

INTRODUCTION

Community development is a broad category; however, it can be easily defined as those projects that enhance a community's quality of life. While these activities can be dismissed as not a fundamental priority they are actually critical to the economic vitality of a city. Expenditures on community development should be considered an investment rather than simply a cost for city government. As the economy is changing, quality of life is becoming a major factor for prospective businesses as they determine where they want to locate. It is no longer only an issue of what city has the best incentives; companies want parks and open space, recreational activities, and other amenities in the communities where they locate. This helps them attract and retain the best employees, leading to greater success for the business. Quality of life helps a city attract and retain the best businesses, leading to a stronger economy and greater sustainability.

The quality of life in Smithville is very high according to the community survey and town hall meeting. Residents appreciate the small town atmosphere and amenities that are available to them. This includes the recreation center, skate park, numerous city parks, Beuscher State Park, and the Colorado River. In addition to recreation, citizens appreciate the educational opportunities provided by Smithville ISD and the quality of education. They also feel that Smithville is overall a very safe community and a great place to raise a family.

This community spirit is an excellent indicator of the great things available in Smithville; however, there are opportunities to make additional improvements to further enhance the quality of life. The public input process identified several priorities that should be pursued to make Smithville an even better community for its residents and even more attractive to potential residents and businesses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations identify projects for the entire community to rally behind. They will increase the quality of life for all residents and make Smithville a truly vibrant and successful community with activities for residents and visitors of all ages. While some projects will require an investment from the city, some can be addressed for minimal costs.

INCREASE RIVER ACCESSIBILITY

The Colorado River is a largely untapped resource that can become a major attraction for Smithville. River recreation is tremendously popular and communities up and down the river are benefiting from it. Smithville should make every effort to get people to the river and provide services for them. The following actions will accomplish this goal and lead to increased tourism and investment in Smithville.

Enhance the Park at the North End of Main Street

This park is currently the only potential river access point in downtown Smithville. It currently is not well developed and does not provide access to the river. It does provide an



overlook to the river; however, most of the property is severely overgrown and is not inviting. Because of its location in downtown improvements to this area should be a priority for community action. The boundaries of the park should be clearly delineated to minimize trespassing. Parking should be clearly designated for visitors to reduce the impact on adjoining property owners. Finally, there should be increased amenities at this park including access to the river, and additional benches and tables. The area should also be cleared and maintained to enhance the connection to the river.



In addition to park improvements, the park must have a stronger connection to downtown. Currently, there is limited signage that would draw visitors to the park. Also, there is no clear pedestrian connectivity from downtown to the park. It would be good to develop a strong connection between the park and downtown because it would encourage visitors to spend more time (and hence more money) in Smithville. Improvements could include sidewalks the entire way to the park, or at least a designated walkway. Good signage would also direct people to the park. Signage will be discussed in more detail later in this plan.

Having a natural area in downtown provides many benefits, including providing a respite from the urban character of downtown. It will also attract additional visitors who may have no interest in downtown initially but will visit to access the river. These visitors may decide to have a meal or do some shopping while they are there, even if that was not their intent in coming downtown.

The river park also offers an opportunity to provide an access point for river recreation. Currently, there is only the boat ramp near the VFW Hall that allows people to get on or off the river easily. If an access point could be developed at this park, canoeists and kayakers would be able to stop and patronize downtown businesses. Improvements to this park should be a priority because of the huge potential this park provides to increase the attractiveness of downtown Smithville and bring in new visitors to the community.

