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January 10, 2008

Mr. Pilar Rodriguez
City Engineer
City of McAllen
1300 Houston Avenue
McAllen, Texas 78501

RE: Final Plan Documents

Dear Mr. Rodriguez:

I am pleased to submit the final document for the Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan. This project commenced on January 19, 2006. Over the course of two years, when the plan was adopted by the City Commission on December 10, 2007, there was a remarkable amount of time invested into this project and hence, the community's future. The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee is to be highly commended for their tireless efforts to review the draft plan and offer their insights and specific guidance. The Commission Liaison, Mr. Jan Klinck, was instrumental in facilitating the latter stages of this process and building consensus on the plan and its directions. Mayor Cortez and the City Commission remained steadfast in their support, leadership, and vision, which will greatly influence the long-term success of this plan and community.

The adoption of this plan makes a statement about the City's commitment to good planning and its preparedness to pursue its vision. The plan is sufficiently general, yet firm in direction and deliberate in action. It sets in motion a significant change in direction as the community seeks to enhance its character and seize its economic potential. As articulated by the plan's vision, in this way ***"McAllen will be the Valley leader, economically, culturally, and environmentally, with a unique character that proclaims McAllen as a 'destination city'"***.

The Foresight McAllen Plan represents a consensus among the community's leadership and its citizens regarding the quality and character of future development and the infrastructure to support it. KKC is pleased to have been part of this rewarding process. Upon implementation of this plan, McAllen will be a model community for others in the Rio Grande Valley and throughout the state and nation to admire and follow. I wish you great success in your continued efforts to be a well "planned" community.

Respectfully,

Bret C. Keast, AICP
Vice President

Acknowledgements

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

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Executive Summary

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

Beginning in 2005, the citizens and leaders of McAllen initiated a process to proactively determine the future of their community. This undertaking was necessitated by both recent and future development and infrastructure improvements that will influence the character of the community. Therefore, a decision was made for the community to determine a course of action – on its own terms. To do so, a shared vision is an essential first step to guide the community and its leaders in their decision-making over the next two decades and beyond.

McAllen is choosing to embark on a new path – one that is being guided by a framework for the future. It is intended that the policies and associated goals, objectives, and recommended implementation strategies serve as a framework for community decision-making. To ensure growth that is both wise and sustainable, decisions must be based on sound policy and an integrated approach to analyzing community issues and identifying realistic solutions, as set forth in this plan.

Planning is about implementation. The costs of implementation and the community's willingness to pay for them will be at the heart of this plan's success.

The Foresight McAllen Plan offers a strategic policy framework for the City's corporate limits and five-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). The objective of the plan is to provide guidance for decisions relating to the future use of land, community growth and provision of infrastructure, area-wide mobility, economic development, quality housing and sustainable neighborhoods, cultural and environmental resources, and parks and open space areas. The horizon of the plan is the Year 2025.

Our Vision and Mission

The following statement identifies what we strive to achieve in the future to meet the needs of our businesses, residents, and visitors. It incorporates our shared values to guide us toward a greater purpose. The vision for McAllen is as follows:

> *By the Year 2025, McAllen will be the Valley leader, economically, culturally, and environmentally, with a unique character that proclaims McAllen as a "destination city." As a model border city, McAllen will promote its unique cultural heritage, be safe and clean, and have a beautiful appearance. McAllen will be a Mecca for a well-educated, creative workforce with quality and diversified employment opportunities. It will have sustainable, quality growth with safe, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and excellent transportation initiatives.*

Our mission statement is more detailed and further states our intentions, which is as follows:

> *The mission of this plan is to promote orderly growth with a renewed emphasis on quality development and redevelopment. McAllen will improve quality of life for its citizens by improving the overall appearance of the city, stabilizing and improving areas in decline, reserving land for parks, open space, and new employers. McAllen will coordinate public and private investment to promote retail shopping, cultural and entertainment options, major higher-paying employment and varied tourist attractions.*
>
> *McAllen will continue to invest in infrastructure in a sustainable manner. Its unique culture, diversity, and history will be preserved and enhanced with new cultural and entertainment venues, added efforts in nurturing, attracting, and retaining its creative class youth, and reinvestment in its historic areas. The tax base will be stabilized and strengthened by improved codes and enforcement, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit, adapting to new and changing economies, and attracting new businesses and manufacturing to the area. McAllen will continue to improve parks and its greenbelt image through the expansion of existing parks, recreational facilities, and plans for increased open space in developing areas.*
>
> *By achieving these goals, McAllen will become the "Destination City" for the entire region of South Texas and Northern Mexico.*

This plan document is comprised of six chapters, of which Chapter 5, Physical Development Plan, contains five individual sections. A summary of these chapters and sections is as follows:

An Overview

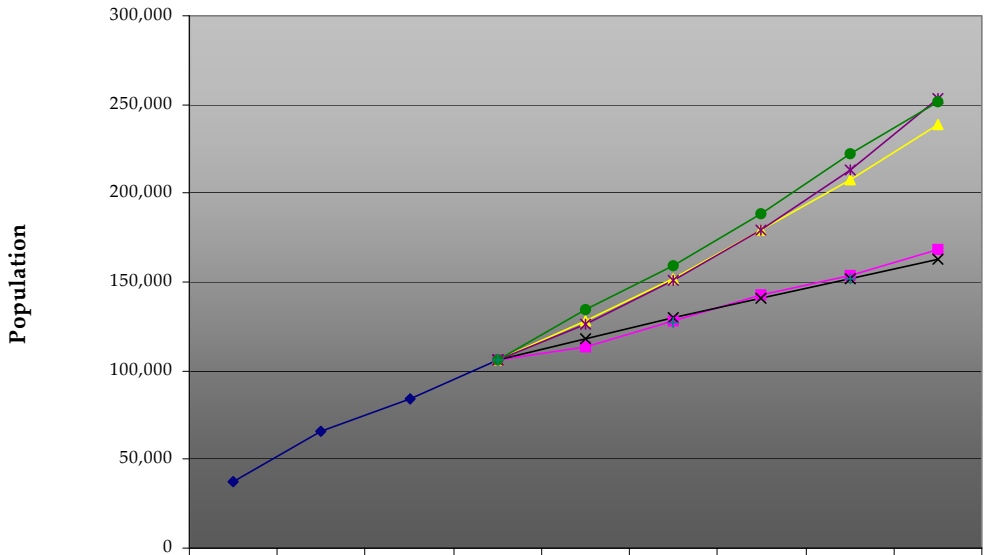


McAllen is a community with an agricultural history that has evolved over the years into an urban center and a hub of economic activity. While the historical past continues to be embraced and celebrated today, made evident by museums, historic neighborhoods, and its noted open spaces, this comprehensive planning process offered an opportunity for the community to remember its past, but more importantly, to envision its future. While future actions are likely to depart from their previous course, the success of the community in achieving its vision will largely depend on its past and why this community is called home by over 120,000 persons (2004 Census estimate).

A community profile offers a summary-level introduction to the City, which documents existing socioeconomic conditions and demographic characteristics pertaining to: the historical and projected future population; the age, gender, and educational attainment of its people; and the economic position of the community and its businesses. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the community has grown from a railroad stop in the early years of the 20th century, identify current characteristics and resources that will contribute to the envisioned future, and analyze where the community appears to be headed in the future.

Notably, as has been witnessed since it's founding and particularly in the last three plus decades, McAllen is expected to continue with an impressive rate of growth. Among the various scenarios examined, the Year 2025 population is forecasted to reach a middle-ground estimate of 208,100 persons, as displayed in **Figure 1, McAllen's Projected Population**. This is significant as the community prepares to meet its demands for public facilities and services, such as police and fire protection, water and wastewater facilities, streets and sidewalks, drainage infrastructure, parks and open space, and municipal buildings and staff.

Figure 1, McAllen's Projected Population



	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Historical	37,636	66,281	84,021	106,414					
Step Down 2000-02				106,414	113,478	127,776	142,816	153,497	168,166
Step Down 1.0				106,414	127,835	152,058	178,927	207,750	239,053
Linear Regression				106,414	118,403	129,607	140,810	152,014	163,218
Geometric				106,414	126,541	150,475	178,935	212,779	253,024
Exponential Growth				106,414	134,441	158,998	188,040	222,387	251,145
Texas Water Development Board				106,414		127,458		152,045	

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

How Do We Compare?

McAllen Is Growing Rapidly

Between 1990 and 2000, McAllen's population grew at a very high rate from 84,021 to 106,414. This 26.6 percent growth rate between 1990 and 2000 represents a higher growth rate than the State of Texas or the United States. This double-digit growth is a continuation of population increases seen across southern Texas in the three comparison cities and Hidalgo County over the past few decades.

McAllen Is Diverse

McAllen continues to be a community of diverse ethnic backgrounds, with Hispanic or Latino being the largest segment of the population at 80.3 percent. Hispanic or Latino background is predominant in the other south Texas cities of Harlingen (72.8 percent), Brownsville (91.3 percent), and Laredo (94.1 percent).

McAllen Incomes High Compared to South Texas Region

The 2000 median household income rose 52 percent to $33,641 from the 1990 median of $22,068. These median income levels continue to lag behind national median income levels of $41,994 for households and $21,587 per capita. The number of individuals living in poverty in 2000 remained lower than other nearby cities, but still remains significantly higher than the State (15.4 percent) or national (12.4 percent) average.

McAllen Uses Traditional Transportation Options

Commuters going to work primarily drive alone (77.1 percent), carpool (16.5 percent), use public transportation (4.0 percent), or walk (1.5 percent). When compared to the rest of Texas and the nation, these figures demonstrate similar usage of personal automobiles, public transportation and carpooling to get to work. 46.7 percent of households owned one or no cars in 2000 and 53.3 percent owned two or more, which is close to the national average (44.5 percent and 55.5 percent, respectively).

McAllen Has an Abundant Housing Supply

The total number of housing units increased from 28,597 in 1990 to 37,922 in 2000, an increase of 32.6 percent. At the same time, population grew by 26.6 percent and, therefore, the housing supply kept pace with the demand. Indicators of this housing abundance include:

- Increases in housing units exceeding increases in total population
- High level of vacant housing units for both renters and owners
- High number of seasonal or vacation homes
- Overall affordable value of units for sale
- High percentage of owner-occupied units
- Low mortgage costs for owners
- Median gross rent is less than 30 percent of household median income
- New housing stock

McAllen Has Large, Young Households

The median age in years for McAllen, Texas, and comparison cities is considerably lower than the national average (35.3 years). This is also demonstrated by very high levels of children under age five and children under age 18. In contrast to the rest of the country, all areas have low numbers of adults over age 65. The average household size is 3.18 persons, which is lower than Brownsville (3.62 persons), Laredo (3.7 persons), and Hidalgo County (3.6 persons). It remains higher than Harlingen (2.94 persons), Texas (2.74 persons), and the U.S. (2.59 persons).

McAllen Educational Attainment Leads the Region, But Lags Texas and Nation

The educational attainment of the population over 25 years old in 2000 indicates that 34.7 percent of residents do not have a high school diploma; 65.3 percent of residents have a high school diploma, some college, or Associate's degree; and 23.6 percent of residents have a Bachelor's degree or higher. These rates are higher than Brownsville and Laredo in all categories, but are on par with Harlingen rates of high school graduation. However, McAllen and these three comparison cities lag behind the Texas (75.7 percent and 23.2 percent, respectively) and U.S. (80.4 percent and 24.4 percent, respectively) averages.

What is Our Plan?

The substantive chapters of this plan address our policies and directions for guiding decisions relating to physical and economic development of our City limits and ETJ. The following summaries outline key planning considerations, highlight goals and policies, and identify significant recommendations of this plan.

Mobility

Although the street system is the dominant transportation medium, each mode of transport is essneitla to meet the future area travel demands. The rate of growth and increasing demand for new transportation infrastructure merits continued development and expansion of other mode choices. Without development of a complete "system" of transportation alternatives, congested travel conditions will worsen causing undesirable and unintended effects on the environment, economic development, and quality of life.

"Walkability is the cornerstone and key to an urban area's efficient ground transportation. Every trip begins and ends with walking. Walking remains the cheapest form of transport for all people, and the construction of a walkable community provides the most affordable transportation system any community can plan, design, construct and maintain. Walkable communities put urban environments back on a scale for sustainability of resources (both natural and economic) and lead to more social interaction, physical fitness and diminished crime and other social problems. Walkable communities are more livable communities and lead to whole, happy, healthy lives for the people who live in them."

Source: Walkable Communities, Inc.

Future Considerations

A summary of the key future planning considerations include:

- The street system must develop in a continuous manner to improve connectivity within and between neighborhoods.
- The traffic carrying capacity of roadways must be preserved through access standards.
- Advanced planning and effective ordinance provisions are necessary to preserve rights-of-way for trails and pedestrian-ways.
- The causal link between the development pattern and the efficiency of the transportation system must be observed.
- Near-term planning and decision-making is warranted to appropriately plan for the eventual need for high-capacity transit.
- There must be increased attention to the appearance of the roadway environs if the City is to distinguish its character and identity.

Key Recommendations

The overall goal is to promote contiguous development concurrent with provision of adequate public facilities and services. Steps to achieve this include:

1. Amend the major street plan based upon the future land use/growth plan.
2. Amend the subdivision regulations to specify right-of-way and pavement width requirements, regulate private subdivisions, manage access, incorporate traffic calming standards, and require shared/cross access.
3. Adopt transit supportive development policies and amend the regulations to allow – and encourage – mixed use development.
4. Update the Pathways & Recreational Trails Study.
5. Implement a Safe Sidewalks Program to make improvements in areas of high pedestrian use, i.e. around schools and parks.
6. Consider concurrency management or traffic sheds to preserve roadway level of service standards.
7. Initiate a preliminary high-capacity transit options study.
8. Prepare corridor streetscape plans and adopt design standards for development adjacent to arterial streets.

Community Character

The community character element presents a series of observations and specific recommendations focused on protecting existing neighborhoods and managing future development needed to accommodate anticipated population growth.

Policy Goals

The goals of the community character element to accommodate future growth while protecting neighborhoods include:

- Reinforce McAllen's community identity through the creation of urban gateways that set the City apart from adjoining cities or rural areas.
- Preserve open space to provide visual relief from intensively developed areas and to create opportunities for in-city wildlife observation.
- Maintain a compatible form of development, preventing future land use conflicts.
- Accommodate future population growth in an orderly and fiscally responsible manner.
- Adopt appropriate investment strategies to strengthen the economic sustainability of Downtown.
- Enhance the community appearance through continued beautification of public areas and improvements in mature strip commercial areas.

Implementation – First Five Years

When considering future community development opportunities, it is important to establish a list of priorities. A draft list of future actions to consider in the near-term could include:

1. Design and implement gateway improvements at strategic entrances to the City. Reserve land parcels for future gateways.

2. Enhance the Route 83 Expressway corridor by providing additional landscaping at major interchanges and along frontage roads.
3. Adopt zoning district classifications that are based on development characteristics rather than land use alone.
4. Amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate bufferyard standards, particularly for areas between commercial and residential uses.
5. Provide for mixed use development as a by-right option.
6. Designate areas for future development to accommodate anticipated population growth.
7. Streamline the development approval process for infill and redevelopment.
8. Amend the sign ordinance to require monument signs, with possible incentives of an increase in the total allowable area.

Cultural Resources

The cultural resources element creates guidelines and action items focused on the preservation and promotion of culture in McAllen. It is dedicated to incorporating the arts into the city's physical form and strengthening the opportunities for effective programming.

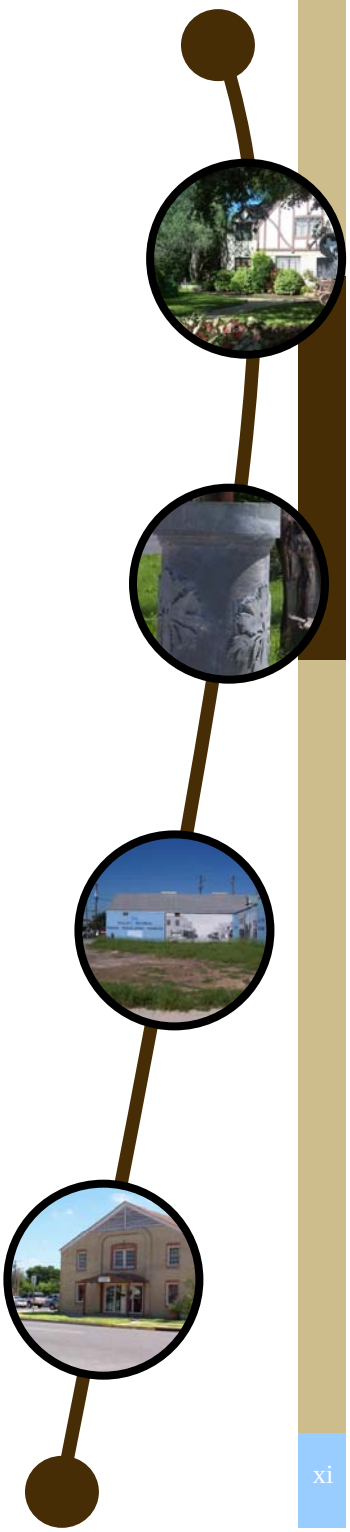
McAllen as a Leader

McAllen serves as the regional center for many aspects of the Valley and the arts and culture scene is no different. The variety of arts groups that exist in the city is constantly expanding and there are many needs that can be identified through this comprehensive plan. As an emerging cultural scene develops it is essential to foster the physical space, programs, and financial support that is required to grow this network. This cultural resources element provides direction for the planning process to include aspects that will help facilitate this future growth and continue to expand the opportunity for cultural expression throughout the city.

Highlights

The highlights of the cultural resources element as it strives to create new opportunities for the arts and culture include:

- Expand opportunities for local artists to design and exhibit their work.
- Identify opportunities for a cultural district.
- Formalize the ArtWalk experience as a heritage trail.
- Create additional arts opportunities with the new Convention Center.
- Incorporate the arts into existing and proposed public facilities, especially non-traditional spaces.
- Design and install local gateways.
- Celebrate local culture and artists through seasonal events and festivals.
- Program new parks for flexible gathering space.



- Organize a new Main Street association.
- Preserve the historic downtown character.
- Finance downtown streetscape and infrastructure improvements.
- Enhance transportation access in the downtown area.

Environmental Resources

Environmental resource issues exist throughout the physical form of the city. Both policy and infrastructure can contribute to a high environmental quality and resulting elevated quality of life for residents. While the future city growth poses challenges to preserving the environment, there are opportunities to create reduced development impacts or even improving existing environmental conditions.

Policy Goals

The goals of the environmental resources element focus on the preservation of land, air, and water quality around the city:

- Expand recycling program
- Remediate brownfields and polluted sites
- Improve stormwater and erosion controls
- Develop new municipal facilities as 'green' design
- Program a Farmer's Market in the downtown
- Increase tree canopy coverage
- Preserve existing agricultural land areas
- Implement alternative transportation strategies
- Maintain and monitor air quality levels
- Reduce the City's energy consumption

Growth has accelerated since the last state water plan was completed five years ago and it shows no signs of abating. By 2060, according to the water plan's projections, more than 3.8 million people will make their home in the region. According to the new State Water Plan, cities and towns in the Valley will need 16 times more water in 2060 than they will in 2010. Hidalgo County is expected to have the greatest shortages, followed by Webb and Cameron. The cost of recommended water supply projects necessary to meet all of the Valley's water needs by that time would be $1.08 billion, the plan found.

Source: Texas A&M University Real Estate Center

Implementation - First Five Years

When looking forward to the future implementation of these environmental elements, it is essential to prioritize projects as being ready for action or needing additional development. A draft list of projects to consider in the short-term could include:

1. Adopting stormwater BMPs in accordance with NPDES Phase II guidelines
2. Identifying space for a Farmer's Market and initiating a seasonal program
3. Reviewing zoning ordinance to promote higher water quality and increased quantity or reuse as grey water
4. Inventorying brownfield sites and identify steps for remediation
5. Creating or partnering with a land trust for preservation of open space
6. Implementing existing City plans for drainage and drought management
7. Designing all new municipal facilities for maximum energy efficiency

8. Adopting street tree planting policy to increase amount of street trees
9. Conducting a City energy audit and plan for reducing energy use by 10%
10. Incorporating higher energy efficiency standards in the City building code

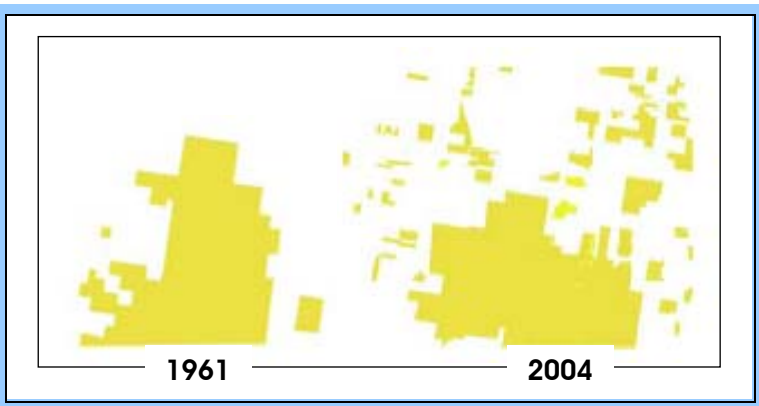
Growth Management

As the community continues to grow – estimated to reach approximately 208,000 persons by the Year 2025 – its challenge is to adopt land use policies and make proactive decisions to ensure a sustainable, fiscally responsible pattern of growth. Achieving this vision requires deliberate policies and implementation of effective strategies for efficient use of infrastructure, an increased capacity to absorb development, and directed growth through annexation, capital programming, and regulatory measures.

Promoting Responsible Development

Scattered development has a number of consequences, including:

- Inefficient delivery of public services, such as police and fire protection, public education, and parks and trails;
- Costly expenditures for premature extension of public infrastructure;
- Increased vehicle miles of travel leading to heightened congestion and air pollution;
- Degradation of agricultural lands and environmental resources;
- Permanent disruption of the rural character; and
- Declining community identity and character.



The change in the pattern of growth between 1961 and 2004 has caused a significant demand for more transportation infrastructure in the outlying, growing areas.

Key Recommendations

The overall goal is to promote contiguous development concurrent with provision of adequate public facilities and services. Steps to achieve this include:

1. Identify resource protection areas and designate sequential growth areas for 10, 15, and 20 years.
2. Prepare a long-term annexation plan and annex land within the designated growth areas as needed to support the projected population.
3. Prepare a capital program to stage infrastructure improvements within the City's utility provision area.
4. Designate Agriculture-Open (A-O) zoning, with rezoning in conformance with the land use plan as adequate infrastructure becomes available.
5. Adopt standards to manage access to unimproved rural roads.
6. Adopt setback standards to preserve sufficient rights-of-way for future road improvements.

7. Provide incentives via reduced lot sizes for use clustered development.
8. Adopt fair-share impact fees for drainage, roadways, and water and sewer infrastructure.
9. Provide incentives for infill development and adaptive reuse of existing buildings, such as flexible standards.
10. Consider the use of traffic sheds to allocate allowable densities based upon roadway design capacity.

Housing and Neighborhoods

Having a diverse stock of housing is instrumental to offer choice and provide for the diverse, individual needs of all households. This is accomplished by providing access to safe, quality, and affordable housing within hghly livable neighborhoods. Further, the types of housing and design of neighborhoods contribute to the character of the community. This, in turn, adds value to the City's continuous efforts to support its residents attract economic opportunities.

Promoting Responsible Development

Residents articulated their desires for quiet, attractive, pedestrian-friendly, inter-connected, and well-maintained neighborhoods that are protected from the undesirable impacts of adjacent, encroaching development. At the same time there are expectations for preserving the value and integrity of the older housing and providing for the living needs of all residents.

Key Recommendations

To achieve the vision of sustainable, diverse, attractive, and vibrant neighborhoods, necessary actions include:

1. Provide a suitable range of zoning districts to allow an array of housing types in different neighborhood settings.
2. Adopt building design standards (building scale and orientation, roof type, materials, lighting, etc.) to ensure compatibility among uses.
3. Require increased open space and landscape surface areas to allow for effective use transitions, with bonuses to offset density and floor area reductions.
4. Require perimeter bufferyards for which the requirement would be commensurate with the intensity of the adjacent use.
5. Offer free neighborhood design assistance and provide funding assistance for neighborhood enhancements and infrastructure improvements.
6. Adopt traffic calming measures through improved subdivision design standards.
7. Require public access easements through and between neighborhoods.
8. Identify redevelopment target areas and establish priorities.
9. Develop a municipal grant program for "self-help" housing rehabilitation.
10. Establish permit streamlining, fee waivers, and cost-sharing for infill development and adaptive reuse of vacant, underutilized structures.
11. Require inclusionary housing via density bonuses and ordinance provisions for market-rate housing.
12. Adopt a housing palette to allow for a wider variety of housing types.

Economic Development

Over the last several decades, McAllen has successfully positioned itself as the premier destination in the Rio Grande Valley for the best in economic and social opportunities. Through aggressive and sustained marketing, McAllen is the first choice for many companies considering the U.S.-Mexico border region as a location for new facilities. The time, however, has arrived for McAllen to consider making the next step in its evolution and development. Currently, McAllen is the *de facto* CBD for the Valley. But as the population north of the Rio Grande is expected to reach nearly 2 million by 2030, the idea of what it means to be the Valley's business center should be re-examined.

Promoting a New Vision for Economic Development

For McAllen to achieve a vision as a leading international business destination, it will require broadening the scope of economic activities occurring within the area to include a focus on financial, business, legal, and other corporate or professional services, including:

- Increasing the entrepreneurial capacity to allow for business startups and innovation to flourish.
- Enhancing downtown McAllen and Central Park to allow them to serve as commercial, cultural, and entertainment centers for the Valley.
- Developing, retaining, and attracting talent to allow McAllen to emerge as a leading destination for educated and skilled workers regionally, statewide, and bi-nationally.

Key Recommendations

The overall goal is to promote higher-end economic activities to leverage the city's current regional strengths and maximize its long-term economic development potential. Steps to achieve this include:

1. Provide the necessary "infrastructure" to support existing entrepreneurs.
2. Create a social environment that embraces and celebrates entrepreneurship.
3. Stimulate entrepreneurial activities and investments.
4. Support the development of Downtown into a denser, more urban core.
5. Strengthen McAllen's position to leverage opportunities in a changing global economy.
6. Transform the City into an international center for business, professional, and financial services.
7. Develop a homegrown educated and skilled talent base to support economic transition.
8. Develop amenities, environment, and infrastructure desired by educated and skilled talent.
9. Promote McAllen as a destination for educated and skilled talent.

World City

Attributes often associated with international centers include: 1) large, diverse populations, 2) corporate services and headquarters (accounting, advertising, banking, legal, consulting, etc.), 3) transportation infrastructure (i.e., mass transit, airports, seaports, freeways, etc.), 4) advanced communications infrastructure (high speed fiber optics and Wi-Fi networks, cellular, 5) major institutions (education, research, healthcare), 7) abundant cultural, leisure, and arts facilities and activities (museums, galleries, opera, orchestra, sports, film), 8) visitors (tourists, business, events), 9) influential media outlets with international reach.

Source: Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network

Implementation

Each chapter of this plan outlines specific issues to be addressed to achieve what is envisioned by community residents. In response are a large number of recommended actions that relate to regulatory changes, programmatic initiatives, and capital projects. While these recommendations are comprehensive and intended to be accomplished over the 20-year horizon of this plan, near-term strategies must be put in place to take the first step toward implementation. These strategies must then be prioritized, with decisions as to the sequencing of activities, the capacity to fulfill each initiative, and the ability to obligate the necessary funding. Those deemed as top priorities and viewed as feasible in the short term are placed in a five-year action plan. In addition to implementing these targeted strategies, the broader policies set forth by the plan text and maps may be used in making decisions related to the physical and economic development of the community.

Priorities

The implementation framework outlines a series of priorities necessary for the City to accomplish its bold and forward-thinking agenda. The order of priorities is yet to be fully determined but include in no specific order of preference:

- Preparation of a **Unified Development Code (UDC)** including significant amendments to the zoning and subdivision ordinances and each of the other development-related ordinances.
- A plan for **growth management** including an agenda for promoting and enabling infill development and implementation of the methods and means to forge a more fiscally responsible pattern of development and infrastructure provision. This calls on the City and the McAllen Public Utility Board, among other regional partners, to collaborate in their policies and plans for capital investments.
- Ongoing development and enhancement of the **Heart of the City** effectively strengthening its economic vitality and enabling it to become the Central Business District for the McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and the entire Rio Grande Valley.
- Planning the pattern, arrangement, and density of development in a manner that will **support high capacity transit**. While it is premature at this juncture due to the unknown nature of the investment options and potential transit alignments, nonetheless, the City must have the foresight and prepare itself for the inevitable demand for alternative transportation options.
- McAllen is noted for its present and emerging trail system. However, without a comprehensive **trails and linear greenways** master plan many opportunities may be lost. The City must therefore, act in the near future to be proactive in establishing an on- and off-street network of trails, bikeways, and pedestrian pathways. This will help to provide for the community's recreational needs while also supporting its objective of a balanced and efficient transportation system.
- The community has witnessed a recent slowdown in the housing economy, which is expected to pick up again in the not-so-distant future. This reinforces the need to create **affordable living options and environments** for residents while maintaining the City's noted high quality standard living environment. Much of this objective may be achieved by provisions of the zoning ordinance yet the City must also coordinate closely with McAllen Affordable Homes in their continued efforts to provide attainable housing within the community.

- Two initiatives of this plan focus on **entrepreneurship and talent development**. These are both short and long-term strategies to promote business start-ups, stimulate economic growth, and create a sustainable economic vitality. Strategies include streamlining the development review process, focusing increased attention on downtown development, establishing a Center for Entrepreneurship, and supporting and empowering expansion of educational institutions and workforce development programs.

Keeping Our Plan Current and Relevant

This plan must remain flexible and allow for adjustment to change over time. Shifts in political, economic, physical, and social conditions, and other unforeseen circumstances will influence the priorities of the community. As growth continues, new issues will emerge while others may no longer be relevant. Some action statements may become less practical while other plausible solutions will arise. To ensure that it continues to reflect the vision and remains relevant and viable over time, this plan must be revisited on a routine basis, with regular amendments and warranted updates.

Revisions to the plan are two-fold; minor plan amendments should occur bi-annually and more significant updates handled every five years. Minor amendments may include revisions to the land use and growth plan, or thoroughfare plan as the development pattern unfolds. Major updates will involve reviewing the base conditions and growth trends; re-evaluating the goals, policies, and recommendations; and formulating new ones in response to changing needs and priorities.

1
CHAPTER

Foreword

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

The Foresight McAllen Plan is designed as a framework for the growth of the City and its five-mile planning jurisdiction over the next 20 years and beyond. It is intended to guide the community's decisions regarding its future physical and economic development. This plan identifies goals, objectives, policies, and actions for elected and appointed officials, members of advisory committees, civic groups and organizations, directors and staff, and citizens to use as decisions are made and the community's vision for McAllen is achieved.

Beginning in 2005, the citizens and leaders of McAllen initiated a process to proactively determine the future of their community. This undertaking was necessitated by both recent and future development and infrastructure improvements that will influence the character of the community. Therefore, a decision was made for the community to determine a course of action – on its own terms. To do so, a shared vision is an essential first step to guide the community and its leaders in their decision-making over the next two decades and beyond.

In response to present circumstances, the City initiated a process to develop this Comprehensive Plan, known as "Foresight McAllen." The name of the plan accurately implies the City's intent to make decisions with both foresight and preparedness, which is the intent and nature of this planning process. It was designed to enable residents and community leaders alike to come together and decide how they would like the community to develop. This process addressed critical considerations such as: the pattern and sequencing of development throughout the City and its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ); timely provision of adequate facilities and services; coordination of infrastructure improvements; and community appearance enhancements. The intended result of this process is to craft a statement of the community's vision. The vision will be a reflection of the expectations and desires of the residents. This vision of what the community aspires to achieve is the first step in charting a path to address the complex decisions that will face McAllen in the future. Rather than simply reacting to events as they unfold, a shared vision will enable the community to develop a proactive plan for achieving the ideal future imagined by the community.

Planning is about implementation. The costs of implementation and the community's willingness to pay for them will be at the heart of this plan's success.

The Planning Process

The planning process will result in a vision statement. An Advisory Committee will lead the initial visioning effort. Their involvement, in addition to those who will participate throughout this process, is essential to the success of this plan. The planning process began with an intensive three-day reconnaissance and public input process in April 2006. City staff and consultants met with special interest groups and toured the City to understand and appreciate the community's assets and planning challenges. During the three days, the consultants made presentations to the City Commission, staff, and private citizens to explain the planning process and why it was so important to involve the community. A Citizens' Congress was held to provide an opportunity for citizens to discuss their concerns about McAllen's future. The issues and comments discussed during the input process are presented in **Appendix A, Meeting Summary.**

About the McAllen Comprehensive Plan

The McAllen Plan offers a strategic policy framework for both the corporate limits and the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). The objective of the plan is to provide guidance for decisions relating to the future use of land, community growth and provision of infrastructure, economic development, and parks and recreation areas. The horizon of this plan is the Year 2025.



McAllen is choosing to embark on a new path – one that is being guided by a framework for the future. It is the intent of this Comprehensive Plan that the policies and associated goals, objectives, and recommended implementation strategies serve as a framework for community decision-making. To ensure growth that is both wise and sustainable, decisions must be based on sound policy and an integrated approach to analyzing community issues and identifying realistic solutions, as set forth in this plan.

Value of the Plan Development Process

Undertaking this comprehensive planning process is valuable for the community because it provides an opportunity to think beyond the normal day-to-day issues. This process allows citizens to think "outside the box." They will examine the projected growth and development, not only within the City, but perhaps more importantly, throughout the entire planning area. The nature of the planning process requires that the community consider the interrelationships among a variety of long-range planning issues.

The objective of the plan is to provide direction over a 20-year planning period in the areas of land use, parks and recreation, and growth policies.

Further encouraging broad, integrated thinking, the planning process provides a means for members of the public to identify the community they want now and, more importantly, in five, 10, and 20 years. An important step in this process is to allow citizens the opportunity to identify their vision and encourage their participation in planning for the future. Successful implementation of this plan is directly correlated to the amount of citizen participation and the sense of ownership derived from the development process.

The vision expressed by residents of this community will be transcribed and formed into a series of goals, objectives, and recommendations, each of which are contained within the respective sections of this plan. Collectively, they will serve as a guide for the City Commission, Planning Commission, City staff, and other boards, committees, and groups in their decision-making and administrative activities over both the short and long term.

Cities plan for many reasons; among them are to:

- Take advantage of the community's strengths and advantages, while solving its limitations and challenges
- Protect the interests of property owners by determining in advance how, when, and where the community develops
- Direct rather than react to new development by timing and sequencing the improvement of infrastructure and provision of municipal services
- Seize economic opportunities through support of existing businesses, attraction of new industry, and fostering business start-ups
- Enhance the features that contribute to quality of life, such as parks and recreation areas, preservation of historic resources, conservation of natural resources, and quality public safety services
- Offer assurance as to the City's commitment to manage its future to ensure compatible and sustainable development

Benefits of the Plan

The McAllen Comprehensive Plan provides long-term policy direction in the areas of land use, growth capacity, transportation, housing and neighborhoods, resource protection, and implementation. It also offers community leaders and residents the following benefits:

- Establishes policy direction for future development and redevelopment and for providing decision-making guidance to members of the Planning Commission, City Commission, and City staff, as well as the community at large.
- Identifies recommendations for creating an annual program for each department within the City.
- Identifies improvement needs and priorities for use by City management to guide budgeting and capital programming decisions.
- States the municipality's intentions regarding the planning area's physical development and infrastructure investment, ultimately creating an improved level of certainty for landowners and developers.
- Communicates to citizens the type, pattern, and character of future development, thereby factoring in the compatibility of development and the potential of private investment.
- Coordinates transportation and infrastructure improvements with development, creating an integrated development framework.
- Lays out the future economic and physical development of the community, which is useful to other local, State, and Federal agencies engaged in the provision of programs, services, and facilities.

Envisioning the Future

A clear vision of what the community aspires to achieve is the first step in charting a path to address the complex decisions facing McAllen in the short and long terms. A vision describes the community's

preferred future, offering direction for the goals, objectives, and policies that provide a framework for future planning, development, and programming decisions.

Citizens' Congress

Core Values

Potential
Livable
Affordable
Energetic
International
Community
Dynamic
Unusual
Unique
Diverse
Opportunity

Strengths

Good reputation
Good parks and schools
Coordination between City and schools
Cultural awareness
Historic potential

Weaknesses

Train whistles
Need for cultural center
Signs
Traffic congestion
East-west traffic routes
Shading for trails and bikeways
Consistency in regulation enforcement
Need more trees
Need better zoning enforcement
Need to preserve historic property

A principal event of the visioning process was a Citizens' Congress, held April 11th, 2006. During this public forum, approximately 300 residents from throughout the community came together to identify their concerns for the future and explore possibilities for making McAllen an even better place to live, work, and recreate. The meeting began with a presentation explaining the role of the Comprehensive Plan in guiding the community's decisions as to how, when, and where McAllen grows. Following the presentation, the attendees choose between three small group discussions focusing on each of the topics of Land Use & Future Growth (land use pattern and density, development constraints, and compatibility), Transportation and Infrastructure (streets, sidewalks and trails, public transportation, water and wastewater facilities, and drainage infrastructure), and Livability (parks and recreation, community character, and appearance). In each of the discussion groups, participants expressed their thoughts concerning the future of the community. The community dialogue was then used to prepare the goals, objectives, and strategic directions of this plan.

Focus Group Interviews

Focus Group interviews were conducted to solicit input into the long-range planning of McAllen. There were seven focus groups; each consisted of between 10 and 38 people who shared similar interests. For example, one group was made up of local business leaders and bankers; another consisted of community service organizations; a third was real estate agents; etc. These participants shared valuable input toward the understanding of the needs of the community. The input gained through these small focus group meetings was used to supplement the feedback solicited through the Citizens' Congress and other public input mechanisms toward the development of a vision statement that is reflective of community.

Advisory Committee

A Committee made up of 14 members representing a variety of interests. It was assembled to provide continuing input and direction throughout the process. Their role is to provide input into the development of the plan to ensure that it accurately reflects the values and priorities of McAllen's citizens. The development of the community's vision, through identification of its core values, strengths, and weaknesses, was critical in understanding the priorities of the citizenry and identifying the emphasis of this plan. Each element of the plan was thoroughly reviewed by the Committee, with input to staff and the consultant regarding additions, modifications, and changes. This iterative process ensures that members of the Advisory Committee are vested in planning for the future.

Our Vision and Mission

A vision statement identifies what a community strives to achieve in the future to meet the needs of its residents. It incorporates a shared perception of the nature of the community and uses this understanding to guide it toward a greater purpose.



The comments and suggestions offered by residents and stakeholders provided for the formation of the community's vision, which is a foundation of this plan.

The vision statement was developed through input from McAllen citizens. The vision for McAllen is as follows:

> *By the Year 2025, McAllen will be the Valley leader, economically, culturally, and environmentally, with a unique character that proclaims McAllen as a "destination city." As a model border city, McAllen will promote its unique cultural heritage, be safe and clean, and have a beautiful appearance. McAllen will be a Mecca for a well-educated, creative workforce with quality and diversified employment opportunities. It will have sustainable, quality growth with safe, pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods and excellent transportation initiatives.*

A mission statement is a more detailed statement of the vision. It states the role, or purpose, by which the community intends to serve its residents. The mission statement describes what the community does, who it serves, and what makes it unique. The mission statement is as follows:

> *The mission of this plan is to promote orderly growth with a renewed emphasis on quality development and redevelopment. McAllen will improve quality of life for its citizens by improving the overall appearance of the city, stabilizing and improving areas in decline, reserving land for parks, open space, and new employers. McAllen will coordinate public and private investment to promote retail shopping, cultural and entertainment options, major higher-paying employment and varied tourist attractions.*
>
> *McAllen will continue to invest in infrastructure in a sustainable manner. Its unique culture, diversity, and history will be preserved and enhanced with new cultural and entertainment venues, added efforts in nurturing, attracting, and retaining its creative class youth, and reinvestment in its historic areas. The tax base will be stabilized and strengthened by improved codes and enforcement, fostering an entrepreneurial spirit, adapting to new and changing economies, and attracting new businesses and manufacturing to the area. McAllen will continue to improve parks and its greenbelt image through the expansion of existing parks, recreational facilities, and plans for increased open space in developing areas.*
>
> *By achieving these goals, McAllen will become the "Destination City" for the entire region of South Texas and Northern Mexico.*

Plan Elements

This plan document is comprised of six chapters, one of which (Chapter 5, Physical Development Plan) contains five sections. A brief narrative description of each is provided below.

Chapter 2, Community Overview

This chapter serves as a background report, which establishes the community context with respect to the metropolitan area, the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and the larger bi-national region. Demographic and socio-economic assessments outline a historical perspective of the community and, more importantly to the focus of this 20-year plan, establish a planning basis by way of forecasting the projected change in population and employment growth. This data is the foundation by which the remaining plan elements derive their planning forecasts and capacity assessments.

Chapter 3, Existing Urban Form

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the statistics and growth guidelines to support later decisions concerning the compatibility and appropriateness of future development. It consists of an inventory and analysis of land development trends in McAllen and the surrounding region. It also serves as the basis for projecting the future physical development of the City and its five-mile Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ).

The existing land use evaluation is based on community character versus the conventional methods of documenting land use. This approach is more effective in providing policies to direct ongoing development and managing future growth, preserving valued areas and lands, and protecting neighborhoods. The existing land use map is supplemented with commentary and statistics that summarize the mix of land uses, densities, and growth trends.

Chapter 4, Mobility

The purpose of this chapter is to address community-wide mobility needs on all levels, from sidewalks and trails, to local streets and neighborhood access, to arterial roadways and regional and international highways. This plan element includes the Thoroughfare Plan, which is the long-term plan for developing an overall system of roadways for the City and its defined growth area. This long-range transportation plan is to be used as a guide for securing rights-of-way and upgrading and extending the network of local, collector, and arterial roads and highways in an efficient manner.

Chapter 5, Physical Development Plan

Due to the comprehensiveness of the physical development plan, this chapter is divided into five sections as outlined below. The purpose of this chapter is to set forth the City's plan as to the type, pattern, and character of future development, and the management of its projected 20-year growth. The sections include:

- Section 5.1, Community Character - The purpose of this section is to establish the necessary policy guidance that will enable sound decision-making about the compatibility and appropriateness of individual developments within the context of the larger community. An essential component of this chapter is the future land use plan, which establishes the City's policy for directing ongoing development and managing future growth, preserving valued areas and lands, protecting neighborhoods, and realizing the envisioned community character.

- Section 5.2, Cultural and Environmental Resources – This section is intended to aid the City in its pursuit of becoming a "destination city" by way of preserving its heritage and enlivening its many cultural assets and amenities. The section address the preservation of the historic fabric of downtown and its abutting areas and neighborhoods, support for the emerging performing and visual arts community, and investment in facilities and improvements to host festivals and other significant community and regional events. In complement to its cultural assets, this section also outlines the methods and means for conserving and protecting the City's significant environmental resources, for the purposes of sustainability and community character.
- Section 5.3, Growth Management - In order for the community to seize its economic development potential, it must be forward-thinking to ensure that it has the capacity of facilities and services to sustain its future development. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the pattern of development relates to its ability to efficiently provide adequate facilities and services. Without mechanisms to guide the direction and timing of development, sprawling patterns will lessen the community's identity and character. This chapter outlines the methods by which the community can effectively manage its future development in a wise and fiscally responsible manner.
- Section 5.4, Housing and Neighborhoods – The purpose of this section is to identify solutions to ensure the City meets its future housing needs and both supports and sustains the value and integrity of its neighborhoods. The goals of this section are to provide for safe, quality, and affordable housing within livable, attractive neighborhood environments. The programs and mechanisms available to ensure that housing continues to be attainable for residents of all economic strata are outlined, and strategies are set forth to ensure that neighborhoods – both new and old – are engaged and empowered to protect themselves against deterioration and the encroachment of incompatible uses.
- Section 5.5, Economic Development – Recognizing that the local and regional economies are a backbone to the continued and increasing success of McAllen, this section strives to help build and strengthen a foundation for a stable, diversified economy. This section outlined the opportunities for promoting and enabling entrepreneurship, as well as growing and attracting talent to the local work force, both of which are fundamental to the City's long-term economic sustainability. This section also gives support to the City's vision of repurposing the existing downtown area and recreating it as the "Central Business District" of the greater metropolitan area, and a regional center for the Lower Rio Grande Valley and the bi-national region.

Chapter 6, Implementation

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the chapters and sections of the plan together in such a way as to provide a clear path forward. It outlines the organizational structure necessary to implement the plan, including roles and responsibilities; establishes a process for annual and periodic evaluation and appraisal of the plan; and outlines the general strategies and priorities to set the plan in motion.

2
CHAPTER

Community Overview

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

This assessment of demographic and socioeconomic factors is a snapshot of the community's past conditions and present characteristics, which provides an understanding of what the future may hold for McAllen, Texas. The findings of this analysis set the stage for more detailed evaluations of historic trends and future planning considerations as each element of the plan is assembled. This profile provides a basis for determining future land use requirements and demands for public facilities and services, but also allows advance planning to effectively guide future development in a desirable and fiscally



McAllen is a community with an agricultural history that has evolved over the years into an urban center and a hub of economic activity. While the historical past continues to be embraced and celebrated today, made evident by museums, historic neighborhoods, and its noted open spaces, this comprehensive planning process offers an opportunity for the community to remember its past, but more importantly, to envision its future. While future actions are likely to depart from their previous course, the success of the community in achieving its vision will largely depend on its past and why this community is called home by over 120,000 persons (2004 Census estimate).

McAllen is currently addressing changing growth and social patterns and is optimistic about what lies ahead. In planning for its future, McAllen faces the challenges of sustaining economic growth, creating more employment opportunities for its youth, preserving and enhancing its community character, and balancing the demands placed on its fiscal resources to maintain and expand an adequate infrastructure system. Before looking at the future, however, it is important to consider the past and current conditions that are realized through this demographic and socioeconomic assessment and which will contribute significantly to the future of McAllen.

This community profile offers a summary-level introduction to the City, which documents existing socioeconomic conditions and demographic characteristics of the community pertaining to its historical and current population; the age, gender, and educational attainment of its people; and the economic position of the community and its businesses. The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the

community has grown since its initial growth as a railroad stop in the early years of the 20th century, identify its current characteristics and resources that will contribute to the envisioned future, and analyze where the community appears to be headed in the future.

An important component of this chapter is the Year 2025 projected population, which is referenced throughout the plan to project future land use demands, infrastructure capacity needs, and economic development strategies. An understanding of existing population characteristics and future population demands is essential in determining the anticipated growth and the resulting demands on the community and its facilities and services.

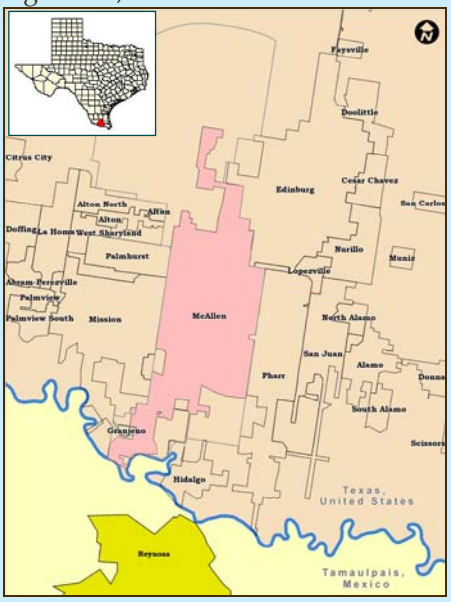
Location of "The City of Palms"

Covering an area of 46.6 square miles, as shown in **Figure 2.1, Location of McAllen**, the City is situated in Hidalgo County in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, sharing its southern border with Mexico. Within Hidalgo County, McAllen lies near the southern edge of the County, adjacent to the cities of Edinburg, Mission, Pharr, and several smaller incorporated cities. McAllen is the largest city in the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), a rapidly expanding MSA that contained 678,245 people in 2005. Besides being the center of the MSA, McAllen serves as:

- The business and cultural focal point of the scenic Rio Grande Valley and
- A significant entry point between the U.S. and Mexico. McAllen/Reynosa's importance is only exceeded by San Diego/Tijuana and El Paso/Ciudad Juarez.

McAllen's location also makes it a gateway to different geographies and economies. Downtown McAllen lies eight miles north of the U.S./Mexico border, which can be covered in a 15-minute drive. On the opposite side of the Mexico border exists the City of Reynosa, a major agricultural and industrial center with a year 2000 population of slightly over 400,000. The synergistic effect of the two cities results in a large and growing population base fueled by international business, tourism, and trade. Additionally, the McAllen/Reynosa gateway serves as a significant entry to Monterrey, Mexico's seventh largest city (at over 1.1 million inhabitants) situated approximately 150 miles southwest.

Figure 2.1, Location of McAllen



McAllen is located 75 miles from the Gulf of Mexico and is adjacent to the Rio Grande River on its southern municipal border. This subtropical location and favorable climate allows the McAllen area to serve as a seasonal retreat for many Midwestern snowbirds, or "Winter Texans."

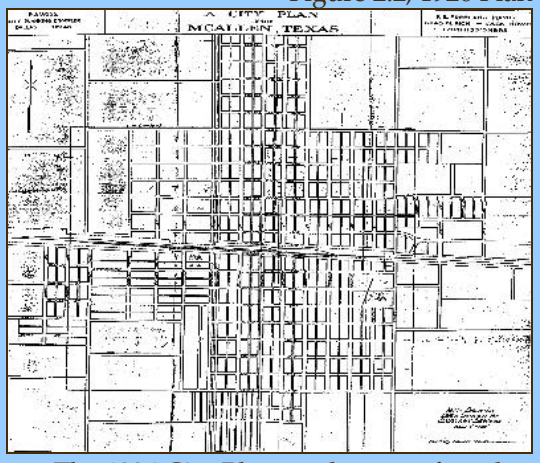
McAllen is accessible by several modes of transportation for both people and goods. Highway access is provided north and south by U.S. Highway 281 (to eventually be upgraded to become Interstate 69 Central) and east-west by U.S. Highway 83. Brownsville is 60 miles east of McAllen, and Corpus Christi lies 160 miles north. The McAllen-Miller International Airport (MFE) provides daily commercial air transportation service to Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, Orlando, and Mexico City. Carriers currently include Continental, American, and Delta.

Ground transportation includes inter-city bus transit to locations throughout the Valley, including Reynosa and other Mexican destinations. Local intra-city transit service was established in 1997. Both inter- and intra-city buses operate from the new Central Station terminal, which was completed in 2000. Freight rail service (including the McAllen Foreign Trade Zone) is provided by Rio Switching Company, which connects to the Union Pacific and Southern Pacific railroads.

History

Although the first settlements in the Rio Grande Valley sprung up in the 1740s, it was not until the late 1800s that settlers developed the area known today as McAllen. The arrival of the railroad to Hidalgo County and, more specifically, the building of a railroad depot led to the initial growth of McAllen. Incorporated in 1911, McAllen boasted a post office, railroad depot, several commercial businesses, and a newspaper at the time. The population continued to grow from a few hundred to over 1,200 persons in 1916 when National Guard soldiers were stationed in McAllen to protect against border raids.

Figure 2.2, 1926 Plan



The 1926 City Plan set the stage for what McAllen has become today and warrants consideration for 2025.

Transportation connections to McAllen increased as the town grew in size as shown by **Figure 2.2, 1926 Plan**. The first international bridge crossing to Reynosa, Mexico was completed in 1926, and then replaced in 1936. The runways were paved at Miller Airport in 1947. During this same time period, McAllen continued to grow, with population increasing to 5,331 persons in 1920; 9,074 persons in 1930; 11,877 persons in 1940; 20,067 persons in 1950; and 32,728 persons in 1960. This steady growth brought increasing levels of commerce and industry, in addition to civic improvements such as a library, city hall, and civic center.

Population growth in McAllen and other parts of the Valley slowed down between 1960 and 1970. Possible contributing factors to this leveling off included a severe freeze in 1961 and the damages caused by Hurricane Beulah, a category 3 storm that affected all communities in the lower Valley.

The more-common availability of household air conditioning and the emergence of the "Sunbelt" economy brought additional opportunity for economic growth to McAllen. Major population gains resumed after 1970, almost doubling between 1970 and 1980 when it increased from 37,636 persons to 66,281 persons. This same period saw an increase in commercial activities and McAllen soon gained a reputation as a shopping destination.

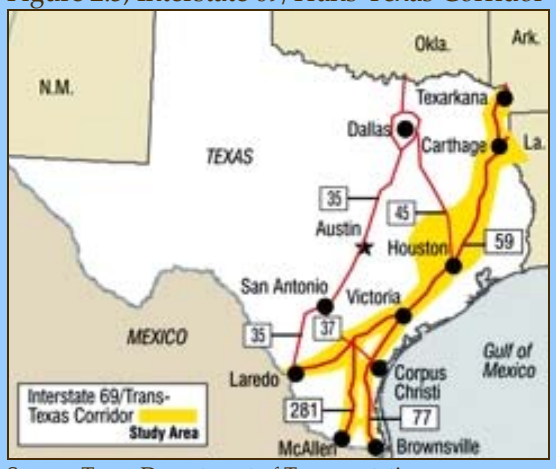
The North American Free Trade Agreement, known as NAFTA, became law in 1993 when it was enacted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico. NAFTA's purpose, among other things, is to facilitate and increase trade among the three countries.

The 1980s was another period of slower growth in McAllen, as well as the region. This was brought about by periods of national recession and inflation, a series of Peso devaluations affecting Mexican trade opportunities, and two more major citrus freezes. The passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1993 strengthened

McAllen's already solid role as an economic and population growth center. Between 1990 and 2000, the population of McAllen increased from 84,021 persons to 106,414 persons, according to the U.S. Census. Despite this impressive growth, it is believed that official population undercounting occurred and there may have been even greater growth than officially recorded. Recent growth has brought improvements such as a new recycling center, bus station, airport terminal, community centers, branch libraries, and a Boys and Girls Club.

Regional Growth along the Mexico Border

Figure 2.3, Interstate 69/Trans-Texas Corridor



Source: Texas Department of Transportation

"Immediately begin developing proposals to build an Interstate-quality highway to connect the Lower Rio Grande River Valley to I-37, including the consideration of new, separate lanes for commercial truck traffic"
- Governor Rick Perry (December 2005)

McAllen's geographic location adjacent to the U.S./Mexico border has played a significant role in shaping its cultural and economic history. The recent NAFTA legislation has increased the role of international trade with Mexico in U.S. businesses; many new opportunities arose in McAllen as a result. Connectivity between McAllen and Mexico is provided by several international gateways for both people and freight. McAllen and the whole metropolitan area are currently served by two border crossings, including the McAllen-Hidalgo-Renoysa International Bridge and the Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge, as described below. A third bridge known as the Anzalduas International Bridge is in the design stages of development and scheduled to open in the fall of 2008. Rio Grande City, a small town 25 miles west of McAllen has a low-volume bridge crossing, and the closer-in hamlet of Los Ebanos has an eight-minute ferry crossing with limited hours of operation—reported to be the last hand-operated ferry on the U.S./Mexico border.

Also of considerable importance to McAllen is the Trans-Texas Corridor, shown in **Figure 2.3, Interstate 69/Trans-Texas Corridor**, which is also known as Interstate 69 or the NAFTA Highway. The route of this major intrastate transportation corridor is yet to be determined awaiting environmental studies; the economic impact on McAllen and the entire Rio Grande Valley will be substantial. It will be particularly significant if the final selected alignment is along or near the existing U.S. 281 corridor. The international bridges are as follows:

- The McAllen-Hidalgo-Reynosa International Bridge is an eight-lane bridge structure that has operated since 1926. It has over 100,000 persons traversing it daily in each direction. This connection allows access to jobs and retail shopping for McAllen and the region as a whole. A large number of maquiladoras operate within a close proximity to this entry point allowing access to a significant workforce.
- The Pharr-Reynosa International Bridge is a gateway of increasing importance as more goods and people move through the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The gateway serves as a major point of entry and exit for goods moved by truck and allows for rapid vehicle inspection times. Total vehicle crossings number between 5,000 and 6,000 vehicles per day. The completion of the I-69 corridor (NAFTA Highway) is expected to have a significant positive impact on the number of crossings of this and the other international bridges.

- The Anzalduas International Bridge at Granjeno is the newest planned crossing between Mexico and the United States, as portrayed in **Figure 2.4, Anzalduas International Bridge**. This bridge is a joint effort of the cities of McAllen, Hidalgo, and Mission. The significance of this crossing is not only a higher level of international movement, but also the increased economic development that will occur near each entry point. On the U.S. side, there is potential for more industrial development involving Just-In-Time (JIT) delivery as travel times between McAllen and Monterrey are decreased. The addition of a new gateway will create a shift in land use pattern that will result in new commercial, industrial (maquiladora), and residential development on both sides of the border.

Figure 2.4, Anzalduas International Bridge

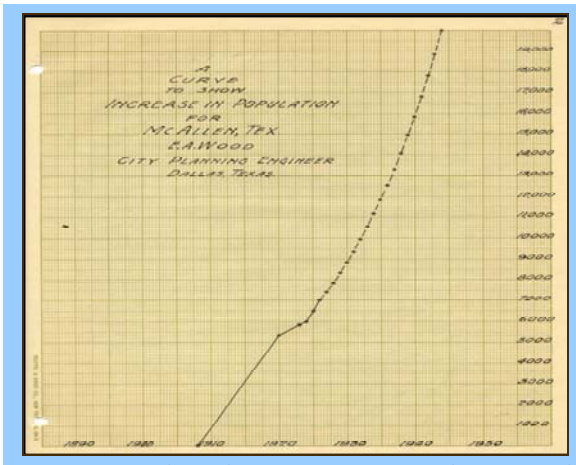


Source: McAllen Monitor and TxDOT

Projected Change in Population

Population projections are an important component of the long-range planning process. Their purpose is to:

1. Evaluate a range of future population scenarios, enabling the community to identify the internal and external factors that may contribute to the rate of population increase;
2. Adequately determine and quantify the demands that will be placed on public facilities and services, such as fire and police protection, water and wastewater facilities, transportation and drainage infrastructure, parks and open space, and municipal buildings and staff;
3. Allow advanced planning to effectively guide new development, coordinate timely provision of adequate infrastructure, and appropriately direct available resources; and
4. Create a strategy to seize opportunities and overcome foreseen challenges.



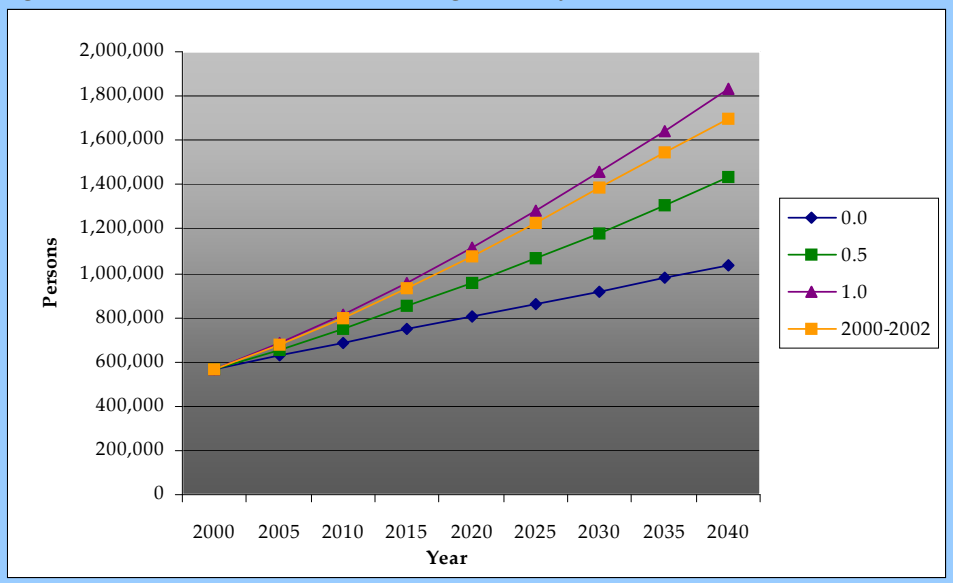
Based on the 6 percent annual projected growth from McAllen's 1926 Plan, there would have been 522,074 residents in 2000, much higher than the actual 106,414. Nonetheless, the plan of eight decades ago was visionary and largely accurate in many areas.

The Texas State Data Center at the University of Texas San Antonio prepares four population scenarios for the State of Texas and the U.S. The scenarios assume the same set of mortality and fertility assumptions, but they differ in assumptions relative to net migration. The net migration assumptions are derived from 1990 to 2000 patterns, which have been altered relative to expected future population trends. The scenarios that are produced are referred to as the Zero Migration (0.0) Scenario, the One-Half 1990 – 2000 (0.5) Scenario, and the 1990 – 2000 (1.0) Scenario. A fourth scenario is produced using migration from 2000 – 2002, which reflects post-2000 patterns. The following points explain the 1990 – 2000 scenarios:

- The *Zero Migration (0.0) Scenario* assumes that in-migration and out-migration are equal, resulting in growth only through natural increase (the excess or deficit of births relative to deaths). This scenario produces the lowest population projection for counties with historical patterns of population growth through net in-migration.
- The *One-Half 1990 – 2000 Migration (0.5) Scenario* was prepared as an approximate average of the Zero (0.0) and 1990 – 2000 (1.0) Scenarios. It assumes rates of net migration that are one-half of those of the 1990s. This scenario is included in projections because many counties in Texas are unlikely to continue to experience the high rate of growth seen in the 1990s. Since the One-Half (0.5) Scenario projects rates of population growth that are approximately an average of the Zero (0.0) and 1990 – 2000 (1.0) Scenarios, it suggests slower growth than the 1990 – 2000 (1.0) Scenario while still indicating steady growth.
- The *1990 – 2000 Migration (1.0) Scenario* assumes that trends in the age, sex, and race/ethnicity net migration rates of the 1990s will characterize those occurring in the future. The 1990s was a period characterized by substantial growth (22.8 percent growth between 1990 and 2000 in Texas). Due to the fact that growth was so extensive during the 1990s, it is not likely to be sustained over time, thereby making this scenario a high growth alternative.
- The *2000-02 Scenario* takes into account post-2000 population trends. In the State overall and in some counties, the post-2000 period has resulted in reduced levels of net migration. In other counties, post-2000 net migration rates have been greater than those of the 1990s. Under this scenario, the 2000-2002 age, sex, and race/ethnicity specific migration rates are assumed to prevail from 2000 through 2040. This scenario allows those users who believe that the 2000-2002 period has produced fundamental long-term changes in population patterns to ascertain the likely future size and characteristics of the population.

The scenarios vary widely in the forecasted future population for the County, as demonstrated in **Figure 2.5, Scenario Forecasts of Hidalgo County**. The 0.0 Scenario reflects a relatively modest increase from 569,463 persons in 2000 to 1,035,971 persons in 2040, or an 81.92 percent population increase. The 0.5 Scenario indicates 1,430,617 persons in the Year 2040, representing a 151.22 percent increase in population from 2000 to 2040. The 2000 – 2002 Scenario indicates 1,698,645 persons in the Year 2040, reflecting a 198.29 percent increase from 2000 to 2040. The 1.0 Scenario represents the most optimistic growth projection, assuming a continuation of the trend from 1990 to

Figure 2.5, Scenario Forecasts of Hidalgo County



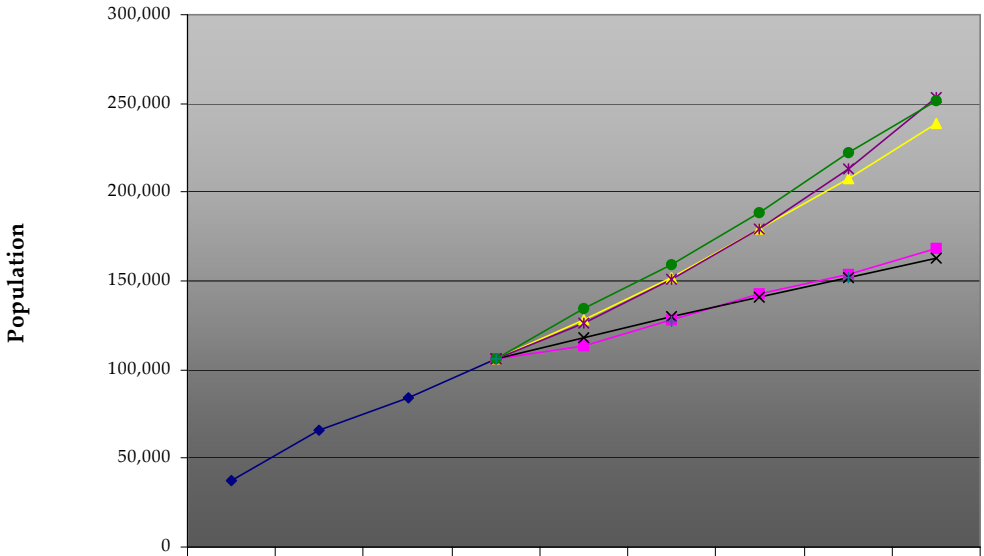
Source: Texas State Data Center

2000 and showing an increase to 1,832,170 persons in the Year 2040, or a 221.74 percent increase from 2000 to 2040.

The projection methods used to generate the alternative future population scenarios in McAllen were linear regression, exponential growth, geometric, and step-down, plus the projection of the Texas Water Development Board.

A linear regression (straight-line) analysis for Hidalgo County illustrates that the 2000 – 2002 Scenario produces values that represent an approximate midpoint between the 0.5 and 1.0 Scenarios. This mid-point position, combined with local trends in migration and the economy, suggest that the 2000 – 2002 Scenario is preferred over the 0.5 and 1.0 Scenarios for projecting population growth in Hidalgo County and, hence, in McAllen. The recent and past history of McAllen suggests that the 0.0 Scenario, which assumes only growth through natural increase and not accounting for in-migration, is not reasonable or reliable. Therefore, it is not considered among the viable alternatives for McAllen and Hidalgo County due to local and regional characteristics that are unique to the State. It should also be noted that population forecasting methods that model births, deaths, and migration are more appropriately used at the county and regional levels, where records of these statistics are kept. Sub-county population growth is strongly influenced by less predictable nuances such as annexations, housing prices, and availability of vacant land to develop.

Figure 2.6, Projected Population Scenarios of McAllen



	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
Historical	37,636	66,281	84,021	106,414					
Step Down 2000-02				106,414	113,478	127,776	142,816	153,497	168,166
Step Down 1.0				106,414	127,835	152,058	178,927	207,750	239,053
Linear Regression				106,414	118,403	129,607	140,810	152,014	163,218
Geometric				106,414	126,541	150,475	178,935	212,779	253,024
Exponential Growth				106,414	134,441	158,998	188,040	222,387	251,145
Texas Water Development Board				106,414		127,458		152,045	

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

To project future population, there are several methods that can be used to further estimate the Year 2025 population including the linear regression, exponential growth, geometric, and step-down methods, as well as the projections of the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB).[1] These statistical methods were used to compare alternative population forecasts to reflect the plan's 20-year horizon, as identified above in **Figure 2.6, Projected Population Scenarios of McAllen**.

Analysis of McAllen and Hidalgo County indicates that the City's share of the County's population has been decreasing each decade since 1970 when it comprised 20.7 percent of the population. By comparison, in the Year 2025, it is expected that McAllen's population will decrease to represent approximately 19.5 percent of Hidalgo County's projected 417,312 persons.

Based upon what we know and understand about McAllen and the factors contributing to its ongoing growth and using a straight-line assessment of the trend since 1970, we are able – with relative confidence – to select a "most likely" scenario. Based upon the trend since 1970, either the exponential, geometric, or step-down (using the 1990 – 2000 1.0 Scenario) methods appear to offer a likely scenario assuming continuation of the growth experience over the last three decades. However, the question that must be asked is whether this level of growth can be sustained in the next two decades, or whether there are the capacities to support such continued aggressive growth. A 13 percent reduced, "middle-ground" approach results in a year-2025 population of 208,100 persons (rounded), which is still nearly double the population in 2000, but tempers the optimism with the unknown of the future economy.

Implications of Population Growth

The population projections and associated shifts in the community's socio-economic characteristics that are identified in this chapter are used as a basis to formulate the City's growth policies and the strategies for addressing the issues and challenges confronting the community. Though tempered by local market and microeconomic factors, the aforementioned projected future population will help the City and private business interests better evaluate the following:

1. Underlying demands for varying housing types, sizes, and prices;
2. Employment opportunities and labor market McAllen and the surrounding area;
3. Changes in the median household income and the effective buying power of residents;
4. Numbers of school-age children moving to the area and the impact on the demand for additional school facilities;
5. Projected future traffic volumes, congestion, and demands for new roadway infrastructure and alternative modes of transportation;
6. Use of neighborhood, community, and regional parks and recreation facilities and the demand for additional areas, facilities, and programs;
7. Increased capacity requirements resulting from induced development for water and wastewater service, storm drainage improvements, and the requisite capital investments; and
8. Impact on the number of police, fire, and emergency medical service calls and their response times, service levels, and facility and staffing needs.

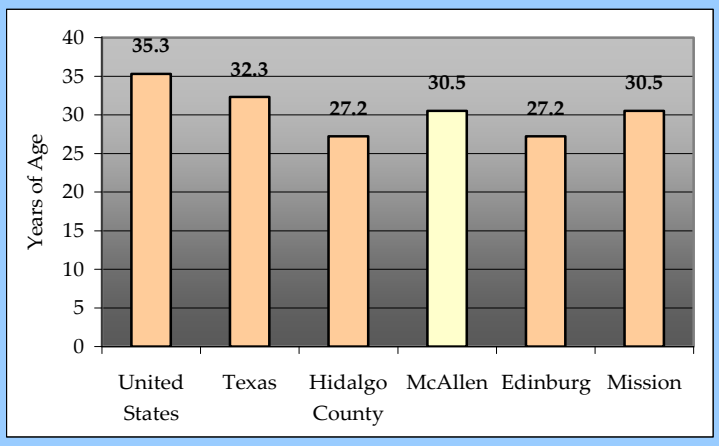
The implications of the expected future population characteristics and the physical and economic growth of McAllen and its planning area are reflected in other areas of this plan.

[1] The TWDB provides projection data on a per decade basis. Projections for the Years 2005, 2015, and 2025 were unavailable.

