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# SAHUARITA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT P3 MASTER PLAN

PREPARED FOR THE TOWN OF SAHUARITA, ARIZONA



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TIP Strategies, Inc., would like to thank the following participants who contributed to the planning process.

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**TIP Strategies, Inc.**, is a privately held Austin-based firm providing consulting and advisory services to public and private sector clients. Established in 1995, the firm's core competencies are strategic planning for economic development, talent strategies, organizational development, resiliency planning, and equity initiatives.

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# INTRODUCTION

Like many communities in the orbit of large metropolitan areas, the Town of Sahuarita, Arizona, has experienced rapid growth. Located just 15 miles south of downtown Tucson and roughly 35 miles north of the US-Mexico border, the Town has grown steadily since its incorporation in 1994. With a population of over 35,000, it has become clear that the Town stands at a crossroads. The community can either respond to growth with a carefully considered economic development strategy or allow Sahuarita to continue as a bedroom community, with most residents leaving the Town for both work and play. The latter trajectory is certainly foreseeable, but not unalterable. By cultivating priorities that align with a vision of what Sahuarita could be, leadership can influence future growth. A community identity that incorporates existing neighborhoods but goes beyond the predominant residential brand of Sahuarita—to include more diverse employment opportunities and a wider array of amenities—would establish the Town as the largest and most successful suburb in Pima County.

The current economic situation in Sahuarita is complex. With its dominant mining industry and the significant presence of federal border patrol agents and support staff, the Town is home to a strong (but historically narrow) group of major employers. It is also home to a sizable population of seniors, including an age-restricted residential development and a large assisted-living facility, which carries with it the requisite healthcare workforce. However, there are some exciting new opportunities on the horizon that must be seized. With the recent completion of the Sahuarita Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Center (SAMTEC), the recruitment of high-technology companies is now a realistic ambition, evidenced by one of its first tenants: PowerPhotonic. The Town's proximity to both Tucson (home to the University of Arizona) and Mexico offers many possibilities for talent attraction and international business. While these economic development options are not exhaustive, they are representative of a future that awaits Sahuarita if local leadership embraces focused and strategic growth.

To help Sahuarita realize its economic potential, the Town engaged TIP Strategies (TIP), a nationally recognized economic development consulting firm, to produce the *Sahuarita Economic Development P3 Master Plan (SP3)*. The SP3's recommendations center on three goals: People, Prosperity, and Place (the three Ps) and build on the success of previous planning efforts for Sahuarita, including the 2015 *A Blueprint for Economic Growth and Prosperity*, the 2016 *Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan*, and the 2020 *Sahuarita Square Design Concept Report*. The Town also recently adopted its 2023–2028 Strategic Plan, including five goal areas: economic expansion and placemaking, outreach and communication, infrastructure and facilities, community well-being, and highly performing organization. This plan aims to provide a foundation for the Town's priorities over the next five to ten years, including actions that can and should be implemented right away.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

The three-phase project launched in the spring of 2023 with the discovery phase, which included analysis of demographic comparisons, employment and commuting trends, and commercial property dynamics compiled in an interactive data visualization. The resulting *Sahuarita Quantitative & Geospatial Analysis* was presented for review by the Town’s Economic Development Department and delivered via [a publicly accessible link](#). In addition to the data analysis, the consulting team met with dozens of community and business leaders to gain qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities impacting Sahuarita’s economic competitiveness. To understand Sahuarita’s position within a broader context, stakeholder input extended well beyond the Town’s municipal boundaries. Valuable interviews and roundtable discussions were conducted with state leaders in the Phoenix area, trade and industry partners in Sonora, and numerous regional partners across Pima County.

## Strategic Framework

Based on the stakeholder input, data analysis, and discussions with Town leaders, a set of guiding principles were established to shape the plan. The idea of these guiding principles, shown in Figure 1 (page 2), is to provide a framework for evaluating potential projects and investments that strengthen Sahuarita’s economic standing. Collectively, the guiding principles add up to a bold vision for Sahuarita’s future.

FIGURE 1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES



Few suburban places have risen from bedroom communities to regional centers and ultimately to national prominence. A handful of those—Scottsdale, The Woodlands, Alpharetta—have achieved broad recognition as dynamic cities with distinctive identities beyond simply being a suburb of Phoenix, Houston, or Atlanta. More than any other suburban community in Southern Arizona, Sahuarita has the potential to rise on the national stage. With a commitment to build a strong identity, expand capacity for growth, and achieve regional status, Sahuarita can become one of the premier suburban destinations in the US.

The SP3 outlines targeted strategies for achieving this vision under the following three goals.

- **PEOPLE.** Committing to a dynamic workforce to meet the needs of current and future employers.
- **PROSPERITY.** Building on regional assets to spur growth and innovation across new and existing industries.
- **PLACE.** Making investments that elevate Sahuarita’s identity to attract residents, visitors, and businesses.

The Action Plan section lays out actionable steps for each goal. These strategies and actions are designed to leverage assets, like the presence of the University of Arizona (UA) and the region’s strong employer base, and to mitigate barriers and challenges. Top-level strategies under each goal are presented in Figure 2 (page 3).

Along with the three goals, implementation of the SP3 will require the Town to take action in two additional areas: capacity building and performance measurement. Evaluating and reporting on progress using clear and meaningful metrics will be essential to the SP3’s success. The Implementation Considerations section of the Action Plan provides guidance about these areas. In addition, a detailed implementation matrix that can be used to assign responsibilities, roles, and timelines was delivered separately.

**FIGURE 2. GOALS AND STRATEGIES**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>1</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PEOPLE</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>2</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PROSPERITY</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>PLACE</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. University of Arizona engagement</li> <li>1.2. Pima Community College expansion</li> <li>1.3. Sahuarita Unified School District support</li> <li>1.4. Talent attraction and retention</li> <li>1.5. Workforce training and wraparound supports</li> <li>1.6. Civic leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. Aerospace and photonics</li> <li>2.2. Healthcare</li> <li>2.3. Mining</li> <li>2.4. International business</li> <li>2.5. High-growth startups and entrepreneurship</li> <li>2.6. Small business support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3.1. Town center and mixed-use destination</li> <li>3.2. Hotel and conference center development</li> <li>3.3. Retail and restaurants</li> <li>3.4. Housing</li> <li>3.5. Future growth</li> <li>3.6. Marketing and image</li> </ul>



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

# ACTION PLAN

The SP3 was crafted around a framework of three goals: People, Prosperity, and Place. These goals were arrived at through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research gathered through stakeholder engagement and data analysis. They provide a structure for strategies and actions that will guide the Town's economic development program, activities, and policies over the next five years and beyond. Within each of the three goals, TIP has identified first priority strategies and those with the highest impact, which will better guide implementation.

## Goal 1. People

*Commit to a dynamic workforce for current and future employers.*

Since its incorporation in 1994, Sahuarita has proven to be a high-growth community. There is little reason to doubt that its population will continue to increase well into the future. Its close proximity to Tucson and the availability of single-family housing developments make it an attractive destination for many. For the Town to secure its economic vitality, it must increase the availability of a skilled and locally based workforce.

A commitment to expanding opportunities for Sahuarita's existing and new residents will involve collaboration with the University of Arizona (UA), Pima Community College (PCC), and the Sahuarita Unified School District (SUSD). Raising educational attainment levels and building the technical expertise of the Town's workforce is essential. Creating a robust talent pipeline will also require a more holistic view of the wraparound supports needed, such as early childhood education, and the attraction of young professionals and their families.

### **First Priority: Strategy 1.4. Talent attraction and retention**

Although Sahuarita is growing rapidly, the Town has historically struggled to attract and retain high school graduates and young professionals. To help build this essential talent pool, a coordinated marketing strategy designed to revitalize Sahuarita's brand is squarely in the Town's economic development wheelhouse. By emulating the success of image-conscious initiatives and websites, like Visit Tucson, Sahuarita leadership is fully capable of implementing this strategy within the first year of implementation.

### **Highest Impact: Strategy 1.2. Pima Community College expansion**

New education and workforce facilities (especially those driven by industry funding) can be transformational for smaller communities with ties to regional institutions. San Jacinto College in Pasadena, Texas, illustrates this case well (see page 7). While the expansion of Pima Community College (PCC) into Sahuarita proper would be time and resource intensive, the impact of the project would significantly bolster the Town's educational attainment and expand its skilled labor force. This strategy recommends working collaboratively with PCC leadership and mining industry partners to develop a plan for the new campus.