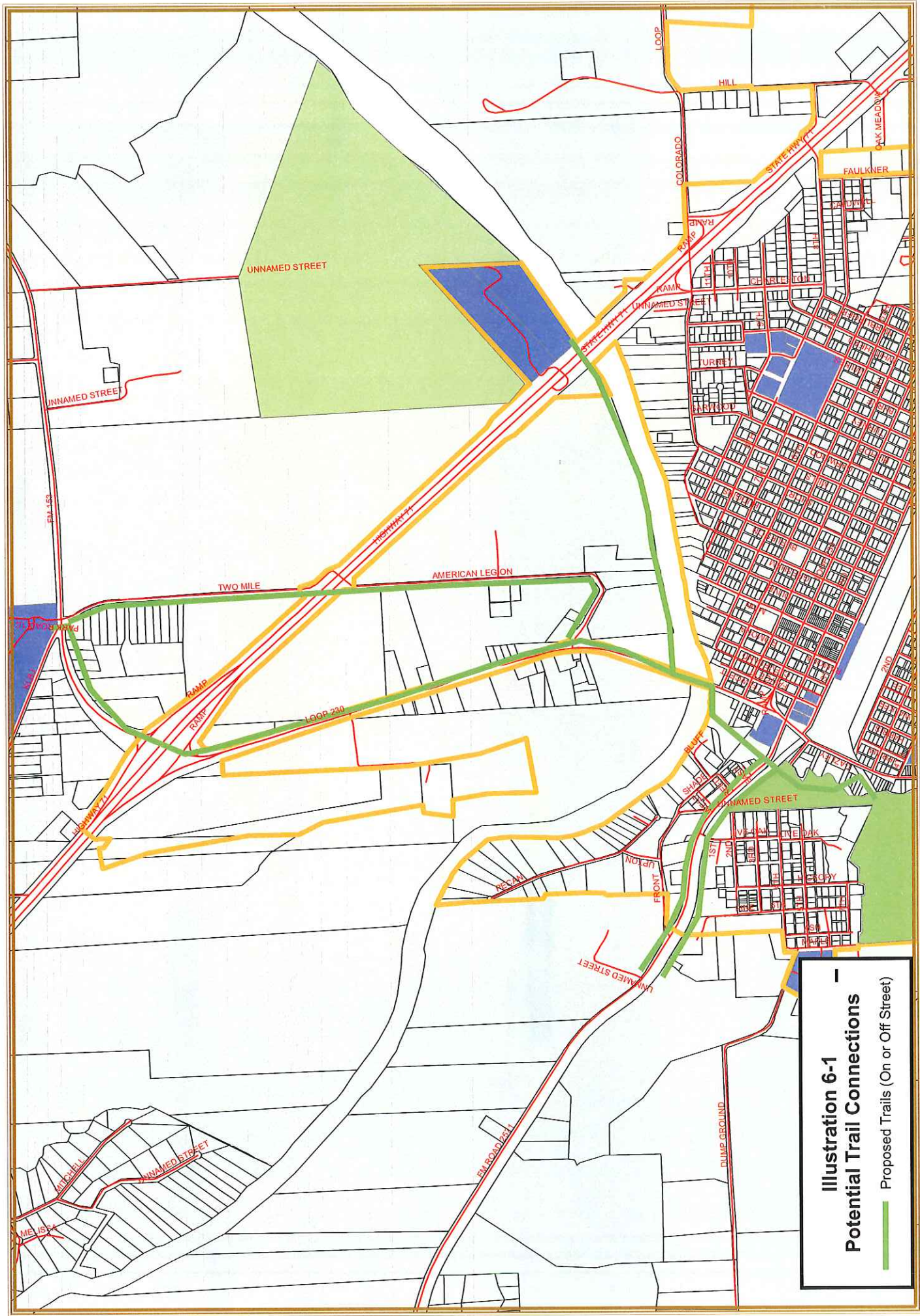
Utilize Gazley Creek for Access to River

Gazley Creek is another location that could be developed as a river access point. It is located on the northwest side of town and would be an excellent starting point for a day float trip that could end at the Main Street Park or Riverbend Park. It would also allow outfitters and other river users an access point for longer trips from Bastrop or to go further downstream.

The area around Gazley Creek also offers an opportunity for the development of a larger passive park facility that could include walking trails, picnic facilities, and other amenities. The area to the south of the confluence of Gazley Creek and the Colorado River is identified in the future land use plan as an area for this kind of park. This entire area connected with trails would be a tremendous benefit to the community and serve as a tremendous attraction. Illustration 6.1 is a map showing the potential connectivity along the river by development at Gazley Creek, the Main Street park and Riverbend. It also shows potential trail development throughout the community that is discussed later in this plan.

