



City of La Porte

2030 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

2012 Update

ADOPTED 12.10.12

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PLAN CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

The La Porte 2030 Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year master plan intended to serve as an official public document, adopted by the City Council, to guide policy decisions relating to the physical and economic development of the community. In general, the plan indicates how the community desires to develop and redevelop over the course of the next twenty years. The original version of the comprehensive plan was adopted in 1984 after extensive community involvement. Since that time, City Council and staff have been implementing that plan as intended. Even good planning, however, needs to be updated. To ensure the plan continued to represent the future of the community envisioned in 2001, the plan recommended updates at a minimum of five year intervals. In 2005, City staff evaluated the plan to update the goals and objectives, reflect progress and accomplishments, identify goals that required attention or deletion, and to recommend any additional goals that were needed to better achieve the 2001 community vision. In 2011, now 10 years into the implementation of the plan, City Council approved a second revision to the plan. Utilizing the firm foundations set in 2001, and as updated in 2005, this revision is more comprehensive in nature and includes an updated community vision to ensure that the City is still moving towards a future that represents the desires, needs, and aspirations of the community.

1.1 Introduction

The comprehensive plan is a physical plan; it is long-range; it is comprehensive; and it is a statement of the goals, objectives, and policies of the local government. It is intended to be inspirational; enough to challenge

the future of the community; but it provides clear direction through specific statements of action to achieve the desired results envisioned by citizens and the leadership of the community. In that context, this plan intends to answer the following questions:

- What are the adequate levels of public facilities necessary to meet the demands of future in-fill development and redevelopment;
- What should the future development pattern look like in order to reflect the values of the community;
- How can we best utilize some of our City's greatest physical assets, i.e., parks and trails, Main Street, Sylvan Beach, and the bayfront;
- How can we improve the image and visual appearance of the community; and
- How can we unify and mobilize our residents and leaders around a common vision and future direction?

Why Update?

"Planning is a dynamic process that must be continuously monitored and renewed as changes occur. The City's comprehensive plan must be flexible in responding to changing conditions and needs, yet steadfast in its vision and support for the community goals and objectives."

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

Why is Planning and this Update Important to La Porte?

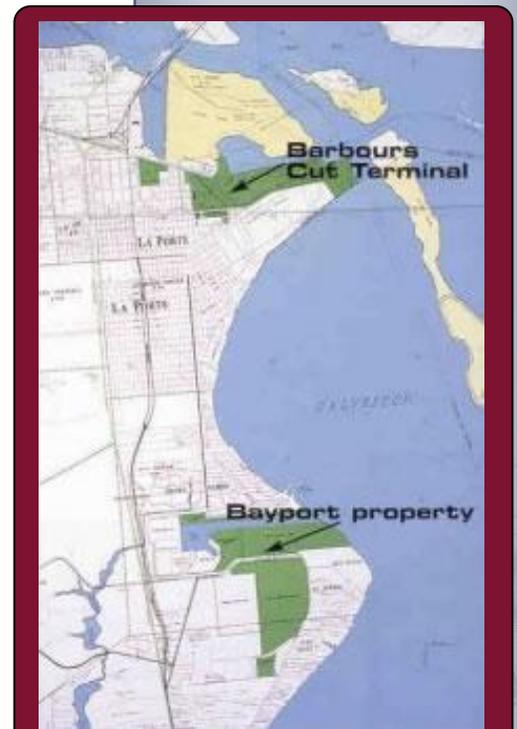
Planning is the process of establishing goals and objectives, and determining the means by which these ends may be achieved. It enables the City to manage future growth and development actively as opposed to reacting to (re)development or infrastructure improvement proposals on a case-by-case basis without adequate and necessary consideration of community-wide issues. The comprehensive plan is a form of "local" planning, and it provides an opportunity for the City's elected and appointed officials to step back from pressing, day-to-day issues and clarify their ideas as to the kind of community they are trying to create and maintain. Through the plan development process, they can look broadly at programs for neighborhoods, housing, economic development, and provision of public infrastructure and facilities and how these efforts may relate to one another. The La Porte 2030 Comprehensive Plan represents a "big picture" of the City, one that can be related to the trends and interests of the broader metropolitan region, as well as the State of Texas.

Planning is often the most direct and efficient way to involve members of the public in determining the future of their community. The process of plan preparation provides an opportunity for two-way communication between citizens and local government officials as to their vision of the community and the details of how that vision is to be achieved. The plan results in a series of goals and policies that, ideally, will assist the City in administering development regulations; determining the location, sequencing, and financing of public improvements; and, in guiding reinvestment and

redevelopment efforts. The plan also provides a means of coordinating the actions of many different departments and divisions within municipal government.

Finally, planning is a dynamic process that must be continuously monitored and renewed as changes occur. The City's comprehensive plan must be flexible in responding to changing conditions and needs, yet steadfast in its vision and support for the community goals and objectives. It is precisely for this reason, that this update is important. Since the original plan adoption in 2001, La Porte has been and will continue to be affected and shaped by some fairly significant internal and external influences, changing conditions, and changing priorities, including, but not limited to:

- Panama Canal Expansion Impacts.** In 2007, the Panama Canal Authority started on an ambitious project to double the capacity of the Panama Canal by 2014 by allowing more and larger ships to transit from the Atlantic to the Pacific and vice versa. Although 1,700 miles and over two years away, this project is already having significant influences on the City of La Porte. With the Port of Houston's Barbour's Cut and Bayport container terminals to the north and south of the City¹, much is being done by the public sector to maximize the future economic benefits stemming from the canal expansion, including widening and deepening the Houston Ship Channel² and the possibility of adding more rail lines.³ On the private side, it has been said that a significant number of new hotels have been constructed in La Porte over the past few years in order to accommodate increased numbers of shipman and other employees as the port traffic increases. There has also been an increase in warehouse and distribution center development and inquiries for other prospective port supporting businesses. Outside of land use issues (i.e., where will these be facilities placed?), there will also be an increase in heavy truck traffic that will have a direct effect on the community and its major arteries (including State Highways 146 and 225, Fairmont Parkway, among others).



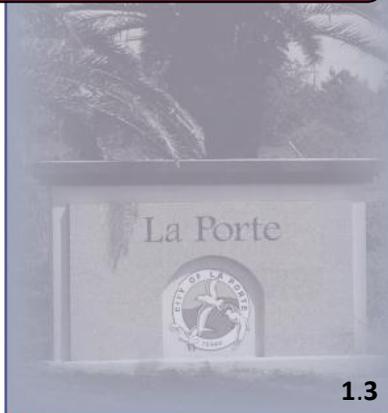
La Porte is bookended by some of the busiest container terminals in the country.

Source: Port of Houston website.

¹ Port of Houston Website. <http://www.portofhouston.com/geninfo/facilities.html>. Retrieved 29 June 2011.

² Ibid. <http://www.portofhouston.com/geninfo/overview2.html#channel>. Retrieved 29 June 2011.

³ ABC News/KTRK-TV Website. <http://abclocal.go.com/ktrk/story?section=news/local&id=8210166>. Retrieved 29 June 2011.



The Bayfront – An Asset and a Liability

As discussed throughout the public participation process, the Bayfront is both an asset (for residents and tourists), but also a liability (for retail development). This is due to the fact that larger national chain and “big box” stores rely on established “trade area thresholds” which are identified in their retail market analyses. The “thresholds” oftentimes view bayfront areas as effectively halving the potential trade area (market loss) needed to development and sustain a retail establishment.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

- **Economic Sustainability.** Economic sustainability was one of the topics that repeatedly surfaced during the Small Group Interviews. Many times it was framed in the terms of a lack of availability and diversity of commercial retail, restaurants, and other non-industry business opportunities within City limits. Concerns were expressed over the lack of retail shopping opportunities, the amount of tax money being generated just outside of City limits (and conversely, not being generated to support the City of La Porte’s tax base), and the apparent disinvestment of certain types of businesses (e.g., the recent closings of the automobile dealerships, among others). Finally, there was a general concern that there was not much that could be done to resolve these problems (see inset); that it was an unsolvable dilemma that has been and will continue to plague the community due to being land-locked, not enough rooftops to generate commercial investment, and too much industry was deterring other forms of land use investment. The other part of economic sustainability is being able to accommodate the normal, but major shifts in local business and regional and global trends (e.g., a dwindling feedstock). For a geographic area that is so closely tied to the industry, this requires a dual approach that both promotes the expansion of existing industry (e.g., the petrochemical industry), but also plans for further economic diversification.

- **Need for a New Collective Vision.** When the original comprehensive plan was adopted in 2001, there was a defined consensus about what La Porte should be in the future. The vision (see inset) talked about La Porte becoming a “first-class community” by focusing on family and youth, committing to sustainability, celebrating its history, balancing land uses, among other things. In the past 10 years, there are many positive examples around the City where the vision has been implemented, such as the recent upgrades to the City’s cultural and recreational resources. However, during the public participation efforts of this update process, the members of the community made it abundantly clear that there is a need to once again seek unity as to their vision for the future of La Porte. Presently, there are diverging opinions on several fronts. By way of a few examples, many expressed great need for increased access and availability to commercial retail and other businesses within City limits, others felt those needs were sufficiently provided just outside City limits. Many expressed approval of the City’s recent investment in the Main Street, while others felt that the City was not doing enough to bring back Main Street. The value and purpose of this plan is to reengage the



citizenry and then reframe a vision that will guide La Porte’s future directions.

- **Need for More Resiliency Planning.** In 2008, the Texas Gulf Coast was struck by Hurricanes Gustav, Dolly, and Ike, as well as Tropical Storm Eduardo, all of which occurred in a span of less than 60 days. Just three years prior, the Texas Gulf Coast was also struck by Hurricane Rita. Each of those hurricanes caused damage to homes, personal property, businesses, and the environment (see inset). Out of those hurricanes, Ike caused the greatest impacts to La Porte, and in many ways the City has yet to fully recover.⁴ While history shows that the upper Texas Gulf Coast will always live with a constant threat of these natural disasters, research shows that there are ways for cities to reduce or even avoid many of the impacts of these storms. First by examining the effects and greatest areas of vulnerability; followed by the incorporation of long-term mitigation strategies and implementation tools into the comprehensive plan (and other master plans, e.g., master drainage plan) policies and its implementing regulations. The evidence shows that such things as modern building and floodplain codes work when adopted and enforced.⁵ While the City has already been proactive in many areas, a comprehensive and coordinated approach to resiliency planning is addressed by this plan to ensure that such items as land use (e.g., protection of natural resource areas for surface water retention or transfer) and the built environment (e.g., requiring underground utilities) are working in tangent with the City’s own capital projects.
- **Landlocked; Focus on Infill and Quality.** As part of the public participation process and interviews with City staff, it was indicated that La Porte’s City limits are going to stay the same during the 20-year planning horizon. Much of the City is already bounded by other municipalities, i.e., Deer Park, Pasadena, Morgan’s Point, and Shoreacres. In addition, the City has interlocal agreements with the Battleground, Bayport, and South La Porte Industrial Districts. (See **Map 1.1, Study Area**) As such, the City’s focus must be to provide the appropriate infrastructure and services necessary for developing the remaining areas and redeveloping underutilized areas. Hence, the City can prioritize its funds to increase the quality and reliability of services, as well as focusing on other important quality of life improvements.

Need for Resiliency Planning

On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike devastated the Texas Gulf Coast.

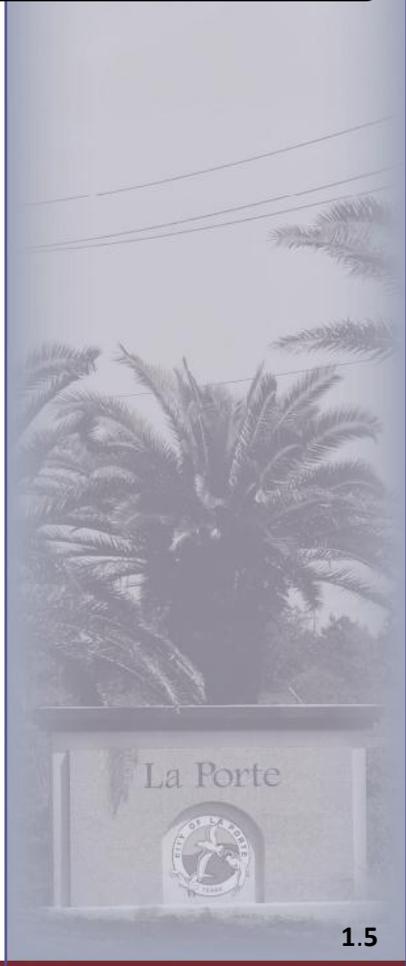
Estimated losses in La Porte:

- 3,861 residential units substantially damaged or destroyed
- \$11 million in commercial damage
- \$2.9 million in damage to infrastructure and facilities

Source: Hurricane Ike Impact Report.

⁴ Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Hurricane Ike Impact Report, December 2008. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/hazard/hurricane/2008/ike/impact_report.pdf. Retrieved 13 July 2011.

⁵ Ibid.



- **Timely Planning Opportunity.** The original 2001 Comprehensive Plan was drafted with a 20-year planning horizon. To ensure that the plan remained a valid representation of the community’s vision, it included recommendations to undergo updates at five year intervals. Now, just over halfway through the 20-year planning horizon, it is both practical and timely to take a more in-depth look at the planning recommendations, the progress to-date, and to reassess the vision to see whether or not the community’s vision and aspirations for the future have changed in the past decade.

All combined, these influences and more, have the ability to change the character and feel of La Porte. So why is this update important? This mid-plan, comprehensive update, allows the City to celebrate its accomplishments over the past 10 years, determine major and minor course corrections, and to proactively respond to (i.e., embrace and accommodate; or mitigate) changing influences, conditions, and priorities; all to ensure that the quality of life continues to improve and sustain the citizens of La Porte.

The process required to create this comprehensive plan and its updates may prove more valuable than the plan itself since the documents are just snapshots in time. The planning process involves major community decisions about how much and where development and redevelopment will occur, the pattern and character of that future development, and the community’s capability to provide and maintain the necessary public services. This leads to the pivotal discussions about what is “best” for the City and how everything from taxes to “quality of life” will be affected.

1.2 Demographic, Historical, and Economic Snapshots

See *Demographic Snapshot* and *Historical and Economic Snapshot* for a demographic, historical, and economic snapshot of the City of La Porte.

1.3 Envisioning the Future

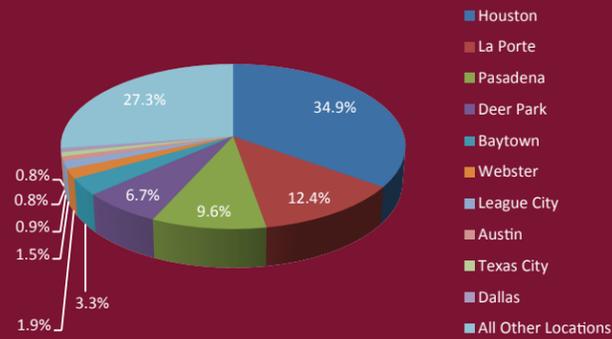
A vision is the first step toward understanding the past, recognizing existing circumstances, collectively deciding on a preferred scenario, and setting a course of action for realizing what is envisioned in the future. This community vision documents citizens’ expectations for “tomorrow” and

⁶ Michael Chandler is a planning consultant based in Richmond, Virginia. He is a former Professor and Community Planning Extension Specialist at Virginia Tech and co-founder of the Virginia Institute for Planning Commissioners.

Job Locations

Of the almost 17,500 jobs held by the residents of La Porte, only 12.4 percent of those jobs are actually in the City of La Porte. Over a third of residents commute to Houston and another 20.4 percent commute to nearby places such as Pasadena, Deer Park, Baytown, and Texas City, with the remainder (32.3 percent) traveling to other locations, some as far as Austin and Dallas.

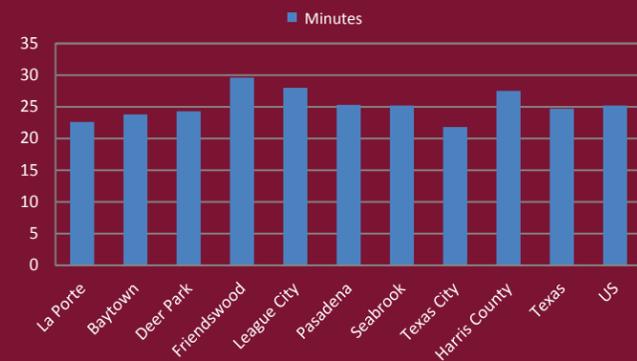
Source: US Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2009)



Commute Time

The average commute time in La Porte is on the low end of commute times for the region at 22.6 minutes; almost five minutes less than the average for Harris County and over two and half minutes less than the average for the State of Texas.

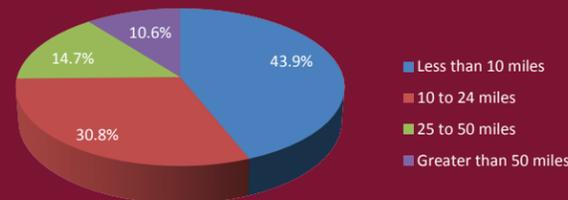
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Distance from Home to Work

A considerable percentage, 43.9 percent, of La Porte workers work less than 10 miles from where they live. Approximately a third of the employed labor force travel between 10 and 24 miles to work, with the remaining 25.3 percent of workers traveling more than 25 miles to work.

Source: US Census Bureau OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2009)



Historical and Economic Snapshot



City of La Porte Historical Timeline

- 1891: Development of a new town at Five Points began by a group of investors from Ohio and a developer from Colorado. The new town was named La Porte, which means "the door" in French.
- 1892: The City was incorporated.
- 1900: La Porte's population reaches 537.
- 1915: La Porte suffers from two major disasters: a fire that destroys the downtown business district and a tremendous hurricane.
- 1916: The Goose Creek oil boom starts to increase the City's population.
- 1920s-1930s: The City gains national attention because of prominent events held at the Sylvan Beach Amusement Park.
- 1950: La Porte's population reaches 4,429.
- 1954: The La Porte-Baytown Tunnel and NASA opens facilitating a slow transition into a bedroom community for local industry.
- 1961: Hurricane Carla hits the Texas coast.
- 1980: The Town of Lomax consolidates with La Porte.
- 1984: The first comprehensive plan is adopted.
- 1987: The Bayshore Municipal Utility District was annexed.
- 2000: La Porte's population reaches 31,800.
- 2001: Comprehensive plan is revised.
- 2010: La Porte's population reaches 33,800.

Source: Timeline courtesy of City of La Porte website and Texas State Historical Commission. Photo courtesy of City of La Porte website.

Labor Force

% Total in Labor Force

La Porte has the fourth highest percentage (70.5 percent) of employees in the labor force of the comparison cities; and approximately the same as percentage as the county (69.2 percent) and slightly higher than the state (65.7 percent). With 66.5 percent of the 70.5 percent employed, La Porte also has a relatively low unemployment rate.

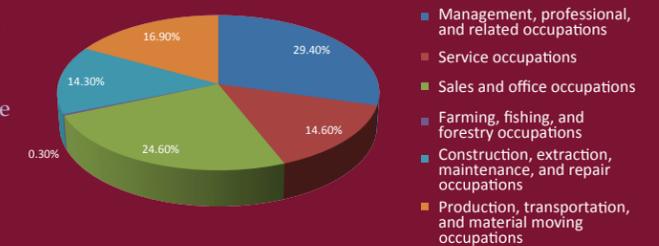
Source: US Census 2005-2009 ACS



Occupations

A relatively high percentage, about 39.2 percent, of La Porte residents work in service or sales and office occupations. Approximately one third (29.4 percent) of the City's working age population are in management, professional, and related fields, which contributes to the City's relatively high family income.

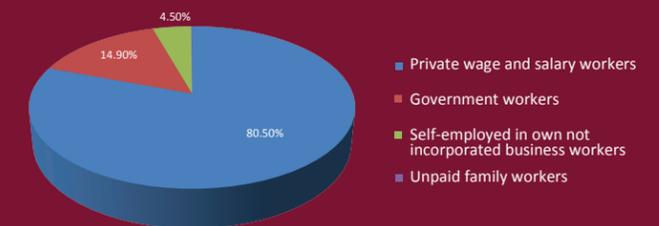
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Class of Worker

At 80.5 percent, the majority of workers in La Porte are salaried or private wage earners. Government workers make up most of the remaining income earners (14.9 percent), along with approximately five percent of self-employed workers.

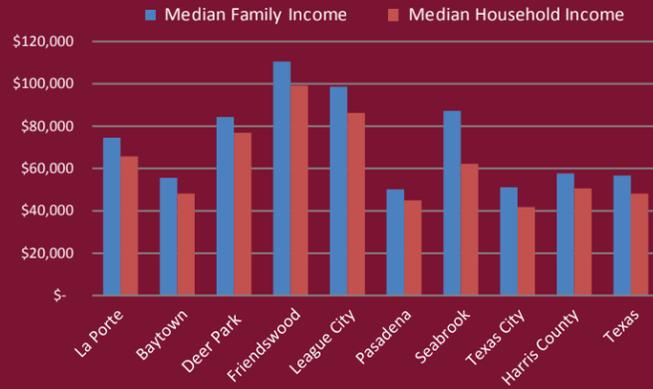
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



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Household and Family Income

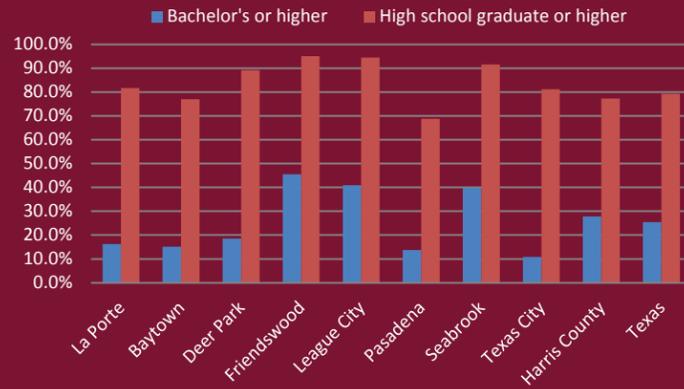
When compared with select similar communities, La Porte has the fifth highest median family income. When compared with Harris County and the State of Texas, La Porte families earn considerably more than the average county and Texas family.
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Educational Attainment

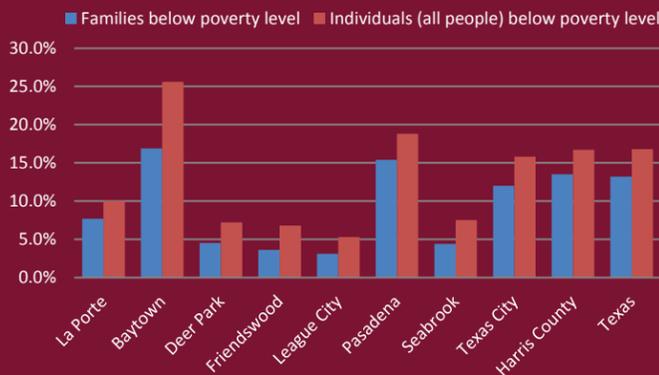
% With High School and Advanced Degrees

La Porte has the fifth highest percentage of high school graduates when compared to the other cities, county, and state. It also has the fifth highest percentage of bachelor's degrees or higher compared to the comparison cities, but is considerably lower than both the county and the state.
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Poverty Level

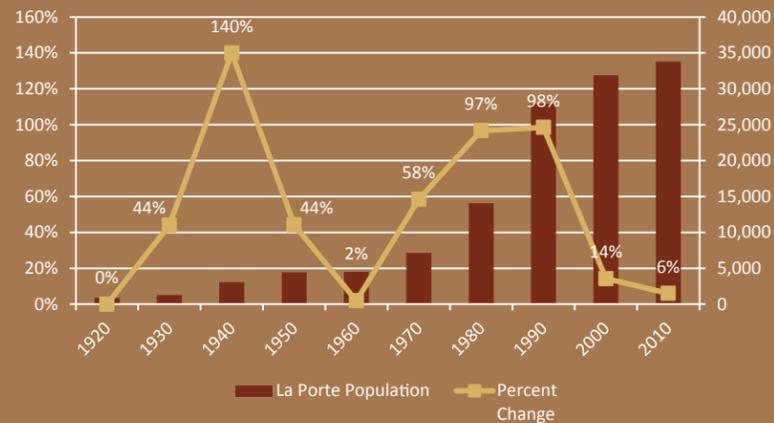
Correlated with the income levels, La Porte has a considerably lower percentage of families below the poverty level than three of the seven comparison cities. The poverty level for individuals and families is also lower than the county and the state percentages.
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Demographic Snapshot

Comparison of Communities in Texas

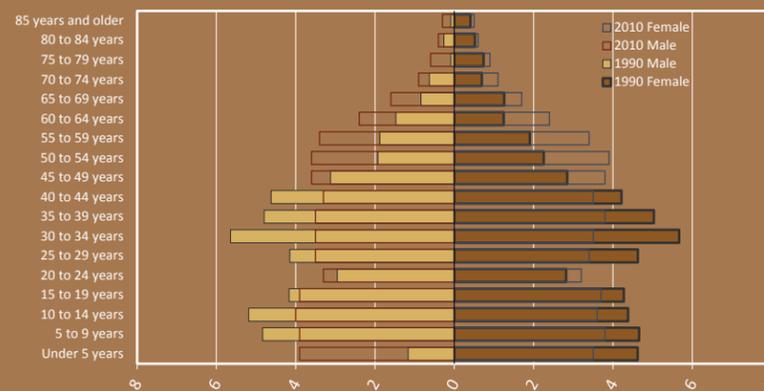
Historic Population of La Porte



Between 1920 and 2010, the population of La Porte increased from 889 to 33,800, and the population increased rapidly between 1930 and 1950 and 1970 and 1990. However by 2000, the population growth rate had slowed and the population percent change dropped to 14 percent from 1990 to 2000 and 6 percent between 2000 and 2010.

Source: US Census Bureau (Population and Percent Change)

Age by Gender Distribution of La Porte



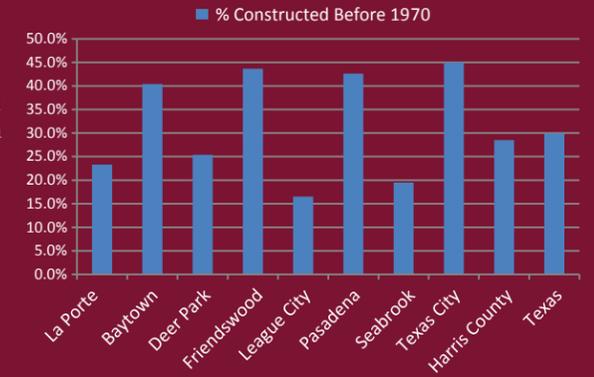
Following similar national trends, the population of LaPorte is aging. For example, between 1990 and 2010, the proportion of people ages 5 through 44 decreased in La Porte while the proportion of people ages 45 and older increased.

Source: US Census Bureau

Age of Housing Stock

Percent Constructed Before 1970

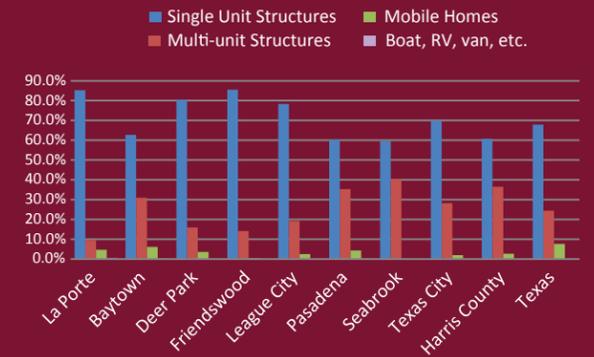
At approximately 23 percent, La Porte has the third lowest percentage of homes constructed before 1970 of all the comparison cities, and also the county and state. A healthy housing market over the past four decades has increased its newer housing stock, and corresponds to the fact that not many areas are in need of redevelopment.
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Housing Type

Single-family, Multi-family, Mobile Home and Other

La Porte has the second highest percentage of one-unit structures and the second lowest percentage of multi-family housing.
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Owner-Occupied Housing

Owner occupied housing is the fourth highest in La Porte. This corresponds to the high percentage of single-family homes and high median income.
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



Housing Values

The high percentage of owner occupied homes and high median family income likely contributes to the fact that La Porte has the fourth highest home owner median value of the comparison cities, although this is significantly lower than the three highest cities.
Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS



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forms a framework by which each individual element of this plan follows. It is long-range and intentionally idealistic as a means to stretch the imagination of what is possible. Casting a vision allows the community to come together to decide what it will be like in 20 years and to put a plan in motion to achieve it.

As part of the “visioning” process that occurred during the development of the original Comprehensive Plan, a consensus “vision” was developed and subsequently guided Council and staff policy and decision-making for the past 10 years (see inset). Evident today, however, is that the community is no longer in agreement as to the future directions. As such, a “visioning” process was conducted during this update resulting in a new consensus vision; one that will continue to be refined through the course of the planning process.

The first step in the visioning process is to assess where the community had been in the past. This effort involved a review of the existing comprehensive planning and other demographic and socio-economic information (refer to the Demographic, Historical, and Economic Snapshots). The profile offers a glimpse of where La Porte has been in the past and where it is today. This analysis set the tone for community discussions and the overall visioning effort.

Stakeholder Interviews. The vision development process consisted of several opportunities designed to generate conversation among citizens regarding their current perceptions, but, more importantly, their expectations for the future. The first opportunity was a series of interviews with community stakeholders, which occurred over the course of two days. In all, over 60 citizens participated in this process, including a session specifically designed to engage the community’s youth. The purpose of these small group interviews was to solicit the input of residents concerning common perceptions, issues, problems, opportunities, constraints, assets, and challenges of the City. This input was invaluable in understanding the underlying issues and needs of the community and, specifically, the values and priorities of those who know best – citizens, Council/Planning and Zoning Commissioners, neighborhood and civic organizations, community service organizations, business and industry leaders, major landowners and developers, and other community leaders.

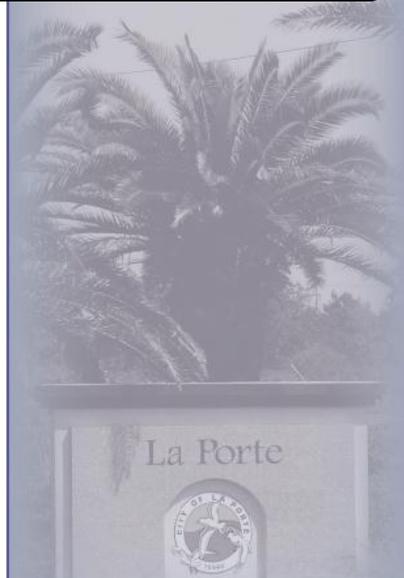
The input received through the interview process was used to formulate the Vision Statement outlined in this chapter. In addition, all of the subsequent

What is a Vision?

To have a vision means to look ahead: to imagine or dream the future – to create in our minds something beyond our present reality – is a distinctly human skill. History has shown that seeing something in the mind’s eye is often the first step to actually achieving it.

As used in planning visioning, visioning is a process by which a community envisions its preferred future. It chronicles the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of a community and helps citizens to agree on what they want their community to become.

Source: Michael Chandler⁶



plan elements are specifically crafted to address the issues, problems, and improvement needs that were identified through the interviews.

During the course of each stakeholder interview, discussion was facilitated in order to encourage and allow participants to speak candidly. In some groups, discussions developed and took on a life of its own through the participants' own initiation; in other cases, a series of open-ended questions were asked to prompt participants to express both their concerns, as well as their vision for a positive future. Open-ended questions were posed to capture the answers to some of the following questions:

- What do you consider to be the greatest assets of living and working in La Porte?
- What are the downsides, if any, to living and working in La Porte?
- What are the most important issues facing La Porte today, as well as what may the community confront in the future?
- What do you envision La Porte being and looking like in 20 years? What is your vision?
- What are the "barriers" or obstacles to progress for the City?
- What do you consider to be the highest priority improvement needs and/or projects over the next 10 years and then longer term?
- How might the City develop in a better and more fiscally responsible manner in the future?
- In what ways could the City be more supportive of business growth and retention?
- Where do you see the greatest potential for improving the appearance and image of the community? Where are good and not-so-good examples of quality development?

As part of the visioning process, the La Porte Planning and Zoning Commission was also asked to provide their input on La Porte's future; first, by using a single word to describe their vision of La Porte in the future, and second, by going through a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis. Their input is displayed in **Figure 1.1, Planning and Zoning Commission Vision Participation.**



Figure 1.1, Planning and Zoning Commission Vision Participation

ONE WORD FUTURE

- Unity
- Vibrant
- Dynamic
- Family
- Joy
- Blossoming
- People
- Opportunity

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

- Diversity
- Small town character
- Open access
- Dept. Heads/Bus. Owners live in area
- Diversity of housing
- Running, walking, and bicycling opportunities
- Strategic location for ports (centrally located)
- Families
- Employment opportunities to ensure kids have future employment opportunities
- Other employment opportunities
- Welcoming
- People helping people
- Coastal; by the bay
- Waterfront access
- Schools
- No brain drain
- Access to colleges & other higher education institutions
- Dual enrollment with high school and San Jacinto College
- Lomax Park Arena
- Sylvan Park and the beach
- Festivals
- Growing Main Street
- Five Points Town Plaza

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of diversity of restaurants
- Families relocating out-of-City
- Low self esteem
- Lack of self-promotion to own City residents
- Loss of community newspaper
- Resistant to change
- Truck traffic
- Lack of retail opportunities
- Lack of rooftops
- Not proactive in attracting new residential
- Disincentives to redevelop
- Negative perception

OPPORTUNITIES

- Sylvan Beach area redevelopment; possibility adding restaurants and other commercial
- Canal expansion will bring new business and expand choice
- More rail opportunities
- Resiliency planning

THREATS

- Truck drive-through area
- Short-term profits vs. long-term economic sustainability
- Port Encroachment
- Adjacent political decisions
- Air quality
- Hurricanes

Source: La Porte Planning and Zoning Commission.

Our Vision

After assembling the ideas and aspirations heard during the public meetings, a new vision emerged to guide La Porte's future (see inset). This vision incorporates the shared understanding of the nature and purpose of the community and uses it to guide City leaders and staff in their decision-making, and to galvanize the citizens so that everyone is moving towards the same greater purpose – which is achievement of the community's preferred future.

Vision

By the year 2030, La Porte envisions itself as a dynamic, vibrant, business-, tourism-, and family-friendly community that has recaptured its historical roots of being "by the bay."

We're La Porte. We're By the Bay. It's Who We Are.

La Porte envisions achieving this by leveraging both its greatest strengths and uniqueness – its strong business base, its proximity to the greater Houston metropolitan area and access to the bay, and most importantly, its people; all to create a highly livable, quality, and sustainable community where people have the opportunity to find joy in all aspects of their lives – living, working, and playing – right outside their front door.

Source: Visioning Process

Glimpse of Our Future

Based upon our core aspirations and our vision, a snapshot of our future would look like this:

Our economy is economically diverse and stable. We have facilitated new residential in-fill development that broadened our diversity of housing, brought in the needed "rooftops;" yet required them to be designed in a way that maintained our sense of small town character. This was the first step in enabling us to grow our commercial retail and business opportunities, which enlarged our regional presence and captured a more significant share of spending by residents, workers, and tourists. Our workforce is well-educated and highly trained, made possible by continued strategic partnerships between La Porte and Clear Creek ISDs and San Jacinto College, and easy access to other colleges and higher education institutions. There are better employment opportunities for our youth and for all residents as they mature in their careers. We have coordinated with our industry (e.g., Battleground, Bayport, and South La Porte Industrial Districts) and intergovernmental partners (e.g., Port of Houston Authority, La Porte and Clear Creek ISDs, San

1.10

Jacinto College, Harris County, among others) to sustain and grow our economy by improving the movement of goods and people in ways that embrace our community character and respect the value and enjoyment of living and working in La Porte; while at the same time, improving the appearance of our corridors. A refocus on our historical roots increased tourism to the area which spurred a coordinated reinvestment in our Main Street and Sylvan Beach areas through better connections, redevelopment, and marketing. All of which further broadened our tax base.

Our government has become a top notch municipal corporation, known for finding the right balance between progressiveness and innovation in achieving our vision of a highly livable, quality, and sustainable community, while remaining diligent with our tax dollars and strategic about our expenditures. We continued our investment in those areas that improved our quality of life. We completed our redevelopment of all parks and recreation areas across the City, and we invested in new parks (e.g., a recreational fitness center on the west side of town). We continued our investment in the trail system by completing the remaining six miles of the 20 mile system. Now we have a fully interconnected system of sidewalks and community trails, which provides City-wide and region-wide access to parks, places of work, and other community gathering areas. Our government has continued to sponsor City-wide cultural events that have helped to develop a unified sense of community for all of La Porte. Our existing infrastructure has been maintained and well-planned so that we continue to have adequate facilities and services. The transportation system has improved local and regional mobility, not only on our roadways, but on our rail network, trail system, bus routes, and airport. We have continuously improved the water, wastewater, and drainage systems to meet guidelines and to provide the necessary operating capacities to serve expanded and new industries, which have continued to give us a competitive advantage over less prepared communities. Our excellent public safety services have continued to make us feel safe. Finally, an overall, unyielding commitment to excellence has permeated through all levels of staff, which has resulted in greater responsiveness to our needs and for those who visit or do business within City limits.

Our character and appearance has continued to improve over the past 10 years through aggressive implementation of our vision. First and foremost, a continued emphasis on the appearance of our gateways and corridors has had a dramatic effect on the image of the community. Our recent gateway improvements, denoted by significant entry features, have



been expanded outward through enhanced roadway beautification efforts, better litter control, and improved buffering and design controls of the abutting land uses. We have successfully coordinated the efforts of the public and private sectors to finish the infrastructure improvements to Main Street, finished development of the Town Plaza at Five Points, and fully implemented the improvements to S. Broadway Avenue and Texas Avenue, as planned for in the La Porte Beautification Master Plan. The resulting reinvestment demonstrated to the private sector the community's resolve to achieve a highly livable, quality, and sustainable community, and resulted in increased private sector investment through such projects as the Gateway Project to La Porte (Fairmont Parkway and Canada Road), and throughout the entire City. Consequently, our overall community now exhibits a character that better reflects our expectations, improved our collective self-esteem, and enhanced our external image.

1.4 Contextual Framework

What is the Purpose of this Comprehensive Plan Update?

This master plan is an important policy document because it is:

- **Visionary.** It lays out a broad, long-term vision with associated goals and recommendations regarding future investment, resiliency, and enhancement of the community;
- **Comprehensive.** It considers the entire geographic area of La Porte, including how the City ties into the surrounding areas, e.g., neighboring municipalities, industrial districts, and port terminals; and
- **Short- and Long-term.** It assesses near- and long-term needs and desires across a variety of inter-related topics that represent the key building blocks of La Porte (e.g.; land use, growth management, mobility, housing and neighborhoods, economic development, parks and recreation, utility infrastructure, and public facilities and services).

Where does the Authority Come From?

Unlike some other states, municipalities in Texas are not mandated by state government to prepare and maintain local comprehensive plans. However, Section 213 of the Texas Local Government Code provides that, "The governing body of a municipality may adopt a comprehensive plan for the long-range development of the municipality." The Code also cites the basic reasons for long-range, comprehensive community planning by stating that, "The powers granted under this chapter are for the purposes of promoting sound development of municipalities and promoting public health, safety and welfare." The Code also gives Texas municipalities the freedom to

“define the content and design” of their plans, although Section 213 suggests that a comprehensive plan may:

- include but is not limited to provisions on land use, transportation, and public facilities;
- consist of a single plan or a coordinated set of plans organized by subject and geographic area; and
- be used to coordinate and guide the establishment of development regulations.

Chapter 211 of the Local Government Code authorizes municipalities in Texas to adopt zoning regulations in accordance with a comprehensive plan. In this way, zoned cities like La Porte are called to have a comprehensive plan. According to the state statues, the zoning regulations must be designed to:

- lessen congestion in the streets;
- secure safety from fire, panic and other dangers;
- promote health and the general welfare;
- provide adequate light and air;
- prevent the overcrowding of land;
- avoid undue concentration of population; or
- facilitate the adequate provision of transportation, water sewers, schools, parks and other public requirements.

As seen in the inset, the City has codified the relationship between the guiding principles of the comprehensive plan and the implementing regulations.

How to Use this Plan

This master plan, as embraced by both the community and its leadership, is envisioned to take the City to a new level in terms of its preparedness, livability, and the achievement of prioritized outcomes. However, it is important to understand that this master plan in and of itself is incapable of accomplishing the vision, strategies, and objectives articulated within. Rather, the plan is merely a guidance document for City officials and staff who must make decisions on a daily basis that will determine the future direction, financial health, resiliency, and ultimately, the look and feel of the community.

These decisions are carried out through:

- targeted programs and expenditures prioritized through the City’s annual budget process, including routine, but essential, functions such as utility maintenance (including staffing to administer and manage those functions);

Planning Charge

Section 106-3 of the La Porte Code of Ordinances references the City’s Comprehensive Plan and its use by City government.”It is the policy of the city that the enforcement, amendment, and administration of this chapter be accomplished with due consideration of the recommendations contained in the comprehensive plan as developed and amended from time to time by the planning and zoning commission and the city council of the city. The commission recognizes the comprehensive plan as the policy established by the city planning and zoning commission and the city council, respectively, to regulate land use and developments in accordance with the policies and purposes herein set forth.”

Source: La Porte Code of Ordinances.

Getting to Action

This master plan must go beyond general and lofty goals. While everyone may agree, progress will only occur if the plan establishes a policy framework and provides guidance as to the implementation steps necessary to achieve success.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

- major public improvements and land acquisitions funded as capital outlays in the City's annual budget;
- new and amended City ordinances and regulations closely linked to the master plan objectives (and associated review and approval procedures in the case of subdivisions and zoning matters);
- departmental work plans and staffing in key areas;
- the pursuit of external funding to supplement local budgets and/or expedite certain projects; and
- initiatives pursued in conjunction with other public and private partners to leverage resources and achieve successes neither may accomplish alone.

Despite these avenues for action, this master plan should not be considered a "cure all" for every problem. On one hand, this master plan primarily focuses on the responsibilities of the City in the physical planning arena, where it may have a more direct and extensive role than in areas such as education, social services, and arts and culture. As a necessity, this master plan remains relatively general in terms of its vision and policy statements; and while it may not touch on every individual challenge before the City, it is meant to motivate concerted efforts to move the community toward action and achievement of its stated goals and vision. It must also be pointed out that the full realization of the vision cannot be achieved by City officials and staff alone; rather, it will take an equal amount of initiation, motivation, and support from the residents who also believe in what the planned future will bring.

It is also important to distinguish between the function of the master plan relative to the City's development regulations. The master plan recommends overall policy for future land use, community character, roads and utilities, parks and open space, and other aspects of community growth and development. The City's zoning and development regulations establish standards in conformance with the master plan for the physical subdivision of land, the layout of new street and building sites, and the design and construction of roads, water and sewer lines, storm drainage, and other infrastructure. In other words, the master plan sets the direction, and the zoning and development regulations are a large part of how it is implemented.

Citizen Involvement – Early and Often

To facilitate the process of creating this master plan update, the City engaged Kendig Keast Collaborative, urban planning consultants, and appointed the Planning and Zoning Commission as an advisory committee, to work with City officials, staff, residents, and the consultants. The Planning and Zoning Commission was specifically chosen as the advisory body because Section 213.003 of the Texas Local Government Code explicitly indicates that adoption or amendment of a comprehensive plan can only occur after review by the City’s Planning and Zoning Commission. In addition, the appointed board already has a role in the zoning and land development.

The ability to implement the master plan is directly correlated to the sense of ownership derived from the process. The master plan contains many components and serves numerous functions, such as providing information, identifying existing conditions and characteristics, and establishing policies and strategies.

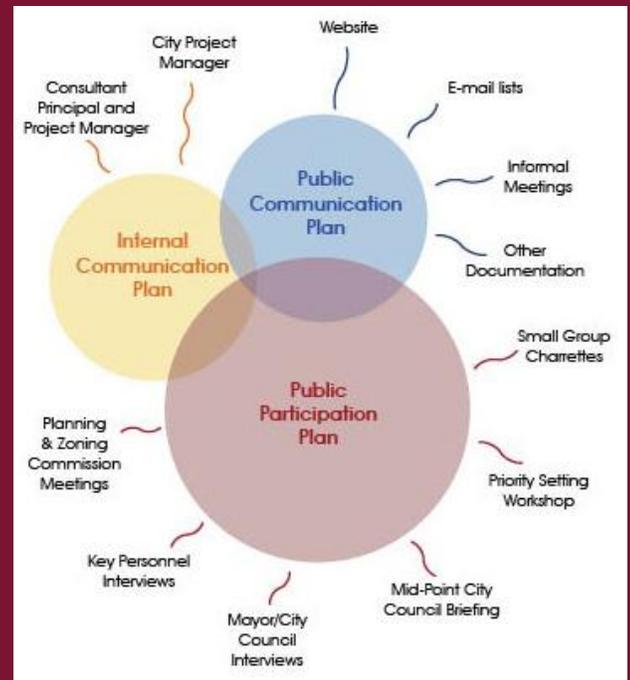
As graphically illustrated in **Figure 1.2, Public Involvement in the Planning Process**, the public involvement strategies included:

Planning and Zoning Commission Meetings. The Planning and Zoning Commission was chosen to provide strategic direction for the project. Their meetings were open to the public and posted on the City’s website; project materials under consideration were made available to the general public pre- and post-meetings.

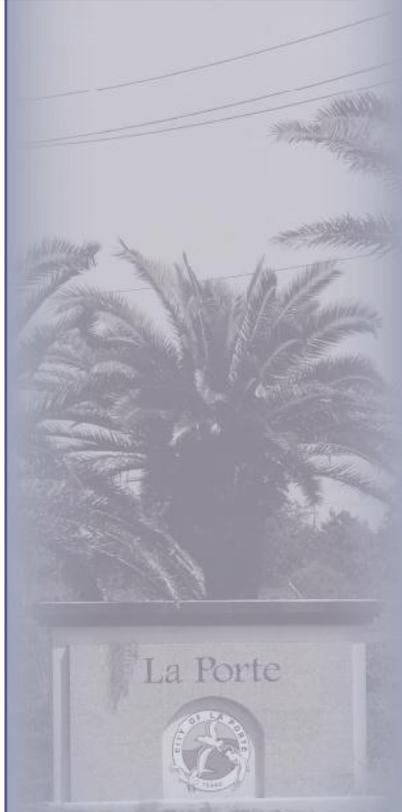
Mayor/Council Interviews. Input from the City’s elected leadership was solicited to ensure the plan incorporates their values and directions for the future; as the community has already placed their trust in their guidance and decision-making abilities. Further, the City’s elected leadership is a barometer of the area they represent.

