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Lockhart Area Plan:

*A Lockhart Area Community Preservation Plan
Enabled by a Lockhart Area Recreation Plan*

Overview

The rural town of Lockhart is a community in which small-scale regional expansion is expected to take place within the next 20 years. The Capitol Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) has an agenda to include the town in a network of highways and byways that will “provide for the maximum mobility for the people of the greater Austin metropolitan area.”¹ Rural towns across the USA have increasingly become weakened and even swallowed by their own overwhelming desire for urbanization, thus losing their identity as a symbol of their independence.² For this reason, it is essential that the small town of Lockhart enact a Community Preservation Plan to be implemented over the next 5 years. The purpose of this plan would be to provide a foundational sense of community that will be necessary to maintain the character of the town throughout the next 20 years and beyond.

In order to promote such a sense of community, the city’s most effective tool will involve a new Recreation and Open Space Plan; one that involves the community through the interaction of its people, despite age, race, gender, or other causes for social constraints. A major source for community interaction and connectivity in the larger city of Austin is its greenbelt system. A simple Community Preservation Plan could be

¹ CAMPO 2025 Transportation Plan

² Jackson, John B, “The Almost Perfect Town,” Landscape, 1952, pg 168.

enabled through a very simple Recreation and Open Space Plan similar to that of Austin's greenbelts.

Greenbelt Background

The city of Lockhart relies heavily on their cultural heritage as their strongest asset, and while this may be true, the recreational potential of the Plum Creek area has long been overlooked. Lockhart, as well as any city, chose not to develop within the 100 year floodplain of the creek. However, other larger cities such as Austin or Houston, are increasingly building greenbelts to serve as communal and recreational facilities within the floodplains of their rivers and creeks. Plum Creek, located on the outskirts of the northwestern quadrant of the city is the ideal location for a greenbelt development in the Lockhart area.

Greenbelts are generally an area set aside by the city government along a creek, stream, or river, through a vast open space or some other area of significant scenic, ecological, or cultural quality. Greenbelts often link together the ecological, social, recreational, and cultural features of a city in order to create an enjoyable environment within which residents may come together and build a stronger sense of community.

Fears common to city residents when developing greenbelts are environmental concerns. Citizens worry that the environmentally sensitive areas may be in danger because of high volume pedestrian traffic in such close proximity to the creek. In fact, a greenbelt in the Plum Creek area would act as a "fence" around the Plum Creek area, protecting its cultural and ecological significance while providing an area for this community to build a stronger identity.

Plum Creek does not provide Lockhart with a water source, nor is it in any present danger of changing meanders. It is frequently inundated, and thus is an area unsuitable for any other development. A greenbelt would help to preserve the natural floodplain and the riparian ecology of Plum Creek.

Community Profile

Lockhart is known as a “bedroom” community; 52% of its residents commute to another county in order to earn their wages.³ The residents may eat breakfast, get gas, eat lunch, run errands, and pass free time, ultimately spending much of their money in the surrounding cities. This is mostly due to convenience; however, if Lockhart had a stronger sense of community, the residents may have more incentive to bring home their earned income.

In 2000, 10,188 people (nearly 90% of the total population) were members of some *household*, totaling 3,627 households. Roughly 75% of those 3,627 households were found to be *family* households, meaning that more than a single person lives under one roof.⁴ This means that there *is* incentive for a large number of the population to be in Lockhart instead of other cities, but enticement to spend more free time or family time within the city limits remains a necessity.

Currently, the Median Household Income for the city of Lockhart is only \$18, 514 per year,⁵ the lowest income levels living in the northeast quadrant. This is substantially less than the \$27,016 Median Household Income of the rest of the state of Texas.⁶ This

³ City of Lockhart website: Community Profile: <http://www.lockhart-tx.org/commprofile.htm>

⁴ Area Connect: Lockhart Population and Statistics: <http://lockharttx.areaconnect.com/statistics.htm>

⁵ Lockhart 2020 Comprehensive Plan, pg 2.

⁶ Lockhart 2020 Comprehensive Plan, pg 2.

statistic reveals a city that would be better benefited by some form of cheap activity center or recreation space within which to become involved in their community.

Lockhart is a city composed of a variety of different age groups; however, the 2000 Census reveals that roughly 68% of the population is aged 44 years or younger, and the remaining 32% lies mostly within the 44 to 54 age range.⁷ This evidence suggests that a vast majority of the community can be considered to highly mobile or physically capable of enjoying a new recreation space.

In 2000, there were an estimated 11,615 residents of Lockhart,⁸ and by the year 2020, there will be a projected 19,105 persons⁹ (nearly double in only 20 years) living within the greater city limits. These figures highlight the need to solidify a fundamental sense of community in order to preserve the essence of Lockhart's rural character for the future.

