

Town of South Padre Island, Texas Comprehensive Plan 2008





Dedication

Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee

A process that started in April of 2006 and was completed February 2008

Wendy Hauschildt	Steve O'Neal
Nancy Marsden	Lucinda Wierenga
Leah Thrash	Clayton Brashear
David Horton	John Giesecking
Lori Wells	Troy Giles
Sally Robey	Mary Helen Flores
Glenn McKinlay	Liz Money
Patricia Hernandez-Edelstein	

Aldermen May 2007 – May 2008

Robert N. Pinkerton, Jr. – Mayor	Kirk Mills, Mayor Pro-Tem
Phillip Money	Jo Ann Evans
Courtney Hayden	Tara Rios-Ybarra

Aldermen May 2006 – May 2007

Robert N. Pinkerton, Jr. – Mayor	Richard Ridolfi, Mayor Pro-Tem
Phillip Money	Jo Ann Evans
Jim Hoff	Tara Rios-Ybarra

Aldermen May 2005 – May 2006

Robert N. Pinkerton, Jr. – Mayor	Richard Ridolfi, Mayor Pro-Tem
Fred Mallett	Kirk Mills
Jim Hoff	Tara Rios-Ybarra

City Staff

City Manager Dewey Cashwell	City Planner Cate Ball
Public Information Officer Jason Moody	



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Chapter I Planning Framework

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan document sets forth the Town of South Padre Island's vision for its future physical and economic development. It is designed to give form to the general statement of vision by specifying the necessary steps to accomplish the vision and realize tangible outcomes. Sound planning is equally important for the Town Aldermen, land owners, residents, and the millions of recreational visitors who are attracted to the Island's beaches and abundant natural resources. Most importantly, this plan is intended to accommodate the Island's future growth and seize its economic development opportunities in a manner that is both livable and sustainable.

Purpose

Why is this plan important? As it is discussed throughout this report, South Padre Island has and continues to experience growth through land development, visitor travel, and redevelopment of existing areas. It is recognized by the Island residents and leaders that it has finite resources. Based upon recent trends, that future growth could exacerbate existing problems well before the Year 2025.

The intent of this Comprehensive Plan is to neither end nor accelerate growth, but to anticipate and appropriately manage it so that the Town government, other public agencies, and the private sector are well-equipped to:

1. Maintain the highest quality community living environment;
2. Protect and enhance neighborhoods for Town residents;
3. Invest in appropriately-scaled infrastructure improvements;
4. Provide for the safe, efficient movement of people and goods;
5. Protect the quality of the natural environment and conserve natural resources; and
6. Provide adequate public facilities and services.

"Sustainable development is positive socioeconomic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and society are dependent."

Source: South Padre Island
Plan, 2010

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"To have a vision means to look ahead: to imagine the future. The ability 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 is a process by which a community envisions its preferred future. It chronicles the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of a community and helps citizens agree on what they want their community to become.

-Michael Chandler, Associate Professor and Community Planning Extension Specialist, Virginia Tech

The most important aspect of this Comprehensive Plan is to help Town leaders in evaluating future development proposals and deciding if they appropriately reflect the Town's goals and vision for the future.

Plan Development

The planning process was a 24-month undertaking involving community stakeholders who represent the diversity of the Island and its leadership. A 12-person Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) was assembled to lead the process and offer input to ensure that the plan reflects the values and priorities of the Town. The committee met often throughout the process to review previous reports and studies, hear informational presentations by representatives of local and regional agencies and departments, review and validate the earlier prepared vision statement, and discuss and prepare comments for each element of the plan. The individuals committed to this planning process and involved on the CPAC are identified in the acknowledgments at the front of this plan.

This Comprehensive Plan represents more than an extension of earlier plans and previous studies: it has been the product of a considerable amount of original thinking and extensive deliberation. It consists of the following elements:

1. **Town Profile:** This element provides an enumeration of existing conditions, issues, and assumptions regarding future growth. It serves as the foundation for the plan's subsequent elements.
2. **Land Use and Development:** This element provides a vision for the future physical form and character of development on the Island. Its purpose is to establish the needed policy guidance for future decisions relating to the type, scale, and pattern of development and its compatibility with the built and natural environments.
3. **Mobility:** This element addresses the Island-wide mobility needs on all levels – from arterial and local streets to sidewalks and trails and public transit. Fundamental issues in this chapter are the need for improved walkability, efficient traffic movement, and an alternative system to relieve tourism-induced congestion.
4. **Parks and Resources:** This element consists of a plan for protecting the Island's beaches, shorelines, and related ecosystems. Protecting the Island's natural features is of fundamental significance, both as an economic asset and, indeed, for overall sustainability of the built-up community.

5. **Growth & Infrastructure:** This element addresses the needs of parks, utility systems, and other public services to accommodate future growth, while reinforcing the cohesion of the Island's resident community. It also proposes guidelines and initiatives to beautify the Island and enhance the identity of key areas of the Town.
6. **Economic Development:** This element expands on earlier studies to enhance and diversify the Town's economic resources and opportunities. Of significance are the strategies to strengthen the tax base so as to moderate its reliance – and success or demise – on a naturally cyclical economy. The availability of advanced communication technology is fundamental to the success of any economic development program in this age; this element will provide particular focus on the Island's access to and distribution of highest-speed communication resources.
7. **Implementation:** The purpose of this element is to identify a course of policy direction that will guide future investment and management decisions. It identifies those agencies and departments responsible for future initiatives and the processes and time frames for completion.

Mission Statement

The vision statement is the starting point from which this plan was initiated in 2003 (See Appendix), ensuring that the values and expectations of residents is being carried forward in the process and giving meaning to the more generalized statements of vision. This process considered earlier studies and plans commissioned by the Town, including an earlier prepared vision statement, and several other planning documents.

Early in the planning process, the CPAC composed the following strong and positive Mission Statement:

South Padre Island is a unique, friendly seaside resort community that values its residents and tourists, preserves and protects the natural environment, and provides for quality sustainable growth and development that is highly diverse and responsive to changing economic conditions.



The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee played a key role in the development of the plan, ensuing integration of the Island's values and expectations for its future.

Public Involvement

There are many diverse values held by the residents, land owners, and business people with an interest in or investment on South Padre Island. In order to enhance the quality of development and livability on the Island, both of which are integral to the overall vision, the continued involvement of Town residents and stakeholders throughout the planning process was vital.

While much of the public input was received through the regular participation of CPAC members, the Town's Board of Aldermen, Planning and Zoning Commission members, and directors of the Economic Development Corporation, there were other opportunities for general public input to contribute to this plan. These included key person and small group interviews, planning workshops, and public

meetings where all citizens were invited to attend and express their views.

The decision to engage in a comprehensive planning process was done principally to influence the future of the Island, rather than reacting to change. This plan is a deliberate stance taken to manage future growth and development as opposed to responding to development proposals on a case-by-case basis without a balanced consideration of Town issues and objectives. It has been many years since the Town conducted a comprehensive planning process and adopted a plan,¹ which emphasizes the importance of the timing of this plan.

Use of the Plan

This Comprehensive Plan belongs to the Town and its citizens. They generously offered their time and talents to create it, and the plan benefited directly from their involvement. The plan contains many components, which serve many functions such as providing information, identifying existing conditions and characteristics, and influencing future governmental policies and responses.

By its nature, the plan is intended to serve all interests and offer the following benefits:

¹ South Padre Island, Plan 2010, prepared in 1990

1. **Certainty in future actions:** It states the intentions of the Town's governing body as to the Island's future physical development and infrastructure investment. This will ultimately result in the enhancement of certainty for land owners, business owners and operators, and developers.
2. **Development guidelines:** It provides policy and guidance toward future development and redevelopment, which may be used by the Planning and Zoning Commission, Board of Aldermen, and others in their decision making capacities.
3. **Input to future investment decisions:** It identifies capital improvement needs and priorities that may be used in the Town's annual budgeting and capital planning processes.
4. **Coordination of land use and public service policies:** It indicates the type, pattern, and density of future development and coordinates transportation and public improvements.
5. **Consistency in land use regulations:** The plan serves as a foundation for zoning decisions and subdivision reviews.
6. **Economic development strategies:** It serves as an overall blueprint for the Island's future economic development and enhancement of existing businesses.

Summary of Goals

In order to optimize the benefits stated above, it is important that the specific policy and physical development recommendations contained in the remaining sections of this plan are based on stated community goals. Detailed goal statements are presented in each section of the Comprehensive Plan. A summary listing of these goals is provided below:

Land Use and Community Character

1. New development and redevelopment must add value to the image and appearance of the Island.
2. Future development must be compatible with the character of surrounding areas.
3. Existing neighborhoods should be preserved and enhanced so as to foster a strong sense of identity.
4. A broad variety of housing types and price ranges are warranted to balance the residential market.

Transportation

1. The plan must be responsive to the strong possibility that a second causeway will be constructed.
2. Pedestrian mobility must be improved to enhance the Island's



The form of development on the Island conveys its character and livability.



Retail businesses catering to Island visitors are the current economic mainstay of the community.

walk-ability and attractiveness for visitors.

3. The use of non-motorized vehicles should be supported on public and private thoroughfares.
4. The transit system must be expanded to facilitate employee commuting, as well as increased ridership by residents and visitors.
5. Improvements to the transportation system are needed to better accommodate peak traffic and parking demands without spoiling the livability of the community.
6. Parking must meet both public and private objectives while satisfying the daily and peak demands of motorists.

Public Facilities and Infrastructure

1. The long-term availability of utilities must be secured to support the planned growth of the Island. The condition of utility infrastructure must be improved to meet current and future needs.
2. There must be improved agreement and coordination with other agencies responsible for many of the essential services that will be needed by the Island as development continues.
3. Drainage must be adequately planned for so as not to allow development that alters pre-development conditions and creates a flooding burden on adjacent properties.

Economic Development and Technology

1. The economy must be diversified so as to stabilize the general business environment and moderate the ebb and flow of the tourism cycle.
2. There must be investment in the existing businesses to ensure they are secure in their investment and remain economically viable.
3. The role of technology is an important consideration in the attraction of businesses and visitors.
4. Opportunities for attracting eco-tourists may improve the local economy through increased stays and spending.

Parks, Recreation, and Resource Protection

1. Beaches, recreational amenities, and natural areas should be appealing to all persons, including areas for both passive and active recreation and indoor and outdoor facilities.
2. Protection of the environment and preservation of resources must remain of value so as to sustain the natural ecosystem and retain the physical character of the Island.
3. A continuous dune line must be constructed, maintained, and protected from encroachment as protection from high energy events.
4. Indigenous plants and landscape must be preserved and protected so as to sustain the ecosystem, contribute to the economy, and enhance the character and appearance of the Island.



South Padre Island is noted for its scenic beauty due to its ocean and bay views and natural areas.

Plan Implementation

1. Strict adherence to building and development codes is vital to sustain the quality of development.
2. The necessary implementation tools must be updated and adopted promptly after acceptance of the plan.

Planning Area

The geographical planning area encompassed in this plan includes both the incorporated Town of South Padre Island and an outer perimeter area that includes the Town's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) area.

While Chapter 42 of the Texas Local Government Code specifies that the ETJ area for "cities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants" is limited to one-half mile, the Town's ETJ on the north of the town limits is five miles due to special legislation. Because there is a reasonable possibility that the determination of South Padre Island's number of "inhabitants" may be expanded to include the Town's numbers of tourists and seasonal residents, the current ETJ perimeter may eventually be extended to one full mile (to the south).

For this reason, the Comprehensive Plan assumes a planning area that includes an ETJ that extends out to one mile. (The most relevant part of the ETJ extends only to the north; the remainder of the Town's existing

and potential ETJ area is occupied by open water, county-owned parks, or lands within neighboring municipal boundaries.)



Chapter 2

Town Profile

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

The assessment of demographic and socioeconomic factors provides a snapshot of past and present characteristics of South Padre Island that will help identify potential opportunities and constraints. This profile provides a basis for determining future land use requirements and demands for public facilities and services, while providing background information needed for planning to guide future development in a desirable and fiscally responsible manner.

History

South Padre Island is a retreating barrier island with a rich coastal identity. It was founded on the vision of John Tompkins and plotted in 1950. The community was incorporated in 1973. The first causeway opened in 1954. The updated Queen Isabella Causeway was opened in 1975 and population growth followed.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to: 1) examine how the Island has grown in terms of its resident population, second homeowners, and visitors; 2) increase familiarity with the characteristics that contribute to the Island's physical and economic development; and 3) identify trends that will influence future growth and development. This information is not intended as a comprehensive assessment of the Town's demographics, but, rather, a guideline.

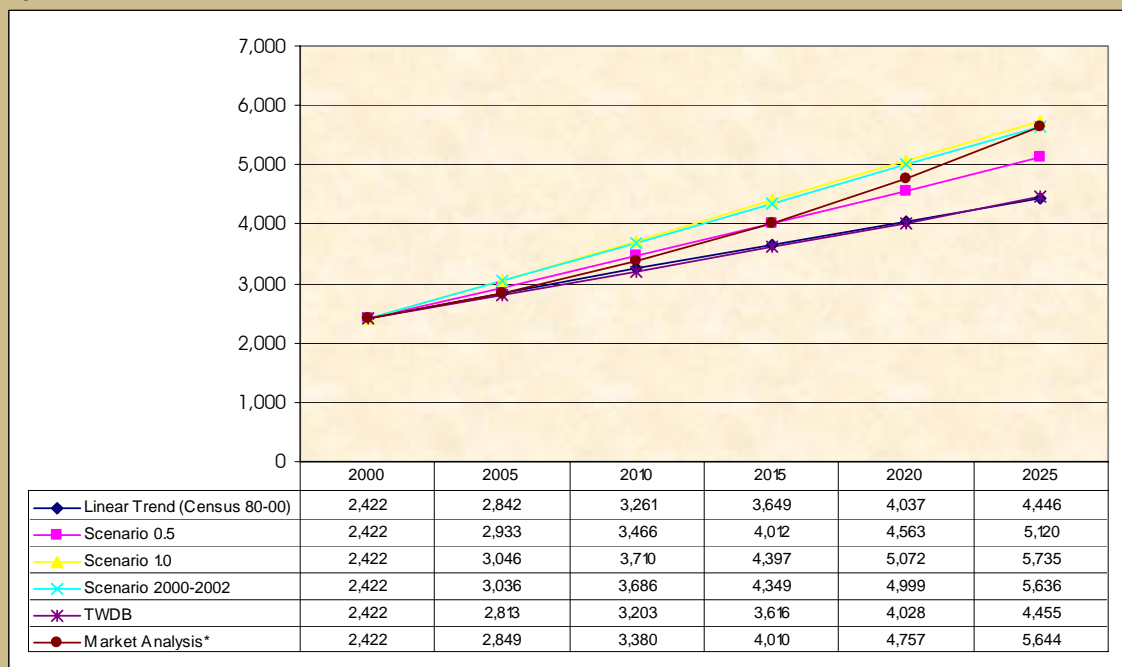
This chapter briefly assesses and compares with the County and State both demographic and socioeconomic trends including historic, current, and projected populations; ethnic and household composition; age and gender; income and poverty level; housing occupancy, tenure, and value; and employment and labor force statistics. This analysis is valuable in that it allows assessment of the Town in terms of where it has been in years past, where it is presently, and where it appears to be

headed in the forthcoming years based upon the best available data and forecasts. The use of the County and State provides a baseline comparison to signify how the Island is doing relative to other proximate jurisdictions. This 'big-picture' view enables decision makers and residents to better understand the issues and challenges and, subsequently, develop policies and implementation strategies to proactively manage the future course of the Island. There are clear connections between the identified issues and the need for corresponding policy response and strategic implementation planning.

Population Trends

1. The resident population is expected to continue increasing at a moderate pace, as shown by **Figure 2.1, Resident Population**. This growth follows a similar pattern to years past, adding about 140 residents per year. While there is a small increase in the pace of projected growth when compared to 1980-2000, the overall trend pattern remains similar.

Figure 2.1, Resident Population

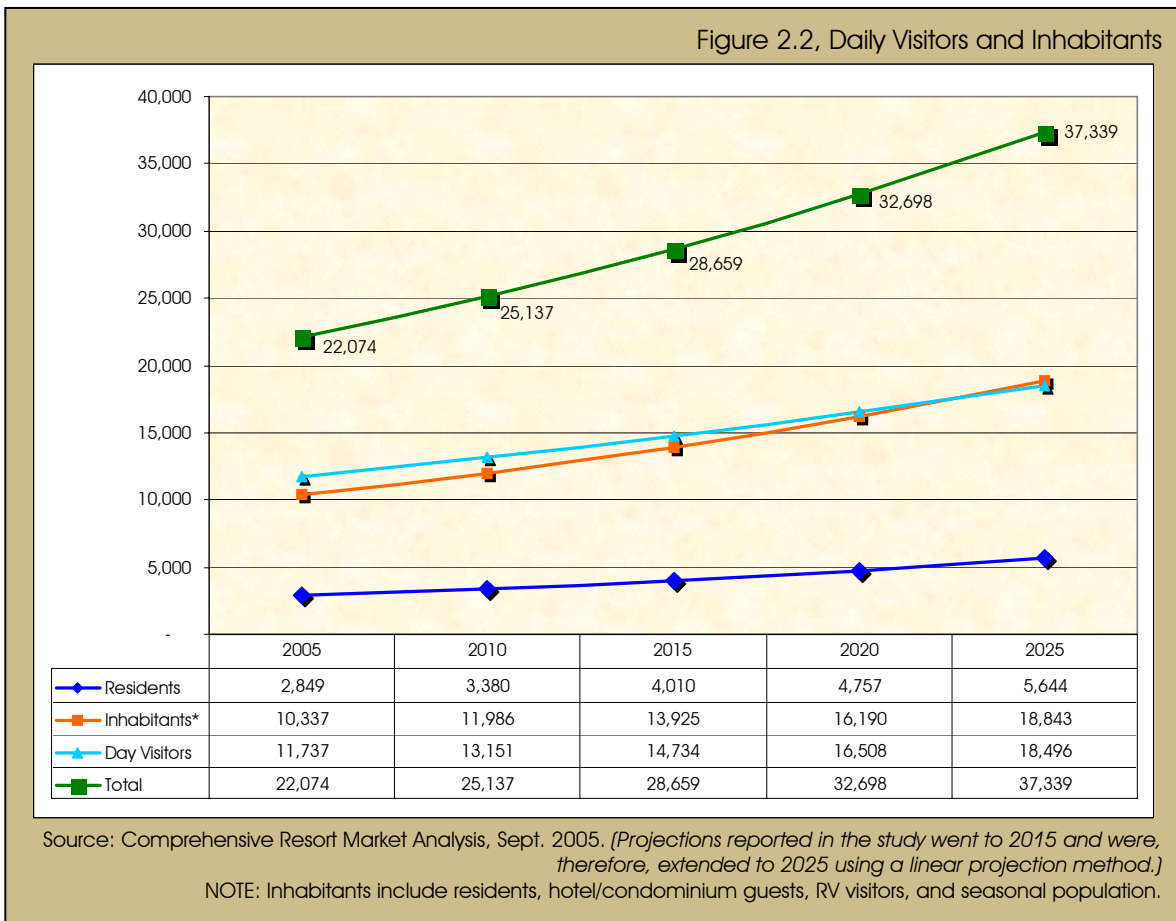


Source: Comprehensive Resort Market Analysis, Sept. 2005. (Projections reported in the study went to 2015 and were, therefore, extended to 2025 using a linear projection method.)

2. A comparison of the number of year-round residents to the large number of seasonal residents is significant and, thus, worthwhile to include daily inhabitants and day visitors in the total population of the Island. These additional inhabitants and visitors will have a substantial impact on land use demands,

traffic, parking, and public spaces and facilities during the 20-year horizon of this plan.

3. In 2005, the baseline residential population (2,849 persons) was augmented by the presence of day visitors (11,737 persons), inhabitants (10,337 persons), and employees (3,171 employees)¹ to equal a total of 25,245 persons on the Island daily.
4. The overall proportions of residents, day visitors, and inhabitants are assumed to remain at similar levels through the Year 2025, as illustrated in **Figure 2.2, Daily Visitors and Inhabitants**, by the roughly parallel line depicting this trend.

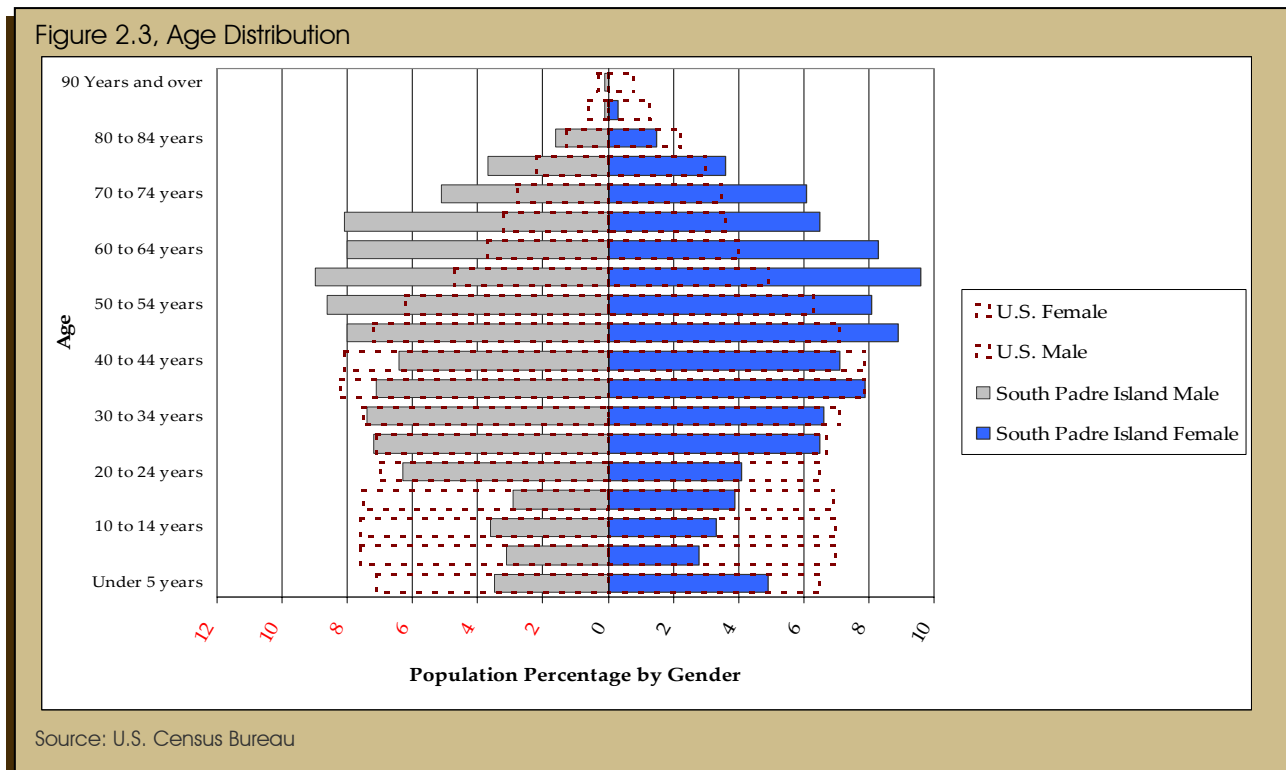


¹ Based on private sector employment in 2004, U.S. Census Bureau (ZIP Code Business Patterns)

Demographics

Population Characteristics

1. Age groups between 45 years and 80 years are significantly above the national average, as shown in **Figure 2.3, Age Distribution**.
2. Conversely, groups between 0 years and 24 years are significantly below the national average.



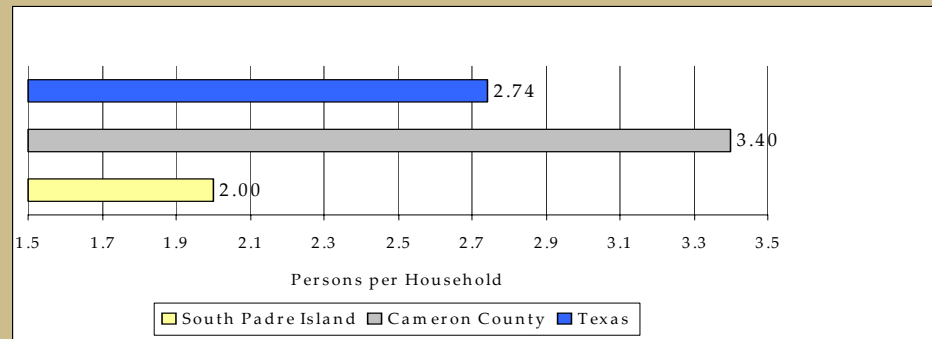
NOTE: The components of population change are typically characterized by births, deaths, and migration. Figure 2.4 excludes persons under 20 years of age; those not of working age. An increase in population for these cohorts can, therefore, only be a result of migration.

3. Other than the age groups between 0 years and 24 years there is an even distribution between males and females.
4. The impact of these age characteristics requires the plan to consider the means for accommodating an older population, such as passive versus active (ball fields, courts, etc.) parks and recreation facilities, pedestrian improvements, etc.
5. The average household size is two persons per household versus 2.74 and 3.40 in Texas and Cameron County, respectively (see **Figure 2.4, Average Household Size**). A small household size inflates the demand for new housing units thereby causing a smaller than apparent population increase. In other words, since there are fewer persons per household there are a greater number of units needed to accommodate a smaller overall population. The results of this are seen in the population projections above.

Population Change by Generation

1. An analysis of population change by age cohort reveals the Rio Grande Valley (defined as Cameron and Hidalgo Counties) is becoming an

Figure 2.4, Average Household Size



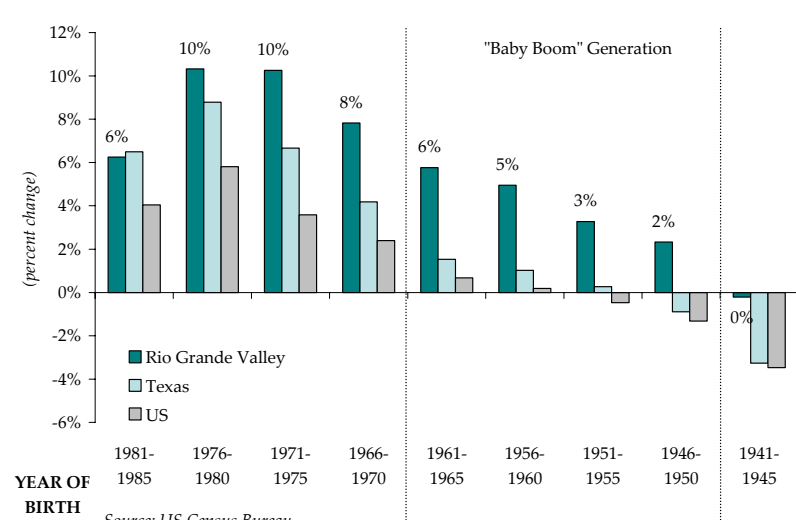
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

increasing destination for working adults. Each cohort of traditional working age (20-64 years) increased between 2000 and 2005, as displayed by **Figure 2.5, Population Change by Age Cohort**.

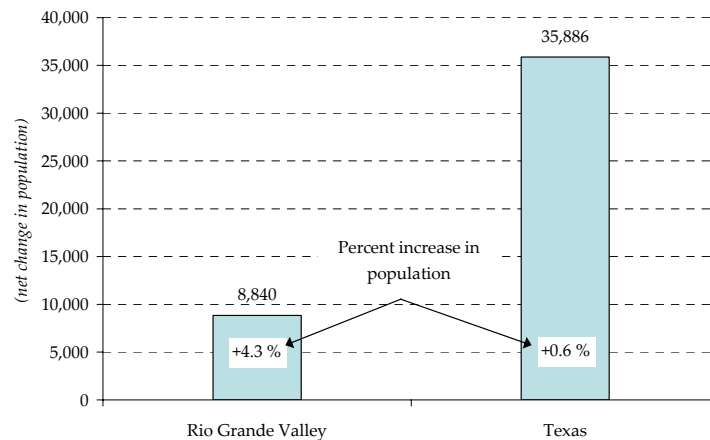
2. The net change in the number of working adults living in the Rio Grande Valley was just over 8,800 persons between 2000 and 2005, compared to approximately 35,900 persons State-wide. In other words, the Valley accounted for 25 percent of the State's growth from working adults relocating to the State.
3. By contrast, the Valley only accounted for six percent of the State's population growth for persons born from 1965 to 1985, meaning that a greater percentage of working adults are relocating to Cameron and Hidalgo Counties.