Key Personnel Interviews. Many interviews were conducted with department heads and other staff from key departments who have a role in implementing many of the components of the master plan.

Figure 1.2 – Public Involvement in the Planning Process



Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative



Youth Engagement

One of the small group charrettes that was held was focused on receiving input directly from La Porte's future – its youth. Their understanding of the community was tremendous and their feedback was pertinent to both understanding and solving the City's greatest issues. In general, they were proud of City's recent quality of life improvements, their schools, and their community.

Conversely, there was concern about the City's abandoned buildings, the increased truck traffic, and the prevalence of litter. In addition, many of them expressed that there was a lack of summer jobs and places for teenagers to socialize together within City limits. There was also concern about the separation between East and West La Porte, but offered solutions on how to achieve better unification.

They felt that despite the recent improvements, there was still a lot of work to do. Yet, the community was headed in the right direction.

Source: Youth Engagement Small Group Charrette.

Small Group Charrettes. Input from residents, land and business owners, and City officials occurred through small group charrettes that were held over the course of two days. These hour-long charrettes pushed attendees to think about the issues and future they envisioned, and the information obtained was used throughout the planning process.

City Council Involvement. City Council briefings were held in October 2011 and February 2012 to update them on the activities to date. As not only the approval body, but also the chief implementing agent, the City Council was involved throughout the process.

A priority-setting workshop with members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council was held in February 2012 to engage in a discussion about the on-going process and to gather feedback. Analysis of the draft document allowed for establishing near- and long-term priorities for plan implementation. The results of this workshop are incorporated into **Chapter 6, Implementation**.

Over a period of 10 months, a variety of public outreach and involvement activities were completed, and individual elements of the master plan were drafted, reviewed, and refined to produce a document for public and official consideration. Throughout the process, citizens were able to review the latest updates on the City's website and provide feedback to City staff. Residents were also able to voice support or opposition at the public hearing.

1.5 Plan Priorities

One of the most important tasks in developing a plan is to determine the key issues that the community needs to address. The reconnaissance efforts early in the process, combined with staff and citizen input resulted in a formulation of a list of priorities in which the remaining chapters of this plan address. These include:

- **Development of a Consensus Vision and Direction.** As mentioned in the Vision section of this chapter, the citizens and City officials once again needed to determine their preferred future. As such, a new "visioning" process was conducted during this update which resulted in a new consensus vision.
- **Determining Strategies to Achieve the Vision.** Once the consensus vision was determined, the focus of the planning efforts turned toward

determining the appropriate strategies to achieve the new vision. The strategies are detailed in the remaining chapters of this plan: Land Use and Character, Infrastructure and Growth Capacity, Community Mobility, and Economic Development. Finally, the strategies are prioritized for near- and long-term action in the Implementation Chapter.

- Community Character and Image.** The general public and City officials are cognizant of the need to enhance the image of the City. Residents voiced a myriad of concerns about La Porte’s character and appearance, especially citing the desire to beautify the corridors. La Porte’s zoning, land use regulations, and other development ordinances, also warrant updating to achieve the community character or aesthetic quality desired by residents. The City has recently undertaken some self-initiated enhancement and beautification programs along its mains corridors; however, to sustain a quality, attractive environment will require improved (yet reasonable) development standards (see inset).
- Quality of Life Improvements.** During the public participation efforts, discussion routinely turned to the recent quality of life improvements, e.g., expansion of the trail system, the new spray-ground-playground at Brookglen Park, improvements to the three civic and recreation centers, the opening of Pecan Park, completion of the Gateway Project, and reinvestment in the Main Street area, to name a few. It was clear that these quality of life improvements had positively excited all facets of La Porte; with residents and business owners being equally enthusiastic. This plan will address what quality of life improvements are needed and where and how they fit into the overall prioritization list for implementation (see inset).
- Addressing Mobility Issues.** There are numerous challenges that La Porte must face regarding its mobility system. The most significant is how to accommodate increased truck traffic stemming from the expansion of the Panama Canal, while being responsive to residents’ quality of life concerns regarding the same. Equally as significant, will be the transition of State Highway (S.H.) 146 into a six-lane, limited access segment of the Grand Parkway (although not an officially designated part of the project); a 170 mile third loop around the Houston metropolitan region. On a smaller scale, this plan will address such issues as signal timing, an increased demand for more walkable streets (via sidewalks and the City-wide trail system), and how the regional circulator system fits into the overall mobility system for La Porte.



Many residents supported the City in being proactive in using necessary controls to prompt property owners to rehabilitate abandoned buildings located within the City.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.



Excitement for the recent quality of life improvements, like this new trail segment, permeated throughout the public participation process.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.





Through a well-planned and coordinated effort, Main Street will help to recapture the City's place as a top tourism destination.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

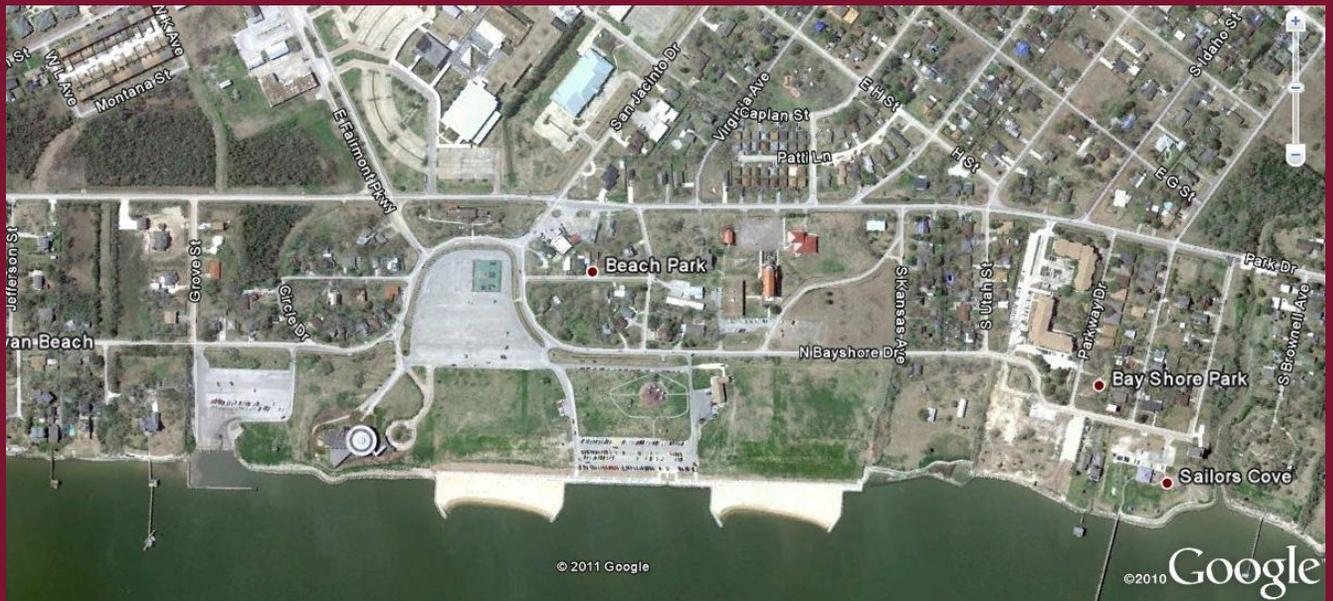
- **Future Direction – Main Street.** Like the Sylvan Beach area, Main Street and the downtown area, have a great ability to change the fabric of the community and are an important part of the City's economic development efforts. As part of the City's investment, they worked in partnership with the La Porte Economic Development Corporation and recently completed the Gateway Project, the Five Points Town Plaza, and other infrastructure improvements. As a result of this investment, Main Street is on the cusp of attracting new businesses. To stitch these improvements together in a well-coordinated manner and to compliment them with an overall economic and redevelopment strategy; a downtown master plan is warranted. This plan would expand upon the general guidance of this plan to spell out the specific improvements, funding needs and sources, and organization to accomplish its own vision (see inset).

- **Future Direction – Sylvan Beach/Bayfront Areas.** The 2001 Comprehensive Plan referred to the bayfront area as the City's "forgotten area." Recently, the City partnered with Harris County, the Texas General Land Office, and the Army Corps of Engineers to renourish and expand Sylvan Beach Park. The citizens loved the reinvestment and the youth indicated that it was one of top places they could hang out in within the City. However, it was clearly articulated during the public participation efforts, that the community feels that the Sylvan

Beach area has yet to reach its potential as a top regional tourism destination. A limitation often cited was a lack of "other" things to do near Sylvan Beach; no places to eat or shop. Further, both physical and cultural connections to the greater community could be made. Some view these factors as limiting La Porte from recapturing that "city by the sea" image. As part of this planning effort, important decisions must be made as to the future of this area, e.g., coordinating with the county to determine future of the Sylvan Beach Pavilion damaged by Hurricane Ike, and determining if and when the City is ready to commit to its principal attraction. As seen in the inset, these are not new issues – they just need to be further addressed in this plan (see inset next page).



Future Direction of the Bay Front



“The bay front at La Porte is underdeveloped. This is due to the fact that the bay front is fragmented by many small lots with individual owners. Most of the existing structures along the bay are older and many are in disrepair. Old piers and pilings litter the coastal waters. There is virtually no commercial or retail activity along the bay front so that when people come to La Porte, they are not even aware of the bay since La Porte lacks a “city by the sea” feeling and atmosphere.”

Source: 1984 Report to City Council from the Community Facilities Committee (5-Year Community Facilities Plan).

- Meeting Future Housing Needs / Aging Populations.** La Porte’s population, like the greater population in general, is growing older. As such, there will be an increased demand for adequate services and resources for “aging in place.” Problems in housing will become increasingly evident now that the first wave of baby-boomers is entering retirement; this is because Post-World War II suburban housing was primarily designed for young working families, not an older population. While the current housing stock in La Porte does not meet the needs of an aging population looking to “age in place,” there is an opportunity to facilitate new development (e.g., a New Urbanism development could be one appropriate example as it promotes diverse, compact, mixed-use communities where residential housing areas would have universal design accommodations, low maintenance responsibilities, and walkable connections to La Porte’s main commercial areas) that may be better suited to accommodate this demographic shift (see inset).
- Unifying the Two La Porte’s.** During the public participation efforts, repeated conversations turned to the fact that there exists a separation of east and west La Porte. Often it was expressed in simple statements



An aging population, like these La Porte residents at the Senior Center, may require adaptations to the City’s zoning and development regulations.

Source: City of La Porte website.

such as “the 30,000 residents on the west side of La Porte, do not even know La Porte exists.” This was not a criticism of the people; rather, it is a broader indication that there is a lack of connectedness between the newer neighborhoods in the west, and older well-established neighborhoods in the east that surround historic downtown and the bayfront areas. This has been further exacerbated by the loss of the local newspaper. This plan addresses strategies to achieve greater unification between the east and west, so that all residents in La Porte understand and feel what it means to be “by the bay.”

- **Continued Commitment to Long-Range Planning.** The La Porte 2030 Comprehensive Plan (and the 2005 and 2010 updates) is a principal part of the City’s overall planning process, which involves all facets of the community. This plan represents an important step toward achieving the vision and desired goals of the community. The plan is not a static document, but rather must be a continuous process to gather, evaluate and make informed decisions based upon constantly changing conditions. As such, the plan is intended to be reviewed annually, and updated at frequent intervals to maintain its accuracy and applicability to current conditions and characteristics of the community. At a minimum, the plan should continue to be updated every five years to ensure that it still reflects the true vision and direction of the community.



LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 2

As expressed in Chapter 1, Plan Context, La Porte will continue to be affected and shaped by significant internal and external influences, changing conditions, and changing priorities. This chapter and subsequent chapters are intended to emphasize how the City can proactively respond to the influences and conditions through policy and recommended programs, ordinances, and investment to ensure the community in 20 years embodies the future the citizens envision – a quality, sustainable, and highly livable community. This chapter also introduces the concept of “community character,” which considers more than the use of land, including the elements of site and building design, the influence of adjacent sites, and use and integration of open space, and the impacts and relationships between sites and the built and natural environments. It emphasizes that the City could consider the transition of community character at some appropriate time in the future.

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the necessary policy guidance to enable the City to plan effectively for its future infill development, redevelopment and revitalization, and character enhancement while respecting the existing land use pattern. Sound planning is essential to ensure the community is prepared for anticipated (and needed) infill development, can serve it adequately with public services, and can manage its impacts to maintain compatibility of land uses and preserve and enhance community character. Along with the background, goals, and strategies in this chapter, the Future Land Use Plan visually depicts the City’s policies, particularly its priorities for

2001 vs. 2012 Plan Comparison

2001	2012 Update
Ch. 4, Land Use	Ch. 2, Land Use and Development
Ch. 7, Parks and Recreation	
Ch. 9, Residential Development	
Ch. 10, Beautification	
Ch. 12, Redevelopment	

well-planned infill development, protection of neighborhood integrity, and enhancement of La Porte's appearance. To ensure the outcomes expressed by this plan, it is important to follow the guiding principles, visions, policies, and action recommendations set forth; all of which will aid the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council in their decision-making.

2.2 Focus Areas, Goals, Actions & Initiatives

Throughout the planning process, a number of issues and concerns were expressed relating to land use compatibility, infill on the few remaining developable tracts, redevelopment of vacant buildings or underutilized properties, Sylvan Beach and waterfront, neighborhood protection and revitalization, and corridor design and appearance. These discussions formed the basis of the following focus areas, along with an analysis of existing conditions and review of current programs, plans, and ordinances. Each focus area contains contextual information, key planning considerations, goals, (and their rationales), and advisable implementation actions and initiatives. The areas of focus are as follows:

- **Focus Area 1** – Transitioning to a Built-Out Community;
- **Focus Area 2** – Quality Neighborhoods and Housing;
- **Focus Area 3** – Enhanced Community Character; and
- **Focus Area 4** – Adequate Parks, Recreation, and Open Space.

Focus Area 1 – Transitioning to a Built-Out Community

Over the 20-year planning horizon of this plan, much of the remaining developable land in La Porte will be built out. As this occurs, the City's focus will shift from new development on the City's western periphery to smaller-scale infill development, as well as redevelopment and revitalization of the City's existing older sites and structures. As identified during the public participation process (including feedback from the City Council and Planning and Zoning Commission), there are already areas that are in need of revitalization. These areas are displayed in the **Map 2.1, Revitalization Areas**, and include such areas as the vacant car dealerships along State Highway 146 South Frontage Road and certain residential areas like those located in the area around Downtown and the Spenwick Subdivision, among others. To reverse the disinvestment in these areas, it will require the City to establish and administer a pro-active and ongoing program for revitalization.

Generally, revitalization programs can comprise "one or more public actions that are undertaken to stimulate activity when the private market is not providing sufficient capital and economic activity to achieve the desired level of improvement. This public action usually involves one or more measures such as direct public investment, capital improvements, enhanced public

services, technical assistance, promotion, tax benefits, and other stimuli including planning initiatives.”¹

So, what is the difference between redevelopment and revitalization? Typically, redevelopment is transformative in nature and may be undertaken by the private sector without any active public involvement beyond the government’s traditional regulatory role. For example, a developer could make application to demolish and redevelop the vacant car dealership properties along State Highway 146 South Frontage Road to develop a mixed-use development or business park. In certain instances however, public sector incentives, (e.g., decreased regulatory barriers, streamlined permitting, reduced fees, etc.), may also be warranted to facilitate the likelihood of private sector reinvestment.

Revitalization, in contrast, is more related to an infusion of public funds intended to facilitate the return of a building and/or property to a useful state by repair, alteration, and modification with the purpose of preventing further blight from occurring. Generally, it can be acquired through private sector; demolition; or removal of certain buildings and improvements; installation, construction, or reconstruction of streets, utilities, and other public improvements; and rehabilitation of certain suitably located but structurally substandard buildings. On the commercial side, it may include establishing programs to rehabilitate aging and underutilized retail facilities by providing financial incentives to existing retail shopping centers for enhancements. The program could be retention-focused with a primary goal of rehabilitating retail facilities, i.e., improving their aesthetic, architectural, and functional appeal. The intent of this type of program is to attract new retail business that would generate additional sales tax revenue and enhance the vitality of the area. On the residential side, a revitalization program could include providing grants and/or low-interest, deferred, and/or forgivable loans for building code violations, health and safety issues, essential repairs and upgrades of major component systems (e.g., electrical, plumbing, roofing, heating), and other general improvements (e.g., exterior finishes). It could also include public investment in an overall neighborhood by improving streets, sidewalks and crosswalks, pedestrian lighting, parks, drainage, etc. The intent of this type of program is to ensure residents are living in decent, safe and sanitary homes; and that both individual homes and the neighborhood, collectively, are able to maintain or increase the area’s property values.

¹ American Planning Association (APA) Policy Guide on Public Redevelopment. <http://www.planning.org/policy/guides/adopted/redevelopment.htm>. April 25, 2004.



A revitalization program could provide public investments to improve aesthetic and architectural appeal of vacant or underutilized commercial properties, e.g., this is a ‘before and after’ example of a rehabilitation project in Carrollton, Texas.

Source: Photos courtesy of the City of Carrollton website.



The photo on top depicts an example in La Porte that may warrant redevelopment, while the photo on the bottom depicts an area that may warrant revitalization.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.



Sugar Land Town Center is an example of a mixed use infill development project.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

Infill development will also play a primary role during the 20-year planning horizon since the City is bound by industrial districts and the limits of other municipalities. Therefore, new development and redevelopment will likely occur in the few remaining vacant or under-utilized parcels adjacent to or within already developed areas. While these remaining areas could be developed using the same policies and regulations that shaped the last 20 years of City growth; it is an opportune time to re-examine how the City facilitates and regulates development, particularly because of an articulated interest to increase residential rooftops and commercial retail opportunities. A successful infill development program must go beyond the piecemeal development of individual parcels; to focus on how the remaining areas may be assembled and developed into the existing community fabric, i.e., creating a healthy mix of uses (that add both vitality and convenience for residents) that are designed and built in a way to improve compatibility while offering additional choices in living and new business opportunities.

Benefits of mixed-use infill development include a more compact form of development, which is less consumptive on land and resources and offers increased convenience and mobility for those who cannot or prefer not to drive (e.g., the elderly, youth, or low income residents who lack a car). Infill development also has a positive impact on the City's budget as vacant properties are added to the tax rolls, less infrastructure is required, and existing facility operation and maintenance costs are able to be spread across more residents and commercial businesses (which is a benefit for individual taxpayers, too). In addition, as discussed later in this chapter, infill development provides the City an opportunity to increase the supply of housing types available within the City. This remaining housing supply will have to be developed in a way that

meets both the needs and purchasing power of the City’s existing and future residents.²

As discussed later in this chapter and throughout this comprehensive plan, two ways to facilitate successful infill development are to adhere to the principles of Smart Growth and to consider a character-based approach to zoning and land development.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations for transitioning to a built-out community in the coming years include:

- 1) Careful planning for the build-out of remaining developable areas following Smart Growth principles. (see inset)
- 2) Responding to the expressed desires for ‘centers’ and focal points, whether in the form of Main Street improvements or through development of mixed-use nodes and neighborhood centers.
- 3) Taking steps to make redevelopment/revitalization efforts attractive in older areas of the community, including incentives and potential relief from regulatory provisions geared toward new development.
- 4) Emphasizing neighborhood integrity and protection as both residential structures and streets and other local infrastructure continue to age.
- 5) Stepping up efforts to revive and/or promote re-use of vacant and obsolete retail properties.
- 6) Ensuring adequate standards and oversight of infill development on scattered parcels.
- 7) Building upon strategic public investments, such as the recent development of Five Points Town Plaza, revitalization of the Sylvan Beach and waterfront, and the community-wide hike and bike trail system.
- 8) Working to reduce the leakage of retail spending just outside the community by encouraging and providing incentives for more sit-down restaurants and other retail-oriented opportunities that residents wish to patronize locally.

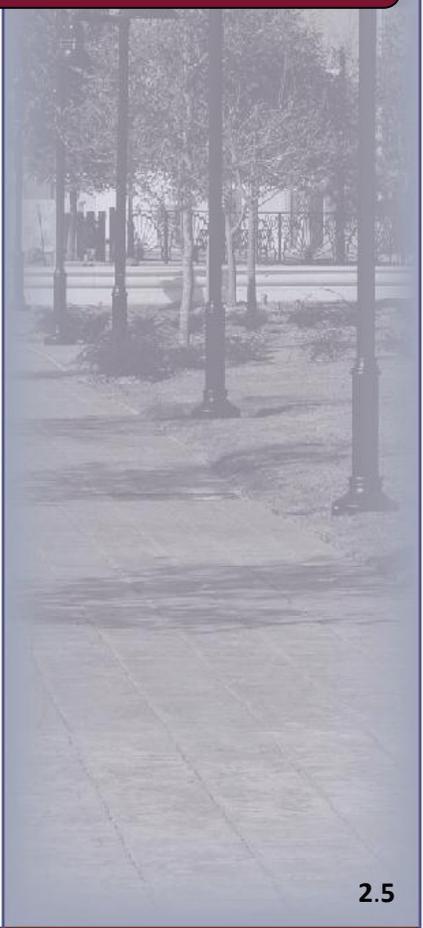
Based on these planning considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives are intended to address the specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process (and outlined in **Chapter 1, Plan Context**).

² Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington. Report No. 38 – Infill Development Strategies for Shaping Livable Neighborhoods. June 1997. <http://www.mrsc.org/Publications/textfill.aspx>. Retrieved on August 31, 2011.

Principles of Smart Growth

- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
- Mix land uses
- Preserve open space, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Take advantage of compact building design

Source: Smart Growth Online.



GOAL 2.1: Provide additional attention and resources to promote new infill development and redevelopment/revitalization of established areas.

Redevelopment/revitalization efforts require cooperative action to encourage new and sustained private investment and to provide supporting rehabilitation of public infrastructure. A key part of the process is determining the strategic actions and initiatives the community should take to achieve its redevelopment goals and objectives. Successful redevelopment will often require cooperation and coordination between agencies at different levels of government, as well as non-profit community organizations. This should include coordination of physical improvements with social service programs that aim to enhance the health and economic capacity of residents in targeted neighborhoods. There are several sizeable undeveloped and underdeveloped parcels within the City that provide opportunities for infill development where streets and utilities already exist or may be readily extended. There are also many individual lots that may be developed. In addition, there are several areas that warrant consideration of redevelopment or revitalization during the 20-year horizon of this plan.

Action and Initiatives

- 1) Conduct individual redevelopment or revitalization plans for those areas identified on *Map 2.1, Revitalization Areas*. These plans should be created in partnership with the City, land and business owners, adjacent property owners, and other stakeholders to determine the most appropriate courses of action to improve these areas.
- 2) Determine the appropriate zoning of infill development tracts and initiate rezoning as appropriate. Zoning actions should be in accordance with the *Future Land Use Plan*, and care must be taken to ensure that the neighborhood character is preserved and compatibility with existing uses is observed.
- 3) Review and amend the City's development ordinances to identify and resolve regulatory impediments to infill development, redevelopment, and revitalization. Incorporate standards that are unique and applicable to these sites.

GOAL 2.2: Continue investment in the Main Street, Sylvan Beach, and the original town area around Downtown.

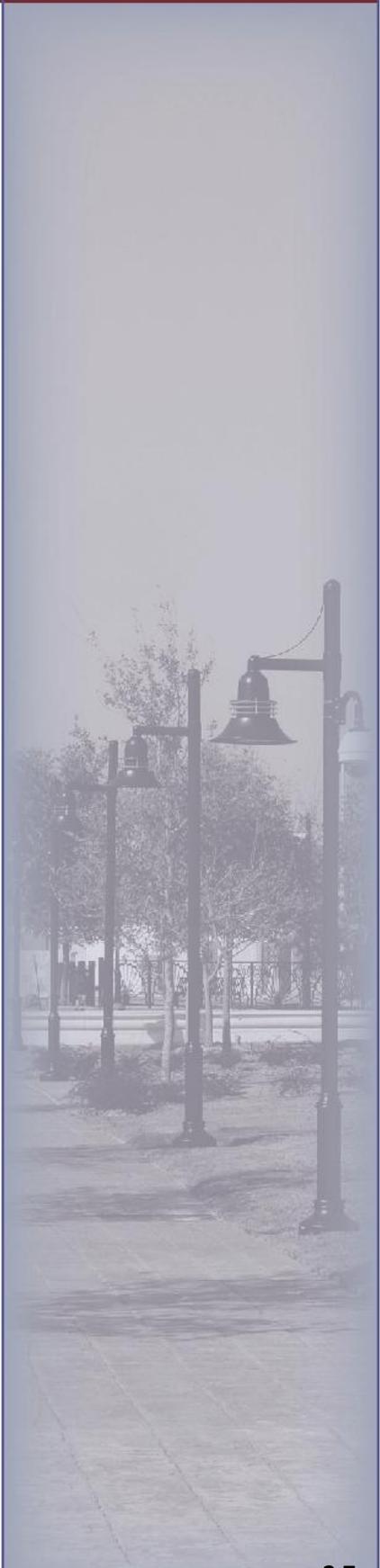
As identified throughout the public process, through previous planning efforts, e.g., the City of La Porte's Economic Development Strategic Plan, and as expressed by the City's Main Street Program, the Greater Downtown, Sylvan Beach and waterfront of La Porte has and will continue to play a significant role in the City's long-term future. Enhancing this and the surrounding areas will encourage economic growth and improve the quality of life for City residents.

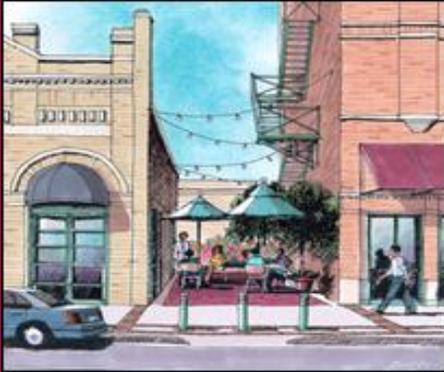
"The Greater Downtown of La Porte offers a unique opportunity to link multiple destinations that serve a broad market. The prospects to grow synergistically two different kinds of retail markets (destination and local service), a tourism base, and downtown living, can establish La Porte as one of the best place in Houston Region to live and visit.

Source: City of La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan. Chapter 3. May 2009.

Action and Initiatives

- 1) Prepare a master plan for the Greater Downtown area. The purpose of the plan is to establish a clear and collectively supported vision and then an implementation framework to guide reinvestment and new investment in the Greater Downtown area of La Porte, including the areas of Main Street, Sylvan Beach and waterfront. This plan should build off the City's revitalization initiatives in Downtown (e.g., Five Points Town Plaza, the San Jacinto off-street trail/sidewalk, and the City/County improvements at Sylvan Beach and waterfront), identifying opportunities to bolster Downtown as an attractive and lightly functional center of activity based on its unique assets. The plan should identify the appropriate land uses and the arrangement and form of development/redevelopment, along with well-planned and designed improvements to streets and parking areas, vehicular and pedestrian access and circulation, streetscape the amenities, signage, lighting, and infrastructure upgrades. In addition, this master plan should:
 - a. Assess the constraints to redevelopment and the effective use of Downtown properties and buildings. Such factors as land and buildings ownership, traffic and pedestrian circulation, parking, building sizes, building code issues (such as ADA accessibility), lease rates, and other contributing factors should be addressed in the plan.
 - b. Address the fringe and/or transitional areas immediately adjacent to identify measures to secure their integrity.
 - c. Include details on the use of design elements and unifying treatments (could include wayfinding signage), in addition to the gateway monuments, to demarcate the boundaries of this area so that it is distinguished from other areas of the community.
- 2) Consider revising regulatory provisions in the Main Street District to ensure new development creates an urban form. This could include:
 - a. Modifying the Main Street purpose statement to include intent of creating a human-scaled urban form comprised of mixed uses.
 - b. Specifying front yard setback provisions as build-to lines, rather than an "average of the existing structures on that side of the street on the same side of the street or the setback of the closest structure on an adjacent lot." The existing provisions will not ensure an urban form over the long-term.





Expressed through the sentiments of many who participated in the public participation process, there is a strong desire for the future of Main Street to become a community attraction. The above illustrations depict a pedestrian-friendly streetscape environment as examples of the types of improvements that could happen in Downtown La Porte.

Source: Chapter 10 of the 2001 La Porte Comprehensive Plan.

c. Specifying minimum and maximum height requirements as an urban form requires a visual sense of enclosure. The current provisions only specify that a maximum height is to be determined.

d. Adding some level of building standards relating to scale and massing, materials, exterior treatments, site lighting, and signs and awnings.

3) Continue to monitor investor interest in Downtown residential projects, including attached single-family, multi-family, and residential-over-retail opportunities. Work with private interests to pinpoint and remove or reduce barriers to new development and redevelopment in and around Downtown. Additional ownership housing options are needed, but such housing alternatives need to be planned and permitted by-right.

4) Continue to work with the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) to offer Main Street Enhancement Grants to provide matching funds to enhance existing buildings in the Main Street District, including façade rehabilitation or enhancement; new awnings, canopies, porches, and signage; and other beautification projects.

5) Continue partnering with the county and other stakeholders in the redevelopment of the Sylvan Beach area (e.g., the rehabilitation of the Sylvan Beach Pavilion and other such improvements) so that the park grows as a local attraction (and local amenity) similar in quality to the one envisioned in the 2004 Sylvan Beach Park Master Plan.

6) Continue to pursue an array of waterfront public/private development projects (e.g., restaurants and other retail opportunities, conference facilities, among others) to compliment the beach park and fishing activities and to generate additional revenues.

Focus Area 2 – Quality Neighborhoods and Housing

La Porte’s long-term future is inextricably tied to its housing availability and conditions. Housing is central to almost any discussion about City affairs, no matter whether the discussion is on economic development, desire for additional local commercial retail opportunities, or the ability to walk from one neighborhood to another. While one challenge is to sustain the integrity of existing housing, another is to address future housing needs. 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 stature. Besides

price and location, another consideration is the design of neighborhoods. The areas that were developed in the late 1960s (with the Spenwick Subdivision) departed from the established town settlement patterns near the core of the City. New housing development and redevelopment needs to reflect a growing demand for neighborhood-style patterns that are once again, integrated into the existing fabric of the community.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations for ensuring quality neighborhoods and housing include:

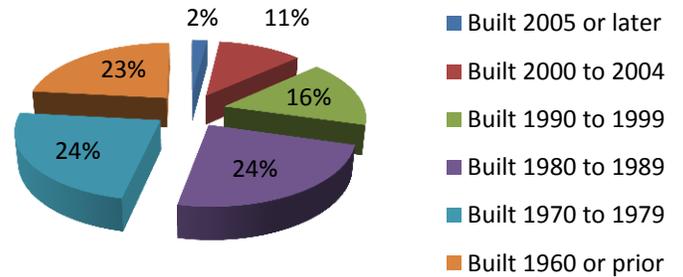
- 1) Addressing “life cycle” housing needs by offering a wider range of housing types and price ranges so that residents can make lifestyle transitions as they age (e.g., from “starter” housing into a larger dwelling to accommodate a family, then into an “empty nester” situation, and finally into a down-sized space and/or “assisted living” or full-time care facility as health conditions dictate.
- 2) Encouraging mixed-use, compact, and pedestrian-oriented developments that can serve the “node” function desired by residents and include types of amenities currently absent in La Porte (e.g., walkable residential/commercial mixed use areas).
- 3) Emphasizing neighborhood integrity and protection as both housing structures and streets and other local infrastructure continue to age.

Based on these planning considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives address the specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process (and outlined in *Chapter 1, Plan Context*).

GOAL 2.3: Protect the integrity of existing neighborhoods.

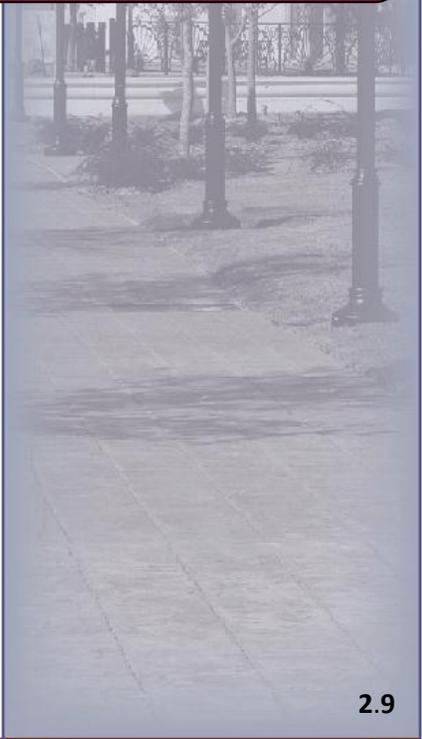
Neighborhoods are one of La Porte’s greatest assets as they form a foundation for a sound quality of life. Strengthening neighborhoods through organization, communication, coordination, and education is a key for maintaining and improving livable neighborhood environments. Established, stable neighborhoods must be preserved and protected from encroaching incompatible development while new neighborhoods should be developed in accordance with Smart Growth. In essence, neighborhoods that are safe, well-maintained, and are of a quality, enduring character, will maintain property values and thus, a sound neighborhood environment and stable residential tax base.

Percentage of Housing Constructed by Year



Although La Porte had the lowest percentage of housing stock constructed before the 1970s for all the comparison cities, the county, and the state (see the Demographic Snapshot located in Chapter 1), this chart illustrates that at least 50 percent of the City’s housing stock is 30 years or older, which corresponds to the time period when housing starts to show signs of blight and could benefit from increased maintenance or rehabilitation.

Source: US Census Bureau 2005-2009 ACS.



The City can greatly enhance the quality of life for its citizens by enacting ordinances and incentives to protect and enhance the integrity of its neighborhoods. Mechanisms to improve the quality of neighborhoods may include ordinances focused on neighborhood conservation; provision of improved or updated public facilities and services such as streets, sidewalks, trails, neighborhood parks, street lighting, drainage systems, pedestrian amenities, traffic control, neighborhood policing and fire protection; enforcement of codes and ordinances; providing support for the creation or the organization of qualified neighborhood organizations by providing technical assistance with private restrictions and/or conducting special neighborhood studies (including redevelopment and/or revitalization plans); providing funds for neighborhood improvements, and, generally investing or reinvesting in the community's neighborhoods.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Consider an annual registration of neighborhood, home-owner, and tenant associations so that updated contact information can be maintained and used to disseminate important community-wide information (including such things as nearby development applications or rezonings, capital improvement projects, and applicable ordinance changes).
- 2) Consider formalizing a neighborhood-oriented planning program to:
 - a. Assist developers in their preparation of covenants and restrictions for new development.
 - b. Ensure private common areas and amenities are adequately maintained in perpetuity.
 - c. Implement neighborhood watch programs; this may be done in coordination with the La Porte Police Department's Police Area Representative (PAR) program.
 - d. Help older communities develop neighborhood plans, which may include elements that would normally be required for a housing grant submittal and could, thus, be very effective as a grant administration tool. Such a plan would highlight potential development/redevelopment sites, infrastructure improvements, increased buffering (to mitigate such things as noise from increased truck traffic), links to important off-site amenities, etc.
 - e. Establish and facilitate an annual city-wide neighborhood, home-owner, and tenant association meeting to gather input on how to better coordinate efforts and develop partnerships while seeking mutual benefit.
- 3) Expand and promote increased awareness of the City's program on traffic calming. This could include



An example of an existing street calming project in La Porte.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

notifying the neighborhood, homeowner, and tenant associations about the program, increasing available funding, and expanding the types of calming measures available, e.g., speed humps, bulb-outs, raised crosswalks, chicanes, etc.

- 4) Provide technical planning support for established neighborhoods. Such support could address issues related to open space preservation, street and sidewalk improvements, traffic control, crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED), code enforcement or navigating the available housing programs.
- 5) Consider modifying existing codes to improve compatibility between commercial areas and abutting residential properties. This could include adding bulk and scale limitations (e.g., residential in scale); better design sign, and lighting controls; improved buffering, among others.

GOAL 2.4: Promote opportunities for neighborhood improvement and housing stock rehabilitation of the housing stock.

The community must remain cognizant of its older housing stock as rehabilitation and reinvestment will become increasingly important to the integrity and vitality of neighborhoods, particularly in the older areas around Downtown, as well as in some areas throughout the community. Comments by residents during public participation indicated concerns about some of these areas being “not well kept.”

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Encourage redevelopment in target areas through programs that target lots that are abandoned or have recently demolished structures so that those lots are put back onto the market and tax rolls.
- 2) Consider forming a target-area community investment program focused on all infrastructure improvements (e.g., sidewalk installation in addition to repair, driveway culvert cleaning and replacement, alley improvements, tree trimming, parking restrictions, shielded street lighting or other improved pedestrian lighting, added greenspace, improved public streetscape/ landscape areas, new signage, etc.) within at-risk neighborhoods. This would be an expansion of the current program that provides dedicated funding for sidewalk repair and maintenance. The purpose of this program is to provide a dedicated source of annual funding for use in making infrastructure improvements and leveraging private reinvestment through rehabilitation, building additions, and/or infill development.
- 3) Consider the use of tax abatement, reduced building permit or utility tap fees, and other financial programs or incentives to elicit private sector reinvestment.
- 4) Consider the use of an advocacy program to aid in code compliance (e.g., violations such as weeds, debris, and junk vehicles) rather



Pursue both code enforcement compliance through citations and advocacy programs to reduce negative signs of blight, e.g., trash, junk vehicles, etc.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

- than citing noncompliant property owners. A key element may be the cross-training of enforcement advocacy officers in conflict management/resolution or the creation of useful information packets listing sources of help for homeowners who are in violation of City codes.
- 5) Promote neighborhood pride by stimulating resident involvement in improvement activities, including:
 - a. Seasonal “clean up, fix up” events;
 - b. “Neighborhood Pride” days focusing on beautification; and
 - c. Annual “amnesty pickup” days of large refuse items with the assistance of City crews and volunteers.
 - 6) Seek the participation of churches, civic organizations, schools, and businesses in neighborhood improvement and revitalization efforts.
 - 7) Continue the program of identifying and demolishing substandard structures; coordinate demolition with a proactive and effective program to provide incentives for home building on empty lots. This may include marketing these properties on the City’s website, coordinate private sector to revitalize, streamlining the permit approval process, and reduced permitting fees.
 - 8) Strengthen the ability for local organizations, e.g., Sheltering Arms Senior Services, Inc., to support weatherization and energy efficiency improvements in existing neighborhoods. The Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) is sponsored by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and helps low-income persons, particularly the elderly and persons with special needs, control their home energy costs. Local organizations need additional support so that more weatherization improvement options are made available. The City may also actively support these local organizations by partnering with them on grant applications or hosting weatherization open houses or organizing energy-efficiency audits.
 - 9) Continue to apply for Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) funds, HOME Grant funds, or other grant or loan programs to create or rehabilitate affordable housing for low-income households.
 - 10) Continue to coordinate with and help to promote housing assistance programs of the Southeast Texas Housing Finance Corporation and the Harris County Community Development Agency.

GOAL 2.5: Ensure affordable and sufficient housing options in the future.

The availability and affordability of different housing options leads to a higher quality of life. In general, as more types and affordable housing options are supplied, a greater number of residents will be able to live and work in La Porte. Therefore, anticipating and meeting future housing demand is essential for the City’s economic development success, and planning will enable the community to respond effectively to the needs of a variety of market segments, from young singles and newly married couples to large families, empty nesters, seniors, and retirees looking to downsize.

The City currently has a narrow range of owner-occupied neighborhoods and housing types, with the current mix being predominantly single-family detached residential dwellings. Indeed, as displayed in the *Demographic Snapshot* in Chapter 1, La Porte has the highest percentage of one-unit structures (84 percent), which is higher than all the comparison cities, the county, and the state. This leaves little room for choice among housing types. In the future, aging residents may desire to have more housing options available, including maintenance free condominiums and additional assisted living and continuing care facilities. In addition, units marketable to households that are “downsizing” should be permitted and encouraged in appropriate locations. Examples of these varied units are depicted in the inset, which may include duplexes, patio homes, townhomes, and multiplexes. This does not mean that there is not a market for single-family homes; rather, it means that future development should incorporate more housing diversity so that existing and future residents will have sufficient options, from large lot single-family dwellings (e.g., in the Lomax area), to residential above retail lofts, live/work units, and attached living.

Lack of affordability is a concern. When there is a lack of affordable housing options available, it increases individual and/or family distress and is considered to have negative effects on a community’s overall health. The City recognizes the need to ensure that all of La Porte’s residents enjoy access to quality and affordable housing within livable and attractive environments. Maintaining livability as the City transitions to an infill and redevelopment focus will require creativity and a willingness to coordinate efforts. The qualities that make La Porte an attractive place to live are also making La Porte an expensive place to live. Increasing housing prices creates obstacles for low-income households and threatens to push residents to unsatisfactory housing options. The inability to find housing locally poses a hardship for households seeking an affordable home, as well as employers seeking employees.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Encourage life-cycle housing options in new developments that will offer alternatives to existing and future residents. New development and redevelopment should include more than one housing type, with ordinance provisions for increased open space as separation and buffering and other standards to ensure compatibility. A combination of housing options and lot sizes will result in a diversity of housing choices – choices that will be useful in attracting and keeping singles, younger families, and older residents.



Duplex



Patio Home



Townhouse



Mutlplex

Future development/redevelopment efforts should place greater focus on diversifying the housing stock within the City, by including some of the above alternate housing types.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

- 2) Consider incorporating accessory dwelling units in the zoning ordinance, along with appropriate provisions governing their use and compatibility. They are common and increasing in popularity in many communities to accommodate elderly parents or relatives (i.e., “granny flats”), young adult family members wanting to live independently but close by, or students in need of basic, low-cost housing.
- 3) Consider adopting design standards for high-density residential development, which may include provisions for building form and scale, articulated building walls, building orientation, architectural detailing, roof types and materials, façade enhancements, and acceptable building materials, as well as site design standards regarding landscape surface, parking location and arrangement, bufferyards, and site amenities.
- 4) Consider establishing an average, rather than minimum, lot size in the residential districts whereby lot sizes are required to vary in width, with a certain percentage being narrower and the remaining being wider than the average. For example, the average lot size may allow a variability of 10 percent.
- 5) In appropriate locations where increased open space is desired or needed to preserve resource features (e.g., wetlands, tree stands, drainage channels) or to protect compatibility between adjacent developments, consider allowing flexible site design and low impact development options that permit alternative treatment of utilities and infrastructure. There can be significant cost savings to development from flexible site design and cluster development techniques, which translate into reduced lot and house prices (e.g., reduced linear feet of street, pipe, sidewalk; fewer street lights, fire hydrants; reduced stormwater management needs; etc.).
- 6) Maintain a Large Lot residential district (i.e., the Lomax Area) so that those seeking larger-lot living arrangements with a more open feel be accommodated within City limits.
- 7) Considering providing a density bonus to offset smaller units or attached housing in order to avoid significantly affecting the feasibility of the residential development. Density bonuses are a type of housing production program where projects are granted additional residential density over and above the maximum limit allowed by existing zoning, with the condition that the additional housing is restricted to occupancy by a certain target group and that the units remain affordable over time.
- 8) Continue sponsoring the Bay Area Habitat for Humanity program as one method of increasing housing affordability within the City. (see inset)



Continue sponsoring Bay Area Habitat for Humanity (BAHFH) houses to ensure an adequate availability of affordable housing within the City. By 2011, BAHFH has completed 22 houses in La Porte including the one pictured above.

Photo source: Bay Area Habitat for Humanity website.

Focus Area 3 – Enhanced Community Character

The appearance of La Porte is the single most evident glimpse of its economic vitality, government proactiveness, and civic pride. The initial impression is formed by the quality of development, property upkeep, condition of public facilities, amount and quality of public spaces, and the design of roadways and other public buildings and infrastructure. Visual appeal reinforces the quality of life for those who reside in La Porte, as well as those making investment decisions.

The City has a window of opportunity to enact policies and standards that influence the quality of its natural and built environments. Without a plan and development standards to accentuate the design of corridors, districts (like Downtown), neighborhoods, and open spaces, there may be a sense of “sameness” in the community with little to distinguish it from the surrounding cities. The City’s character and appearance (i.e., the City’s image) was among the concerns expressed throughout the public process. Indeed, the character of new development and redevelopment will contribute to the community’s image and may affect the City’s ability to attract and maintain new investment.

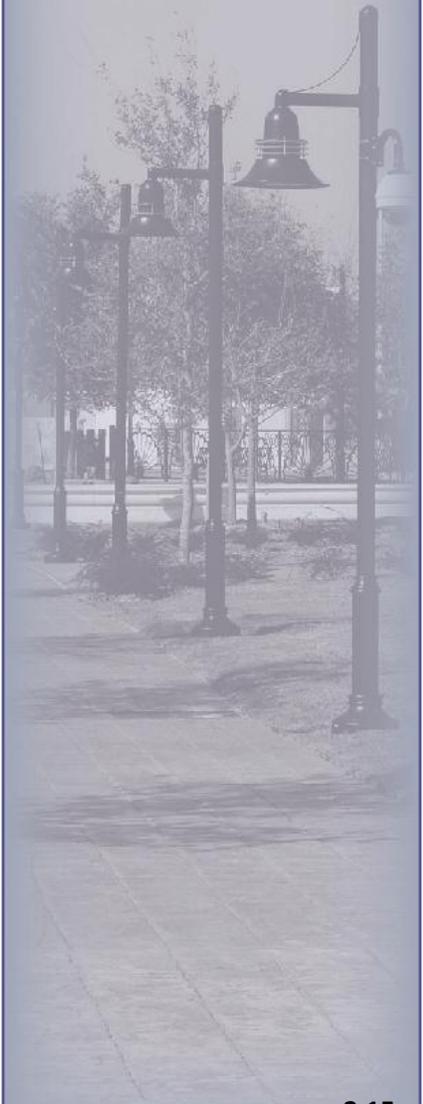
Finally, aesthetic enhancements such as the design of buildings, landscaping and screening, sign control, and site amenities also contribute to enhanced community character.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations for enhancing community character include:

- 1) Pursuing opportunities to create unique, signature areas in the community (particular destinations, corridors, public facilities, parks and open space areas).
- 2) Enhancing first impression and “front door” appearance by focusing on the aesthetic treatments at community entries.
- 3) Coordinating gateway improvements so that a consistent, high-quality appearance exists at all entry points to the City.
- 4) Enhancing wayfinding, not only to help residents and visitors navigate the community and find its key destinations, but also as a unifying design element across the City.
- 5) Improving the appearance of the City’s primary corridors so that an enhanced image of the City is created.