## Strategies and Actions

### 1.1. University of Arizona engagement. Strengthen ties between Sahuarita and UA.

- 1.1.1. Cultivate relationships with UA leadership and faculty, especially in academic and research areas with close ties to Sahuarita's major industries.
- 1.1.2. Build stronger connections with Tech Launch Arizona to encourage more university-affiliated startup activity and technology transfer to take place in Sahuarita.
- 1.1.3. Take advantage of Sahuarita's proximity to the UA Tech Park and explore opportunities for programmatic participation and business recruitment.
  - Conduct regular site visits to the Tech Park to evaluate the needs and barriers of current tenants.
  - Work with UA leadership to ensure that Town involvement is perceived positively, rather than competitively.
- 1.1.4. Increase recruitment outreach to UA students in the College of Engineering's Mining and Geological Engineering program to the Town's thriving mining employers, building on events like tours of the San Xavier Mine.
  - Package recruitment materials in collaboration with industry partners.
  - Host career day events held in the Town.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

- 1.2. Pima Community College expansion.** Work with PCC to pursue the opening of a new campus in Sahuarita, with a commitment to procuring private industry funds for new facilities.
- 1.2.1.** Engage with the PCC leadership and the Desert Vista Campus to discuss best practices and possible plans for PCC expansion.
  - 1.2.2.** Coordinate with local real estate holders to investigate the ideal site for a PCC facility.
  - 1.2.3.** Work with PCC and area private sector partners (including the mining industry) to identify corporate and philanthropic funding sources for the construction of a new PCC campus—including state-of-the-art equipment for training—in Sahuarita. *See case study of San Jacinto College CPET facility, entirely funded by private sector industry partners, page 7.*
  - 1.2.4.** Leverage PCC’s existing emphasis on Centers of Excellence (e.g., the Aviation Technology Center in Tucson) to evaluate the potential for nontraditional campus facilities in Sahuarita.
- 1.3. Sahuarita Unified School District support.** Build physical and staff capacity for SUSD to accommodate continued growth.
- 1.3.1.** Leverage the passage of the 2023 \$50 million SUSD bond proposition to set the stage for future funding initiatives.
  - 1.3.2.** Continue to expand the Sahuarita WINS! initiative by engaging current partners (e.g., Freeport-McMoRan, Raytheon, and the University of Arizona) and exploring new opportunities, such as increased tuition support and additional dual enrollment programs.
  - 1.3.3.** Host public information sessions on the intersection of K–12 education and economic development.
  - 1.3.4.** Expand the course offerings and dual credit enrollment of SUSD’s Career & Technical Education program.
- 1.4. Talent attraction and retention.** Develop a new Town-branded attraction strategy that targets young professionals and families to relocate to Sahuarita.
- 1.4.1.** Create a new marketing landing page for the Town that mirrors Visit Tucson, focusing on getting nonresidents to explore Sahuarita’s lifestyle and then relocate.
  - 1.4.2.** Lean into Sahuarita’s family-friendly reputation and market all related assets and plans for future developments that appeal to parents.
  - 1.4.3.** Consider incentives for relocating remote workers, such as broadband reimbursement.
  - 1.4.4.** Begin recruitment efforts in the Tucson, Phoenix, and wider Arizona markets.
- 1.5. Workforce training and wraparound supports.** Promote alternative higher education opportunities, like technical training certifications, to adult demographics.
- 1.5.1.** Target early- and mid-career residents for reskilling and upskilling via public information sessions.
  - 1.5.2.** Ensure Sahuarita is represented and regularly involved in the Pima County Workforce Investment Board as part of the region’s workforce development and industry collaboration efforts.

**1.5.3.** Improve the availability and affordability of childcare services for residents with young children.

- Educate the local business community about the importance of childcare as a two-track generational workforce issue—providing high-quality early childhood education for Sahuarita’s youngest residents and helping the Town’s working parents.
- Collaborate with major local employers to explore opportunities for industry-funded childcare facilities and services for their workforce.
- Consider innovative solutions to childcare challenges, such as the recent acquisition of a faith-based site adjacent to the Sahuarita Town Hall to provide after-school care.

**1.6. Civic leadership.** Build a diverse pipeline of engaged civic leaders—ranging from young professionals to retirees—who support economic development in Sahuarita.

**1.6.1.** Work with the Green Valley/Sahuarita Chamber of Commerce to launch a civic leadership program for established and emerging business leaders to become more actively involved in economic and community development.

- Study successful civic leadership programs—such as Greater Tucson Leadership, Leadership Austin, and IMPACT Pasadena (a leadership development initiative of the Pasadena, Texas, Chamber of Commerce)—to learn about their programs and apply relevant best practices for a similar program in Sahuarita.

**1.6.2.** Create more opportunities for engaging the large pool of highly skilled retirees who want to be active, serve in mentorship roles to younger business owners and professionals, take college courses, and embed themselves in the local civic/community affairs.

**1.6.3.** Design and implement an annual survey/questionnaire to evaluate how young professionals in Sahuarita and the Tucson area make decisions about where to live, work, and spend leisure time. This could be a standalone survey or an add-on to the existing community survey.

### San Jacinto College LyondellBasell Center for Petrochemical, Energy, and Technology (CPET)

Housed at the central campus of San Jacinto College (SJC) in Pasadena, Texas, in the Greater Houston area (the “Energy Capital of the World”), CPET is the largest petrochemical training facility in the Gulf Coast region. The \$60-million, 151,000-square-foot facility opened in September 2019 and boasts 35 training labs, 20 interactive classrooms, 4 custom workstations, advanced control rooms, and modern conference space for academic and industry uses. Funded entirely by 17 private industry sponsors (including Siemens, Dow, and Shell), CPET closely connects SJC students to hands-on training in real-world applications for petrochemical companies’ processes, spanning technology-focused programs in electrical, environmental health and safety, instrumentation, and nondestructive testing. With plans to expand its facilities and course offerings, CPET has firmly established itself and SJC as a world-class hub for postsecondary petrochemical training and practice.

## Goal 2. Prosperity

### *Spur growth and innovation across new and existing industries.*

Growing a more educated and skilled workforce is not enough. A more dynamic and diversified industry presence is crucial to continued economic success. Sahuarita is already making efforts in pursuit of this goal, such as the completion of the SAMTEC facility. SAMTEC houses an innovative optics company (PowerPhotonic) and an entrepreneurship-focused collaboration with the UA Center for Innovation (UACI). Building on these new avenues for innovation within existing industries will prove critical to the Town's future.

The mining industry has long been a key economic driver for Sahuarita, with large operations including ASARCO and Freeport-McMoRan, each employing hundreds of workers. In addition to jobs and investment, mining is an increasingly advanced industry, with significant innovation at the UA San Xavier Underground Mining Laboratory and Caterpillar's mining equipment Proving Ground located near Sahuarita. Beyond advanced manufacturing and mining, the healthcare sector has a growing presence in Sahuarita, anchored by Northwest Medical Center Sahuarita and La Posada. The following recommendations provide a roadmap for accelerating the growth of existing industries and attracting new business investment and high-wage jobs into the community.

#### **First Priority: Strategy 2.4. International business**

One of Sahuarita's most significant and durable economic strengths is its location near the US-Mexico border. Beyond the large employment base of US Customs and Border Protection personnel, the direct line down Interstate-19 into Nogales, Mexico, provides strategic advantages for foreign direct investment (FDI). As more businesses seek to combat instability in global supply chains through near-shoring—moving their logistics and distribution operations closer to the US—Mexico stands ready to accommodate them, and Sahuarita should capitalize on these opportunities. Given that Town leadership already collaborates to some degree with Mexico-based industry and economic development, the expansion of these relationships (including with other influential organizations like the Arizona Commerce Authority) is actionable right away. Furthermore, marketing the Town's capabilities more aggressively across the border would be an immediate win.

#### **Highest Impact: Strategy 2.1. Aerospace and photonics**

Although Sahuarita carries a historical legacy as a mining town, recent developments have opened the window of opportunity for growth in high-tech industries. The Town's close proximity to existing aerospace assets in Pima County, including the Raytheon facility and the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, provides a mutually beneficial relationship between Sahuarita and these potential partners with their specific workforce and supply chain demands. If the Town can prove itself able to accommodate the talent pipeline (and their families), as well as attract smaller synergistic companies, it can position itself as a key regional player in aerospace. The completed construction and occupancy of the new SAMTEC facility presents another innovative industry ripe for economic impact in Sahuarita: photonics. With a leading international optics manufacturer already located in SAMTEC (PowerPhotonic) and a connection to the UA Wyant College of Optical Sciences on the horizon, leadership should target additional talent and companies in the photonics space. The growth of these industry relationships will require years to achieve, but the potential economic impact for Sahuarita is undeniable.