Population Characteristics

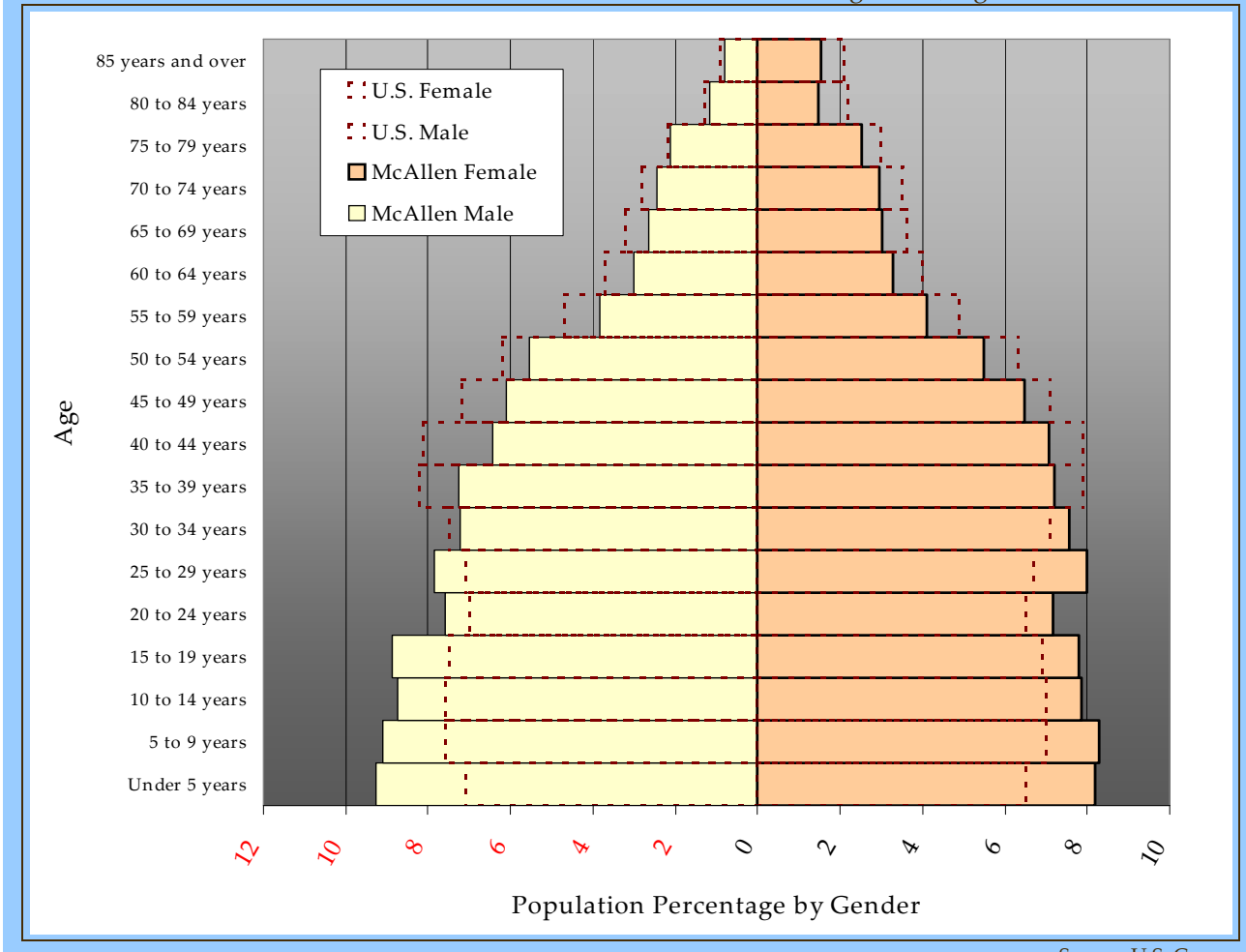
Age analysis as reflected in **Figure 2.7, Age**, indicates the age of the population in McAllen and surrounding areas. Overall patterns of age in McAllen indicate a much younger population than the rest of the United States, with a median age of 30.5 years in McAllen compared to 35.3 years for the U.S. When compared to Texas, Hidalgo County and McAllen demonstrate a lower median age of 27.2 years and 30.5 years, respectively. Within Hidalgo County, McAllen represents a slightly higher median age compared with the younger age of 27.2 years for nearby Edinburg or equal to the 30.5 years in Mission.

Figure 2.7, Age



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2.8, Age and Gender Cohorts



Source: U.S. Census

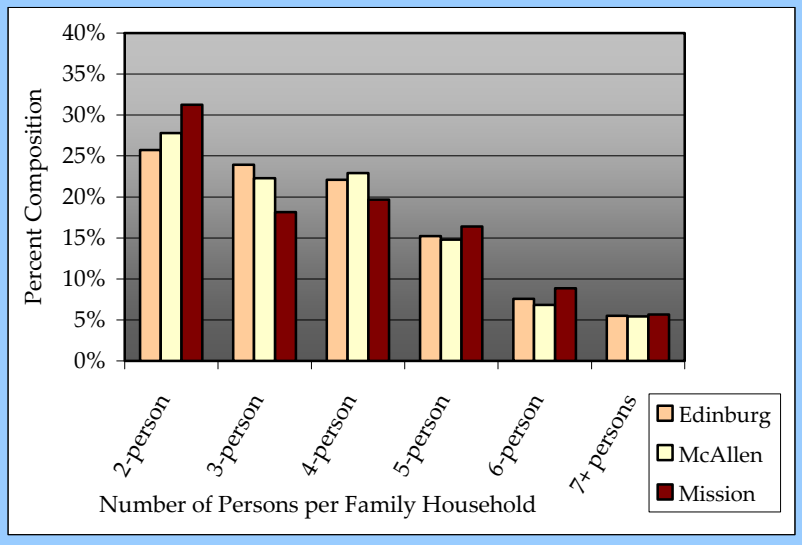
This younger age characteristic is also revealed in the age cohort table displayed in **Figure 2.8, Age and Gender Cohorts**. There are two age cohorts that clearly stand out among the general population: children under 10 years of age and young adults between the ages of 25 and 35 years. Both age groups have significantly higher numbers than the national average, which results in a younger median age in McAllen. In contrast, there are several age cohorts that are found less often in McAllen: adults older than 40 years. All of these cohorts contain the fewest amounts of McAllen residents and are lower than the national average.

The analysis of age cohorts is noteworthy because it contradicts the general trend of an aging population elsewhere in the country. A national age cohort chart indicates a larger number of residents age 50 and over, which represents the "baby boomer" phenomenon. As far as national trends are concerned, this indicates a need for planning for the "graying" of the population as this age group continues to get older. This national aging of the population has housing, jobs, health care, and transportation implications that will need to be addressed. As stated previously, the age trends in McAllen are not reflective of the national trends and, thus, require a different planning approach. The influx of younger residents, both children and adults, indicates a significant trend for McAllen and Hidalgo County.

A comparison of gender and age illustrates a relatively even division between male and female, with men representing 47.4 percent and women representing 52.6 percent of the population. This division is clear among younger age cohorts although there is a slight predominance of women in adults over 25 years of age. This small gap in male and female distribution is most visible for the population between the ages of 25 and 50 years, as well as 85 years and older. This is another interesting statistic in the community as most communities are much closer to a 50/50 split.

Household Characteristics

Figure 2.9, Number of Persons per Family Household

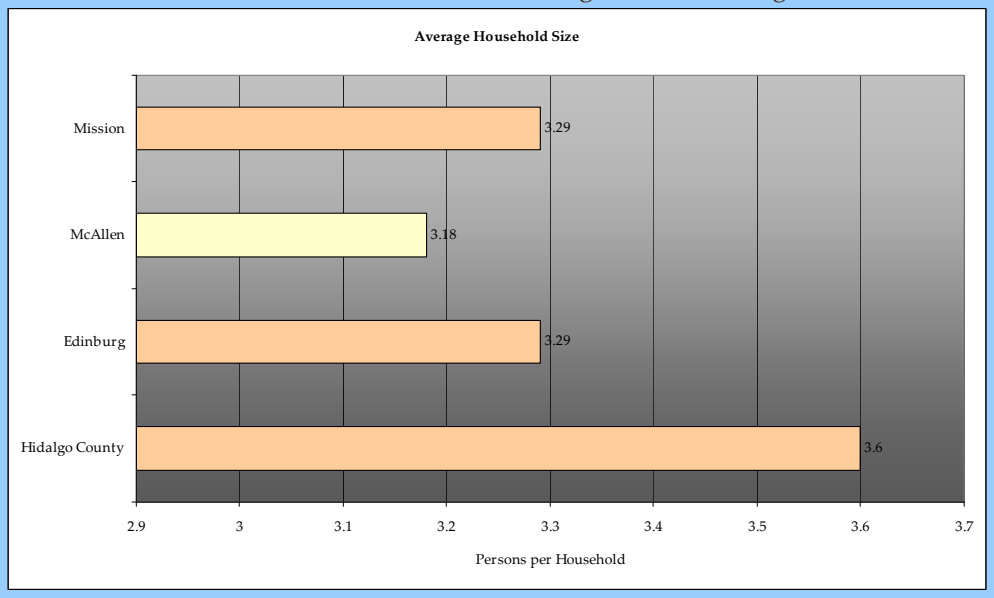


Source: U.S. Census

Households are classified as "family" or "non-family" units. Non-family households consist of a single person living alone. Family households are comprised of a married couple or a single head of household with or without children. An analysis of households in McAllen indicates that 78.7 percent are family households and 21.3 percent are non-family households. In Hidalgo County, the percentage of family households is higher than non-family households as compared to McAllen, with 84.7 percent of the County's population comprised of family households and 15.3 percent non-family households.

The distribution of households by number of persons is illustrated in **Figure 2.9, Number of Persons per Family Household**. The largest segments of the family population of McAllen are in the two-person (28.2 percent), three-person (22.1 percent), and four-person (23.0 percent) family households. Five-person (14.5 percent), six-person (6.6 percent), and seven-person (5.5 percent) family households are also present in relatively significant numbers, although less than those of Edinburg and Mission. Shown by **Figure 2.10, Average Household Size**, are the household sizes of Hidalgo County, McAllen, Edinburg, and Mission. McAllen had an average of 3.18 persons per household, which is significantly higher than the national average of 2.59 persons per household. As a comparison, though, the average household size is lower than Hidalgo County at 3.6 persons per household, as well as both Mission and Edinburg, which are both reporting 3.29 persons per household. In addition to having a high percentage of family households, both Hidalgo County and McAllen maintain large family household sizes. The impact of large family households requires that future plans accommodate the requisite housing, transportation, open space, and educational needs.

Figure 2.10, Average Household Size

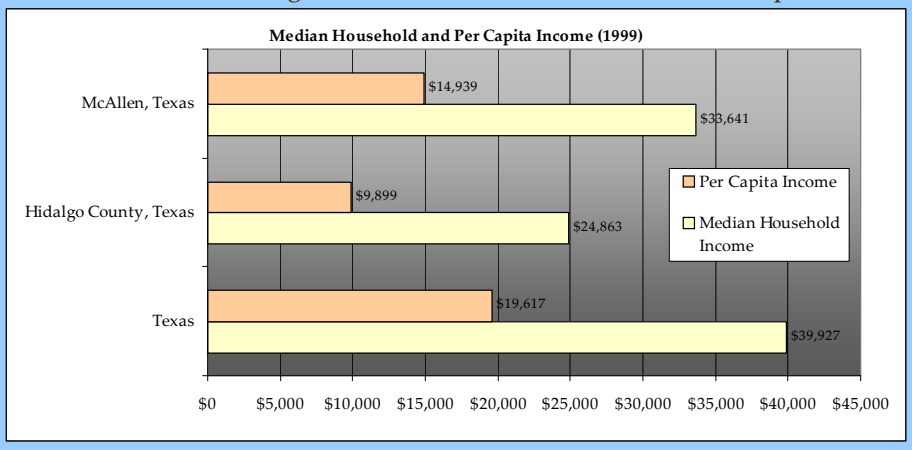


Source: U.S. Census

Income and Poverty

As illustrated in **Figure 2.11, Median Household and Per Capita Income**, the median household income in McAllen was $33,641 and the per capita income was $14,939 in 1999. While these McAllen income levels are lower than the statewide median, they represent a higher income level than the median income for Hidalgo County.

Figure 2.11, Median Household and Per Capita Income



Source: U.S. Census

Table 2.1, Median Household Income

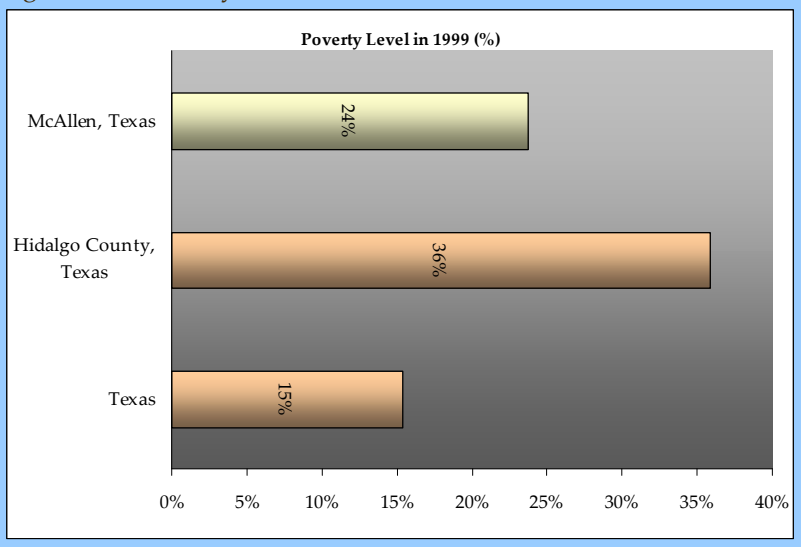
Jurisdiction	1989	1999	Percent Change
Texas	$27,016	$39,927	47.79%
Hidalgo County	$16,703	$24,863	48.85%
McAllen	**$22,068**	**$33,641**	**52.44%**
Mission	$17,489	$30,647	75.24%

Source: U.S. Census

Historically, these 1999 income levels reflect the same income hierarchy from 1989 (**Table 2.1, Median Household Income**). In 1989, McAllen's median household income was $22,068, while Texas was slightly higher with $27,016 and Hidalgo County slightly lower at $16,703. However, it is important to note that, while there has been impressive growth in median household income in Texas and Hidalgo County, the most positive change occurred in McAllen incomes. The McAllen median household income rose by 52.44 percent between 1989 and 1999, which was slightly higher than both Texas and Hidalgo County (47.79 percent and 48.85 percent, respectively).

The U.S. Census Bureau uses a set of household income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is classified as living in poverty. If the total income for a family or unrelated individual falls below the relevant poverty threshold, the family or unrelated individual is classified as being "below the poverty level." As illustrated in **Figure 2.12, Poverty Levels, 1999**, McAllen had 24 percent of households classified as living in poverty. This poverty benchmark indicates that McAllen has a higher level of poverty than Texas (15 percent), but a lower level of poverty than Hidalgo County (36 percent). Compared to the national average of 12.4 percent, McAllen's population had a much higher percentage of persons who were determined to be living in poverty.

Figure 2.12, Poverty Levels, 1999



Source: U.S. Census

Housing Characteristics

Housing occupancy rates are general indicators of the health of a housing market. Vacancy rates between five percent and seven percent are considered desirable, while housing vacancy rates over 10 percent are normally considered to be highly undesirable. A saturated housing market is indicated with a vacancy rate of five percent or less. Too low of a vacancy rate creates an inefficient market that prohibits moving into or out of an area and suggests that more housing units are required.

Table 2.2, Housing Unit Vacancy Rates

Jurisdiction	1990	2000
Texas	13.38%	9.37%
Hidalgo County	19.31%	18.60%
McAllen	**12.91%**	**12.68%**
Edinburg	7.95%	10.48%
Mission	21.98%	21.75%

Source: U.S. Census

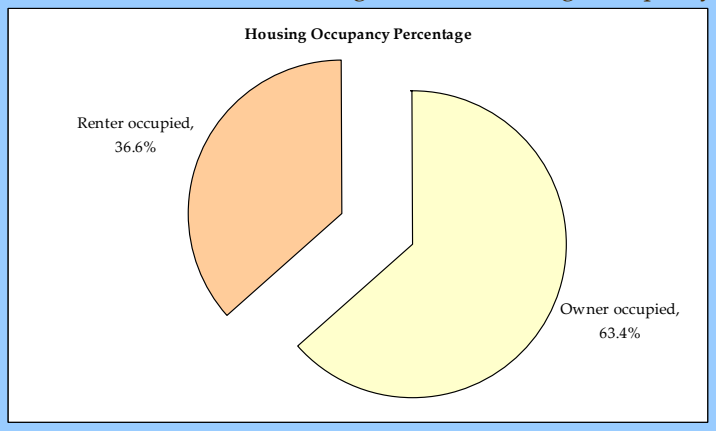
Aggregate residential vacancy rates are shown in **Table 2.2, Housing Unit Vacancy Rates**, which reflects 1990 and 2000 Census data. Hidalgo County (19.31 percent in 1990

and 18.60 percent in 2000) and McAllen (12.91 percent in 1990 and 12.68 percent in 2000) both maintained higher housing unit vacancy rates in 1990 and 2000 than the statewide average (13.38 percent in 1990 and 9.37 percent in 2000). McAllen saw a negligible decrease in vacancy rates during this time period, while the state of Texas vacancy rate decreased by four percent.

Further examination of the City's vacancy rates by housing market sector indicated that there is significant variation between owner-occupied, rental, and seasonal housing units. Statistics provided by the McAllen Planning Department indicate that the vacancy rate for rental housing often exceeds 10 percent, while owner-occupied units maintain vacancy ratios that are slightly above the desirable two percent level. McAllen's aggregate vacancy ratio is further skewed by a small, but statistically significant, number of seasonal agricultural laborers who reside in the City, but work out-of-town for extended parts of the year. Until only recently, the Census Bureau often miscategorized these units as vacant. A third way in which the Census vacancy data may be misleading is from the increasing number of Mexican residents who purchase McAllen housing units as an investment hedge or shelter from the volatile Peso, but often don't occupy or rent them out. These and other factors related to McAllen's complex housing market are explored further in ***Chapter 5, Physical Development Plan (Section 5.4 Housing and Neighborhoods)***.

While new residential development in McAllen may offer more housing options to home buyers, it may also increase an already high vacancy rate. A balance must be struck between adding homes and maintaining existing housing unit availability in order to create a more stable housing market.

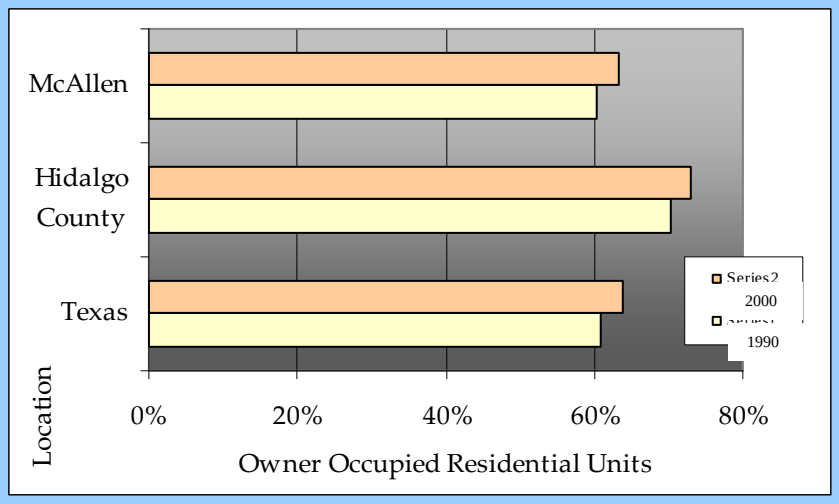
Figure 2.13, Housing Occupancy



Source: U.S. Census

According to the 2000 Census data, as shown in **Figure 2.13, Housing Occupancy**, McAllen has an owner occupied percentage rate of 63.4 percent and a renter occupied rate of 36.6 percent among occupied units. When comparing these 1990 and 2000 rates on a regional level in **Figure 2.14, Owner Occupied Units by Percentage**, McAllen (63.4 percent) exhibited a lower level of owner occupied units than Hidalgo County (73.1 percent in 2000) although it remains almost even with Texas (63.80 percent in 2000). All communities in the McAllen-Mission-Edinburg MSA realized an increase in

Figure 2.14, Owner Occupied Units by Percentage

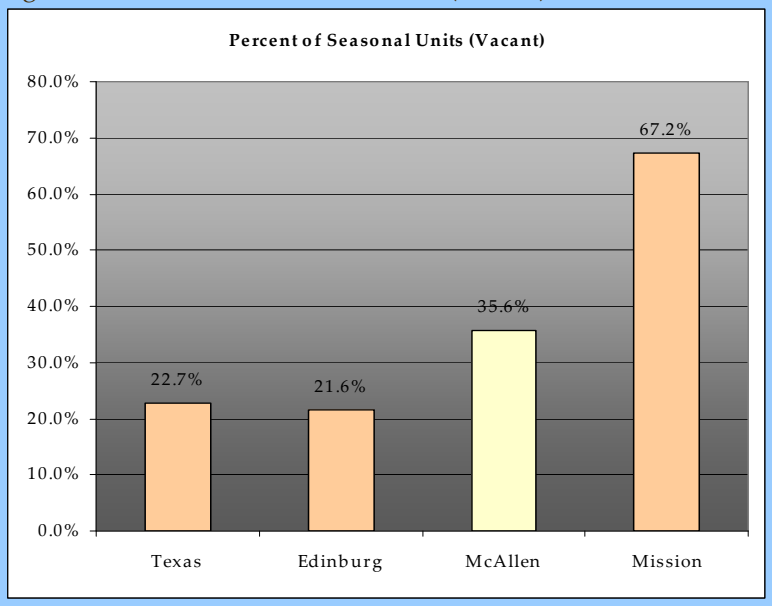


Source: U.S. Census

"The Rio Grande Valley has become an emerging destination, where seasonal visitors are referred to as 'Winter Texans,' instead of snowbirds."
-Boston Globe (November 27, 2004)

owner occupancy between 1990 and 2000. Although Hidalgo County remains almost 10 percentage points higher than McAllen, there should be consideration of other factors in the housing market that may influence owner occupancy. Some factors that may play a role in McAllen's owner occupancy include the type of housing stock available, price of housing units, local student population commuting to University of Texas - Pan American, or residents who are simply not interested in pursuing homeownership.

Figure 2.15, Percent of Seasonal Units (Vacant)



Source: U.S. Census

Seasonal housing units are growing in popularity within Texas and Hidalgo County. The 2000 Census results indicate housing occupancy as owner occupied, renter occupied, or vacant. Within the vacant category are housing units considered to be seasonal or part-time units. While these figures may not be significant to many inland and northern communities, the presence of seasonal housing units make a difference in The Valley. Illustrated in **Figure 2.15, Percent of Seasonal Units (Vacant)**, is the occurrence of seasonal units as a percentage of the overall vacant housing units. Translating this percentage into actual numbers of units reveals the true extent of seasonal housing impacts. McAllen (35.6 percent) has 1,698 seasonal units as compared to Edinburg (21.6 percent) with 399 or Mission (67.2 percent) with 2,659 seasonal units.

Housing Affordability

Affordability is traditionally conceptualized as the percentage of income devoted to housing costs. Generally, housing is considered affordable if no more than 30 percent of household income is devoted to housing costs. As depicted in **Table 2.3, McAllen Housing Affordability**, $841.03 per month is an affordable mortgage payment for a median household income of $33,641.00 (the median household income in McAllen). For households earning 30 percent of the median income, affordable housing means a monthly mortgage payment of $252.31.

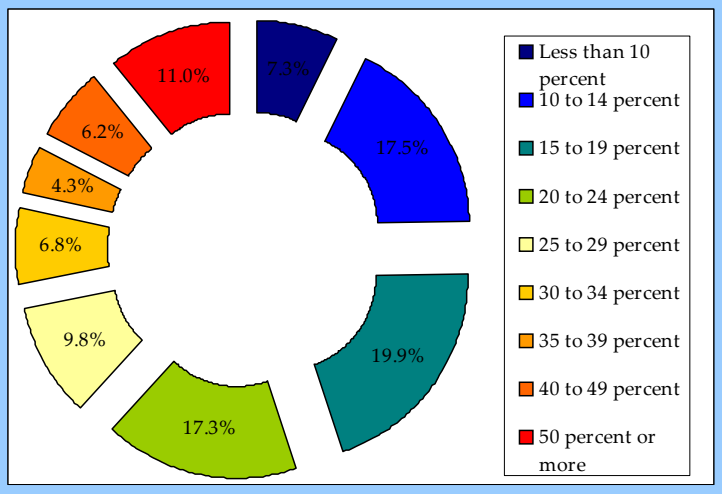
Table 2.3, McAllen Housing Affordability

Percent of Median Income	Household Income	Affordable Mortgage Payment
180	$ 60,553.80	$ 1,513.85
150	$ 50,461.50	$ 1,261.54
130	$ 43,733.30	$ 1,093.33
100	**$ 33,641.00**	**$ 841.03**
80	$ 26,912.80	$ 672.82
50	$ 16,820.50	$ 420.51
30	$ 10,092.30	$ 252.31

Source: U.S. Census

As illustrated in **Figure 2.16, Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in 1999**, 27.9 percent of owners in McAllen who have a mortgage spend 30 percent or more of their household income on their home, which is slightly above that for the U.S. (26.6 percent). As noted above, spending more than 30 percent of household income is considered unaffordable. The largest segment (19.9 percent) of the McAllen population spends between 15 and 19 percent of household income on monthly owner costs, which is generally on par with the U.S. (20.4 percent).

Figure 2.16, Monthly Owner Costs as a Percentage of Household Income in 1999



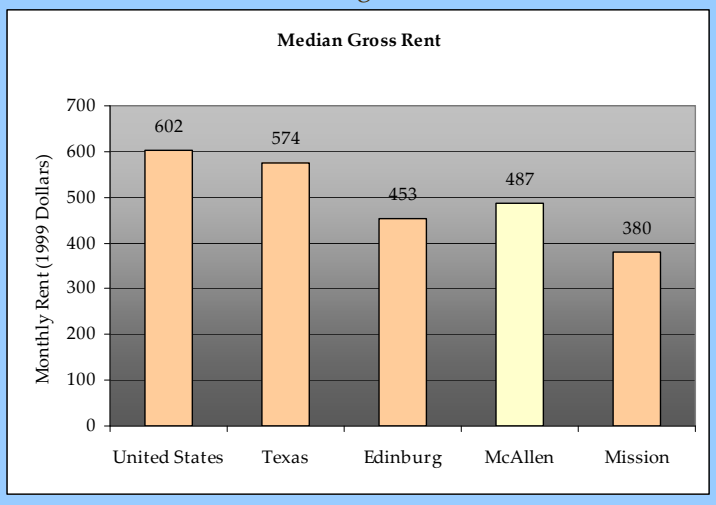
Source: U.S. Census

According to the most recent Census data, of the 17,820 owner occupied housing units in McAllen, 58.8 percent have a mortgage compared to 41.2 percent that do not have a mortgage. The number of persons without a mortgage is significantly higher compared to the U.S. where 29.7 percent of households do not have a mortgage. This information suggests that a higher percentage of homeowners in McAllen have a higher disposable income (i.e. income not dedicated to mortgage debt) compared to the rest of the U.S.

In McAllen, 36.6 percent of the population occupies rental accommodation. While this rental rate is comparable to Edinburg (37.73 percent), it greatly exceeds Mission's rental population (25.0 percent). The difference can be explained, in part, by higher housing costs, as well as by the number of Winter Texans and the transient population who occupy rental units, some for relatively short periods of time.

As depicted in **Figure 2.17, Median Gross Rent**, McAllen's median gross rent is $487 per month. This is generally comparable to Edinburg ($453 per month), but exceeds Mission's median gross rent ($380 per month). This difference in median gross rents among the MSA municipalities can be explained by the fact that McAllen is a substantially larger market for rental housing compared to the other communities and, hence, is an attraction due to employment and other factors. On a wider scale, the rents in McAllen and throughout the metropolitan area are much lower than those throughout Texas ($674 per month) and the U.S. ($602 per month).

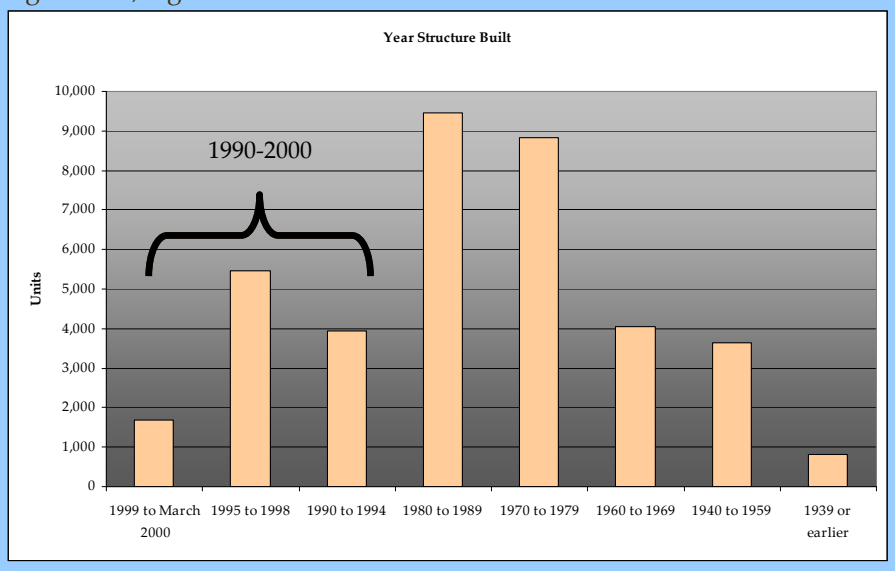
Figure 2.17, Median Gross Rent



Source: U.S. Census

Shown in **Figure 2.18, Age of Structure**, is the age of housing within McAllen. As displayed, nearly 50 percent of the housing in McAllen was built during the 1970s and 1980s. Comparatively, from 1990 through March 2000, 29 percent of the total housing was built. Therefore, the age of housing is relatively new in the community, which is influenced by the amount of ongoing residential building activity. The community must remain cognizant of the older housing stock as rehabilitation and reinvestment will become increasingly important to the integrity and sustainability of the established neighborhoods within the original town area.

Figure 2.18, Age of Structure



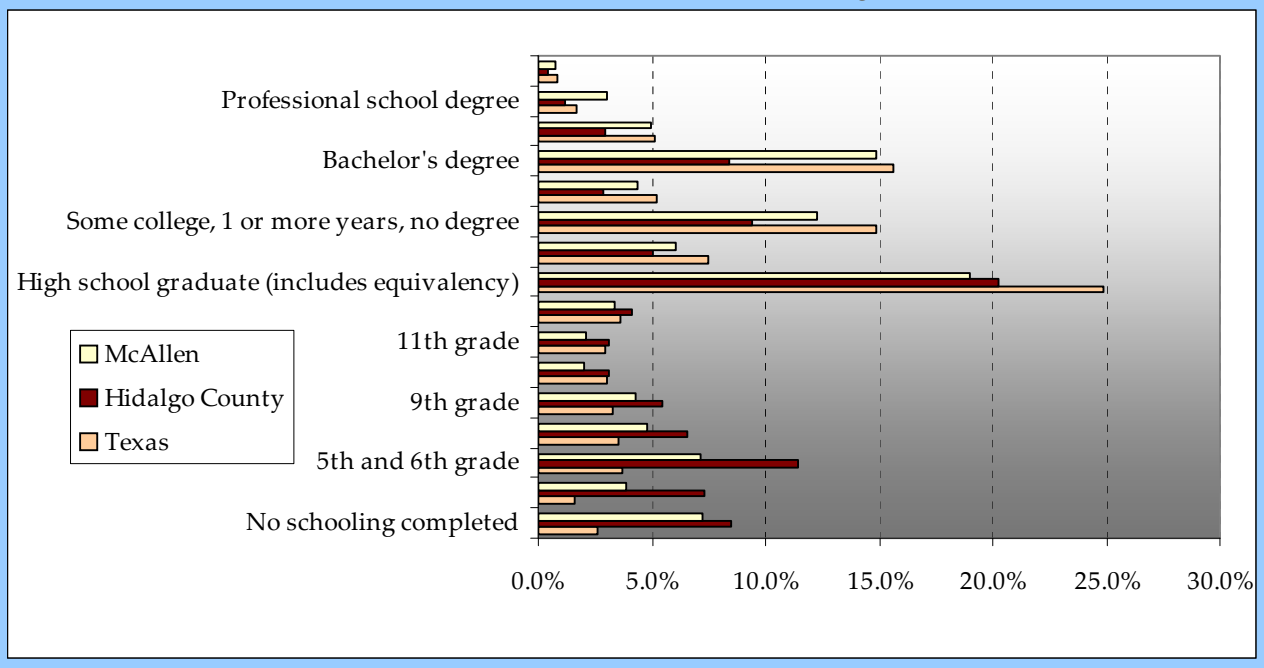
Source: U.S. Census

Educational Profile

The City of McAllen is served primarily by the McAllen Independent School District (McAllen ISD), which covers 35.8 square miles. The McAllen ISD includes three high schools, six middle schools, one early childhood learning center, one guidance center, two private schools, and 19 elementary schools. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the total student membership in the 2003-2004 school year was 24,009 students. The McAllen ISD abuts "peer" school districts including: Hidalgo ISD, Edinburg CISD, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, and Sharyland ISD. Small edges of McAllen's incorporated area and major parts of the City's Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ) area are included in these neighboring districts. Future growth to the northwest will require additional coordination with adjoining school district authorities and possible adjustment of district boundaries.

The educational attainment of persons 25 years and over in McAllen compared to Edinburg, Mission, and the State is displayed in **Figure 2.19, Educational Attainment**. In McAllen, 7.2 percent of the population has no schooling completed. While this number is comparable to Hidalgo County (8.5 percent), it exceeds the statewide average of 2.6 percent. McAllen also exceeds Hidalgo County and Texas with regard to the percentage of its population whose highest level of educational attainment is 12th grade (no diploma). The largest cohort was seen in the category "High School Graduate (includes equivalency)" (19.0 percent). In terms of attainment of a post-secondary degree, 27.9 percent of McAllen's population has obtained an Associate, Bachelor's, Master's, Professional School, or Doctoral degree. Comparatively, 15.8 percent of the Hidalgo County population and 28.5 percent of the Texas population have a post-secondary degree.

Figure 2.19, Educational Attainment



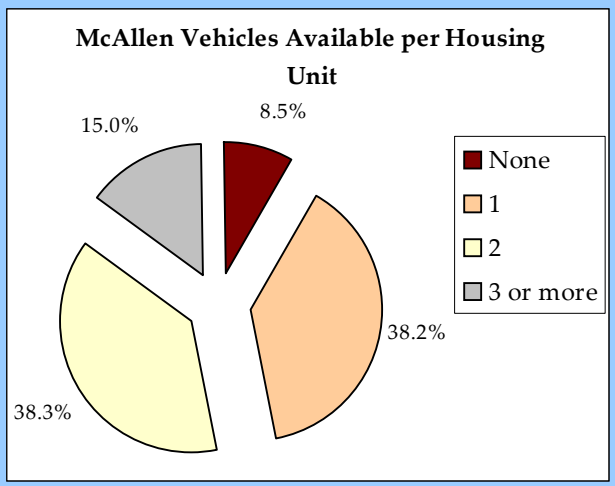
Source: U.S Census

Advanced education facilities are needed in order to upgrade the labor force as it meets the changing requirements of business and industry. There is a predominant trend throughout the country that demands workers with advanced degrees to fill management and advanced blue collar positions. Nearby advanced education facilities that facilitate higher learning include the Med-High and Sci-Tech Schools in Mercedes, International Baccalaureate facility and programs, South Texas campus (29th and Pecan), the Technology campus (Military Highway and Ware Road), and the University of Texas – Pan American (Edinburg). While many current jobs may require minimal academic skills, McAllen must evolve its labor force in order to compete in the future.

Transportation

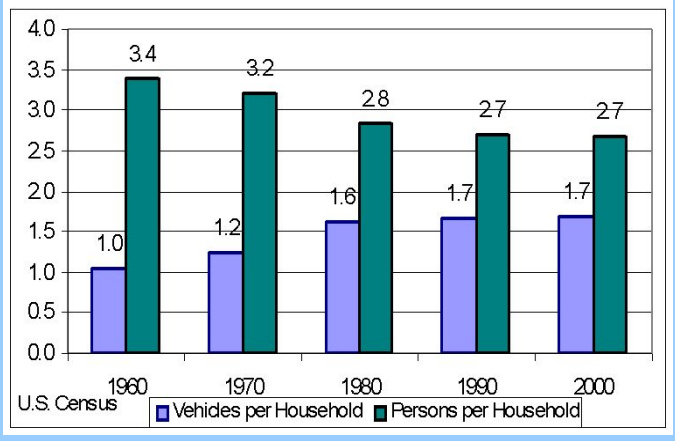
McAllen residents maintain a moderate number of vehicles per household as demonstrated in **Figure 2.20, Vehicles Available per Housing Unit by Percentage**. Almost half (46.7 percent) of the housing units had access to one or no cars in 2000, with the other half (53.3 percent) having access to two or more cars. When these numbers are compared nationally since 1960, as displayed in **Figure 2.21, Vehicles Available per Housing Unit Since 1960**, it is clear that the number of vehicles available per housing unit has increased steadily. This is even more significant when taking into account the fact that the number of persons per household has been shrinking since 1960. It can be assumed that the City of

Figure 2.20, Vehicles Available per Housing Unit by Percentage



Source: U.S Census

Figure 2.21, Vehicles Available per Housing Unit Since 1960



Source: U.S Census

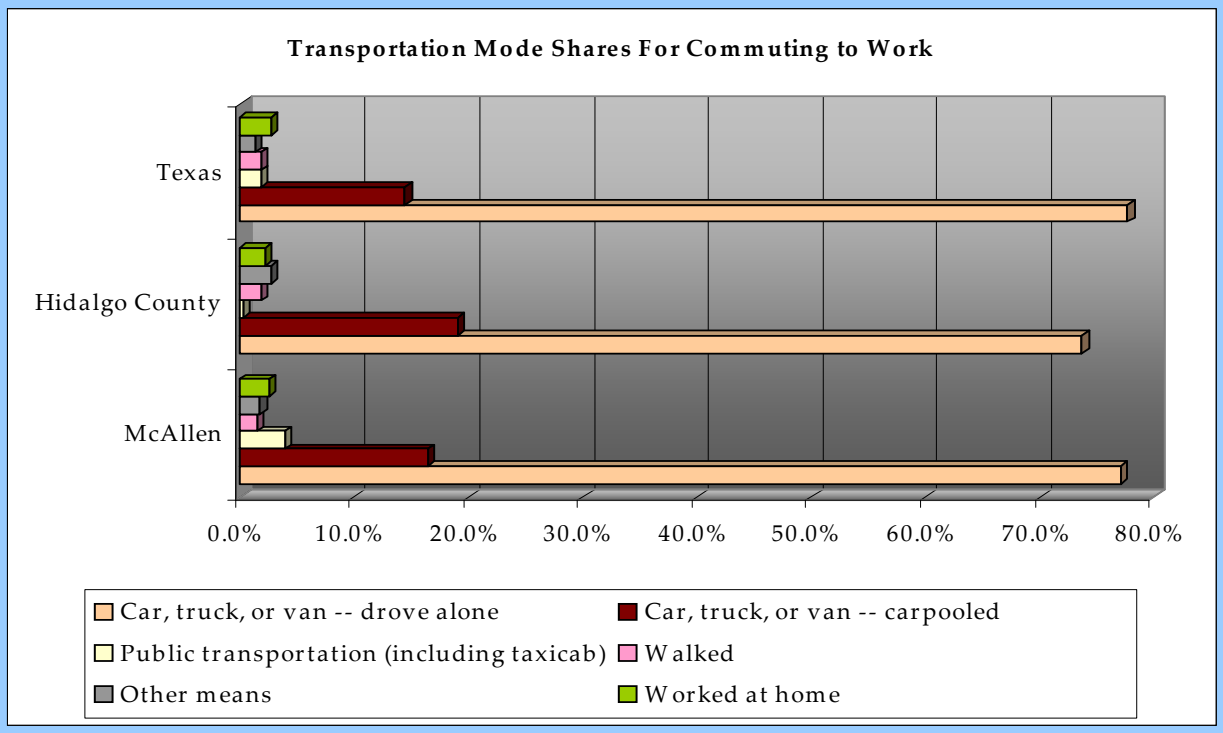
McAllen has followed this trend of slightly increasing levels of car ownership with every passing decade.

The impact of this increasing car ownership is not only visible with traffic congestion and parking scarcity. Transportation is the second most expensive budgetary consideration (after housing), and car ownership can be an enormous financial burden, especially for low-income households.

Figure 2.22, Transportation Mode Shares for Commuting to Work, illustrates that McAllen's predominant commuting trend is single occupancy automobile (77.1 percent). Other transportation methods utilized in work commutes included carpooling (16.5 percent), public transportation (4.0 percent), walking (1.5 percent), other means (1.8 percent), and working at home (2.6 percent). The general transportation mode trends of McAllen closely resemble those of Hidalgo County and the larger State of Texas.

When considering the fact that one of McAllen's largest age groups (0-16 years) does not drive automobiles and are reliant on other means of transportation, it is especially important that the needs of younger residents are included in transportation planning and site design. Future land use decisions should require multi-modal options along transportation routes in order to accommodate an increased number of users and allow for increased transportation choices. Schools, parks, day care facilities, and other areas that are frequented by younger residents should be designed or retrofitted to provide for walking, biking, and transit accommodations.

Figure 2.22, Transportation Mode Shares for Commuting to Work



Source: U.S. Census

Economic Characteristics

"Employment in Texas stands at an all-time high, 9,923,700 jobs, and is growing at a healthy rate of 2.9 percent. Sustained job growth speaks well for Texas employers and the Texas economy."
- Ron Lehman, TWC Commissioner Representing Employers (April 21, 2006)

The labor market in Texas and the McAllen-Mission-Edinburg MSA is reporting healthy gains in employment. The most recent employment report from the Texas Workforce Commission indicates that the State of Texas had a 5.0 percent unemployment rate[2] in March 2006. This demonstrates a 0.4 percent reduction in unemployment since March 2005. Similarly, the McAllen-Mission-Edinburg MSA reports a March 2006 unemployment rate of 7.2 percent, which is down 1.3 percent since recording an 8.3 percent unemployment rate in March 2005. Despite these gains, both Texas and McAllen MSA remain above the national unemployment level. The U.S. rate was listed as 4.8 percent in March 2006 after declining 0.6 percent since it was 5.4 percent in March 2005. It is also notable that the McAllen MSA continues to maintain the highest unemployment levels of any MSA in Texas and has done so since March 2005.

McAllen boasts a high number of major businesses in the City and continues to draw significant employment to the region. Among the Top 20 Employers in McAllen listed in **Table 2.4, Major McAllen Employers**, are representatives from the health, education, retail, utility, and manufacturing industries.

Table 2.4, Major McAllen Employers

Major McAllen Employers	Number of Employees
McAllen Independent School District	3595
McAllen Medical Center	2800
Columbia Rio Grande Regional Hospital	975
South Texas Community College	811
Vanity Fair Intimates	400
Dillard's	354
Foley's	350
McDonald's Restaurant	350
Sam's Club Discount Store	350
J.C. Penney Company	304
Wal-Mart	300
Wal-Mart	300
Work Solutions	300
HEB	275
HEB	265
HEB	250
Metro Electric	250
Southwestern Bell	230
Valley Coca-Cola Bottling Co	225
Sears Roebuck & Company	220
Charles Clark Chevrolet	210

Source: McAllen Chamber of Commerce

Educational, Health, and Social Services is the economic sector that employs the largest share of McAllen residents, as shown in **Table 2.5, Employment by Industry Comparison**. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than one-fourth (11,076 persons) of all employed McAllen adults work in this sector, compared to 26.3 percent of all Hidalgo County residents and only 19 percent of persons state-wide. Employment within this sector is dominated by the Educational Services (public and private education) sub-sector, which employs 14.7 percent of all working adults in McAllen. This high percentage is likely the result of two factors including the presence of the nearby University of Texas-Pan American and a high

[2] Unemployment rates are based on Civilian Labor Force Estimates for Texas Metropolitan Statistical Areas (Not Seasonally Adjusted) available from the Texas Workforce Commission

Table 2.5, Employment by Industry Comparison

Industry	McAllen		Hidalgo Co.		Texas	
	Workers	% of Total	Workers	% of Total	Workers	% of Total
Total Employed McAllen Residents, Age 16+ Yrs.	**40,618**		**180,121**		**9,234,372**	
Natural Resources	**780**	**1.9%**	**7,475**	**4.1%**	**247,697**	**2.7%**
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	427	1.1%	6,139	3.4%	126,173	1.4%
Mining	353	0.9%	1,336	0.7%	121,524	1.3%
Construction	**2,231**	**5.5%**	**17,008**	**9.4%**	**743,606**	**8.1%**
Manufacturing	**2,670**	**4.4%**	**13,349**	**7.4%**	**1,093,752**	**11.8%**
Wholesale Trade	**1,797**	**4.4%**	**8,863**	**4.9%**	**362,928**	**3.9%**
Retail Trade	**6,508**	**16.0%**	**24,315**	**13.5%**	**1,108,004**	**12.0%**
Transportation/Utilities	**1,647**	**4.1%**	**9,001**	**5.0%**	**535,568**	**5.8%**
Transportation & Warehousing	1,370	3.4%	7,551	4.2%	438,903	4.8%
Utilities	277	0.7%	1,450	0.8%	96,665	1.0%
Information	**1,025**	**2.5%**	**2,984**	**1.7%**	**283,256**	**3.1%**
Financial Activities	**2,335**	**5.7%**	**6,708**	**3.7%**	**630,133**	**6.8%**
Finance & Insurance	1,560	3.8%	4,457	2.5%	437,467	4.7%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	775	1.9%	2,251	1.2%	192,666	2.1%
Business & Professional Services	**3,289**	**8.1%**	**10,946**	**6.1%**	**878,726**	**9.5%**
Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services	2,045	5.0%	5,084	2.8%	534,974	5.8%
Management of Companies & Enterprises	5	0.0%	28	0.0%	5,883	0.1%
Administrative & Support & Waste Services	1,239	3.1%	5,834	3.2%	337,869	3.7%
Educational, Health & Social Services	**11,076**	**27.3%**	**47,346**	**26.3%**	**1,779,801**	**19.3%**
Educational Services	5,975	14.7%	26,693	14.8%	871,375	9.4%
Health Care & Social Assistance	5,101	12.6%	20,653	11.5%	908,426	9.8%
Leisure & Hospitality	**3,056**	**7.5%**	**13,559**	**7.5%**	**673,016**	**7.3%**
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	1,660	4.1%	1,566	0.9%	111,571	1.2%
Accommodation & Food Services	2,622	6.5%	11,993	6.7%	561,445	6.1%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	**2,071**	**5.1%**	**10,315**	**5.7%**	**480,785**	**5.2%**
Public Administration	**2,133**	**5.3%**	**8,252**	**4.6%**	**417,100**	**4.5%**

Source: U.S. Census and TIP Strategies, Inc.

proportion of school-age children that require more schools and teachers compared to other communities without a predominantly young population. The Health Care and Social Assistance sub-sector employs 12.6 percent of working adults living in the City, a higher percentage than both county-wide and state-wide (11.5 percent and 9.8 percent, respectively).

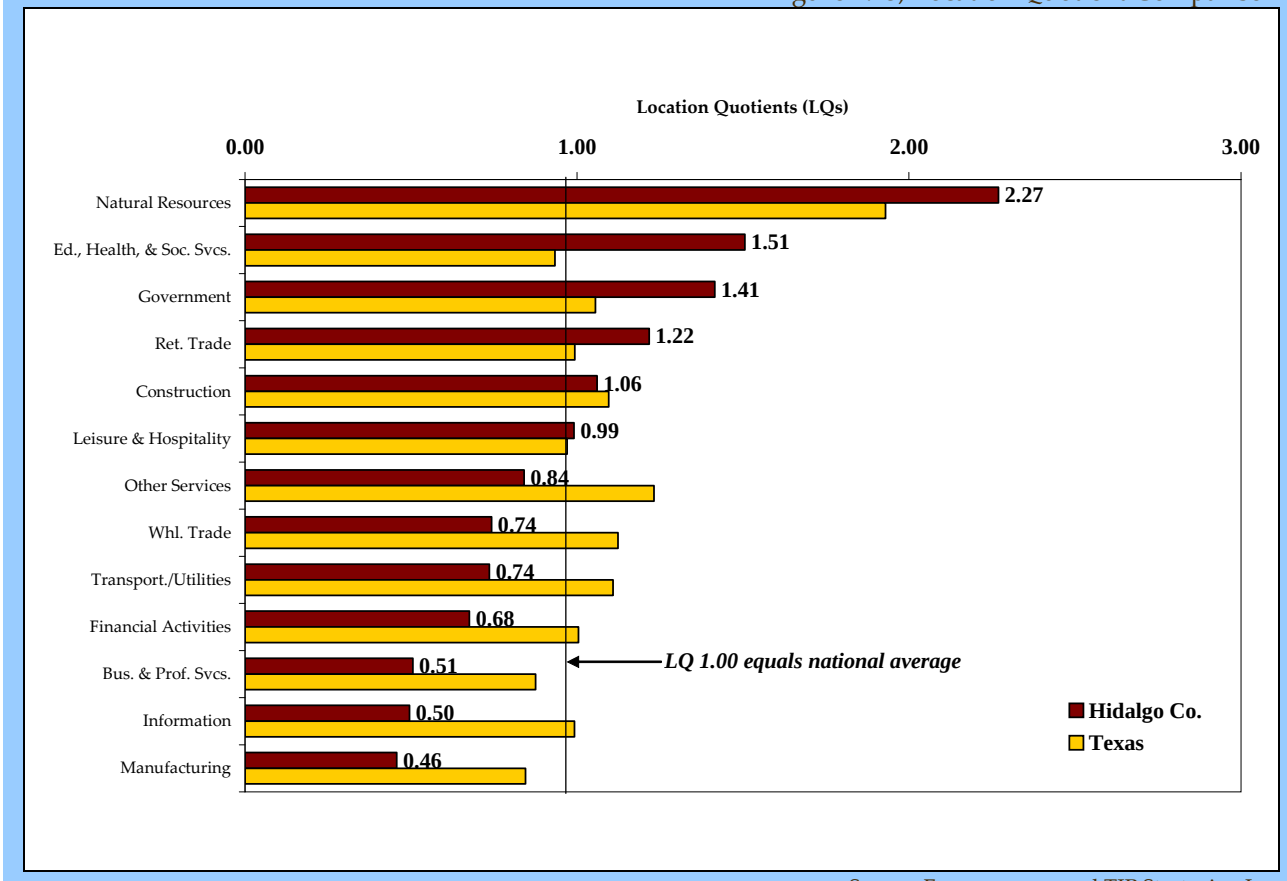
McAllen's second largest employment sector is Retail Trade, employing 6,508 residents or 16.0 percent of the City's workforce. Despite being the second largest employment sector, Retail Trade in McAllen represents a larger share than throughout Hidalgo County (13.5 percent) and Texas (12.0 percent). The Public Administration sector employs 5.3 percent of workers living in McAllen. This represents a slightly larger share than Hidalgo County's 4.6 percent and the State's 4.5 percent respective shares.

Other major employment sectors for McAllen residents include Business and Professional Services and Leisure and Hospitality. Business and Professional Services employs 8.1 percent of the City's employed residents. This is a slightly higher share than the County as a whole (6.1 percent), but is significantly lower than the State's 9.5 percent rate of employment. Within this sector, Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services employs 5.0 percent of McAllen's residents, compared to just 2.8 percent throughout Hidalgo County and 5.8 percent state-wide. The proportion of McAllen's residents employed in the Leisure and Hospitality sector (7.5 percent) is equal to Hidalgo County (7.5 percent) and slightly higher than the State (7.3 percent).

Also of note are the low employment rates of McAllen residents in the Construction (5.5 percent) and Manufacturing (4.4 percent) sectors. Among county-wide residents, Construction employs 9.4 percent of all workers and Manufacturing employs 7.4 percent of the labor force. This is in comparison to employment rates of 8.1 percent in Construction and 11.8 percent in Manufacturing state-wide.

Location quotients (LQs) are ratios generally used to measure the relative concentration of an industry in a region versus its concentration in the nation by measuring employment. While an LQ equal to 1.00 indicates that an industry's regional concentration is the same as the nation, an LQ greater than 1.25 generally indicates a regional specialization in that industry. Likewise, an LQ that is significantly lower than 1.00 points to a weak presence for an industry in a region. Displayed in **Figure 2.23, Location Quotient Comparison,** are the LQs by major industry for Hidalgo County and Texas in the Year 2004 according to employment data provided by Economy.com.

Figure 2.23, Location Quotient Comparison



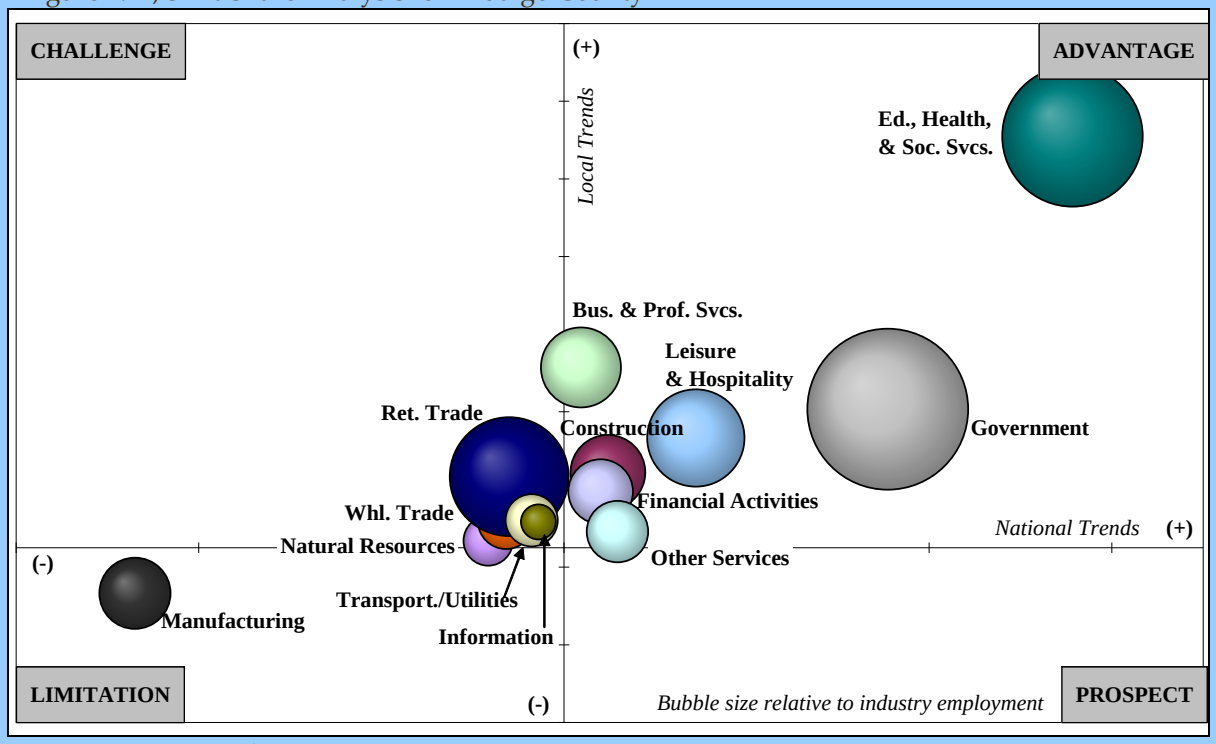
Source: Economy.com and TIP Strategies, Inc.

The Natural Resources sector has the highest LQ in Hidalgo County at 2.27. In other words, this industry has over two times as many jobs in Hidalgo County than would be expected given national employment rates. While Hidalgo County has a high concentration of jobs in this sector, Hidalgo County employment in Natural Resources stands at only 4,480 or 2.4 percent of all jobs. Other industries with strong LQs in Hidalgo County include Education, Health, and Social Services (1.51), Government (1.41), and Retail Trade (1.22).

Hidalgo County's lowest LQ is in Manufacturing at 0.46, meaning that slightly less than half as many manufacturing-related jobs are present than would be expected given national employment rates. Hidalgo County has low LQs in several high-end service sector industries including, Financial Activities (0.68), Business and Professional Services (0.51), and Information (0.50). While Hidalgo County has benefited from its location along the U.S./Mexican border, its geographic advantage has yet to be fully realized as seen in its relatively low concentration of jobs in the Transportation/Utilities industry (0.74 LQ).

Shift-share analysis is a comparative tool used to measure the economic linkages between changes in the structure of a local economy and that of a higher-level or parent economy. In this case, the U.S. Shift-share analysis is a technique that determines the source of changes in a given industry in the local economy by allocating shifts in employment among three components, including national industry mix, and regional competitive share. Graphically depicted in **Figure 2.24, Shift-Share Analysis for Hidalgo County**, is the employment size and economic performance of Hidalgo County's major industries from 1999 to 2004, according to employment data provided by Economy.com. Each of Hidalgo County's major employment sectors can be categorized as an asset, prospect, challenge, or limitation.

Figure 2.24, Shift-Share Analysis for Hidalgo County

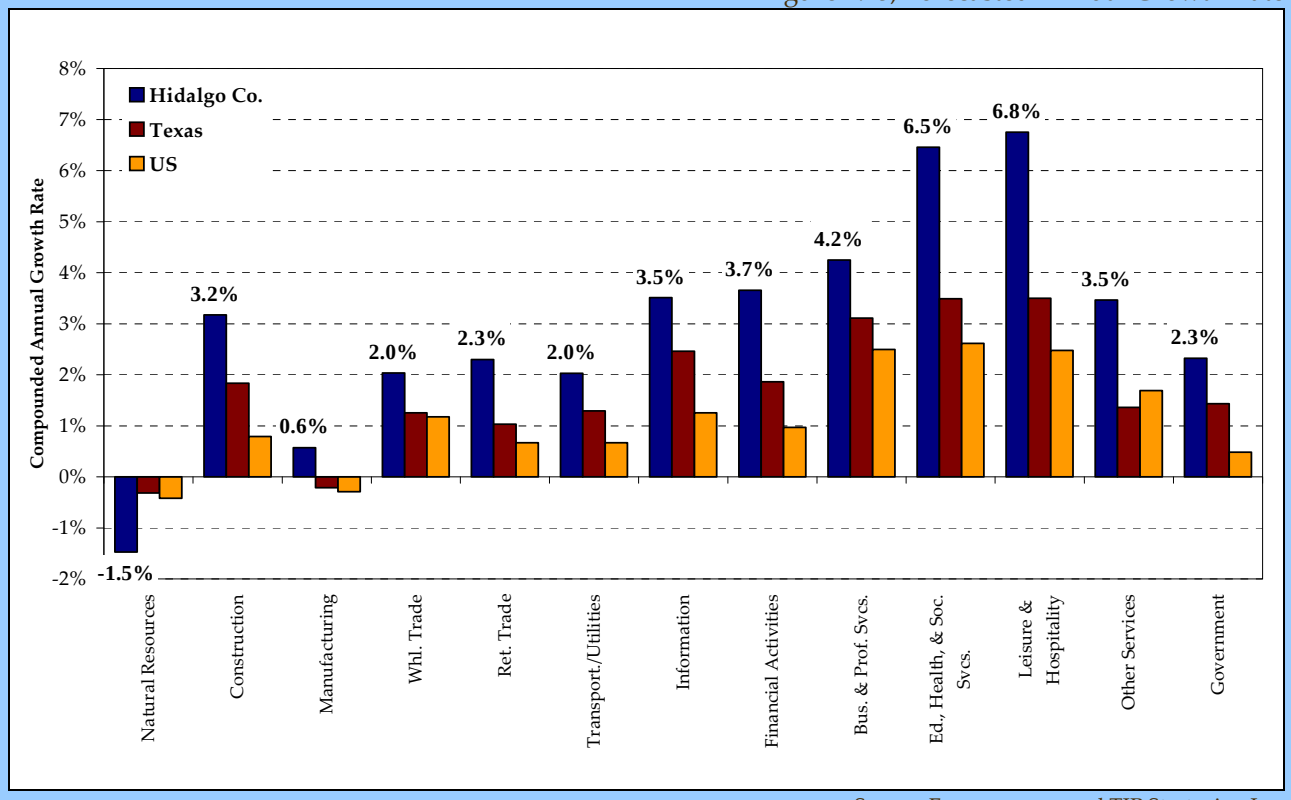


Source: Economy.com and TIP Strategies, Inc.

According to shift-share analysis performed for the last five years, the Education, Health, and Social Services sector is Hidalgo County's greatest economic asset. This is due to the industry's strong pace of growth both nationally and locally, implying that opportunities for continued growth should persist. Other major sectoral advantages include Government, Business and Professional Services, and Leisure and Hospitality.

Several of Hidalgo County's major industries are categorized as "challenges" according to shift-share analysis: Retail Trade, Wholesale Trade, Information, Transportation/Utilities, and Natural Resources. These industries are considered challenges because Hidalgo County showed relatively strong growth recently in industries whose employment levels either declined or lagged nationally during the shift-share time frame (1999-2004). In other words, macroeconomic trends may present challenges to future growth prospects locally in these industries.

Figure 2.25, Forecasted Annual Growth Rate



Source: Economy.com and TIP Strategies, Inc.

As shown in **Figure 2.25, Forecasted Annual Growth Rate**, nearly every major sector will grow at a more rapid pace in Hidalgo County than state-wide and nationally during the next 10 years according to data provided by Economy.com. In particular, industries in the services sector are expected to lead employment growth. For example, Leisure and Hospitality and Education, Health, and Social Services are forecasted to grow at annual rates of 6.8 and 6.5 percent, respectively. Other industries that are forecasted to grow at a rapid pace include Business and Professional Services (4.2 percent), Financial Activities (3.7 percent), Information (3.5 percent), and Construction (3.2 percent).

Natural Resources and Manufacturing are both projected to shed jobs at the state and national levels during the forecast period (2004-2014). Locally, Natural Resources is also expected to decline (-1.5 percent per year), while Manufacturing will add jobs at a slow annual rate (0.6 percent).

Detailed in **Table 2.6, Employment Forecast by Industry**, is the total expected job growth in Hidalgo County for industries that are expected to add 500 jobs or more during the next 10 years. According to Economy.com, these 30 industries will represent 80 percent of all job growth in Hidalgo County during the forecast period. Dominating this list are industries from the Education, Health, and Social Services;

Table 2.6, Employment Forecast by Industry

4-digit NAICS	Industry Description	Major Sector	Employment		Change	
			2004	2014	Percent	Actual
	Total Employment		**187,671**	**271,886**	**44.90%**	**84,215**
6216-	Home Health Care Svcs.	Education, Health, and Social Services	14,576	29,047	99.30%	14,471
GVL	Local Government	Government (includes public education)	37,623	48,028	27.70%	10,406
7222-	Limited-Service Eating Places	Leisure and Hospitality	7,664	15,883	107.20%	8,219
7221-	Full-Service Restaurants	Leisure and Hospitality	5,705	10,413	82.50%	4,708
6211-	Offices of Physicians	Education, Health, and Social Services	4,159	8,483	104.00%	4,324
6221-	General Medical & Surgical Hospitals	Education, Health, and Social Services	6,205	9,775	57.50%	3,570
6241-	Individual & Family Svcs.	Education, Health, and Social Services	2,630	5,397	105.20%	2,767
5221-	Depository Credit Intermediation	Financial Activities	2,853	4,482	57.10%	1,629
5614-	Business Support Svcs.	Business and Professional Services	2,632	4,228	60.70%	1,596
6244-	Child Day Care Svcs.	Education, Health, and Social Services	1,354	2,802	106.90%	1,448
7211-	Traveler Accommodation	Leisure and Hospitality	1,592	2,747	72.50%	1,155
GVS	State Government	Government (includes public education)	4,848	5,992	23.60%	1,144
4411-	Automobile Dealers	Retail Trade	2,310	3,333	44.30%	1,023
5613-	Employment Svcs.	Business and Professional Services	2,888	3,883	34.40%	995
2360-	Construction of Buildings	Construction	2,090	2,983	42.70%	892
4451-	Grocery Stores	Retail Trade	4,248	5,125	20.60%	877
2370-	Heavy & Civil Engineering Construction	Construction	1,721	2,583	50.10%	862
2382-	Building Equipment Contractors	Construction	1,986	2,781	40.10%	796
6231-	Nursing Care Facilities	Education, Health, and Social Services	1,148	1,870	62.80%	721
5616-	Investigation & Security Svcs.	Business and Professional Services	814	1,518	86.60%	704
4471-	Gasoline Stations	Retail Trade	1,752	2,407	37.40%	656
8111-	Automotive Repair & Maintenance	Other Services	1,549	2,187	41.20%	638
5617-	Svcs. to Buildings & Dwellings	Business and Professional Services	807	1,444	79.00%	637
7139-	Other Amusement & Recreation Industries	Leisure and Hospitality	764	1,386	81.40%	622
6214-	Outpatient Care Centers	Education, Health, and Social Services	571	1,167	104.50%	596
2383-	Building Finishing Contractors	Construction	1,192	1,768	48.30%	576
4461-	Health & Personal Care Stores	Retail Trade	1,282	1,857	44.90%	576
7224-	Drinking Places (Alcoholic Beverages)	Leisure and Hospitality	560	1,132	102.00%	572
GVF	Federal Government	Government (includes public education)	2,781	3,292	18.40%	511
4421-	Furniture Stores	Retail Trade	859	1,361	58.40%	502

Source: Economy.com and TIP Strategies, Inc.

Government; Leisure and Hospitality; and Construction sectors. Many of these sectors provide services that are needed to serve a growing and aging population such as education, health care, construction, restaurants, and retail trade.

Community Comparison

As the municipal leader in the Rio Grande Valley, McAllen should be compared to other cities outside of its MSA neighbors, Edinburg and Mission, as illustrated in **Table 2.7, Regional Community Comparison**. There are several comparable cities in South Texas that have similar populations, ethnic characteristics, and growth patterns as McAllen. A brief comparison chart was completed in order to have some additional measurement of the ways in which the McAllen community is changing. This additional data includes comparison cities of Harlingen, Brownsville, and Laredo, as well as Hidalgo County, the State of Texas, and the United States. Basic conclusions include the following:

McAllen Is Growing Rapidly

Between 1990 and 2000, McAllen's population grew at a very high rate from 84,021 to 106,414. This 26.6 percent growth rate between 1990 and 2000 represents a higher growth rate than the State of Texas or the United States. This double-digit growth is a continuation of population increases seen across southern Texas in the three comparison cities and Hidalgo County over the past few decades.

McAllen Is Diverse

McAllen continues to be a community of diverse ethnic backgrounds, with Hispanic or Latino being the largest segment of the population at 80.3 percent. Hispanic or Latino background is predominant in the other south Texas cities of Harlingen (72.8 percent), Brownsville (91.3 percent), and Laredo (94.1 percent).

McAllen Incomes High Compared to South Texas Region

The 2000 median household income rose 52 percent to $33,641 from the 1990 median of $22,068. These median income levels continue to lag behind national median income levels of $41,994 for households and $21,587 per capita. The number of individuals living in poverty in 2000 remained lower than other nearby cities, but still remains significantly higher than the State (15.4 percent) or national (12.4 percent) average.

McAllen Uses Traditional Transportation Options

Commuters going to work primarily drive alone (77.1 percent), carpool (16.5 percent), use public transportation (4.0 percent), or walk (1.5 percent). When compared to the rest of Texas and the nation, these figures demonstrate similar usage of personal automobiles, public transportation and carpooling to get to work. 46.7 percent of households owned one or no cars in 2000 and 53.3 percent owned two or more, which is close to the national average (44.5 percent and 55.5 percent, respectively).

McAllen Has an Abundant Housing Supply

The total number of housing units increased from 28,597 in 1990 to 37,922 in 2000, an increase of 32.6 percent. At the same time, population grew by 26.6 percent and, therefore, the housing supply kept pace with the demand. Indicators of this housing abundance include:

- Increases in housing units exceeding increases in total population
- High level of vacant housing units for both renters and owners
- High number of seasonal or vacation homes

- Overall affordable value of units for sale
- High percentage of owner-occupied units
- Low mortgage costs for owners
- Median gross rent is less than 30 percent of household median income
- New housing stock

McAllen Has Large, Young Households

The median age in years for McAllen, Texas, and comparison cities is considerably lower than the national average (35.3 years). This is also demonstrated by very high levels of children under age five and children under age 18. In contrast to the rest of the country, all areas have low numbers of adults over age 65. The average household size is 3.18 persons, which is lower than Brownsville (3.62 persons), Laredo (3.7 persons), and Hidalgo County (3.6 persons). It remains higher than Harlingen (2.94 persons), Texas (2.74 persons), and the U.S. (2.59 persons).

McAllen Educational Attainment Leads the Region, But Lags Texas and Nation

The educational attainment of the population over 25 years old in 2000 indicates that 34.7 percent of residents do not have a high school diploma; 65.3 percent of residents have a high school diploma, some college, or Associate's degree; and 23.6 percent of residents have a Bachelor's degree or higher. These rates are higher than Brownsville and Laredo in all categories, but are on par with Harlingen rates of high school graduation. However, McAllen and these three comparison cities lag behind the Texas (75.7 percent and 23.2 percent, respectively) and U.S. (80.4 percent and 24.4 percent, respectively) averages.

Table 7, Regional Community Comparison

	McAllen	Harlingen	Brownsville	Laredo	Hidalgo County	Texas	United States
Population, 2000	106,414	57,564	139,722	176,576	569,463	20,851,820	281,421,906
Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000	26.6%	18.1%	34.1%	43.6%	48.5%	22.7%	13.1%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	46	34	80	78	1570	261,797	3,537,438
Persons per square mile, 2000	2313.3	1693.1	1746.5	2263.8	362.7	79.6	79.6
Median age in years, 2000	30.5	31.8	27.7	26.9	27.2	32.3	35.3
Persons under 5 years, percent, 2000	8.7%	9.1%	9.9%	10.5%	10.2%	7.8%	6.8%
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2000	30.8%	30.7%	34.6%	35.5%	35.2%	28.2%	25.7%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2000	10.4%	15.0%	9.5%	7.8%	9.7%	9.9%	12.4%
Average household size, 2000	3.18	2.94	3.62	3.7	3.6	2.74	2.59
Persons of hispanic/latino origin, percent, 2000	80.3%	72.8%	91.3%	94.1%	88.4%	32.0%	12.5%
Housing units, 2000	37,922	23,008	42,323	50,319	192,568	8,157,575	115,904,641
Homeownership rate, 2000	63.4%	61.1%	61.2%	64.4%	73.1%	63.8%	66.2%
Percent of housing units constructed since 1990	29.2%	21.4%	25.4%	35.8%	37.8%	20.7%	17.0%
Percent of housing units constructed between 1980 to 1989	25.0%	23.1%	23.8%	20.2%	26.0%	22.6%	15.8%
Percent of housing units constructed between 1970 to 1979	23.3%	18.5%	22.4%	16.5%	17.9%	21.5%	18.5%
Housing unit vacancy rates, 2000	12.6%	17.3%	9.8%	6.9%	18.6%	9.3%	9.0%
Housing affordability based upon 30% median income, 1999	$ 841	$ 757	$ 612	$ 728	$ 622	$ 998	$ 1,050
Median gross rent, 1999	$ 487	$ 455	$ 405	$ 454	$ 401	$ 574	$ 602
Median household income, 1999	$ 33,641	$ 30,296	$ 24,468	$ 29,108	$ 24,863	$ 39,927	$ 41,994
Per capita income, 1999	$ 14,939	$ 13,886	$ 9,762	$ 11,084	$ 9,899	$ 19,617	$ 21,587
Persons below poverty, percent, 1999	23.8%	24.9%	36.0%	29.6%	35.9%	15.4%	12.4%
High school graduates, percent of persons age 25+, 2000	65.3%	66.2%	51.7%	54.8%	50.5%	75.7%	80.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher, pct of persons age 25+, 2000	23.6%	16.8%	13.4%	14.7%	12.9%	23.2%	24.4%
Percent of households with access to 1 or 0 automobiles	46.7%	54.0%	52.4%	48.8%	50.1%	43.4%	44.5%
Percent of households with access to 2 or more automobiles	53.3%	46.0%	47.6%	51.2%	49.9%	56.6%	55.5%
Mean travel time to work, workers age 16+ (minutes), 2000	18.7	18.1	20.4	20.8	20.9	25.4	25.5

3
CHAPTER

Existing Urban Form

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

This overview of McAllen's existing physical characteristics provides insight into the community's natural setting, current uses of land, and supporting infrastructure and public facilities. Planning for future land use and community character will depend, in part, on how McAllen has grown and evolved in the past and where it stands today as an urbanized community that still retains areas of rural flavor. It will be important for community leaders and residents to appreciate how the physical development pattern of McAllen is moving away from — or building upon and reinforcing — traditional practices and amenities.

