I think where we've seen the biggest growth is around the university. When you look at Northgate Proper, Century Square, Northpoint Crossing, along that little stretch, University Drive and College Station. Over the last 5 years we've added 7000 beds. And that's big. Now part of that was planned part of it was a shock to be perfectly honest with you. When Northgate was originally designed, I think Todd you were at College Station at the time. We hope that someone would come in. A 4 story, 5 story. We never dreamt that it would be the large high-rises that we're seeing today.

One positive is that in the Northgate area we're starting to see more and more students flock to that area cause you don't necessary need to have a car. We're seeing our parking demands go down in that area even with the densities going up because the use of Uber, Lyft, and not necessarily having to have a car when you come into town. Now one thing that we all have to deal with as a community is the university being more involved in multifamily with the park west development. That 3500 bed development caught us all a little flat-footed from the standpoint of local ownership and how that's impacted the market. I'm interested to see the occupancy rate, they're still fairly low, but with the university growing. From the folks I've talked to in multifamily market, they're still interested in the multifamily market. They believe the three year window

which will be back to the occupancy rate we're typically use to, the 90& market mark. I hope that's the case. You just never know.

Bobby Gutierrez:

And you ask from a PNZ standpoint? From an PNZ standpoint and what we're having to deal with at Bryan has all that redevelopment north of Northgate. That whole area. We're actually doing a study on right now the overlay district. Trying to regulate the egg and shack, detached share housing by the bedrooms and stuff like that. It's transitioning neighborhoods. Within in that quarter say Villa Maria and University Drive, Wellborn Road and South College, we've identified that as an area that's already transitioned. There's not a lot that we can do that can help or take the impact off those neighborhoods that have traditionally been single family home neighborhoods. You'll have four homes and you'll have one 5 by 5 bedroom, 5 bedroom and 5 bathroom house being rented by the bedroom. From an PNZ standpoint, we've taking it to a conditional use so we can try to protect the other neighborhoods that are around, not that we're not going to protect those neighborhoods, but we have identified they've already transitioned. That neighborhood should have gotten together, formed their neighborhood conservation district, which we're really trying to push right now. We've had, since we put that thing together, we've had three new ones, I guess, three new RNC's that have come up within the city of Bryan, that say look, we want to be a neighborhood and we want to control our destiny.

And then you have other ... I guess to go back to what we found out within PNZ doing a study is, we have less than a 50% owner occupied houses. There's more rental houses in Bryan College Station than there are houses ... than there are homeowners in Bryan College Station, so we have a lot of outside influences. A lot of our landlords don't even live here, they live out of state, out of country, wherever, so they're making these decisions on our community based on their pocketbook, and we're trying to make decisions based and what we want to be.

Todd McDaniel:

I'll just echo on the City of Bryan, in terms of multifamily new build, I think what's a little bit different for us is the nature of the tenants. So if you think about our Park Hudson area, young professionals, even out here in Atlas and ... And if you think about Hawthorne and a couple other projects, the ranches at Turkey Creek. Really more accommodating towards young professionals, so not so much students, although maybe graduate level students, I think would be the key. Out here, of course, you've got the Health Science Center, I think you see some synergies there as well.

It's a little bit different for Bryan. I feel there has been significant amount of new multifamily downtown. There's been a sizeable amount of new multifamily development, the Perry Project, which is a fantastic project. The Viz Lab of the university and elements of the College of Architecture actually on the first floor of that building, it's a mix-used building. So, it's a challenge but I agree with Natalie. I think there'll be a correction. I do think three years, I think we'll see that all kind of work itself through as RELLIS Campus continues to grow, and the University does what it does, Blinn College, etc.

Jay Socol: Yes? Right in the middle, right here. We'll get to you next.

Bobby Gutierrez: Regional growth is what you're talking about? I mean, there's stuff going on all around us. We are, obviously, we're the hub of everything, and one of the things we've looked at being involved in the BBDC, I'm still trying to get used to this acronym of it. I know we have Matt back here in the back, raise your hand. Okay, so, a lot of those questions, anybody that has a question about that you can actually ask Matt, he's out executive director. The BBDC is kind of involved in everything, and we are right in the middle of a market study right now, Market Street, that is a company we brought in to kind of look at who we are as a community, what we need as a community, what we're lacking, and what we have. Our good strong strengths and our negatives that we have and our weaknesses within our community.

Hopefully we'll be sewed up with that thing, and then again, it was another, for me a businessman, another study. I was like, "Man, we're going to spend more money on another study." After we got involved and after we got engaged in this thing, I think this is probably going to be the most important study that either of our cities have ever done because we're going to come to a reality of who we are collectively. Not just as an organization, but who we are as a city, collectively, who we want to be when we grow up, what we can actually be. They might go, you know what, this is what we want to be but you guys are never going to become this because of x,y,z. This is what you can become and this is what is reality within your area of what you can become.

