

City of Palacios Comprehensive Plan 2023

The Texas Local Government Code allows under chapter 213 for a municipal comprehensive plan for the purpose of promoting sound development of municipalities and promoting public health, safety, and welfare.

The primary purposes of this plan are to:

- guide routine planning, engineering, and financial decisions
- publicly acknowledge the future intentions of the City government with respect to growth and the nature of the community
- allow for increased coordination between the city, other governmental and non-governmental organizations, the citizens, private businesses, and developers.

In 1995 the City initiated a planning process that included the input of citizens, community leaders, consulting engineers, and planning consultants to inventory, describe and analyze the City's physical, economic, and social conditions. The resulting 1998 Planning Studies Report included:

- a community profile
- population and housing studies
- land use studies
- water system study
- wastewater system study
- storm drainage system study
- street system study
- thoroughfares study
- recreation and open space study
- economic development study
- central business district study
- a capital improvements program

The stated goals and objectives to guide the future development process for the city are repeated below

General Community Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: All development shall promote the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens of the community.

Objective: Encourage housing rehabilitation to eliminate fire and other hazards and to provide handicapped accessibility for homeowners.

Objective: Provide a citywide potable water treatment, storage and distribution system that meets minimum state standards regarding quality, quantity, pressure, and engineering specifications that promote the health and safety of residents.

Objective: Provide a citywide sanitary sewer collection and treatment system that meets minimum state standards regarding effluent quality, treatment capacity, collection system capacity, and other health and safety-related standards.

Objective: Resurface and reconstruct streets that pose a danger to motorists.

Goal 2: Balance preservation of the community's small-town quality of life with economic development and housing growth.

Objective: Encourage additional commercial and small-scale industrial development along major highways on the outskirts of the community.

Objective: Encourage construction on subdivided lots in developed areas (infill) rather than on agricultural land or woodland by providing and maintaining infrastructure serving developed areas.

Objective: Develop additional housing in single family home subdivisions and apartment complexes at moderate densities.

Goal 3: Retain the affordability of living in the community.

Objective: Pursue grant funding for financing improvements to the community's water and sewer systems to reduce the level of funds that the community must raise and to limit debt service.

Objective: Pursue grant funding to rehabilitate existing housing and to assist homebuyers in order to maintain the community's affordable housing stock.

Goal 4: Pursue efficiency in delivery of community services by maximizing service and minimizing costs.

Objective: Continue interlocal agreements with Matagorda County for maintenance of roads and drainageways, thus avoiding equipment purchases and continual labor expenses.

Objective: Construct water and street improvements in a manner that encourages compact development to reduce the cost of infrastructure construction and maintenance for each resident.

Even though these goals and objectives were developed about 25 years ago, they are still relevant for use in the City's future. During the last 25 years the following significant events and factors

have occurred that need to be factored into future decision-making processes.

1. The City elected to become a home rule city with a City Manager/Council form of government. This allows for continuity of professional management that previously depended upon reelection of a mayor/ council team for continuity.
2. The city adopted a zoning ordinance for the purpose of regulating uses within zones to encourage orderly development and encourage compatible growth through infill. This strategy appears to be suppressing orderly growth by strict use definitions discouraging innovative land use products that are now common in many areas such as attached single family homes, home based businesses, and neighborhood retail and eating establishments. City should consider elimination of zoning districts and the creation of development regulations that protect existing neighborhoods by screening, setbacks, and nuisance controls.
3. The City's population continues to decline. In 1998 the population was 4,824 and was forecast to be 5,383 by 2013. The 2020 census reports the City's population as 4,385 or about a 10% decrease since 1998. This must be reversed ASAP. Reasons for decline are unknown, but lack of local employment opportunities, lack of education and training opportunities, and deteriorating streets, housing, and utility systems are surely observable and contributing factors. The city can fix its infrastructure and should do so. Commerce, employment, and population gains are interrelated and highly dependent on adequate affordable housing supply and lifestyle considerations. Rooftops and people can be expected to increase if the city were to focus on the laid-back small-town lifestyle that would be competitive when compared with large city hurried and small inland town lifestyles. The entire City could emulate the isolated adult communities now found outside many larger cities. Priorities would be retired and home working adults, second home buyers for vacation and short-term rental investment use and tourism by both day trippers and longer stay tourists.
4. ALCO 25,000 square foot discount general merchandise store was built, opened, closed and the building remains vacant now for several years. Indicates the difficulty of sustaining retail operations without sufficient population and traffic in a town. Commerce in the form of products and services will organically come to serve the population and traffic base when the demand meets their business model.
5. The old Camp Hulen property has been partially developed as a residential subdivision of about five hundred fully serviced building lots. Less than 20 homes have been built there in the last 15 years. This clearly adds to the supply of building lots that will not require any significant additional infrastructure investment by the City to add significantly to City revenues from utility service, ad valorem tax and sales taxes on building materials and other purchases by new homeowners and vacation short term renters. This major subdivision is well suited for the active adult market that is popular right now.
6. Studies were recently completed to establish needs for maintenance and rehabilitation of the City's water, wastewater, drainage, and streets systems. These should be incorporated into a 5-year Capital Projects budget. Given the estimated cost to bring the systems up to the levels mandated by regulatory authorities and to provide the levels of service needed to attract the number of people and the amount of commerce needs to pay for them. Adding new structures and infrastructure into our ETJ should be evaluated very carefully, giving higher priority to rehabilitating what we have first.

7. The Palacios school district has approved a large bond issue and is replacing all of its existing school buildings. This impacts the city in two ways. First it will help make our schools more attractive to potential families with children. Another positive about this is that two school tracts may be available on our utility system for uses that could enhance our city and its revenue stream. On the other hand, it adds to the financial burden on the City and its citizens, overlapping tax rate burden and total funded debt per capita are just two of the financial statistics used when lenders decide on the amounts loaned, the interest rate charged, and other lending terms.
8. The City's airport property has remained unchanged for many years. A short- and long-range plan is needed. An airport expert with a successful small town airport development track record who can see and exploit a cooperation that may exist with the Port of Palacios should be sought. Such a person needs to bring the vision and a third-party financing plan to the table.

In summary, preserving our small-town quality of life by prioritizing City spending into maintaining and rehabilitating the basic infrastructure we already have will result in the rooftops, residents and tourists needed to assure that small town quality of life can continue. Revised decision-making principles are as follows:

1. *All decisions shall promote the health, safety, and welfare of all citizens of the community.*
2. *Balance preservation of the community's small-town quality of life with economic development and housing growth while giving priority to population and housing growth.*
3. *Enhance the affordability of living in the community by adhering to sound management and financial policies, minimizing burdensome regulations, and regular maintenance of infrastructure.*
4. *Execute a rolling 5 year capital projects budget that considers the following priority of spending: a) restore and maintain existing infrastructure; b) drinking water infrastructure; c) Wastewater infrastructure; d) street and drainage infrastructure; e) public safety personnel and infrastructure; and f) parks and recreation infrastructure.*
5. *Invest in training and education of City employees*
6. *Coordinate the Economic Development Corporation with City adopted goals and priorities.*

*Prepared by C Woolf 10-30-22, revised 11-28-22
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