Based on these planning considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives address specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process (and outlined in **Chapter 1, Plan Context**).





Expand upon existing gateway improvements to create a consistent theme and ensure a high quality of appearance of the monument, lighting, and surrounding landscaping.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.



Consider code modifications and other program support to implement beautification projects in accordance with the San Jacinto Design Standards, e.g., conceptual plan to beautify the N. 9th Street / State Loop 410 intersection.

Source: Aerial Image (City of La Porte GIS); Conceptual Plan (San Jacinto Design Standards, pg. 29)

GOAL 2.6: Enhance the overall appearance of the built environment in the City.

To be fully effective in achieving the community’s vision for the future, proactive efforts should be undertaken to improve the appearance of the built environment within the City. Unfortunately, the needs often outweigh the financial or administrative resources available to achieve the desired outcomes. Therefore, it is recognized that there are areas of La Porte that are more visible and, thus, may serve as a “starting point” to initiate these enhancement efforts.

There are a large variety of components that contribute to the visual appearance and “feel” of a community. Some components are more apparent than others, although they all contribute to the overall character of the community. Since the last plan update, the City has been proactive in improving the appearance of the City, including the installation of gateway signage, and investments in public amenities such as the revitalized Five Points Town Plaza and the emerging City-wide trail system. However, according to the sentiments expressed during the public participation process, the citizens feel that continued improvement is a priority.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Expand the efforts started with Ordinance 1501-II (which was intended, partly, as a means to mitigate the visual impacts of container yards) to require existing non-conformities’ in designated enhancement corridors to be brought into compliance over a reasonable period of time. Similar provisions have been adopted elsewhere in Texas where nonconforming site conditions (e.g., parking lot landscaping and screening outdoor storage and display, fencing, buffering, signage, etc.) must be registered with the City and steadily brought into compliance over a period of years.
- 2) Outside of City limits, partner with the entities in which the City has interlocal agreements to determine strategies to increase the level of screening of container yards that exist along the City’s entry corridors and periphery.
- 3) Consider the development of corridor enhancement plans for the primary and secondary enhancement corridors depicted in **Map 2.2, Beautification Plan**. (Additional guidance can be found in **Chapter 4, Community Mobility**.)
- 4) Enhance the appearance of properties adjacent to street corridors by evaluating and improving codes and standards for better building placement (build-to, maximum vs. minimum setbacks), design (building shape, wall articulation, entry identification, transparency, 360

degree architecture), and materials; improved parking lot, streetscape and foundation landscaping; higher quality screening of outdoor storage; management of outdoor display; improved lighting and sign controls; and improved buffering of adjacent properties.

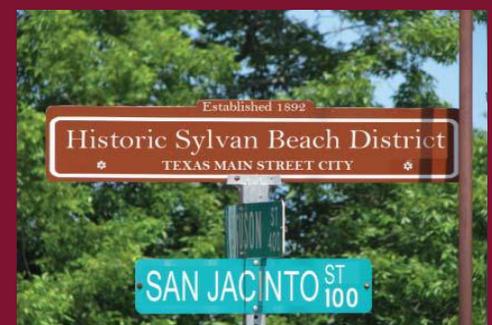
- 5) Expand on previous efforts to consider embellished gateway treatments with more significant “signature” monuments, landscaping, and lighting at the locations of greatest visibility. Ensure high quality maintenance of these areas, as depicted on *Map 2.2, Beautification Plan*.
- 6) Consider modifying existing codes to adopt appropriate design standards in conformance with the San Jacinto Corridor Design Standards.(see inset previous page)
- 7) Continue to work with the Economic Alliance Houston Port Region and consider code modifications and other program support to implement the San Jacinto Historic District design standards, including the Project Stars Initiative, which uses industrial infrastructure and landscaping to highlight and celebrate the area’s history and historical significance.³
- 8) Consider implementing a program to publicly recognize residential and business property owners for their role toward enhancing the visual appearance of the City. This could include monthly recognition on the City’s website or other public communication media.
- 9) Partner with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to enhance the visual appearance of the City’s existing and future overpasses, as depicted on *Map 2.2, Beautification Plan*. (see inset)
- 10) Continue seeking public/public and/or public/private partnerships to master plan and implement site specific enhancements throughout the City. By way of example, continue working with the La Porte Independent School District (ISD) and adjacent retail center owners to implement the enhancements depicted in the Texas Avenue Beautification Project Master Plan, among others.
- 11) Partner with TxDOT to enhance the visual appearance of the Miller Cut Off Road, Sens Road, and SR 146 interchange areas (see inset). These enhancements could be similar in type and quality to the improvements already completed at the State Highway 225/Independence Parkway interchange located just outside City limits, as depicted on *Map 2.2, Beautification Plan*.

³ Economic Alliance Houston Port Region. San Jacinto Texas, Historic District Corridor Standards at <http://www.ci.la-porte.tx.us/civica/filebank/blobdload.asp?BlobID=8725>. May 2010.



Partner with TxDOT to improve the visual appearance of the City’s overpasses. The top photo depicts an overpass in La Porte along S. 9th Street and Spencer Highway. The photo on the bottom is an enhanced bridge and landscape treatment in Sugar Land, Texas.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.



Develop a comprehensive wayfinding program for Main Street and Sylvan Beach areas.

Photo Source: City of La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan. Chapter 3. May 2009.

Table 2.1, Existing Parks

<i>Neighborhood Parks</i>	
Parks	Acres
14 th Street Park	2.40
Bay Oaks Park	1.20
Brookglen Park	2.0
Central Park	4.60
Creekmont Park	3.50
Glen Meadows	8.13
Ohio Street	0.93
Pete Gilliam	1.20
Pfeiffer	1.20
Pine Bluff	0.11
Seabreeze	3.13
Spencer Landing	3.99
Spenwick	0.50
Tom Brown	0.57
Wood Falls	8.30
E Street Linear Park	2.50
Neighborhood Park Subtotal	44.26
<i>Community Parks</i>	
Parks	Acres
Fairmont Park	17.70
Little Cedar Bayou & undeveloped	48.70
Lomax	10.00
Northside Park	4.6
Northwest & undeveloped	35.00
Pecan Park	33.6
5 Points Plaza	1.00
Community Park Subtotal	150.60
Total	194.86

11) Create a comprehensive wayfinding program to project a consistent image for the entire City and to provide directional guidance to the area’s greatest assets, i.e., Main Street and Sylvan Beach. Partner with TxDOT to develop and obtain approval for a Wayfinding Sign Guide System Plan. (see inset previous page)

12) Evaluate program criteria and make necessary improvements to achieve certification through the Scenic City Certification Program. Sponsored by Scenic Texas, this certification recognizes Texas municipalities that implement high-quality scenic standards for public roadways and public spaces, with the long-term goal of improving the image of all cities.

13) Evaluate program criteria and make necessary improvements to gain recognition in the Tree City USA Program. Sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation, this program helps communities become better stewards of their tree resources.

Focus Area 4 – Adequate Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

Parks and recreation facilities are an essential part of a healthy, quality, and vibrant community environment. They provide the necessary components for events outside the home and after work and after school activities. Whether for passive or active use, parks and recreation facilities are an important factor of everyday living, active living – serving health benefits for children, seniors, and people of all ages. The park system also enhances the community’s “quality of life” factor, boosting economic development efforts to recruit and retain a skilled workforce; build a strong tax base to finance system expansion, facility enhancements, and maintenance; and attract retirees.

It is clear that La Porte places high value on its park and recreation system. Subsequent to the last comprehensive planning process, in 1998, the City prepared and adopted a separate Parks and Open Space Master Plan (2002; amended 2008) and Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Implementation Plan (2003); both of which the City has been actively implementing in the over the past several years. This section of the Comprehensive Plan is not intended to supplant those separate specific master plans; rather it is intended to review those plans in terms of how they currently fit within the overall framework of a 20-year planning horizon—meaning, will the full implementation of those plans achieve the goals of creating a park, recreation, and open space system that is high quality (safe and well maintained), convenient and accessible (to its users), diversified (in its

activities), and interconnected (to the community), while trying to preserve and protect La Porte’s natural assets. Note that while trails are an integral part of a park and recreation system, they are an equally important part of the City’s non-vehicular mobility system, and as such, will be discussed in *Chapter 4, Community Mobility*.

The City Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for the operation and maintenance of all parks and recreational facilities. Their ultimate goal is to “to provide and manage superior parks and recreational facilities, innovative programs, and services that will provide our customers with pleasure and enrichment.”

Existing Park Inventory

The foundation for establishing an adequate park and recreation system is the availability and condition of the existing parks and recreation areas. To assess the projected future need for additional land, facilities, and improvements, it is essential to first determine the level of service provided by the existing parks and recreation system. Subsequently, the level of sufficiency or deficiency of the existing system can be determined to assess the current need prior to projecting the future parks and recreation system needs.

Currently, the Department is responsible for 21 neighborhood and community parks (comprising over 150 acres), two special use parks (i.e., Five Points Town Plaza and the Bayforest Golf Course), and eleven miles of trails (see **Table 2.1, Existing Parks** and **Map 2.3, Park Inventory**). Overall, the City has a total of 23 parks and recreation facilities comprised of playgrounds and playscapes; picnic amenities; baseball, softball, soccer, football fields; basketball and other sports courts; bicycle/pedestrian/exercise/nature trails; a senior center; a Special Populations Center; two bayside parks; two fishing piers; a rodeo/open riding arena; three neighborhood pools and one sprayground/playground; and other amenities. Over the past 21 years, the City has spent close to \$18 million on its parks and recreation system.

In addition to the parks and recreation areas owned and managed by the City, there are five school playgrounds located at the elementary schools that provide additional recreation and open space that is available to residents and visitors of the La Porte area. The school playgrounds are displayed in **Table 2.2, School Playgrounds**. As displayed in **Table 2.3, Private Parks**, there are also six park facilities and one neighborhood pool that are owned and maintained by the homeowners’ associations.

Table 2.2, School Playgrounds

<i>School Playgrounds</i>	
Parks	Acres
Lomax Elementary	2.25
Jennie Reid Elementary	0.35
Rizzuto Elementary	1.06
La Porte Elementary	7.06
Bayshore Elementary	2.62
Baker 6 th Grade Campus	1.00
La Porte High School	5.00
Total	19.34

Source: Google Earth

Table 2.3, Private Parks

<i>Private Parks</i>	
Parks	Acres
Bayside Terrace Park	0.49
Bay Colony Park	0.75
Fairmont East	2.00
Fairmont West	1.18
Shady Lane	2.59
Shady River	2.35
Total	9.36

Parks and Recreation Standards

Standards provide a measure for determining the amount of parks, recreation and open space needed to meet the current and projected future demands of the City's citizens and visitors. Parks and recreation standards are typically expressed in terms of acres of land dedicated for parks, recreation and open space per unit of population, such as 1 acre per 1,000 persons (for neighborhood parks). While general standards are useful, it is important to establish standards that are based upon unique local considerations, such as participation trends and projections, user characteristics, demographics, climate, natural environment, and other considerations. Values related to leisure and recreation are unique to each municipality; therefore, the standards should represent the interests and desires of local parks users.

The suggested standards from the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA), as modified for La Porte's unique conditions, are illustrated in **Table, 2.4, NRPA Development Standards**. (on next page)

Needs Assessment

To assess the adequacy of the existing parks and recreation supply, it is necessary to look at existing population, the supply of parks provided by existing facilities including planned improvements or expansions, and relate them to planning standards for desirable levels of service. In addition, it is necessary to consider forecasts in future population to determine future needs and to identify deficiencies to address the needs of the system. As such, the park and recreation system currently and in the future would meet the needs of the full build-out population of 49,954 persons⁴. Based upon these parameters and displayed in **Table 2.5, Parks and Recreation Needs** (following next page), the City would not have to add new neighborhood parks and new community parks as it exceeds the standards to meet the needs of the projected future population. However, since parks, recreation, and greenspace are such highly valued community resources (and in La Porte there is a diminishing supply), it was suggested that it is important for the City to continue pursuit of additional properties to exceed national standards over time.

Service Areas

Evaluating service areas is an effective means of identifying geographic areas that have sufficient park areas available, but more importantly to identify those in need of additional parks and recreation areas and facilities. Neighborhood parks have a service area of one-quarter (¼) mile, while community parks have a service area of one mile; which means that the majority of the persons who utilize these facilities live within those respective distances. The service areas for the City's parks are displayed in

⁴ See analysis of the build-out population in Appendix B, *Build-out Population Projection Analysis*.

Table 2.4, NRPA Development Standards

Pocket Park	Use: Serves a concentrated population within an immediate proximity. Examples are a tot lot in an apartment complex or a vacant lot developed as a passive park.
	Service Area: Immediate development
	Desirable Size: 0.25 to 1 acre
	Density: 0.25 acre per 1,000 persons
Neighborhood/ Linear Park	Site Characteristics: Close proximity to high-density developments.
	Use: Serves neighborhood residents within walking distance. Facilities are for active use (e.g. sports activities, playgrounds) and passive use (e.g. walking, picnicking).
	Service Area: Primarily serves neighborhood residents within a one-half mile radius.
	Desirable Size: Minimum 3 to 8 acres
Community Park	Density: 1.0 acres per 1,000 persons
	Site Characteristics: Evenly distributed across the City with convenient and safe access for nearby residents. Joint school/park facilities are highly desirable.
	Use: Serves the broader community. Includes facilities for active and passive recreation and leisure, including athletic fields, swimming pools, picnic areas, walking/jogging paths, open play areas, exercise stations, and restrooms, among other improvements
	Service Area: Primarily for neighborhood residents within a one-mile radius, but available throughout the City.
Linear	Desirable Size: Minimum 10 to 30 acres
	Density: 3.0 acres per 1,000 persons
	Site Characteristics: Located to provide full access to the city.
	Use: Serves the broader community or region by providing key linkages between residential areas and important community facilities (e.g., parks, libraries, schools, etc.) while providing adequate areas for hiking, biking, jogging, horseback riding and similar off-street activities.
Special Use Facility	Service Area: Available to all persons.
	Desirable Size: No minimum standard.
	Density: No minimum standard.
	Site Characteristics: Intended for City-wide or regional use.

Source: National Recreation and Park Association; Modified for La Porte, TX.

Map 2.4, Park Service Areas. Since school playgrounds and private parks also provide neighborhood-scale park and recreation benefits to City residents, their service areas have been included in this analysis.

Table 2.5, Parks and Recreation Needs

Park Classification	2010 (Population 33,800)				Build-out Population (49,954 ⁴)			
	Recommended	Actual	Acres	% of Need Met	Recommended	Actual	Acres	% of Need Met
Neighborhood Parks (1.0 ac./1,000 persons)	33.80	53.62	>19.82	159%	49.93	53.62	>3.69	107%
Community Parks (3.0 ac./1,000 persons)	101.40	169.94	>68.54	168%	149.78	169.94	>26.16	113%
Total	135.20	223.56	>88.36	--	199.71	223.56	>29.85	--

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

Park System Plan

The La Porte Park System Plan is designed to meet the requirements of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) in order to become eligible for grant reimbursement of up to 50 percent (with a maximum of \$500,000 per application cycle when available) for qualified projects. With the City being proactive in adopting separate Parks and Open Space and Trails master plan, these requirements have been met as long as an update is performed every five years. **Map 2.5, Park System Plan**, is intended to be an intermediary analysis that will facilitate future discussion when those separate master plans are updated and could provide additional guidance about where there may be distribution deficiencies within the City limits.

As the City moves forward in expanding park acreage to exceed the needs of the future build-out population, the *Park System Plan* delineates the areas of deficiencies within the City and should be one of the primary considerations used to identify where future neighborhood and community parks are located.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations for ensuring adequate parks, recreation, and open space include:

- 1) All people should have equal access to recreational areas, activities, services, and facilities regardless of personal interest, age, gender, income, cultural background, housing environment, or handicap.
- 2) Public recreation should be highly coordinated among public institutions and private entities to avoid duplication and encourage cooperation.
- 3) Public recreation should incorporate public services such as education, health and fitness, transportation, and leisure.

- 4) Facilities should be well-planned and coordinated to ensure adequate adaptability to future needs and requirements.
- 5) The availability of financial resources should be considered in all phases of planning, acquisition, development, operation, and maintenance of spaces and facilities.
- 6) Public participation is critical to the eventual success of the parks and recreation system and should, therefore, be included in all stages of the process.
- 7) There should be established procedures for acquiring land for future parks and recreation areas and facilities prior to development.
- 8) The design of spaces and facilities should encourage the most efficient utilization of land, accommodate other compatible City services (e.g., libraries, museums, etc.), be constructed in the most sustainable, highest quality possible, and consider the needs and desires of the intended users.

Based on these planning considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives address the specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process and the above analysis.

GOAL 2.7: Ensure all existing and future parks and recreational facilities are maintained to an equivalent standard of quality and excellence.

One of the topics that were discussed during the public participation process was related to inequalities in the quality and condition of existing parks within the City. New parks (e.g., Pecan Park) and improvements (e.g., the new sprayground/playground at Brookglen Park) created a higher standard than now exists at some other existing parks.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Establish a formalized parks-to-standards program to ensure all parks are brought up to, and maintained in, an equivalent quality standard. This program should include a general maintenance and repair schedule. The priority maintenance tasks include:
 - a. Resurfacing, restriping, or re-grading unpaved surfaces or parking areas.
 - b. Improving drainage.
 - c. Increasing park accessibility.
 - d. Increasing the amount of signage and/or repair of existing signage.
- 2) Conduct regular risk management inspections to identify and schedule repairs, address safety issues, and conduct routine maintenance and cleaning, and other necessary improvements to playground and park equipment that is funded by an adequate operating and maintenance budget.



The two photos above highlight differences in the level of quality between parks in the City. Newer parks such as Pecan Park (top photo) has an overall higher level of quality than other parks, such as Pete Gilliam Park (bottom photo).

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

- 3) Use the National Program and Playground Safety guidelines and/or the United States Consumer Products Safety Commission standards in the design and replacement of playground equipment, all surface areas, and other recreational facilities and improvements.
- 4) Enhance landscape plantings and lawn maintenance in all parks.
 - a. Develop a program to improve the turf quality in all parks through turf restoration and over seeding, re-grading (to address erosion and drainage issues), and improved irrigation.
 - b. Continue to partner with Trees for Houston to add shade trees and shrubs in each park to improve aesthetics, create much needed shade, and improve the overall future beauty of the park system.
- 5) Conduct an annual condition assessment of park conditions. The assessment should be considered during the budget preparation process for the following fiscal year.

GOAL 2.8: Continue to increase the quality and diversity of amenities in the existing and future parks to attract and accommodate people of all ages (and non-traditional park users) for both active and passive activities.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Focus on park and recreation improvements as a means for elevating neighborhood viability. Highlight the importance of clean, safe, well-maintained, and vibrant neighborhood parks as an anchor for strong, established neighborhoods where residents and kids use public spaces and interact on evenings and weekends.
- 2) Establish a policy of master planning new/revitalized parks to develop a unique design theme for each park to broaden the types of facilities and activities that are available across the community and to better tie their identity to adjacent neighborhoods.
 - a. Conduct neighborhood design charrettes to gather resident input to determine unique features, types of amenities, and overall theme. Ideas may include parks for special events, arts and culture, heritage, eco-tourism, sustainability, etc.
- 3) Prepare revitalization plans for each of the existing, well established parks. Plans should include equipment replacement and repair, building/structure rehabilitation, new features/activities, and other refurbishments.
- 4) Evaluate opportunities to add new types of amenities that appeal to intergenerational and non-traditional users in existing and future parks, including community gardens, dog parks, climbing walls, bike trails, Frisbee golf, spraygrounds, running/walking trails, checkerboard tables, art walks, sandboxes, among others.



Each amenity in the park (e.g., playscapes, parking lots, bathrooms, pavilions, etc.) should be connected by a handicap accessible walking path/trail that is designed to accommodate persons with disabilities, the elderly, parents with strollers, etc.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

- 5) Continue to add shade structures to all existing and future parks. Shading should consist of a combination of playscape shade structures, individual picnic shelters, and larger pavilions (which provide more shade and more opportunities for socialization, among other things).
- 6) Improve on-site and off-site accessibility to each park by developing a sidewalk improvement program to repair, replace, or install new sidewalks, crosswalks, and curb cuts, in high pedestrian use neighborhoods immediately surrounding the parks, schools, and other community facilities.
- 7) Incorporate on-site handicap accessible walking trails that create a loop around the edge of each park and connect the important amenities within the park, so that users can utilize these trails for walking, running, biking, roller blading, pushing strollers, among other things. (see inset previous page)
- 8) Continue to provide adequate funding in the annual capital and operating budgets to enhance, improve, and maintain the existing public parks, recreation, trails, and open space.

GOAL 2.9: Continue to offer and expand recreational and/or cultural programs that meet the interests and needs of persons of all ages and abilities by providing programs independently and in cooperation with partners.

Action and Initiatives

- 1) Continue to proactively pursue additional park and recreation acquisition of property and/or protection of additional greenspace within the City limits. As the City nears the build-out population, the availability of these tracts becomes increasingly difficult to identify and secure for the protection and enjoyment of future generations. This recommendation is made with the knowledge that the City already meets and exceeds (currently and for the future build-out population) established national standards for park and recreation acreage.
- 2) Provide opportunities for individuals and groups (including low-income, minority, disabled, elderly, and the youth at risk populations) to participate in cultural, recreational, and educational activities that foster better health and wellness and strengthen both body and mind.
- 3) Formalize through reciprocal agreements the coordination of programming and joint use of facilities by and between the City and the La Porte Independent School District (LPISD), homeowner associations, among others.
- 4) Continue to offer and/or enhance the Fun Times Parks and Recreation Magazine.

- 5) Consider providing on-line registration for any camps, lessons, workshops, or classes available through the City or its program partners.
- 6) Join with the program partners to make application for outside funding to support and expand the City's educational and recreational programming. Seek special funding for underprivileged residents (particularly children) who may not have access to pools for programs that would address need for swimming lessons in the bay.
- 7) Continue to expand sponsorships and investigate opportunities to affiliate with other agencies (i.e., public/public or public/private partnerships), special interest groups, service clubs, and the private sector in organizing and operating special events, programs, and leagues.
- 8) Continue to work with youth sport associations to further develop facilities for recreational activities including baseball, softball, basketball, soccer, football, rugby, swimming, among others.
- 9) Continue to work with public and private sector groups (i.e., civic associations, etc.) to promote the annual community activities such as sports tournaments, festivals, outdoor concerts, fairs, and other special events.
- 10) Conduct an annual meeting with the City's program partners and other community organizations to discuss opportunities for the improved coordination and provision of services.

Future Land Use

The essence of comprehensive planning is a recognition that La Porte does not have to wait to react to development proposals. Rather, it can determine where development and redevelopment will occur and what type of land use the new built environment will reflect. Through active community support, this plan will ensure that development meets certain standards and, thus, contributes to achieving the desired community vision. As a guide for land development and public improvements, **Map 2.6, Future Land Use Plan**, represents how and where the City will focus new development and redevelopment over the next two decades – and beyond. The Future Land Use Plan is an integral part of this Comprehensive Plan and represents the most desirable land use based upon the goals and objectives stated in the Comprehensive Plan in consideration of existing uses and development and physical characteristics of the community. The land use designations form the basis for zoning, and thereby, the location of housing, commercial, and industrial areas. The Future Land Use Plan and Thoroughfare Plan (in *Chapter 4, Mobility*) are the two most important planning tools available to the City.

In the determination of whether a specific zoning classification conforms to the land use designation on the map, flexibility should be used to interpret land use designations boundaries which are applied on a broad scale. Street

rights-a-way, lot lines, topography, and other features should be utilized in the location of appropriate zoning district boundary lines. Generally, zoning district boundaries should follow rear lot lines or alleys to preserve the cohesiveness of the streetscape and compatibility of adjacent uses.

Zoning, when applied, breaks these areas into more specific classifications with legally binding land use regulations that according to state law must be “in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.”⁵ The following discusses the land use designations found in the Future Land Use Plan.

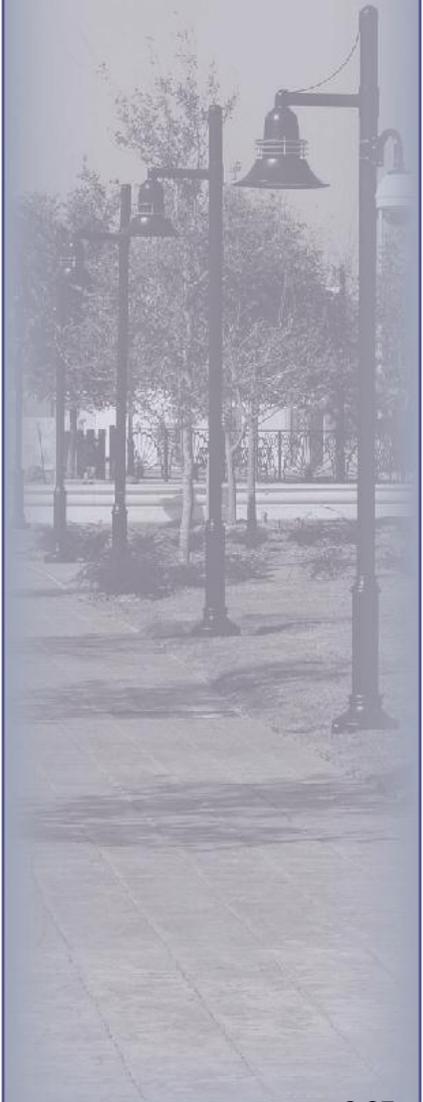
During the comprehensive planning process, an existing land use study was undertaken to determine if there were any major nonconformities existing in the City’s commercial and industrial zoned areas that may (or may not) need to be reflected in the updated Future Land Use Plan. This abbreviated study was conducted in April 2012 and focused primarily on commercial and industrial zoning nonconformities.

The Future Land Use Plan for the City of La Porte is a general physical plan for future development based on land use. It shows the generalized pattern of planned future land use, taking into account the City’s land use goals and objectives identified throughout the Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the land use plan is to minimize conflicts between adjacent uses, maximize efficiency of the transportation network, achieve fiscally sound decisions pertaining to private development and public infrastructure investments, and generally to aspire to create a livable environment for the citizens of the community.

The future land use classifications used on the plan to depict the type and density of development are as follows:

- **Large Lot Residential** – The Large Lot Residential classification was added during the 2012 plan update and is intended to further protect the existing large lot residential areas in Lomax. This classification has a minimum of one-acre lot size and allows permitted uses that are in conformance with the Large Lot District (LL).
- **Low-Density Residential** – The Low-Density Residential classification includes single family residential uses with minimum lot area ranging from 4,500 to 43,560 square feet. Other permitted uses are those in conformance with the Low Density Residential District (R-1).
- **Medium to High-Density Residential** – The Medium to High-Density Residential classification includes single-family attached or detached dwellings, multiple family dwellings, patio homes, garden apartments, condominiums, and townhouses. The minimum lot area for these uses

⁵ Texas Local Government Code, Sec. 211.004, Conformance with the Comprehensive Plan.



ranges from 2,000 to 20,000 square feet with maximum lot coverage ranging from 50 to 60 percent. Medium and High Density Residential uses generally include those specified in the Mid-Density Residential District (R-2) and High-Density Residential District (R-3).

- **Mixed Use** – The Mixed Use classification was added during the 2012 plan update and is intended to provide development options in certain areas near Sylvan Beach and waterfront. New or improved zoning and/or development provisions should be considered to ensure future development fulfills the intent of these particular areas.
- **Neighborhood Commercial** – The Neighborhood Commercial classification was added during the 2012 plan update and is intended for uses that are in conformance with the Neighborhood Commercial (NC) District.
- **Commercial** – The Commercial classification includes uses that are in conformance with the uses permitted in the Neighborhood Commercial District (NC), and General Commercial (GC) District.
- **Main Street** – The Main Street classification was added during the 2012 plan update and is intended for those uses allowed in the Main Street (MS) and Main Street Overlay (MSO) Districts. New or improved provisions should be considered, particularly for the Main Street District (MS), to ensure future development reflects an urban character (e.g., build to lines, on-street parking, among other considerations).
- **Business Industrial** – The Business Industrial classification provides for the establishment of industrial development that is compatible with surrounding or abutting residential districts. Uses are limited to administrative, wholesaling, manufacturing, and related compatible uses as defined by the Business Industrial Park (BI) District.
- **Light Industrial** – The light Industrial classification provides for the establishment of warehousing and light industrial development.
- **Heavy Industrial** – The heavy industrial district is to provide for the establishment of heavy industrial and manufacturing development away from residential and commercial uses.
- **Parks and Open Space** - The Parks and Open Space classification was added during the 2012 plan update and is intended for existing public parks and recreation areas, open spaces, natural habitat areas, and areas within the floodplain.
- **Public and Institutional** – The Public and Institutional classification includes such uses as schools, library, utilities, and government buildings.

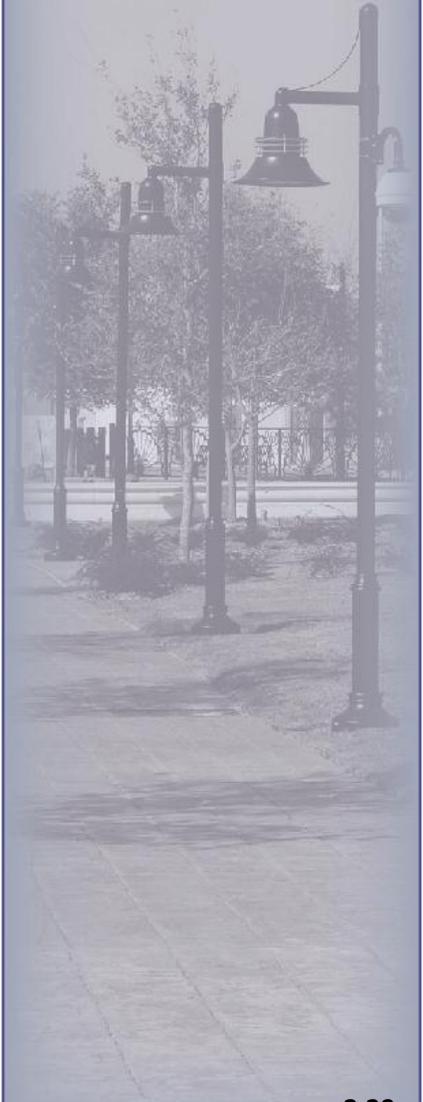
The land use plan is intended to generally guide future land use decisions, which are typically made simultaneous to other decisions regarding the provision of adequate public facilities and services and infrastructure

improvements. Consideration should be given to the following issues prior to making land use decisions:

- Character of the surrounding and adjacent neighborhoods;
- Existing use of nearby properties, and the extent to which a land use classification would be in harmony with such existing uses or the anticipated use of the properties;
- Suitability of the property for the uses to which would be permissible, considering density, access and circulation, adequacy of public facilities and services, and other considerations;
- Extent to which the designated use of the property would harm the value of adjacent land uses;
- Extent to which the proposed use designation would adversely affect the capacity or safety of that portion of the road network influenced by the use;
- Extent to which the proposed use designation would permit excessive air, water or noise pollution, or other environmental harm on adjacent land use designations; and,
- The gain, if any, to the public health, safety, and welfare due to the existence of the land use designation.

Individual land development proposals should be considered for approval at the scale of neighborhood, sub-area, and development project planning, which are to be considered in subsequent zoning and rezoning actions by the City. These decisions should be based upon consideration of the established policies and conformance with the Future Land Use Plan.

The Future Land Use Plan is not a zoning map, nor should it be used as such. The detailed pattern and location of land uses on a parcel-specific basis cannot be accurately predicted for 20 years into the future. Small area land use decisions should appropriately be made at the scale of neighborhood, sub-area, and development project planning, which are to be considered in subsequent zoning and rezoning actions by the City. These decisions should be based upon consideration of the Future Land Use Plan and should be consistent with the generalized land uses shown in the plan.



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INFRASTRUCTURE AND GROWTH CAPACITY

CHAPTER 3

As detailed in Chapter 1, Demographic Snapshot, the City experienced significant growth rates over a 20 year period from 1970 to 1990. More recently, over the past two decades, the rates of growth have decreased and the remaining developable areas have become finite. While there will still be growth in population, the City needs to transition its focus from greenfield to infill development. Similarly, the City needs to transition its focus from adding new infrastructure, facilities, and services to one focused on the expansion and maintenance of the systems that already exist. The decisions made today will have lasting effects on the City's continued abilities to generate economic growth and provide adequate, efficient, and fiscally responsible municipal services to its citizens.

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is closely related to other elements of this plan addressing land use and community character, mobility, and economic development as they relate to development, redevelopment, and the community's capacity to meet its demands for providing and improving public facilities and services. The analysis and findings presented in this chapter are based primarily on known factors regarding existing utility infrastructure systems, programmed and anticipated utility improvements, existing staffing and service capabilities of the police, fire, and EMS departments, and projected population growth of the City. A general conclusion is that the community is in relatively good shape to serve its existing development and also to accommodate new infill development and population within its established jurisdictional boundaries.

2001 vs. 2012 Plan Comparison

2001	2012 Update
Ch. 6, Utility Infrastructure Systems	Ch. 3, Infrastructure and Growth Capacity
Ch. 8, Community Facilities	
Ch. 11, Public Safety	

La Porte, like many communities, is increasingly challenged by limited fiscal resources. While the City has benefitted economically over the years because of its growth, now the City needs to focus more on maintenance, rehabilitation, and replacement of aging infrastructure and to fix problem areas, e.g., poor drainage, inefficient and redundant infrastructure, etc. In addition, as detailed in **Chapter 2, Land Use and Development**, the City needs to now provide additional attention and resources to promote new public and private sector development and redevelopment/revitalization in already existing areas. One of the ways to accomplish this is through public investment in infrastructure and services.

3.2 Focus Areas, Goals, Actions and Initiatives

Throughout the planning process a number of issues were identified regarding storm drainage, flood control, and other public infrastructure, and there was a general consensus about maintaining high quality public safety services. These discussions formed the basis of the following focus areas, along with an analysis of existing conditions and review of current programs, plans, and ordinances. Each focus area contains contextual information, key planning considerations, goals, (and their rationales), and advisable implementation actions and initiatives. The areas of focus are as follows:

- **Focus Area 1** – Improved Flood Control and Drainage;
- **Focus Area 2** – Adequate, Efficient, and Resilient Public Utilities;
- **Focus Area 3** – Maintaining and Improving Public Safety Services; and
- **Focus Area 4** – Need for Increased Sustainability.

Focus Area 1 – Improved Flood Control and Drainage

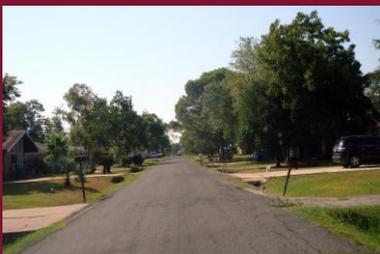
Storm Drainage Summary

The City lies within three major watersheds; Armand Bayou, Clear Creek, and Lower San Jacinto/Galveston Bay. The City’s topography is generally flat with an average elevation of 24 feet above sea level, and there is approximately three miles of coastline along Galveston Bay.

Drainage collection in the built environment is through a combination of methods. In the older areas, e.g., Old Town La Porte, collection is primarily through open, roadside ditches. In the more recently developed areas, e.g., Spencer Landing, collection is primarily through underground storm sewers. (see inset) While there are identified drainage problems across the City, the older areas have greater drainage and flooding problems.

As displayed in **Map 3.1, Drainage System**, the City conveys its storm drainage through approximately 35 miles of Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) drainage channels, which constitute the City’s primary

Drainage Collection



Open, roadside ditches in Old Town La Porte



Storm sewers in Spencer Landing

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

mechanism for surface drainage.¹ These primary drainage channels consist of natural bayous, man-made, but natural-looking channels, and concrete channels. (see inset)

In 2007, the City participated in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) sponsored Tropical Storm Allison Recovery Program (TSARP), which resulted in revised 100-year flood maps (also known as FIRMs, i.e., flood insurance rate maps) that became effective on June 18, 2007.² In 2009, the City undertook a City-wide drainage study to identify, develop, and recommend improvements to address drainage problems and lessen flooding and its impacts across the City. In addition to natural causes common to coastal areas (e.g., storm surge), the plan identified six reasons causing the City’s existing drainage and flooding problems.³ They were:

- 1) Insufficient flow capacity in ditches and channels;
- 2) Ponding of waters in streets and adjacent properties;
- 3) Undersized storm sewers;
- 4) Temporary blockage of storm water inlets by debris;
- 5) Backup of storm waters in sewers; and
- 6) Lack of overland or sheet flow paths.

As part of that study, the City requested that past repetitive loss data be studied to determine the level of severity of drainage and flooding problems so that the City could identify priority projects on a subdivision-level scale. The report identified 27 subdivisions that had significant drainage or flooding problems, with Brookglen, Creekmont Section 1, Glen Meadows, Fairmont Park East, Pinegrove Valley, and Spencer Highway Estates being the highest ranked problem areas.⁴

As solutions to these identified problems, the plan identified remedies to correct current flooding and drainage problems, as well as mitigation techniques to prevent future drainage problems that could arise from new development. To address current drainage and flooding problems, the plan recommended the following four types of projects:

- 1) Channel improvements;
- 2) Detention ponds for flood flow diversion;
- 3) Storm sewer upgrades; and
- 4) Development of relief swales.

¹ La Porte Citywide Drainage Study by Klotz Associates, Inc., January 2009.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

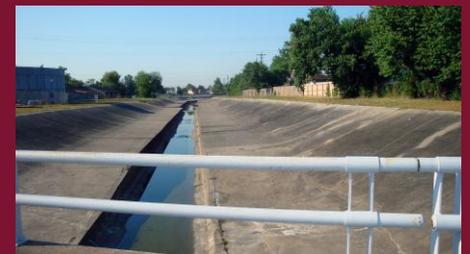
Channels Types



Natural Bayou



Natural Channel



Concrete Channel

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

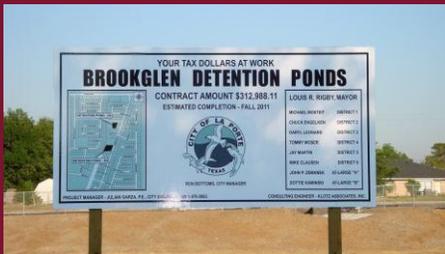
Spencer Landing Joint Use Park and Detention



Spencer Landing Park is one the City's more recent additions to the park system and it serves a dual purpose of providing both regional detention and passive and active recreation.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

Brookglen Regional Detention



The Brookglen Detention Ponds, which are currently under construction, are a good example of an after-the-fact retrofit to solve existing drainage problems within the City.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

To address future drainage problems, the plan discussed two common approaches: on-site detention and regional detention. While there are benefits and costs for each, consideration should be given to the fact that the City has a finite area remaining for both physical and economic development purposes. When regional detention is used, it creates multiple opportunities. First, it lessens the amount of land needed to be set aside on each individual site and maximizes the amount of land that is available for taxable purposes, e.g., residences and businesses. When there is plenty of land left to develop, this may not seem as important. However, when there is limited land left to develop, i.e., the limited infill areas remaining in La Porte, it becomes increasingly important. Indeed, many of the remaining infill lands may be undeveloped because they are constrained in one form or another, e.g., limited size, presence of floodplain, incompatibility with adjacent property, etc. So there may be mutual benefit to multiple property owners to pursue regional detention options. Second, regional detention provides opportunity for the joint purpose of detention and active and passive recreation (see inset). Coincidentally, the Citywide Drainage Study identifies regional detention locations (i.e., #'s 34, 36, 42, 43, and 44) that coincide with or abut areas of park need as identified in **Map 2.5, Park System Plan**. Coordinating regional detention efforts with park expansion efforts would be a good way to improve flood control and maximize the City's limited land and finite budgetary resources at the same time.

Finally, although the Citywide Drainage Study did not specifically identify buy-outs of flood prone homes, it did recognize that some buy-out may be necessary in the future. Currently, HCFCDD has been working in collaboration with willing home-owners to buy-out some of the most flood prone homes in the Brookglen Subdivision (see inset).

However the City chooses to mitigate increased drainage stemming from future development, i.e., on-site, regional, or a combination of both, it is recommended that it be designed and constructed to combine functionality with the cross purpose of creating an attractive and sustainable public amenity that provides citizens with accessible opportunities for active and passive recreation, particularly trails.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations regarding the planning needs to improve flood control and drainage, include:

- 1) Implementing the recommendations of the Citywide Drainage Study so that it leads to actionable results.

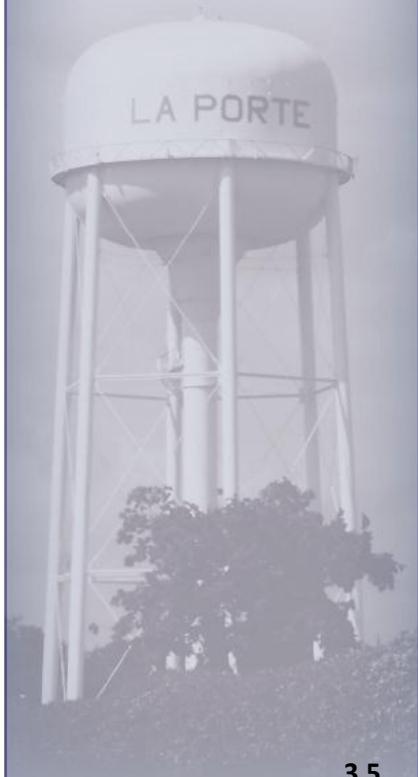
- 2) Continuing to budget for capital projects that reduce the chance of flood damage.
- 3) Reviewing existing ordinances that guide local development to ensure that existing policies and implementation tools are in accordance with best management practices.
- 4) Pursuing intergovernmental coordination with HCFCF and neighboring cities in addressing drainage across the broader region.
- 5) Encouraging the joint use of detention areas for drainage and parks and recreation amenities.

Based on these considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives address specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process (and outlined in **Chapter 1, Plan Context**).

GOAL 3.1: Improve the City’s drainage system to reduce future flood events from causing impacts to life and property.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) In conformance with the specifications set forth in the Citywide Drainage Study, construct the recommended relief swale and pipe upgrade projects, including:
 - a. Pinegrove Valley: Relief Swale;
 - b. Brookglen: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade;
 - c. Fairmont Park West: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade;
 - d. Glen Meadow: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade;
 - e. Meadow Park: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade;
 - f. Fairmont Park: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade;
 - g. Creekmont Section 1: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade;
 - h. Fairmont Park East: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade;
 - i. Spencer Highway: Relief Swale;
 - j. Villa Del Rancho: Relief Swale;
 - k. Battleground Estates: Relief Swale; and
 - l. Old La Porte: Relief Swale and Outfall Pipe Upgrade.
- 2) In conformance with the specifications set forth in the Citywide Drainage Study, construct the recommended channel improvement and pond projects, including:
 - a. Fairmont Park, Fairmont Park East: Channel Widening;
 - b. Brookglen: Channel Lining;
 - c. Meadow Park, Villa Del Rancho: Channel Widening;
 - d. Lennox Gardens; L Street: Pond for Diversion;
 - e. Battleground Estates, Pinegrove Valley, P Street: Channel Lining;
 - f. Shady River: Channel Widening;
 - g. Woods on the Bay, Pine Bluff, Shady River: Channel Widening; and
 - h. Meadow Crest, Creekmont, Glen Meadows, Fairmont Park, Fairmont Park West: Pond for Diversion.
- 3) Pursue inter-local agreements with the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCF) regarding maintenance of drainageways. This would be



for those drainageways where agreements may not already exist and for which are of critical importance to the City. These agreements would establish minimal acceptable levels of maintenance, where the City has permission, under appropriate limitations and constraints, to perform such maintenance for an agreed upon compensation or other considerations.

- 4) Coordinate with HCFCD to jointly fund and develop mutually beneficial flood control projects within the City.
- 5) Eliminate or minimize exceptions that allow development to occur within the floodplain. Development exceptions should meet the specifications identified in the Citywide Drainage Study.
- 6) Consider enclosing certain segments of the drainage ditches for use as a recreational amenity, such as trail space, greenways, and landscaping.
- 7) Evaluate the requirements and standards for on-site detention including a minimum site threshold, exemptions for sustainable practices, and the placement, design, and function of basins and other improvements.
- 8) Consider modifying the Public Improvement Criteria Manual (PICM) for stormwater design to incentivize or require, rather than “give consideration,” that design should be for multipurpose use, e.g., playgrounds, ballfields, miniparks, required green spaces, etc.
- 9) Facilitate the joint use of regional detention whereby there can be a cost-share arrangement and agreement among multiple properties and owners.
- 10) Pursue loan or grant funding from the Texas Water Development Board, Governor’s Division of Emergency Management, to implement flood control improvement projects within the City.
- 11) Revise the standards and specifications for drainage features to correspond with development character expressed by this plan. For instance, “suburban” development requires a high percentage of open space (either by way of larger lots or larger common areas), which allows for on-site collection, infiltration, and positive surface (natural) drainage. This contrasts with a more densely developed “urban” character that requires an underground stormwater drainage system.
- 12) Require riparian buffers along stream and drainage ways to increase filtration and improve water runoff quality.
- 13) Encourage adequate design of new developments to maintain pre-development runoff conditions using development types with open space preservation—such as cluster developments. This provides necessary density for developers in exchange for conserving site resources and preserving sufficient land for stormwater collection and detention/retention.
- 14) Periodically update the Citywide Drainage Study to reflect changing conditions.

Focus Area 2 – Adequate, Efficient, and Resilient Public Utilities

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 the automobile. More recently, the development reflects a contemporary design with curvilinear street systems, the use of cul-de-sacs, and larger more irregularly shaped lots. Similar to many communities across the United States, the increased reliance on the automobile has caused more spread out patterns of development. To serve this development has required a greater degree of public infrastructure that now needs to be maintained.

