

## Town Core CONCEPT

It is envisioned that over time, the Town Core area will continue being the civic and commercial center of Falfurrias, Texas. For this reason, it is important that the City highlight the area by incorporating community development initiatives such as Streetscaping, Ornamental Parks, Enhancing Walkability, and revitalizing the Downtown Area.

### STREETSCAPE ELEMENTS

Streetscape elements include various types of visual amenities that can enhance the “view from the road.” For the purpose of this Town Core Concept Plan, the streetscape elements deemed most important include street trees, landscaping, public art, special lighting, distinctive signage (e.g., banner signs), and unique paving patterns.

As part of this linkage concept, “major” streetscape elements have been shown in relation to US 281 & SH 285, with all other roadways shown with “minor” streetscape. This is intended to project the extreme importance of The City of Falfurrias’s visual image along these highways, and the fact that these highways should be the first priority when streetscape elements are funded. Also, because of the higher speed of the traffic, the streetscape elements established in relation to SH 285 may need to be sized differently than the elements are in relation to the other, lighter-trafficked roadways. Minor streetscape roadways include; [list of streets].

### ORNAMENTAL PARKS

Ornamental areas are shown on the *Town Core Plan Map (Plate 8-1)* within each of the three areas. The importance of public space in relation to the population feeling ownership of an area has been previously discussed herein. The type of ornamental areas envisioned are those that help create an identity for the Town Core, Old City, and the TOD, and that provide a special place for pedestrians. Ornamental areas can be any number of things, including a central green space, plaza, gazebo, fountain, or splash pad for children, etc. (*Image #17*). Creation of a series of ornamental parks that link the Town Core areas will project the concept that each area is a special place in the City of Falfurrias, Texas.

### WALKABILITY

It is not enough to simply provide a trail linkage between the three areas. If the areas are separated by too great a distance, people will be inclined not to walk but to drive. However, the Old City, City Center, and TOD area are not too far from one another for people to walk between. A five to ten minute walk is about the amount of time that people are willing to spend getting somewhere on foot. This is equivalent to ¼-mile to ½-mile radius. Therefore, the ¼-mile radius for each of the three major areas has been shown on *Plate 8-1*. These areas are in fact within walkable distances of one another. Another aspect to walkability is enticing people to walk

with an inviting atmosphere. One way to create this atmosphere is by providing pedestrian and bicycle amenities that are practical as well as attractive. For example, a bench that is provided as a rest stop needs to be one that looks inviting – compare *Image #18* to *Image #19*. Other examples include outdoor dining areas (*Image #20*), special lighting and signage scaled to pedestrians and bicyclists (*Image #21*), landscaping (*Image #22* and *Image #23*), and interesting elements such as water and public art (*Image #24*).

## DOWNTOWN AREA

Numerous cities across Texas, both large and small, are trying to find ways in which to reinvigorate their downtown areas. At the same time, new areas for uses that once located in downtown areas – uses such as public, retail, and residential – are being encouraged to develop in other areas. There is, therefore, a need to balance both of these objectives.

The purpose of this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is to put forth concepts that would help the City of Falfurrias create this balance in relation to similar local objectives. There is a strong desire, on the part of citizens and City leaders alike, to preserve the City of Falfurrias’s local history, which is represented by the Old City Area. This preservation, however, is a challenge given that the Old City area has experienced a decline in the number of residents and businesses that were once located there.

There is also an aspiration to create a new Town Core area where citizens can visit their City Hall, gather for events, shop, eat, work, etc. Public and private efforts have already begun to shape this in this area with City plans to allocate monies toward the construction of a Downtown City Hall in its Capital Improvements Plan (CIP).

The Town Core Concept Plan is based on these three areas of the City of Falfurrias – the Old City, the Town Core, and the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) area – and how to effectively link them so that they can be mutually beneficial. The entirety of the three areas encompasses approximately **\_\_\_\_\_ acres**. Making this central piece of land unique will set the stage for The City of Falfurrias as a whole – the City Center will become an area for which the City is known. One of the most challenging aspects in creating an integrated feel to the three individual areas will be the presence of State Highway 285, which tends to divide them physically and psychologically. However, with aesthetic elements to enhance them, pedestrian features to link them, and uses to create activity, these areas can become a cohesive City Center for the City of Falfurrias.

It is envisioned that over time, the City Center area will become the civic and commercial center of the City. In addition to design considerations that would apply to the City as a whole as described, development in the City Center should address design elements including:

- Building setbacks should be minimal** so as to create lively and walkable streets
- Bulk and scale of new buildings should be compatible with existing buildings to provide some architectural continuity
- Landscaping should provide shade, be water-use efficient, and provide storm water management

- Parking should be in the rear of the building and shared parking encouraged
- Crosswalks should be easily accessible and designed with pavers or similar materials
- Benches, trash receptacles, and lighting should be sited for pedestrian use
- In addition to the Downtown Veteran’s Memorial Park identified in the Master Plan for Parks and Open Space and other community facilities, zocolos, courtyards, or plazas should be encouraged in new development
- Access to public/community facilities should be available by pedestrian and other non-vehicular traffic
- Storm water facilities should be located near open space and parkland areas where possible so that buffer areas can be incorporated into the design. Generally, catchment basins will not be located on property frontage
- When technically and economically feasible, utilities should be buried to protect views and limit visual clutter

## CITY HALL

The functions of Falfurrias City operations are currently fragmented. The Main Municipal Building has been temporarily located at the Public Works Facility at 625 N St Mary’s St. As part of the Town Core Plan, there is interest in building a New City Hall in the Town Core. This will centralize most of the vital city functions under one roof. Leveraging technology and cost-effective design in this way will increase level of service and reduce additional space and staffing needed for Falfurrias in the future. Smaller cities have chosen to locate public facilities such as a library or City Hall in their downtown to act as an “Anchor” to support business. The traffic generated by a City Hall in the downtown area would put more “boots on the ground” in the downtown area. City staff envisions a municipal building that acts as the nexus for Downtown traffic where local residents who frequent City Hall to pay utilities and conduct business as well as the visitor traffic who visit the City’s municipal court can provide much needed activity to Downtown.