## Strategies and Actions

**2.1. Aerospace and photonics.** Leverage existing assets in high-tech, innovation-centric industries, like aerospace and photonics.

**2.1.1.** Build on the early success of SAMTEC by reaching 100 percent capacity.

- Identify and pursue potential high-tech tenants nationwide.
- Conduct a feasibility study for the construction and operation of a similar facility in the Town.

**2.1.2.** Recruit machine shops, 3D printing shops, packaging and hardware suppliers, and other related businesses to complement and support the growth of existing companies, such as Hydronalix and PowerPhotonic, in Sahuarita's emerging industry sectors.

**2.1.3.** Connect PowerPhotonic to the UA Wyant College of Optical Sciences to increase technology transfer and student recruitment.

- Align specific subspecialties in the program with the company's current and future staffing needs.

**2.1.4.** Work with local and regional partners to support the retention and expansion of Raytheon, the largest private sector employer in Pima County with roughly 13,000 employees.

- Work with local and regional educational institutions and workforce development organizations to support Raytheon's current and future talent needs, including monitoring of job sites like Indeed and ZipRecruiter and promoting these job opportunities for Sahuarita residents.
- Recruit suppliers and service providers within Raytheon's supply chain into Sahuarita.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

**2.1.5.** Connect Sahuarita to the opportunities provided by the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base (AFB) in Tucson, which is responsible for an economic impact of \$2.6 billion and nearly 17,000 jobs according to figures from the Southern Arizona Defense Alliance.

- Work with Davis-Monthan AFB leadership to connect military personnel and military families to local employment and training opportunities.
- Maintain strong connections with trailing spouses of military and federal civilian workers stationed at Davis-Monthan AFB (and other federal facilities, such as the US Customs and Border Protection [CBP] stations in Nogales and other portions of the Tucson Sector of the CBP) who have the potential to stay or relocate into Sahuarita for in-person or remote work.

**2.2. Healthcare.** Building on the 2020 opening of the Northwest Medical Center Sahuarita, which carries an estimated economic impact of \$165 million and approximately 100 jobs, explore opportunities for other regional healthcare providers to expand into the Town. *See Round Rock, Texas, case study, page 12.*

**2.2.1.** Leverage Sahuarita’s concentration of elder care services (e.g., La Posada) to recruit new companies and the requisite increased nursing labor force.

**2.2.2.** Target telehealth technologies and providers for inclusion in the Town’s existing healthcare ecosystem.

**2.2.3.** Evaluate the opportunity to develop additional medical office space for smaller providers to complement Northwest Medical Center Sahuarita (e.g., Waxahachie, Texas, is home to the 300,000-square-foot Baylor Scott & White Medical Center and leveraged it into a concentration of facilities, like the Methodist Family Health Center and Children’s Health Specialty Center).

**2.3. Mining.** Work with local mining industry leadership to prioritize investments in technology and innovation, workforce development, environmental resiliency, and other initiatives to align the industry’s interests with those of new and existing residents.

**2.3.1.** Encourage more K–12 engagement between Sahuarita USD and the mining industry to develop a local workforce pipeline for the mining industry and other major employers in Sahuarita.

**2.3.2.** Advertise public tours of mining facilities with an emphasis on child-friendly education.

**2.3.3.** Collaborate with mining industry employers and other partners to drive progress on sustainability and climate-related issues.

- Invite national and international industry delegates and academic experts to conduct presentations for Sahuarita-area mining leaders and other local stakeholders on the importance of the mining sector as part of US and global efforts to invest in more environmentally friendly industries.
- Monitor and evaluate the water utility needs of local mining operations and identify solutions.
- Host public information sessions for mining company representatives to describe to Town residents how their operations are focused on supporting a thriving natural environment locally and globally.

**2.3.4.** Work with the UA San Xavier Underground Mining Laboratory to expand its programs connected to Sahuarita’s mining industry.

- Coordinate with university leadership to promote the lab’s offerings, including the supervisory roles open to undergraduates, training for federal and state agencies, research efforts by external clients, and tours of the mine.
- Encourage expansion of the mine’s role as a national research and development (R&D), innovation, and training center for the mining industry, using the NORCAT Underground Centre in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, as a model for services and programming (e.g., NORCAT hosted the Mining Transformed event in 2022, the world’s first underground tech exhibition in an underground operating mine).

**2.4. International business.** Use the Town’s proximity to Mexico for international business development and foreign direct investment.

**2.4.1.** Engage regularly with maquiladoras in Nogales to build economic relationships, centered on near-shoring opportunities in logistics and distribution.

**2.4.2.** Work with regional, state, and international partners to advocate for investments in technology, infrastructure, and staffing resources to modernize and improve border crossings for passengers and goods movement.

**2.4.3.** Capitalize on Sahuarita’s proximity to Mexico to promote the community as an investment opportunity for high-net-worth individuals, including Mexican nationals and other foreign investors and business executives.

**2.4.4.** Expand collaboration with the Arizona Commerce Authority, the Arizona-Mexico Commission, and other partners to encourage more international business development in Sahuarita.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

- 2.5. High-growth startups and entrepreneurship.** Fund and expand the Town’s partnership with the UA Center for Innovation (UACI) for the Sponsored Launch program and entrepreneurial bootcamps.
- 2.5.1.** Conduct public engagement with Town elected leadership and residents to demonstrate the local economic impact and return on investment of the program.
  - 2.5.2.** Target and recruit early-stage startups who demonstrate interest in solving critical local and regional sustainability challenges like water availability and electrical power during high temperature periods.
  - 2.5.3.** Coordinate with SUSD and PCC to attract students for entrepreneurship opportunities.
- 2.6. Small business support.** Continue and expand the small business support services offered by the Town.
- 2.6.1.** Increase funding and capacity for Grow IN Sahuarita, including program coordination staff.
  - 2.6.2.** Building on the Sahuarita BizHub workspace, re-envision the Town Hall as a flexible business and community hub with space for private sector companies and coworking space for entrepreneurs and professional workers.
  - 2.6.3.** Promote the SizeUpSahuarita website to provide advanced data analytics for all potential and existing small businesses.
  - 2.6.4.** Work with the Green Valley/Sahuarita Chamber of Commerce, business leaders, landowners, and Town leaders to maintain a strong local business climate and continually remove impediments to business growth.

### Round Rock, Texas

Located just north of Austin, Texas, the thriving community of Round Rock is projected to grow its population by 75,000 residents by 2040. Its geographic position presents a host of strategic benefits, not only because of the city’s proximity to Austin but also due to its own concentration of higher education institutions and related life sciences industry assets. The postsecondary institutions include Austin Community College, Texas State University, and Texas A&M Health Science Center. Local economic development efforts have leveraged these education providers as a focal point for future growth. Adjacent to the higher education complex, the city has developed a major regional retail destination anchored by IKEA (the only IKEA store serving the Austin-Round Rock metropolitan area) and the Round Rock Premium Outlets. By not being content to remain “just” a suburb of Austin, leadership has created an economic engine of their own and driven healthcare industry expansion in the city, now spanning hospitals, medical laboratories, biopharmaceutical companies, healthcare information technology, and medtech research. The Round Rock Chamber of Commerce released a comprehensive [Life Sciences Strategic Vision](#) plan in 2022 that reinforces the vast opportunities in front of the city, thanks to targeted development.

## Goal 3. Place

### *Make investments that elevate Sahuarita's identity.*

Underpinning the SP3 is a new vision for Sahuarita's future. Without a clear and forward-looking sense of place, the Town could become the victim of directionless growth—a risk faced by many suburban communities that are without a diverse economic base or that lack the broad mix of amenities desired by residents and workers. To achieve this goal, priority must be given to the creation of mixed-use developments that provide space for midsize and large employers alongside small businesses. Restaurants, bars, and hotels must be not only allowable but also actively recruited and encouraged at the outset of new development.

Bold plans are already taking shape. The Sahuarita Square and Sonoran Corridor projects are examples. The Town should augment these efforts with a multi-year rollout of bond initiatives that provide the necessary funding for the ambitious strategies proposed in this goal. With a commitment to quality of place, Sahuarita will be able to attract, retain, and grow its workforce and business base for years to come.