Figure 2.5, Population Change by Age Cohort

Population Change by Age Cohort, 2000-2005



Increase in Baby Boomers, 2000-2005



Source: US Census Bureau

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- South Padre Island’s population is classified by the U.S. Census Bureau as predominantly “White” (94.6 percent). The “White” population on the Island is significantly more populous than Texas or Cameron County. **See Table 2.1, Population Classified as “White.”**

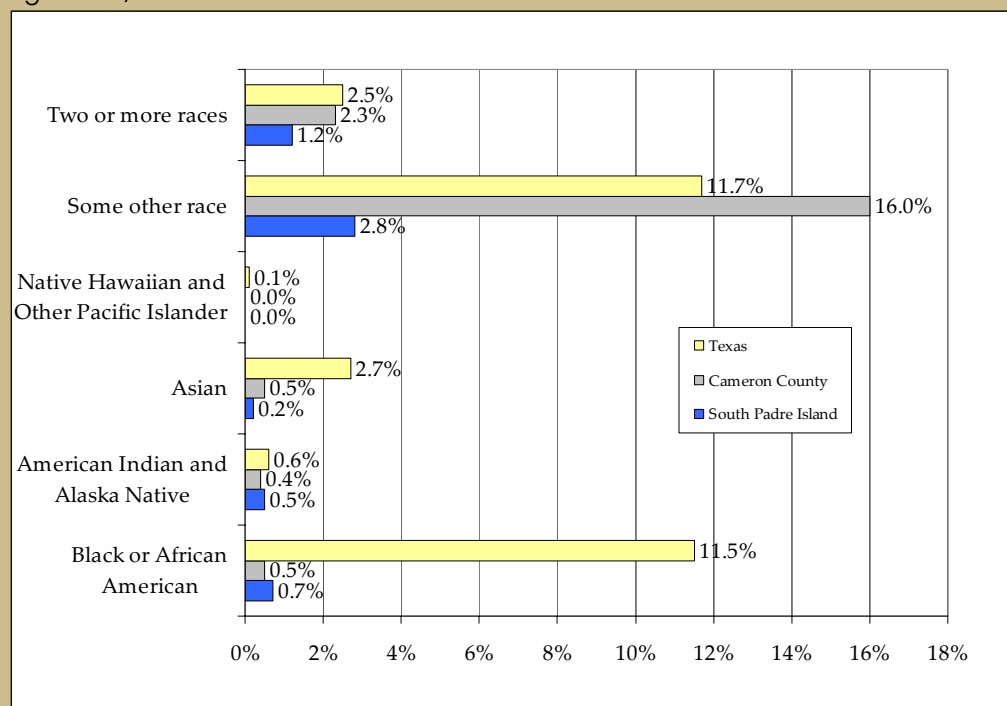
Table 2.1, Population Classified as “White”

	White	Other
Texas	71.0%	29.0%
Cameron County	80.3%	19.7%
South Padre Island	94.6%	5.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

- Among the races other than white, “some other race” accounts for 2.8 percent, with much smaller percentages for each of the other races, as shown in **Figure 2.6, Race Other than White.**

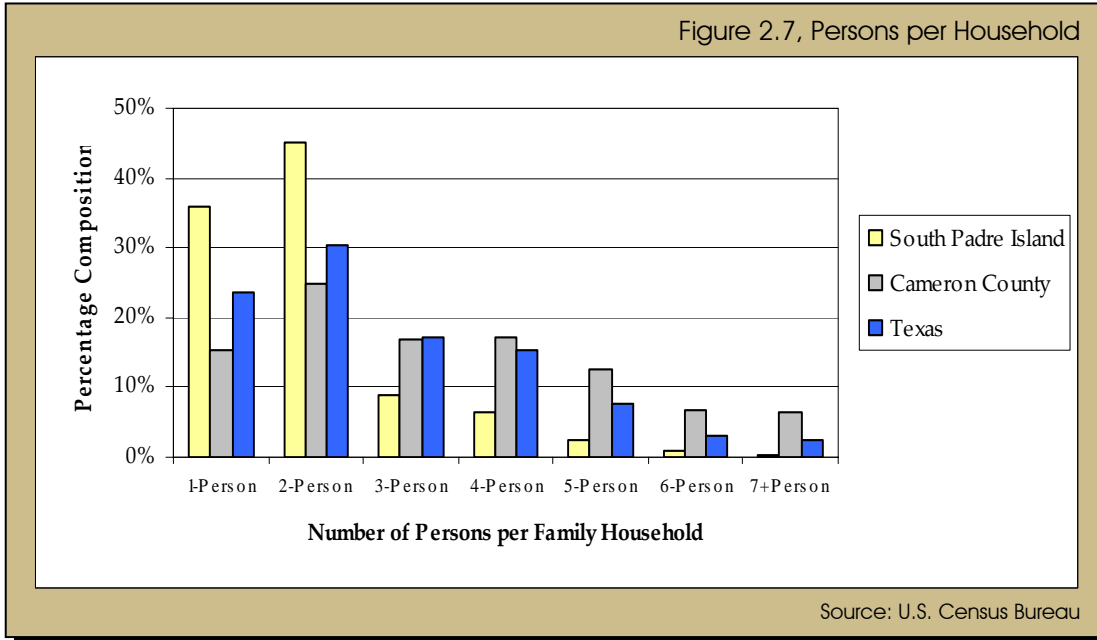
Figure 2.6, Race Other than White



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

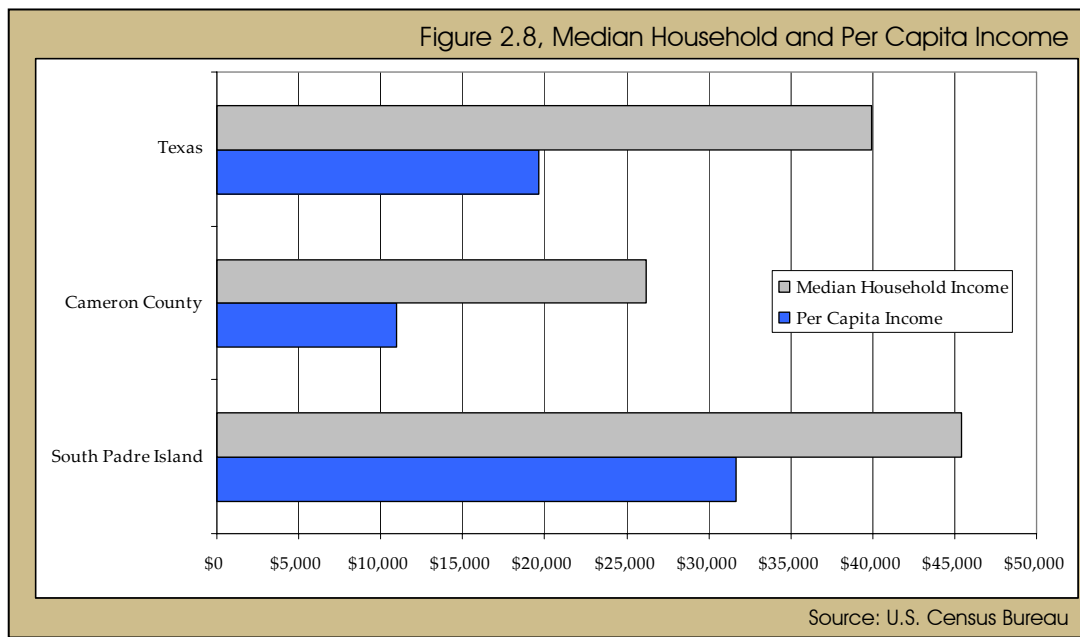
Household Characteristics

- South Padre Island has a significantly higher percentage of one-person (35.8 percent) and two-person (45.1 percent) households than Cameron County and Texas, as exhibited in **Figure 2.7, Persons per Household.**
- Conversely, the Island has a significantly lower – progressively smaller – percentage of three or more person households than the County and State.
- These percentages indicate small family sizes on the Island, which, again, contribute to a demand for increased housing units without a comparable increase in total population.

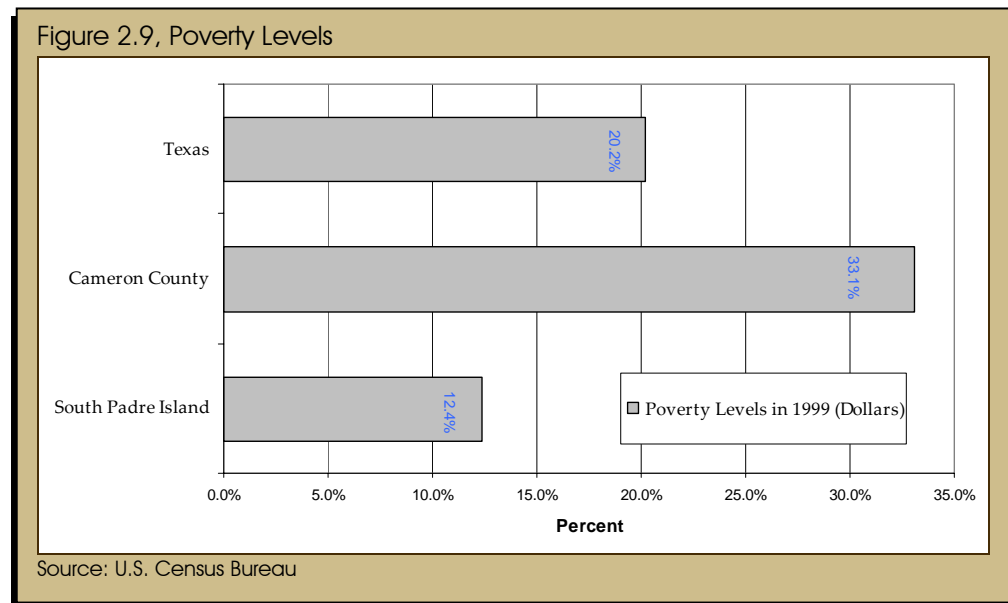


Income and Poverty

1. Per capita income and median household income for South Padre Island (\$31,708 and \$45,417, respectively) are significantly higher than Cameron County (\$10,960 and \$36,155, respectively) and moderately higher than Texas (\$19,671 and \$39,927, respectively), as displayed in **Figure 2.8, Median Household and Per Capita Income**.

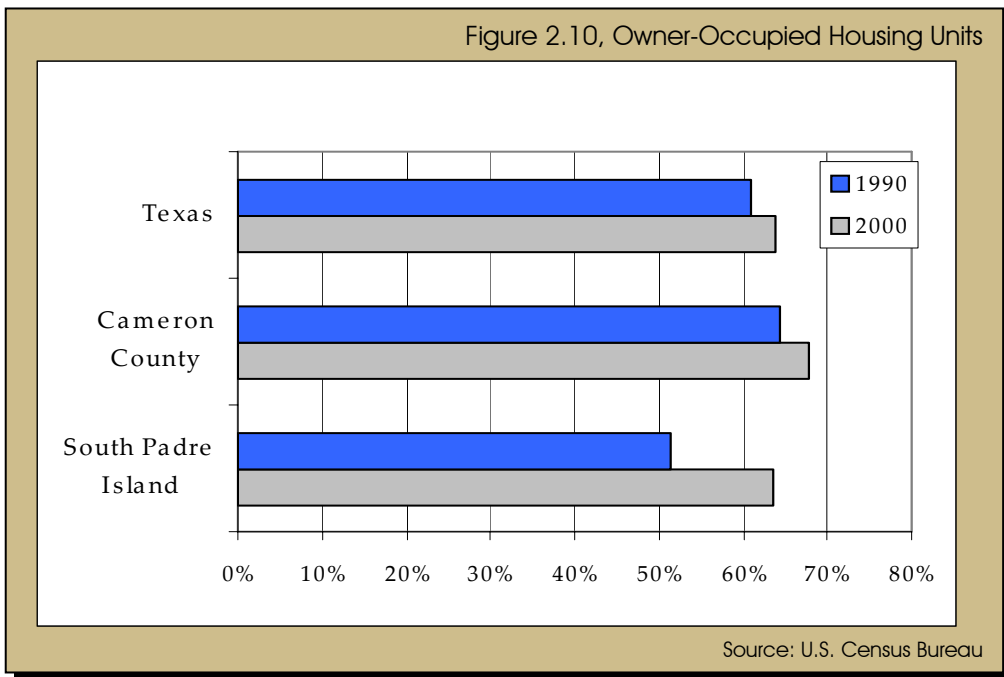


2. With a 12.4 percent poverty level, as shown in **Figure 2.9, Poverty Levels**, the Island is well below the levels of the State (20.2 percent) and Cameron County (33.1 percent). This is directly attributable to the median and per capita incomes, as well as the type of development and residents on the Island.

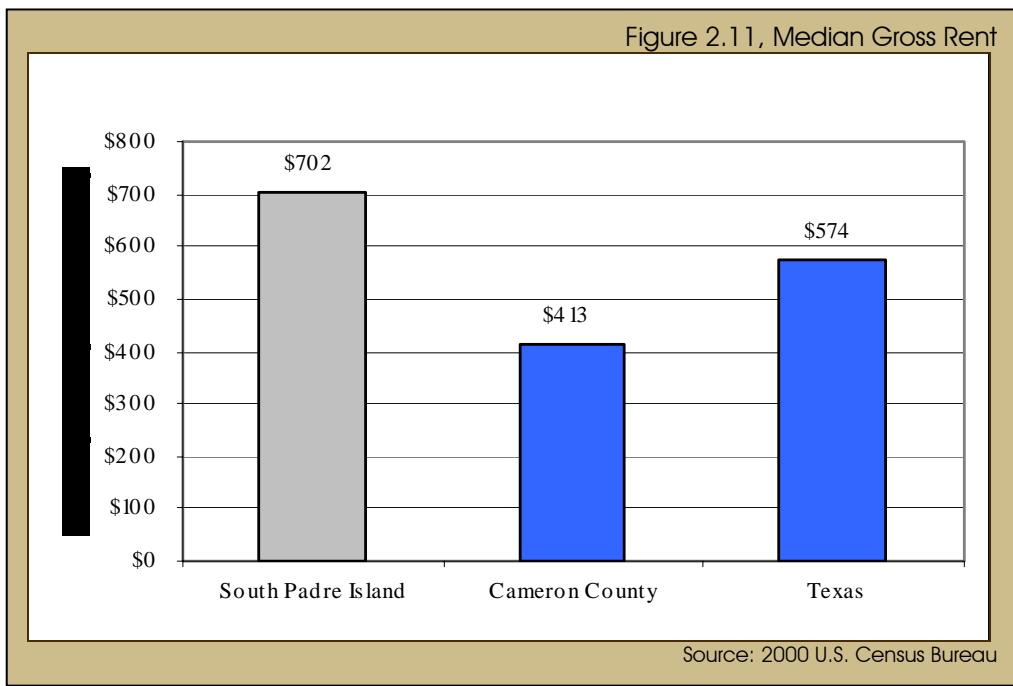


Housing Characteristics

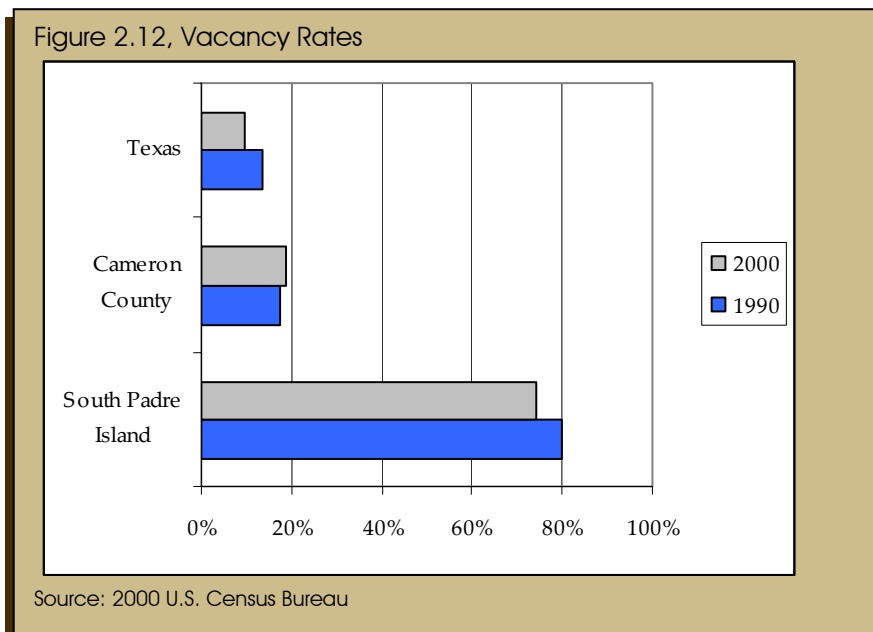
1. In 1990, the Island had a significantly lower percentage (51.4 percent) of owner-occupied units than the State (60.9 percent) and Cameron County (64.4 percent). However, between 1990 and 2000, there was a significant shift in the trend, resulting in positive increases in owner-occupied units: South Padre Island (+12.1 percent), Cameron County (+3.3 percent), and Texas (+2.9 percent).
2. As a result of the increase in owner-occupied units over the course of the last decade, the Island had 63.5 percent owner occupancy compared to 51.4 percent in 1990 (**Figure 2.10**) below. This is significant for the amount of new investment on the Island, which has contributed to the demand for new units.



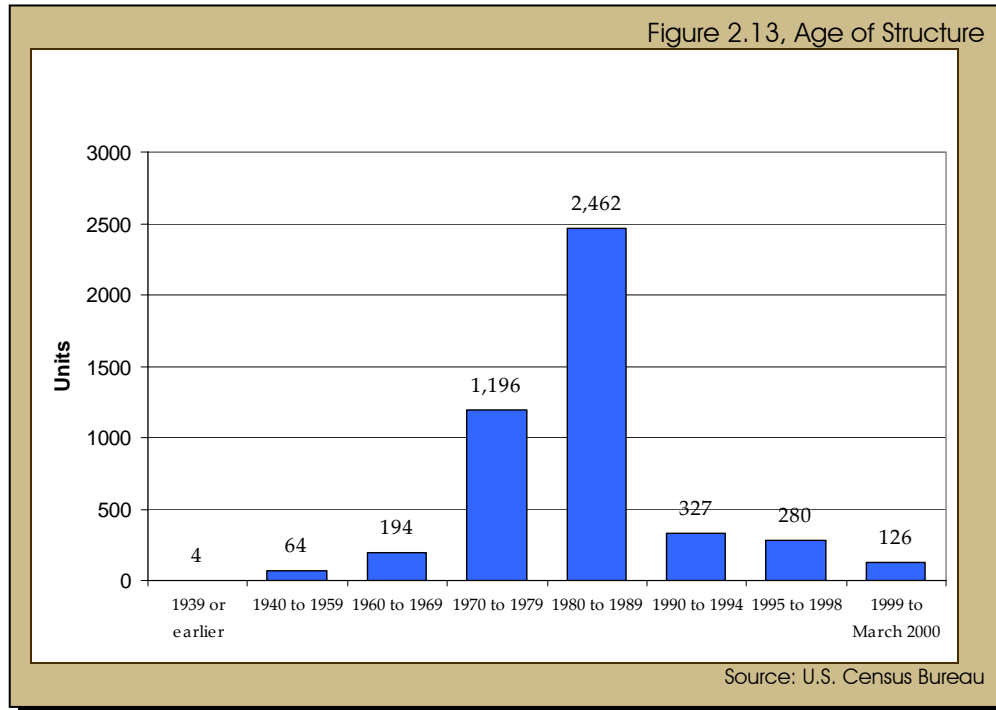
- As displayed by **Figure 2.11, Median Gross Rent**, the rent on the Island is \$702 per month, which is significantly higher than the State median (\$574) and the Cameron County median (\$413). This is expected for a resort destination of tourists and visitors.



4. In both 1990 and 2000, the Island had a significantly higher (close to 60 percent higher) vacancy rate than the State or County. This is not unexpected though due to the amount of seasonal living.
5. Between 1990 and 2000 there was a decrease in the percentage of seasonal units, from 74 percent in 1990 to 59.5 percent, as shown in **Figure 2.12, Vacancy Rates**. This shift mirrors the increase in the number and percentage of owner-occupied units. This is a very positive trend for the Island; its implications are reflected in increased daily traffic, parking, and other observed impacts.
6. In 2000, of all vacant housing units, the percentage (59.5 percent) on the Island is comparable to that in Cameron County (52.5 percent) while being significantly more than the State (22.7 percent).



7. As exhibited in **Figure 2.13, Age of Structure**, nearly 26 percent of the housing stock on the Island was built during the 1970s, meaning it is around 30 years old. This is significant since structures generally begin to exhibit signs of wear and require updating and significant structural improvements after 10-20 years. Therefore, many of these structures may begin to be remodeled and/or redeveloped, particularly considering escalating land costs.
8. Approximately 53 percent of the housing stock was built during the 1980s, meaning that these structures are now approaching 15 to 25 years of age and beginning to require updating and ongoing maintenance.

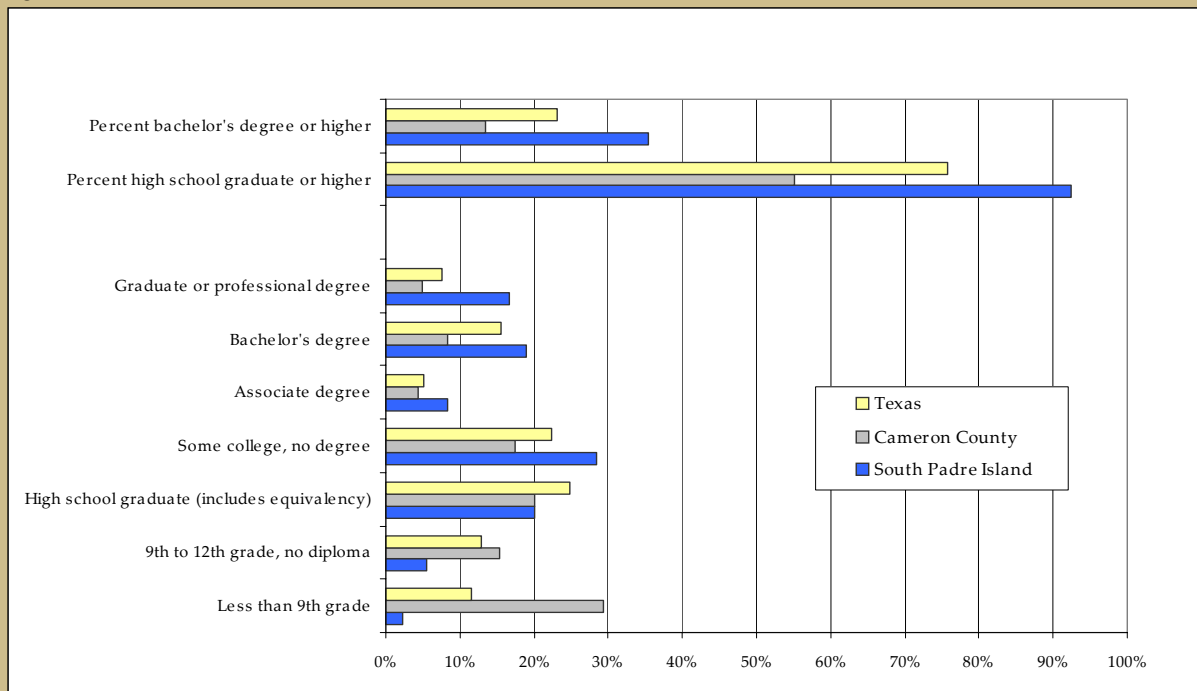


- Only 5.6 percent of the housing stock was built before 1970, much of which is likely to be replaced or reconstructed in the near term.

Educational Profile

- South Padre Island, on average, has higher educational attainment than both Texas and Cameron County, as shown by **Figure 2.14, Educational Attainment**.
- The low percentages of categories "Less than 9th grade" (2.2 percent) and "9th to 12th grade, no diploma" (5.4 percent) relative to the County and State indicate that residents of the Island tend to have a higher level of education.
- The Island leads in each of the categories from "Some college, no degree" (28.5 percent) to "Percent Bachelor's degree or higher."
- These educational characteristics are indicative of the mature population on the Island (i.e., retired professionals), as well as their socioeconomic status, which correlates with many of the other statistics, i.e. income, household size, etc.

Figure 2.14, Educational Attainment



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Transportation

1. As shown in **Table 2.2, Vehicle Availability**, a majority (52.7 percent) of housing units on the Island have one vehicle present.

An additional 39 percent have two vehicles per housing unit.

2. Five percent of the housing units on the Island do not have a vehicle available, as reported to the U.S. Census. This means that there are 232 units that rely on walking, bicycling, public transit, or other persons for their means of travel. Assuming two persons per household this accounts for 464 persons.

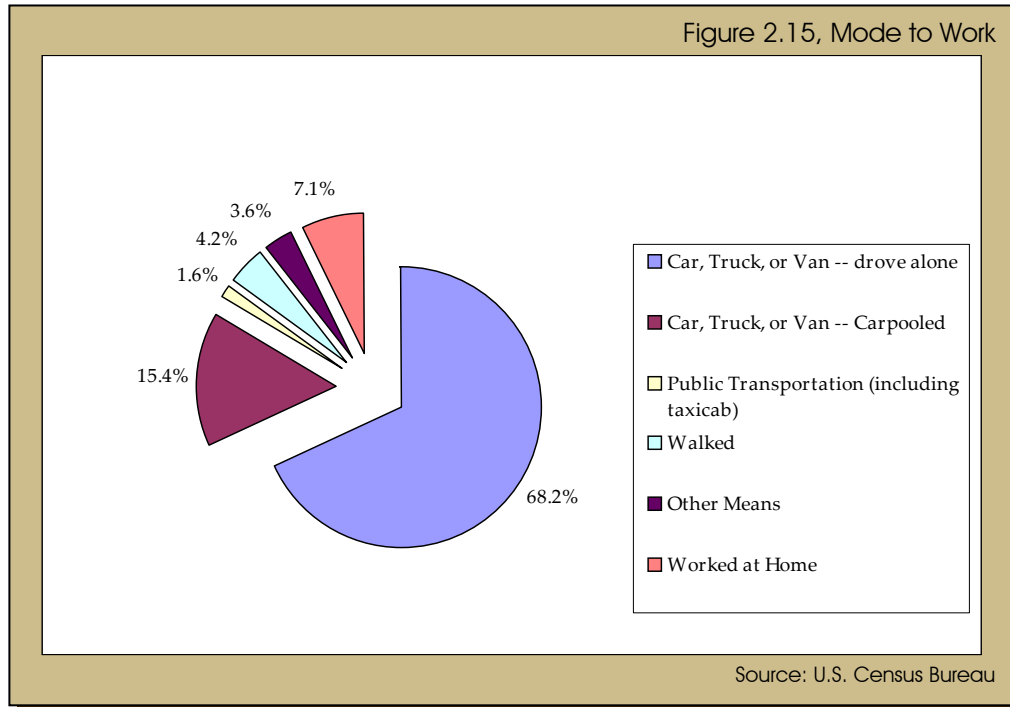
3. As displayed by **Figure 2.15, Mode to Work**, 83.6 percent of the Island residents commute to work in a car, truck, or van. Of these commuters, 68.2 percent commute alone, below the national average of 75.7 percent.

4. Residents who worked from home (7.1 percent) are more than double the national average (3.3 percent). This is an economic development opportunity as outlined in *Chapter 7, Economic Development*. It also created a market opportunity for live-work, mixed-use units on the Island.

Table 2.2, Vehicle Availability

Vehicles Available/Unit	Percent
None	4.9%
1	47.8%
2	39.0%
3	8.0%
4	0.0%
5 or more	0.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau



5. In addition to those who work from home, 4.2 percent of these commuters walk to work on the Island, higher than the national average of 2.9 percent. This correlates to the number of units without a vehicle present.
6. Due to a lack of regional transit for work trips, only 1.6 percent commutes to work via public transportation. As pointed out in *Chapter 4, Mobility Plan*, this is an opportunity and priority for the Island.

Employment Trends

1. Available data indicate two large year-over-year employment decreases: 1995-1996 and 2003-2004. South Padre Island enjoyed steady job growth between those two periods.
2. From 1994 to 2004, the number of private sector jobs located in ZIP code 78597 (South Padre Island) remained virtually unchanged. During the same period, the number of private sector jobs increased 27.6 percent throughout all of Cameron County and 25.8 percent State-wide. (See **Figure 2.16, Private Sector Employment and Job Growth**.)
3. ZIP code level employment data are collected only once per year in mid-March due to the lack of seasonal trends during that time of year in a typical community. Unfortunately, mid-March in South Padre Island may not be indicative of employment patterns for the remainder of the year due to the timing of Spring Break.

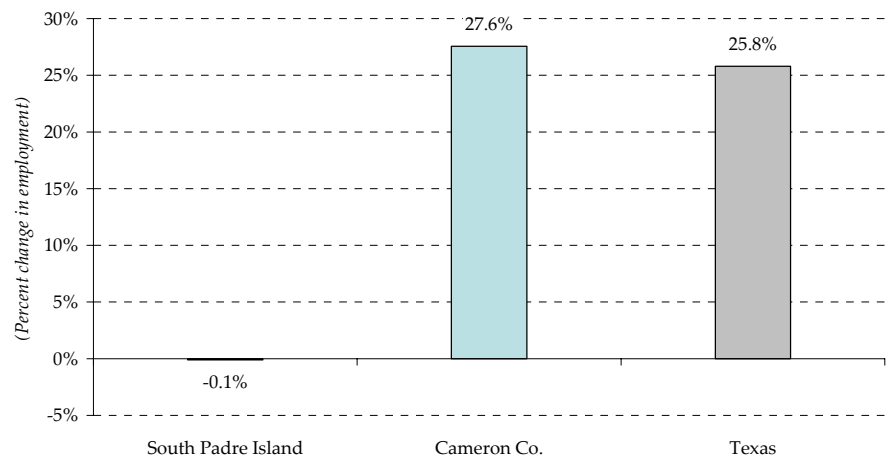
Figure 2.16, Private Sector Employment and Job Growth

**South Padre Island Private Sector Employment
(mid-March in ZIP 78597)**



Source: US Census Bureau (ZIP Code Business Patterns)

Private Sector Job Growth Comparison, 1994-2004



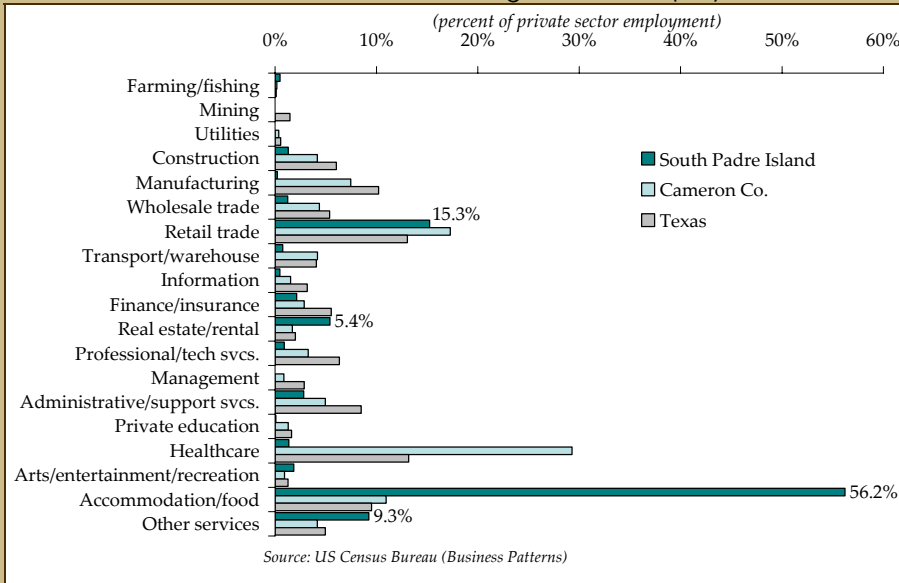
Source: US Census Bureau (Business Patterns)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Business Patterns) and TIP Strategies, Inc.

Employment Distribution

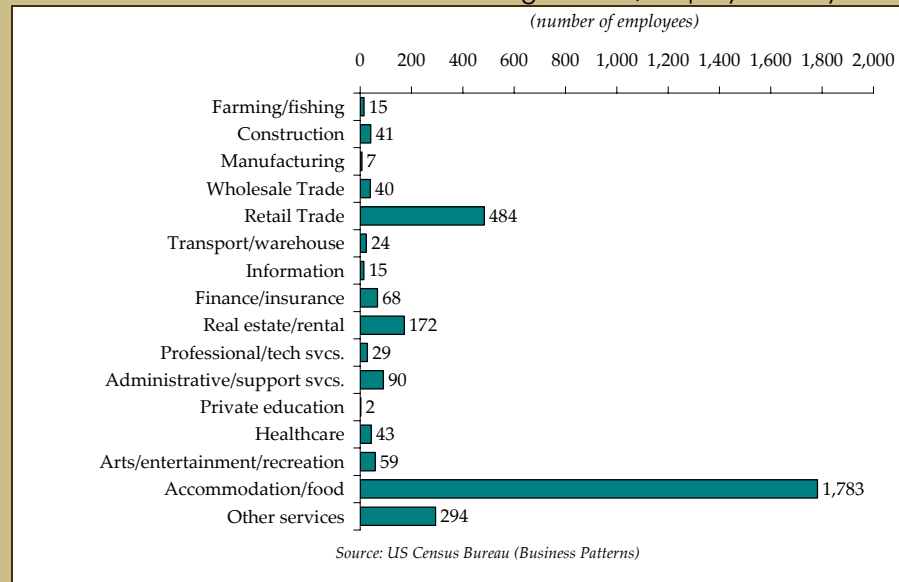
1. The distribution of the number of jobs by employment sector reveals that the local economy is very dependent on tourism, especially during mid-March. For example, as shown in **Figure 2.17, Employment Distribution**, 56 percent of all private sector jobs on the Island were recorded in the Accommodations and Food Services (hotels and restaurants) sector. An additional 15 percent of jobs were in Retail Trade.