Natural Environment

Floodplains and Wetlands

The impacts of land use upon floodplains and wetlands can be significant for a community over the long term. Loss of these valuable natural resources reduces natural habitat, exemplary viewsheds, and recreational opportunities. Unfortunately, the role of these natural areas has been misunderstood historically, and many of the original areas in the Rio Grande Valley have been developed or filled in. The few remaining natural areas are critical resources that should be preserved and protected from future urban development. Preservation and mitigation techniques can be effective through ordinances, such as a wetlands protection ordinance, or by using standard methods, such as zoning and subdivision regulations. Erosion and sedimentation controls can also be enacted to prevent nearby developments from impacting floodplains and wetlands.

A **viewshed** is the landscape or topography visible from a geographic point, especially that having aesthetic value.

Floodplains and wetlands have an important role in the ability of McAllen to address issues of stormwater and flood protection. The proximity of the Rio Grande creates a potential for flood disaster for areas of southern McAllen as illustrated in **Figure 3.1, FEMA Floodplain Areas**, as well some localized flood areas in the upper northern areas of McAllen. The majority of McAllen is outside the 100-Year Flood Area (FEMA Zone A), but there remains a higher risk from the floodplain areas in south McAllen. These floodplains and drainageways temporarily hold and eventually carry all the stormwater away from urbanized areas like McAllen and into the Gulf of Mexico. Rain events such as Hurricane

Allen in 1980, which dumped over seven inches of rain in a 24-hour period onto McAllen, can stress the stormwater system and even cause catastrophic levee failure as demonstrated in New Orleans last year.

A **riparian area** is essentially the narrow strip of land that borders a waterway. Because of its proximity to water, the topography and vegetation often differs from nearby "upland" areas, and periodic flooding is expected.



Disaster prevention and mitigation has become an increasingly important focus in future plans for communities that are adjacent to lowland areas or riparian floodplains. McAllen and Hidalgo County are certainly in this category, and flooding continues to be a noteworthy concern in planning. Hurricane Beulah proved the need for disaster planning 40 years ago, and last year's Hurricane Katrina emphasized the fact that much remains to be done. One of the national trends in the wake of Hurricane Katrina has been the increased emphasis on evacuation and rescue procedures for urban areas in the hours and days immediately following a disaster. However, these efforts are not preventive strategies that can reduce the likelihood of the disaster altogether. Natural and manmade improvements to the floodplain and drainageway system can enhance the overall disaster preparedness of McAllen against future flood events. These are the types of disaster mitigation efforts that are best addressed through a long-term strategy.

Natural floodplains and engineered levees are two components of the McAllen and Hidalgo County flood protection system. The floodplains soak up periodic rainwater and delay initial storm surge flows from impacting downstream areas. A series of interconnected floodplains and drainageways, such as found in southern McAllen, allows for the temporary storage and slowed dissipation of floodwaters across a local area. This floodplain system exists as a natural component in the landscape, but can easily become segmented, restricted, or channelized due to urban development. A floodplain area that is reduced due to increased development will not be able to handle stormwater flows as before and weakens the overall system. Too much development in the floodplains will result in future rainfall events with increased runoff and higher flood stages along waterways. Building in the floodplain should be restricted by zoning or other ordinance enactment to ensure that no substantial reduction in floodplain effectiveness will occur. This policy will not only preserve the floodplain habitat, but will also protect downstream development that would be impacted by a significant rainfall event or hurricane.



Urban development involves intervention in natural drainage patterns, both in terms of the quantity of storm runoff and how and where drainage flows are conveyed.

Although levee improvements are less of a land use concern and more of an engineering focus, there should be mention of levee system improvements as a secondary component of a well-functioning natural floodplain system. The levees that are in place in Hidalgo County could impact McAllen in the case of a severe rain event and levee failure. In particular, a tropical depression that hits McAllen or a severe rain event in Mexico's San Juan Basin could result in levee failure in some areas. Similar to floodplains and land use, future levee projects should be protected against any urban impacts that might

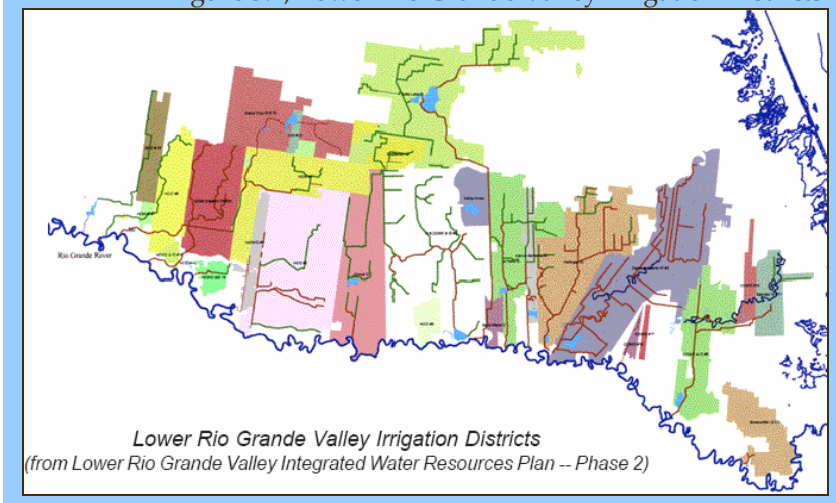
reduce their effectiveness. Without being overly dramatic, the future flood preparedness of McAllen will depend on the policy decisions being made today with regard to floodplain protection.

Irrigation Districts

Water issues continue to loom over discussions of the future growth of the Lower Rio Grande Valley. McAllen is no exception to this persistent water scarcity. Consideration of the City's growth outlook needs to take into account the availability of water, both to municipal users as residential population increases and business development continues and to rural users as farmers continue to depend on water supplies for irrigation.

The changing landscape of Hidalgo County has also created a different business environment for irrigation districts in McAllen as illustrated in **Figure 3.2, Lower Rio Grande Valley Irrigation Districts**. The City of McAllen and its extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) are located within five irrigation districts: San Juan (Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 2), McAllen 3 (Hidalgo County Water District No. 3), Edinburg (Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 1), United (United Irrigation District of Hidalgo County), and Sharyland Plantation (Hidalgo County Irrigation District No. 19). The character of Hidalgo County has changed dramatically since the State of Texas gave farmers the right to form public irrigation districts in 1904 when the predominant land uses were agriculturally based. The steady urbanization of Hidalgo County over the past 100 years, along with national and international factors, has reduced the agricultural economy. The function of irrigation districts has been changing as a result. This trend is expected to continue in the future as more rural areas become urbanized. Despite the evolving landscape and reduction in agricultural land area, rural irrigation districts face growing water shortages, especially in drought years. Rio Grande water distribution assumes a hierarchy in which municipal needs are addressed first before rural irrigation districts receive water as a secondary priority. The end result is there is not enough water for all the farmers in an irrigation district in most years, and this situation is exacerbated in drought years.

Figure 3.2, Lower Rio Grande Valley Irrigation Districts



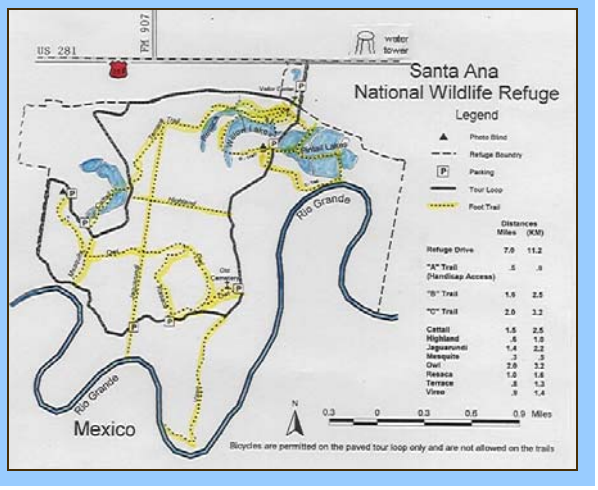
Lower Rio Grande Valley Irrigation Districts
(from Lower Rio Grande Valley Integrated Water Resources Plan -- Phase 2)

Source: Lower Rio Grande Valley Integrated Water Resources Plan

National Wildlife Refuges

One way the City of McAllen maintains a close association with the environment is through its proximity to several large natural areas. Two nearby areas that provide for extensive wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation are the Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge and the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. Both of these areas are operated at the Federal level by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Department of the Interior). The Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located south of McAllen near the Rio Grande as depicted in **Figure 3.3, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge**. A much larger area

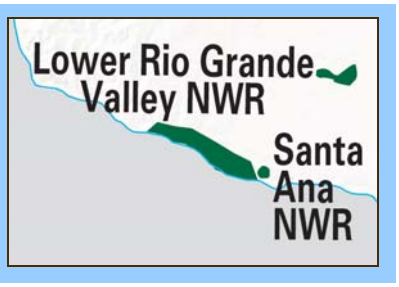
Figure 3.3, Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge



is covered by the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR, which extends along the river immediately west of the Santa Ana NWR.

As NWR holdings, these are important sanctuaries for a rich biodiversity of species, in addition to providing opportunities for interpretive experiences for visitors seeking to learn more about their natural environment. It is also notable that their location adjacent to a large urban area creates an increased level of accessibility for McAllen residents. This is in contrast to the majority of other NWR properties, which are typically tucked away in the remote wilds of Alaska, operate on the desert fringe in Nevada, or are scattered as small sites throughout farm country in North Dakota. McAllen residents benefit from this immediate accessibility to large tracts of undeveloped open space that almost literally sits right outside their doorstep. The closeness of these refuge lands only increases their importance as large-scale natural resources that preserve the physical landscape and offer a respite from the impacts of nearby urban areas.

The Santa Ana NWR is a 2,088-acre facility that primarily serves as a refuge area for migratory birds, but also includes an array of other subtropical species. This refuge is a butterfly and birdwatcher's paradise since it provides habitat for nearly 400 species of birds and half of the butterfly species in the United States. This area is also a habitat for other rare species, such as the indigo snake, malachite butterfly, and ocelot. This biodiversity stems from the refuge's location in an area that contains subtropical, coastal, plains, and desert ecologies. Preserving these ecosystems in a relatively small area allows for a diversity of species to live and flourish in this special landscape – even though many of the birds and butterflies are using the lands only as a short rest stop on their migration between Central America and areas farther north. The Santa Ana NWR acts as an island of natural landscape that exists today as it did hundreds of years ago – and all within a compact area that is a short distance from McAllen.



The Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR extends westward from the Santa Ana NWR area and continues 275 miles along the Rio Grande riparian corridor. This vast network of parcels currently comprises 90,000 acres. A high-priority expansion effort will eventually culminate in a conservation area of 132,500 acres. Private and public lands contribute to the overall makeup of this corridor, and the synergistic effect is an untouched natural landscape that extends along this important Rio Grande habitat area. Although the sheer size of the NWR would imply that there are many species present, the actual numbers are even more impressive: the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR contains over 480 bird species, 300 butterfly species, 1100 plant types, and 700 vertebrates. While not all the tracts of land are available on a daily basis to human visitors, there are many opportunities for visitors to engage in active recreation such as fishing, bird watching, hiking, big game and dove hunts, kayaking, and canoeing.

Agriculture and Orchards

McAllen's history as an urban area began over 100 years ago as a place where local farmers could come into town to buy supplies and engage in trade. The agricultural tradition still continues in the ETJ area adjacent to McAllen even though the community has grown its population considerably. After citrus fruit was introduced to the McAllen area in the early part of the 20th century, it proved to be an attractive agricultural product for Rio Grande Valley farmers. The subtropical climate, rare hard frosts, and suitable soil type were instrumental in creating the perfect conditions for raising oranges and grapefruit year round. Land use in the ETJ area north of McAllen is still characterized by rows of citrus orchards, which provides a sizable citrus crop each year to the rest of the nation.

Built Environment

Historical Pattern of Growth

The long-term pattern of growth in McAllen has involved the gradual annexation of surrounding lands as they are developed, with overall growth occurring primarily in a north-south direction due to the presence of neighboring municipalities. The original McAllen core from the early half of the 20th century now exists as the downtown area, which continues to be a focal point of commerce and urban residential life. Annexations to this core area have taken place in a circular fashion, spreading out in all directions as illustrated in **Figure 3.4, Annexation History**. This expansion pattern is typical of cities that face no physical development obstacles, such as an ocean or mountains. Development was unimpeded in all directions as the circular annexation pattern illustrates, and this unfettered access to available land enabled McAllen's rapid population growth.

Examining the most recent annexations reveals that McAllen is facing constraints to further physical expansion that were not present in prior years. These constraints include the Rio Grande floodplain area to the south and political boundaries of neighboring municipalities to the immediate east and west. The existing ETJ does allow for potential future development to the northwest in an area that is predominantly characterized by rural development and citrus orchards. Future development to the east, west, and south of the McAllen downtown will primarily be infill development, although there are certainly many vacant sites scattered throughout those areas. Any large annexations in the future will be limited to the northwest of the City.

Besides considering changes in the spatial direction of future development, it is also noteworthy to analyze the historical pattern of development. The development pattern illustrated in the 1939 aerial image within **Figure 3.5, Aerial Images of McAllen** indicates that the early years of McAllen consisted of a traditional neighborhood design with grid streets and small housing lots. There were alleys present in many neighborhoods for circulation and garbage collection, although the majority of houses still maintained driveway access via the front yard. The neighborhood unit concept was present in the form of local streets that led out to larger collector streets where commercial and civic uses could be found. Many of the housing units were within a walkable distance to neighborhood services located along the main boulevards.

Examination of the subsequent aerial images for 1961, 1980 and 2004 – reveals a gradual change over time in many of the characteristics that typified the 1939 development pattern. The grid system of streets is slowly infiltrated with development that incorporates curvilinear street designs. Many of these curvy

streets are parts of large subdivisions that empty directly onto arterial roadways. The development pattern of alleys is still present in many cases, but the typical suburban model of front-loading, front-facing driveways becomes standard in many of the outlying areas. Distances between uses have increased dramatically, with one important outcome being that residential neighborhoods are no longer connected to commercial areas by a short walk. The presence of regional shopping malls has also consolidated many of the commercial and service uses into one node that is primarily accessible by automobile.

Figure 3.5, Aerial Images of McAllen



1939



1961



1980

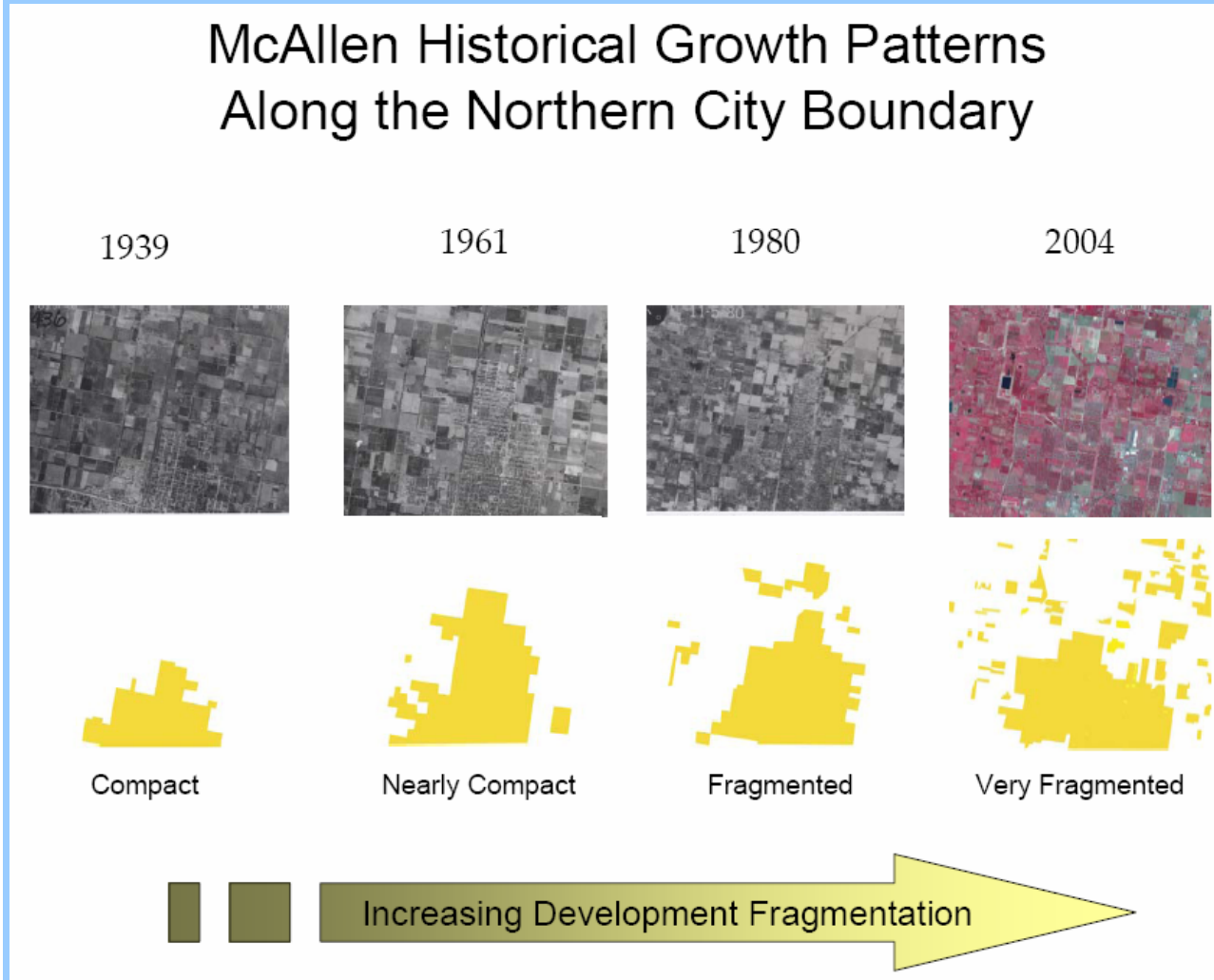


2004

In addition to community design changes over the years between 1939 and 2004, there is a difference in the spatial arrangement of new development along the urban fringe of McAllen. As compared in **Figure 3.6, McAllen Historical Growth Patterns Along the Northern City Boundary**, the aerial images focus on development over time at the ever-changing northernmost community edge. A bird's-eye view of the land use pattern demonstrates that the development becomes increasingly fragmented over time. The 1939 aerial image depicts a city that builds each house right next to the previous house with no significant undeveloped spaces in between. The grid system continues right up until the last house built, presumably to continue in this fashion as the town expands.

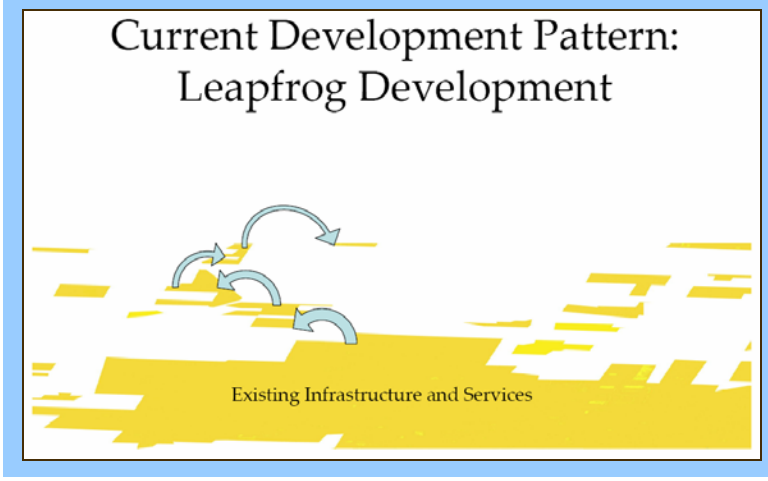
The 1961 and 1980 aerial images depict an increasingly different pattern as larger spaces emerge between the new developments and McAllen's existing urban area. Instead of individual houses that are spread out in the manner of the

Figure 3.6, McAllen Historical Growth Patterns Along the Northern City Boundary



countryside, there are suburban-style subdivisions that have jumped a sizable distance away from the developed area. Finally, the 2004 aerial image illustrates an almost complete fragmentation of fringe development in which new subdivisions exist as virtual islands when compared spatially with the developed area. This is a vast departure from the development patterns that were seen in the fringe areas of the 1939 photo. This growth pattern as it exists today in and around McAllen is typical of many sprawling suburban areas. **Figure 3.7, Current Development Pattern: Leapfrog Development**, exemplifies the land use pattern of one development being spaced

Figure 3.7, Current Development Pattern: Leapfrog Development



farther away than the previous development, while large tracts of undeveloped land lie in between. Later chapters will discuss the implications of such growth, and decisions will need to be made as to future development alternatives and long-term direction.

Existing Zoning

A zoning ordinance regulates land development to protect the public's health, safety, and welfare as established by Section 211 of the Texas Local Government Code. Classic components of a zoning ordinance include districts which set development standards related to land use; lot area; building height, bulk, and setbacks; and off-street parking. The zoning ordinance should provide the necessary guidance for a landowner to understand the potential development options for an individual parcel.

The origin of zoning in McAllen stemmed from the first McAllen City Plan by E. A. Wood, which established zoning concepts in 1927. The Board of Commissioners in 1945 adopted the City's first zoning ordinance, which designated the zoning districts and uses for McAllen. These regulations were subsequently updated in 1960, 1971, and 1977. During these years of impressive growth and development in McAllen, low-intensity uses were allowed to mix with higher-intensity uses. The 1979 zoning ordinance changed course by preventing low-intensity uses (single-family homes) from being developed amid higher-intensity uses (commercial districts and business parks). For better or for worse, this change has led to recent construction of many single-use areas that do not include a mix of uses.

The current zoning consists of 19 zoning districts which regulate land use for residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and special uses. The zoning districts reflect not only the current state of land use, but also the desires for future development in an area. Long-term community goals are achieved through zoning districts that not only improve neighborhoods through change, but also preserve them through regulations that protect existing character. The relationship between zoning and the comprehensive plan is important since the zoning regulations guide new development to fit prescribed policies and standards. Therefore, the goals of the comprehensive plan should drive the criteria of the districts in the zoning ordinance. Potential conflicts between the intent of the comprehensive plan and the implementation of zoning regulations should be remedied so that the plan's goals are promoted and ultimately attained. For instance, if the redevelopment goal of a community is to create more residential units in the traditional downtown, then the zoning ordinance should allow for residential development to occur in the upper stories of buildings or on smaller footprints to fit the existing downtown conditions. A zoning ordinance that retained large lot sizes and high parking requirements and prohibited a mix of uses in a building would act as an impediment to the stated comprehensive plan goal of creating more downtown housing opportunities. Analysis of McAllen's current zoning code will occur throughout the comprehensive plan as it relates to particular issues such as housing, transportation, environmental protection, and civic improvements.

When evaluating the City's zoning, another important consideration is the allocation of current land acreages to each individual district. The zoning regulations should reflect not only the community's goals for future development, but also the existing land use types and market realities. Too much land devoted to one district type, such as high-intensity commercial, may be a mismatch for the real estate market and surrounding community if it results in an abundance of underutilized land. A comparison of McAllen's zoning districts is presented in **Table 3.1, Existing Zoning Coverage**, which details the amount of land within each individual district.

The two primary zoning districts are A-O (agricultural and open space) and R-1 (single-family residential), which reflect the existing development patterns in McAllen. It is possible that the amount of acreage zoned for multi-family housing may be too small to accommodate future community goals and market demands. Although the acreages may reflect existing conditions, there could be a shortage of areas designated for multi-family housing for future needs. This same concern may be true of mixed-use developments as the current zoning ordinance does not allow mixing of uses in all districts.

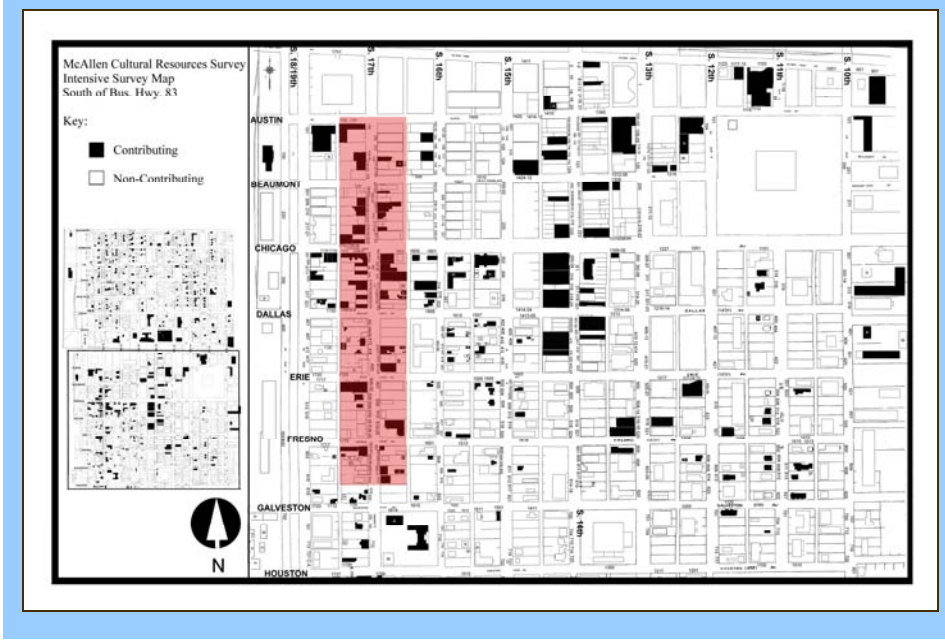
Table 3.1, Existing Zoning Coverage

Zoning District	Total Sum (Acres)	Percent
A-O (Agricultural and Open Space)	10,346	39.1%
C-1 (Office Building)	273	1.0%
C-2 (Neighborhood Commercial)	62	0.2%
C-3 (General Business)	3,095	11.7%
C-3L (Light Commercial)	67	0.3%
C-4 (Commercial Industrial)	386	1.5%
DROD	61	0.2%
ECOD	12	0.0%
H	1	0.0%
I-1 (Light Industrial)	1,462	5.5%
I-2 (Heavy Industrial)	471	1.8%
PID	5	0.0%
PUD	35	0.1%
R-1 (Single Family Residential)	8,154	30.8%
R-2 (Duplex-Fourplex Residential)	575	2.2%
R-3A (Apartments)	632	2.4%
R-3C (Condominiums)	138	0.5%
R-3T (Townhouses)	217	0.8%
R-4 (Mobile Homes)	482	1.8%
Total	**26,474**	**100%**

Historic and Cultural Resources

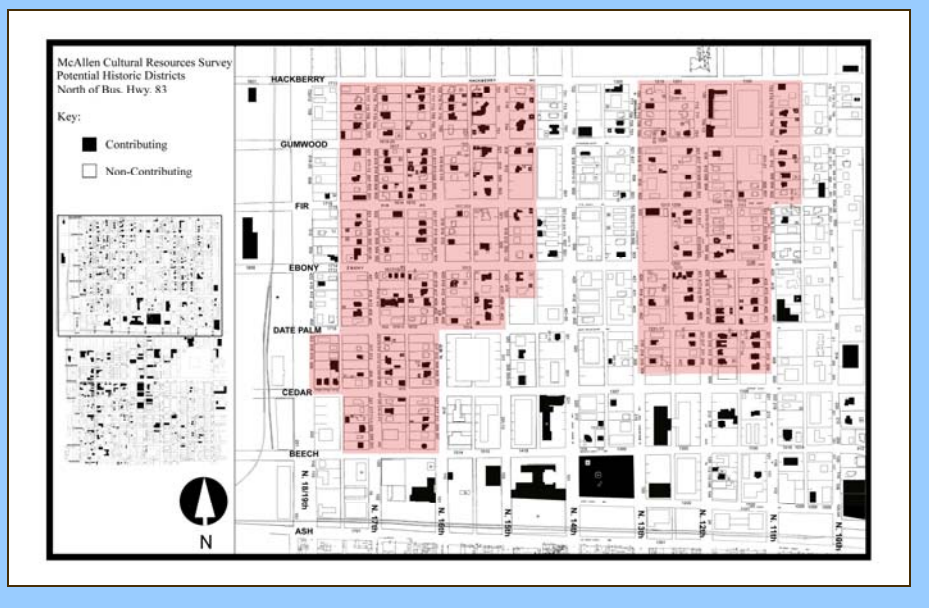
The McAllen community maintains a close relationship with its historical and cultural past through the presence and celebration of many historic and socially meaningful landmarks. McAllen is fortunate to have many buildings that reflect earlier time periods while also creating an identifiable character that remains today. Many of these landmarks are identified in **Figure 3.8, Landmarks**, which was compiled by City of McAllen staff. Some of the identified landmarks include the El Rey Theater, Quinta Mazatlan, Southern Pacific Depot, Miller House, Casa de Palmas, McAllen Post Office, Archer Park, and hospitals and churches.

Figure 3.9, Downtown Historical Survey



McAllen is also home to neighborhoods that retain their original historic architecture and style from the early part of the last century. It is important to recognize the existence of these neighborhoods and ensure their preservation into the future. The City recently solicited a survey of several historic neighborhoods to assess

Figure 3.10, De Palmas Historical Survey



their key features and locations. These two surveys are summarized in **Figure 3.9, Downtown Historical Survey**, and **Figure 3.10, De Palmas Historical Survey**. The identification of these cultural resources is critical to maintaining their character in the future and establishing land use development guidelines that continue to strengthen the community in these historical areas.

Neighborhoods and Housing

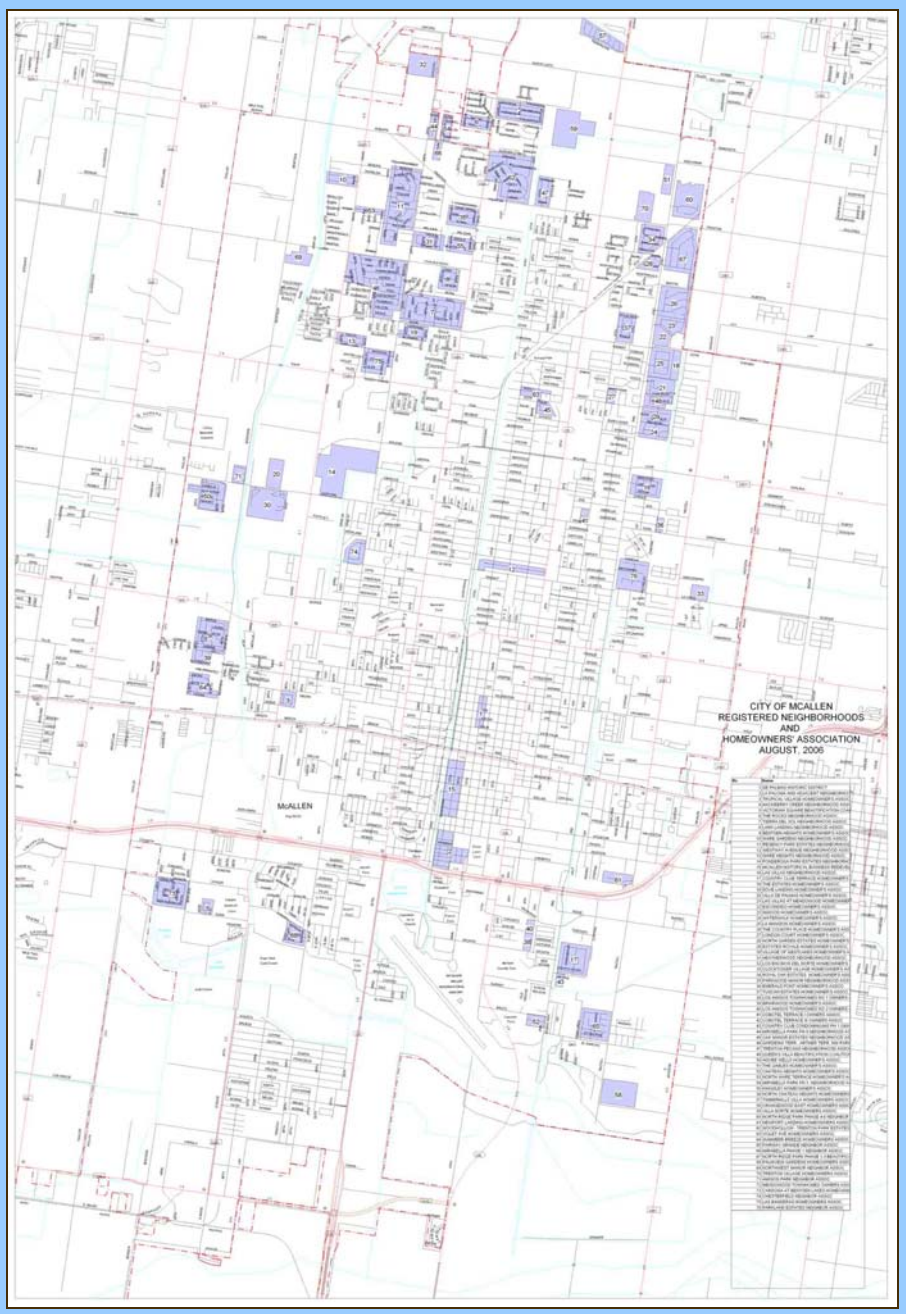
There are certainly community areas that function as a unit based upon access to common resources, such as a local elementary school, church, or park. While the City maintains many distinctive neighbor-hoods, both historical and modern, single- or multi-family, there are no officially recognized neighborhood designations. Despite this lack of an all-inclusive list of neighborhoods or neighborhood organizations, there is a collection of City-registered neighborhoods and home-owner's associations as illustrated in **Figure 3.11, Registered Neighborhoods and Homeowners' Associations**. There are 76 organizations listed on this city-wide map with associated boundaries that vary between one and 10 blocks in size.

Housing characteristics throughout McAllen vary by neighborhood type, age, and location. The overall housing stock age is relatively young, but that follows the trend of McAllen development in general since it is a youthful, growing urban area. As examined by smaller units in **Figure 3.12, Median Year Structure Built**, there is clear age pattern of the housing stock within McAllen that closely follows the annexation pattern. The oldest homes (pre-1960) are found in the central downtown area. The next oldest homes are located just outside this area. This stands to reason since McAllen slowly expanded in all directions from its historic core over time. The most recent developments from the last 20 years are in the fringe areas of McAllen, which represents the areas most recently annexed into the municipal boundaries.

The size of existing McAllen structures is depicted in **Figure 3.13, Number of Bedrooms per Unit**, with bedrooms as an indicator of overall housing unit size. The overall composition of McAllen housing units is primarily split into one-, two-, and three-bedroom units with a small portion in no bedrooms, four bed-rooms, or five or more bed-rooms. This distribution is typical of many urban areas since it is an even split across the housing sizes that are most standard in the real estate market. Within the City, there are spatial distribution patterns that reflect differences in housing sizes in different neighborhoods. The older, central areas tend to exhibit housing types that are primarily characterized by one- and two-bedroom units, with a smaller share of three-bedroom units. There are few four- or five-bedroom units available in any area south of Nolana Avenue and north of the airport. Likewise, there is a shift in housing types near the City's edge where the typical housing unit has three, four, five, or more

bedrooms. In these areas, one- or two-bedroom units are less common, while a no-bedroom loft would be a rare find indeed. This pattern fits the historical development trend in McAllen since the older, central area was developed during an earlier era when the average house size was much smaller. Newer development of single- or multi-family units would not offer one- or two-bedroom units exclusively since the average home size has increased significantly since the early days of McAllen.

Figure 3.11, City of McAllen Registered Neighborhoods and Homeowners' Associations



Source: City of McAllen

This spatial distribution of housing sizes and ages does raise a very important issue of housing availability, which is the ability of residents to choose housing in all neighborhoods. The trend of older housing in the City center and newer housing on the fringe is not necessarily a pattern that should be changed to ensure uniformity across the entire City. Rather, there should be a conscious effort to bring new housing units (not necessarily new housing styles) into older areas that could use redevelopment. As land values escalate in the older neighborhoods, there should be opportunities to create new housing in these areas. This not only injects new life into older neighborhoods, but also allows residents who enjoy a particular part of the City to have a ready supply of housing ages to choose between. This same strategy can be applied to fringe areas so that solid, older housing stock can be preserved. Residents who prefer to live in less dense areas can also have a choice in housing unit age.

While the age of housing stock in which a family resides is primarily based on preference, the choice of housing units with a certain number of bedrooms is a less flexible decision for many households. While a household composed of two people may choose between a no-bedroom, one-bedroom or two-bedroom unit, there is less of a choice for a household with seven people. Assuming they can afford a larger home, it is doubtful that a seven-person household would even consider a one-bedroom or two-bedroom unit. They are restricted to a certain size range simply by the need for personal space for family members. The City-wide trend of smaller units in the central areas results in fewer housing options for large households in these areas. These households find less housing supply available to them in the older areas and have a more abundant supply in the outer fringe. The lack of housing choice within many neighborhoods could create an issue for larger households since they are restricted to the outer areas where development is generally newer and more expensive and homes are located farther from traditional job centers. McAllen is particularly affected by this land use trend since it has a higher than average household size, 3.18, as compared to the nation at 2.59. With roughly one-half extra person per household on average in McAllen, residents have a greater need for housing units with more bedrooms. This additional need for space only emphasizes the need for larger family (3+ bedroom) units to be developed in all neighborhoods across the City. Later discussion in the housing chapter will identify strategies for accommodating this existing need and future growth.



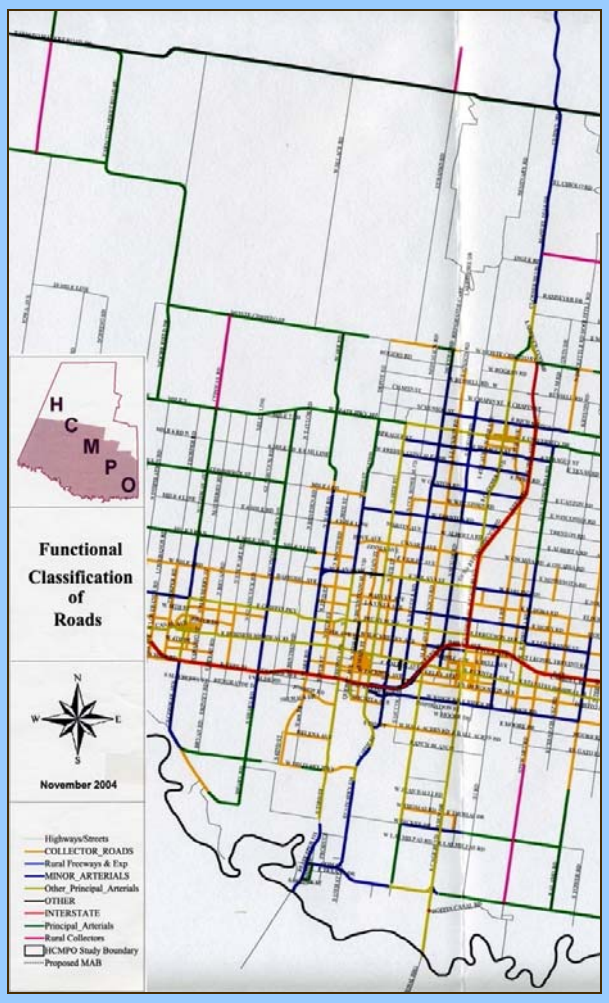
Infrastructure

Transportation

The origins of McAllen's transportation system extend back to the 1927 City Plan for McAllen by E. A. Wood. This forward-thinking plan not only mandated broad concepts such as the adoption of the quarter-mile grid system, but also focused on small details such as the cross-sections for different classes of streets. The solid foundation on which McAllen was planned is still relevant today even though the City has expanded well past its original boundaries and will expand to larger areas in the future. In spite of this growth and modernization since the 1927 Plan, the general design of McAllen's expanding roadway network continued to follow a grid system although there are new subdivisions that incorporate curvilinear streets, especially in the northern areas of the City. The existing street classification system is illustrated in **Figure 3.14, Street Functional Class**, and includes interstate highways, principal arterials, rural freeways, rural collectors, collectors, and local streets.

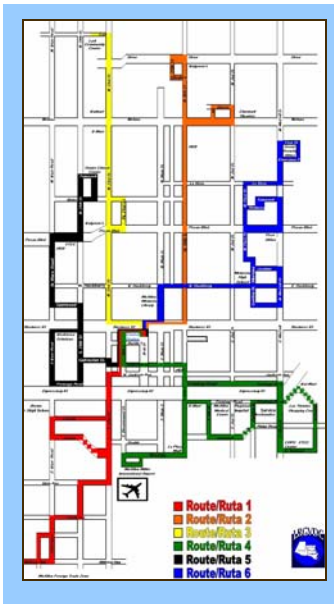
As subdivisions with curvilinear roadway networks gain in popularity, there is the cumulative result of higher transportation demands on collector and arterial routes for the larger area. The dramatic growth in the McAllen ETJ needs to be monitored closely so that the addition of more rural subdivisions does not overload a road network that traditionally existed primarily for agricultural traffic demands. One future challenge for McAllen will be the improvement of rural roads that face increased traffic from ongoing, rapid development in the north area of McAllen and its ETJ.

Figure 3.14, Street Functional Class



Source: Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization

Miller International Airport (MFE) plays a significant role in the urban form of McAllen and also has implications for broader land use. The airport's central location, southeast of the downtown area, allows for quick and easy access to the airport for businesses and residents alike. This proximity is rare for a major urban area. Efforts should be made to improve connectivity between the airport and neighboring destinations, such as the downtown or civic center. Integrating access into the existing transportation and land use systems will allow for a more seamless community and reduce barriers to travel and trade. Of course, this proximity to neighborhoods and the downtown can also create nuisance issues that need to be addressed. The noise from air traffic can disrupt local neighborhoods, while development pressure near the airport may impair its ability to expand and create new facilities. Regulations governing development near the airport and in flight path areas should be reviewed to determine the appropriate level of building heights, uses, and services for these special areas.



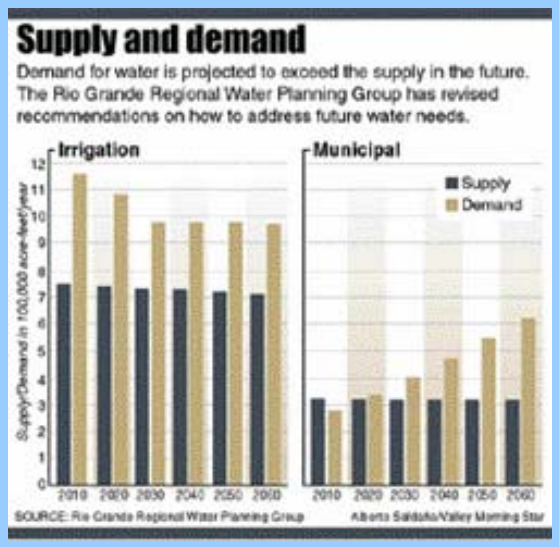
The McAllen Express bus service began in June 1997 as a local transit option for the downtown area. Six routes currently operate on a roughly hourly schedule from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., Monday through Saturday. The one-way fare is $1.00 for adults and 50 cents for children and senior citizens. The bus lines operate out of the main bus terminal at Central Station where connections can be made to regional bus service in the United States and Mexico. The downtown location of Central Station puts travelers in the midst of many of McAllen's local attractions and businesses. McAllen intra-city bus travel averages 28,417 person trips per month.

Water

The boundary of McAllen water distribution is depicted in **Figure 3.15, McAllen Water Service Area**, which details the spatial distribution of the McAllen Water Certificate of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) area. As mentioned previously in regards to the plight of contemporary irrigation districts, access to water is a fundamental issue in the future development of the Rio Grande Valley's urban and agricultural sectors. This water scarcity also affects municipal users as growing communities such as McAllen are forced to purchase additional water rights and seek alternative water sources. Short-term effects of additional water purchases may be a steady increase in the price of water for residents as growth forces increased competition for the same level of Rio Grande water resources.

Long-range planning will involve analysis of alternative water supplies that become financially feasible with increased water prices. According to five-year plans for the Rio Grande Valley submitted to the Texas Water Development Board in 2006, these alternative options will likely include a combination of desalination, reclaimed water use, and increased purchases of Rio Grande water rights. However, **Figure 3.16, Water Supply and Demand**, predicts that municipal demands will outstrip supply by 2020. This eventual supply-and-demand mismatch will create a situation where the market value of water hastens the need for municipalities to adopt alternatives. Municipal conservation options may include, among other programs, the re-use of non-potable "greywater" for parks and lawns. McAllen will need to take into account these new water market realities and respond with its own balanced program to lower demand through conservation, while also securing new water resources to increase supply.

Figure 3.16, Water Supply and Demand



Source: Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group

Sewer

The sanitary sewer system in McAllen collects and treats wastewater within the City limits according to the Sewer Certificate of Convenience and Necessity (CCN) service area mapped in **Figure 3.17, McAllen Sewer Service Area**. There are rural areas in the ETJ and some areas within the City that rely on on-site treatment systems.

Drainage

In addition to the natural floodplains that exist in the areas surrounding McAllen, there are many man-made stormwater improvements that provide flood relief for developed areas as shown in **Figure 3.18, Existing Drainage Areas**. This is especially important since the topography is mostly flat and the natural systems are relatively ineffective at removing significant amounts of water. The City has created four main drainageways that channel water away from the developed areas: Mission Floodway Pilot Channel, Southeast Main Drain (2nd Street ditch), North Main Drain (18th Street ditch), and the Rado Drain. Some of these main lines also have smaller collector facilities which store runoff in linear detention areas. These drainageways are spread throughout McAllen and are also a consideration in the building of new roads

since increased engineering is required to facilitate their construction. Hidalgo County also maintains and constantly improves its drainage system that functions to remove water from the areas around McAllen.

Community Facilities

Public Buildings

McAllen's urban form is also characterized by the presence of various public and quasi-public institutions that perform vital roles and deliver services to local residents. Several of these institutions are historical assets in McAllen whose buildings serve as an important component of the local cultural fabric. Among these institutions are the municipal service facilities of the Municipal Building, Public Safety Building, Civic Center, Central Station, and Memorial Library. The school and park systems are quite extensive in McAllen and function locally as neighborhood amenities, as well as collectively by offering a high-quality network of available options to residents.

Schools

The McAllen Independent School District (MISD) includes 19 elementary schools, six middle schools, three high schools, one guidance center, two private schools, and one early childhood learning center. The City of McAllen is served primarily by MISD although the municipal limits also include portions of adjacent school districts including: Hidalgo ISD, Edinburg CISD, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD, and Sharyland ISD. As depicted in **Figure 3.19, Schools and School Districts**, there are educational facilities distributed across the city.

Three additional elementary schools and one middle school, one in Sharyland ISD and three in McAllen ISD, are planned in the northwest area of the city, which follows the existing pattern of new population growth. Since it is anticipated that future growth will occur in the northwestern portion of the McAllen City limits, there should be consideration of additional schools as new neighborhoods are being designed. The presence of Sharyland ISD and Edinburg ISD in this area also requires that new residential growth be closely coordinated with the needs of the particular district responsible for educational facility expansions and yearly programs and maintenance.



Parks

McAllen has an expansive park inventory offering a wide variety of recreational opportunities to its citizens. Based on a community survey conducted in 2000, McAllen residents are quite happy with their

parks. Existing and future park needs should take into account the fact that the McAllen population is relatively young—more than a third are under the age of 18 and only 10 percent are 65 years and older.

The park system owned and operated by the City of McAllen, as displayed in **Figure 3.20, McAllen Park System**, includes 794.40 acres of land (418.90 developed acres and 375.50 of undeveloped land). This excludes the acreage of special use facilities. The acreage is divided among:

- five community parks totaling 131.73 acres;
- eighteen neighborhood parks accounting for 123.4 acres (plus 13 school sites with 57.51 total acres included here as a sub-category of neighborhood parks);
- four pocket-parks at 4.32 acres;
- fourteen special use facilities totaling 144.7 acres; and
- five linear parks with 102 acres.



A comprehensive analysis of parks and recreation opportunities in McAllen is currently underway through preparation of a new parks master plan, the final version of which is scheduled for release in late 2006. Each City park has been visited and inventoried and assessment scores were assigned to each to indicate relative priorities for facility upgrades and repairs. More detailed information will be included in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

4
CHAPTER

Mobility

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

Planning in advance for transportation system development is important to meet the City's future travel demands and ensure safe and orderly movement of traffic within and through the community and throughout the region. It is also important in achieving economic development objectives to improve national and international access to markets, whether by air, rail, bus, or interstate highways. A well-planned and regularly maintained transportation system also contributes to character and appearance, as well as to the quality of life of residents.

This chapter is entitled mobility because each mode of transport is essential to meet the future area travel demands. The rate of growth in McAllen, as well as the greater metropolitan area,[1] merits continued development and expansion of other mode choices. Without development of a complete system of transportation alternatives, congested travel conditions will worsen, causing undesirable and unintended effects on the community's environment, economic development, and quality of life.

The McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) ranks 74th out of 276 MSAs in total population in the United States.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

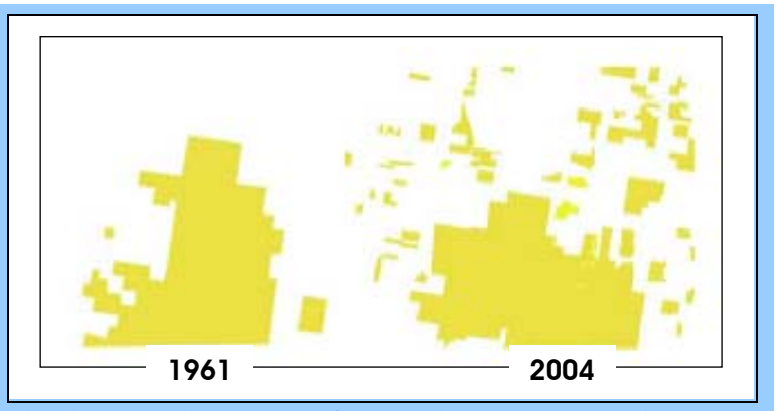
The street system necessitates significant attention since 77 percent of commuting trips are by way of a single occupant vehicle.[2] The public transportation system is also evaluated to coordinate the City's growth plan with the requisite future transit improvements. The density and pattern of development contribute to the propensity of future transit use. This relationship is of relevance as the land use and growth policies formulated in this plan will, to a large extent, determine the future feasibility of increased transit services. Considering the potential for an investment in high-capacity transit, the policies and subsequent implementing regulations are vital if the City is to realize its economic potential. Development must occur in a more transit-supportive manner and adequate rights-of-way must be preserved so as not to eliminate this as a viable future alternative. Short-sighted decisions may hinder the

[1] The Hidalgo County metropolitan planning area has been among the top five fastest growing metropolitan areas in the U.S. each year since 1986, Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2005-2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, December 2004

[2] Reference Figure 2.22, Transportation Mode Shares for Commuting to Work, Chapter 2, Community Overview

long-term outlook of the community without the foresight and preparedness to act in the best interests of future generations.

There is an essential relationship between this and other elements of the plan. For instance, the future land use and overall development patterns help determine the transportation infrastructure necessary to meet the future mobility needs. The transportation system also relates to growth management (Subsection V.3), housing and neighborhoods (Subsection V.4), and economic development (Subsection V.5). The transportation system is vital to the movement of goods and services, thereby having direct influence on the community's economic development. Businesses seeking to locate or expand are interested in their access to and within the community and, in the case of a major industry, the proximity to a border crossing or the expressway.



The change in the pattern of growth between 1961 and 2004 has caused a significant demand for more transportation infrastructure in the outlying, growing areas.

Transportation arteries provide opportunities for linear connections via sidewalks and/or bicycle trails, which complement the parks and recreation system. The design of roadways also determines the type and character of development. In essence, transportation is a common thread that ties this plan together.

This plan focuses on the key issues that must be addressed for the community to achieve its vision for the future transportation system. There is a range of issues relating to the multi-modal transportation system in McAllen and throughout the greater metropolitan area, which are described below and articulated in **Appendix B, Streets & Transportation**.

Efficiency of the Street System

Future thoroughfare development must achieve continuity and connectivity to be functionally efficient. To do so, the City's plan, development requirements, and approval procedures must stipulate applicable standards so as to avoid discontinuous and irregular street patterns, particularly in the outlying areas where development is occurring in a noncontiguous manner. Barriers to connectivity, such as the railroad and irrigation canals, must be overcome. Also, the traffic carrying capacity of roadways must be preserved and improved through appropriate design of the street system and adequate standards for property access.

Transportation System Management (TSM) is the improvement of vehicular flow by implementing low-cost measures that increase the efficiency of the existing road pavement and avoid the need for major roadway expansion. Examples of such measures include traffic signal and intersection improvements, one-way road pairs, access control measures, and removal of on-street parking.

Source: Your Government & Community Online Resource, Martin County, FL

Goals

- Appropriate functional classification of the street system to achieve adequate mobility

- Maximized continuity of the roadway network to form a highly functional, interconnected system of streets
- Congestion mitigation through transportation system management (TSM)
- Improved traffic flow and maximized carrying capacity of roadways through managed access
- A transportation system that is commensurate with the type, pattern, and density of land use
- Improved vehicular and pedestrian travel safety
- Improved traffic distribution within and between neighborhoods
- Preservation of rights-of-way in advance of ensuing development
- Improved neighborhood integrity and traffic calming through a well-designed local and collector street system

Recommendations

Table 4.1, Functional Classification

Criterion	Freeway	High Speed and Principal Arterial	Minor Arterial	Major and Minor Collector	Local Street
Functional Role	Entirely through traffic movement with no direct access to property.	Mobility is primary, access is secondary. Connects Freeways and other Arterials.	Connects Freeways, Principal Arterials, and lower classifcation roadways. Access is secondary.	Collects traffic destined for the Arterial network. Connects Arterials to Local Streets. Also land access.	Access is primary. Little through movement.
Roadway Continuity	Inter-city, regional, and interstate	Connects Freewways to lower classification roadways. Connects major activity centers.	Connects Freeways and Principal Arterials to lower classification roadways.	Continuous between Arterials. May extend across Arterials.	Discontinuous. Connects to Collectors.
Roadway Length	Usually more than 5 miles	Usually more than 5 miles	Usually more than 3 miles	Varies from roughly one-half mile to 2 miles	Generally less than 1 mile
Traffic Volumes (VPD = vehicles per day)	40,000+ VPD	20,000 to 60,000 VPD	5,000 to 30,000 VPD	1,000 to 15,000 VPD	100 to 5,000 VPD
Desirable Spacing	5 miles or more	2 miles or more	Generally one-half to 2 miles	Generally one-quarter to one-half mile	Varies with block length (at least 125 feet between)
Posted Speed	55 to 70 mph	40 to 55 mph	30 to 45 mph	30 to 35 mph	20 to 30 mph
Access	Controlled access. Grade separated interchanges and frontage/service roads.	Intersects with Freeways, Arterials, Collectors, and Local Streets. Restrited driveway access.	Intersects with Freeways, Arterials, Collectors, and Local Streets. Restrited driveway access.	Intersects with Arterials and Local Strets. Driveways limited.	Intersects with Collectors and Arterials. Driveways permitted.
On-Street Parking	Prohibited	Restricted	Restricted	Normally permitted	Permitted
Community Relationship	Defines neighborhood boundaries	Defines neighborhood boundaries	Defines and traverses neighborhood boundaries	Internal and traverses neighborhood boundaries	Internal
Through Truck Routes	Yes	Yes	Permitted	No	No
Bikeways	No	Limited	Permitted	Yes	Yes
Sidewalks	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

1. Adopt the functional classifications of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), as shown in **Table 4.1, Functional Classification**, with the following policies and design criteria amendments:[3]

   a. High-Speed Arterials
      1. High-speed arterials may be used where access is restricted to intersecting arterials spaced no less than one mile apart.
      2. Property access to high-speed arterials should be fully restricted. Marginal access roads should connect only to intersecting arterial streets and in no case to a high-speed arterial.
      3. Grass or raised medians should be included in the design cross-section with median breaks only as warranted by a traffic study.
      4. All traffic signals should be synchronized to maximize traffic carrying capacity.
      5. A portion of the right-of-way should be preserved as a potential high-capacity transit lane until which time a regional high-capacity transit study is completed and routes are determined.

   b. Principal and Minor Arterials
      1. Principal and minor arterial streets are to be reserved for locations where the abutting land use and development within the traffic shed does not exceed 60,000 vehicles per day (VPD) and 30,000 VPD, respectively.
      2. Access to high-intensity land uses should be limited by way of cross and joint access agreements and marginal access roads.
      3. Access points should be a minimum distance of 120 feet from street intersections.
      4. A raised median should be included in the design cross-section of all new principal arterial streets where the abutting property is not yet developed. A raised median may be included for minor arterial streets, where warranted. For largely developed areas, an access study should be prepared to determine the feasibility of raised medians.
      5. Access points should be aligned with median breaks and access points across the street.
      6. Local streets should not access principal arterial roadways. Rather, they should access a collector roadway to minimize the impedance of traffic and maximize the traffic carrying capacity of the principal arterial street.
      7. Residential driveway access shall not be allowed onto a principal arterial street.
      8. Collector roadways should maintain a spacing of approximately one-quarter to one-half mile, which may be signalized with a principal arterial street.
      9. Acceleration and deceleration lanes should be provided at all intersections to facilitate safe turning movements, as warranted by a traffic impact study.
      10. Parking should not be permitted on principal or minor arterial streets.
      11. A signal warrant study should be conducted to determine the location of signalized intersections.
      12. Pedestrian crossing improvements should be limited to signalized intersection locations. Such improvements should include crosswalk delineation via reflective paint or pavement texturing, American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements, pedestrian and bicycle

Analogous to the concept of a watershed, essentially a traffic shed evaluates traffic patterns in outlying areas and provides a form of analysis and a regulatory approach for managing traffic volumes commensurate with the capacity of the roadway.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

[3] Referenced amendments are to Section V, Thoroughfare Plan, Foresight McAllen: A Growth Management Guide for the 21st Century

actuated signals, pavement markings, and signage. An underwalk or overwalk may be warranted at mid-point crossings.

13. An eight-foot wide trail section should be incorporated on one side of all principal and minor arterial streets.
14. A portion of the right-of-way of principal arterial streets should be preserved as a potential high-capacity transit lane until which time a regional high capacity transit study is completed and routes are determined.

c. Major and Minor Collectors

1. Collector streets should be spaced at one-half mile intervals.
2. Minor collector streets should be determined by a government development plan or a local circulation plan prepared by the city.
3. Minor collector streets are for spacing between arterial and major collector streets where there are no more than 10,000 VPD.
4. Collector streets should cross irrigation canals and other barriers to provide for street continuity.
5. Collector roadways should not be designated as truck routes, unless special precautions are taken with respect to design (curb return radii, minimum tangent lengths between reverse curves, construction specifications, etc.) and the abutting land use.
6. Driveways should not access major collector streets and should be allowed for properties abutting no more than 25 percent of the lot frontage abutting minor collector streets.
7. Collectors should extend continuously between arterial streets.
8. Traffic calming techniques should be used to slow traffic along continuous sections of collector roadways.
9. Sidewalks should be located on both sides of all major and minor collector streets.
10. Traffic control devices should be installed according to the Uniform Traffic Control Manual.

d. Local Streets

1. Amend the subdivision regulations to include performance standards for local streets, where the type of access, number of dwelling units served, and the units' average frontages determine the right-of-way, pavement width, parking lanes, curb width, parkways, and sidewalks. Therefore, the right-of-way and street design are directly tied to development density and traffic volumes.
2. Amend the subdivision regulations to incorporate street design standards, including the requirements for right-of-way and pavement width. The standards should be linked to vehicles per day or other roadway operating characteristics.
3. Traffic calming techniques may be used to slow traffic, particularly adjacent to schools, parks, and public buildings.
4. Traffic control devices should be installed according to the Uniform Traffic Control Manual.

Traffic Calming involves changes in street alignment, installation of barriers, and other physical measures to reduce traffic speeds and/or cut-through volumes, in the interest of street safety, livability, and other public purposes.



Speed Hump



Roundabout



Narrowed Entrance



Street Closure



Choker

Traffic impact studies help communities to:

- Forecast additional traffic associated with new development.
- Determine the improvements that are necessary to accommodate new development.
- Assist communities in land use decision making.
- Assist in allocating scarce resources to areas which need improvements
- Allow the community to assess the impacts that a proposed development may have.
- Help to ensure safe and reasonable traffic conditions on streets after the development is complete.
- Reduce the negative impacts created by developments by helping to ensure that the transportation network can accommodate the development.
- Provide direction to community decision makers and developers of expected impacts.
- Protect the substantial community investment in the street system.

Source: Community Guide to Development Impact Analysis

2. Amend the thoroughfare plan based upon the adopted land use plan. Upon adoption, coordinate with the MPO.[4] to integrate it into the Hidalgo County Thoroughfare Plan, adopted as part of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP).
3. Incorporate the future land use plan into the urban area transportation model to define the classifications of streets and the roadway capacities. The use of character-based land use designations allows quantification of transportation impacts, including population and dwelling unit counts, trip generation, and other model inputs. The land use model developed as part of this plan may be organized into traffic analysis zones (TAZs) as the planning variable inputs into the transportation model. In this way, there is a high level of coordination between the adopted land use and growth plans and the resulting thoroughfare network, thereby greatly improving the accuracy of trip generation and the corresponding assignment and distribution of trips.
4. Perform a street network study to evaluate the connectivity of the existing street system. The study should identify opportunities for extending existing roadways. A subsequent traffic study should determine and prioritize those that would improve safety and ease congestion. For newly developing areas, the subdivision regulations[5] should require the connectivity of streets between proposed new and existing subdivisions.
5. Amend the subdivision regulations[6] to specify the required right-of-way and pavement widths of each street classification, including the conditions for which additional right-of-way or street width is required or may be narrowed.
6. Establish that private subdivisions[7] shall not terminate an existing or planned collector or arterial roadway. Alternatively, a private subdivision may propose a realignment of a collector or arterial road as long as its function and intent is preserved.
7. Incorporate provisions requiring a traffic impact study for conditions that exceed a certain traffic generation threshold or specified development conditions. Require submission of a study prior to the official acceptance of an application for subdivision or property development.
8. Perform localized traffic calming studies where there are continuous, straight streets (for a distance of 500 feet or more) carrying volumes of traffic in excess of 100 vehicles per hour during peak hours, when

[4] The Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which is the area-wide agency charged with the conduct of the urban transportation planning process, and is the designated recipient of Federal funds for the transportation planning process.

[5] Chapter 134, Subdivisions, Sec. 134-105. Street requirements, (b) Relation to adjoining street systems

[6] Chapter 134, Subdivisions, Sec. 134-105. Street requirements, (j) Pavement widths of rights-of-way

[7] Chapter 134, Subdivisions, Division 3. Private subdivisions, Sec. 134-167. Private streets and sidewalks; gated entries

actual speeds exceed the posted limit on a regular basis, and/or when the street is in close proximity to a school, park, or other location frequented by children. The study should identify the recommended improvements based upon site-specific conditions.

9. Conduct a street access study to evaluate the feasibility of local street closures at their intersections with N. 10th Street and N. 23rd Street generally between U.S. 83 and W. Pecan Boulevard. Such closure(s) would lessen the impedance of traffic flows caused by vehicles entering/exiting these streets and reduce traffic volumes on these local residential streets.
10. Include a provision in the subdivision regulations authorizing the City to develop local circulation plans in lieu of general development plans. This provision would allow the City to determine a street layout plan for an area that has constraints or unique circumstances warranting special study.



Excessive street connections impede traffic flow, as seen along 10th Street.

11. Require major collector streets to be spaced every one-half mile and minor collector streets every one-quarter mile between arterial streets, whether or not they are reflected on the Thoroughfare Plan. Include performance criteria determining the warrant for collector streets based on the density of development and the resulting traffic generation.
12. Amend the Thoroughfare Plan to designate boulevard (divided arterial with a center raised or depressed median) or parkway (street section with open space to one side; similar to Col. Rowe Blvd) street sections, as well as transit street sections. The purpose of boulevards and parkways is functional by way of improved traffic management, as well as allowable space for irrigation, storm detention, and other underground utility transmission. Transit street sections are intended to secure adequate rights-of-way to accommodate a fixed or flexible route, high-capacity transit system in the future.
13. Consider the inclusion of a connectivity index which conditions curvilinear, discontinuous streets, dead-ends, and cul-de-sacs on the basis of continuity and points of access. Generally, a certain point threshold must be met to permit subdivision approval.
14. Amend the zoning ordinance to include a housing palette, which specifies the dimensional criteria for different housing types. This is relevant to the location and amount of on-lot parking to avoid overflow parking on streets. In this way, a sufficient travel lane width may be protected and the street capacity preserved.
15. Adopt access management regulations to restrict the number, location, and spacing of driveways; street intersections, medians and median openings; marginal access roads, turn lanes, and acceleration/deceleration lanes at major intersections. This is particularly important on 10th Street, as well as on each of the major and minor arterials. The regulations should require marginal access roads and/or cross access easements along all commercial frontage abutting arterial and collector roads to minimize

According to the Metropolitan Transportation Plan, the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) "urges member municipalities to explore and implement ordinances and regulations that will target the reduction of congestion on the area's transportation infrastructure.

Source: Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2005-2030 Metropolitan

the number of driveways. The number of residential streets with access to arterial streets should be restricted by requiring marginal access streets or collector roadways located no less than 660 feet apart.

16. Require shared driveways and cross-access easements between adjacent and abutting properties to eliminate the need to use the public street for access between adjoining businesses.
17. Periodically conduct signal warrant studies as area travel volumes increase with new development. In areas that are already managed by traffic signals, signal timing should be reviewed, particularly in congested areas, to determine if timed traffic signals are appropriate relative to the volume and peaks in traffic flow Pedestrian and bicycle actuated traffic signals should be installed at intersections around South Texas College, specifically, as well as near schools, parks, and other areas with high pedestrian traffic.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility

"Walkability is the cornerstone and key to an urban area's efficient ground transportation. Every trip begins and ends with walking. Walking remains the cheapest form of transport for all people, and the construction of a walkable community provides the most affordable transportation system any community can plan, design, construct and maintain. Walkable communities put urban environments back on a scale for sustainability of resources (both natural and economic) and lead to more social interaction, physical fitness and diminished crime and other social problems. Walkable communities are more livable communities and lead to whole, happy, healthy lives for the people who live in them."

Source: Walkable Communities, Inc.

A dense and comprehensive grid of bikeways, walking trails, and other non-motorized linkages is among the highest priorities according to the input of residents, as well as via an attitudinal survey conducted with the City's Parks Master Plan.[8] Achieving a pedestrian system, though, requires advanced planning and effective ordinance provisions to secure the necessary rights-of-way and assure sustainable design standards. Reconstruction or installation of new sidewalks is an essential element of a complete pedestrian system and for achieving improved community walkability.

Goals

- Comprehensive, interconnected grid of trails, greenways, and pedestrian linkages to improve non-motorized circulation
- Public corridors that are planned, designed, and constructed for multiple transportation modes and functions
- Highly coordinated long-range transportation planning and capital programming
- Incentives for greenway and pedestrian system development
- Mitigation of barriers to intra-neighborhood and City-wide circulation
- Improved pedestrian and non-motorized systems and handicap accessibility
- Increased pedestrian safety around schools, parks, public spaces, and other areas

[8] Source: A Parks and Recreation Master Plan/Recovery Action Plan for the City of McAllen, January 20, 2000

Recommendations

1. Update the McAllen Pathways & Recreational Trails Study[9] to identify a network of on- and off-street linear connections between neighborhoods, parks, and schools, with prioritization of improvement packages. An existing sidewalk and trail inventory will be an essential prerequisite for this study.
2. Prepare a gap and needs assessment to determine immediate and near-term improvements to connect existing sidewalks and trails. Such improvements may include short trail or sidewalk connectors, intersection or crossing projects, or improved signage.
3. Amend the roadway cross-sections and design standards for all arterial and collector street projects to incorporate an eight-foot wide sidewalk/trail. Design considerations include minimum bridge clearance for trail underpasses and bridge approach and interchange design standards.
4. Solicit the involvement of local interest groups and other agencies, organizations, and jurisdictions to provide funding assistance or in-kind services for the construction of trails and nature walks.
5. Amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate density bonuses to offset the imposition of land dedication or fee in-lieu requirements for parkland. This is accomplished by adjusting the maximum allowable densities such that an equivalent development yield is achieved while setting aside land for trails and greenways.
6. Require the inclusion of trails in all subdivisions, subject to standards as to the minimum required connections. For subdivisions with rural street standards and an average lot size in excess of one acre, trails may be constructed in lieu of sidewalks, subject to certain standards and requirements. Incorporate provisions requiring public access easements at intervals of every 600 feet, which must be shown on a preliminary plat. In the case of private subdivisions, the trail system may also be private provided the continuity of the City-wide trail network is not interrupted.
7. Regularly update the sidewalk inventory including an inventory of existing ADA accessible ramps and curb cuts. Subsequently, prepare a five-year capital improvement program (CIP) with prioritization assigned to areas around schools, parks, and other public areas. Budget annually for sidewalk improvement, replacement, and construction. Alternatively, establish a public improvement district (PID) whereby the improvement costs are proportionately allocated to property owners.



Pedestrian underwalks provide a safe crossing of significant barriers such as arterial streets. Such improvements must be accounted for during the platting and design phases of new development.

Public Improvement Districts (PIDs) are created to provide special services and improvements, such as sidewalks and trails, landscaping, parking, enhanced security, and marketing. Property owners in the PID pay special property assessments into a fund administered by the City in conjunction with an advisory body. A City Council approved service plan is established for a period of five years and can be renewed for five-year periods thereafter.

Property owners can apply for a PID. Community-based organizations could assist or become an advisory body for property owners petitioning for PID status. PIDs are most suitable for areas where property owners have the financial ability to pay for improvements through additional tax assessments.