#### **First Priority: Strategy 3.1. Town Center and mixed-use destination**

In the heart of Sahuarita, the Town Center is ready for renewed development attention. Prior planning for the Sahuarita Square project has stalled, largely due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reinvigorating those plans and converting them into action should be a priority for the first year of implementation. However, the Town Center is one piece in a larger puzzle of the evolving identity of the Town. There are spaces, like the recently acquired Parcel 30, that could be developed with mixed-use opportunities in mind, forming a commercial and multifamily residential hub designed to sustain Sahuarita's population and workforce growth for years to come. In addition, these plans and others that follow must be a collaborative effort that unites key real estate stakeholders, like Farmers Investment Co. (FICO) and Rancho Sahuarita, around a shared vision for the building out of the Town's land. Tackling these prospective projects and fostering the necessary relationships should act as a catalyst that drives the Town's momentum from the first day of the SP3's implementation to its last.

#### **Highest Impact: Strategy 3.5. Future growth**

This set of strategic recommendations represents the most ambitious and long-term vision for Sahuarita's future. It touches on a range of catalyst projects that would cement the Town as one of the fastest-growing and most economically successful communities in not just the Tucson area, but also the state. Sahuarita is already in the process of planning for a series of 2024 bond propositions, which is a significant step toward implementing Action 3.5.1, modeled after the featured best practice of the Oklahoma City MAPS program (see page 16). If passed, these bonds would form the foundation for a series of large-scale fiscal investments in the Town's amenities. Via the engagement of independent public relations consultants, the Town has proposed the following projects, currently valued at \$105.5 million: dog parks, pickleball courts, a multi-generational recreation center, Town Hall expansion and remodel, Police Department building expansion, Public Works maintenance facility, and community trails development. Although the public outreach process has not yet begun, the established deadline for Mayor and Council approval of the bond projects is scheduled for June 24, 2024.

Related efforts, like broadband and utilities expansion, will be necessary to sustain future growth. Likewise, plans to annex land in the identified Sahuarita East Conceptual Area Plan (SECAP) area would put Sahuarita on the road to surpassing 100,000 residents by 2044. Although the implementation of these recommendations will certainly not be easy, TIP's qualitative and quantitative analyses point toward the capability and necessity of the Town taking these dramatic steps in the coming decades.

## Strategies and Actions

**3.1. Town center and mixed-use destination.** Initiate and jump-start new and existing development projects across the Town's available land to define the Town's identity in the minds of visitors and residents.

**3.1.1.** Revive plans for the Sahuarita Square to invigorate the Town Center area.

- Host public town halls related to the project.
- Ensure consistent and timely completion of project milestones.
- Prioritize mixed-use developments and aggressively pursue real estate groups that align with that objective.

**3.1.2.** Prioritize mixed-use opportunities (including multifamily housing) in the newly acquired Parcel 30 tract from Freeport-McMoRan.

- Explore possibilities for integration of technologies such as energy efficiency, water reuse, and other environmentally responsible infrastructure in new developments (see Action 3.6.4.).

**3.1.3.** Foster collaboration between the Town, FICO, and Rancho Sahuarita to align visions for land use in Sahuarita.

**3.1.4.** Create a plan to construct a youth sports complex that attracts competitive events.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

**3.2. Hotel and conference center development.** Set an ambitious goal of developing 500 hotel rooms in Sahuarita by 2034.

- 3.2.1.** Conduct a feasibility study for hotel construction within the Town limits and pursue site selection engagement for quality chains with conference and event space. *See Roadmap for Hotel Development, page 15.*
- 3.2.2.** Develop a comprehensive Town events strategy that includes marketing initiatives to attract visitors from major regional events, such as the Tucson Bicycle Classic, the Tucson Gem Show, and the Tubac Festival of the Arts.
- 3.2.3.** Package and promote area tourism opportunities including scenic and outdoor recreation assets, such as Madera Canyon (one of the premier global birding destinations), and other attractions, such as the Titan Missile Museum as a menu of entertainment options for visitors.

### Roadmap for Hotel Development

From January 2000 through June 2023, the Tucson metro area hotel market added 3,821 net new hotel rooms (an inventory that grew from 13,109 to 16,930) at a compound annual growth rate of 1.1 percent. None of that hotel development took place in Sahuarita, despite the fact that the Town represented 15 percent of the Tucson metropolitan statistical area (MSA) population growth during the period, accounting for more than 32,000 residents out of the roughly 214,000 residents added metrowide. If recent growth trends from the past two decades continue—both for population and hotel development—the Tucson hotel market will add just over 2,000 net new hotel rooms over the next 10 years. If Sahuarita captures 15 percent of that new growth, that would represent about 300 hotel rooms. However, a reasonable assumption based on stakeholder input and data analysis upholds the notion that the town could easily support two or three 100-room hotels given *current* market dynamics. With a “catch-up” development target, as well as positioning the Town for future market-driven hotel development, a goal of 500 new hotel rooms over the next decade is ambitious yet achievable.

**3.3. Retail and restaurants.** Recruit Tucson-area retailers, restaurants, and bars, as well as other regional and national chains, for expansion into Sahuarita.

- 3.3.1.** Leverage the Tucson area’s status as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) City of Gastronomy, the first in the US (and one of only two US cities), part of the Creative Cities Network.
- 3.3.2.** Gather and maintain psychographic sales data to evaluate consumer spending profiles in the Town and create target market materials with these data for site selectors.
- 3.3.3.** Recruit craft breweries, bars/restaurants, live music venues, coffee shops, and similar establishments desired by a diverse set of residents and visitors, including young professionals, remote workers, and creative workers.
  - Explore expansion opportunities for a second location of the largest and/or fastest-growing Tucson area craft breweries.
  - Approach Phoenix breweries and related establishments for expansion into Sahuarita, including communication of possible opportunities for financial incentives.

- 3.4. Housing.** Construct new workforce housing that meets the needs of middle-wage talent.
- 3.4.1.** Explore opportunities for land acquisition, land banking, and zoning allowances that would empower the Town to construct these developments.
  - 3.4.2.** Engage with local and regional real estate developers who focus on multifamily housing.
- 3.5. Future growth.** Position Sahuarita for accelerated long-term growth as it envisions a future population upward of 100,000 as the Town approaches its 50-year anniversary in 2044.
- 3.5.1.** Create a roadmap for a multi-year series of bond initiatives to fund catalyst projects (such as connected bike paths, parks and recreation facilities, and other community amenities). *See Oklahoma City MAPS case study, page 16.*
    - Conduct public education sessions on the importance and potential of bond packages for investing in amenities for existing residents.
    - Use relevant examples from other communities, such as the Oklahoma City MAPS program and the Zoo, Arts, and Parks (ZAP) Program in Salt Lake County, Utah.
  - 3.5.2.** Work with Pima County to invest in broadband infrastructure, positioning Sahuarita as the first broadband-certified community in Pima County that requires all new building permits to include broadband infrastructure for individual parcels.
  - 3.5.3.** Ensure the continued progress of the Arizona Department of Transportation’s Sonoran Corridor project (I-19 and I-10 connection).
  - 3.5.4.** Revise policies facilitating development of infrastructure. Town code currently prohibits infrastructure east of La Villita Road. This change would require a Town Council vote and possibly a referendum put to the voters.

### Oklahoma City MAPS Program

Faced with stagnation and urban decay in the 1970s and 1980s, the people of Oklahoma City (OKC) chose to make a \$350 million investment in downtown revitalization through their Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) initiative, a voter-approved temporary 1-cent sales tax. Given the tremendous success of the original MAPS initiative, established in 1993, four more iterations have since been approved by voters: MAPS for Kids (2001), MAPS 3 (2009), and MAPS 4 (2019). The initial MAPS focused on downtown revitalization efforts, elevating OKC’s national reputation and building new cultural and convention facilities. Subsequent rounds have targeted improving the public school system through capital projects (MAPS for Kids) and enhancing the city’s quality of life, most notably through the “core-to-shore” project designed to increase access to the riverfront (MAPS 3). The current initiative, MAPS 4, will fund 16 projects through an eight-year, 1-cent sales tax. Projected to raise more than \$1 billion, the investments will include projects aimed at improving downtown connectivity and transforming the Oklahoma City Innovation District. More than 70 percent of MAPS 4 funding is allocated to neighborhood and human needs, while the remainder will go to improving quality of life and career initiatives.

**3.5.5.** Support Tucson International Airport’s growth as a gateway linking Southern Arizona to the world.

- Participate in regional efforts to attract more nonstop flights to/from Tucson.
- Make a concerted effort to market Tucson as the preferred airport for air travel passengers originating from Nogales, Sonora, Mexico—currently the largest Mexican border city without its own commercial airport—instead of driving three hours south to Hermosillo, the next closest commercial airport.
- Leverage Sahuarita’s proximity to the airport to attract aviation and aerospace-related development and business expansion opportunities.

**3.5.6.** Prioritize Town expansion into the Sahuarita East Conceptual Area (SECAP). *See details, page 18.*

- Set a goal of becoming a community with a 1:1 ratio of employed residents to workers by 2044.