Figure 2.17, Employment Distribution



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Business Patterns) and TIP Strategies, Inc.

Figure 2.18, Employment by Sector

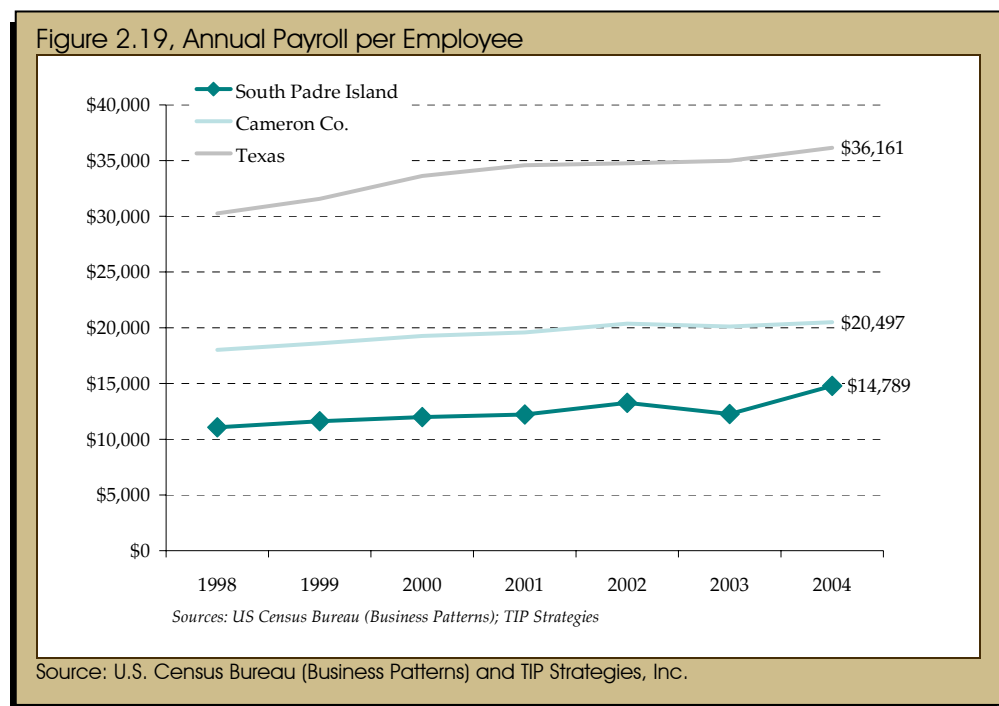


Source: U.S. Census Bureau (Business Patterns) and TIP Strategies, Inc.

- Given the Island’s status as a tourism destination, as shown by **Figure 2.18, Employment by Sector**, the low share of workers employed in Arts/Entertainment/Recreation is surprising, and, thus, provides an economic opportunity.
- Slightly more than 5.4 percent of jobs located on the Island were in the Real Estate sector, which is more than twice the percentage in Cameron County or State-wide. This indicates the strong role that real estate development and sales play in the local economy.

Local Area Payroll

1. In 2004, exhibited by **Figure 2.19, Annual Payroll per Employee**, the average annual payroll per private sector worker was \$14,789 on the Island, compared to \$20,497 County-wide and \$36,161 State-wide.
2. This discrepancy in wages is likely due to the high concentration of jobs in Accommodations and Foods Services, which is a low-paying sector. In addition, it is common for waiters and waitresses to not report their tips. Regardless, the average annual payroll on South Padre Island increased \$3,700 from 1998 to 2004, a greater dollar amount than County-wide.



Regional Occupation & Wages

1. An analysis of occupational data for the Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties) reveals that the highest paying jobs in the region are typically in Management, Professional, and Technical fields, which tend to require advanced training and higher education. On average, these professions pay approximately \$46,000 per year in the region (**Figure 2.20, Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates**). Within this broad category, however, can be found some occupations that pay even higher rates, including Management (\$67,097), Legal (\$59,588), and Healthcare Practitioner and Technical (\$58,055).
2. Occupational projections provided by the Texas Workforce

Figure 2.20, Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates

	Employment	% of Total Employment	Avg. Ann. Wage	Net chg, 2002-2012	% chg., 2002-2012
ALL OCCUPATIONS	310,020		\$26,034	72,700	21.9%
<i>MANAGEMENT, PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL</i>	74,930	24.2%	\$45,967	27,550	28.6%
Management	10,120	3.3%	\$67,097	4,150	21.3%
Business and Financial Operations	5,670	1.8%	\$41,816	2,100	27.6%
Computer and Mathematical	1,440	0.5%	\$45,368	1,000	35.7%
Architecture and Engineering	1,540	0.5%	\$42,422	600	23.5%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	1,000	0.3%	\$42,993	350	26.9%
Community and Social Services	3,520	1.1%	\$35,683	1,400	28.0%
Legal	1,460	0.5%	\$59,588	450	20.9%
Education, Training, and Library	31,790	10.3%	\$35,821	10,800	30.0%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	2,170	0.7%	\$28,379	600	21.1%
Healthcare Practitioner and Technical	16,220	5.2%	\$58,055	6,100	36.4%
SERVICE	86,170	27.8%	\$16,716	24,400	30.7%
Healthcare Support	15,880	5.1%	\$16,265	5,950	48.8%
Protective Service	9,480	3.1%	\$32,093	2,650	32.9%
Food Preparation and Serving	27,370	8.8%	\$14,457	5,000	19.0%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	10,130	3.3%	\$15,987	2,100	18.3%
Personal Care and Service	23,310	7.5%	\$13,738	8,700	40.7%
SALES & OFFICE	84,770	27.3%	\$21,636	11,450	13.7%
Sales and Related	32,460	10.5%	\$21,317	6,050	16.8%
Office and Administrative Support	52,310	16.9%	\$21,835	5,400	11.3%
"BLUE COLLAR"	64,160	20.7%	\$21,058	9,250	12.8%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	3,550	1.1%	\$13,391	900	12.9%
Construction and Extraction	12,100	3.9%	\$21,869	2,750	18.6%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	11,160	3.6%	\$25,114	2,250	19.8%
Production	15,620	5.0%	\$21,206	150	0.9%
Transportation and Material Moving	21,730	7.0%	\$19,668	3,200	14.4%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005 Wages & Employment estimates for Cameron and Hidalgo Counties); Texas Workforce Commission (Occupation projections for Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy Counties)

Commission indicate that higher paying fields will also tend to be the fastest growing through 2012. For example, Management, Professional, and Technical occupations are expected to add over 27,000 jobs from 2002 through 2012, a 28.6 percent growth rate. This would equal nearly 38 percent of all new occupations throughout the region.

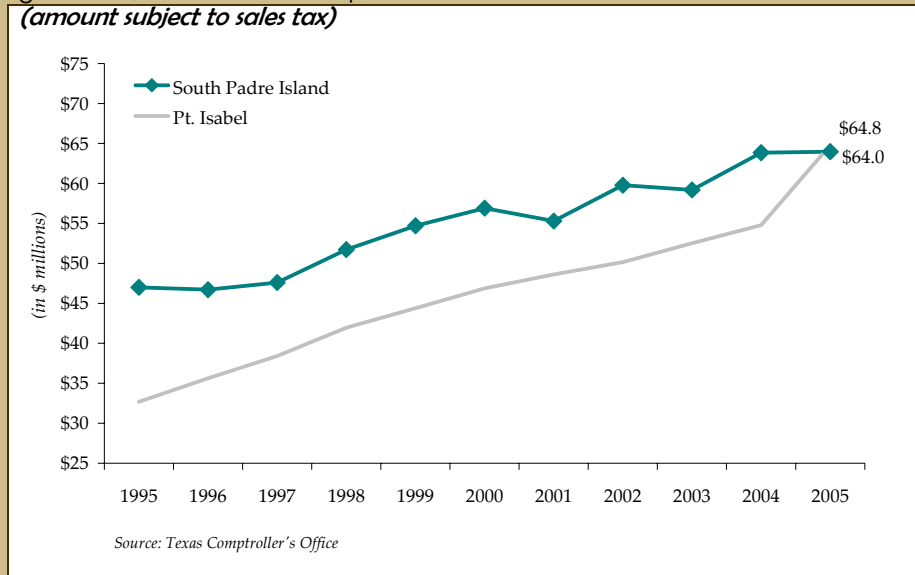
3. On average, low-paying "Blue Collar" occupations are expected to add the smallest number of new jobs in the region.

Retail Trade

1. During the last ten years, taxable retail sales in South Padre Island climbed steadily, reaching \$64 million in 2005, a 36 percent increase over 1995 (**Figure 2.21, Retail Sales Comparison**).

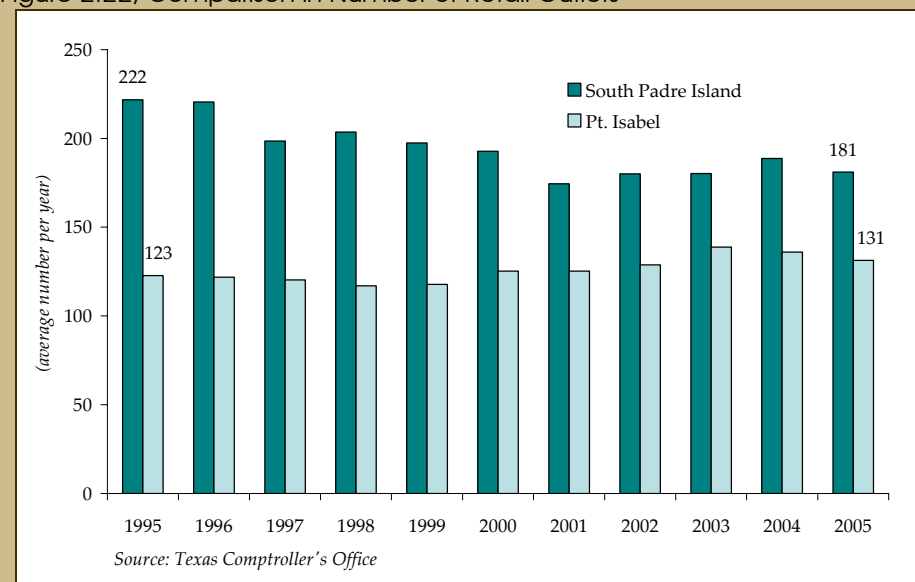
2. By comparison, taxable retail sales in Port Isabel increased 98 percent during the same period and surpassed South Padre for the first time in 2005. This City's large 2005 increase was undoubtedly related to the opening of the Super Wal-Mart that year.
3. During the same period, the number of retail outlets located on the Island decreased from 222 in 1995 to 181 in 2005, while the number of stores in Port Isabel increased slightly (**Figure 2.22, Comparison in Number of Retail Outlets**).

Figure 2.21, Retail Sales Comparison
(amount subject to sales tax)



Source: Texas Comptroller's Office and TIP Strategies, Inc.

Figure 2.22, Comparison in Number of Retail Outlets



Source: Texas Comptroller's Office and TIP Strategies, Inc.



Chapter 3 Land Use

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

The purpose of the Land Use Plan is to achieve a preferred and sustainable future for South Padre Island. The plan identifies goals and policies that will enhance South Padre Island's quality of life, respect its unique natural environs, preserve its beautiful setting, and support complementary economic growth and development.

Premise

Four interacting and inseparable themes are fundamental to sustainable and appropriate Land Use policies and goals:

1. Preserving and enhancing the Quality of Life.
2. Advancing economic growth and development.
3. Creating and preserving a Sense of Place.
4. Preserving our natural assets.

Land use and development of South Padre Island must balance these themes in all its applications.

The Quality of Life

South Padre Island values a welcoming, open, eclectic, tolerant, and relaxing feeling where residents and visitors enjoy an entertaining, interesting, physically active, safe, orderly, and simple life style.

Economic Development

Tourism, real estate development, construction, restaurants, retail trade, and the service industry are key components of a strong economy. A sound, sustainable community relies on strong economic growth to provide jobs, products, services, and a steady revenue source for funding government services and community enhancement.

A Sense of Place

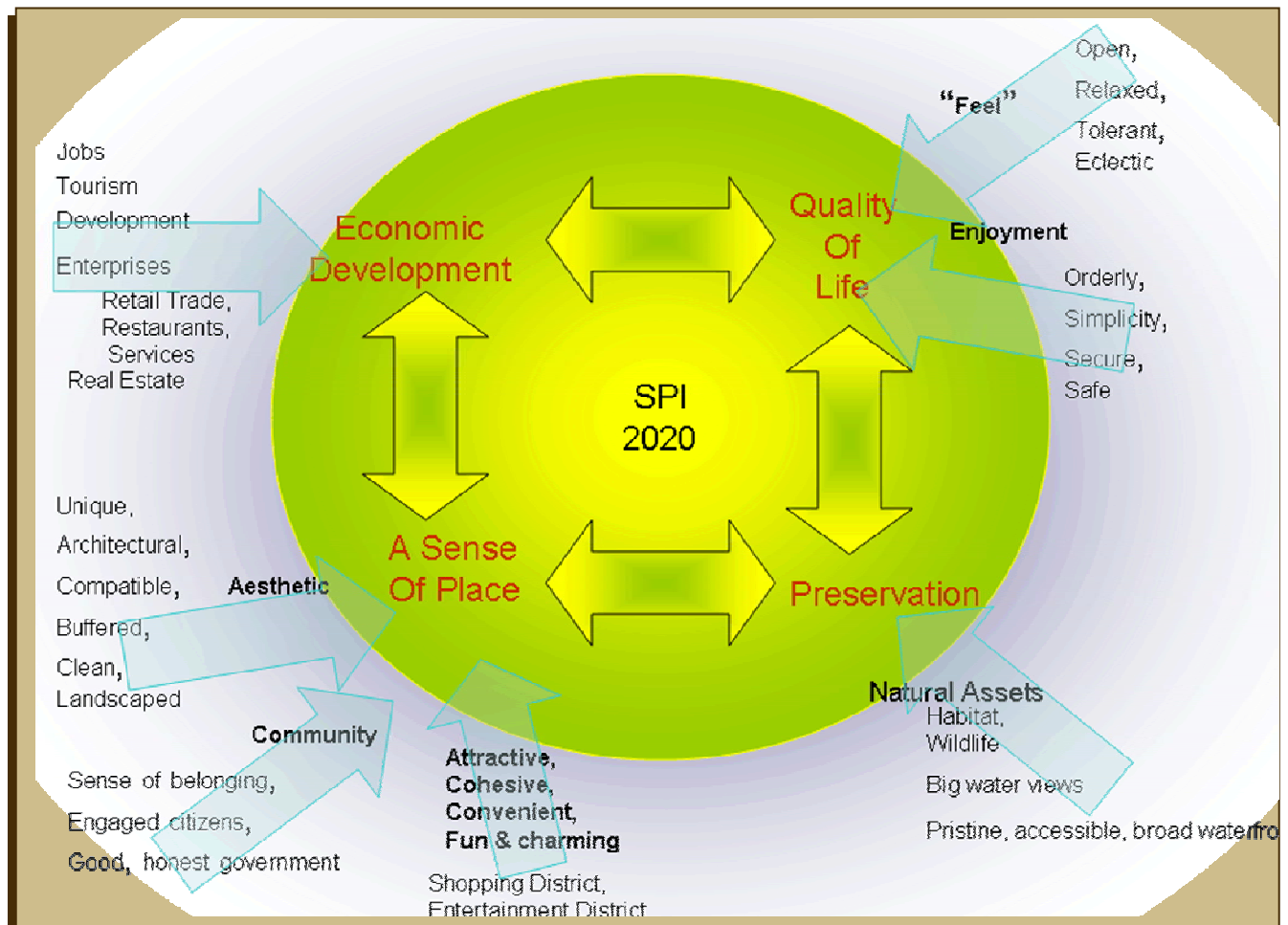
South Padre Island is a unique, naturally beautiful, clean, and cohesive town. It is architecturally interesting with visually attractive environs. Residents are engaged in their community and government and enjoy a sense of belonging. Visitors are drawn to its destination resort qualities and its fun shopping and entertainment districts.

Preservation

The abundance of natural beauty defines the Island: its easily accessible pristine and protected beaches and Bayfront, grand vistas, diverse wildlife, marine life, and marine and wetland habitats.

Inseparably Connected

The diagram below demonstrates the reliance of each theme upon all the others to complete a sustainable future plan for South Padre Island. Natural asset preservation contributes to the sense of a unique and beautiful place, which adds greatly to the quality of life and, all taken together, provides the basis for the 'value proposition' for investment and economic development. A strong economy is fundamental to the



quality of life, funds preservation efforts, and draws people to the community where they create a sense of place. The intermix of forces is inseparable.

Policies

This policy framework intends to serve as a decision-making guide for the Board of Aldermen, Town staff, and the Planning and Zoning Commission as they implement the Comprehensive Plan. Actions and policies should coincide with the four fundamental themes for a sustainable, preferred future for South Padre Island and consider economic, environmental, and social impacts.

1. Land uses should harmonize so as not to detract from the enjoyment and value of surrounding properties.
2. Land uses should concentrate similar uses and densities. Where mixed uses are the intended use, the physical appearance should be cohesive and coordinated.
3. Commercial and residential development should encourage a walking and bicycling convenience and experience.
4. Development zoning patterns should provide for suitable transitions and buffering between land uses and densities.
5. To preserve views and enhance values, in the northern extraterritorial areas of the Town, development should favor more dense, high-rise buildings on the inland center of the island and mid-rise and low-rise structures toward the Bay and Gulf shores.
6. Development or redevelopment of 'infill' lots, within a zone, should consider similar scale and density of surrounding properties.
7. High-density housing development should be concentrated where roadway and utility infrastructure and off-street parking can support it.
8. Development should favor districts over strip centers.
9. Small-scale neighborhood retail and service facilities should be located at the edge of neighborhoods at arterial intersections.
10. Development should preserve and enhance the physical environment and natural features of the Island. Nature reserve areas, greenbelts, and open areas should be set aside for preservation and recreation and to be used as buffering areas.
11. Public beaches and Bayfront shores, dunes, views, access, and ecological health should be proactively preserved and protected.
12. A previously allowed use should not be prohibited after a major casualty loss. An affected person should be able to rebuild same or similar size for use that otherwise conforms with the existing zoning regulations.

13. Zoning should provide for an alternative building setback rule that exchanges open space and views for building heights other than presently allowed under current building height and stair step setback rules.
14. Local ordinance should provide a process whereby a developer, development, or both may apply to the Town Board of Aldermen to negotiate a desired variation from a zoning ordinance. The variation must not negatively affect surrounding property values. If a variance is negotiated and the town receives compensation from a developer, development, or both, the compensation received must be used for a public purpose such as public sidewalks, public parking, parks and recreation, etc. The application process would not preclude the right to apply for a variance with the Board of Adjustments and Appeals (Variance Board).

GOALS

The four themes and the recommended policies intend to encourage and facilitate the achievement of the following goals:

Standards of Land Use

- 3.A. Preserve the conformity and integrity of the existing development
- 3.B. Provide for increased compatibility between adjacent uses
- 3.C. Allow increased flexibility while also establishing improved minimum standards
- 3.D. Streamline the review and permitting process
- 3.E. Collaborate with neighbors and property owners prior to altering present land uses in a zoning district

Appearance & Redevelopment of Existing Structures and Properties

- 3.F. A "Main Street" enhancement program
- 3.G. Enhance the standards and appearance of public rights-of-way and properties
- 3.H. Provide for reuse and redevelopment of older and under-utilized structures
- 3.I. Establish and enforce landscaping requirements

GOALS

GOALS

Development and Preservation

- 3.J. Improve the quality appearance of new development
- 3.K. Protect sensitive lands and conserve natural resources
- 3.L. Use incentives and bonuses to encourage enhancements, preservation, and open space
- 3.M. Encourage imaginative and 'unique' subdivision designs.
- 3.N. The Township should accumulate land throughout the Town to facilitate the building of additional public tourist attractions such as: parks, bay front access, an aquarium with educational exhibits, an IMAX theater, an amphitheater, performing arts theater, historical museum and public boat ramps.
- 3.O. Encourage "Green" development and enhancement (energy, waste handling, renewable resources)

Plan Implementation

- 3.P. Amend the development ordinances to implement this plan
- 3.Q. Apply standards and regulations legally, consistently, and equally
- 3.R. Establish a review process to assess and re-evaluate the plan every five years, or sooner as needed
- 3.S. The Town should add to its Emergency Management Plan for natural disasters an emergency beach re-nourishment strategy that, in advance, sets up a coordinated response from the Brownsville Navigation District, the Army Corp of Engineers, the Texas General Land Office, and any other agency or party whose participation is needed to begin immediate recovery action

THE IDEAL

The four themes, the policies recommended, and the goals targeted intend to define and encourage development and land use on South Padre Island that by 2020 would have the following ideal characteristics:

- 15. An attractive, close together, walk-able shopping district
- 16. A community commons area: gathering, market, recreation, nature
- 17. Preserving, causing grand vistas of Gulf and Bay
- 18. Attractive, interesting architecture and layouts
- 19. Attractive, charming, aesthetic main street
- 20. Wildlife (bird, marine, other) preserved and increased

21. Wide, clean, accessible waterfront, beaches
22. Broad use of renewable energy, conservation
23. More permanent residents
24. A greener island, lush native vegetation
25. Integration of SPI into RGV and border life; inclusiveness
26. Full, year round employment
27. Strong year round economy, tourism
28. Family owned/original local character businesses
29. Clear, legal, and equally applied rules and regulations
30. Open spaces and public parks
31. Entertainment district
32. Recreation venues: Aquaria, Imax, museums
33. Pedestrian-, cyclist-friendly paths and roads
34. Uncongested roads
35. Fun mass transit
36. Events, festivals, concerts, more arts, culture
37. Increased basic services, including medical
38. Transparent, effective, responsive, democratic, ethical, law abiding government
39. Safe, peaceful
40. Involved, engaged citizens
41. Small Town feeling
42. Open, eclectic, inviting, embracing community



Chapter 4 Mobility Plan

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

Due to the uniqueness of this barrier island and its growing popularity as a place to live and visit, the term transportation conveys a different meaning. In light of new development and continuing growth in visitation, the plan for future mobility is of essential importance. In addition to improvements to the street system, there must be a renewed focus on walking, bicycling, and transit. The plan devotes increased attention to all modes of transport. A well-planned and designed transportation system will also contribute to the character of the Island and its quality of life. The Town, through its ordinances and regulations, should promote an environment that facilitates business and commercial activity.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to plan for the short-term demands and long-range mobility needs of the Island. Its transportation system is unique and, thus, requires a different approach. While the street system will remain important, so is each of the other modes. Walking and bicycling deserve increased attention to establish them as a viable alternative to the vehicle. Coupled with a sound pedestrian system is a reliable, convenient, and highly accessible public transportation system. Complementary options include taxicabs, pedicabs, and water taxis. Therefore, the plan for enhanced mobility must balance all transportation modes.

This chapter includes the Town's long-range plan for developing an efficient roadway network. This will be an increasingly important means of planning as development expands northward into the extraterritorial jurisdiction and to tie into the proposed second causeway. The plan will be a guide for securing rights-of-way and upgrading and extending the network of streets throughout the 20-year planning area. Transportation infrastructure must be planned well in advance of development to ensure orderly and timely improvements as the mobility and access needs continue to increase.

A Thoroughfare Plan assures development of the most efficient and appropriate street system necessary to meet existing and future travel needs. Its primary objective is to ensure that adequate rights-of-way are preserved on appropriate alignments and of sufficient width to allow the orderly and efficient improvement of the thoroughfare system.

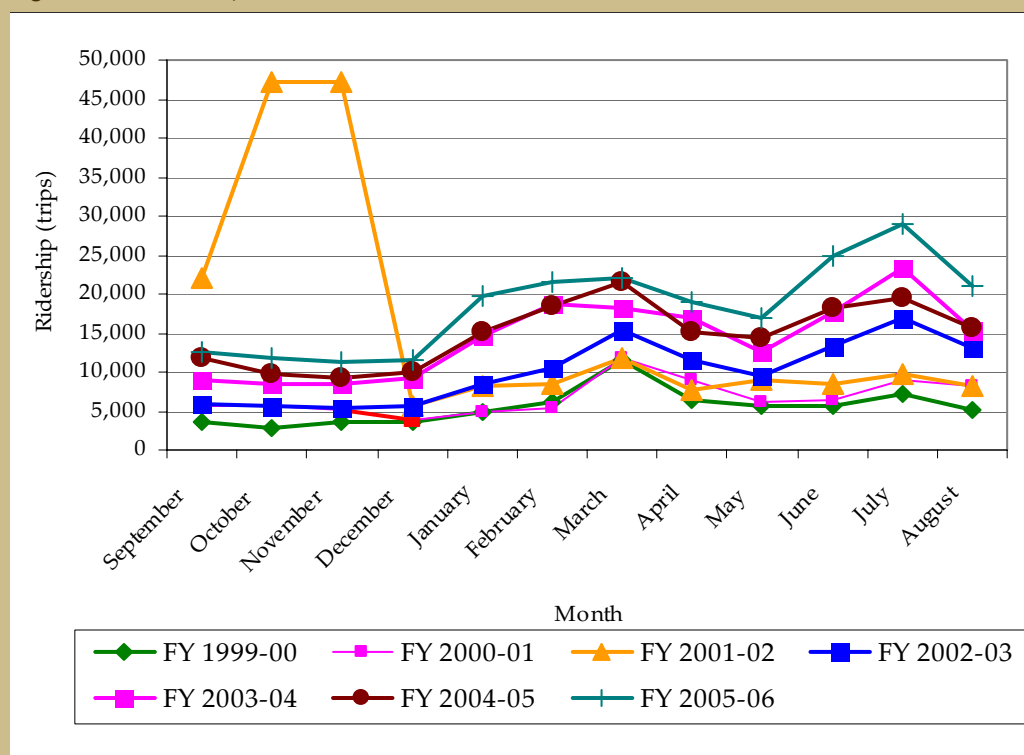
Public Issues

Mobility Issues

The following mobility issues were identified:

- Improved causeway access to the Island:** In 2004, there were 7.8 million causeway crossings, which are projected to reach 9.8 million by the Year 2015 and 11.5 million by the Year 2025.¹ This projection indicates an increase from 21,370 to 31,507 average crossings per day, which reflects a 147 percent increase. With the breach of the Queen Isabella Causeway in September 2001, the need for a second causeway became apparent. While the location of a new causeway is yet to be determined, there remains diligent study for environmental clearance. This project would provide congestion relief for the Queen Isabella Causeway, improve hurricane evacuation, and facilitate economic growth. Continuous planning and networking with other planning authorities is essential to mitigate the probable impacts of this project on the Island’s natural and built environments.
- Public Amenities:** The amenities such as public way-finding signage should give general destinations, goods, services, and usage. Such signage should not be a substitute for or restrict the merchant’s right to display their private signs. Introducing shaded walkways and rest areas, benches, and public art will create an environment conducive to walking.

Figure 4.1, Ridership on The WAVE



Source: Town of South Padre Island

- Improved Local Transit Usage:** Since 1999, the average monthly ridership on The WAVE has increased 223 percent, from 5,514 to 12,314 riders, as displayed in **Figure 4.1, Ridership on**

¹ Comprehensive Resort Market Analysis, THK Associates, Inc., September 20, 2005

The WAVE. Yet, there remains a significant latent demand because of thousands of daily visitors. In addition, there are roughly 6,000 employees on the Island, many of whom commute daily from throughout the Valley. Seizing this demand as a means to reduce vehicle trips, congestion, and parking demands is an opportunity, as well as a challenge. Keeping pace with the vehicle and infrastructure needs and requisite funding will require added resources. The WAVE also may convey the image of the Island through the type of vehicles and design of transit improvements.

4. **Enhanced Pedestrian Environment:** The importance of pedestrian mobility is heightened on the Island due to the volume of daily visitors. The density of development and the proximity between many origins and destinations makes walking a viable option. However, for it to be attractive, there must be pedestrian ways that are safe, convenient, and inviting. Overcoming challenges such as high-traffic streets, driveways, public streets, and a lack of sidewalks on the side streets, must become a priority. The format for such facilities may vary among the different neighborhoods on the island.
5. **Safe and Efficient Traffic Movement:** Efficient traffic movement is essential to the economy and contributes to the experience of visitors and the quality of life of residents. The street system must be designed to effectively convey traffic on an ordinary day, as well as during peak periods. A hierarchical network of roadways is necessary. The traffic carrying capacity of each street must be preserved for the system to operate efficiently. Due to the linear nature of the island and its natural constraints, there are relatively few options for expanding the street system. Therefore, traffic movement on the existing streets must be optimized.

Goals and Recommendations

Access to the Island

- 4.A. Ongoing involvement and coordination in the feasibility assessment and plans for the second causeway
- 4.B. Seamless integration of the causeway into the local transportation system
- 4.C. Sensitive planning and stewardship of the causeway environs
- 4.D. Pedestrian and bicycle access across the new bridge
- 4.E. Expand valley transit including airport access

The Cameron County RMA was formally established on September 30, 2004. Their purpose is to provide the area with an opportunity to significantly accelerate needed transportation projects. The RMA is working closely with the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) on the second causeway to South Padre Island, which is one of their top two current priority projects.

Recommended Actions

- 4.1. Appoint a liaison to the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (CCRMA) to regularly attend their board meetings. Support regional planning and inter-agency cooperation to improve valley wide transportation to the island, access to the airport, and public education regarding such services.
- 4.2. Upon completion of the preliminary alternatives and environmental analyses² and again at the stage of the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), contract a planning consultant to conduct an independent assessment of the analyses and findings and outline the probable impacts. The purpose of this evaluation is for continuous review and advanced planning commensurate with the recommendations of the causeway studies.
- 4.3. Periodically review the Thoroughfare Plan and make amendments as the final alignment is determined.
- 4.4. Prepare comments during the mandated public comment period for the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS).

Improved Pedestrian Friendliness

- 4.F. Provide a safe and attractive environment for walking and bicycling
- 4.G. Encourage transportation forms other than the automobile
- 4.H. Develop walking and biking paths that are coordinated with existing businesses, residences, street infrastructure, and transit opportunities and that contribute to the character and identity of the Island and the individual corridors on which the paths are located.

Recommended Actions

- 4.5. Coordinate with TxDOT to request funding for the reconstruction/replacement of the sidewalks with a minimum width of eight feet and planter boxers such as those located on Swordfish and Padre Blvd. The Town should participate in the design of sidewalks, possibly including pavers, textured patterns, or an inlay of marine life or other elements that relate to the Island's identity.

² This study, commissioned by the RMA, is expected to commence by January 2007.