Community Vision

“The Lockhart Vision is a broad statement of how the community views itself as it moves into the 21st Century. It is an ideal image of the future based on the community's values. Lockhart's Vision is:

- To be a first-class community that has maintained its integrity and sense of community...
- To create a positive community ...by creating new neighborhoods served by parks and open space...
- To be a City that focuses on family by ensuring quality recreational activities...

⁷ Area Connect: Lockhart Population and Statistics: <http://lockhartx.areaconnect.com/statistics.htm>

⁸ Area Connect: Lockhart Population and Statistics: <http://lockhartx.areaconnect.com/statistics.htm>

⁹ Lockhart 2020 Comprehensive Plan, pg 2.

- To be a City recognized for...the integration of the natural landscape throughout the community...”¹⁰

Recreation Conditions

Lockhart is a city rich with recreational activities, but there is ample room for improvement on the existing structure. The city is expecting to see a significant rise in the population over the next 20 years, as it is expecting to experience considerable annexation and expansion as described in the Lockhart 2020 Comprehensive Plan.

To date, there stands only 95 acres of existing parks and recreation land, and the city plans only to obtain a total of 155 acres by the year 2020.¹¹ The population is expected to nearly double, yet the amount of parks and recreation land is only expected to increase by about 50%.

Lockhart has a whole of seven parks, at a grand total of only 91.83 acres.¹² One of those is its own State Park, Lockhart State Park, just a short drive west of the city. Recreational activities take place in the various parks including swimming, fishing, biking, hiking camping, and even golfing.

Lockhart has a movie theater and two “very active community theaters” that keep the entire city involved. A Community Recreation Center provides the ability for the town youth to become involved in recreational activities as a community, offering numerous team sports such as volleyball, softball, basketball, etc. The City Park is another major recreational feature of the city of Lockhart. The large fishing pond,

¹⁰ Lockhart 2020 Comprehensive Plan, pg 1.

¹¹ Lockhart 2020 Comprehensive Plan, pg 3.

¹² City of Lockhart website: Parks & Recreation Department: <http://www.lockhart-tx.org/cityparks.htm>

amphitheater, and annual celebration events offer residents of all ages an opportunity to enjoy the city.¹³

Currently, there is the Town Branch Trail, a roughly 1.2-mile hiking/running trail running a small stretch of the Town Branch Creek located east of 183 and north of San Antonio Street.¹⁴ This miniscule stretch of trail creates no open space, is embedded within the subdivisions, and is too short to be attractive to runners or bikers.

TXDOT has a plan to install a new, roughly 5.5 mile trail called the T-21 by the year 2020.¹⁵ This trail would run directly through the city, beginning within the 100-year floodplain in the southwest corner of the town and running slightly northwest until it empties out into the northern part of the Plum Creek floodplain on the opposite side of the town.¹⁶ This trail would run as a line, not as a loop, serving as more of an alternative transportation corridor than it would an ecological buffer or an educational or recreational ground.

Recreation and Open Space Needs

With a population expressing a desire to maintain a greater sense of community; a population that is expected to nearly double within the next 20 years; a population that lives off of a lower than average median household income; a population that is in large part under 44 years old, the city should plan to obtain another 200 acres of existing parks and recreation land by the year 2020.

The city needs to develop a system of trails that connects itself to the natural environment. This connection will provide a better quality of life for the residents and a

¹³ City of Lockhart: Recreation: <http://www.lockhart-tx.org/recreation.htm>

¹⁴ Tony Cortez, Lockhart Greenbelt Project Manager, Personal Interview, April 30, 2004.

¹⁵ Tony Cortez, Lockhart Greenbelt Project Manager, Personal Interview, April 30, 2004.

¹⁶ Bernie Rengal, Parks Manager, Personal Interview, April 30, 2004.

better sense of identity for the community. The land should be largely accessible to those of lesser incomes, and meet the recreational needs of the entire community, both young and old. The community needs an area in which they can escape and reflect or unite and enjoy Lockhart's natural beauty when they arrive home from their commute. This greenbelt must be closed from dusk to dawn so that crime will be minimized, and it must have workout stations installed along the corridor closest to the city so that walkers who would likely not walk the entire loop may benefit from the stations. The greenbelt must have a limited number of access points so that a "safety in numbers" deterrent from vehicular break-ins may be enhanced.

The Town Branch Trail was originally expected to cost almost \$700,000.00 because it required the acquisition of 26 pieces of property, but the total cost has not yet been figured, as the city only had to acquire 11 pieces.¹⁷ The Parks and Recreation Department of Lockhart requests a grant from the state, which must be matched by Lockhart with half of the amount requested. Lockhart does not need another expensive greenbelt system that only runs 1.2 miles, and as the Plum Creek Area is nearly undeveloped, the total cost should remain relatively low.