Water Summary

The supply of water is a significant long-term issue for any community, which needs to be planned well in advance of future needs. The primary source of water for the City is from the City of Houston via the La Porte Area Water Authority, which supplies treated surface water to the cities of La Porte, Morgan’s Point, and Shoreacres. Treated surface water is delivered to six City water plants and deposited in groundwater tanks. As displayed in **Map 3.2, Water System**, the six water plants are located at:

- Fairmont Park (Hillridge) Water Plant (see inset);
- Plant 3 (Fairmont/4th Street) Water Plant;
- Plant 4 (Broadway) Water Plant;
- Plant 5 (S. 25th Street) Water Plant;
- Plant 7 (Bandridge) Water Plant; and
- Plant 9 (Humphreville) Water Plant.⁵

Although each of these water plants distribute surface water, they are also capable of distributing groundwater supplied from seven wells located throughout the City.⁶ This capability exists because the City previously and exclusively utilized groundwater for its water source up until the 1980s when the City transitioned to the surface water used today.

After leaving the water plants and the groundwater tanks, the treated water is then re-pumped into the City’s four elevated water tanks and into the City-operated water distribution system. The four elevated storage tanks (EST) are:

- Main EST;
- Fairmont EST;

⁵ City of La Porte Water Master Plan by HDR and Claunch & Miller. October 2009.

⁶ La Porte’s surface water is sourced by the Trinity River and is treated by the City of Houston’s Southeast Water Purification Plant. La Porte’s groundwater is sourced from seven groundwater wells tapping into the Gulf Coast Water Aquifer. City of La Porte Water Quality Report for 2010.

Elevated Storage Tank at Fairmont Park



Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative



- Lomax EST; and
- Bayshore EST.

The water supply system is constantly providing potable water to residential, commercial, and industrial customers while at the same time providing adequate pressure for needed fire flows. Overall, the City's water distribution system serves 14,187 water service connections (i.e., individual water meters) through 231 miles of water mains,⁷ resulting in an average daily consumption of 3.963 million gallons per day.⁸

In 2009, the City worked with consultants to produce a Water Master Plan, which evaluated (using Texas Commission on Environmental Quality requirements) the existing system under current conditions, with immediate known development (i.e., development within the next five years) and under ultimate build-out conditions. To determine the future build-out conditions, the remaining undeveloped land within the City was estimated to reach a population of approximately 52,540 persons, which would translate to an equivalent of 21,746 water service connections.⁹ Coincidentally, the population projections correspond to the Year 2060 estimates provided by the Texas Water Development Board.¹⁰ Based on these projections, it was determined that the City already has an adequate water supply to meet the needs of its build-out population.¹¹ However, recommended improvements were identified to ensure the overall system is capable of serving the build-out population. In addition, this also indicates that the City's infrastructure meets the needs of the build-out population derived during planning process. See **Appendix B, Build-Out Population Projection Analysis**.

To implement the necessary improvements, the plan indicated that the City would have to spend approximately \$400,000 to \$600,000 annually over the course of 10 years. Its recommendations were based on three priorities: 1) improving the water service in the Lomax Area, 2) removing bottlenecks in the system and improve system performance, and 3) make improvements to accommodate future growth within the City.

⁷ City of La Porte Website. Retrieved on 10/12/11.

⁸ City of La Porte Water Master Plan 2009, Table 2 on Water Usage 2003 through 2008.

⁹ The future built-out population projection of 52,540 persons was calculated based on applying a fire flow calculation to the remaining undeveloped areas within City limits. City of La Porte Water Master Plan 2009.

¹⁰ Population projections by the Texas Water Development Board and Region H Water Planning Group indicated a 2060 City of La Porte population reaching 52,539 persons. Texas Water Development Board, 2011 Regional Water Plan, City Population Projections for 2000-2060.

¹¹ City of La Porte Water Master Plan 2009.

Wastewater Summary

As displayed in **Map 3.3, Wastewater System**, the City maintains an extensive system of 36 lift stations (including the lift station serving the Sylvan Beach Pavilion that is currently inactive) and 187 miles of force mains and gravity sewers.¹² The City also operates the Little Cedar Bayou Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) (see inset) located on South 4th Street at Cedar Bayou, which has a permitted capacity of 7.56 million gallons per day (mgd) by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

The existing wastewater treatment plant was designed in 1980 and put in service in 1982. The plant was expanded in 1986 and again in 2010. These expansions allow the City to treat approximately 21.8 mgd for a peak two hour period (usually during large storm events). At present, the City treats an average 3.2 mgd (calculated as an average daily flow 2006-2010), which puts the plant at about 42 percent of its permitted capacity (see inset on TCEQ's "75/90" rule). With the latest round of improvements, the plant will accommodate the City's build-out population¹³. In addition, the City also still contracts with the Gulf Coast Waste Disposal Authority (GCWDA) at a negotiated fee, currently \$0.20 per 1,000 gallons, for up to 0.5 mgd.

Post treatment, the majority of the water is released into the Little Cedar Bayou. However, during certain times of the year, particularly summer, the City utilizes a maximum of 600,000 gallons per day (gpd) to irrigate the Bay Forest Golf Course and the soccer fields at Little Cedar Bayou Park.

The City has been proactively monitoring and replacing aging infrastructure. Currently, the City has budgeted approximately \$350,000 per year to reduce inflow and infiltration (I/I) problems in the wastewater collection system. Over time, pipes, valves, and manholes start to deteriorate consequently, allowing the inflow and infiltration of stormwater/groundwater into the wastewater collection system. This increases the volume of wastewater that has to be treated by the WWTP. The additional volume also increases the wear and tear on plant infrastructure and can prematurely cause the City to unnecessarily expend funds on plant capacity increases. The City has also been proactive in replacing, consolidating, or eliminating its lift stations. As late as 2008, the City had 40 lift stations; today 36. In 2003, the City commissioned a lift station evaluation study to determine the highest priority projects. By 2008, four out of five of those projects were complete. The City then

¹² City of La Porte Website. Retrieved on 10/12/11.

¹³ Interview with the City of La Porte Public Works Director.

Little Cedar Bayou WWTP



Source: City of La Porte Website, Department of Public Works.

The "75/90" Rule

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) regulations require that a wastewater permittee commence engineering design and financial planning for expansion when a plant reaches 75 percent of permitted average daily flow for a consecutive three-month period. This rule further requires that the permittee gain regulatory approval and begin construction of expanded facilities when a plant reaches 90 percent of the permitted average daily flow for a consecutive three-month period.

Source: TCEQ.

commissioned a second lift station evaluation study to determine the next five highest priority projects. That evaluation study identified the following priority projects as well as a need for \$2,082,000 in funding¹⁴:

- Lift Station 13;
- Lift Station 14;
- Lift Station 19; and
- Lift Station 37 (scheduled for completion Jan. 2012).

Key Planning Considerations

- 1) Addressing long-term expansion and rehabilitation needs within the existing systems through targeted capital improvements (e.g., to address deteriorated older pipes, increasing line sizes, removing dead-ends, and adding additional water storage).
- 2) Supporting effective, ongoing planning and system monitoring – in parallel with land use and development tracking – to ensure that needed infrastructure is available in the remaining areas of future growth and the City’s capital investment phasing and timing is on target with new and continuing service demands.

GOAL 3.2: Improved data collection and analysis of public utility infrastructure systems to help prioritize the short- and long-term maintenance needs for existing infrastructure.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Complete the geographic information system (GIS) mapping database, i.e., Utility Mapping Program, by providing additional resources to capture and input the necessary data for a complete asset management program. (see inset) This system should be utilized to maintain records on inflow and infiltration (I/I) problems and main breaks, types and sizes of piping, dates of improvements and repairs, and other information relevant to an asset management system. Data should be used as a prioritization tool in the preparation of annual budgets and capital improvement programs.
- 2) Conduct a system-wide condition analysis of all utility infrastructure, i.e., storm sewer, water, and wastewater, to determine an appropriate short- and long-term plan of action to repair, rehabilitate, or replace existing utility infrastructure. Information should be entered into the Utility Mapping Program to identify targeted geographic areas with the greatest needs.
- 3) Allocate the necessary funding on an annual basis to implement the corrections identified in the conditions analysis so that the City’s limited funds can be expended in a cost-effective, efficient, and timely manner to correct the greatest areas of need.
- 4) Continue inter-departmental coordination between the Planning, Engineering, and Parks and Recreation Departments to offer

Utility Mapping Program

In the update to the Comprehensive Plan in 2005, it was indicated that public utility infrastructure GIS mapping should be complete by 2007. Today, some of the data is mapped, particularly the “location” of infrastructure. However, to realize the full potential of utility mapping, additional attribute data is needed to complete the database. For example, if all breaks and repairs are mapped, the resulting data over time would help to prioritize limited funding to mitigate the areas that are in the most need of repair.

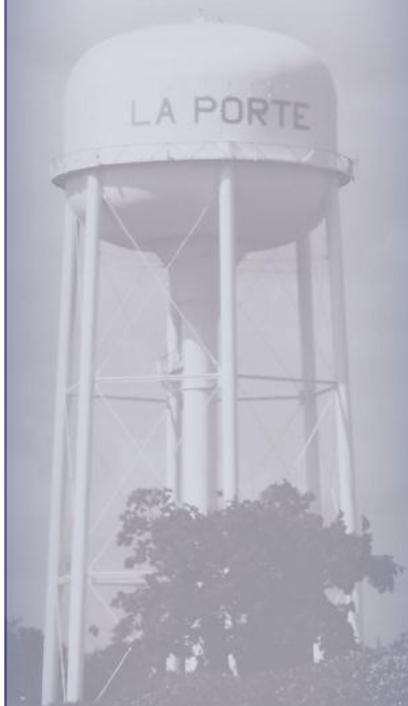
¹⁴ HDR/Claunch & Miller Lift Station Evaluation Study. 2008

inspection services and plans for enhancement/redevelopment of public facilities servicing the community. Utilize these annual inspections to set priorities for funding in the Capital Improvement Program.

GOAL 3.3: Provide for the long-term supply of water and reliable treatment and distribution systems.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Plan accordingly to budget approximately \$400,000 to \$600,000 per year to expand and/or upgrade the City's water system infrastructure, plus additional funding as necessary to replace aging infrastructure in-kind.
- 2) In conformance with the schedule and specifications set forth in the Water Master Plan, construct the necessary water system improvements as identified below:
 - a. 2011: 12-inch water line on N. L. Avenue (Phase 1);
 - b. 2012: 12-inch water line on N. L. Avenue (Phase 2);
 - c. 2013: 12-inch water line on N. L. Avenue (Phase 3);
 - d. 2014: 12-inch water line on Bandbridge Road, Somerton Drive, Spencer Highway; and Venture Lane;
 - e. 2015: 8-inch water line on Airport Boulevard and on N. 3rd Street.;
 - f. 2016: 12-inch water line on N. 8th Street and W. Barbours Cut; and
 - g. 2017: 12-inch water line on Lomax School Road.
- 3) In response to development proposals, coordinate with the private sector to ensure the construction of the following water system infrastructure improvements as identified in the Water Master Plan:
 - a. 12-inch water line on N. Avenue P; and
 - b. 12-inch water line on State Highway 225.
- 4) In conformance with the specifications set forth in the Water Master Plan, improve booster pump capacity at the following locations:
 - a. Phase III: Hillridge Water Plant prior to 15,584 water service connections, estimated to occur around 2020;
 - b. Phase IV: Fairmont/4th Street Water Plant, prior to 16,958 water service connections, estimated to occur around 2040;
 - c. Phase V: Broadway Water Plant, prior to 18,182 water service connections, estimated to occur around 2040; and
 - d. Beyond 2040 through build-out: Bandridge Water Plant.
- 5) In conformance with the specifications set forth in the Water Master Plan, construct a new 700,000 gallon elevated storage tank prior to 18,500 water service connections that are estimated to occur by the Year 2041.
- 6) Identify and eliminate any remaining dead-end water mains.
- 7) Periodically review the existing Surface Water Supply Contract to ensure that it will provide the necessary amount of water to supply the City's build-out development. At minimum, a review should be conducted if water use per capita increases to 400 gallons per day.



- 8) Continue to fund and implement an aggressive maintenance program and annual water line replacement program. This has become particularly important due to deficiencies identified during the recent drought, e.g., some of the existing concrete asbestos piping in the City has shown not to be as durable as other types of piping, and thus should be prioritized for replacement.
- 9) Periodically update the Water Master Plan, Water Conservation Plan, and Drought Contingency Plan to reflect changing conditions.

GOAL 3.4: Sufficient and efficient wastewater systems and capacity to accommodate the build-out population and compliance with state/federal regulations.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Conduct a feasibility study to determine if the wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) can be improved to increase the total available quantity of reuse water and to determine where additional public or private reuse opportunities in the City might be located.
- 2) Continue to allocate approximately \$350,000 annually to combat infiltration and inflow (I/I) problems and thus, minimize the amount of water reaching the WWTP that does not need to be treated.
- 3) Continue to allocate funding, as needed, to conduct lift station evaluation studies as means for identifying the highest priority lift stations to be replaced, consolidated, or eliminated. Currently, funding should be allocated to upgrade the following projects as identified in the most recent Lift Station Evaluation Study:
 - a. Lift Station 19;
 - b. Lift Station 37 (scheduled for completion Jan. 2012);
 - c. Lift Station 14; and
 - d. Lift Station 13.
- 4) Continue to allocate funding to replace, consolidate, or eliminate at least one lift annually per the recommendations identified in the lift station evaluation studies.
- 5) Continue to apply for Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) funds to increase the resiliency of infrastructure systems. This should include, among other things, purchasing additional backup generators at the WWTP to ensure sufficient operational capacity during power outages.

Focus Area 3 – Maintaining and Improving Public Safety Services

An increase in population, combined with new development and redevelopment, will create an increased demand for public safety services. To keep pace, the City needs to commit to a gradual expansion of its Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Departments and invest in new facilities, equipment, and staffing to

Police Headquarters



Photo: Kendig Keast Collaborative

ensure adequate service capabilities, responsiveness, and geographic coverage in the coming years.

Police Services

The Police Department operates out of its headquarters at 3001 N. 23rd Street; a new 56,000 square foot police facility constructed in 2007. The building is the Police Department's primary facility serving both its administrative and general purpose needs.

The Police Department currently has 108 employees, two reserve officers, and 96 dedicated volunteers;¹⁵ this includes 75 commissioned, full-time officers (including the Chief). The department is divided into Patrol Operations and Support Services. The Patrol Division is divided into three patrol shifts. It also operates a traffic/commercial vehicle enforcement section, motorcycle patrol, K9 units, bicycle patrol, SWAT team, as well as an Explosive Ordinance Disposal (a.k.a. bomb disposal) unit. The Police Department's service area is the City-limits, but they are occasionally called upon to respond to neighboring jurisdictions such as Shoreacres, Morgan's Point, and areas in the ETJ where the County Sheriff has jurisdiction.

The Support Services Division is divided into Criminal Investigations and Support Services (e.g., community services, training, IT, building maintenance, communications (i.e., E-911) and records, animal control, and school resources officers). The City's joint E-911 dispatch center is located within and staffed by the Police Department, which handles dispatch for all emergencies for the Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Departments, as well as the Morgan's Point Police Department. During 2010, emergency dispatchers dispatched 37,190 police calls, 1,582 fire calls, and 2,976 EMS calls for a total of 41,748 calls for service.

As the community continues to grow, the Police Department sees a need for additional jailers and a full-time crime analyst, in addition to adding patrol officers to keep pace with the new population. The Police Department also foresees a need to expand portions of the current facility, particularly for evidence storage needs. The Police Department has also identified that keeping pace with the change in technology is one of their greatest challenges. It is their intent to transition to more in-house training as long as there is adequate training budget available.

¹⁵ La Porte Police Department 2010 Annual Report.

Best Practices Accreditation

In December 2009, the La Porte Police Department was recognized as an accredited, Best Practices law enforcement agency by the Texas Police Chief's Association – one of only 35 in the entire state of Texas.

Source: La Porte Police Department 2010 Annual Report.

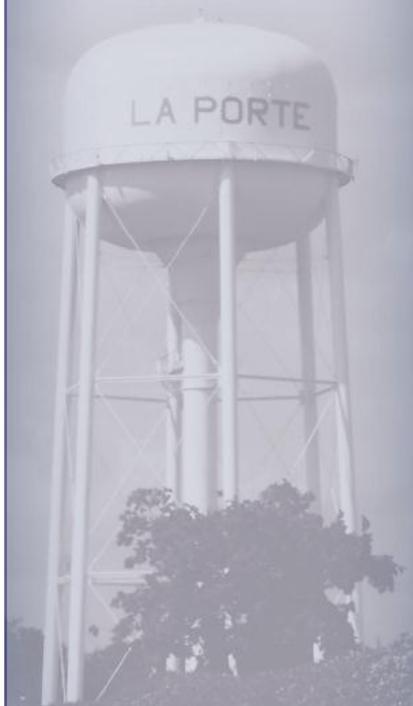


Table 3.1, Police Department Officer Needs

Year	Population**	Officers per 1,000 persons	Officers	Additional Officers Needed***
2010	33,800	2.2*	75	--
Build-Out Population	49,954		110	35

*Based on a City in the south with a population between 25,000 to 49,999 persons.

**Based on the build-out population projections derived during this planning process.

See *Appendix B, Build-Out Population Projection Analysis*.

*** Officers should be added concurrent with population growth.

Source: FBI and Kendig Keast Collaborative

A survey conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) of cities located in the south with a population between 25,000 and 49,999 persons showed an average of 2.2 full-time law enforcement officers per 1,000 citizens.¹⁶ Based on a 2010 population of 33,800 persons, the La Porte Police Department is currently meeting this standard. To maintain this standard to meet increasing future service demands, the City will need to provide the necessary budgetary resources to hire additional full-time officers concurrent with

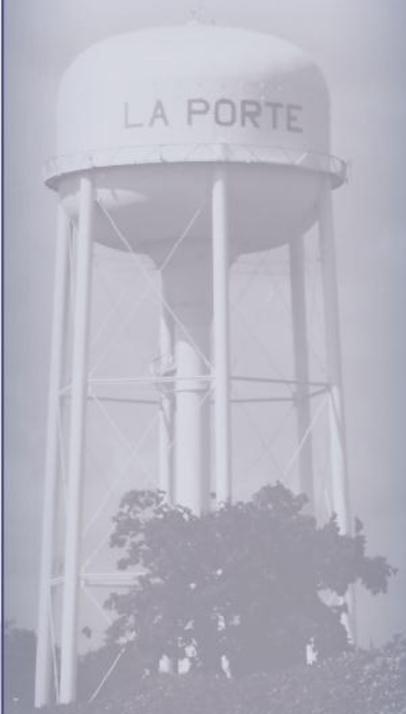
population growth. As displayed in **Table 3.1, Police Department Officer Needs**, the City will need an additional 35 officers to support a build-out population of 49,954 persons. In addition to full-time law enforcement officers, the City will need to ensure there is adequate civilian support staff to support the build-out population.

Fire Services

Fire protection is provided by the La Porte Fire Department, which covers the City-limits, as well as contract fire protection services for the cities of Morgan’s Point and Shoreacres. The Fire Department does not have any formal mutual aid agreements in effect except being a member of Channel Industries Mutual Aid (CIMA), which is a non-profit organization combining the fire-fighting, rescue, hazardous material handling, and emergency medical capabilities of the refining and petrochemical industry in the Houston Ship Channel area. Overall, the Fire Department’s service area exceeds 45 square miles.

The Fire Department is currently staffed via a combination of 14 full-time firefighters and 52 volunteers. The volunteers are trained in-house during an annual academy and are responsible for making 25 percent of the fires and 50 percent of the weekly drills. Full-time firefighters are certified as Texas Firefighter I and must have two years’ experience. The Fire Department operates a total of four, 24/7 manned stations. Their headquarters facility is located on 124 South 2nd Street and is due for replacement in 2011. In addition, the Fire Department operates three other stations that are manned 24 hours per day by a full-time firefighter. The station locations are:

¹⁶Federal Bureau of Investigation, Crime in the United States, Uniform Crime Reports 2010, Table 71.



- Station 1 – 124 South 2nd Street;
- Station 2 – 9710 Spencer Highway;
- Station 3 – 2400 Sens Road; and
- Station 4 – 2900 South Broadway.

The Fire Department also has a fire training facility, located at 12201 N. C. Street, which is used to provide hands-on training to firefighters so that they become more confident and competent in dealing with fire control and extinguishments. The training facility includes a concrete multi-story burn facility with a roof simulator, drafting pit, railroad car simulator, and an 80 person classroom.

For fire suppression response, the City utilizes two ladder trucks, eight engines, two rescues, two command vehicles, two grass/brush rigs, a foam trailer, and a fire rescue boat. In addition to fire suppression capabilities, the Department is capable of responding to emergencies dealing with heavy rescue extrication; hazardous materials incidents; as well as high and low angle rope, water, and confined space rescue. The Fire Department budget is supplemented by a ¼ of 1 percent sales tax, which generates approximately \$700,000 to \$750,000 annually. Subsequent to the adoption of the last comprehensive plan, the City has been working to reduce its Insurance Services Office (ISO) rating.¹⁷ As part of this effort, the City has added equipment and updated water systems, which has reduced the ISO rating both within and outside the City from a "4" to a "2" for both inside and outside City limits. In 2010, the Department was dispatched 1,582 times.

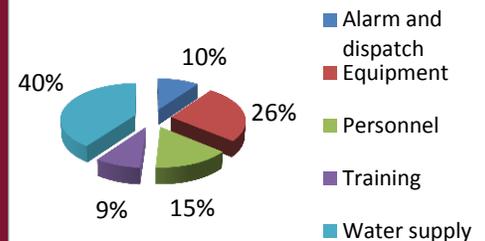
As the community grows, the Department sees its biggest challenge is keeping the volunteers active and generally doing more with less due to the economy. As volunteer firefighter numbers and availability continue to decline, primarily during the daytime hours, it may be necessary to add additional paid personnel during those times to provide adequate staffing for response. Another potential concern that may have to be addressed in the future is the fuel source of the fire training facility. While the facility is currently serving the needs of the Department very well, a transition from burning hay (to create fire conditions) to an alternate fuel (which will reduce or eliminate excess smoke) may be necessary as the population continues to expand surrounding the facility. Finally, they also foresee the need for a third dispatcher to split Fire / EMS so that 911 calls can be taken by a call-taker and dispatched by another.

¹⁷ Insurance Services Office (ISO), Items Considered in the Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS). Retrieved 10-10-11.

Insurance Services Office (ISO) collects information on public fire protection and analyzes the data using a Fire Suppression Rating Schedule (FSRS). ISO assigns a Public Protection Classification (PPC™) from 1 to 10. Class 1 represents the best public protection and Class 10 indicates less than the minimum recognized protection.

By classifying a community's ability to suppress fires, ISO helps communities evaluate their public fire protection services. The program provides an objective, country-wide standard that helps fire departments in planning and budgeting for facilities, equipment, and training. And by securing lower fire insurance premiums for communities with better public protection, the PPC program provides incentives and rewards for communities that choose to improve their firefighting services.

ISO Fire Rating Factors



Source: Insurance Services Office.

Bike Medic Team



In 2003, the City implemented a bike medic team which is used on a part-time basis for special events (like the San Jacinto Day in 2006) and public safety education.

Source: La Porte EMS Department Website.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS)

Basic and advanced emergency life support services are provided by the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department, which covers an approximate area of 75 square miles of incorporated, unincorporated, and contracted areas (consisting of Bayport, Battleground, Port of Houston – Barbours Cut Terminal, and Morgan’s Point-). The EMS Department consists of 26 full-time staff and three part-time staff consisting of a Chief, Assistant Chief, two Captains, 21 paramedics (I, II, and III’s), EMS interns, and a billing specialist. The EMS Department utilizes five Mobile Intensive Care Unit (MICU) ambulances in its fleet and has two MICU ambulances on-duty at all times, along with Advanced Life Support (ALS) first responder vehicles. EMS Headquarters is located at 10428 Spencer Highway and was built in 2007. It consists of 4,000 square feet of living and administrative space and 4,000 square feet of apparatus bays. EMS Headquarters currently houses all three on-duty ambulances until the completion of fire station 1, scheduled to be completed in late 2012, at which time one of the three on-duty

ambulances will be housed at fire station 1. Currently, the EMS Department has mutual aid agreements with the cities of Baytown, Deer Park, and Clear Lake, which, in 2010, were utilized by the City approximately 74 times and other agencies 104 times. The City also staffs a part-time Bike Medic Team during special events and for public safety education¹⁸ (see inset), and has specially trained tactical medics that are assigned to the Police Department’s SWAT team. In 2010, the EMS Department responded to 3,120 emergency calls. Outside of emergency response, the EMS Department offers a number of programs to increase public awareness and health and safety of the community, including blood pressure tracking, childhood immunizations, child safety seat inspections, DWI awareness programs, and others.

As the community grows, the EMS Department sees its biggest challenge being able to attract and retain qualified paramedics. Similar to the Fire Department, they also foresee the need for a third dispatcher to split Fire / EMS so that 911 calls can be taken by a call-taker and dispatched by another.

Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and La Porte, Morgan’s Point, and Shoreacres Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC)

The City of La Porte Office of Emergency Management (OEM) works with local industry and surrounding agencies to mitigate natural and man-made disasters by providing education on how best to prepare and train for all

¹⁸ The Bike Medic Team was implemented in February 2003 due to EMS providers becoming more aware of the benefits of an extremely mobile team of responders, particularly during crowded special events. Information retrieved from the La Porte EMS Department Website.

types of emergencies. The OEM also coordinates emergency response and recovery efforts when an emergency occurs, including activation of the Emergency Operation Center (EOC) during any major disaster. The OEM (and the EOC) is located in the La Porte Police Department and is staffed with two persons who work in coordination with other City departments and the LEPC.

The La Porte, Morgan’s Point, and Shoreacres Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) works with the City to develop emergency plans and increase citizen awareness of the appropriate actions to take during a chemical emergency. This is particularly important given La Porte’s coastal location and proximity to major industrial areas, such as the Battleground, Bayport, and South La Porte Industrial Districts, where there is, on any given day, potential for a plant fire or explosion, an accidental chemical release, or a transportation-related incident.

The LEPC works closely with the cities, schools, and communities to encourage emergency preparedness and provide shelter in place education to those who live and work in and around the City.

As part of an overall emergency notification system, the LEPC (see inset) utilize several means of public notification, including:

- **Emergency Sirens.** The Outdoor Warning System is used to notify citizens in the event of a chemical emergency. Currently, the system is comprised of 12 sirens located throughout the area that are tested every Saturday at noon.
- **CAER Line.** The Community Awareness Emergency Response (CAER) telephone system provides information about plant activities for emergency and non-emergency messages.
- **Connect-CTY.** Connect-CTY is the City’s latest system that allows the City to contact citizens with important information by phone, email, and text message.
- **Radio Station AM 830.** This a local emergency radio station maintained by the LEPC, which broadcasts instructions during emergencies and weather information/public service announcements otherwise.
- **Alert Beacons.** The beacons are stationed at all local schools to provide shelter-in-place instruction directly to teachers and students.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations to maintain and improve public safety services include:

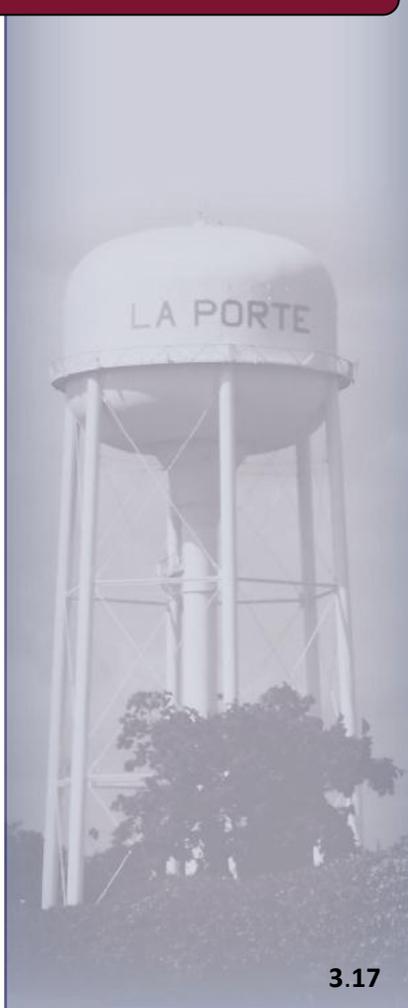
- 1) Providing adequate staffing levels to meet basic response and operating standards, ensure personnel safety, and provide relief to personnel routinely required to work extended hours.
- 2) Investing in sufficient facilities, in terms of location, design, and functionality, to provide reliable response and service area coverage.

Emergency Preparedness



The LEPC participates in many community outreach events each year, in addition to providing school and community awareness education throughout the community in parks, neighborhoods, and along roads.

Source: La Porte LEPC Department Website.



- 3) Budgeting adequately for the periodic acquisition – and maintenance – of the numbers and types of vehicles necessary to support core departmental responsibilities.
- 4) Targeting adequate resources to areas that pose particular challenges in a growing community, including traffic- and school-related policing and emergency response.
- 5) Continuing to pursue inter-governmental approaches to coordinate basic functions and gain cost savings, while remaining sensitive to administrative and operational challenges that may be involved.
- 6) Preparing for future population growth while working to meet today's service demands more efficiently and effectively.

Based on these planning considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives address specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process (and outlined in **Chapter 1, Plan Context**).

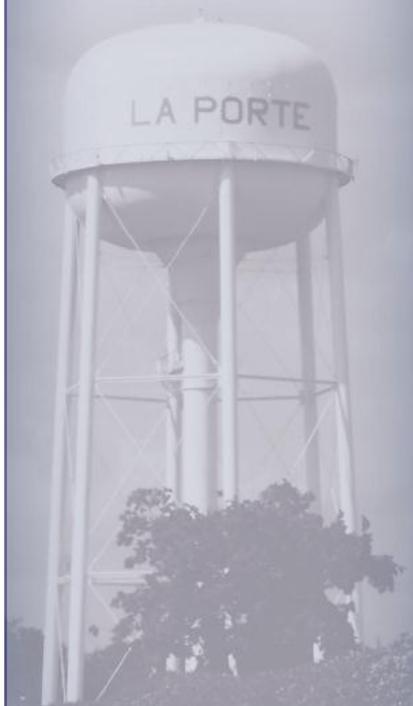
GOAL 3.5: Provide for the ongoing needs of the Police Department to ensure adequate protection of the population.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Periodically review the Police Department's personnel needs and hire additional staff to accommodate increased calls for service concurrent with population growth. Utilize the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Crime in the United States (latest edition) staff survey as a measurable comparison for full-time law enforcement professionals and civilian staffing needs. This could include:
 - a. Full-time law enforcement officers concurrent with population growth;
 - b. One additional crime analyst;
 - c. One additional jailer per shift; and
 - d. One additional dispatcher per shift so that Fire/EMS Departments have a dedicated person taking and dispatching their calls.
- 2) Construct a new joint 6,000 square foot animal shelter that is sufficient to achieve certification requirements.
- 3) Support the Police Department's efforts in providing roving safety training throughout the community.
- 4) Upgrade the firing range so that it has adequate lighting and a moveable target system to increase officer preparedness in emergency situations using force.
- 5) Establish a formalized replacement and procurement program for vehicles and equipment to keep pace with state-of-the-art law enforcement technology and capabilities. This could include:
 - a. Rotating cars every three years;
 - b. Replacing laptops and software in patrol cars in a timely manner.
- 6) Provide adequate funding to expand the amount and quality of more cost-effective in-house training for patrol officers and other staff.

- 7) Continue to contract with Cry Wolf false alarm management solutions so that the numbers of false alarms continue to decrease,¹⁹ thereby reducing the potential of injury to public safety staff and citizens (due to unnecessary dispatch and response) and increasing the amount of time available for training and response to actual emergency situations.
- 8) Continue to pursue grant opportunities, e.g., the Texas Department of Transportation's Selective Traffic Enforcement Program (S.T.E.P.), among others, so that additional public safety programs can be provided at minimal cost to taxpayers.
- 9) Continue to work in partnership with the La Porte Independent School District to provide on-site School Resource Officers (SROs) to maintain a visible presence on campuses for the safety of school children and educators.
- 10) Continue to operate the Police Area Representative (P.A.R.) program, which provides a specific liaison (based on zones) between the Police Department and the community so that citizens have a resource to gain assistance with non-emergent, but important problems, such as abandoned vehicles, traffic problems, graffiti, and gang or drug-related concerns.
- 11) Continue to provide the Citizen's Police Academy, a community awareness program that provides hands-on demonstration and interactive instruction during a 13 week course.
- 12) Continue to provide the Youth Explorer Program, which educates teens interested in law enforcement as a career in such topics as crime scene investigation, traffic enforcement, SWAT and patrol operations, and criminal investigations.
- 13) Continue to prepare and publicly disseminate the La Porte Police Department Annual Report.
- 14) Continue to maintain and keep up-to-date the Police Department's pages on the overall City's Website.

¹⁹ According to the La Porte Police Department Annual Report 2010, there was a 34% reduction (i.e., 2009:1,327; 2010: 871) in the number of false alarms in the City attributed to active participation in the Cry Wolf program.



GOAL 3.6: Provide for the ongoing needs of the Fire Department and Fire Marshal's Office to ensure adequate protection of the population.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Continue to pursue improvement in the City's Insurance Services Office (ISO) ratings within and outside of the City. While the City's current rating is very good, lowering it would result in reduced insurance rates in addition to the benefits of improved response and, thus, the protection of life and property. Consideration should be given to capital projects that help improve the rating, including increased fire flows, looped water systems, new hydrants, and a generally improved water supply.
- 2) Periodically review the Fire Department's personnel needs and hire additional staff to accommodate increased calls for service concurrent with population growth. Utilize the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) or other suitable standard as a measurable comparison to determine adequate staffing of paid and volunteer firefighters. This could include conducting a manpower study specifically to determine whether or not a second full-time firefighter is warranted at each fire station.
- 3) Work in coordination with the Police and EMS Departments to add a third dispatcher to the E-911 call center.
- 4) Establish a formalized replacement and procurement program for vehicles and equipment to keep pace with state-of-the-art fire rescue technology and capabilities. At a minimum, this should include a replacement schedule as follows:
 - a. Engines: 20 years;
 - b. Ladder trucks: 25 years; and
 - c. Command vehicles: 10 years.
- 5) Continue Fire Department participation in the City's plan review process so that water supply and other emergency response considerations are incorporated into plans and plats for new development/redevelopment.
- 6) Continue Fire Marshal participation in the City's Building Plan Review process and on-site inspections so that fire and life safety codes are incorporated into construction plans and verified compliant during post-construction inspections.
- 7) Adequately fund training opportunities for fire personnel to improve personal skills and departmental capabilities. Utilize the new Fire Training Officer to expand cost-effective in-house training capabilities.
- 8) Adequately support the Fire Department's efforts to convey the message of fire prevention through programs such as CPR, first aid training, and fire safety related school events.
- 9) Continue to monitor fire and building codes to determine if a newer addition would achieve better life safety protection for the City.
- 10) Continue to conduct fire safety inspections of all businesses and public facilities to ensure compliance with fire and life safety code requirements.

- 11) Continue to prepare and publicly disseminate the La Porte Fire Code Construction and Development Guide.
- 12) Continue to maintain and keep up-to-date the Fire Department and Fire Marshal's pages on the overall City's Website.

GOAL 3.7: Provide for the ongoing needs of the City's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Department to ensure adequate protection of the population.

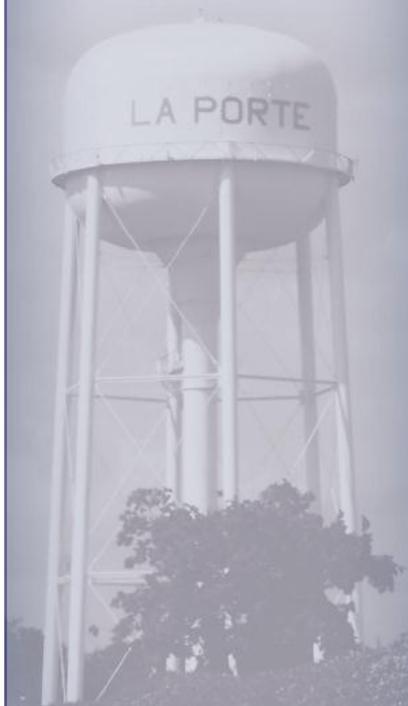
Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Periodically review the EMS Department's personnel needs and hire additional staff to accommodate increased calls for service concurrent with population growth. This could include adding an additional Captain to relieve the Assistant EMS Chief from being a shift commander. This would allow the Assistant EMS Chief to dedicate more time developing overall strategies to improve the operation of the EMS Department.
- 2) Work in coordination with the Police and Fire Departments to add a third dispatcher to the E-911 call center.
- 3) Add a third 24/7 Mobile Intensive Care Unit (MICU) ambulance to each shift to ensure adequate emergency life support service protection for the citizens and visitors of La Porte.
- 4) Adequately support the EMS Department's efforts to improve the health and safety of the community through such programs as the Childhood Immunization Program, Child Safety Seat Inspection Program, Shattered Dreams (i.e., bi-annual DWI awareness program for high school juniors), "Vial of Life" Program (documentation and storage of medical information in homes), as well as cyclist training (in coordination with the International Police Mountain Biking Association) and CPR training (American Heart Saver) at the bystander and healthcare professional level, among others.
- 5) Continue the Bike Medic Program on a part-time basis during special and public safety education events to bridge the gap between an on-foot response and an ambulance response in crowded conditions. This is particularly important due to the City's recent efforts to expand and interconnect the trail system. Consider adding a periodic presence on the City's overall trail system during non-event, peak summer days.
- 6) Continue to pursue joint partnerships with the La Porte Independent School District, Galveston County Immunization Coalition, and Texas Department of State Health Services to provide cost effective educational and training programs to the community.

GOAL 3.8: Maximize public safety and protection of citizens during and after natural or man-made disasters.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Routinely update the Basic Emergency and Annex Q Plans to ensure that they reflect changed conditions (the last update was posted 6/19/09)



and adequate resources in place for effective emergency response under various scenarios.

- 2) Continue to coordinate with Harris County and other local jurisdictions to promote better regional evacuation planning.
- 3) Ensure adequate City representation on the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) so that the City's priorities are addressed and that overall progress and effectiveness is routinely evaluated.
- 4) Continue to encourage and participate in regular and challenging simulated emergency drills in coordination with the LEPC and other appropriate entities to ensure a high level of readiness and to evaluate the adequacy of emergency response plans.
- 5) Continue to coordinate closely with the LEPC to maintain an up-to-date list of hazardous waste handlers and other facilities that could experience toxic material releases or other dangerous situations during severe weather.
- 6) In coordination with the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) and LEPC, continue to maintain or expand emergency notification capabilities to ensure citizen safety during and after natural and man-made emergencies. This includes supporting the emergency siren system, Community Awareness Emergency Response (CAER Line) telephone system, Connect-CTY, Radio Station AM 830, and the system alert beacons, among others.
- 7) Continue City support for OEM and LEPC school and community outreach programs, e.g., Hurricane Awareness Week, Storm Surge Markers, Shelter-in-Place signs in parks, neighborhoods, and along roads; and the emergency preparedness guides, as well as special events, such as the Health and Safety Fair, Sylvan Beach Parade, the Neighborhood Centers Inc. Community Health Fair, and Christmas on Main Street, among others.

Focus Area 4 – Need for Increased Sustainability

In recent years, there has been a renewed awareness and emphasis on sustainable development practices. There are many approaches to seek improved sustainability, one of which is the design and construction of new (or redeveloped) building sites. Infusing Best Management Practices (BMPs) and providing incentives for good design will move the City toward more responsible development / redevelopment outcomes. Many of these techniques also have the added benefit of enhancing community character.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations to maintain and improve public safety services include:

- 1) Increasing water conservation through the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs), Low Impact Development (LID), water conservation

programs, and additional landscaping to reduce demand for treated, potable water.

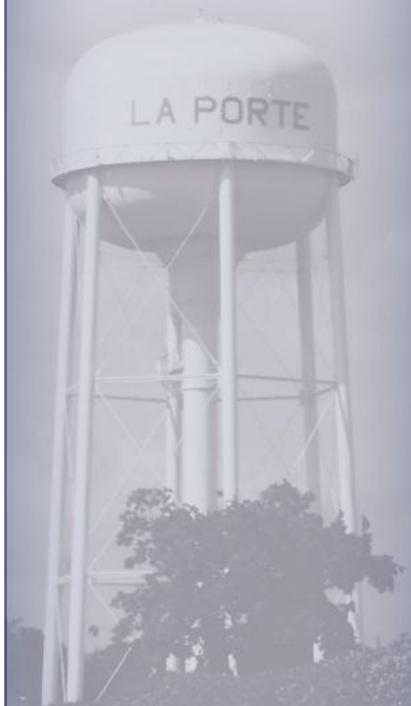
- 2) Protecting important and finite natural resources such as air and water quality, wildlife habitat, and open space lands.
- 3) Reducing solid waste to landfills through continued improvements in recycling, composting, and diversion of solid waste from landfills.
- 4) Reducing the long-term operational costs of public infrastructure, thereby maximizing the use of taxpayer dollars.
- 5) Increasing the amount of outreach to encourage both the private sector and citizens of La Porte to adopt sustainable practices.

Based on these planning considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives address specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process (and outlined in **Chapter 1, Plan Context**).

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Determine a plan of action to reduce per capita per day water usage by five percent within five years of the most recent adoption of the City's 2009 Water Conservation Plan. In the same timeframe, maintain a level of unaccounted water loss at 12 percent or less. Within 10 years, the City should achieve a 10 percent reduction in per capita per day water usage and maintain a level of unaccounted water loss at 10 percent or less.²⁰
- 2) 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 plan.
- 3) Consider publicizing the City's progress in achieving the above stated goals on the City's Website and through other forms of public communication.
- 4) Analyze the current water rate structure to determine its effectiveness in achieving reduced water consumption, particularly from outdoor watering.
- 5) Consider sub-metering for all installed irrigation systems so that individual watering of landscapes can be tracked and managed over time.
- 6) Incentivize clustered development, e.g.; through density bonuses, so that larger areas of natural resources are protected; more natural areas are available for flood and drainage control, and less infrastructure is required to serve the development; which means that there will be less infrastructure for the City to maintain over the long-term.

²⁰ For the purposes of calculations, the 2009 Water Conservation Plan specified that per capita water use is equated to the use per connection. The five- and 10-year targets are based on a five- and 10-year rolling annual average.



Examples of Low Impact Development



Source: Low Impact Development Center, Inc.

Continue Municipal Sustainable Design and Construction



“The new Municipal Court Building serves as a model for our community that municipal growth can proceed in a way that promotes energy efficiency and delivers a cleaner environment.”

Quote Source: City of La Porte Website.
Photo Source: Turner Construction Website.

- 7) Consider methods that either encourage, by education and information, or require/incentivize by regulation, water conserving landscaping by residential customers and commercial establishments. Municipal projects, e.g., gateways and bridge treatments, public rights-of-way and other landscaping, etc., should also be designed to survive in prolonged drought conditions. This has become increasingly more evident during the recent drought.
- 8) Periodically update the City’s Best Management Practices (BMPs) to ensure the City remains up-to-speed on the latest available technologies.
- 9) Incorporate provisions in the zoning and subdivision regulations for low impact development (LID) practices. This approach uses site design techniques to store, infiltrate, evaporate, and detain runoff, which address runoff volumes, frequency, and water quality. Examples of site design elements include on-lot micro-storage, functional landscaping, open drainage swales, reduced imperviousness, minimal grades, and depression storage. (see inset)
- 10) Require the use of bio-swales in parking lots and along roadways to collect and hold stormwater, enhance recharge rates, and improve water quality.
- 11) Use bio-retention areas or rain gardens to collect rainwater after storms and divert it from the stormwater system. For instance, runoff from parking areas can channel water into constructed wetlands or native planting areas.
- 12) Consider phasing in incentives for private sector development that meets an established third-party green standard, e.g.; LEED for Neighborhood Development (LEED-ND) or LEED for New Construction (LEED-NC), through reduced plan review fees or review times, reduced tax rates, etc.
- 13) Consider pursuing third-party certification, e.g., LEED-NC, for the design and construction of all new municipal projects. Similar to the energy efficient and environmentally sound Municipal Court Building (see inset), these sustainable projects can be used as educational features (to inform residents about the science and conservation efforts behind the pilot project), as well as resulting in financial savings over the long-term. Beyond standard building features, consider using municipal projects as demonstration sites for such things as innovative rainwater capture and treatment, xeriscaping, energy production, etc.
- 14) Establish community drop-off recycling locations in each park. As a long-term strategy, coordinate with Waste Management to establish curbside recycling.
- 15) Continue participating in the Harris-Galveston Coastal

Subsidence District's program for educating elementary students about water conservation.

- 16) Adopt a more proactive approach to educating the development community and the general public including the use public property as demonstration sites or including specific pages on the City's Website that details the established public education program on water saving measures, including how and where to find additional information.



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COMMUNITY MOBILITY

CHAPTER 4

Advanced transportation planning and thoroughfare development help communities prepare for future traffic demands and create a safe and efficient system of travel to, from, and within a community. For La Porte, a community that is relatively built out, advanced transportation planning relies more on filling in missing linkages; maintaining connectivity to the east and west side, refining existing corridor appearance, functionality, and efficiency; and improving the balance of transportation choices for the community during new and revitalization/redevelopment projects. If designed well, these projects will not only improve mobility, but will also improve safety and the overall quality of life in the community.

4.1 Introduction

A city's transportation system has a strong influence on the quality of life and economic potential of a community. When residents cannot move with relative ease throughout their community, this leads to frustration and detracts from local quality of life. Likewise, retaining and attracting businesses requires having adequate roadway, rail, air, and other facilities to move people and goods to and from the area in an efficient manner. Indeed, traffic congestion, street maintenance, and safety along roadways are often the most prevalent and talked about issues when addressing current and future community needs.

2001 vs. 2012 Plan Comparison

2001	2012 Update
Ch. 5, Transportation Thoroughfare System	Ch. 4, Community Mobility

While travelling by car is the predominate form of people mobility in La Porte¹ and is typically the topic that receives the most attention, planning for future travel needs in the City will involve looking at transportation as an interconnected system of roadways, paths, trails, and sidewalks, with multiple options for getting around including by transit and bike. In fact, the City's recent commitment to constructing a City-wide trail system is already starting to be a game-changing influence on the discussion of mobility in La Porte.