Source: City of Houston

[9] City of McAllen Parks and Recreation Department, September 1993

8. Amend the subdivision regulations[10] to increase the minimum width of sidewalks from four to five feet. Furthermore, specify the recommendations for sidewalks in commercial, industrial, public, and multi-family areas, rather than leaving it discretionary.
9. Prepare a Safe Sidewalks Program to identify those locations where the condition and maintenance of the sidewalk are particularly important, such as areas prone to heavy utilization. Submit a proposal to the Texas Safe Routes to School (SRS) program.[11]
10. Where warranted, for funding assistance install medians/esplanades along the arterial adjacent to public parks and buildings for use as a pedestrian refuge to shorten the unprotected distance across wider roadways. Install ramps for persons with disabilities; marked, signed and/or signaled pedestrian crossings; and pedestrian-actuated signal detectors at key locations throughout the community.
11. Include requirements for the installation of bicycle racks at commercial developments over 15,000 square feet and for businesses employing more than 10 persons.

Adequate Transportation Infrastructure

The pattern of urban development contributes substantially to the adequacy of the transportation infrastructure. Scattered, peripheral development limits continuity of streets, sidewalks, and trails; prematurely burdens the existing infrastructure systems; and creates unsafe conditions and other unintended outcomes. Furthermore, it places a fiscal strain on public resources to prematurely improve infrastructure in an inefficient manner. Therefore, growth management has a direct, causal link to the adequacy and efficiency of the transportation system.

Impact fee means a charge or assessment imposed by a political subdivision against new development in order to generate revenue for funding or recouping the costs of capital improvements or facility expansions necessitated by and attributable to the new development..

Source: Chapter 395. Financing Capital Improvements Required by New Development in Municipalities, Counties, and Certain Other Local Governments, Texas Local Government Code

Goals

- Consideration of roadway design and functional capacities in the pattern and timing of new development
- Capital street infrastructure planning and improvement coordinated with the City's land use and growth plans
- Adequate transportation infrastructure concurrent with new development
- Improvement program or fees that are proportional to the costs attributable to new development
- Fair and equitable financing methods for street improvements and capacity enhancements
- Continued and expanded coordination with other jurisdictions of government
- Creative development options that are coordinated with street design capacities and adequate levels of service

Recommendations

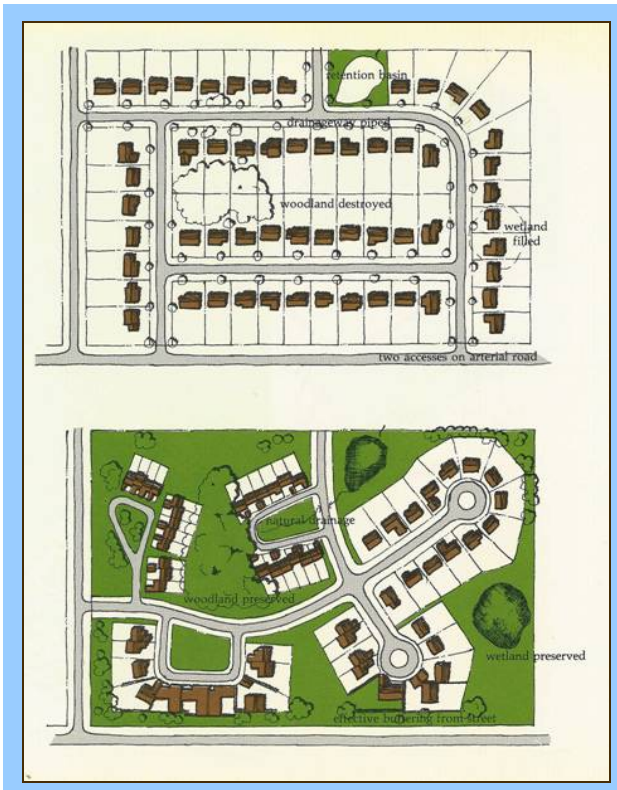
1. Inventory all roads in the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ), including right-of-way widths, surface types and widths, types of cross-sections, locations and widths of culverts and bridges, traffic control devices, and

[10] Sec. 134-120. Sidewalks

[11] Texas is expected to receive approximately $40 million in Safe Routes to School funding from 2005 to 2009

obstructions. Integrate this data into a database in the City's geographic information system (GIS) for use in capital infrastructure planning and plat consideration. Assign the requisite design capacity of each roadway to identify a level of service standard and the threshold at which the capacity will be exceeded.

2. Explore the practical and legal validity of different approaches for ensuring adequate transportation infrastructure concurrent with new development. Among the options is concurrency management, which allows development up to an allowable density that does not exceed the roadway capacity threshold. Traffic sheds proportionally allocate allowable densities across the area for which the generated trips originate, which is coupled with development clustering allowing continued development which there is added capacity. Seek a legal opinion from the Attorney General, in coordination with the Texas Chapter of the American Planning Association (APA) and the Texas Municipal League (TML). Refer to **Appendix B, Streets & Transportation** for more information.
3. Prepare a capital improvement plan that identifies the timing and sequencing of capital roadway and other infrastructure improvements, consistent with the adopted future land use and growth plans. The capital plan may also be used to calculate an impact fee. The recommended capital plan should describe the existing roadways and the costs to expand, improve, or replace them; an analysis of the total capacity, level of current usage, and commitments for usage; proposed improvements and the costs attributable to new development; and a quantified generation by land use type, among other requirements.
4. Conduct a traffic impact fee study for the City.
5. Consider public improvement districts to undertake improvement projects that confer a special benefit on a definable part of the City or ETJ. A project may include "acquiring, constructing, improving, widening, narrowing, closing, or rerouting of sidewalks or streets and rights-of-way."[12] This may be a viable alternative for the approval of subdivisions in the ETJ where, in many cases, the existing road conditions and capacities are inadequate to support the traffic generated by the new development.
6. Consider the use of development agreements within the ETJ to provide for street and road drainage and water, wastewater, and other utility systems.[13] Such agreements would allow the City to extend its planning authority and enforcement of its development regulations in exchange for continuation of the extraterritorial status for a prescribed period of time.



Development clustering allows property to be built concurrently with the availability of adequate transportation infrastructure, without compromising development efficiency and feasibility.

[12] Sec. 372.003. Authorized Improvements, Chapter 372. Improvement Districts in Municipalities and Counties, Texas Local Government Code

[13] Sec. 212.172. Development Agreement, Chapter 212. Municipal Regulation of Subdivisions and Property Development, Texas Local Government Code

7. Establish an interlocal agreement with Hidalgo County to "establish a single set of consolidated and consistent regulations related to plats, subdivision construction plans, and the subdivisions of land."[14] This would allow for procedural consistency and enable better control of roadway capacities.
8. Incorporate provisions for development clustering to enable properties to build out over time as increased road capacity becomes available. Incorporate standards for increased density for clustered development to serve as an incentive for this development type.
9. Consider a transferable development rights (TDR) program whereby an equivalent – or higher – density to that allowed by right under the current regulations could be transferred from the ETJ to a designated receiving zone that is appropriate for increased density, such as downtown.

Public Transportation

While the street system demands substantial investment due to its increasing use and congestion, there is a growing population who are dependent on public transportation. In a climate where outside funding sources are shrinking and there is an increased competition for limited public funds, it is difficult to meet the requisite needs of the community. The rate of growth in McAllen warrants near-term planning and decision-making regarding the eventual need for a high-capacity transit system. Such advanced planning must occur soon to avoid short-sighted decisions that may hinder the long-term economic growth of this City and region. Here again, the growth policies of this community and the resulting form and density of development will dictate the warrant and feasibility of a more efficient transportation system.

Goals

- Expanded transit services concurrent with expected population and employment growth
- Increased intra-city, inter-city, regional national, and international mobility for both transit dependent persons and choice riders
- Advanced planning for increased investment in public transportation
- Improved site design to facilitate increased transit access and usage
- Improved regional coordination and public transit availability
- Improved transportation relations and interaction with Mexico
- Adequate long-term commitment of funding for improved regional transportation services
- Increased transit options for all residents, visitors, and tourists
- Incorporation of transit improvements into capital street projects
- Public education and marketing of available transit services
- Transit-supportive land use and growth pattern
- Reduced single-occupant travel through increased high capacity transit options

Recommendations

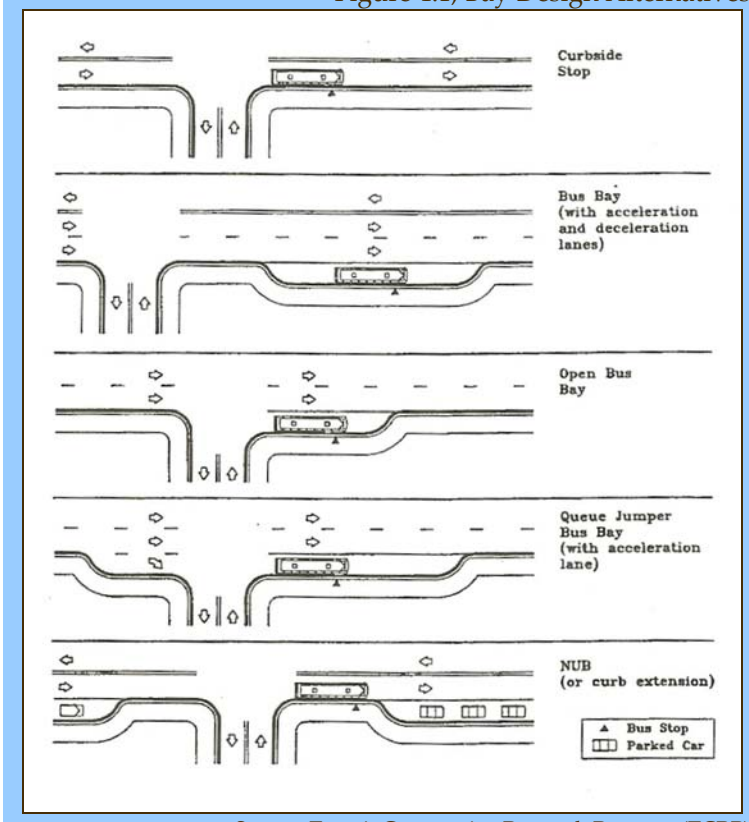
1. Expand the services of McAllen Express to keep pace with new development including additional routes (particularly from the affordable housing areas to the maquilas and other major area employers); reduced headways; increased points of transfer with Rio Metro, Rio Transit, and other transit providers; and increased hours of operation.
2. Expand Central Station to accommodate more administrative space, parking for patrons and

[14] Chapter 242. Authority of Municipality and County to Regulate Subdivisions in and outside Municipality's Extraterritorial Jurisdiction.

employees, additional bus queuing and maneuvering areas, added loading/unloading and passenger drop-off/pick-up areas, traffic circulation improvements, and more shade canopies and user amenities. The benefits of mixed use should be evaluated in support of this facility, as well as the whole downtown area.

3. Coordinate with the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) to initiate a high-capacity transit options study to evaluate the feasibility of transit investments, such as a coordinated, expanded regional bus system; bus rapid transit; commuter rail; and light rail transit. A feasibility assessment should forecast future ridership to determine when an increased investment in public transit is warranted. The study should recommend future funding needs, revenue options, and financing strategies. An organizational approach and governance structure should specify the roles of each transit provider. The transit study must consider the national and international transit needs, the propensity for transit use, and the requirements and limitations of collecting and sharing revenues between counties.
4. Explore the option of a transit service for choice riders - a service that is highly attractive for those who ordinarily drive their cars to work. This could also be attractive for tourists and visitors to the area.
5. Research peer transit providers to identify alternative methods of funding. This may include a dedicated funding source, such as a local options tax, as well as jurisdictional participation, contract sources, franchising arrangements, and business marketing and advertising programs.
6. Coordinate the operating schedules of all transportation providers in a consistent format and in a manner to allow timely and convenient transfers. Establish a regional call center that centralizes the dispatch function and facilitates improved coordination and transit needs matching. A single website for all local, regional, national, and even international carriers providing service would be highly beneficial.
7. Coordinate the fixed transit routes that are committed for the long term with the capital streets improvement program. As displayed in **Figure 4.1, Bay Design Alternatives**, incorporate street-side transit improvements, such as bus pull-out bays. Other transit improvements include sidewalks of an increased width with curb cuts and handicap accessible ramps; non-slip surfaces; marked, signed, and/or signaled pedestrian crossings; prevention of obstructions for wheelchair access; and installation of pedestrian actuated traffic signals. Low-cost transit-oriented street improvements include:
   a. Special left-turn lane signal phases at select intersections;

Figure 4.1, Bay Design Alternatives



Source: Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 19, Federal Transit Administration

b. Preferential signal timing to aid bus travel time;
c. Initiation of parking regulations to clear the curb lane for bus operations;
d. Improved identification of bus stop locations and installation of no parking signs; and
e. Pavement markings in support of signing at transit stops.

8. Develop an advertising and marketing campaign to inform the public as to the services and schedules available in McAllen, as well as inter-city and international connections.
9. Amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate transit-supportive site development standards and design criteria. Considerations include pedestrian access within parking lots and to adjacent sites and transit stops; sheltered areas for transit patrons; access and site circulation for transit vehicles; site geometrics for vehicle maneuvering; and siting of transit stops and user amenities.
10. Amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate a mixed use transit district. This district would be permitted by right, subject to standards regarding building height, bulk, and scale; minimum and total allowable floor area ratios, minimum landscape surface ratio; site access and circulation; building design; street context; and buffering of the subject and adjacent sites.
11. Expand the interdepartmental development coordinating committee to include the City's transit department in the review of development project proposals. This is particularly important for the siting of affordable housing and multiple-family and mixed use projects in proximity to transit routes. Their input into site planning is essential for on-site vehicle routing and safe patron access.
12. Acquire land in advance of ensuing development for future park-and-ride locations. This will need to be coordinated with the future land use plan to achieve requisite density thresholds to warrant major transit investment.
13. Develop a bi-national multi-modal transportation plan including street surface systems, bridge crossings, and coordinated public transportation systems. Address issues such as border and homeland security, international relations, regulatory laws and practices, and revenue sharing.
14. Develop an inventory and GIS database of all transit properties and fixed improvements. Subsequently, prepare a needs assessment to identify capital acquisitions such as shelters, kiosks and displays, signage, benches, refuse containers, public art, and other patron and pedestrian improvements and amenities.
15. Devote increased attention to the regional transit coordination committee sponsored by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) for partnership forming, including interlocal agreements among other jurisdictions, as well as joint use arrangements with other providers of transportation. This may include formal relationships with each of the Valley cities, Rio Metro, and Rio Transit, as well as with each of the school districts, hospitals, social service agencies, colleges and universities (South Texas College, UT PanAmerican, etc.), and others. There are opportunities for shared services, such as driver hiring, training, and licensing programs; vehicle procurement and transfers; and vehicle maintenance.

According to the United States Code (U.S.C.), "It is the policy of the United States Government that special efforts are made to preserve the natural beauty of the countryside and public park and recreation lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites. The Secretary of Transportation will cooperate and consult with the Secretaries of Interior, Housing and Urban Development, and Agriculture, and with the States, in developing transportation plans and programs that include measures to maintain and enhance natural beauty of lands crossed by transportation activities or facilities."

Source: 49 U.S.C., Section 303, January 1983

Corridor Appearance

If McAllen is to achieve recognition for the quality of its natural and built environments, the importance of the visual appearance of roadways must be acknowledged. The City's ordinances and standards are responsible for the form of development, including the location and design of buildings, arrangement of parking areas, extent of open space and vegetation, perimeter fencing and bufferyard treatments, and size and placement of signage. The design of the roadway itself also forms a sense of place and conveys the character of the community.

Goals

- Better standards to achieve more uniformity and attractiveness of subdivision fencing along roadway corridors
- Walls and fencing along public rights-of-way that are well maintained and in good repair
- Recognition of roads as character-forming public spaces
- Improved appearance of roadway environs
- Maximum functional utility of public rights-of-way
- Incorporation of greenbelts along roadways for buffering and added public open space
- Revitalization and visual enhancement of existing roadway corridors
- Heightened standards of development for the built environment adjacent to principal corridors

Recommendations

1. Adopt fencing standards and incorporate them into the subdivision regulations. The location, type, materials, and design of subdivision fencing should be submitted and approved concurrent with the preliminary plat or, where a subdivision is a unit of a larger tract, with the required submission of an area plan. In the case of a larger tract, the fencing adjacent to collector and arterial streets should be uniform. The City may also consider standardization of fencing – not to the extent of denying the character of individual neighborhoods but establishing a sense of uniformity. The fencing should be constructed by the subdivider at the time of development and should be of consistent type and design around the perimeter of the subdivision and adjacent to any public street right-of-way. Along arterial roadways, the fencing should have decorative (to be defined) support columns and horizontal relief at least every 40 feet. Its proximity to the right-of-way should allow sufficient space for the required street bufferyard (refer to ***Section 5.1, Community Character*** regarding bufferyards).
2. Require neighborhood associations to be responsible for the repair and/or replacement of subdivision fencing and fully compliant with the ordinance standards. For neighborhoods that do not have a neighborhood



Edge treatments separating the public and private realms contribute to the roadway environs and appearance.

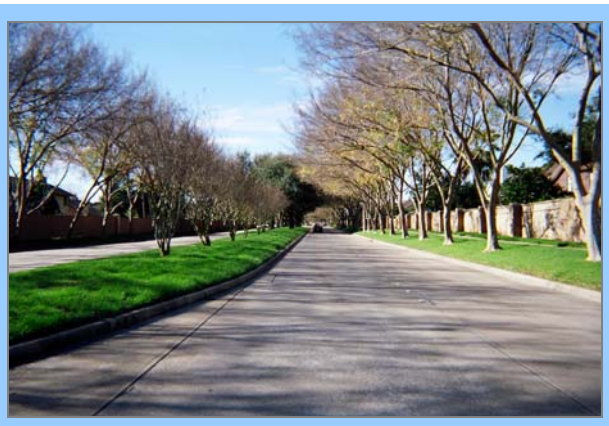
association, a provision on the land title notifying the owner of record as to the requirements for fencing adjacent to street rights-of-way. Alternatively, the City could make the necessary repairs and assess the property owner.

3. Amend the design standards for arterial and collector roadways to acquire sufficient lands for increased green space adjacent to the abutting use. Alternatively, require a minimum perimeter buffer area of five feet adjacent to collector streets and 10 feet adjacent to arterial streets. There must be maintenance agreements and guarantees on behalf of the subdivider and neighborhood association.



Well landscaped roadways create an ambiance and desirable neighborhood character, which is realized by way of canopied streets.

4. Coordinate the alignment of new arterials with underground irrigation, drainage, and/or utility transmission lines to incorporate green space adjacent to the street right-of-way, similar to Col. Rowe Boulevard.
5. Based upon the findings of the proposed transit options and preliminary alignment studies, identify transit corridors and acquire the rights-of-way. Prior to system development this area may be preserved as green space or utilized for an interim use.
6. Coordinate with TxDOT along the F.M. 490/Hidalgo County Loop to establish a greenbelt of at least 50 feet in width to be used for landscaping, berming, and walls to improve the "front door" of the community and to act as a noise barrier. Require marginal or reverse frontage roads to front uses to the corridor with indirect access to the loop.
7. Prepare streetscape plans for U.S. 83, Bus. 83. 10th Street, Ware Road, 23rd Street, McColl Road, Pecan Street, Nolana Avenue, Dove Avenue, Trenton Road, Freddy Gonzalez, and S.H. 107, as well as other arterial roads and highways, e.g. F.M. 490/Hidalgo County Loop, as they are developed. The studies should include an assessment of existing conditions, including land use and zoning, building footprints, driveways and parking lots, signs, trees and vegetation, power poles and overhead lines, street cross-sections, sidewalks and pedestrian improvements, pervious and impervious surfaces, and general visual characteristics. The design plans should include regulatory recommendations and identified improvements and their costs. An implementation plan should identify priorities, funding options and sources, and a timeline. Design principles for corridor design and enhancement may include:



The roadway environs are within the purview of the public sector as to their design, appearance, and maintenance.

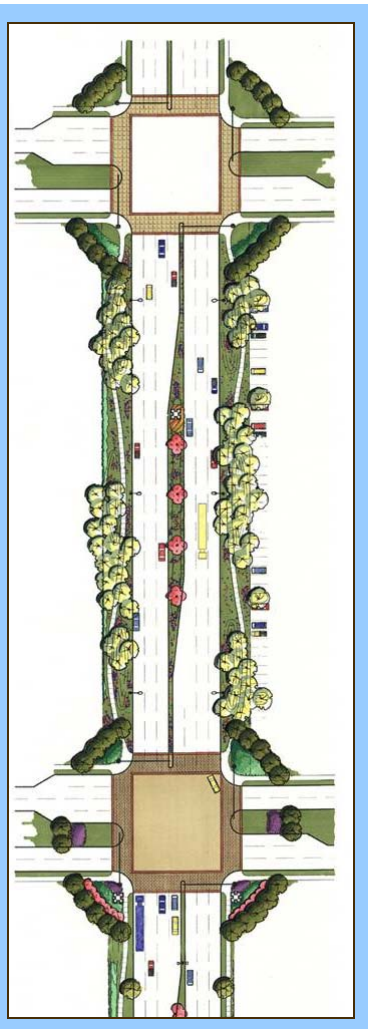
a. Raised or depressed medians to break up the expanse of pavement and create space for runoff and drainage, grass, trees, signage, gateway treatments, and other amenities.

b. Street trees allowing a canopy to be formed over the roadway. The species of trees must be tolerant of the environment and have roots that can coexist with streets and sidewalks. Incorporate xeriscaping to be more natural in appearance, environmentally sustainable, and require little maintenance.
c. A streetscape buffer on either side of the street pavement to create separation between the public and private realms and provides space for more "green" adjacent to the roadway. This area may be planted in grass or some form of groundcover or may include rock or mulch in some locations, which helps to alter the monotony of the street and create visual interest.
d. Limiting the number, width, and location of new driveways, consolidating existing driveways, and defining the edges with curb cuts and patterned crossings to create a more appealing pedestrian environment.
e. The use of decorative street lamps to form a unique community identity, separate from the typical standard installed by TxDOT and utility and public works providers. The use of banners affixed to the lampposts would allow the community to personalize itself by advertising upcoming community festivities or public events.
f. Placing overhead wiring underground or relocating them away from the primary corridors, replacing the typical wood poles with concrete poles, and consolidating the lines onto a single set of poles.
g. Enhanced standards for traffic control devices and consolidating signs onto single poles or relocating signs to enhance the appearance of corridors.

8. Further to the recommendations of ***Section 5.1, Community Character,*** design standards for properties abutting or within a specified distance of arterial rights-of-way may include:
   a. A definitive edge between public and private properties defined by a streetscape buffer adjacent to the property line.
   b. Islands placed throughout parking areas, each with trees, shrubbery, and/or groundcover.
   c. The arrangement of parking areas to the side and/or rear of the building and parking bays that are arranged parallel or at an acute angle.
   d. Trees within the streetscape area, around the perimeter of the site, adjacent to the building, and within the parking areas, including both preserved and newly planted trees.
   e. An impervious surface ratio (ISR) versus a minimum landscaped area to account for the amount of pavement and building rather than building footprint alone.
   f. Monument versus pole signage with pole signs reserved only for those situations when the road is grade separated, such as U.S. 83 and the future F.M. 490/Hidalgo County Loop.
   g. Building standards pertaining to the use of specified primary building materials, 360-degree architecture, vertical relief of long elevations, articulation of walls, and fenestration.
   h. The relationship of the building to its site is controlled by a floor area ratio (FAR), which relates to the bulk and scale of a building to ensure it is compatible with its environment.
   i. The use of a maximum versus minimum front building line (forming a build-to line) to draw the



The use of increased open space adjacent to the street edge, monument signage, and street trees enhances the driving experience of major.



Streetscape enhancement may include landscaping at intersections, decorative pavement and crosswalks, landscaped medians, meandering trails within liberal green space, and an overall greening of the roadway environs.

buildings closer to the street environment, thereby providing increased street enclosure. Landscaping is also important to ensure adequate vegetation adjacent to the closest wall surface.

j. Outdoor lighting standards to ensure an appropriate light intensity and to regulate light pollution and light spillover.

k. Hipped versus flat roofs to add architectural dimension and the use of dormers and other building features to establish a building style that improves on an ordinary "box-like" structure.

9. Establish significant gateways at each of the community entranceways with priorities based on traffic volumes.
10. Establish a public arts commission to create standards for the placement of public art throughout the community, including at community entry points and along major streets.
11. Acquire a triangular area as part of the right-of-way at all new or reconstructed intersections to be used as public open space.
12. Initiate redevelopment and enhancement projects at the entrances to the community, including public infrastructure improvements and strict enforcement of code violations.
13. Organize a public education campaign regarding property maintenance and environmental codes; establish an annual amnesty program for code violators.

Thoroughfare Planning

Thoroughfare system planning is the process to assure development of the most efficient and appropriate street system to meet future travel needs. The objective of a thoroughfare plan is to preserve adequate right-of-way on appropriate alignments to allow the orderly and efficient expansion and improvement of the thoroughfare system. Proposed alignments are shown for planned new roadways and roadway extensions. Actual alignments will vary depending on the design and layout of development. Requirements for rights-of-way dedication and construction of street improvements apply to all subdivision of land.

The thoroughfare system is displayed in **Figure 4.2, Thoroughfare Plan**. The plan shows alignments for planned thoroughfares that will be considered in the platting of subdivisions, right-of-way dedication, and construction of major roadways. In keeping with a goal of the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP),[15] the right-of-way requirements and design standards should generally conform to the standards of the County Thoroughfare Plan. While consistency is advocated by this plan, there are also standards that directly relate to the individual goals and objectives of this community that merit supplemental standards

[15] The fourth goal of the 1999 Plan was to "Standardize Roadway Design and Subdivision Ordinance throughout the County", Section 2.8, Progress from the 1999 Plan (Page 81), Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization, 2005-2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)

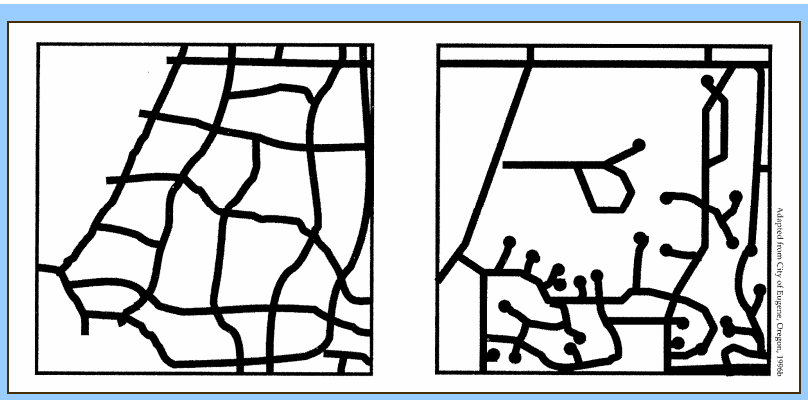
to those of the County, and each of the other cities in the Hidalgo County Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). These standards are outlined below in the section entitled, *Roadway Classifications.*

Some elements of the thoroughfare system, such as those roadways for which abutting development has already occurred or is planned to occur, may require wider rights-of-way and may be developed as two-lane or multi-lane roadways with various cross-sections. Some streets identified as arterials or collectors may not ever be widened due to right-of-way limitations. Instead, the designation signifies its traffic-handling role and the importance of maintaining it in superior condition to maximize their traffic capacity.

The plan does not show future local streets because they function to provide access to individual parcels and their alignments will vary depending upon land development plans. Local street alignment will be determined by the City as part of the subdivision development process. Likewise, collectors are required with new development, but are not shown in all cases on the Thoroughfare Plan. Nevertheless, they are vital to an efficient transportation network and must not be overlooked during the subdivision development process. Collectors should be situated to connect arterial streets with other collectors and local streets.

Key features and policies of the Thoroughfare Plan are as follows:

- Review of general development plans and preliminary and final plats must be in compliance with the thoroughfare plan.
- The general location and alignment of thoroughfares must be in conformance with the Thoroughfare Plan. Any thoroughfare alignment that is inconsistent with the plan requires the approval of the Planning and Zoning Commission through a public hearing process. A change includes any proposal that adds or deletes a thoroughfare designation or changes the alignment that would affect adjacent lands.
- Variances from the Thoroughfare Plan should not be approved unless there is substantial evidence through a qualified traffic circulation and impacts study establishing a warrant for such amendment and showing how an alternative alignment or area street plan will provide improved circulation and an equal or improved level of service on all affected roadways.
- The necessary rights-of-way, in accordance with the roadway classification and corresponding cross-sections, must be dedicated at the time of final platting. Properties proposed for subdivisions that include or are adjacent to an existing thoroughfare with insufficient right-of-way should be required to dedicate land to compensate for any deficiency.
- Existing streets adjacent to land proposed for subdivision should be continued so as to meet the continuity objectives of the Thoroughfare Plan. The arrangement of streets in a new subdivision – including private subdivisions - must make provision for continuation of the existing arterial and collector streets in the adjacent areas.



Continuity of the street pattern is essential for its efficient and systematic function in the overall thoroughfare system.

- Land owners are responsible for the dedication of rights-of-way and may be responsible for constructing sections of roadways located within or adjacent to their property.
- The total width of street rights-of-way must be dedicated at the time of development. The dedication of one-half of the required right-of-way should not be accepted unless the other half already exists or there is a plat on file for the adjacent land.
- To maximize mobility, collector streets must provide access and circulation both within and between neighborhoods. Collectors should connect arterial streets rather than allowing development to have a street system with no points of ingress and egress other than the major entrance.
- Collectors must be situated to connect arterial streets with other collectors and local streets. Their continuity in the roadway system is essential to its function of distributing traffic within the hierarchical system.
- The fact that a thoroughfare is shown on the plan does not represent a commitment to a specific timeframe for construction or that the City or other governing body will build the roadway improvement.
- Individual thoroughfare improvements may be constructed by a variety of implementing agencies, including the City, Hidalgo County, Texas Department of Transportation, private developers, and/or intra-governmental agencies.
- The future alignments of local streets are dependent upon land development plans and, thus, are not set forth by the Thoroughfare Plan.

Roadway Classifications

In the administration and enforcement of the Thoroughfare Plan, special cases and unique situations will occasionally arise where conditions and constraints in certain areas conflict with the need for widening of thoroughfares to the planned right-of-way width and roadway cross-section. Such circumstances require adaptability in the administration of the plan. Acceptable minimum design criteria and special roadway cross-sections may have to be applied in constrained areas where conditions limit the ability to meet desirable standards. Special roadway cross-sections should be determined on a case-by-case basis, and these exceptions are subject to approval by the City Engineer. Otherwise, standard roadway cross-sections should be used.

A single set of standards within the City and ETJ may be problematic. Standards for development within the City limits, with rare exception, should reflect its urban, auto-urban, and suburban character, with provision for curb and gutter construction, sidewalks, street lighting, signage and sufficient open space. In the ETJ where the character of development is estate or agriculture, the standards may be varied to mirror the character, yet remain reasonable and feasible.

Roads are grouped into functional classes according to their role for traffic movement and land access. Characteristics of each functional class differ to meet the intended purpose. The functional classification of area roadways includes freeways; high speed, principal and minor arterials; major and minor collectors; and local streets.

Local Streets

Local streets allow direct property access within residential and commercial areas. Through-traffic and higher speeds should be discouraged by geometric designs, traffic control devices, and traffic calming techniques. Local streets typically comprise about 65 to 80 percent of the total street system.

The Thoroughfare Plan does not designate future local streets. The plan establishes standard cross-sections, with alternatives based upon such performance characteristics as type of access, number of dwelling units served, and the units' average frontage.

The current standard is a right-of-way width between 50 and 60 feet and a pavement width of 37 feet with 11-foot travel lanes.[16] These standards do not account for situations where less right-of-way and pavement width may be acceptable due to lower density and fewer trips generated. As a result in some cases, there is more pavement width than necessary, which adds to development costs, occupies additional space, thereby reducing development efficiency, causes higher travel speeds, and results in an increased impervious surface and, hence, stormwater runoff. This plan proposes alternative street cross sections where such pavement width is not warranted, as displayed in **Table 4.2, Local Street Standards (Illustrative)**.

Table 4.2, Local Street Standards

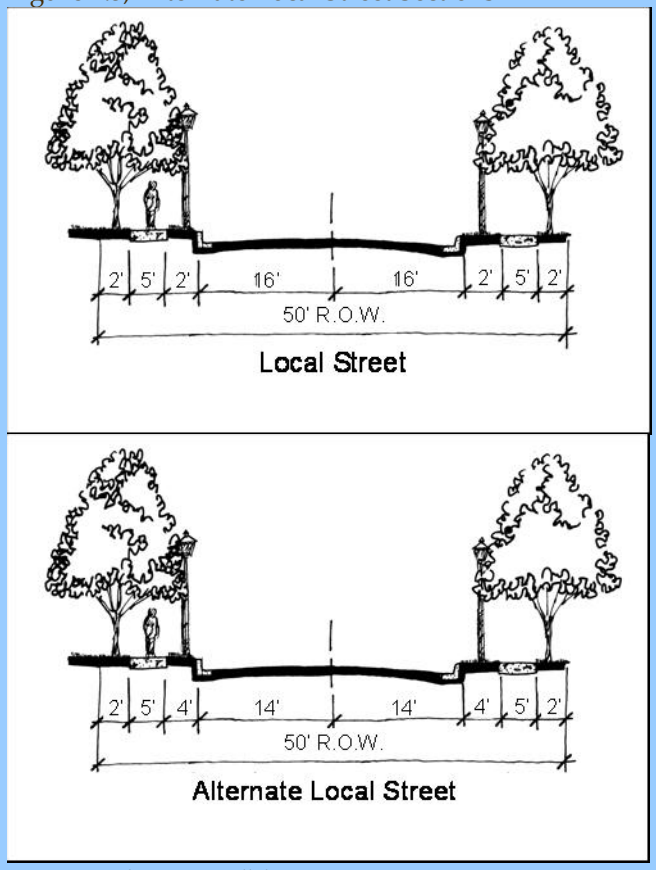
Lot Frontage (ft,)/Lot Area	Number of Dwelling Units Served	Total ROW	Travel		Parking		Curb Width	Parkway Each Side	Sidewalk	
			No. Lanes	Lane Width	Number	Width			Side	Width
Greater 130'	10 or less	40'	1	12'	0	7'	0	14'	0	5'
	11 to 44	44'	2	8'	0	7'	0	14'	0	5'
1 acre +	45 to 159	52'	2	11'	0	7'	0	10'	2	5'
	160 to 240	54'	2	12'	0	7'	0	10'	2	5'
90'-129'	10 or less	39'	1	14'	0	7'	0	10'	1	5'
	11 to 44	50'	2	9'	0	7'	1'	10'	2	5'
15,000 sf - 40,000 sf.	45 to 159	59'	2	10'	1	7'	1'	10'	2	5'
	160 to 240	64'	2	12'	1	7'	1.5'	10'	2	5'
50'-89'	10 or less	50'	2	8'	1	7'	1'	10'	1	5'
	11 to 44	67'	2	10'	2	7'	1.5'	10'	2	5'
5,000 sf -14,999 sf	45 to 159	71'	2	12'	2	7'	1.5'	10'	2	5'
	160 to 240	71'	2	12'	2	7'	1.5'	10'	2	5'
Less than 50'	10 or less	61'	2	9'	2	7'	1.5'	8'	2	5'
	11 to 44	65'	2	11'	2	7'	1.5'	8'	2	5'
4,999 sf.or less	45 to 159	67'	2	12'	2	7'	1.5'	8'	2	5'
	160 to 240	67'	2	12'	2	7'	1.5'	8'	2	5'

Example: Performance-based street standards determine required right-of-way and pavement widths based upon the density of development and, hence, the traffic generated by the development. These standards are not applicable in cases where there are through traffic movements from adjoining and nearby developments.

Displayed in **Figure 4.3, Alternate Local Street Sections,** is two alternate cross sections requiring a minimum 50 feet of right-of-way with minimum pavement widths of 28 and 32 feet. A local street with a pavement width of 28 feet would be limited for developments with fewer, larger lots taking access to a local street. On-street parking would not be allowed on the narrower street width, while it would be allowed on only one side of the 32-foot street. Such parking restrictions necessitate review of lot sizes, setbacks, and on-lot parking provisions to accommodate parked vehicles out of the public right-of-way.

[16] Hidalgo County Thoroughfare Plan

Figure 4.3, Alternate Local Street Sections



Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

These pavement widths are designed to adequately carry local traffic and sufficiently accommodate fire apparatus, yet of a width to allow traffic calming. Narrower streets encourage reduced travel speeds, an increased distance between the street and sidewalk, and a wider streetscape.

Local streets may also be adapted to an estate or agriculture character to include an open or closed ditch system, rather than curb and gutter. The right-of-way within these environments may be reduced to 40 feet with a 20-foot pavement width. The cross section must include provision for stormwater management by way of a sufficient ditch cross section. For very low-density developments, trails may be constructed in lieu of sidewalks. Alternatively, a striped pedestrian/bicycle lane may be used within the right-of-way assuming a minimum pavement width of 24 feet.

Classifications for alleys and marginal access streets are a function of service and property access and, therefore, are not included in the classification system. This is not to indicate that the plan ignores the use of alleys. In fact, the plan recognizes the valuable contribution of alleys to the urban fabric and establishment of community character and proposes that they be used, as appropriate.

Collector Streets

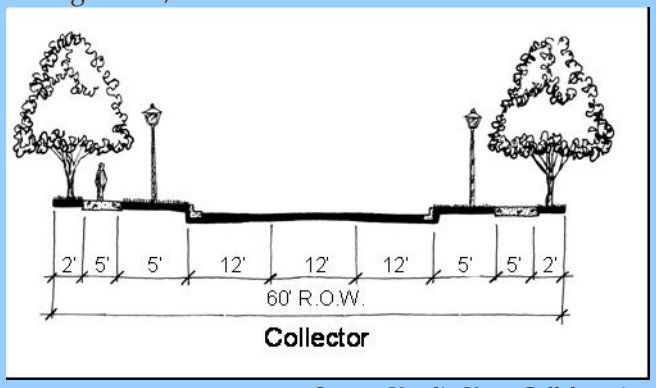
Subdivision street layout plans and commercial and industrial districts must include collector streets to provide efficient ingress/egress and traffic circulation. Since collectors carry higher traffic volumes than local streets, they require a wider cross-section and added lanes at arterial street intersections to provide adequate capacity for both through-traffic and turning movements. However, since posted speeds are slower and more turn movements are expected, a higher speed differential and thus, closer intersection spacing, may be used. Collectors typically make up about five to 10 percent of the total street system.
The current standards for collector streets are as follows:[17]

Characteristic	Major Collector	Minor Collector
Right-of-way	80′	60′ to 70′
Pavement width	44′	40′ to 44′
Lane width	11′ to 12′	11′
Moving lanes	2 to 4	2

[17] Hidalgo County Thoroughfare Plan

This plan proposes classifications of major and minor collectors distinguished by volume of traffic. A major collector is designed for 7,500 to 15,000 vehicles per day (VPD), which requires a pavement width of 44 feet, consistent with the current standards. Alternatively, a minor collector may allow a pavement width of 36 feet, which is for 1,000 to 7,500 VPD, as displayed in **Figure 4.4, Alternate Minor Collector Street Section.** The subdivision regulations must include provisions to distinguish the warrant and criteria for major and minor collector roadways.

Figure 4.4, Alternate Minor Collector Street Section



Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

An option for estate and agriculture development is collector roads without sidewalks or curb and gutter. This permits development to maintain a rural character and provide natural versus structural drainage system. In this case an interior trail system would be necessary to compensate for the loss of sidewalks. Pavement width would be reduced to 32 feet, while the right-of-way requirement would remain at 60 feet to account for the space required for open or covered ditches.

Arterial Streets

Arterial streets form an interconnecting network for broad movement of traffic. Although they usually represent only five to 10 percent of the total roadway network, arterials typically accommodate between 30 and 40 percent of an area's travel volume. Since traffic movement - not land access - is the primary function of arterials, managing access is essential to avoid congestion and delays caused by turning movements. Likewise, intersections with other streets and private drives should be designed to limit speed differentials between turning vehicles and though traffic to no more than 10 to 15 miles per hour. Signalized intersection spacing should be long enough to allow a variety of signal cycle lengths and timing plans that can be adjusted to meet changes in traffic volumes and maintain traffic progression (preferably one-third to one-half mile spacing).

The cross-section may vary from four to six lanes to a two-lane roadway in the developing fringe where traffic volumes do not warrant more traffic lanes. Functional classification is not dependent on the number of lanes since the functional role typically remains constant over time, while the roadway's cross-section is improved to accommodate increased traffic volumes. Thus, lower-volume roadways that are continuous over long distances may function as an arterial, particularly in the ETJ.

The current standards for arterial streets are as follows:[18]

Characteristic	High Speed Arterial	Principal Arterial	Minor Arterial
Right-of-way	150′	120′	100′
Pavement width	76′ to 84′′	76′ to 90′	66′
Lane width	12′	12′	11′ to 12′
Moving lanes	4 to 6	4 to 6	4 to 6
Median	48′	16′	16′

[18] Hidalgo County Thoroughfare Plan

According to the current thoroughfare design standards, there is a 16-foot median for all three classifications. However, as exists today, an arterial roadway may be undivided with a continuous center turn lane. This plan advocates a raised or depressed median in all new high speed and principal arterial roadways where the land development pattern is not yet established. Medians within the developed and urbanizing areas should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, based upon warrants and constraints, accident records, fatality incidents, and specific design considerations. Minor arterial roadways are proposed to have an undivided street section with the above described dimensional characteristics.

Plan Implementation

Implementation of the thoroughfare system will occur as the City grows and, over many years, builds toward that reflected by the Thoroughfare Plan. The fact that a thoroughfare is shown on the plan does not represent a commitment to a specific timeframe or that the City – or another jurisdiction - will build the roadway. Individual improvements may be constructed by the City, Hidalgo County, and/or the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), as well as developers and land owners for roadways within or adjacent to their property.

The Thoroughfare Plan may be used to make decisions related to the planning, coordination, and programming of future development and other infrastructure improvements. Review of preliminary and final plats in accordance with the City's subdivision ordinances must comply with the Thoroughfare Plan to ensure continuity and availability of sufficient rights-of-way for the roadway alignments shown on the plan. It is of particular importance to provide for continuous roadways and through connections between developments to ensure efficient citywide mobility. By identifying locations where rights-of-way are needed, landowners and subdividers may consider the roadways in their subdivision planning, dedication of public rights-of-way, and provision of setbacks for new buildings, utility lines, and other improvements located along the rights-of-way for existing or planned thoroughfares.

Requirements and Standards

The following criteria supplement the design standards of the City's subdivision ordinance. These policies should be regulated through ordinance provisions to ensure proper implementation.

- **Location and alignment of thoroughfares** - The general location and alignment of thoroughfares must be in conformance with the Thoroughfare Plan, as currently expressed in the City's subdivision ordinance.[19] Subdivision plats should provide for dedication of needed rights-of-way for thoroughfares within or bordering the subdivision. Any changes in thoroughfare alignment that are inconsistent with the plan require the approval of the Planning and Zoning Commission through a public hearing process. A "change" includes any proposal that involves the addition or deletion of a thoroughfare, or change in the alignment of thoroughfares that would affect parcels of land beyond the specific tract in question.
- **Location and alignment of collectors** - To adequately serve their functional role, collectors should be placed between arterial streets, with a spacing of one-quarter to one-half mile for minor and major collectors, respectively. Collectors must be shown for all proposed subdivisions of land consistent with the Thoroughfare Plan. Where a collector is not shown on the plan, but is warranted due to development density and projected traffic volumes, it is also required and must be shown.

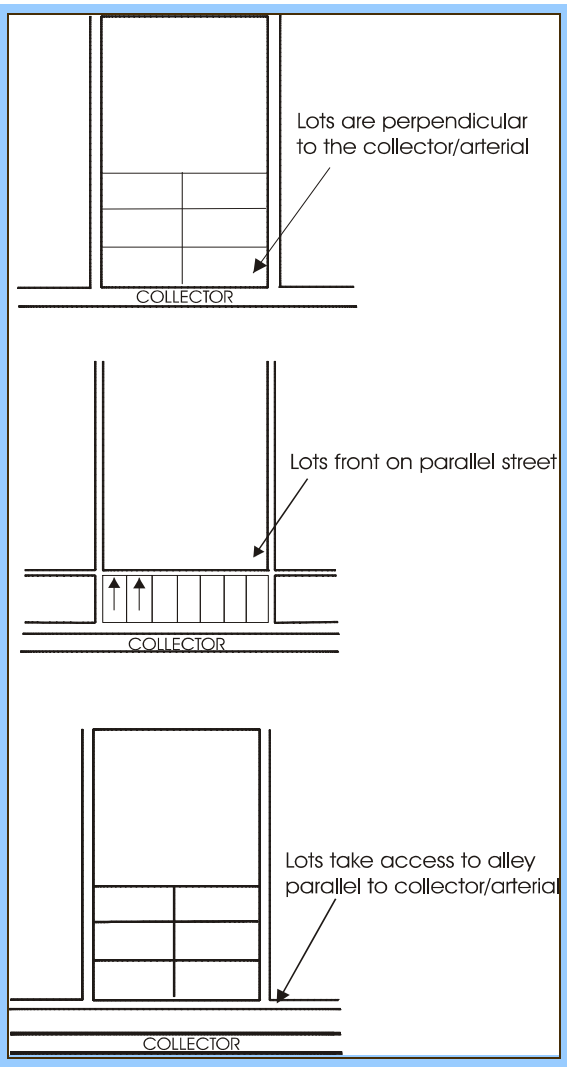
[19] Sec. 134-4. Conformance to general plan, Chapter 134, Subdivisions

- **Roadway continuity** – To maximize mobility it is essential that collector streets traverse adjacent neighborhoods to provide access and circulation within, and between, neighborhoods. Collector streets should connect arterials, rather than allowing developments to have a street system with limited points of ingress/egress other than the primary entrance(s). Rather than allowing waivers of this requirement, the subdivision regulations must identify warrants and criteria for exemption.
- **Right-of-way and pavement width** - The pavement and right-of-way width for thoroughfares must conform to minimum standards. Properties proposed for subdivision that include or are bordered by an existing thoroughfare with insufficient right-of-way must dedicate land to compensate for any right-of-way deficiency of that thoroughfare. When a thoroughfare extension is proposed to connect with an existing thoroughfare that has a narrower right-of-way, a transitional area must be provided. An alternative to the current practice of requiring street widening at the time of subdivision development is a street escrow program whereby funds for street construction are held in escrow until such time as widening of the complete street section is warranted.



A street escrow program is warranted to resolve dangerous situations of abrupt road width and alignment changes.

- **Continuation and projection of streets** – In accordance with the policies of this plan, existing streets in adjacent areas should be continued, and, when an adjacent area is undeveloped, the street layout must provide for the continuation of streets into the undeveloped area. In particular, the arrangement of streets in a new subdivision must make provision for continuation of right-of-way for the principal existing streets in adjoining areas – or where new streets will be necessary for future public requirements on adjacent properties that have not yet been subdivided. Where adjacent land is undeveloped, stub streets must include a temporary turnaround to accommodate fire apparatus.
- **Location of street intersections** - New intersections should be planned to align with existing intersections to avoid off-set or "jogged" intersections and to provide for continuity of existing streets.
- **Angle of intersection** – Consistent with the design standards in the subdivision ordinance, the angle of street intersections should be as nearly at a right angle as possible. Corner cutbacks or radii should be required at the acute corner of the right-of-way line to provide adequate sight distance at intersections.
- **Offset intersections** – It is advisable to increase the current standard for offset or "jogged" street intersections from 125 feet to a minimum separation of 200 feet between the centerlines of the intersecting streets.
- **Cul-de-sacs** - Through streets and tee-intersections are preferable to cul-de-sacs. Care should be taken so as not to over utilize cul-de-sacs, which limit through access, restrict pedestrian circulation, increase response times, and confuse motorists. However, when cul-de-sacs are used, they should have a maximum length of not more than 600 feet measured from the connecting street centerline to the centerline of the radius point. It is advisable to amend the current pavement diameter in residential areas to 100 feet with a right-of-way diameter of 120 feet. A cul-de-sac with an island should have a diameter of no less than 150 feet.



The layout of lots contributes to the traffic carrying capacity, safety, and efficiency of collector streets.

- **Residential lots fronting on arterials** - Subdivision layout must avoid the creation of residential lots fronting on arterials with direct driveway access to the arterial street. Lots should be accessed from local streets within or bordering the subdivision or an auxiliary street designed to accommodate driveway traffic.
- **Residential lots fronting on collectors** - Subdivision layout must avoid the arrangement of lots to access major collector streets and, to the maximum practicable extent, minimize access to minor collector streets, particularly within 180 feet of an intersection.
- **Geometric design standards and guidelines** - Other requirements and guidelines for the geometric design of thoroughfares and public streets should be provided in the subdivision ordinance and standard specifications. This includes special provisions for lot width and building setbacks on corner lots to preserve sight distances at adjacent intersections.

5.1
Section

Community Character

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

The pattern of land use and its density, arrangement, and scale contribute to the character of McAllen. Individual land use decisions, whether involving zoning changes or major infrastructure improvements, have a role in determining the form and character of future development. Character creates the image of the community, which contributes to economic development and desirability as a place to live and work. Therefore, advanced planning is warranted as to when, where, and how the community develops.

Residents have expressed their pride in the community and the reasons they have chosen to call it home. They cite its quality of development, convenience to commercial areas and places of employment, attractiveness of neighborhoods, the genuineness of Downtown, array of outdoor recreation opportunities, quality parks and trails, and valued environmental resources as some of the assets that make McAllen a special place. As such, protection and preservation of these values is a high priority.

At the same time, they have concern for the future and the means for accommodating significant new growth without compromising their cherished community. This plan must, therefore, transform these intangible values into growth strategies so that future decisions enhance – rather than deteriorate – these essential community values.

The purpose of this section is to establish a policy framework as to how the community grows and the pattern, type, and appearance of new development. An outcome of this process is the Future Land Use and Growth Plan, which depicts the intended pattern of land use and its densities and design characteristics that will form the future of McAllen. Once this plan establishes the overall policies and strategies, the zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, and other City codes must be comprehensively amended to ensure new development occurs in a manner that is consistent with the vision of this plan – and, more importantly, community residents. (Refer to ***Appendix C, Community Character***)

Reinforcement of Community Identity

Residents would like to portray a positive first impression on those who visit or pass through the community. The entrances offer opportunities to establish an image, communicate community values, and attract attention to local attractions and tourist destinations. Formal points of entry – or gateways –

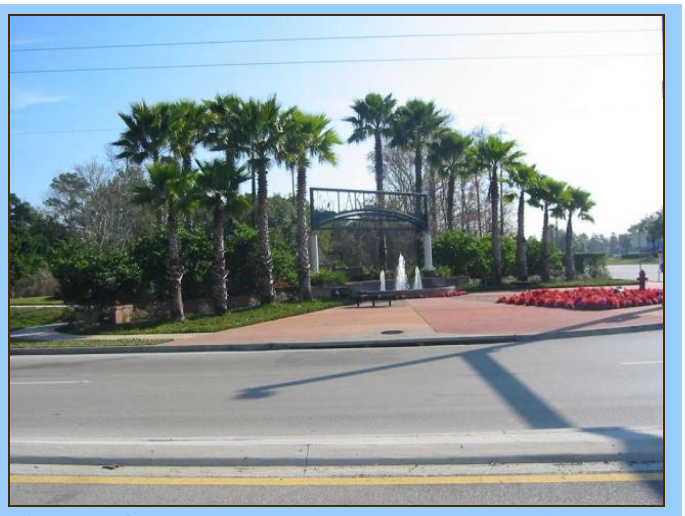
define the boundaries to distinguish it from other jurisdictions. These visual cues stimulate the idea of arrival at a distinguishable place that is notable in more ways than the City limit sign. There are several "gateways" and "district portals" that exist: the boundaries of the City itself, the Heart of the City, and a potential arts district. The entrances to these areas require better definition through infrastructure enhancements and design elements that denote a formal entry. Enhancement may include landscaped medians, preservation of natural features and vegetation, and special pavement treatments; significant entry monuments; liberal open space and well-designed streetscaping; upgraded lighting standards; way-finding signage; integration of public art, fountains, and monuments; and well-maintained and attractive adjacent properties.

Goals

- Enhancement of City gateways and entryways to special areas to establish identity
- Provision of design guidance for distinct areas and highly visible corridors
- Integration of urban design elements into public improvement projects
- Cohesiveness of development design through improved standards
- Preservation of open space buffering in the outlying areas of the ETJ to create a defined boundary and, hence, a sense of arrival to the community

Recommendations

1. Fund, design, and construct community gateways in the following priority locations:
   - The fringe areas of the Heart of the City;
   - U.S. 83 at South Jackson and South Taylor Road;
   - 10th Street at W. Military Highway and the northern limits of the growth area or ETJ (the northern gateway should be moveable or able to be reconstructed as the City limits extend northward);
   - Business 83 at South Jackson and South Taylor Road;
   - Nolana Avenue at South Jackson and South Taylor Road; and
   - Other locations as locally determined.
2. Reserve parcels of land for future gateways at the yet to be developed western and northern entrances of each of the arterial and collector streets, as proposed to be extended. Particular emphasis should be placed on S.H. 107 and the proposed Hidalgo County loop.
3. Implement the gateway improvement recommendations of the Heart of the City Plan, including those currently budgeted for the principal entries. Also, construct secondary gateways at each of the other points of access to Downtown.
4. Prepare corridor and small area enhancement plans. Simultaneously, amend the zoning ordinance to include special district design standards relating to building height and scale, building form (articulation, fenestration, etc.), signage, landscaping/ streetscaping, and, optionally, an



The use of signature gateway monuments and enhancements should be used at primary entrances.
Source: Photograph from Lake Mary, Florida

architectural theme or palette. The priority locations for these plans include:

- The fringe areas of the Heart of the City;
- Central Park;
- U.S. 83;
- 10th Street; and
- Others as locally determined.

5. Identify and acquire open space areas and/or linear corridors within the ETJ that will buffer future growth from adjoining jurisdictions. Providing permanent open space at City entrances, wherever possible, will enhance the image as a freestanding community, rather than as an anonymous component of contiguous Valley development, as growth continues in future decades.
6. Integrate gateway treatments into programmed capital improvement projects. Enhancements may include pavement colors and patterns, crosswalk textures, ornamental street fixtures (signal poles and mast arms), unique signage, recovered green space, street trees, and pedestrian amenities.
7. Repurpose the bus stop locations near and within the above identified special places. Incorporate signature, one-of-a-kind shelters and the incorporation of public art displays.

Open Space Preservation

Preserving the desired character of the community requires protection of open space. Open space must be reserved around the periphery to distinguish McAllen from its neighboring jurisdictions. There must also be open space integrated into development not only to achieve neighborhood character, but also for drainage and park land purposes. The question is how to accomplish this without compromising private interests or the economic development potential of the community. The answer lies in a flexible land use and zoning system that is designed to achieve the intended character while meeting the practical needs for open space and infrastructure.

Goals

- Continuation of policies requiring open space land dedication as a part of land development projects.
- Acquisition of strategic sites for future recreational development, as recommended in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan/Recovery Action Plan
- Amendment of standards and regulations to achieve community objectives while remaining flexible
- Preservation of National Wildlife Refuge lands in the northern ETJ area
- Preservation of the natural landscape, urban tree cover, long-standing citrus groves, and protection of sensitive resources

Recommendations

1. Amend the zoning ordinance to adopt district classifications that are based on development character rather than on use and minimum lot size. Establish several development options that are allowed by right within each district. Use correlating standards for density (units per acre) and open space (percent undeveloped) to maintain the same character.
2. Establish the minimum required open space to correspond with the on-site detention requirements,[1] together with that required for park land dedication. Build density bonuses into the allowable development options to reward greater amounts of open space. This is done by clustering home sites

[1] Based upon recent changes requiring on-site detention for 25-year storm events in both residential and nonresidential developments.

and allowing a mix of housing types to achieve greater gross density. The bufferyard requirements discussed in this section, along with enhanced design standards, would be used to ensure compatibility between different housing types.

3. Amend the park land dedication ordinance as follows:
   - Increase the standard from five to six and one quarter acres per 1,000 persons. This is the minimum national standard and that proposed within the Parks and Recreation Master Plan/Recovery Action Plan. The density bonuses referred to above must offset this added requirement such that the number of lots remains the same – or slightly higher as an incentive – after the ordinance amendments.
   - Increase the fee in-lieu amount such that it corresponds to the land dedication requirement. This way, either land dedication or fee in-lieu ensures a provision of park space commensurate with the demand generated by new development.
   - Allow a credit toward the required park land dedication for land required and used for on-site stormwater detention. The credit must be proportionate to the amount of usable space. Larger, flat-bottom detention facilities may have dual use for ball fields (similar to Jackson City-School Park). The perimeter may also be used for walking trails.
   - Incorporate standards relating to the design of detention facilities and their maintenance to ensure their attractive appearance and contribution as a community amenity.



Design enhancements to drainage facilities may serve as a neighborhood amenity with recreational value.

Source: Photograph of McAllen

4. Amend the subdivision regulations to allow alternative subdivision designs, such as clustered (30 percent open space), conservation (50 percent open space) and preservation (80 percent open space) development. These alternative neighborhood environments would allow the City to enhance its character while protecting its resources, adding open space, and meeting drainage demands.
5. Incorporate ordinance provisions as to the handling of open space areas. These may be managed by the City (where dedicated for public purpose), a homeowners' association, or as a permanent conservation easement
6. Coordinate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife to supplement the existing National Wildlife Refuges with additional parcels. Also, seek to buffer the refuge with added open space, which may supplement the City parks and corridor system and provide future recreational opportunities to developing neighborhoods.

Compatible Pattern of Development

The pattern of existing development is generally well-planned. For the most part, neighborhoods are within the interiors of the superblock formed by the four bounding arterial roadways. Newer commercial developments have adhered to higher standards and present fewer problems, although their relationship to the abutting neighborhoods remains important. As the community expands into the ETJ, the patterns

of use and design of high-density residential and nonresidential sites must observe new standards to ensure neighborhood protection and land use compatibility. There must be development policies and ordinance provisions in place to ensure new uses that contribute positively to the character of the community and are not undesirable for existing adjacent uses.

The "centers concept" contained in the earlier Foresight Plan, while basically sound, must be re-evaluated and adjusted to consider the market needs of retail developers and the varying space and location requirements of neighborhood, City-wide, and regional commercial development. A more viable approach is a plan with fewer, more significant nodes with neighborhood-serving uses integrated within mixed-use developments. Without a market-based land use plan, areas foreseen for commercial use will remain undeveloped, which is counter to fiscally responsible development policies and the expectations of the community.

Goals

- Improved land use policies and zoning practices to mitigate the impacts of intensive land uses on residential neighborhoods and other sensitive areas
- Adoption of a land use plan that is market supported and economically viable
- Promotion of commercial building clustering with primary access taken from consolidated side street entrances
- Provision of mixed-use developments that utilize infrastructure more efficiently, are transit supportive, enhance walkability, and offer an improved jobs-to-housing balance.
- Strengthened landscape buffering requirements between different land uses or community character classifications.

Recommendations

1. Amend the zoning ordinance to adopt new districts that reflect the intended character of development. Within each district should be development options allowing increased flexibility while securing development character, as displayed in **Table 5.1.1, Sample Character Districts**. Each option must have corresponding density and open space requirements to preserve the district character, while providing density bonuses for the cluster and planned development types.
2. Amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate bufferyard standards whereby the requirements vary according to the intensity and impacts of abutting properties. Variables must include a measure for opacity determined by a combination of bufferyard width, plant density, land form (i.e. earthen berms), and fencing.

A bufferyard standard may be met in a number of ways, as displayed in this example. It may be a wide yard with limited plant units or a narrow yard with liberal plantings, all meeting the performance standard.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

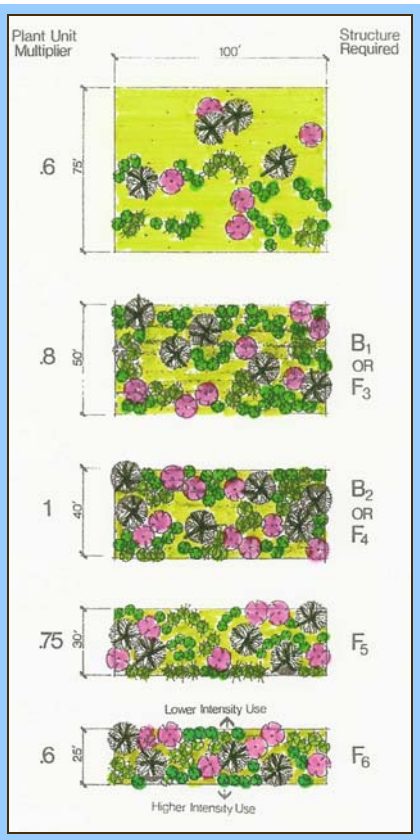


Table 5.1.1, Sample Character Districts

District and Development Type	Min. OSR	Density		Required Utilities	Minimum Site Area
		Max. Gross	Max. Net		
Suburban (S)					
Residential	0.10	1.92	1.92	public	15,000 sf
Cluster	0.30	2.17	2.17	public	5 ac
Planned	0.85	2.25	3.50	public	15 ac
Auto-Urban (AU)					
Residential	0.10	2.61	2.90	public	20,000 sf
Cluster	0.30	3.23	5.54	public	10,000 sf
Planned	0.35	4.37	7.50	public	10,000 sf
Urban (U)					
Residential	0.10	3.27	3.64	public	15,000 sf
Cluster	0.25	4.15	5.54	public	8,000 sf
Planned	0.35	5.56	8.50	public	6,000 sf

Within each residential district (shown in grey), there are three development options, with corresponding open space ratio (OSR) and density standards. As the minimum open space increases, there is a corresponding increase in maximum allowable gross density, thereby offering a bonus for provision of increased open space.

3. Integrate into the bufferyard standards perimeter buffering of neighborhoods abutting arterial and collector streets. An increased setback from the right-of-way must be provided to allow for landscaping treatments. Walls should become a secondary element to the bufferyard.
4. Incorporate transitional development options within the Auto-Urban District allowing increased density adjacent to arterial roadways. The bufferyard requirements would apply within the district between the different densities.
5. Undertake a study to identify the market viability of the adopted future land use plan. Generally, the distances between commercial centers should be increased. In addition, the nodes should be distinguished between community/regional and neighborhood centers, with a limitation of 25,000 allowable square footage for neighborhood centers.
6. Rezone undeveloped tracts for which there is limited market support. Bonuses and protective measures via site design and buffering will be essential to allow feasible development without an undue economic impact on the property owner or burden on abutting properties.
7. Adopt building design standards for neighborhood centers to ensure compatibility. These standards should include a floor area ratio, landscape surface ratio, maximum building height, roof design, building shape and orientation, location of parking, site lighting, and signage.
8. Amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate a mixed-use development option that is permitted by right. Such district must have applicable dimensional criteria and performance standards so as to ensure compatibility and quality outcomes.



Design standards for suburban commercial uses can be residential in appearance and effectively blend in with the adjacent neighborhood.

Source: Photograph of Sugar Land, Texas

Accommodation of Future Growth

As McAllen continues to grow, the City must designate areas where orderly development is planned to occur. The essence of this plan is the City's desire to be proactive, rather than reacting to development on a project-by-project basis. Through active community support, this plan will ensure that future development meets certain prescribed standards and aids in achieving the desired community character.

An alternative to scattered development of the peripheral agricultural land is infilling or redevelopment of established areas. Any form of infill development that increases residential density or nonresidential use intensity will reduce the amount of undeveloped land needed for the future growth. Within the City limits is currently 1,146.16 undeveloped acres, as shown in **Figure 5.1.1, Undeveloped Land**. While intensive redevelopment could offset the need for major amounts of growth in the ETJ, there is – at least to date – a relatively small demand for high-rise urban living, which results in limited offsets without a substantial change in the living environment.

The Future Land Use Plan captures the community's values regarding the pattern, type, and character of future development. This is significant since the recommendations of this plan provide the basis for decisions pertaining to the City's zoning and subdivision ordinances, which are the primary tools to implement this plan.

Goals

- Designation of appropriate land areas to accommodate the projected new population and the associated commercial and industrial growth through the Year 2025
- Adoption and diligent implementation of growth management practices that promote infill and contiguous growth and coordinate land development with the provision of adequate streets, utilities, and other public facilities and services
- Provisions for a variety of housing types, residential densities, and development forms
- Promotion of clustering or conservation forms of development that are designed to preserve open space and protect valued lands and resources

Recommendations

1. Adopt a Future Land Use Plan that incorporates a combination of new development, infill, and redevelopment to accommodate the anticipated population and employment gain.
2. Promote land use policies and corresponding development regulations that allow and encourage a wide range of housing types and development forms.
3. Enact an infrastructure reinvestment program for the core areas of the community, with a focus on repair, replacing, and/or reconstructing streets and street lights, sidewalks, water/sewer lines, and storm drainage improvements.
4. Amend the zoning ordinance to incorporate a streamlined approval process for compliant applications for infill and redevelopment. Paramount to an expedited review process are clear standards to ensure compatibility with the context of the surrounding neighborhood environs.
5. Incorporate provisions for minor and major waivers of area requirements within the existing, older developed areas. Minor waivers may be approved administratively, whereas major waivers require Planning and Zoning Commission approval. These waivers are intended to allow investment and reinvestment in the older areas of the community, subject to specific standards and dimensional limitations.

6. Amend the zoning ordinance to allow accessory residential units in neighborhoods, subject to provisions regarding the maximum square footage, numbers of bedrooms and baths, and the percent of the primary structure. Establish performance standards regarding on-site parking.
7. Adopt infill development standards to ensure that new development is of the same character as the adjacent neighborhood environs. Such standards may relate to the scale and height of infill structures, as well as the use of materials, roof pitch, porches, and other dimensional specifications.
8. Expand the current neighborhood planning program with a goal of registering more neighborhoods and homeowners' associations. This program should offer technical assistance in the formation of associations and drafting private restrictions. Incentives to encourage enrollment may include priority capital improvements, availability of local grants or low interest loan programs, and neighborhood planning and design assistance.
9. Prepare one or more neighborhood plans annually, including drafting new or recommending changes to private restrictions; inventorying and identifying needed infrastructure improvements; drafting overlay district provisions, as needed; and formulating neighborhood empowerment initiatives.
10. Conduct a constructive review and critique of the zoning ordinance to identify and remove barriers to redevelopment, such as overly restrictive dimensional standards, cumbersome processes, extensive and costly submission requirements, etc.
11. Plan for development of a new urban, mixed-use center in the northern portion of the ETJ to serve as a regional retail, office, and hospitality cluster with upper floor and dense integrated and surrounding residential occupancies. This cluster needs to be designed for a different market focus so as not to diminish the stature and attractiveness for reinvestment in the existing Heart of the City.

Downtown Success and Economic Sustainability

McAllen's central business district endures as a viable commercial center. Outlying highway-oriented and arterial street commercial areas, the Gateway Plaza La Plaza Mall, and "big-box" clusters long ago eclipsed the stature of the "Heart of the City" as the City's dominant shopping area. In order to continue, the area must continue to transform itself into a specialized retail and entertainment center. Since McAllen's founding, the Heart of the City has remained as the only urban center, is well-oriented to 10th Street and the U.S. 83 Expressway, and affords considerable potential for redevelopment and enhancement. As the community continues to grow farther northward, this area may be in danger of becoming increasingly irrelevant without action in support of the recent plan. The City must commit to its sustainability by taking decisive steps to secure its long-term future role, make significant investments – like the parking garage – that strengthen its economic sustainability, and eventually re-establish its prominence as a symbol of McAllen's well being.

Goals

- Continuation of City-wide investment in Downtown by completing implementation of the Heart of the City revitalization program
- Encouragement of higher density residential and mixed-use development within and on the periphery of Downtown
- Establishment of improved design standards and guidelines for achieving the intended development form of an urban center
- Improved portal entries, signage, and way-finding techniques to aid visitors unfamiliar with McAllen in finding the Downtown area

Recommendations

1. Continue investing in Downtown by diligently implementing the Heart of McAllen revitalization and enhancement program.
2. Amend the zoning ordinance to establish a new zoning district that is specifically tailored for this special area. In an urban environment, the control of use is secondary to building design and, hence, the use of standards to ensure maintenance of the character. Specific provisions and design standards should include:
   - A minimum building height of two stories to ensure building enclosure and, thus, an urban character.
   - Zero front and side yard setbacks.
   - Building form standards to mimic the historic and current design of buildings.
   - Design standards relating to building wall articulation and fenestration (placement of doors and windows).
   - Specification of allowable building materials and the use of colors.
   - Unique sign styling, placement, and sizing.
   - Street-level amenities such as window displays, outdoor plazas and seating areas, and use of the public sidewalk.



To sustain the urban character of Downtown, the front building wall must be maintained, the historic architecture and facades preserved, and an enhanced pedestrian-scaled environment created.
Source: Photograph from McAllen

3. Amend the zoning ordinance to create a district for the residential Downtown fringe area, with applicable standards to ensure compatibility with Downtown and the abutting low-density neighborhoods. Adopt specific design standards and a design review process to evaluate the appropriateness of the design to its historic context.
4. Provide incentives in the form of density and/or floor area bonuses to encourage creation of public spaces and pedestrian amenities.
5. Adopt provisions that expedite the approval process for Downtown infill projects – those that fill in the gaps between existing buildings. The above recommended district and design standards would ensure consistency in the scale and design of the infill structure.
6. Conduct a Downtown fringe area plan for the neighborhood and impending transitional areas immediately adjacent to and around the Downtown to identify measures to secure their integrity. An area-wide access and parking plan is needed, as is a buffering plan to ensure increased compatibility from the more intensive urban center.
7. Adopt an aggressive redevelopment plan that includes selective removal of deteriorating structures and provides for the assembly of properties in order to accommodate larger commercial, office, and residential mixed-use projects. Vacation of street rights-of-way may be viable and warranted in certain situations to create larger sites.
8. Improve neighborhood conditions in areas peripheral to Downtown through infrastructure reinvestment, housing rehabilitation, compatible infill development, and preparation of neighborhood plans and technical assistance.

9. Conduct a market and economic study focused on the Downtown. A business mix assessment should be prepared to identify the current mix of businesses and the optimum future mix of uses. Of particular importance will be to identify targeted businesses, along with strategies and necessary incentives to attract their location to Downtown. Care must be taken to attract businesses that complement the current genuineness of the area. Financing mechanisms will be essential to identify means for offering incentives, attracting redevelopment, overcoming code compliance issues, and assisting in physical enhancement efforts.
10. Prepare a constraint analysis to identify limiting factors for development, redevelopment, and improved utilization of Downtown properties and buildings. The analysis should include interviews of business owners, land owners, and lessees, as well as an objective review. Such factors as land and building ownership, building and lease space sizes, building conditions, building code issues such as ADA accessibility and fire access, lease rates, parking, vehicular and pedestrian access, and other contributing factors should be identified and addressed.

Enhanced Community Appearance

The character of McAllen is, perhaps, the single most evident glimpse of its economic viability, government pro-activeness, and civic pride. The initial impression is formed by the quality appearance of development, including the nature of community aesthetics, condition of public facilities, amount and quality of public open space, and design and maintenance of roadways and other infrastructure. The appearance of the community reinforces the quality of life and livability for those who reside in McAllen, as well as those who may be making an investment or relocation decision.