Recreation and Open Space Strategy – 1 Year Plan

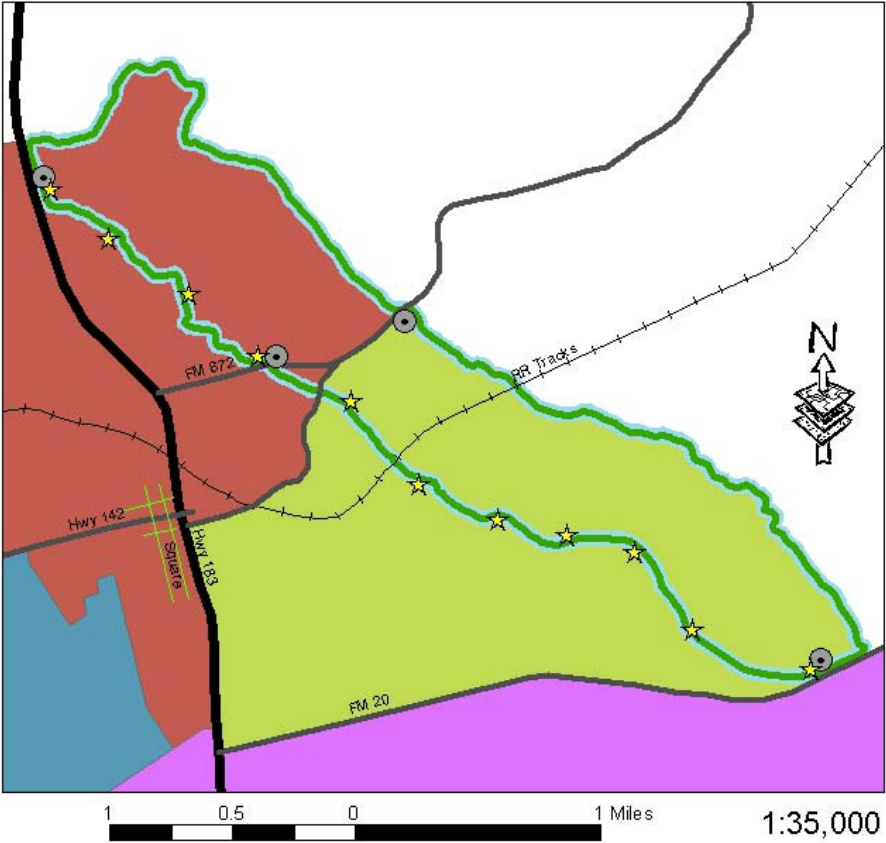
The 1.2 mile Town Branch Trail has been anticipated since the late 1970's, and has only recently been developed. The city spent nearly 30 years waiting for the funding and only four months to construct it.¹⁸ For the proposed Plum Creek Greenbelt to serve its purpose of community preservation, it must be enabled and constructed within the next 5 years. Listed below is a description of key projects and priorities:

¹⁷ Tony Cortez, Lockhart Greenbelt Project Manager, Personal Interview, April 30, 2004.

¹⁸ Tony Cortez, Lockhart Greenbelt Project Manager, Personal Interview, April 30, 2004.

- Begin an Environmental Impact Analysis on habitat located within the 50 meter buffer (see Feasibility Map) of the Plum Creek floodplain.
- Identify the locations where private property touches the 50 meter buffer, and determine the cost to purchase the property.
- Begin competition for a state grant of \$800,000.00 (if reasonable estimate).
- Find additional non-federal sources of funding through city funds, donations, private leverage from investors, etc.
- Design a greenbelt along the Plum Creek area north of FM 20 and east of Hwy 183 (see Feasibility Map) to maximize scenic quality and environmental interaction while minimizing the environmental impact.
- Develop 11 workout stations along the western side of the greenbelt (see Feasibility Map) to enhance the capability of walkers to participate in physical fitness activities other than running.
- Facilitate accessibility to both the low-income and minority populations (see Feasibility Map) of the city so as to enhance both their property values and their activity in community affairs.
- Develop well-lit parking-lots on open grounds along well-traveled roads (see Feasibility Map) so as to minimize vehicular break-ins and other parking-lot criminal activity.
- Make the area accessible by at least one major thoroughfare (see Feasibility Map) so as to increase its attractiveness to other cities.
- Make all bridges/stairways handicap accessible.

Lockhart Greenbelt Design: Feasibility Map for 2005



Data Source:
US Census Bureau

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