

## Proposal for a Vision Manifest: Lockhart, Texas

Thirty miles south of Austin, nestled among the hills of a winding Texas terrain, there rests the small town of Lockhart. It's the kind of place urbanites from Austin have heard of but don't know much about. On the other hand, Lockhart's 12,000 citizens can assure you much of what Lockhart is in many ways is dictated by its close proximity to Austin. Living in the shadow of a more economically dynamic city like Austin means that more than half of Lockhart's residents commute to Austin or San Marcos for work; hence its classification as a bedroom community. Lockhart shares the air pollution problems of a bigger city, but also contributes to air pollution by perpetuating commuter traffic.

Lockhart is in the poorest county in Texas and yet receives less federal funding than many cities its same size simply because due to its classification in the same Metropolitan Statistical Area as Austin. But Lockhart can not be altogether identified according to its relationship to Austin. Rather it holds promise of manifesting its vision of development. I propose that Lockhart must address its Economic Development Plan is close collaboration with its existing Housing Development Plan to procure the vision of development set forth by the community to see Lockhart

First off, the current economic situation in Lockhart is not inviting to businesses. In Caldwell County as a whole, service and retail trade account for more than 62% of jobs, manufacturing accounts for 18%, and other industries that amount to less than 1%<sup>1</sup>. But as the economic developer, Sandra Mauldin, can assure you, "industry is what we

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<sup>1</sup> Lockhart 2020 Plan: Economic Development- jobs

[Lockhart] need”.<sup>2</sup> Median income of Lockhart households is \$41,111, 14.6% of the population lives below the poverty line<sup>3</sup> and unemployment is at a scary 5.4%<sup>4</sup>.

Any business must consider that a significant amount of commuter service workers who look to surrounding areas for not only jobs but resources. Many businesses face a risk in settling in Lockhart because it means asking employees to move to a city where much of their services will be located in surrounding areas. For instance, Lockhart has an Ace Hardware and a lumber yard, but getting the best deal on lumber probably means going to Lowe’s in San Marcos. Similarly, the local Wal-Mart does not offer the same variety of products of the bigger Super Wal-Mart in San Marcos.

Lockhart’s current housing situation reflects its economy on many levels. Most evident of this is the large number of housing available compared to retail and commercial space. A September 1998, a land use survey of Lockhart was conducted. While the statistics have varied somewhat in the last six years, they reflect the proportions that still define Lockhart very much as a bedroom community. Nearly 18% of Lockhart’s total land use is for Residential purposes.<sup>5</sup> In speaking with Sandra Mouldin, I have concluded that the housing has only increased since this survey. She said that in 2000 alone, 150 homes were built in Lockhart. Since the economy slowed down in 2001, building has remained at a rate of approximately 110 homes per year. All around Lockhart this residential space has come primarily in the form of subdivisions with track homes that cater to a low income population.

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<sup>2</sup> Mouldin, Sandra. Interview. 26 April 2004.

<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, 1999: 2000 statistics, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

<sup>4</sup> Lockhart 2020 Plan: Economic Development- jobs

<sup>5</sup> Lockhart 2020 Plan: Chapter 3, Land Use- courtesy of Dan Gibson, City Developer

Most of low income housing has come in the form of subdivision development with a large emphasis on track homes. Track homes are built such that a few plans are offered with little variation and accommodate Lockhart's demand for low priced entry level houses. This keeps costs down to builders and many national track home developers such as KB Homes and Choice Homes attracted to the Lockhart market. Just off San Antonio street in Northern Lockhart is the site of Windridge subdivision.

Choice Homes and KB homes have contracted with the developer to offer citizens three different plan schemes that range from a \$90,000 starting price to approximately \$120,000. Just south of Windridge on the other



side of W. San Jacinto Street, KB Homes and Choice homes, along with a few custom



builders have built Clear Fork and Meadows at Clear Fork. Originally, the lots in Meadows at Clear Fork were going to be reserved for custom builders. Lockhart Partners have since contracted with Classic and it has since seen the incorporation of track homes from Choice

Homes. Dan Gibson, city planner, has seen this type of development as the most popular. He points out that in addition, plans were approved for Patio homes three years ago and the demand for track homes has been more influential to developers.<sup>6</sup> Further south, just past Wal-Mart lies the site of Summerside subdivision. Here, Lockhart Partners built homes with a starting price of approximately \$80,000 and with plans from both Choice Homes

<sup>6</sup> interview: Dan Gibson 3 May 2004.

and Classic Century Homes. Summerside is currently in two phases and there are plans underway for a third and fourth addition to the neighborhood.