Streetscape bufferyards with increased open space, meandering sidewalks, and liberal landscaping portray a positive visual impression.
Source: Photograph from McAllen

Community character is a top priority according to those who participated in the public input process. Residents recognize the importance of livability in the success of their economic development and both desire and expect quality new development and redevelopment. There is a desire to improve the entrances with distinctive gateways, enhance the roadway environs with streetscape improvements, increase the amount of green space along streets, add more landscaping and screening of parking areas, control the size and location of signage, manage the appearance of structures and vacant properties, and diligently enforce the City's codes.

Goals

- Continued and enhanced City beautification efforts and streetscape enhancement projects
- Revision of density requirements and development forms that will require more open space for provision of parks, linear greenways, landscape buffers, and street tree plantings
- Reduction of densities for future non-clustered, single-family residential developments. Elimination of the "cookie cutter" appearance of conventional small-lot subdivisions.
- Development of design standards to reinforce the character and visual integrity of public corridors and special districts

Recommendations

1. Adopt building design standards throughout the community or alternatively – and at a minimum – for each of the primary street corridors. Standards should regulate the building shape, which must vary according to building size, roof, and skyline; building materials and design elements; and loading and storage placement and screening. Industrial district standards should differentiate between outer (those with street frontage and visible to the public) and interior (those shielded or screened from public view via building orientation, location, or design) elevations. Truck loading and exterior storage areas must be effectively screened and buffered.
2. Amend the sign ordinance to require monument versus pole signs, with an incentive for an increase in the total allowable sign area. Re-evaluate and change the allowable sign areas and dimensions based on street frontage. (Note: With a reduced front yard setback, as recommended below, the need for large signage is limited.) Place limitations on the total number of signs per premise or center (currently allowed is one freestanding sign per premise plus wall signs without limitation, one awning and one under-canopy sign per occupancy, and one projection or flag mount sign).
3. Require submission and administrative approval of a master sign plan for all multiple tenant centers and developments beyond a specified gross floor area.
4. Adopt amortization provisions for nonconforming signs, which will require their removal after a specified amount of time. A study will be necessary to identify the number of affected signs and to establish a reasonable period of time for their conformance with the sign code.



"Sign clutter" persists as an issue confronting the older commercial corridors.
Source: Photograph from McAllen (10th Street)



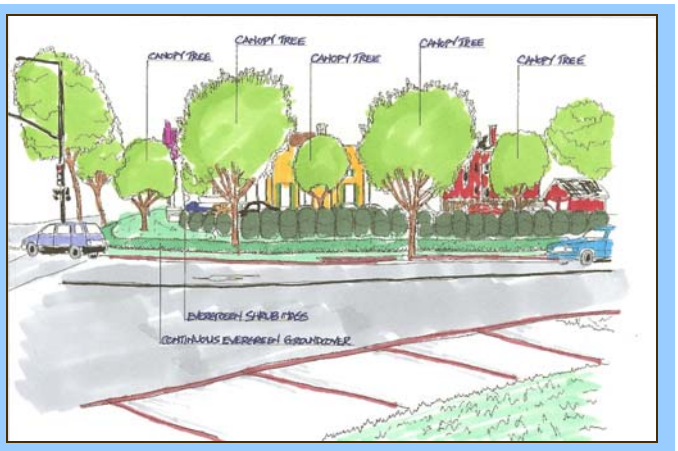
Source: Photograph from Sugar Land, Texas

5. Amend the zoning ordinance to accomplish the following:
   - Establish a minimum open space ratio (OSR) within residential developments and landscape surface ratio (LSR) within nonresidential developments. These ratios must vary according to the character of the district. Suburban districts must have greater green space requirements than auto-urban and urban districts. These open space areas would provide visual buffering and shade, accommodate recreational amenities, and provide needed space for stormwater detention. The allowable densities and use mixtures must be adjusted to maintain an equivalent development yield.
   - Amend the landscape and buffer plan requirements[2] to require screening along 100 percent of all parking and vehicular use areas that are parallel to public street rights-of-way and major

[2] Sec. 110-49. Landscape buffers, Division 2, Plans and Specifications

entrance drives. The screening may include shrubbery, earthen berms, walls, or a combination thereof to meet the performance standard.

- Amend the height and yard requirements[3] to include maximum building coverage ratios and floor area ratios for each of the districts to manage building bulk and scale, as well as neighborhood and commercial district context.
- Establish floor area ratios to manage building coverage and ensure that yards are large enough to accommodate the required landscaping.
- Include specific provisions to further design the requirements for landscaping and buffering "visible from the street fronting the parcel." Using a streetscape bufferyard would allow flexibility while varying the requirements according to the intensity of the site and surrounding uses.



Streetscape bufferyards establish an edge to properties abutting street rights-of-way, screen unsightly areas, and contribute to an enhanced appearance.

- Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

- Reduce the minimum front setback from one-half of the width of the street right-of-way it faces to a maximum build-to line of 15 feet in the non-urban commercial districts. At the same time, increase the rear setback from five feet to 40 feet. Include design standards relating to monument signage and standards for blank walls and street yard landscaping.
- Require a triangular open space easement at the intersection of all street classifications with arterial streets. This area must be landscaped and maintained as open space, with provisions for site distance visibility.

6. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, diligently implement this plan and enforce its standards and regulations. Without a commitment on behalf of community leaders, the value and integrity of this plan and its expected outcomes will not be fully realized.

Future Land Use Plan

The essence of comprehensive planning is a recognition that McAllen does not have to wait and react to growth and development. Rather, it can determine where growth will occur and what character this new development will reflect. Through active community support, this plan will ensure that development meets certain standards and, thus, contributes to achieving the desired community character.

As a guide for land development and public improvements, the plan depicted in **Figure 5.1.2, Future Land Use Plan**, captures and develops into the City's policies the community's values regarding how, when, and where it will grow over the course of the next two decades. This is significant since the findings and recommendations contained in this plan provide the basis for the City's development ordinances as the primary tools to implement the plan.

[3] Sec. 138-356. Table of height and yard requirements, Division 2, Requirements by District

5.2
SECTION

Cultural and Environmental Resources

Cultural and environmental resources are essential amenities for residents, businesses, and visitors. Cultural assets allow a resident or visitor to attend a theatrical performance, walk through a sculpture gallery, view public murals, or stroll through an historic downtown. Likewise, environmental resources are of value to the character of the community. Therefore, these resources warrant sensitive planning since they have a significant influence on quality of life.

The relationship between culture and the environment with other physical planning elements is too often considered separately from their overall context. This often results in strategies that are not properly integrated and, thus, less successful than if there was a more holistic viewpoint during the planning process.

Several cultural elements are integral to the overall planning strategy. They have their own infrastructure, programming, funding, and implementation considerations that are tied to other sections of this plan. An increasing draw for McAllen residents and visitors is the emerging arts culture that includes the visual and performing arts, historic buildings, seasonal events, and the renewal of the Heart of the City. These cultural attractions are linked in proximity, as well as by the type of resources and planning they require. In fact, a visitor may engage in a multi-faceted cultural visit. A trip may take the visitor along an ArtsWalk within view of historic buildings while on the way to indoor art galleries that are demarcated by public art displays. McAllen should strive to strengthen its identity as the center for arts in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

"Cultural tourism is big business for Texas," said Ricardo Hernandez, TCA's executive director. "Economic development studies have shown the cultural arts generate nearly 20 percent of the total tourism in Texas, that Texas attracts more cultural tourists than almost any other state, and that travelers who participate in cultural and heritage activities tend to stay longer and spend more. Cultural tourism is a significant catalyst for local economic development initiatives."

Source: Texas Commission on the Arts, 2006

McAllen maintains many quality environmental resources. This element reflects the City's commitment to preserve and sustain the integrity of the natural environment. There need to be policies in place, though, to maximize protection while minimizing the impact of the built environment. Innovative technologies and practices should be adopted that not only keep pace with population growth, but also match the demonstrated efforts of other leading cities.

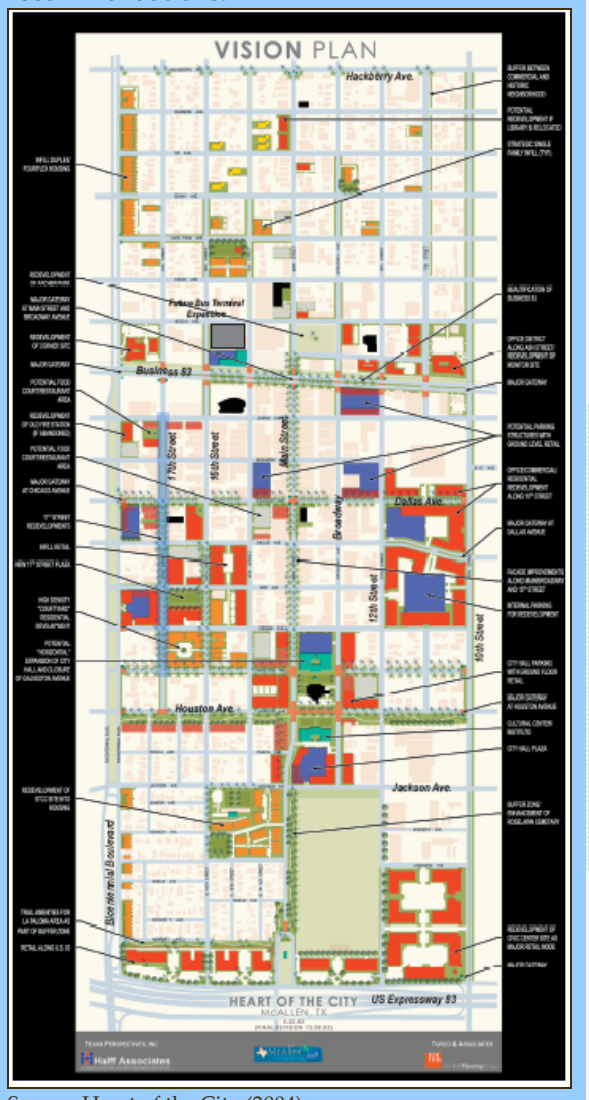
Synopsis of Cultural Issues

This section focuses on the steps necessary to support and grow McAllen's emerging cultural, historic, and arts networks to keep in step with the City's growth. The origination of these issues was through the input of residents during the plan development process. (Refer to **Appendix A, Meeting Summary**.) These comments were supplemented by the observations of City staff and the consultants.

Downtown Historic Preservation

Historic preservation will become more critical as the City ages and the housing characteristics change over time, as is evident in the original town area. While the overall age of the housing stock is relatively young, it offers a collection of older housing. The assortment of older buildings and styles around the Heart of the City creates a sense of character that is not replicated elsewhere in the community. In essence, it creates a 'living history' of the past. Functioning businesses and homes characterize the historical areas as this is still a lively part of the City. The current effort to survey and define the historical nature and boundary is an important step in the preservation process. This work-in-progress will allow for district formation and possible designations of historical areas. Financial incentives and cultural programs can also create motivation to celebrate this historical heritage. Property and business owners must be involved in the public process and must serve as advocates for preservation and program initiatives.

The Heart of the City Plan identifies future improvements in the downtown area. Many focus on urban design of streetscapes, historic buildings, and gateways. Gateway sites and design concepts are included as recommendations.



Source: Heart of the City (2004)

Goals

- Formation of historical districts to preserve the integrity of locally significant structures and areas
- Establishment of reuse and restoration standards and flexible design guidance
- Provision of incentives and financial and technical assistance to facilitate desired outcomes
- Leveraging increased private investment by way of public improvement projects
- Initiation of programs to attract increased visitation and patronage
- Improved means of access and enhanced pedestrian friendliness

Recommendations

1. Analyze the McAllen Cultural Resources Survey for potential historic district areas. Each historical district should be a contiguous area that has definitive boundaries.

2. Designate one or more historical districts that capture contributing buildings identified in the survey. The local district(s) should include special design review guidelines and procedures.
3. Draft design guidelines or standards for any future redevelopment in the historical areas. These guidelines should allow for flexibility to permit the updating of buildings for fire safety and electrical/heating system improvements while retaining their exterior historic character.
4. Offer financial assistance to property owners through a façade rehabilitation program. This program can involve low-interest loans, grants, technical assistance, and expedited approval for façade or sign improvements. A successful pilot project can aid in promoting this type of assistance and serve as a model to be followed by other property owners. Such a project should be promoted in press notices and marketing materials.
5. Create a Business Improvement District (BID) that can initiate highly-visible public improvement projects to leverage increased private investment. This district must be supported and led by downtown businesses. Once a majority of owners have agreed to the regulations, the City Commission should designate the district, as well as its time span and scope.
6. Motivate shoppers to patronize Downtown through historical district programming. This programming may be led by the Chamber of Commerce or can be part of a future Main Street program.
7. Incorporate nighttime shopping events and cultural activities to encourage a more vibrant "24/7" lifestyle. As cities look to attract new residents, there is an emphasis on reaching the "creative class." This type of resident seeks higher quality of life amenities and enjoys cultural attractions that a lively downtown can offer.
8. Enhance access to the historic district by offering increased connections for all transportation modes. Eliminate barriers to pedestrian access and amenities.
9. Improve future transit access to the Heart of the City, including increased service frequency and the number of routes and national and international carriers. As the downtown improves, the need for transit access will continue to increase as visitors seek out alternative means of transportation.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) represent an entrepreneurial approach on behalf of downtown leaders or participating businesses to proactively address their business area. Benefits include:

- protecting and enhancing public spaces through the deployment of "security teams" or "ambassadors;"
- initiating services such as sidewalk cleaning, marketing, promotions, business retention, and recruitment;
- advocating downtown businesses to communicate a unified vision/message to aid the district's revitalization;
- creating cooperation among competitive businesses, which allows them to engage in activities that they would not be able to do on their own;
- generating financing for capital improvements for more attractive streetscapes; and
- researching and planning services such as collecting and analyzing economic and demographic data, monitoring progress, setting and revising strategic goals, and developing multi-year redevelopment programs.

Source: Department of City & Regional Planning UNC-Chapel Hill, April 19, 1999

Performing and Visual Arts

McAllen has an emerging performing and visual arts community that is growing its awareness and organization. The efforts on behalf of the City and the Chamber of Commerce to foster an attitude of acceptance and celebration must continue to be fostered. Arts groups need assistance in spreading throughout the community and being viewed in different venues. This growth may occur through the addition of physical spaces such as more downtown gallery space, theater performance venues, musical

concert halls, outdoor performance spaces, seasonal exhibition opportunities, neighborhood park displays, and municipal facilities such as the proposed Central Park. The arts may also grow through policies such as the designation of an arts district, funding capital projects, identification of heritage trails, zoning for live/work housing, cultural tourism marketing, and public/private partnerships.

Goals

- Growth and expansion of the "creative community" through increased programming and complementary capital investments
- Increased visibility and enhanced awareness of the arts
- Regulatory allowances and incentives to support the objectives of the art community
- Multi-functional use of public buildings and spaces to exhibit the arts
- Representation of the arts in the planning and design of public projects

Recommendations

1. Expand the McA² Creative Incubator through advanced business counseling and technical assistance, more programming, development of a community awareness campaign, and financial incentives.
2. Leverage private reinvestment with municipal projects around the incubator. Small-scale projects such as pedestrian-scale street lighting, sidewalks, landscaping, and street re-surfacing would improve the safety and accessibility of the facility and its connectivity with the neighborhood.
3. Open a second phase of the Incubator in Downtown or another central location. The new incubator should include performance and gallery space with a larger black box theater and exhibition area.
4. Incorporate zoning provisions to allow – and encourage – mixed-use development. Density bonuses may be used in Downtown to lower market rates, making gallery space more affordable. Also, an incentive for upper floor residences allows a live/work situation where local artists may both live and work in the same building.
5. Complete a survey of cultural facilities to identify clusters of artists that may become an Arts and Cultural District. Locations of existing structures or those that may be suitable for studios, galleries, performance venues, and workshops should be identified. Subsequent to the survey, create an Arts and Cultural District.
6. Amend the zoning ordinance to make live/work units a permitted use in the urban and planned districts. Also, permit accessory units in the auto-urban and suburban districts. Develop performance standards to manage compatibility.
7. Implement the recommendations of the Heart of the City Plan to create a distinct sense of place. Artistic

Existing Irrigation Pipes at Col Rowe Blvd



Potential Murals as Public Art



The irrigation pipe infrastructure currently exists as an eyesore that could be a cultural asset.

features such as public sculptures, signage, streetscape amenities, murals, and interpretive exhibits should be used to demarcate the specific district.

8. Expand upon the ArtWalk program to establish a heritage walk. Paint or stone materials may be used for the sidewalk as a means of way-finding for self-guided arts tours. They may also relate to the history and local significance of the area by way of historical facts. Seek private sponsorship for development of the heritage walk.
9. Incorporate into community parks flexible spaces for use in the expression of the arts and performance. Large-scale art exhibition spaces, such as an amphitheater or plaza, should be incorporated into a community park or other public space in a central and visible location. Smaller parks should allow murals, temporary art exhibition space, arts programming, and creatively designed infrastructure elements (park benches, trash cans, etc.).
10. Maximize the use of walls and open floor space within the Convention Center for temporary exhibitions, rotating displays, and performances. This functional use of the Convention Center would enhance the character of the performing arts center and distinguish McAllen as a leader of the arts in the Valley.
11. Integrate art and design features into capital improvement projects. Introduce an art representative into the early design stage of projects to identify opportunities for art incorporation. Art in public projects may be used in seeking grant funds or soliciting public support for an infrastructure project. Opportunities for art to be a visible part of future capital projects include roadway medians, municipal buildings, public parks and spaces, utility boxes, fire hydrants, school buildings, and irrigation facilities.
12. Coordinate with the local school districts to utilize school buildings for murals or temporary displays of visual art. Performance spaces such as an auditorium may also be incorporated as a shared-use space for performing arts groups.
13. Strengthen connections between local artists and the Heart of the City by including arts and culture in future Main Street programming. Examples of programming may include a downtown art festival or an expanded ArtWalk program. A future Main Street office may feature local artists as a rotating display of McAllen culture.
14. Conduct an annual design competition for local and regional artists to create interpretive displays on the upright concrete irrigation valves. Establish design and

Non-traditional Artistic Settings



Controlled artistic expression may unveil itself in non-traditional environments such as on the many fences and walls throughout the community.

Expressway 83 Opportunity



Example of U.S. 59 in Sugar Land, Texas



The U.S. 83 Expressway offers a major opportunity for gateway corridor enhancement and identity creation.

thematic parameters to relate the art to the community. Select highly visible locations for the initial displays, with a phased multi-year implementation program.

Seasonal Festivals and Sporting Events:

McAllen's tropical climate allows it to enjoy warm weather for most of the year, which creates opportunities for both indoor and outdoor seasonal events. However, special events require adequate facilities, human resources, funding assistance, and leadership. The growing population requires that its cultural attractions, whether seasonal or permanent, grow while meeting its future cultural needs.

Goals

- Investment in permanent facilities and improvements to host both small and large community events
- Partnership and collaborative with other sponsoring organizations to grow the program of local and regional events

Recommendations

1. Continue to promote and sponsor seasonal events such as PalmFest and others. Invest in facilities and improvements to support and grow the events in a permanent location. Seek local support and partnerships with other organizations to co-sponsor new events to serve the growing demands of the population.
2. Design future facilities and spaces to be multi-functional and to accommodate gatherings of all sizes. Plan and construct a large, permanent outdoor space as a performance venue to accommodate concerts or exhibitions for large gatherings. An amphitheater or plaza with significant fixed and flexible seating is needed for large-scale seasonal events so more cultural activities can occur on a regular basis.
3. Consider forming a nonprofit organization to plan and coordinate local and regional events. The City should be the primary sponsoring entity with secondary sponsors such as other cities, organizations, and private groups.



The sites and sounds of PalmFest attract patrons and visitors from both national and international regions, which contribute to the culture and heritage of the community.

Source: PalmFest, 2006

Main Street Program

The McAllen Main Street program is in the beginning stages of review from the National Main Street Program Accreditation through the National Historic Trust Main Street Program. Acceptance would offer an opportunity to recognize Downtown and celebrate its cultural contributions through improvements and programming. The program would incorporate national benchmarks and professional staff to strengthen and rejuvenate the commercial area. This program would represent a first step of a "virtuous cycle" in downtown preservation and redevelopment.

Goals

- Accreditation as a National Main Street City.
- Commitment of local resources to initiate and sustain a Downtown development program
- Establishment of a dedicated funding source for program and project development

Recommendations

1. Continue to coordinate with the National Main Street Program toward accreditation as a Main Street City. Seek counsel as to the steps and strategies that may be taken locally to facilitate acceptance.
2. In the interim (before Main Street Program acceptance), establish a local Main Street office as either a City department, sponsored in part or in whole by another organization, or as a non-profit organization. This should serve as a coordinating body to act on the initiatives of this plan and the Heart of the City plan.

"The Main Street Approach is a community-driven, comprehensive methodology used to revitalize older, traditional business districts throughout the United States. It is a common-sense way to address the variety of issues and problems that face traditional business districts. The underlying premise of the Main Street approach is to encourage economic development within the context of historic preservation in ways appropriate to today's marketplace. The Main Street Approach advocates a return to community self-reliance, local empowerment, and the rebuilding of traditional commercial districts based on their unique assets: distinctive architecture, a pedestrian-friendly environment, personal service, local ownership, and a sense of community."

Source: National Trust for Historic Preservation

Synopsis of Environmental Issues

The environment is important to McAllen and is thus, interwoven throughout this plan. There are many areas that have environmental implications, some of which are highlighted here and others highlighted elsewhere in this chapter and plan. The issues and recommended solutions follow.

Agricultural Heritage and Farmer's Market

The surrounding agricultural and ranching is becoming increasingly urbanized. Yet, this land is vital to the economy and is responsible for the identity and character of the City. Complete loss of this space will lead to a bleeding together into a single, composite community. Such pattern will blur the edge and, hence, the definable identity of McAllen. Therefore, this agricultural character should be preserved and integrated into the fabric of the community. At the same time, a farmer's market may be used to compliment the agricultural lands, as well as the Heart of the City.

Goals

- Preservation of agricultural lands and orchards
- Promotion of development that is sensitive to the agricultural environment
- Allowance of an economic return for preserved agricultural lands
- Protection and management of environmental resources

Recommendations

1. Amend the zoning ordinance to include an agricultural district. This district would have development rights at very low densities. The use of clustering as shown in **Figure 5.2.1, The Farm**, may allow increased development density at an appropriate point in the future when adequate facilities and services are available. Alternatively, the balance of the land may continue to be used for orchards, agricultural operations, or for the protection of environmental resources.

Figure 5.2.1, The Farm



Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

2. Create countryside and/or estate districts. These districts would allow increasing densities where adequate facilities are or may become readily available. These districts would be for the developing area where a rural character is desired.
3. Incorporate performance standards into the agricultural district to ensure compatibility. Standards should include distance and bufferyard requirements, limitations on use and operations, and environmental standards.
4. Integrate density bonuses into the agricultural district for the preservation of orchards, to protect other valuable features, or meet other community objectives.
5. Adhere to the recommendations of ***Section 5.3, Growth Management***, regarding the use of annexation or other instruments to manage the pattern and timing of development.
6. Consider a transfer of development rights from the agricultural areas to the defined growth area. In effect, increased density would be allowed in approved locations where adequate facilities and services are readily available.
7. Create a Downtown Farmer's Market as a niche economic and marketing tool. Locate it in a central location with good access and in proximity to complimentary uses. Allow adequate space for growth in market space and parking.

Brownfields and Waste Facilities

A brownfield site is a "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant.

Source: U.S. EPA, CERCLA (1980)

Land pollution has lasting effects on the environment in the form of soil and water contamination that may extend well beyond the boundaries of a polluted site. Leakage of hazardous material may cause ground contamination that prohibits use of the site for residential purposes and creates redevelopment feasibility issues due to the cost of the cleanup. Contamination may also spread to the ground or surface water systems and, hence, extend great distances. The effects of contamination are widespread, difficult to remediate, and expensive to redevelop. Examples of contaminated sites include old gas stations, chemical factories, petroleum drilling sites, waste facilities, rail yards, and transit stations. Brownfields also include waste facilities such as recycling plants and municipal and private transfer stations and landfills.

Goals

- Protection of the environment from the harmful affects of contamination
- Regulation of contaminate contributing uses
- Continuation and expansion of recycling and reuse

Recommendations

1. Create a brownfield inventory of all properties that are known to contain soil contamination through environmental testing (or already included on EPA brownfields list) or could potentially contain contamination. Subsequently, create a database with information about the type of contamination or remediation.
2. Collaborate in the planning of new or expanded waste facilities for recycling or trash dumping. Focus on site design, as well as transportation connections to the sites (truck routes), avoiding potential leachate contamination, and operating nuisances (noise, odor, and lighting).
3. Amend the zoning ordinance to establish specific performance standards for applicable brownfield uses. A specific use permit must be required, with decision criteria and provisions for revocation.
4. Incorporate environmental performance standards into the zoning ordinance relating to noise, lighting, dust, debris, vibration, and odor, subject to national standards.
5. Expand the recycling program (and trash pick up) concurrent with population growth. Expand the current curb-side recycling in target areas to encourage participation and reduce the net tonnage of recyclable materials. Furthermore, extend the recycling program into public parks and other spaces and buildings.
6. Research and record the recent trend for collection of recyclable materials. Set a goal to increase the per capita tonnage of collected materials by 10 percent over the course of five or more years.

Water Quantity and Quality

Water issues focus on both quality and quantity for above- and below-ground water sources. McAllen faces challenges due to its urbanization and location. Environmental risk for water quantity focuses on a lack of water for local wetlands or declining water levels in lakes and streams. Water quality issues are related to stormwater runoff from impervious surfaces that create issues with water contamination, erosion, and sedimentation. Water quality issues are increasing due to the rapid development of previously undeveloped agricultural lands. Both issues are exacerbated by McAllen's geographic and geologic settings. There are also substantial financial implications through the increased need for water treatment, water rights acquisition, canal improvements, and wetlands reconstruction.



Vegetated swales are BMPs that slow water runoff and filter pollutants and potential contaminants, while also beautifying the visual environment and reducing the need for ground maintenance.

Goals

- Adoption of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for stormwater collection and conveyance
- Prevention of cumulative stormwater impacts through improved site design
- Conservation of water through awareness and better practices
- Innovation in rainwater capture, treatment, and reuse

Recommendations

As authorized by the Clean Water Act, the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program controls water pollution by regulating point sources that discharge pollutants into waters of the United States. Point sources are discrete conveyances such as pipes or man-made ditches. Individual homes that are connected to a municipal system, use a septic system, or do not have a surface discharge do not need an NPDES permit; however, industrial, municipal, and other facilities must obtain permits if their discharges go directly to surface waters.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)

1. Concurrent with the adoption of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II guidelines for stormwater control, adopt Best Management Practices (BMPs) for construction and post-construction stages of development. These guidelines help to reduce pollutants from entering local streams and stormwater systems, but also assist in controlling erosion and sedimentation. Avoiding the effects of erosion and sedimentation results in better functioning stormwater systems, improved habitats, and reduced local flooding. Reducing the pollution loading levels in stormwater systems allows for better stormwater discharges and improved water quality.
2. Increase the maintenance of the stormwater system to allow for an efficiently functioning series of stormwater drains and collection areas. This is important due to heavy erosion that results from the Valley weather pattern: infrequent, hard rains. Lack of preventative measures results in local flooding of streets and may extend into private properties during peak storm events.
3. Design new development to achieve an overall stormwater management plan that reduces the level of runoff to 10 percent of pre-development levels. For redevelopment and expansions, determine on a site-by-site basis the required ratio of post- to pre-development levels.
4. Implement and periodically review and update a City-wide Master Drainage Plan (in anticipation of part of the NPDES process) to create a policy and management guide for subdivision review and development. The plan should compile existing stormwater policies and mandates into a single stormwater information source.
5. Implement water conservation practices identified in the City's Conservation and Drought Contingency Plan. Consider a phased change from reliance on voluntary efforts to staged requirements to reduce the consumption of water in non-drought periods. Establish goals for incremental per capital net consumption reductions over five- and 10-year periods.
6. Design new municipal buildings as pilot projects for innovative rainwater capture and treatment techniques. This will result in financial savings over the long run, especially in operating costs. Use interpretive displays to inform residents about the science and conservation efforts behind the pilot project.



Source: Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (1999)

Incorporate incentives by way of expedited approval or other attractive alternatives for integration of water reduction practices in private land development. This is particularly applicable for "big box" development that has high ratios of impervious surfaces.

7. Use bio-retention areas or rain gardens in residential or municipal uses to collect rainwater after storms and divert it from the stormwater system. Runoff areas alongside roads can channel water off the roads and into native streetscape planting areas. The City should identify sites for potential bio-retention areas that could assist the storm drains in removing water from the roads. These sites might also be effective in reducing the need for stormwater system extensions into difficult to reach locations, sensitive areas, or sites that have high engineering costs.

Air Quality

The growing population and trade impacts upon air quality are issues that affect McAllen and the entire border region. The current air quality monitoring standards indicate the area is in attainment. There are many influences on the regional air quality that include the rate of population growth, the type and patterns of use, transportation mode choice, geography, and the climate, among many others. McAllen and the entire metropolitan area need to protect themselves from the health and environmental impacts that afflict residents in non-attainment areas.

"Air quality in the Valley is generally good. TNRCC scientists suggest the Valley may be vulnerable to significant pollution brought by winds from other urban areas to the northeast and added to the smaller sources locally. The TNRCC is tracking developments and hopes controls established in Houston, Galveston, and other cities will reduce pollution that may be imported to the Valley."

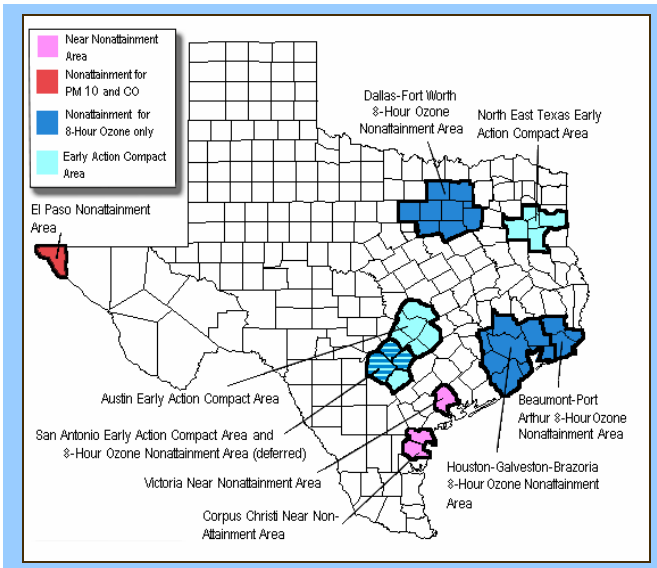
Source: Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (2002)

Goals

- Coordination with State and Federal agencies to monitor air quality and the area's attainment status
- Reduction of the influence on vehicle emissions through transportation systems management
- Management of growth patterns and responsible development forms

Recommendations

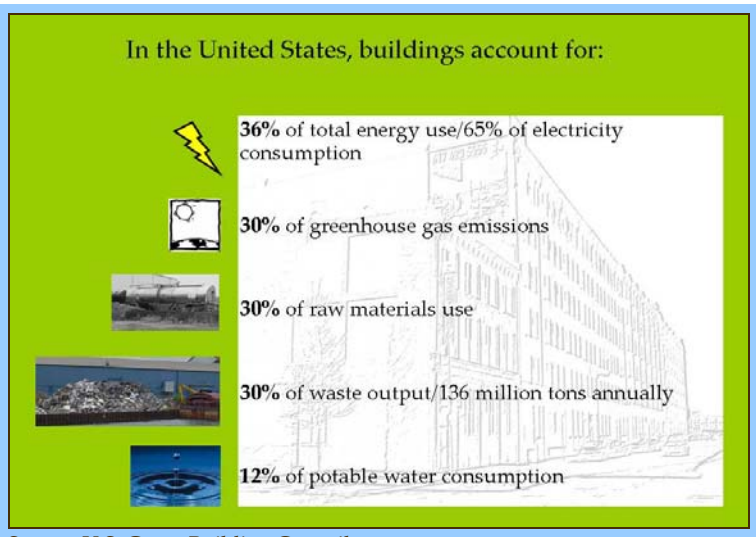
1. Coordinate with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and U.S. EPA Region 6 to monitor the air quality and stay alert as to any changing air quality conditions. Seek to avoid the negative economic implications of non-attainment, such as limitations on industrial development and costly remediation planning.
2. Seek alternative transportation solutions to be enacted at the local and regional levels to preserve air quality. Transportation impacts represent some of the largest contributions to poor air quality, with up to 40 percent of the pollution levels resulting from nonpoint source transportation causes. This is notable since McAllen is a hub of commerce and trade, which require mobility and, hence, traffic.



Source: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

3. Improve conditions and the infrastructure for increased walking, biking, and the use of carpooling and public transit to reduce the relative vehicle miles of travel and, thus, vehicle emissions. These strategies represent the philosophy to "think regionally and act locally."
4. Evaluate the future land use and growth plan relevant to the required lane miles and vehicle miles of travel. Adopt a plan and implementing regulations that provide incentives for responsible development patterns and efficient development forms.
5. Emphasize tree cover to increase the level of urban tree coverage. This requires both tree preservation and increased landscaping requirements for new development. This must apply to residential and nonresidential development and to both public spaces and private properties.

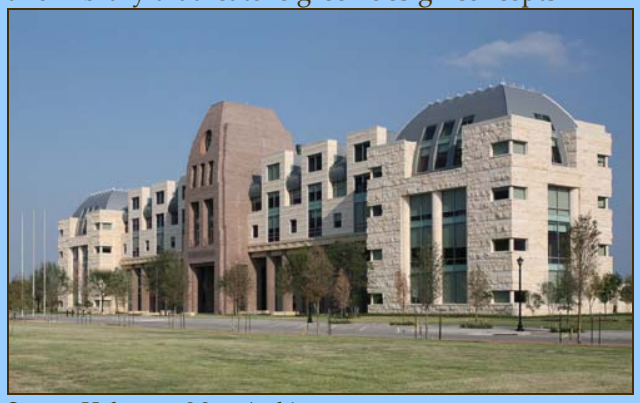
Energy and Building Efficiency



Source: U.S. Green Building Council

Energy usage affects the environment through the production of energy by traditional fossil fuel sources, development of new energy infrastructure, and exploitation of natural resources to recover new sources of raw fossil fuels. Much of this energy usage is involved with transportation, but there is a large amount in the everyday operation of buildings. The energy usage of buildings can be reduced through better design and conservation practices. The City may follow the lead of others by mandating that municipal projects meet certain standards of building energy efficiency.

The City of Frisco, TX recently built a joint City Hall and Library that feature green design concepts


Source: Holzmann Moss Architecture

Goals

- Increased energy efficiency through better design of both public and private development projects
- Reduction of municipal energy usage by 10 percent or more.

Recommendations

1. Reflect the latest innovation in building energy efficiency in the existing building and zoning codes. Encourage higher levels of energy and water efficiency through voluntary practices in both site and building design.

2. Follow standards for "green design" or LEED certification[1] for municipal projects. The City's long-term operating costs would be reduced if there is a policy that all future municipal buildings follow certain elevated levels of energy efficiency.
3. Adopt a long-term energy strategy to include an energy plan that enumerates reduction goals based on the current energy usage. A modest reduction of 10 percent in building energy usage is achievable under such a plan. The first step is to undertake an energy audit, which the City is already planning in conjunction with the local energy transmission service. The results of that audit should give rise to municipal policies aimed at electricity reduction solutions that save money while benefiting the environment.

The Chicago Standard

The Chicago Standard consists of 46 practices and technologies from the LEED rating system that are reasonable and appropriate for the design, construction, renovation and operation of buildings in Chicago. As in LEED, these practices and technologies are organized in six categories:

Sustainable Sites

Practices for sustainable site development include selecting sites that are not environmentally sensitive; designing the building with a minimal footprint to minimize site disruption; designing the site to maintain natural stormwater flows by promoting infiltration; using vegetated surfaces and open-grid paving or high-reflecting materials to reduce heat absorption; and selecting a site and providing amenities to encourage occupants' use of alternative modes of transportation.

Water Efficiency

Strategies for maximizing water efficiency within a building include using innovative technologies such as ultra low-flow fixtures and occupant sensors, and reusing stormwater and greywater for non-potable applications such as toilet and urinal flushing, mechanical systems, irrigation, and custodial uses.

Energy & Atmosphere

Practices for enhancing energy efficiency include engaging a commissioning authority and adopting a commissioning plan to ensure that building systems operate as intended; designing the building envelope and systems to maximize energy performance; and providing at least 50 percent of the building's electricity from renewable energy technologies on-site or off-site. Practices for reducing ozone depletion include installing heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration equipment that uses no chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) or hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs).

Materials & Resources

Strategies for conserving resources include reusing existing buildings; establishing goals for landfill diversion and adopting a construction waste management plan to achieve those goals; using regionally-produced materials and materials with recycled content; and installing Forest Stewardship Council-certified wood-based materials and products.

Indoor Environmental Quality

Practices that improve indoor environmental quality include developing and implementing an Indoor Air Quality (IAQ) Management Plan for the construction and pre-occupancy phases of the building; specifying low-VOC materials and products in construction documents; and designing the building to maximize interior daylighting and views.

Innovation & Design Process

Practices that reflect innovation in design—such as those that substantially exceed an energy performance or water efficiency level specified by LEED—may be awarded additional points by the USGBC.

Source: City of Chicago (2004)

[1] The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings.

5.3 SECTION

Growth Management

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

A significant growth management challenge is confronting the City because there are large vacant areas in the ETJ that are attractive to development. Nearly all of these areas, however, lack streets or utilities — and existing services will be strained by any new development. Additionally, the City is facing investment decisions involving maintenance and or replacement of existing, aging infrastructure. Current fiscal resources are being burdened to meet the needs for utility extension, upgrading, maintenance, and operation.

There is little question that McAllen will continue to experience significant growth for the foreseeable future.[1] Among the challenges is to allocate its costs fairly and to ensure that land use policies and decisions create enduring and sustainable value for individual owners and the community as a whole. In this respect, this section is based on the related principles that the City should:

- create value for its citizens; and
- be good stewards of public resources.

As to value, a group of economists recently forecasted that McAllen-Mission would be first in a list of 10 markets that are expected to realize significant price appreciation in 2007 (est. 8.5 percent) and 2008 (est. 9.8 percent).[2] Indeed, there is much cause for optimism. The bottom line is that there is no better time than now to use the strength of the market to make – and promote – investments in a sustainable future.[3] That is why this plan advocates that the City's appreciating values and strong development market should be used to create increased value for residents, developers, and property owners – wealth that accrues to future generations, rather than being borrowed from them.

If the CNNMoney.com analysts are correct, the City will be realizing significant new revenues in the immediate future. The challenge will be to direct growth and channel public investment in a way that leads to fiscally sustainable development. The key to this is to address the costs of growth so that they are

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[1] Population forecasts are provided in Chapter 2, Community Snapshot.

[2] CNNMoney.com, December 21, 2006.

[3] The environmental aspects of sustainability are addressed in Section 5.2, Cultural and Environmental Resources. These environmental measures are relevant to growth management because they increase the City's capacity for expected increases in population by lessening the environmental "footprint" of each person.

For the purposes of this section, the term "sustainable" refers to a City that maintains its fiscal integrity and continues to provide a great place for its residents to live, learn, work, shop, and play.

minimized up-front to the greatest extent practical and then allocated in a fair and fiscally responsible manner.

The purpose of this section is to set out policies and tools that can be used to shape new growth and redevelopment in a manner that serves the City's specific planning objectives (set out throughout *Foresight McAllen*). The tools are intended to ensure that new development is patterned in a way that does not unreasonably or unfairly stretch the City's limited resources.

The growth management approach is to:

1. **Embrace the market** and affirmatively use its energy to create real estate products that tend to optimize the use of public infrastructure and services.
2. **Increase capacity** for absorbing a growing population by promoting land use patterns and conservation efforts that reduce individual demands on transportation systems and natural resources.
3. **Draw realistic boundaries** for development within the planning horizon of this plan to ensure that the amount of land that is needed to accommodate projected population and economic growth (without unreasonably constraining the market) is available and planned for development, with preference for underutilized and vacant parcels within the limits and appropriate contiguous areas in the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). Land outside of the boundaries would not be barred from development, but would maintain a rural character with a land use pattern that would allow for suburban or urban intensification in the long term.

Optimizing Public Infrastructure

Two identical projects may have very different impacts on public infrastructure depending upon their location. For example, a residential project that is three miles outside of the City limits on a two-lane rural road that has no public water or sewer lines is similar to, yet much different than, the same development inside the City limits and with all infrastructure readily available. The former would require a three-mile extension of utilities and a three-mile upgrade to the rural road. By contrast, the latter would require relatively few improvements.

Figure 5.3.1, Scattered Development



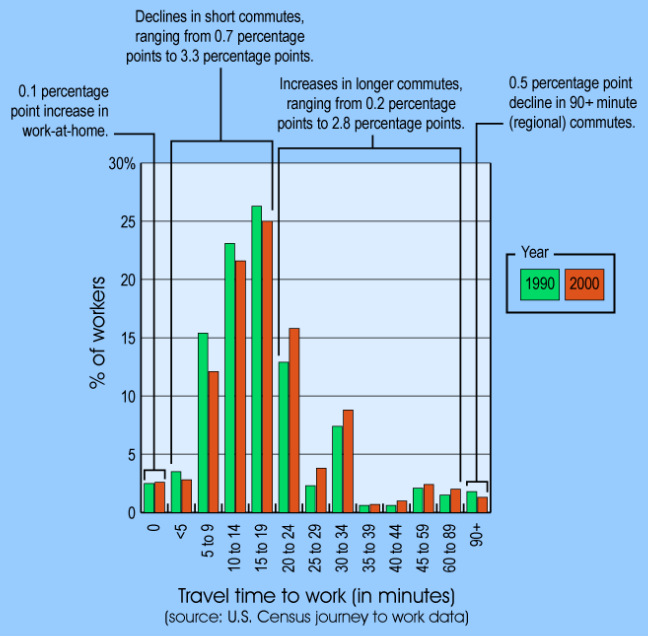
If the highlighted parcels were converted to subdivisions, the result would be a "scattered development" pattern.

Assume the developer of the former signs a participation agreement to share the cost of extending oversized water and sewer lines so that intervening development could be served. On the surface, the cost-sharing arrangement might appear to be a fiscally prudent decision. However, the mid- to long-term effect of the decision is to expose the rural landscape to urban development contributing to sprawl and prematurely altering the rural character.

The pattern of scattered development, as shown in **Figure 5.3.1, Scattered Development**, is both evident and continuing. That development form has a number of consequences, including:

1. Costly and inefficient delivery of public services, including police and fire protection, public education, parks and trails, and water, wastewater, and stormwater utilities.
2. Increased traffic since vehicles have to traverse relatively longer distances to reach their destinations. Such increased traffic and longer trip distances mean more than just greater public inconvenience, as displayed by **Figure 5.3.2, Time in Traffic**. They also mean more public dollars expended on road building, maintenance, street lighting, and traffic enforcement.
3. Declining community character and agricultural operations, as formerly large, contiguous farms and groves, are broken up by scattered suburban development and the proliferation of "exurban" five+-acre lots.

Figure 5.3.2, Time in Traffic



The amount of time it took McAllen's residents to get to work increased from 1990 to 2000. The percentage of the workforce that had a commute of less than 20 minutes declined, while the percentage with a commute of 20 to 89 minutes increased.

Regulating the pattern of development is complicated by the pace of growth, coupled with the limited authority for controlling land use in the ETJ. However, it is the purpose of this section to describe strategies to achieve fiscally and environmentally responsible development and expansion that enhance community character and quality of life.

Goals

- Promote contiguous development concurrent with adequate facilities and services
- Consider the use of fair share impact fees for development within the growth area
- Promote infill development and encourage redevelopment in the developed area

Recommendations:

1. Use all available regulatory tools to protect the environment, farming operations, and community character in the ETJ, including:
   - Utilize the A-O zoning district for the areas without readily available and adequate infrastructure. Amend the district standards to include a minimum lot size much larger than five acres with corresponding dimensional requirements. Incorporate a density bonus for the use of clustering or conservation development. The latter would allow build-out at urban densities upon the availability of adequate public facilities.

Community Character and Agriculture in the ETJ



Field crops are an important part of McAllen's economy, heritage, and community character.



Groves contribute to the character of the outlying areas.



Scattered subdivisions in the outlying areas prematurely disrupt agricultural operations and drastically shift the land character.



Scattered development is highly inefficient and compromises the rural character without adequate management.

- Adopt and strictly adhere to access management standards that avoid groups of narrow lots that take individual access from arterials.[4] A general rule for access along state highways is 250 feet of spacing for 35 m.p.h. posted speeds, 360 feet of spacing for 45 m.p.h. posted speeds, and 425 feet for 50+ m.p.h. posted speeds.[5]

[4] § 212.004(a), TEXAS LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE, exempts lots that are greater than five acres from subdivision requirements, but only if: (1) there are no dedications; and (2) access is provided to each subdivided plot.
[5] Texas Department of Transportation, ACCESS MANAGEMENT MANUAL, Table 2-2 (p. 2-15) rev. 6/2004. Along any given frontage, fewer of these lots could be subdivided, and their impact on community character and agricultural operations would be mitigated due to their significantly wider frontages and shallower depths. As such, access management builds in a subtle incentive for subdivision that could be organized in a cluster form.

- Establish setback lines from public rights of way in the ETJ that help to mitigate the visual impact of non-agricultural buildings on the rural landscape and to allow for the widening of streets and future access management needs.[6]
- Establish permeable open space requirements in appropriate areas to protect groundwater supplies.[7]
- Amend Chapter 118, Article II, Division 3 of the City Code to minimize development in the floodplain, to require buildings in the floodplain to be elevated at least two feet above the base flood elevation, and to require compensatory storage when other areas of the floodplain are filled.
- Amend the City's subdivision regulations as follows:
  - Adopt "development plat" regulations, which would require platting for all development (in the City and in the ETJ) and increase the City's control of its development patterns. Development plats may be required even if land is not divided.[8]
  - Increase the minimum width of a lot that is exempt from platting requirements in Section 134-10, from 100 feet to widths consistent with the access management requirements.
  - Set a minimum lot size for property that is not zoned and allow flexibility with regard to lot size if the plat utilizes cluster development techniques to protect natural resources, open space, and rural character.[9]
  - Require fire-rated water lines in all subdivisions. Delete from Section 134-108(b) the sentence, "A contractual agreement between the owner and the City shall be required for the provision of hydrants in areas without fire-rated water lines."
- Develop an annexation plan, annex land within the growth area (refer to *Strategic Growth Management*, page 10), and maintain agricultural zoning until such time as the property is needed to accommodate population growth.

"If the annexed area had a lower level of services, infrastructure, and infrastructure maintenance than the level of services, infrastructure, and infrastructure maintenance provided within the corporate boundaries of the municipality before annexation, a service plan must provide the annexed area with a level of services, infrastructure, and infrastructure maintenance that is comparable to the level of services, infrastructure, and infrastructure maintenance available in other parts of the municipality with topography, land use, and population density similar to those reasonably contemplated or projected in the area." The City should seek a legal opinion as to whether this proviso would permit the City to provide an agricultural (low) level of municipal services to annexed property that is zoned and used for agricultural purposes.

Source: § 43.056(g), Texas Local Government Code

[6] § 212.003, TEXAS LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE allows municipalities to extend "rules governing plats and subdivisions of land within the municipality's jurisdiction…", with certain enumerated exceptions. Setbacks are not one of the enumerated exceptions.

[7] The authority of a municipality to establish permeable open space requirements in the ETJ was upheld in the case of *Quick v. City of Austin*, 7 S.W. 3d 109 (Tex. 1998).

[8] *See* 23 TEX. PRAC., MUNICIPAL LAW AND PRACTICE (2d ed.) § 21.03, "Subdivision plat approval."

[9] § 212.003, TEXAS LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE does not allow municipalities to regulate building bulk or residential density in the ETJ. However, lot size does not necessarily dictate density in that duplex, triplex, or multi-family homes of any height, or even nonresidential uses, could be constructed on an individual lot. The lot sizes and configurations simply help to control the arrangement of buildings in furtherance of public health, safety, and welfare objectives like fire protection.

In many jurisdictions, fair share impact fees are used to compensate developers who provide oversized infrastructure as new users connect to the system. It is recommended to investigate whether such fees can be dovetailed into statutorily authorized participation agreements.

Figure 5.3.3, Infill Development



Infill development would result from developing the highlighted parcels.

Figure 5.3.4, Mixed-Use Development



Pictured above is a mixed-use center in Southlake, Texas that integrates residential, retail, office, governmental, hotel, and entertainment uses. Mixed-use can be successful at both neighborhood and community scales provided there are sound market conditions.

2. New development must pay its fair share for drainage, roadways, water and sewer infrastructure, and parks that become necessary as a result of the new development. The principles of fiscal responsibility and stewardship upon which this plan is based support adoption, provided that they comply with the law in that:
   - They are *fair and proportionate* to the demands created by the new development;[10]
   - They are used for projects that *serve new development*; and
   - They are used in a *timely* manner.

   It is recommended to provide a flexible mechanism for reducing impact fees for justifiable projects that serve an identified public need, such as affordable housing.
3. Amend the zoning ordinance to define "infill development" as development or redevelopment on parcels within the City limits that are served by public utilities and are either:
   - vacant and surrounded on three sides by developed parcels, or on two sides by developed parcels and on two sides by streets, as displayed in **Figure 5.3.3, Infill Development**, or
   - under-utilized or developed with obsolete buildings.
4. Amend the zoning code to provide incentives for infill development, improvement, and adaptive re-use of existing buildings and redevelopment, including:
   - Flexible development standards to encourage intensification and adaptive re-use in ways that are not currently allowed due to rigid requirements (refer to *Flexible Development Standards*, next page).
   - Standards should be adopted that allow nonconforming uses/structures that are beneficial to become conforming by way of a conditional use permit, which may allow improvement without the nonconforming limitations.
   - Additional zoning districts should be created to allow for market-responsive development to occur at intersections of arterials within the

[10] Fair share impact fees can be more efficient and more predictable than other exactions for public improvements that are related to the impacts of proposed development.

Flexible Development Standards

Section 138-176 states that a purpose of the R-1 residential district is, "To provide for privacy and access of light and air to windows, as far as possible, through controls over the spacing and height of buildings and other structures."

Take, for example, an R-1 lot that is 75 feet wide. Its side setbacks must be six feet. Yet, there are other – and, in some cases, better – ways to ensure "privacy and access of light and air to windows" than a strict 12-foot space between buildings (six feet on each yard). Landscape buffers, offset windows, and fencing can serve the same objective.

This plan advocates flexible standards as alternatives to the rigid requirements of the *Table of Height and Yard Requirements* in Section 138-356 of the City Code. This way, for example, lesser setbacks could be allowed (without a Board of Adjustment hearing) upon demonstration that light, air, safety, and privacy interests are protected in other, comparable ways. Owners could then improve their properties (with Administrative approval) without having to go before the Board of Adjustment to show "unnecessary hardship," which is required by Section 138-43(4) provided that the buildings and landscaping are sensitively and appropriately designed.

City limits where there are significant amounts of underutilized lands. It is recommended to consider amendments that allow for the development of mixed-use, neighborhood-scale centers as in **Figure 5.3.4, Mixed-Use Development**, where demonstrated market support exists and sufficient land and infrastructure is available. The centers should be composed of vertically mixed-use buildings with neighborhood-serving retail and services on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floors, as well as public amenities such as central plazas and public art. Pedestrian linkages should be established between these centers and abutting neighborhoods to promote non-vehicular access. Reasonable separation and substantial buffering is warranted to mitigate any impacts on abutting properties.

5. Implement a fair program for funding capital improvements.
   - If impact fees for water connections are adopted, include a credit for developer-installed water line loops.
   - If development occurs in areas that are distant from water and sewer lines, enter into development agreements to oversize the lines to accommodate future development. Use impact fees collected from intervening properties to pay back the developer as new development connects to the system.
6. Deny development applications that exceed the functional capacity of the existing, available infrastructure.

Increase Capacity to Absorb Population and Economic Growth

The second part of the growth management strategy is to increase the capacity to absorb population and economic growth. The premise is to decrease the impact of each individual development on the City's infrastructure and natural resources – put simply, to become more efficient.

Mitigate the Effect of Growth on Traffic Congestion

A common side-effect of rapid growth is increased traffic congestion. There are many ways to mitigate traffic congestion, including: providing viable alternative routes, balancing land uses to reduce the distance traveled from origin to destination, and mixing land uses to promote walking or bicycling. In addition to the fiscal and environmental benefits of these strategies, many also contribute to community character and livability.

Goals

- Exercise a pattern of development that reduces travel demand
- Manage development commensurate with existing and planned roadway capacities
- Seek a compact, highly efficient future development form

Recommendations:

1. Amend the zoning ordinance to promote attainable housing near major employment centers. (Refer to ***Section 5.4, Housing and Neighborhoods*** for more information.)
2. Continue to expand the traditional grid of streets and preserve corridors for trail linkages to maximize connectivity.
3. Implement a traffic-shed model for evaluating the impacts of new development and redevelopment on yet-to-be-developed roads. Effectively, this approach allocates allowable densities across a defined "traffic shed" (the area that feeds traffic to an arterial road) based upon the design capacity of the road. This way, traffic generation is not allowed to exceed the road capacity until such time as the adequate capacity is available. Capacity may be added by way of the City's capital improvement program or by private development.
4. Amend the zoning ordinance to encourage mixed-use development in strategic locations including – depending on market support – one or more larger-scale "lifestyle centers" within the staged growth area. This would concentrate nonresidential development rather than allowing a sprawling, strip commercial pattern of use at intersections and along major roadways.

Promote Water Conservation

McAllen will be increasingly challenged by the availability of water as outlined by the Texas A&M University Real Estate Center:

> *Growth has accelerated since the last state water plan was completed five years ago and it shows no signs of abating. By 2060, according to the water plan's projections, more than 3.8 million people will make their home in the region. According to the new State Water Plan, cities and towns in the Valley will need 16 times more water in 2060 than they will in 2010. Hidalgo County is expected to have the greatest shortages, followed by Webb and Cameron. The cost of recommended water supply projects necessary to meet all of the Valley's water needs by that time would be $1.08 billion, the plan found.*[11]

"Let the water you cannot drink flow by."

- Mexican Proverb

Water supply is a significant issue with respect to the City's – and region's – capacity for growth. An important way to preserve supply is to conserve the resource. Simple measures to conserve water can have a significant impact when applied on a community-scale, many of which may be quite inexpensive (refer to *Simple Conservation Measures Can Produce Big Results*, next page).

Note: The recommendations of this section are complementary to those in ***Section 5.2, Cultural and Environmental Resources****, all of which are based on a perspective of environmental stewardship.*

[11] <http://recenter.tamu.edu/mnews/mnsearch.asp?pg=2&AID=15>

Simple Conservation Measures Can Produce Big Results.

Simple water conservation measures can result in major reductions in consumption when applied on a community-wide scale. The State of Texas has required low-flow shower fixtures (less than 2.75 GPM) since 1992. However, about 25,600 housing units in McAllen were built before 1992.

Assume that all of the showerheads in McAllen in homes built prior to 1992 are of a conventional design that uses about 8 gallons of water per minute. If these were replaced with 2.25 gallon-per-minute showerheads (available for less than $10), 72 percent less water would be used per shower.

For an order of magnitude illustration of the potential impacts, assume that 90 percent of the population uses the shower once per day for 6 minutes:

Existing use:

8 gallons per minute x 6 minutes = 48 gallons per shower x 81,408 showers per day (based on 3.18 people per household) = 3,907,584 gallons per day.

Potential use:

2.25 gallons per minute x 6 minutes = 13.5 gallons per shower x 81,408 showers per day = 1,099,008 gallons per day.

Potential Water Savings:

3,907,584 gallons (existing use) – 1,099,008 gallons (potential use) = 2,808,576 gallons per day (2.8 MGD).

For a point of reference, the City's Southwest Water Treatment Plant has a capacity of just over 40 MGD. 2.8 MGD conserved -- just retrofitting with efficient showerheads – accounts for 7 percent of the plant's capacity.

The City recently opened a $15.5 million water treatment plant with a current capacity of 8.25 MGD and a potential capacity of 30 MGD. Although the plant was well-advised due to the age of the old plant and the need for redundancy in the water system, the City should shift its focus to expanding the number of people the City's two plants can serve by reducing individual water demand.

Such measures would be quite cost-effective:

Cost of new plant:
$15,500,000 / 8,250,000 gallons per day, or $1.88 per MGD (even if the plant could be expanded to full capacity at no additional cost, the cost per MGD would be about $0.52.

Cost of new showerheads:
51,200 showerheads (2 per household) x $10 per showerhead (over-estimated) = $512,000, or about $0.18 per MGD saved.

Goals

- Promote increased environmental stewardship to improve energy efficiency
- Seek to reduce water consumption through public education and incentives
- Implement water conservation and reuse measures into municipal projects

Recommendations:

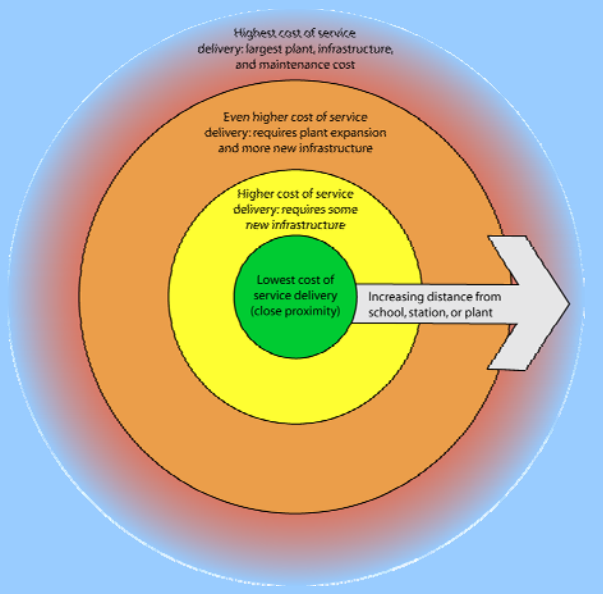
1. Set aggressive, yet reasonable, targets for reductions of household consumption of potable water based on historical use trends, availability and ease of installation of low-cost conservation technologies, and expansion of "greywater" systems for irrigation.
2. Adopt and periodically revisit water efficiency standards for construction that promote integration of state-of-the-art conservation measures. Recent advances in water conservation technology have resulted in cost-effective fixtures that are substantially more efficient than is required by Section 372.002 of the Texas Health and Safety Code.
3. Strongly encourage residents to replace conventional fixtures in pre-1992 housing units with low-flow fixtures. Consider utility bill inserts with coupons for low-cost, low-flow shower fixtures, which can be paid by the water utility or through a partnership with local home improvement stores.

4. Adopt and enforce xeriscape standards to conserve water used for irrigation. Provide examples of attractive xeriscapes on the grounds of public buildings and in parks.
5. Adopt a water rate structure that promotes conservation by providing discounts to households that save water and impose additional costs on households that waste water (use more than is needed for general household use and reasonable irrigation).
6. Investigate the feasibility of expanded water reuse systems.

Promote Energy Conservation, Renewable Energy Production, and "Green Building."

Policies and recommendations for promoting energy conservation and green building are set out in ***Section 5.2, Cultural and Environmental Resources***. These policies and recommendations also tend to increase the City's capacity to absorb new residents. Other cities that have implemented strong energy conservation programs have learned that the old adage, "a penny saved is a penny earned" applies equally to energy savings. In general, most of the money spent on electric bills leaves the community. By contrast, money saved as a result of energy-efficiency is much more likely to be spent in town, encouraging economic growth and opportunity.

Sprawl Subsidies – Who Pays?



As the distance from a water plant, fire station, or school increases, the cost of providing services increases. In the case of water and wastewater, those who live closest to the plant subsidize those who live further away because rates and fees are evenly spread out across all users. Unfortunately, the typical pattern is that those who live in areas of least-cost service delivery tend to be those who can least afford to provide subsidies.

This is especially true in McAllen, where a significant percentage of households are "cost-burdened." That is, they spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

McAllen averages 223 sunny days per year, compared to the national average of 205. Also due to its subtropical latitude, the City has favorable conditions for the production of solar energy. As solar technologies become more competitive in the energy market, the City should take steps to ensure that its building and zoning regulations do not contain unnecessary regulatory barriers to deploying photovoltaic (solar energy) systems.

Strategic Growth Management

The basis of growth management, commonly referred to as smart growth or "sustainable development," has been known for 40 years or more. First developed in the late 1960s, the general approach remains valid today – identify the area(s) for which development may be efficient and adequately served by infrastructure. The framework involves four areas, as follows:

1. The **developed area** has existing infrastructure and includes opportunities for infill and redevelopment.
2. Land on the fringe of the developed area is the logical **growth area** where urban development should be focused and encouraged. The growth area should accommodate 10 to 20 years of development, determined in conjunction with a capital investment program for expanding infrastructure and municipal facilities.
3. There are **resource areas** including those within the 100-year floodplain, sensitive portions of the Lower

Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) Aquifer, and natural habitat areas. These are areas where regulations should limit, and, in some cases, prohibit, development through zoning, environmental standards, or purchase.

4. **Future growth areas** represent those outside the growth area, but are attractive for development. Development of these areas is considered premature and sprawl inducing. Most problems with growth management revolve around how to treat this area. Since these areas are not adequately served by urban infrastructure, they are more suitable for agricultural uses, large-lot (40+ acres) development, or clustered subdivisions.

Periodic Expansion

The growth area has a development capacity of 20 years. This area must be regularly revisited and amended to add land as warranted and consistent with the policies of this plan. The growth area should be incrementally expanded to maintain a 20-year growth potential. Expansion should take place well before the current growth area is 50 percent developed.

Affect on Development Pattern

A growth management approach is not intended to limit community growth. In fact, to the contrary, its purpose is simply to direct development to areas that are most suitable and feasible given the existing pattern of use and ready availability of adequate infrastructure. The growth area, as displayed in **Figure 5.1.2, Future Land Use Plan**, will accommodate a population of approximately 218,000 persons, which exceeds the projected population of 208,100 persons (refer to ***Chapter 2, Community Overview***) to allow market flexibility.

While the most effective means for implementing growth management involves cooperation with Hidalgo County – and is highly advocated by this plan – it may be accomplished by the City through other means. In lieu of the County's participation – and limited authority for managing development - the growth areas could be annexed into the City, thereby allowing the City to enact its zoning authority. Alternatively, the strategies outlined above could be employed by the City through amendments to the subdivision regulations and municipal policies. Also, the use of incentives such as density bonuses within the City limits may be an effective means for compliance.

Levels of Service

Local governmental service should be quantified as meeting an expressed level of service. This is a familiar concept on roads where the level of service (LOS) relates to the degree of congestion. The same concept can hold true for other service types. With sewer, this is basically a two-level condition: public and on-site sewers. Water service is based on normal water supply pressure and whether there is sufficient hydrant pressure and capacity for firefighting. Fire and emergency services have response time criteria, which for fire is also combined with water service conditions. With a two-stage level of service approach in mind, developed areas and growth areas should be given uniform levels of service.

Areas beyond the growth area are not intended for urban development during the next 20 years. As a result, the level of government services should be held to the lowest possible level.

Growth Policies

Redevelopment

- There should be an increased level of attention given to older neighborhoods to enhance efforts for redevelopment.
- Upon designation as a redevelopment neighborhood, water and sewer services should be studied to determine maintenance and replacement needs to sustain their integrity and service quality.
- Parks should be improved and the level of service brought to standard where current levels are inadequate.
- Sidewalks should be maintained and improved in the initial redevelopment effort.
- Downtown would benefit by an increase in residential population. This should be coordinated with changes to the current zoning regulations to encourage mixed use buildings and upper floor rental or condominium units.
- Roads and other infrastructure should be maintained and replaced in accordance with a capital improvements program to maintain such facilities in safe, sound, and efficient conditions.

Growth Areas

- Establish a capital improvements program or other means of providing needed infrastructure or services. This includes capital facilities including police, fire/rescue services, library, schools, and parks.
- Extend water and sewer to the growth area in a sequential manner, concurrent with development. The timing of infrastructure improvements is reliant upon the rate of new development.
- Provide plans for parks and recreation areas, as well as police, fire and emergency management services, and solid waste collection, concurrent with new development.
- Provide for review of the plan and updating every five years to ensure the development capacity is adequate.

Resource Areas

- Prohibit development in the 100-year floodplain except for water dependent uses and essential road crossings.
- Make clustering with minimum density and maximum open space a permitted use.
- Regulate development within any defined aquifer protection zones to manage this water resource.
- Prohibit development in wetlands, except for on-site mitigation in commercial and industrial areas where the quality of the wetland would be degraded if preserved.
- Use drainage way soils for stormwater management facilities.

Future Growth Areas

- The area should be divided into two areas for future development: septic tanks and areas that, in the distant future, may ultimately be provided with sewers. The actual timing of service extension will depend upon the rate of new development and the build-out of the growth area.
- Municipal sewer and water services should not be extended into these areas unless this plan is amended to re-designate the land into the growth area. Minor improvements to any existing development should be limited to upgrade the benefit of the current users.
- There should be a disincentive, such as significant impact fees, to develop in the future growth areas.

Goals

- Flexible development standards to allow reuse and infill development
- Guide future development through proactive infrastructure planning
- Ensure fiscally responsible development and infrastructure improvements

Recommendations:

1. Overcome constraints to development or redevelopment within the developed area, including those that cause difficulty for building on infill sites, such as provision of street and utility infrastructure, strict compliance with flood detention requirements, on-site parking, and other dimensional provisions. Requirements pertaining to setbacks, lot coverage, and building height may need to be relaxed or overcome through other performance standards to allow feasible development of constrained sites.
2. Use the Capital Improvements Program (CIP) to direct infrastructure improvements to the growth area. It should direct improvements to under-served areas within the developed area as the highest priority, followed by the growth areas immediately adjacent to the City limits. The infrastructure program should encourage a logical sequencing of contiguous development.
3. Extend the authority to conduct subdivision plat review throughout the five-mile ETJ. Alternatively, consider relinquishing portions of the ETJ for which the City cannot adequately provide services within a reasonable amount of time. State law requires municipal

The Costs of Sprawl

A 1992 study by the Center for Urban Studies at Rutgers University pegged capital costs (roads, water, sewer, schools) attributable to sprawl development patterns at $1.3 billion over 20 years. Additional operating and maintenance costs of $400 million annually were also linked to sprawl development. Capitalized at current borrowing rates, these annual O&M costs translate into an additional $7-8 billion price tag for sprawl over 20 years. The Rutgers study suggested if 500,000 new residents arrive in New Jersey in the next two decades, each house will cost $12,000-$15,000 more because of sprawl development than would be the case if development patterns were more compact.

In a 1989 monograph for the Urban Land Institute, James Frank, associate professor of urban and regional planning at Florida State, estimated a $48,000 per house sprawl "premium" for providing services to a three unit per acre development located ten miles from central facilities and employment centers. By contrast, the same costs for a home in a 12-unit per acre development, located closer in, with an equal mix of townhouses, garden apartments, and single family homes, would be 50 percent lower.

Development costs vary with lot sizes, distance to central facilities, proximity to existing development, community demographics, existing service capacity, and the requirements of local codes and standards. Yet numerous studies dating back to 1955 all point toward a similar conclusion: sprawl is a significant burden on both homebuyers and taxpayers.

Who Pays for Growth? While "on-site" development costs (e.g. sidewalks, sewer laterals, etc.) are passed on to buyers by developers as part of the price of a home, sprawl-related costs that are "off-site" (trunk sewers, water mains, schools, fire stations, treatment plants, widening roads, etc.) are paid by everyone. While some governments are now charging "impact fees" to developers for "hooking up" to community infrastructure, it is frequently the case that the full costs of off-site infrastructure go unpaid, and, as a result, everybody pays -- indirectly.

Recapturing the Costs of Sprawl - Many communities across the U. S. now charge impact fees for schools, roads, sewers, etc. According to Jim Nicholas, one of the country's foremost experts, these fees can range up to $50,000 on a single-family home in some parts of country, while, in other parts, impact fees are non-existent. The average impact fee for a single-family home is $10,000, but is growing at a rate of 20% per year.

Some jurisdictions, such as Tallahassee, Florida and DuPage County, Illinois, have begun to move toward geographically variable fees. Others in Florida and California are selling "pre-paid subscriptions" to landowners and developers who plan on hooking into public service systems within the next 20 years.

service provision of an equal standard to that currently provided within a timeframe of two and one-half years from the time of annexation. Due to the expanse of the City's ETJ and the availability of water through rural districts, this is not reasonable or feasible for large portions of this area. Without the ability to ensure that subdivisions within the ETJ comply with the municipal development standards, such as streets and utilities, it is not in the City's interest to incorporate these areas. Incorporation brings with it an obligation to accept responsibility for maintenance of the infrastructure, which may have been constructed using inadequate standards.

4. Create a fiscal impact model to quantify the fiscal consequences of development and, subsequently, adopt policies to ensure responsible outcomes. Such model would allow alternative developments to be tested as to whether the projected revenues offset the required expenditures for provision and ongoing maintenance of infrastructure. This would allow the City to educate itself about the costs associated with increased development, and particularly those requiring substantial public investment, and subsequently make informed decisions as to the feasibility of establishing a municipal utility district or incorporation into the City.

Annexation Policies

As a general policy statement, annexation should occur prior to or concurrent with development to properly plan for and coordinate the extension of adequate public facilities and services. The following policies should be considered in guiding the City's decisions for annexation:

Policy 1: The City will annex territory in compliance with state law and in accordance with the policies of this plan.

Policy 2: The City will anticipate and effectively manage its long-term pattern of growth in a forward-looking and fiscally responsible manner, while balancing the needs of current residents and existing infrastructure investments.

Policy 3: The City will ensure that future growth is closely coordinated with infrastructure investments, compatible with existing development, environmentally sensitive, and fiscally responsible.

Policy 4: The City will establish criteria for considering the suitability of requested extensions to the corporate limits.

Policy 5: The City will maintain an annexation plan and conduct associated service planning for gradual expansion of the corporate limits and extension of municipal facilities and services, where determined feasible and beneficial to the City. The plan will be periodically updated to account for changing development conditions and new infrastructure development.

Policy 6: In order to maximize the efficiency of the existing infrastructure, the City will direct growth toward developable and under-utilized areas within the corporate limits before the growth area is considered for annexation.

Policy 7: The City will focus its annexation strategy toward the growth area to extend municipal services and manage development quality.

Policy 8: The City will use fiscal impact analyses to assess the projected costs of providing municipal services and weigh them against the anticipated revenues of each annexation proposal. Intangible benefits of proposed annexations will also be evaluated.

Policy 9: The City will utilize its annexation authority to extend its jurisdiction to encompass critical areas such as major transportation corridors, public facilities, and areas provided municipal services subject to the policies of this plan.

Policy 10: Where short-term annexation is not feasible, the City will consider the option of negotiated agreements with landowners, developers, or other entities in lieu of annexation to provide for interim service arrangements, cost-sharing or fee mechanisms, and potential adherence to development guidelines to ensure desired development outcomes in areas subject to possible future incorporation.

