
Hays County Strategic Policy and Implementation Plan 2010



Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Table of Contents

HISTORY and GEOGRAPHY	1
INTRODUCTION	2
Plan Process	2
Plan Recommendations	3
DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS	7
Introduction	7
Current and Projected Population	7
Population Characteristics	8
Income and Employment	9
Housing	10
Conclusion	11
INTERNAL OBJECTS	13
Introduction	13
Current Activities	13
Short-term Projects (1 – 3 Years)	14
Mid-term Projects (3 - 5 Years)	23
Conclusion	25
WATER and WASTEWATER	26
Introduction	26
Current Activities	26
Short-term Projects (1 – 3 Years)	27
Mid-term Projects (3 - 5 Years)	31
Long-term Projects (> 5 Years)	33
Conclusion	34

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

TRANSPORTATION	35
Introduction	35
Current Activities	35
Short-term Projects (1 - 3 Years)	36
Mid-Term Projects (3 - 5 Years)	39
Long-term Projects (> 5 Years)	41
Conclusion	43
GROWTH MANAGEMENT	44
Introduction	44
Current Activities	44
Short-term Projects (1 - 3 Years)	45
Mid-term Projects (3 - 5 Years)	49
Long-term Projects (> 5 Years)	51
Conclusion	53
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	54
Introduction	54
Short-term Projects (1 - 3 Years)	54
Mid-term Projects (3 - 5 Years)	58
Conclusion	61
QUALITY OF LIFE	62
Introduction	62
Current Activities	62
Short-term (1-3 Years)	63
Mid-term (3-5 Years)	66
Conclusion	68
CONCLUSION	70

This Page Intentionally Left Blank

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

HISTORY and GEOGRAPHY¹

Hays County is located just south of Austin, the state capitol. There has been human settlement in the area for thousands of years, drawn to the springs in the area. Permanent European settlements started in 1807, when the first settlers came to the San Marcos River. Land grants brought additional settlers, and the first Anglo-American was Thomas G. McGhee. Hays County, officially created on March 1, 1848, and named after John Coffee “Jack” Hays, a famous Texas Ranger. Growth came to the county, especially with the completion of the railroad in the late 1800s. The population stayed nearly unchanged around 15,000 from 1900 into the middle of the 20th century, with a predominantly agricultural economy. Starting in 1960, the population of the county began a steady growth, which exploded in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Environment

Hays County is on the border of two river basins - the Colorado and the Guadalupe. As mentioned, the area has abundant springs, including San Marcos Springs, fed by the Edwards Aquifer and the second largest in the state, and the Trinity Aquifer which feeds Jacobs Well. These springs, and local rivers, are also home to many unique species found only in this area. The Edwards and Trinity Aquifers underlie much of the county and are a major source of drinking water for the region.

The Balcones Escarpment divides the county into two distinct geographical areas: the Texas Hill Country to the northwest, and the Blackland Prairie to the southeast. The mean annual rainfall is 33.75 inches. Average maximum temperature is 96 degrees in July, and the average minimum is 40 degrees in January.

Economy

The economy has changed from its historic basis in agriculture and has diversified over the last 20 years. San Marcos has a strong manufacturing and retail sector, and the retail sector grows with the ever-increasing population. Tourism is also budding with the environmental assets and quaint small towns attracting visitors. Texas State University is a major employer and continues to expand. These assets were instrumental in Hays County’s success in weathering the most recent economic downturn, one that proved detrimental to similar communities.

Hays County’s proximity to Austin, scenic beauty, lower cost of living, and small town character makes it an attractive destination for newcomers to the region and those wanting to escape the ‘big city.’ The economy has changed and will continue to change as the county develops its own unique identity rather than simply being an agricultural area or bedroom community to Austin.

¹ Source: Handbook of Texas Online

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, Hays County began the development of a Strategic Policy Plan with the goal to create a document that would provide a framework for decision-making for the Commissioners Court. It is intended to be a holistic document that addresses nearly every aspect of County governance and reaches across jurisdictions to enhance coordination between the County, Cities, School Districts, and others. An extensive input process was conducted to ensure opportunities for as much participation from all parts of the county. The goal is to enhance efficiency of service for the citizens of Hays County.

Plan Process

The development process began with an internal assessment of County government. Elected and appointed officials were interviewed to identify their needs and goals over the next several years. This internal assessment was intended to identify existing opportunities and issues for the Commissioners before moving into an open public process. This would reduce the potential for unrealistic expectations by providing a firm foundation of internal needs that must be met to continue providing current services. Identified goals include the need for a new government center, jail improvements, software standardization, satellite office expansions, among others. Across the board, elected and appointed officials were committed to providing excellent service and maximum efficiency to citizens and identified ways to improve service at all levels.

In May 2009 a Leadership Charrette was conducted, bringing together leaders from the Cities, School Districts, Emergency Services Districts, and others to discuss common needs and issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries. Attendees, asked to identify existing and proposed projects in their communities, hoped to impact the rest of the county (such as major transportation projects, etc.) and ways that coordination could be enhanced. This meeting was the first step in building cooperation across the county and will lead to better coordination of activities in the future.

The third step in the input process was a series of focus groups held across the county and with a range of diverse constituencies. These included environmental groups, economic developers, seniors, School District boards, neighborhood groups, developers and land owners, and social service providers. The meetings were intended as a dialogue to gather information rather than a presentation. To facilitate this dialogue a series of questions was asked:

- What are the top issues facing your organization?
- How is your organization responding to growth?
- What new facilities are you planning in the next 3–5 years?
- How can the County assist you with your projects?
- What other issues are facing Hays County?

These meetings were very well attended and a number of common issues were identified including the need for water management, transportation improvements, economic development, and overall growth management.

Finally, an Internet survey was conducted and four open Town Hall meetings were held (one in each Commissioner Precinct) to provide an opportunity for citizens to voice their opinions. These meetings followed a similar format to the focus groups, starting with a demographics presentation then asking a series of questions:

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

- Why do you live in Hays County?
- How can those qualities be maintained and enhanced?
- What is the County doing well?
- What challenges do you see facing Hays County?
- What should be done to address those challenges?
- Are you willing to stay involved and active in addressing these challenges?

In addition, there was an exercise in which participants were given “one dollar” to spend on current County activities as well as the opportunity to identify new programs or efforts and how much (if any) additional taxes to fund them.

All of the information gathered from this process has been incorporated into the goals and recommendations identified in this plan. A Steering Committee, appointed by the County Judge, worked with staff from the Lower Colorado River Authority’s Community and Economic Development Department to facilitate the input process and develop the plan recommendations.

Plan Recommendations

The plan identifies six broad categories of work. The first is internal projects, which are tied directly to basic County governance, identifies strategies for more efficient work as well as projects that are currently underway or should be undertaken. The other categories were Water and Wastewater, Transportation, Growth Management, Economic Development, and Quality of Life. These are all areas where the County has a direct role to play and can have a tremendous impact on residents. Within each of these categories, a series of Short-, Mid-, and Long-term recommendations were identified that will enable the County to best respond to growth and use limited resources to best serve citizens.

Internal Objectives

Current Activities

- Serve as an information clearinghouse for the County
- Strengthen Internal County Cohesion and Coordination
- Update Voice and data network
- Review of Veterans Affairs
- Jail Improvements / Consider New Jail
- Energy Audit

Short-term (1 – 3 Years)

- Build new government center and consolidate offices
- Inventory and Standardize Software across the County
- Hire an Ombudsman
- Coordinate existing and future County plans (Habitat Conservation Plan, Transportation, Water & Wastewater, Drainage, etc.)
- Coordinate with local plans (City, Watersheds, etc.)
- Centralized Collections and Compliance (Process starting with Courts)
- Centralized Purchasing Process County-wide
- Expand Fleet Services
- Inventory Precinct offices and determine expansion needs

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

- Optimize use of Odessey
- Additional District Judge

Mid-term (3 – 5 Years)

- Establish centralized 911 as an independent entity
- Additional County-Court-at-Law

Water and Wastewater

Current Activities

- Hold a Water Summit with Cities, MUDs, developers, River Authorities, Groundwater Conservation Districts, water conservation and environmental groups, etc.
- Water and Wastewater Facility Plan being developed for Western Hays County
- County-wide Drainage Basin / Flood Protection Plan being developed
- Rainwater Harvesting incentives being reviewed and reworked

Short-term (1 – 3 Years)

- Create an annual County Judge's Award for projects that incorporate best water conservation practices (xeriscaping, buffers, conservation, reuse, etc.)
- Support the Edwards Aquifer Authority's efforts to implement impervious cover restrictions
- Increase education and outreach to residents on the importance of water quality and quantity and preservation
- Stay engaged with the Region K and L planning process and ensure the County is appropriately represented
- Establish strong relationship and coordination with existing water suppliers and regulatory bodies
- Explore opportunities for new water supplies in the county
- Participate in the Edwards Aquifer's Recovery Implementation Rules
- Incorporate Watershed Protection plans into Subdivision Rules

Mid-term (3 – 5 Years)

- Work with AgriLife extension and landowners to support Texas Watershed Steward Program, brush management, creekside conservation, and other efforts to protect water quality and quantity
- Continue to purchase sensitive land as financially feasible to protect water quality and quantity and consider incentives for landowners to preserve lands

Long-term

- Utilize Water / Wastewater study as basis for using County authority as Water / Wastewater District

Transportation

Current Activities

- Complete the county Transportation Plan On-going coordination with school districts to ensure adequate facilities

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

- Continue participation in Austin-San Antonio Rail project (Lone Star Rail District)

Short-term (1 – 3 Years)

- Ensure strict adherence to County standards to minimize curb cuts along
- Incorporate Water Quality Best Practices into all road projects
- Continue to push for Scenic Road designations
- Consider establishing Park and Ride facilities
- Increase enforcement in high traffic areas

Mid-term (3 – 5 Years)

- Incorporate bike and pedestrian facilities into new and upgraded roads where feasible
- Explore feasibility of Capital Metro service or bus connector to Austin

Long-term (> 5-years)

- Explore the possibility for additional corridors and / or improvements to existing roads across the county to alleviate growing congestion on key roads (RR 12, I-35, US 290, etc.)
- Support development of rail infrastructure and stations to serve commuter rail

Growth Management

Current Activities

- Establish a “One-Stop” Permitting’
- Continue to enforce regulations requiring *Water Availability Studies*
- Adopt and implement the *Habitat Conservation Plan*

Short-term (1 – 3 Years)

- Develop and implement an ETJ Agreements with cities
- Work with cities to focus development in existing urban areas
- Identify ‘Preferred Growth Areas’
- Encourage “low-impact” development
- Promote and facilitate the development of pedestrian facilities and increased connectivity in the street network
- Work with TxDOT, developers, and others to focus their mitigation projects where most beneficial

Mid-term (3 – 5 Years)

- Continue working towards authority for the County to regulate land use
- Explore potential for light and noise pollution controls

Long-term (< 5 Years)

- Provide funding for land and development rights acquisition in sensitive areas
- Develop a Transfer of Development Rights program
- Ensure adequate funding to support growth of County personnel and facilities to match growing population
- Leveraging the successful implementation of the *Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)*, develop and implement *Conservation and Development Plan*

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Economic Development

Short-term (1 – 3 Years)

- Build upon and strengthen working relationships with local economic development entities in San Marcos, Kyle, Buda, Dripping Springs, Wimberley, and other emerging locations
- Establish a County-wide Economic Development Policy
- Evaluate development of a County-wide incentive policy to encourage additional business investment in the area.
- Encourage Cities to pursue 'Certified Retirement Community' status
- Coordinate with Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVB), and any other tourism organizations to promote tourism initiatives through joint marketing efforts, event coordination, and information sharing.

Mid-term (3 – 5 Years)

- Encourage infrastructure development in areas most suitable for economic development
- Work with communities, private property owners, and other key players in Hays County to protect and enhance unique natural features, historic sites, and other irreplaceable physical assets in the county
- Explore efforts to increase access to Community College / Vocational education in county with minimal impacts to taxpayers
- Explore economic development opportunities: recruiting State of Texas offices to Hays County, expand health care opportunities, advanced technology, and clean industry
- Evaluate services and programs to enhance value-added agriculture and promotion of unique natural products
- Develop cycling infrastructure and market Hays County as a cycling destination

Quality of Life

Current Activities

- Continue support for CARTS and explore potential for expanding services
- Continue Support for Non-Profits across the county
- Continue support for EMS Services
- Fund and continue to support the Healthy Communities Coalition

Short-term (1 – 3 Years)

- Support School Districts
- Expand recreation opportunities across the county

Mid-term (3 – 5 Years)

- Provide grant writing support to local non-profits and others
- Explore Healthcare District
- Increased Access to Health Care
- Update Hays County Strategic Plan

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

DEMOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS

Introduction

Hays County has seen explosive growth in the last 20 years. The population has more than doubled, and some cities within the county have grown even faster. Proximity to Austin, scenic beauty, lower cost of living, and quality of life are what attract new residents. Many work in Austin; however, there has been growth in local employment opportunities as well. It is important in any planning exercise to have a firm understanding of the population the plan serves. This Demographic Analysis provides an overview of Hays County and the people who live here.

Current and Projected Population

As this table indicates, the population has more than doubled in the last 20 years, and this growth is expected to continue. Incorporated cities have seen significant growth, particularly Kyle; however, approximately half of all new residents are in the unincorporated areas of Hays County, where there is limited authority to regulate growth. Cities and the County are struggling to manage this growth as demand for services, traffic, etc. surge. This plan is an effort to effectively address these key issues moving forward. Population estimates and projections are a challenge and open to dispute. The Texas Water Development Board also provides estimates and projections; however, they do not have them for every city in the county. These estimates are in the second table below. The estimates and projections are significantly different; it will be up to community leaders and planners to compare the numbers here with their own information (such as utility connections, etc.) to determine appropriate numbers for specific planning projects.

