

INTRODUCTION

Smithville is located approximately 45 miles east of Austin, in southeastern Bastrop County (Illustration 1). With its proximity to Austin, the western half of Bastrop County has experienced rapid growth in the last 10 years. Smithville has seen growth; however, it is not experiencing the same level as the rest of the County. Given the tremendous growth in the region, it is likely that Smithville will soon feel its effects. This comprehensive plan is an effort to help prepare the community for the expected growth and provide tools to preserve the assets that make Smithville the unique and desirable community it currently is.

History¹

The town was originally established by Thomas Gazeley, who settled near the present site in 1827. A community arose around the store he operated and was named Smithville after another early resident. The first church, Smithville Presbyterian Church was founded in 1871. The post office was established in 1876. The arrival of the railroad, first the Bastrop and Taylor, which became the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas ('Katy') drove additional growth.

In 1894, the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad established its central shops in Smithville. The population quickly doubled, and the town was incorporated in March 1895. In 1900 Smithville had a population of 2,577. The population continued to grow until it peaked in the mid-1940's around 4,200. As railroad jobs dried up, so did the town's population, dropping below 3,000 by the 1960's. Since 1990, Smithville has experience steady growth, with the population increasing from 3,196 to an estimated 4,250 in 2005.

Smithville has maintained its rural character and small town charm. Its downtown is lined with historic buildings, many of which house unique shops and other businesses. The area surrounding the central business district is filled with historic homes, the majority of which are well-maintained and attractive. This historic charm and unique character attracted filmmakers for the Sandra Bullock movie, "Hope Floats", much of which was filmed in Smithville. The citizens are very proud of their participation in this movie, and a 10th anniversary celebration is being proposed.

The countryside around Smithville exemplifies the rural character of Central Texas, with rolling hills, ranches, and farms. The Colorado River runs through the City and provides a tremendous opportunity for recreation. There are two state parks connected by a park road in proximity to Smithville as well as several City parks and additional recreation on private land. This heritage is reflected in the rural character of Smithville residents who are committed to maintaining strong ties to the land.

¹ Sources: Texas State Handbook, City of Smithville website (www.smithvilletexas.net)

