



City of Georgetown 2030 Comprehensive Plan
Chapter 1. - Introduction

1. Introduction

HISTORY OF PLANNING IN GEORGETOWN

Section 213.002 of the Texas Local Government Code grants municipalities the authority to “adopt a comprehensive plan for the long-range development of the municipality.” This section further allows the governing body of a municipality to define the content and design of the comprehensive plan, which may:

- Include but not necessarily limit provisions on land use, transportation, and public facilities;
- 1. Consist of a single plan or a coordinated set of plans organized by subject and geographic area; and
- 2. Be used to coordinate and guide the establishment of development regulations.

Georgetown’s first two comprehensive plans, the first prepared in 1964 and the second in 1976, were predominantly analytical and either provided few policy recommendations or had little “teeth” for implementation. Both were prepared with minimal community input.

In 1979, the City initiated a community-based planning effort to supplement and update the 1976 plan, holding public hearings in each of the city’s eight sectors. The input obtained from citizens through this effort was compiled into the “Guide to Growth and Development in Georgetown, Texas.” While the guide was generally put to use, it was not intended as a long-range planning tool, focusing instead on immediate and short-term issues.

In 1986, the residents of Georgetown approved, by a wide margin, an amendment to the City Charter to require a comprehensive plan. This amendment committed the City to plan as a “continuous and ongoing governmental function,” with the common goal of enhancing and maintaining a high quality of life for the city’s residents. The Charter establishes that the comprehensive plan must contain the “Council’s policies for growth, development and beautification of the land within the corporate limits and the extraterritorial jurisdiction of the City, or for geographic portions thereof, including neighborhood, community or area-wide plans.” The Charter also prescribes that the comprehensive plan must address the following elements:

- ♦ Future land use
- ♦ Traffic circulation and public transit
- ♦ Infrastructure, including wastewater, electric, solid waste, drainage and potable water
- ♦ Conservation and environmental resources
- ♦ Recreation and open space
- ♦ Housing
- ♦ Public services and facilities, which shall include but not be limited to a capital improvement program
- ♦ Public buildings and related facilities
- ♦ Economic development
- ♦ Health and human services

- ♦ Historic preservation
- ♦ Citizen participation
- ♦ Urban design, and
- ♦ Public safety

The Charter goes on to explain that:

“The several elements of the comprehensive plan should be coordinated and be internally consistent. Each element should include policy recommendations for its implementation and should be implemented, in part, by the adoption and enforcement of appropriate land development regulations.”

Upon approval of the Charter amendment, the City’s first task in preparation for a new comprehensive plan was to develop a work program. In June 1986, staff prepared and the City Council approved “A Program Proposal for the preparation and adoption of a Comprehensive Plan for the City of Georgetown, Texas.” This program defined the process, work tasks, and schedule to be followed to meet the April 1988 deadline established in the Charter amendment for adoption of the plan. The Fiscal Year 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 budgets made significant commitments to the preparation of the comprehensive plan which later came to be known as “The Century Plan.” Two additional staff planners and a graphics technician were hired, and an extensive base mapping program was undertaken in support of the Plan. In addition, a series of studies were conducted during this period in anticipation of the comprehensive plan. The studies included a Development Impact Analysis, a Thoroughfare Plan, and a Parks and Recreation Plan. The Development Impact Analysis included a Development Plan to guide land use decisions made by the City. In 1986, the Intensity Map became the only portion of the previous studies to be adopted by the City Council.

Development of the Policy Plan proceeded through two major steps, including data collection and analysis and plan formulation. Base studies prepared by staff as part of the first step were designed to provide the various decision-making groups with a broad understanding of existing conditions, past trends, and potential future needs of the community as they relate to each of the base study subject areas. The base studies were used as the basis for development of the policies, ends, and means included in the Policy Plan.

The second major step in developing the comprehensive plan was plan formulation. The name “The Century Plan: A New Century Georgetown,” was selected from entries submitted by Georgetown school children, and became the official name for the comprehensive plan. A fifteen member Century Plan Steering Committee was established to lead the process and present recommendations to the City Council. The Steering Committee was comprised of two Council members, the Mayor, the seven Planning and Zoning Commissioners, and five citizens at-large. The citizens at-large also chaired Task Groups charged with preparing goals, objectives and policies related to specific areas of concern. The documents prepared by the Task Groups, reviewed and refined by the Steering Committee, became the basis for the Plan, which was presented to the public before City Council began their review in December of 1987.