- 4.6. Prepare a landscape/hardscape design plan along each of the public rights-of-way. The plan should specify native plant materials, hardscape surface treatments, irrigation, pedestrian and street lighting, and signage.
- 4.7. Enhance existing bike lanes on major thoroughfares; promote bike use and add bicycle racks at beach access points and public facilities and encourage businesses to do the same.
- 4.8. Develop a capital sidewalk improvement plan. The highest priority is Padre Boulevard followed by Gulf Boulevard and the east-west connectors planned for full median access. Laguna Boulevard would closely follow in priority. The remaining east-west streets are a secondary priority.
- 4.9. Consider redesign of Gulf Boulevard to include a serpentine alignment within the public right-of-way. The plan should consider the following: parking on the west side of Gulf Boulevard, parallel parking in low-density areas, and diagonal parking in higher-density areas with sidewalks, landscaping, signage, and trolley stops.
- 4.10. Coordinate with the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority (CCRMA) and TxDOT to accommodate an eight-foot, barrier-separated walkway/bikeway on the second causeway.
- 4.11. Consider traffic calming measures where needed.
- 4.12. Clearly delineate sidewalks, trails, and bike lanes.



Xeriscape promotes creative approaches to water conserving landscapes by helping people improve their landscapes and reduce the need for water, maintenance, and other resources.

GOALS

Expand Local Transit Services

- 4.I. Increase ridership on The WAVE by both residents and visitors
- 4.J. Expand public transportation options
- 4.K. Improve transit facilities
- 4.L. Identify potential funding sources
- 4.M. Improve regional coordination and communication among transit providers
- 4.N. Increase public awareness of transportation services

Recommended Actions

- 4.13. Seek coordinative opportunities for expanding the reach of The WAVE through increased interface with other transit providers and neighboring communities.
- 4.14. Devote increased attention to the regional transit coordination committee sponsored by TxDOT, including interlocal agreements and joint use arrangements with other providers. Seek shared services such as employee recruitment, training, and licensing programs; and vehicle procurement, transfers, and maintenance.
- 4.15. Investigate the feasibility of commuter routes from Brownsville and Harlingen-San Benito for employment transportation. Conduct an intercept survey to solicit information as to commuter trip purpose, origin and destination, and other factors. Utilize the survey to target the market area and potential users for use of a commuter service. Consider a rideshare program where employees are matched with one another to carpool to work.
- 4.16. Support the initiative of the Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council (LRGVDC) to improve coordination throughout the three-county TxDOT Pharr District. Organization may reduce the administrative costs of managing The WAVE, while also offering added benefits in terms of access to other sources of funds, improved regional communication and coordination, and expanded services.
- 4.17. Consider installing bus pull-out bays (refer to **Figure 4.2, Bay Design Alternatives**) along Padre Boulevard utilizing the existing shoulder space. Mark transit stops as appropriate. Such improvements are also advisable along Gulf and Laguna Boulevards.



The design of transit shelters contributes to their visibility and can relate to the Island's identity.

4.18. Improve transit stops by incorporating sidewalks, curb cuts, handicap accessible ramps, non-slip surfaces, marked signed and/or signaled crossings, prevention of obstructions for wheelchair access, and installing pedestrian actuated signals, near major transit stops.

4.19. Evaluate the performance of the fixed route and establish service standards, identify route modifications and new routes, research coordinative opportunities with other area providers, analyze commuting patterns and assess the feasibility of commuter routes, analyze fuel alternatives, recommend vehicle types and specifications, identify infrastructure needs, and recommend revenue options and funding strategies.

4.20. Explore the feasibility of a multi-use facility that may serve as a new transit vehicle storage facility for The WAVE and a public parking garage, along with mixed retail, office, and upper floor living uses. The facility may also serve as a center for taxicab, pedicab, and water ferry operators, a commuter service, and tour operators.

4.21. Solicit private enterprise to initiate added public transportation services, with start-up funds, low-interest loans, and other financial incentives.

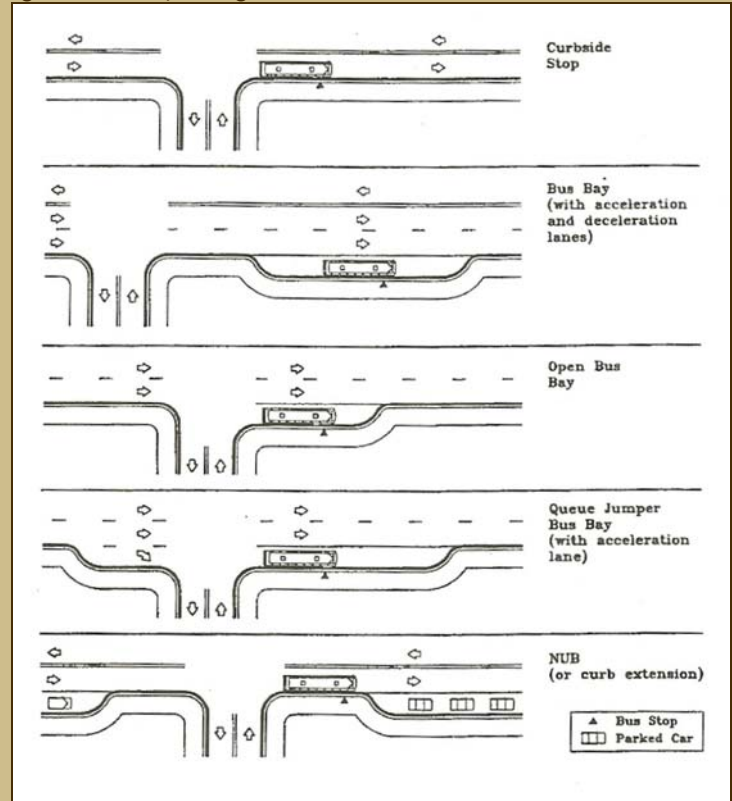
4.22. Solicit the involvement of the arts community in the design of custom transit shelters that relate to the identity of the Island.

4.23. Develop a shelter replacement program beginning on Padre Boulevard followed in priority by the stops with the highest use and public visibility.

4.24. Request businesses to participate in funding expanded transit services. As an incentive, offer parking credits to reduce the required parking commensurate with their employee and patron use.

4.25. Execute a marketing campaign to inform the public as to The WAVE and its schedule, the connection in Port Isabel, and future service expansions. Accommodate Island employees

Figure 4.2, Bay Design Alternatives



Source: Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) Report 19, Federal Transit Administration

GOALS

followed by daily visitors and tourists. The marketing should include a web-based campaign, as well as transit kiosks, way-finding signage for stop locations, and bus-wrap advertising.

- 4.26. Consider amending the ordinance pertaining to the definition of signs and the appropriate use of murals on building walls in the Town Limits.

Efficient and well-managed traffic

- 4.O. Preserve the traffic carrying capacities of roadways
- 4.P. Ensure suitable street infrastructure commensurate with traffic demands and volumes
- 4.Q. Plan in advance for an efficient street network
- 4.R. Implement up-to-date transportation policies and standards
- 4.S. Enhance street right-of-way appearance and contribution to Town character

Recommended Actions

- 4.27. Adopt driveway regulations to restrict their number, location, and spacing, street intersections, and median openings. The regulations should require parallel access roads and/or cross access easements to minimize the number of driveways.
- 4.28. Coordinate with TxDOT to identify opportunities for consolidation of driveways and other means of access other than directly from the Boulevard. As displayed by **Figure 4.4, Access Consolidation**, vacating right-of-way may reduce the number of access points from three to one without affecting property ingress/ egress.
- 4.29. Coordinate with TxDOT to put in signs and crosswalks where warranted as area travel volumes increase along Padre Boulevard.

Street Closures / Cul-de-sacs

'Street Closures/ Cul-de-sacs' are neither good nor bad per se. However, one factor can transform each into real problems for residents – location. The Town's policy regarding street closures should be a function of location. In some locations, they may be 'impractical' or even 'bad;' in others, they may be 'useful' or even 'good.' The policy decision in each area should respond to clearly defined objectives.

Joint access means a shared driveway that may serve more than one parcel. **Cross access** is a drive providing access between two or more contiguous sites so the driver need not enter the public street. A **parallel access road** is an auxiliary road located on one side of an arterial street for providing access to the abutting properties.

Cross access is accomplished by a platted and/or recorded easement giving access between two nonresidential or high-density residential properties, thereby eliminating the need for motorists to use the boulevards to move between abutting and nearby properties.

should determine the policy regarding private developments that incorporate cul-de-sacs. If developers think such features enhance their competitive position, then they should plan accordingly. Buyers would have the choice of deciding to buy property affected by a closed street. The Town's policy should be to leave the specific planning to the private developers.

5. Conclusion

The Town's policy should recognize the different circumstances in the different areas. Closing streets in the current residential areas is not desirable. Closing streets in the Entertainment District should be an option available to affected businesses in the district. The free market should determine the use of closed streets in future developments. The Town should not take or unduly burden the use of private property in the closing of any streets subject to its control.

Traffic and Access Management

Essential to managing the efficiency of each of the boulevards is preserving their traffic capacities. Even though these roadways are designed to carry a certain volume of traffic, there are situations that affect their efficiency including:

1. the number of driveways;
2. head-in parking resulting in vehicles using the public right-of-way to maneuver into and out of parking spaces;
3. lane width;
4. synchronization of signals, which will become important as signals are added;
5. number of cross street intersections;
6. allowance for deceleration/acceleration at major access points of ingress and egress, such as The Shores Development; and
7. the presence or nonexistence of a center turn lane or median.

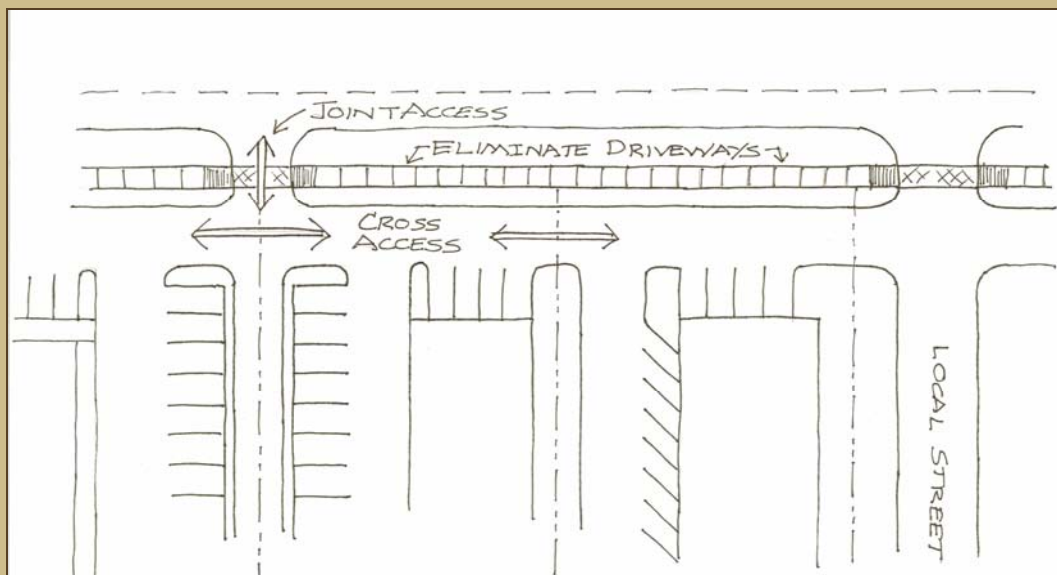
Of relevance to this plan is the management of access along each of the boulevards. There are many examples of head-in parking being accessed by the public right-of-way. While these are required spaces, the Town needs to seek other ways to provide an equivalent number of spaces in a more efficient configuration, such as parallel or diagonal parking.³ There appears to be an opportunity to convert 90 degree

³ Alternatives to the existing head-in parking configurations along each of the boulevards should be addressed by the parking study, with feasible alternatives identified.

head-in spaces to 60 degree diagonal parking, allowing an access aisle on site rather than using the street.

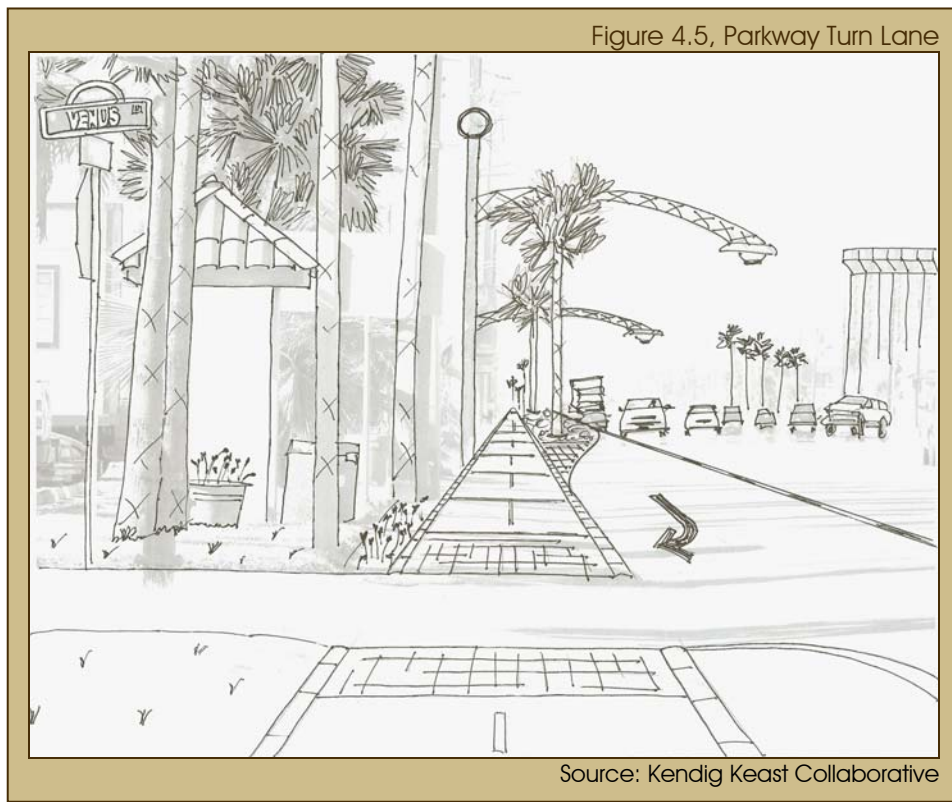
While the one block grid of cross streets maximizes access, it allows disruption of traffic flow on Padre Boulevard. Additionally there are a number of driveways accessing Padre Boulevard and Gulf Boulevard which impedes traffic flow. A solution is termination of some of the cross streets, which would form distinct neighborhoods without cut-through traffic. The intersection with Padre Boulevard could be maintained to provide shared access to the two abutting properties, allowing the existing driveways to be closed. A solution for new

Figure 4.4, Access Consolidation



development is shared driveways. Similarly, cross access between properties is also highly effective.

Access management will become increasingly essential as growth continues to occur. If implemented, it will effectively manage congestion and protect the capacity of future streets by controlling access at the time of development. Properly utilized, it can greatly limit the need for costly right-of-way acquisition and street widening.



The following access management strategies may be used:

1. Coordinate with TxDOT - Access management along Padre Boulevard must involve TxDOT. Through coordinated efforts, such as the design and improvement of medians, access management may greatly improve the efficiency of this principal arterial roadway.
2. Separate conflict points - Driveways must be spaced such that they are a sufficient distance from street intersections.
3. Establish design standards - Design standards should address the spacing of driveways, dimensions and radii, sight distance, and the length of turn lanes.
4. Locate and design traffic signals to enhance traffic movement – As more signals are added along Padre Boulevard, their spacing and synchronization is essential.
5. Remove turning vehicles from through travel lanes - Left and right turn lanes provide for the deceleration of turning vehicles. A portion of the shoulders along Padre Boulevard may be used for turn lanes at street intersections, as displayed in Figure 4.5, Parkway Turn Lane.
6. For Commercial Properties, encourage shared driveways, unified site plans, and cross access easements - Joint use of driveways for

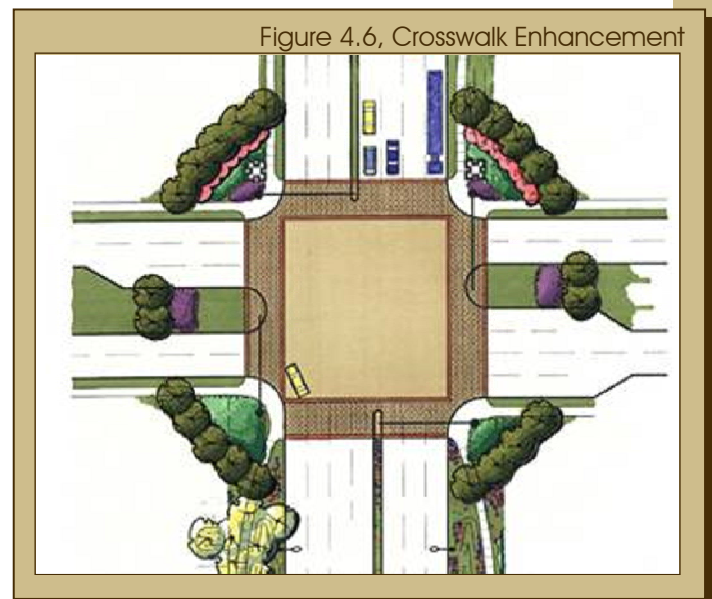
commercial properties will reduce the number of access points along Padre and Gulf Boulevards, which will reduce congestion, improve travel safety, and delay costly improvements. Such driveway arrangements also encourage shared parking.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Routes and Crossings

As a resort and visitor destination, sidewalk and trail use is much higher on the Island than elsewhere. To meet the demands, a complete network of sidewalks and trails is needed. The network must link each of the major origins (neighborhoods, hotels/motels, condominiums, RV resorts, etc.) and destinations, such as shopping areas, the entertainment district, parks, and the convention center. Doing so will enable residents and guests to walk or bicycle rather than driving their vehicles.

A prioritized sidewalk and trail network includes:

1. Reconstruction of the sidewalks on both sides of Padre Boulevard. The minimum width should be eight feet and must comply with the Federal accessibility standards. The sidewalks should contribute to the design of the corridor. The alternatives for siting the sidewalks are as follows:
 - a. Remain at the back of the existing curb provided the shoulder lane becomes a landscaped parkway. This is important to increase the separation between the pedestrian and passing motorists.
 - b. Relocate the sidewalk nearer to the front building line. This option is less preferred due to conflicts with parking lots, patios, gardens, and changes in grade. Also, pedestrians would have to cross parking lots, drive-through lanes, driveways, and cross streets, creating added conflict points.
2. Delineation of a combined eight-foot sidewalk/bikeway along Gulf Boulevard. Due to its proximity to the beach, individual sidewalks and bikeways are not warranted. To minimize costs, this pedestrian/bicycle corridor can be within the existing 40 feet of paved surface. It must be clearly marked by pavement striping and signage and separated from the travel lanes by a parking lane.
3. Where there are beach accesses, a sidewalk needs to be installed on at least one of the



Benefits of Thoroughfare Planning Include:

- ◆ Preserving **adequate rights-of-way** for future long-range transportation improvements.
- ◆ Minimizing the **amount of land** required for street and highway purposes.
- ◆ Identifying the **functional role** that each street should be designed to serve in order to promote and maintain the stability of traffic flow and land use patterns.
- ◆ **Informing citizens** of the streets that are intended to be developed as arterial and collector thoroughfares so that private land use decisions can anticipate which streets will become major traffic facilities in the future.
- ◆ Providing information on **thoroughfare improvement needs** which can be used to determine priorities and schedules in the Town's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and capital budget.
- ◆ **Minimizing the negative impacts of street widening and construction** on neighborhood areas and the overall community by recognizing where future improvements may be needed and incorporating thoroughfare needs in the Town's comprehensive planning process.

side streets north or south of the beach access in order to connect the beach accesses to Padre Boulevard and eventually to Laguna Boulevard. The Town should base their decision for the sidewalk location on existing conditions/businesses located along Padre Boulevard and the side streets.

4. Construction of sidewalks on one side of each of the local streets between Padre Boulevard and Laguna Boulevard.

Crosswalk Improvements

All crosswalks must be clearly delineated. Given the Island's environment, thermal plastic striping or other durable and visible materials are recommended. Newly constructed streets and intersections should include crosswalks.

Thoroughfare Plan

The Town's Thoroughfare Plan should be designed to ensure orderly development of the transportation system (not only streets, but also pedestrian ways and hike/bike trails) and provide efficient traffic flow within the Town's jurisdictional limits. Additionally, north and south primary arterials must be designed to accommodate traffic levels associated with seasonal high demands and potential evacuations due to hurricanes or other emergency situations.

Main arterials should be designed to reduce or eliminate sources of traffic restrictions encountered during normal scheduled maintenance and seasonal community activities.

Design of major arterials should conform to TxDOT specifications, and all secondary collectors and residential streets should conform to State and local standards and be of proper design to allow use of fire fighting vehicles, trash collection, and other traffic normally expected for the end use of the particular developed area.

Future large private developments should be encouraged to provide multiple access points to main arterial streets and adhere to minimum street standards adopted by the Town of South Padre Island.

Future developments of any Thoroughfare System should be designed to avoid any negative impact to sensitive wetlands or wildlife habitat. The system should include the recommendations of the Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan relating to public areas, wherever possible, and said Plan would be subject to approval of the South Padre Island Planning and Zoning Commission and final approval by the local elected officials.

Private Issues

Mobility Issues

The following mobility issue was identified:

1. **Adequate Parking in Appropriate and Convenient Locations:**
Parking demands are unique due to the type of development and the cyclical nature of the economy. This circumstance presents a challenge on occasions when the demand exceeds the available supply. There are also varying needs among different parkers, depending on their trip purpose, destination, and duration. A comprehensive parking program that meets the needs of both residents and visitors must be assembled to manage the demand and supply while mitigating the cumulative impacts.

Goals & Recommendations

- 4.T. Improved Pedestrian Friendliness
- 4.U. Provide a safe and attractive environment for walking and bicycling
- 4.V. Encourage transportation forms other than the automobile
- 4.W. Develop walking and biking paths that are coordinated with existing businesses, residences, street infrastructure, and transit opportunities and that contribute to the character and identity of the Island and the individual corridors where the paths are located.

GOALS

Recommended Actions (See Chapter 3)

- 4.30. Amend the subdivision regulations as follows:
 - a. Require sidewalks on both sides of arterial and collector streets and one side of local streets.⁴ Consider requiring alternative materials such as recyclables.
 - b. In all new subdivisions, require pedestrian easements between properties that abut an open space or street no less than every 600 feet and at the ends of cul-de-sacs.
 - c. Develop right-of-way and pavement cross sections for all street types, including alternatives for Planned Development Districts (PDDs)⁵ and defined situations, i.e. changes in density, etc.
 - d. Incorporate specifications for crosswalk improvements including pavement texturing and/or striping, signage and warning lights,

⁴ Sec. 2.13 Sidewalks of the Standards and Specifications for the Installation of Improvements currently requires sidewalks on both sides of all streets.

⁵ Sec. 20-23. Planned Development Districts (PDD District), Chapter 20, Zoning.

pedestrian and bicycle actuated signals, and curb cuts and handicap accessible ramps.

- 4.31. Require sidewalks crossing driveway entrances to comply with accessibility standards. Furthermore, require that the sidewalk is constructed with a unique surface and/or color to alert motorists to the crossing and to serve as a design feature.
- 4.32. Initiate plans to construct a boardwalk along the shoreline of Laguna Madre within the entertainment district. Connect it with a larger pedestrian network across the Island.

Efficient and Well-Managed Traffic in Private Developments

GOALS

- 4.X. Preservation of the traffic carrying capacities of roadways
- 4.Y. Suitable street infrastructure commensurate with traffic demands and volumes
- 4.Z. Advanced planning for an efficient street network
- 4.AA. Up-to-date transportation policies and standards
- 4.BB. Enhanced corridor appearance and contribution to Town character

Recommended Actions (See Chapter 3)

- 4.33. Amend the subdivision regulations as follows:
 - a. Require private streets to conform to public street standards.
 - b. Allow varying local street widths in the Planned Development District (PDD), whereby the number of dwelling units and the average lot frontages determine the street right-of-way, pavement width, parking lanes, and sidewalks.
 - c. Incorporate the traffic impact report (TIR) provisions now located within the Standards and Specifications for the Acceptance of Public Improvements.
 - d. Require a general development plan for multi-phased development, which ensures compliance with the policies of this plan. Authorize the Town to develop small area street plans to allow staff to determine a street layout plan for areas warranting special study.
 - e. Require shared driveways and cross-access easements between abutting nonresidential and high-density residential properties.
 - f. Incorporate provisions for other types of plats as allowed by State law, including minor plats, replats, vacating plats, development plats, and amending plats, to offer streamlined review, which, in many cases, can be handled administratively.



Chapter 5 Parks & Resources

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

The Island offers many amenities including pristine beaches, the Laguna Madre Bay, and an abundance of flora and fauna. The Town has become increasingly popular as a destination. With popularity, though, comes development pressure, which, if not well-managed, may disturb the very resources that attract residents and visitors. Disturbances can impact the habitat and alter natural forms – a process that can have devastating impacts. Protection and conservation of resources is essential to sustain the ecological systems and ensure long-term economic success.

Purpose

South Padre Island is one of many barrier islands located along the Gulf Coast and is separated from the mainland by the Laguna Madre Bay. It is characterized by broad beaches, vegetation-stabilized dunes (increasingly), expansive wind-tidal flats, wash-over channels, brackish and salt-water ponds and marshes, and black mangrove communities. South Padre has an important role in the coastal ecological system and as a protective barrier for ocean-bearing storms.

Tourism is the largest industry and, thus, the most significant contributor to the economy. This industry is based upon the natural resources that attract both residents and visitors. Ongoing success will rely, in part, on the existence and preservation of these natural resources.

The purpose of this element is to ensure protection and conservation of natural resources, allowing for their continued use and enjoyment by future generations. This must be accomplished, though, without significantly compromising the development interests of land owners or limiting economic development opportunities. This will require a substantive shift in current practices and in the means available for achieving this vision.

The greatest long-term threat to the health and productivity of the State's Bay and Estuary systems is diminished freshwater inflows. The Lower Laguna Madre Bay System is designated as a priority system for water quality improvements in the 2005 Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan.

Source: Texas Parks and
Wildlife

Accordingly, 1.6 miles of the Town's beaches are eroding at an average of eight feet per year, while 2.4 miles of beaches are accreting at rates averaging up to two feet per year. Historically, accretion has occurred in the south; however, short-term erosion rates show that the south is eroding, the middle of the Island has sporadic accretion, and the northern-most portion, although experiencing long-term erosion, is accreting. The slowing of erosion rates is primarily due to re-nourishment efforts.

Source: The University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology

Texas has one of the highest rates of coastal erosion in the country, which can be detrimental to beaches and increase the risk to beachfront structures. In response to this the Texas Legislature created the Coastal Erosion Planning & Response Act and put the General Land Office in charge of its administration. The Coastal Erosion Fund provides funding for a two-year period to fend off the forces eroding Texas beaches.

Issues

The following issues emerged during the course of developing this plan:

1. **Protection and enhancement of the beach and dunes** – As one of its greatest assets, the beach is a high priority for ongoing nourishment and protection against both natural and artificial (human-caused) erosion. Doing so requires pro-action to maintain a continuous dune line and prevent erosion-contributing influences. Without continuous planning and advanced preparedness, the beach and dunes will be increasingly vulnerable – as will the ecosystems they support and the development they help to protect.
2. **Sustaining the quality and environmental value of Laguna Madre** – The Laguna Madre Bay is a valuable resource that has great commercial, recreational, and conservation value. The Bay provides for a variety of recreational and eco-tourism opportunities, including boating, fishing, and bird watching. Preserving the Bayside and its marine and natural habitats, including the extensive seagrass beds, is important to sustain fish and wildlife populations and the tourism industry. Enhancing water quality is also important, as a healthy aquatic system is necessary to support Bay functions. Population growth is threatening the system with dredging, spoil removal, and excess nutrients. High concentrations of nutrients come from urban development and runoff. Together with other jurisdictions, the Island may better manage water quality by controlling nonpoint source pollution.
3. **Sustainability of habitats and valuable, native flora and fauna** – Coastal wetlands are valuable natural resources that provide many ecological and economic benefits, e.g., flood control, improved water quality, erosion control, wildlife habitat, and recreation. However, they are disappearing due to erosion, subsidence, rising sea level, and/or being filled in and built over to accommodate development. Along with the protection of valued lands, open views, and natural amenities, other natural areas and open spaces also provide areas for native vegetation, recreation, nature viewing, and habitat for wildlife. Protection and enhancement of these resources are instrumental to environmental conservation, providing for recreational and ecotourism opportunities and for long-term growth of the economy. Natural Resources and Priority Protection Areas are shown in **Figure 5.1, Natural Resources**, and **Figure 5.2, Priority Protection Habitat Areas**.
4. **Parks and recreation facilities** – The Island provides for many nature-based recreational and tourism opportunities; however, these amenities can be enhanced to provide more trails, neighborhood parks and gathering areas, and recreational

facilities and programs. While the visitor population is likely content with beach and water activities, residents have different needs, which were clearly articulated through the involvement process. Due to the nature of the population and the environment, the design of facilities must be unique. Providing for recreational needs may be accomplished through conservation of open space and protection of resources and valuable areas.

Goals and Recommendations

Beach and Dunes

- 5.A. Secure funding for beach renourishment. Ongoing funding for beach maintenance should be established as a line item in the Town's budget.
- 5.B. Protect the dune system from erosion and artificial damage
- 5.C. Adhere to strict enforcement policies for dune trespassers
- 5.D. Dedicate funding for beach and dune development and maintenance
- 5.E. Create, preserve, and enhance access to beach

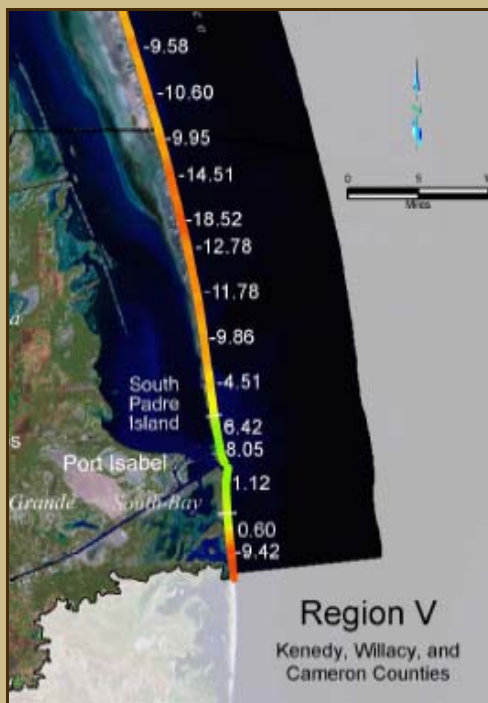
GOALS

Recommended Actions

- 5.1. Construct or reconstruct two-way board-walkovers at all designated beach access points. Simultaneously, construct directional barriers to prevent breached access to the dunes.
- 5.2. Install interpretive signage along the walkovers and dune line for environmental education as to the function and value of the dune system and the purpose of its protection. The Town should keep at least two beach access points in the raw state for the purpose of education and enjoyment as dune preserves.
- 5.3. Actively involve beachfront owners and managers in the public education and enforcement of illegal dune access.
- 5.4. Encourage joint construction of walkovers and boardwalks when feasible.
- 5.5. Provide at least two ADA walkovers where and when feasible.
- 5.6. Establish or strengthen an ongoing, regular dune maintenance program. Continue to leverage access to State and Federal funds to continuously sustain this activity.
- 5.7. Seek legal counsel as to the ability to use park land dedication requirements as a means of beach and dune protection and development. Further, research whether fees collected through an in-lieu of dedication program may be used as a source of funds for beach/dune development and maintenance.