## RECOMMENDED TOWN CORE POLICIES

Following are recommended policies related to public services and facilities. The Town Core Concept Plan Map, Plate 8-1, is intended to be used in conjunction with these policies. The Implementation Plan will outline specific ways in which the City can implement these policies, along with other recommended policies from within this 2013 Comprehensive Plan.

### **POLICY 1: CONSIDER SEED PROJECTS TO CREATE PRIVATE INTEREST**

Public investment in an area is often needed to spur private interest and related private investment. City-funded improvements signal to the private sector that an area is worth investing in – the investment becomes a better bet because the public sector is doing its part. The City, therefore, needs to invest in the Town Core in order to create a catalyst for private investment.

**The City should prioritize capital investments in concentrated areas.**

- ❑ Concentrated public projects will have more impact than projects that are spread throughout the City Center. Such “seed” projects will help attract private development
- ❑ Incorporating streetscape elements along SH 285 in Downtown should be the first priority. Street trees, lighting, landscaping, and special signage are examples of effective streetscape elements. Improving aesthetics and announcing the City’s Main Street in this highly trafficked corridor will greatly impact how The City of Falfurrias is perceived and improve the identity of the City Center.
- ❑ The following are the recommended priority projects for each of the three areas
- ❑ City Center – The City of Falfurrias’s leaders and citizens have shown a commitment to investing in the City Center through the funding of City Hall. The next prioritized improvement should be the ornamental areas shown on Plate 8-1. These areas should be completed with the Ten Principles shown on page 8.12 in mind
- ❑ Old City – Annual streetscape capital projects should be completed in the Old City area. Such projects should be concentrated in one-block lengths along streets for maximum visual impact. Street trees, lighting, and cohesive signage are examples of projects that would enhance Old City.
  - The first street length prioritized should be St. Mary’s Street; improvements should be constructed around the SH 285 intersection for maximum visual impact from citizens and travelers using SH 285
  - When Rice Street is realigned to provide entrance into the City Center, it should become a top priority for improvements from SH 285 west and south into the Old City area. This will create visual interest into Old City from the City Center

**POLICY 2: INVOLVE THE PUBLIC IN CITY CENTER DECISIONS**

**The City should encourage the creation of a Downtown Association.**

- ❑ People that live, work, and own businesses or property in the City Center should have a voice in decisions that the City makes that affect this area of the City of Falfurrias. The creation of an committee that can represent the interests of the people with interest in the City Center would be mutually beneficial – it would give City Center representatives the advantage of having their needs and concerns heard, and it would give City representatives a recognized group to which to listen
- ❑ The creation of a Downtown Committee would also help people acknowledge the City Center as a whole, instead of the separate parts (e.g., City Center, Old City)

**POLICY 3: ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT IN OLD CITY**

The development of infill-type lots or redevelopment projects that involve one or more lots are often more difficult to complete than the development of a vacant land area. In addition to seed projects, development/redevelopment in Old City should be encouraged by the City through procedural and cost-cutting measures.

**The City should investigate ways in which it can streamline the development and/or redevelopment process in Old City.**

- Lot Consolidation – Given the small size of lots that characterize Old City, there may be a need to consolidate two or more lots into one lot for development purposes. This would require a re-plat. In order to encourage lot consolidation for development/redevelopment in Old City, the City could waive re-platting fees and associated application costs, thereby saving the applicant money
- Shortened Approval Process – The less time it takes to get a development proposal approved and completed, the more profit is realized from the development. The City should investigate its approval procedures and should streamline such procedures, if possible. One way of streamlining is to allow administrative approval of some types of development applications. Another way is to place approvals on the consent agenda of the applicable government body

**POLICY 4: CONSIDER ZONING REQUIREMENTS & STANDARDS**

Zoning is perhaps the strongest regulatory tool a municipality has to implement its vision. The vision for the City Center put forth within this chapter will need support through zoning regulations.

**The City should review, and amend if necessary, current zoning regulations.**

Development standards within the Zoning Ordinance should be reviewed in relation to the following:

- Building materials – These requirements should probably be different for the City Center and Old City. The City Center buildings should be primarily masonry, have façade offsets, have a certain height requirement (e.g., minimum two-story adjacent to the City Hall area), etc.
- Signage – These requirements should consider attached signs, require only monument signs (no pole signs), require pedestrian-oriented signs, etc.
- Landscaping – There should be a minimum requirement in the front yard, and then possibly a requirement in relation to pedestrian amenities
- Outdoor dining – A requirement for this for restaurants should be considered
- Setbacks – Possibly minimal to no setback requirement for buildings, except along SH
- Parking – Require behind the building, or generally not where pedestrian access is provided
- Pedestrian and bicycle considerations – Requirements for amenities such as off-street trails through developments, sidewalks, connectivity to adjacent development, and bicycle racks
- Current Historic Overlay District requirements should be reviewed, and amended if necessary, to reflect the concepts and policies for the Old City area discussed herein