2007 Smithville
Comprehensive Plan

Greenways Plan



Develop Additional Boat Ramps

There is currently one boat ramp, that is apparently not the best, located near the VFW Hall. When TxDOT builds the new bridge across the river it is reported they will install an additional ramp at that location. In addition to this facility, there could be an additional boat ramp put in to increase river access. There is a potential location near Riverbend Park that may be suitable for development. Any boat ramp will require good access to the river and adequate land for parking and access for trailers. This would benefit the city by making it more attractive for fishermen and others wanting to be on the river.

Establish Stronger Relationship With River Outfitters

As river access is improved there will be a need to establish relationships with river outfitters to encourage them to use Smithville as an access point for their trips. The Chamber of Commerce should contact existing outfitters in Bastrop and other communities to determine what their requirements are and ensure those are met as river access points are developed. This would ensure that Smithville becomes an attractive location for the outfitters.

An additional opportunity is to establish multi-sport activities that utilize the river and other amenities. Bastrop is already a destination for bicycling, both road and mountain biking. One option may be to develop an itinerary of mountain biking at Rocky Hill Ranch in the morning and relaxing on a float trip during the afternoon. Road cyclists could ride from Smithville to Bastrop between Beuscher and Bastrop State Parks then float back down the river to end their day. Recreation tourism is hugely popular and the raw materials to establish this in Smithville are available. These amenities would attract visitors and serve residents alike.

INCREASE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY AND AMENITIES

Many Smithville residents do not have access to a car; these are not just young people, but the elderly and disabled. These residents are often unable to safely access community facilities because of a lack of safe places to walk. In addition, walking is a popular form of exercise and many residents currently walk through town nearly every day. Rather than spending money to develop a walking track that is really a single purpose facility, these resources could be spent on making improvements throughout the city that will make walking an attractive option for all residents, both as exercise and access.

Identify Common Pedestrian Routes Through Town

The first step in developing pedestrian access is to identify where people are currently walking. Obvious destinations include schools, parks, especially the skate park, and downtown. These should be starting point for designing the pedestrian network. The future land use plan also identifies where new growth may occur that will drive additional pedestrian needs. This is especially true of the multi family and mixed residential areas which are major sources of pedestrians.



The purpose in identifying where people are trying to walk to and from is critical to prioritize where improvements should be made. This will allow limited resources to be targeted to those areas most in need.



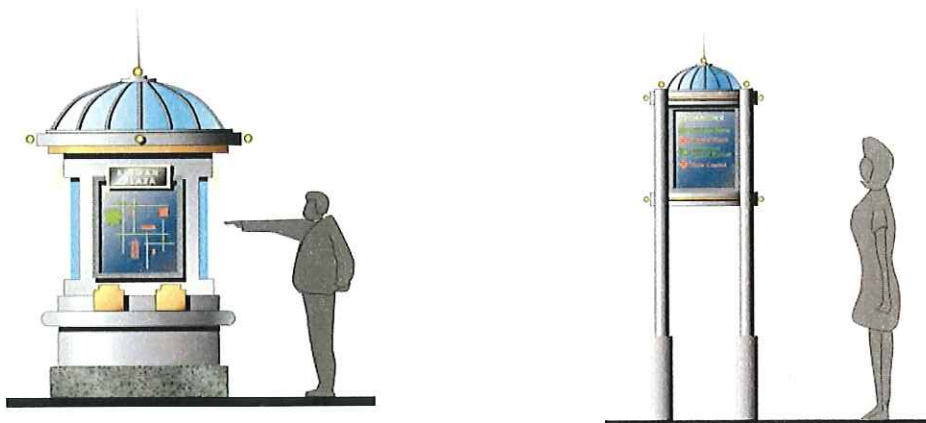
Identify and Prioritize Needed Improvements to Enhance Pedestrian Connectivity

Once the routes have been defined the next step is to determine what, if any improvements are needed. It may not be necessary to install sidewalks throughout, a simple designation (see picture) may suffice on lesser traveled roads. The idea of marking roads is to raise driver awareness that pedestrians may be present.