Population Estimates and Projections

	1990	2000	2009 (est.)	% Change 1990 - 2009	2014 (Proj.)
Hays County	65,614	97,589	149,264	127%	182,620
Bear Creek	232	360	501	116%	619
Buda	1,481	2,404	3,298	123%	3,980
Dripping Springs	818	1,548	1,770	116%	2,114
Hays	145	233	268	85%	329
Kyle	3,265	5,314	16,664	410%	22,645
Mountain City	392	671	790	144%	1,030
Niederwald	324	594	1,310	304%	1,659
San Marcos	28,832	34,733	43,182	50%	49,023
Uhland	142	386	685	382%	896
Wimberley	2,343	3,797	4,846	107%	5,796
Woodcreek	864	1,274	1,382	60%	1,549

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

	2010 (est)	2020 (proj)
Buda	9,338	13,971
Dripping Springs (WSC)	5,325	9,308
Kyle	21,457	31,126
Mountain City	1,019	1,187
Niederwald	1,021	1,530
San Marcos	48,814	69,906
Wimberley (WSC)		
Woodcreek	1,730	2,252

Source: Texas Water Development Board 2011 Regional Water Plan

*Not all Cities included in the TWDB projections

As part of the *Habitat Conservation Plan*, a projection for the year 2040 was done. This shows the population of Hays County growing to 375,873, another doubling from today's population. This fits within the expectations of the Austin metropolitan region also doubling its population in that same time frame.

The recent economic slowdown has given some breathing room to Cities and School Districts most impacted by this growth. This window of opportunity can allow the community to lay the groundwork to more effectively manage future growth.

Population Characteristics

The population of Hays County is changing, along with the rest of the State of Texas. The growing Hispanic population affects the needs and priorities of the community. The Hispanic population was also underrepresented in the public input process, so it will be important to ensure their concerns are heard and addressed moving forward. In the Census, Hispanic is considered an ethnicity not a race, so the totals do not add up to 100%.

Race and Ethnicity

	2000	2009	% Change
White Alone	78.9%	74.0%	(-4.9%)
Black Alone	3.7%	4.2%	0.5%
American Indian	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%
Asian	0.8%	1.0%	0.2%
Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Other	13.4%	17.0%	3.6%
Two or More	2.5%	3.0%	0.5%
Hispanic	29.6%	37.5%	7.9%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

The age of the population also affects the expectations for service and facilities within the county. An aging population places increased demand on public safety resources, medical services, and transportation. While the percentage of young people and those in the 35–44 year cohort is declining, the overall growth of the population means total numbers continue to rise. The continued rise in percentage of older residents reflects the desirability of Hays County as a retirement community, and the growth in medical services in the county complements that.

Population by Age 2000 - 2009

	2000	2009	% of Pop. Change
0 – 4	6.3%	6.7%	0.4%
5 – 9	6.5%	6.3%	(-0.2%)
10 – 14	7.1%	6.3%	(-0.8%)

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

15 – 19	10.1%	8.6%	(-1.5%)
20 – 24	15.0%	13.5%	(-1.5%)
25 – 34	13.3%	14.3%	1.0%
35 – 44	15.0%	12.5%	(-2.5%)
45 – 54	12.4%	13.6%	1.2%
55 – 64	6.6%	9.8%	3.2%
65 – 74	4.2%	4.7%	0.5%
75 – 84	2.5%	2.6%	0.1%
85+	0.9%	1.1%	0.2%
Median Age	28.5	30.6	2.1

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Income and Employment

Hays County has seen a steady growth in family income in the last several years. The economic downturn has had an effect on the county, but not at the same level as other parts of the country. The proximity to Austin and a relatively diversified economy have somewhat insulated Hays County.

Median Household Income

	County 2000	County 2009
<\$15,000	16.1%	12.3%
\$15,000 - \$24,999	11.2%	8.5%
\$25,000 - \$34,999	11.8%	7.9%
\$35,000 - \$49,999	16.2%	14.0%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	19.9%	21.2%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	11.9%	14.0%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	8.7%	14.6%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	2.3%	4.0%
\$200,000+	1.8%	3.5%
Median Household Income	\$45,006	\$59,184

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

As mentioned, Hays County has a fairly diversified economy. San Marcos has a strong manufacturing sector, Texas State University, as well as a huge retail base with the outlet malls. Other communities are seeing their retail sector grow with the population growth. Medical facilities are also expanding. This diversity provides a significant opportunity for residents to work within the County. Many still commute to Austin and this is likely to continue. New roads and the planned rail will help to ensure a strong connection to Austin for those residents who commute.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Occupation

	County % of Total
Total Employees	66,380
White Collar	63.2%
Management / Financial	14.1%
Professional	23.3%
Sales	11.5%
Administrative Support	14.3%
Services	17.7%
Blue Collar	19.1%
Farming/ Forestry / Fishing	0.3%
Construction / Extraction	7.2%
Installation / Maintenance / Repair	3.1%
Production	4.8%
Transportation	3.7%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

The recommendations in this plan will support the efforts of local economic developers to attract and retain quality businesses to Hays County. A strong economy is critical to a community's success by providing tax revenues for local jurisdictions and options for residents to work close to home.

Housing

The explosive population growth in Hays County has led to major growth in housing. The vast majority has been single-family homes, although there has been some multi-family built along the I-35 corridor. This growth has strained roads, water systems, etc. as communities struggle to manage the influx. One benefit to this growth is that Hays County continues to have a diversity of housing at varying price points for residents to have options.

Housing Occupancy 2009

	# of Units	% of Units
Total Housing Units	55,319	100%
Occupied	50,862	91.9%
Owner	32,554	58.8%
Renter	18,308	33.1%
Vacant	4,457	8.1%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

As this indicates, approximately 8 percent of the homes in Hays County are vacant. Some of these may be vacation or seasonal homes; however, these represent a challenge for the community. Vacant homes can become magnets for crime, vandalism, etc., and should be monitored to ensure they are not havens for bad behavior.

Home Values 2009

	# of Units	% of Units
< \$10,000	319	1.0%
\$10,000 - \$14,999	162	0.5%
\$15,000 - \$19,999	255	0.8%
\$20,000 - \$24,999	288	0.9%
\$25,000 - \$29,999	352	1.1%
\$30,000 - \$34,999	309	0.9%

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

\$35,000 - \$39,999	292	0.9%
\$40,000 - \$49,999	822	2.5%
\$50,000 - \$59,999	1,138	3.5%
\$60,000 - \$69,999	843	2.6%
\$70,000 - \$79,999	787	2.4%
\$80,000 - \$89,999	935	2.9%
\$90,000 - \$99,999	925	2.8%
\$100,000 - \$124,999	2,754	8.5%
\$125,000 - \$149,999	3,071	9.4%
\$150,000 - \$174,999	3,058	9.4%
\$175,000 - \$199,999	2,068	6.4%
\$200,000 - \$249,999	4,256	13.1%
\$250,000 - \$299,999	3,073	9.4%
\$300,000 - \$399,999	3,211	9.9%
\$400,00 - \$499,999	1,470	4.5%
\$500,000 - \$749,999	1,260	3.9%
\$750,000 - \$999,999	401	1.2%
> \$1,000,000	505	1.6%

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

Median Home Price 2009

	Median Value
Hays County	\$174,730
Bear Creek	\$342,222
Buda	\$160,590
Dripping Springs	\$275,987
Hays	\$248,000
Kyle	\$146,222
Mountain City	\$234,722
Niederwald	\$76,154
San Marcos	\$122,786
Uhland	\$145,833
Wimberley	\$226,737
Woodcreek	\$212,083

Source: ESRI Business Analyst

As these tables indicate, there is reasonable diversity of housing costs across Hays County. A prospective buyer should be able to find an appropriate and affordable home. This is not to say every part of the county has this diversity. In fact, many parts of the county have a major challenge with housing affordability. The table above shows the median home price in each incorporated city, showing the affordability issue that exists in some of them. Housing affordability was not a priority identified in the planning process. Residents show some level of concern with the rise in home prices; however, the economic downturn has moderated this increase to some degree. New policies to manage growth may also have an impact on housing availability and affordability if they are too strict or unreasonable. This plan is an attempt to balance the needs of managing growth while protecting affordability for new and existing residents.

Conclusion

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

As this chapter indicates, Hays County is a rapidly growing and changing community. Explosive population growth is affecting the roads, environment, and character of the county. Hays County is no longer a rural, agricultural community. It is transitioning into a suburban county while trying to maintain its rural character. Population growth will continue because of the desirability of the county, its proximity to Austin, and the availability of land. County leaders will have to monitor and manage this growth to ensure water quality and quantity, environmental features, and quality of life are protected over time.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

INTERNAL OBJECTS

Introduction

The projects identified as 'internal' are those most closely related to the core functions of County government as an organization. They are meant to help the organization enhance its efficiency and effectiveness in serving the citizens of Hays County. These recommendations are primarily based on the interview process with elected and appointed officials and the Leadership Charrette. These recommendations can be driven by the Commissioners Court; however, due to the unique nature of County government and the autonomy of its elected officials, it will require the support of those individuals as well to be successful. This plan is based on the input of these officials, not driven by the Commissioners Court, which should encourage participation from all levels of County government.

Current Activities

Hays County has been very active in a variety of projects to move the County forward. This plan is intended to be an overarching plan to coordinate these on-going and newly identified efforts.

Serve as an Information Clearinghouse for the County

Part of coordinating efforts involves creating a shared network of information. The County should work with cities and other jurisdictions to create a centralized, web-based information network to share data both internally and with citizens. This can include major infrastructure projects, important dates (Council and Court meetings, etc.), key contact information, as well as updates on other projects and activities across the county.

Another aspect of this is to establish solid, working relationships between County staff and others. Informal workshops and discussion sessions at staff level should be conducted to encourage networking and relationships to develop. Too often, local jurisdictions see each other as competition rather than partners, which results in minimal cooperation. These informal meetings should lead to more formal leaders meetings, possibly 2 or 3 times a year that would allow elected officials and other leaders to come together and discuss common issues and projects. Residents often do not understand the distinction between City and County government; they simply want effective, efficient service. The stronger the links between City, County, School Districts, and others, the more effective each can be.

Strengthen Internal County Cohesion and Coordination

During the internal assessment, one identified concern was the need to strengthen relationships among departments and elected officials internally. Because of the unique structure of County government, each elected official operates fairly independently, with the Commissioners Court having overall responsibility but somewhat limited ability to influence. The Court should consider an annual planning retreat where all elected and appointed officials come together to prepare for the year ahead. This could lead to collaboration across departments and reduce the competition that occurs at budget time. If leaders could work together to identify priorities and needs, it would result in more effective budgeting. It could also lead to cost savings and efficiencies as common needs and purchases are better coordinated. This should be a high priority for County action to better serve the citizens of Hays County.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Update Voice and Data Network

The County is currently installing a countywide network and centralized telephone system (VoIP), which will result in considerable savings and a stronger connection between offices. With the tremendous need for information, this is a key project that should be moved along as quickly as possible.

Review of Veterans Affairs

The County Veterans Affairs program provides a critical service to veterans and is experiencing growth in demand for those services. The program has been an example of minimalism, with only one full-time staff member.

Jail Improvements / Consider New Jail

Spending money on the County Jail is typically not a politically attractive activity because taxpayers have little interest in this. However, the State has found serious issues with the County jail that need to be addressed in short order. Commissioners Court will have to include money in the next budget for significant upgrades, improvements, and an increase in maintenance funding to the jail. These improvements may be sufficient to continue using the jail for the foreseeable future ; however, it may be time to consider an alternative.

Burnet County recently opened a new jail at minimal cost to taxpayers. The County partnered with a private firm to build and operate the jail, with the County paying a fee to house prisoners. The jail will also contract with other Counties, the Federal government, and others to house additional prisoners at the facility. This project has provided the County with a new state of the art facility, as well as taken the cost and liability of managing the jail off the County. This can serve as an example of what may be possible in Hays County and should be fully explored by Commissioners Court as an example to solve the jail dilemma. If the decision is to replace the jail, this is one option; however, the Commissioners Court will have to make the decision that works best for Hays County and not rely solely on what works in another county.

Energy Audit

The County recently received a grant for an Energy Audit of all County facilities. This grant will allow the County to do a thorough assessment of its energy use and identify strategies for conservation. This will result in lower utility bills for the County, saving the taxpayers money. This also supports the environmental goals of the County by reducing energy demand. Although the grant will provide some funding for implementation, the Commissioners Court should plan to include additional money in the next fiscal year budget to implement recommendations from the Audit.

Short-term Projects (1 – 3 Years)

Short-term projects are those that demand immediate attention. In some cases, they have already been funded and planned for (government center, Energy Audit). Others are required due to regulatory issues (i.e., jail improvements). These projects will require Commissioners Court to consider them in the next budget cycle and should be considered of high importance.

Build new Government Center and Consolidate Offices

The County has planned and budgeted for a new Government Center that would allow many departments to consolidate into one location. This would be a tremendous benefit to the County because it currently rents or owns many buildings, including several in downtown San Marcos.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Consolidation would allow for greater coordination between departments, as well as reduce costs for maintenance, security, utilities, etc. It would also be a major morale booster, particularly for those employees in the current Justice Center which was originally intended to be a temporary replacement for the permanent Justice Center.

The building would also benefit the citizens of Hays County by providing many services at one location rather than having to go to many locations. San Marcos would also benefit because many of the buildings currently occupied by County offices could be redeveloped into commercial businesses that will bring in tax revenue and increased visitors into downtown. This project has been discussed and planned for many years and should be implemented as soon as possible.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Finalize Building Plans and Budget 100% CDs	3 Months	July – September 2010	Commissioners Court
Oversee Construction	2 Years	July 2010 – July 2012	Commissioners Court
Move to new Offices	1 Year	December 2011 – January 2012	Commissioners Court, County staff

Possible Partners?