In addition to preparing for City-initiated annexations, the City should establish clear policies and guidelines to determine when future landowner petitions for annexation within the designated urban area will be accepted. Potential considerations include:

1. the results of a fiscal impact assessment;
2. proximity to the City's existing service areas and the feasibility of extending adequate facilities and services in a timely manner;
3. capital budget limitations; and
4. intangible costs and benefits.

Annexation Criteria

Important criteria for use in considering whether annexation of land is warranted and fiscally responsible include:

- The subject parcel(s) is within the developed area or growth area.
- The land requested for annexation is certified by the City Engineer to be within the City's utility service area, with proven feasibility of efficiently extending water and sewer mains.
- All parcels could be adequately served by municipal police, fire, ambulance, and road maintenance meeting City standards.
- All public improvements, off-site as well as on-site, necessary to serve the annexed area will be constructed and financed in accordance with City standards and policy.
- As determined by the City, the actual financial impact for providing police, fire, road maintenance, and other public improvements is favorable to the tax base and offsets the necessary costs.

5.4
SECTION

Housing and Neighborhoods

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

Neighborhoods are the foundation of McAllen, as they are places where residents live, recreate, interact, and call home. When well-designed and protected, they function as a sense of community pride. The condition, availability, and choice of housing are important to the integrity of neighborhoods and to the quality of life of residents. Sustainable, diverse, attractive, and vibrant neighborhoods enhance economic development, improve livability, and maintain property values and the City's tax base.

As McAllen continues to grow, it must keep pace with the ever-changing demand for housing. While the development of new residences will be met by the market, the challenge will be to sustain the integrity of neighborhoods and the quality of the existing, older housing. Having a diverse stock of housing – new and old, big and small – is instrumental in offering choice and providing for the individual needs of all households, regardless of economic conditions.

The purpose of this section is to identify solutions to ensure the City meets its future housing needs. This is accomplished by providing access to safe, quality, and affordable housing within livable, attractive neighborhood environments. Furthermore, the types of housing, their arrangement and design, and integration of open space and amenities contribute significantly to the quality appearance and character of the community. The City's economic health relies, in part, on its ability to preserve its well-established neighborhoods, while planning for the development of new living environments that meet the physical, social, and economic needs of its residents.



Highly livable neighborhoods are the lifeblood of McAllen, which portrays its sense of place and forms its unique identity among Valley cities.

Quality Development and Livable Neighborhoods

Providing quality housing and neighborhoods is fundamental in creating a desirable place to live. In fact, residents supported this premise through their comments indicating their desire for quiet, attractive, pedestrian-friendly, and well-connected neighborhoods that are protected from the undesirable impacts of adjacent, encroaching development. The cause for their concerns is due to residential areas being developed as independent subdivisions, rather than dynamic neighborhoods. Walled subdivisions have become the norm, which is partly done to distinguish themselves, but, also, to protect the development from adjacent uses. A land use system based on its physical character versus its use (e.g. single-family without consideration of its density and influence on abutting areas, as discussed in ***Section 5.1, Community Character)*** ensures that adjacent development is compatible in character. This helps to avoid situations where subdivisions with varying densities abut one another without the requisite separation and buffering.

Goals

- Neighborhoods that are attractive, well-kept, and pedestrian friendly
- Adequate protection of neighborhoods from encroaching incompatible uses
- Walkable neighborhoods that are integrated and connected to the rest of the community

Recommendations

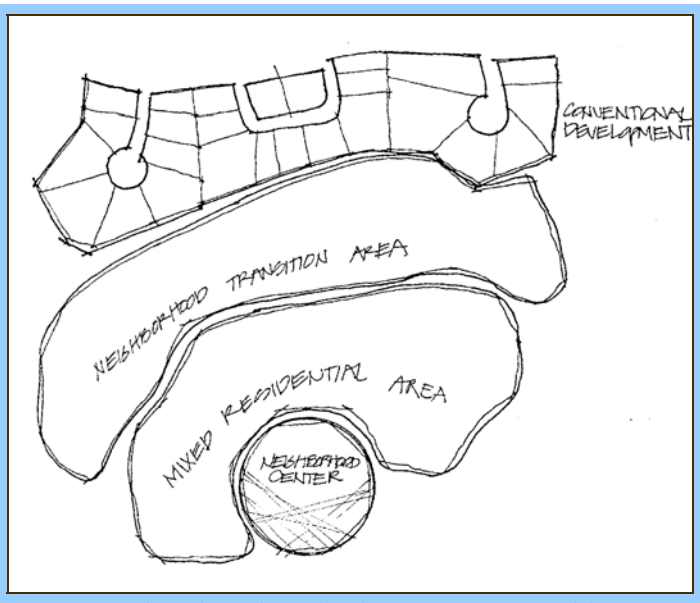
1. Amend the zoning ordinance to include more than one district for single-family development, consistent with *Table 5.1, Sample Character Districts* (refer to ***Section 5.1, Community Character***). The districts should have different density and open space requirements to alter neighborhood character. Incorporate variations in lot sizes and housing types with density bonuses for larger lot sizes, making them an attractive development option.



Anti-monotony regulations are becoming increasingly common, particularly for speculative and volume building where model sales homes are used.

2. Adopt and incorporate into the zoning ordinance anti-monotony regulations for single-family development. The standards require a minimum separation between similar houses on the same block and a variety of floor plans, façade treatments, and other dimensional requirements (height, roof type, material types, garage placement, etc.).
3. Require homeowner's associations responsible for the following:
   - Enforcing deed restrictions.
   - Maintaining common areas including open drainage areas, signs, landscaping, and any pool and recreational facilities.
   - Perimeter walls and landscaping including open space between subdivision walls and street rights-of-way.
   - Maintenance of private roads, street lights, and sidewalks, as applicable.

4. Reflect a suburban character type, e.g. suburban commercial, for nonresidential development adjacent to low-density neighborhoods. Incorporate suburban design standards to ensure improved compatibility, such as:
   - comparable building heights or, alternatively, performance standards allowing increased height on larger parcels with increased separation and open space requirements;
   - building design standards relating to roof type and material, wall materials and colors, and residential in appearance;
   - floor area ratios to control building bulk and scale;
   - site design standards relating to the placement of parking, material storage, and service uses; and
   - environmental standards for noise, lighting, debris, etc.



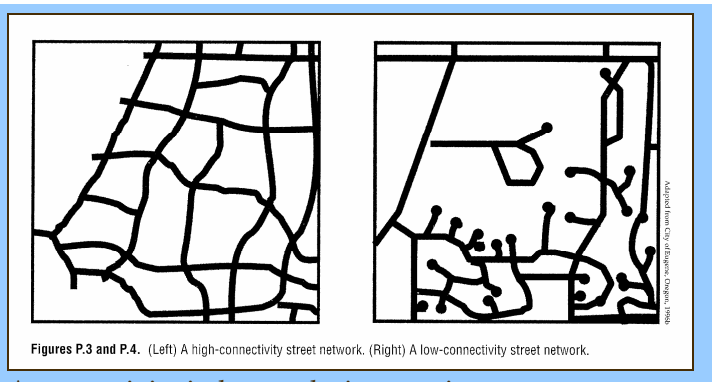
Rather than directly abutting incompatible uses, a suburban character district would require sufficient open space to form an effective transition area.

5. Require open space ratios for residential and landscape surface ratios for nonresidential districts to allow sufficient common areas to effectively separate and buffer incompatible uses. As shown in the inset, the neighborhood transition area would be a bufferyard, park or greenway, conservation area, or an enhanced detention area. The allowable densities of the mixed residential and neighborhood center would need to be increased to offset the transition area. The required site area also must be of a sufficient size to accommodate a neighborhood center.
6. Adopt design standards for high-density residential development, including building form and scale, articulated building walls, building orientation, architectural detailing, roof types and materials, façade enhancements, and acceptable building materials.
7. Amend the subdivision regulations to require a perimeter bufferyard around single-family neighborhoods. A portion of the required open space would be used to meet this standard. The scale of the bufferyard would be commensurate with the intensity of the adjacent use. Arterial streets would be factored in to ensure sufficient visual protection and to mitigate noise and other impacts.
8. Require street trees in all new residential developments, which must be coordinated with utility placement. These trees would be in addition to those within the "required landscape area."



Street trees and landscaped medians with a tree canopy over the roadway contribute to neighborhood character.

9. Consider requiring a median for major collector roadways, with trees required to complement the street trees.
10. Offer neighborhood design assistance through the neighborhood planning program. Such assistance would include development of enhancement plans for streets, parks and common spaces, neighborhood gardens, and/or gateway treatments. Funding assistance could also be provided by way of neighborhood planning grants or other means.
11. Require tree preservation for residential development. The required open space ratios and density transfers will allow increased flexibility in subdivision design to avoid mature stands of existing vegetation.
12. Establish requirements concerning gated communities that address fire access, roadway continuity and pedestrian connections between abutting neighborhoods and to nearby schools and parks, setbacks of the subdivision wall or fence from the public street right-of-way, the amount of open space and landscaping required between the wall or fence of the right-of-way, and the materials and design of monuments, gates, and walls. Requirements should ensure:
    - Private subdivisions do not interfere with circulation within a superblock.
    - Private development does not obstruct any planned pedestrian circulation system or access to any public park or school by forcing pedestrians out to collector or arterial roads.
    - Where there are subdivisions with stub streets that can be connected so that circulation can occur within the superblock, rather than being forced onto collectors or arterials a gated private road is not permitted.
13. Offer incentives for alternatives to the use of walls, such as a significant bufferyard with berming and dense landscaping. The allowable density must be equivalent to that allowed with a wall, with a bonus to make the option economically viable.
14. Incorporate street layout and design standards into the subdivision regulations to accomplish traffic calming objectives without creating discontinuous streets. Standards may include collector street offsets or jogs, curves, and narrowed street sections. On-street parking also serves to slow traffic.
15. Adopt a street connectivity index that would increase the number of street connections in a neighborhood and improve directness of routes. The purpose of connectivity requirements would be to create multiple, alternate routes for automobiles and create more route options for people on foot and bicycles. Features of the ordinances should include:
    - An appropriate connectivity index (street links divided by street nodes).
    - Requirements connecting local and collector streets to adjacent developments to ensure a minimum level of external connectivity.
    - Requirements to establish pedestrian routes between land uses. This is particularly important where natural features make it impractical to connect streets. In McAllen, the irrigation canals are a constraint to street connectivity; however, requiring trail access will allow for connectivity to adjacent developments and other areas.
    - Provisions to discourage cut through traffic and speeding.



Figures P.3 and P.4. (Left) A high-connectivity street network. (Right) A low-connectivity street network.

A connectivity index results in a continuous street system. With appropriate design standards, the intended outcome of a subdivision with looped, discontinuous streets and cul-de-sacs may be achieved.

16. Consistent with the recommendations of ***Chapter 4, Mobility***, require sidewalks in all neighborhoods. As an alternative, off-street trails may be used in-lieu of sidewalks as long as there is adequate linkage within and through the neighborhood, providing connection to adjacent neighborhoods and the surrounding area.
17. At the time of platting, require public access easements to provide for direct linkages between developments and to trails, parks, schools, and neighborhood convenience areas.



Public access easements contribute to pedestrian friendliness and provide much needed connections.

Maintenance and Appearance of Existing Neighborhoods

In addition to ensuring the design and development of sustainable new neighborhoods, the City is obligated to ensure the long-term integrity of the older housing areas. The condition of structures and the maintenance of properties contribute to the health and welfare of residents, as well as the appearance of neighborhoods and the larger community. Since a majority of the housing was built prior to the 1980s, they are beginning to show signs of needed maintenance. Without proactive assistance and neighborhood empowerment, these areas are at risk of falling into disrepair and disinvestment. Their location and proximity to the Heart of the City, access to amenities, and mature landscaping make these desirable areas. Additionally, they exhibit the qualities of traditional neighborhoods, making them walkable and highly livable. Improvement, reinvestment, and revitalization of these existing, older areas is essential – and increasingly so – to preserve the historic fabric of the community. Residents have a strong desire to keep these areas in tact and to improve their conditions and qualities as a place to live.

...Our aim is to ensure safe, decent and affordable housing; create opportunities for residents' self sufficiency and economic independence and assure fiscal integrity by all program participants.

- The Housing Authority of the City of McAllen

Goals

- Improved housing conditions through proactive programming and public assistance
- Enforcement of codes for improved health, safety, and appearance
- Elimination of neighborhood blight and unsightly conditions
- Empowerment of residents to stimulate involvement and self-initiative
- Reinvestment and revitalization of public infrastructure

Housing Recommendations

HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME) is the largest Federal block grant to State and local governments designed exclusively to create affordable housing for low-income households. The program provides formula grants to States and localities that communities use, often in partnership with local nonprofit groups, to fund a wide range of activities that build, buy, and/or rehabilitate affordable housing for rent or homeownership or provide direct rental assistance to low-income people.

1. Coordinate with the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, who receives funds through the Federal HOME Partnership Program. This program is used to establish ongoing, low interest loan programs for housing rehabilitation.
2. As an Entitlement City, use Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to finance rehabilitation of housing units throughout a qualifying low-income neighborhood.
3. Work with local lenders to form low interest loan pools to be used for housing rehabilitation. If local lenders keep these loans in their portfolio instead of selling them to secondary markets, they may be able to "stretch" some of the lending requirements such as loan-to-value ratios and closing costs.
4. Develop and enforce minimum housing standards and maintenance codes so housing can be maintained in an affordable manner. The standards should be flexible to allow for "as safe as" or "equal to" conditions when affordable housing developments and rehabilitation is involved.
5. Conduct a conditions survey of all existing residential structures in the well-established neighborhoods to establish redevelopment priorities and to define target areas for rehabilitation or new construction following removal of substandard buildings.
6. Establish a housing maintenance program, including:
   - Develop a municipal grant program for "self-help" rehabilitation of substandard housing using government-funded programs, while also leveraging the value of public dollars with private resources such as financing institutions and foundation funds.
   - Establish a pro-active code enforcement program that offers helpful assistance to property owners in complying with codes, rather than a punitive approach.
7. Work with McAllen Affordable Homes and the City's Housing Authority to develop new and strengthen existing programs for housing rehabilitation. The program requires a dedicated funding source, as well as technical and administrative assistance to homeowners.

Neighborhood Integrity Recommendations

1. Adopt and enforce provisions that reduce blighting influences on neighborhoods, including:
   - On-street storage of commercial vehicles, recreational vehicles, utility trailers, and other vehicles.
   - Removal of junk, abandoned vehicles, and other derelict items from yards and alleys.
   - Accessory building sizes and setbacks.
2. Expand the current neighborhood planning program to incorporate more registered homeowners. The program should assist homeowners with the following:
   - Establish and enforce deed restrictions.
   - Beautification efforts.
   - Identification of physical improvements.
   - Redevelopment alternatives and strategies.
   - Enforcing property maintenance codes.

3. Promote neighborhood pride and stimulate resident involvement in improvement activities, including:
   - Seasonal "clean up, fix up" events.
   - "Neighborhood Pride" days focusing on beautification.
   - Annual "amnesty pickup" of large refuse items with the assistance of City crews and volunteers.
4. Utilize Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to leverage the amount of reinvestment and to implement projects and programs (such as infrastructure repair, park development or improvement, or removal of unsafe structures), aiming to eliminate blight and improve neighborhood conditions in areas of low to moderate income.



Refuse and other unsightly items create health and safety hazards and scar the appearance of neighborhoods.

5. Solicit the volunteer assistance of local attorneys to offer assistance in drafting deed restrictions that may be adopted by neighborhood associations to restrict and enforce certain uses and conditions.
6. Seek the participation of churches, civic organizations, schools, and businesses in neighborhood improvement and revitalization efforts.
7. Create incentives such as permit streamlining, fee waivers, tax deferral, and infrastructure cost-sharing for builders and organizations that provide infill construction on vacant lots or parcels in a manner that compliments the surrounding neighborhood.
8. To ensure the compatibility of infill units, establish design guidelines that address building materials, roof pitch, façade treatment, porches, proportional dimensions, and other elements to ensure that new development and rehabilitation maintains or enhances neighborhood character.
9. Inventory vacant lots and work with the property owner to make timely improvement. This may include assistance in constructing an infill housing unit, regular mowing, and/or use as a playlot or neighborhood garden.
10. Develop a multi-year capital improvement program for alley maintenance, surface improvement, and upgrading. Also, increase the annual operating budget for ongoing maintenance.
11. Conduct annual inspections for conformance with City ordinances, particularly including nonconforming businesses, structures, and uses. Issue an amnesty notice for correction of the violation within a prescribed period of time. Subsequently, issue a citation for failure to correct the unlawful activity.



Landscaping of vacant lots creates amenities and neighborhood gathering areas.

Solicit the assistance of neighborhood groups in conducting the inspections, self-enforcement, and satisfactory resolution.

Revitalization and Redevelopment Recommendations

1. Coordinate with the South Texas Community Development Corporation (CDC), which, as a nonprofit organization, can assist in the implementation of neighborhood revitalization projects and programs.
2. Identify areas of the community that are experiencing or at risk to experience particularly high levels of disinvestment and deterioration and provide both technical and administrative assistance to aid in redevelopment efforts. Coordinate with area property owners to identify and prioritize needed infrastructure improvements funded by a target-area capital investment program.



Extending incomplete sidewalks is an example of a capital investment in at-risk neighborhoods.

3. Form a target-area capital investment program focused on infrastructure improvements within at-risk neighborhoods. The purpose of this program is to provide a dedicated source of annual funding for use in making improvements and leveraging private reinvestment through rehabilitation, redevelopment, building additions, and/or infill development.
4. Create a pro-active program for handling the condemnation, demolition, and rehabilitation of substandard structures and underdeveloped property. Revise local health, building, and development codes to streamline the process for addressing unsafe or dilapidated structures and other health and safety risks such as inoperable vehicles, weeds and heavy trash, overgrown sites, and run-down structures used for criminal activity.

Affordable Housing

A significant sector of McAllen's population faces housing affordability issues since 28 percent of owners and 37 percent of renters spend 30 percent or more of their household incomes on their residences. This is becoming an increasing issue as land and material costs and interest rates rise and incomes fail to keep pace. Historically, families earning the median income have been able to afford housing, but continuing increases, in many cases, have exceeded the affordable reach of these families. This increase affects persons in all income brackets, increasing risks for builders and lenders and causing shifts in demands for different housing types and price ranges. While there are a number of affordable housing programs available, there remains the need to address affordability as evidenced by the nine-month waiting list of McAllen Affordable Homes.

Goals

- Enhanced affordability of housing for all households, particularly lower-income residents
- Broadened range of housing types and price diversity to meet the changing needs of the population
- Empowerment of residents to stimulate involvement and self-initiative
- Eliminated regulatory and procedural impediments to affordable housing development
- Integration of attainable and affordable housing in new developments

Recommendations

1. Streamline the application review process to avoid undue impediment to affordable housing projects.
   - Consider establishing a rapid review committee consisting of relevant local staff, called a Green Light Committee, which can provide an expedited review of affordable housing projects, as well as critical economic development projects, when time/costs are crucial to the project.
   - Establish administrative departmental policies that assign a project manager for each application to be reviewed and define the responsibility and authority of the staff involved in the review.
2. Review ordinances to remove unnecessary constraints and barriers to affordable housing. Examples of barriers include: street standards that over-design street widths in low-density residential areas, complexity and length of time to gain approval of mixed use projects, and limiting use of accessory dwelling units. Incentives may include shared parking for residential units and on-site commercial uses, exemption of floor area devoted to affordable housing from the maximum floor area limitations, and reduced, waived, or deferred fees.
3. Amend the zoning ordinance as follows:
   - Incorporate an inclusionary housing provision, with density bonuses where the housing is subsidized by a state or federal, affordable or low- and moderate-income housing program. Establish proportional limitations based upon the total number of units in the development, e.g. no more than 45 percent for a development of 50 to 199 units.
   - Add as a development option within the residential zoning district(s) an increased density incentive for transition areas adjacent to arterial streets.
   - Include a provision of market housing whereby a percentage of the units are reduced in price to make them more affordable than the average market units. Require demonstration that the bonus density is used to lower the costs of land and infrastructure. Establish criteria regarding similar design and finishes of affordable units.
   - Allow accessory units within residential district(s), which are exempt when determining the allowable density in the district. Add ordinance provisions specifying the maximum allowable floor area as a percentage of the floor area of the principal unit. Design standards are also necessary to ensure compatibility with adjacent structures.
   - Develop standards for the provision of small family units for seniors, individuals, or new families with no more than two people. Greatly reduced lot areas per unit may be allowed with floor area ratios and spacing standards. Require issuance of an annual permit to allow regular inspection for program compliance.
   - Allow modular housing on individual lots in specified residential areas and subject to established standards, in strict compliance with neighborhood design standards.

In the context of affordable housing, density bonuses are a type of housing production program where projects are granted additional residential density over and above that otherwise allowed, with the condition that the additional housing is restricted to occupancy by a certain target group and that the units remain affordable over time.

- Establish an average, rather than minimum, lot size whereby lot sizes are required to vary in width, with a certain percentage being narrower and the remaining being wider than the average. This approach allows a variety of housing styles.
- Establish standards for industrialized housing, including a value equal to or greater than the median taxable value of each single-family dwelling within 500 feet; requiring exterior siding, roofing, roof pitch, foundation fascia, and fenestration (design and position of windows in a building) compatible with other dwellings; and requiring compliance with all applicable dimensional requirements.



McAllen already exhibits an impressive collection of housing types, which indicates a market for different product types and price ranges.

4. Promote the construction of new housing units in all price ranges, but especially affordable housing.
   - Revise the zoning ordinance to provide a wider variety of housing types and prevent a single type from consuming a disproportionate amount of land. This may be accomplished with a housing palette and a requirement for more than one housing type within developments of a certain size.
   - Develop an inventory of undeveloped and underdeveloped sites that provide desirable housing locations with practical levels of residential density. Identify sites that are most suitable for special needs housing due to their proximity to services typically needed by the elderly, disabled, and other citizens of special needs. These sites may include those adjacent to Downtown, possibly within candidate redevelopment areas.
5. Work with McAllen Affordable Homes, the McAllen Housing Authority, and the South Texas CDC to continue developing new affordable housing and participating in the following programs:
   - Federal Employer Assisted Housing (EAH) whereby local employers invest in workforce housing solutions such as home buyer education, down payment assistance, and loan guarantee programs. The benefit to the employer is cost savings associated with decreased employee turnover and the less tangible benefits of a positive public image.
   - Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation 501(c)(3) Bond Program, which provides bond financing to nonprofit, multi-family developers that supply affordable rental units to eligible tenants. This financing may apply to the acquisition and rehabilitation of existing multi-family development or construction of a new multi-family development. Developers must adopt a dollar-for-dollar public benefit program, investing at least one dollar in rent reduction, capital improvement projects, or social, education, or economic development for every dollar of abated property tax revenue they receive.

- Affordable Homeownership Program for Texas, which provides mortgage financing options for eligible low- to moderate-income families, as well as down payment assistance equal to seven percent of the mortgage loan amount.
- Multi-family Direct Lending Program, which offers financing to nonprofit and for-profit developers to increase and preserve the stock of affordable multi-family housing. Affordable rental housing projects must have at least 24 units, which may be comprised of scattered sites, senior apartments, affordable assisted living, limited equity cooperatives, single-family rental units, and other nontraditional, multi-family rental housing. All projects must satisfy Community Reinvestment Act criteria.

Summary of Existing Housing Conditions:

Existing housing characteristics are discussed in ***Chapter 2, Community Overview,*** and ***Chapter 3, Existing Urban Form.*** A summary of these characteristics is as follows:

- Vacancy rate is 12.7 percent; vacancy rate for rental housing exceeds 10 percent, while vacancy rates for owner-occupied equals approximately two percent.
- 63.4 percent of housing is owner-occupied, while 36.6 percent is renter-occupied.
- Seasonal units equal 35.6 percent of vacant units (1,698 units), indicative of a growing number of Winter Texans.
- According to the most recent Census data, of the 17,820 owner-occupied housing units in McAllen, 58.8 percent have a mortgage compared to 41.2 percent that do not have a mortgage.
- Nearly 50 percent of the housing in McAllen was built during the 1970s and 1980s. Comparatively, from 1990 through March 2000, 29 percent of the total housing was built.

Housing Costs

- Median value of owner-occupied housing units is $69,800. The cost of housing has increased by 34 percent over the last decade (1990 to 2000), while median household income has increased by 53 percent, making housing more affordable.
- McAllen's median gross rent is $487 per month, which is below the State average.

Affordability

- $841.03 per month is an affordable mortgage payment for the City's median household income of $33,641.
- 27.9 percent of owners in McAllen who have a mortgage spend 30 percent or more of their household income on their home.
- 37 percent of renting households pay more than 30 percent of their income for rent, and 18 percent paid more than 50 percent.
- The first time home buyer index is 0.93, while the State of Texas is 1.23, meaning that the median-income family has slightly less than the necessary income to qualify for a loan to purchase the median-priced home.

Affordability Index

The index reflects general housing affordability in terms of the ability of the median income family to purchase the median-priced existing house in the area using standard, conventional financing terms. A ratio of exactly 1.0 indicates that the median family income is exactly equal to the income a conventional lender would require for the family to purchase the median priced house. A ratio of less that 1.0 means that a median income family has insufficient income to qualify for the loan to purchase the median-priced house. A ratio of greater than 1.0 indicates that a median income family earns more than enough to buy the median-priced house (that is, the family could afford to buy a house priced above the median price)

Source: Real Estate Center, Texas A&M University

- Overall, the housing affordability index has fluctuated in the community over the past five years from 0 in 2002 to 1.84 in 2004, as displayed in **Table 5.4.1, Housing Affordability Index Estimates**. The 2005 housing affordability index is equal to 1.32, meaning that a median-income family earns more than enough to buy the median-priced house.

Table 5.4.1, Housing Affordability Index Estimates

Jurisdiction	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
McAllen	1.35	1.37	1.34	0	0	1.84	1.32
Texas	1.74	1.58	1.69	1.68	1.81	1.46	1.79
United States	1.38	1.38	1.45	1.43	1.61	1.53	1.34

Source: Real Estate Center, Texas A&M University

Recent Construction

- Residential development has remained steady and strong over the past five years, as shown by **Table 5.4,2, Building Permit Data**. During 2005, over 1,100 and 350 single- and multi-family building permits were issued, respectively.
- Based on a five-year historical average, over 1,800 units are projected to be built in 2006 and 2007.

Table 5.4.2, Building Permit Data

Fiscal Year	Single-Family	Townhouse	Condominium	Multi-Family
2000	793	0	0	237
2001	902	0	0	752
2002	884	0	0	194
2003	785	0	0	598
2004	879	35	6	316
2005	1107	18	9	352
*2006	906	11	5	488
*2007	907	13	6	399

* Projection based on five-year average
Source: City of McAllen

5.5 SECTION

Economic Development

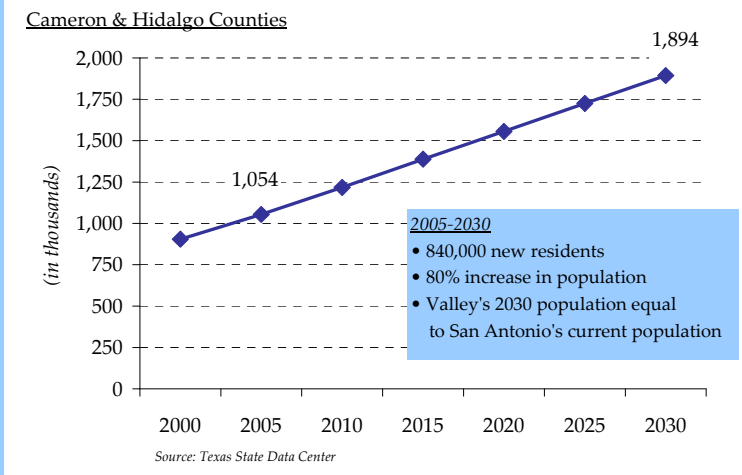
Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

The purpose of this chapter is to identify specific ways that the City can positively influence its economic vitality. The recommendations outlined are based on two key assumptions: (1) that attracting, retaining, and developing talent is paramount to the current and future success of McAllen, and (2) that much of the new wealth created in McAllen will be from business expansions and entrepreneurship.

The vision of McAllen's leadership over the past several decades has borne fruit – job growth is at an all-time high; retail sales increases lead the nation; per capita income is rising; businesses continue to expand; and healthcare, entertainment, and cultural opportunities are improving. McAllen has positioned itself as a destination in the Rio Grande Valley for the best in economic and social opportunities. As most fast-growing communities can attest, however, rapid growth has its consequences. Traffic congestion has increased; entertainment opportunities have not kept pace with demand; and many organizations – both public and private – are struggling to find the talent they need to operate efficiently.

The McAllen Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) has a long track record of success in the region. With the support of the City, MEDC has been extraordinarily effective in bringing new jobs to the area and facilitating a positive business climate. Through aggressive and sustained marketing, McAllen is the first choice for many companies considering the U.S./Mexico border region as a location for new facilities. MEDC has a reputation for responsiveness and consistency in delivering a quality product. Therefore, this chapter is not about designing a new marketing message for the City or MEDC. Nor is it about identifying a new industrial recruitment target. MEDC is a leader in economic development in these areas and should continue to do what it does well.

Figure 5.5.1, Rio Grande Valley Projections, 2000-2030



Source: Texas State Data Center

The time has arrived for McAllen to consider making the next step in its

evolution and development. It has emerged as the regional center for the Valley. In fact, much of the region's growth is due, in part, to McAllen's success. In essence, McAllen is the *de facto* central business district (CBD) of the Valley. But as the Valley grows, as shown by **Figure 5.5.1, Rio Grande Valley Projections, 2000-2030**, the idea of what that means should be re-considered. The Valley's population is expected to continue to increase at a rapid pace over the next 20 years.

World City

Attributes often associated with international centers include: 1) large, diverse populations, 2) corporate services and headquarters (accounting, advertising, banking, legal, consulting, etc.), 3) transportation infrastructure (i.e., mass transit, airports, seaports, freeways, etc.), 4) advanced communications infrastructure (high speed fiber optics and Wi-Fi networks, cellular, 5) major institutions (education, research, healthcare), 7) abundant cultural, leisure, and arts facilities and activities (museums, galleries, opera, orchestra, sports, film), 8) visitors (tourists, business, events), 9) influential media outlets with international reach.

Source: Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network

What does this mean for the vision of McAllen in the future? The City will become the business center for a region whose population will approach two million people (on the U.S. side of the border). McAllen leaders should begin to consider positioning the City so that it can better compete with other regional commercial centers such as Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and Monterrey. Land constraints will prevent McAllen proper from attaining population levels comparable to these cities, but the bi-national Valley region will. In essence, McAllen will likely remain the CBD, but of a much larger Valley population. In light of this, McAllen must reconsider its economic development objectives. For McAllen to achieve this vision as an international business destination, it will require broadening the scope of economic activities occurring within the area to include a focus on financial, business, legal, and other corporate or professional services.

The foundation for this economic transition will be built on the following three pillars:

1. **Increase the entrepreneurial capacity** to allow for business startups and innovation to flourish.
2. **Enhance downtown McAllen and Central Park** to allow them to serve as commercial, cultural, and entertainment centers for the Valley.
3. **Develop, retain, and attract talent** to allow McAllen to emerge as a leading destination for educated and skilled workers regionally, State-wide, and bi-nationally.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship Fundamentals

A healthy entrepreneurial climate requires three key components:

- Ideas
- Management talent
- Capital

If any of these elements are missing, the entrepreneurial program will fail. More importantly, these three elements are true of virtually all businesses.

One of the most promising opportunities for McAllen will be the development of a local business and social climate that promotes entrepreneurship and small business startups. Over the long term, cultivating talent and promoting entrepreneurship will lead to more plentiful economic development opportunities closer to home. This process is often the most overlooked, yet most important strategy for stimulating growth, generating wealth, and creating sustainable economic vitality.

Promoting entrepreneurship involves leveraging existing resources within the local business sector, such as

innovation, financing, know-how, and business and social networks and matching these resources with investment opportunities. Their presence should be treated as a critical and unique asset for McAllen to create a positive business climate that is conducive to fostering entrepreneurial success. To leverage this opportunity, it will be necessary for the community to fully develop an "infrastructure" that will stimulate and support local entrepreneurs and startups. Creating this infrastructure will require the active engagement of multiple partners, from both the public and private sectors, including the City, MEDC, the Chamber, South Texas College, UT PanAm, school districts, local banks, established businesses, and area entrepreneurs.

Goals

- Provide the necessary "infrastructure" to support existing entrepreneurs
- Create a social environment that embraces and celebrates entrepreneurship
- Stimulate entrepreneurial activities and investments

Recommendations

1. Assist in the establishment of an *Entrepreneurship Task Force* to act as the champion for initial entrepreneurship activities. Individuals serving on the Task Force should be comprised of individuals who possess local expertise on entrepreneurship (i.e., established entrepreneurs, business leaders, etc.). The following activities should be considered as the work plan for the Task Force:
   - Consider the establishment of an *Entrepreneurs Forum* where individuals can network and discuss key issues relevant to their efforts. The forum should be held regularly so that area leaders can meet with current and potential entrepreneurs to better understand issues affecting their business decisions. The forum would also provide networking opportunities for area professionals and emerging entrepreneurs. Participants should include the City, MEDC, Chamber, and education partners.
   - Open a dialogue with UT PanAm faculty from the College of Business Administration to better understand their resources, uncover best practices, and build support for their involvement in the establishment of a Center for Entrepreneurship.
   - Advocate for entrepreneurs by facilitating local government assistance and help address issues and challenges faced by startups.
   - Act as a liaison between local entrepreneurs, the City, MEDC, and the Chamber.
2. Assist in the facilitation of financing for local entrepreneurs. While the City is not and should not consider itself as the direct funding source for private business startups, activities undertaken – with the assistance of area economic development partners – could play a critical role in expanding available financing within McAllen. Priority should be given to entrepreneurial ventures that go beyond the traditional "mom & pop" operations that are the typical target of such efforts.
   - Consider the development of a revolving loan fund focused on local start-up enterprises.
   - Work with area lenders to offer small business financing to assist start-ups and strengthen their own Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) ratings.
   - Support the expansion of ties between McAllen's economy with Texas-based angel investors and venture capital networks to educate them about the commitment to entrepreneurship and support for start-ups in a unique international business climate. Consideration should be given to working with MEDC in developing a call campaign to meet with potential venture capitalists outside the Valley. Potential destinations include Austin, Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas.

- Assist in leveraging existing state and federal programs that offer business start-up assistance (e.g. SBDC, etc.). Federal grants that support innovation and assist private companies in securing government contracts have been a key element in the success of many communities (including Austin, Silicon Valley, and Research Triangle). The City should identify and interview local recipients of federal funding to learn more about the constraints faced in competing for these types of awards. Examples include the Small Business Innovation Research Program (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer Program (STTR). Data on award recipients are available from the Small Business Administration.

3. Foster a business climate that supports small business and entrepreneurial development.
   - Encourage the creation of an entrepreneurial program at South Texas College – potentially in collaboration with UT PanAM – to teach key entrepreneurial skills in a case-based program.
   - Assist in developing and/or sponsoring workshops for would-be entrepreneurs to address such topics as developing business plans, raising capital, and managing growth, which may coincide with the Entrepreneur's Forum.
   - Encourage the establishment of entrepreneurship programs in secondary schools of area districts (e.g., Junior Achievement programs), which may be facilitated by the Entrepreneurship Task Force.
   - Consider co-sponsoring an annual awards program for area entrepreneurs to provide an incentive/award for the most innovative concept.
   - Develop a local media campaign celebrating local entrepreneurial success stories.
4. Assist in the establishment of a *Center for Entrepreneurship*, which could serve as a major catalyst for business start-ups and professional services growth. The Center could be located in Downtown as part of an overall strategy for supporting professional business development in Downtown. This center could also be an extension of the UT PanAm Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development or a new initiative.

Downtown

Over the long term, the success of Downtown will be indistinguishable from the City's success as whole. As such, Downtown should be a focal point for the City's economic development efforts. However, the recommendations below are not to support a typical "downtown revitalization" plan. Instead, these efforts must be considered in light of more strategic concerns and opportunities.

Given McAllen's geographic location and status in the Valley, the City has a unique opportunity to emerge as an international hub for commerce and culture linking Mexico to the U.S., rivaling both San Antonio and Monterrey. As a result, the City should take the next step in its evolution as an international destination for talent and high-end corporate services for the U.S./Mexico border region. It is within this context that Downtown should be considered as a critical economic development asset. Essentially, Downtown should be treated as the "business park" for the development and recruitment of corporate and financial services.

To realize this potential, the City must pay close attention to the urban amenities that are required to support its evolution as an international destination for business. This means promoting density (i.e., high-rise residential and office developments), meeting telecommunication demands, supporting the Arts, and planning for eventual mass transit.

Downtown McAllen should aspire to be the financial, professional, and commercial center of the bi-national metropolitan region. This transformation will not occur over night. Yet, the long-term opportunity remains. Attaining this vision requires the City to begin taking short-term steps, including an aggressive business development strategy for Downtown. The targets for this strategy include: 1) customers for existing businesses, 2) new residents, 3) expansion of existing businesses, 4) new business, and 5) other organizations that will make Downtown a destination for activity.

Goals

- Support the development of Downtown into a denser, more urban core
- Strengthen McAllen's position to leverage opportunities in a changing global economy
- Transform the City into an international center for business, professional, and financial services

Chase Texas Tower



Source: McAllen Memorial Library

Recommendations

1. Conduct a business development approach to enhancing the economic opportunities in Downtown. A "Main Street"-style program alone cannot achieve the level of transformation that is proposed by the vision of Downtown as an international center of commerce. The City and its partners – especially MEDC – must be aggressive in promoting Downtown similar to the business park.
   - Support the expansion of MEDC's target sectors to include potential Downtown users, such as professional, financial, legal, and other corporate services, as well as fine dining, entertainment, and niche retail. Leverage the marketing, lead generation, and prospect development expertise of MEDC to target users for specific properties in Downtown.
   - With the assistance of MEDC, identify and market to experienced developers who can build the types of products (i.e., residential, commercial, retail, and office) that reflect the quality desired for new Downtown development.
   - Investigate options for establishing mechanisms to help attract private investment, such as private/public partnerships and a business improvement district and/or tax increment finance (TIF) district, and evaluate current building codes to ensure they do not hinder traditional Downtown-style development.
2. Provide advanced telecommunication infrastructure throughout the City.
   - Consider the development of a free a City-wide WiFi system.
   - Ensure adequate high-speed fiber network is available in Downtown and City-wide.
3. Pursue high-profile "catalyst" projects for Downtown, such as an institute or university-level center for excellence. Catalytic projects are those that tend to stimulate economic activity within adjacent areas, much like a department store can anchor a mall. Catalytic projects can be generated through both the public and private sectors.

4. Support the establishment of a higher education presence in Downtown.
   - Encourage South Texas College to support the establishment of a branch campus in Downtown.
   - Encourage the establishment of other specialized educational and/or institutions (i.e., culinary institute, regional university branches, ITT, etc.) in Downtown.
5. Transform Downtown into the leading destination for urban living, entertainment, culture, and shopping for the Valley. This requires developing a mix of shopping, entertainment, and housing opportunities within Downtown. An alliance must be established between private interests and public agencies to pursue ventures that will draw people (shoppers, residents, and visitors) to Downtown and spur high-impact development activities in the heart of the City.
6. Maintain the "authenticity" of Downtown by adhering to development standards that are consistent with the Heart of the City vision.
7. Support the establishment of an entertainment, arts, and cultural district in Downtown.
   - Consider various attraction options that might be included within the district, including a performing arts center, art museum, children's museum, etc.
   - Support private sector efforts for leveraging the district, including the establishment of art galleries, entertainment venues, and full service restaurants.
8. Encourage urban housing options in Downtown, including high-rise condominium, live-work, and other mixed-use residential developments.
9. Support the development of pedestrian-friendly retail districts linking major destinations and activity centers in and around Downtown.
   - Examine pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular traffic patterns Downtown.
   - Improve signage and wayfinding in the Downtown area.
   - Update maps of Downtown area, indicating significant existing and planned projects.

Redefining Talent

The concept of talent means more than a skilled workforce. It means recruiting talented people, as well as cultivating the talent pool represented by groups as diverse as students, retirees, and entrepreneurs. It also means ensuring that the employees and companies that have been responsible for growth continue to see a reason to remain in the area.

National demographic trends, most notably the aging of the baby boomers, suggest that demand for workers may soon outstrip supply. As a result, competition for labor is expected to increase among companies, as well as communities. Focusing on the development, attraction, and retention of talent should, therefore, be an important part of McAllen's economic development strategy.

Talent

Nurturing and attracting a strong talent base is perhaps the most fundamental issue for developing long-term, sustainable economic vitality in the 21st Century. Much of this is due to the changing needs of U.S. employers as the economy transitions from manufacturing to services. But "talent" implies more than typical workforce development and training. It also encompasses the idea of recruiting people, especially younger professionals. While McAllen is fortunate to have South Texas College and the University of Texas–Pan American located within close proximity, the Valley may have difficulties meeting the needs of higher end services companies that would serve as the basis for McAllen's transition into an international center.

Talent recruitment is based on the recognition that many Americans, especially highly educated and young professional workers, have begun to place a higher priority on choosing a community over specific employment opportunities. In other words, *place* will often take precedence over *position* for many of the nation's most

upwardly mobile talent. This is not to say that employment opportunities do not matter to this cadre of professionals. Rather, the implicit presumption is that employment opportunities will be plentiful, given their skills and education. As a result, the array of amenities – including mobility, housing options, outdoor recreation, cultural, entertainment, arts, nightlife, urban environment, etc. – often receive an equal consideration for talent as a specific employment opportunity.

Goals

- Develop a homegrown educated and skilled talent base to support economic transition
- Develop amenities, environment, and infrastructure desired by educated and skilled talent
- Promote McAllen as a destination for educated and skilled talent

Recommendations

1. Strengthen and leverage existing educational institutions, workforce development, and other training assets. The City of McAllen and area partners must remain supportive of McAllen ISD, South Texas College, and UT PanAm by:
   - Developing a City/school district project team focused on facility expansions and enhancements to enable McAllen ISD to quickly adapt to student population growth pressures.
   - Including public schools as part of the City's and the MEDC's overall economic development marketing efforts.
     - Special consideration should be given to highlighting the special programs in the schools that support the City's economic vision.
     - Meet with McAllen ISD officials to establish a coordinated marketing message and offer assistance in the creation of marketing materials for the district.
   - Assisting in the establishment of internship/apprenticeship programs to aid in the transition from vocational students to entry-level positions among existing targeted industries.
   - Aligning vocational education offerings with MEDC's target industries.
   - Supporting the enhancement and expansion of existing partnerships between McAllen ISD, other school districts, and South Texas College, including programs geared towards gaining vocational education and experience in the local business community.
2. Support the expansion of workforce development and other training programs by.
   - Assisting in the facilitation of an annual workforce conference for local business owners and representatives of WorkFORCE Solutions, South Texas College, UT PanAm, and each of the school districts to:
     - Understand McAllen's workforce assets and talent base available for potential employers relocating to the community and surrounding area.
     - Maintain and strengthen existing relationships between WorkFORCE Solutions, South Texas College, UT PanAm, the City, school districts, and the business community.

While the responsibility for developing homegrown talent falls primarily on McAllen ISD and each of the adjacent districts, South Texas College, and UT PanAm, there are ways for the City to participate, including supporting recruitment strategies, actively supporting the expansion of existing and the development of new recreational and cultural amenities, and promoting developments that build community character.

- Support the development of new training programs, such as customized training, to match business needs in McAllen.

- Supporting new and expanding existing internship/apprenticeship programs (if needed) that aid in the placement of vocational/technology students with McAllen employers to support their growing needs for talent.

3. Promote the expansion of South Texas College and UT PanAm programs to support economic development in McAllen.
   - Meet regularly with South Texas College and UT PanAm officials to establish a coordinated marketing message highlighting McAllen's higher education assets.
   - With the assistance of MEDC, inform and advise South Texas College and UT PanAm officials, faculty, and staff of the economic development direction of the City and the specific economic sectors that the community will target for business development.
   - Incorporate and highlight specific programs at area higher education institutions in the City's marketing material.
   - Promote higher education as part of overall economic development marketing efforts to both residents and businesses considering a location in McAllen.
   - Consider potential opportunities (both public and private) for establishing a university presence within the City.
4. Consistent with the recommendations of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan/Recovery Action Plan, support the expansion of outdoor recreation options including:
   - Expansion of the parks system to the areas of deficiency within the developed area;
   - The development of new parks concurrent with the City's growth.
   - Increasing the amount of natural green space with new development.
   - Expansion of the current greenway and trail system to form a comprehensive, City-wide network.
   - Preservation of natural resource areas and other valued lands.
   - Expansion of the recreation program offerings, including new indoor venues.
   - Organization and development of arts and cultural attractions.
5. Continue to coordinate roadway infrastructure improvements with adjacent communities, including arterials and neighborhood streets, to avoid potential bottlenecks and alleviate existing traffic flows.
6. Consider, over the long term, the development of a commuter and/or light rail system serving McAllen, its neighbors, and potentially the entire Valley region. While the primary goal for such transportation system is to meet the mobility needs of McAllen's growing

Principles for Creating Great Community Places

The Community is the Expert. Identify members' talents and assets, use their perspective, and seek a sense of ownership.

Create a Place not a Design. A strong sense of community and a comfortable image are the goals.

Look for Partners. Museums, schools, and other local institutions can provide invaluable support to help get a project off the ground.

Observe. Analyze existing public spaces with an eye towards how they do or do not function.

Have a Vision. Imagine specific activities occurring in comfortable, significant places that makes the community proud.

Triangulate. Bring at least three elements together. For example, Downtown, Central Park, and the Cultural District will attract more users together than each on its own.

Money is not the Issue. Benefits can outweigh the cost when the community and other partners are involved.

Source: Project for Public Spaces

population, a secondary goal is to serve as a catalyst for denser, more urban development, especially in areas surrounding future rail stations.

7. Assist area partners in the development of an internal marketing campaign focused on promoting McAllen as an international destination for business and professional services. The most important target audience is the people and businesses who are already established, as they have already made a commitment (both financial and emotional) to the community. They also represent McAllen on a daily basis in their business interactions.
   - Convene a focus group of area entities (e.g., City, MEDC, McAllen Chamber of Commerce, South Texas College, UT PanAm, etc.) to discuss the merits for the development of a coordinated marketing message/theme for McAllen.
   - Conduct a local awareness campaign for economic development to increase public support for specific recommendations (e.g., Center for Entrepreneurship, Cultural District).
   - Incorporate the theme into the marketing materials and website.
8. Establish a marketing campaign inviting former residents to "Come home to McAllen and the Valley."
   - Create a database of former residents with the assistance of area organizations (e.g. MEDC, the Chamber, area schools, churches, etc.)
   - Develop marketing material and quarterly newsletter to inform former residents of opportunities and current events in McAllen (e.g., job postings, business expansions, investment opportunities, planning initiatives etc.).
     - Consideration should be given to creating an electronic form of the newsletter for easier and less expensive transmittal (Constant Contact is one recommended service provider).
     - Consideration should be given to distributing the newsletter to job placement counselors at area institutions of higher education (e.g., UT PanAm, South Texas College, UT Brownsville, Texas State Technical College, etc.,) as a means for informing existing and former residents of local opportunities.
9. Establish an external marketing campaign to promote McAllen as a destination for professional talent to better compete with San Antonio, Monterrey, Austin, Houston, and Dallas-Fort Worth.
   - Market McAllen's recreational assets and its economic direction throughout the state to business professionals seeking new opportunities in an international business climate.
   - Strengthen area entrepreneurship networks and establish a Center for Entrepreneurship in Downtown.
   - Support the development of high-rise office space in Downtown and mid-rise offices along major freeways and arterials.

6
Chapter

Implementation

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

This plan sets forth a vision as to how McAllen should develop over the next 20 years – and beyond. With the vision in place the community must now direct its resources to effectuate plan implementation. Each of the goals, policies, and recommended action statements identified throughout this plan must be turned into specific programs, initiatives, and/or new standards. This element establishes priorities and sets forth a process to ensure the plan is implemented and kept current over time.

Implementation is an essential step in the plan development process. It requires the commitment of the City's leadership, including the Mayor and City Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, other City boards and commissions, and City staff. It is also necessary for there to be close coordination with and joint commitment from other organizations that significantly influence McAllen and its growth, including the following:

- Hidalgo County
- Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC)
- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)
- Texas Transportation Commission (re: Trans Texas Corridor)
- McAllen ISD and other area school districts
- Neighboring cities (Edinburg, Mission, Pharr, Hidalgo, Palmhurst, and Alton)
- South Texas College
- University of Texas PanAmerican in Edinburg
- Border Trade Alliance
- McAllen Chamber of Commerce
- McAllen Economic Development Corporation (MEDC)
- Other organizations, agencies, and groups.

Each chapter of this plan outlines specific issues to be addressed to achieve what is envisioned by community residents. In response are a large number of recommended actions that relate to regulatory changes, programmatic initiatives, and capital projects. While these recommendations are comprehensive and intended to be accomplished over the 20-year horizon of this plan, near-term strategies must be put in place to take the first step toward implementation. These strategies must then be prioritized, with decisions as to the sequencing of activities, the capacity to fulfill each initiative, and the ability to obligate

the necessary funding. Those deemed as top priorities and viewed as feasible in the short term are placed in a five-year action plan. In addition to implementing these targeted strategies, the broader policies set forth by the plan text and maps may be used in making decisions related to the physical and economic development of the community.

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the elements of the plan together to provide a clear path for sound decision-making. This chapter outlines the organizational structure necessary to implement the plan, strategic directions and priorities for implementation, and a process for regular evaluation and appraisal of the plan to ensure it is kept relevant and viable.

Methods and Responsibility for Implementation

To be successful, the City must utilize this plan on a daily basis, and it must be integrated into ongoing governmental practices and programs. The recommendations must be referenced often and widely used to make decisions pertaining to the timing and availability of infrastructure improvements; City-initiated and owner-requested annexations; proposed development/redevelopment applications; zone change requests; expansion of public facilities, services and programs; and annual capital budgeting, among other considerations.

Each Commission, staff person, and member of boards, commissions, and/or committees has an obligation to use this plan in guiding their decisions. The plan is designed to guide the growth and economic development of the community. It is intended to guide staff – of all departments – in managing their individual activities, annual work programs, and capital projects.

The primary means of implementation include:

- **Amendment of current and preparation of new land development regulations** to ensure a quality and character of development that reflects the community's vision. The zoning and subdivision ordinances, in particular, must be re-written to improve use compatibility, conserve natural resources and open space, preserve the character and integrity of neighborhoods and valued areas, improve the efficiency of facility and service provisions, and contribute to fiscally responsible pattern of urban growth.
- **Formation of policies**, directly and indirectly, through recommendations by City staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission, other boards, and the decisions of the City Commission. As new development is proposed, staff and the City's advisory boards, together with the City Commission, must abide by the policies and recommendations of this plan. The text of this plan, coupled with the land use, growth, and thoroughfare plans, provide the requisite guidance for achieving that envisioned by the residents and stakeholders of this community.
- **Regular updating of a capital improvement program (CIP)**; a five-year plan identifying capital projects for street infrastructure; water, wastewater, and drainage improvements; park, trail and recreation facility provisions; and other public buildings and municipal services. These capital improvements must be coordinate with the objectives of this plan, and implemented consistent with the future land use and growth plans, the thoroughfare plan, parks and recreation system plan, and other relevant plans.
- **Identification and implementation of special projects, programs, and initiatives** to achieve organizational, programmatic, and/or developmental objectives. These may include further studies, detailed area plans (individual neighborhoods or special districts), or initiating or expanding upon

key City programs. These tend to be more of a managerial function, which may support or influence physical improvements or enhancements, but themselves focus on community betterment.

Plan Administration

A host of community leaders must take "ownership" in this plan, and maintain a commitment for its ongoing, successful implementation. The City's management and staff, together with its boards and commissions, committees and organizations, will have essential roles in implementing the plan and, thus, ensuring its success.

Education and Training

A necessary first step is to conduct individual training workshops with the Planning and Zoning Commission, City Commission, and City department managers, as well as each of the other boards and committees who have a role in plan implementation. These are the groups who, individually and collectively, will be responsible for implementation. The importance of their collaboration, coordination, and communication cannot be overstated. The training initiative should include:

- Discussion of the roles and responsibilities of each individual commission, board, or committee, and their function in the organization.
- A thorough overview of the entire plan, with particular emphasis on the segments that most directly relate to their charge.
- Implementation tasking and priority setting, allowing each group to establish their own one-, two-, and five-year agendas, in coordination with the strategic agenda of the Mayor and City Commission.
- Facilitation of a mock meeting to exhibit effective use of the plan and its policies and recommendations.
- A concluding question-and-answer session.

Role Definition

The City Commission will assume the lead role in implementing this plan. Their chief responsibility is to decide and establish the priorities and timeframes by which each action will be initiated and completed. In conjunction with the City Manager, they must manage the coordination among the various groups responsible for carrying out the plan's recommendations. Lastly, they are also responsible for the funding commitments required, whether it involves capital outlay, budget for expanded services, additional staffing, further studies, or programmatic or procedural changes.

The hierarchy and roles of implementation are as follows:

City Commission

- Establishes overall action priorities and timeframes by which each action of the plan will be initiated and completed.
- Considers and sets the requisite funding commitments.
- Offers final approval of projects/activities and associated costs during the budget process.
- Provides direction to the Planning and Zoning Commission and the City management and staff.

Planning and Zoning Commission

- Recommends to City Commission an annual program of actions to be implemented, including guidance as to the timeframes and priorities.
- Prepares an Annual Progress Report for submittal and presentation to the Mayor and City Commission (see Bi-annual Amendment Process later in this chapter for more detail).
- Ensures decisions and recommendations presented to the City Commission are consistent with the plan's policies, objectives, and recommendations. This relates particularly to decisions for subdivision approval, site plan review, zone change requests, ordinance amendments, and annexation.
- Ensures that the plan influences the decisions and actions of other boards and committees.

City Departments and Plan Administrator

All departments are responsible for administering this plan, specifically as it relates to their function within the organization. Many departments were involved in the plan development process and are, therefore, familiar with its content and outcomes. They must now be enrolled as implementers to ensure their budgets and annual work programs are in line with the plan.

Intergovernmental Coordination

Increasingly, jurisdictions are acknowledging that issues are regional, rather than local, in nature. Watersheds and other ecosystems, economic conditions, land use, transportation patterns, housing, and the effects of growth and change are issues that cross the boundaries of the community and impact not only McAllen, but also Hidalgo County and each of the other adjacent communities. As a result, the economic health of McAllen is partly reliant upon the County and neighboring communities, meaning that the success of one is largely dependent on and, thus, responsible for the success of the other. In addition, cooperation is now more important than ever due to increasing service demands and limited resources. Coordinating among entities allows for more efficient service provision.

Perhaps of greatest importance to the effective implementation of this plan is recognition that all levels of government and the private sector must participate. Therefore, the idea of managing growth of the City, for instance, will not be effective without the coordination of the rural utility districts and the County. Peripheral, unplanned growth will have grave impacts on the City and its ability to provide adequate services and meet the expectations of its future constituency. The type and quality of this development not only impacts the character of McAllen but also impacts its resources, as residents living in these unincorporated areas come into the City for their shopping and service needs. With development occurring in the unincorporated areas there will be increasing demands on the City to provide infrastructure, police and fire protection, and other services. Instead of trying to meet the increasing demands, a decision must be made as to the appropriateness and cost efficiency of providing these services.

Strong intergovernmental cooperation will be instrumental in effective implementation of this plan. Each of the governmental agencies share common interests and goals, including enhancing economic development, providing for quality housing, services and infrastructure needs. These goals can be more effectively achieved through mutual cooperation and coordination.

Recommended Strategies for Intergovernmental Cooperation

- Create an intergovernmental planning advisory council, which should include a representative from each public and semi-public agency. The council should meet quarterly to consider and act on projects and initiatives that are of mutual interest and benefit.
- Undertake jointly an area plan for the ten- and twenty-year growth areas of the City, which must include a future land use plan and specific recommendations as to ordinance additions and changes to better manage development.
- Develop a memorandum of understanding between the City and each rural utility provider, with a goal of not deterring the ability of the City to manage its pattern of development, protecting their resources, and ensuring sound fiscal management practices.

Implementation Strategies

Shown in **Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan**, is the key strategies for implementation, with more detail found within the individual plan chapters. These strategies highlight the steps to be taken by the City, often in coordination with other jurisdictions, organizations, or agencies. This table is intended as a quick reference to that outlined below. It is designed to be kept up-to-date and used on an annual basis as part of the regular review process. Each year the projects that are substantially complete should be removed, with the corresponding years advanced one year, and a fifth year of programmed actions added. In this way, this table may be used on an ongoing basis and provided to the City Commission to keep them apprised of the progress of implementation.

Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan

Element/ Action Statement	Budget Timeframe			Agency Responsible
	0-2 Years	3-5 Years	5+ Years	
New Ordinances and Amendments				
Statement #1				
Statement #2				
Statement #3 …				
Capital Projects				
Statement #1				
Statement #2				
Statement #3 …				
Programmatic Initiatives				
Statement #1				
Statement #2				
Statement #3 …				
Plans and Studies				
Statement #1				
Statement #2				
Statement #3 …				

Plan Amendment

1st. Unified Land Development Code

Benefits of a Unified Development Code

- A UDC offers procedural consistency and a single source of standards and definitions.
- It greatly simplifies the amendment process helping to ensure consistency among the different codes.
- It makes the regulations more user-friendly for the development, real estate, and consultant communities.
- There can be better cross-referencing to ensure that all related provisions are taken into account pertaining to any particular development proposal.
- The administration of the codes is consolidated into one section thereby simplifying the roles and responsibilities of each official and body.
- The applications and procedures for all development processes can be clearly defined including use of a flow diagram to illustrate the submission and review process.
- It allows application of subdivision requirements to "zoning-only" projects, such as driveway access and site circulation review for a single-user site plan when subdivision is not required.
- It improves the ability to track the total development process.

Currently, the City has separate zoning and subdivision codes. It is therefore, advisable to combine these into a single, unified document. In the following paragraphs the elements that are a priority for implementation are addressed.

Zoning Ordinance

Amendment of the zoning ordinance is imperative. The current ordinance has pyramidal residential districts meaning that uses are cumulatively permitted in each district. This acts against the preservation of neighborhood character. All districts are use-based, which do not reflect their intended character. The districts must therefore, be amended to be based on character rather than use. This will permit added flexibility and provide better protection of open space and valued features. The need is for a complete revision of the zoning and subdivision regulations into a unified development code.

Key amendments include:

1. Base the zoning districts on **community character** rather than use and lot size, with several development options allowed within each district. Use correlating standards for density/open space (residential) and intensity/landscape surface (non-residential) to preserve character.
2. An increase in the required **open space**, consistent with the proposed increased requirements for parkland dedication and the recent requirements for on-site detention while providing a equivalent offset in added density. A "suburban" district, whether residential or commercial, for instance, requires more open space within neighborhoods or landscape surface within nonresidential districts.
3. Requirements for **variable bufferyard requirements** between and, in the case of mixed use districts, within developments based upon use intensity (density or floor area ratio).
4. Permit **clustered and planned developments** as a permitted development option, subject to development and performance standards to ensure compatibility. Density incentives may then be used to encourage more open space than that required for parkland dedication and on-site detention.
5. Establishment of a **streamlined review and approval process** that expedites compliant applications. With clearly outlined performance standards the process may be eased with greater reliance on sound administration of a well-written development code.
6. Establish **criteria for submittal of variances**, which must be present for the City to accept an application. The proposed amendments to the zoning ordinance will greatly reduce the need to request variances due to the increased options and flexibility that are built into the new standards.

7. Incorporation of **resource standards** for protection of orchards, stream channels and irrigation canals, valued open areas, and other natural features. A two-tier approach is recommended. First is to identify the resources and establish protection levels in terms of the amount of open space required for protection. Second is a density bonus to offset the loss in development yield. These strategies ensure protection is consistently achieved without an inordinate loss of density. It is most efficient to combine all resource protection into performance standards with a site capacity calculation that alerts landowners as to the impact the natural resources have on the site. A site capacity calculation links the resources to the maximum allowable density on the site.
8. Improved **site standards** such as landscaping, screening, and other design guidelines. More site landscaping is necessary to improve the aesthetic value of properties, specifically along the City's principal arterials like 10th Street and the U.S. 83 Expressway. Better screening of parking lots, loading and storage areas, and ground- and building-mounted equipment will improve the appearance of development.
9. Managed **sign control** including specification as to the placement, size, and height of signs, as well as the type and number of signs. For multi-tenant centers, in particular, a cohesive sign plan is important.

Subdivision Code

The current subdivision process focuses on whether the plan meets the standards and is properly engineered, as allowed by State law. However, it does not easily handle clustered development nor does it directly allow for the protection of resources. Development now maximizes its site without regard to preservation of open space, protection of sensitive lands, or enhancement of community character. Therefore, specific standards and review criteria are needed, particularly ensuring conformance with this plan. The code should integrate the subdivision and land development standards with zoning by way of a unified development code.

Formalizing elements of the land development application process doesn't mean that the process is more burdensome. The use of established procedures and checklists provides clarity to all participants thus, helps to streamline the application process. The application process and regulations can also be streamlined, or incentives built into the process to enable an applicant to get through the process easily. The City Commission must be clear in their delineation of standards, where approval is to be granted to the Planning Commission or staff, as many land development decisions are not legislative in character, and do not require review by the City Commission - provided clear standards exist. By providing standards for development, the City can tell an applicant, "This is what we want to see. If you decide to develop with less open space, for example, you must go through additional review steps." In other words, there is benefit to those who meet the preferred standards – and expectations of the community.

2nd. Growth Management

The plan for growth management, while including infill areas within the City limits, deals with undeveloped – and rapidly developing - land within the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) contiguous to the City limits and within the 10-year growth area. Implementation of this plan is essential if the City is to forge fiscally responsible future development, preserve its character, protect views and open space, secure the protection of sensitive resources, and, effectively, control its destiny. While State law

complicates the means by which the City may accomplish its growth management objectives, following is the advisable approach:

1. First and foremost, prepare **infill development standards** to allow new development to occur on infill tracts and ensure it is of comparable scale and character to the surrounding development. Obstacles like certain unattainable requirements (e.g. on-site detention) must be overcome, with expedited review standards to serve as an incentive. In certain instances, economic incentives may be warranted.
2. Prepare a **non-exempt annexation plan**[1] for those areas for which there are fewer than 100 residences. Subsequently zone them in accordance with the Future Land Use Plan. In instances where there are not readily available or a capital plan for extension of services, zone them A-O, Agricultural and Open Space District. (Note: The minimum lot size must be increased to larger than five acres, such as 20 acres or larger).
3. Prepare a **three-year annexation plan** for the remaining areas within the 10-year growth area. This will require a facility and infrastructure service plan, which "must provide the annexed area with a level of services, infrastructure, and infrastructure maintenance that is comparable to the level of service, infrastructure, and infrastructure maintenance available in other parts of the municipality with topography, land use, and population density similar to those reasonably contemplated or projected in the area."[2]
4. Prepare a **fiscal impact model** to determine the relative impact of the proposed annexation and the proposed future development, including an assessment of the expense of providing the required City facilities and services. The fiscal evaluation must occur concurrently with the annexation plans to allow sound decisions as to the inclusion or exclusion of certain areas.
5. Conduct an **impact fee study** to consider the imposition of fair-share development exactions for water, wastewater, and drainage improvements within both the City limits and ETJ.
6. Amend the **subdivision regulations** to accomplish the following:
   a. Incorporate access management standards along arterial roads to avoid groups of narrow lots that take individual access from the arterial roads.
   b. Adopt development plat regulations thereby requiring platting for all development within the City or ETJ.[3]
   c. Require adequate public facility provision, particularly concerning fire-rated water lines.
   d. Establish a large minimum lot size for unzoned properties, with flexibility with regard to lot size as an incentive for clustered development.
7. Consider the use of **traffic sheds**, which allocates allowable development on the basis of roadway level of service, which is consistent with the powers granted to the City for the "purpose of promoting the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare." This approach has merit and is certainly warranted although it is yet to be implemented in Texas given the City's authority – or lack thereof – in the ETJ.

Capital Improvement Plan

Closely related to the ability of the City to manage its growth is the adequacy of its existing infrastructure and its ability to maintain it. The requirement to keep pace with development in terms of increasing

[1] Subchapter C. Annexation Procedure for Areas Annexed Under Municipal Annexation, Section 43.052. Municipal Annexation Plan Required.
[2] Section 43.056. Provision of Services to Annexed Area (g)
[3] Section 212.045. Development Plat Required

capacities and service needs is significant. This strengthens the cause for managing growth to ensure that new development occurs within the areas where infrastructure and services already exist.

Capital improvement strategies include:

1. Tie the capital improvements program to the growth plan allowing the City to assess its long-term infrastructure needs, and to stage improvements concurrent with growth.
2. Prepare financially constrained infrastructure improvement plans. Resources should be directed to serving infill projects followed by those that are contiguous to the service area. All projects should be within the defined growth area.
3. In coordination with the growth plan, direct new development only to areas where there is existing adequate street and utility infrastructure, or where they may be readily extended without financial burden on the City.
4. Adopt utility extension policies that strictly adhere to the growth policies of this plan.
5. Use density bonuses to provide incentives for development clustering, which minimizes the needs for infrastructure since there are fewer roads and utility lines needed thus, maximizing their efficiency. Incentives for extreme forms of clustering, such as conservation (75 percent open space) and preservation (90 percent open space) development should be used within the areas beyond the 10-year growth area.

3rd. Heart of the City Development

Ongoing development of Downtown is important. As indicated in Section 5.5, Economic Development, this area must be viewed as a hub for commerce and culture. Key strategies include:

1. Formation of an urban center district to require continuation of the urban character (minimum two-story building heights, build-to front and side property lines, higher floor area ratios).
2. Creation of an urban center high district for taller, more intensive development, particularly along 10th Street near both U.S. 83 and Business 83.
3. Development of residential and non-residential design guidelines for building scale and massing; relationships to the street front; pedestrian facilities and amenities; parking location and design; site lighting; service, loading, outdoor storage, and mechanical areas; building design (facades, articulation, exteriors, fenestration, blank walls, etc.); and signs and awnings.
4. Increased urban living options in an immediately adjacent to Downtown.
5. Economic targeting for particular downtown businesses that reflect a local genuineness. This includes catalyst projects to stimulate added private investment and economic activity.
6. Continued development of the visual and performing arts and cultural features and attractions.

4th. Transit Supportive Planning

Given the pace and pattern of development the City should promptly proceed in coordinating with the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to prepare a transit options study. The timing of this study is paramount if the development pattern is to be transit supportive. Without near-term action the corridors will be heavily constrained and highly costly to transform into transit-ways. Higher density, mixed use development is required along transit corridors, with an increase in persons per square mile within one-quarter mile of the transit line. Upon determining the potential alignments the following strategies are warranted:

1. Amend the future land use plan to designate higher, mixed use development adjacent to the transit corridors, and particularly at major crossroads and intersections.
2. Amend the zoning ordinance to facilitate transit-oriented development near designated stop locations. This should also include design and development standards to ensure desirable outcomes.
3. Integrate height and density bonuses to allow transit-oriented development to occur.

5th. Trail System Planning

Many linear greenways and trail opportunities will be lost if development continues in the absence of a comprehensive trails and greenways master plan for the City and ETJ. Given the proposed changes to the zoning ordinance, which will better facilitate the provision of open space and protection of linear trail corridors, an updated trail master plan is warranted and timely. The master plan should include:

1. A detailed inventory of all existing public trail segments, including preparation of a map and GIS database.
2. An updated inventory of all existing sidewalks as well as existing and committed (platted and planned) private trails.
3. Preparation of a gap analysis to identify locations where improvements may be made to connect existing sidewalks and trails.
4. Preliminary assessment of available rights-of-way, easements, and publicly-owned properties suitable for possible trail development.
5. Development of a conceptual trail network depicting all possible trail locations.
6. Screening of the conceptual network to evaluate the warrant and feasibility of individual segments.
7. Preparation of a final trail master plan indicating the general alignments of off-street trails, key destinations, potential trailhead sites, and areas of special consideration (areas with physical design constraints).

Subsequent to the master plan, fund Phase I improvements focused on connectors to form a more complete network of existing trails. The subdivision regulations must be amended to require provisions for trail connections and development.

6th. Quality, Affordable Housing

With rising land and development costs affordability will become an increasing issue for the community. In the interest of accommodating persons of all economic strata, mechanisms must be put in place to allow for attainable housing, in addition to and support of that being provided by McAllen Affordable Homes. In addition, the City must act to protect, stabilize, and strengthen neighborhood environments while revitalizing "tired" neighborhoods and rehabilitating the older housing stock.

Key strategies to improve quality and affordability include:

1. Amend the development code to incorporate the following:
    a. A housing palette allowing a range of different housing types within the same neighborhood, with dimensional criteria to ensure compatibility and consistent character.
    b. Provisions for inclusionary housing under certain specified circumstances, which may be accomplished by way of a housing bonus program whereby a subdivider may achieve greater

overall density (using alternative housing types or via lot size adjustments) in exchange for providing affordable units.

c. Use of an average lot formula requiring an average rather than minimum size lot, which allows a mixture of lot sizes thereby accommodating different floor plans and sizes and prices of units while fending off monotony at the same time.
d. Provisions for market rate housing whereby the increment created by density bonuses is used to write-down the lot and infrastructure costs for a specified percentage of units making them more attainable.
e. Providing a range of development options within each district, with density bonuses for planned development. To achieve higher densities within a planned environment, a minimum of two or three housing types are required, which helps to achieve community affordability objectives.

The City should strengthen its neighborhood planning program. In coordination with individual neighborhoods, at least one – and preferably more depending on the available resources - small area plan should be developed annually. These plans would focus on specific area improvements and relevant code enforcement issues, which may result in the identification and prioritization of capital projects, plan or zoning district amendments, enhancement projects, or other special initiatives or programs.

7th. Economic Development

The City should continue to work closely with MEDC in the local economic development program. As outlined in this plan, two major initiatives include a focus on entrepreneurship and talent development. This will help promote small business startups, which are an important strategy for stimulating growth, generating wealth, and creating sustainable economic vitality. At the same time, talent is a fundamental issue if the City is going to compete successfully for businesses that offer well paying jobs and increased benefits.

Economic development strategies include:

1. In the initial phase of preparing a unified development code, focus attention on rewriting the standards of submission and the procedural aspects of development review and approval. The integration of performance standards will allow better development outcomes with less reliance on the review process since they are clearly articulated in the development regulations.
2. Focus attention on downtown development, including attraction of a significant anchor to the area. There are opportunities for reuse and redevelopment throughout and particularly on the fringes that are ripe for public-private partnership. Continued development on the edge of the community should be curtailed in favor of infill development, building reuse, and redevelopment.
3. Permit increased density and mixed use in and immediately around Downtown while preserving the urban form. With increased intensity will come a need for more parking so the City must be prepared to partner with the private sector to provide structured-parking. Density bonuses may also be used to facilitate improved feasibility of structured parking.
4. Establish a *Center for Entrepreneurship* to serve as a major catalyst for business startups and professional services growth, which may be located in Downtown.
5. Leverage existing educational institutions, workforce development, and other training assets by developing a City-School District team, establishing an internship/apprenticeship program, hosting workforce conferences, and promoting expansion of STC and UTPA programs.