There may be some areas of town, particularly on busy streets, that will require sidewalks or other off street facilities to accommodate pedestrians. This will require significant investment and should be considered a longer term goal for the city. New sidewalks should be installed first in those areas that will provide the most benefit, such as connecting the Main Street park with downtown and improving access to schools.

Lighting is another key component to pedestrian safety. This is not to say Smithville should be lit up like a stadium, but key intersections and areas should be well lit to enhance safety in the evening. This includes areas where people will tend to congregate at night, such as downtown and the recreation center. Intersections should also be illuminated for safety.

Finally, signage and 'wayfinding' is a consideration for improving pedestrian access throughout town. Key walking routes should have signage geared toward pedestrians. This would include directional signs and possibly additional information about sites in town. Historic buildings and locations could have a kiosk explaining their significance as part of the overall wayfinding signage.



Good signage will help visitors navigate through town and may attract them to places they would not have known to visit. It also will serve the purpose of making drivers aware that they are in a pedestrian zone and should be more careful. The idea of improving pedestrian access is to make Smithville safer for existing residents who are

unable or unwilling to drive, as well as make it more attractive to visitors who want the experience of strolling through a small town.

Identify Potential Trail Development

In addition to increasing the connectivity within the developed parts of Smithville, there are many areas that could be connected through the development of a trail network. Riverbend Park and Beuscher State Park are two destinations that should be targeted, along with developing a trail that follows the Colorado River. The map included in this plan identifies potential trail routes along with destinations that would be connected. A well-developed trail network that connects with the pedestrian network in town will provide a unique asset for Smithville that will increase its tourism potential and serve existing residents.

Areas that can be utilized for trails include floodplains that are unsuitable for other types of development. Also, easements can be acquired for trail access across property that will not require acquisition of the land to build the trail. A quality trail network will build Smithville's reputation as a recreation destination and will complement development of the river as a resource.

Identify Funding for Trail and Pedestrian Improvements

The biggest challenge to implementing these recommendations is funding. The city has limited resources to devote to projects of this type, and the necessary improvements far exceed available money. The city should be creative in how it develops these projects and utilize a broad range of resources to pay for necessary (and desired) improvements.

One opportunity is to work with developers to encourage them to include trails and sidewalks in new development. If the city adopts a park set aside requirement in the subdivision ordinance these amenities could count towards that. Property owners could also be asked to donate easements on their property for a trail route. This would benefit the city by reducing the cost of trail development, serve as matching funds for grant applications, and the owner may receive a tax write off for the value of the donated easement.

There are numerous state, federal, and private grants that can be utilized to help pay for trails and pedestrian improvements. If the trail network connects different facilities in town, such as schools, parks, shopping, etc. they tend to score higher on many grant applications. These connections can also open the door for transportation funding that may not be available for strictly recreational trails. The resource guide included identifies grant resources the city can pursue.

Finally, local fundraising and sponsorship can be utilized. While it can be a challenge to ask citizens for funding for projects, it can be very successful. The City of Burnet had great success getting sponsorships and fundraising for a local recreation center. They had a 'Buy-a-Brick' program that recognized contributors with a brick in the sidewalk of the facility. This type of program can be very successful in raising funds. Residents, clubs, and businesses can also 'adopt' a section of trail once developed to help maintain and keep it clean. This would reduce maintenance costs for the city and increase citizen buy in for the trails. This support will keep them in better condition and encourage citizens to use the network. This use will enhance the safety of the trails as well

because if people are there all the time then there will not be an opportunity for trouble makers to take advantage.