Elected and Appointed Officials who will move to new building

How will you measure success?

Substantial completion date by December 2011

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Currently budgeted bond money

Inventory and Standardize Software Across the County

This is a key recommendation that should be implemented immediately. One elected official said when he first started the three computers in his office each had a different version of Microsoft, meaning they could not even connect with each other. This is unacceptable in today's world and should be remedied. The most efficient fix would be to purchase an enterprise license of Microsoft that would cover every computer at the County. This would be a large initial expense (well over \$100,000); however, it would result in cost and frustration savings for employees and better service to citizens. The IT department would also have an easier time with maintenance because systems would be standardized. A rotational system could be established to replace aging computers regularly across the County to ensure all users have adequate equipment. While it is a difficult thing to include the initial cost in an annual budget, the on-going savings will make this investment worthwhile very quickly.

Odyssey is another software tool that has the potential to bring benefits and efficiencies to the Court system; however, it has not been universally adopted and its full benefit realized. Commissioners Court should make efforts to provide adequate funding for training to all potential Odyssey users and strongly encourage its adoption across the board. Again, the increased efficiency will benefit the County and citizens in the long run.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

The Appraisal District is an independent agency that is funded by the different jurisdictions within the County. Currently, the District is not using Geographic Information System software to manage its parcel inventory. The County and other jurisdictions should strongly encourage them to adopt GIS software to be compatible with other users and make their data more accessible to their customer jurisdictions.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Utilize IT staff to identify all software being used on County computers	3 Months	January – March 2011	IT
Determine a common platform for all computers (Windows 7 for example)	3 Months	July – June 2011	Commissioners Court, Elected and Appointed Officials
Adopt Countywide policy on software and hardware standards	3 Months	June – August 2011	IT, Commissioners Court
Budget for Enterprise License for Windows	3 Months	June – August 2011	Commissioners Court
Purchase License and Install County-wide	6 Months	October 2011 – March 2012	Commissioners Court, IT

Possible Partners?

IT Consultant, Elected and Appointed Officials affected by change

How will you measure success?

Enterprise license in place by March 2012

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

~\$150,000 for Enterprise License

Staff Time

General Funds

Hire an Ombudsman

Because the County provides such a broad range of services and in so many different locations, it can be difficult for residents to know where to start or where to go with issues and complaints. The role of the Ombudsman is to be that one point of contact where people can get started or where concerns can be addressed. This person could then take issues to the appropriate departments and work with County staff to address concerns and challenges identified by residents. The Ombudsman could also serve an internal role, providing employees with a place to go with issues.

It is challenging in times of tight resources to consider adding staff; however, this position would result in better service to residents and County employees. It would also reduce the burden on current staff who often have to respond to calls and spend time tracking down the right person. The Court should consider funding this position as resources allow to continue providing optimal service to residents and staff.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Determine clear role and responsibilities for the position	3 Months	February - April 2011	Commissioners Court, HR Officials
Determine if it can be an added responsibility for existing staff or if new staff is needed	1 Month	May 2011	Commissioners Court, HR Officials
If financially feasible, add position into FY 2012 budget	1 Month	June 2011	Commissioners Court
Hire Person and publicize to staff and citizens	On-going	October 2011	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

County staff and officials

How will you measure success?

Ombudsman position filled by October 2011 (either with new staff or responsibilities assigned to existing staff)

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Salary and Benefits

General Funds

Coordinate Existing and Future Plans

The County recently completed a *Habitat Conservation Plan*, which focuses on protecting endangered species habitat, as well as a "Greenprint" of the county, which identifies those areas most suitable for development and conservation based on local values and priorities. A transportation plan is being developed internally, a water and wastewater plan will be completed soon, and a drainage plan has also been grant funded and will begin in the western half of the county. All of these plans will have implications on development and growth and to be effective will require a high level of coordination. The County has hired a Planner who is tasked with this effort and is leading the development of the transportation plan. This shows a commitment by County leaders to ensure Hays County is not just developing plans that will sit on a shelf, but will actively implement those plans to manage growth and change.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify all relevant existing County plans and Review	3 Months	July – September 2010	County Planner
Develop Plan Implementation Guide that will ensure that all Plans are referenced in a centralized document.	3 months	July – September 2010	County Planner
Stay involved with future planning efforts to ensure they reflect existing issues opportunities	On-going	On-going	County Planner

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Possible Partners?

County staff and officials

How will you measure success?

Plans are coordinated and an implementation guide is developed

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

General Funds

Coordinate with Local Plans

Several of the cities in Hays County have, or are developing, Comprehensive Plans. There are also watershed protection plans and other plans that have been created for specific areas and projects. Incorporating these into a larger action plan will be critical to success. One of the purposes in developing this county-wide plan is to identify on-going local projects where coordination across jurisdictions will be beneficial. For example, if a City is expanding a two-lane road to four lanes, it would be beneficial if the County or adjoining City knew about it so a bottleneck is not created at the City Limits if the road immediately squeezes back down to two lanes. This type of coordination has happened on an ad hoc basis; however, staff has now taken the responsibility to actively monitor this. Oversight should result in more efficiency and better use of tax dollars through coordination of effort and reduced conflicts.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify all relevant existing County plans and Review	3 Months	September - November 2010	County Planner
Determine common issues and recommendations	3 months	September – JNovember 2010	County Planner
Stay involved with future planning efforts so the County stays informed and can coordinate projects	On-going	On-going	County Planner
Establish and maintain working relationships with local staff and officials to ensure on-going County / City coordination	On-going	On-going	County Planner, Commissioners Court, City Staff, ESD, ISD Staff

Possible Partners?

County staff and officials, City staff and officials

How will you measure success?

Plans are fully coordinated

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

General Fund

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Centralize Collections and Compliance

This is another area that should be centralized; however, due to the fact that each Judge and Court is independently elected, it can be a challenge. Currently, each jurisdiction has its own philosophy and approach to collections and compliance, which creates confusion and challenges for citizens as well as the County trying to oversee it all. There has been an effort made to begin this process, but just as with the 911 dispatch it will require leadership to change habits and get other elected officials to buy into a unified system. A study showing the benefits of a unified system would be helpful to overcome resistance.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Create a task force of affected departments to develop ideas and discussion	3 Months	July – September 2010	County Commissioners, Courts at Law, other Courts, Treasurer
Determine common issues and recommendations	3 months	October – December 2010	Task Force
Build support and consensus across departments to support the effort	6 Months	January – April 2011	Task Force, Commissioners Court
Identify staffing and facility needs (new staff vs. existing staff, etc.)	6 Months	May – July 2011	Task Force, Commissioners Court
Include in FY 2012 Budget to implement	4 Months	July – September 2011	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Elected and Appointed County Officials, particularly Judges, Justices of the Peace, Constables

How will you measure success?

Centralized System in place by end of 2012

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on staffing and equipment
General Funds

Centralize Purchasing Process

Centralized purchasing will bring cost savings and efficiencies to the County because it would provide one point of contact for major investments and spending. It can also be a tool for standardizing software, computers, etc. Another opportunity this presents is to partner with Cities and other jurisdictions on common purchases, such as computers, vehicles, etc. to get better prices. Again, the goal is efficiency and saving tax dollars. This will be a sensitive issue because elected officials appreciate the autonomy of managing their own purchases; however, centralization has its benefits, will save money for the County and ensure compliance with state and county purchasing rules and regulations. Every opportunity to do so should be explored by the Court and leadership shown to overcome resistance.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Create a task force of affected departments to develop ideas and discussion	3 Months	January – March 2011	County Commissioners, Courts at Law, other Courts, Treasurer
Determine common issues and recommendations	3 months	April – June 2011	Task Force
Build support and consensus across departments to support the effort	6 Months	June – December 2011	Task Force, Commissioners Court
Identify staffing and facility needs (new staff vs. existing staff, etc.)	6 Months	January – June 2012	Task Force, Commissioners Court
Include in FY 2013 Budget to implement	4 Months	July – October 2012	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Elected and Appointed County Officials

How will you measure success?

Centralized System in place by end of 2012

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on staffing and equipment

General Funds

Expand Fleet Services

Currently, many County vehicles are serviced at commercial shops rather than at the central fleet services. This is due in part to a lack of resources to do all the work and the convenience for vehicles located at satellite offices. This is a cost to the County that would be better invested in improvements and expansion to the centralized fleet service. This will be a cultural shift (as many of these projects are) to change employees' behavior. Commissioners Court will have to talk up the benefits, and the fleet services staff will have to prove the efficiency and benefits of having centralized service. Again, this will take time and investment to make successful, and the Court will have to decide if the upfront money is worth the cost savings and efficiency over time.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Work with Maintenance Staff to Establish Needs and Priorities	6 Months	January – June 2011	County Commissioners, Fleet Maintenance, Sheriff
Determine if cities, ESDs or ISDs can partner for joint services	6 Months	January – June 2011	County, Cities, ESDs, ISDs
Determine Needed Facilities and Budget	3 months	June – August 2011	County Commissioners, Fleet Maintenance, Sheriff
Incorporate in FY 2012 Budget for needed improvements (if feasible, improvements may take several years)	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Possible Partners?

Cities, School Districts, ESDs

How will you measure success?

Facilities expanded to serve all county vehicles by end of 2014

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on staffing and equipment
General Funds

Inventory Precinct Offices and Determine Expansion Needs

Many interview participants identified the need for space in the precinct offices as an issue. As population has grown, staff has been added; however, space has often not. A couple of the precinct offices are at capacity and will require expansion in the next few years. There may be options to grow at existing locations, but in some cases new facilities may be required. The Court should work closely with Commissioners and staff to identify a prioritized list of needs and budget accordingly. It can be a challenge to justify spending taxpayer dollars on offices; however, it is necessary to provide services to them and as an aspect of staff morale and keeping quality employees. While the inventory and prioritization should be done fairly soon, it will likely be longer term before major expansion can be done at these sites.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Get staffing needs from department heads and elected officials	3 Months	January – March 2013	Commissioners Court
Determine priorities for necessary expansions	3 months	April – June 2013	Commissioners Court, Department Heads
Develop Facilities Plan to Address Needs	6 Months	June – December 2013	Commissioners Court
Budget as feasible for priority expansions	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Elected and Appointed County Officials

How will you measure success?

Facilities Plan in place by December 2013
Approved process in place to ensure adequate office space

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on staffing and facility needs
General Funds, Grants, Bonds

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Optimize Use of Odyssey

The County has adopted Odyssey to help manage processes across County departments. While the program has potential to save time and money, it has not been utilized to its highest potential. County staff recognizes this potential but do not have the training to implement the program to its best use. Training all users will be an initial expense; however, the time and cost savings over time will make this investment worthwhile for the County.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Survey users and determine training needs	3 Months	July – September 2010	IT
Prioritize issues and strategies to address	2 Months	October – November 2010	IT
Provide training to all users	1 Year	2011	IT, Training consultant
Encourage staff to use to maximize benefit	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, IT

Possible Partners?

County staff and officials

How will you measure success?

All current staff using Odyssey receive full training
 Odyssey use in all appropriate areas by end of 2012

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time
 Training Expenses
 General Funds

Additional District Judge

Creating an additional Hays County district for a District Judge will require legislative action. With the realized and projected rapid population growth in Hays County, a new court is needed. The new government center is designed with room for new Courts, so that should not be an issue; however, funding for staff, etc. will have to be found when the new Court is created. The creation of an additional Hays County District Court will allow each the Justices to have more specific duties and focus on specific types of cases rather the current “generalist” system.

Because the Legislature meets only biannually, the Court will have to start the process early enough to catch the Legislative session so the process is not delayed for another two years. This should be considered for the 2011 session.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify funding for additional District Judge	3 Months	July – September 2010	County Commissioners
Develop a Proposal for the Legislature	3 Months	August – October 2010	County Commissioners
Present the proposal to area elected officials and ask them to sponsor legislation	3 Months	October – December 2010	County Commissioners
Support legislation in the 2011 Session	4 Months	January – April 2011	County Commissioners

Possible Partners?

County staff, State Legislators

How will you measure success?

Legislation introduced to create new District Judge

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal to develop proposal

Salary, equipment, office space for new Judge

General Funds

Mid-term Projects (3 - 5 Years)

Most of the mid-term projects relate to efforts to reorganize and consolidate some functions of County government and expand facilities to meet growing needs. These may create upfront costs; however, the savings and efficiencies over time make the investment worthwhile. It should also result in better service to the citizens, which should be the goal of County government.

Establish Centralized 911 as an Independent Entity

This effort has begun and should be continued to establish a stand-alone agency to manage County 911 dispatch. The current system is effective; however, it can be more efficient and provide better service as its own entity. This will require leadership from Commissioners Court to overcome potential resistance from the public safety organizations in the county.

Another benefit (and potential partner) is the ability to dispatch school buses from the centralized system. School districts may be willing to participate in this effort to help them better manage their fleet, which would help spread the cost across jurisdictions.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Support current efforts that have begun	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, Sheriff, ESDs, Cities
Develop outreach and education to build support for the effort	1 Year	January 2010 – December 2011	County Commissioners, Sheriff, ESDs, Cities

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Determine facility requirements, staffing, and funding structure	6 Months	June – December 2011	County Commissioners, Sheriff, ESDs, Cities
Formalize Program, Interlocal agreements, etc. to create agency and incorporate into budgets	6 Months	January – June 2012	County Commissioners, Sheriff, ESDs, Cities
Open and Operate 911 Dispatch System	6 Months	October 2012 – March 2013	New Agency, County Commissioners, Sheriff, ESDs, Cities

Possible Partners?