- 5.8. Consider seeking legislation due to the unique and different needs of the Island.
- 5.9. Regularly repair, re-nourish, and eliminate gaps in the dune line via dredging and/or hauling of sand.
- 5.10. Develop an aggressive program to re-vegetate bare dunes, including assistance from and partnership with local groups and agencies.



Average Annual Shoreline Change Rate
Source: Coastal Texas 2020 Plan – 2005



Historical Shoreline Data

Source: Bureau of Economic Geology, University of Texas Austin, Kendig Keast Collaborative

- 5.11. In coordination with the General Land Office (GLO), annually re-map the dune protection line. Subsequently, monitor the change and act accordingly. Review and amend the dune protection line as necessary and applicable.
- 5.12. Promote public education regarding dune protection and beach cleanliness via signs and print media.
- 5.13. Evaluate all options and the feasibility and means for controlling erosion.
- 5.14. Evaluate and embrace Beach Management Practices (BMPs), drawing from programs and experiences of other coastal communities.
- 5.15. Implement a 'Leave nothing but footprints' campaign or a similar slogan.
- 5.16. Investigate and support alternatives to beach raking.
- 5.17. A percentage of the Town's budget should be set aside for the restoration of beach quality sand on an on-going basis, so that funds are available whenever the channel is dredged or a high quality sand source is found for on-going beach renourishment.
- 5.18. A Memorandum of Understanding should be developed with the Brownsville Port Authority to ensure that when the channel is dredged, South Padre Island will have access to that sand.
- 5.19. An on-going contract with a hopper dredge company should be established to assist with obtaining this sand.
- 5.20. A conduit system across the island should be considered to assist with sand placement.
- 5.21. The Town should create a separate, autonomous entity (i.e. Beach Manager) that will oversee and monitor the care of the beach and the dunes. This person/position should be on the city payroll but answer to the environmental concerns of the beach first.

Laguna Madre

- 5.F. Protect the Laguna Madre as a valuable resource
- 5.G. Recognize and support the multiple functions of the Bay
- 5.H. Enhance water quality to conserve habitat and minimize health risks
- 5.I. Heighten management to preserve the quality of the Bay
- 5.J. Continue maintenance and beautification of street ends
- 5.K. Protect public access
- 5.L. Impose, support and enforce rules of practical safety for the beach and Bay, and provide education and enforcement of water safety practices for the Bay – Tompkins Channel areas.

Recommended Actions

- 5.22. Prioritize and secure funding to implement the recommendations outlined in the Ad Hoc Bay Area Task Force Report, including:
 - a. Beautifying street ends on the Bay side within the public street right-of-way.
 - b. Repairing and maintaining bulkheads and retaining walls on City property.
 - c. Providing additional public boat ramps in-lieu of permitting private docks beyond the rights-of-way and Town limits toward Tompkins Channel.
 - d. Entering into an intergovernmental agreement with Cameron County to post 'no wake' signage along Tompkins Channel and to regulate marine and water safety. Alternatively, annex the submerged lands out to and including the Channel. Subsequently, establish and enforce Town-initiated restrictions.
- 5.23. Develop a recreational use plan, identifying associated facilities and improvements to facilitate its implementation, e.g. marina improvements and the requisite dredging.
- 5.24. Reduce water quality impacts as a result of nonpoint source pollution by:
 - a. Participating in regional water quality management efforts.
 - b. Establishing runoff controls and requirements for construction sites.
 - c. Preparing a stormwater management plan.
 - d. Adopting structural and non-structural Best Management Practices for controlling the quality of runoff.
 - e. Adopting a stormwater management ordinance that requires pre-treatment of stormwater prior to discharge off site.
 - f. Amending the zoning ordinance to reduce impervious cover, with height and density bonuses as an incentive (refer to Chapter 3, Land Use).

GOALS

- g. Controlling pollution from marina operations, including runoff from parking and maintenance areas.
- 5.25. Prepare a Bay area management plan to address the long-term conservation and sustainability of wetlands, erosion, water quality, natural habitat areas, and recreational opportunities on the Bay.

Wildlife Habitat and Flora and Fauna

- 5.M. Conserve environmentally sensitive lands
- 5.N. Support the economy through nature preservation and ecotourism
- 5.O. Conserve marine and other habitats to ensure environmental quality
- 5.P. Protect and aggressively restore native flora and fauna
- 5.Q. Protect wetland resources through regulatory controls and voluntary conservation and restoration
- 5.R. Improve public education outreach regarding the ecological values of wetlands and plant species

Recommended Actions

- 5.26. Identify, inventory, and map primary and secondary conservation areas in coordination with the General Land Office, Texas Parks and Wildlife, and other agencies. Conservation areas may include wildlife habitat, dunes, beaches, wetlands, scenic view areas, and areas that provide linkage.
- 5.27. Local elected officials need to support conservation of existing wetlands and oppose development and other activities that destroy those wetlands.
- 5.28. Establish an open space acquisition program and identify funding sources for acquisition. Consider public funding sources, public/private partnerships, park land dedication and fee in-lieu provisions, and/or nonprofits like the Trust for Public Land.
- 5.29. Coordinate with the land owners to the north to request voluntary dedications of sensitive land for public purposes. Enter into a development agreement to secure their development interests regarding annexation and allowable development rights.



Laguna Madre Bay provides for a number of amenities including wildlife viewing, boating, and fishing.

- 5.30. Require a certain percentage of landscaping and bufferyard plant materials be of a native species.
- 5.31. Adopt landscape preservation provisions to protect significant populations of native flora and fauna.
- 5.32. Revise the landscape ordinance to prevent the installation of undesirable and/or invasive plants and trees as part of the required landscaping installed for new development.
- 5.33. Limit impervious surface allowed per site or per developed subdivision.
- 5.34. Require the use of vegetated buffers adjacent to wetlands and sensitive areas.
- 5.35. Implement strategies to protect seagrass beds, which is an important marine habitat for finfish and shellfish, including:
 - a. Establish a no-wake zone.
 - b. Improve channel access to developed portions of the Island, with appropriate signage and enforcement.¹
 - c. Develop an education and outreach program regarding the importance of seagrass beds and measures to avoid or, at a minimum, mitigate impacts by boaters.
- 5.36. Prepare a public education program to provide information about wetlands and their importance to the environmental system and economic well being of the Island.
- 5.37. Establish a system of incentives for wetland preservation, including tax incentives, funding and assistance with preservation, density bonuses, and market advantages (eco-tourism).
- 5.38. Amend the development ordinances to include strategies for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation of wetlands. Strategies include clustered development, as well as water gardens, rain barrels, pervious pavement, and vegetated swales, among others.
- 5.39. Encourage on-island mitigation for all new developments, where necessary, and identify potential mitigation sites.
- 5.40. Coordinate with the GLO in mitigating and proactively planning for oil spills and other environmental occurrences. Organize a volunteer group that may be dispatched for clean-up assistance.
- 5.41. Consider local tax abatement or other incentives for preservation of heavily vegetated properties.

“Submerged seagrass meadows are a dominant, unique subtropical habitat in many Texas bays and estuaries. These marine plants play critical roles in the coastal environment, including nursery habitat for estuarine fisheries, a major source of organic biomass for coastal food webs, effective agents for stabilizing coastal erosion and sedimentation, and major biological agents in nutrient cycling and water quality processes.”

Source: Seagrass Conservation Plan for Texas, 2000

¹ Coastal Texas 2020 Plan

GOALS

- 5.42. Adopt an ordinance allowing property owners to apply to have their property designated as a “Natural Habitat Area”. The purpose and policy of the ordinance is to preserve and protect the island’s remaining natural habitat, for animals, especially birds. Land designated as NHA would be subject to different mowing guidelines. Enforcement and disputes should be processed through the city manager or his designee, subject to review by the Board of Aldermen, and finally to municipal court. The ordinance should separately address matters in the current town and new development (up north). Within the town, developed and undeveloped land may be subject to different guidelines. Among the criteria for qualifying for NHA status would be to maintain a specified minimum amount of approved native plants. Financial incentives, tax credits or abatement, should be offered.

Parks and Recreation

- 5.S. Design unique parks to meet the needs and desires of residents
 5.T. Provide adequate park land concurrent with new development
 5.U. Provide a system of trails and pathways connecting key destinations across the Island
 5.V. Provide indoor facilities and recreational programming
 5.W. Improve access to the Laguna Madre Bay

Recommended Actions

- 5.43. Conduct a design and development workshop for nearby residents of Water Tower Park to identify their desires for improvements and enhancements, such as a windbreak, shade structures, additional landscaping, covered basketball court, security lighting, demonstration garden, public art, etc.
- 5.44. Acquire by dedication or fee simple purchase neighborhood parkland within the identified deficiency areas displayed in **Figure 5.3, Park Service Area and System Plan**. Also, acquire community park acreage north of the Town limits. Seek to acquire this land within five years to avoid escalated land costs.
- 5.45. Coordinate with the County to preserve or acquire a portion of Isla Blanca Park for public park land in the event it sells.
- 5.46. Seek design assistance to enhance Morningside Park.
- 5.47. Amend the zoning ordinance to require on-site amenities for development above 15 units per acre.
- 5.48. Consider a tax abatement or lease on undeveloped land for use as multi-use recreational fields.

- 5.49. Develop a backbone system of trails in the area north of the Town limits, which would be required and modified as development occurs.
- 5.50. Conduct design and development workshops for the needed future parks to prepare a master development plan for each property. Resident participation is essential to ensure development that is compatible with their needs.
- 5.51. Establish a park land dedication and fee in-lieu ordinance. This would require private development or public dedication of land concurrent with new development and consistent with the standards of this plan. The fee amount must be equivalent to the value of dedication and/or private development. It must include minimum facility and development standards.
- 5.52. Develop a community center with indoor and outdoor facilities, which could facilitate recreation.²
- 5.53. Enhance existing beach access points to include additional amenities such as public showers and restrooms, drinking fountains, benches, small play areas, and/or small picnic pavilions as per the recommendations of the Beach and Dune Task Force.
- 5.54. Improve existing boat access ramp locations along the Bay to include landscaping, benches, picnic tables, and/or other amenities. Seek a Boat Access Grant through Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Parks and Recreation

Providing for neighborhood-focused parks and recreational programs and activities is important to the quality of life for those who live on the Island. While their intent is not to attract tourists and visitors, they may still supplement the nature-based recreational amenities on the Island. Parks are also well documented as contributors to the economic health and value of the community. Currently, the three County parks meet much of the need for larger-scale community facilities.

Existing Facilities

Existing park facilities include Water Tower Park, which is a one-half acre park with a basketball goal and bleachers, a playscape, and three



Trails and separated pathways are important to facilitate safe pedestrian activity.

² The recommendation for a community center was stated in the 2000 Parks Master Plan and the 2010 Implementation Plan.

covered picnic tables. Equipment and facilities are worn and in need of replacement. Additional facilities include a road island with two covered picnic tables and a pavilion (Morningside Park) and the Island Gateway. In addition are the three County parks located at the northern and southern ends of the Island. Isla Blanca Park consists of 305 acres, has approximately one mile of Gulf beach frontage, and is located in Cameron County Precinct 1. This coastal park is located at the southern tip of South Padre Island and provides public beach access, over 600 Recreational Vehicle rental spaces, and two picnic pavilions with immediate frontage to the Gulf of Mexico and one on the Laguna Madre Bay. This park also provides many retail concessions, such as a water park, full service marina with boat sales, clothing retail, restaurants, beach rental concessions, and fast food concessions.

Andy Bowie Park consists of approximately 225 acres located just north of the South Padre Island Town limits and is also located in Cameron County Precinct 1. This park is also known as Beach Access #2 and provides pedestrian beach access, two picnic pavilions that accommodates groups of 150 per pavilion, a beach rentals concession, a fast food concession, 18 Recreational Vehicle rental spaces and two restrooms with showers.

E. K. Atwood Park, also known as Beach Access #5, consists of 2.43 acres and is also located in Cameron County Precinct 1. This park provides vehicular beach access and accommodates approximately 90 persons under a covered picnic pavilion. This park also provides restrooms and showers with a walkway for pedestrians to access the beach.



In lieu of neighborhood park space, public streets are being used for recreation.

The popular Laguna Madre Nature Trail, located adjacent to the Convention Center, is also owned by the County. The South Padre Island Nature and Birding Center will also be available, although this will primarily attract tourists.

Park Standards

To satisfy diverse individual interests and ensure adequate and equal opportunity, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) recommends the standards illustrated in **Table 5.1, Development Standards**. The Island is unique, though, which warrants modification of the standards to reflect the extent of available public amenities, the type of

development, and the user characteristics. Therefore, following are the recommended standards:

Table 5.1 Development Standards

Component	Use
Mini-Park	Use: Specialized facilities serving concentrated or limited population or specific group such as tots or senior citizens.
	Service Area: Less than ¼-mile radius
	Desirable Size: 1 acre or less
	Acres per 1,000 population: 0.25 to 0.50
	Site Characteristics: Within neighborhoods and close to apartments, townhouses, or housing for the elderly.
Neighborhood Park	Use: Area for intense recreation activities such a field games, court games, crafts, playgrounds, skating, picnicking, wading pools, etc.
	Service Area: ¼- to ½-mile radius, serves a neighborhood area
	Desirable Size: Minimum five acres
	Acres per 1,000 population: 1.0 to 2.0
	Site Characteristics: Suited for intense development, easily accessible, centrally located in neighborhood, with safe walking and bike access; may also be a school playground.
Community Park	Use: Areas of diverse environmental quality may include intense or combined recreation areas such as athletic complexes, large pools, and areas for walking, viewing, sitting, picnicking, etc. May include natural features such as water bodies in area for intense development. Easily accessible to all areas of the community.
	Service Area: 1- to 2-mile radius (serves several neighborhoods)
	Desirable Size: 10 to 50 acres
	Acres per 1,000 population: 5.0 to 8.0
Linear Park	Use: Area for hiking, biking, jogging, horseback riding, canoeing, and similar off-street activities.
	Service Area: No applicable standard
	Desirable Size: Width should be sufficient to protect resources and provide maximum use and safety.
	Acres per 1,000 population: Variable
	Site Characteristics: Man-made corridors such as utility rights-of-way, greenbelts, ridgeline or bluff areas, water bodies, ditches, canals, and abandoned rail lines.

1. **Mini-parks** are generally provided on site in the form of pools, tennis courts, exercise facilities, and beach volleyball, among an assortment of other offerings. To ensure adequate on-site facilities, there should be requirements and standards for development over a certain density.
2. **Neighborhood parks** represent the most significant needs. Since 74 percent of the housing units are part-time, it is recommended that the standard be 0.50 acre per 1,000 residents.
3. **Community parks** are not necessary for the current Town limits due to the County parks, provided neighborhood parks fill the deficient area. To the north, additional community parks will be necessary. A standard of five acres per 1,000 residents is advised by NRPA.
4. **Linear parks** are warranted, but unreasonable for the current Town limits. To the north, they may be achieved within the required open space requirements integrated into the zoning districts (as proposed). Density bonuses may be used to offset the required open area. This, however, assumes annexation and the imposition of zoning or use of development agreements. The standard for community parks may be reduced to 3.5 acres per 1,000 residents, coupled with provision of linear parks consistent with Town requirements.

Needs Assessment

Displayed in **Table 5.2, Existing and Future Needs**, is the amount of park acreage needed to meet the demand of the current and projected populations. Based on a standard of 5.5 acres per 1,000 persons, 1.4 acres of neighborhood parks and 14.25 acres of community parks are needed. Currently, the Town has 0.5 acres, meaning there is a deficiency in neighborhood parks of one acre. The Town has sufficient acreage in community parks to meet the needs in the Year 2025. As growth continues, additional neighborhood park acreage will be needed. By the Years 2015 and 2025, the Town will need an additional one and one-half acres and two acres of neighborhood park land, respectively. Although there is sufficient acreage within the three County parks to meet the Island's long-range needs, a community park will be needed in the northern development area due to the distance from Andy Bowie Park, as shown in *Figure 5.3, Park Service Area and System Plan*.

Table 5.2, Existing and Future Needs

Classification	Standard (acres per 1,000 persons)	Existing Acreage	2005 ¹		2015 ²		2025 ³	
			Required	Surplus/ Deficient	Required	Surplus/ Deficient	Required	Surplus/ Deficient
Neighborhood Park	0.5	0.50	1.43	(0.93)	2.00	(1.50)	2.23	(1.73)
Community Park	5.0	266.00	14.25	251.50	20.05	245.50	22.28	243.72
TOTAL		266.50	15.68	250.60	22.05	244.00	24.51	241.99

Note: The acreage for Morningside Park and Gateway Park is not included as neighborhood parks.

1 – Based on a population of 2,849 (Comprehensive Resort Market Analysis, 2005)

2 – Based on a population of 4,010 (Comprehensive Resort Market Analysis, 2015)

3 – Based on a population of 4,455 (Texas Water Development Board, 2025)

In addition to the acreage of parks, their location is also an important consideration. Neighborhood parks should be within one-quarter mile for residents. Due to the linear nature of the Island, the typical one-mile service area for community parks has been linearly elongated. Therefore, the three County parks, together with neighborhood parks in the center of the Island, may offer suitable coverage for the existing development.

Legal Issues

This element of the Comprehensive Plan is very sensitive to the protection of natural resources in the community as these natural resources are the foundation of the Town's economy. While this element promotes the preservation and conservation of habitat areas, wetlands, the Bay, beaches, and dune system, it has made every effort to do so in a manner that recognizes private property rights. The majority of land on the Island is privately owned and some land owners depend on their land for income. Preservation of land provides very little economic benefit to a land owner unless some benefits are realized as a result of conservation efforts. Therefore, this plan promotes the use of strategies and actions that provide incentives to conserving valuable areas including density bonuses, transfer of development rights, purchase of development rights, tax incentives, and funding, among other possible strategies. These incentives allow a property owner to be compensated for the loss of developable land due to conservation. Where incentives are not feasible, it is recommended that land be purchased by the Town or in coordination with nonprofit organizations and through public/private partnerships.

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Wetlands

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
|  Algal Vegetation |  Mangrove Marsh |  Critical Erosion Area |
|  Beach |  Open Water |  Dune Protection Line |
|  Estuarine Marsh |  Palustrine Marsh |  Seagrass |
|  Flats (Mud, Sand) |  Submerged Vegetation |  Park and Recreation |
|  Impounded Area | |  Town Limits |

Figure 5.1 Natural Resources North

Source: General Land Office



Figure 5.1 Natural Resources South

- Wetlands**
- Algal Vegetation
 - Beach
 - Estuarine Marsh
 - Flats (Mud, Sand)
 - Mangrove Marsh
 - Open Water
 - Palustrine Marsh
 - Submerged Vegetation
 - Impounded Area
 - Critical Erosion Area
 - Dune Protection Line
 - Seagrass
 - Park and Recreation
 - Town Limits

Source: General Land Office



Figure 5.2 Priority Protection Habitat Areas North

Priority coastal habitat areas to be protected during oil or hazardous material spills on the Texas Coast.

- High
- Medium
- Low
- Critical Erosion Area
- Dune Protection Line
- Town Limits

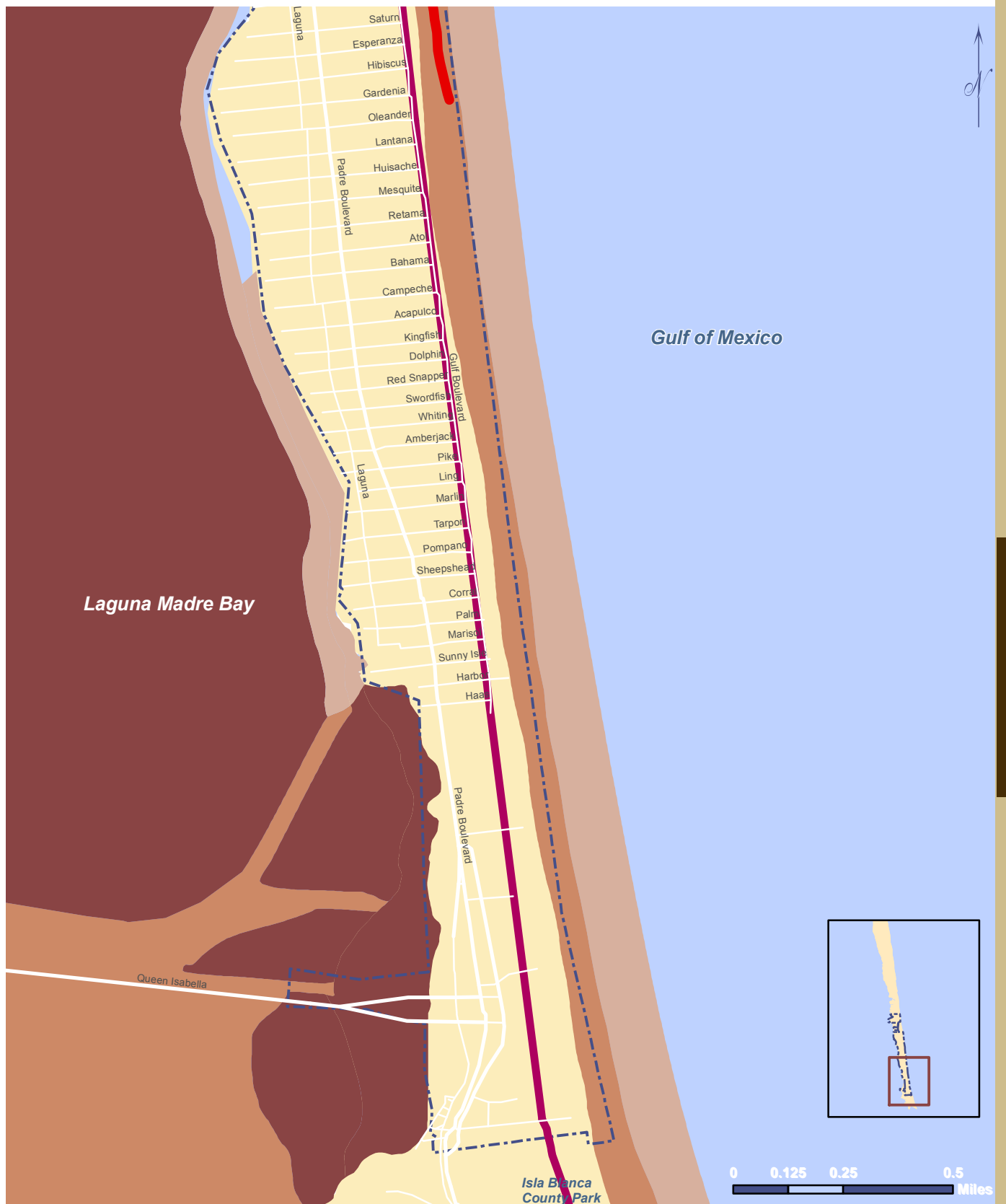


Figure 5.2 Priority Protection Habitat Areas South

Priority coastal habitat areas to be protected during oil or hazardous material spills on the Texas Coast.

- High
- Medium
- Low
- Critical Erosion Area
- Dune Protection Line
- Town Limits



Figure 5.3 Park Service Areas and System Plan Central

- Neighborhood Park Service Area
- Community Park Service Area
- Public Park
- Boat Ramps (General Land Office)
- Town Limits
- Community Park Need Area
- Neighborhood Park Need Area

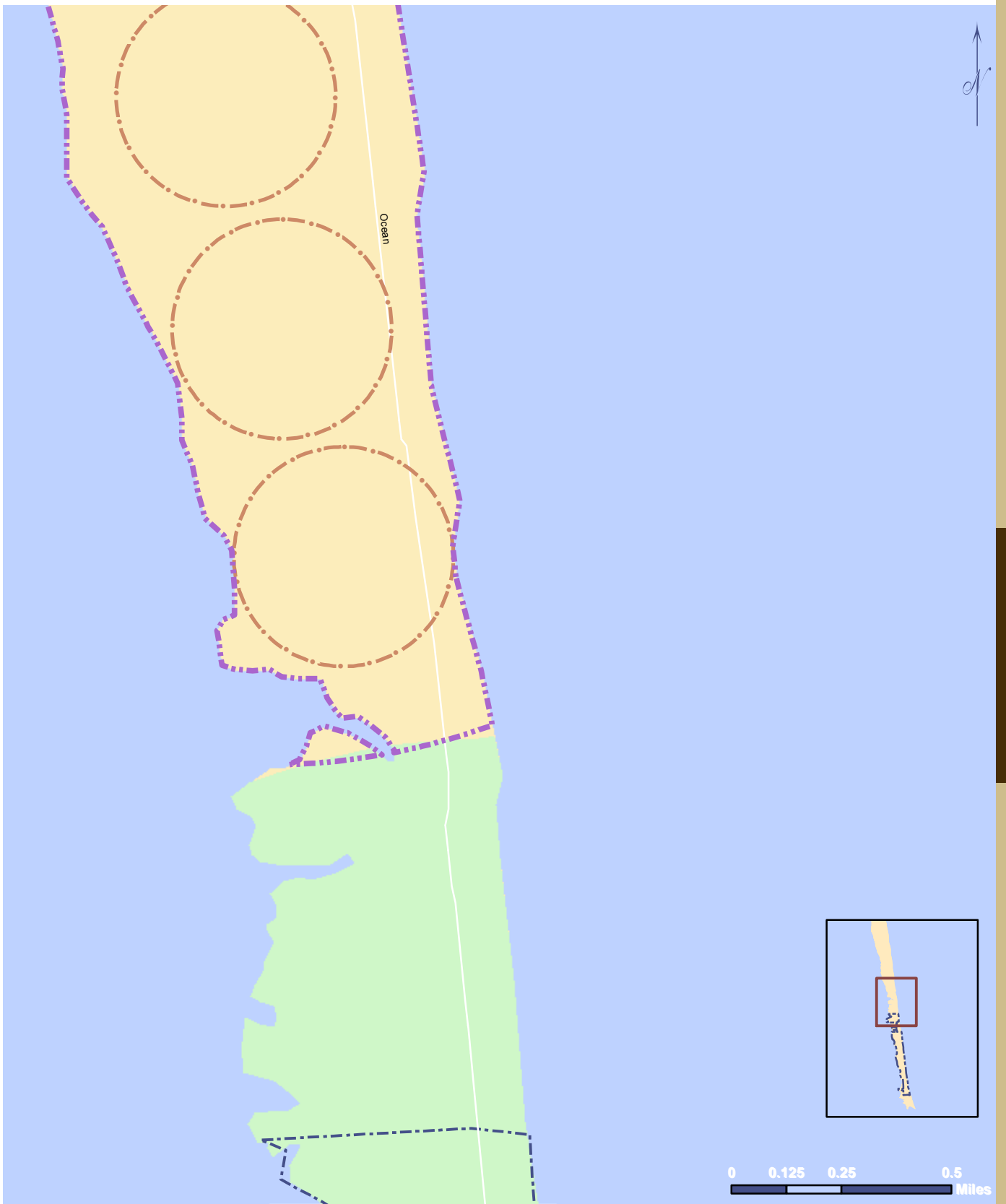


Figure 5.3 Park Service Areas North

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
|  | Neighborhood Park Service Area |  | Community Park Need Area |
|  | Community Park Service Area |  | Neighborhood Park Need Area |
|  | Public Park | | |
|  | Boat Ramps (General Land Office) | | |
|  | Town Limits | | |

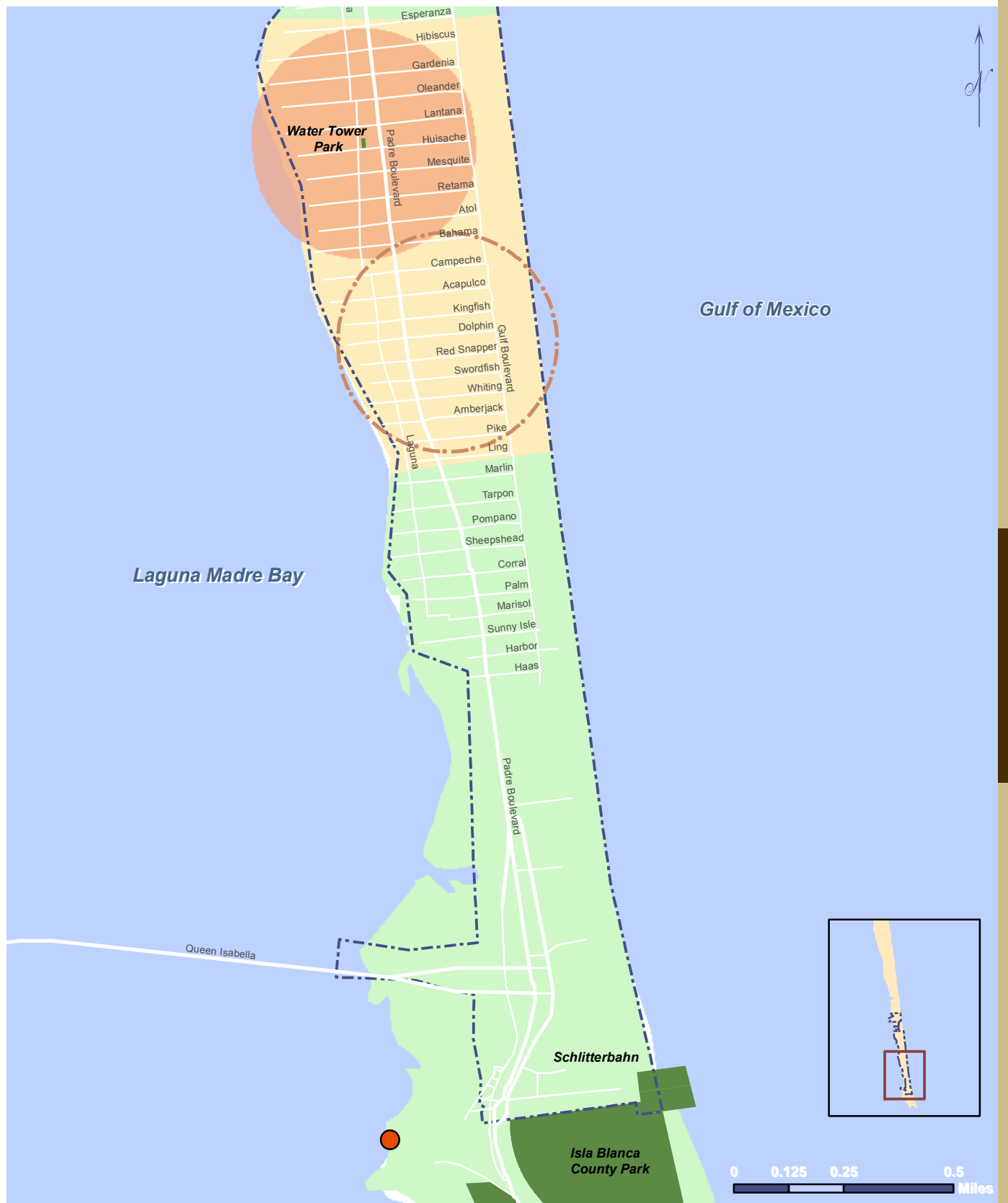


Figure 5.3 Park Service Areas and System Plan South

- Neighborhood Park Service Area
- Community Park Service Area
- Public Park
- Boat Ramps (General Land Office)
- Town Limits
- Community Park Need Area
- Neighborhood Park Need Area



Chapter 6

Growth & Infrastructure

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

The near-term efforts of the Island to manage the pattern, arrangement, and timing of future development – consistent with its economic development agenda – will determine its ability to maximize its value and secure quality, sustainable development outcomes. Growth management does not mean deferred growth. Rather, it refers to a proactive approach for guiding development to occur at a time and in a manner by which the Town can feasibly provide adequate facilities and services.