The Century Plan was adopted in 1988. The effort garnered praise among the planning community as innovative and state-of-the art. However, a number of elements were never completed, and the plan as a whole was not systematically monitored and updated.

THE NEED FOR THE 2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Georgetown is unique among Texas communities for the importance it places on comprehensive planning. This is evidenced by the action of City Council in 1986 to amend the City Charter with the addition of Section 1.08, excerpted as follows:

...(to) establish comprehensive planning as a continuous and ongoing governmental function in order to promote and strengthen the existing role, processes and powers of the City of Georgetown to prepare, adopt and implement a comprehensive plan to guide, regulate, and manage the future development within the corporate limits and extraterritorial jurisdiction of the City to assure the most appropriate and beneficial use of land, water and other natural resources, consistent with the public interest.

This action led the City to commence the following sequence of planning activities:

- ♦ In 1988, the Century Plan – Policy Plan was adopted, which outlined the City’s policies for growth and development, created the process by which the various elements would be adopted, and created the administrative requirements by which the comprehensive plan would operate for the City.
- ♦ The Century Plan – Development Plan, which was first adopted in 1990 and amended in 1996, includes land intensity, utilities, and transportation in a combined plan element. This plan recognized and addressed the linkages between land development and the availability of services such as water, wastewater, and transportation.
- ♦ The Future Land Use Plan was approved by the City Council in April 2002. The Plan was created to provide a basis for making land use decisions. In addition, the Plan provided a basis by which the City could create growth scenarios for future utility, transportation, and facility planning. The Thoroughfare Plan (2002) was subsequently replaced with the Overall Transportation Plan in 2005.

While the City’s past planning activities continue to be a source of community pride, the Century Plan is now nearly two decades old and no longer addresses today’s challenges in managing growth and change. Since the adoption of the Policy Plan, the city has tripled in population, along with a dramatic geographic enlargement of the city limits and the area of extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). The Century Plan was innovative for its time, providing tools such as the Intensity Map to help regulate development intensity based on the capacity of roads and infrastructure. However, it no longer provides an adequate policy response or the tools and strategies that can address the challenges the city will face in managing growth over the next two decades.

The 2030 Comprehensive Plan builds on the foundation established by the Century Plan and advances the state-of-the-art of planning for the city’s future in five important ways:

- ♦ First, the 2030 Comprehensive Plan establishes a definitive Vision Statement reflecting the shared values and aspirations of citizens, which becomes the policy touchstone and the destination for the comprehensive plan.

- ♦ Second, it identifies the tools that should be put in place to better manage the city's growth so as to realize the Vision. These include a tier system to stage the city's growth over time and prevent the consequences of fragmented sprawl, as well as land use categories and development standards to promote more creative and efficient development, such as mixed-use and walkable communities. It also suggests an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance to ensure that premature development does not overburden schools, infrastructure, and public safety resources.
- ♦ Third, it depicts on its Future Land Use Map the desired patterns and locations for land use between now and 2030, including the land needed for future employment uses to strengthen the tax base and enable the city to become more economically independent.
- ♦ Fourth, as the city has grown, Georgetown has reached its potential ETJ limits to the east, south and west, creating an ultimate growth boundary in those directions. This allows the City the opportunity to begin approaching planning decisions based on the ultimate buildout, potential redevelopment, and inter-connectivity to adjacent communities without an endless horizontal growth scenario.
- ♦ Finally, it provides a framework for implementation that includes a timetable of actions along with protocols to monitor progress and make amendments thus ensuring that the plan will remain relevant to emerging challenges and changing circumstances.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

The City of Georgetown mobilized a significant effort to create the 2030 Comprehensive Plan. The first step in the planning process was the preparation of the Land Use Element, completed through a collaborative structure in which specific responsibilities were assigned as follows:

- ♦ A Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, comprised of a broad cross-section of citizens, guided policy-making throughout the plan process, including nine monthly meetings.
- ♦ A Staff Resource Team, comprised of senior City staff, compiled necessary data and studies, provided support for all presentations and meetings and took responsibility for much of the mapping.
- ♦ A Consultant Team, led by Wallace Roberts and Todd, LLC, facilitated the planning process and drafted the land use policies and strategies for review and refinement by City staff and the Steering Committee.