ESTABLISH ADDITIONAL RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

Smithville is well served with its existing park system; however, there are opportunities to expand amenities to serve different needs and access issues in the community. The goal is to provide a system of parks that meets the needs of users of all ages and interests. This means having some type of open space in proximity to every resident, even if its only a single lot that has a small playground or a few picnic tables. These small parks can become a cherished part of a neighborhood as a gathering place for children and entire families.



WHITT JOHNSON PARK

There is often a fear that these types of neighborhood parks can become a source of trouble for a neighborhood. They can serve as a congregating point for ne'er-do-wells and troublemakers. This can be avoided through good park design that keeps all areas of the park visible from adjoining streets and by people using the park regularly. If the park is not well visited it can become a source of trouble; however, if it has amenities people want it will be used and not be a problem.

Identify Potential Sites for New Parks

The future land use plan identifies sites that should be considered for new parks. One area is on the western edge of town just south of the 'Hill'. A sports complex was recommended in the southeast near the railroad tracks and proposed industrial area. This is a suitable location because of the traffic, noise, and lights generated by a sports complex. Other facilities include proposed golf courses near the high school and in the northeast of town across Hwy 71. This diversity of locations, along with existing parks will ensure there are parks across the town.

The next step will be to locate potential 'pocket park' locations. These should be focused on areas in proximity to where people live. As discussed, these should not be large parks, simply a small area that can be a center for the surrounding neighborhood. Illustration 6.2 has a $\frac{1}{4}$ radius circle around existing parks in town (including the elementary school). It shows two areas with limited access, on the far south end of town, and the north central area of town. These areas should be the focus for identifying where a pocket park could be developed that would serve these neighborhoods.



Establish Park Requirements in the Subdivision Ordinance

This recommendation is mentioned in the land use plan but deserves more discussion. A park set aside would move the burden of providing new parks to developers who are building new subdivisions in Smithville. The benefit is that new parks would be developed as needed to serve new development and would be paid for by the developers rather than the city having to pay for them. The drawback is that the costs



would be passed along to the homebuyers, thus adding to the cost of new homes. Typically though, this is not a huge cost for the developer, depending on the standards imposed for the set aside. As mentioned, the City of Bertram has a 5 percent set aside or \$250 per home. This does not create an undue burden because the total area required to be set aside is minimal. The city should work with property owners and citizens to determine if this requirement should be added to the subdivision ordinance. People may be more agreeable if it is limited to larger projects, for example, subdivisions with 20 or more homes or projects over 50 acres. This would minimize the burden on small property owners or developers that may be challenged to design a profitable project that includes a park set aside.

Consider Developing Golf Courses

There are quite a few golf courses in Bastrop County; however, there is not one in Smithville that can serve the eastern area of the county. Golf continues to grow in popularity and a high quality golf course will attract visitors to Smithville. A golf course can also serve as the anchor for an upscale development that could have high end homes and upscale condominiums to serve executives and retirees looking for a quality community to call home.

The future land use plan identifies an area that is suitable for an 18 hole golf course development on the north east side of town. This site has significant river frontage and is adjacent to the existing Riverbend Park. This is a good location for a large development of this nature and could become a unique destination for Smithville. This type of project is something that would likely be undertaken by a private developer, although there is an opportunity for the city to partner. An option may be for the city to help develop the golf course in return for it being a public access course and the developer would still be able to design it and build homes around it.



If a golf course is developed, there is an opportunity to partner with other courses to market Bastrop County as a true golf destination. Golf enthusiasts could spend a long weekend at the Hyatt Lost Pines resort and enjoy golf on several courses throughout the county. It would be worth exploring the potential for a Bastrop County Golf Pass that could be purchased to provide rounds of golf at multiple courses. This would encourage long term stays and money to be spent in the community.

An option that would serve a need in Smithville is for the city to develop a public 9 hole golf course. A site just south of the school has been identified for this that would

allow the high school golf team easy access to the course for practice. Currently, they have to go out of town to practice. This course would also serve local residents who may be unwilling to spend the money to play at one of the major courses, but would appreciate a short, inexpensive round of golf. A golf course like this would increase the variety of recreational amenities in Smithville and would enhance the overall quality of

life for all residents. As mentioned, the park system should be designed to accommodate a range of needs, and a 9 hole golf course could be developed fairly quickly, and at a not unreasonable cost.