Purpose

Growth that is not managed or adequately planned for often leads to inefficient development in the undeveloped areas of the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). These areas often lack adequate street infrastructure, utilities, and other services like parks, trails, and police and fire protection. On a day-to-day basis, the Island is faced with the challenge of balancing investment decisions between the maintenance of existing infrastructure, facilities, and services. Inefficient growth exacerbates this situation, often leading to costly service and infrastructure provisions. While growth of the Island appears inevitable, its pattern, types, and location can be effectively managed through advanced planning, sound infrastructure investment policies, and adequate coordination of development with the timely provision of adequate utilities and services. Well managed and fiscally responsible growth will contribute to the economic health of the Island and, ultimately, enhance quality of life.

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate and compare the anticipated infrastructure and facility needs against future growth and provide direction in managing it in a fiscally responsible manner. In coordination with the land use task, this element identifies

recommendations and policies that direct growth in a responsible and sequential manner – first to areas that have adequate and readily available infrastructure and then to areas currently beyond the Town limits, as needed to meet the land use demands through the Year 2025.

Growth and Development Issues

The following issues are central to the ability of the Island to effectively manage its development and growth in a wise and sustainable manner.

1. **Managed Growth and Annexation** – The Town is a general law city with a resident population of less than 5,000 inhabitants.¹ The Town currently has an ETJ of one-half mile on the south end and five miles on the north. The Town is experiencing development pressures to the north. An opportunity exists to ensure new development occurs in an orderly and fiscally responsible fashion through the imposition of the subdivision regulations and, possibly, the use of annexation and zoning. While annexation will be important in controlling the quality and type of development, it must be strategically planned and undertaken in a staged and deliberate fashion, annexing only those areas necessary to accommodate or exercise authority over premature future growth. Promoting growth and annexing areas beyond what is needed to accommodate the population by the Year 2025 can result in unnecessary and costly utility extensions,² increased traffic, and a loss of Town character. A staged and sequential approach to annexation concurrent with the adequate provision of services and infrastructure will result in fiscally responsible development.
2. **Capacity to Support Future Development** – New development must be supported with utilities and infrastructure including, among others, water and wastewater, drainage, and roadways. While the Town does not have direct control over the provision of water and wastewater services, they must continue to work closely and coordinate with the Laguna Madre Water District to ensure such provision in a timely, logical, and sequential manner. Increasing capacity of the Town's infrastructure can be accomplished not only by increasing the size of plants and extending lines, but also by optimizing efficiency and the sustainable use of resources through compact development and promotion of infill development, adaptive reuse of under-utilized structures, and redevelopment.

¹ According to the 2000 U.S. Census

² A service plan is required for provision of "full municipal services" within two and one-half years after annexation, comparable to the existing level of service available in similar areas in the municipality.

3. **Provision of Adequate and Feasible Public Services** – As growth continues, the organization and administration of the police and fire departments must commensurately change to accommodate increased calls and demands for expanded service. This change will warrant additional space, equipment, and facility needs. In addition to public safety services, the Town administration will also require additional staff for which their space needs will be met by the new municipal complex.
4. **Effective Stormwater Management** – Drainage on public and private property is a continuing issue on the Island. Current drainage problems occur along sections of roadways, as well as between individual lots. Problems can be attributed to the flat topography, sandy soils, the non-curbed street sections, and insufficiently sloped road profiles, as well as the frequency or nonexistence of storm inlets. There are significant areas that experience heavy ponding and flooding during significant storm events. Storm drainage on east-west cross streets must be addressed by re-grading the ditches and swales during regular maintenance and improving site development standards. As development occurs, the impervious surface coverage will increase. The Town should require or provide incentives by way of density bonuses to cluster development and preserve open space.

A Well-Managed, Sequential Approach to Growth

This plan emphasizes a management plan that promotes infill development and the sequential timing and phasing of annexation and development. This does not mean growth will be limited, but rather encouraged in a managed and fiscally responsible fashion that seeks to promote economic development initiatives, while preserving the natural assets and character of the Island, increasing efficiency, and reducing costs of providing services and facilities.

Benefits of managed growth include:

Adequate and efficient provision of services

As growth continues to occur, municipal services and facilities will need to be extended to emerging growth areas. This will result in the need for additional staff, equipment, and facilities including police substations and fire stations. Advance planning and the sequential timing of annexation will allow the Town to adequately prepare to serve these areas.

Fiscally responsible provision of utilities

Annexation and growth plans should be highly coordinated with the Laguna Madre District's ability to provide adequate water and wastewater services. The further development occurs away from existing services, the more costly and inefficient utility extensions and provision of services will be. While developers currently pay for utility extensions, maintenance of the system is the responsibility of the district. A number of improvements will have to be made to meet the projected growth (see Water and Wastewater section that follows).

Efficient and effective thoroughfare system

Growth and sprawl leads to an increase in traffic congestion and the resulting need for transportation improvements. Encouraging a logical and sequential pattern of growth promotes a more compact form of development and helps minimize constraints placed on the transportation system.

Preservation of natural assets and Town character

Preservation of natural assets is instrumental in the continued economic growth and vitality of the Island. Development patterns that focus on infill and redevelopment and encourage clustering and compact development will contribute to maintaining these highly valued natural areas. It must be recognized, though, that there must be corresponding density increases to avoid severe economic impacts, which could stunt the Island's economic development.

GOALS

Managed Growth

- 6.A. Fiscally responsible and well-managed growth coordinated with the provision of adequate public facilities and services
- 6.B. Staged annexation strategy and plan to accommodate future growth and development over the next 20 years

Recommended Actions

- 6.1. In coordination with the land use plan and zoning map determine the requisite future growth area that is appropriate and adequate to accommodate development to the Years 2015, 2020, and 2025. This area is where capital improvements and services should be directed.
- 6.2. Develop an annexation plan to strategically annex land in

Table 6.1, Land Capacity and Annexation Needs

Use Type	Total demand, 2007-2025 (in acres) ¹	Existing Vacant Land	Year 2025 Deficiency	Current Capacity (in years)
Single Family	382.5	79.3	303.2	3.1
Multi-Family	162.3	143.8	18.5	13.3
Recreational Vehicle	34.8	24.3	10.5	10.5
Hotel/Lodging	41.7	24.6	17.1	8.8
Office/Retail	99.7	106.7	-7	16.1
Marina	23.2	14.5	8.7	9.4
Total	744.2	393.2	351	7.9

¹ Comprehensive Resort Market Analysis, 2005

Source: Kendig Keast Collaborative

advance of development.³ Based on the projected acreage demands for individual land use types⁴ and the projected future population, **Table 6.1, Land Capacity and Annexation Needs**, displays the total acreage

demands by land use type, the currently available acreage, the resulting deficiency of vacant land inside the Town limits, and the current land capacity by land use type (in years).

- 6.3. Periodically update *Table 6.1* and use it in decision making as to whether annexation is necessary and warranted. Generally, direct new development to occur on infill parcels and areas immediately adjacent to the Town limits before significant territory is annexed. This will allow maximum efficiency of existing infrastructure. Exceptions must comply with the annexation policies and criteria provided later in this chapter.
- 6.4. Coordinate the long-term capital improvement plan with the annexation plan to ensure the availability and capacity of “full

³ Since there are fewer than 100 tracts of land within the future growth area, an annexation service plan is not required (Sec. 43.052, Texas Local Government Code).

⁴ Comprehensive Resort Market Analysis Study, 2005

municipal services” within two and one-half years from the date of annexation. This must be closely coordinated with the Laguna Madre Water District’s long-term plan for provision of water and wastewater service.

- 6.5. Assess the feasibility of providing “full municipal services”⁵ and weigh them against the anticipated revenues of each annexation proposal.

Capacity to Support Future Development

- 6.C. A sensible development pattern that minimizes impacts and costs to public facilities and infrastructure.
- 6.D. Promotion of adaptive reuse, infill development, and intensification in certain areas.
- 6.E. Coordination with the Laguna Madre Water District to ensure adequate water and wastewater facilities.
- 6.F. Promotion of water conservation measures and incentives.

GOALS

Recommended Actions

- 6.6. Utilize the Future Land Use Plan to guide decisions about annexation and zone change requests, consistent with the staging of adequate public facilities and services.
- 6.7. Periodically update the study to quantify the demands and needed acreage of different uses. Subsequently, amend the land use plan and zoning ordinance accordingly. In this way, the Island can optimize the use of its land without infringing on the rights of adjacent properties or compromising Town character.
- 6.8. Critique the development ordinances and procedures to identify and overcome constraints to development or redevelopment within the developed area, including those that cause difficulty for building on infill sites. However, care must be taken to ensure that the existing character is maintained and there is no undue burden or impact on adjacent properties.
- 6.9. Meet quarterly with the Laguna Madre Water District to coordinate their capacity improvements and utility service provision with the growth plan of the Island. The infrastructure program must encourage a logical sequencing of contiguous development.

“The District is an area of explosive growth potential, particularly north of South Padre Island and west of Laguna Vista. Spring and summer tourism can result in extended periods of peak water usage greatly in excess of the usage by the permanent resident population. As a result of existing needs, unanticipated and unprecedented rate of growth, the District has historically experienced a situation of trying to keep up with needs and demands of the system. The planning and design of water facilities in tourist areas differ from the standards or average design criteria for relatively permanent population communities. Water systems must be designed to accommodate peak population conditions during any day of a month.”

Source: 2004 Comprehensive Plan for Water and Wastewater Facilities Laguna Madre Water District

⁵ “Full municipal services” include police and fire protection; emergency medical services; solid waste collection; and operation and maintenance of streets and street lights, parks, and any other publicly-owned facility, building, or service. Section 43.056(b), Texas Local Government Code

- 6.10. Coordinate with the Laguna Madre Water District to establish a water conservation program including conservation rate structures, water accounting (large volume user audits) and loss control, landscape efficiency, water use restrictions, rebates and incentives, reuse and recycling, and public education.
- 6.11. Amend the zoning ordinance⁶ to encourage xeriscaping for the purpose of water conservation.
- 6.12. Amend the landscaping regulations to encourage the use of bio swales rather than raised parking islands.
- 6.13. Explore the feasibility and options for making greater use of treated effluent for irrigation purposes (parks, medians, etc).
- 6.14. Set aggressive, yet reasonable, targets for reductions of household consumption of potable water based on historical use trends, availability and ease of installation of low-cost conservation technologies, and expansion of greywater systems for irrigation.
- 6.15. Encourage residents to replace conventional fixtures in pre-1992 housing units with low-flow fixtures. Consider utility bill inserts with coupons for low-cost, low-flow shower fixtures, which can be paid by the water utility or through a partnership with local home improvement stores.

Provision of Adequate and Feasible Public Services

GOALS

- 6.G. Provision of adequate public services including fire and police protection
- 6.H. On going support for the needs of the Police and Fire Departments to ensure adequate protection of the population

Recommended Actions

- 6.16. Prepare annual estimates of the daily population and review and adjust police and fire staffing needs as necessary and warranted.
- 6.17. Identify and acquire a site for a police substation to the south, and eventually north, to accommodate annexation.
- 6.18. Identify and acquire sites for new fire stations to the north and south, concurrent with future development.
- 6.19. Plan and budget for additional fire and police staffing and the requisite vehicles, equipment, and facilities.
- 6.20. Establish an asset management system for all Town vehicles and equipment, with regular service scheduling and a standardized replacement and procurement program.

⁶ Sec. 20-21, Required Landscaping, Town Code of Ordinances

Drainage

- 6.I. Employ best management practices
- 6.J. Improve stormwater management systems

Recommended Actions

- 6.21. Evaluate and amend as needed the requirements for on-site detention/retention.
- 6.22. Prepare a stormwater management plan to quantify existing and projected demands, capacity deficiencies, and needed capital improvements.
- 6.23. Amend the zoning ordinance to better control building, impervious cover, and the ratio of open space (residential) and landscape surface (nonresidential). Incorporate offsetting incentives for development clustering and increased floor area ratios.
- 6.24. Prepare a drainage master plan to prioritize improvements, particularly for Gulf and Laguna Boulevards and each of the east-west streets.
- 6.25. Amend the development ordinances to:
 - a. Require the use of best management practices in collecting, storing, and conveying stormwater.
 - b. Accomplish improved water quality. Options include clustering or contribution to a community stormwater system (known as avoidance); water gardens, rain barrels, and swales (minimization); or retention/detention (mitigation).

Water and Wastewater

The Laguna Madre Water District provides water and wastewater service to the Island and Port Isabel, the Village of Laguna Vista, and the unincorporated area of Laguna Heights.

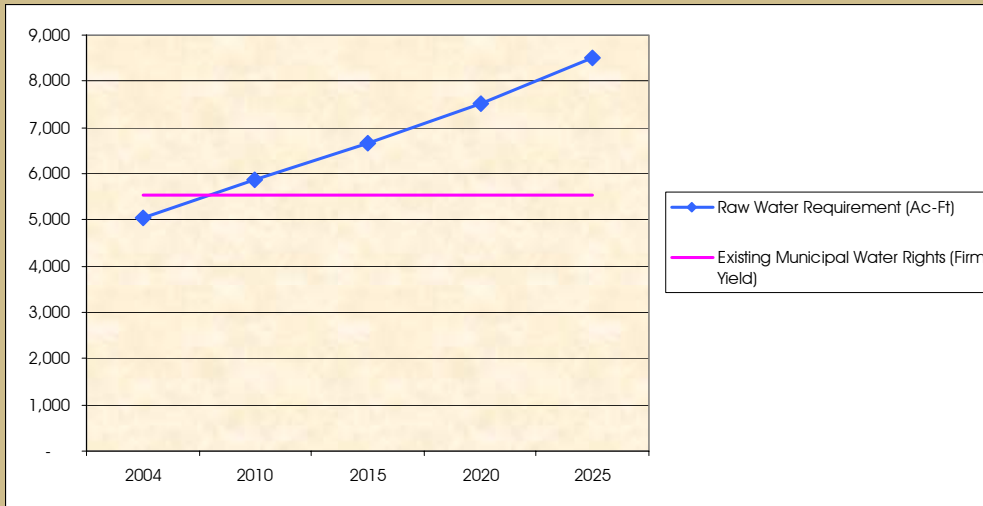
Water

The District maintains its own water supply system from the Rio Grande River to two water treatment plants (WTPs) located in Port Isabel (WTP#1) and Laguna Vista (WTP#2). WTP#2 supplies the Island and Laguna Vista. The current total capacity of both plants is 9.1 million gallons per day (MGD); however, WTP#1 is planned for closure, with a planned upgrade of WTP#2 from five to ten MGD.

Based on a 2.5 percent growth rate,⁷ to accommodate present and future growth, the district will have to complete several water supply,

⁷ Comprehensive Plan for Water and Wastewater Facilities, Laguna Madre Water District, 2004

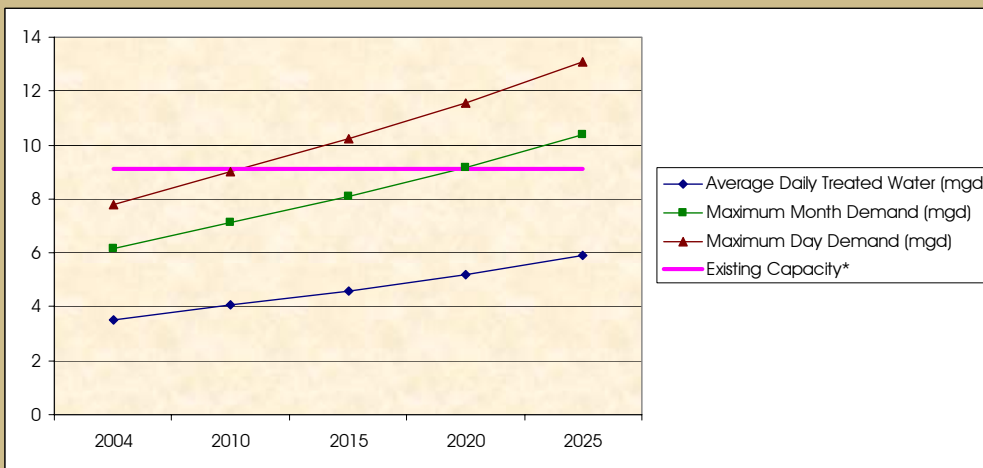
Table 6.2, Raw Water Requirements



Source: Table 6.1, Recommended Water Rights, Comprehensive Plan for Water and Wastewater Facilities, Laguna Madre Water District, 2004

NOTE: Over the next 20 years, the district will have to purchase an additional 3,500 acre feet of water rights.

Table 6.3, Water Treatment Plan Capacity



Source: Table 4.3, Summary of Projected Water Use, Comprehensive Plan for Water and Wastewater Facilities, Laguna Madre Water District, 2004

NOTE: Currently, the water plants are at 85 percent treatment capacity. In five years, they will be at 90 percent capacity based on 10 MGD. The District will need additional water treatment capacity of at least 2.0 MGD to satisfy short- and long-term needs.

treatment, and distribution projects including purchasing additional water rights and providing for additional potable water capacity.

The plan considered four options to obtain additional capacity:

Implement seawater desalination.

1. Purchase water from the Southmost Regional Water Authority.
2. Implement brackish groundwater desalination.
3. A 7.0 MGD expansion of Surface Water Plant No. 2 (instead of 5.0 MGD expansion).

Currently, the district is undergoing a pilot study for a 1 MGD seawater desalination plant on the north part of the Island. The study will determine its feasibility. Based on the seawater desalination option, below are the water needs and priorities:

Immediate Needs (2005-2007):

1. Abandon Water Plant No. 1.
2. Water Plant No. 2 Expansion of 5.0 MGD.
3. Conversion of existing 16" raw water line to potable transmission line.
4. Rehabilitation of Port Isabel Elevated Storage Tank.

5. Connection of Laguna Heights Elevated Storage Tank to Mainland.
6. Begin Seawater Desalination evaluation process to include: well field or sea water intake and discharge locations, test well drilling, right of way permits, discharge permit, preliminary design.

Short-Term Needs (2007-2010)

1. Seawater Desalination Phase 1 – 1.0 MGD.
2. 0.3 MG elevated storage tank west of Laguna Vista.
3. 0.3 MG elevated storage tank north of South Padre Island.
4. 16" waterline interconnection at Old Causeway in South Padre Island.

Long-Term Needs (2010-2025)

1. Seawater desalination phase 2 – 1.0 MGD.
2. Additional water treatment capacity needed until the Year 2025.

Wastewater

The district has four wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs), including two on the Island (3.35 MGD). The two plants include Isla Blanca (2.6 MGD), which treats the wastewater in the southern part of town, and Andy Bowie (0.75 MGD) for the northern area. Both plants discharge their treated effluent into the Laguna Madre.

The growth potential is in the area of the Andy Bowie plant, which will require expansion to accommodate future growth. The current potential for a 30-day flow exceeds the plant's current treatment capacity. Short-term needs include expansion of the plant to 1.5 MGD, which would satisfy the needs to the Year 2020. The Isla Blanca plant has sufficient capacity to treat the wastewater generated within its sewershed boundaries at full development. Improvements are needed to the collection system in both areas.

Annexation

As a general policy statement, annexation should occur prior to or concurrent with development to properly plan for and coordinate the extension of adequate public facilities and services. The following policies should be considered in guiding the Town's decisions for annexation:

Policies

1. Annexation should occur in compliance with the policies of this plan.
2. The long-term pattern of growth should be managed in a fiscally responsible manner, while balancing market demands and economic development objectives.
3. Future growth should be coordinated with infrastructure and public service investments such that the pattern and timing of development occurs in a fiscally responsible manner.
4. Criteria should be established to consider the suitability and fiscal benefits of annexation.
5. When qualified for Home Rule, an annexation plan and associated service planning should be developed and maintained to allow methodical expansion of the Town limits and extension of facilities and public services (in coordination with the Laguna Madre Water District), where determined feasible and beneficial.
6. To maximize the efficiency of the existing infrastructure, growth should first be directed toward vacant lots and under-utilized lands before the growth area is considered for annexation.
7. Capital facilities and public services should be committed in accordance with the Town's growth plan.
8. Fiscal impact analyses should be used to assess the projected costs of providing public services and weigh them against the anticipated revenues of each annexation and development proposal. The intangible benefits of annexation, such as the ability to impose the Town's zoning authority, should also be closely evaluated.
9. Where short-term annexation is not feasible, the Town should consider negotiated agreements in lieu of annexation to provide for interim service arrangements, cost-sharing or fee mechanisms, and adherence to the Town's development standards.

As a General Law municipality, the ability of the Town to expand its ETJ or corporate limits is limited to a request by property owners.

Upon surpassing a population of 5,000 inhabitants, the City may adopt a Home Rule Charter which grants additional authority to annex area adjacent to the municipal limits without the limitations of a General Law municipality.

Home Rule cities, in any given year, may annex acreage equal to ten percent of their current incorporated area. If the city does not annex any territory, the acreage allowance may be carried forward and combined with the ten percent allotment for the next year. This cumulative acreage amount is capped at 30 percent of the city's existing geographic area.

Criteria

1. The subject parcel is within the Town limits or the designated growth area.
2. The land requested for annexation abuts the existing water and wastewater service area and may be immediately provided by the Laguna Madre Water District.
3. The land may be adequately served by municipal police, fire, emergency medical services, and maintenance of roads, street lights, parks, and any publicly-owned facility, building, or service in accordance with the "full municipal services" provisions of State law.

4. All public improvements necessary to serve the annexed area will be constructed and financed in accordance with Town standards and policies.
5. As determined by the Town, the actual financial impact for providing police, fire, road maintenance, and other public improvements is favorable to the tax base and sufficiently offsets the necessary costs.

Disaster Recovery

In addition to implementing the Town's Emergency Management Plan, provisions need to be made to assist property owners to recover from catastrophic events in as timely a manner as possible. In the event of a natural or man-made disaster that causes significant damage to private and/or public property, allowances should be made to assist property owners and the Town with rapid recovery from the damage caused by this type of event. Disasters which should be included in this category include damage from hurricanes, high winds, high waves, earthquakes, off-shore oil or gas spills, etc.

Ordinances should be put into place to address disaster recovery.

- 6.26. Property owners should have the ability to put up temporary structures to live in or for local businesses to continue operations while cleaning up the damage and rebuilding formerly existing structures.
- 6.27. They should be allowed to temporarily put unscreened dumpsters on the property.
- 6.28. Consideration should be given to allowing the placement of these temporary structures within the Town's right of way, and existing parking lots, even if this causes a temporary reduction in parking that does not meet the parking requirements that are existence under normal circumstances.
- 6.29. Whenever possible, effected businesses should be allowed to remain open, utilizing temporary structures, and temporary access to utilities through the use of generators, port-a-potties, and bottled water.

Contracts and Memorandums of Understanding should be established before a disaster happens.

- 6.30. Contracts should be developed with private trash and brush removal vendors prior to the occurrence of a disastrous event to ensure that these services are significantly increased to respond to increased need for removal of debris.
- 6.31. Contracts should be put in place with hopper dredge companies, and trucking companies that can handle sand

hauling so that they can act quickly in response to any incident involving a large loss of sand on our beach.

- 6.32. As new sand placement techniques are developed, contracts with companies offering promising practices in sand restoration should be developed with these companies.
- 6.33. Memorandums of Understanding should be established with the federal government, the State of Texas, Cameron County, and the Brownsville Port Authority to allow for quick response following a disaster.

Systems should be put into place to meet the needs of residents, business owners, and tourists to provide easy access to needed information following a disaster.

- 6.34. The Town's emergency website (<http://www.spiemergency.com>) is currently fairly comprehensive with links to other websites and pertinent phone numbers. The site also has downloadable content such as evacuation routes, the FEMA homeowner's plan, pet plan, storm tracking, and special assistance information.
- 6.35. The frequently asked questions on the Town website should add information regarding the addresses for emergency shelters as this information becomes available.
- 6.36. Updates and links to TXDOT's recovery plan, the Laguna Madre Water District's recovery plan, and utility company's recovery plans should be included.
- 6.37. Pet rescue information should be included on the town website.
- 6.38. An information sheet containing pertinent information should be available at town hall.
- 6.39. Once businesses and the beach re-opens, an ad campaign should be developed to inform the public that the entities are open.
- 6.40. Different locations for obtaining needed information should be established for residents, tourists, and business owners.



Chapter 7

Economic Development

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

The Town's economy is its location. The island's location produces two economic activities, real estate and tourism. Both are functions of location – sub-tropical South Padre Island. The island's economic strength is also its weakness. It is a single industry town ("location"), in a place prone to hurricanes, whose commerce is seasonal.

The Town's Economic Development Policy has three primary goals:

- 1 - Develop a year-round economy.
- 2 - Support sound fiscal policy by the Town.
- 3 - Support an environment friendly to residents and businesses.

Suggestions, ideas and policies that will help achieve these goals are reviewed below.

Reaching a consensus on a common understanding of economic development is the first necessary step in developing attainable goals and strategies. Effective economic development planning occurs within the context of collaboration and partnership. Additionally, economic development policy for the Town of South Padre Island should be judged by how well the community can create a business environment that will elicit a positive response from private investors. The most common method for measuring the effectiveness of economic development is by counting new jobs. South Padre Island, however, presents a unique challenge for traditional economic development standards. As a result, a more inclusive set of metrics should be used to gauge the community's economic development progress, such as business startups, retail sales, talent attraction, and marketing/branding image.

Purpose & Methodology

This chapter is the result of the combined work of an economic development study done in 2005 by TIP Strategies ('TIPS') (Austin, TX) for the town's Economic Development Corporation, and the committee. The original TIPS study is in the Appendix.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the Town of South Padre Island and area economic development partners with guidance for pursuing opportunities to achieve long-term growth and economic vitality. A multitude of issues are raised in this plan. Some, however, that have an indirect impact on economic development in South Padre Island -but lie beyond the direct responsibility of the Town-are raised in this plan. This chapter makes recommendations regarding a myriad of issues, because failure to address them will ultimately weaken the Towns' effectiveness and overall capacity to support and promote economic development.

This economic development chapter is divided into the following two sections:

1. Discussion of trends affecting economic development opportunities in South Padre Island.
2. Recommended goals for leveraging its key economic development assets.

A. Trends Affecting Economic Development

Economic and Demographic Assessment

To better understand the opportunities available in South Padre Island, the consulting team conducted an economic and demographic assessment of the community and the surrounding area. The primary goal for the following economic and demographic assessment is to arrive at a common understanding of the most significant trends affecting South Padre Island. This analysis of data from secondary sources is presented in the context of the regional economy as a means for understanding South Padre Island's economic base and its relative position within the Rio Grande Valley. It also serves as means for uncovering potential opportunities to enhance the economic vitality of South Padre Island.



The consulting team relied on the most current and accurate data sources (proprietary and public) covering those factors that most

clearly reflected South Padre Island's recent economic performance. This analysis included the following:

1. A review of existing economic and demographic data, including population growth, employment growth and distribution, payroll, retail sales, and home ownership,
2. Tours of South Padre Island sites to better understand its economic development product from a real estate standpoint,
3. Focus group meetings and workshops with area residents and business leaders to establish priorities for appropriate goals and objectives.

Key Findings

The local economy is almost entirely dependent on tourism. The vast majority of jobs on the island are in Accommodations, Food Services, and Retail Trade. At the same time, the island has a higher than average number of jobs associated with real estate. Employment growth on the island, however, appears to have remained limited during the last ten years.

The current boom in condominium construction on the island would seem to contradict estimates that show a slowly growing population. The most current reliable housing data from the 2000 Census, however, indicate that three-quarters of all units on the island were vacant. In other words, much of the community's housing units are primarily used as seasonal residences. A very large share of the condo units under construction are without a doubt intended for seasonal use by retirees and investors from northern Mexico. This interpretation of the data was reinforced through interviews with local stakeholders who were familiar with the local real estate market. While South Padre Island's permanent population is growing at a slower pace, nearby Port Isabel and Laguna Vista have seen their respective populations increase much more rapidly. These trends would indicate that South Padre Island's high prices are forcing potential and current residents to live on the mainland, making it part of a larger urbanized area at the lower end of the Laguna Madre. For example, the growth in retail sales on the Island has begun to lag behind those in Port Isabel, which appears to be emerging as the retail trade center for the area through the recent location of a Wal-Mart Supercenter and other retailers and restaurants. The Rio Grande Valley is emerging as a major metropolitan area. According to Census Bureau estimates, the population of the two-county area (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties) topped 1 million residents for the first time in 2005. It is no secret that the Valley is growing rapidly. But the nature of the region's recent growth-and the resulting changes in its future character-may be understood by only a few. For example, the two counties accounted for 25 percent of the state's growth in its baby boomer population from 2000 to 2005. This would indicate that the Valley's economy is

providing sufficient job opportunities to attract an age cohort that is in its prime earnings period. Moreover, occupational employment projections indicate that nearly 40 percent of new jobs in the Valley are expected to be in high-paying managerial, technical, and professional fields.

Implications

Together, these trends imply that both South Padre Island and the Rio Grande Valley have reached a strategically significant juncture in their development. While the community is located on an island geographically, TIP Strategies believes that South Padre Island's long-term economic development potential will be limited without the recognition that the community is part of a larger region. In other words, these data imply that the resources for many of South Padre Island's greatest opportunities - from an economic development perspective- can most easily be found in the Valley. Skyrocketing real estate prices have rendered the community unaffordable to the vast majority of persons working on the island, including many working professionals. As a result, South Padre Island is no longer an isolated and affluent enclave in a poor region. Instead, it is inextricably linked through commuting ties and spending patterns with its neighbors across the bridge. An understanding that South Padre Island is only one part of the greater Laguna Madre area should lead to greater cooperation with Port Isabel and Laguna Vista.

At the same time, the emergence of the Rio Grande Valley as a major metropolitan region will hold strong influence over South Padre Island's long-term economic opportunities. For example, the influx of active adults working in higher paying professional careers to the Valley indicates that some of the island's greatest opportunities for increased visitor spending may lie closer to home. Developing South Padre Island as a unique destination-one that can compete with the growing number of retail, dining, entertainment, and recreation opportunities throughout the remainder of the Valley are critical to enhancing South Padre Island's year-round economy.