4.2 Focus Areas, Goals, Actions and Initiatives

Throughout the planning process a number of issues were identified regarding truck traffic, lack of connectivity, trails, sidewalks, and the airport. These discussions formed the basis of the following focus areas, along with an analysis of existing conditions and review of current programs, plans, and ordinances. Each focus area contains contextual information, key planning considerations, goals, (and their rationales), and advisable implementation actions and initiatives. The areas of focus are as follows:

- **Focus Area 1** – Maintained, safe and efficient street transportation network;
- **Focus Area 2** – Improved alternative modes of people mobility; and,
- **Focus Area 3** – Expanded opportunities for water, rail, and air movement of goods.

Focus Area 1 – Maintained, Safe and Efficient Street Transportation Network

Since La Porte is a composite community that is part of a larger metropolitan area, the City's transportation system is comprised of both local streets, which provide access throughout the City, and regional thoroughfares (e.g., state and county roadways), which provide access to other parts of the region. Both are necessary to create an efficient transportation street system. Depicted in **Map 4.1, Streets By Jurisdiction**, is an inventory of the roadways in the City by jurisdictional authority.

Regional Transportation Network

La Porte is well-connected to the region and is located along two major state highways: State Highway (S.H.) 225 and S.H. 146. The existing street network currently provides adequate north-south (i.e., Underwood Road, Sens Road, and S.H. 146) and east-west connections (i.e., S.H. 225, Spencer Highway, and W. Fairmont Parkway). Many of these roadways provide efficient,

¹ Over 95 percent of La Porters workers, age 16 and older, commute to work in an automobile. U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

convenient access to the greater metropolitan area, including Houston, Baytown, Kemah, and Galveston.

Due to the significant increases in growth in the metropolitan area, numerous studies and improvement projects have been proposed for these roadways so that their capacity is maintained and/or improved as the area continues to grow.

Grand Parkway (S.H. 99)

One of these projects is the construction and completion of the Grand Parkway (S.H. 99), a proposed (and under construction) 180+ mile, six-lane highway, which will eventually become the third outer loop to serve the regional mobility needs of the metropolitan area (see inset).

The Grand Parkway is comprised of 11 segments which form a “C” around the metropolitan area. As denoted in the inset in red, the area of S.H. 146 that passes through La Porte is not part of the official Grand Parkway alignment.² Despite not being officially designated as part of the Grand Parkway, this section of S.H. 146 through the City will undoubtedly see increased usage when the loop system is complete. Construction is being undertaken by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and there are currently two segments complete.

State Highway 225

S.H. 225 extends from its interchange with S.H. 146 west along the north corporate limits of La Porte, extending across Beltway 8 and Interstate 610 and terminating at Broadway Boulevard. The freeway is access-controlled with grade separated partially or fully constructed interchanges at Sens Road/26th Street, Miller Cut Off Road, and Battleground Road. The Union Pacific Railroad runs along the southern boundary of the freeway.

In 2003 through 2005, TxDOT conducted a Major Corridor Feasibility Study (MCFS) for an approximate 16-mile segment of S.H. 225 from Interstate 610 and ending at S.H. 146. The impetus for the plan was that the corridor serves as a primary access route for the Barbours Cut Container Terminal and is perceived to have heavy truck traffic.³

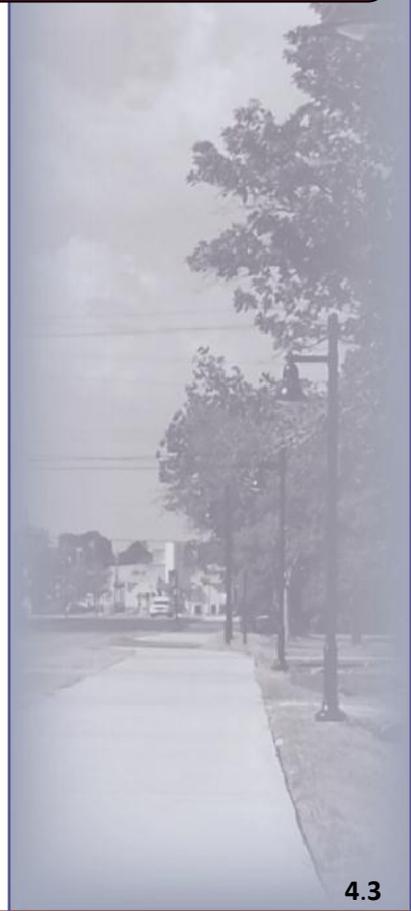
² Grand Parkway (S.H. 99) Environmental Review (June 1993); www.grandpky.com website; phone interview (01/09/12) with David Gornet, P.E., Executive Director of The Grand Parkway Association.

³ TxDOT, Houston District. S.H. 225 Major Corridor Feasibility Study – Final Report, prepared by Carter & Burgess, Inc., November 2005.

The Grand Parkway (S.H. 99)



The Grand Parkway does not currently connect through La Porte.
Source: www.grandpky.com



As part of that study, an Interchange/Ramp Improvements alternative received the highest ranking and is currently being implemented. However, there were no improvements planned for the interchanges within or adjacent to the City of La Porte.⁴

State Highway 146

S.H. 146 traverses La Porte on a north/south alignment and extends south to Interstate 45 in Texas City and north across the Fred Hartman Bridge and over the Houston Ship Channel eventually intersecting with Interstate 10 and then continuing north to S.H. 90. This corridor has been identified by the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), as a candidate for significant infrastructure investment.

Currently, S.H. 146 is undergoing a significant improvement project, which will add sufficient capacity to meet the mobility needs of corridor through the Year 2022.⁵

On its northern segment (i.e., north of Fairmont Parkway), it is an access-controlled freeway and there are no proposed improvements at this time. On the portion south of Fairmont Parkway, the highway was an open highway consisting of two lanes in either direction. This portion of the highway is currently under construction, which, when finished, will consist of a six lanes with some areas having two, three-lane frontage roads. This improvement project also includes the addition of three grade-separated interchanges at Shore Acres Boulevard, Port Road, and Red Bluff Road, and a direct special connection to the Bayport Terminal so that heavy trucks can enter the highway corridor without intermixing with local traffic on the frontage roads.⁶ Finally, as a result of public involvement in the planning process, each proposed alternative, including the chosen preferred alternative, included improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities within the corridor.

Fairmont Parkway

Fairmont Parkway is a major east-west connector for the City as it connects directly to Beltway 8 and terminates near Downtown La Porte at Sylvan Beach. Previously, the corridor was under consideration to be converted into a toll road. That proposal is no longer under consideration and subsequently, Harris County, Precinct 2, has moved forward with a four-phase widening project.

⁴ Phone interview with Patrick Gant, Engineer with the Texas Department of Transportation. 01/09/12.

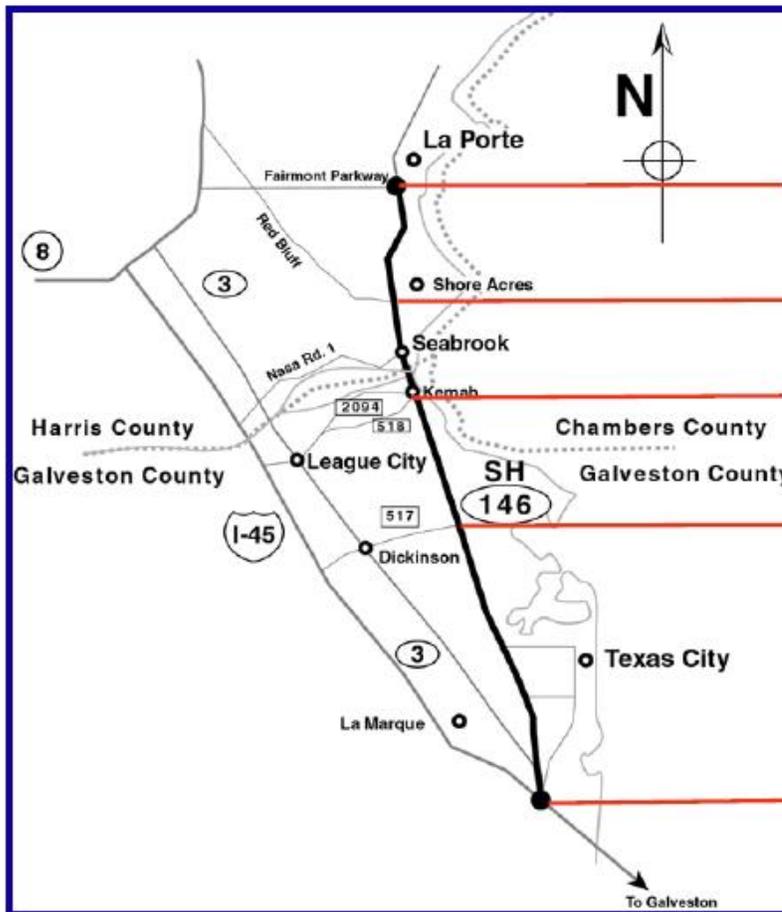
⁵ TxDOT S.H. 146 Major Investment Study (MIS).

⁶ Phone interview with Patrick Gant, Engineer with the Texas Department of Transportation. 01/09/12.

Local Transportation Network

The City is also comprised of local streets which move residents through the community from their homes to employment and shopping centers, schools, and places of leisure. As development and redevelopment continues in and around the City, ensuring through-movement along the arterial street system, adequate connectivity, and ample options for travel on the roadway network will be important for enhancing local mobility. The City is already well-interconnected and given limited resources (i.e., financial) and

S.H. 146 Improvement Project



Fairmont Pkwy

Segment 4 - Provide 6 Freeway lanes with Frontage Roads and potential future HOV lanes.

Red Bluff

Segment 3 - Provide 6 Arterial Lanes with Express lanes grade separated at major intersections.

FM 518

Segment 2 - Provide 6 Arterial lanes with grade separation at major intersections

FM 517

Segment 1 - Provide 4 Arterial lanes with grade separation at major intersections.

I45

Source: SH 146 Corridor MIS. www.txdot.gov.

constraints (i.e., limited vacant areas for new thoroughfare placement), maximizing existing roadway assets through access management and other techniques (e.g., adding connections) will be important for optimizing local mobility.

The majority of the City's older residential areas are on a grid system, providing good connectivity within and through neighborhoods. Even many



Transportation System Management (TSM)

The Transportation Systems Management (TSM) approach to congestion mitigation seeks to identify improvements to enhance the capacity of existing system through better management and operation of existing transportation facilities. These strategies are low-cost but effective in nature, which include, but are not limited to:

- Intersection and signal improvements;
- Freeway bottleneck removal programs;
- Data collection to monitor system performance; and,
- Special events management strategies.

Source: NCTCOG.

of the City's new neighborhoods (e.g., Fairmont Park West) have relatively good connectivity where there is multiple access points and limited reliance on dead-end and cul-de-sac streets. As detailed later in the actions and initiatives section, there are some residential areas where it is recommended to extend existing streets to improve connectivity. Many of these connections were identified in the previous thoroughfare plan and are still important today. However, there was one previously identified connection, Farrington to S.H. 225, which, due to changing conditions, may no longer be as important today as it was in the past. Over the past 10 years, the City has proactively determined that the Lomax area should remain rural in character, which also has a direct correlation to transportation and traffic, as rural areas naturally have lesser traffic volume and a more rural appearance (i.e., open grass swales vs. curb and gutter). In addition, both arterials on either side (i.e., Underwood Road and Sens Road/Bay Area Boulevard) have been, or will be improved to ensure an efficient roadway network for that area. Therefore, in that area, it recommended to extend Farrington Boulevard just to Lomax School Road and to extend the stubbed out Valley Brook Drive, which would provide a northern entry/exit point for the Glen Meadows subdivision and provide better fire and EMS access/protection for area residents.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations regarding the needs to ensure a maintained, safe, and efficient street transportation network include:

- 1) Improving roadway conditions through reconstructing failing streets, striping roadways, seal-coat or overlay those needing surface improvement, installing and/or improving underground or ditch drainage systems, replacing traffic signs, and synchronizing traffic signals.
- 2) Implementing a comprehensive streets-to-standards program to concentrate on bringing all roads throughout the community to an equivalent standard. This program is essentially a City-wide initiative to inventory all street conditions and institute a pavement management system.
- 3) Coordination with regional partners to implement the necessary improvements to S.H. 146 (i.e., constructing frontage roads and three grade-separated intersections or flyovers) and Fairmont Parkway (i.e., constructing an additional lane in each direction).
- 4) Being cognizant of the fact that full implementation of the Grand Parkway (S.H. 99) will impact traffic patterns in the City.
- 5) Facilitating an adequate arterial and collector street system that provides for multiple connections and options.
- 6) Accommodating and mitigating the effects of increased freight movement in and through the City, including being proactive in protecting the two east to west access routes (i.e., Fairmont Parkway and Spencer Highway) from increased truck traffic.

- 7) Maximizing flow and reducing traffic conflicts on existing facilities through access management and other Transportation System Management (TSM) strategies.
- 8) Thoroughfare development that is aesthetically pleasing and compatible with and complements desired character. The character of a corridor is influenced by the City's ordinances and Public Improvement Criteria Manual (PICM) standards which regulate the form of development, including the location and design of sites and buildings which interact with the thoroughfare system.

Based on these considerations, the following goals, actions, and initiatives address specific issues and needs identified during the public participation process (and outlined in **Chapter 1, Plan Context**).

GOAL 4.1: Coordinate with federal, state, and local partners in enhancing regional mobility to facilitate moving people and goods to, from, and through the community in an efficient and effective manner.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Actively participate with TxDOT, The Grand Parkway Association, and other agencies as additional planning and design efforts are undertaken on the S.H. 99 segments north and south of the City. Since these segments will have an effect on the City, it is important for the City to evaluate its planning and design implications.
- 2) Actively participate in regional and statewide transportation planning activities to promote funding and improvements that benefit La Porte.
- 3) Continue to coordinate with the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC), TxDOT, and other regional partners to consider implementation of the following planning projects identified in the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).⁷
 - a. TIP (2012) – Sens Road from N. H. St. to Spencer Highway; Widen to 5-lane concrete pavement with storm drainage; estimated to cost \$8,725,292 (Harris County).
 - b. TIP (2011) – S.H. 146 southern access road and Port Road; construct eastbound exit; estimated to cost \$2,943,369 (Port of Houston Authority).
 - c. TIP (2012) – BNSF railroad and Port Road; construct northbound direct connector; estimated to cost \$8,394,099 (Port of Houston Authority).

⁷ Bridging Our Communities 2035 – The 2035 Houston-Galveston Regional Transportation Plan Update, 1/25/11.

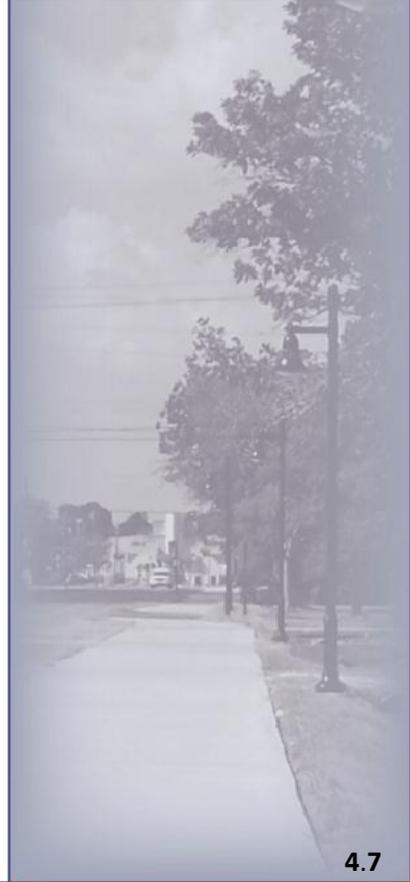
H-GAC 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Prioritization



The H-GAC 2035 RTP groups projects into three timeframes:

- 1) TIP – transportation improvement program imminent for construction;
- 2) Short-range – four to 10 years; and,
- 3) Long-range – 11 to 25 years.

Source: H-GAC 2035 RTP.



- d. Short-range RTP (2016) – S.H. 146 Southbound southern access road; construct direct connector from southbound lanes; estimated to cost \$13,379,661 (Port of Houston Authority).
 - e. Long-range (2020) – Broadway St. from Barbours Cut Blvd. to N. L. St.; widen to 4-lane road; estimated to cost \$2,632,382 (Port of Houston Authority).
 - f. Long-range RTP (2023) – City of La Porte Bike Trail for comprehensive bike and pedestrian trail system; estimated to cost \$13,012,801 (City of La Porte).
 - g. Long-range RTP (2023) – N 16th St. from W. Main to SH 146; 12 ft. construct 4-lane divided arterial and crossover/underpass at intersection; estimated to cost \$8,686,337 (City of La Porte);
 - h. Long-range RTP (2020) – W&E Main St., San Jacinto St., Fairmont Parkway, Park St., E. St.; City of La Porte streetscape improvements; estimated to cost \$8,015,360 (City of La Porte).
 - i. Long-range RTP (2020) RTP –Wharton Weems Blvd. from Powell Rd. to SH 146; construct a new 4-lane divided arterial concrete curb & gutter & underground storm sewer; estimated to cost \$7,547,378 (City of La Porte).
- 4) Continue to monitor other planning projects identified in the 2035 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) to ensure La Porte’s transportation needs are addressed.

Goal 4.2: A local transportation system that moves people through the community in a safe and efficient manner.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Continue to utilize the Thoroughfare Plan to address transportation improvement needs and to preserve future rights-of-way needed to accommodate long-term development of the arterial and collector thoroughfare system. This also includes, to the extent feasible, minimizing the existence and new construction of dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs.
- 2) Maintain the conformity clause in the zoning regulations requiring conformance with the adopted Thoroughfare Plan. (see inset)
- 3) Extend collector roads to arterial roads to increase connectivity within and between subdivisions. This can be achieved by requiring, concurrent with subdivision approval, continuous collector roadways between all arterials, aligning with existing collector roadway segments.
- 4) Explore the concept of incorporating volume-based standards for local residential streets into the City’s development regulations. Under this approach, the type of access, number of dwelling units served, and the units’ average frontages determine the street right-of-way, pavement width, and other design requirements such as parking lanes, curb width,

Conformity Clause

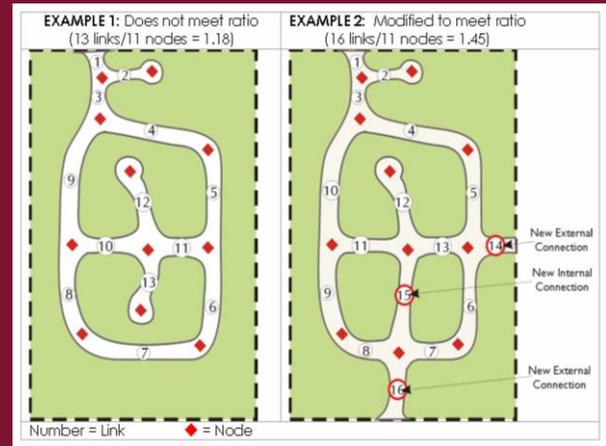
“All buildings shall be placed in such a manner that they will not obstruct future streets which may be constructed using existing rights-of-way or dedicated rights-of-way in accordance with the adopted thoroughfare plan of the city.”

Source: La Porte Code of Ordinances Sec. 106-237, Conformance with Thoroughfare Plan

parkways, and sidewalks (this would apply only to local streets with no potential for future connection or extension). Therefore, the required right-of-way and street design is directly tied to development density and generated traffic volumes as opposed to a “one-size-fits-all” standard for all local streets. Where appropriate, sidewalks or off-street trails could be required as a tradeoff for reduced pavement width. Alternatively, modify the PICM standards to include a standard cross section and an alternative cross section that provides more flexible options based on conditions on the site, e.g., developer wants to install a narrower street, planted center median, and offset trails, rather than the standard 28-foot, two lane local street with sidewalks offset two feet from the pavement.

- 5) In conformance with the Thoroughfare Plan (see **Map 4.2, Thoroughfare Plan** and **Section 4.3** of this Chapter), work with affected stakeholders to consider the following street connections on existing streets:
 - a. Collingswood Road and Collingswood Drive;
 - b. Catlett Lane from Roseberry Drive to Valley Brook Drive;
 - c. Venture Lane from Aston Lane to Somerton Drive;
 - d. N. Avenue H just east of Meadow Lark Lane;
 - e. West Barbours Cut Boulevard to Sens Road (would require an overpass over the railroad);
 - f. Bayou forest Drive to McCabe Road with an extension to Hollow Tree Street; and,
 - g. Valley Brook Drive to N. Avenue H.
- 6) Adopt a street connectivity index (for the remaining larger undeveloped areas) to ensure there are adequate street connections in a neighborhood and to 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. The connectivity ratio would be identified in the development regulations and would be based on existing subdivisions in La Porte. Features of the ordinance should include:
 - a. An appropriate connectivity index (e.g., street links divided by street nodes).
 - b. Requirements for connecting local and collector streets to adjacent developments to ensure a minimum level of external connectivity.
 - c. Requirements to establish pedestrian routes between land uses. This is particularly important where natural features or other constraints make it impractical to connect streets.
 - d. Provisions to discourage cut-through traffic and speeding. (see inset)

Street Connectivity Index



A connectivity index increases the number of street connections in a neighborhood and improves directness of routes.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.



Access Management Needs



In this section of Spencer Highway, the number of vehicles that will be entering and exiting (particularly left-hand turns) the multiple access points (denoted in yellow) will cause a worsening of congestion as this corridor fully develops or redevelops.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

7) Coordinate with the county, as necessary, to conduct signal warrant studies to determine if signals are needed at the below specified intersections. Indicative of a rural area, Lomax has long lengths of roadways and limited connectivity. As such, the terminus of each of these roadway segments may warrant the need for a signal now, or in the future as infill development/redevelopment continues.

- a. North P Street and Sens Road;
- b. North L Street and Sens Road;
- c. North Avenue H and Sens Road; and,
- d. North Avenue H and Underwood Road.

8) Coordinate with the county to request signal timing studies to be done on Fairmont Parkway and Spencer Highway.

9) Periodically conduct signal warrant studies as area travel volumes increase with new development

and as truck traffic increases due to the Panama Canal expansion and regional growth.⁸ In areas that are already managed by traffic signals (e.g., and the new signal at 16th Street was identified as having existing signal timing problems), 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. Adjustments should be made to traffic signals so they are timed accordingly. Pedestrian- and bicycle-actuated traffic signals should be installed at intersections near schools, parks, and other areas with high pedestrian traffic.

- 10) Develop an access management program and guidelines that provide appropriate strategies and access design requirements based on the roadway's functional classification as identified on the Thoroughfare Plan. Further, coordinate with the state, county, and other partners, as necessary, to prepare access management studies to identify and evaluate appropriate TSM measures that would be suitable and feasible along corridors of concern. These measures could include the addition of right or left turns lanes at certain locations (with or without planted center medians), consolidation of driveways, and signal timing. There are a number of sources and criteria that could be used in determining appropriate TSM measures in the community, including those identified in TxDOT's Access Management Manual and the Transportation Research Board's Access Management Manual. (see inset on page 4.6)
- 11) Amend the development regulations and/or the Public Improvement Criteria Manual (PICM) to restrict and/or guide the number, location,

⁸ Truck volumes are expected to grow by 77 percent by 2035 along the major trade corridors serving the Houston-Galveston area's port and waterway system. H-GAC Regional Goods Movement Study – Final Report. Dec. 2011.

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 in preserving capacity along roadways that are not currently lined with development. The regulations should require marginal access roads and/or cross-access easements along all commercial frontage abutting arterial and collector roads to minimize the number of driveways.

- 12) Amend the development regulations and/or the PICM to 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.
- 13) Amend the development regulations and/or PICM to limit or prohibit residential driveways along collector roadways to preserve the intended function of these roadways. Ideally, side lot lines should face the collector street.
- 14) Create a Strategic Corridors Program by identifying strategic corridors within the community and direct aesthetic and infrastructure improvements along those corridors as a priority. Coordinate with the state and county, as necessary, for non-City roadways. This allows the City to improve key corridors in a more holistic fashion, making improvements including infrastructure, property maintenance, access management, aesthetics, and landscaping to a corridor all at once. A corridor streetscape plan should be prepared for these strategic corridors. The plans should include a detailed inventory and assessment of existing conditions, including land use and zoning, building footprints, numbers and locations of driveways and parking lots, numbers and locations of signs, trees, and vegetation, power poles and overhead lines, street cross sections and rights-of-way, sidewalks and pedestrian improvements, pervious and impervious surfaces, and general visual characteristics. The enhancement and design plans should include any regulatory recommendations and identified improvements and their estimated costs. An implementation plan should identify priorities, funding options and sources, and a timeline. As identified in **Chapter 2, Map 2.2, Beautification Plan**, primary corridors should include S.H. 225, Fairmont Parkway (in conjunction with the Harris County widening project), Underwood Road, and S.H. 146 frontage roads. Secondary corridor enhancements should be completed on Spencer Highway, Sens Road, San Jacinto Drive, and Broadway Street.



City Council Votes 'No'

On xx-xx-xxxx, the La Porte City Council voted unanimously to reject a legislative attempt to create a Heavy Haul Corridor, which would allow increased truck weights along S.H. 225 and S.H. 146.

Source: City of La Porte

Benefits of Complete Streets



Complete Streets:

- Make economic sense;
- Improve access;
- Improve safety;
- Promote active living and good health through encouraging walking and bicycling;
- Can help ease transportation woes;
- Can lower transportation costs for families;
- Help keep kids safe;
- Improve mobility for people with disabilities and the elderly;
- Make fiscal sense; and
- Foster strong and livable communities.

Photo and Text Source: National Complete Streets Coalition.

15) Expand the formal traffic calming program⁹ to include City-initiated travel speed studies to determine appropriate speed restrictions in neighborhoods and pedestrian areas. Perform localized traffic calming studies where there are observed unsafe conditions of cut-through and/or high-speed traffic to determine if any potential mitigation strategies are viable without undermining roadway capacity and creation of traffic congestion issues. (see also **Chapter 2, Land Use and Development, Goal 3, Action Item # 5**)

16) Continue to take necessary action to avoid implementation of a Heavy Haul Corridor on S.H. 225 and S.H. 146. (see inset)

17) Coordinate with state, county, industrial districts, and other regional partners to address increasing truck traffic in the area. This could include determining potential long-term solutions for reducing and/or removing some or all truck traffic from Fairmont Parkway as other road improvements in the area are completed (e.g., Canada to Red Bluff Road connection, widening and grade-separated crossings on S.H. 146, Spencer Highway and Sens Road widening, etc.).

18) Maintain funding and support for the Clean City Street Program as it improves the appearance of existing corridors and helps to enhance quality of life for La Porte's citizens.

19) Maintain established regulations allowing golf carts to be utilized on certain public rights-of-way within City limits.¹⁰

Focus Area 2 – Improved Alternative Modes of People Mobility

Currently, the private automobile is the primary form of transportation for most individuals in La Porte. However, with an aging population, escalating fuel costs, continuing environmental concerns, and the high cost of planning and building roadways, opportunities exist for providing and accommodating alternate modes of transportation, including transit and bike pedestrian facilities. Indeed, as a testament to the change in times since the last comprehensive plan, the City now participates in a jointly funded transit system (the "Circulator"), and has constructed almost 14 miles (out of 38 miles)¹¹ of a planned City-wide trail system. In fact, the trail system was one of the most talked about topics during the public participation process.

One of the best ways to increase alternative modes of people mobility is to adopt and implement a Complete Streets policy (see

⁹ City of La Porte Public Works Department, Traffic Humps. <http://www.ci.la-porte.tx.us/gov/pw/streets/th.asp>.

¹⁰ La Porte Code of Ordinances, Sec. 70-304. Operation of golf carts permitted.

¹¹ City of La Porte, Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Implementation Plan. 2003.

inset), which means that streets are designed for all modes of transportation – walking, bicycling, transit, and vehicular movement.¹²

Sidewalks

With the City’s recent expansion of the trail system, it further justifies and increases the value of improving the City’s existing and future sidewalk system. This can be accomplished in two ways: the installation of sidewalks where they do not currently exist, and the repair of sidewalks that are in disrepair. Prioritization for sidewalk installation should include key routes to schools, parks, and trails, as well as those areas connecting residential developments and areas of employment and commercial services.

The design of public streets and their amenities greatly influences the safety and enjoyment of pedestrians and encourages people to choose alternative modes of transportation. Sidewalks with a minimum width of five feet should be constructed on both sides of all new public streets, with wider eight foot sidewalks along designated arterial streets and within commercial areas. Parkway, or separations between the street and the sidewalk, should be required for all new streets. The combination of parkways and street trees help to slow traffic and separates pedestrians from the noise, exhaust, and danger of adjacent automobile traffic. Although the City requires all new sidewalk installations to conform to the Federal Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requirements, there are many existing sidewalks where there remain barriers to persons with disabilities due to their poor condition or lack of accessible ramps and curb cuts at street intersections.

Similar to street connectivity provisions, pedestrian connections provide a great many benefits, including the promotion of increased exercise and alternate forms of transportation. Within subdivision reviews, likely current and future pedestrian destinations (such as parks, schools, the City’s trail system, nearby shopping and dining establishments, etc.) should be carefully examined and pedestrian pathways should be required in mid-block or cul-de-sac locations to provide more direct and efficient pedestrian route opportunities. (see inset)

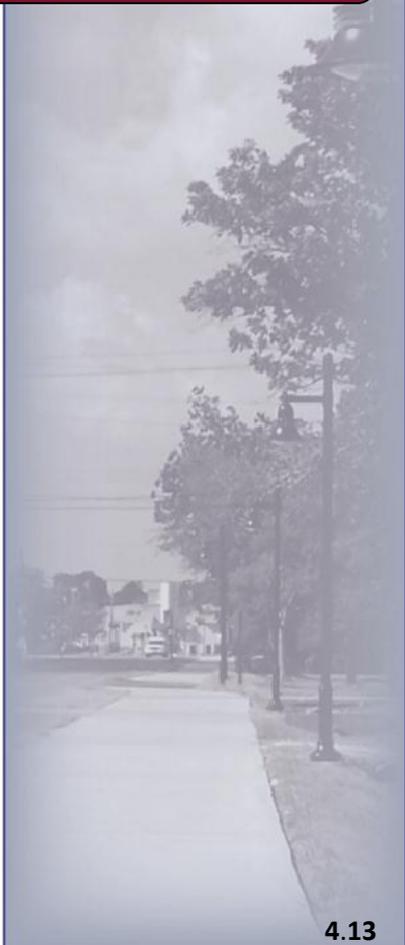
¹² Complete Streets are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users. Complete Street policies direct transportation planners and designers to design consistently with all users in mind. Elements of Complete Streets include: sidewalks/trails, bus pull-outs, bike lanes, raised crosswalks, wide shoulders, audible pedestrian signals, sidewalk bulb-outs, refuge medians, pedestrian amenities, special bus lanes, shade and shelter, and trees and landscaping. National Complete Streets Coalition, www.completestreets.org.

Pedestrian Connectivity



Sidewalk connectivity is equally as important as street connectivity. In this photo, the street and both sidewalks dead end, thereby preventing connectivity (and furthering reliance on the automobile) to San Jacinto College and other parts of the City.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative



Trails

In 2003, the City Council adopted the La Porte Pedestrian-Bicycle Master Plan with the intent of creating a City-wide trail network that connects both the east and west sides of town. Prior to adoption of the comprehensive trail plan, the City had less than two miles of trails, mostly comprised of walking paths within existing park and recreation areas.

The plan’s focus was to show how a network of pedestrian and bicycle ways can be implemented, “designing an interconnected system of paths, trails, lanes, and routes that are multipurpose, accessible where possible, convenient and connect to residential neighborhoods, parks, schools, workplaces, shopping and major open spaces as well as tie into the neighboring communities’ trail systems.”¹³ The plan’s goals were to:

- Enhance the quality of life for La Porte citizens by providing the opportunity for non-motorized travel from home to recreation, school, shopping, work or visiting friends;
- Create and preserve green belt linkages of parks, open spaces, drainage ways, irrigation canals, bikeways, paths, and natural areas throughout the City;
- Use linear parks and greenbelts to create low maintenance additions to the park system; and,
- Coordinate with Harris County, H-GAC, the City of Baytown, City of Pasadena and other municipalities, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, International Boundary and Waterway Council, and other federal, state, and local governmental entities in efforts to preserve and enhance the waterways, green spaces, and natural areas within the La Porte area.¹⁴

As displayed in **Table 4.1, La Porte Trail System Phasing**, the result of the plan identified and defined a City-wide network of trails of different types, including connector, hike and bike, equestrian, and nature trails. The plan suggested implementation over a period of 20 years, identifying three phases of improvements.

Table 4.1, La Porte Trail System Phasing

<i>Phase / Type</i>	<i>Paved Trail</i>	<i>Soft Surface Trail</i>	<i>Striped On-Street Trail</i>	<i>Total</i>
Phase I	7	3.95	1.35	12.3
Phase II	4.25	4.4	5.3	13.95
Phase III	9.4	0	2.8	12.2
Total Trail System:				38.45

Source: City of La Porte Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Implementation Plan

To implement the City-wide trail system in the most efficient way possible, the plan recommended using a variety of trail corridors and trail types, many of which were

¹³ City of La Porte, Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Implementation Plan. 2003.

¹⁴ Ibid.

already permanent, existing corridors through the City. The corridors included:

- Drainage channels / bayous;
- Railroad / utility corridors or easements; and,
- Right-of-way easements / on-street connectors.

The types of trails included:

- Shared use paths;
- Bicycle lanes;
- Shared roadways; and,
- Designated bicycle routes.

Finally, the plan recommended the design and construction of safe trail crossings, including both grade-separated (i.e., above- and below-grade) and at-grade crossings. While most trails are originally constructed using at-grade crossings, over time and as trail usage increases, grade-separated crossings should be added. (see inset)

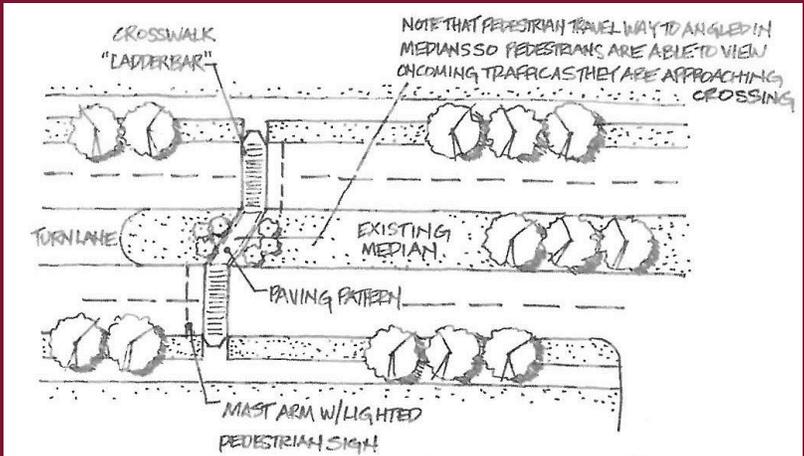
As displayed in **Table 4.2, Completed Trail Segments – 2011**, the City has constructed approximately 14 miles of the trail system, which now allows citizens to ride a bike on a paved trail from the Five Points Town Plaza to the Pasadena Convention Center and many other parts of the City that were not previously accessible just years ago.¹⁵

Transit

In 2006, a Comprehensive Transit Strategy study was undertaken to determine the needs of those county citizens who live outside of the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO) service area. The study recognized that there was limited access to “regional employment centers, medical services, and higher education facilities particularly for those households with lower incomes,

¹⁵ La Porte By the Bay – Community Information 2011, New Hike and Bike Trails Connect Citizens, Neighborhoods.

Design of Safe At-Grade Trail Crossings A Priority



Source: City of La Porte Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Implementation Plan

Table 4.2, Completed Trail Segments – 2011

Trail Segment	Miles of Trail
Little Cedar Bayou / LP Recreation and Fitness Center	0.4
Fairmont Parkway	6.7
Broadway	2.1
Bayshore Elementary	0.4
San Jacinto	0.8
Park Street	0.8
East E. Street	0.5
Driftwood	0.7
Sens Road	1.2
Total	13.6

Source: La Porte By the Bay Community Information 2011

and for those lacking access to a personal vehicle.”¹⁶ As part of that study, it was determined that there were over 420,000 citizens who lived in Harris County Precinct 2 that were outside of METRO’s service area. The plan’s goals were to:

- Identify areas of transit needs;
- Provide mobility options to underserved portions of the county (outside METRO’s service area);
- Enhance existing services through coordination of providers/programs;
- Capture fair share of federal funding;
- Impact the value of local investments and match federal funding; and,
- Utilize transit as a tool for community revitalization and economic development.¹⁷

Some of the recommendations that came out of that study for Precinct 2 were the creation of a park-and-ride along S.H. 225 to serve La Porte and Pasadena and to create a Baytown-Pasadena-La Porte Circulator. To fund these initiatives, the Harris County Commissioners Court authorized the Community Services Department (CSD) to be the administrator of all non-infrastructure Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Transit funds. CSD also obtained consent from the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) and Harris County METRO to become an additional Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recipient of Section 5307 funds, which was the first step in the process of gaining access to \$4.5 million annually in Federal grant funds. These funds will be used to provide transportation alternatives to county residents who previously did not have access to these types of services. To be eligible for receiving Federal funding, local share funding and commitments are required.¹⁸

In 2007, the Harris County Office of Transit Services was created to design and operate a multitude of transportation services in areas of the county not served by METRO. These services include Park and Ride, fixed-route, and para-transit services. In January 2010, a fixed-route “Circulator” was created and sponsored by the Pasadena Second Century Corporation, San Jacinto College, and the cities of South Houston, Pasadena, and La Porte. In October 2010, La Porte entered into an Interlocal Agreement with Harris County and contributed \$90,000 to continue the circulator bus service for another year.¹⁹

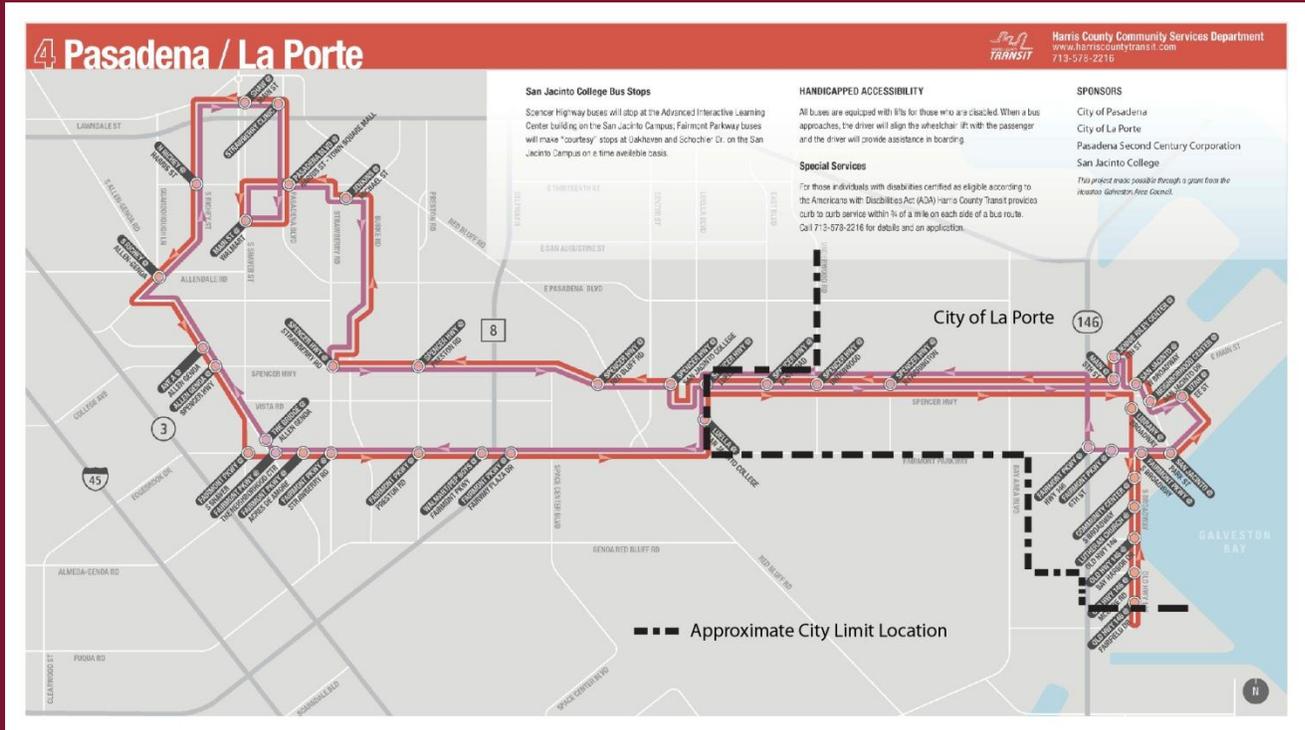
¹⁶ Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) Regional Transit Framework Study Related Plans and Studies Report. HDR Engineering, June 29, 2010 update. <http://www.harriscountyttransit.com/news.html>

¹⁷ Harris County Transit Strategy – Enhancing Mobility & Economic Development Through Transit. Presentation by The Goodman Corporation to the Mayors of Precinct 2. January 25, 2006.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ La Porte By the Bay – Community Information, Harris County Bus Route Serves La Porte Citizens. 2011.

Harris County Transit Circulator Route 4



The jointly sponsored "Circulator" traverses La Porte along its east/west axis.

Map Source: www.harriscountyttransit.com.

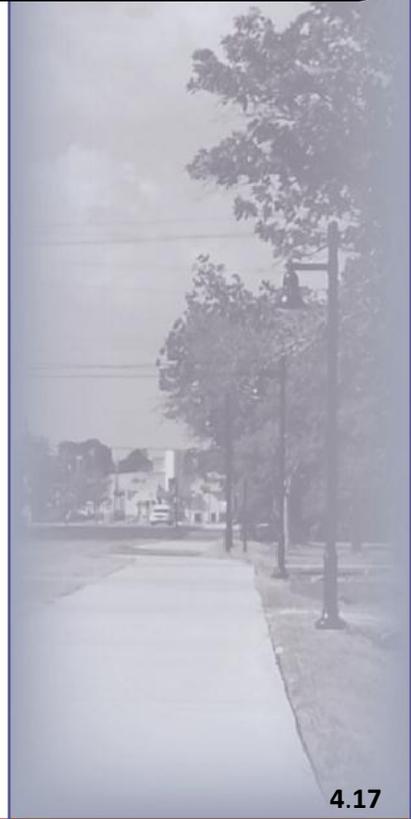
In less than 15 months of operation, "Route 4" averages 2,500 boardings per month and is growing. (see inset next page) About a third of that ridership is attributed to younger San Jacinto College students looking for efficient, dependable alternate transportation options. These students were also the first to utilize the bike racks attached to the buses so that their mobility options pre- and post- transit are also increased. In addition to travelling to and from college and work, the circulator is also used for mall shopping, doctor visits, and library visits. Despite being a relatively new service, with limited signage, marketing, benches or covered shelters, this alternative mobility option is being used by hundreds daily.²⁰

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations regarding the needs to improve alternate modes of people mobility include:

- 1) Constructing or reconstructing sidewalks that are in poor condition (particularly adjacent to schools and public buildings), installing pedestrian amenities including crosswalks and signals, and installing street lights.

²⁰ City of La Porte website: Harris County Transit Fixed Route Bus Service: Pasadena / La Porte Corridor Video. <http://www.ci.la-porte.tx.us/about/transportation.asp>.



Sidewalk Design



Sidewalk Expansion Retrofit



New Sidewalk Construction

Increasing the minimum sidewalk width, allowing variation in setback from right-of-way, providing larger areas of “tree lawn”, street trees, etc., will help to increase usage of the sidewalk system because users feel more comfortable. The newer sidewalks are much better designed and constructed (bottom photo) than many previous installations (top photo).

Photo Sources: Kendig Keast Collaborative

- 2) Working with Harris County to expand public transit opportunities to additional residents.
- 3) Identifying needs and innovative transportation options for accommodating an aging population and disabled residents (e.g., those using motorized wheelchairs and scooters), including appropriate transit services and parking facilities.
- 4) Expanding connectivity between neighborhoods and commercial and public areas through an interconnected system of sidewalks and trails.
- 5) Finding a balance between the social service aspect of providing public transit and the overall community benefit of increased mobility.
- 6) Neighborhood design that calms traffic and encourages slower speeds, including narrower streets where appropriate.

GOAL 4.3: Adopt a “Complete Streets” policy for new and reconstructed roadway corridors to facilitate alternate modes of people mobility.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Adopt a “Complete Streets” policy and commit to designing and constructing “Complete Streets” in the remaining areas of new development (and in any area undergoing revitalization or redevelopment), which will provide for the mobility and safety of all users of the system, rather than just automobile traffic. A “Complete Streets” approach may be more difficult to apply to already established thoroughfares, although it should be able to be incorporated during road reconstruction and/or streetscape improvement projects. On thoroughfares that are constrained by narrow rights-of-way, only some “Complete Street” features, such as wider sidewalks or streetscape enhancements, may be feasible through a redesign and retrofitting process.