County staff and officials, City staff and officials, ESD staff and officials, ISD staff and officials

How will you measure success?

Local jurisdictions buy into the system and show their support by June 2011
 Formal Structure, funding in place by June 2012
 Agency established and working by March 2013

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on staffing levels, equipment and facilities costs, number of partners involved
 General Funds from various agencies, TX Commission on State Emergency Communications, CAPCOG

Additional Court at Law

Creating an additional Court at Law will require legislative action. With the rapid population growth in Hays County, a new court will likely be needed in the next 5 to 10 years. The new government center is designed with room for new Courts, so that should not be an issue; however, funding for staff, etc. will have to be found when the new Court is created. The creation of a new Court would allow Justices to have more specific duties and focus on specific types of cases rather than being generalists as they currently are.

The Commissioners Court should work closely with the County Courts at Law to determine when to start the process for a new Court. Because the Legislature meets only biannually, the Court will have to start the process early enough to catch the Legislative session so the process is not delayed for another two years. This should be considered for the 2013 session.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Work with current Judges to establish a timeline	6 Months	January – June 2014	County Commissioners, Courts at Law Judges
Determine funding needs	6 Months	June – December 2014	County, Cities, ESD's, ISD's
Utilize 2015 Legislative Session to get legislative approval	4 Months	January – April 2015	County Commissioners, Legislature
Budget for and appoint new Judge and Set up Court Room	6 Months	October 2015 – March 2016	Commissioners Court

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Possible Partners?

State Legislators

How will you measure success?

New Court at Law in place by March 2016

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on staffing and equipment

General Funds

Conclusion

Hays County has seen tremendous growth and now County government has to adjust to accommodate new demands on existing services and expectations of additional services. The internal projects identified in this plan come from interviews with elected and appointed officials and citizens during the public input process. It will require leadership and commitment from the Commissioners Court to accomplish many of these goals because there will have to be money spent and new policies put in place. It will be important to stress the efficiency and cost savings to be gained from implementing these recommendations and making sure officials understand how it will benefit them in the long run. Hays County is taking a proactive approach to its future, planning and preparing for expected growth. The Commissioners Court should continue to be proactive and show the leadership necessary to implement this plan.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

WATER and WASTEWATER

Introduction

Starting in 2007, central Texas experienced a severe drought. While this has technically ended with recent heavy rains, the need to conserve water and develop new sources remains due to growth pressures and the ever-present potential for another drought. Water resource planning encompasses a range of issues, including water conservation, identifying new sources of water, and land use. A key to water resource planning is developing a coalition between all the players – cities, county, water supply corporations, groundwater conservation districts, river authorities, developers, and citizens.

Current Activities

The County is currently addressing water and wastewater issues in a number of different strategies. The current on-going projects revolve around planning and developing stakeholder groups for implementing water and wastewater programs.

Hold a Water Summit with Cities, MUDs, developers, Groundwater Conservation Districts, River Authorities, and water conservation and environmental groups.

Because so many organizations are involved in the provision of water and no single entity has authority over all aspects of water, it is important to coordinate efforts as much as possible. The County can facilitate relationship building between the various groups and conduct regular meetings to ensure everyone is working together. This can include regular meetings among the various entities to discuss new and on-going projects that impact water. The County's Water and Wastewater Facilities Plan will also provide an opportunity to coordinate efforts as it identifies key issues and recommendations to ensure adequate water availability to a growing population.

Water and Wastewater Facility Plan being developed for Western Hays County

In 2009, Hays County Commissioners Court began working with the Texas Water Development Board and Hays County water and wastewater service providers to develop a water and wastewater facility plan to address the county's burgeoning growth and diminishing water supplies. The plan is on-going and being conducted by the firm of HDR Engineering.

County-wide Drainage Basin / Flood Protection Plan being developed

The County is working in partnership with Halff & Associates to develop a county-wide Drainage Basin/Flood Protection Plan. The plan scope will include defining flooding risk and potential reduction in flood insurance rates, identifying projects to alleviate existing flooding, establishing floor elevations for new construction, identifying where storm water management facilities are required, and encouraging economic development. The study is being implemented and will be ongoing for the next 3 to 6 years.

Rainwater harvesting incentives being reviewed and reworked

Rainwater harvesting is the collection of rainwater off the roof of a building and is touted as an environmental and viable departure from utilizing ground or surface water as a potable water source. Hays County has one of the most progressive rainwater harvesting incentive programs in the country. However, the effectiveness of the incentives is in review and the County is

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

working to strengthen and rework them to promote ubiquitous conservation of water through rainwater harvesting in the county.

Short-term Projects (1 – 3 Years)

Most of the Short-term Projects identified in this plan will not require a significant investment of money from the County. Rather, they are focused on best practices and opportunities to improve water conservation throughout the county.

Create an annual County Judge's Award for projects that incorporate best water conservation practices (xeriscaping, buffers, conservation, reuse, etc.)

An inexpensive way of promoting water conservation is to provide an award from the County Judge to individuals who implement a “best practice” for water conservation in the county. The incentive to participate would be publicity and friendly competition. An award is also a good way to stimulate grass roots, self-directed participation in water conservation as opposed to through regulations and ordinances.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Research other community programs for examples	1 Month	July 2010	County Judge
Determine Criteria and Process for Awards	1 Month	August 2010	County Judge
Publicize Award	1 Month	September 2010	County Judge
Award Recognition	1 Month	October 2010	County Judge

Possible Partners?

Chambers of Commerce, Cities, Commissioners, Local Businesses

How will you measure success?

First Project Recognized in October 2010
 Institute annual recognition thereafter

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Support the Edwards Aquifer Authority's efforts to implement impervious cover restrictions

In a meeting of the Edwards Aquifer Authority (EAA) in January of 2010, the Authority received a draft of the expanded impervious cover rules for the watershed. National studies have shown that surface water quality decreases with as little as 10% impervious cover within a watershed. Since the Edwards Aquifer is dependent on recharge from streams and precipitation, it is imperative that the quality of surface water, including storm water runoff, remain as high as

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

possible. To provide protection for aquifer water quality, the control of impervious cover on the recharge zone should be more stringently regulated.²

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Continue Relationship with EAA	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court
Consider a letter of support or other option to legislature indicating County support	2 Months	July – August 2010	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Cities

How will you measure success?

New Impervious Cover Standards adopted

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Increase education and outreach to residents on the importance of water quality and quantity and preservation

Hays County residents garner information regarding water quality and quantity through a number of sources such as the media, non-profits, and local and regional government agencies. As part of the Water Summit mentioned above and any plan developed towards water resource planning, a public education component should be included. A coordinated effort to engage and inform the public is integral to the success of water conservation efforts in the county.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Research Programs in other Communities (LCRA and City of Austin's Program, State's Water IQ)	3 Months	October – December 2010	Public Affairs Office
Determine best options for the program (website, updates in newsletters, insert in water bills, etc.)	3 Months	January – March 2011	Public Affairs Office
Begin program and spread the word	On-going	On-going	Public Affairs Office

Possible Partners?

Cities, Water Utilities, Groundwater Districts, Aquifer Authorities

How will you measure success?

Program in place by March 2011

² Draft Concept Memorandum for Edwards Aquifer Authority Impervious Cover Rules, 2006. <http://edwardsaquifer.org/pdfs/news/impervious%20cover%20concept%20memo.pdf>

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Stay engaged with the Region K and L planning process and ensure the County is appropriately represented

Hays County is one of the few counties in Texas to be in two water planning regions. It will be important for the County to be an active participant in the long range planning efforts of these entities to ensure local needs are adequately met.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Ensure County staff and elected officials participate in planning efforts when appropriate	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, County Staff
Work with other Counties in the Regions to ensure good representation of County interests	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners

Possible Partners?

Other Counties in Regions K & L, Cities, Water Providers

How will you measure success?

County interests included in regional water planning

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Establish strong relationship and coordination with existing water suppliers and regulatory bodies

Similar to some of the other short-term goals, establishing relationships with water suppliers and regulatory bodies is a piece of an overall strategy to facilitating stakeholder buy-in and commitment to water quality and conservation goals. Establishing solid lines of communication and trust between all stakeholders is imperative.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Conduct regular regional water meetings	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, Water Utilities, County Staff
Ensure County staff is engaged with Water Utilities and State	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, Water Utilities, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Texas Water Development Board, River Authorities, Groundwater Districts, Aquifer Authorities

How will you measure success?

On-going communication and relationship established

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Explore opportunities for new water supplies in the county

It is unclear if the population growth in the county can be sustained through a reliance on groundwater without serious effects on water quality and quantity. During the drought of the last few years, wells have gone dry, setting off a scramble to dig deeper and look for alternatives. Some alternatives include pumping water in from adjacent aquifers that have more plentiful water or tapping into surface water supplies. A number of planning efforts are looking at this issue, including a water/wastewater facilities planning study currently underway by the County, and the County should remain engaged and work with the many stakeholder towards solutions for the county's water supply issues.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Utilize relationships with suppliers to stay involved with their long range planning	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, Water Utilities, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Texas Water Development Board, River Authorities, Groundwater Districts, Aquifer Authorities

How will you measure success?

On-going communication and relationship established

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Participate in the Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Rules

The Edwards Aquifer Recovery Implementation Program is an effort to develop a plan to protect threatened and endangered species within the Edwards Aquifer. The County should be engaged in this process to ensure the concerns of the County are included in the recommendations and to identify how the County can play a role in implementing the plan.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Ensure staff is participating in this effort to support County goals	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, County Staff
Determine proper role for County in participating in the implementation of the rules	6 Months	On completion of rules development	County Commissioners, County Staff
Update or adopt new regulations as needed to implement rules if feasible	1 Year	On completion of rules development	County Commissioners, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Edwards Aquifer Authority

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

How will you measure success?

New rules adopted if feasible (if County authority allows, etc.)

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Incorporate Watershed Protection Plans into Subdivision Rules

There are several watershed protection plans being developed within Hays County targeting specific watersheds. These plans outline best practices and recommendations for enhancing the water quality of those water features. The County should support these efforts by incorporating those best practices into the Subdivision Rules when possible. Given the limited authority counties have to regulate development, not all recommendations may be possible to incorporate; however, the County should address those that it does have the ability to control.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Participate in Watershed Planning efforts to represent County interests	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, County Staff
Determine opportunities for updating County regulations to incorporate Watershed Planning recommendations	6 Months	January – June 2011	County Commissioners, County Staff
Update ordinances to incorporate recommendations if within scope of County authority	1 Year	June 2011 – June 2012	County Commissioners, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Watershed Planning teams

How will you measure success?

Feasibility of new rules determined by June 2011
 If feasible, new rules adopted by June 2012

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Mid-term Projects (3 - 5 Years)

Some of the mid-term projects will require funding and planning from the County to implement. However, the long-term benefits are substantial, so they should be considered investments rather than simply costs.

Work with AgriLife Extension and landowners to support the Texas Watershed Steward Program, brush management, creek side conservation, and other efforts to protect water quality and quantity

Another stakeholder in water supply management is the AgriLife Extension office. AgriLife has assisted Hays County's water resource planning efforts by conducting the Texas Community Futures Forum (TCFF), a state-wide needs assessment, which identified water conservation, quality, quantity, environment, protection, and development of resources, and holding rainwater

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

harvesting workshops. In addition, AgriLife can be a resource by supporting the efforts stated in this goal: brush management, creek side conservation, and other projects.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Include Watershed Steward Program in County-wide water conservation education and outreach program	On-going	Once that effort is in place	Public Affairs Office
Determine if funding is available to support programs such as brush management, etc.	3 Months	March – April 2011	County Commissioners, County Staff
If funding available include in FY 2012 budget	3 Months	May – July 2011	County Commissioners

Possible Partners?

Agri-Life Extension, land owners, Conservation groups

How will you measure success?

Education and outreach included in new conservation effort

If financially feasible, funding for conservation efforts included in FY 2012 Budget

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal for outreach

Dependent on allocation

General Fund

Continue to purchase sensitive land as financially feasible to protect water quality and quantity

As noted in the Growth Management section of this plan, land use has a direct relationship to water quality and quantity. The Growth Management section outlines plans that are underway and strategies for preserving the most sensitive lands that will have the greatest impact towards water protection. The County should also consider partnering with land owners to preserve sensitive land and properties with significant recharge features or riparian corridors. This can be done at a lower cost to the County over purchasing the land. In addition, land trusts and others organizations may have resources to assist with this effort in partnership with the County and landowners, as has been done on several major properties in Hays County.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Utilize Greenprint and other resources to identify most suitable properties for conservation	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, County Staff
Identify funding for land purchases (existing bond money, etc.)	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, County Staff
Purchase land as financially feasible	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, County Staff

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Work with landowners, land trusts, and others to identify other means of land preservation besides just County purchase (deed restrictions, conservation easements, etc.)	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, County Staff
---	----------	----------	------------------------------------

Possible Partners?

Landowners, Land Trusts, Developers

How will you measure success?

Key properties for water conservation identified and preserved

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on amount of land to be purchased
Parks and Open Space bonds, Grants, Public-Private partnerships

Long-term Projects (> 5 Years)

Long-term projects are just that, and will require additional study before implementation occurs. The purpose of including them is to ensure County leadership at least has these in mind and begins laying the groundwork. These projects will require significant investment of resources and will need strong citizen support to be successful. By identifying them now, the Commissioners Court can begin building the foundation for success in these efforts.

Utilize Water / Wastewater study as basis for using County authority as Water and Wastewater District

The Water / Wastewater study will study the feasibility of the County becoming a utility provider. By taking on that role, the County would have greater control over the distribution of water/wastewater infrastructure throughout the county and subsequently have some control on growth.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Determine legality of County pursuing this option	6 Months	On completion of County wide study	County Attorney, Commissioners Court
Determine appropriate action to take to implement plan	2 Years	On completion of County wide study	County Commissioners, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Water Utilities, Groundwater Districts, River Authorities, Aquifer Authorities

How will you measure success?

