

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 14, 2026

Destination Waco Launches Community Planning Process to Shape “Waco Forward: Our Destination Strategy”

The City invites residents, businesses, and community partners to help shape the future of Waco's visitor economy.

WACO, TEXAS — Destination Waco, the City of Waco's destination management organization, has launched a community-wide planning process, to develop Waco Forward: Our Destination Strategy, a five-year strategy designed to guide the future of Waco's visitor economy and ensure tourism continues to create meaningful benefits for the people who live, work and do business here.

Tourism is one of Waco's economic engines, generating \$832 million in annual visitor spending and supporting approximately 6,500 jobs across the Waco metropolitan area, based on 2025 economic impact data from Travel Texas. Those visitor dollars support local businesses, restaurants, hotels, attractions and events while also contributing to the broader Waco economy.

Waco Forward: Our Destination Strategy will establish a shared direction for building on that success, encouraging visitors to experience more of Waco, supporting local businesses and hospitality careers, activating the river and public spaces, sharing the stories of Waco's neighborhoods, and ensuring tourism contributes to Waco's quality of life and economic vitality.

“This isn't a plan that will sit on a shelf, it's a Destination Strategy to shape the future of tourism for visitors, residents, and the industry,” said Lisa Blackmon, Chief Destination Development Officer for the City of Waco. “When tourism is done right, it means stronger small businesses, better events and public spaces, real career paths in hospitality, and visitor dollars helping pay for services our residents count on. Waco already has a strong foundation. This process is about building on it together and moving in the same direction.”

The City has engaged Solimar International, a Washington, DC-based firm that has spent 25 years working exclusively in tourism across more than 200 programs worldwide, to facilitate the process.

Solimar's team spent four days in Waco in late June and early July, meeting with more than 100 stakeholders representing hotels, restaurants, attractions, arts and culture, Waco's three chambers of commerce, Baylor University, Magnolia, McLennan County, City leadership and other community partners. The team also facilitated a tourism community workshop to begin identifying opportunities, challenges and priorities for Waco's future.

“What struck us in a week of listening is how much Waco already has going for it and how ready this community is to work together,” said Chris Seek, CEO of Solimar International. “In nearly every conversation we heard the same thing: Waco doesn’t lack assets or ambition, it needs a shared direction. The best destinations in the world are great places to live first. That’s the strategy Waco is ready to build.”

A Planning Steering Committee representing approximately 15 community organizations has also been established to help guide the process. The committee includes representation from the city and county, higher education, lodging, restaurants, arts and culture, sports, the airport and Waco’s three chambers of commerce, helping ensure a broad range of community perspectives are included.

“Waco has tremendous momentum, with new businesses, continued investment and more people discovering everything our community has to offer, from our river and public spaces to our restaurants, attractions and neighborhoods,” said Mayor Jim Holmes. “Waco Forward gives us an opportunity to be intentional about where we go from here and how tourism can continue contributing to our economy and quality of life. I encourage residents, businesses and community partners to take the survey and help shape Waco’s next chapter.”

Residents, businesses and community partners are encouraged to help shape Waco’s future as a destination by taking the stakeholder survey. The survey invites participants to share their perspectives on Waco today and their priorities for the future and is available online at <https://waco-texas.com/dmo>. It will also be promoted through City channels and partner organizations.

Waco Forward will be developed throughout the fall, with additional Planning Steering Committee review before the final strategy is presented to the Destination Waco Commission and Waco City Council in early 2027.

The planning process will also help strengthen Destination Waco as an organization, building its capacity as it continues evolving from a traditional convention and visitors bureau into a destination management organization focused on Waco’s long-term success.

Waco Forward will complement the City of Waco’s 2040 Comprehensive Plan and economic development strategy, connecting the visitor economy to Waco’s broader priorities for economic opportunity, quality of life and vibrant places for residents and visitors alike.

About Destination Waco

Destination Waco is the City of Waco’s destination management organization, responsible for growing the visitor economy in ways that benefit residents, businesses, and the community — through destination marketing, convention and event sales, visitor services, and destination development.

About Solimar International

Solimar International is a sustainable tourism consulting firm based in Washington, DC. For 25 years, Solimar has worked exclusively in tourism, completing more than 200 programs in over 90 countries and dozens of U.S. destinations, helping communities plan, develop, and manage tourism that works for residents and visitors alike. Learn more at solimarinternational.com.

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