GOAL 4.4: Increase the prevalence and functionality of existing and future sidewalks in order to facilitate increased usage.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Modify the Public Improvement Criteria Manual (PICM) to increase the standard sidewalk from four feet to a minimum of five feet. This will help to prevent having to widen sidewalks after installation. (see inset)
- 2) Establish a policy to add sidewalks along roadways where they are not already present when such roadways are improved or widened.
- 3) Establish requirements within the PICM relating to the location of sidewalks within the right-of-way. According to the City’s established standards, there is sufficient right-of-way beyond the minimum required

pavement width to accommodate a parkway, which separate sidewalks from the back of the curb or street edge.²¹

- 4) Maintain the provisions within the PICM requiring the installation of sidewalks on both sides of public streets; in addition to other areas as required; including parks, drainage channels, public utility easements, and detention ponds. Provisions should be added requiring external connection points to the existing and/or planned City-wide trail system.²²
- 5) Maintain the provisions within the PICM disallowing dead-end collectors and dead-end major and minor thoroughfares. Provisions should be added requiring public access easements at the end of cul-de-sacs. Such easements should be a minimum width of 15 feet and improved with a five foot wide sidewalk or trail connections.²³
- 6) Maintain the provisions in the PICM requiring sidewalk pedestrian refuge areas for all esplanade roadways.²⁴ Where warranted, proactively install medians in the rights-of-way of existing arterial roadways, particularly near public parks and buildings, for use as a pedestrian refuge to shorten the unprotected distance across roadways.
- 7) Identify and stripe appropriate roadways for bike lanes. Many of the City's roadways are currently wide enough to accommodate bike lanes without the need for additional right-of-way acquisition or street widening. Bike lanes should be located along collectors and minor arterials where driveways and access points are limited.
- 8) Add provisions to the PICM requiring commercial development to provide sidewalk connections from the front of the commercial establishment to the sidewalk located in the public right-of-way. This is to ensure there is a marked, safe connection from the street, through the parking lot, and into the building. (see inset)
- 9) Target pedestrian/bicycle improvements at key locations within the community, particularly around the San Jacinto College, Downtown, and Sylvan Beach.
- 10) Prepare a Safe Sidewalks Program to identify those locations where unsafe conditions and/or poorly maintained sidewalks exist particularly around, adjacent to, and leading to/away from schools; near and adjacent to public buildings and spaces; and other areas prone to heavy utilization of the sidewalks. In these priority areas, conduct regular inspections of safety conditions to ensure the walking surface is free from hazards and dangerous obstructions. Also, organize a public education program to notify the community of the Safe Sidewalks

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

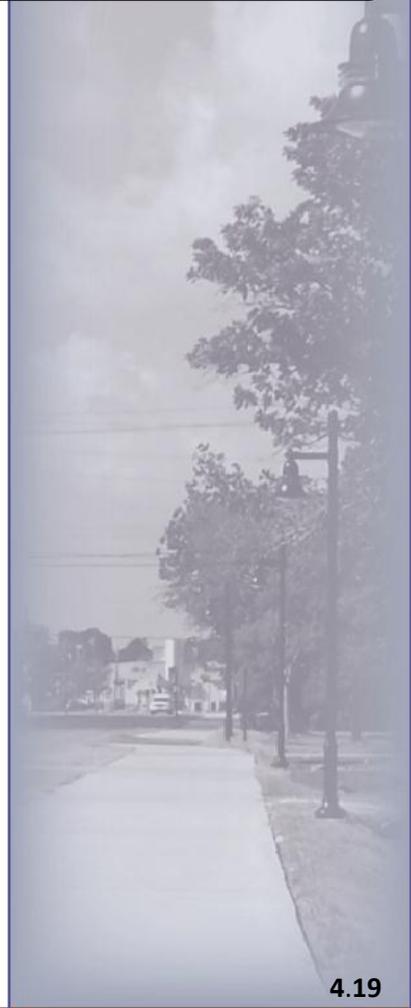
²⁴ Ibid.

Sidewalk Design



Provisions should be added to provide a safe pedestrian connection between the public street and the building entrance. An example is denoted in yellow.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative



Program, the priority pedestrian areas, and the individual responsibilities for care and maintenance. Due to the significant costs of initial construction, maintenance of the existing sidewalk system should be a priority and should be adequately funded in the annual operating budget. Additional grant funding should also be pursued from such sources as Federal, State, private entities.

- 11) Identify intersections in the community that are heavily used by pedestrians and prioritize and implement safety improvements at these intersections. Intersections should be prioritized based on use and pedestrian risk. Improvements could include walkovers; installing accessible ramps for persons with disabilities; marked, signed, and/or signaled pedestrian crossings; and pedestrian-actuated signal detectors. Examples of intersections that are in need of pedestrian improvements include the intersection at Five Points and Oakhaven Road and Luella Boulevard near San Jacinto College.

GOAL 4.5: Continue to implement the planned trail network and facilitate increased connection points over time.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Continue to coordinate with the La Porte Independent School District (La Porte ISD) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to pursue funding for, and construction of, additional "Safe Routes to School" segments. This program was used to fund the 2.1 mile Broadway Trail completed in 2005.
- 2) Periodically update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Implementation Plan as changes in conditions occur. Subsequent updates should include a detailed analysis to determine where additional connections can be made to maximize access to the already established trail system. Future trail segments and crossings should be designed to be safe for all users, including families. In addition, benchmarking should be incorporated into the plan to establish goals and to monitor the success of the trail system over time.
- 3) Continue to budget, or pursue additional outside funding, to construct the remaining trail segments as identified in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Trail Implementation Plan, with priority given to developing trail segments consecutively so that it results in a continuous and cohesive trail system. Due to the significant costs of initial construction, maintenance of the existing trail system should be a priority and should be adequately funded in the annual operating budget. Additional grant funding should also be pursued from such sources as federal, state, private entities.
- 4) To facilitate the increased availability of using a bicycle as an alternate form of mobility over time, amend the development regulations to add provisions for requiring bicycle racks at office and retail establishments

exceeding 15,000 square feet and businesses employing more than 10 persons.

GOAL 4.6: Further invest in the Harris County Transit System to increase usage as an alternate mode of mobility for the citizens of La Porte.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) At a minimum, continue to budget \$90,000 to cover the City’s portion of the costs to maintain and operate the Route 4 circulator bus service. As ridership increases, pursue grant funding or other funding sources to further invest in amenities for those bus stops located within the City limits. Implementation should be prioritized on the average number of boardings per day at the stop. The amenities should include all-weather shelters (for protection from rain and other elements), benches (for seating), trash cans (for maintaining cleanliness), concrete or paved connections to the curb (for disabled users), appropriate maps and signage (for fare and route information), monitors for real-time information on the arrival of buses, public art, lighting, and advertisements (potentially to offset the costs of installing and maintaining each bus stop).
- 2) Coordinate with the Harris County Office of Transit Services (and other partners) to implement an online (and mobile app), real-time transit information system using GPS technology to notify passengers when the arrival of the next bus will occur. Studies have shown that this can increase ridership.
- 3) Consider coordinating with the Harris County Office of Transit Services (and other partners) to initiate and implement a Summer Youth Pass Program, where high school-aged children are given unlimited access to buses (for a nominal fee) during the summer months so that it provides the City’s youth with increased access to a range of activities along the bus route and provides greater independence to the youth while their parents are at work. Coordination with the La Porte Independent School District (ISD) could also be done to market the program prior to the end of the school year.
- 4) Coordinate with the Harris County Office of Transit Services (and other partners) to conduct a study to determine additional placement of bus stops. Additional scheduled stops could be located at the entrances of each major subdivision (e.g., Brookglen Subdivision), multi-family housing, large commercial developments, assisted living facilities, etc.) Alternately, programs could be implemented where the bus would stop at designated “flag stops” only if a flag is set to request a stop or via pull cords where a rider would pull a cord to request a stop.

Bus Stop Investment Can Increase Ridership



Existing Bus Stop



Future Bus Stop

A bus stop is a designated place where buses stop for passengers to board or leave a bus. As ridership increases, investment in bus stop areas (e.g., shelters, benches, trash cans, etc.) can further help to increase ridership numbers.

Photo Sources: Kendig Keast Collaborative (top); Wikipedia.org (bottom)



- 5) Coordinate with Harris County Office of Transit Services (and other providers) to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of expanding the existing route to include stops at designated areas within the surrounding industrial districts and terminals, e.g., adding a Bay Area Boulevard to Shore Acres Boulevard to Broadway loop.
- 6) Coordinate with the Harris County Office of Transit Services to determine the feasibility of constructing a Park-and-Ride in the City for commuter access to Downtown Houston.

Focus Area 3 – Expanded Opportunities for Water, Rail, and Air Movement of Freight or Goods.

Freight, or goods movement, refers to the transportation of physical goods from one location to another and includes everything from chemicals, machinery, and anything else shipped from one place to another. The region's freight transportation system is comprised of roadways, airports, water ports, pipelines and freight terminals, including truck, rail, port, and pipeline terminals. The region's multi-modal transportation system, of which La Porte is a primary contributor, moves nearly 700 million tons of freight annually and is expected to grow 58 percent (to 1.2 billion tons of freight annually) by 2035. Consequently, identifying and implementing improvements to accommodate increasing demand for goods movement is critical to La Porte's, and the regions, economic vitality. In fact, a large part of the Houston-Galveston region relies on its diverse transportation assets, including deep water ports, the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, and Class I railroads.²⁵

The La Porte Municipal Airport

The La Porte Municipal Airport is located on 300 acres on the north side of Spencer Highway east of Farrington Street and west of Driftwood Drive. It was originally constructed in the mid-1940s by the United States Government and served as a second auxiliary landing field to Ellington Air Force Base. Ownership was deeded to the City of La Porte in June 1947 and was reclassified as a local service airport in 1959.²⁶

According to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA's) National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS), the La Porte Municipal Airport is classified as a General Utility airport with Reliever status. The General Utility airport designation refers to the particular Aircraft Approach Categories and Airplane Design Groups (ADGs) that can be accommodated at the airport. Reliever airports are general aviation airports in metropolitan areas that are intended to reduce congestion at large commercial service airports by

²⁵ H-GAC Regional Goods Movement Study – Final Report. Dec. 2011.

²⁶ La Porte Municipal Airport – Airport Master Plan Update (Final), April 1992.

providing general aviation pilots with alternative landing areas, and providing more general aviation access to the community. In 1991, the Houston-Galveston Areas Council (H-GAC) identified the La Porte Municipal Airport as one of 10 designated reliever airports. As established in the Airport and Airway Improvement Act of 1982, a minimum of 10 percent of Airport Improvement Program funds must be reserved for reliever airports.

The La Porte Municipal Airport Master Plan was prepared for the City in 1992. The plan identifies existing and future airport conditions and facilities, including details on fixed base operators, aircraft parking, maintenance, navigational aids, airport layout plan, terminal area plan, airspace and approach zones surfaces, on-airport land use plan, and an environmental consequences review. However, an operational plan was not included.

Historically, the airport has not met the use and revenue projections of the Airport Master Plan. Further complicating the problem is the recent vacancy of the 27th Squadron of the Texas Air National Guard and a general perception that the airport grounds have not been well maintained. Consequently, one of the topics that came up during the public participation process was whether or not the airport property should be redeveloped as another use. Reusing the property for non-airport purposes, however, would be difficult due to Federal regulations attached to the property conveyance.²⁷

Railroads

Rail transportation in the La Porte area is provided by the Union Pacific Railroad, which operates in 23 states across the western two-thirds of the United States. A Union Pacific Railroad line runs along the north City limits, along the southern rights-of-way of S.H. 225. The line provides port terminal service to the Battleground Industrial District north of S.H. 225, as well as the Barbours Cut Terminal in Morgan's Point. The main line branches south on a north/south alignment parallel to S.H. 146, extending south along S.H. 146 to the Port of Galveston. This line branches off to provide service to the

²⁷ Conveyances to Public Agencies. ... the Secretary of Transportation shall request the head of the department, agency, or instrumentality of the United States Government owning or controlling land or airspace to convey a property interest in the land or airspace to the public agency sponsoring the project or owning or controlling the airport when necessary to carry out a project under this subchapter at a public airport, to operate a public airport, or for the future development of an airport under the national plan of integrated airport systems. ... A conveyance may be made only on the condition that the property interest conveyed reverts to the Government, at the option of the Secretary, to the extent it is not developed for an airport purpose or used consistently with the conveyance. 49 USC Chapter 471, Airport Development Code, Sec. 47125, Conveyance of United States Government land. (paraphrased for clarity).



Bayport Industrial District south of Fairmont Parkway and the Bayport Terminal. In the Houston-Galveston Region, the Union Pacific Railroad operates 1,248 freight trains weekly, which accounts for over 57 percent of the regions freight movement.²⁸

Both in the past and present, railroads have had a major influence on growth and development of the region and perform an important transportation service contributing to the area's economic vitality based on international trade in and out of the Barbours Cut Terminal, Bayport Terminal, and the Port of Galveston. Therefore, care should be taken to preserve the functional utility of rail corridors while

coordinating with thoroughfare needs. Traffic conflicts between railroads and motor vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles are a significant concern due to at-grade railroad crossings and railroad alignments. At-grade intersections of the railroad lines with area roadways are a cause of traffic delays and traffic safety concerns. Constructing grade separated over or underpasses at major railroad-roadway intersections and traffic safety improvements at existing crossings are potential solutions. In fact, the recent completion of the grade separated crossing over Fairmont Parkway was well received and considered a success. (see inset)

Fairmont Parkway Overpass



Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

Port of Houston

“The ports, ship channels, and waterways of the Houston Galveston region are of vital regional, national, and international significance, linking its chemical, oil, and agriculture industries with markets and suppliers located throughout the world.” Despite the recession, the region’s waterborne freight tonnage is expected to grow by approximately 45 percent by 2035, with the Port of Houston projected to experience an increase of nearly 42 million tons.²⁹

The Port of Houston is a general purpose, deep-water cargo port that ranks first in the United States in terms of foreign waterborne commerce and second in terms of total tonnage. The port consists of a complex of public and private docking facilities and industrial parks that extend for 25 miles along the Houston Ship Channel. The ship channel and its tributaries and

²⁸ H-GAC Regional Goods Movement Study – Final Report. Dec. 2011.

²⁹ Ibid.

basins are a 50-mile long waterway that reaches from the head of Galveston Bay at Morgan's Point, just north of La Porte, to and including the turning basin within the City limits of Houston. A shallow-draft channel extends up Buffalo Bayou from the turning basin to the Main Street Bridge. Additional facilities of the port are located along the upper west side of the Galveston Bay at Bayport near Red Bluff, which is adjacent to the south of La Porte. The Port of Houston handles 40 percent of all freight moving through Texas ports. This port is also ranked first in the U.S. in handling petro-chemicals.

Public terminal docking facilities along the Houston Ship Channel are owned and operated by the Port of Houston Authority, which is an autonomous subdivision of the State of Texas and official sponsor of the Houston Ship Channel. Public facilities owned by the Port Authority include the Barbours Cut Container Terminal and the Bayport Terminal, both of which are immediately adjacent to the City limits of La Porte. In 2005, the Port Authority completed a five-and-one-half-year plan, which deepened the Houston Ship Channel from 40 to 45 feet and widened it from 400 to 530 feet.³⁰

Barbours Cut Terminal

The Barbours Cut Terminal is located in Morgan's Point near the Galveston Bay opening to the Houston Ship Channel, adjacent to the north City limits of La Porte (see inset). It is the largest container terminal on the U.S. Gulf Coast. It operates under a computerized inventory control system that tracks the status and location of individual containers. The terminal also provides electronic data interchange capabilities and has six berths and 13 wharf cranes.³¹

Bayport Terminal

The Bayport Container and Cruise Terminal were developed to relieve pressure on the Barbours Cut Terminal. It is a state-of-the-art facility and will substantially increase the Port's container handling capacity. It will have seven container berths with a capacity to handle 2.3 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs). In addition, it includes the Bayport Cruise Terminal, which will provide three berths for modern cruise vessels. The opening phase was in 2007.³² The Bayport Terminal complex comprises chemicals and chemical specialty facilities. S.H. 146 would be the

³⁰ Port of Houston website.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

Barbours Cut Terminal Container Yard



Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

major arterial for truck traffic to and from the terminal, which is projected to attract 7,000 trucks per day. In addition, a new rail line is proposed to be constructed east of the existing Union Pacific alignment, intersecting S.H. 146 at Red Bluff.

Key Planning Considerations

- 1) Coordination with railroad providers to maximize the ability to move freight in and out of the City, while minimizing the adverse impacts on quality of life. Because roads intersect with rail lines throughout the City, they must be designed to include adequate safety provisions to ensure safe crossings for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. Signal crossings, signage, and pavement markings are ways to provide for safe intersection crossings. While the railroad presents some challenges, it also presents an opportunity in terms of transporting goods through the region.
- 2) The railroad is a constraint for east/west movement of automobile traffic in the La Porte area.
- 3) The airport makes a significant economic impact and benefits the economic development potential for the La Porte area.
- 4) Airport-related industrial development is a significant opportunity for future growth on and around the airport.
- 5) The Port of Houston, Barbours Cut Terminal, and Bayport Terminal are essential and intricately linked to the City's entire economy.

Actions and Initiatives

- 6) At a minimum, grade crossing safety and traffic control devices including gate arms, flashing lights, signage and pavement markings should be installed and maintained at railroad-roadway crossings. As regional and local traffic volume increases, consider coordinating with the railroad and other regional partners to study the need to construct grade separated crossings for those street/railroad intersections that may warrant it, e.g., along Bay Area Boulevard and Choate Road.
- 7) Coordinate with the railroad to ensure train speed limits are observed and enforced for train operations in the La Porte area.
- 8) Coordinate with regional agencies and partners to ensure that the planned expansion of rail service through the City will observe and mitigate the impacts on the cities and businesses of La Porte.
- 9) Due to the recent decreases in tenant occupancy at the airport, e.g., the leaving of the 27th Squadron of the Texas Air National Guard, and due to the length of time since the last update, it is important for the City to undertake an airport master plan update. The airport master plan update should include the following:

- a. Operations plan;
 - b. Updated facilities and development plan (if priorities have changed);
 - c. Economic development strategy to increase both commercial use and use of the airport by nearby industry; and,
 - d. Overall site and landscape improvement plan, which includes a gateway entrance and adequate buffering of the airport property from neighboring subdivisions and other public rights-of-way.
- 10) Continue to monitor zoning and development in the areas immediately adjacent to the airport. This is to ensure protection of the airport’s long-term operational interests from encroaching incompatible development.
- 11) Support the Port Authority’s efforts to make more efficient connections to the State Highway and regional rail system; where such actions will not be detrimental to the City.

4.3 Thoroughfare Plan

The City’s Thoroughfare Plan is designed to provide for the future travel needs of the community by ensuring orderly development of the street system, including the extension and improvement of existing streets, as well as planned future roadways. The Thoroughfare Plan is designed to ensure that adequate rights-of-way are preserved with a general alignment and sufficient width to allow for efficient expansion and improvement of the street transportation system. In addition, it is designed to provide opportunities for other transportation modes so as to not place a fiscal burden on the community to fund extensive road improvements, which, in turn, require long-term maintenance.

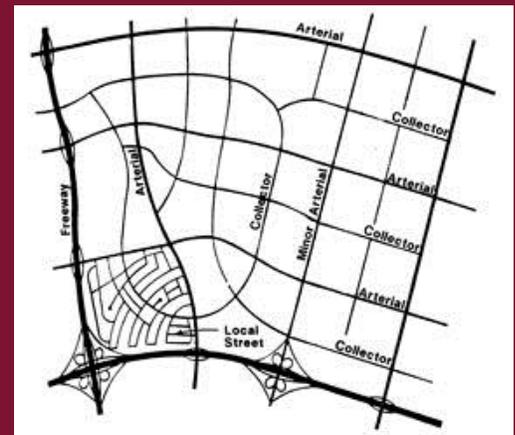
While La Porte’s existing thoroughfare system is nearly built out, there are areas where there is opportunity for improvement, particularly with regard to connectivity. Displayed in **Map 4.2, Thoroughfare Plan** (and detailed in **Goal 4.2**) are the proposed alignments for the extensions of existing collector and arterial roadways.

Roadway Design Standards

While street classification reflects the functions that roadways serve as part of the street network, roadway design standards are related to traffic volume, design capacity, and level of service. The City’s existing requirements are shown in **Table 4.3, Existing Paving Design Criteria**.

In the administration and enforcement of the Thoroughfare Plan, special cases and unique situations will occasionally arise where physical conditions and development constraints in certain areas conflict with the need for widening of designated thoroughfares to the planned right-of-way width and

Typical Thoroughfare Network



A typical thoroughfare network forms a grid defined by arterial and collector roadways, within which are superblocks and the local street network.



roadway cross section. Such special circumstances require a degree of flexibility and adaptability in the administration and implementation of the plan. Acceptable minimum design criteria and special roadway cross sections

Table 4.3, Existing Paving Design Criteria

<i>Street Classification</i>	<i>Principal Arterial</i>	<i>Minor Arterial</i>	<i>Major Collector</i>	<i>Minor Collector</i>	<i>Local 2 Lanes</i>
Right-of-Way Width	100 feet	100 feet	80 feet	80 feet ⁽¹⁾	60 feet
Curb Face to Face Distance	80 feet	70 feet	60 feet	40 feet	28 feet
Total Paved Width of Travel Lanes -1 Dir.	33 feet	25 feet	24 feet	20 feet	14 feet
Median Width ⁽²⁾	14 feet	30 feet	12 feet	0 feet	0 feet
Distance from Curb Face to ROW line ⁽³⁾	10 feet	30 feet	10 feet	20 feet	16 feet
Distance from ROW Line to Sidewalk	2 feet	2 feet	2 feet	2 feet	2 feet
Max. Number of Lanes (one direction)	3	2	2	2	1

(1) With on-street parallel parking

(2) Median turning lanes are included in median widths

(3) On non-curb and gutter streets substitute 'edge of pavement' for 'curb face.'

Source: City of La Porte Public Improvement Criteria Manual (PICM), Chapter 6, Paving Design Criteria, Table 6.1.

may have to be applied in constrained areas where existing conditions limit the ability to meet desirable standards and guidelines. Special roadway cross sections should be determined on a case-by-case basis when a unique design is necessary, and these exceptions should be subject to review and recommendation of the Departments of Planning and Public Works and approval by the Planning and Zoning Commission. Otherwise, adopted roadway cross sections should be used in all newly developing areas and, whenever possible, in revitalization and redevelopment of existing developed areas.

In addition, relying on a single set of standards for development may be problematic. According to the City's 2005 Comprehensive Plan Update³³ and the City's Public Improvement Criteria Manual (PICM),³⁴ all new streets within the City will be concrete curb and gutter. Rather, standards for development should reflect its urban, auto-urban, and suburban character, with provision for curb and gutter construction, sidewalks, street lighting, signage, and sufficient open space. By way of example, new development in the Lomax area (where the character of development is rural), the standards should be varied to mirror the character (i.e., open channel construction), yet remain reasonable and feasible.

³³ "All new and planned subdivisions have, or will have concrete, curb and gutter streets." La Porte Comprehensive Plan – 2005 Update, Obj. 5.5a.

³⁴ City of La Porte Public Improvement Criteria Manual, Chapter 6, Paving Design Criteria, Table 6.1.

Street Classification

State Highways / Freeways

Freeways are devoted entirely to traffic movement with limited or no direct land service function. Freeways are multi-lane divided roadways with a high degree of partial access control, meaning few, if any, intersections at grade. Full or partial control of access distinguishes freeways from other classes of roadways. Freeways serve large volumes of high-speed traffic and are primarily intended to serve long trips. In La Porte, S.H. 225 and S.H. 146 are classified as state highways/freeways.

Although the freeway/state highway classification includes the main lanes of designated facilities, continuous frontage roads (also termed service roads or feeders) are more appropriately classified as secondary arterial roadways or collectors. It is desirable to have another parallel arterial roadway offset one-half to one mile along either side of a freeway, to provide circulation for traffic movement along one-way frontage roads. Since these roadways are state highways, the City's ability to manage them is limited.

Principal Arterials

Principal arterials are also intended to carry large amounts of regional traffic. Within La Porte, the designated principal arterials include Canada Street, Fairmont Parkway, Barbours Cut, Bay Area Boulevard, and Sens Road. These arterials are commonly two- to five-lane facilities (in some cases six) that are designed to accommodate 20,000 to 60,000 vehicles per day. Access is generally limited along streets of this classification in order to preserve their vehicle carrying capacity. In urbanized settings implementing access control becomes increasingly important.

Minor Arterials

Minor arterials are intended to carry less traffic than primary arterials. Generally, Minor arterials can be anticipated to accommodate 5,000-30,000 vehicles per day and they are typically fed by collectors, although local streets may also connect to them. Spencer Highway, Underwood Road, and the frontage roads along the state highways are good examples of minor arterials. Access to these streets from neighboring properties should be controlled to limit conflicts. Minor arterial streets should include bike lanes, parkways and street trees, sidewalks, and transit facilities.

Collectors (Major and Minor)

Collectors are intended to carry fewer trips than principal and secondary arterials, but they are "higher order" roads than local streets. Collector roads can typically be expected to accommodate 1,000 to 15,000 vehicles per day. To adequately serve their role to collect and distribute traffic from local streets to the arterial street system, collectors are generally placed between arterial streets, with a desired spacing of no more than approximately one-half mile. To maximize mobility it is essential that collector roads traverse



adjacent neighborhoods to provide access and circulation not only within, but also among, neighborhoods. Old 146 Highway is a good example of a Major Collector, while Farrington Street is a good example of a Minor Collector. Access via driveways to individual residential properties along collectors should be limited. Where numerous residential driveways exist, the City should require access spacing, on-site turn-arounds, or alley access (where available) when properties with direct access to the road are substantially improved or redeveloped. All collector roads should include bike lanes, parkways and street trees, sidewalks, and transit facilities (where necessitated).

Local Streets

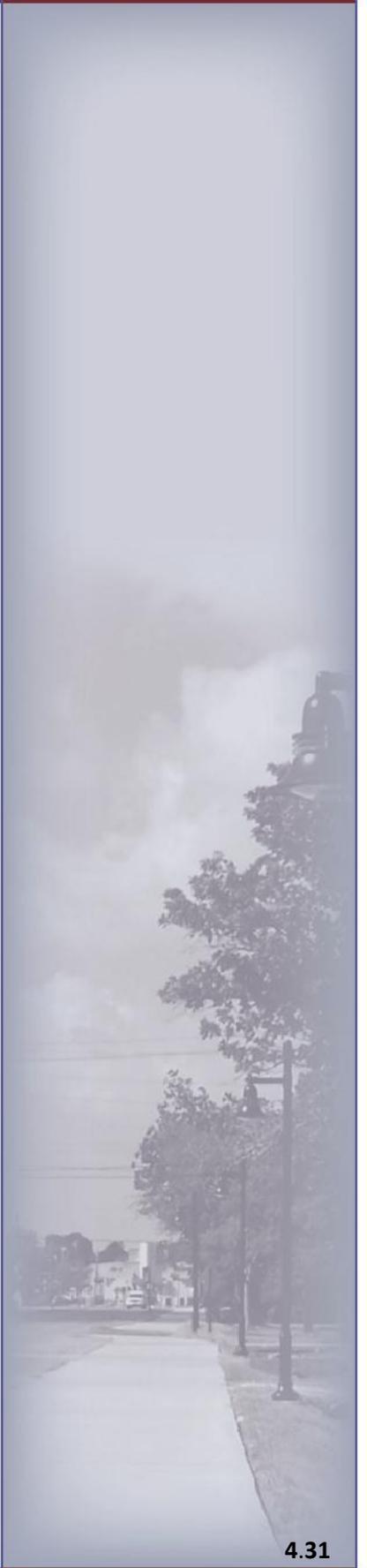
Local streets are principally intended to provide access to abutting properties. Traffic on local streets is generally slow and relatively sparse. Such streets can typically be anticipated to accommodate between 500 and 1,000 vehicles per day. Local streets in areas of cut-through traffic are candidates for traffic calming. Where local streets provide only local access to adjacent residential developments, narrower streets may be allowed to reduce the amount of impervious surfaces (to reduce storm water runoff) and to slow local traffic through residential areas. Local streets should include parkways, street trees, and sidewalk facilities.

Implementing the Thoroughfare Plan

Implementation of thoroughfare system improvements occurs in stages over time as the community grows and, over many years, builds (and rebuilds) toward the ultimate thoroughfare system shown by the Thoroughfare Plan. The fact that a future thoroughfare is shown on the plan does not represent a commitment to a specific timeframe for construction or that the City – or another jurisdiction – will build the roadway improvement. Individual thoroughfare improvements may be constructed by a variety of implementing agencies, including the City, Harris County, and/or TxDOT, as well as private developers and land owners for sections of roadways located within or adjacent to their property. Road construction can be implemented by individual entities or in partnership.

The City, Harris County, and TxDOT, as well as residents, land owners, and subdividers, can utilize the Thoroughfare Plan in making decisions relating to planning, coordination, and programming of future development and transportation improvements. Review of preliminary and final plats for proposed subdivisions in accordance with the City's development regulations and Public Improvement Criteria Manuals (PICMs) should include consideration of compliance with the Thoroughfare Plan in order to ensure consistency and availability of sufficient rights-of-way for the general roadway alignments shown on the plan. It is particularly important to provide for continuous roadways and through connections between developments to ensure mobility. By identifying thoroughfare locations

where rights-of-way are needed, land owners and subdividers can 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 right-of-way for existing or planned thoroughfares.



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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER 5

Economic sustainability is essential to La Porte’s future. Simply, it will determine whether and how the City grows and redevelops in the coming years. The City’s economic strength will set the tone and pace for new development/redevelopment and impact its ability to maintain quality public facilities and services, which are necessary to help retain, attract, and support future businesses and the people that fuel them. La Porte is a thriving industrial city with high household/family incomes and housing values, and low unemployment and poverty rates (see Chapter 1, Demographic Snapshot). But, as evident during the public participation process, a majority of citizens increasingly want to find the right balance between protecting the City’s industrial roots, while also improving its livability.

In today’s talent-driven economy, the City’s ability to capture new opportunities will depend somewhat less on having the lowest business costs than on having a higher “quality of life” than its competitors. Although “quality of life” is highly generalized, and is difficult to gauge how the City measures up in things like personal safety and security, neighborhood integrity, recreational opportunities, access to healthcare and social services, availability of retail and other shopping opportunities, quality schools and higher learning, etc.; but one that is increasingly important in helping to attract and retain the people the companies need and desire.

2001 vs. 2012 Plan Comparison

2001	2012 Update
No chapter on economic development in 2001 Comp. Plan; but incorporated recommendations found in the Economic Development Strategic Plan, Jan. 2009	Ch. 5, Economic Development

5.1 Introduction

Strong Metropolitan Growth

The Houston metropolitan area was recently rated among the 20 fastest-growing economic regions in the world, coming in at No. 19 on a list compiled by the Washington-based Brookings Institute.

Source: Houston Chronicle, Houston earns high marks for strong economy. Jan. 21, 2012.

La Porte's economy does not exist in a vacuum. It is inextricably linked to the economic fortunes of both metropolitan Houston and the global economy (see inset). The economic drivers that have historically sustained the City's economy, including manufacturing, construction, and transportation and warehousing, have suffered during the recent recession.¹ However, with the City's proximity to the Port of Houston, including both the Barbour's Cut and Bayport Terminals, a short commute to Houston's Central Business District (CBD), and rail linkages to the rest of the country, La Porte is well positioned to benefit from a resurgence of the global economy. Accordingly, as the national and global economies fully recover from this recession,² the City will be primed for growth, particularly with the expansion of the Panama Canal and its predicted associated increase in containerized shipping.³

Despite these strong indicators, the City has additional issues it should consider. First, there is limited land remaining for development. In these areas, the City should seek a balance of land uses: residential, commercial, industrial, as well as park and recreation areas, streets, drainage, etc. While industrial expansion is attractive due to an increased tax base and jobs, this may not represent the collective vision for the community and its sense of livability. For this reason, this plan advocates open public dialogue and sound leadership to make decisions that are in the best and broad interests of the community.

"Economic Development" is ...

the application of public resources to stimulate private investment.

Economic development is as much about quality as it is about quantity. It needs to be measured not just by gross tax revenues and job growth, but also by job quality and security; the impact on local wages, public services, and the environment; and the proportion of locally-owned to absentee-controlled businesses; among other factors.

Secondly, economic development does not happen on its own. It requires a deliberate, proactive strategy, as well as up-front public investment in new infrastructure and program development (see inset). Once begun though, it can start a positive and self-sustaining cycle: It helps hold the line on taxes through tax base growth thus, creating an even more attractive place for

¹ Comparison of total jobs in zip codes 77571 and 77507 between 2006 versus 2009 shows a slight decrease in total number of jobs. U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap Application and LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics (Beginning of Quarter Employment, 2nd Quarter of 2002-2010).

² The 2008/2009 recession has been defined as starting in December 2007 and ending June 2009. Business Cycle Dating Committee of the National Bureau of Economic Research. September 20, 2010.

³ H-GAC Regional Goods Movement Study – Final Report. Dec. 2011.

businesses, as well as households. It brings in new income into the community helping to spawn local spending and wealth creation. And most importantly, it impacts the City’s ability to retain and return its best and brightest by expanding local employment and creating opportunities for new businesses.

Economic Development Strategy

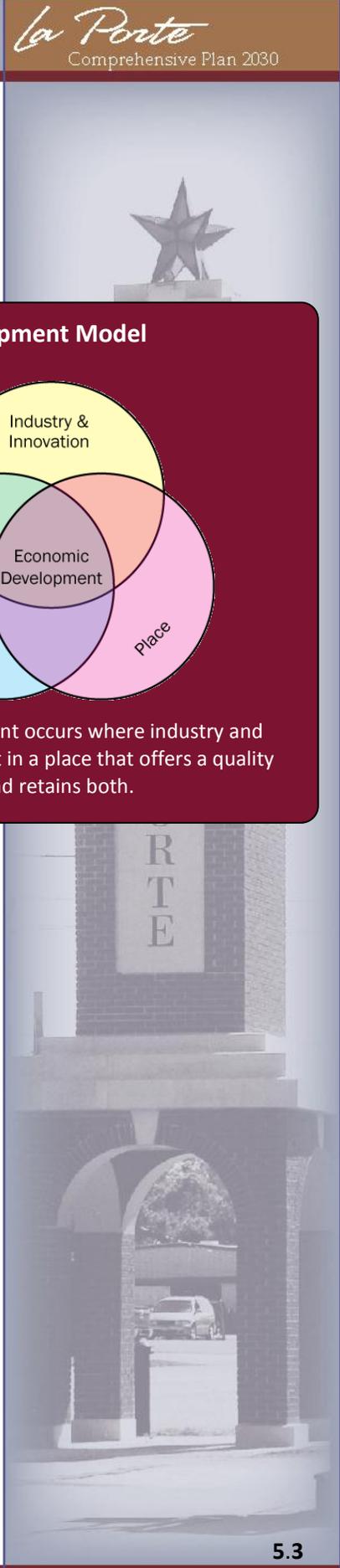
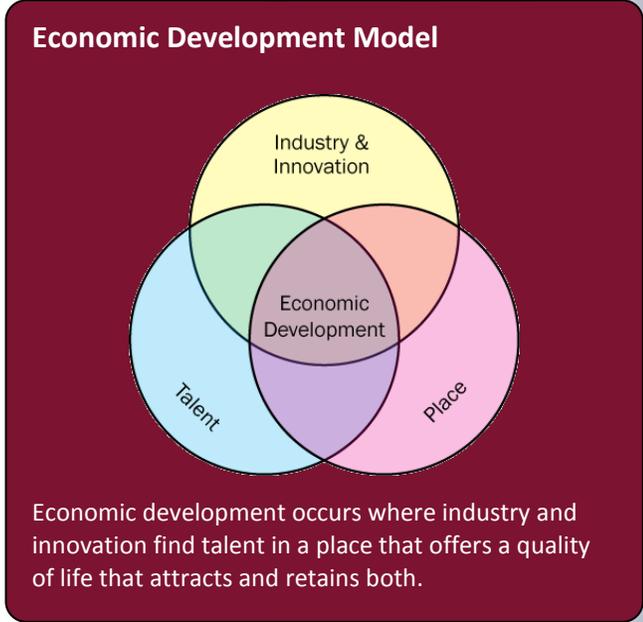
The economic development model is based on the overlap of industry and innovation, human talent, and quality of place. (see inset)

Industry & Innovation. In the economic development model, “industry” considers the full complement of economic activities, from traditional industrial employers to entrepreneurship, as well as the physical infrastructure (industrial parks, sites, transportation etc.) and business climate to support those activities. “Innovation,” is about the opportunities for expansion of existing companies, and the best targets for recruitment. These are important building blocks of an economic development plan.

Talent. “Talent” refers to the individuals that possess the skills and values to make organizations effective. The concept of “talent” means more than a skilled workforce. It means bringing talented people to the community, as well as cultivating the existing talent pool. It refers to groups as diverse as students, retirees, and entrepreneurs. It also involves ensuring that the employees and companies that have been responsible for a community’s economic health continue to see reasons to remain in the area.

Quality of Place. Much has been written about the importance of “quality of life” to the site selection process. Communities throughout the nation have positioned themselves by touting their advantages in this regard – good schools, attractive neighborhoods, strong presence of history and culture, safe streets, pleasant weather. These factors are obviously important, but the focus is still too narrow. Quality of life assumes that everyone thrives in the same environment and is attracted to the same amenities. It assumes that current residents’ view of what makes a community would be shared by all.

By contrast, “quality of place” considers what is attractive to a range of residents, both existing and new. Assessing the “quality of place” involves viewing the assets of the City through the eyes of the talent it wishes to attract and retain. The idea of quality of place accommodates growth and recognizes the benefits of change. It recognizes that one person’s “good





place to raise a family” might translate into another’s “there’s nothing to do in this town.” Quality of place is about providing options, not just for current residents, but also for those who will be residents in the future.

While La Porte has made significant strides in the last decade by establishing its Citywide trail system and improving the Sylvan Beach, bayfront, and Downtown areas, according to residents, further improvement is warranted. The bayfront established this community and remains one of our premier amenities. These should remain high priorities for action during the horizon of this plan. Expanding La Porte’s quality of place amenities and enhancing its community character will go far in making the City an attractive location for educated and skilled workers. This chapter builds upon the core community character theme – and associated action strategies – that are found throughout this Comprehensive Plan, particularly in the Land Use and Development chapter.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis (alternately SLOT analysis) is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses/Limitations, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats of a community and its economic development. Among others, it involves specifying the economic and quality of life objectives of a community and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve these objectives. Setting the objectives is to be done after the SWOT analysis has been performed. This allows the determination of achievable goals or objectives to be set for the community.

- **Strengths:** characteristics of the community that gives it an advantage over other communities or regions
- **Weaknesses (or Limitations):** are characteristics that place the community at a disadvantage relative to others
- **Opportunities:** external chances to improve performance (e.g. increase tax base) in the environment
- **Threats:** external elements in the environment that could cause trouble for the community in achieving its objectives

Identification of SWOTs is essential because subsequent steps in the process of planning for achievement of the selected objective may be derived from the SWOTs.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

5.2 Focus Areas, Goals, Actions and Initiatives

Throughout the planning process a number of issues were identified regarding economic sustainability, which was often framed in terms of a lack of availability and diversity of retail stores, restaurants, and other non-industry businesses in the City. There were additional concerns regarding the amount of retail leakage (and loss of associated tax dollars) to neighboring jurisdictions, and the apparent disinvestment in certain types of businesses. In addition to the public participation efforts conducted throughout the planning process, information was incorporated from the City’s existing Economic Development Strategic Plan (January 2009), which was an in-depth study of the City’s economic issues and strategies to improve them.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis

As displayed in **Table 5.1, SWOT Analysis** (on next page), one component of the Economic Development Strategic Plan was the facilitation of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis

(see inset), which was performed to frame economic issues in the City. Articulating the issues in this manner is intended to facilitate the development of strategies that address the weaknesses and threats by building upon the strengths and opportunities.

As evident by the analysis, some of La Porte’s enviable strengths are its strong industrial base and proximate location. Similarly, the City’s proximate location is also listed as an *opportunity* for economic development, as was



Table 5.1, SWOT Analysis

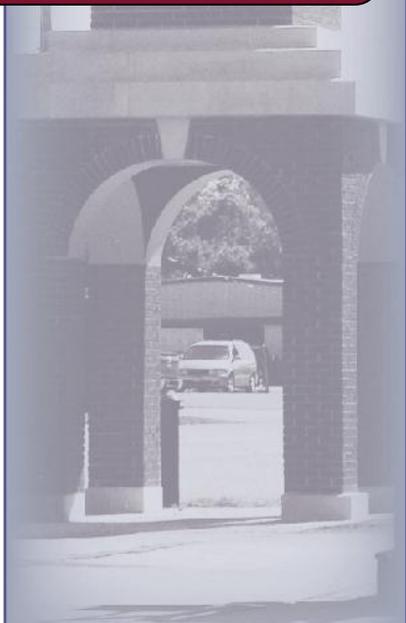
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvan Beach / Bay Front • Historic Main Street • Strong Industry Base • Low Cost of Living • Location within Greater Houston • Current and Planned Parks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bayfront Enhancement • Downtown Redevelopment • Sylvan Beach Improvement • Beautification • Attracting Tourists • Retail Readiness
<i>Weaknesses</i>	<i>Threats</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical Appearance • Sales Tax Leakage • Disconnected Downtown / Bayfront • Division of east and west side • Intracity Communication • Limited Undeveloped Land • Economic Diversification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truck Traffic • Oil and Gas Industry Downturn • External Perception • Flooding • Growth Management

Source: City of La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan, Chapter 2: SWOT Analysis. January 2009.

improving the City’s overall appearance. The City’s identified weaknesses included the City’s increasingly limited land available for development, missed opportunities for generating sales tax revenue, and economic diversification. Finally, the analysis identified increasing truck traffic and a negative external perception, among others, as perceived threats to the City’s livability. All of these issues were again discussed during the public participation process of this Comprehensive Plan Update.

As such, these discussions formed the basis of the following focus areas, along with an analysis of existing conditions and review of current programs, plans, and ordinances. Each focus area contains contextual information, key planning considerations, goals, (and their rationales), and advisable implementation actions and initiatives. The areas of focus are as follows:

- **Focus Area 1** – Expanded economic development toolkit;
- **Focus Area 2** – Improved business friendliness of the City;



- **Focus Area 3** – Expanded opportunities for higher quality industrial operations within the City limits and the ETJ; and,
- **Focus Area 4** – Continued commitment to place-based economic development.

Advantages / Disadvantages of Development Corporations

Advantages

- Can act with greater confidentiality and speed
- Can help to minimize and mitigate the effects of politics on development
- Can more effectively deal with tax credits and solicit tax deductible donations from foundations and philanthropic entities
- Can act as pass-through vehicles for tax-exempt bonds

Disadvantages

- Typically exist as a self-supporting entity
- Frequently suffer from a lack of dedicated public financing
- Some are not fully established, rather they are just off-shoots of existing organizations

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

Focus Area 1 – Expanded Economic Development Toolkit.

La Porte Economic Development Corporation

Development Corporations are sometimes structured the same way as redevelopment authorities. The term “development corporation” however, usually connotes a higher degree of autonomy from City government and is often structured as a private or public-private non-profit organization. It is common for corporations to be involved in activities other than just real estate development to include the administration of low-interest loan pools that support business and economic development. (see inset)

La Porte Community Library



The La Porte Community Library is a joint venture between the City of La Porte (who is responsible for the building and furnishings) and the Harris County Library System (who staffs and runs the library). Construction of the library was facilitated by the EDC as one of its first projects.

Operating capital often derives from the ownership and management of real estate assets, private donations, development and financing fees, and fees from tax exempt bonds and special taxes. The La Porte Economic Development Corporation (EDC) is an example of a development corporation already established in La Porte. It offers a full complement of economic development programs and incentives, which are primarily coordinated by the Economic Development Division of the EDC. The Department and its activities are funded through a collection of a one-half cent sales tax (established in 1999), which must be spent on economic development projects relating to capital investment and job creation. The most recent activities include the re-nourishment of Sylvan Beach, the ball fields at Pecan Park, the library (see inset), and infrastructure improvements along Main Street.

La Porte Redevelopment Authority

The City of La Porte Redevelopment Authority⁴ was set up as a local government corporation pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 394 of the Texas Local Government Code.⁵ The Authority is organized as a public, nonprofit corporation for the “purposes of aiding, assisting, and acting on behalf of the City in the performance of its governmental function to promote the common good and general welfare of Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone (the “TIRZ”) and neighboring areas, and to promote, develop, encourage, and maintain housing, educational facilities, employment, commerce, and economic development in the City.”⁶

One of the current projects undertaken by the Authority was to enter in a Development Agreement with Port Crossing Limited for the purpose of constructing TIRZ public infrastructure in the Lakes at Fairmont Green development. Unfortunately, the national recession and downturn in the local residential housing market slowed growth. Future use of the TIRZ should include a cost benefit analysis along with established goals. In addition, other types of incentives should be considered including grants.⁷

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations regarding expanding the economic development toolkit include:

- 1) Expanding the City’s economic development program to ensure there is a comprehensive and coordinated resource toolkit to serve the City’s existing and future business community.
- 2) Ensuring existing and future businesses have a dedicated person with whom to collaborate when deciding whether to relocate to the City, and to assist them through the relocation and/or development process.
- 3) Increasing coordination with partners to ensure economic development incentives are provided in a synergistic, efficient, and cost effective manner.

Goal 5.1: Re-evaluate and retool the City’s economic development program toolkit.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Consider becoming a member of the National Business Incubator Association (NBIA)⁸ and establishing a small business incubator site

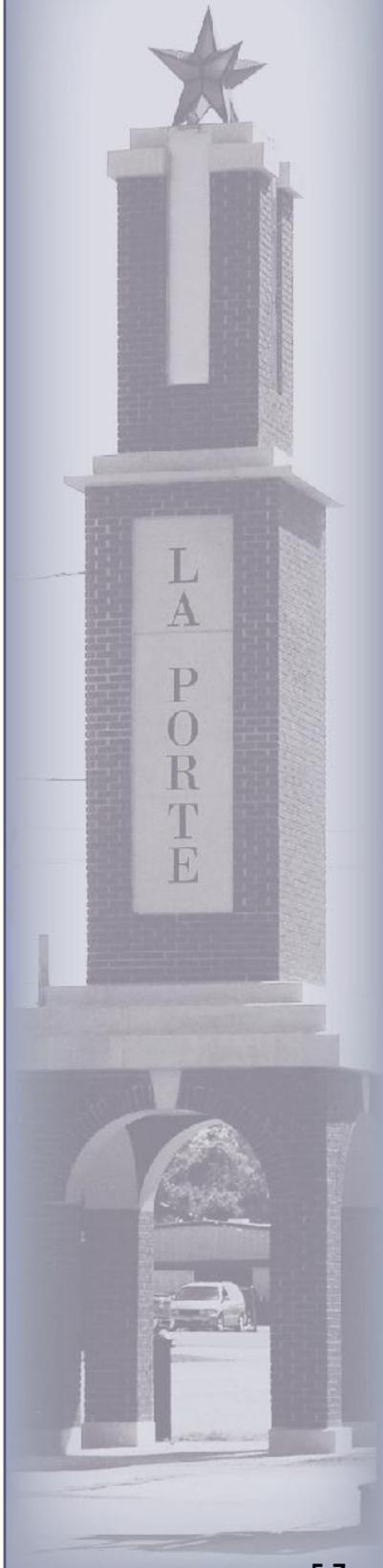
⁴ The City of La Porte Redevelopment Authority was authorized by Resolution No. 2009-19 passed on December 11, 2000.

⁵ Texas Local Government Code, Title 12, Chapter 394. Also known as the Texas Housing Finance Corporations Act of 1987.