**3.6. Marketing and image.** Create a campaign to promote the Town and its placemaking efforts regionally.

**3.6.1.** Position Sahuarita to become the most important regional hub within the Tucson metropolitan statistical area (MSA), culminating with a renaming of the MSA by the federal Office of Management and Budget in 2033 as the Tucson-Sahuarita, Arizona, MSA.

**3.6.2.** Cultivate networks and relationships with business decision-makers including corporate executives, real estate developers and brokers, and site selection consultants.

- Focus on outreach to corporate leaders and real estate professionals in the Tucson and Phoenix areas.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

- 3.6.3.** Host an annual fam tour (familiarization tour) for site selectors, real estate developers, and commercial/industrial brokers to generate awareness of Sahuarita as a destination for business expansion and real estate development/investment.
- Focus the tour on specific business opportunities (such as hotel and medical facility development) and real estate development projects (such as the Sahuarita Square vision plan) for the real estate professionals to provide input on.
- 3.6.4.** Brand Sahuarita as a forward-thinking community focused on long-term environmental resiliency.
- Leverage continued public and elected leadership education efforts connected to environment-related Town departments, such as Public Works.
  - Include and highlight any recent sustainability initiatives in Town marketing materials.
- 3.6.5.** Actively participate in regional and statewide economic development initiatives to ensure Sahuarita is “at the table” alongside Pima County, Sun Corridor, the Tohono O’odham Nation, utility providers, the Arizona Commerce Authority, and other partners.
- Participate in the implementation working groups (industry and business retention/expansion) of the recently launched Pima County 2023–2026 economic development strategic plan.

### Sahuarita East Conceptual Area Plan (SECAP)

The Tucson MSA (Pima County) population has grown at a 1 percent compound annual growth rate from 2000 to 2022. If this growth continues at the same rate over the next two decades, and if Sahuarita’s growth continues at the same 15 percent share of the region’s growth, the Town’s population will roughly double to just under 75,000 residents while the Tucson MSA grows to just over 1.3 million. The SECAP area has a combined estimated build-out of 53,600 dwelling units and up to 134,000 people. If the SECAP area develops as envisioned, the Town’s growth rate could rise to encompass closer to 20–25 percent of the county’s growth, pushing Sahuarita’s population over the 100,000 mark—an important threshold for many national retailers, restaurants, and other businesses.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

## Implementation Considerations

In order to enact the recommendations, additional factors will need to be considered.

### Capacity Building

The SP3 calls for a transformation of Sahuarita's economic development program. In order to carry out the new and expanded programs, additional staff capacity will be required. A fully staffed Economic Development Department would ideally have a team of six people including a Director, an Assistant Director, and three Coordinators/Project Managers (roughly one per each goal area of the plan), and an Administrative Assistant. In year one (2024), one to two additional staff should realistically be added, increasing the Economic Development team to three or four full-time employees. In year two or three (by 2026 at the latest) the full six-person team should be in place.

### Performance Metrics

An often-overlooked, but essential, component of a successful strategic plan is the set of metrics by which the plan's implementation can be measured. An important consideration for economic performance indicators is to take into account the performance of the local economy relative to the larger state and national economy. If goals cannot be met because of a national recession, for instance, the Town should not be held to unrealistic expectations. With that caveat in mind, the SP3 includes the following metrics to measure progress in the growth of Sahuarita's economy.

- Educational attainment levels of residents age 25 and older (including share of residents with associate's degrees and share of residents with bachelor's degrees or higher)
- Employment, unemployment, and labor force participation rates of working-age residents
- Median age of residents
- Median household income
- Share of population in poverty
- Homeownership and household wealth
- Housing affordability (including share of cost-burdened households spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent or mortgage payments)
- Share of households with broadband connectivity
- Share of residents working from home
- New jobs created/retained
- Average wages of jobs created/retained
- New capital investment
- Retail and restaurant sales
- Town tax revenue growth
- Total new commercial office space added (and vacancy rates and median rental rates for existing inventory)
- Total new retail/restaurant space added (and vacancy rates and median rental rates for existing inventory)
- Total new industrial space added (and vacancy rates and median rental rates for existing inventory)
- Total number of hotel rooms added (occupancy levels and average rates for existing hotels)
- Number of new residential units added to the Town's housing market (median sales prices and median rental rates for existing residential units)
- [Walk Score](#) and [Bike Score](#) for the Town as a whole and for individual neighborhoods

# PLANNING CONTEXT

As part of the strategic planning process, TIP Strategies conducted an extensive quantitative and geospatial analysis of factors influencing Sahuarita's competitive position. Coupled with insights gained from discussions with stakeholders and partners, the quantitative work also informed the preparation of an analysis of the Town's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOTs), which is presented at the end of this section.

## Economic Analysis

The economic analysis was completed as part of TIP's discovery phase. Initial data collection began in April 2023, and the work extended for the next six months. An in-depth analysis was delivered to the Town in October 2023 in an interactive data visualization. Key findings, summarized in this section, shaped the direction of the SP3.

### *In-demand jobs favor specialized training and experience.*

The Tucson area is rich in innovation-heavy industries, with target sector jobs largely favoring workers who possess higher education or specialized skills training. While a greater percentage of Sahuarita's residents possess a college degree than the residents of many of its peer cities, there is still a sizeable population without postsecondary experience. These workers lack the specialized skills that are required by research and innovation-heavy industries, such as photonics and aerospace. Even in industries with less stringent formal education requirements, like amenities and hospitality or mining, a lack of industry-specific experience or technical skills (e.g., restaurant operation and food preparation; heavy machinery operation and safety standards) hinders potential workers from finding employment in these fields. Through partnerships with regional institutions like UA and Pima Community College, Sahuarita could pursue local campuses and facilities, funded by private industry, giving residents increased access to adult education and the cultivation of industry-specific skills. Promoting alternative educational opportunities, like apprenticeships and technical training certificates, to adult demographics would also increase the skills of the local workforce and build on the Town's recent investment in advanced manufacturing.



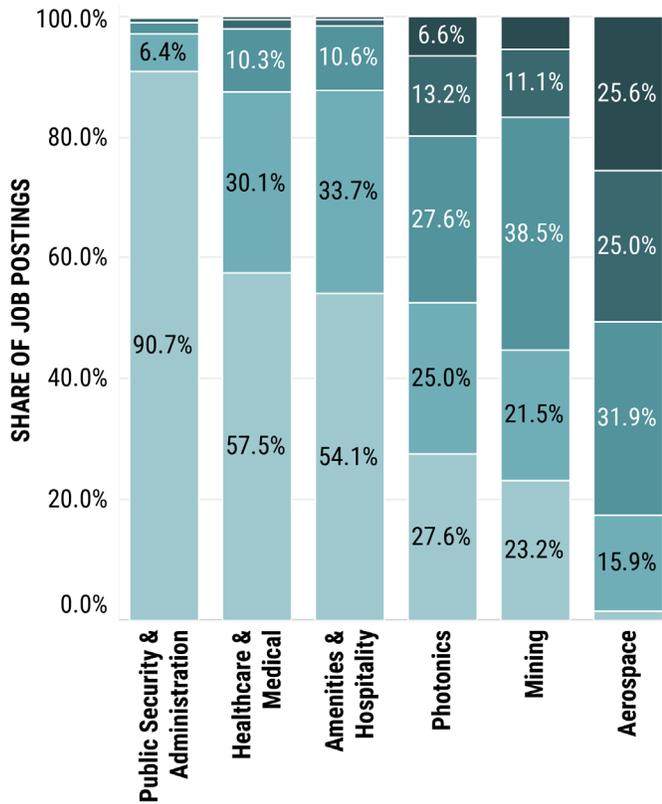
Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.