Population Trends

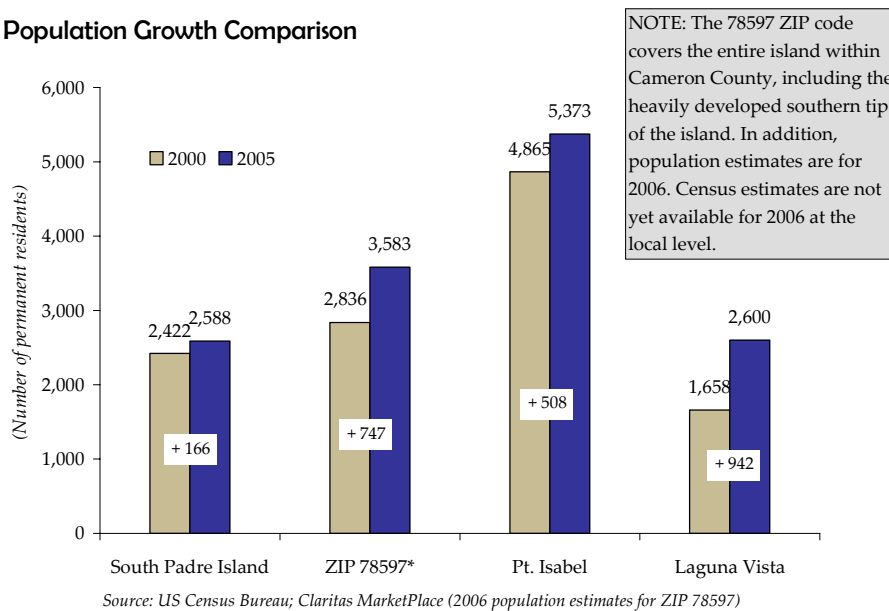
1. The number of persons claiming South Padre Island as their permanent place of residence increased only six percent from 2000 to 2005 with the addition of 166 new residents.
2. At the same time, neighboring communities such as Pt. Isabel and Laguna Vista experienced greater population expansions. During that period, Pt. Isabel's population increased ten percent with the addition of over 500 new residents. Laguna Vista's population increased at an even more rapid 57 percent pace



with the addition of 942 persons.

3. The combined population of these three communities increased 18 percent through the net increase of almost 1,600 persons. By 2005, it is estimated that 10,561 persons lived on the south end of the Laguna Madre.
4. The population of the Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties) has also increased at rapid pace, growing from approximately 900,000 to 1,050,000 in five years. The region's rate of growth was significantly higher than the state as a whole.

Population Growth Comparison



Area Population, 2000 & 2005

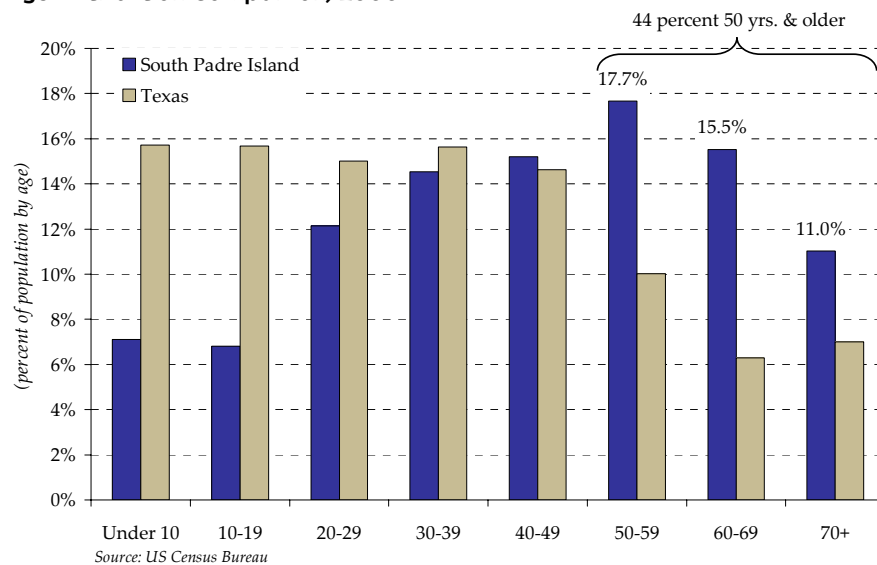
Geography	2000 Census	2005 Estimate	'00-'05 % chg.	'00-'05 # chg.	2006 Estimate	'00-'06 % chg.	'00-'06 # chg.
ZIP Code 78597	2,836	-	-	-	3,583	26.3%	747
South Padre Island	2,422	2,588	6.9%	166	NA	-	-
Port Isabel	4,865	5,373	10.4%	508	NA	-	-
Laguna Vista	1,658	2,600	56.8%	942	NA	-	-
Lower Laguna Madre Area	8,945	10,561	18.1%	1,616	NA	-	-
Cameron County	335,227	378,311	12.9%	43,084	NA	-	-
Hidalgo County	569,463	678,275	19.1%	108,812	NA	-	-
Rio Grande Valley	904,690	1,056,586	16.8%	151,896	NA	-	-
Texas	20,851,820	22,928,508	10.0%	2,076,688	23,507,783	12.7%	2,655,963

Source: US Census Bureau; Claritas MarketPlace (2006 population estimates for ZIP 78597)

Age Distribution

1. Forty-four percent of South Padre Island’s “permanent” residents in 2000 were 50 years of age or older, compared to just 23 percent statewide.
2. Not only does the island have a much larger population share that is 65 years or older (traditional retirement age), but also a higher share of residents in their fifties. For example, 18 percent of South Padre Island residents were 50-59 years of age, compared to 10 percent statewide. This may indicate that the island has also become a destination for baby boomers that have either retired early or have chosen to pursue opportunities on the island.

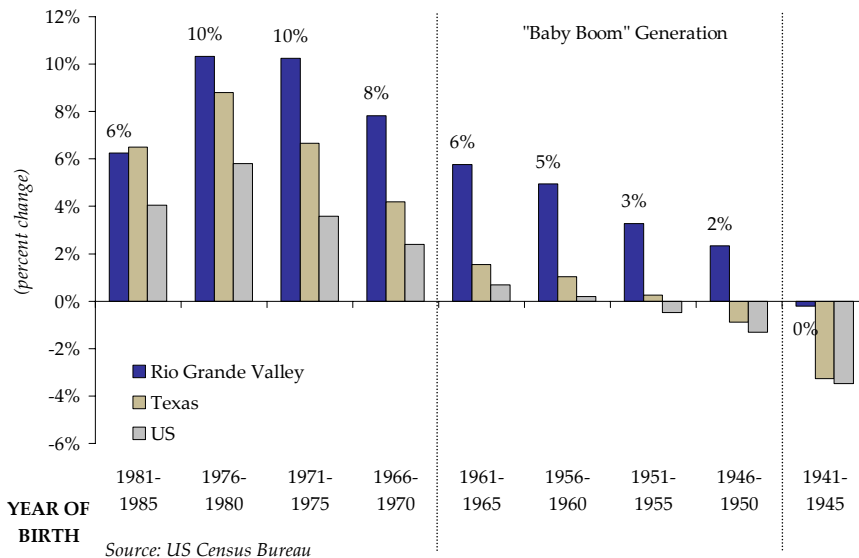
Age Distribution Comparison, 2000



Population Change by Generation

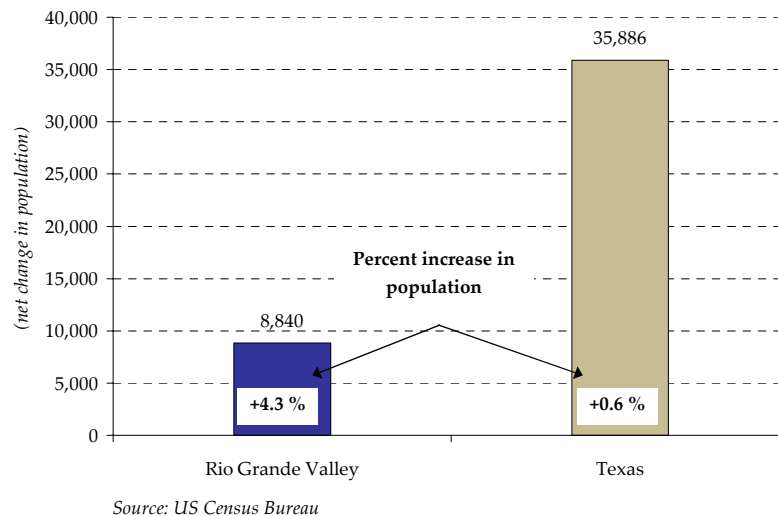
1. An analysis of population change by age cohort reveals the Rio Grande Valley (here defined by Cameron and Hidalgo Counties) has become a destination for working adults. Each cohort of traditional working age (20-64 years) increased from 2000 to 2005.
2. The net change in the number of Baby Boomers living in the Rio Grande Valley was just over 8,800 from 2000 to 2005, compared to approximately 35,900 statewide. In other words, the Valley accounted for 25 percent of the state's growth from Baby Boomer relocating to Texas.
3. By contrast, the region only accounted for six percent of the state's population growth from persons born from 1965 to 1985.

Population Change by Age Cohort, 2000-2005



NOTE: The components of population change are typically characterized by births, deaths, and migration. The chart below excludes persons under 20 years of age. An increase in population for these cohorts can, therefore, only be a result of migration to the area.

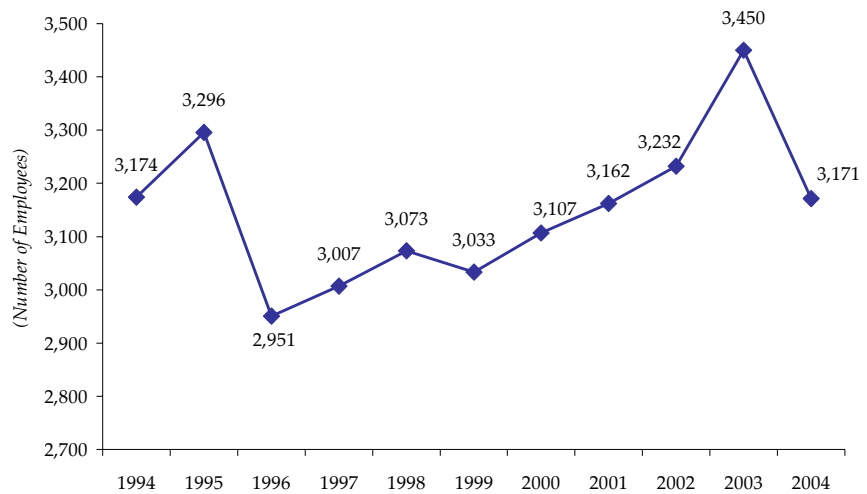
Increase in Baby Boomers, 2000-2005



Employment Trends

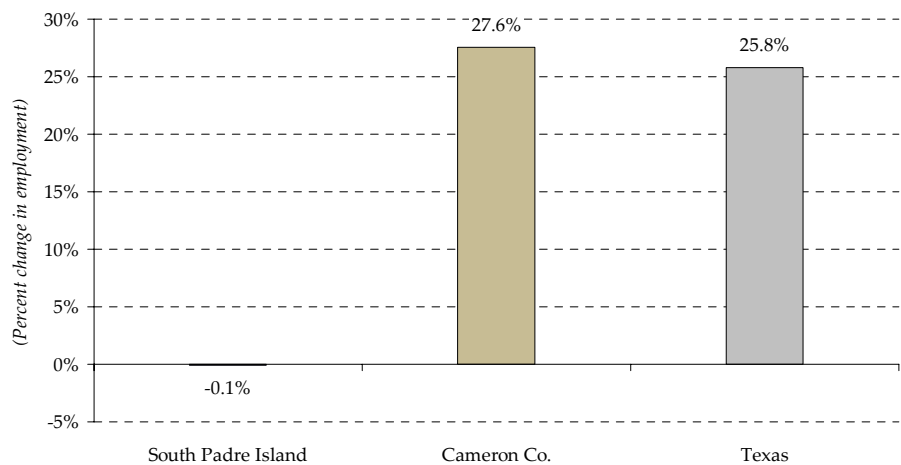
1. ZIP code level employment data are collected only once per year in mid-March due to the lack of seasonal trends during that time of year in a typical community. Unfortunately, mid-March in South Padre Island may not be indicative of employment patterns for the remainder of the year due to the timing of Spring Break.
2. Available data indicate two large year-over-year employment decreases: 1995-1996 and 2003-2004. South Padre Island enjoyed steady job growth between those two periods.
3. From 1994 to 2004, the number of private sector jobs located in ZIP code 78597 (South Padre Island) remained virtually unchanged. During the same period, the number of private sector jobs increased 27.6 percent throughout all of Cameron County and 25.8 percent statewide.

South Padre Island Private Sector Employment
(mid-March in ZIP 78597)



Source: US Census Bureau (ZIP Code Business Patterns)

Private Sector Job Growth Comparison, 1994-2004

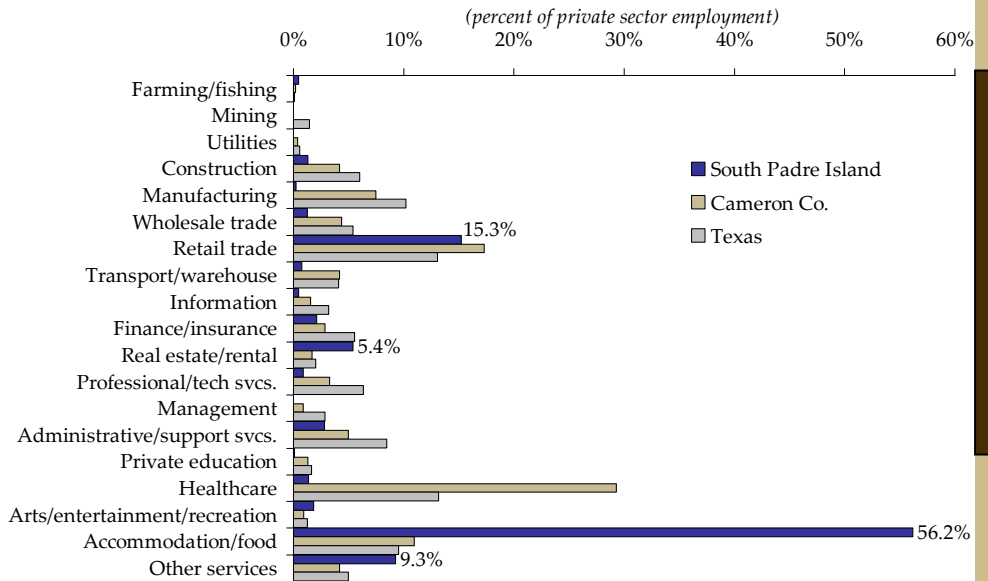


Source: US Census Bureau (Business Patterns)

Employment Distribution

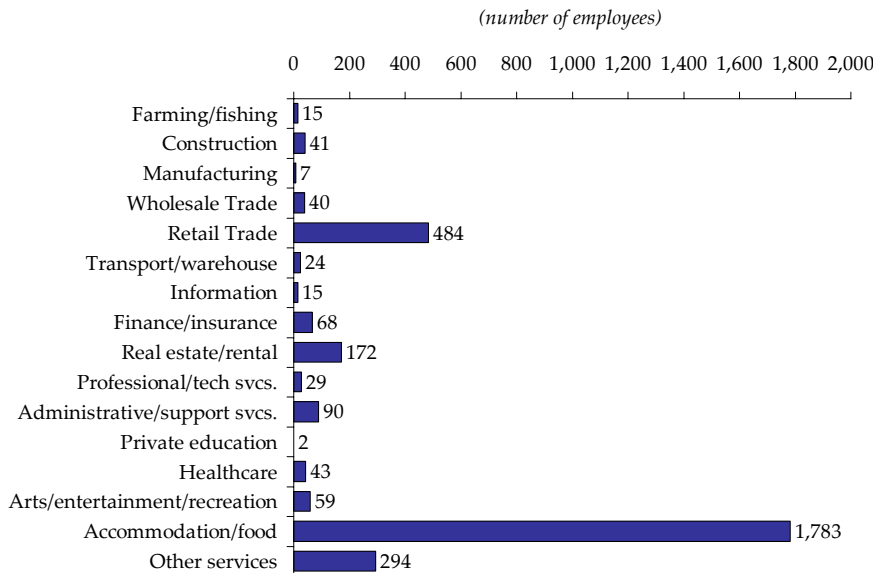
1. The distribution of the number of jobs by employment sector reveals that the local economy is very dependent on tourism, especially during mid-March. For example, 56 percent of all private sector jobs on the island were recorded in the Accommodations and Food Services (hotels and restaurants) sector. An additional 15 percent of jobs were in Retail Trade.
2. Given South Padre Island's status as a tourism destination, the low share of workers employed in Arts/Entertainment/Recreation is surprising.
3. Slightly more than 5.4 percent of jobs located on the island were in the Real Estate sector, which is more than twice the percentage in Cameron County or statewide. This indicates the strong role that real estate development and sales play in the local economy.

Employment Distribution, 2004



Source: US Census Bureau (Business Patterns)

South Padre Island Employment by Sector, 2004

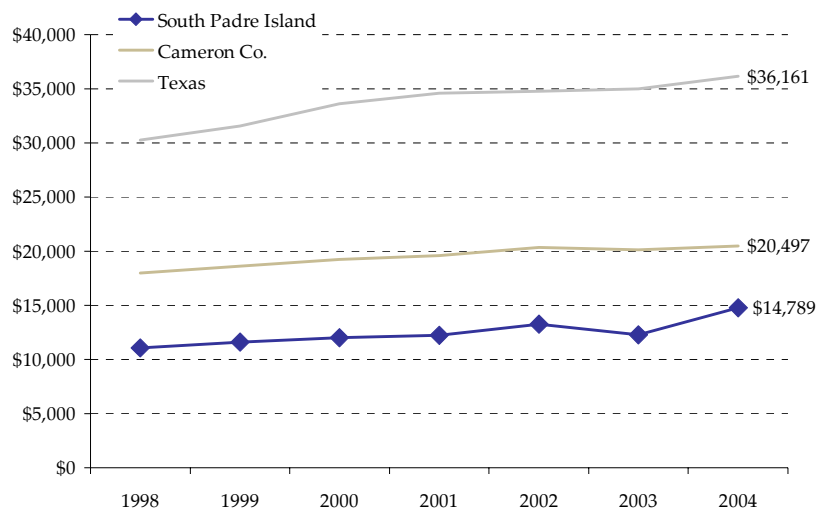


Source: US Census Bureau (Business Patterns)

Local Area Payroll

1. In 2004, the average annual payroll per private sector worker was \$14,789 on South Padre Island, compared to \$20,497 countywide and \$36,161 statewide.
2. This discrepancy in wages is likely due to the high concentration of jobs in Accommodations and Foods Services, which is low paying sector. In addition, it is common for waiter and waitresses to not report their tips. Regardless, the average annual payroll on South Padre Island increased \$3,700 from 1998 to 2004, a greater dollar amount than countywide.

Annual Payroll per Employee, 1998-2004



Sources: US Census Bureau (Business Patterns); TIP Strategies

Regional Occupations & Wages

1. An analysis of occupational data for the Rio Grande Valley (Cameron and Hidalgo Counties) reveals that the highest paying jobs in the region are typically in Management, Professional, and Technical fields, which tend to require advanced training and higher education. On average, these professions pay approximately \$46,000 per year in the region. Within this broad category, however, can be found some occupations that pay even higher rates, including Management (\$67,097), Legal (\$59,588), and Healthcare Practitioner and Technical (\$58,055).
2. Occupational projections provided by the Texas Workforce Commission indicate that higher paying fields will also tend to be the fastest growing through 2012. For example, Management, Professional, and Technical occupations are expected to add over 27,000 jobs from 2002 through 2012, a 28.6 percent growth rate. This would equal nearly 38 percent of all new occupations throughout the region.
3. On average, low-paying "Blue Collar" occupations are expected to add the smallest number of new jobs in the region.

Occupational Employment & Wage Estimates, 2005

	Employment	% of Total Employment	Avg. Ann. Wage	Net chg, 2002-2012	% chg., 2002-2012
ALL OCCUPATIONS	310,020		\$26,034	72,700	21.9%
MANAGEMENT, PROFESSIONAL & TECHNICAL	74,930	24.2%	\$45,967	27,550	28.6%
Management	10,120	3.3%	\$67,097	4,150	21.3%
Business and Financial Operations	5,670	1.8%	\$41,816	2,100	27.6%
Computer and Mathematical	1,440	0.5%	\$45,368	1,000	35.7%
Architecture and Engineering	1,540	0.5%	\$42,422	600	23.5%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	1,000	0.3%	\$42,993	350	26.9%
Community and Social Services	3,520	1.1%	\$35,683	1,400	28.0%
Legal	1,460	0.5%	\$59,588	450	20.9%
Education, Training, and Library	31,790	10.3%	\$35,821	10,800	30.0%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	2,170	0.7%	\$28,379	600	21.1%
Healthcare Practitioner and Technical	16,220	5.2%	\$58,055	6,100	36.4%
SERVICE	86,170	27.8%	\$16,716	24,400	30.7%
Healthcare Support	15,880	5.1%	\$16,265	5,950	48.8%
Protective Service	9,480	3.1%	\$32,093	2,650	32.9%
Food Preparation and Serving	27,370	8.8%	\$14,457	5,000	19.0%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	10,130	3.3%	\$15,987	2,100	18.3%
Personal Care and Service	23,310	7.5%	\$13,738	8,700	40.7%
SALES & OFFICE	84,770	27.3%	\$21,636	11,450	13.7%
Sales and Related	32,460	10.5%	\$21,317	6,050	16.8%
Office and Administrative Support	52,310	16.9%	\$21,835	5,400	11.3%
"BLUE COLLAR"	64,160	20.7%	\$21,058	9,250	12.8%
Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	3,550	1.1%	\$13,391	900	12.9%
Construction and Extraction	12,100	3.9%	\$21,869	2,750	18.6%
Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	11,160	3.6%	\$25,114	2,250	19.8%
Production	15,620	5.0%	\$21,206	150	0.9%
Transportation and Material Moving	21,730	7.0%	\$19,668	3,200	14.4%

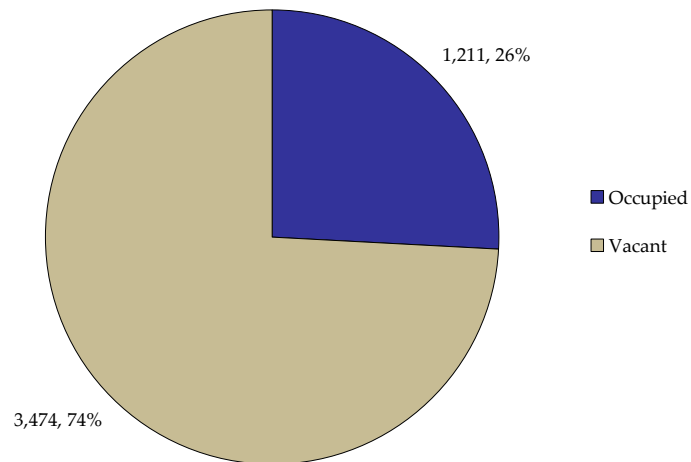
Sources: US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005 Wages & Employment estimates for Cameron and Hidalgo Counties); Texas Workforce Commission (Occupation projections for Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy Counties)

Housing

1. Three-quarters of South Padre Island's 4,685 housing units were "vacant" at the time of the 2000 Census. This figure largely reflects the overwhelmingly seasonal use of housing units on the island.

(Census definition for vacant: A housing unit is vacant if no one is living in it at the time of enumeration, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. Units temporarily occupied at the time of enumeration entirely by people who have a usual residence elsewhere were classified as vacant)

South Padre Island Housing Units, 2000

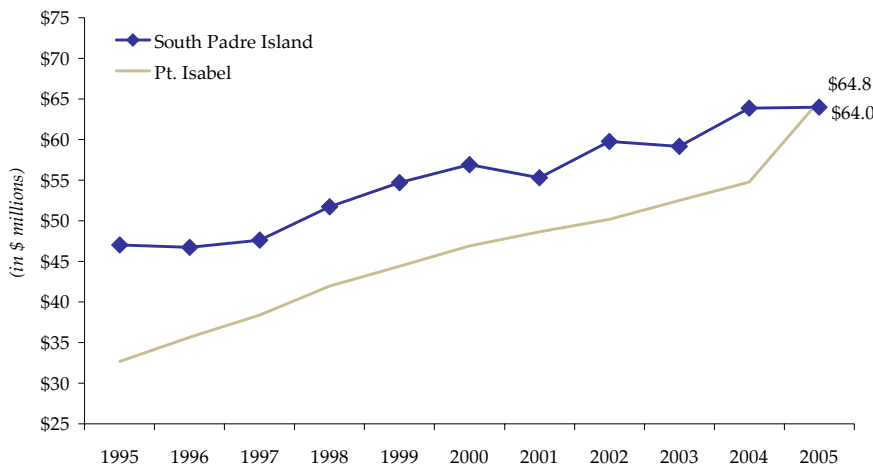


Source: US Census Bureau

Retail Trade

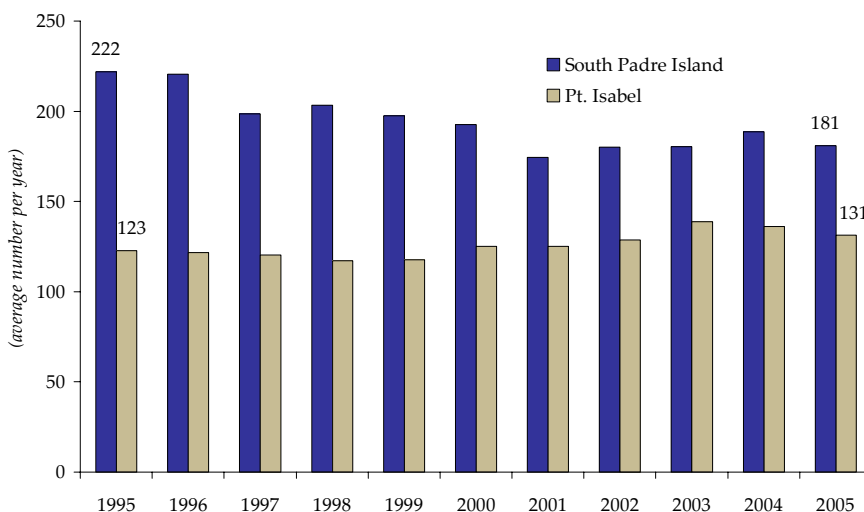
1. During the last ten years, taxable retail sales in South Padre Island climbed steadily, reaching \$64 million in 2005, 36 percent increase over 1995.
2. By comparison, taxable retail sales in Pt. Isabel increased 98 percent during the same period and surpassed South Padre Island for the first time in 2005. This city's large 2005 increase was undoubtedly related to the opening of the Super Wal-Mart that year.
3. During the same period, the number of retail outlets located in South Padre Island decreased from 222 in 1995 to 181 in 2005, while the number of stores in Port Isabel increased slightly.

Retail Sales Comparison, 1995-2005
(amount subject to sales tax)



Source: Texas Comptroller's Office

Comparison in Number of Retail Outlets



Source: Texas Comptroller's Office

Economic Development SWOT

The consulting team conducted a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats analysis for South Padre Island to develop a common framework for understanding the town's economic development related issues. This assessment was based on interviews, site visits, data analysis, and our experience. The following captures the major findings from this analysis:

Strengths

1. Renewed attention from developers
2. Destination for retirement
3. Destination for tourism
4. Sun & surf
5. Proximity to airports in Harlingen and Brownsville
6. Local arts community
7. Passionate leadership

Weaknesses

1. Appearance of Padre Island Boulevard
2. Limited retail & dining (off-season)
3. Distance from airports in Harlingen and Brownsville
4. Limited roadway access to island
5. Housing costs

Threats

1. Competition from other beach communities in Texas and elsewhere along Gulf Coast
2. Continued stagnation in retail sales
3. Unmanaged development
4. Congestion on roads and beach
5. Divided leadership

Opportunities

1. Padre Island Blvd. make-over
2. Growth in the Valley's population and status
3. Changing nature of retirement (i.e., zoomers)
4. Amenities that match "zoomer" interests
5. Regional entertainment and fine dining demand
6. Growth of neighboring communities
7. Joint marketing of Laguna Madre area assets and amenities

The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee also discussed the Town's economic Strengths, Weaknesses, Threats and Opportunities and developed the following:

Strengths

1. Location
2. Climate
3. Water proximity
4. Availability to Mexico
5. Inexpensive labor pool
6. Recreation, Major regional recreation area
7. Water sports, Fishing, Ecotourism, Outdoor Cultural Diversity
8. Winter Texans
9. Broad spectrum of international visitors
10. Eclectic local culture, Atmosphere, Fun Friendly/informal, Relaxed
11. Personal Economic Generator for the Valley

Weaknesses

1. Location - susceptible to natural disasters
2. Housing costs / property rentals
3. Limited transportation to/from airport
4. Limited retail & dining (off-season), Lack of upscale retail, Lack of off-season shopping /farmers market
5. Restrictive ordinances (signs, events)
6. Seasonal nature of tourism
7. Lack of a downtown; no town center
8. Unmanaged development

Threats

1. Natural / Unnatural Disaster to ecology, Red tide, Hurricanes, Oil spills, Beach Erosion
2. Seasonal congestion on the beach, on the roads
3. Spending & increased taxes
4. Increase of both unmanaged development, Oil/gas coming so close
5. Wind Farms Fluctuation of the economy
6. Interdependency between US/Mexican economies

B. Economic Development Goals

Both TIPS and the committee agree that developing a year-round economy is a priority; the committee considers it the first priority. In order to work toward this goal, the committee adopted these priorities (September 11, 2007)

1. Develop a diversified economy to support economic activity,
2. Encourage tourism in the island's realistic market area,
3. Support economic policies that encourage permanent residents and businesses,
4. Support reasonable fiscal policy (taxing and spending), and
5. Support regional marketing by partnering with the Laguna Madre communities.

Meeting these economic development goals will strengthen South Padre Island's position as a leading destination on the Gulf Coast, setting it on a course for long-term economic growth and vitality. The Town of South Padre Island and area economic development allies should, remain mindful that a lack of support for one of these goals may hinder progress in another. As a result, community leaders should recognize that policies supporting a strong business climate for promoting economic development cannot be implemented within a vacuum. Instead, policies and program activities should be considered within the overall context of the variety of factors that can influence long-term economic growth in South Padre Island.

7.A. Develop a Year-Round Economy - Local and Regional Focus: "Rediscover the Island!"

The Town understands its relevant market includes the Rio Grande Valley, northern Mexico, Texas and the region. These areas are as matters of fact, the island's primary sources of residents and tourists. While national, or targeted national, marketing may serve specific purposes, in context of a year-round economy, the island's primary market areas are local (the Valley) and regional (Texas and northern Mexico). Consistent with this, Tom Stellman, the lead consultant from TIP, suggested local marketing could encourage locals to "Rediscover the Island!"

The Town should identify and target various segments of consumers for the various recreational activities the island offers. Among these segments are kite boarders, windsurfers, ecotourists, persons seeking a winter getaway (Winter Texans), arts, music, culture, athletic activities (for example, runners, walkers, bicyclists), rallies for 'bikers' (for example, 'Roar by the Shore'), beach-related activities (for example,

Sand Castle Days), fishing, colleges for Spring Break, and residents. The geographical scope of the relevant market area differs among the activities - some are local, some regional, and some national.