And I think I'm really really looking forward to seeing that. You know, what are strengths are, what our weaknesses are around us, because everybody around us, whether it be Hearne, Navasota, Caldwell, Madisonville, Bedias, Iola, Normandy, all these areas around us, they supply our workers, they supply all of our people into here. And, let's just be quite frank, some of these things we're talking about high paying jobs, low paying jobs they can't afford to live here. Because you've got these ten dollar an hour jobs, eight dollar an hour minimum wage jobs, and these are the guys that are coming out, they have to live in these other areas. Because at five hundred dollars a bedroom, I don't know about you guys, but when I was starting out I couldn't do that math. I mean, I don't know where I would live at this point. Thank God I was able to buy something early on, and before everything went up. But, it's a different area, and we're going to have to look at those outlying areas too just because of our jobs.

Jay Socol: Right back here.

Audience 2: I do a lot of work with the Girl Scouts. To take it in a different direction, so obviously we are talking about money and retail and stuff like that, but I come from the standpoint of quality of life and creating a better community for all. So, how do the nonprofits, the Girl Scouts, the Boy Scouts, Habitat for Humanity fit into all this, because obviously you can't come into it and rent space at the retail that you would be able to do with someone who is selling something, and do

you think about us in terms of standpoint of when you are planning? How do we benefit from you? How do you benefit us? How does this all work together?

Natalie Ruiz: From a community standpoint, you're absolutely right. We have to sell that quality of life.

Jay Socol: Repeat the question.

Natalie Ruiz: Oh, I'm sorry. The question was, how do we incorporate some of our service organizations, the Girl Scouts, Habitat for Humanity, how does quality of life impact our overall recruitment efforts?

Quality of life is more and more important these days, from a standpoint of recruiting new jobs. As Bobby mentioned earlier, you have a trailing spouse who is also looking for a career path, looking at schools, looking at parks. For a community our size, for us to have a symphony, that's a huge selling point for our community. But, from the standpoint of the service organizations, I think you have to have very strong support, both at the government level and at the local level to be able to fund those organizations. We've partnered with the Arts Council for years and they've just got themselves a new space, and they sponsor other organizations. But, from the standpoint of the quality of life, we have to have those service organizations to be able to promote as well. Our school districts, having the, Bryan having the International Bachelorette program, College Station being so highly ranked. School systems are also putting our youth out and saying, "Okay, here's what we have to offer for your families when you come here as well." But, having those strong organizations locally is very important to economic development. It's just all a question of funding and how those organizations are funded.

Bobby Gutierrez: Also, if you, I mean from a show of hands, how many people here are self-employed? Okay so, stand up and write all their names down, because these are the people who, and take mine off that list please. No, and that's a very good point. We have so many organizations in our community. I mean there is a lot of organizations, a lot of nonprofits. I've got to think that Bryan College Station's gotta be the most giving community in the country. I mean, I've lived in a bunch of different places, and have been hit up for a lot of things, but there's no place in the world that I think I've ever been hit up like here every single day. Even to open the door sometimes might cost you three hundred dollar sponsorship just to walk in.

So, from a chamber standpoint, you're getting involved, and you're seeing different people from the chamber standpoint, and I really do think, you know we do this buy local, shop local kind of things like that. And Bryan is very much kind of a bedroom community of your local mom-and-pop type shops. And in the back of your minds, as chamber members, think about that because your big box stores, there's really sometimes, and I really shouldn't say it cause I see Rich ride over here and he's always smiling you guys if you never noticed that. He's a happy man.

It's one of those things that you're not going to walk into I guess, if I sit next door and say, "Hey, I want you to sponsor my such and such" on a daily basis. But you're going to walk in to a face that you know, like mine, and you'll go, "Hey, I need this." And, for us, unless you guys are buying stuff from us and shopping with us it's very hard for us to support everything in this, and I have a hard time saying no. Obviously I have a hard time saying no because I'm on all these things, but it's one of those things that you love your community, you want to see your community go, and you feel very responsible for helping drive that conversation. But that goes within the giving part too. There's great things that all these companies are doing, all these nonprofits are doing, and you should all get involved in this. If you want to be involved in something that's really special, look at one of these nonprofits. Not only chamber of commerce, but look at these nonprofits if you want to get plugged into the community, that's a good place to get plugged in.

Jay Socol: Let's do one more question. Who has one? Something hard, I mean stump these folks.

Audience 3: Just drawing up from College Station, where I am, I've always seen Highway 6 is not ever been a huge growth factor for us as far as shopping retail. You can drive down, it's much more in the last probably ten years, we've seen the growth of it. Is there plans for Highway 6? Kinda what is the idea for Highway 6 to grow that or especially the increase in the traffic flow?