For affordable housing, Lockhart has a variety apartment homes that are government subsidized. Of these, the new Southpark Village Apartment homes offer two and three bedroom units that begin at \$555/ month. Mr. Gibson informed me that these are so popular that people are often turned away from the leasing office because they have a higher salary than the subsidizing will fall under. In addition to apartment homes, Lockhart has trailer parks that account for 17 acres of total land use according to the 1998 Land-use Survey.

Currently, more affluent residents reside in the historical, centrally located part of Lockhart. If they are interested in building, residents or potential residents can opt to build custom homes with Buckner Builders and Countywide Builders. Once they have a plan,



residents can submit their plan to Lockhart Building Official Michael Catching. Getting the city’s approval to build is “about a five to ten day process”.<sup>7</sup> Laura Goodard, a secretary at Countywide Builders, explained that the process of custom home approval occurs less often as there is little demand for higher ended homes. When I asked Sandra

<sup>7</sup> interview: Michael Catching, Building Official. 28 April 2004

Mouldin if Lockhart had any residential subdivision development opportunities to offer someone looking to spend more than \$200,000 and her reply was, “I wish.”

Lockhart faces the challenge of a growing residential sector with little economic to offer its residents. I propose that Lockhart must address its Economic Development Plan in close collaboration with its existing Housing Development Plan to procure the vision of development set forth by the community of Lockhart. As Dan Gibson put it, seeing this through is like the chicken and the egg analogy. What comes first? Lockhart needs to attract business to stabilize the commuter economy but cannot do so without offering sufficient places for those people to live. In the residential sector, I will argue that Lockhart has done a fine job of remembering the needs of its citizens. Affordable and low income housing is readily available. While Lockhart does not offer residential opportunity for more affluent citizens, there is no demand. Now Lockhart must pursue economic development strong enough to attract wealthy citizens and balance the residential imbalance that classifies Lockhart as a poor city.

Lockhart’s housing goals set forth in the Lockhart 2020 plan included ‘meeting the housing needs in Lockhart by providing housing for a variety of housing options, revitalizing and rehabilitating existing housing in the community where needed, and promoting a standard of home ownership encouraging attractive and well maintained residential properties’.<sup>8</sup> As my above examples have proven, I think most of these goals have been met. However, housing goals, in conjunction with accomplishing the economic goal can improve the quality of Life in Lockhart. Some of the economic goals defined in the Lockhart 2020 Plan include to ‘enhancing the economic attractiveness of Lockhart to

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<sup>8</sup> Lockhart 2020 Plan: Housing Vision

perspective industry and business, improve the quality of the present and future labor supply in Lockhart, and recruit, expand, and retain clean primary business and industry that pay an above average wage to the existing and potential work force'. My goal for Lockhart is to make the goals of the community happen by bringing in industry.

I think Lockhart needs to be aggressive in attracting business in a way that compliments their unique community. Continuing to compete with Austin and San Marcos will detour businesses considering Lockhart as a place for business. Lockhart certainly holds the potential to show the outside communities that it is a community made of hard working people, a friendly atmosphere, and as declared by the Texas Legislature, the Barbeque Capitol of Texas.

Industry for Lockhart can happen through barbeque. Lockhart should bring in a large corporate Barbeque sauce manufacturer to set up a production factory within city



limits. The title of the Barbeque Capitol of Texas can mean a lot of profit for a barbeque sauce company. I propose that Lockhart give barbeque companies an offer to subcontract the sauces and products of all four

Lockhart Barbeque restaurants under one label.



These food corporations could include, Nabisco, Betty Crocker, Heinz and Kraft. Each of these has the clout of corporate money but could benefit on a large scale from producing a smaller, consumer friendly product. The business could be set up such that it

includes jobs for production, packaging, and shipping. The most important incentive to this company is that it would be based in small town Texas that happens to be the declared Barbeque Capital of Texas. Simultaneously, Lockhart will have a corporate adjunct in its city limits. This alone will offer economic growth to Lockhart. So far as better equalizing the residential base, this company will have managers and officers who will spark higher ended residential growth. They will likely build in Lockhart and boost the economy by needing the very services Lockhart citizens are leaving the city to get elsewhere.