EXPLORE THE POTENTIAL FOR A COMMUNITY POOL

The citizens of Smithville want a community swimming pool. This was made very clear through the public input process, both as comments on the mail survey and at the Town Hall meeting. A swimming pool can be a great asset but it is also expensive to build and more importantly to staff and maintain. Careful consideration should be given before moving forward with this project to ensure the city has a good funding mechanism to pay for the project over time.



Establish Funding Mechanism and Plan for Developing and Maintaining a Pool

The expense of building a pool is usually not the biggest challenge because of the opportunity for grants and sponsorships to help defray the costs. It is the on-going expenses of maintenance and staffing that are the problem. There are few grants that pay for these expenses, most are for capital improvements only. Before moving ahead, the city should establish a long-term funding mechanism to

help defray these costs. This can include annual memberships and day use fees, similar to what is charged at the recreation center. These would not likely cover all the costs, but would help offset some.

The City of Burnet has a successful model with the Recreation Center they have developed. A non-profit partnered with the city to develop the facility which is owned and staffed by the city. The non-profit continues to provide financial assistance to cover the costs associated with the center. This is a model that could work for Smithville in developing a pool. A non-profit could raise funds that it donates to the city which would be responsible for staffing, etc. The City of Brenham has an elaborate swim center that is sponsored by Blue Bell Ice Cream. This provides more than just a basic swimming pool, it has many amenities that make it attractive for all ages and swim abilities.

The city should also explore a partnership with the school district to help spread the cost of a pool. The school district may be a willing partner in developing a facility and could provide land and other assistance. This would also generate more use for the pool. In addition to the school district, the city should work with the senior living facility to get them involved. The pool could be designed to be used for therapy and water aerobics that would benefit seniors.

The site for the pool should be one that is accessible to the maximum number of residents. The area by the high school has been discussed in conjunction with the 9 hole golf course. This is easily accessible by car, but would have limited access for pedestrians or bicyclists. Many would



have to cross the railroad track to get to the pool. The benefit to this location would be easy access to the school for students to use for sports and other activities.

The idea is to be creative so the entire cost of the pool does not rest with city government. There are many avenues that can be pursued to help fund a pool and given the importance to the community, this should be a priority.

PROTECT AND ENHANCE COMMUNITY APPEARANCE

While most of this plan has focused on recreational amenities (and projects that can involve substantial financial investment) this goal will allow for action at a minimal cost. It focuses on recommendations that will protect and improve the community, making it more attractive and safe for current and potential residents. A clean, attractive community has a huge impact on the success of economic development activities and in the overall quality of life.

Strictly Enforce All Ordinances to Protect Community Appearance

The city has the authority to maintain the health and safety of the community through code enforcement. The city already is doing this and should continue to strictly enforce its ordinances. The future land use plan that identifies deteriorating and dilapidated housing can serve as a starting point to prioritize areas for enforcement. The survey did not identify commercial buildings that are deteriorating; however, the code enforcement officer is likely familiar with these properties already.

An enforcement campaign can begin with education to inform property owners of the negative impact their property has on their neighbors. This can include letters and photographs of the offending property sent to the owners. Some communities are more aggressive and put large signs up on property that is not up to code with the owners name on it and a pronouncement that the property is not in compliance. This public shaming often has more impact than just sending letters and notices. Smithville is doing a good job in this area and should build on its success to ameliorate those remaining properties that are not in compliance.

Maintain All Public Property

If the city expects private citizens to maintain their property, it should set an example by properly maintaining all public lands, rights of way, and other facilities. This is another area where the city is already doing good work, so it should continue to ensure adequate budget to maintain property. Also, as other facilities recommended in this plan are developed the maintenance budget will have to expand accordingly to ensure new facilities are well kept, safe, and attractive.