Plan Amendment

This plan must remain flexible and allow for adjustment to change over time. Shifts in political, economic, physical, and social conditions, and other unforeseen circumstances will influence the priorities of the community. As growth continues new issues will emerge while others may no longer be relevant. Some action statements may become less practical while other plausible solutions will arise. To ensure that it continues to reflect the vision and remains relevant and viable over time, the plan must be revisited on a routine basis, with regular amendments and warranted updates.

Revisions to the plan are two-fold; minor plan amendments should occur bi-annually and more significant updates handled every five years. Minor amendments may include revisions to the land use and growth plan or thoroughfare plan as the development pattern unfolds. Major updates will involve reviewing the base conditions and growth trends; re-evaluating the goals, policies, and recommendations; and formulating new ones in response to changing needs and priorities.

Annual Progress Report

A progress report should be prepared annually by the Planning and Zoning Commission, with the assistance of the Plan Administrator, and presented to the Mayor and City Commission. This ensures that the plan is regularly reviewed and modifications are identified for the minor plan amendment process. Ongoing monitoring of plan consistency with the City's ordinances must be an essential part of this effort.

The Annual Progress Report should include:

- Significant actions and accomplishments during the past year including the status of implementation for each programmed task.
- Implementation constraints including those encountered in administering the plan and its policies.
- Proposed amendments that have come forward during the course of the year, which may include revisions to the plan maps, or other recommendations, policies, or text changes.
- Recommendations for needed actions, programs, and procedures to be developed and implemented in the forthcoming year, including a recommendation of projects to be included in the CIP, programs and initiatives to be funded, and priority coordination needs with public and private implementation partners.

Bi-annual Amendment Process

Plan amendments should occur on a bi-annual basis, allowing proposed changes to be considered concurrently so that the cumulative effect may be understood. The proposed amendment must be consistent with the goals and policies set forth in the plan. Careful consideration should also be given to guard against site-specific plan changes that could negatively impact adjacent areas and uses or detract from the overall vision and character of the area. Factors that should be considered include:

- Consistency with the goals and policies of the plan;
- Adherence with the future land use, growth, thoroughfare, and parks and trails plans;
- Compatibility with the surrounding area;
- Impacts on infrastructure provision;
- Impact on the ability to provide, fund, and maintain adequate services;

- Impact on environmentally sensitive and natural areas; and,
- Contribution to the vision of the plan and character of the community.

Five-Year Update/Evaluation and Appraisal Report

An evaluation and appraisal report should be prepared every five years. This report should be prepared by the Plan Administrator, with input from various City departments, Planning and Zoning Commission, and other boards and committees. The report involves evaluating the existing plan and assessing how successful it has been in implementing the vision and goals. The purpose is to identify the successes and shortcomings of the plan, look at what has changed, and make recommendations on how the plan should be modified. The report should review baseline conditions and assumptions about trends and growth indicators, and it should evaluate implementation potential and/or obstacles related to any unmet goals, policies, and recommendations. The result of the evaluation report will be a revised comprehensive plan.

More specifically, the report should identify and evaluate the following:

1. Summary of plan amendments and major actions undertaken over the last five years.
2. Major issues in the community and how these issues have changed over time.
3. Changes in the assumptions, trends, and base studies including the following:
   - The rate at which growth is occurring relative to the projections put forward in the plan;
   - Shifts in demographics and other growth trends;
   - The area of urban land that is designated and zoned and its capacity to meet projected demands;
   - City-wide attitudes and whether changes necessitate amendments to the vision and goals; and,
   - Other changes in the political, social, economic, or environmental conditions that dictate a need for plan amendment.
4. Ability of the plan to continue to successfully implement the vision.
   - Individual statements or sections of the plan must be reviewed and rewritten to ensure that the plan provides sufficient information and direction to achieve the intended outcome.
   - Conflicts between goals and policies that have been discovered in the implementation and administration of the plan must be resolved.
   - The action agenda should be reviewed and major actions accomplished should be highlighted. Those not accomplished should be re-evaluated to ensure their relevancy and/or to revise them appropriately.
   - The timeframes for implementing the individual actions should be re-evaluated. Some actions may emerge as a higher priority given new or changed circumstances while others may become less important.
   - Based upon organizational, programmatic, and procedural factors, as well as the status of previously assigned tasks, the implementation task assignments must be reviewed and altered to ensure timely accomplishment.
   - Changes in laws, procedures, and missions may impact the ability to achieve the goals. The plan review must assess these changes and their impacts on the success of implementation, leading to any suggested revisions in strategies or priorities.

A
Appendix

Meeting Summary

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

As a citizen-based plan, community engagement is essential to ensure that the plan reflects the values and priorities of the community, its residents, and stakeholders. A broad cross-section of citizens, including those involved in community organizations, civic clubs, neighborhood associations, land and business interests, representatives of local and regional coordinating agencies, and residents played an essential role at the outset of this plan development process to provide input as to community issues and concerns, as well as their opinions and ideas as to the solutions and priorities.

On April 11, 2006, a series of small group interviews were held concurrently with the Discovery and Reconnaissance phase of the work program. These focus group meetings consisted of one-hour discussions between a representative of Kendig Keast Collaborative (KKC), the project consultants, and a 10 to 25 community members who expressed their ideas and preferences as to how the community develops in the next 20 years and beyond. These discussions formed the foundational basis of this plan. The plan is issue based, meaning that it began with the identification of issues, exploration as to the nature and cause of the issues, and, ultimately, an expressed deliberate course of action to overcome obstacles and resolve difficulties to achieve the overall vision for the Year 2025.

On the evening of April 11th, over 400 residents attended a Citizens' Congress, which was an opportunity for the community to band together to collectively initiate the process of forging the future of their fine community. The Foresight McAllen plan update initiative was introduced, with an explanation as to the process and its intended outcomes. Community leaders, including members of staff and the elected City Commissioners, pledged their support and commitment to the plan and its value in guiding their decisions. The balance of the evening was spent in small group discussions, much like that conducted earlier in the day. These discussions provided an opportunity to hear again, some of the issues spoken earlier, which confirmed their importance and value to the community and its future. At the same time, new issues and ideas surfaced and added to the record of community input.

On the following pages are the issues and ideas that were raised during both the small group discussions and the Citizens' Congress. These comments contributed to development of the vision, goals, and objectives for the City's long-range plan. They have also been used to determine solutions and as guidance for the community planning over the course of the Foresight McAllen Plan update process.

They are organized by topical area using the same outline order found in the Goals and Policies section (Section IV) of the original Foresight McAllen Plan.

Urban Design and Form

Growth: Limit growth—limit job opportunities. Future growth. Manage growth. Quality growth. Controlled growth. Manage resources in the community. Annexation. Only 5 miles of undeveloped land, nothing to support growth of people, look past 5 years. Five miles of undeveloped land, where are they going? Facilities to meet needs of the future.

Water and Sewer: Water and sewer plans—forward planning infrastructure. Water and sewer—pay one time for expansion. Planned growth—water and sewer. Water supply. Water supply—two water supply corporations (WSC), McAllen PUB, Sharyland WSC, no hydrants, rural water system (major issue). Water—Pub—EXPANDING north WWTP Sprague, 6-15 years—life of expansion, expansion North WTP, Studying South WWTP—Increase capacity, conservation needed, convert brackish water—idea. Water—Falcon Lake, depend on Mexico to honor agreement, valley-wide issue, net gain of water, to take from agriculture to subdivision.

Infrastructure: Need time line from the City; extension of infrastructure. Infrastructure, need to look ahead 15 years, east/west transportation gridlock. One-half mile collectors—applied in some cases, not in others, often doesn't go anywhere. Type of density for future needs of infrastructure, right-of-way parking, etc. Infrastructure development, tax payers of developers, responsibility.

Drainage: Mile 3 outfall project, see Hidalgo County Drainage District. Drainage—what is being done as far as new construction. Containing storm water and development. Bicentennial and drainage ditch—no outlet and limiting side street access. Drainage problem. Lack of drainage improvements.

Environment

General: Overall environment impacts. Make McAllen a cultural destination City. Quality of Life. Visit cities of cultural and historic resources, downtown McAllen, help growth, development, quality of life, participation from financial partners, low interest loans, tax incentives. Destination city—culture, art, stronger arts council, galleries, museum, birding center. Cultural district.

Habitat and Nature Preservation: Protecting urban forest, incentives for homeowners and developers, native habitat. Keep agriculture, open space, and resources. Birding.

Nature Centers: Nature center on Old 83—Amphitheater. Expand/enhance new nature center. More destinations than the Nature Center. Tie arts to nature community.

Historic Preservation: Historic preservation—landscape (orchards, irrigation, canals), landmarks and vistas. Historical integrity of buildings, incentives to redevelop historical buildings, encourage incentives. Planning staff could be a resource to help developers do historic preservation. Old Methodist Church downtown, reuse as art center, will become charter Montessori School. North Main—Old Methodist Church—Arts Center. Incentives for historical buildings (private, city as resource.) Library, save historic resources, Old Civic Center—reuse—central to City as art center. Historic preservation, capitalize on McAllen's assets, better

community wise participation, tax incentives, emphasis on redeveloped, revitalization, City is nearing 100 years old, La Paloma neighborhood, walkable communities, maintain livability. Make use of historical structures/properties. Combine with historical center other arts/cultural. Historic preservation of downtown core.

Transportation

General Comments: Don't reinvent the wheel. Traffic advisory board, walking/biking to school, purpose of medians. Thoroughfare plan reviewed annually. Drainage—multi use-re-profile to accommodate trails, build roads on either side. Tie into regular thoroughfares—loops. Provide main trunk lines—who installs?—City or developer. Plan transportation corridors as Los Angeles, CA does to avoid problems. Need through ways and expressway. Transportation issues.

City needs to acquire new right-of-way where no existing right-of-way, center 30-40 feet. Right-of-way—unfair as to the required dedication, reimbursed for utilities. Easements or right-of-way— private or public? Look at reverse frontage.

Loop system—TxDOT; Pharr, Edinburg, McAllen. Highways—need to be 7 lanes.

Service roads around commercial centers, used for cut-through. Who upkeeps alleys? Bars/nightclubs concern. Bufferyards needed. Smaller parking lots—build up instead of build out.

Traffic: Connect 281 to 83 arounnd northwest, Nolana connect to Westlake? Nolana is not a loop! Trenton more viable. No east-west cross roads.

Traffic congestion—1/2 mile collectors versus ¼ mile due to ditches, lengthy streets. ½ mile collectors needed . Transit/ 10,000 month, 30,000/month now, impacts of aging, street side improvements. Traffic congestion. Slow process, 800' length requirement is a problem.

Driveways at intersections. More right-turn lanes. Turn lanes and bus stop improvements. Turn islands good to control flow.

Traffic—light system—set to traffic. 23rd and 10th St.—congestion. Synchonize lights needed. Cameras at red lights. Light signals—separations. Regional Computerized Transportation Signalization System (RCTSS) needed, particularly at congestion points. Signal timing. Electrified street signs—good. Sign control.

Medians: If we get them, paint with orange paint. Medians—will lose business if on the other side of road. Raised medians needed. Medians —detriment to business, Nolana being discussed.Nolana—opposed to raised medians, retrofitting them; not necessarily new development.

Specific Roads:

Ware Rd: grade separations; McColl or 10th St. would be other ones.

West of 10th: Truck routes on Ware Rd. 23rd & 10th St.—Congestion. Traffic from Share Rd. Bentsen widening—preserve trees.

South of Nolana: Extend Military Hwy. To 10th St. and Jackson Rd. Fern and 2nd St.-City could extend at dead-end. Hackberry—too congested.

More transportation at Hidalgo bridge. Hidalgo International Bridge—port of entry, outdated 911 impacts Need additional port of entry, 8 mile trip transport to McAllen, gas impacting volume, circulator—idea. Increase in pedestrian crossing/decrease in vehicle trips. 29% bus ridership, 15,000 trucks/day, 16,000 pedestrians/day, 150 busses/day, 100,000 people/day, 78% Hidalgo, 22% Pharr-Reynosa—more commercial traffic. New port—5 miles upstream—south or mission, Sept 08 operational, vehicle/pedestrian traffic, 20 minutes off from Monterrey cause skirt Reynosa.

North of Nolana: North-south corridor is a necessity as we grow North . Dove Ave—citizens should be notified when widening roads. Widen Dove Ave.

Southeast Roads: Jackson Ave. from 2nd St. to 10th St., should be widened. Jackson and Houston—make one-way streets.

Northeast roads: Dove and 6th, example of mixed use.

Southwest Roads: Need to look at Ware Rd. & 10th. Bicentennial—interchange with Hwy. 83. Traffic from Shary Rd. 29th to free trade zones. Widening of Daffodil divides neighborhood; supports widening of Nolana, opposes widening of Daffodil. Safety of arterials-Daffodil. . Daffodil—widening, neighborhood input wanted—concern for safety.

Northwest Roads: Should extend Bi-centennial. Bicentennial needs to be an arterial, 10th and Nolana—overpass. Cut off streets that access Bicentennial, eliminate yellow lights, ideas: no trucks (45 mph), north of Nolana could be different—overpasses possible, sound walls. Ware or Bicentennial need to go to next loop, Monte Cristo next logical Loop—get right-of way now

Ware and Route 281—North to extend: Widening Nolana thru to Taylor or the City limits McColl and 23rd is the only way to go North. More north/south expressways, 23rd too narrow.

Sidewalks, Trails and Bikeways: Hike/bike paths. Sidewalks between neighborhoods and walking trails. Exercise, bike trail, soccer field, baseball (cool, shade), canopy on bike trails (more appealing), rubber surface on jogging trails. Exercise, bike trails, soccer field, think cool, think shelter, canopies on trails, if more parks use softscape, rubberized. Trolley for tourists between sites. Art along hike and bike trails.

Environmentally friendly methods of transportation. Sidewalks around schools; kids safety walking to and from school. Pedestrian traffic. Make downtown more pedestrian friendly. Sidewalks—improve 5 miles of sidewalks per year. Need sidewalks on both sides of street continuous. ADA accessibility for sidewalks and ramps. Elevated rail or elevated walking area. Hike and bike—liked, limited pedestrian access, gaps/stops of bike lanes. Public transportation, bus system, train system.

Public Transportation: We need more frequent service; choice riders; more transit routes; less headways. Elevated rail. Bus stop improvements. Bus system—communicate with public; senior transport needed. Need transportation centers.

Rail Traffic: Commercial railroads—should be industrial trade zone. Train whistles—Bicentennial Rd., North McAllen residents noise; 10th between Houston and Pecan. Keep railroads running. Railroads running north and south, can ghey be used as transportation? Light rails for trains on existing rail lines. Elevated rail or elevated walking area. Public transportation, bus system, train system.

Air Traffic: Airport—future runway lengths and size of aircraft. Airport Master plan, Phil Brown manager, compatible use, 10,000 ft. runway—needed for cargo, differ zone contours for cargo—Part 150 study, cargo support facilities, truck access, parking needs.

Neighborhoods

General Comments: Quality versus quantity is preferred (2). Image is important. Development that will make McAllen unique. Identification of community, composite—blending with other adjacent cities. Cooperative standards—infrastructure. What is Quality? East-West Access. Clean city. Plan future land use. Aesthetics. More aesthetically pleasing. Protecting value of property in all areas of McAllen. Homogenous architecture, Hunt development is an example, drainage—flooding, historical preservation. Quality development. Subdivision requirements. Architectural theme—city wide, city personality.

Subdivisions: McAllen must lead, small ownerships—10 to 70 acres is good subdivision. Willing to pay reimbursement—equitable. $40,000 per acre to Monte Cristo Sharyland Water Supply—don't want development, ISD is popular.

Landscape and Fences: Landscape—community character. Landscape design to revive areas. Maintain fences. Maintain landscape, enforce. More encouragement at homeowner's association to keep up landscaping. Wall—fenced—permanent. Covenants restricting fences, standards for outside weathered fences, falling down, develop for security, graffiti, fences are needed. Require maintenance of landscaping, there is an ordinance requiring commercial landscaping; develop on 10th street South of Harvey; Enforcement of landscaping requirements, residential landscaping requirements are not rigid enough. Standards for landscaping. Residential landscape (more) and drainage. More shade threes vs. palms—combat heat.

Subdivisions and Neighborhoods: Housing—chicken & the egg, quality begets quantity Lot sizes are an issue. Need strong mix of housing. Strong mix—all levels of housing. More townhomes Redevelopment is important. Revitalization, walkable communities. Low income needs to be near downtown—close to activity areas—walkable. Rader—cited developments, more fairness in all neighborhoods, quality vs. quantity of growth. Rear yards against corridors, private property outside of fence and right-of-way needs to be maintained. View—small lots, land values. Sprawl—high rises. Homeowner association encouragement is needed. Number of subdivision entrances. Louisiana, commercial intrusion concern, need better notification, buffer between business and residential.

Subdivision walls tend to divide the city. Very small lots are a problem. Density must be looked at. Parking in front and backyards is a problem.. Renters are not homeowners, no maintenance. Run down neighborhoods—lighting, maintenance, and architectural standards. Buffers between

homes and business need to be more standardized. North McAllen commercial encroachment in neighborhoods, notification, need confidence that plan will be followed through.

Trenton Village—keep parts of city residential (less commercial, destroys quality of life.) North McAllen—commercial encroaching on residential areas. Dove/Trenton @ 2nd—protect neighborhoods streetscape. Trenton—growth is out of control, keep commercial out of residential areas, more traffic, crime, dangerous.

Safety Concerns: Residents of Adobe Wells park safety. Violet and 2nd Street—high voltage towers and lines over neighborhoods—energy production and supply. Dog Control.

New Neighborhoods: Neighborhood identity/planning—advocate within city, special training. More neighborhood planning (model to create neighborhood assoc.)

General Housing

Low Income Housing: McAllen affordable homes, low-income housing, issues getting enough land; starter homes, elderly, funding being sought. McAllen affordable homes—funding cut. McAllen Affordable Homes is in business—not for profit company. Low income housing, no low income housing since 1950's. 300-400 on waiting list.

Revitalization of Older Neighborhoods: Housing—revitalization of existing homes in lower density neighborhoods, use matching grants to match beautification. Old neighborhoods, incentives to remodel continuing to delay, low-income areas with elderly. Older development, comply with ordinance. Old homes, tax incentive to buy and renovate old neighborhoods. Revitalizing low density neighborhoods (matching grants). Older homes and mature yards/trees, tax incentive to renovate old neighborhoods. Older abandoned neighborhoods, remodel homes, keep old neighborhoods intact, city assistant. Takes too long to grow new trees, save trees.

Commercial

Outlying Areas: More commercial areas outward in the developing areas. Commercial—not-inmy- backyard (NIMBY)

Heart of the City: Central growth, Heart of the City plan. Strengthen downtown, better parking. Bicentennial, get rid of bars.

Maintain quality of life in the core of the city; real estate values. Maintain downtown core. SE corner of 83/Bus 83, needs multi-level parking near downtown area, city is working on it. Fifteenth and Beaumont parking garage (438 spaces). Downtown behind, need parking, bars on Bicentennial. Heart of the City—key ingredient.

Sign control: Sign control is needed.

Community Facilities

General: Providing city services. Concerned with annexation and providing City services. Fire department—more staffing. School, Fire Department, Police substations.

Cultural and Community Centers: More entertainment districts. Cultural Assets. New theatres, performing arts. Cultural arts, school, music programs, bring in people. Six arts organizations in McAllen—30 in the Valley. Guadalupe arts center in KC, MO—good example. Rio Grande Valley Arts Council—coordinating agency. Creative Incubator. Sam Houston Center—Cultural Arts Center. Convention center in process of being built. Stronger performing arts council.

No interesting architecture/art. Departure of culture. Zoo. Support cultural arts, attract music and arts, tennis center. McAllen Film Commission—recording studios, sound production editing, bilingual essential. Performing arts center needed, thriving symphony with no facility. Cultural awareness, entertainment district, two cultural districts—Downtown, extend from Dallas (stops) to Houston. Increase support for arts—learning environments, particularly north. More mid-size facilities for performances, outdoor events in parks—for dances, etc. Help advertise cultural events—City assist. More cultural places, events. Trying to do an arts districts—where? Broaden the art walk in Downtown. Increase amount of public art.

Library: Recent Library needs assessment shows need for a new main library. New central library. New Library—books!, cultural arts and literacy events, renovate—create central library. New library—incorporate gallery, teen center, coffee shop. It should continue to provide computers and genealogy Open to library branches. Use existing library for historical/genealogical center, branch libraries (need more). Turn present main library into historical museum, new library because of growth, more branch libraries.

Old Library downtown—renovate vs. rebuild. Moving main library will cause businesses to go out of business if library is moved, businesses will lose, put new library downtown near present building, tear out existing building site for parking. Increase size, use present building as parking.

Use present Civic Center building for Library after Convention Center is built. Do not tear down the Civic Center buildings.

Museum: Plan for museum to fulfill needs. Stars party, building digital dome theater. Museum of arts, dynamic museum, new PAC. Museum, stars party, draw 1000s of people, star watching, digital dance theatre. Digital Dome Theater—draw visitors.

Youth Programs and Sports Facilities: Youth Advisory Committee, With adults and parents, Boys and Girls clubs, survey—arts center (Old Sam Houston) (dance, painting), open late keep out of trouble. Old Sam Houston—classes. Youth Advisory of 7501, Art Center LaPoloma, Arts Center (La Paloma), Community Youth Activity Center, Community Adult Music Facility, youth issues—art center.

Rising Star Academy—sports academy for kids to play (host tournaments), how they utilize fields (more fields) Shade! Swimming Pools. Tennis center. Baseball academy, more kids sports facilities, soccer tournaments, year round baseball, need more shade. Youth softball facilities—regulation fields. Limit programs—shortage of facilities, four softball fields now—needed, sports complex—team with ISD, 25,000-30,000 stadium for semi-pro athletics. Need more sporting facilities, sports complex on north side, have to go to Los Encinos.

Senior Citizens: Three community centers now for seniors.

Recycling: Where do homeowners put clippings/trimmings? How do you require that they be bought to a controlled location?, central vs. house by house, more common areas—pick up monthly, enforcement of dumping. Business recycling needed, paper and cardboard now. Litter—need receptacles.

Parks and Recreation

Recreation: Golf course; Ware Rd, 18 holes, add nine more? Use as a park until then. Possible location for city festival? Golf course (Ware) use land.

Parks and Swimming Pools: Swimming pools. More linear parts—set us apart from other cities. More parks—Linear are popular, more culture in parks? More importance. Give back pocket parks. More parks needed. Pocket parks desired by residents, HOA vs. city maintained? Some HOA's are voluntary, problems for enforcing. Nice parks, need more of them. Dog parks (2). Parks on South side. Parks and recreation lighting. Dog scoopers. Put parks in low areas. Leave space for parks in developments—City requirement, more park dedication. Parks on north side.

More large parks. Exercise, bike trails, soccer field, think cool, think shelter, canopies on trails, if more parks use softscape, rubberized. More swimming pools. Parks need more money, dog parks, more lights, school parks—excellent! School board/commission. School parks, very good Parks and Recreation Department. City parks partner with culture/artist groups organizations.

Develop on low spot, put parks in low spots of development, need to require developers to include parks in development. Irrigation systems essential in parks. Renovate parks—critical. More lighting at parks so play at night—cooler. More tennis courts needed with lights, tennis center, supervised, youth training, tournament. Lack of parking at parks. Sports tourism through tournaments. Common gardens—idea—Example Austin.

Education

Schools Working With the City: Push educational opportunities. Education.

Coordination with the Schools: Coordination between City and Schools.

Development in the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction

Land Fill: Concerned with incorporating area that may become a land fill.

Annexation: What happens if we don't annex? Concern—subdivision without adequate facilities, land costs less north of S.H. 107?

City Services: Core services. Annexation requires more services.

Coordination with the County: County's policies changing—lot sizes, widths, etc. Exercise codes in County areas. City versus county standards. Planning with county, open space, park areas. Involvement with County planning, communications with other cities.

Extraterritorial Jurisdiction: Schools have no utilities for facilities in ETJ-problem. Time span for foresight in the ETJ. One half acre lots with septic in County. Infrastructure in ETJ—major issue.

Plan Implementation

City Services: Code enforcement personnel, who to talk to? They are spread too thin due to number of projects, utilities, streets, etc. Underground utilities.

Mixed Use: Overlay district for mixed uses. Walkable/integrated communities, mixed uses, neighborhood stores/businesses. More mixed use, urban center approach. Mixed uses with compatibility to the character of the neighborhood. Strict regulations are needed with new construction. Mixed use—apartment units over businesses. Mixed uses (along arterials).

Codes: Enforce codes. Advocate viable city code, Exercise codes in County areas, Protection against code variances.

Zoning: Rezoning request. Enforce zoning so that the business/homeowners know what they are investing in. Limit zoning—limiting property values. No spot zoning—no assurances of property owners. Zoning needs to allow mixed use. Strict adherence to zoning.

Variances: Better notification process. Concerned with granting variances; example, day cares, home occupations in single family. Apply rules consistently. Consistent regulations, executions, uncertainty of developer/individuals. Exceptions should be rare (exception not rule).

B
Appendix

Streets & Transportation

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

Thoroughfare system planning is an essential function for McAllen to adequately prepare to meet its future travel demands – particularly with a forecasted doubling of the current population - to ensure safe movement of people within and between neighborhoods, and efficient transport of goods throughout the community and internationally. Access to, through, and within the community, whether by air, rail, bus, automobile, bicycle, or foot, is vital for the physical, economic, and social well-being of McAllen. A well-planned and highly coordinated transportation system will contribute to the character of the community and its pattern of future growth.

INTRODUCTION

Through the public involvement process there were numerous comments received regarding the local transportation system, ranging from desires for the widening or improvement of specific street segments to bikeway and trail needs, the public transportation system, and the railroads and airport. As a result of this input, together with our own observations, following are what have been identified as the primary issues related to the transportation system in the City and the larger McAllen planning area (extending beyond the current limits of the extraterritorial jurisdiction).

The primary transportation system in McAllen is the street system, which consists of a series of rights-of-way that connect the community's origins (neighborhoods and complexes) and destinations (employment centers, educational institutions, public buildings and spaces) with the larger McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley, the state and nation, and Mexico. While the street system warrants significant attention in this plan, it will also be essential for each of the other modes to be addressed as well, particularly in light of such proposed improvements as the TransTexas Corridor, the level of support and spoken desire for walking and bicycle paths, and the emerging demand in McAllen and throughout the fast growing metropolitan area for an expanded system of high capacity transit.

It is important for this community to recognize that the transportation system largely forms the backbone of the community. Not only is it vital for personal mobility and the movement of commerce, but it also shapes and forms the pattern, scale, and character of future development. Since roadway corridors carry both residents and non-residents, they also convey to the public a sense of community by way of the appearance of the corridor environs and the adjacent development and vacant lands. Therefore, while the

plan will focus its attention on the overall transportation system, including its efficiency and effectiveness in conveying multi-modal movement, it must also remain cognizant of the intended – and unintended – influences that may result.

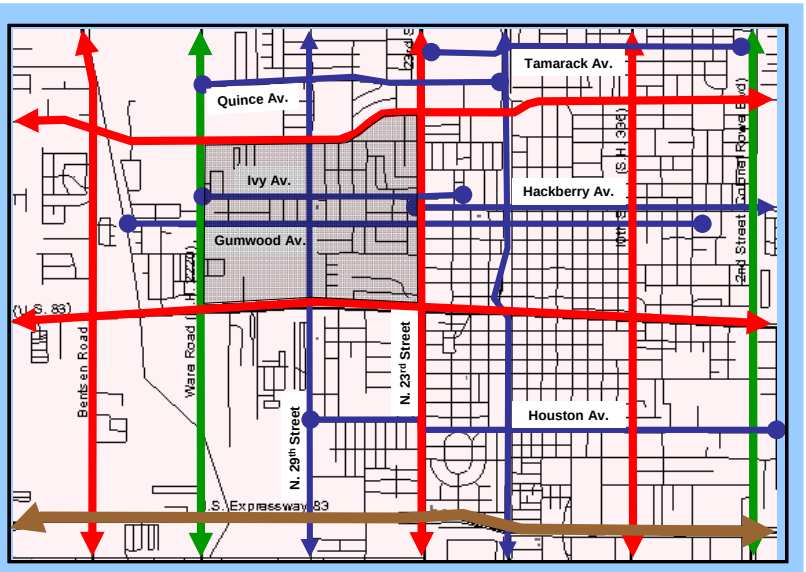
ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Through the public input process, particularly including the small group interviews and community forum, there were a number of concerns expressed as to the transportation system. These concerns along with the observations and opinions of the consultant formed the basis of the following outline of key transportation issues.

Efficiency of the Street System

A surface transportation system is formed by a network of highways and streets, each with different designations as to their function within the overall system and their designed traffic carrying capacity. Each street segment contributes to the interconnectivity of the network. Without a continuous system, there are unnecessary interruptions thereby altering natural traffic movement patterns onto street segments that are not designed to carry the associated traffic volume and, thus, become overly congested. Therefore, for a network to operate efficiently, it is essential for there to be a complete system of roadways designed in a hierarchy from highways (U.S. 83), to arterial roads (McColl, 10th Street, N. 23rd Street, Ware Road, Pecan Blvd., Nolana, etc.) and collector streets (Hackberry Avenue, Houston Avenue, 29th Street, North 6th Street, etc.) to the local residential street network. Each link is intended to function according to its design capacity, in effect, distributing traffic from the lowest design classification – local streets – to the highest functional classification – highways and expressways. Connectivity is a key to providing an efficient, safe, and convenient roadway network for vehicular traffic.

An optimum street network has a principal or secondary arterial roadway each mile (or thereabouts), which forms a neighborhood superblock. Within the superblock, collector roadways should be spaced at one-half mile intervals in each direction; north-south and east-west. A good example of this is the area bound by W. Pecan Blvd on the north, Business 83 on the south, N. Ware Road to the west, and N. 23rd Street on the east. Within this "superblock" are N. 29th Street and Gumwood Avenue that serve as collector roadways, effectively collecting traffic from the local streets and distributing it to the bounding arterials. North 29th Street, in particular, is exemplary of a viable collector street because it is continuous through this superblock and from south of U.S. 83 north to the City limits. Gumwood, on the other hand, extends west across N. Ware



Discontinuous collector roadways unnecessarily redistribute traffic to local neighborhood streets and arterials thereby creating congested intersections and roadways, which impedes the flow of traffic on throughways such as N. 23rd Street, 10th Street, and others.

Road where it terminates at an irrigation canal and terminates to the east at Hackberry Park. Furthermore, Hackberry Avenue one block to the north serves as the collector roadway from N. 23rd Street eastward to N. Jackson Road and into Pharr. Also, Ivy Avenue serves as a collector street from N. 21st Street across N. 23rd Street (an arterial roadway) to N. Ware Road where it terminates. While there are streets serving in the capacity as collector roads they fail to provide continuity in the street network. There are several other examples as shown by the blue (collector) lines in the graphic inset. While the street pattern is already set within the established areas of the City, such situation must be avoided within the newly developing areas of the City and extraterritorial jurisdiction. Sufficient subdivision regulations that stipulate design criteria are necessary to accomplish an efficient collector and arterial street network. Left to the decisions of individual landowners and developers and without a thoroughfare plan, the street network will naturally be constructed in a piecemeal fashion resulting in a similar situation to that found in the older areas of the community.

Relevant Citizen Comments

- Purpose of medians
- Thoroughfare plan reviewed annually
- Tie into regular thoroughfares – loops
- Provide main truck lines
- Plan transportation corridors
- Need throughways and expressways
- Acquire new right-of-way
- Loop system
- Service roads around commercial centers used for cut-through
- Driveways at intersections
- Signal timing
- Raised medians needed
- Medians – detriment to businesses

With the amount of development occuring in the extraterritorial jurisdiction in the form of subdivision requests and approvals, the presence of an adopted Throughfare Plan is critical. While the Metropolitan Transportation Plan provides some level of guidance it is not sufficiently detailed to meet the long range needs of McAllen. A thoroughfare plan will ensure that adequate rights-of-way are dedicated to the City concurrent with development and on general alignments that are consistent with the plan. The plan must not only show those roadways that are relevant to the whole metropolitan area but also those that are necessary for the mobility of McAllen residents. A complete grid of expressways, primary and secondary arterials (including boulevards), and collectors (possibly primary and secondary) are needed to ensure an efficient local transportation system that integrates into the larger metropolitan transportation plan. Currently, the thoroughfare plan in the ETJ reflects a general network of principal and minor arterials and north-south collectors, with limited east-west collectors north of Monte Cristo Road (FM 1925). Since much of this area is within the influence of future growth an adequate and complete network must be planned and reflected on the Thoroughfare Plan.



Multiple driveway entrances along arterial roadways unnecessarily impede traffic flow and causes congested conditions and increased vehicular conflicts/accidents.

The grid street pattern throughout McAllen is generally effective for conveying traffic to the collector and arterial roads. However, barriers to

connectivity such as the railroad and irrigation canals interupt the grid and have forced realignment of streets. At the same time, the design and layout of the grid is inconsistent and irregular with cul-de-sacs, dead-ends, and looped roads that do not connect to thoroughfares or the next neighborhood. The introduction of curvilinear streets in the more recent subdivisions, particularly to the north of W. Trenton Road, further complicates the continuity of the street system. Such inconsistency diverts traffic flow to the arterial streets, which get overly congested during peak periods due to the volume of traffic. To overcome such obstacles and constraints the City must adopt subdivision layout standards and street design criteria.

An essential element of a thoroughfare's efficiency is the preservation of its traffic carrying capacity. Even though roadways are designed to carry a certain volume of traffic there are situations that affect its efficiency, including the number of access points (driveways and alleys), lane width, synchronization of signals, number of intersections, impedance of traffic flow by vehicles entering and existing properties, allowance for deceleration/acceleration at each ingress/egress point, and the presence or nonexistence of a center turn lane or median, among other factors. Of relevance to this plan is the management of property access along each of the community's major arterials. While a grid street pattern maximizes access and continuity, it allows an increased disruption of traffic flow with vehicles entering and exiting thoroughfares from local streets. In addition are the numbers of driveways, particularly along 10th Street as shown in the graphic insert on the previous page. The numbers of potential conflict points all affect the operating efficiency of the street system. Solutions to this problem are shared driveways (or shared access) to reduce the number of breaks in traffic; cross access easements to move vehicles between properties without accessing the arterial street; and, in feasible locations, raised medians. The effectiveness of medians is the ability to manage points of access. Medians, however, are admittedly difficult to retrofit along developed corridors due to concerns for limiting access to current businesses. In developing areas though, where the land development pattern has not already been fully established, medians may be particularly advantageous and thus, warranted and advised.

Benefits of Raised Medians include:

- Reduce crash rates and points of conflict
- Uniform traffic flow while concentrating and improving left turns and U-turns
- Pedestrian refuge at mid-block and intersection crossings
- Landscaping opportunities providing aesthetic benefits
- Better access management results

Source: Access Management Manual, Transportation Research Board (TRB) Committee (www.accessmanagement.gov), 2004

Study Results of Medians in Texas

- Employment in area businesses experienced a boost after the installation of a median.
- Business owners reported that the volume of passer-by traffic did not change.
- Surveys indicated patrons were likely to return.
- Specialty retail, fast food & sit-down restaurants reported increases in customers per day, gross sales and property values after installation.

Source: Eisele, W.L., Frawley, W.F. "A Methodology for Determining Economic Impacts of Raised Medians: Data Analysis on Additional Case Studies." Research Report 3904-3, Texas Transportation Institute, October 1999.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility

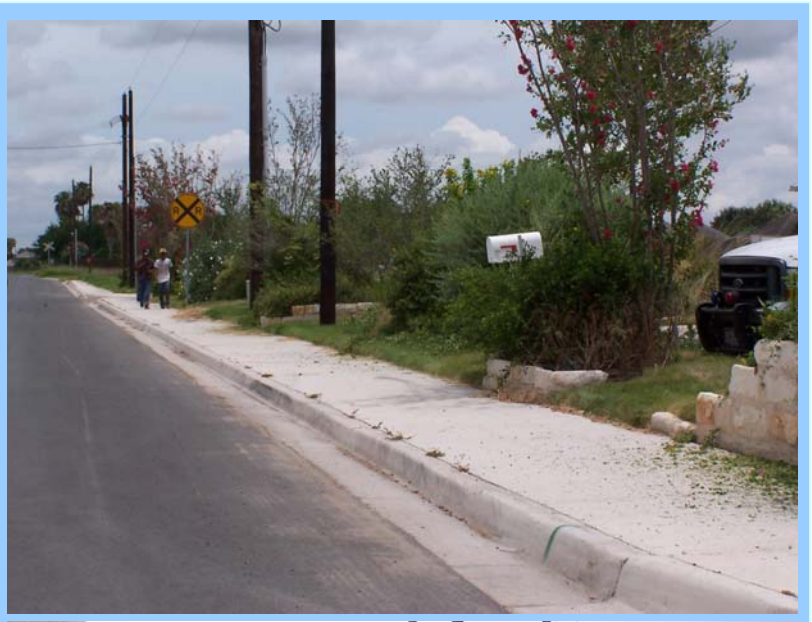
McAllen is noted throughout the area for its trail along Col. Rowe Blvd./2nd Street, particularly given its attractive, green setting. At the same time, residents view this segment and the entire trail system as a

highly valued amenity and an important component of their livability. Such comments were received indicating a strong preference for an expanded network of trails and bikeways connecting all parts of the City, particularly to the north where new development is occurring. Residents like the trail system for exercise, recreation, and as a walking path for children between home and school. Furthermore, according to a public opinion survey conducted concurrent with the Parks and Recreation Master Plan in 1999, dissatisfaction ratings were highest for the amount of walking/jogging trails, among other facilities. Multi-purpose trails were also cited as the highest priority for inclusion in new parks.

A true system of transportation infrastructure offers a variety of modes, including both motorized and non-motorized transportation options. Especially in a community with such great interest for trails, the importance of walking and bicycling is heightened. There were comments received through the public input sessions regarding the need for more hike/bike paths, sidewalks between neighborhoods, canopies and added shade along the trails, use of rubberized surfaces, provision of art displays, safety of children walking to/from school, pedestrian friendliness of the community and special areas, and the gaps and stops of the bicycle lanes. Pedestrian improvements such as pedestrian actuated signals, crosswalk signage and pavement markings – or even the use of a speed table to further distinguish high-use crossings and to slow traffic (e.g. Downtown) – and curb cuts and median breaks are an essential part of the infrastructure necessary to support and encourage pedestrian activity.

Without a proactive stance for the provision of trails they are often left to retrofit in an existing environment, which is much more difficult and costly. Currently, there are several loosely connected segments of off-road trails and sidewalks, bicycle lanes and routes, and paved roadway shoulders that do not yet form a complete network. While the City is proactively and continuously pursuing expansion of the trail system, the amount of new development and its sporadic locations throughout the City and ETJ has stifled the ability to keep pace. Completion of this network is made difficult by a lack of sufficient rights-of-way, requirements for costly acquisition of additional rights-of-way or easements, and severe design constraints where there are limited or nearly cost-prohibitive options for connection. Instead, the City must update its Pathways & Recreational Trails Study[1] to form a comprehensive grid of off-street trails, paths, greenways, and pedestrian connections. Subsequently, ordinance provisions must be executed to secure sufficient rights-of-way concurrent with subdivision approval. Doing so requires additional dedication of rights-of-way (preferably instead of easements) for the provision of trails and public access easements as well as standards for private trail construction. The request from the developer for the necessary green space may be offset by density bonuses and other development incentives (expedited approval).

[1] City of McAllen parks and Recreation Department, September 1993





Multiple driveway entrances along arterial roadways unnecessarily impede traffic flow and causes congested conditions and increased vehicular conflicts/accidents.

In many areas, the sidewalk is placed immediately at the back of the street curb (see graphic inset on the previous page), which provides a walking surface but is less desirable than one that is placed a safe distance from the street. A sidewalk that is a reasonable distance from the street is perceived to be safer than where the sidewalk abuts the travel lane. To accommodate the preferred scenario, the subdivision regulations must be structured properly to allow sufficient right-of-way. The zoning ordinance must also allow a sufficient lot size and front yard setback to provide separation from the front façade. For higher intensity housing types the front setback may be reduced to limit the distance from the sidewalk to the front façade.

Most of the neighborhoods and commercial areas have sidewalks; however, they lack continuity and connection within and between neighborhoods and other districts. In addition, there are significant barriers to their use, including wide, highly traveled street sections with worn pavement markings and no pedestrian refuge (center median), a lack of signal warning lights at high pedestrian crossing locations, lack of American's with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements (particularly in the older areas where the sidewalks were installed before the Federal law), and cracked and uneven surfaces. These barriers contribute to the lack of use, which must become a priority if the community is to encourage walking and bicycling for exercise and recreational use as well as a viable mode of transportation. Sidewalks help to fulfill pedestrian mobility needs within and between neighborhoods and for children walking to and from school, but also are integral to completing a trail grid as connectors to the larger system. Their importance, therefore, must not be overlooked.

Sidewalks in older, well-established neighborhoods and business areas are difficult to contend with in terms of replacement, repair, and/or installation. In addition to being a costly proposition, in light of the demands for other services in a rapidly growing environment, there is question as to the source of responsibility; the City, neighborhood association, or individual home/property owner. In cases where there are missing or incomplete sections there are commonly obstacles (trees, light poles, utility boxes, etc.) as well as an adversity on behalf of homeowners for disturbing their yard. Nonetheless, this dialogue is necessary if the vision of a complete pedestrian network is to be realized – at the cost of some but to the benefit of all.

Adequate Transportation Infrastructure

Up to 1970, the City was generally compact in its overall development form. During and after the 1970s, according to an annexation history diagram, the amount of annexed land area grew substantially, which generally mirrors the rate of population growth and represents the City's historical annexation policies. Today, the City continues to witness development pressure in the extents of its corporate limits, at its fringes, and in the outlying areas of the ETJ. This situation is enabled by the availability of utilities by other utility districts, an absence of regulatory authority in the County, and limited authority of the City to regulate the use of any building or property; the bulk, height, or number of buildings; the size of a building; the number of residential units; or the size, type, or method of construction of a water or wastewater facility[2]. As a result, subdivision plats are being submitted and approved for development throughout the five-mile McAllen ETJ.

There are both practical and policy issues associated with scattered, peripheral development. Among the reasons for concern for an imbalance of growth are an overburdening of under-developed infrastructure systems, including unimproved and inadequate roadways, under-sized water and wastewater lines with insufficient capacities, a lack of drainageways and detention areas, increasingly over-populated schools, insufficient public safety response times, and a lack of parks and recreation areas and public facilities. The consideration at issue here is the condition and capacity of roadways to carry the requisite volumes of traffic that are being generated by new subdivisions. There are instances where new subdivisions with typical-sized lots are being developed along gravel roads, as shown in the graphic inset. Such occurrence creates unsafe conditions by prematurely placing an increased level of service on a road that is not designed or constructed to handle such traffic volume. Continued approval of subdivisions without the availability of adequate transportation – and other - facilities will later result in constrained conditions for acquiring adequate rights-of-way, increased acquisition costs, short-sighted decisions on street layout and placement without context as to an integrated roadway system, and near-term travel safety hazards.

An approach for managing the type, pattern, and density of the community's future growth is allowing development to occur only as adequate transportation and other infrastructure is available. One means of ensuring that growth occurs where infrastructure is either present or readily available includes the creation of an Adequate Public Facilities Ordinance (APFO). Also known as concurrency requirements, this mechanism ensures that infrastructure is available prior to or concurrent with development. In other words, a subdivision would not be approved unless there is a determination that the infrastructure available is adequate to support the requisite demands. This may result in phased development that occurs as capacity improvements are made to the supporting infrastructure. The timing of development

[2] Chapter 212. Municipal Regulation of Subdivisions and Property Development, Section 212.003. Extension of Rules to Extraterritorial Jurisdiction

would be determined by the provision of improvements by the developer or through a programmed capital improvement of the County or City. Another means available - and actually more effective - is the development of traffic sheds. This method estimates existing roadway design capacities and the properties generating the traffic volumes, and then paces development concurrent with improved roadway capacity. In effect, this prevents the overcrowding of available public infrastructure by the first one or two landowners, and directs where and how fast development may come so that traffic problems are minimized.

Ordinances like those described above require applicants for new development to demonstrate that facilities and services are or will be available to serve the project at the time the development is available for occupancy. Utilizing this system, McAllen would be able to adopt level-of-service standards, which could be used as criterion for approving or denying applications depending on conformance to the standards. As an alternative, impact fees and/or greater developer participation in infrastructure construction and financing may be necessary to shorten development timeframes.

These approaches are both practical and defensible. However, there would need to be research as to any experience in Texas regarding similar means or mechanisms given the language of the Texas Local Government Code[3] regarding limitations of the City for regulating the number of residential units that can be built per acre of land. These mechanisms would approach this subject not through density limitations but rather, through promotion of the "public health, safety, and welfare" of the community. Given the increasing emergence of situations in the ETJ, this warrants near-term community discussion. The key to effectively employing such systems is rationality in determinations as to the adequacy or inadequacy of public facilities. The strength of these approaches is their ability to allow the community to establish a direct, causal link between the provision of facilities and the public health, safety, and welfare.



Premature urban development in advance of adequate street and utility infrastructure creates potentially unsafe conditions and poses severe constraints for future improvement.

Public Transportation

Among the various issues regarding transportation, an often cited concern was the need to improve and increase public transportation in the community. As indicated in Section II, Community Overview, 77 percent of trips that occur in McAllen are by single occupant vehicles, much of which is due to the distant proximity of neighborhoods to employment areas and commercial centers. While public transit will not replace the automobile as the standard and preferred means of travel, the

[3] Chapter 212. Municipal Regulation of Subdivisions and Property Development, Section 212.003. Extension of Rules to Extraterritorial Jurisdiction

availability of public transportation must play a significant role in achieving efficiency in the transportation system. The pattern of development is an essential consideration as to its influence on the feasibility and warrant for public transportation. A low-density, sprawling development pattern does not generate the propensity of transit use as does a dense, compact land use pattern. For this reason, there must be coordination between this and the land use and growth elements of the plan.

During the public involvement process, there were several comments received about the adequacy of the current transit services. Residents cited increasing transit needs warranting a need for expanding the current transit services. Particularly, there was concern voiced about the frequency of service, the number of routes, and bus stop improvement needs. Confronted with the reality of financial feasibility, transit systems are highly subsidized. With the amount of State and Federal funding support shrinking, McAllen and the whole metropolitan area is challenged by its willingness and creativity to find sources of funds to expand and improve their transit services. While there are inarguably needs and a percentage of the population heavily dependent upon public transportation services, there are significant financial constraints.

According to the Texas State Data Center at the University of Texas San Antonio, the McAllen-Edinburg-Pharr Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) is forecasted to reach a population ranging from 1,035,971 to 1,698,645 persons by the Year 2040, depending on the opted projection scenario.[4] Based upon a Year 2000 population of 569,463 persons, this amounts to a rate of growth ranging from 20 percent to 50 percent per decade (or two to five percent annually). This ranks among the fastest growing in the nation. Therefore, it is timely for the City to begin coordinating closely with the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) regarding the feasibility of high-capacity transit throughout the greater metropolitan area. As an example, as of the 2000 Census, the Austin-San Marcos MSA had a population of 1,249,800 persons and it recently passed a referendum for high-capacity transit. Therefore, while the metropolitan area may be several years from meeting a practical population threshold warranting a higher level of investment for public transportation, it is not too early for this community to begin the initial stages of planning to accommodate such proposition. Without a view to the future, such a system may be nearly cost prohibitive due to the extent of property acquisition and retrofitting necessary to accommodate the rights-of-way for a fixed transit system.

The 2005-2030 Hidalgo County Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) includes a public transportation element that summarizes the current transit services, outlines goals and priority objectives, evaluates long-range trends, and establishes the long-range transit need. Key findings from the MTP indicate the following:

- Overall ridership on McAllen Express, Rio Metro, and Rio Transit increased from 266,000 riders in 2000 to 386,000 riders in 2002.
- Transit ridership is significantly outpacing annual population growth, ranging from 12 percent to 78 percent annually.
- Ridership on McAllen Express grew 48.5 percent between 2000 and 2002.
- Rio Metro ridership grew 78 percent in its first year and another 12 percent in its second year of operations.

[4] The Texas State Data Center uses four projection scenarios that utilize different assumptions of natural births and deaths and in- and out-migration, based upon trends between 1990 and 2000 and most recently, between 2000 and 2002.

The plan indicates that 19 percent of the population in high transit need areas will be located in the currently incorporated area of McAllen. Additionally, the plan surmises that one-quarter of the population in high demand locations will be spread across what is now unincorporated. The plan acknowledges that trending toward higher land use and population density is a positive trend for transit usage. Therefore, a consideration of this plan is the pattern of urban growth, the amount of infill development that may – or should – occur, and any shifts in density as areas develop and redevelop.

Corridor Appearance

The character and appearance of McAllen are of top priority according to a broad cross section of the community that participated in the key person interviews and community forum. Residents recognize the importance of quality of life in the success of their economic development and, therefore, both desire and expect quality new development and redevelopment. There is a strong desire to improve the entrances to the community with distinctive gateways, enhance the roadway environs with streetscape and fencing improvements, increase the amount of green space adjacent to the rights-of-way and throughout the community (similar to the exemplary example of Col. Rowe Blvd.), add more landscaping and screening of parking and storage areas, control the size and location of signage, incorporate more public displays of art and community way-finding, better manage the appearance of structures and vacant properties, and diligently enforce the City's codes.

The appearance of the corridors is perhaps the most significant issue pertaining to community appearance. After all, these are the most highly traveled roadways in the community, carrying both those who travel them daily and those who are introduced to the community for the first time. The appearance of the corridors may be characterized, first, by their wide street sections and, secondly, by large building setbacks and expanses of parking adjacent to the street; limited provision of green space or landscaping; a wide variety of fence types, heights, styles, and colors; multiple points of ingress and egress interrupting the pedestrian ways; a proliferation of signage (in many cases over-sized for the site) with little consistency as to its placement and size; and widely varying building styles and use of materials. Achieving enhanced corridor environments involves policies, programs, regulations, and incentives addressing each of the contributing factors. Enhancement of a single factor will help, but will not result in a positive visual impact. Instead, each of the factors must be handled together to revitalize and re-establish a desired character and appearance.

There are two separate yet related components involved in improving the appearance of corridors. First is the street right-of-way itself, which is owned and controlled by the City, Hidalgo County, or the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). Within the public right-of-way, the design of the pavement surface, including whether the roadway is undivided or divided by a raised or depressed median, improved with curb and gutter, or constructed of asphalt or concrete, contributes to the appearance of the corridor. Maintenance of the pavement surface, as well as the open space within the right-of-way, is significant to its visual appeal. The preservation of the natural landscape, where applicable, and provision of green space and vegetation helps to soften the roadway environs and enhance views. The design of structures, such as bridges and overpasses, retaining walls, and drainage improvements are also important elements in the overall design scheme. Each of these improvements is largely at the discretion of the City (in coordination with TxDOT for the state-owned facilities), as well as the County in the peripheral areas.

The second component involves private property, which must be either regulated or provided with incentives to achieve the desired development outcomes. Typically, regulations and standards pertaining to building appearance, signage, landscaping, screening and buffering, and open space are applied city-wide or to the properties within a certain distance of specified corridors. Incentives for compliance with the standards may include automatic approval, increased density (for residential uses) or intensity (for non-residential uses), relaxed parking requirements (meeting specified conditions), reduced dimensional standards, or financial participation through grants or when done in conjunction with a public infrastructure improvement.

The appearance of the community entrances is important, particularly as McAllen and the neighboring cities become a composite community. Without something to delineate the uniqueness of McAllen, the community's individual identity will be lost. Residents are proud of their community and would like to portray a positive first impression on those who visit or pass through the community for the first time. The entrances offer opportunities to establish an image, communicate community values, and attract attention to local attractions and destinations. Formal points of entry (or gateways) define the boundaries to distinguish it from the adjacent cities. Simply put, gateways help to form the community's physical identity.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Following are some of the points of conversation at our meeting scheduled for July 26th.

Efficiency of the Street System

1. Should the City conduct a street connectivity assessment (before all options are lost to development) to identify opportunities for connecting neighborhoods and extending streets to form continuous collector roadways? This may require the resubdivision of latter phases of development or possibly acquiring or condemning land.
2. Through the subdivision review and approval process, should the City require crossings of irrigation canals for extension of continuous collector roadways?
3. Should the City develop criteria and standards for gated communities and private streets in the interest of preserving continuity in the thoroughfare system?
4. Should the City develop a joint thoroughfare plan with the cities of Pharr, Edinburg, and Mission to ensure continuity between cities and, to the maximum practicable extent, consistent street naming?
5. Should the subdivision regulations be amended to include subdivision street layout design criteria requiring continuous collector roadways? Are the number of dead-ends and cul-de-sacs important to regulate?
6. Should the City consider closure of some local streets at their intersection with arterial roadways, e.g. 10th Street, to minimize traffic flow impedance and create defensible neighborhoods?
7. Should the City incorporate access management regulations into their development code to require joint driveways and accessways between properties thereby limiting driveways on arterial roads? Other driveway regulations include their number and width, alignment with adjacent access points, distance from intersections, etc.
8. Are the use of medians an attractive alternative in the outlying, newly developing areas where the land development pattern is yet to be established? Should they be retrofitted in existing developed areas to better direct and manage traffic flows?
9. As new roads are planned are parkways with extensive green space to one side attractive, even if they necessitate more right-of-way?

Bicycle and Pedestrian Mobility

10. Among the other plan priorities (street improvements, utility expansions, public facilities, etc.), how important is the development of a comprehensive trail system plan and subsequent development of trail projects?
11. Should development and construction of a comprehensive, multi-phased trail system be included in a bond package? If so, would it pass?
12. Should the development code be amended to require dedication of rights-of-way for trails and walkways concurrent with new development? Should the trails be constructed privately or should there be an improvement fee for their development by the City?
13. Should the City embark upon a citywide sidewalk improvement program? Should sidewalk improvements be the responsibility of the City or the property owner?

Transportation Infrastructure

14. Should the City implement a growth management plan to stage development according to the availability of adequate and improved roads? Is this a significant enough issue for the City to pursue legal remedy even if it has not been attempted or legally tested in Texas?
15. Should development be required to improve or alternatively, participate with the City in the improvement of roads sufficient to carry the projected volume of traffic generated by the development?

Public Transportation

16. To what extent does the pattern and density of development have on transit usage and feasibility?
17. Will bus rapid transit or light rail transit be feasible at the metropolitan area continues to grow? Would residents support such a proposition on a ballot?
18. Should the City increase the density and intensity of mixed use at certain nodes so as to improve the propensity for transit use?
19. Should the City coordinate with the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) to initiate a preliminary high-capacity transit options study so as not to be short-sighted in managing the development pattern, i.e. transit oriented development, or in the preservation of right-of-way?
20. Should the City incorporate street-side transit improvements such as pull-out bays, shelters and stop pads, etc. in street improvement projects?

Corridor Appearance

21. Should corridor improvement plans be developed for each of the major arterials to identify and design enhancements to the roadway environs?
22. Should the City assume the responsibility for replacing the existing privately owned fencing along corridors or should they make the improvements and assess the adjacent property owner?
23. Are significant gateway improvements necessary at each major intersection to distinguish McAllen?
24. Is the idea of a build-to line desirable whereas buildings would be constructed closer to the street with a landscape area along the street and the parking located to the side and rear? The buffering requirements of the City would need to be drastically restructured based upon the variation of intensity of adjacent uses, i.e. commercial versus single family residential.
25. Should the ordinances be amended to include a streetscape bufferyard, meaning intensive landscape screening adjacent to the street?
26. Should the amount of green space be increased adjacent to the street, i.e. require an increased parking lot setback?
27. Should the sign ordinance be rewritten to require monument versus pole signs and submittal of master sign plans?
28. Should the City amortize existing signs over a certain period of time, e.g. 10 years?

C
Appendix

Community Character

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

McAllen has identified its desired future vision as an economically balanced, highly attractive, family-oriented, urban community composed of a variety of neighborhoods. To implement this vision, a means of converting this statement of future intent into land use policies and development regulations must be formed. A community character analysis was used to characterize the existing development and to document the land use patterns and design elements that form the character of individual developments and the community as a whole.

This approach allows the formulation of standards to achieve the desired community character.

Each of the community character types described below is present in McAllen with varying degrees of significance. The more readily identifiable are the:

- Urban character in Downtown along Main Street and from Business 83 to Jackson Avenue;
- Auto-urban nature of commercial development along 10th Street, 23rd Street, University Boulevard, Nolana Avenue., and other arterial routes;
- Industrial nature along the railroad and Military Highway;
- Auto-urban and urban character neighborhoods surrounding the central business district, with smaller lots and homes;
- Auto-urban residential areas containing very small single-family lots, townhouses, and apartment complexes;
- Suburban character of neighborhoods throughout the community;
- Scattered areas of estate residential, with lots exceeding one acre; and
- Agricultural and natural areas north and west of the City limits.

Community Character Types

The range of community character types and their functions are as follows:

Natural Character

Natural and scrubland areas surrounding McAllen have been left undeveloped mainly due to their remoteness



Natural and agricultural area near the northern boundary of McAllen.

from the City and other nearby communities. These areas are prominent north and northwest of the City and include parts of the Lower Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge.

Agriculture Character

The character of this rural area is dominated by low intensity agricultural cropland, pastures, and orange groves; where homes are customarily an accessory to agriculture. The landscape is accented by a few farmsteads, outbuildings, and in some cases a virtually unbroken flat horizon, which contribute to its rural character

Countryside Character

This type of rural character includes sparse residential acreages commingled with agriculture, which are often in the ex-urban areas (the areas beyond the city limits) where the first signs of suburbanization are present. There are few, yet increasingly emerging examples of a countryside character around McAllen. This character type may be combined with the Agriculture character as analysis proceeds or may remain freestanding, depending on the outcomes of the forthcoming process.

Estate Character

This type of suburban character is also rare in McAllen although there are several examples around its periphery in the ETJ. An estate character requires low density development on larger properties (typically one acre or larger), thereby producing a visual openness. As a result of larger lot sizes, open space and vegetation are intended to be the more dominant views. The buildings are to be apparent, yet secondary to the landscape. Depending on the size of the home and its percent of coverage and location on the lot, the estate character may more closely resemble a larger version of the typical suburban character. To achieve an estate character, the design of these subdivisions must actively seek to imitate more rural areas through the use of rural street cross sections without sidewalks, vast open space throughout the development, the use of rural fence types and/or hedgerows to divide properties, the preservation or planting of native vegetation along property boundaries, and generous building setbacks on all sides.



Example of estate community character development in the northern sector of McAllen

Suburban Character

This community character type is very different from the urban and auto-urban types. The distinguishing factors of a suburban character are an increased open space–both on individual sites and cumulatively throughout a development–and the preservation or use of vegetation within and between developments, which helps to create a more even balance between building mass and "green mass." Rather than creating a sense of enclosure by buildings, as in an urban environment, trees and vegetation form a very different sense of enclosure. Therefore, open space and vegetative cover are essential elements in creating a suburban space.

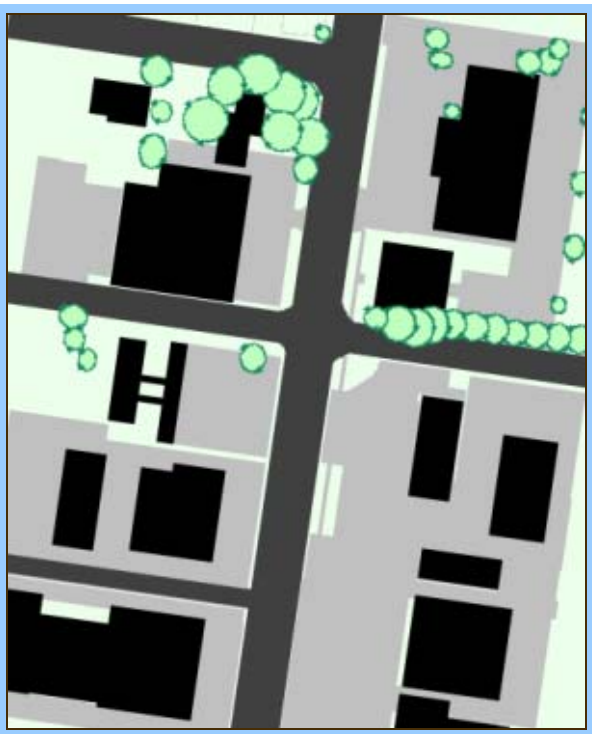
The physical distinction between a suburban and urban (or auto-urban) character is the level of use intensiveness or magnitude of activity affecting adjacent uses. Suburban environments are sought as relief from more intensive urban settings, thereby leading to the popularity of contemporary neighborhoods denoted for their larger lots, privacy fences, and open areas.



New construction in a suburban character area—with borrowed open space

All too often, the open space that contributed to the suburban character of a neighborhood is abutting land that is not yet developed and open views that are not yet closed. As in the case of many neighborhoods in McAllen, particularly those that are on the edge of the City or those that currently abut vacant land, the adjacent views that contribute to the rural small-town character are temporary, rather than permanent. The natural open space and views of the landscape are "borrowed" from the adjoining land. Consequently, as additional development occurs abutting these existing neighborhoods, the character will change. This is an important consideration as to the design of new subdivisions and whether they use the adjacent land or incorporate permanent open space into the development to sustain its original character.

In many of the newer suburban character neighborhoods in McAllen, a large percentage of the homes have views of "open space" across the street or behind their lots. Most of this space, however, is borrowed until it is developed, which often leads to a dissatisfaction of homeowners when there are proposals to develop the adjacent land. Therefore, to maintain these views and achieve the community character expressed as desirable by the residents, this borrowed open space must be incorporated into each development. One means of achieving this character is by clustering development, thereby maintaining an equal or higher density while preserving permanent open space.



An example of Auto-Urban development at 10th Street and Yucca Avenue

Auto-Urban Character

This character type is most commonly associated with a highway-oriented commercial or business strip. Fast food restaurants, gas stations, and strip shopping centers like those found along 10th Street and 23rd Street are the dominant commercial images of an auto-urban character. Higher density residential uses such as attached and multiple-family housing, manufactured home communities, and site-built homes on small lots also have this character due to their density, limited open space, relative amount of impervious surface devoted to buildings and parking lots, and increased building enclosure.

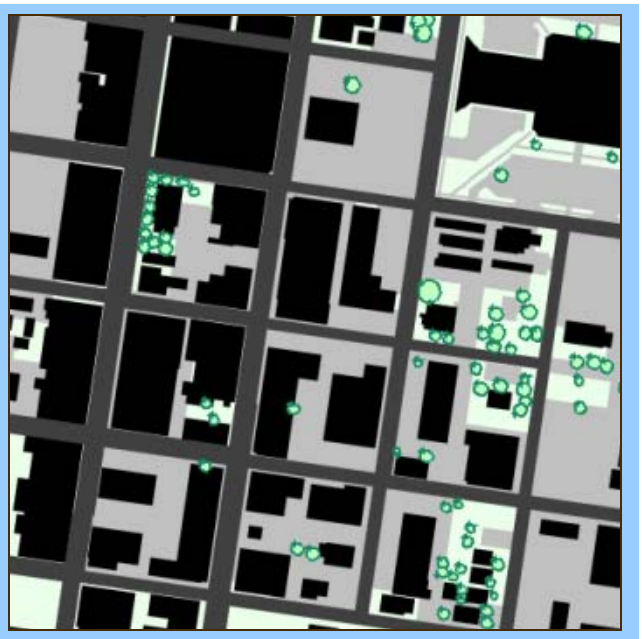
The primary difference in urban and auto-urban characters is the role of the automobile in its site design. Rather than buildings oriented to the street, as in an urban setting like that found in Downtown, auto-urban environments are characterized by large parking lots surrounding the buildings.

Although the development intensity of auto-urban areas is usually less than that found within an urban setting, this is commonly due to lower land values and design preference, as opposed to development regulations. Auto-urban uses require a significant amount of space for high levels of automobile dependent interaction, *i.e.* large surface parking lots with multiple points of ingress/egress. As a result, buildings are constructed at the back of the site nearest neighboring uses and away from their roadway frontage. Auto-urban uses also have a greater reliance on site access, thereby adding to the number of driveways and access points. The result is expansive parking areas that dominate the front setback and, thus, the character of the development.

The impact of accommodating motor vehicles, as is typical of contemporary development, is a primary determinant in the character of an auto-urban environment. Auto-urban uses, with very few exceptions, consume more land for streets, parking, and other vehicular use areas than is covered by buildings, which commonly exceeds a two-to-one ratio. This type of development design demands large sites and proximity to a high-volume arterial roadway, which diminishes the importance of architecture and results in reduced open space and commonly, elimination of natural features.

Urban Character

Urban areas are historically the center of commerce, culture, and entertainment in the community. The features that contribute to an urban character similar to that found in Downtown are the proximity of uses to the public ways, with little or no building setbacks, and a strong pedestrian orientation at the sidewalk level. An urban center is designed with an intensity of use to draw people into close contact, where congestion and personal encounters are both expected and essential for a vibrant community center.



McAllen's Central Business District (left) typifies the urban community character classification. Areas east of Downtown (right) are clearly Auto-Urban, as the streets and parking areas dominate the building footprints.

Urban spaces are "architectural," meaning that they are enclosed by buildings. In other words, the distance across a space, e.g. the width of a downtown street in relation to height of the block face, is essential for creating an "urban" environment. This environment is formed Downtown as a result of the building face abutting a moderately wide pedestrian pathway (sidewalk), a roadway narrowed by parking on both sides, and a narrow or nonexistent grass strip between the sidewalk and street.