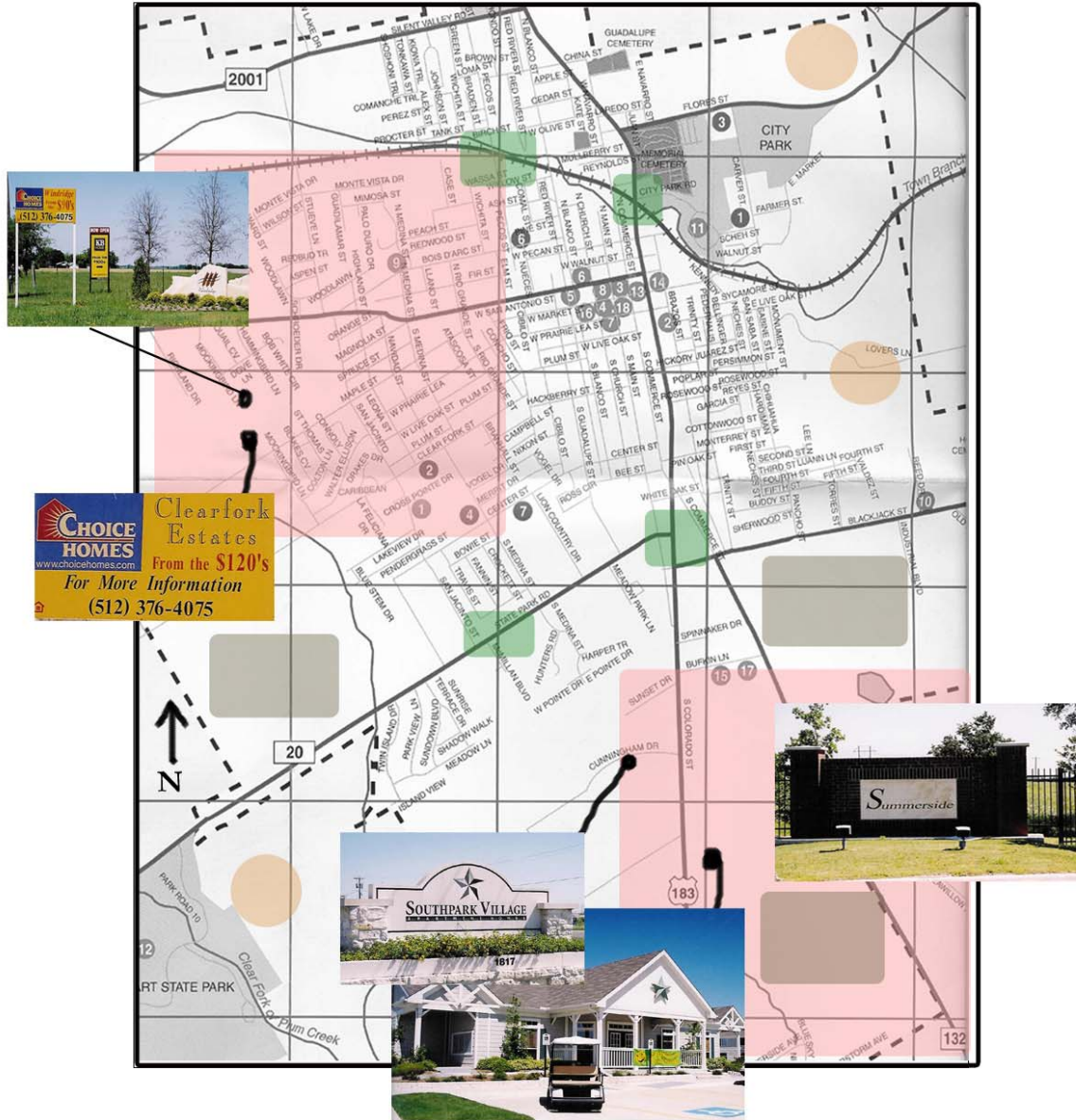
I propose that this plan works in close conjunction with further residential development by offering citizens a way to be proud of their community. With Barbeque industry, developers should consider Ranch style developments that offer the amenities of community living like playgrounds and swimming pools along side the subdivisions already in existence. Also, Lockhart should ally with Austin to further entertainment possibilities. Years down the road, Lockhart could include their barbeque themes into an amphitheater with live music. People from Austin who pride themselves on being from the “Live Music Capital of the World” would take the opportunity to for a road trip to Lockhart if it meant getting to taste the famous barbeque of Lockhart, Texas while hearing a great band.

Finally, bringing a corporate Barbeque set up to Lockhart will give Lockhart the industry it needs by using the great qualities it already has. Furthermore, industry will transform a bedroom community into more proportioned local workforce. This in turn will lead to commercial and retail opportunities at other levels that can provide its citizens with resources locally without having to drive to



San Marcos or Austin. With this plan, Lockhart can make its vision for develop manifest. Soon, Austinites will be so familiar with Lockhart, they will tell there friends from out of town, “oh, you have to go taste the barbeque and see that cute Lockhart.”

# LOCKHART, TEXAS



most suitable for track subdivision development

most suitable for future commercial retail development

suggested areas for BBQ factory

proposed site for entertainment facility

Meg Merritt