Feasibility of County becoming provider established within 6 months of Water / Wastewater Plan being completed

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on what action is needed

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Conclusion

Ensuring an adequate, clean water supply in Hays County is one of the most important issues the County faces. Water supply is the limiting factor for continued economic prosperity and population growth. The County plans to balance economic goals and environmental mission through proactive planning, facilitating stakeholder buy-in to the process of water resource planning, and a mixture of top-down government solutions mixed with grass roots citizen driven solutions.

TRANSPORTATION

Introduction

Transportation improvements were a key issue discussed during the public input process for this plan. County roads are seeing increased traffic as residents use them as alternatives to I-35 and other State roads. New roads, and improvements to existing roads, are needed to ensure adequate access throughout Hays County. Fortunately, the County recognized the need for road improvements and has passed bonds and made agreements with Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to address many of the most critical areas. Rather than waiting for the State to come in and take care of things, the County has been proactive. This will need to continue given the fiscal issues at TxDOT, the State, and Federal government, as well as the need for improvements now rather than down the line.

Current Activities

As mentioned, the County is currently addressing transportation issues on a number of levels. There is active planning happening and the County is coordinating with regional entities such as Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO), which is the overarching transportation authority, and the Lone Star Rail group, which is developing commuter rail between Austin and San Antonio.

Complete the County Transportation Plan

County staff is currently developing a Transportation Plan that will identify priorities for road improvements and other facilities. This plan will coordinate with local jurisdictions as well, including cities and school districts, to maximize coordination of projects and activities. This coordination is vital to minimize the potential for bottlenecks where County and City roads connect and to ensure that the roads for new and expanded school facilities are adequate.

This plan will also help the County in its work with CAMPO to ensure that needed projects are identified for inclusion on CAMPO's long range transportation plan. Inclusion is required for projects that will include State or Federal funding. If the County has a clear direction and reasoning for their projects, it will increase the likelihood for funding from other sources besides County taxpayers.

Coordinate with School Districts

Every school district in Hays County has built new facilities in the last few years, and more schools are being built or planned for. In some cases, these new facilities have created major traffic issues. To minimize this for future projects, the County must actively coordinate with School Districts to ensure County roads are adequate for the locating of schools and that needed road improvements are made.

Continue Participation in the Austin to San Antonio Rail Project

Hays County will likely have two rail stops (San Marcos and Kyle / Buda) on the planned commuter rail connecting Austin and San Antonio. This connection will allow residents living in Hays County much easier access to these employment centers without having to fight traffic on I 35 (or on narrow County roads). The stations also represent a huge opportunity for economic development as mixed use centers may develop around them.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

The Rail District is actively working with the Legislature and others to identify funding for the project, with the major obstacle currently being the need to relocate Union Pacific freight rail. This will require major dollars, and the County should continue its active support of the effort to find funding. Once the project is under development, the County may find opportunities to participate in station development and other projects to help the effort. Because of the major benefits the rail connection can bring, the Commissioners Court should consider providing whatever assistance it can at the appropriate times.

Short-term Projects (1 – 3 Years)

Most of the short-term Projects identified in this plan will not require a significant investment of money from the County. Rather, they are focused on best practices and opportunities to improve transportation that do not involve building roads.

Ensure Strict Adherence to County Standards to Minimize Curb Cuts

Curb cuts and intersections are the biggest factor in reducing the capacity of County roads. Often, a road may be wide enough to handle traffic; however, because of curb cuts and cross traffic, major slowdowns are common. The County has good standards to reduce curb cuts and these should be strictly adhered to. Variances should only be given in rare circumstances when there is no other option for the developer. Every effort should be made to reduce curb cuts by funneling parking lots onto adjacent streets where possible, connecting parking lots to each other, and having shared entries, etc. This will help reduce the need for road expansion by minimizing points of conflict along County roads.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Review existing County standards for curb cuts	3 Months	July – September 2010	County Staff
Update if needed and ensure all projects adhere to standards	On-going	On-going	County Staff

Possible Partners?

Developers, TxDoT

How will you measure success?

Curb cuts minimized in new development to maintain efficient traffic flow

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Incorporate Water Quality Best Practices into all Road Projects

Protecting water quality should be a major priority for the County. Water is a limited resource in the county and demand is only increasing. It is critical for the County to incorporate best practices for water quality protection in all road projects. This means ensuring contractors, as well as Road and Bridge employees, utilize silt fences and other tools as they work on projects. It may also mean carefully studying the routes of new projects to minimize water quality

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

impacts. Roads are a key driver of growth and the County can help to influence where growth occurs by directing road building to those areas where water quality is less of an issue (away from the aquifer recharge areas). While incorporating best practices may cost more up front, it will reduce the County's liability for water quality impairment and help to protect the water supply for residents. The County should review its current standards and update them to reflect best practices for future road projects.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Research Best Practices for Water Quality protection in Construction Projects	6 Months	June – December 2010	County Staff
Update Construction regulations and practices to incorporate best practices	6 Months	January – June 2011	County Commissioners, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Construction companies, Developers

How will you measure success?

Water Quality best practices incorporated into all County road projects

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on what action is needed
Road project funds

Continue to Push for Scenic Road Designation

Hays County is a beautiful place and residents want to be able to see that natural beauty as they drive on area roads. There is strong support among residents to minimize the number of billboards in the county. Due to the limited authority of counties, this has to be done through the Scenic Road designation. This designation requires Legislative action which the County has been pursuing for some time. This effort should be continued and citizens brought in to help support it. Scenic Texas can be a strong ally in this effort, along with other non-profits and community groups.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Contact local State Reps and Senators and ask them to carry legislation	6 Months	June – December 2010	Commissioners Court
Continue to work with legislators during session to encourage passage	6 Months	January – June 2011 (on-going if not successful in 2011 session)	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Neighborhood groups, Scenic Texas

How will you measure success?

Scenic Roads bill passed in 2011 Session

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Consider Establishing Park and Ride Facilities

Informal car pooling is likely very common in Hays County because so many residents work in Austin. In other metropolitan areas, there is an informal system of ‘slug’ lines where residents meet at a common location (often a large shopping center) and park to car pool with others. It is a completely organic event where participants typically do not know each other, but it works. This might sound like an odd concept, but it is common and very successful where it is happening. The County can help to foster this type of car pooling by identifying suitable locations where people can meet up to car pool and publicizing this as an option. There are a number of spots in Hays County that would be suitable, particularly in the Kyle / Buda area and San Marcos, which is where most of the commuters live.

This is not an attempt by the County to mandate car pooling, rather it is an opportunity to foster cooperative behavior among residents and give them an option to driving alone to Austin every day. It may be the County identifies a location then works with a local business to provide free coffee and donuts to encourage people to participate. This could be done for a week or two to let people know about it and make it a habit to car pool rather than drive alone. The key is to help get cars off the road, and this can be one small part of that larger effort.

Another opportunity is the shuttles run by Texas State University. These may be an appropriate option for some residents who are able to make connections to get from the shuttle drop off in Austin to their destination. The County can help to promote this service through its website and other communication tools.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who’s Responsible?
Determine if an informal car pooling system is feasible	6 Months	June – December 2010	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities
Identify Locations where Car Poolers could meet (large shopping centers, etc.)	3 Months	January – March 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities
Publicize the Opportunity to Park and Ride	On-going	On-going	Public Affairs Office

Possible Partners?

Cities, Residents

How will you measure success?

If feasible, informal car pooling established

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Increase Enforcement in High Traffic Areas

The Sheriff’s Department knows where accidents are happening and where enforcement is needed. Residents can also identify areas where speeding and other unsafe driving is an issue.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

These areas should be targeted for a high visibility, high enforcement campaign targeting unsafe driving. If an area is saturated for a week or two, drivers will begin to instinctively slow down and be more careful in that area. These rolling enforcement crackdowns can target the high traffic, high accident areas first (much like enforcement around schools is always high at start of the school year) then move on to lower concern areas. This type of activity can have a significant impact on accident reduction without the investment of new facilities, signage, etc. Schools and community groups can serve as a conduit for information in identifying priority areas to begin this effort.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify key areas based on accidents, resident complaints, etc.	3 Months	July – September 2010	County Sheriff
Direct enforcement to those areas	On-going	On-going	County Sheriff
Publicize the Effort	On-going	On-going	Public Affairs Office

Possible Partners?

Cities, Residents

How will you measure success?

Decrease in accidents and complaints in targeted areas

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal (just redirecting existing staff)

Mid-Term Projects (3 - 5 Years)

The mid-term projects will require funding and planning from the County to implement. However, the long-term benefits are substantial, so they should be considered investments rather than simply costs.

Incorporate Bike and Pedestrian Facilities in New and Upgraded County Roads

Hays County is already a cycling destination, with riders from across the region converging on the rural County roads. This creates a safety issue because many of these roads do not have shoulders and are often narrow and winding. Coming around a bend onto a pack of cyclists is unsafe for both the drivers and the cyclists. This is something that was identified by citizens as a serious issue that should be addressed moving forward.

The first step in this effort should be an identification of major cycling routes in the county. The Austin Cycling Association (<http://www.austincycling.org/>) would be a good place to start as they have a solid knowledge of the cycling community in Austin and plan rides throughout the region. This list can be used when the County does maintenance or upgrades the roads as they can include a wide shoulder at a minimum to allow for cyclists.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Down the line, off-street facilities may be appropriate as well. This can include purchasing some additional right-of-way initially to incorporate future facilities. The County should also work with developers to incorporate cycling and pedestrian facilities in new development. Often, new developments are designed with only one or two entrances onto a major road so residents are forced to all converge onto one arterial. By incorporating alternatives, residents may be able to ride or walk to destinations rather than driving.

Funding will be an issue if the County is adding facilities. The County has a grant writer who can be used to help find funding to offset some of the costs. There should also be an education component so residents can understand the benefits of incorporating these facilities into projects and their importance on safety, etc. Because of the concern of residents about this issue it should be a priority for the County in the next few years.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify high bicycle usage roads	6 Months	January – June 2012	County Staff
If feasible (adequate ROW, etc.) include a shoulder on all new County roads and on major rebuilds on existing roads	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities
Work with Cities to match facilities with City bikeways, shoulders, etc	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities
Identify opportunities for off-street trails (work with developers and landowners to create connections)	On-going	On-going	County Staff, Cities, Developers, Landowners

Possible Partners?

Cities, Landowners, Developers

How will you measure success?

New projects incorporate cycling facilities
 Subdivisions incorporate cycling and pedestrian amenities

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on Projects
 State and Federal grants, Transportation Bonds, Developers

Explore the Feasibility of Capital Metro service to Austin

Capital Metro has a defined service area and receives 1 cent of the sales tax in its jurisdiction. Because most jurisdictions in Hays County do not have 1 cent available, it is unlikely that the service area can be expanded into the county. However, this does not preclude the County, in conjunction with Cities possibly, from contracting with Capital Metro to provide some level of bus connection to Austin. This could be an Express bus that stops in the Kyle / Buda area and San Marcos before going into Austin. This would give residents an alternative to driving themselves. The costs and potential ridership would have to be fully explored to determine if it's financially worthwhile; however, it is worth exploring the possibility. As traffic and gas prices increase, it may become more attractive for residents to find an alternative to driving, and the County should facilitate this.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Work with cities to determine feasibility of contracting with Capital Metro (if no support, then stop here)	6 Months	January –June 2012	Commissioners Court, Cities, Capital Metro
If there is agreement with cities, contact Capital Metro to discuss terms of service (if too expensive, then stop here)	6 Months	June – December 2012	Commissioners Court, Cities, Capital Metro
Develop necessary agreements with cities, Capital Metro on routes, payments, etc.	9 Months	January – September 2013	Commissioners Court, Cities, Capital Metro
Include funding in FY 2014 budgets and begin service	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, Cities, Capital Metro

Possible Partners?

Capital Metro, Cities

How will you measure success?

Determination of feasibility by December 2012
 If feasible then service begins October 2013

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on Agreement with Capital Metro
 City and County general funds

Long-term Projects (> 5 Years)

Long-term projects are just that, and will require additional study before implementation occurs. The purpose of including them is to ensure County leadership at least has these in mind and begins laying the groundwork. These projects will require significant investment of resources and will need strong citizen support to be successful. By identifying them now, the Commissioners Court can begin building the foundation for success in these efforts.

Explore the possibility for additional corridors and / or improvements to existing roads across the county to alleviate growing congestion on key roads

There are limited roads that truly serve cross-county traffic. I-35 is the main north-south corridor. US 290 is a major east-west corridor, but is in the northern part of the county. Geography limits the potential for additional east-west connections; however, these are becoming more critical. In addition, roads like 1626 and others are seeing significantly more traffic than they were designed for because they have become alternatives to I-35. The completion of SH 130 will likely encourage growth in eastern Hays County and the need for roads connecting to this major thoroughfare. Expanding roads will be a key need 5 and 10 years down the road as the population continues to grow.

The *County Transportation Plan* will likely include recommendations for expansion of existing roads, or possibly new roads, to help alleviate some of the congestion. It should incorporate the *Habitat Conservation Plan* and “*Greenprint*” to minimize negative impacts on environmentally sensitive areas. Residents should be involved as well to encourage their support for any new

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

roads that may affect their communities. New roads are expensive and can create serious divisions in a community. By having a solid plan and outreach campaign, this resistance can be reduced.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Utilize Transportation Plan to identify key needs	6 Months	Upon completion of Transportation Plan	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Coordinate with planned developments, Greenprint, Habitat Conservation Plan, City plans	On-going	On-going	County Staff, Developers, Cities, TxDOT
Establish education and outreach for proposed new projects	On-going	On-going	Public Affairs Office
Determine funding for new projects	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Cities, Developers, CAMPO, TxDOT

How will you measure success?