Reinvigorate the 'Yard of the Month' and 'Business of the Month' Programs

Most people appreciate public recognition for their good deeds. These types of programs recognize those property owners who set an example for maintaining and enhancing their properties. This program can be run through the Chamber of Commerce as part of their outreach. Recognition could include signs that can be placed in the yard, write ups in the newspaper, and possibly gift certificates or other prizes. The main reward is the recognition more than an actual prize. This type of program would

not have to be very expensive or time-consuming to manage and would provide an immediate, visible success from this planning process.

Establish Design Guidelines

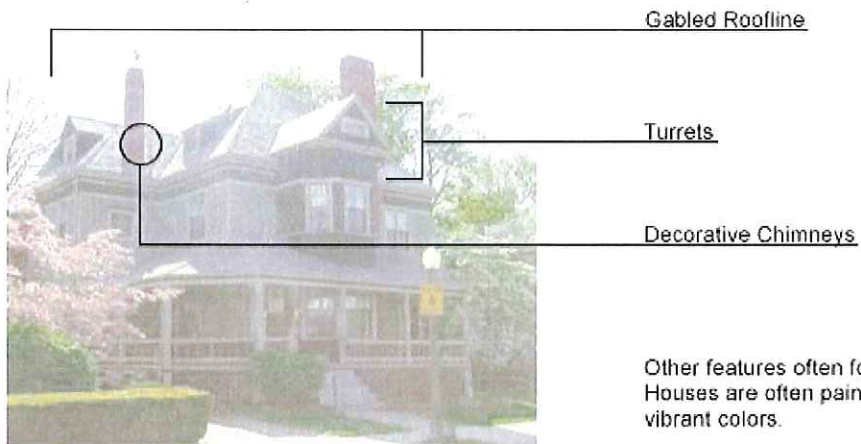
New development should blend with the existing character and appearance of the community. The appearance of buildings and their relation to one another is critical in creating an attractive community that will encourage people to visit and even move there. Design guidelines are a tool that can be used to ensure new development is appropriate and attractive. These guidelines can be as simple as requiring masonry or other facades for the frontage of metal buildings, or go so far as to dictate the color a building can be painted. In the case of Smithville, it is recommended to take a moderate approach. The downtown area will be covered by a historic preservation ordinance, so these guidelines should focus on those areas not included in the historic district. This includes the area along Hwy 71 and Loop 230.

Conventional Strip Mall Design



Any design guidelines should be developed through a public process that involves property and business owners and other citizens. A review of other communities' guidelines should be conducted as well to identify best practices. The guidelines should be clear and reasonable so as not to inhibit development. Design guidelines should focus on commercial development at this time, because that will likely be more supported by residents than imposing guidelines on residential development. There is also the opportunity to encourage good design through incentives, such as allowing for an expedited review process or infrastructure assistance if projects implement good design. The goal is to protect the unique character and heritage of Smithville so it does not become 'Anywhere, USA' as can occur when development standards are not used.

Many communities are using graphic design books rather than text for their design guidelines. These are easier for developers to use and provide much better direction than a thick book of rules and regulations. This image is an example of how a design book would provide direction to a developer. The idea is not to regulate every detail, but rather to provide a range of opportunity for a developer to create a unique project with its own identity that still fits into the overall image of Smithville.



CONCLUSION

The list of projects identified in this plan may seem daunting at first glance. This should not be a deterrent to action; the implementation guide provides a timeline for developing these projects that takes into account financial realities and citizen priorities. Additional recreational opportunities will encourage a healthier, more active community. Citizens will be involved in their neighborhoods and interact with one another at the park, or walking through the community. The appearance of Smithville will be maintained and enhanced as owners fix up their homes and businesses. New businesses will be developed that are in character with the rest of Smithville and are well designed. The unique character of Smithville will be protected as the community grows. By following through, the city will enhance the already high quality of life in Smithville and make it a truly vital, sustainable community that residents will be proud to call home.