Physical Geography²

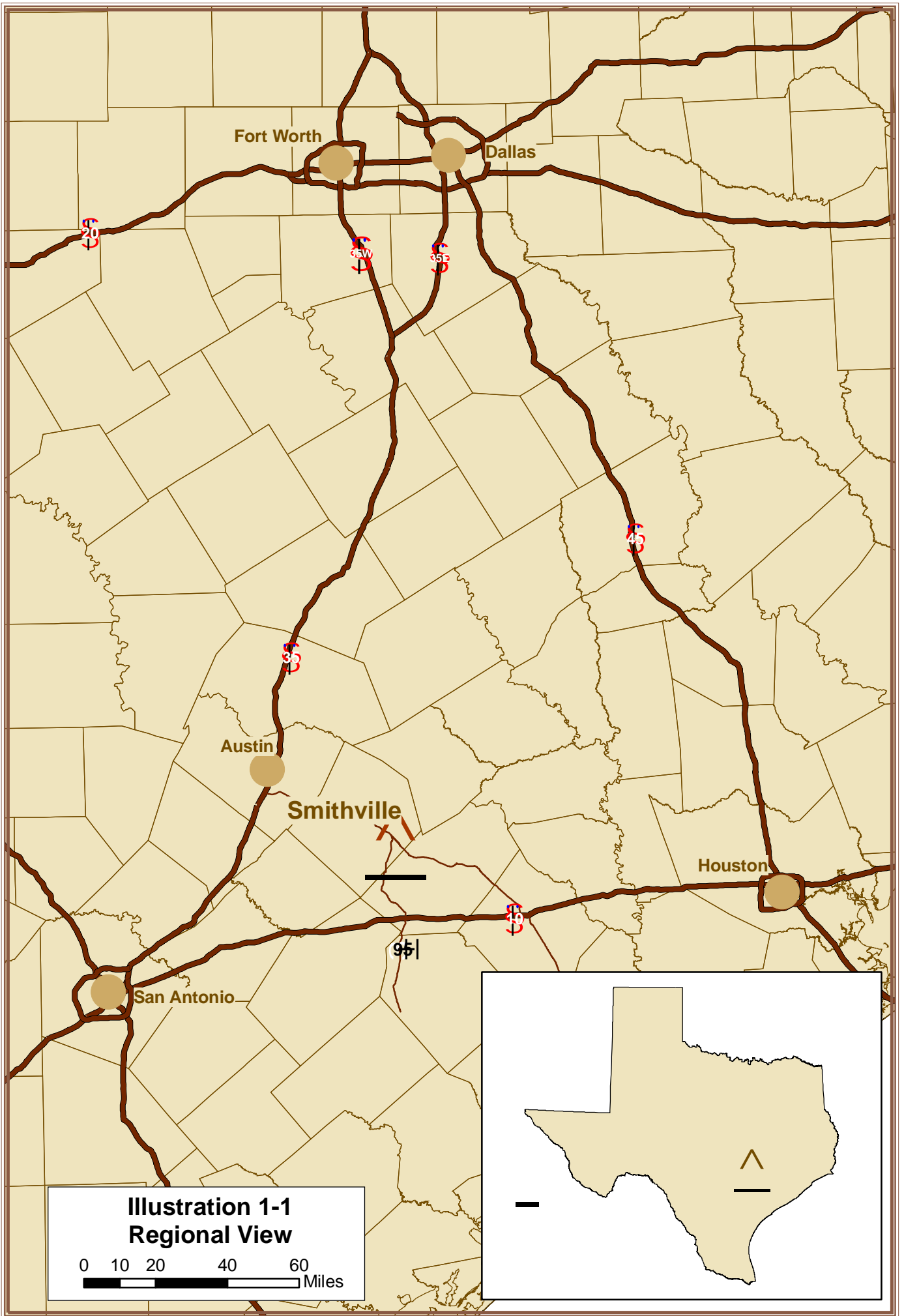
Smithville lies at the northwestern edge of the Gulf Coastal Plain, near its boundary with the Blackland Prairie. It is in the area of the so-called 'Lost Pines' which are the western-most outlier of the thick piney woods that characterize much of East Texas. The terrain has low rolling hills, with a few significant elevation changes, particularly the bluffs along the Colorado River, and the Devil's Backbone, a ridgeline just to the north of town. This balance of topography, forest, and prairie made the region very attractive to early settlers who could farm and ranch the prairie, while having access to quality timber for building homes and other needs.

The Colorado River, the longest river wholly contained in one state, runs through Smithville. This river provides drinking water and irrigation for much of Central Texas and farmers near the coast. Smithville lies over the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer, which provides much of the drinking water for rural residents of Bastrop County surrounding Smithville. This is typically a reliable source of water, although increasing growth may lead to local availability concerns.

Climate

Monthly Average. High Temp _____	July: 96`
Monthly Average Low Temp _____	Jan.: 40`
Annual Average Precipitation _____	37.1"
Elevation _____	324ft.
Growing Season _____	268 days
Prevailing Winds _____	Southeast

² Source: Texas: A Geography, Terry G. Jordan with John L. Bean, Jr. and William M. Holmes



PLANNING PROCESS

In the summer of 2006, City leaders decided it was time to develop a comprehensive plan that would provide guidance on how to protect Smithville from uncontrolled growth while providing jobs and other amenities desired by citizens. The plan would also tie in with a County-wide strategic plan being developed at this time. This comprehensive plan is the result of that effort and includes the following topics:

- Demographic Analysis – Current and projected population characteristics
- Land Use – Description of current land use and a Future Land Use Plan
- Economic Development – Recommendations for increasing employment opportunities and tax revenues for the City
- Community Development – Recommendations for community facilities such as parks, etc.
- Housing – Recommendations for providing quality housing options for all incomes
- Downtown Revitalization – Recommendations for strengthening the Central Business District
- Historic Preservation – Recommendations to preserve and enhance the historic assets of Smithville
- Stormwater Assessment – Recommendations to protect property and water quality
- Development Ordinance Review – Recommendations on updating the subdivision and zoning ordinances
- Implementation Guide – Lists specific actions to accomplish plan goals

The plan is the result of an extensive public input process that is discussed in greater detail in its own section of the plan.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is intended to address all of the different facets of community development in a holistic fashion. Rather than addressing issues such as housing, economic development, transportation, and others individually, the comprehensive plan takes a big picture look at how all of these different issues interact. The goal is to identify projects that can generate the highest return on investment in multiple areas of the community. For example, a plan that only addresses economic development may call for focusing resources on business recruitment. However, if there is a housing shortage, businesses are unlikely to locate to the community. A comprehensive plan avoids this conflict by addressing these issues simultaneously to maximize the benefit to the community.