Necessary improvements identified
Congestion reduced

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on Projects
Road bonds, TxDOT funding, Federal funding

Support Development of Rail Infrastructure

As discussed in the Current Activities, there is a planned rail link being developed between Austin and San Antonio which may have tremendous impact on Hays County. The County is actively involved in the planning and advocating for this and should continue this. In addition, the County should start considering what, if any, action should be taken to help fund the effort. Major funding will be needed to move Union Pacific freight services off of the existing rail line. This would benefit Hays County in several ways beyond just commuter rail. San Marcos and other communities are bisected by the rail and this creates major traffic snarls, as well as public safety issues with response access. Moving the freight rail will improve these issues. While the County cannot, and should not, be the primary funder, there may be a need for some funding to help resolve this issue. In addition, the County may consider participating in the development of stations for the rail. These stations can become new economic and residential centers as they develop and will require significant infrastructure investment. There is ample time to plan for this project; however, the County should be thinking of how it will participate in the development of this critical infrastructure.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Stay engaged with Rail planning efforts of the Lone Star Rail District	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, Lone Star Rail District
Determine what funding (if any) the County can provide	6 Months	When Rail planning reaches that stage	Commissioners Court
Consider partnership with cities for station development	1 Year	When Rail planning reaches that stage	Commissioners Court, Cities, Lone Star Rail District

Possible Partners?

Lone Star Rail District, Cities

How will you measure success?

Rail Service started

Stations in place

New development around stations increasing tax base

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on Agreement with Lone Star Rail and level of support for station development

City and County general funds, Transportation bonds

Long-term Goal: Ensure adequate connectivity to major corridors across Hays County.

Conclusion

Transportation is one of the core functions of County government and is one of the major expenses as well. Maintaining adequate transportation infrastructure requires constant attention and investment. Hays County has been proactive in planning and funding for road improvements; however, it is challenged by the explosive growth. The County should continue its focus on transportation investment while also being supportive of alternatives such as rail and bus transit that may in the future alleviate some of the burden on County roads.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT

Introduction

Growth management is an umbrella term for applying multiple strategies to affect where and how development occurs within a region. Growth management policies and initiatives work to mitigate problems that arise from unregulated growth, such as incompatible land uses, habitat and view-shed destruction, and increased cost in the provision of infrastructure (roads, water, wastewater). County governments have limited regulatory authority to affect land use. They do not have the power to zone nor – outside of road construction – do they supply infrastructure for development.

However, Hays County has been proactive in planning and designing programs to control growth to meet their economic and environmental goals. For example, Hays County has participated in “*Greenprinting*,” a land suitability analysis that identifies where development should occur to ensure adequate wildlife habitat, aquifer recharge and water quality, and retention of agricultural and open lands. In Hays County, growth management projects also aim to improve and expedite the development review process and negotiate consensus regarding administrative oversight of development between the numerous municipalities’ jurisdictions within the county.

Current Activities

At this time there are three projects related to growth management within the county. The first is to move all permitting functions to one location, thus streamlining the process for developers. Second, continue enforcing the regulations regarding water availability studies for new development; and third, is to adopt and implement a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).

Establish “one-stop” permitting

County governments have the authority to review and approve subdivision plats for development outside of cities’ extraterritorial jurisdictions (ETJs). Permit review is a bureaucratic, complicated, and time consuming process. Actions by governmental agencies to streamline the process are typically welcome in the development community. One such step undertaken by Hays County is moving all permitting functions to one location thereby establishing a “one-stop” permitting process. This will enable applicants to address any permitting issues without having to travel to separate locations. In addition, Commissioners’ Court recently approved a reduction in required materials for qualified applications. This is an attempt to further improve the application process.

Continue to strictly enforce regulations requiring *Water Availability Study*

The three-year drought from 2007 to present has certainly impressed upon the citizens of the county the need for water planning. Currently, any developer submitting a plat for permitting must provide a *Water Availability Study* to show there is available water to meet the demand of their development. This requirement, an important tool for countywide water resource planning, should continue, even if the drought dissipates. The County should also consider water availability as it relates to environmental needs to maintain aquatic habitat with increased demand.

Adopt and Implement *Habitat Conservation Plan*

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

In 2005, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) awarded \$753,750 to the County to develop a regional *Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)*. The goal of the plan is to provide guidance towards the conservation of habitat for endangered species and to protect water resources in the face of high population growth and subsequent development in the county. The County should consider incorporating the portions of the Habitat Conservation Plan into other planning efforts such as the Countywide Transportation Plan. Also, the County can consider adding an update on the current status of the incorporated plans.

Short-term Projects (1 – 3 Years)

Most of the Short-term Projects identified for growth management will not require a significant investment of money from the County; however, significant time expenditure of staff and elected officials may be required.

Develop and implement ETJ agreements with cities

County governments in Texas have the authority to review and approve subdivision plats outside the extraterritorial jurisdictions of the municipalities. The counties and cities can enter in an arrangement wherein the counties conduct permitting within a city's ETJ. With such an arrangement, the County's regulations will be enforced. Hays County will review existing permitting agreements with all the municipalities in the county. This review should ensure that there is minimum, uniform permitting processes applied throughout the county to promote quality development.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Determine County goals for ETJ Agreements	3 Months	July – September 2010	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Schedule workshops with Cities to discuss issues	6 Months – 1 Year	March 2011– September 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities
Develop Agreements with Cities that meet County and City goals	1 Year	September 2010 – September 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities

Possible Partners?

Cities

How will you measure success?

ETJ Agreements with all Cities by September 2011

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Hays County will work with cities to focus development in existing urban areas

Housing developments outside of established urban areas - commonly referred to as *Greenfields* – pose a set of problems for local government, including: 1) the cost of providing services such as water, sewer, libraries, fire, and police is typically greater than the property

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

taxes collected; 2) roadways may lack the capacity to handle the increased vehicle load; 3) conflicts with agricultural and industrial uses; and 4) loss of habitat or open space. Therefore, the County has a vested interest in facilitating growth within the cities. The role of the County should be to establish a dialogue with the cities to provide education on the benefits of reducing Greenfield development.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
As part of ETJ discussions, educate cities on importance of focused development	1 Year	September 2010 – September 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities
Focus infrastructure improvements to facilitate in-fill development	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities

Possible Partners?

Cities

How will you measure success?

Fewer acres of undeveloped land turned into subdivisions

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Identify “preferred growth areas”

It is impractical and undesirable that a moratorium on Greenfield development be imposed; however, through a number of tools, the County can help to guide development into areas suitable for growth. The County has done a lot of work analyzing where those areas are through “greenprinting” and the development of the *Habitat Conservation Plan*. Perhaps the first step to a comprehensive implementation of growth management policies is to ensure that all the plans that will affect development within the county are in sync (e.g. the transportation plan works with the habitat plan). This effort can be expanded to include a review of all Cities’ comprehensive plans to ensure that their transportation, land use, environmental, and housing goals support the County’s.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Utilize Habitat Conservation Plan, Greenprint, Transportation Plan, etc. to determine most suitable locations for development	1 Year	Upon completion of all plans	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities
Focus infrastructure improvements to encourage development in desired areas	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities

Possible Partners?

Cities

How will you measure success?

Fewer acres of undeveloped land turned into subdivisions

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Staff Time

Encourage “Low-Impact” development

Cluster development is one model for the subdivision of land that is currently at the vanguard of the environmental movement. Essentially, the idea is to centralize the housing and commercial development - as well as roads and other infrastructure - in a small, high-density portion of the tract thus leaving large, open-space commons for use by all of the landowners. This model for development reduces infrastructure costs and the affect of storm water drainage. The high densities of the developments may increase affordable housing and potentially work better with regional public transportation networks. The County currently has a cluster development or conservation subdivision permit, but it is underutilized. Efforts should focus on how to promote this option and make it more attractive to developers.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who’s Responsible?
Promote Existing Conservation Subdivision opportunities	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Consider incentives for clustered development (density bonuses, utility assistance)	1 Year	January – December 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Cities

Possible Partners?

Cities

How will you measure success?

Increase in number of clustered developments

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Where appropriate, promote and facilitate the development of pedestrian facilities and increased connectivity in the street network.

After World War II with advent of the automobile, subdivisions in America underwent a change; in general, entrances to low-density housing developments were limited to a collector street or two, with most of the housing constructed on cul de sacs. The result of this pattern is that daily trips to the store, school, work, and friends are too long or unsafe for walking or biking and thus require driving. This has led to a set of problems that some would argue range from childhood obesity to social disconnect as people remained ensconced in their cars and houses.

There is a movement afoot to change how subdivisions are built. One tenet of the movement, known as Traditional Neighborhood Design or New Urbanism, is to increase the connectivity and safety of the street network and provide dedicated pathways for pedestrians and bicycles. The County can incorporate these ideals into their subdivision rules by insuring sidewalks and certain standards for connectivity are met. In addition, linear parks and rails-to-trails should be incorporated into the County’s Parks and Recreation Plan.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who’s Responsible?
Growth Management			

Growth Management

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

See Transportation Section			
Review County Subdivision Regulations to ensure they have adequate connectivity requirements	3 Months	August – October 2010	County Staff

Possible Partners?

Cities

How will you measure success?

More access to pedestrian facilities
Less congestion on major roads

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on Improvements
Road bonds, general funds

Ensure that environmental mitigation projects by TxDOT, businesses, developers, and others are planned and will focus where most beneficial.

Government agencies, corporations, developers, and other entities can be required to implement environmental programs or projects as retribution for actions that may have denigrated the environment. These projects are an opportunity for the County to accomplish environmental goals that, perhaps due to lack of funding, it could not address otherwise. Therefore, this goal proposes that the County be prepared to coordinate any mitigation efforts by an external entity with its list of environmental projects to ensure the greatest leveraging of mitigation funds.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify needed environmental projects utilizing watershed protection plans, Greenprint, and other resources	6 Months	January – June 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Contact TxDoT, developers, and others who may be needing to do mitigation and inform them of desired projects	On-going	On-going	County Staff
Focus mitigation to accomplish overall goals	On-going	On-going	County Staff

Possible Partners?

Developers, Texas Department of Transportation, Cities

How will you measure success?

Mitigation projects focused on areas of identified need

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Mid-term Projects (3 - 5 Years)

The mid-term projects will require funding and planning from the County to implement. However, the long-term benefits are substantial, so they should be considered investments rather than simply costs.

Continue pushing for additional County authority to regulate land use and development

In 2009, the Hill Country Alliance, a coalition of counties within the Hill Country, worked to change State law and allow the State to provide counties limited land use powers. Hays County was a part of this initiative, which failed. Many of the County's environmental and growth management goals could be achieved through the powers of land use control. Therefore, the County should continue to join in the efforts to change the State's statutes.

One tool currently available to the County that will help to ensure quality development is the adoption of the International Fire Code. The County currently has a Fire Marshal, which is required, and is considering the adoption of this code, which would establish minimum standards for building throughout the County. This would also establish minimum standards for development across jurisdictions.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Continue Participation in Hill Country Association	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court
Work with State Legislators to push legislation expanding powers	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court
Adopt and enforce a Countywide Fire Code	On-Going	On-Going	Commissioners Court
Educate and Outreach to citizens on importance of expanded authority	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Developers, Cities, State Legislators, Other County Elected Officials

How will you measure success?

New Authority granted to better manage development

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Hire a Conservation Coordinator to manage Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) and other conservation efforts

Ensuring that the *Habitat Conservation Plan* is implemented will require the efforts of a dedicated staff position. The County should hire a Conservation Coordinator with knowledge of ecology, biology, and government practices. Part of the scope of employment should be identifying and procuring funding for implementation of projects identified in the plan.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify budget availability for additional staff	3 Months	July – September 2011	Commissioners Court
Allocate budget for additional staff	1 Month	October 2011	Commissioners Court
Hire new Staff person	3 Months	January – March 2012	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

County Staff

How will you measure success?

New Coordinator hired by March 2012

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on Salary and Benefits
General Funds

Explore potential for light and noise pollution controls

Light pollution is any adverse effect of artificial light resulting in decreased visibility of the night sky, glare, light trespass, elimination of habitat, and energy waste. In rural counties, one intrusion of development is light pollution from housing and commercial development. This loss can be countered by regulation of the types of lighting used and education to change people's habits regarding night time lighting.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Research opportunities for implementing controls	6 Months	January – June 2011	County Staff
Educate and communicate need for light and noise pollution controls to developers and property owners	On-going	On-going	Public Affairs Office

Possible Partners?

Developers, Property Owners

How will you measure success?

Reduced Light Pollutions

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Long-term Projects (> 5 Years)

Long-term goals require large amounts of resources in time, study and funding to become a reality. The purpose of including them is to ensure County leadership can begin to lay the groundwork: identify funding and resources and solicit citizen support. Implementing long-term goals typically spans multiple administrations, so by identifying them now, the Commissioners Court can begin building the foundation that, if required, can be carried out by others to ensure success.

Provide funding for land and development rights acquisition in sensitive areas

Hays County citizen’s desire to manage the growth in the county to ensure that adequate land is preserved for habitat, water quality, and other goals noted above. Acquiring development rights is one method of securing lands which will remain undeveloped. The key word in the goal is “sensitive areas.” The County has laid the ground-work through various studies (HCP) to ensure that there is a rational scientific approach to the acquisition of lands to meet the stated objectives.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who’s Responsible?
Continue utilizing current bond money to acquire sensitive properties	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Work with land trusts and property owners to secure additional lands	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Consider additional funding for purchases	1 Year	When current funding is exhausted	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Land Trusts, Property Owners, Developers

How will you measure success?