Todd McDaniel: Well for Bryan, Highway 6 is still a critical corridor. I think if you look at some areas around there, again I was referencing University Drive East. Today, just like with twenty to eighteen, said Highway 6 is no longer the bypass. It's pretty much part of a main artery going through College Station, so ultimately there will be hopefully an east side bypass, you'll continue to see the high speed train happens, and all that kind of stuff. But, for Bryan at least, we certainly look at Highway 6 corridor from University Drive up to Texas Triangle Park as being important. There's been a lot of growth and development along there, and I think that's going to continue.

It's still very much a kind of a focal point for big box national retailers. I mean, it's very much still the heart of the watermelon, if you will. So, I think that's going to continue to be the case. I mean it's certainly our connectivity back into Houston, which I think is also a driver. But all that as you know is a function of economic considerations, it's rooftops and all that kind of stuff. But it is important, very much so. But I think again, you have to kind of vision it out and say, well you know what's the next... you've got for example the 47 corridor. So for us, that's going to, for the city of Bryan, that's going to be really kind of pioneering. It's going to be a new frontier within our market for economic growth and development. But, again, that's how you're going to have to look at it, holistically as a community.

Jay Socol: Good question.

Natalie Ruiz:

I think too, from the College Station prospective when you look at that, first you've got to solve the traffic backing up on Highway 6. When you leave on the Harvey Road area, Highway 60, it's backed up in the afternoon, so working with TxDOT on expanding that roadway, which is something that's in the works. But, also, from a retail prospective, we have focused from, the city's focused on that Highway 6 corridor and looking at retail opportunities and commercial opportunities.

We went in and did some city initiated rezonings in areas where we felt like it made a lot of sense from a commercial standpoint. Now one of the things that we've also seen is that's where a lot of where our established residential neighborhoods are. And so, trying to balance that with someone wanting to be on Highway 6 where you have the highest traffic counts. Because that's what retailers looking for, they're looking for the highest traffic counts, your wealthiest residents, the best neighborhoods, to try to get in close proximity to those rooftops. So we have done some city initiated rezonings, they've been pretty controversial, but that's how we got the new Mercedes dealership, and a few other projects that we're working on along Highway 6. But I still continue to see that as a growth area, mainly for commercial, because you've got access to Highway 6.

Bobby Gutierrez:

And when you see too, College Station is filling up. So, just, and they have the density to it. He's talked about the 30,000 population number. That's a real number, so when you look, as you travel north on Highway 6 into Bryan, in that area there, you don't have that density because we have bigger, more single family homes, there's bigger lots. If you go east of Highway 6, now you're into some of the rural areas, so that density for us is a problem.

And being on P&Z is one of those things as you start doing this thing, people have a real problem with developing in their backyard. Even though they don't own that property next to them. I've said it one hundred times, I say, "You know, you've looked at that empty lot for the last thirty years it's been in your backyard, you've used it, you've enjoyed it, and everything else. If it was that important to you, to not have anything there, you shoulda bought it." Because you don't own it, you don't control it, it's not yours. But at that point, and nobody ever comes to complain until it happens in their backyard.

So, be part of that process, whether it be the P&Z process, whether it be the development process, be part of that process because think about where you live, because you can't control anything but your own spot. Even within here, you want to check something really good, look at the ILA that we have here. Within traditions, within this bio corridor, what we have going on right now at 47 Highway into RELLIS. It could potentially be annexed in the city of Bryan now. We have some development standards that were set in place a long time ago. So when you're looking at this area, this whole corridor between here and the new RELLIS campus, it's going to look very similar to this. So if you like this, we have the new Ranch at Riverstone that Michael Beckendorf just developed.

Higher end, more for your corporate people to live, fast internet, trying to do things and developments that more relate to the area. It's like Todd said, it's a different clientele, we don't want so much of the students, which we love the students, but we have an opportunity in Bryan to kind of control our destination. We have, as we develop to the west, we can take pressure off the middle. Where we have those density, when you have this traffic problems that you're having in College Station. I have a house in College Station, there's no way I could live at that house because I couldn't get in and out of my neighborhood at the point. So we have that leased out and I don't want to have those same problems.

And we have an opportunity now with these overload districts that we're doing to push some of this density out here. To push some of the high density stuff out to 47 because that transition between RELLIS and Texas A&M biocorridor is a natural progression, and we don't have to clog up the city, the middle of the city. We can do some real plan development, and we are blessed to have this. College Station, it got thrown upon them. All of the sudden somebody wakes up and goes, you know what, we want to be at 80,000. We're at 30, now we want to be at 40, now we want to be at 80. That's not anything that you guys can control, and to have that kind of population thrown on an infrastructure is very tough.

Jay Socol:

So we are going to wrap it up. I want to thank our guests, Natalie Ruiz, Bobby Gutierrez, Todd McDaniel. Thank you to Leadership Brazos class of 2019. Thank you to the Stella Hotel. And, thank you to anybody who is going to be watching or listening to this edition of "Is This a Thing?" Thanks very much.

Alright, so you ready to do the real thing now?

Natalie Ruiz:

Yeah, are you ready to film?