**FIGURE 3. TARGET SECTOR QUALIFICATIONS**

BASED ON AN ANALYSIS OF TWO YEARS OF JOB POSTINGS IN THE TUCSON MSA, JUNE 2021 TO MAY 2023

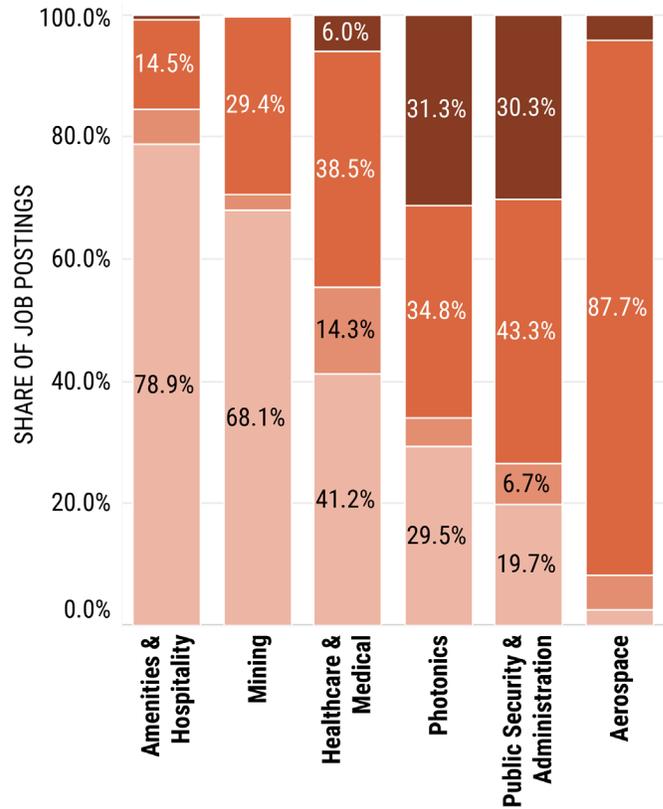
**MINIMUM EXPERIENCE REQUESTED**

- 10+ Years
- 7 - 9 Years
- 4 - 6 Years
- 2 - 3 Years
- 0 - 1 Years



**MINIMUM EDUCATION REQUESTED**

- Graduate Degree
- Bachelor's Degree
- Associate's Degree
- High School or GED



Source(s): US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS); Lightcast 2023.2—Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed; TIP Strategies, Inc.

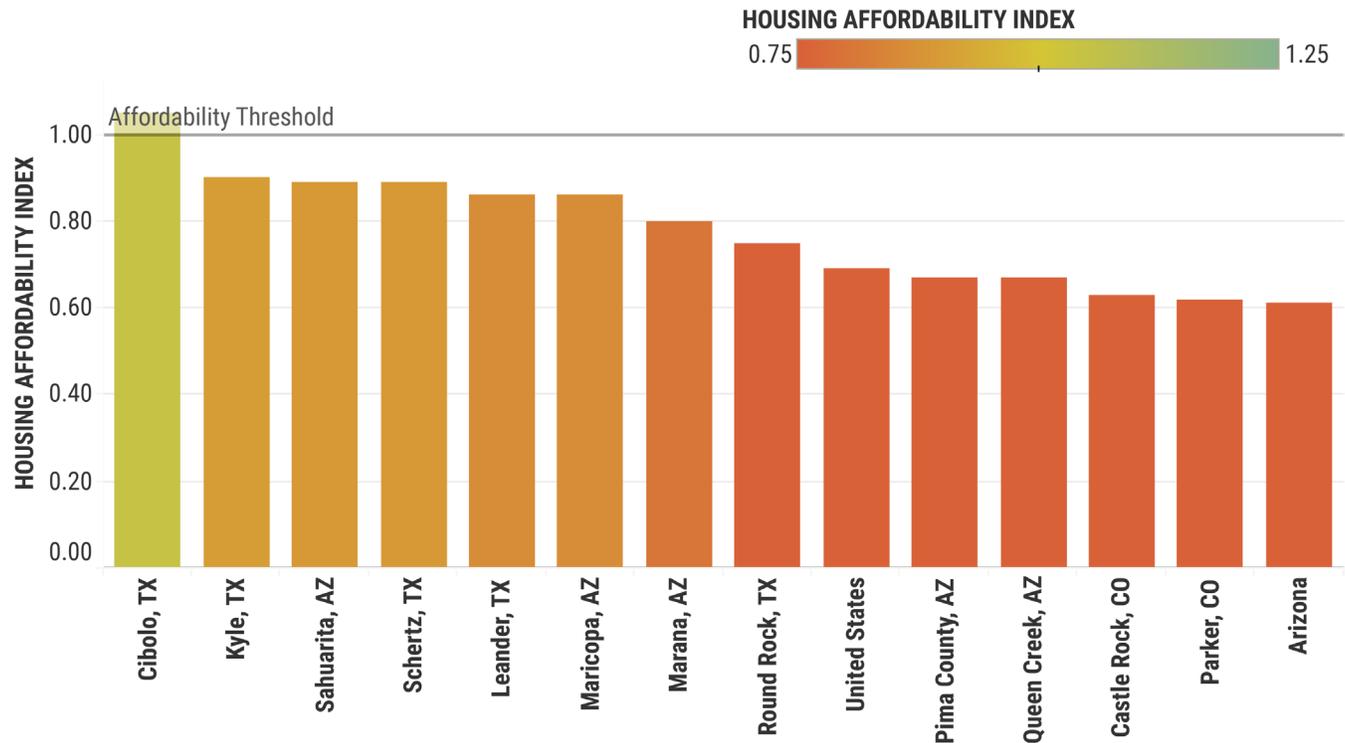
Note(s): Job postings include non-staffing, unique, newly posted job postings for full-time, part-time, and flexible positions including internships, between June 2021 and May 2023. GED refers to the General Education Development test, a standardized test that is one of several alternatives used to meet high school equivalency requirements for postsecondary institutions and employers.

**Attracting a younger workforce requires affordable housing and marketing.**

It is easy to see why younger workers nationwide crave affordable housing. Homeownership has been made increasingly more difficult in recent years through high interest rates and still-elevated home prices. This affordability crisis extends to the rental market, with recent graduates and young workers particularly burdened by high rent costs. Even though it is more affordable than many of its peers, the Town of Sahuarita’s housing market is still unaffordable to a family making the median household income. Sahuarita and its immediate area has seen little construction of new multifamily housing over the past two decades, especially when compared with the larger Tucson MSA. In conjunction with increased amenities and attractions that appeal to a young workforce, affordable housing will allow the Town to cultivate a branding and identity that can be marketed toward recent college graduates or young families, incentivizing them to relocate to Sahuarita.

**FIGURE 4. HOUSING AFFORDABILITY INDEX, 2021**

AFFORDABILITY = 1.00 WHEN A MEDIAN-INCOME HOUSEHOLD CAN AFFORD A MEDIAN-PRICED HOME



Source(s): 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year sample; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): The Housing Affordability Index was adapted from Texas A&M University’s Real Estate Center by TIP Strategies, Inc. Mortgage payments only include the monthly payments on the loan (does not include insurance or tax payments).