Agriculture (AG)	This is intended for those areas within the City limits that do not yet have adequate public facilities and services and may therefore, have on-site utilities. The minimum lot size is generally at least 20 to as large as 40 acres, or larger, which serves to manage premature growth Residential development at very low intensities is permitted if it is clustered to preserve the rural character, with a requirement for public services at a certain density. The required minimum site area varies according to the development option, which may range from 10 acres for a ranchette to 30 acres for a planned development with on-site utilities (or 80 acres with public utilities).	Min. lot size = 20 acres Lot width = 660' Setbacks = 100' (front/rear) 75' (side) Open Space = 0% Gross Density = 0.046 <u>Cluster</u> Min. lot size = 5 acres Lot width = 330' Setbacks = 75' (front/rear), 50' (side) Open Space = 50% Gross Density = 0.086	 
Estate Residential (ER)	This is for large lot rural development generally on the fringes but should also be available within the City so development in the ETJ is not required to achieve this character – and lifestyle. The minimum lot size would be 5 acres, which could be reduced to 1 acre with 50 percent open space. The minimum site area would likely range from 5 acres to 10 acres for clustering (four units minimum).	Min. lot size = 5 acres Lot width = 330' Setbacks = 75' (front/rear) 50' (side) Open Space = 20% Gross Density = 0.139 <u>Cluster</u> Min. lot size = 1 acre Lot width = 130' Setbacks = 40' (front/rear), 25' (side) Open Space = 50% Gross Density = 0.414	
Suburban Residential (SR)	This is for mid-size single family lots (typically around 15,000 square feet). In a planned development, other housing types are permitted subject to the density restrictions of the district and the use of a floor area ratio (FAR) to manage consistent scale and hence, neighborhood character. The McAllen image (lower photograph) depicts a multi-family development with a high open space ratio and separation between each cluster and adjacent properties. The new standards will require bufferyards and improved connectivity other than from the adjacent streets. The minimum required site area would likely range from 15,000 for single family development up to 5 acres for clustering and 15 acres for planned development.	Min. lot size = 15,000 s.f. Lot width = 90' Setbacks = 30' (front/ rear), 15' (side) Open Space = 10% Gross Density = 1.984 <u>Cluster</u> Min. lot size = 10,000 s.f. Lot width = 80' Setbacks = 20' (front), 25' (rear), 8' (side) Open Space = 30% Gross Density = 2.194 <u>Planned</u> - *Village housing type* Min. lot size = 5,000 s.f. Lot width = 55' Setbacks = 10' (front), 25' (rear), 5' (side) Open Space = 35% Gross Density = 3.496	 
Auto-Urban Residential (AUR)	This is for smaller single family lots similar to the minimum 5,000 square foot lot allowed now, which may be increased in size. There is less open space than SR but would be more than required now. Other housing types are allowed within a planned development. There could be a broader range of housing due	Min. lot size = 6,500 s.f. Lot width = 65' Setbacks = 25' (front/ rear), 7' (side) Open Space = 10% Gross Density = 3.836	

Auto-Urban Residential (AUR) cont'd	to a higher density (around 7.5 units per acre). A minimum open space of 20 percent (or higher) would be required to have apartments comparable in density to what is now allowed. Design standards and buffering would be required. The required minimum site area typically ranges from 5,000 square feet for an individual residence to 5 acres for planned development, multi-family development, and manufactured home development (assuming the latter two are permitted in this district, possibly requiring a limited or conditional use allowing site conformance review).	<u>Planned (20% open space)</u> Min. lot size = 5,000 s.f. Lot width = 50' Setbacks = 20' (front/rear), 6' (side) Open Space = 20% Gross Density = 4.432 <u>Multi-Family (35% open space)</u> Site area per building = 15,000 s.f. Lot area per unit = 2000 s.f. Setbacks = 20' (front/rear) Bldg Separation = 30' Height = 3 stories Gross Density = 12.189 or Height = 2 stories Lot area per unit = 1800 s.f. Open Space = 30% Gross Density = 13.562	
Urban Residential (UR)	This is for a higher density single family district (around 4 units / acre). This was created for the near downtown neighborhoods but may also be used around other commercial centers or as a transitional use. Other housing types would be permitted within a planned development allowing the density (to 7.5 units/acre) and open space (20%) to increase. The minimum site area typically ranges from 4,000 square feet for an individual single family unit to 1 acre (equivalent to one-half block) for planned development and 5 acres for multi-family development. The minimum site area may be increased to 1 acre to facilitate town home redevelopment.	Min. lot size = 4,000 s.f. Lot width = 40' Setbacks = 10' (front), 15' (rear), 5' (side) Open Space = 10% Gross Density = 6.233 <u>Planned</u> *- Townhouse, 3 story* Min. lot area per group = 7,200 s.f. Lot area per unit (2,200 to 2,600 s.f. – average lots) Lot width = 20' to 26' Setbacks = 12' (front), 30' rear, Min. bldg. separation = 10' Floor area ratio = 1.20 Open Space = 20% Gross Density = 12.717	 
Auto-Urban Multifamily (UM)	This could either be a stand-alone district (if the intent is to accommodate multi-family only development) or it could be a development option within the AUR District. If it is the latter, it would require a minimum site area of five acres, 20 percent (or more) open space, and would be subject to increased bufferyards and building design standards. Another option is to allow multi-family development only within a planned development, which would be restricted by the density limitations of the district. The minimum site are is commonly 5 acres to meet parking and open space needs, but may be increased or decreased to encourage larger or smaller-scale projects. At a minimum it would be one block (equal to roughly 2 acres).	Lot area per unit = 1500 s.f. Setbacks = 20' (front/rear) Bldg Separation = 30' Height = 2 stories Open Space = 20% Gross Density = 17.969 Lot area per unit = 1500 s.f. Setbacks = 20' (front/rear) Bldg Separation = 30' Height = 3 stories Open Space = 30% Gross Density = 16.916	

Urban Multifamily (UM)	This was created for the area immediately adjacent to the downtown to allow higher density. Densities would be 20 + units per acre. This would be determined at the time the ordinance is rewritten. In the case of redevelopment, a minimum site area would be required to prevent multiple family units on individual lots and intermixed with single family units. The minimum site area would likely be one block (equal to roughly 2 acres).	Lot area per unit = 1500 s.f. Setbacks = 10' (front/rear) Height = 3 stories Open Space = 10% Gross Density = 25.345 Lot area per unit = 1000 s.f. Setbacks = 10' (front/rear) Height = 5 stories Open Space = 12% Gross Density = 34.189	
Urban Residential Mixed	This was created to allow a blend of housing types within an urban context. The primary use is residential but a certain amount of first floor retail would be permitted for live-work arrangements and convenience shopping and services. A minimum site area would be required to develop or redevelop within the district, subject to standards to preserve the character of the district and to co-exist with adjacent uses. The minimum site area is typically one-half block for town homes and one block for multi-family development. To encourage redevelopment the minimum area may be reduced given certain standards.	Lot area per unit = 1200 s.f. Height = 3 stories: first floor retail, upper residential Open Space = 10% <u>Surface parking</u> - Gross Density = 28.57 - FAR = 1.181 <u>Two-story parking</u> - Gross Density = 38.36 - FAR – 1.585 Height = 5 stories: first floor retail, upper residential Open Space = 12% <u>Surface parking</u> - Gross Density = 36.16 - FAR = 1.245 <u>Two-story parking</u> - Gross Density = 53.99 - FAR – 1.859	
Suburban Commercial	This land use district is appropriate adjacent to and abutting residential neighborhoods and other areas of aesthetic value. Generally, the building scale is limited to no more than 15,000 square feet (a typical drug store) and 60,000 square feet per intersection, with "residential in appearance" design standards, i.e. roof style and material, lighting, signage, parking, landscape surface ratio, etc. The landscape surface area would be 20 to as high as 30 percent. The minimum site area is commonly 10,000 square feet with a larger site area required for 3 story buildings.	Height = 1 story Surface parking Open Space = 20% - FAR = 0.303 Open Space = 30% - FAR = 0.265 Height = 2 stories Surface parking Open Space = 20% - FAR = 0.374 Open Space = 30% - FAR = 0.327 Height = 3 stories Open Space = 30% Surface parking - FAR = 0.355 2-story parking - FAR = 0.597	 
Auto-Urban Commercial	This is for the majority of the areas identified for commercial use, generally concentrated at intersections versus strip development along the major roads. The use of a higher landscape surface area, better landscaping, a build-to line (rather than a large front yard setback) and other signage and design standards would significantly enhance the	Height = 1 story Surface parking Open Space = 10% - FAR = 0.341 Open Space = 15% - FAR = 0.322 Height = 2 stories Surface parking Open Space = 10% - FAR = 0.421 Open Space = 15%	

Auto-Urban Commercial cont'd	appearance of these areas. Similar to the SC district, the minimum site area is commonly 10,000 square feet but may be larger for multi-tenant buildings and centers. More intensive uses will naturally require larger site to meet other site standards such as parking and site circulation.	- FAR = 0.397 Build-to line would bring buildings to the front of the site, with a enhanced streetscape treatment.	
Urban Center	This is for the immediate downtown area. A minimum (rather than maximum) height would be established to maintain the urban character of the district. A series of form (architecture detail) and design standards could also be put in place as desired by the City. The minimum site area typically ranges from 5,000 square feet for retail uses to 20,000 square feet for mixed use.	Minimum Height = 2 stories Open Space = 5% Public surface parking - FAR = 0.444 3-story public parking - FAR = 0.885 Height = 6 stories Open Space =10% Public surface parking - FAR = 0.509 3-story public parking - FAR = 1.255	
Urban Center High	This was created to encourage more intensive commercial development adjacent to the 10th Street corridor. This would allow taller buildings with higher floor area ratios. Residential uses would be allowed on the upper floors. Bonuses (FAR and density) would be used to encourage structured parking, which aids in the urban character. Due to the intensity of use, i.e. building height, the site area typically is a minimum of 1 to 2 acres, or more.	Height = 6 stories Open Space =5% 4-story public parking - FAR = 1.566 Height = 12 stories Open Space =5% 4-story public parking - FAR = 1.781	
Industrial	This is for all the industrial areas. There would be design standards (building materials, higher landscape surface area, screening of storage and use areas, loading areas, etc.) for the "outer ring" uses that are visible from public rights-of-way, with reduced standards for those within the interior of an industrial park. The minimum site area for this district is commonly 1 acre.	Height = 1 story Surface parking Interior businesses Open Space = 15% - FAR = 0.472 Peripheral businesses Open Space = 25% - FAR = 0.417	

Commentary

Areas that are reflected on the Future Land Use Plan differently than what they are now developed are expected to transition over time. Reinvestment in these neighborhoods may be initiated by individual landowners or, in some instances and under certain circumstances, may be assisted by the City or another public agency. The land use plan is for the purpose of guiding land use and infrastructure decisions and does not express any particular intent as to the timing of development or redevelopment nor the means by which such may occur.

To meet the standards of the development regulations a minimum site area is necessary, which, depending on the type and scale of development, is commonly one-half to one full block. Depending on the arrangement and size of lots, the presence of alleyways, and land ownership, in some cases, the site area may be as small as one-quarter block (or roughly three individual lots).

The above dimensional standards, densities, and open space ratios are for illustrative and explanatory purposes only. Actual dimensions and other site requirements will be determined at the time the land development code is amended. This process will require dialogue with local stakeholders to account for local circumstances and the preferred development outcomes.

D
Appendix

Growth Management

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

In order for McAllen to realize the future that will be envisioned through this plan update process, leaders must now begin to consider a balanced strategy for achieving economic growth, while guiding development in a pattern that is fiscally responsible. Doing so will require preparedness and creativeness, both in terms of its advanced facility planning and future land use management. This issue paper sets forth an initial framework of policies to consider that are intended to guide the timely extension of adequate infrastructure, provision of quality municipal services, and a logical sequencing of future development.

INTRODUCTION

This topic is closely related to plan elements addressing land use and community character, parks and recreation, and transportation as they relate to expected growth and the community's capacity to meet the growing demands for providing roads, public facilities (such as water and sewer) and services. Growth means government expenditures are needed to maintain the quality the community expects.

In addition to analyzing the City's capacity to support future changes in population or shifts in its land use pattern, this issue paper also posits some of the basic principles for managing future development in a manner that is wise and fiscally responsible. Without a proactive stance to ensure that development occurs in a logical and sequential pattern, it will continue to be driven solely by market forces, which does not necessarily occur in a manner that can be efficiently served with adequate public facilities and services.

McAllen has witnessed dramatic gains in its population over the course of many decades. Naturally, much of this new development has occurred around the expanding peripheries of the City, leaving pockets of undeveloped land. The community has also seen a fair amount of rural subdivisions and suburban development within outlying areas. These observed patterns of development are a significant cause of concern. McAllen does not want to be surrounded and have its growth choked off by County development. Annexation triggers the need to upgrade services and facilities in a short time frame. County development has occurred without adequate roads, a situation that results in high costs to the city. In contrast, within the City the roads would have to be provided by the developer.

BASIC FORMS OF GROWTH

Irrespective of the land use category or community character type, land development occurs in three basic forms: scattered, contiguous, and infill. Each of them is described on the next pages in their pure form.

Scattered Development

As depicted in Figure 1, scattered development (often referred to as "leapfrog" or "shotgun" growth) appears to occur in a random pattern. The further this growth occurs away from already developed areas, the more "premature" it is considered. Scattered growth represents developers' search for less expensive land, both in terms of per acre cost and infrastructure costs by going into rural areas and not having to pay for quality infrastructure. The City is forced to make this up with taxes on its residents because the development does not meet city standards.

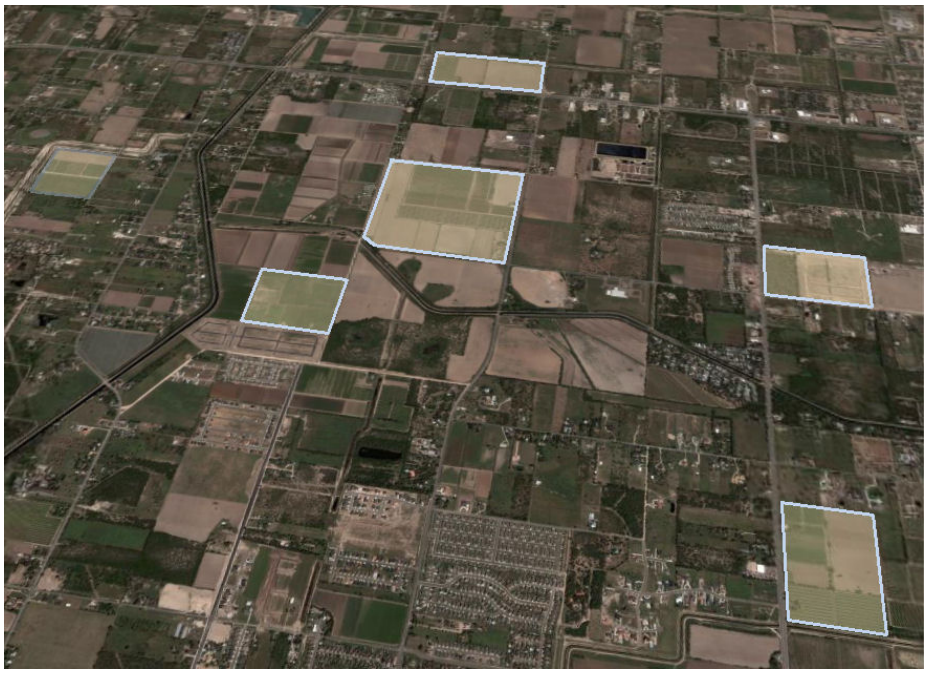


Figure D.1
Conceptual Scattered Development

Scattered development results from the lack of appropriate growth management policies and regulations that would otherwise restrict growth to more appropriate areas. For instance, an overabundant quantity of undeveloped land that is zoned for residential use (or no has no zoning at all) will be susceptible to these patterns. Other examples of factors that passively encourage scattered growth include the willingness of utility companies and jurisdictions to extend rural-level water service or paved two-lane street access to a new isolated subdivision.

As one might intuitively expect, this form of growth is highly disadvantageous to just about everyone (other than the developer).

- To governmental jurisdictions, scattered development increases the costs of routine public services such as public safety, refuse pickup, postal service, school bussing, and the like.
- To utility companies, this pattern often results in inappropriately sized water mains and trunk sewers, the need for additional sanitary lift stations, and the need other inefficient capital expenditures. Moreover, as scattered areas fill in, accumulated incremental demands quickly cause facilities to approach and exceed capacity and ultimately require replacement.
- To residents of scattered areas, this inefficient form of growth results in greater driving requirements, traffic congestion on undersized access roads, longer wait times for emergency services, and the possibility of conflict with adjoining agricultural operations.
- To the community at-large, scattered development preempts the long-term opportunity for cohesive growth, coordinated acquisition of sites for future parks and schools, establishment of gateways or edges, and formation of a city with community character types and development intensities best suited to available services and infrastructure.

Most significantly, as scattered growth continues in piecemeal fashion, undeveloped areas will ultimately fill in to create undesirable "composite" forms of development that cause a neighborhood or the entire community to loose its distinct identity.

Scattered development has occurred at and beyond most of the peripheries of McAllen, both in the incorporated area and the ETJ area. It is continuing to the northwest, particularly between 8 Mile Road and Monte Christo.

Contiguous Development

Growth that occurs either directly adjacent to or within very close proximity to the currently developed areas represents contiguous development. This form of development rarely occurs in a pure, banded format—normally, there is some randomness and unavoidable gaps in the growth pattern; but all development takes place within one-half mile of the earlier edge of development. A conceptualized example is shown in Figure 2.



Figure D.2
Conceptual Contiguous Development

Contiguous development provides the opportunity for the appropriate design of utility components, coordinated provision of elevated water storage for fire protection, adequate access roads, and other forms of infrastructure. It also can be more efficiently served by parks, schools, emergency services, and other public services. It is the most desirable type of development, though it rarely occurs in its ideal form.

Infill

As illustrated in Figure 3, infill represents the closing-in of the undeveloped gaps from previous scattered developments. The nature of the real estate market is that there are always tracts that are not available. The gradual infilling of some vacant areas remediates the inefficiencies derived from scattered growth. Too much infill results in higher costs because land is skipped over for many years before it is built on, meaning more miles of infrastructure per taxpayer. As areas fill in, the *per capita* costs of many urban services are eventually lowered. Often, however, infill development results in the need to upgrade infrastructure components to accommodate higher service demands from an area.



Figure D.3
Conceptual Infill

As infill development occurs, it is also important that opportunities are taken for public acquisition of sites for parks, trails, schools, community buildings, and open space. Actually, it is more appropriate to acquire these areas before significant infill occurs, as the infill development itself tends to drive up land costs for closer-in tracts.

Arrested Development

Arrested (or "passed-by") development is actually a form of non-development that often contributes to scattered development and its resulting inefficiencies. It has the effect of either creating barriers to contiguous growth or creating undeveloped "holes" in the urban fabric. Arrested development is caused when certain desirable areas are artificially prevented from development through zoning, utility configuration, ownership patterns, or economic policies that either prohibit development or keep an otherwise useful tract off the market. Examples or variations of arrested development include:

- Vacant areas with available utility services that are zoned for commercial or industrial development with little or no market demand for such development.
- Inefficiently platted vacant areas where the consolidation of parcels is necessary before development can occur.
- Lands tied up in legal disputes or surplus government properties.
- Areas that cannot be easily provided street access or utility services due to topographic constraints, waterways or drainage facilities, flood plains, or other geographic features.

It appears that a number of vacant parcels in McAllen are situated at proposed commercial node intersections and have not developed for lack of commercial demand. This land use policy should be reviewed as the Foresight McAllen plan update program proceeds.

KEY GROWTH CAPACITY ISSUES

The following issues pertain to the City's ability to provide adequate facilities and services and ability to manage future development. The findings are based on an initial analysis of the existing land use and expected future development pattern, anticipated improvements of the water and wastewater systems, police and fire capabilities and service areas, and both short-term and long-range strategies to manage future growth. These issues are summarized into the following broad categories:

1. **Efficient utilization of public facilities and services** – The City's pattern of development over the course of its history has naturally grown outward from its original settlement around what is now Downtown. The City's earlier development was generally compact as a result of the grid street system, traditionally smaller lots and home sizes, and less reliance on motor vehicles.

   Over time, McAllen has, with few exceptions, succeeded in maintaining its grid pattern while spreading outward, particularly to the north. The scattered development, described earlier, has left pockets of undeveloped land to separate older and newer neighborhoods and to increase service costs.

Smart Growth Goals:

- **Neighborhood Livability** - A central goal of smart growth is the quality of neighborhoods. They should be safe, convenient, attractive, and affordable. Sprawl development too often forces trade-offs between these goals. Some neighborhoods are safe, but not convenient. Others are convenient, but not affordable. Too many affordable neighborhoods are not safe.
- **Better Access, Less Traffic** - One of the major downfalls of sprawl is traffic. By putting jobs, homes, and other destinations far apart and requiring a car for every trip, sprawl makes everyday tasks a chore. Smart growth's emphasis on mixing land uses, clustering development, and providing multiple transportation choices helps us manage congestion, pollute less, and save energy. Those who want to drive can, but people who would rather not drive have choices.
- **Thriving Cities, Suburbs and Towns** - Smart growth puts the needs of existing communities first. By guiding development to already built-up areas, money for investments in transportation, schools, libraries, and other public services can go to the communities where people live today. This is especially important for neighborhoods that have inadequate public services and low levels of private investment. It is also critical for preserving what makes so many places special— attractive buildings, historic districts, and cultural landmarks.

Smart Growth Goals:

- **Shared Benefits** - Divisions by income and race have allowed some areas to prosper, while others languish. As basic needs, such as jobs, education, and health care become less plentiful in some communities, residents have diminishing opportunities to participate in their regional economy. Smart growth enables all residents to be beneficiaries of prosperity.
- **Lower Costs, Lower Taxes** - Opening up green space to new development means that the cost of new schools, roads, sewer lines, and water supplies will be borne by residents. Sprawl also means families have to own more cars and drive them further. This has made transportation the second highest category of household spending, just behind shelter. Taking advantage of existing infrastructure keeps taxes down. And where convenient transportation choices enable families to rely less on driving, there's more money left over for other things, like buying a home or saving for college.
- **Keeping Open Space Open** - By focusing development in already built-up areas, smart growth preserves rapidly vanishing natural treasures. From forests and farms to wetlands and wildlife, smart growth lets us pass on to our children the landscapes we love. Communities are demanding more parks that are conveniently located and bring recreation within reach of more people. Also, protecting natural resources will provide healthier air and cleaner drinking water.

–Source: Smart Growth America

A key development factor affecting utility and service costs, described in more detail in the Community Character issue paper, is the relatively high residential densities that are permitted in many parts of McAllen. While these somewhat higher densities have the effect or reducing per unit service costs, other concerns have been raised about the aesthetic qualities, inadequate buffering, and stormwater runoff generated by these areas.

2. **Sequencing of development and public services** – A majority of the more dense urban development has occurred within the City limits or, in some cases, directly abutting or in near proximity to them with incremental annexations. The benefit to the owners of these properties for being within the City limits is the availability of truly urban infrastructure (water service with fire hydrants, sewer and drainage improvements), services (police and fire services, among others), and the City's authority to regulate the quality of development through its zoning and subdivision ordinances. These services, however, come with a cost, which increases development and housing costs.

There are both practical and policy issues associated with peripheral development. The more significant issues relate to the inability of the City to promote orderly growth and urbanization by coordinating development with the provision of facilities and services. Another common issue with development occurring outside the City limits is a limitation for expanding the tax base in line with increasing service demands. This is especially important since residents and businesses outside the City benefit from access to many public facilities and services, such as parks and libraries, but do not always share in the tax burden associated with constructing and maintaining these facilities and services. A sprawling pattern of development stretches resources and increases costs for providing services, while burdening the capacities of infrastructure systems that are not adequately designed to support such development.

3. **Sustainable provision of quality, reliable infrastructure facilities** – McAllen's population will continue to expand for the indefinite future. Therefore, infrastructure planning must focus on increases in plant capacities and extensions of water distribution and wastewater collection mains, along with the updating of older infrastructure components. Concerns about long-term water supplies and wastewater treatment capacities will be addressed in this plan update process.

4. **Multiple service providers** – Because water and sewer in currently undeveloped areas can easily be provided by service providers who do not provide urban quality services—to fight fires for example. The City must ultimately rebuild the water lines or build water towers at considerable expense at a later time. This also forces the McAllen Independent School District and neighboring districts to build new schools in rural areas and to sustain higher busing costs for scattered students. Much of McAllen's future growth, particularly in the ETJ area, must rely of services to be provided by agencies that have been traditionally aligned with McAllen's neighboring jurisdictions. The City will need to work with these agencies to coordinate their service standards and approval procedures in order to minimize the effects of any jurisdictional barriers.

SENSIBLE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Typical development patterns are based upon the simple notion of creating development that is both marketable and profitable. Often, little thought is given to the cumulative impact of development until it has occurred and the impacts are realized. Sprawl is defined as an inefficient consumption of land, which spreads from urban and suburban areas to undeveloped rural land that results in an inefficient use of infrastructure. While sprawl is marketable to the general public, equating to larger lots and lower home prices, as well as the financial institutions that fund development projects, from the perspective of the community, it is short-sighted and of long-term consequence.

In recent years, communities are adopting development practices that still allow for marketability and profit, but also aid the community in achieving efficiency and improving quality of life. While the popular term of "Smart Growth" has been attached to this notion, it is really nothing more than sensible planning that better reflects the interest of the community and its residents. The tenets of planning for sensible development seek to balance the need to support economic development, while protecting the environment, directing development to the areas for which public services and utilities are readily available, encouraging infill development on vacant or underutilized properties where existing infrastructure may be more efficiently utilized, promoting a more compact development pattern to reduce the need for costly infrastructure and minimize the loss of raw productive land, maintaining a highly efficient street network and infrastructure systems, and providing community gathering areas and pedestrian-friendly destinations.

The goal for McAllen should certainly not be to limit or slow development activity. Rather, the objective is to seize its economic development opportunities, while carefully managing the location and pattern of growth and rewarding those who place an emphasis on the community's values.

A policy framework and coordination with Hidalgo County would be useful to guide decisions about the timing and pattern of future development outside McAllen's corporate limits. These policies should be used to either support or deny applications for development around the periphery of the community where facilities and services are not readily available or capable of supporting increased development densities.

ANNEXATION

Annexation requires the community to extend its municipal services, regulations, voting privileges, and taxing authority to new territory. In contiguous growth situations it is a mechanism for promoting orderly growth and urbanization by coordinating private land development with construction or

improvement of public facilities (streets, water, sewer, drainage, etc.) and provision of adequate public services through phased expansion of the City's corporate limits. With scattered development the City must provide services in reaction to development and may incur higher costs.

As development proceeds into McAllen's ETJ, it is particularly important to establish an effective annexation policy. Hidalgo County's powers to regulate the location and quality of development are limited, and it is important that the City exercise any tools that are available to assure that future growth is in concert with McAllen's continuing passion to achieve the highest quality of development available. Additional work in the Foresight McAllen plan update will.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Following are some of the points of conversation at upcoming meetings.

Development Forms

1. Is the occurrence of scattered development continuing or abating?
2. How can the city promote infill development?
3. Would restrictions on development in the outer areas of the ETJ promote contiguous development?
4. Are there any significant instances of arrested development in McAllen? Do these provide opportunities for possible public acquisition?

Growth Capacity

5. Has past adherence to the basic grid street system served McAllen well? Are the curvilinear street patterns in newer suburban subdivisions appropriate?
6. How can clustering and possible use of conservation subdivisions contribute to reductions in service costs?
7. How far in advance of actual development should streets and utilities be extended into areas where growth is planned?
8. Do ultimate limits in water supply capacity have the potential of constraining future population growth in McAllen?

Sensible Future Development

9. Will restrictions that restrict scattered development affect prices and marketability of future housing.
10. Should the cost of new housing not include critical infrastructure costs that the entire population will ultimately have to subsidize?
11. Will possible housing cost increases be offset by lower utility and transportation costs?
12. What support can we expect from Hidalgo County in managing future growth?

Annexation

13. Are current annexation laws and policies sufficient to meet McAllen's future growth management needs?

Executive Summary

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

5.1
Section

Community Character

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

5.2
SECTION

Cultural and Environmental Resources

5.3
SECTION

Growth Management

5.4
SECTION

Housing and Neighborhoods

5.5
SECTION

Economic Development

City of McAllen

Comprehensive Plan







KENDIG KEAST
COLLABORATIVE



City of McAllen

Comprehensive Plan

City of McAllen

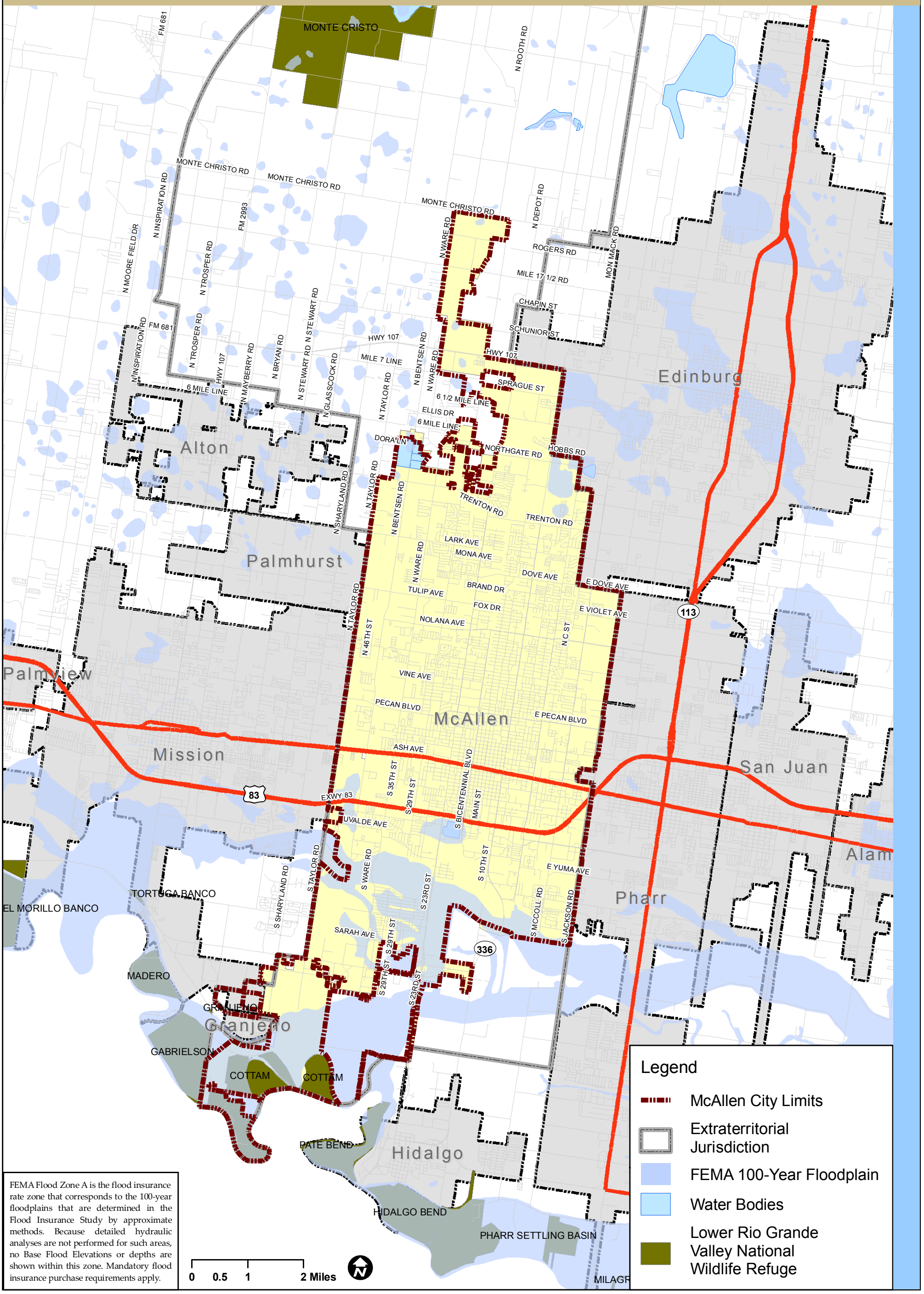
Comprehensive Plan







KENDIG KEAST
COLLABORATIVE



FEMA Flood Zone A is the flood insurance rate zone that corresponds to the 100-year floodplains that are determined in the Flood Insurance Study by approximate methods. Because detailed hydraulic analyses are not performed for such areas, no Base Flood Elevations or depths are shown within this zone. Mandatory flood insurance purchase requirements apply.

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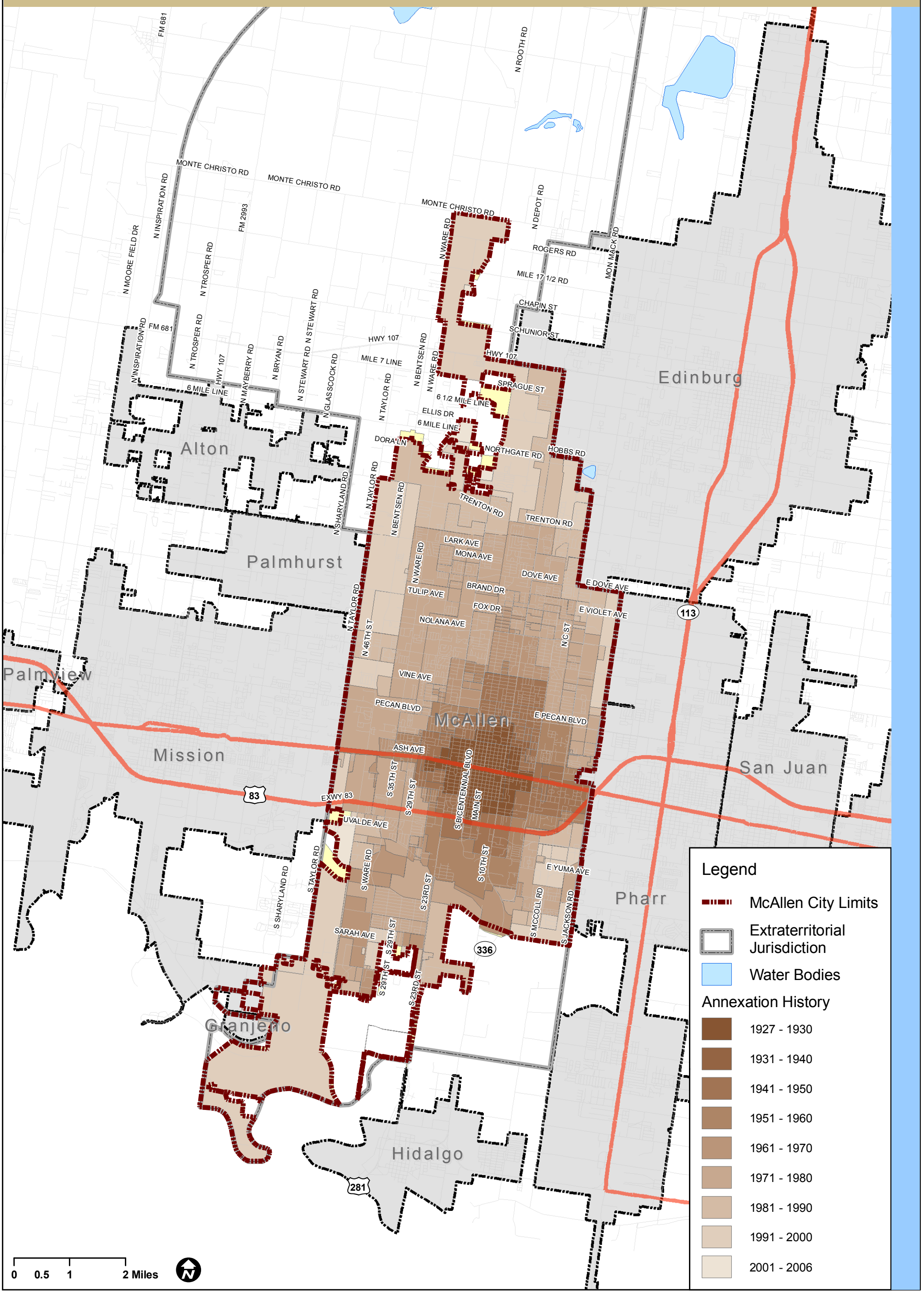
FEMA Floodplain Areas

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

KENDIG KEAST COLLABORATIVE

December 10, 2007

Final Version



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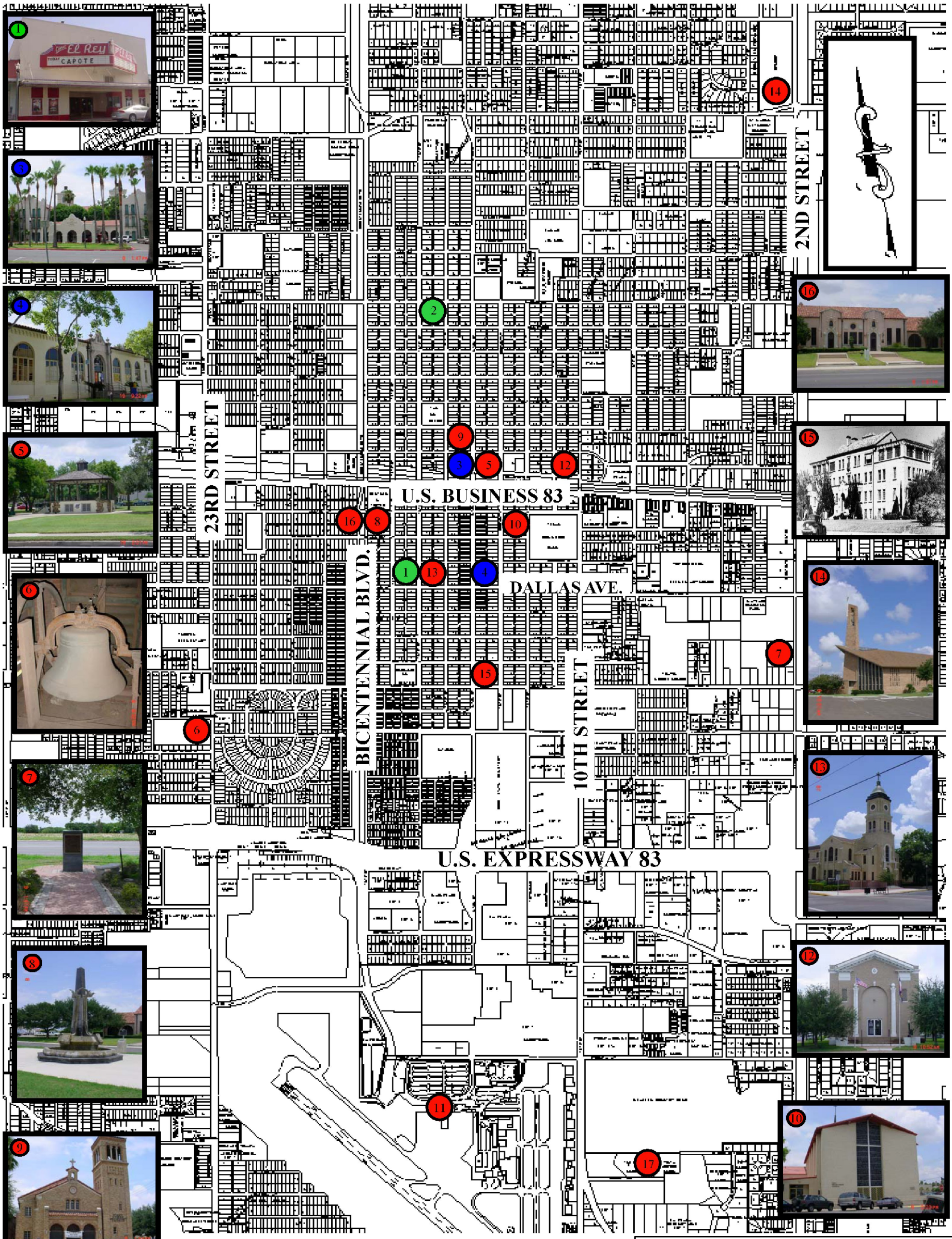
Annexation History

KENDIG KEAST COLLABORATIVE

Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

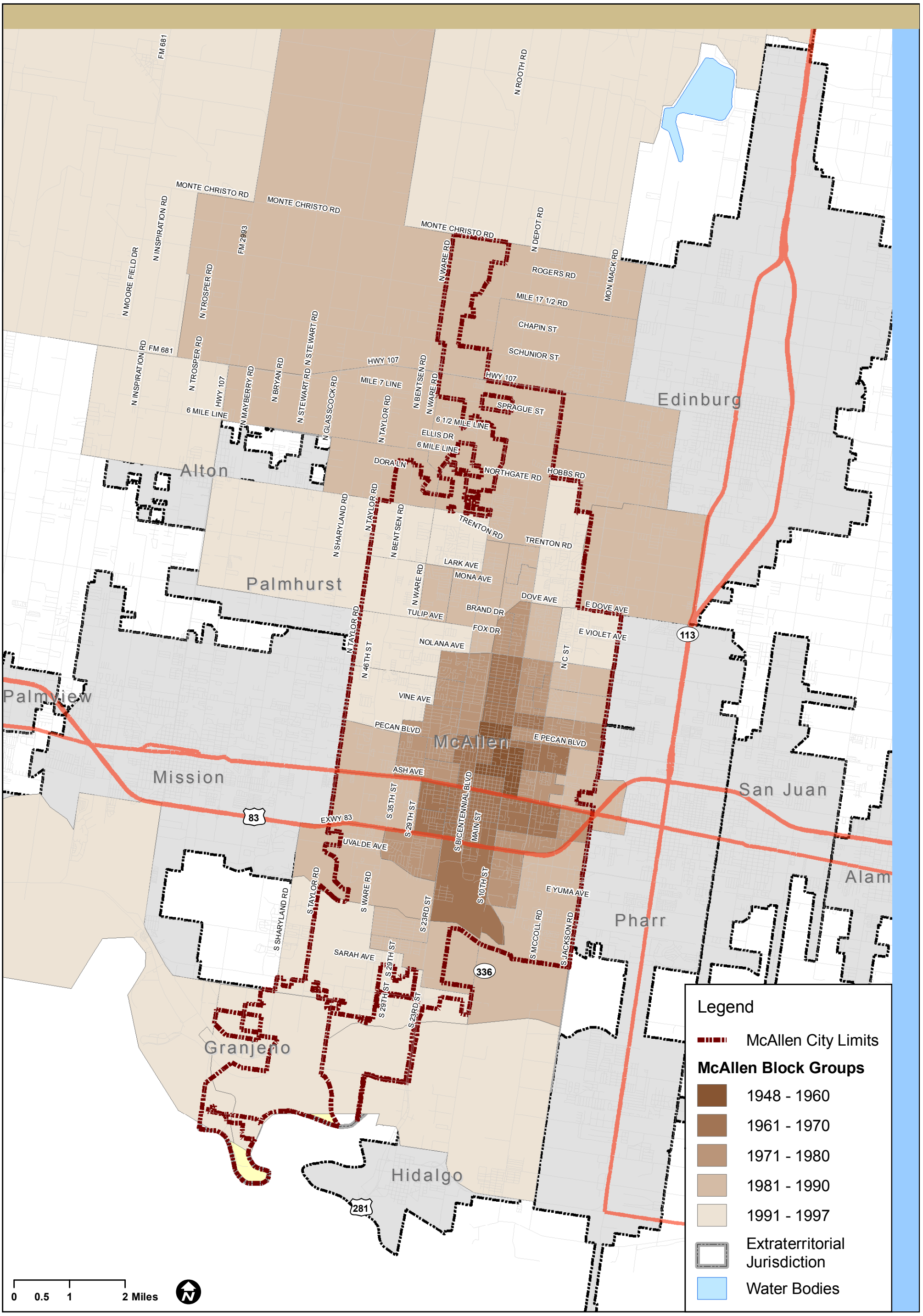
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Legend

- National Register of Historic Places
- Recorded Texas Historic Landmarks
- County Historical Landmarks



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3.12

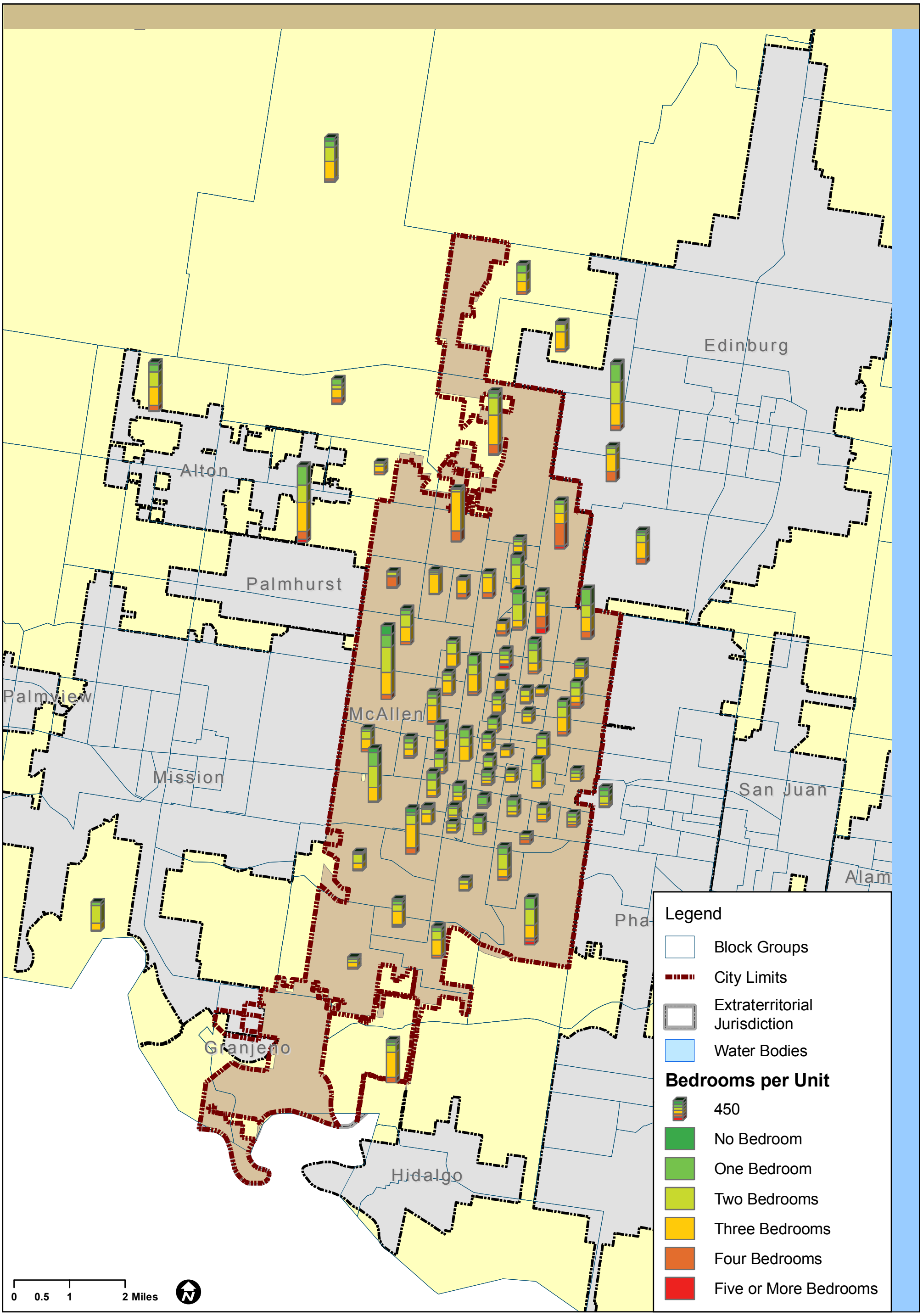
Median Year Structure Built

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3.13

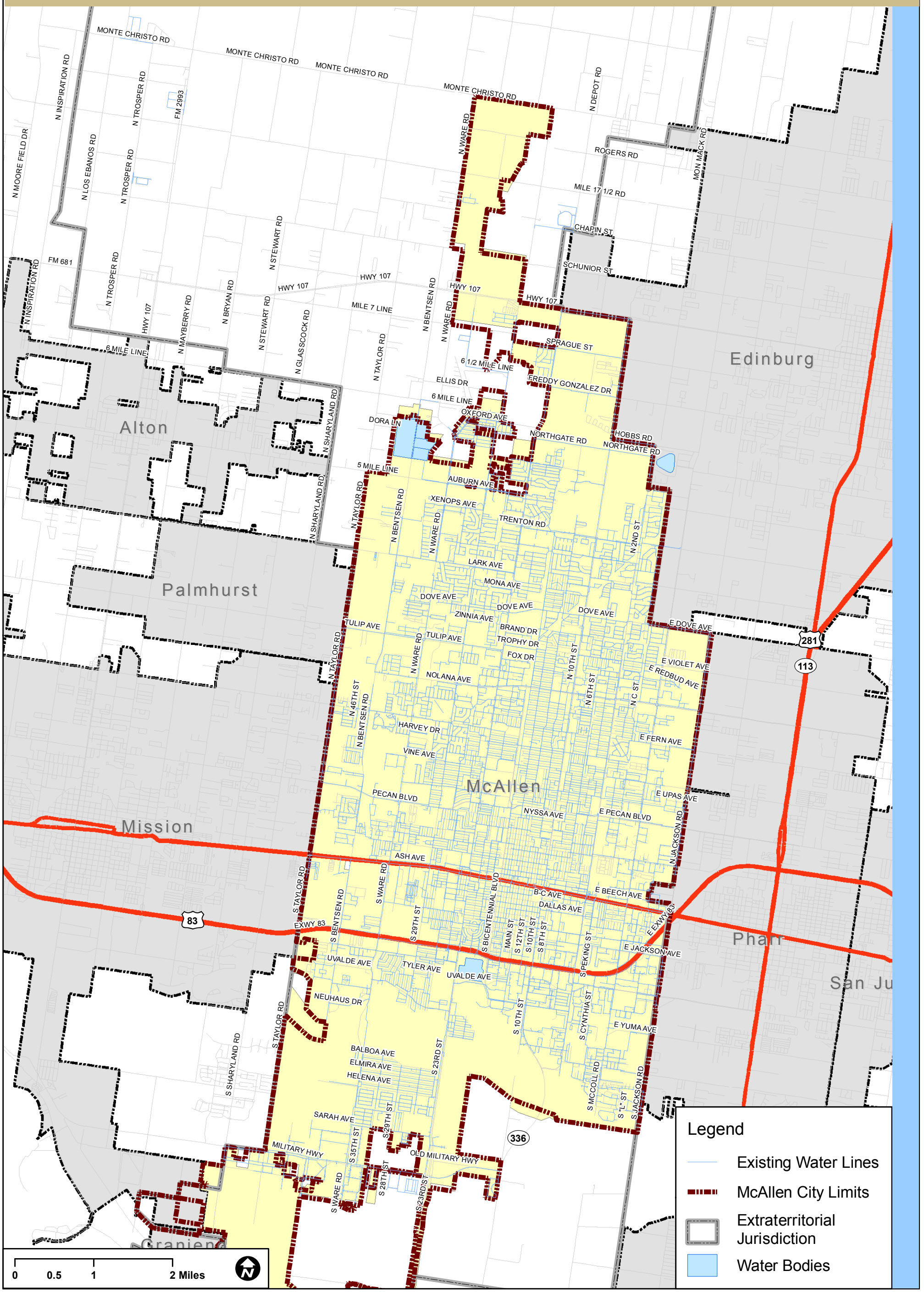
Number of Bedrooms per Unit

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3.15

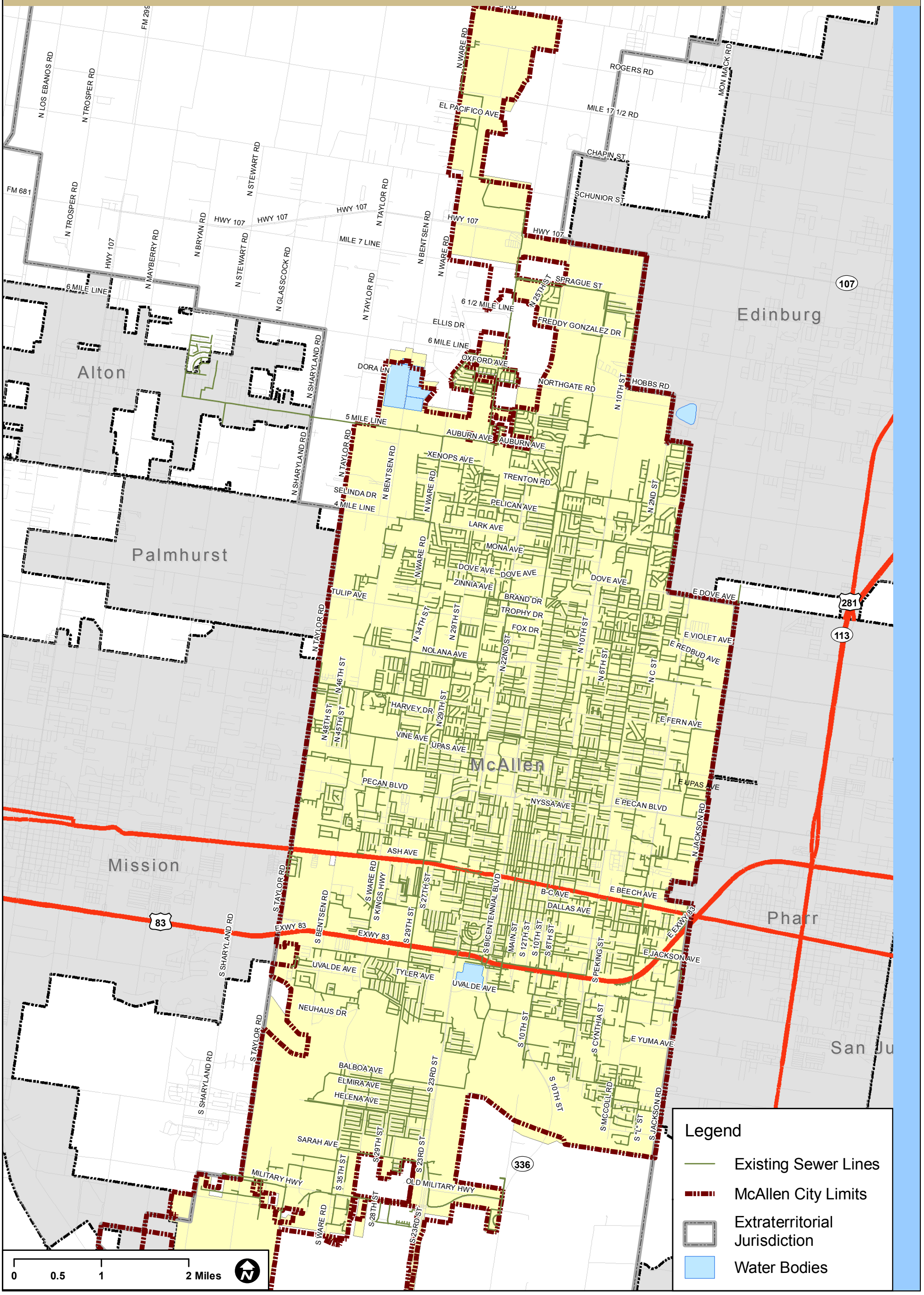
McAllen Water Service Area

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McAllen Sewer Service Area

3.17

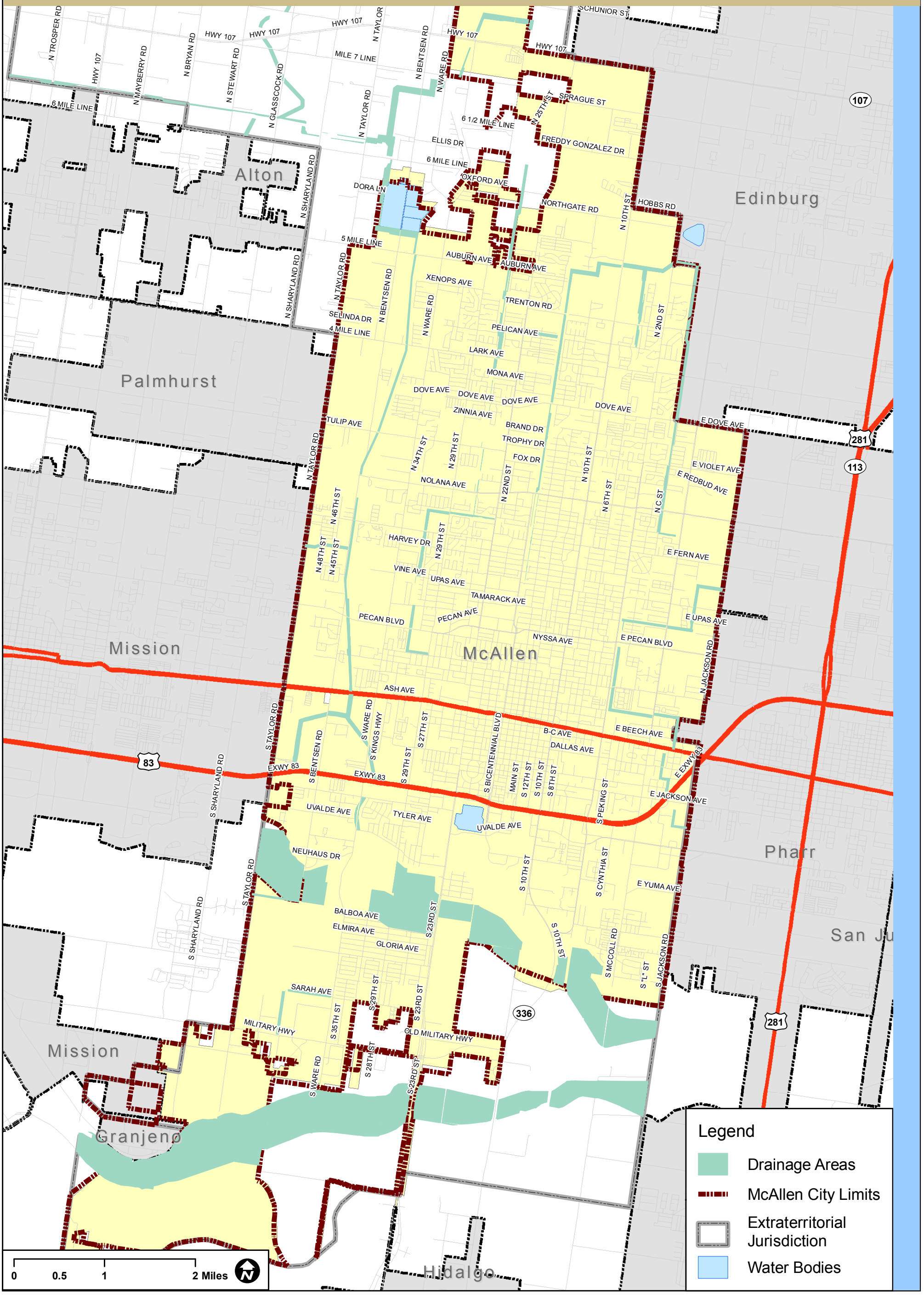
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3.18

Existing Drainage Area

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LA JOYA ISD

EDINBURG ISD

SHARYLAND ISD

MISSION ISD

MCALLEN ISD

PHARR-SAN JUAN-ALAMO IS

LGO ISD

VALLEY VIEW ISD

Alton

Palmhurst

Mission

Edinburg

McAllen

Pharr

San Ju

N LOS EBANOS RD
N TROSPER RD
FM 681
HWY 107
N MAYBERRY RD
N BRYAN RD
N STEWART RD
N GLASSCOCK RD
N TAYLOR RD
N BENTSEN RD
N WARE RD
6 MILE LINE
MILE 7 LINE
6 1/2 MILE LINE
5 MILE LINE
4 MILE LINE
EL PACIFICO AVE
ROGERS RD
MILE 17 1/2 RD
MON MACK RD
CHAPIN ST
SCHUNIOR ST
107
SPRAGUE ST
N 25TH ST
FREDDY GONZALEZ DR
OXFORD AVE
DORA LN
NORTHGATE RD
HOBBS RD
N 10TH ST
AUBURN AVE
XENOPS AVE
TRENTON RD
SELINDA DR
PELICAN AVE
N 2ND ST
DOVE AVE
ZINNIA AVE
BRAND DR
TROPHY DR
FOX DR
TULIP AVE
E DOVE AVE
281
113
E VIOLET AVE
E REDBUD AVE
N 22ND ST
N C ST
N 46TH ST
N 48TH ST
WESTWAY AVE
VINE AVE
E FERN AVE
E EXPAS AVE
N JACKSON RD
ASH AVE
E BEECH AVE
S TAYLOR RD
S BENTSEN RD
S WARE RD
S KINGS HWY
EXWY 83
E EXWY 83
LINDBERG AVE
E JACKSON AVE
UVALDE AVE
NEUHAUS DR
S SHARYLAND RD
S 10TH ST
S CYNTHIA ST
E YUMA AVE
BALBOA AVE
ELMIRA AVE
HELENA AVE
S 23RD ST
S MCCOLL RD
S "L" ST
S JACKSON RD
SARAH AVE
S 35TH ST
MILITARY HWY
OLD MILITARY HWY
S 29TH ST
S 27TH ST
83
336

Homer J. Middle School
Sam Rayburn Elementary School
Reynaldo G. Garza Elementary School
Leonelo H. Gonzalez Elementary School
Alonzo De Leon Middle School
Dr. Carlos Castaneda Elementary School
Ben Milam Elementary School
Christa McAuliffe Elementary School
James "Nikki" Rowe High School
McAllen High School
Andrew Jackson Elementary School
David Crockett Elementary School
Abraham Lincoln Middle School
Dr. Rodney D. Cathey Middle school
Francisca Alvarez Elementary School
Options in Education
Woodrow Wilson Elementary School
Memorial High School
Lorenzo De Zavala Elementary School
Victor Fields School
Instruction & Guidance Center
William B. Travis Middle School
Jose De Escandon Elementary School
Dorothea Brown Middle School
James Bonham Elementary School
Theodore Roosevelt Elementary School
Sam Houston Elementary School

McAllen ISD Proposed/Planned Schools:
Two elementary schools (Main and 29th)
and one middle school (5 mile)

Sharyland ISD Proposed/Planned Schools:
One elementary school (Dove)

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Legend

- Proposed Schools
- Schools
- School Districts
- McAllen City Limits
- McAllen ETJ
- Water Bodies

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3.19

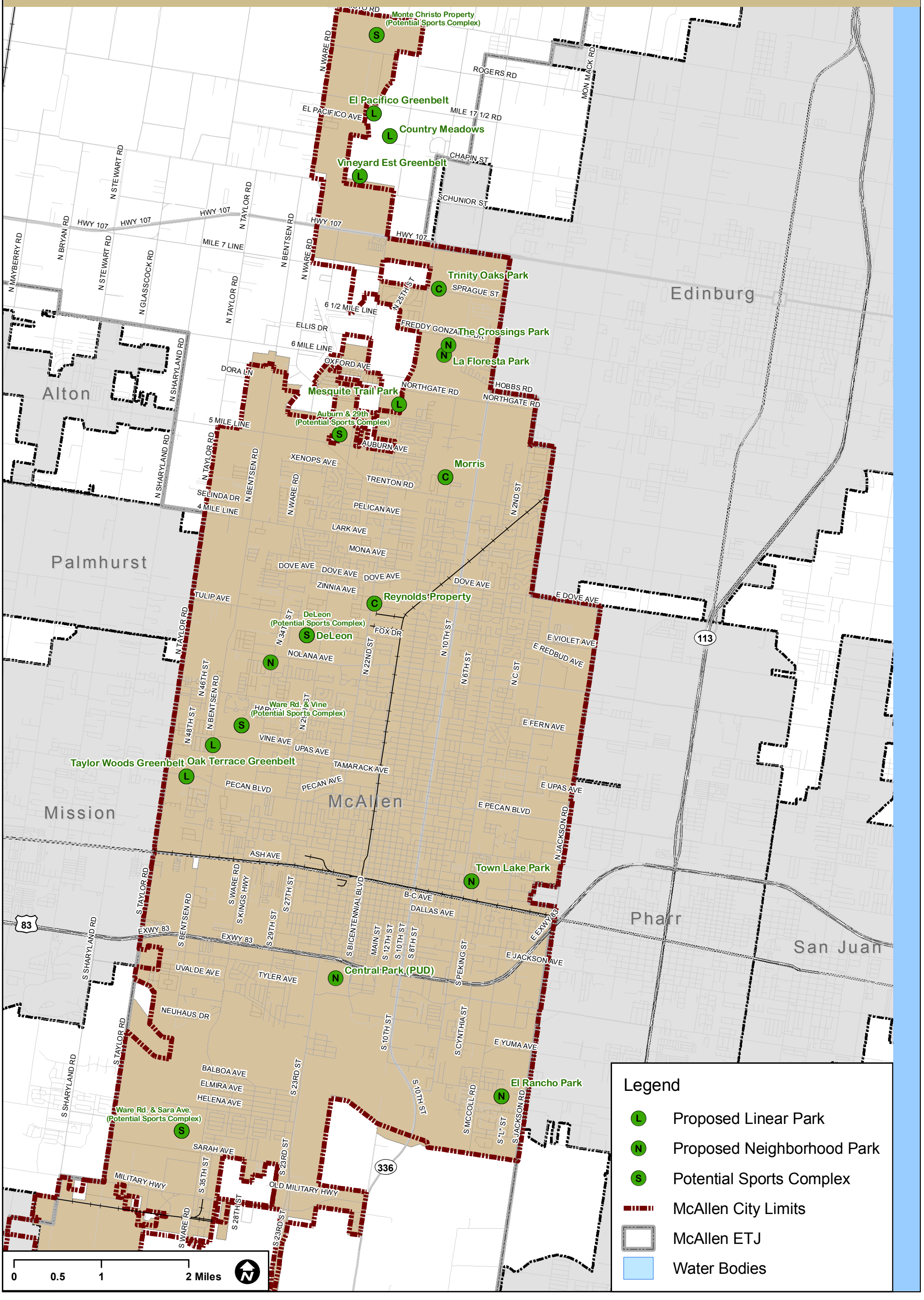
Schools and School Districts

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3.20

McAllen Park System

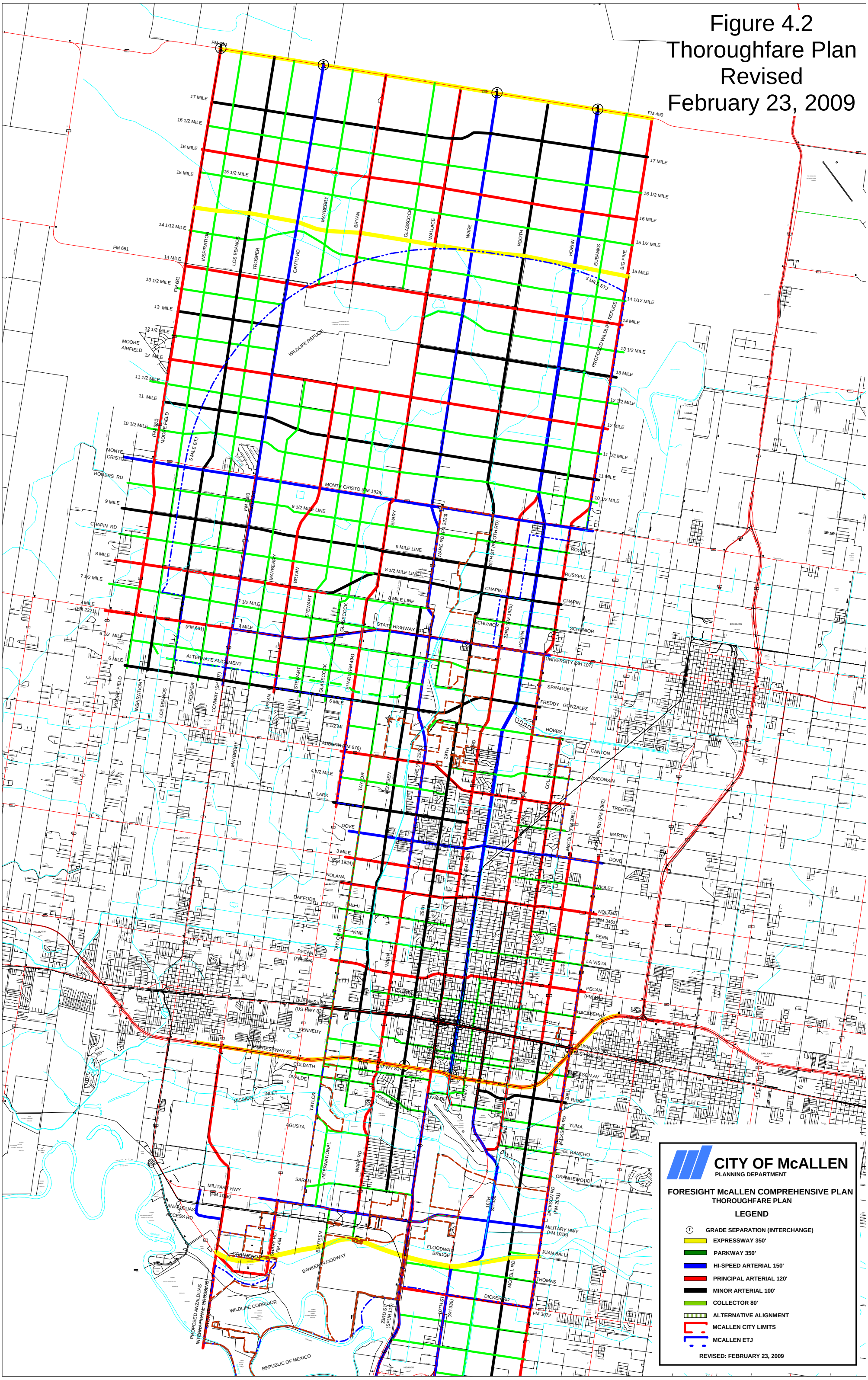
KENDIG KEAST COLLABORATIVE

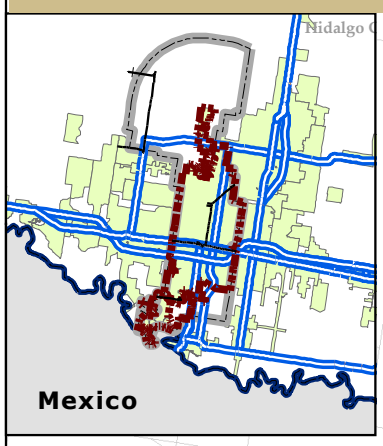
Foresight McAllen Comprehensive Plan

December 10, 2007

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Figure 4.2
Thoroughfare Plan
Revised
February 23, 2009





FM 490
FM 490
FM 490
FM 490
FM 681
N ROOTH RD
MONTE CHRISTO RD
MONTE CHRISTO RD
MONTE CHRISTO RD
MONTE CHRISTO RD
N INSPIRATION RD
N TROSPER RD
FM 2993
N LOS EBANOS RD
N TROSPER RD
N MOORE FIELD DR
N WARE RD
N DEPOT RD
ROGERS RD
MILE 17 1/2 RD
CHAPIN ST
SCHUNIOR ST
FM 681
N INSPIRATION RD
N TROSPER RD
HWY 107
N BRYAN RD
N STEWART RD
N STEWART RD
N GLASSCOCK RD
MILE 7 LINE
N TAYLOR RD
N BENTSEN RD
N WARE RD
HWY 107
HWY 107
SPRAGUE ST
6 MILE LINE
N MAYBERRY RD
HWY 107
6 1/2 MILE LINE
ELLIS DR
FREDDY GONZALEZ DR
OXFORD AVE
DORA LN
HOBBS RD
N SHARYLAND RD
N SHARYLAND RD
5 MILE LINE
AUBURN AVE
N TAYLOR RD
N BENTSEN RD
N WARE RD
TRENTON RD
336
LARK AVE
MONA AVE
DOVE AVE
N TAYLOR RD
Alton
McAllen
Palmhurst
Mission
0 0.350.7 1.4 Miles

Legend

- Railroad
- McAllen City Limits
- Hidalgo County
- McAllen Extraterritorial Jurisdiction
- Agriculture
- Open Space - Natural
- Open Space - Parks
- Estate
- Suburban Residential
- Auto-Urban Single-Family Residential
- Auto-Urban Multi-Family Residential
- Urban Single-Family Residential
- Urban Multi-Family Residential
- Urban Residential - Mixed
- Suburban Commercial
- Auto-Urban Commercial
- Urban Center
- Urban Center High
- Civic and Public
- Industrial
- Special Uses
- Water Bodies
- Vacant
- Neighborhood Conservation

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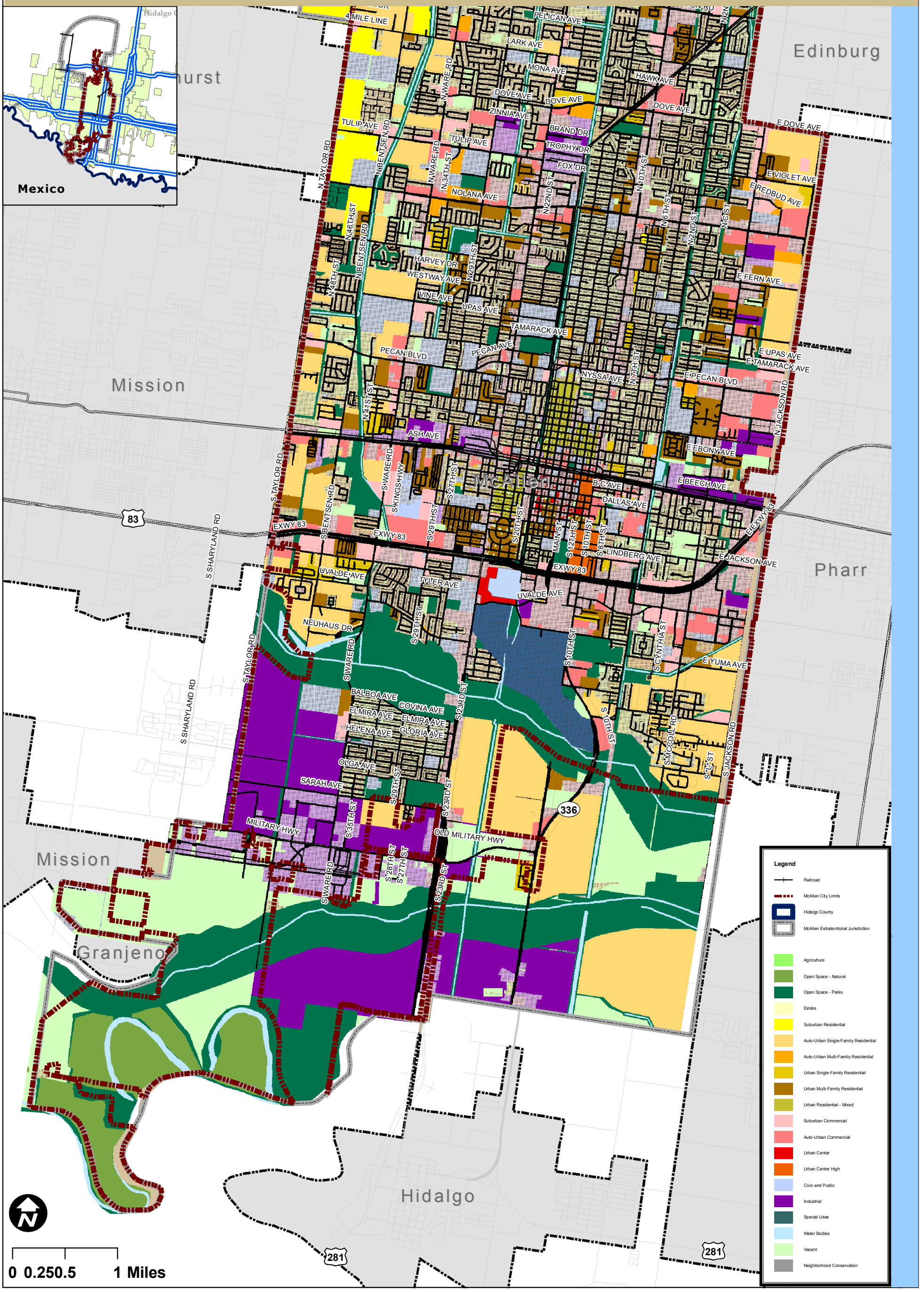
Future Land Use Plan

5.1.2

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July 2007



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Future Land Use Plan

5.1.2

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