⁶ Independent Auditor’s Report of the La Porte Redevelopment Authority. Patillo, Brown & Hill, LLP. September 30, 2010.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Further information on the National Business Incubator Association can be found at <http://nbia.org/>.



What are “Business Incubators”?

“Business incubators nurture the development of entrepreneurial companies, helping them to survive and grow during the start-up period, when they are most vulnerable. These programs provide their client companies with business services and resources tailored to young firms. The most common goals of incubation programs are creating jobs in a community, enhancing a community’s entrepreneurial climate, retaining businesses in a community, building or accelerating growth in a local industry, and diversifying local economies.”

Source: National Business Incubator Association (NBIA)

within the City in coordination with the San Jacinto College Small Business Development Center (SJC SBDC).⁹ Priority consideration should be given to already-owned property located in the Downtown area or in an area near San Jacinto College. The jointly sponsored incubator could include fully equipped office space at low cost (City provided) with initial and follow-along counseling at no cost (SJC SBDC provided) for entrepreneurs of small and emerging companies. Criteria would need to be developed for admission to the business incubator for start-up companies. In addition, the site could be cross-utilized as a temporary headquarters on a short-term, temporary basis (i.e., one to three months) for new arrivals of established, major companies relocating to La Porte. The Temple Business Incubator (in Temple, TX) is an example of a jointly sponsored and successful business incubator.

- 2) Continue to provide adequate funding for the Economic Development Coordinator/Business Ombudsman and associated staff positions. These are important functions as they direct economic development planning activities for the City by negotiating with business and industry representatives to encourage location (or relocation) to the area. They also conduct research, analysis, and evaluation of data to determine the economic impact of proposed expansions and/or new development.
- 3) Continue to use a single-point-of-contact protocol for all new development and business permit applications. This would be likened to a one-stop project manager or expediter who would help shepherd development applications through the process, troubleshoot problems on the applicant’s behalf, coordinate tax abatement requests with the county, and lead the applicant in the direction of other assistance. This person should continue to be the Economic Development Coordinator/Business Ombudsman.
- 4) Maintain links to the current digest of local, state, and federal economic development programs on the City’s website. The Economic Development Coordinator should be fully abreast of all non-local economic incentives and should act as a liaison for businesses interested

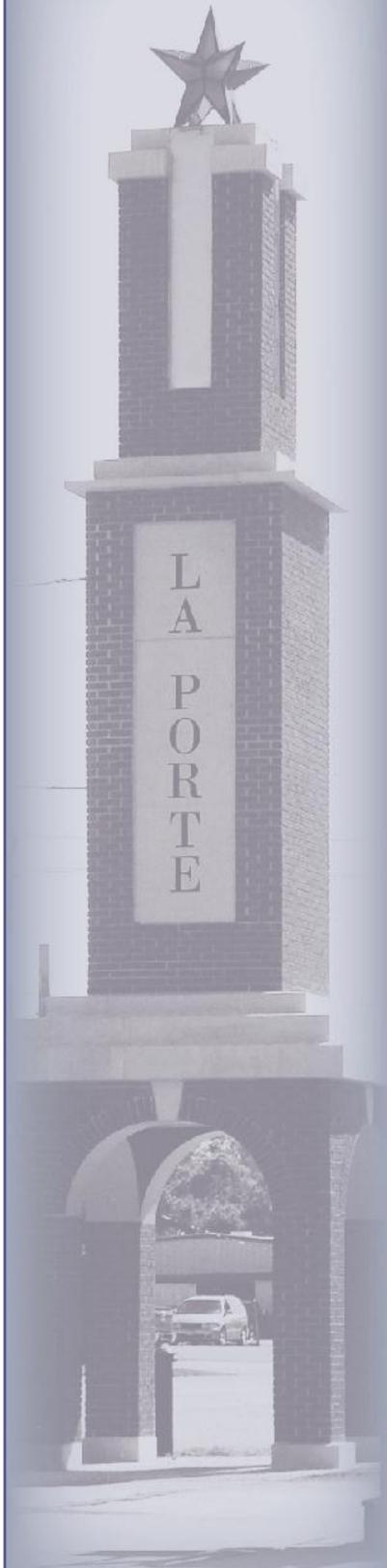
⁹ The San Jacinto College Small Business Development Center (SJC SBDC) provides free business consulting and affordable training seminars to small- and medium-sized business owners and managers. The SJC SBDC is a business consulting and training center of the University of Houston SBDC Network, which serves 32 counties in Southeast Texas through 14 business consulting and training centers. It offers customized instruction training at its facility in Pearland, Texas, or it could be facilitated at the future established incubator site in La Porte. More information can be found at <http://www.sjcd.sbdcnetwork.net/sanjacinto/default.asp>

in using these incentives as part of a location or relocation package to La Porte.

- 5) Consider adopting local tax abatement provisions for commercial construction registered with the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED®), or other similar programs. This would include partial tax abatement for the incremental investment associated with obtaining such certification. While the City does not have any certified LEED projects, nearby City of Houston has 165 certified projects.¹⁰ Any private sector projects utilizing this incentive should agree to their involvement in marketing the community and the program.
- 6) Mobilize top government officials and business leaders as welcoming committees for promising businesses, site selectors, and selected developers.
- 7) Continue to periodically research and keep abreast of the latest state and federal economic incentives (including grants) so that the City can expand the toolkit (see inset next page) in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible.
- 8) Continue to conduct regular business outreach to understand the plans and needs of area businesses and to troubleshoot potential problems.
- 9) Continue use of the industrial payments (the Community Investment Fund) for economic development, community beautification, and revitalization programs, rather than supplementing the general fund.
- 10) Continue to use the Hotel/Motel Fund for projects that encourage visitors to the City. This includes Main Street revitalization efforts; the creation, promotion, and sponsorship of festivals and events; print, Internet, and broadcast advertising; membership dues for the Bay Area Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau; directional and historical (i.e., wayfinding) signage; and projects that enhance the City's image to out-of-town visitors.¹¹ This also includes continued funding for staff positions dedicated to economic development. A cost benefit analysis should be conducted along with establishing goals so that results can be measured.
- 11) Continue to support the Economic Development Corporation (EDC)'s efforts to fund capital investment and job creation as a means of increasing economic development within the City.

¹⁰ Green Building Certification Institute (GBCI) Certified Project Directory. January 31, 2012.

¹¹ City of La Porte, Texas Annual Budget for Fiscal Year 2011-2012 (October 1 – September 30).



- 12) Annually evaluate return on investment and consider continuing partnerships with the La Porte-Bayshore Chamber of Commerce, Bay Area Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau, Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, Economic Alliance Houston Port Region, Greater Houston

Existing Local Incentives and Programs (Local Toolkit)

The City of La Porte currently offers several local incentives for businesses who are considering locating within the City.

- **Tax Abatements** – The City offers ad valorem tax abatements for new construction for qualifying facilities, including regional distribution/service (up to 10 percent), manufacturing/other basic industry (up to 10 percent), and retail/commercial office/regional entertainment (up to 50 percent). To be eligible for an abatement (averaged over five years), qualifying companies must also have a minimum \$3 million capital investment and create at least 10 jobs.
- **Industrial District Agreements** – The City provides incentives to businesses that relocate in the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). Agreements are approved where the City agrees not to annex the property for a specified period of time and sometimes includes annual fee-in-lieu of taxes for the use of City facilities or contractual services (e.g., fire department response).
- **Public Improvement Districts** – The City has the ability to establish a Public Improvement District (PID), which enables commercial areas to make improvements by spreading out the cost equally among all properties. Property owners are assessed based on benefits and assessments may be used to pay debt service on bonds or they may be used to pay for services directly if no bonds are issued. PID funds may also be used in connection with improvements or enhancements such as water, wastewater, streets, drainage, parking, landscaping, etc.
- **Foreign Trade Zones** – The City supports the Port of Houston in its efforts to apply for federal exemptions from state and local ad valorem taxes on tangible property imported from outside the United States, and held in Foreign Trade Zones (FTZ).
- **Freeport Exemption** – The City supports the La Porte Independent School District (La Porte ISD) which offers Freeport Exemption. These are intended to exempt personal property consisting of inventory goods or ores, other than oil, natural gas, and petroleum.
- **Municipal Grants** – The City Council has the authority to provide loans and grants of City funds to promote economic development projects within the City.

In addition, the City incentivizes economic growth and expansion of facilities in the industrial districts, where the company renders to the City an amount “in lieu of taxes” based on 62 percent (value years 2008 – 2013) or 63 percent (value years 2014 – 2019) of the amount of ad valorem taxes payable if it was within the City limits. Further, new construction is incentivized for substantial increases in the value of land and tangible property to the amount equal to 25 percent (value years 2008 – 2013) or 20 percent (value years 2014 – 2019) of the amount of ad valorem taxes if it was within the City limits.

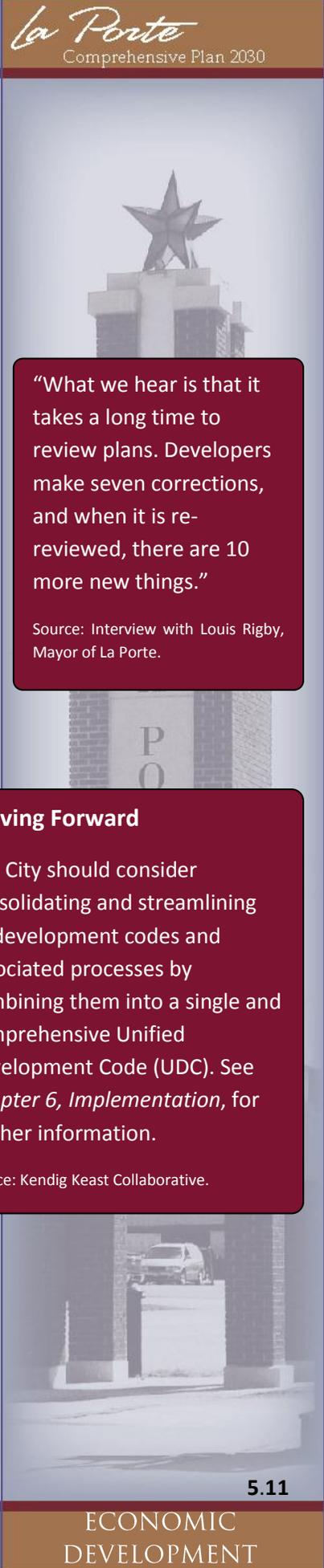
Source: City of La Porte Website – Economic Development Department

Partnership, and the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) to work towards enhancing economic development within the City. Consider convening an annual meeting with partners to ensure a synergistic, efficient, and coordinated plan of action is realized.

- 13) Consider expanding the business retention and expansion program. While recruiting new businesses is important to growing its economic base, La Porte cannot afford to ignore its current businesses and risk losing one of them to closure or relocation. A strong business retention and expansion program should include regular visits with local employers. These visits can include formal surveys or be informal interviews. However, they should establish a relationship with the employer and serve as a mechanism by which the Economic Development Coordinator can ascertain any major challenges or plans for expansion, and help to identify suppliers or customers who could benefit from relocating to La Porte. In addition to site visits, the business retention and expansion program could be expanded to include such initiatives as shop local programs, advertising cooperatives, shopping guides, frequent shopper programs, small business seminars, etc.
- 14) Budget to update the La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan, which was prepared as a five-year plan of action (2009-2013).

Focus Area 2 – Improved Business Friendliness of the City.

One topic that was frequently discussed during the public participation process was the perceived lack of business friendliness of the City with regard to how projects moved through the development process. Indeed, it was a topic that came up in almost every small group charrette, many stakeholder interviews, and in public meetings. It was typically framed from the standpoint that it takes longer to permit a project than it actually takes to construct a project, or that it was overly difficult to permit rehabilitation or other improvement projects. Other times, it was framed as adding requirements during each subsequent submittal, rather than being identified during the original submittal. Some of this discontent may be attributed to the normal course of doing government business. But, a large part of it may be attributed to the City's outdated zoning and development codes and administrative and public approval processes. What is important, though, is for the City to dedicate time and resources to pinpoint the issues, and then determine an action plan to correct them.



“What we hear is that it takes a long time to review plans. Developers make seven corrections, and when it is re-reviewed, there are 10 more new things.”

Source: Interview with Louis Rigby, Mayor of La Porte.

Moving Forward

The City should consider consolidating and streamlining its development codes and associated processes by combining them into a single and comprehensive Unified Development Code (UDC). See *Chapter 6, Implementation*, for further information.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.



Benefits of a Unified Development Code (UDC)

- 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.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

As the City moves forward with the recommended zoning and development code changes contemplated throughout this Comprehensive Plan Update, it is highly recommended to reach out to, and involve, the development community in the process. Consolidating all the zoning and development codes into a single and comprehensive Unified Development Code (UDC) is an opportunity to implement the regulatory provisions discussed in this plan, while at the same time, providing an opportunity to greatly improve the administrative and public approval processes – all of which can improve La Porte’s business friendliness and contribute to the City’s ability to facilitate economic development.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations improve the business friendliness of the City include:

- 1) Analyzing the City’s permitting process to determine where processes can be streamlined.
- 2) Updating the City’s zoning and development codes in conformance with the actions identified throughout this plan.
- 3) Increasing communication with the development community to determine and solve impediments to development.
- 4) Providing the necessary online and other resources needed to successfully navigate the development process.

Goal 5.2: Update the City’s zoning and development codes to implement the regulatory improvements as a means to aid economic development.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Update the City’s zoning and development regulations to provide for greater predictability in land use decisions while ensuring land use compatibility and enhancing community character. Further, consider consolidating all development-

related provisions into a comprehensive Unified Development Code (UDC) that makes the regulatory specifics easier to navigate and comprehend (i.e., more “user-friendliness”) for the development, real estate, and consultant communities (see inset). Developers and the businesses that finance them want timeliness and certainty. Developers will almost always prefer to be held to a higher standard than to be subjected to an arbitrary, lengthy, and unpredictable approval process. The former allows the developer to “pencil out” the project to see if it is

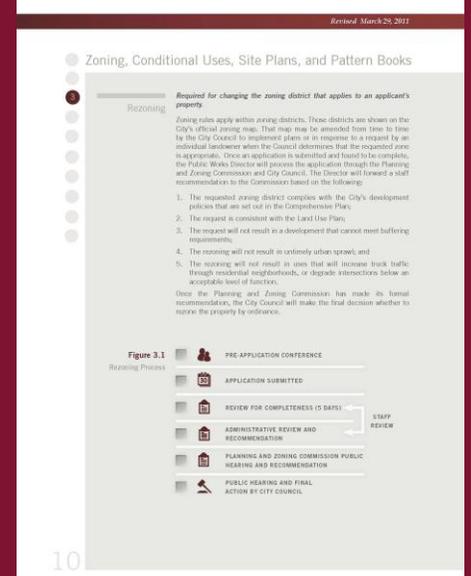
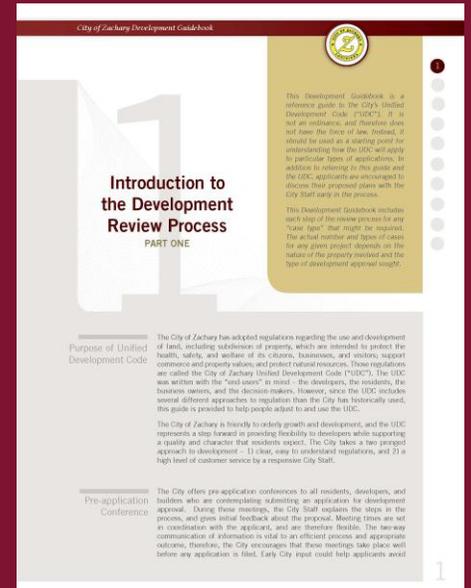
financially feasible. The latter (e.g., a typical Planned Unit Development process) requires a very high tolerance for risk. Consequently, undefined development approval provisions force potential developers to jump through many regulatory “hoops” to get a project approved, which may discourage development when the profitability of the end-product is not known. Additionally, businesses usually need space on a relatively short notice, particularly for start-ups, who will not have the time or resources to hire a team of professionals to navigate a process for obtaining multiple zoning approvals. Indeed, undefined or multiple “hoops” may cause businesses to locate elsewhere.

Goal 5.3: Conduct a thorough review of the City’s intake procedures for development projects, business permits, and fee structures with a view toward adopting more expedited and “business-friendly” permitting processes.

Actions and Initiatives

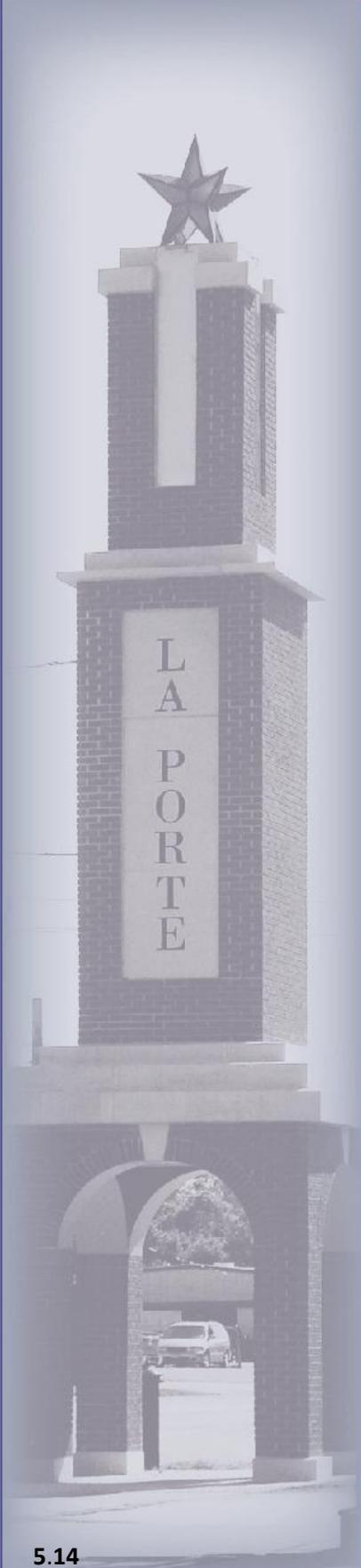
- 1) Consider conducting customer service training for front desk personnel and other key staff members and implementing a survey tool to monitor customer satisfaction.
- 2) Establish a “streamlined permitting process” for desirable developments. Develop a baseline comparison of La Porte’s development review and permitting process with neighboring communities (e.g., Deer Park, Pasadena, etc.). If no such baseline comparison already exists, then the City should begin tracking the review time for different categories of permitting. Once the data has been collected, the City should hold monthly or quarterly meetings with the development community to review the benchmark data and obtain their feedback regarding their dissatisfaction with the development process. Feedback should be requested on how to improve both regulations and the process. Develop a short- and long-term action plan to resolve issues that do not compromise the integrity of the process or conformity with established regulations. Typically, the development community wants and needs consistency and predictability. So, in some cases, streamlining may not resolve the issue. Sometimes, larger issues with the review process lie in the subjectiveness of project approvals. This can be particularly evident when trying to navigate the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process. Relevant feedback from this analysis should be presented to the Planning and Zoning Commission and City Council.
- 3) Complete the guidebook for the development community and residents to utilize during the development process. The guidebook should include descriptions of the types of applications available, flowcharts of each process, tables of submittal and hearing dates, details

Example Guidebook



A well-designed development guidebook can facilitate improved outcomes (e.g., these pages from Zachary, LA).

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.



as to where further information may be found, and other items pertinent to the successful navigation of the process.

- 4) Update the website to make it easier to access information required by the public to secure approval for projects. This could include Adobe PDF fillable application forms, expanded GIS data (e.g., locations and size of public infrastructure), etc.
- 5) Consider surveying applicants once the development process is complete to determine and quantify overall satisfaction with the department and processes, and to gather feedback on suggested improvements.

Focus Area 3 – Expanded Opportunities for Higher Quality Industrial Operations within City Limits and the ETJ.

La Porte is an industrial City. It is located just 25 miles from Downtown Houston and is located directly between the Barbours Cut and Bayport Container Terminals of the Port of Houston. The City's quick and easy access to the north/south Interstate 45 corridor and the east/west Interstate 10 corridor is further served by more than 130 trucking lines providing routes to all of the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The Union Pacific and BNSF railroads, with rail hubs in Houston and other Texas cities, serve thousands of miles of track and all Gulf Ports.¹² Combine this with the fact that the Port of Houston is expected to increase its freight tonnage by 42 million tons by 2035 (with an overall expected increase of 45 percent for the region's freight tonnage);¹³ La Porte is well-positioned to be an ideal location for businesses in warehousing and manufacturing industries. It is precisely this reason why the City should maintain its focus on industrial economic development activities.

With this being said, the U.S. manufacturing industry continues a transformation that has profound effects on the practice of economic development. It is forcing us to rethink what we mean by a *primary job*, how we measure economic impact, and how we design incentives. This is due, in large part, because manufacturing employment continues to decline. It is not overstatement that an economic strategy built solely around manufacturing jobs may be destined for failure.

For this reason, it is recommended to direct economic development efforts to a few key target industries that are complimentary to the City's existing industrial base. These target industries were identified by the Gulf Coast Economic Development District (GCEED) as being favorable for local economic conditions:

- Biomedical/Biotechnical;

¹² City of La Porte Economic Development website.

¹³ H-GAC Regional Goods Movement Study – Final Report. Dec. 2011.

- Chemical & Chemical Based Products;
- Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing; and,
- Machinery Manufacturing.¹⁴

Since the growth of clusters (e.g., biotech cluster) is significantly affected by local economic factors that can be modified or improved by local policy makers, it is critical that further evaluation is undertaken.

However, expanding the City's industrial base (or targeted clusters) cannot, and should not, be to the detriment of the City's overall livability. Conversely, new industrial development should be in conformance with the City's overall vision as being a business-, tourism-, and family-friendly community (see section on Vision in *Chapter 1, Plan Context*). Achieving this business/tourism/family balance may require the City to think differently about its approach in the coming years.

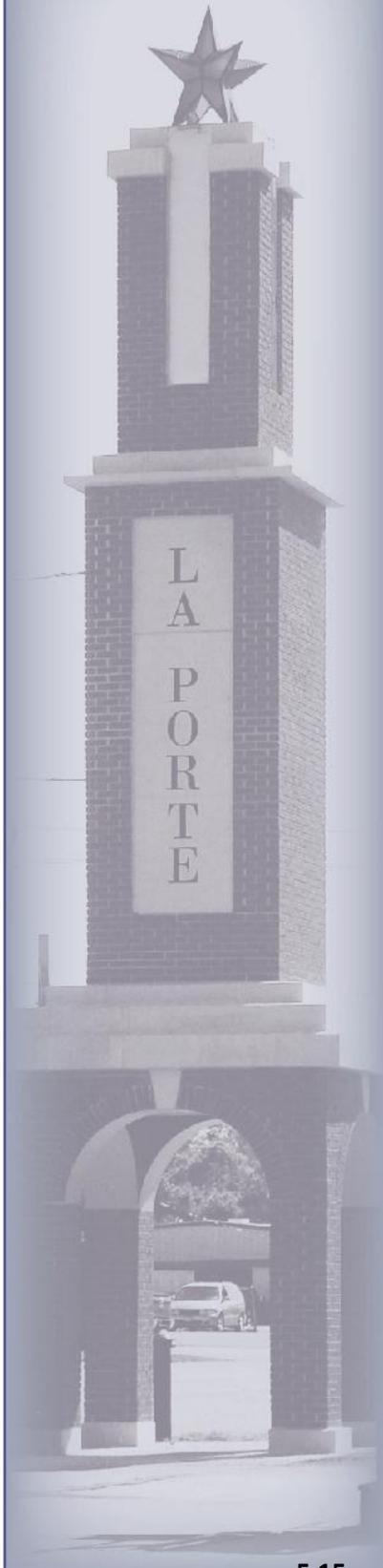
One of the primary ways to achieve this balance is to strengthen development regulations to implement the Business Park and Auto-Urban Industrial character areas. As detailed in the **Appendix A, Future Consideration of Character-based Planning**, business parks are primarily for office, medical, and technology/research uses, but can also include light industrial (including warehousing/distribution) when well screened and in buildings with enhanced materials and design. Business parks also have areas of common open space, extensive landscaping along the perimeters, special streetscape and design treatments at entries (and other areas), and site operations that are conducted indoors with limited or no outdoor storage or display.

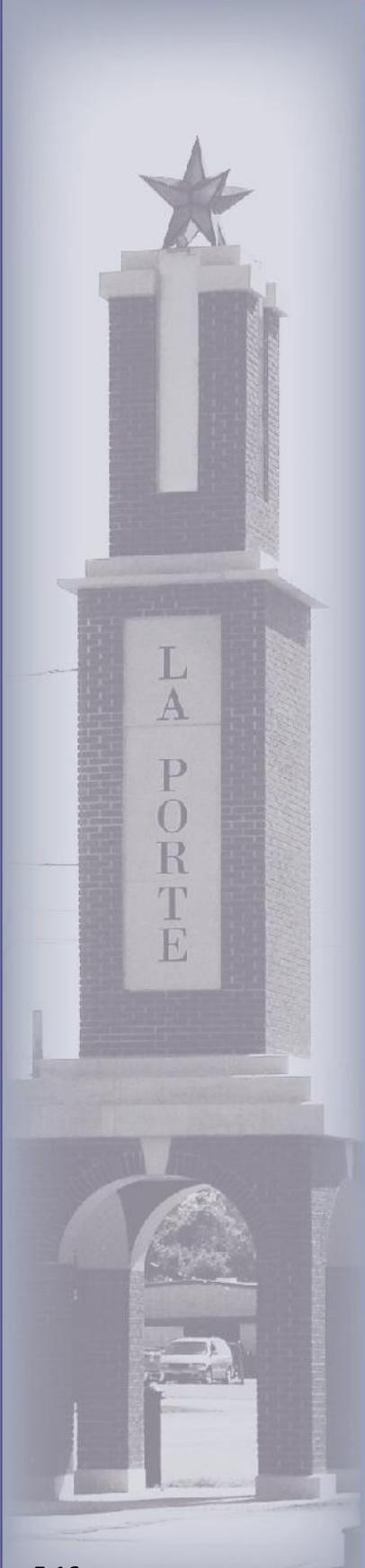
Auto-Urban Industrial, by contrast, is more typical of the industrial operations currently in existence within the City and the ETJ. They are characterized by large parking and storage areas (e.g., container yards) and unscreened or lesser screened outdoor activities. For future developed areas, strengthened regulations should mitigate these areas through landscaping and buffering standards, including screening of any outdoor activity and storage from the public rights-of-way and adjacent uses and properties.

Key Planning Considerations

Key Planning Considerations for expanding opportunities for higher quality industrial operations within the City and the ETJ include:

¹⁴ The Gulf Coast Economic Development District conducted a regional cluster analysis to assess regional competitiveness in attracting and retaining industry clusters. It revealed dominant clusters in the region as well as the ones that are emerging or transforming. Gulf Coast Economic Development District – 2009-2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy. July 17, 2009.



- 
- 1) Continued partnerships and support for the Port of Houston's Barbours Cut and Bayport Terminals.
 - 2) Strengthened regulations for new Business Park and Auto-Urban Industrial development/redevelopment.
 - 3) Pursuing and offering economic incentives for those industrial activities (or targeted clusters) that complement the City's existing industrial base and agree to meet the City's livability objectives.

Goal 5.4: Balance increased economic development incentives for industry (and targeted clusters) with improved regulatory provisions to protect the City's livability.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Strengthen the language in Development Agreements to require new industrial development in the ETJ to adequately screen operations and storage areas from public rights-of-way, provide additional landscaping, etc., as a means to improve the City's character and livability.
- 2) Continue to promote industrial development within the City and industrial districts in the Exterritorial Jurisdiction (ETJ).
- 3) Assess local economic factors to determine favorable conditions for locating identified industry clusters. This would include identifying the most appropriate target clusters, followed by surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with industry experts to identify their location preferences.
- 4) Update the zoning and development codes to ensure higher quality standards are achieved for those uses that would be allowed in Business Park and Auto-Urban Industrial areas. Additionally, provisions need to be strengthened to improve compatibility between areas of differing character and to achieve better community livability (see *Chapter 2, Land Use and Development*, for additional information on needed regulatory improvements).

Goal 5.5: Proactively prepare undeveloped (and appropriate) areas for future industrial development and target clusters.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Proactively zone land within the City for needed commercial, office, and light industrial uses, as identified on *Map 2.6, Future Land Use Plan*. In anticipation of the 45 percent increase in expected freight tonnage, this is particularly important to pre-zone those areas designated as Business Park and Auto-Urban Industrial.
- 2) Market and provide incentives for these pre-zoned areas to create large-scale business parks. This could include incentives to install the public infrastructure needed for multi-lot developments, so that future individual businesses have shovel-ready lots where all that is remaining to do is to construct the building.

- 3) Consider facilitating the discussion with property owners, state and county economic officials, and the Union Pacific Railroad, among others, to test the idea of creating a special logistics park in the vacant area bounded by State Highway (S.H.) 225 and S.H. 146 and adjacent to the existing Union Pacific rail line. There are a number of distribution-related companies in the region. The key in maximizing this opportunity is for the City to go beyond warehousing to create opportunities to add value to the goods passing through the area. Specialized facilities that allow for easy off-loading of freight combined with special financial incentives for the modifications of imports and exports (such as through a Foreign Trade Zone) could be a key in making La Porte even stronger for value-added manufacturing and distribution. This would include:
 - a. Facilitate discussion with state and federal officials on the process of creating a general-purpose Foreign Trade Zone, which can be sponsored by economic development corporations and typically involve public facilities that can be used by more than one firm, and are most commonly industrial parks used by small to medium sized businesses for warehousing/distribution and some processing/assembly.¹⁵
 - b. Facilitate rezoning and permitting the property to allow high-quality, large site industrial warehousing.
 - c. Approach Union Pacific on the possibility of building special rail sidings (i.e., a low-speed track sections distinct from the main line to be used for loading and unloading freight) into a proposed park.
- 4) Work with large undeveloped landowners to discover their goals for the property and help facilitate their goals in conjunction with the objectives of this plan or modify this plan to match mutual goals of the owner and City.

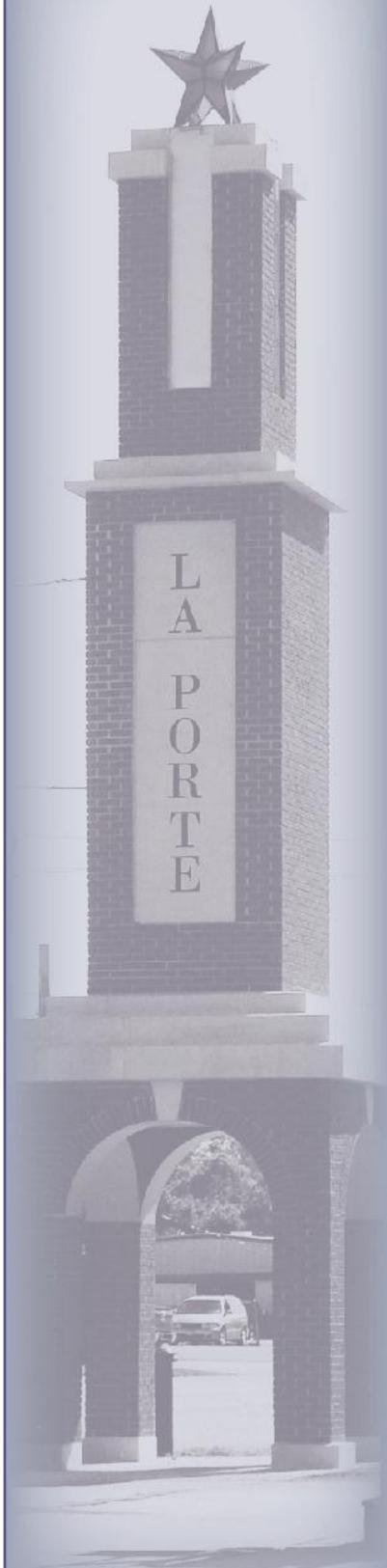
Focus Area 4 – Continued Focus on Expanding Retail and Commercial Service Businesses within the City.

One of the topics that came up repeatedly during the public participation process was a lack of commercial retail opportunities within the City. Indeed, per capita retail sales in La Porte were \$1,844 in 2007¹⁶, which is significantly lower than the neighboring cities of Deer Park (\$4,220), Texas City (\$4,561), and Baytown (\$7,024), and Harris County as a whole (\$5,938). This indicates that the City could potentially capture a higher level of spending by residents.

Although most retail developers have sophisticated approaches for site selection, and are primarily driven by demographics, it is beneficial to build

¹⁵ Trade Information Center. June 2000.

¹⁶ City of La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan. Confirmed by the U.S. Census Bureau as the most recent year comparable numbers were available.



Retail Development: Fairmont and Main Street

Fairmont Parkway has been developing as the new location (or relocation) of some of the City's key destinations that were once anchors for Main Street, including City Hall, the U.S. Post Office, and many of the newer retail businesses. As business expanded on Fairmont Parkway, business declined on Main Street.

Today, there is opportunity to have complimentary retail in both locations. Main Street offers a place well suited for entertainment, fine dining, neighborhood cafes, boutique shopping, and tourist-based businesses, all in an urban, pedestrian-scaled and walkable environment. On the other hand, Fairmont Parkway has developed as an auto-urban commercial corridor, which best serves the automobile and is less conducive to pedestrians and tourist-based businesses.

Source: City of La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan; modified by Kendig Keast Collaborative.

relationships with these businesses. As mentioned in the La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan, continued attendance at the International Conference of Shopping Centers (ICSC) and the ICSC Texas Conference and Deal Making Event could provide increased opportunities to market La Porte's assets to those that have the ability to bring future retail shopping opportunities to the City.

Providing incentives to attract retail is already being done. Providing incentives for retail has its advantages and disadvantages; and accordingly, only certain cities choose to do it. Though retail provides an improved quality of life, increased tax revenues, and improves the property tax base on and/or near the operation, sales collected at these locations are often sent to a headquarters based elsewhere (and in some cases, out of state) and rarely are re-invested to expand the operation or provide above-average wages to local residents. To this extent, most retail, but not all, cause local dollars to flow out of the local economy. Given the lack of retail opportunities in La Porte, however, it is important to pursue additional opportunities for attracting retail and commercial service businesses to the City. This should include the continuation of the "up to 50 percent" ad valorem tax abatement for new construction of retail/commercial office/regional entertainment businesses.

Outside of marketing, incentives, and other procedural streamlining measures, the City's best economic development action may be "community development." The age-old axiom, "retail follows rooftops," is also common sense. Sellers need buyers and will tend to set up shop where they are concentrated. Since La Porte's market area is constrained on one side by the bay, and since there is limited area left for residential development, the City should be smart and strategic with regard to its zoning and development decisions so that there remains a sufficient area for higher quality (and in some cases, higher density) residential development.

Key Planning Considerations

Key planning considerations for continuing the focus on expanding retail and other commercial service business include:

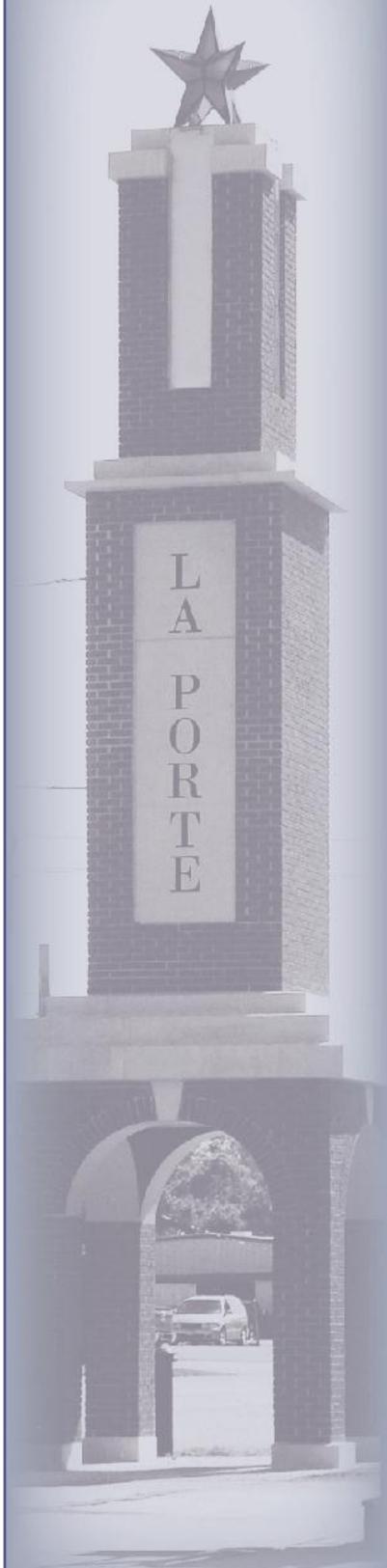
- 1) Analyzing demographic and retail market conditions to determine appropriate market segments for which to provide incentives.
- 2) Expanding the types of incentives and/or procedural streamlining to help attract retail and commercial service businesses.

Goal 5.6: Increase retail and commercial service business opportunities through targeted incentives and streamlined permitting.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Consider the use of retail sales tax grants¹⁷, which are tax rebates based upon a percentage of the sales and use tax received by the City from the sale of taxable items. The City may also condition the incentive upon the creation of employment, construction of improvements, certain development, continued operations for a specified period of time, or other public consideration.
- 2) Undertake a retail market analysis to help identify opportunities for future expansion of the City's retail space. The analysis should include a demographic analysis of La Porte's market segments, a sales gap analysis, and an analysis of the City's economic composition and competition. The outcome of this analysis should be to develop a coordinated economic development strategy comprised of four main elements: retail development, tourism, a convention center (consistent with the available space at the soon-to-be-renovated Sylvan Beach Pavilion), and support for industry. Prepare to proactively market La Porte to identified market segments identified in the report.
- 3) Consider non-cash incentives for stimulation of new development/redevelopment of retail and other commercial service businesses, including such things as:
 - a. Fast-track plan review and permitting (as staff work allows);
 - b. Dedicated inspections;
 - c. Corporate relocation assistance for employees and their families;
 - d. Employee recruitment and training, as funded through state grant programs and potentially San Jacinto College;
 - e. Business promotion and assistance; and,
 - f. Assistance with demolition of existing structures for redevelopment and new investment.
- 4) Implement the recommendations identified in *Chapter 2, Land Use and Development* as it relates to housing development. This includes such things as encouraging life-cycle housing options in new developments, incorporating accessory dwelling units in the zoning ordinance, adopting design standards for high-density residential development, establishing average lots size provisions, adding density bonuses, adopting a by-right housing palette, among others, so that there is a sufficient and diverse housing supply (i.e., the rooftops needed to support retail expansion).
- 5) Look for ways to increase dollars available for retail spending. Some of the variables effecting increased retail dollars are number of dwellings (i.e., roof tops), household income, cost of living expenses, and a better understanding of demographics.

¹⁷ Retail sales tax grants are authorized by Section 380.001 of the Texas Local Government Code.



Quality of Life Challenge

One challenge facing local governments in their endeavor to accommodate future growth is ensuring an adequate quality of life for area residents and businesses.

Public services such as health, safety, and education, along with amenities such as cultural and recreational opportunities, scenic natural areas and “community character” are becoming increasingly important factors in the economic competition among and within regions.

Investments and public policies aimed at improving quality of life appear to have the potential to yield economic benefits by maintaining or improving the region’s desirability as a place to live and work.

Source: 2009-2011 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, Gulf Coast Economic Development District.

Attracting Talent

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 any economic development strategy.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

Focus Area 5 – Continued Commitment to Place-Based Economic Development.

Businesses that do not depend on or need the local and regional infrastructure established for the shipping and container industry (i.e., the ports, state highways, railways and rail yards) will choose to locate (or not choose to locate) in La Porte for a multitude of reasons. Years ago, these decisions were primarily related to location and costs of doing businesses. While these are still extremely important, the business environment in the 21st Century has undergone drastic changes as the national economy is transitioning from being manufacturing-based to service-based. Traditionally, economic development was mostly focused on recruiting businesses to locate in your community. This approach depends heavily on large incentives, such as tax abatements, free land, and reduced costs for infrastructure. While these types of services certainly remain an important part of the overall business/industry attraction process, most organizations stop at this point. Fortunately, these are only the most basic tools in the economic development toolkit.

Nurturing and attracting talent is perhaps the most fundamental issue for creating 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 this “talent” goal implies more than workforce development and training. It also encompasses the idea of recruiting people.

As denoted in *Chapter 1, Demographic Snapshot*, La Porte’s decreasing rate of population growth signifies that the City will not meet the expectations established by the H-GAC 2035 Forecast due to limited areas remaining for residential development, combined with a relatively low-density pattern of development that currently exists in the City today (and is expected to continue in the future). Further, the *Demographic Snapshot* shows that the City’s younger cohorts (i.e., 40 to 44 years and younger) are decreasing, while the older cohorts (i.e., 45 to 49 years and older) are increasing in size. This will result in an overall aging of La Porte’s population. To maintain a healthy and sustainable workforce, La Porte should focus on attracting and retaining younger workers. (see inset)

The quality of education can enhance a community’s ability to attract and retain a younger demographic, as well as talent, in general. The quality of schools plays a pivotal role in attracting families and employers to an area. The perception of low-quality schools can be a major deterrent to moving to a particular community. As such, a community cannot afford to ignore its public schools. Higher education

also plays a pivotal role. Not only must employers be assured of access to educated and skilled workers, but talented individuals are often drawn to places that offer access to higher education and related amenities. As a result, it is imperative that the City remains supportive of La Porte Independent School District (La Porte ISD) and San Jacinto College to ensure the City remains a more attractive option for new residents and employers.

Increasingly, companies rely on the skills and talent of their workforce to retain or gain a competitive advantage. Only recently have employers discovered that one way to tap into talented workers is by locating operations in communities with a strong sense of place. This is because communities offering a multitude of amenities are the ones attracting many of today's skilled and talented workers. While no set definition for "quality of place" exists, the one common factor is the wide availability of choices in housing, entertainment, culture, recreation, retail, and employment.

In La Porte, the same assets that make it a desirable tourism and recreation destination enhance its quality of place. The historic Main Street, proximity to Sylvan Beach and the bay front, and the recently constructed Citywide trail system are attractive to residents and visitors alike.

For this reason, as the City supports projects to revitalize Main Street, the greater Downtown area, and Sylvan Beach; improve its physical appearance; and expand the number of choices available, marketing these opportunities is of the utmost importance. Increasing the number of visitors to and expanding the population of La Porte is a necessary component of sustaining an enhanced quality of place.

Key Planning Initiatives

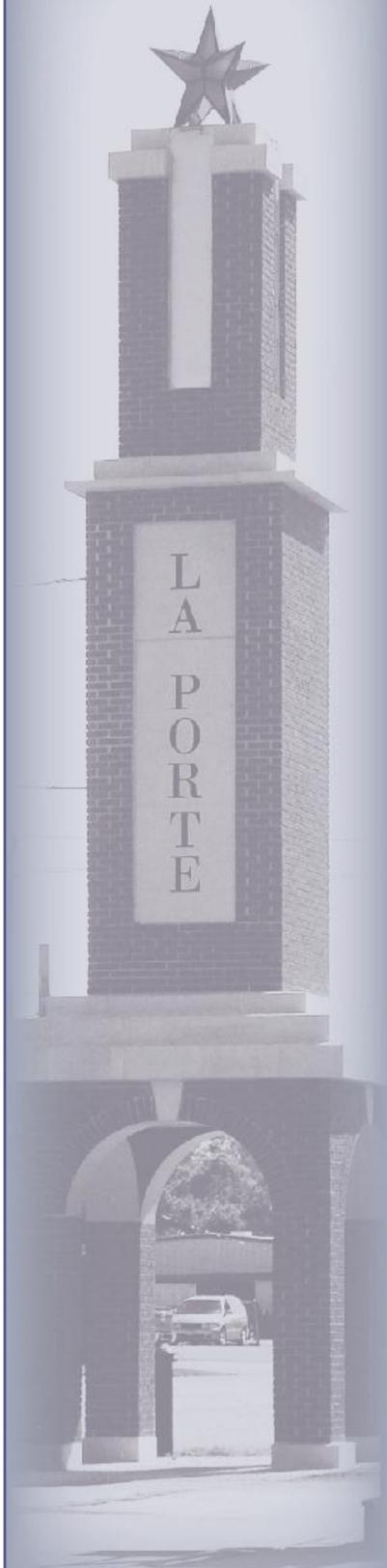
Key planning considerations for continuing to commit to place-based economic development include:

- 1) Strengthening partnerships with San Jacinto College as a means to improve the City's overall economic development conditions.
- 2) Developing a targeted tourism and internal / external marketing strategy.
- 3) Facilitating infrastructure improvements to enhance community livability.

Goal 5.7: Improving the City's overall economic development conditions by investing in the community and making La Porte an attractive place to live and work.

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Develop collaborative programs with engineering, business, and other similar programs at San Jacinto College to encourage student-led projects that aid in the betterment of the community. Examples of such





programs are design competitions for historic building re-use or parkland design and planning, student consulting projects for area businesses or the City, internship programs with local employers, and community service programs such as Habitat for Humanity or the Keep La Porte Beautiful Program.

- 2) Support the creation of a program designed to retain San Jacinto College graduates and attract alumni. This program should involve the City, San Jacinto College, the Chamber of Commerce, and the La Porte Economic Development Corporation. The program could include scholarships to place graduates with area employers and provide incentives for them to remain in La Porte after graduation. The program should also include a marketing component to establish and maintain communication with San Jacinto College alumni to keep them informed of changes, and the opportunities and benefits of living in La Porte. This can be achieved by publishing a monthly or quarterly e-newsletter to be sent to alumni and other people with ties to La Porte.
- 3) Strengthen the City's relationship with San Jacinto College, as it plays a much wider role in the community as an economic development asset.

The City should explore ways it could partner with the college to help it carry out its goals and mitigate its challenges. In addition, the City should work to enhance San Jacinto College's student experience by encouraging improved pedestrian infrastructure around the college and supporting programs that promote student involvement in the community (see inset). Utilizing representatives from San Jacinto College as a featured speaker at the Main Street Morning Brew is a good beginning point for improving this relationship.

- 4) Develop a coordinated tourism strategy that goes beyond trying to attract visitors to the area, as this is not sufficient. Rather, the tourism strategy should be focused on capturing visitor's dollars by local businesses, so that the full economic benefit can be realized by the City and area businesses. In coordination with area partners (e.g., the La Porte Bay Area Heritage Society), the City should create a tourism plan that focuses on developing tourism "products" that attract visitors, a retail strategy that provides outlets for visitors to spend money, and a marketing plan that effectively targets those groups who are likely to come to La Porte.