The Georgetown 2030 Comprehensive Plan is the product of a careful design process that incrementally built consensus on the desired future of the city and the means to achieve that future. The Land Use Element led the way in the design of this process, in which the major steps were as follows:

Step One: Project Mobilization

The “getting ready” step consisted of meetings between City staff and consultants to review available data and design a coordination protocol, a day-long tour of Georgetown, interviews with a variety of community leaders and stakeholders to get an initial scan of issues of local concern, and a Steering Committee Kickoff Meeting to discuss the steps in the planning process, the “job description” of the Steering Committee, and their expectations about outcomes.

Step Two: Vision Statement

If a comprehensive plan is thought of as a community’s roadmap to the future, then the Vision Statement should be thought of as the community’s destination: a description of the desired future character of the community based on the shared values and aspirations of its citizens. The process to write the Vision Statement for Georgetown’s 2030 Comprehensive Plan included the following:

Community Forum Series One – “Aspirations and Concerns”

The first of three community forum series were held on November 2, 3 and 4, 2006 to measure consensus on community aspirations for the desired quality of life and community character of Georgetown, today and in the future, and the perceived impediments to realizing those aspirations. Steering Committee members were trained to facilitate small group discussions using a modified “SWOT” (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) technique. The results were subsequently tabulated for use in articulating shared values and identifying key issues of community concern.

Issues Identification

The consultant assisted the Steering Committee in identifying issues raised through the stakeholders’ interviews and Community Forum Series One, including the identification of key themes and areas of apparent consensus.

Vision Statement

The Vision Statement, included in Chapter 2.0 of the plan, puts into words and images an expression of the community character and quality of life desired by residents. The Vision Statement is the motivation and the policy touchstone for the Land Use Element, as well as for all comprehensive plan elements to follow.

Step Three: Existing Conditions and Trends – the Dynamics of Change

In this step, a systematic investigation and analysis of existing conditions and trends was conducted in the following areas:

Existing Conditions

- ♦ Regional Context
- ♦ Natural Features
- ♦ Existing Land Use
- ♦ Zoning
- ♦ Current Land Use Policies
- ♦ Community Facilities
- ♦ Police/Fire/EMS
- ♦ Infrastructure (water and wastewater)
- ♦ Transportation/Road Network (existing and planned)

Development Trends

- ♦ Annexation History
- ♦ Development/Permitting Trends
- ♦ On-going/Planned/Proposed Developments
- ♦ Community Structure (susceptibility to change and development)
- ♦ Factors for Change (potential triggers for growth)
- ♦ Build-out Scenario

A series of meetings of the Steering Committee were facilitated to deliberate potential policy responses to the emerging development patterns and trends, with a particular focus on altering these patterns and trends to ensure that in the future they will reflect the 2030 Vision of Georgetown.

Step Four: Preliminary Goals, Policies and Strategies / Future Land Use Map

The consultant drafted a series of preliminary Land Use Goals, Policies and Strategies to address the issues that emerged from the existing conditions and trends assessment. In addition, the consultant and City Staff prepared several iterations of a Future Land Use Map, depicting the land use and development patterns reflected in the preliminary Goals, Policies and Strategies. In a sequence of monthly Steering Committee meetings, the “menu” of draft policy directions for each identified issue, along with the Future Land Use Map and proposed Growth Management Framework, were incrementally refined until the Steering Committee arrived at consensus.

Step Five: Public Review of Preliminary Goals, Policies and Strategies / Future Land Use Map

The preliminary Goals, Policies and Strategies, the Future Land Use Map and the Growth Management Framework were presented to the public at a series of events, including:

- **City Council Workshop Presentation**

At a workshop on August 13, 2007 the Consultant and City Staff presented the Preliminary Goals, Policies and Strategies and Growth Management Framework and received City Council direction to present it for public review.

- **Community Forum Series Two**

On August 23 and 24, 2007, the Consultant and City Staff presented the Preliminary Goals, Policies and Strategies and the Growth Management Framework at two community forums to answer questions, receive public comment, and refine the policy and growth management frameworks.

- **Community Forum Series Three**

On October 4 and 5, 2007, the Consultant and City Staff presented the proposed Future Land Use Map, along with the refined Goals, Policies and Strategies and the Growth Management Framework in a sequence of two community forums, with the aim of answering questions and receiving public comment.

Step Six: Comprehensive Plan Framework Document / Land Use Plan Element

The Future Land Use Element, along with the Comprehensive Plan Framework, was documented to reflect and respond to public input at the final community forums, at the direction of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.