Sensitive properties (water quality, habitat, etc.) preserved

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

As much as voters will support

Bonds, State and Federal Grants, Land Trusts, Property owner donations (of land or development rights)

Develop a Transfer of Development Rights program

A Transfer of Development Rights program provides developers with incentives to not develop in “environmentally sensitive areas” by allowing additional development in areas that are already built up or are not environmentally sensitive.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who’s Responsible?
Utilize HCP and Greenprint to identify environmentally sensitive lands	6 Months	January – June 2013	Commissioners Court, County Staff

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Research programs to determine best practices for TDR	6 Months	January – June 2013	County Staff
Establish a trade value and procedures	6 Months	June – December 2013	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Develop program and begin ‘marketing’ to developers and property owners	6 Months	January – June 2014	Commissioners Court, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Land Trusts, Property Owners, Developers

How will you measure success?

Sensitive properties (water quality, habitat, etc.) preserved
 Program established by June 2014

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Ensure adequate funding to support growth of County personnel and facilities to match growing population

To continue to provide an excellent level-of-service to the citizens of Hays County, the staffing and funding of services must grow to match demand, which is typically driven by population growth.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who’s Responsible?
Conduct regular workshops with County Staff to identify staff, equipment, program needs before beginning budget process	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Continue to prioritize programs based on plans and to respond to new needs	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Maintain adequate tax rate to support County programs	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

County Staff

How will you measure success?

Adequate staffing levels are maintained to provide service.

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on programs, services, etc.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Leveraging the successful implementation of the *Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP)*, develop and implement *Conservation and Development Plan*

The HCP is an excellent starting point for the County's environmental mission. However, the HCP could be grown into a Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program. The description of the program is from the United States Department of Agriculture website:

The Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Program is reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill). The RC&D program increases opportunities for volunteer, locally elected, and civic leaders in designated RC&D areas to plan and complete projects for resource conservation and community development. Program objectives focus on "quality of life" improvements achieved through natural resources conservation and community development. Such activities lead to sustainable communities, prudent land use, and the sound management and conservation of natural resources.³

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Research other communities for best practices	6 Months	January – June 2014	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Identify funding for consultants to help with process (or ensure adequate County staff)	3 Months	June – August 2014	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Fund and Develop plan	1 Year	January – December 2015	Commissioners Court, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Land Trusts, Property Owners, Developers

How will you measure success?

Conservation and Development Plan adopted in December 2015

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

\$50 - \$100,000 for consultant-led effort

Conclusion

Hays County is at a crossroads. The last decade or so of strong population growth has created a sea-change to the economy, demographics, and culture of the county. Balancing growth and economic development with strongly held ties to rural lifestyle, values, and landscape is not an easy role to manage. The goals identified in this plan certainly make it clear that a studied, logical approach to conserve and preserve open space in the county for habitat protection, water quality, and other reasons is a priority for the citizens.

³ http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Programs/rcd/pdf_files/RCD_2009_factsheet.pdf

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

The Hays County government has played a meaningful role in fostering and promoting the quality of life for its citizens by efficiently providing services that enable economic growth and development of the area. Economic development is a critical component of the County's overriding purpose: improving the quality of life for all Hays County residents.

Participants at the various town hall meetings, focus groups, and in one-one-one interviews are supportive of the County engaging in strategically focused economic development activities that raise living standards for the citizens of Hays County.

Hays County spans urban, rural, and suburban development patterns. It is home to a diverse citizenry with income levels ranging from wealthy to disadvantaged. The County has benefitted all of these constituency groups in efficiently formulating and implementing its day-to-day programs and services. The opportunity and challenge going forward will be for the County to continue to deliver efficient policies and programs to benefit all segments of the economy.

The economic development powers given to county governments in Texas is outlined and codified in Section 381 of the Local Government Code. Counties are granted broad authority and flexibility to engage in all manner of economic and community development activities.

As a practical matter, however, counties in Texas have exerted limited powers when it comes to economic development. Typically, counties defer to local economic development entities on the day-to-day, grassroots level of economic development. This is due to the fact that counties have fewer resources for economic development and broader mandates and responsibilities than most local governments.

County governments can play a major "deal closing" role in the business recruitment arena when it comes to attracting large, desirable, primary employers. This happens when counties are asked to participate in financial incentive packages when recruiting the likes of Samsung, Motorola, and Dell. The most common form of county incentive is ad valorem property tax abatements.

Finally, counties can and do make the difference between success and failure in local economic development efforts by fostering a pro-business climate and culture. Counties also set the tone and stage for economic development by laying a solid economic foundation for future progress in critical areas like transportation, long-term infrastructure, and favorable business climate.

Short-term Projects (1 – 3 Years)

Build upon and strengthen working relationships with local economic development entities in San Marcos, Kyle, Buda, Dripping Springs, Wimberley, and other emerging locations. Hays County can serve as a bridge and connection to these local economic development offices and thereby promote cooperation in terms of attracting new business investment to Hays County. The County should know local economic development priorities and activities; in each instance, Hays County can leverage its limited resources to make maximum contribution to local efforts. The County has contributed financially to the Greater San Marcos Economic

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Development Plan and has set aside additional money for implementing that plan. This is one example of a strong partnership.

The County should hold quarterly or twice-yearly luncheon meetings to collaborate with Economic Development Offices on topical matters, successes, opportunities, and impediments to future growth and development. The County can also serve as point of contact and advocate for major Hays County businesses -- especially those businesses located in the County but outside the purview and control of cities and communities.

Most local communities have established business retention and expansion programs and interview and survey their major employers on at least an annual basis to determine priorities, opportunities, and problems. Businesses located outside community ETJ are often overlooked and may not benefit from State and Federal incentive programs to build businesses. The County can establish a Hays County Business Roundtable to liaison and coordinate with large private sector primary employers and those primary businesses not linked into local economic development efforts. It is recommended that this effort should start small, say with the 10 largest primary employers. The number of businesses can be ramped up over time.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Continue participation in local economic development planning (i.e. the Greater San Marcos plan)	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Conduct regular workshops with local economic development entities (quarterly or semi-annual)	On-going	October 2010	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Establish a Hays County Business Roundtable to bring together large employers across the County	On-going	January 2011	Commissioners Court, business owners, local eco dev entities

Possible Partners?

Cities, Businesses, Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Corporations

How will you measure success?

Hays County grows reputation as business friendly community
 New Businesses locate in Hays County

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Establish a County-wide Economic Development Policy

Hays County has a strong base of existing businesses and has successfully attracted new businesses in response to its rapidly growing population. Many of these jobs have been in the service and retail sector, which often provides low wage, part time employment. Many of the cities have active economic development programs and it is expected that they will continue to be the forerunners in economic development efforts. The County should consider adopting an economic development policy that will support the local efforts. It is important to have a policy in place before a major prospect enters the picture to ensure standards are in place and not be influenced by the desire to land a big company. The County should work closely with its

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

citizens, utilizing economic development professionals as advisors to develop a policy that will position Hays County as a leader in economic development.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Commissioners Court establishes committee charge and appoints a citizen based committee with an advisory sub-committee	1 Month	August 2010	Commissioners Court, County Planner
Committee reviews current policy and formulates a new policy	4 Months	September – December 2010	Commissioners Court, County Planner
Utilize the policy when conducting economic development activities	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Cities, Businesses, Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Corporations

How will you measure success?

Hays County grows reputation as business friendly community
 New Businesses locate in Hays County

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Evaluate development of a County-wide incentive policy to encourage additional business investment in the area.

The County does not have a formal incentive policy at this time. It has provided incentives to several new businesses locating in the County including an HEB warehouse and Grifols. Economic development is a very competitive endeavor and much of the preliminary site selection work is done before the community is even contacted. Having an incentive policy in place that a site selector can access is key to keeping Hays County on the “short list” for business relocation. An incentive policy can include the following:

- (a.) Ad valorem property tax abatements for desirable and targeted new businesses,
- (b.) Freeport tax exemptions to inventory critical companies,
- (c.) Sponsor and apply for Texas Capital Fund grants and loans for business recruitment and expansion projects, and
- (d.) Chapter 381 Local Government Code programs and agreements for new and expanding businesses.

To be successful, the County should develop its policy to complement existing policies at the cities and ensure that any incentive will meet established goals for the County. It should also include strict “clawback” provisions that will protect the County from a business that does not meet agreed upon performance goals.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Research Best Practices from other Counties	6 Months	January – June 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Work with Cities to evaluate best policy	3 Months	June – August 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Adopt Incentive Policy and Promote	On-going	September 2011	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Economic Development Corporations, Governor’s Office of Economic Development

How will you measure success?

Incentive Policy in place by September 2011

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Encourage Cities to Pursue “Certified Retirement Community” status

The Certified Retirement Community Program, managed through the Texas Department of Agriculture, provides a “stamp of approval” for a community to meet the needs of its retirees and visitors. This includes health care, education, safety, entertainment and other factors. There is an application process and assessment by TDA to achieve this status. Growth in Hays County has brought additional medical services, retail, and other opportunities to serve an aging population, making the region more attractive to retirees. Having this stamp of approval would be another marketing tool for Cities to attract this population.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who’s Responsible?
Conduct an informative workshop with City leaders on benefits of program	1 Month	November 2010	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Encourage them to pursue this	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Cities, Texas Department of Agriculture

How will you measure success?

1 or more communities becomes certified

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Coordinate with Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureaus (CVB), and any other tourism organizations to promote tourism initiatives through joint marketing efforts, event coordination, and information sharing.

The County can hold quarterly or semi-annual luncheon meetings with Chambers of Commerce, CVBs, and other interested tourism partners to coordinate activities and maximize effectiveness in tourism activities.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Conduct regular workshops with tourism entities to coordinate activities and foster cooperation	On-going	January 2011	Commissioners Court, County Staff, Chambers of Commerce
Utilize County website as central clearinghouse for information with links, etc. to local websites	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff

Possible Partners?

Cities, Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitors Bureaus

How will you measure success?

Increased Tourism in Hays County

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Mid-term Projects (3-5 Years)

Encourage Infrastructure Development in Areas most Suitable for Economic Development

The County is working on a number of infrastructure plans that will identify key infrastructure needs and recommendations to address them. Ensuring adequate infrastructure will make Hays County more attractive to potential businesses and should be a priority for the County moving forward.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
See "Identify Preferred Growth" within the Growth Management Section			

Work with communities, private property owners, and other key players in Hays County to protect and enhance unique natural features, historic sites, and other irreplaceable physical assets in the County

The County should identify property owners and key players to begin dialogue on a possible strategy. It should also solidify relations with Austin and Travis County to the north and major communities and counties to the south. It always makes sense to partner with and collaborate with those neighbors who have more resources.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
See Growth Management Section			

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Explore efforts to increase access to Community College / Vocational education in County with minimal impacts to taxpayers

Local school districts have already established a relationship with Austin Community College and are offering credit courses to students. Hays County can support this effort and add value to recruitment efforts in Kyle, Buda, San Marcos, and other Hays County communities.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Support Efforts of Local School Districts	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

School Districts, Austin Community College, Vocational Schools, Texas State University

How will you measure success?

Community College and Vocational Education facility open in Hays County

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal for County

Be vigilant to economic development opportunities: recruiting State of Texas offices to Hays County, expanded health care opportunities, advanced technology, and clean industry.

Residents want the County to encourage quality job creation for residents. These are the types of companies that people want: clean, non-polluting, high paying, technology-oriented jobs. The County should continue to partner with local economic development professionals to target these businesses.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Promote Hays County as alternative location to State Legislators and other State elected officials	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court
Identify potential sites and market those	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, Cities

Possible Partners?

Cities, Economic Development Entities, State Officials

How will you measure success?

State offices expand in Hays County

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Evaluate services and programs to enhance value-added agriculture and promotion of unique natural products.

There are also other unique agriculture products grown here including truffles, lavender, and other crop products. These ventures typically are very mindful of water and other environmental concerns. The County should encourage these activities and provide support where possible to boost alternative crops.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Work with local producers to determine local products, existing marketing strategies, etc.	6 Months	January – June 2014	County Staff
Work with cities to encourage Farmers Markets and other events to make local products available	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners, Cities
Provide information on available programs and assistance to local producers	On-going	On-going	County Commissioners

Possible Partners?

Cities, Ag producers, Texas Department of Agriculture, Farmers Markets

How will you measure success?

Increased demand for local products
Farmers able to maintain their livelihood

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Develop bicycling infrastructure and promote Hays County as a cycling destination.

Hays County is already a bicycling destination, with cyclists from Austin and other areas coming to enjoy the scenic beauty and quiet roads. Unfortunately, this has created safety issues on some County roads that do not have shoulders for the cyclists. Participants in the focus groups and town halls identified this as an issue. As the County performs maintenance and upgrades to County roads, cycling facilities should be considered and installed where feasible. This can simply be adding a shoulder to the road; it does not have to be a major investment.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Develop cycling facilities as feasible on new and upgraded County roads	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court
Contact area cycling clubs and talk with them about cycling in Hays County	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court
Put links to local cycling routes and other cycling resources on County website	3 Months	August – October 2010	County Staff
Encourage local shops to carry cycling products	On-going	On-going	County Staff

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Possible Partners?

Cities, Local Cycling clubs, business owners

How will you measure success?

Cycling increases in Hays County
Measure and calculate cycling safety

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on added facilities

Conclusion

Hays County is fortunate to have a diverse economy that has weathered the economic downturn fairly well. The County has positioned itself to support economic development at the local level and is seen as a partner by the local practitioners. The County should continue to play this role and review its policies to ensure it is meeting the needs of local businesses and continuing to make Hays County an attractive destination for new business.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

QUALITY OF LIFE

Introduction

Quality of life is an important issue to every county resident but can often mean very different things to different groups of people. This planning process includes several quality of life functions that will help to ensure public safety, improved mobility, expanded recreational opportunities, and healthy and vibrant communities.