To be successful, a comprehensive plan must have a strong public input component. If the citizens are not involved in the process, they will not support the plan recommendations and the resources allocated to projects identified in the plan. Also, it is important to understand what the citizens identify as priorities for action because that will engender their support for using limited public resources on projects identified in the plan. Also, in rural communities, like Smithville, city government has very limited staff and resources; involving residents in the planning process will empower them to participate in implementation of the plan.

The comprehensive plan has a series of goals identified during the public input process. Some of these require government action, while others are more geared towards local organizations. Each goal has a series of projects and actions to implement. This implementation process is the key to success for the plan. Implementation is a long term process; some projects can be accomplished in the first year or two, while others will require more time and investment. The plan balances 'quick' victories that will build enthusiasm and support, while leading to larger successes down the road.

The most important consideration is that the comprehensive plan cannot be put on the shelf. The plan reflects the needs and desires of the citizens of Smithville and should be used regularly to guide decision making. Also, the plan must be continually reviewed to ensure it continues to reflect the community. Ideally, the plan is reviewed annually, potentially by the Steering Committee and City Council. Any major changes to the community will likely result in an update to the plan. For example, if a business with 100 employees locates in Smithville it will result in different priorities than are currently addressed in the plan. It will be up to the citizens to stay involved and ensure that decisions are being made in accordance with the plan. They cannot sit back once the plan is adopted and not participate in the process. It is critical for City leaders to see the support of the citizens as they allocate resources to the plan.

Process

The first step in developing the comprehensive plan was creating a steering committee. This committee consisted of private citizens appointed by the City Council to represent the City as a whole. The purpose of the committee was to work with staff from the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) in developing the plan to ensure it reflects the priorities of Smithville residents. The steering committee was involved throughout the public input process and reviewed all aspects of the plan. This group will also take a leadership role in helping to implement the plan by keeping residents involved in task forces and going before City Council to remind them of the plan priorities.

As mentioned above, planning required a focus on public involvement. In September 2006 surveys were sent monthly bills to all Smithville utility customers. The survey (Appendix A) was an effort to determine the 'big picture' of community sentiment and priorities. The survey covered topics ranging from historic preservation, housing, economic development and recreational opportunities. Based on the survey results, five topics were selected for further discussion at the Town Hall meeting held in October. These topics were Community Development, City Services and Utilities, Downtown Revitalization and Historic Preservation, Economic Development, and Wild Card (to provide an open forum for ideas). This meeting allowed residents to identify more specific issues related to these topics and then prioritize them for inclusion in the Plan. Following the Town Hall meeting, a series of focus groups were held to develop programs to address the identified issues. These meetings resulted in a list of projects that the City and other organizations can undertake to implement the plan. Appendix A contains a full list of comments received at the Town Hall meeting along with the voting results along with a detailed explanation of the survey results.

In addition to the public input process, a land use survey was conducted. This survey identified the current land use of every parcel in Smithville and its extra-territorial jurisdiction. This shows how the community has developed over time, where undeveloped land is available, and serves as the basis for the future land use plan. A workshop was held that allowed participants an opportunity to draw their vision of what Smithville should look like in the future. The map created in this workshop is a guide for land use decision making and can serve as the basis for updating the City's zoning code.

The plan was developed based on all of the public input. The goals and recommendations of the plan reflect the priorities of the citizens of Smithville. These recommendations are defined and explained in the body of the plan; however the most important piece in the plan is the last section. The last section of the plan is the implementation guide, which provides a detailed road map to making things happen. It spells out specific actions, timelines, responsible parties, etc. so that anyone can review the plan and identify how projects can be accomplished. This is the section of the plan that should be required reading for all elected officials, city staff, and concerned citizens because it outlines how the plan can be successful.

Once the plan was developed it went before City Council for adoption. By adopting the plan, city leadership commits to utilizing the plan as a framework for decision making. However, responsibility for implementation goes beyond city government. Local organizations, such as the Chamber of Commerce, Smithville Heritage Society, Downtown Merchants Association, and others must be involved in making the plan successful. Also, citizens must stay informed and involved to ensure the plan is kept current and on the front burner of community action. If nobody serves as a champion for the plan, it will be put on a shelf to gather dust.