***The Tucson area is a hotbed of innovation.***

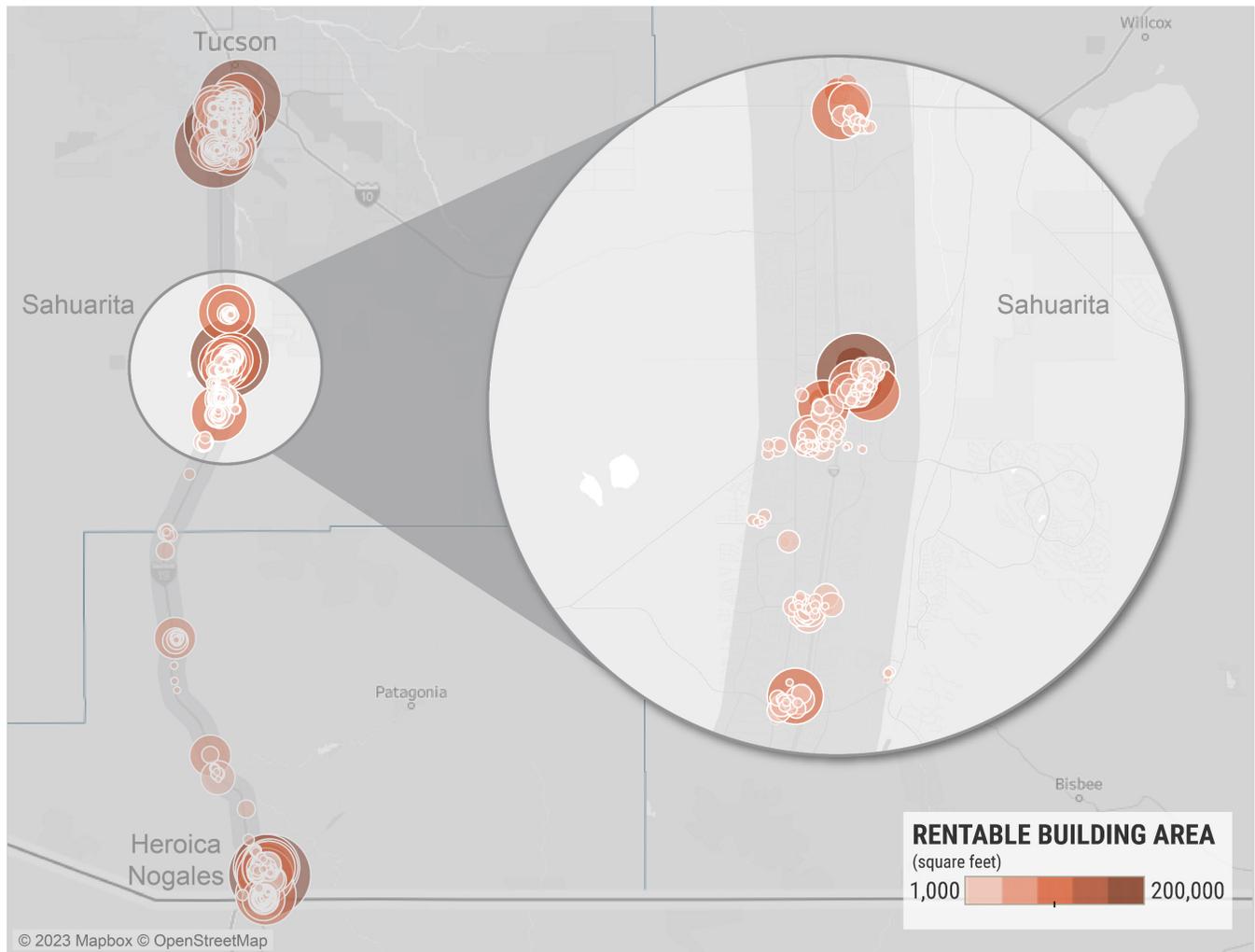
As illustrated in Figure 3 (page 21), the Tucson MSA’s key industries favor an educated workforce. This employer demand coupled with the presence of a major research university in the University of Arizona and its Center for Innovation have ensured that the region is an incubator for innovation. Sahuarita companies interested in R&D can benefit from this environment. Cooperation with the UA Wyant College of Optical Sciences can provide recruitment and workforce development opportunities for local photonics companies as well as opportunities for development and commercialization of new photonics technologies. The UA College of Engineering’s Mining and Geological Engineering program can serve as a partner for mining industry leaders to develop more environmentally conscious mining operations standards and an appropriately equipped workforce. In the advanced manufacturing industry, the early success of the SAMTEC facility has illustrated the great potential for innovation-driven industries in Sahuarita that capitalize on a research-and-development friendly ecosystem while bolstering the local economy. Figure 5 (page 23) illustrates the network of Pima County firms in selected target industries that have received federal funding aimed at fostering innovation and commercialization of R&D activities.



**Sahuarita can stake its claim in the local retail space.**

It's no surprise that Tucson, the second most populous city in Arizona, provides a wealth of retail opportunities for its residents and visitors. Although the area immediately surrounding Sahuarita has expanded the retail options available to locals in recent years, there is little to draw in visitors from larger cities. In a trend that was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, consumers increasingly crave experiential retail opportunities that allow them to go beyond the traditional shopping experience and enjoy meaningful interactions with local attractions and businesses. Through a public, mixed-use gathering place like Sahuarita Square, the Town of Sahuarita can draw in visitors from larger cities like Tucson and Nogales, creating a destination along the I-19 corridor that gives the Town a distinctive identity in the Tucson-area retail space. Additionally, Sahuarita has an opportunity to pursue mixed-use development in its recently acquired land, providing both multifamily housing for a younger workforce and distinctive retail opportunities to attract customers.

**FIGURE 6. RETAIL INVENTORY**  
I-19 CORRIDOR, 2023



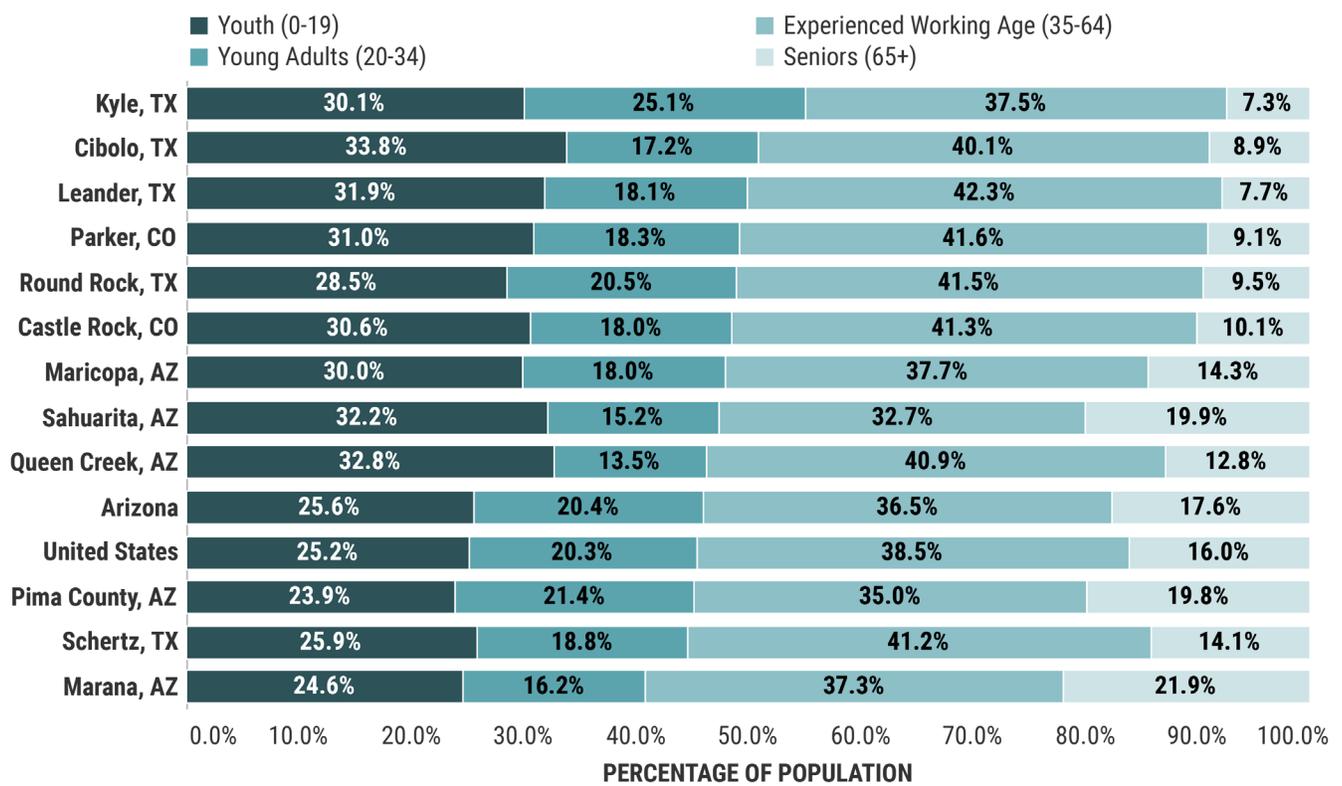
Source(s): CoStar Group; TIP Strategies, Inc.

Note(s): Larger circles indicate larger buildings. All data are estimated by CoStar as of mid-June 2023 and represent a snapshot in time.

### Sahuarita must meet the needs of a growing population.

Amenities like restaurants and bars are essential to the attraction of a younger workforce and the pursuit of placemaking retail opportunities. Currently, nearly one-half of Sahuarita’s residents are under the age of 35 (see Figure 7, page 25). By increasing the stock of affordable, multifamily housing, Sahuarita can ensure that these young workers and families can afford to live comfortably. With access to a vibrant restaurant and bar scene, residents can thrive, enjoying a wealth of dining and social experiences within their own community. Locally owned establishments can contribute to Sahuarita’s identity while expansions from Tucson-area chains can help the Town compete with other nearby communities. Another way in which Sahuarita may compete with its peers is by hosting community events and sports competitions. Especially for residents with children, a youth sports complex would not only provide a public greenspace and an opportunity for outdoor recreation but also would attract competitive events that bring in visitors from across the region. While talent recruitment and skill development are essential to Sahuarita’s growth, ensuring that residents have access to leisure-time amenities is correspondingly important to establishing the Town’s identity and creating a sense of place.

**FIGURE 7. AGE DISTRIBUTION, 2021**  
RESIDENTIAL POPULATION DIVIDED INTO BROAD AGE GROUPS



Source(s): 2021 ACS 5-year sample, TIP Strategies, Inc.  
Note(s): Figures may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

## SWOT Analysis

During the initial phase of the project, the consulting team gathered qualitative input from stakeholders concerning issues influencing local economic development. In addition, TIP conducted quantitative analyses to understand Sahuarita's competitive position in the Tucson region. The results of these efforts informed the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis.