An area's quality of life can also impact economic development efforts. A high quality of life leads to a healthy and productive workforce and can help to attract and retain desirable businesses.

In the town hall meetings and focus groups, Hays County residents consistently listed quality of life as something that should be maintained and improved. Many residents moved to Hays County because of the high quality of life that exists in the area. To their credit, Hays County leaders understand the importance of maintaining a high quality of life and have actively contributed to this goal.

Current Activities

Continue Support for CARTS and Explore Potential for Expanding Services

As Hays County grows, transportation within the County will become a bigger challenge. Solutions to relieve highway congestion, improve traffic flow, develop commuter rail, and increase pedestrian usage will be at the forefront of County planning efforts.

Another important component of transportation in Hays County involves the Capital Area Rural Transportation System (CARTS). CARTS provides transportation services in seven counties (including Hays County) and the non-urban areas of Travis and Williamson counties. Because it is funded through an interlocal agreement with these nine counties, the CARTS budget is directly dependent on the tax revenues of these counties. That, coupled with declining Federal and State transportation funding, creates a gap that will likely continue to widen for the foreseeable future.

To compound the situation, there is an increasing need for expanded CARTS services in Hays County. Williamson County has already done extensive research into potential solutions and funding mechanisms for increasing the reach of CARTS in that county. These solutions are available in a report called "*Williamson County Public Transportation Planning Study*."

The study details several possibilities, including new routes, different types of routes (local, regional, on-demand, etc.), scheduling changes, etc. Also included in the study is an examination of different possible funding streams to help provide this expanded service.

Continue Support for Non-Profits Across the County

The non-profit sector in Hays County plays a significant role in the quality of life of residents. Non-profits work with the public sector to deliver the programs and services that county residents need. Non-profits and the public sector are natural partners in this role because each bring unique knowledge, expertise, and resources which work together to support Hays County residents. Support for senior centers, libraries, and the women's shelter were consistently ranked at the top of the list by Hays County residents.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Hays County already provides support to several local non-profits by allocating funds that help these organizations extend their budgets, and thus, outreach efforts. Because of the shrinking pool of funds available from Federal and State sources, local non-profits are facing gaps in their ability to provide services to an ever-increasing clientele.

Since increases in County funding may not always be possible, the County should help foster a more collaborative environment to help meet local needs. Resources are limited. Collaboration and cooperation could help to ensure that these resources will be efficiently utilized through eliminating duplication, identifying priorities, combining resource opportunities, and for targeting services where they are most needed.

Continue Support for EMS Services

During the town hall meetings and focus groups, Hays County citizens consistently rated public safety as a top priority. Fire and EMS services rank the highest within this topic. As the County continues to transition from a rural/suburban county to one that is increasingly urban, it begins to face more and more public safety challenges and pressures. To meet these challenges, Hays County must provide sustained and ongoing investment. The coordination and collaboration of several local, regional, and State public safety partners will also be needed. Because public safety is a priority, Hays County must ensure that the EMS services are equipped to meet current and future County needs. Areas to address include proper infrastructure, training, funding, technology and communications systems, and staffing.

Fund and Continue to Support the Healthy Communities Coalition

Health care is a critical issue facing many residents in Hays County. The Healthy Communities Coalition is a service that helps to provide affordable health care in the county. This partnership should be continued because of the cost savings to the County it provides.

Short-term (1-3 Years)

In addition to Hays County's current efforts, there are several ways that Hays County can improve the quality of life in the short-term. These efforts will have a significant impact on Hays County residents by helping to fill an immediate need.

Support School Districts

An educated and skilled workforce is an essential element in creating economic development opportunities. Simply stated, quality schools attract businesses and people. Hays County is already home to many highly-educated and highly-skilled workers, and businesses in the area reap the benefits of this talented workforce.

Texas State University plays a key role in preparing tomorrow's workforce. Opportunities also exist within the K-12 grades to align education and training programs with local business needs to ensure that all potential workers are well-prepared for working in the growing Hays County economy. Hays County should encourage collaborative efforts between educators; area schools, community colleges and universities; and local businesses and industries to develop specific steps to help meet regional needs.

Ideas for this group to consider include the following:

- Increasing the use of technology applications in all levels

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

- Implementing multiple pathway approaches to prepare students for careers and college
- Strengthening the links between education providers and the business community
- Gathering data on workforce shortages and skill gaps use the collected data to improve educational and training programs
- Beginning career awareness programs such as job shadowing, internships and apprenticeships, dual credit classes, and career counseling

In addition to their primary role of educating local students, schools can also help provide some social services in conjunction with the County and local non-profit organizations. The Family Learning Centers in the San Marcos ISD are one such example. Through their adult education, early childhood education, parenting, and English as a Second Language (ESL) offerings, many local families are receiving the information and assistance they need to become more productive families and citizens. Recreational programming could also fit in this category. Organized recreation activities promote exercise and provide opportunities for families to interact.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Serve as an advocate and promote schools to citizens	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, School Districts
Consider joint use buildings and other facilities to share costs	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, School Districts
Consider holding regular workshops with school districts to ensure coordination of efforts and planning	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, School Districts

Possible Partners?

School Districts, Residents

How will you measure success?

Greater coordination of effort between County and School Districts

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Expand Recreation Opportunities Across the County

The population increases anticipated in Hays County will create a huge need for parks, open space, and recreational opportunities. The County must act now to ensure that enough public land is available to provide opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors and to prevent congestion and sprawl.

In addition to their aesthetic beauty, parks and open space provide many other benefits. They encourage healthy living through active lifestyles, help preserve local culture and heritage, help manage growth, and enhance tourism and recreational opportunities. Hays County can begin this initiative by working with the cities to purchase and set aside land that can be developed into parks, open space areas, and trail systems within the next few years.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Certain parts of the county have a higher need for park development. Eastern Hays County, particularly east of I-35, is an area that should be targeted for the development of parks and open spaces. According to the *Central Texas Greenprint for Growth, Conservation, and Economic Opportunity for Hays County*, most of the public park land exists within the cities in the form of neighborhood parks. The “Greenprint” has already identified high priority areas for park development in the unincorporated parts of eastern Hays County, so this document should be used to guide future efforts. Additionally the Hays County Parks and Open Space Master Plan needs to be updated and further developed. This process should start soon. With expected growth due to the creation of Tollway 45 East, expansion of State Highway 21 and the 130 Corridor to the east, the County should plan for protecting open space as development occurs.

Hays County residents have shown their support for parks initiatives by approving bond elections. However, the County cannot continue to tap into the same funding stream time and time again. In addition to bond elections, Hays County could explore several other funding options:

- Enter into cooperative agreements with cities to share the costs and responsibilities
- Seek donations of land from private landowners and businesses
- Apply for grants from Texas Parks & Wildlife
- Land acquisition
- Park development or renovation
- Acquisition and development of multi-jurisdictional recreation areas
- Recreational trail projects

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Identify underserved areas for parks and recreation amenities	1 Year	January – December 2012	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Work with Cities to coordinate park development efforts	On-going	On-going	County Staff, Cities
Encourage developers to include parks in new developments	On-going	On-going	County Staff, Cities
Purchase land and develop parks as funding allows, focusing on underserved areas	On-going	As funds allow	Commissioners Court, County Staff

Possible Partners?

School Districts (for shared facilities), Developers, Cities

How will you measure success?

Access to parks and open space throughout Hays County

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on land and facilities

Parks and Open Space bonds, State and Federal grants, local fundraising

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Mid-term (3-5 Years)

Some of the other ways to improve the quality of life for Hays County residents require a longer commitment of time, as well as a larger investment of shared resources. As the County continues to grow, its population will also become more diverse. The County will need to enact programs and policies that will benefit this growing and diverse population of residents.

Provide Grant Writing Support to Local Non-Profits and Others

Because County funds are limited, it is essential to explore other areas of funding to augment the County's budget for specific public projects. Hays County has recognized this need internally through the work of the Grants Administration Department. It is their job to identify and obtain supplemental financial resources to support Hays County's strategic goals.

For projects where the County's strategic goals overlap with those of other organizations, this department may be tapped to assist local non-profits with grant writing services. Hays County could also take a lead role in sponsoring or conducting grant writing seminars that will give local non-profits the tools they need to identify and obtain their own potential grants. Several organizations already provide grant writing seminars and workshops, and might be available to host them in a Hays County location. Organizations include the Texas Historical Commission and Regional Foundation Library.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Work with local non-profits and others to determine their needs	1 Year	January – December 2012	County Grant Writer
Determine policy for providing assistance	3 Months	January – March 2013	Grant Writer, Commissioners Court
Begin providing assistance	On-going	On-going	Grant Writer

Possible Partners?

Non-profits

How will you measure success?

Local non-profits receive more grants

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time, potential for additional staff if demand is great

General Funds

Explore Healthcare District

An opportunity the County should consider to help with growing health care demands and costs is the establishment of a regional or Hays County specific Healthcare District. This District would have taxing authority to raise funds to pay for services and facilities to provide healthcare to residents of Hays County. Travis County and Austin recently created a healthcare district, and part of the agreement was that the City of Austin reduced its property taxes by a commensurate amount to what the new district would charge. This was because, with the district in place, Austin would no longer be funding those services. An agreement like this may

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

make the creation of a Healthcare District more palatable to residents who may resist an increased tax burden.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Work with the Healthy Community Coalition to discuss process and pros and cons of establishing a District	6 months	January – June 2011	Commissioners Court
Establish an education and outreach program to gather public input	18 months	June 2011 – December 2012	Commissioners Court
Conduct an election to establish District if there is community support	5 Months	January – May 2013	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Cities, Health care providers, Health/Community Coalition

How will you measure success?

Health District established (if supported) by May 2013

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Staff Time

Increase Access to Health Care

Access to health care services is a major component of quality of life. In addition to helping citizens maintain a healthy lifestyle, preventative and primary care can be less expensive in the long run than emergency services and long-term medical care.

Hays County has several health care facilities and organizations that work to provide care and services to Hays County residents. Their ability to reach every citizen in every part of the County is limited because of budgetary constraints, geographic distribution of facilities, and residents' transportation challenges.

Mobile healthcare clinics could be a potential solution for increasing access to health care to underserved populations and in rural areas where public transportation is lacking. Most mobile healthcare clinics provide services comparable to those offered in a physician's office, such as routine exams, children's wellness checks, screenings, prenatal care, and family medicine. The County should seek collaborative agreements with medical programs from area colleges and universities to provide supervised training for their students as they provide care in mobile clinics.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Ensure budget for indigent care continues to grow with need (if financially feasible)	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, Indigent Health Care
Work with local providers to encourage their provision of assistance	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, local health care providers

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

Consider offering mobile health clinics to provide preventive care (could be in local facilities or purchasing a mobile clinic bus)	1 Year	January – December 2014	Commissioners Court, Indigent Health Care, local health care providers
---	--------	-------------------------	--

Possible Partners?

Local Health Care Providers, School Districts

How will you measure success?

Residents have access to basic medical care

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Dependent on need

General Funds, State and Local grants, Local fundraising

Update Hays County Strategic Plan

A plan should provide a set of goals and objectives to move the County forward; however, it must be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure it reflects on-going issues and opportunities. For example, if a major company were to relocate to Hays County, it might change some aspects of the plan and generate a new focus on infrastructure to a particular location, etc. The plan is a framework for decision-making and must be kept current and reviewed frequently. With a dynamic growing population, new data should be collected and citizens should continue to assist the County with establishing new goals and objectives.

Implementation

Actions	Duration	Timeline	Who's Responsible?
Ensure new staff and elected officials are introduced to the plan when coming on board	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff
Review plan at least annually, particularly at budget workshops to ensure goals are being addressed	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court, County Staff, LCRA
Update plan at least every 3 – 5 years	On-going	On-going	Commissioners Court

Possible Partners?

Cities, School Districts, Residents, LCRA

How will you measure success?

Plan is incorporated into all aspects of County decision making

Plan stays current and reflects priorities of community

Estimated funding needed and possible sources?

Minimal

Conclusion

As this chapter illustrates, quality of life is important to the citizens of Hays County. Through the planning process, groups and individuals identified public safety, improved mobility, expanded recreational opportunities, and healthy and vibrant communities as key quality of life components. Following the outlined actions, will allow administrators to create and sustain a

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

county that welcomes citizens and offers resources for the development of an improved lifestyle. In the past, Hays County leaders have shown illustrated that quality of life is a high priority. This goal will help in further expanding and developing resources to enhance the success of these endeavors.

Hays County Strategic Policy Plan

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this document is present suggestions and ideas to help maintain or improve the overall quality of life for the citizens of Hays County. It can serve as a guide for future development of policy, rules, and regulations; furthermore, the suggestions and action plan is a direct product of the public input and evaluation process. As the introduction states, “this document is intended to be a holistic document that addresses nearly every aspect of County governance and reaches across jurisdictions to enhance coordination between the County, Cities, School Districts, and others.” Proposed actions outlined in this comprehensive plan were derived from the aforementioned Plan Process of internal interviews, public surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings.

This plan is an attempt to address the common issues and concerns identified by residents while maintaining the need to exercise fiscal discipline by the County. Many of the projects identified will require minimal financial investment from the County, some will require financing, and others may result in cost savings over time. It will be up to the Commissioners Court to address these recommendations and make this plan reality. The citizens of Hays County also have an obligation to stay informed and involved over time to ensure their recommendations are addressed. If citizens do not continue to participate, this plan may not be realized and an opportunity to prepare for the future and move the County towards common, supported goals will be lost.