- 5) Implement the recommendations identified in *Chapter 2, Land Use and Development* as related to continued investment in Main Street, Sylvan Beach, bayfront, and the Downtown area, including establishing connections between the bayfront and the Downtown area, developing a Downtown master plan, revising regulatory provisions to ensure a strengthened urban character, facilitating additional housing choice (e.g., residential over retail units), and continued pursuit of public/private bayfront development projects.

- 6) Implement the recommendations in *Chapter 2, Land Use*

Pedestrian Improvements Can Improve the Economic Bottomline for Local Businesses



In the City of Lodi, California, a series of public-private pedestrian-oriented projects were completed along five street blocks (including widening sidewalks, bulb-out intersections, and other improvements) and were credited for a large economic turnaround. Vacancy rates dropped from 18 to six percent and upon completion, the City saw a 30 percent increase in Downtown sales tax revenue.

Source: Alliance for Biking and Walking.
Photos Source: LODI.Com

and Development as related to enhancing the City’s visual character and appearance. Over time, these improvements will increase the City’s overall livability.

- 7) Implement the recommendations in *Chapter 4, Community Mobility* as related to sidewalk and trail improvements.
- 8) Continue to pursue infrastructure and facility improvements on Main Street and at Sylvan Beach. For Main Street, the City should build off of the recent gateway and Five Points Town Plaza improvements to implement other pedestrian improvements along the entire length of Main Street. For Sylvan Beach, the City should build off of the recent beach re-nourishment project and planned renovation of the Sylvan Beach Pavilion to determine other projects that will have a similar economic impact in these areas. These types of “community enhancement” projects can be significant economic development generators for the City (see inset).
- 9) Continue to sponsor festivals and events in Downtown and other parts of the City, including Christmas on Main Street, The La Porte by the Bay Half Marathon, Veteran’s Day concert, and Art Walk (see inset), among others.
- 10) Promote Main Street as the primary entertainment and retail destination for residents, students, and tourists. Downtowns are typically the lifeblood of a community, where residents, employees, and tourists can be seen walking, shopping, entertaining, and dining. The recent improvements made along Main Street are a good start, but there are still significant improvements to be made.
- 11) Once the Sylvan Beach Pavilion is renovated, utilize its historic status¹⁸ as part of an overall marketing strategy for weddings, dances, and other community events (see inset). Historic preservation activities can also have a significant impact on the City’s economic development and overall livability.¹⁹ Additionally, continued support for implementing the



Sylvan Beach Pavilion



The Sylvan Beach Pavilion restoration project, like other historic preservation projects, may yield significant economic development benefits for a community. Below are a few of the benefits:

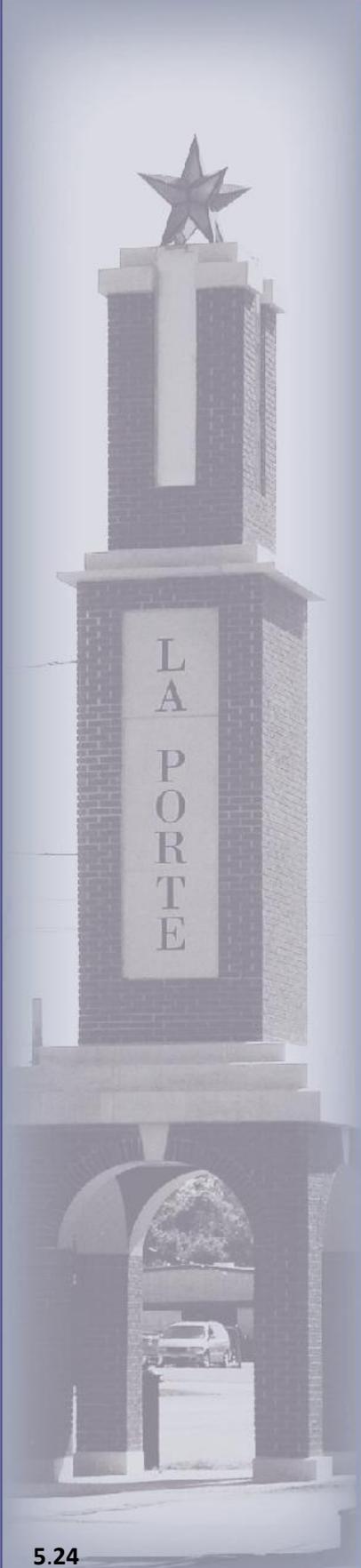
- Historical designations improve property values
- Incentives for historic properties attract reinvestment
- Historic building rehabilitation rebuilds Texas communities
- Preservation of historic properties creates jobs
- Texas’ heritage attracts tourists
- History museums draw tourists and economic vitality to communities
- Revitalization of Texas Main Street cities makes good business sense

Source: Provided by ‘Friends of the Sylvan Beach Park and Pavilion www.savethepavilion.org’

¹⁸ The Sylvan Beach Pavilion is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), as well as designated as a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark (RTHL), and a State Archeological Landmark (SAL). Letter from the Texas Historical Commission. 11/15/11.

¹⁹ The Center for Urban Policy Research at Rutgers University, Texas Perspectives and The LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin. Historic Preservation at Work for the Texas Economy. 1999.





- recommendations found in the San Jacinto Historic District Corridor Standards Report can help to bring in tourism dollars.
- 12) Maximize the recent improvements to Seabreeze Park and Sylvan Beach by incorporating the City-owned property into an overall bayfront experience for the citizens of La Porte.
 - 13) Fully implement the economic development internal and external marketing campaign envisioned in the La Porte Economic Development Strategic Plan. La Porte's economic development players should work to build consensus for a primary theme/message to market La Porte that will be shared by all community development, economic development, and tourism-related organizations. As with all successful marketing, it is critical to identify target audiences and to focus efforts on them. The primary target audiences for La Porte should be:
 - a. Local and regional business leaders who can influence business location and other investment decisions;
 - b. Key allies, such as state and regional economic development organizations;
 - c. Members of the region's various media; and,
 - d. Decision-makers at companies within the target industries.

The most important target audience for La Porte should be the people and businesses who are already invested (either financially or emotionally) in the community (e.g., the Main Street Business Alliance). They are also the ones who represent La Porte on a daily basis in their business and personal interactions—both regionally and nationally. A sustained internal marketing campaign should be undertaken to generate and promote a positive image of La Porte. This includes maintaining support for the "Business. By the Bay." quarterly newsletter publication. Making sure that existing residents and local business leaders have a positive image of the community is critical to the success of any external campaign as these are the people who can best tell the La Porte story to the outside world.

La Porte needs to set itself apart from the competition throughout the region. The most effective marketing strategies are those that promote specific initiatives and opportunities. In other words, the various target audiences must be swayed by the message that their interests can be maximized by investing social and economic capital in La Porte.

- 14) To compensate for the closed *The Bayshore Sun* newspaper, the City should continue to pursue additional media opportunities to ensure City residents are kept fully abreast of local government news.

IMPLEMENTATION

CHAPTER 6

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

2001 vs. 2012 Plan Comparison

2001	2012 Update
Ch. 13, Implementation	Ch. 6, Implementation

6.1 Introduction

Implementation is a team effort, requiring the commitment and leadership of elected and appointed officials, staff, residents, business and land owners, and other individual and collective influences that will serve as champions of this plan. This includes close coordination and joint commitment from local, regional, and state partners that significantly impact the future and growth of La Porte, including:

- Harris County;
- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT);
- Port of Houston Authority, and the Barbours Cut and Bayport Terminals;
- Battleground, Bayport, and South La Porte Industrial Districts;
- La Porte Independent School District (La Porte ISD);
- La Porte Economic Development Corporation;
- La Porte Redevelopment Authority;
- Bay Area Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau;
- La Porte-Bayshore Chamber of Commerce;
- San Jacinto College;
- Main Street Business Alliance; and
- 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 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.

6.2 Methods and Responsibility for Implementation

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

Each Councilman, 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 development ordinances, in particular, should 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 a 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 Council. As new development/redevelopment is proposed, staff and the City’s advisory boards, together with the City Council, must abide by the policies and recommendations of this plan. The text of this plan, coupled with the future land use, beautification, and thoroughfare plans, provides the requisite guidance for achieving what has been 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 coordinated with the objectives of this plan and implemented consistent with the future land use, beautification, and thoroughfare plans, 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 managerial in function, which may support or influence physical improvements or enhancements, but themselves focus on community betterment.

6.3 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

Due to the comprehensive nature of this plan update, it is necessary to conduct individual training workshops with the Planning and Zoning Commission, City Council, 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 Council.

- 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 Council 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 Council

- 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 Council 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 Council.
- Ensures decisions and recommendations presented to the City Council 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. The Planning Director will serve as the Plan Administrator and will play a lead role in coordinating among the various departments.

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 La Porte, but also Harris County and each of the other adjacent communities. As a result, the economic health of La Porte 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.

Perhaps of greatest importance to the effective implementation of this plan is recognition that all levels of government and the private sector must participate. For example, the idea of improving the overall appearance of corridors in the City, for instance, will not be effective without the coordination of the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), Harris County, and in large part, the private sector as new development or redevelopment occurs along these corridors.

Strong intergovernmental cooperation will also be instrumental in effective implementation of this plan. Each of the governmental agencies shares common interests and goals, including enhancing economic development and 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 representatives from different entities and agencies including the City, Harris County, Economic Development Corporation, La Porte, ISD, San Jacinto College, Port of Houston Authority, the industrial districts, and others. The council should meet quarterly to consider and act on projects and initiatives that are of mutual interest and benefit.
- Develop agreements with La Porte ISD to address potential joint acquisition of park land, improvement and maintenance of land and facilities, and use and management of areas and buildings. This could also include a joint agreement to construct and operate a natatorium.

6.4 Implementation Strategies

Shown in **Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan**, are 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. It is designed to be kept up-to-date and used on an annual basis as part of the regular review process. Projects should be further prioritized into a five-year action plan. 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 Council to keep them apprised of the progress of implementation.

Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan

Priority	Primary Action Items	Land Use & Development	Infrastructure & Growth Capacity	Mobility	Economic Development	
		Chapter Reference				
Highest Priority Actions (in order of priority)						
Action Agenda	1	Streamlined Permitting Process. Study existing development processes and regulations to determine a plan of action to resolve issues without compromising the integrity of the process or enforcement of established regulations. This also could include such things as fast-track permitting, assistance with demolition of structures, etc..				•
	2	Public Safety Improvements. Continue to support an excellent system of public safety services. In addition, consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> expanding police, fire, and EMS personnel concurrent with population growth; constructing a new animal shelter; establishing a formalized replacement and procurement program for vehicles and major equipment; and, providing adequate funding for training and community education programs. 			•	
	3	Neighborhood Improvement Program. Develop a formalized neighborhood improvement program that ensures the quality of existing neighborhoods are maintained or improved over time. This would include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> additional planning (e.g., facilitating the development of neighborhood plans) and technical support; development of a target-area community investment fund; streamlined regulations and processes (focsed to faciliate and incentivize reinvestment); and, development of an advocacy-based code enforcement program. 	•		•	•
	4	Business Retention and Expansion Program. Improve efforts to maintain relationships with existing businesses in order to determine public/private strategies to overcome challenges or facilitate plans of expansion.				•

Continued on next page.

Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan – Continued.

Priority	Primary Action Items	Land Use & Development	Infrastructure & Growth Capacity	Mobility	Economic Development
		Chapter Reference			
Highest Priority Actions (continued in order of priority)					
Action Agenda	5	<p>Park and Trail System Improvements. Improve the existing quality of existing parks and recreation areas through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adopting and implementing a parks-to-standard program; • master planning for all new/revitalized park development; • increasing the diversity of amenities; • improving accessibility and connectivity; • establishing an on-line registration system for programs; • adding neighborhood and community parkland in areas of need and concurrent with population growth; and • completing the trail system per the City’s Trail Master Plan. 	•	•	•
	6	<p>Market Retail Analysis. Undertake a market retail analysis separately or in coordination with an update to the Economic Development Strategic Plan.</p>			•
	7	<p>Infrastructure Improvements. Continue to implement the recommendations in the City’s Water Master Plan, Water Conservation Plan, and Drought Contingency Plan. In addition, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completing the geographic information systems (GIS) utility mapping database; • conducting a system-wide condition analysis of all utility infrastructure to determine an appropriate short- and long-term plan of action to repair, rehabilitate, or replace existing utility infrastructure; • identifying and eliminating any dead-end water mains; and, • studying to identify expanded opportunities for reuse of wastewater. 		•	
	8	<p>Unified Development Code / Modification of Regulatory Provisions. Prepare a Unified Development Code (UDC) to ensure an effective transition from comprehensive plan to the implementing regulations. Modified provisions should include, but not be limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building placement, design, and materials; • parking lot, streetscape, and foundation landscaping; • screening, lighting, and buffering; • lot design and open space; • street and pedestrian connectivity and access management; and, • sidewalk design, placement, and amenities. 	•	•	•

Continued on next page.

Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan – Continued.

Priority	Primary Action Items	Land Use & Development	Infrastructure & Growth Capacity	Mobility	Economic Development
		Chapter Reference			
Highest Priority Actions (continued in order of priority)					
Action Agenda	9	<p>Downtown Master Plan. Prepare a master plan for the Downtown area, including Main Street and Sylvan Beach, the connections between, and the transition to adjacent areas. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • setting a clear and collectively supported vision; • determination of implementation framework to guide new/reinvestment; and, • coordinating with previous work completed on marketing and branding. 	•		•
	10	<p>Drainage Improvements. Continue to implement the recommendations identified in the Citywide Drainage Study. In addition, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • designing and constructing all future/redeveloped flood control and on-site drainage projects as community enhancements and/or recreational amenities; and, • encouraging vegetative buffers along stream and other drainageways. 			
	11	<p>Coordinated Tourism Strategy. Develop a coordinated tourism strategy to focus on capturing visitor’s dollars by local businesses.</p>			•
	12	<p>Business Parks. Proactively zone and market areas for higher quality business parks for those areas identified on the Map 2.6, Future Land Use Plan.</p>	•		•
	13	<p>Business Incubator. Establish a small business incubator site within the City in coordination with San Jacinto College Small Business Development Center (SJC SBDC). Priority consideration should be given to locating the site in Downtown or near San Jacinto College.</p>			•
	14	<p>Safe Sidewalks Program. Prepare a safe sidewalks program to identify and correct unsafe and poorly maintained sidewalk segments at key locations throughout the community.</p>			•

Continued on next page.

Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan – Continued.

Priority	Primary Action Items	Land Use & Development	Infrastructure & Growth Capacity	Mobility	Economic Development
		Chapter Reference			
Highest Priority Actions (continued in order of priority)					
15	<p>Increasing Sustainability. Determine a plan of action to improve the City’s sustainability, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reaching the identified per capita water reduction targets; reducing the City’s energy usage; pursuing third-party certification (e.g., LEED-NC®) for design and construction of all new municipal projects; offering tax abatement incentives for private-sector development registered with LEED or other similar sustainable design and construction programs; utilizing drought resistant landscaping for public improvement projects and providing incentives for private sector projects; and, establishing community drop-off recycling locations in each park in the short-term and curbside recycling in the long-term. 	•	•		•
	<p>Strategic Corridors Program. Develop a strategic corridors program to direct aesthetic and infrastructure improvements for those corridors identified on <i>Map 2.2, Beautification Plan</i>.</p>	•		•	
Mid- to Long-Term Priority Actions (requires further prioritization in subsequent years)					
16	<p>Community Enhancement. Partner with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) and the county to enhance the appearance of existing corridors, gateways, interchanges, and bridges, as depicted on <i>Map 2.2, Beautification Plan</i>. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strengthening ordinance 1501-II; developing corridor enhancement plans for the primary and secondary corridors identified on <i>Map 2.2, Beautification Plan</i>; partnering with area partners to determine other strategies for visual improvement of the corridors; and, implementing a comprehensive wayfinding program. 	•		•	•
	<p>Scenic Texas Certification. Continue to make necessary improvements to achieve certification through the Scenic City Certification Program sponsored by Scenic Texas.</p>	•			

Continued on next page.

Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan – Continued.

Priority	Primary Action Items	Land Use & Development	Infrastructure & Growth Capacity	Mobility	Economic Development
		Chapter Reference			
Mid- to Long-Term Priority Actions (requires further prioritization in subsequent years)					
Action Agenda	<p>Revitalization Program. Develop a comprehensive revitalization program for those areas identified on Map 2.1, Rehabilitation Target Areas. This program should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a detailed public participation process; • the development of revitalization plans; and, • updates to the City’s development ordinance and processes to remove regular impediments to infill development, redevelopment, and revitalization. 	•			•
	<p>Existing Street Connectivity Improvements. Work with public and private stakeholders to determine a plan of action and funding source to develop the additional connections on existing streets as identified on Map 4.1, Thoroughfare Plan.</p>			•	
	<p>Signal Warrant Studies. Conduct signal warrant studies to determine if signals are warranted at the terminus of roads traversing and bounding the Lomax Area and along Fairmont Parkway and Spencer Highway.</p>			•	
	<p>Access Management Studies. Conduct access management studies along corridors of concern to identify and evaluate Transportation System Management (TSM) measures to enhance the capacity of the existing street system.</p>			•	
	<p>Complete Streets Policy. Adopt a Complete Streets policy and commit to implementing it during all new development/redevelopment projects.</p>			•	
	<p>Expand Mass Transit Availability. Coordinate with area partners to determine the feasibility of additional bus stops and routes to facilitate increased ridership over time.</p>			•	
	<p>Improved Mass Transit Quality. Improve the quality of each dedicated bus stop located within the City (e.g., installation of all-weather shelters, benches, ADA accessibility, online transit arrival information, etc.).</p>			•	
	<p>Summer Youth Pass Program. Coordinate with the Harris County Office of Transit Services (and other partners) to implement a Summer Youth Pass Program for high school-aged children to have unlimited access during the summer.</p>			•	

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

Table 6.1, Summary Action Plan – Continued.

Priority	Primary Action Items	Land Use & Development	Infrastructure & Growth Capacity	Mobility	Economic Development
		Chapter Reference			
Mid- to Long-Term Priority Actions (requires further prioritization in subsequent years)					
Action Agenda	<p>Airport Master Plan. Update the Airport Master Plan which should include an:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an operations plan; • updated facilities and development plan; • economic development strategy; and, • overall site and landscape improvement plan. 			•	
	<p>Facilitate Industry Clusters. Assess local conditions to determine favorable conditions for identified industry clusters. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying appropriate clusters; and, • conducting surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. 				•
	<p>Logistics Park. Facilitate discussion with the Union Pacific Railroad (and others) to develop a special logistics park in the vacant area bounded by State Highway (S.H.) 225 and S.H. 146 and adjacent to the existing rail line. This could include the creation of a general-purpose Foreign Trade Zone and development of special rail sidings into the proposed park.</p>			•	•

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

6.5 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 future land use, beautification, or thoroughfare plan as the development/redevelopment pattern unfolds and enhancement

Plan Amendments

Minor Amendment

Similar to what occurred in 2005, City Staff should under take another minor update revision sometime around 2015-2016.

Major Amendment

By 2020-2021, the City should undertake a complete rewrite of this plan.

projects get implemented. 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 Council. 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:

- 1) Significant actions and accomplishments during the past year, including the status of implementation for each programmed task.
- 2) Implementation constraints, including those encountered in administering the plan and its policies.
- 3) 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.
- 4) 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:

- 1) Consistency with the goals and policies of the plan.
- 2) Adherence with the future land use, beautification, thoroughfare, economic development, and parks and trails plans.
- 3) Compatibility with the surrounding area.
- 4) Impacts on infrastructure provision.
- 5) Impact on the ability to provide, fund, and maintain adequate services.
- 6) Impact on environmentally sensitive and natural areas.
- 7) Contribution to the vision of the plan and character of the community.

Five-Year Update/Evaluation and Appraisal Report

Similar to the process that was undertaken in 2005, City Staff should undertake a more comprehensive evaluation in about five years. A 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:
 - a. The rate at which growth is occurring relative to the projections put forward in the plan.
 - b. Shifts in demographics and other growth trends.
 - c. The area of land that is still remaining vacant and its capacity to meet projected demands.
 - d. Citywide attitudes and whether changes necessitate amendments to the vision and goals.
 - e. 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.
 - a. 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.
 - b. Conflicts between goals and policies that have been discovered in the implementation and administration of the plan must be resolved.
 - c. 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.
 - d. 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.

- e. 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.
- f. 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.

FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF CHARACTER-BASED PLANNING

APPENDIX A

One of the ways to improve community appearance is to adopt a “character-based” approach to zoning and land development, which offers many benefits (see inset) when compared to a conventional approach like that of the City’s existing ordinance. As such, this Comprehensive Plan update recommends the City consider in the future to transition to a character-based approach to planning. The remainder of this chapter provides guidance for if and when that transition might be undertaken.

Community character goes beyond typical categorization of the functional use of land – such as residential, commercial, and industrial – to account, as well, for the physical traits one can see in an area that contribute to its “look and feel.”

A character-based approach focuses on the development intensity, which encompasses the density and layout of residential development; the scale and form of non-residential development; and the amount of building and pavement coverage (i.e., impervious coverage) relative to the extent of open space and natural vegetation or landscaping. This applies both on individual development sites and across entire areas. It

Why should Community Character be Considered in La Porte?

The community character approach offers many benefits including:

- the ability to determine and realize the intended character of future development;
- an increased assurance as to quality development outcomes;
- improved compatibility within and between districts;
- attraction of highly-skilled workers and high-tech businesses;
- potential premium to the value of housing;
- increased design flexibility to protect natural resources and valued open space;
- fewer zoning map amendments and thus, streamlined approval;
- increased certainty in the development process;
- ability to better plan for infrastructure needs;
- mixed use projects on a by-right basis; and
- buffering that is commensurate with the level of impact on adjacent and abutting properties.

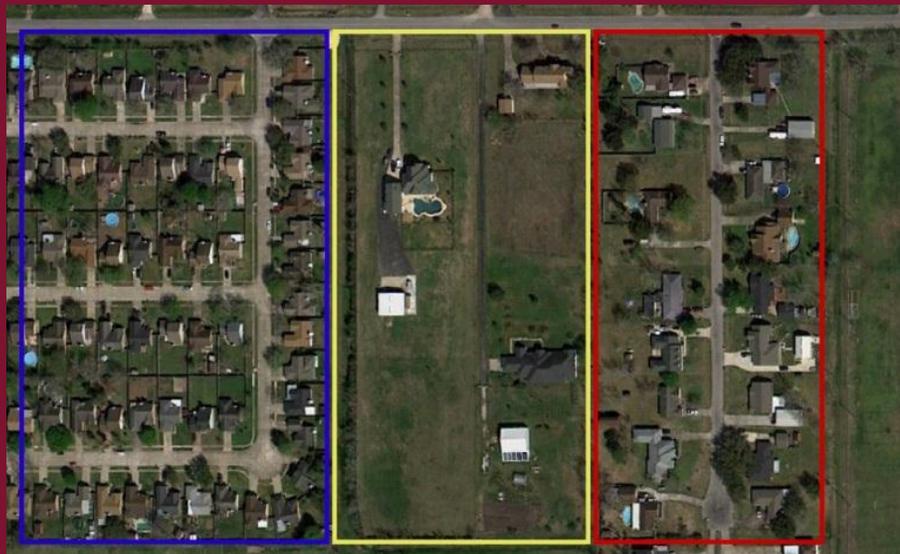
Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

is this combination of basic land use and the characteristics of such use that more accurately determines the real compatibility and quality of development, as opposed to land use alone. For instance, both Main Street and Fairmont Parkway have restaurants (i.e., the same use); however, when patronizing a restaurant along Main Street, one encounters a more pedestrian-friendly environment with sidewalks, gridded streets, buildings brought mostly to the street, and on-street parking. In contrast, when patronizing a restaurant along Fairmont Parkway, one encounters a more auto-oriented environment where there are no sidewalks (or they are sporadic) and buildings are set back behind off-street parking (see inset on next page for an example of the same residential use exhibiting three different characters).

Key Planning Considerations

- 1) Amending the zoning ordinance to repurpose and recalibrate its districts and standards to reflect their intended community character outcomes.

Same Use; Different Character



While the use is the same, the character of these individual developments is much different by way of lot sizes, setback, street configurations, and the density and spacing of development. The character may again change should the center property develop. The value of a character-based zoning system is a preservation of character and hence property values. This segment along N. P Street features three adjacent areas developed for single-family residential use, but each exhibiting a much different character—Auto-Urban on the left, Rural in the middle, and Suburban on the right. These character types are elaborated later in this chapter.

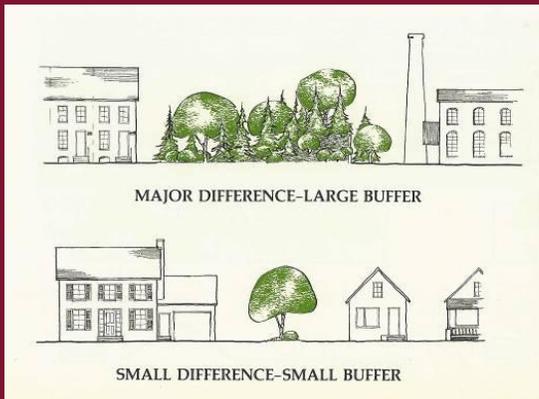
Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

GOAL A.1: Implementing a character-based approach to planning by refocusing the zoning ordinance to emphasize the character intent and form of development in appropriate zoning mixed use districts.

The City's zoning ordinance was originally adopted in the 1980s and is based on a conventional (Euclidean) approach to zoning – one that focuses on land use and minimum area standards. As part of the implementation of this comprehensive plan update, it is recommended that the City consider at some time in the future to repurpose and recalibrate the zoning and development ordinances to place emphasis on the character of development (without placing as much emphasis on land use). While use should remain a secondary consideration, the density/intensity and design of development is of much greater importance if the City is to enhance its character. (see inset)

Actions and Initiatives

- 1) Consider revising the district purpose statements to define the intended character of the district, rather than general use types. For instance, the purpose of the R-1, Low Density Residential District is “for low-density, single-family detached dwellings...” Instead, the purpose may indicate the district is suburban in nature, characterized by a balance between the landscape and buildings, which may be large lots or smaller lots clustered around public open space. Open space and low impervious surface ratios characterize the built environment.
- 2) Consider recalibrating the density and open space ratios of each zoning district and revise the dimensional standards to reflect the intended character. For instance, the setbacks and lot widths and coverage should vary by character, with small setbacks and higher coverage for neighborhoods of an urban character and larger setbacks and lower coverage for suburban and rural neighborhoods.
- 3) Consider identifying established neighborhoods with cohesive character and community identity and create neighborhood conservation districts to protect and promote the existing neighborhood feel. In addition, allow for reasonable improvements in these existing neighborhoods without cumbersome variance procedures. Include by-right standards for making improvements to buildings to ensure that they remain in character with the neighborhood and do not adversely impact the use and enjoyment of neighboring properties.



Flexible bufferyards ensure that the scale of the bufferyard is commensurate with the intensity and/or proximity (i.e., the character) of adjacent uses. In addition, a flexible bufferyard approach would provide multiple options (i.e., landscaping only, landscaping and berm, or landscaping and fence structure) to achieve the same level of compliance, while providing the developer with flexibility to implement the one that is most appropriate for their site and project.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

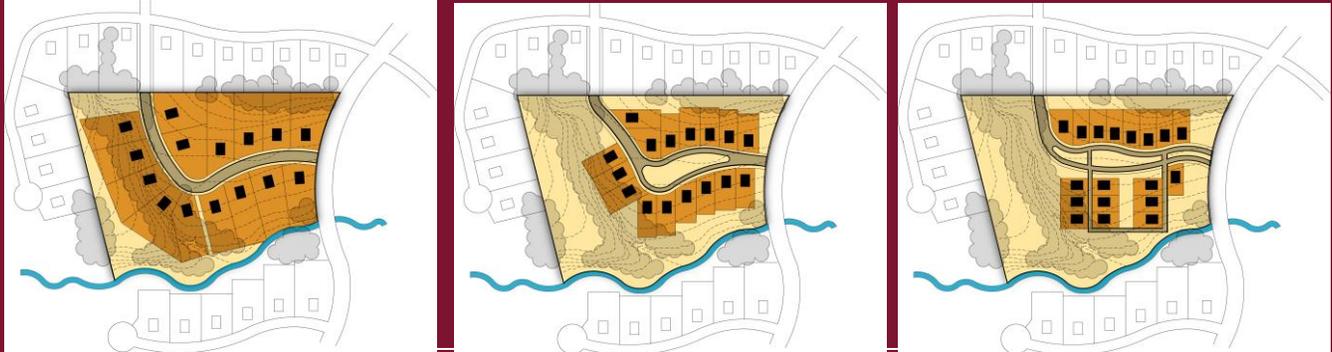
4) Consider transitioning the existing Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations to a Planned Development (PD) option available in certain districts in order to mix different housing types. This by-right option allows the density and open space standards to be clearly defined to reflect the intended character. A housing palette should be utilized to clearly specify the minimum lot areas and dimensions, setbacks, building heights, and maximum building coverage for each dwelling unit type. These new PD provisions would include explicit density and open space standards together with provisions for permitted and limited uses, housing diversity, dimensional criteria, residential and nonresidential development standards, open space and recreation design, subdivision layout and design, street configurations, and bufferyards and transitions thereby allowing them as a by-right option rather than through a discretionary approval process.

5) Consider reviewing and revising the lists of permitted and conditional uses in each district. The current districts are cumulative meaning that single family dwellings are permitted in both low and high density districts. The permitted uses in the commercial district are based on their use function rather than their scale or design character. By way of example, the neighborhood commercial district allows drugstores, eating places, and grocery stores with limitations of scale or other design parameters to ensure a character that is compatible with the adjacent neighborhood.

- 6) Consider adopting a housing palette that includes dimensional standards for each of several housing types. The purpose of the palette is to ensure the character (size, spacing, scale) of each housing type in a neighborhood or mixed housing development, such as a mixed use center or traditional neighborhood development (TND).
- 7) For the purposes of procedural streamlining and to better focus the appropriate locations of uses, consider restricting the types and numbers of allowable conditional uses. For those uses with performance standards, make them a limited use whereby they are administratively permitted subject to written standards.
- 8) Consider amending the ordinance to include bufferyard provisions for ensuring improved compatibility between adjacent areas of different character. The bufferyards must vary according to the intensity of abutting development, with a range of options (including combinations of buffer width, plant density, earthen berms, and fencing) to meet a specified standard of opacity. This would provide adequate buffering of adjacent uses as well as street corridors. The existing provisions only specify a 25 foot buffer between multi-family and single family

residential developments without any specification as to the type of density of landscaping. (see inset)

The Rationale of Character-Based Land Use Districts



A character-based system differs from the City's current use-based system in that each of the above developments may be permitted in the same land use (or zoning) district. A use-based land use and zoning system would require each of these to be in separate districts even though their relative densities and thus, impacts (e.g. traffic, utility demands, etc.) are the same. In this way, while the form of development or type of house may be different the character remains the same. This is so as a character-based system uses density and open space measures to control – and ensure – the intended character. The density and open space controls may hold the density constant (density neutral) or may allow a bonus as means to provide incentive to preserve open space and resources or to achieve other community objectives.

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative.

- 9) Consider establishing a minimum open space ratio (OSR) within residential development and landscape surface ration (LSR) within nonresidential development. The ratios will vary according to the character of the district. These areas will provide visual buffering and shade, accommodate recreational amenities, and provide needed space for stormwater detention.
- 10) Below details potential future character districts that could be implemented if the City transitions to a character-based approach to planning.

Future Character Districts

Rural. This designation is for areas with large acreages (scattered homesteads and pasture land) and very large lot developments (see inset). It may also include clustered residential development that is offset by a high percentage of open space on the overall tract. Rural character is usually found in areas on the fringe of the City where infrastructure (i.e., curb and gutter, sewer, etc.) may be less intensive than other areas of the City. Rural character typically exhibits:

- Wide open landscapes, with no sense of enclosure, and the views to the horizon are unbroken by buildings.
- Structures are in the background – or invisible entirely as they blend into the landscape.

Rural



Suburban Residential



- Very high open space ratios and very low building coverage.
- Greater building separation providing privacy and detachment from neighboring dwellings.
- Much greater reliance on natural drainage systems.
- A more pleasant environment for walking and biking, especially for off-street trail systems.

Suburban Residential. This designation is for areas that include detached residential dwellings (see inset); planned developments (to provide other housing types, e.g., attached residential, with increased open space), etc. Suburban Residential character typically exhibits:

- A high degree of open space maintained on the site.
- Larger lot sizes to allow for larger front yards and building setbacks.
- Greater side separation between homes.
- Less noticeable accommodation of the automobile (especially where driveways are on the side of homes rather than occupying a portion of the front yard space, and where garages are situated to the side or rear of the main dwelling).
- In some case, Suburban Residential can accommodate smaller lot sizes in exchange for greater open space, with the additional open space devoted to maintaining the Suburban character and buffering adjacent properties.

Auto Urban Residential



Auto Urban Residential. This designation also includes detached residential dwellings; attached housing types (see inset) (subject to compatibility and open space standards, e.g., duplexes, townhomes, patio homes); planned developments (with a potential mix of housing types and varying densities, subject to compatibility and open space standards), etc. Auto Urban Character typically exhibits:

- Less openness and separation between dwellings compared to Suburban areas.
- Auto-oriented character (e.g., driveways and front-loading garages dominate the front yard and facades of homes).
- Uniform front setbacks where minimal variation in individual house design can create a monotonous street environment.
- Lack of variation (sometimes) or excessive monotony which can be offset by “antimonotony” architectural standards, landscaping, and limitations on subdivision layouts that are overly characterized by straight streets and uniform lot sizes and arrangement.

Traditional Residential



Traditional Residential. This designation covers many of the core single-family residential neighborhoods within East La Porte (see inset). The prevailing lot size allows for less openness and separation between homes than in Suburban and Rural residential areas. Traditional Residential character areas typically exhibit:

- Mature tree canopies; which help to differentiate these areas from Auto-Urban Residential areas.

- Highly gridded streets, oftentimes with alleys.
- Incremental increases in housing density and lot coverage; enough to differentiate from corresponding Suburban Residential areas.

Suburban Village. This designation includes mixed use (on single sites and within individual structures), attached residential dwellings (possibly live/work units), commercial retail, office, etc. (see inset). Rather than linear strips, these village centers will have much smaller building footprints and typically cater towards neighborhood conveniences such as drug stores, professional services, and retail users. Given the expected increases in population constrained by the limited areas remaining for development, it is recommended that La Porte consider facilitating the development of some of the remaining areas as more self-contained, mixed use villages. Suburban Village character areas typically exhibit:

- High degree of landscape surface than found in Auto-Urban character areas.
- Pedestrian-oriented setting and more walkable environments.
- Higher site coverage, where a minimum two-story structures are encouraged.
- Reliance on on-street parking, centralized public parking, and where feasible, structured parking.

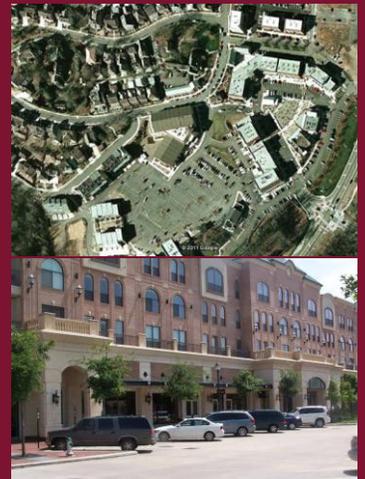
Auto Urban Commercial. Development types include a wide range of commercial retail and service uses (at varying scales and intensities depending on the site); office (both large and/or multi-story buildings and small-scale office uses depending on the site); and public/institutional areas (see inset). Auto-Urban character areas typically exhibit:

- A largely horizontal development pattern.
- A very open environment (but to accommodate extensive surface parking versus the more prominent green spaces found in Suburban areas)
- Significant area devoted to vehicular access drives, circulation routes, surface parking, and loading/delivery areas (making pavement the most prominent visual feature versus green or open areas). Auto-oriented character may be enhanced with better building and site design.

Urban Downtown. This character area is different from an Auto-Urban commercial area in that the buildings are brought to the street and there is no or very limited on-site parking (see inset). Buildings within this district occupy a large percentage of the site, and front and side yard setbacks must be built to the property line in order to maintain the characteristics of a traditional downtown. Downtown character areas typically exhibit:

- Most intensive development character in City.
- Streets framed by buildings with zero/minimal front setbacks.
- Greatest site coverage.
- Minimum two-story structures encouraged.

Suburban Village



Photos not from La Porte

Auto Urban Commercial



Urban Downtown



Business Park



Photo not from La Porte

Auto-Urban Industrial



Parks and Open Space



- Reliance on on-street parking, centralized public parking, and where feasible, structured parking.
- Public/institutional uses designed of an Urban character.

Business Park. This designation is typically Suburban in character and primarily is for office, medical, and technology/research uses, but can also include light industrial (including warehousing/distribution) when well screened and in buildings with enhanced architectural design (see inset). Business Parks are a good way to attract new companies to the area and could be an attractive alternative the existing facilities available today. Business Park character areas are typically grouped in campus style settings and typically exhibit:

- Reduced site coverage and larger areas of common open space.
- A minimum open space ratio of 20%-30%, which still allows for a sizable cumulative building footprint since most such developments involve large sites.
- Extensive landscaping of business park perimeter, and special streetscaping and design treatments at entries, key intersections, and internal focal points.
- Development outcomes that exceed City ordinances and development standards (because they are often controlled by private covenants and restrictions)
- Site operations that are conducted indoors with no outdoor storage or display.

Auto-Urban Industrial. La Porte’s has been traditionally known as an industrial City, and as such, there are many industrial areas located in and around the City which exhibit an Auto-Urban character (see inset). Although, these areas can be enhanced through landscaping and buffering standards, master-planning via “industrial parks,” and optimal site selection. The City’s existing industrial buildings are a mix of older and new brick and metal buildings scattered throughout the City. Auto-Urban Industrial character areas typically exhibit:

- Predominantly characterized by large parking and storage areas and minimal greenspace; although some industrial park developments may feature more open space and landscaping, regulated signage, screening, etc.
- Outdoor activity and storage, which should be screened where visible from public ways and buffered from residential areas. It could also include certain publicly owned uses (e.g., public works facilities, fleet maintenance, treatment plants, etc.)

Parks and Open Space. This designation is for the City’s park, recreation, and open space areas and the trail system. Parks are formally developed recreation areas comprised of public parks, trails, and other improved recreational (active and passive) or cultural amenities (see inset). Open

spaces are less developed natural areas typically characterized by sensitive or unique environmental features that may or may not be developed. Typically, public parkland will remain in the public realm in perpetuity with future parkland acquired to fill the gaps and support new development. Park design, intensity of development, and planned uses/activities should match the area character (e.g., Five Points Town Plaza should look different than Pete Gilliam Park). Parks and Open Space character areas typically exhibit:

- Manicured lawns, parking lots and sidewalks, playgrounds, sports courts and sports fields, etc.
- Unimproved natural areas or improved to provide limited amenities, e.g., parking, trails, bird blinds, etc.

Public/Institutional. This designation includes the City-owned buildings and facilities (including City Hall and the police and fire stations), as well as other publicly or privately-owned schools and hospitals, churches and accessory buildings, public parking lots and structures, and other non-governmental civic functions (e.g., Chamber of Commerce) (see inset). Since these facilities occur throughout the City, they should be designed to be compatible with the character of the surrounding area. Irrespective of which character area these facilities are placed, they should still exhibit:

- High quality, highly durable materials.
- Sufficient landscaping and full screening of outdoor storage.
- Special streetscaping and design treatments may be warranted in certain areas.

Public / Institutional



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BUILD-OUT POPULATION PROJECTION ANALYSIS

APPENDIX B

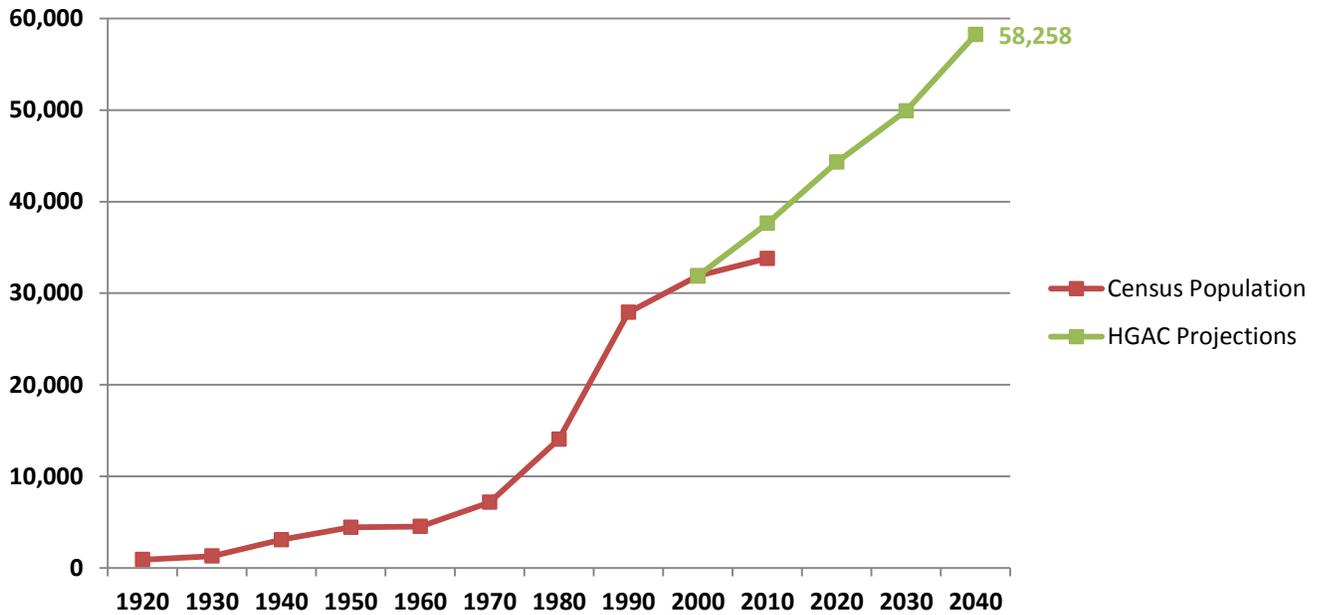
Historically, the City has seen tremendous growth during the 20th century, showing about a 60 percent rate of growth through the 1960s and a 100 percent rate of growth through the 1970s and 1980s. More recently however, as the City nears build out, the rate of population increase has been decreasing. In the 1990s, the rate of growth decreased to 14 percent. During the last decade, the rate of growth decreased to six percent.

One of the established sources of population projections is the Houston – Galveston Area Council (H-GAC). Traditionally, they provide population forecasts for each city and county in the Houston-Galveston metropolitan region. However, H-GAC’s population projections are derived using a regional, macro-level analysis based on past growth trends to predict the future population increase. This macro-level analysis accordingly does not account for the diminishing amount of developable land remaining in La Porte. In fact, using this method resulted in H-GAC over-predicting approximately 4,000 persons in La Porte by 2010 (about 11 percent higher than actual). Further, H-GAC projects the City’s population will reach almost 60,000 people by 2040, which is unlikely given the development constraints and existing land use patterns in the City. Depicted in **Figure B.1, Historical and Projected Population Increases**, is the past historical population numbers for the City, combined with H-GAC’s population projections based on the 2000 Census.¹

Rather than taking these H-GAC numbers as a given, it was decided to base population projections on the remaining residential developable land in the City. First, vacant parcels were selected using the latest aerial map to identify

¹ H-GAC – 2035 Regional Growth Forecast Data. <http://censusforecast.h-gac.com/2035Forecast.aspx>

Figure B.1, Historical and Projected Population Increases



undeveloped lots and land in those areas that are depicted as residential on the draft Future Land Use Plan (i.e., Large Lot, Low Density Residential, and Medium to High Density Residential). This is depicted in **Map B.1, Vacant Property Map for Build-Out Population Projection Analysis**. Next, average density per land use category was derived using the City's existing zoning regulations. This is depicted in **Table B.1, Average Dwelling Units Per Acre**, are the results of this analysis.

Table B.1, Average Dwelling Units Per Acre

FLU Residential Land Use Category	Associated Zoning District	Average Dwelling Units Per Acre	Housing Type (from Zoning Regulations)
LL	LL	1.0	Large Lot
LDR	R-1	4.8	Single Family Detached
MHDR	R-2	8.6	Single Family Detached/Attached; Multi-Family
	R-3		Single Family Detached/Attached; Multi-Family; Garden Apts.; Condos/Townhomes

Note: These numbers are derived using an average of existing allowable density per housing type as found in the City's existing zoning regulations. The densities stated in the zoning regulations are assumed to be accurate; KKC did not evaluate actual developed densities.

Finally, the average dwelling units per acre were then used to determine additional and total population at build out (based on existing zoning regulations). This is depicted in **Table B.2, Additional and Total Population at Build Out**.

Table B.2, Additional and Total Population at Build Out

FLU Residential Land Use Category	Vacant Acreage	Multiplied by Average Dwelling Units Per Zoning District	Multiplied by Avg. Household Size (2.84)*
LL	442	442	1,255
LDR	470	2,258	6,412
MHDR	349	2,989	8,488
Additional Persons at Full Build out			16,154
Total Build Out Population			49,954

* Derived from the 2010 Census data.

Based on that analysis, it was determined that the City could reach approximately 49,954 persons at full build out. However, this is based on a few assumptions that may decrease the actual total number as development occurs. First, the numbers were derived using maximum allowable densities and does not account for development that has occurred and may occur in the future at lower density. Second, there are several large tracts of land (e.g., the PPG property) that are designated as residential on the draft Future Land Use Map that may not be developed using the average dwelling units per acre numbers derived above. Other large tracts of land are fully covered in trees (e.g., some of those residential tracts at the southern tip of the City off State Highway 146) and also may not be developed at the average dwelling units per acre derived above.

Finally, taking into account that the City has been experiencing a decreasing rate of growth over the past 20 years, it is most likely that the City will not be reaching the full build out population of 49,954 persons in the next twenty years. Rather, the rate of growth will continue to decrease to less than what was experienced in the first decade of this century (i.e., < six percent).