**FIGURE 8. SWOT ANALYSIS FINDINGS**

<b>STRENGTHS</b> <i>Assets and resources to strengthen and diversify the economy.</i>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b> <i>Liabilities and barriers that could limit growth potential.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-growth mindset</li> <li>• SAMTEC</li> <li>• Homeownership</li> <li>• Industry/business retention and expansion working groups</li> <li>• Exploding population</li> <li>• Federal employees</li> <li>• Border trade</li> <li>• Tourist events (e.g., cycling)</li> <li>• Interstate highways</li> <li>• Strong median income</li> <li>• Healthcare</li> <li>• Mining</li> <li>• Diverse community</li> <li>• Geography (Tucson, Nogales)</li> <li>• Aerospace and defense industry</li> <li>• University of Arizona</li> <li>• Lower cost of living compared to coasts</li> <li>• Airport</li> <li>• Pima Community College</li> <li>• Semiconductor industry</li> <li>• Competitive tax climate</li> <li>• Innovation-focused education development</li> <li>• Arizona Commerce Authority</li> <li>• Arizona State University</li> <li>• Strong dollar</li> <li>• Tech progress</li> <li>• Flow of federal funds</li> <li>• International economy linkage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restaurants/bars</li> <li>• Hotels</li> <li>• Entertainment/lifestyle</li> <li>• Land ownership</li> <li>• Limited workforce housing</li> <li>• Lack of industry diversification</li> <li>• Limited education development resources</li> <li>• Class A office space</li> <li>• Lack of united Town vision</li> <li>• Trailing spouse opportunities</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Retention of high school graduates</li> <li>• Construction costs</li> <li>• Educational attainment</li> <li>• Airport direct connections</li> <li>• Income disparities</li> <li>• Workforce for skilled trades</li> <li>• Lack of strong national brand/image</li> <li>• Aging population</li> <li>• Hospitality post-COVID-19 pandemic</li> <li>• Growing income inequality</li> <li>• US national debt</li> <li>• Talent shortages</li> </ul>

continued next page

FIGURE 8. SWOT ANALYSIS FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b> <i>Competitive advantages and favorable trends.</i>	<b>THREATS</b> <i>Potentially unfavorable factors and trends (often external).</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sahuarita Square plans</li> <li>• FICO land plans</li> <li>• Hotel(s)</li> <li>• Public-funded projects (bonds)</li> <li>• Industrial development</li> <li>• Photonics industry</li> <li>• UA Center for Innovation</li> <li>• PCC campus expansion</li> <li>• SECAP expansion</li> <li>• Restaurants and bars</li> <li>• Broadband</li> <li>• Sonoran Corridor</li> <li>• Office construction</li> <li>• Youth sports</li> <li>• Migration from urban areas on the coasts and surrounding states</li> <li>• “Thrive in the 05” initiative</li> <li>• Economic diversification</li> <li>• “Visit Tucson”</li> <li>• Opportunity Zones</li> <li>• Historic preservation tax credits</li> <li>• On-shoring</li> <li>• New Markets Tax Credit Program</li> <li>• Rise of remote workers</li> <li>• Global sustainable development goals</li> <li>• Artificial intelligence</li> <li>• Foreign direct investment (FDI)</li> <li>• Federal stimulus funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bedroom community identity</li> <li>• Older population’s priorities</li> <li>• Rising housing costs</li> <li>• Complacency</li> <li>• Disconnect between population growth and placemaking</li> <li>• US-Mexico trade relations</li> <li>• Industry diversification</li> <li>• Retention of existing employers and industries</li> <li>• Out-migration of skilled talent</li> <li>• Decreased defense spending</li> <li>• Future water availability</li> <li>• Workforce for skilled trades</li> <li>• Immigration restrictions</li> <li>• US political uncertainty</li> <li>• Inequitable distribution of jobs and opportunity</li> <li>• Competition with China</li> <li>• Fragile global supply chains</li> <li>• Cybersecurity threats</li> <li>• Climate change</li> <li>• Economic recession</li> <li>• Russia-Ukraine war</li> <li>• Artificial intelligence</li> <li>• Trade policy uncertainty</li> <li>• Aging workforce</li> </ul>

## Additional Case Studies

In addition to the examples provided within the Action Plan (San Jacinto College, Round Rock, and Tucson), TIP prepared an overview of relevant communities that have taken decisive steps to achieve success that Sahuarita could emulate effectively.

### Carmel, Indiana

As a growing city immediately adjacent to a major metropolitan area (Indianapolis) with a population of approximately 100,000, Carmel is a model for what Sahuarita could become in the future. The city engaged in a series of bold actions, designed to enhance its livability while preserving its suburban character, that have driven its economic development efforts. From 2001 to 2015, Carmel [annexed nearly 20,000 acres](#) of land. The Carmel Clay Parks and Recreation Department led the expansion of public parks and trails and opened a new, large-scaled [Monon Community Center](#) in 2007, which provides recreation amenities that are accessible for a membership fee. Leadership utilized significant tax increment financing monies to construct a brand new [City Center](#) in Carmel's downtown that opened up multi-story mixed-use development, capitalized on its vibrant arts culture, and branded the city as a destination for young professionals. As a result of all of these intentional investments in its community, Carmel earned the title of the #1 [Best Place to Live](#) among small cities from CNNMoney in 2012. By proactively following the best practices of Carmel, Sahuarita has the potential to make similar strides in regional, state, and even national visibility.

### Dublin, Ohio

The city of Dublin stands at roughly the same size (50,000 residents) as Sahuarita and is part of the Columbus MSA. Given that direct comparison, the Town leadership would benefit from examining and replicating some of the major steps that Dublin has utilized to drive business attraction and commercial development in recent years. In 2016, Dublin engaged in a [public-private partnership with Juniper Networks](#) and Metro Data Center to enhance the broadband connectivity of its critical office infrastructure to 100 gigabit speed. The goal of the effort (called Dublink) was the targeted attraction of smaller, high-growth, technology-driven companies that depend heavily on state-of-the-art fiber service. Dublin saw immediate results, with the city's chief information officer stating, "We've been successful in creating an economic vortex of activity. When we ask new businesses why they came to this legacy office park, they say they heard about Dublink and the 100 gig project and they want to be close to the other businesses that are in it."<sup>1</sup> Since then, the city has not stopped in its push to create more effective real estate development. As recently as January 5, 2024, [new plans were established](#) to build a mixed-use development at Dublin's Metro Center office park. The concept, as submitted to the city's planning and zoning commission, calls for a five-story building that includes 164 residential units, 7,680 square feet of commercial space, 231 parking spaces, and a public courtyard. It is precisely these kinds of ambitious projects that the Town of Sahuarita needs to consider as it strives to become the premier community to live and work in the Tucson MSA.

<sup>1</sup> Juniper Networks, "[Dublin, Ohio Attracts Fast Growing Small Businesses with a 100 Gbps Network and an Innovative Public-Private Partnership](#)," December 2016 case study.

## Frisco, Texas

The city of Frisco, just 30 minutes from Dallas, serves as an aspirational example for Sahuarita. In 2000, Frisco was home to just 33,000 people. Twenty years later, its population stood at just over 200,000 residents. This dramatic growth was the result of deliberate and strategic economic development decisions. While Frisco's growth owed much to disenchantment with the city of Dallas, there are important lessons for Sahuarita to consider. The city made significant investments in amenities that have wide regional appeal. Between 2003 and 2005, Frisco constructed a baseball park, a stadium, a 165-store mall, and an IKEA store. The results were astonishing. By the end of that decade, it was the fastest-growing city in the country and had opened 25 new schools. This explosive growth was fueled by a stream of positive press. [Forbes listed Frisco in "America's 25 Best Places to Move"](#) in its 2009 ranking. More recently, Frisco has added the [Dallas Cowboys World Headquarters](#) (The Star), a 242-acre mixed-used development ([Frisco Station](#)), and the expansion of higher education facilities (a University of North Texas campus that includes coworking and business incubator space) to its long list of accomplishments. The parallels for Sahuarita are worth considering: benefiting from the growth of an adjoining city, leveraging higher education, and committing to suburban amenities not easily replicated elsewhere. Frisco's ambitious vision for entertainment venues, retail sites, innovative industries and occupations, and educational expansion is scalable. While Sahuarita operates in a different market, the Town is well-positioned for growth in a way that benefits its own citizens and builds a distinct identity within the Tucson MSA.



Image credit: Courtesy of the Town of Sahuarita.