TIP stressed that the RGV's population boom is the island's market. In a few years the Valley's population will be as large as current San Antonio, including many high income professionals - this is and will be the island's market. According to TIP, the island should embrace and market to the Valley. The consultant stated the island should market the "possibilities of the region," noting that not everyone could afford to buy a house on the island. The island benefits from regional marketing. For example, the population across the bay helps local restaurants.

The 23,000,000 people in Texas, and millions more in northern Mexico, are the island's primary market. Advertising should focus on the relevant areas and media likely to produce business.

7.B. Increase spending on the island throughout the year and during the off-season

While increasing the number of permanent and seasonal residents should augment retail spending at shops currently on the island, South Padre Island should also place a focus on expanding the variety of businesses that are available. Official population figures undoubtedly underestimate the number of potential consumers on the island at a single point in time. This situation, combined with high real estate costs, likely plays a strong role in the lack of investment by national chain stores, which typically rely on standardized data models for their location decisions. As result, Port Isabel has recently benefited from the arrival of a number of retail and dining chains.

TIP consultant, Mr. Tom Stelman, told local officials that the island would probably never be a 'shopping destination, citing the already excellent shopping in McAllen and at the new Outlet in Mercedes. The island's sales tax receipts indicate that people do not come to SPI to shop. However, he emphasized that the island could become the 'destination' for other activities.

This does not mean the island is not an attractive location for new business. On the contrary, South Padre Island is strongly positioned to take advantage of specific opportunities, given its exceptional location and unique assets. Identifying the market niches for South Padre Island requires an understanding of its potential customers and a repositioning to meet their demands. The greatest opportunity for South Padre Island to increase year-round spending is through its

development as a destination for entertainment, culture, and fine dining.

This is the result of the recognition of a number of factors. McAllen currently serves as the default destination for these activities in the wider Rio Grande Valley, which is largely due to the number of full-service hotels, their business class clientele, and the community's proximity to maquiladora plants in nearby Reynosa. Despite these significant 'built-in' advantages, McAllen has yet to fully leverage its position. As a result, there remains significant latent demand within the larger regional market for a sophisticated, upscale destination for entertainment, culture, and dining. The island's greatest disadvantage in serving this unmet need is its distance from the Valley's major population centers (e.g., McAllen, Harlingen, Brownsville, etc.). At the same time, the development of a quality 'product' in combination with its natural amenities should be more than enough to offset its locational disadvantage. Ironically, the island's distance might also be transformed into an advantage. For example, potential customers could in fact be seeking a getaway/escape from the border area's socioeconomic environment. This is not to say, however, that the only customer for an upgraded South Padre Island product is the business executive. The bulk of the island's clientele may in fact come from the Valley itself, which has a quickly growing and increasingly prosperous professional class. In addition, the opportunity of catering to the wealthier Mexican national who is already shopping and investing in the Valley should not be forgotten.

- 7.1. Establish the island as the Valley's destination for entertainment, culture, and dining. While Port Isabel appears to be emerging as the center for national chain restaurants and retailers in the Laguna Madre area, South Padre Island has the potential to develop into the leading destination for entertainment, culture, and dining in the entire Valley region. Doing so would serve two purposes. First it would enhance the island's attractiveness to visitors and provide increased opportunities for capturing traditional tourism dollars throughout the year. Second, a dearth of these types of activities is currently present throughout the entire Rio Grande Valley. Increasing these entertainment, cultural, and fine dining opportunities on the island would lead to an increase in sales to Valley residents as well as to visitors, ranging from business travelers to Mexican nationals.
 - a. Support the enhancement of the entertainment and cultural district on the island. The best location for such a district would be the area west of South Padre Island Boulevard between Palm and Marlin streets, which is already the location for a number of restaurants.

The Entertainment District and the Convention Center attract visitors year-round. These facilities should be well maintained, improved, and expanded as needed. The Entertainment District should be developed as a pedestrian friendly destination. The town should encourage development of additional lodging facilities as needed. Specific consideration should be given to:

- i. Identifying the boundaries of the entertainment district.
 - ii. Designating the district with special zoning status (if needed).
 - iii. Developing a conceptual site plan for the district as a means for promoting the idea of the district to private investors - both regionally and nationally - as a means for reducing potential expense burdens on the Town.
 - iv. Establishing an organizational structure and local funding options for the entertainment district (e.g., redevelopment authority, public improvement district, tax increment finance district, etc.).
 - v. Constructing a Town-owned or privately managed parking garage when needed.
- b. Showcase the Arts and promote live music on South Padre Island. Already, the community is home to a number of local artists. Consideration should be given to:
- i. Establishing an arts festival for local and regional artists, as well as encouraging local and regional artists to host collaborative shows and events.
 - ii. Supporting forums (digital; brick and mortar) for local artists to display their works.
 - iii. Establishing a week-long music festival during the fall months, inviting Valley musicians and state/national performers as a means for establishing a live music scene on the Island. Potential venues for live music include the Flats, eating and drinking places throughout the island, as well as establishments within the proposed entertainment district.

Outdoor Arts and Crafts Fairs

Outdoor arts and crafts fairs and exhibits can assist both local artists and general business by attracting tourists. The Valley is the primary market for such events. The weather is pleasant during most of the “slow” season (September - February). While state law provides that the hotel occupancy tax can be used to promote the fine arts, such has not been a priority in the past; it should be. Outdoor arts and crafts fairs and exhibits, and the activities needed to promote and present them, often are illegal or subject to burdensome regulation under current ordinances.

The restrictions imposed by local ordinances on local businesses and economic activity is a recurring problem. For, example, the ordinances prohibiting street vendors and displays, and the complicated procedure for approval of 'special events' need to be amended so as to support rather than thwart economic activity. If the town wants a 'year-round' economy, local ordinances must not only permit, but encourage the necessary economic activity.

- 7.2. Aggressively market the island's existing unique character and assets. While every community claims to be unique, South Padre Island is 'more unique' than most. It is one of only a handful of towns in the US located on an island off the mainland. In addition, the community is located within a short driving distance from the Mexican border. Finally, the character of the island is imbued with a sense of the eclectic and independent nature of its citizens. Capturing the South Padre Island experience, distilling it into a marketing theme and capitalizing on its message is critical for economic development efforts. Both the CPAC and Mr. Tom Stellman, the lead consultant from TIP, agree that the island's eclectic style is a valuable economic commodity. In order to market this commodity, the town must protect and preserve its character - its "Padre Style". A marketing message/theme that refers to South Padre Island's unique character (eclectic, authentic, etc.) should prove a powerful tool for reaching desired market segments.
- 7.3. Specific consideration should be given to the following actions for both marketing and enhancing the island's unique character and assets:
 - a. Position South Padre Island as destination for eclectic experiences, including beachcombing, ecotourism/bird watching, fishing, surfing, etc.
 - b. Support the development of a retail strategy for existing businesses and for the attraction of new specialty boutiques and niche retailers that area characteristics in South Padre Island.
 - i. Develop an inventory of properties along Padre Boulevard.
 - ii. Create an information packet, including the sites inventory, to provide to commercial brokers and individuals seeking to establish retail on the island.
 - iii. Survey consumers (area and regional residents and tourists) to determine their shopping patterns and retail needs, as well as their perceptions of South Padre Island.
 - iv. Meet with existing island retailers to better understand their product offerings, customer profiles, store traffic, as well as their needs and challenges in their present locations.

- v. Provide on-going business workshops and seminars for existing retailers and restaurants to communicate a common interest in the retailers' continued growth and success on the island. Retail Opportunity Workshops should also be held for those entrepreneurial-minded persons interested in opening a retail business in South Padre Island.
- vi. Expand and promote existing festivals occurring on the island as a means for increasing the duration of visitors' stay and their local spending. Consideration should be given to establishing:
- vii. Concurrent events and festivals to expand joint-promotional opportunities.
- viii. Consider co-promoting festivals with other Laguna Madre area communities to increase traffic and raise the profile of all area festivals.

Events Specific to Certain Months

September and October, and usually November provide good weather for water sport activities. These activities include sailing, windsurfing and kite boarding. Possible events include a sailboat race from the island to Corpus Christi [Port Mansfield], and offshore power boat races. Currently, there is a sailboat race for Hobiecats during early September. This event could be expanded to include much larger vessels (30 feet and up) to compete in a race from South Padre Island to Corpus Christi. Racing classes could be established for participants to race either round trip or one way. The race could be modeled after well-established annual venues that take place on Lake Michigan (Chicago to Mackinaw) and Lake Huron (Port Huron to Mackinaw). Off-shore power boat (cigarette style) races could also be considered if the proper conditions (wind, waves, etc.) of the Gulf exist during this time of the year.

Windsurfing and kiteboarding are important economic activities for the island's economy. These activities are unusual among the various water sports offered on the island and in the Laguna Madre - they draw people from a national market. Even with keen competition among various locations, the superior conditions on the Laguna Madre, the wind and the expanse of calm open water, make it a national destination. The town must do what is necessary to secure and maintain sufficient bay access to insure that the island remains competitive as a national destination. A bayside public park is essential to insure the access to the bay that these sports require.

The town should consider beginning the 'holiday season' with the Christmas Mercado, beginning Thanksgiving weekend and continuing through New Year's Day. The purpose of the Christmas Mercado is to encourage the Valley to share in the island's unique Christmas activities. Local merchants should have the discretion to promote their businesses in context of the Christmas Mercado theme. This will again require changes in the current restrictive ordinances in order to permit merchants to market their goods and services. For example, local shops should be free to sponsor outdoor performers and exhibits. The Port Isabel Chamber of Commerce already markets its Christmas Boat Parade to the Valley. Similarly, the Laguna Madre communities should jointly market their holiday activities. One local hotel at present advertises holiday packages on local radio stations. Local hotels should consider discounting rates by the amount of the occupancy tax, and advertise the island's 'Tax Holiday for the Holidays!'

The Music Fest 2007, held in [Oct/Nov] is an example of an annual event that can boost activity in the 'slow' season . According to Mr. Tim Hayden, who promoted and managed the event , 62% of persons attending were from the Valley and northern Mexico. In his report to the Convention and Visitors Bureau board (December 2007), Mr. Hayden expressed optimism that the Music Fest would become a successful privately funded annual event.

Spring Break is an essential part of the local economy. Unfortunately, each year since the mid-1990's it has attracted fewer and fewer college students. The six week Spring Break of the 1990 has contracted to Texas Week. The decline has hurt local business.

Spring Break should be marketed to the colleges and families in Texas and the region who are likely to consider the island as a destination. College students as 'breakers' should always be viewed as potential repeat customers, possible second home owners, and when 'the party is over', as retirees who might want to revisit a place filled with fond memories of a well spent youth. All resources of the town should be used to make all visitors, including breakers, feel welcome and eager to return.

7.C. Encourage Permanent Residents and Businesses

While the number of new construction projects on the island is a testament to South Padre Island's attractiveness to real estate investors, quantitative data and anecdotal evidence suggest that this activity has

not yet translated into a wave of new 'residents'. As a result, the pool of potential local consumers remains small, which directly affects the number of business establishments that are able to survive the off-season. This situation contributes to the overall economic instability on the island and has hindered the development of a vibrant and sustainable business climate.

Understanding the overall dynamics that negatively affect the number of persons who spend a significant amount of time and money on the island (i.e. permanent, retired, and/or seasonal residents) is the first step toward reaching this goal. Some of these include: the island's relative isolation away from major regional employment centers (e.g., Harlingen, Brownsville, and McAllen); the high cost of land and housing on the island; and the lack of significant local employment opportunities with high enough incomes for workers to live on South Padre Island. The second -and more critical- step is discerning the appropriate actions that the Town of South Padre Island or local economic developers can feasibly undertake as a response.

Due to the rising cost of housing lots, it is highly doubtful that "workforce" housing options will be provided by the private sector in the local real estate market. Given constraints on the Town's mandate and the limited funding options, it is also unlikely that the local public sector could feasibly initiate an affordable/attainable housing program. Consequently, the demand for housing on the island will remain at the higher end of the market. While the target audience for the community's marketing efforts should include higher-income individuals who can afford to live on the island, it should not be limited to any one group.

7.4. Market the island as a destination for both residency and business. Within the next five years, the first of the nation's 78 million baby boomers will become 65 years old. This wave of retirees promises enormous opportunities for communities that can successfully position themselves as a retirement destination. TIP consultant, Mr. Tom Stellman, told local officials that most people who retire stay near their 'home'; only about one (1) in five (5) relocates. Competition is intense among communities that want to attract these people. He stated that for the 'Baby Boom' generation, 'retirement' is a change in lifestyle, not a discreet event. Many 'boomers' are looking for a second career. He stated that the island would be lucky to attract 50 - 100 'zoomers'. This reality indicates that while retired persons may be among the desired permanent residents, they are only a small demographic group.

- 7.5. Fortunately, the South Padre Island area offers an assortment of assets that make it an attractive retirement destination. Due to high (and rising) real estate costs on the island, the town should position itself as a destination for a niche within this broad boomer demographic: *zoomers*. While these individuals tend to be more affluent and active, surveys also indicate that they show a strong disposition toward starting a second career by establishing their own business upon “retirement.” As a result, South Padre Island should position itself not merely as a retirement destination, but also as a community that embraces entrepreneurship – especially within professional services. Fortunately, technology (e.g., wireless telecommunications and high-speed internet, etc.) and proximity to nearby airports could allow the island to serve as the base of operations for white collar zoomers needing to access markets beyond the Rio Grande Valley. To better position itself as a destination for zoomers, South Padre Island should:
- a. Raise awareness of the island as a business and retirement destination among individuals who participate in professional associations (e.g., legal, financial, accounting, management, etc.). Focus initially in the Valley and major Texas metros. Then, target cities where existing residents may have strong professional ties.
 - b. Establish a professional network organization for entrepreneurs to raise awareness of the community’s commitment to supporting startups. (e.g., Institute of Senior Professionals).
 - c. Work with local and regional media to ensure local entrepreneurial success stories are published.
 - d. Market in statewide media the town’s entrepreneurship program (see below) to attract “lone eagles” (successful professionals who might be leaving larger metropolitan cities and setting up business operations in smaller, slower-paced communities).
- 7.6. Consider the convention center as a marketing vehicle for the island. The center hosts a number of conventions each year to several statewide professional organizations. This presents South Padre Island with a unique prospect for raising awareness among zoomer professionals that not only is the island a leading retirement destination, but that it also offers an opportunity for remaining engaged in the business world.
- a. Coordinate with the CVB the targeting of specific associations within service sectors for holding conferences on the island.
 - b. Establish a local volunteer program through which local business professionals and/or retired entrepreneurs could market the island’s asset to conference center attendees.

- c. Create a brief profile and coherent and coordinated marketing message to assist the volunteers in promoting South Padre Island's positive aspects.
- d. Create a formal mechanism through which the volunteers could refer leads.

In 2005 the Convention and Visitors Bureau, upon the advice of the Atkins Group consultants removed reference to 'Texas' from advertising marketing the island. This was supposedly based on the focus group interviews which showed that people have a negative view of Texas and Texas's beaches. However, a review of the transcripts of the interviews does not support this conclusion (See Appendix) The committee recommends that the town resume using reference to 'Texas' in its marketing advertisements

7.7. **Enhance business assistance and entrepreneurship efforts.** If South Padre Island is to promote itself as a good place to start up small businesses, the community will need to make a concerted effort towards ensuring that it can follow on this pledge. As a result, area economic development partners should work towards establishing an entrepreneurship program to facilitate new startup activity on the island. Consideration should be given to the following activities:

- a. Meeting regularly with current and potential entrepreneurs to better understand issues affecting their business decisions.
- b. Advocating for entrepreneurs by meeting with area taxing entities to ensure they have a strong understanding of how their decisions might influence business investment decisions.
- c. Advocating for an increase in assistance to local entrepreneurs and help address their issues and challenges.
- d. Promoting networking opportunities and functions for area professionals.
- e. Facilitating financing for entrepreneurs, including consideration of the development of revolving loan fund; encouraging local lenders to offer small business loans (and strengthen their Community Reinvestment Act ratings); and leveraging existing state and federal program that offer business startup assistance (e.g., Small Business Development Center, etc.)
- f. Considering the expansion of high speed internet and wireless telecommunications on the island to support startups.

7.D. **Support Regional Marketing. Leverage and enhance relationships with area communities to help meet the town's long-term strategic needs**

While South Padre Island is a separate legal jurisdiction located on an island, by no means is the town isolated from other communities. In fact, interviews and workshops throughout this planning process

revealed that several local stakeholders were not necessarily citizens of South Padre Island. In many cases, individuals worked on the island but lived in Port Isabel or Laguna Vista. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the trend toward mainland residence and island work is increasing, which is largely fueled by the high cost of housing and real estate on the island. As a result, South Padre Island, Port Isabel, and Laguna Vista form shared labor, housing, and retail market with common concerns and issues (e.g., traffic). This indicates that these communities should make a concerted effort at reaching a coordinated approach to meeting shared challenges and leverage common strengths. Similarly, the Laguna Madre area entities, including South Padre Island, should recognize they are part of the larger Rio Grande Valley region. If fully leveraged, the opportunities presented by the larger region's strong economic and population growth could provide greater stimulus to South Padre Island's economic development efforts.

Brownsville and McAllen in 2007 were among the five (5) lowest cost places to live in the United States (See Appendix). The population of retired people in the Valley is already growing faster than in Texas. Retired people who live on fixed incomes are usually sensitive to costs. Mr. Stellman offered the McAllen-Reynosa marketing model, whereby McAllen marketed Reynosa as a place for manufacturing plants to locate in order for McAllen to benefit from the economic activity the plants would bring to McAllen. Similarly, the Laguna Madre communities, as the regional recreation destination, benefit from marketing the Rio Grande Valley as a retirement area.

- 7.8. **Market Port Isabel, Laguna Vista, and the remainder of the Laguna Madre area as part of South Padre Island's "product."** The beach and direct access to the Gulf are the island's main attractions for residents and tourists alike. Beyond activities associated with "sun and surf," the number of leisure and recreation options on the island remains somewhat limited. The wider Laguna Madre area, however, offers a broader spectrum of attractions, including golfing, ecotourism, etc. This should be an important marketing consideration for South Padre Island, given that a wider recognition of the variety of options increases the likelihood that a person will spend more time on (or near) the island. As a result, South Padre Island should consider jointly marketing South Padre, Port Isabel, and Laguna Vista as a single destination offering a wide variety of recreation, shopping, and entertainment options.
- 7.9. **Increase coordination of planning efforts with Laguna Madre area communities.** South Padre Island, Port Isabel, and Laguna Vista form a common and highly integrated labor and housing market. While regional planning is often easier said than done,

it will be critical for the Town to open a dialogue with its nearest neighbors to develop a common framework for tackling the most pressing issues facing the area. For example, housing costs continue to rise on the island, making it increasingly difficult for even professional employees to live on the island. This problem may eventually affect some of the island's major employers as well, including the hotels, restaurants, and retailers. Given that many entry-level service workers are paid minimum wage, they may find it increasingly difficult to find housing options within the immediate area. Already, it has been suggested that a large share must commute from as far away as Brownsville. As a result, South Padre Island should work with its neighbors to increase workforce housing options within the Laguna Madre area.

- a. Host a meeting with community leaders from Port Isabel and Laguna Madre to express South Padre Island's interest and willingness to work as a partner with its neighbors and begin to identify shared policy concerns (i.e., housing, transportation, education, etc.).
 - b. Hold monthly meetings through which updates on progress can be held. This forum should also be used to establish trust and goodwill and to develop a foundation from which future progress can be built.
 - c. Attempt to develop a common vision among these community leaders for the Laguna Madre area as whole.
 - d. Develop a common position among South Padre Island, Port Isabel, and Laguna Vista on the various challenges facing these communities.
 - e. Leverage common economic development goals for establishing a coordinated marketing message for the Laguna Madre area (see above).
- 7.10. **Participate in Valley-wide economic development efforts to raise awareness of South Padre Island.** Area economic development allies should focus efforts on enhancing the island's profile as a regional economic development partner. Although the community's population is dwarfed by larger regional cities, the impact of that the island could have on regional economic development efforts could be significant. While assisting in the economic development efforts of cities as far away as McAllen may seem counterintuitive at first, it would provide South Padre Island an important "place at the table" with key decision makers in private industries. In other words, this activity may serve as a medium for marketing the community to business professionals who might choose to shop or personally invest on the island.
- a. Consider assisting in promoting economic development marketing in other regional cities (e.g., McAllen, Edinburgh,

Harlingen, and Brownsville) to create goodwill among other area communities, as well as assist in promoting the island as the premier entertainment destination in the Rio Grande Valley.

- b. Offer to host “developer days” and/or other regional economic development promotional events as a means for assisting Valley partners and also to draw attention to the island among prospect decision makers.

7.E. Support an environment friendly to residents and businesses.

It is a proper role of government to maintain an environment in which private enterprise can flourish. The town should

1. support ordinances that facilitate a free flow of commerce,
2. support expansion of local events, and,
3. recognize that residents and businesses are all part of the same ‘food chain’ — residents have businesses, and business owners are residents.

The town’s ordinances, regulations, policies and practices should in all ways serve to effect these goals.

The current regulatory environment on the island is at best burdensome and sometimes challenging to businesses and residents. The regulatory burden increases the cost of doing business, and this cost is passed on to the consumer — both local residents and tourists. Merchants often compare the ease of doing business in Port Isabel to the burden of doing business on the island; some even relocate to escape the regulation. If the dream of a year-round economy is to become reality, then these things must change.

Problems with Current Ordinances

The Code should have a standard index. The Code of Ordinances should be streamlined and simplified. The current Code of Ordinances is complicated and not ‘user friendly’. It is often difficult to find the correct current version of an ordinance. Multiple amendments make the Code difficult to use.

The ‘rule of law’ is essential to the free flow of commerce and the individuals’ quiet enjoyment of life. At present the town’s officials and employees routinely fail to comply with state’s Open Meetings Act and the Public Information Act, and local ordinances.

Some of the town’s ordinances raise constitutional issues. The First Amendment protects ‘free speech’; this includes ‘freedom of expression’ (for example, the individual’s right to choose the color he wants to paint his shop or home), and ‘commercial speech’ (for example, a merchant’s right to advertise his business). Some current ordinances appear to violate the First Amendment concerning

'freedom of expression' and 'commercial speech'. These ordinances are mentioned below; copies are included in the Appendix.

Code of Ordinances Section (cite), as part of the regulation of 'signs', defines 'art' for businesses. The ordinance actually gives a town board the authority to determine what is and is not 'art'. The First Amendment prohibits the government from making such determination for private citizens. This ordinance appears to violate the First Amendment.

Code of Ordinances Section (cite), as part of the regulation of 'signs', dictates to merchants what information they can display on their shop doors. The information a merchant desires to display on his shop door is protected as 'commercial speech' by the First Amendment. The government can limit such commercial speech only in two ways — to prevent the communication of false information, and pornographic images or information. The town's 'informational signage' ordinance goes beyond the scope of lawful regulation. . This ordinance appears to violate the First Amendment.

The town's practice of regulating the color merchants can use on their shops, and that residents can use on their homes, not only raises First Amendment issues, but appears to exceed the scope of the enabling ordinance. The ordinance (See Appendix) as written does not give the town the authority to decide what colors of paint an applicant may use, but as applied, the town presumes to pass judgment on 'color' of paint and material used.

Code of Ordinances Section (cite), as part of the regulation of 'signs', prohibits 'murals'. In context of the First Amendment, this prohibition raises both 'freedom of expression' and 'commercial speech' issues.

The 'murals' ordinance also has a quantifiable adverse economic impact. Murals can be an economic asset. Breckenridge advertises itself as the 'Mural Capital of Texas'. El Campo has turned its murals into a valuable tourist attraction (See Appendix). Rather than prohibiting murals, the town should encourage their use. This could both enhance the eclectic 'Padre Style' image and serve to support local artists.

The town's regulation of paint color used by residents and business owners on their homes and shops causes various problems. The ordinance (See Appendix). In addition to the First Amendment issues (freedom of expression and commercial speech), the town's administration of the ordinance appears to go beyond the scope of the ordinance as written. On its face as written, the ordinance does not give the town the authority to dictate choice of color. However, as

applied, the town routinely dictates the choice of color. As applied, this ordinance appears to violate the First Amendment and Fifth Amendments.

Even though the First Amendment prohibits the government from limiting the individual's right to freedom of expression, there is a faction in the community that advocates an ordinance that would decide what colors can be used on buildings. Under this ordinance, individuals would be required to select colors from the government-approved 'color palette'. While the government can lawfully regulate the colors which can be used in an historical district, it cannot generally regulate 'color'. Similarly, private developers can lawfully regulate 'color' in their developments, and individuals can voluntarily choose to buy property subject to such regulation. The First Amendment prohibits the town from creating a mandatory 'color palette' by ordinance.

C. Arts, Culture & Historical Preservation – A Means to Help Improve the Town's Economy

Arts

Arts in any community add a sense of community spirit, creativity and uniqueness. Artists as citizens add richness and interest to the community. Art education and presentations offer activities for both residents and guests. The arts can celebrate our natural surroundings and educate about their needs. On South Padre Island visual arts, creative writing, theater and music could provide year round tourist attractions with no ecological ramifications or disturbance to the public. The richness of the island experience can only be enhanced by extending a welcome to artists and art events.

Purpose

While the city can only promote arts in the community within its role as a municipality, there are multiple things that can be done to remove barriers and encourage art events. It could also utilize funds towards promoting art education, public art displays and promotions.

It is important to note that artists require a profit center and business opportunities to secure their interest in art events and in communities that support them. By providing locations in which artists can sell their work, the artists will in return enrich the community.

Thus, all encouragement of the arts must remember that an art economy is the first step to further community benefits. Other tourist communities like Santa Fe, NM, Laguna Beach CA, St. Petersburg FL and Rockport TX have built a strong tourist market based on the visual

arts. The demographics of these guests are of the high quality that South Padre would like to attract as well.

Issues

1. The current events ordinance does not allow for outdoor art events as are popular in other resort areas.
2. The high cost of commercial space and seasonal market has driven traditional galleries and other art businesses off the island.
3. Public art and murals are difficult or impossible to place due to commercial restrictions.
4. Artists are not allowed to sell work from their homes without commercial zoning, commercial construction, permits, etc.

Goals

- 7.F. Create an annual outdoor arts fair including visual art for sale, music, food and entertainment.
- 7.G. Establish a public location that can be made available as a place to have arts and crafts sales, farmers markets and art displays.
- 7.H. Encourage the CVB to promote artists and art events in the community.
- 7.I. Give special dispensation to arts groups and remove restrictive ordinance barriers.
- 7.J. Fund public art.
- 7.K. Seek locations that may serve additional purposes and provide space for art education and organizations.
- 7.L. Develop a space committed to art exhibits, classes and studio space.
- 7.M. Create a juried show of bird themed art to be exhibited at the new World Birding Center on South Padre Island.
- 7.N. Work with the CVB to incorporate local arts into their functions such as special events, historical preservation and marketing.

GOALS

Recommended actions:

- 7.11. The community can begin to encourage an art economy and arts culture by removing barriers restricting small arts fairs. An art fair could occur in the county park, at an open air business or in a parking lot. Plein air painters (open air painters of landscapes) could be given permission to paint on the beachfront and offer their work for sale after completion. Arts groups should be

- granted use of city facilities (old city hall) for the purposes of art education and display.
- 7.12. The city could foster a more welcoming attitude by allowing approved murals of visual or historical significance to be painted on commercial buildings. The city may consider a grant or tax investment in outdoor sculpture or public art. Our current sculptures on the island garner great interest from visitors and are among our most memorable landmarks. Public art need not be so grand in scale but, can be as simple as small sculptures and decorative plaques placed at bus stops.
 - 7.13. The CVB should promote local artists on it's website and encourage art events to support arts in our community. The CVB should allocate appropriate funds to promote and market arts in the community.
 - 7.14. Mostly, the city must decide that arts in our community are an important part of our island experience and creative outlets should be encouraged.

Historical Preservation

While South Padre Island is a relatively young township and community, the island itself has a fascinating history that reads like an adventure novel. Few guests and residents know the details of our shipwrecks, natives, pirates and even our development in to a town.

Purpose

Our rich history can be presented and shared as a means of community collaboration and pride as well as an enriching and intelligent tourist experience.

Goals

- 7.O. Place historical plaques and markers at beach access points creating a "historical walking tour". This would make for interesting tourist experiences, add artistic interest to beach access points and encourage walking and biking. These markers could discuss some of the interesting points of island history such as the Singer family experience, the native tribe, the Spanish shipwrecks and more.
- 7.P. Support and enrich the new historical presentation area to be located in the new city hall. Adding local stories and community information will be a wonderful display as well as a cohesive community activity.
- 7.Q. South Padre does not benefit from the architectural history that other communities have to draw from. In our climate, buildings are not to last long. However, the history of business and home

construction is fascinating. Our “classic beach houses” and early businesses may be gone or rapidly disappearing but, a historical reference should be created to preserve their stories.

- 7.R. CVB funds should be used to create historical areas of interest and activities for visitors and residents alike.

Recommended Actions

- 7.15. A historical preservation committee has formed and begun to discuss these issues. But, our goals cannot be achieved with out funding. We must allocate a budget from the city, the CVB and support from public donations in order to defray the costs of these projects.

Island Culture

South Padre has a unique culture. It is defined in our vast differences and eccentricities. We are an unusual community in that our residents are all from different geographical backgrounds and ethnic cultures. However, those who seek to make Padre Island their home have their own unique culture. We are an eccentric group of creative individuals who embrace the relaxed tropical atmosphere of the island.

Purpose

By defining our culture and having pride in it we can preserve it. The “keep Austin weird” campaign served to unify a community around a simple sentiment of acceptance and creativity. This is the sort of expression that bonds a group with common culture. The report provided by TIPS Strategy recommends this type of cultural marketing. It is also reflected in the current “be yourself here” campaign by the Adkins Agency.

Goals and Recommendations

- 7.16. Sponsor more “cultural events”. These events can be anything from supporting local surfers in their culture to making way for local artists to display their coastal art.
- 7.17. Define our culture. It may not be a slogan or a t-shirt campaign but, a community tag line that expresses our cultural uniqueness.
- 7.18. Do not take ourselves too seriously. Culture and community personality does not develop from policy and regulation. It is an ever changing attitude that permeates everything from architectural style to language. By allowing our citizens to express their uniqueness, cultural movement develops. From

these freedoms, fun cultural events, unique businesses and wonderful personalities will emerge.

Miscellaneous Matters

The town should support year-round shuttle service to and from Valley International Airport in Harlingen. If private enterprise options are not viable, then the town should consider the feasibility of providing the shuttle as part of the WAVE service. The committee was unanimous on this recommendation.

According to David Alex, President of the Cameron County Regional Mobility Authority, in a radio interview on KURV (Talk show host Davis Rankin, a local island resident), the second causeway will bring “billions of dollars of development” to the island.

Conclusion

The town’s future depends on its economy. The island must be not only a nice place to visit, but a good place to do business and live. The town should encourage sustainable growth and development for residential, retail, commercial and second homes.

The policy development process involves diverse, competing, and sometimes antagonistic, interests. Success of this process depends on the rule of law, transparent government, and local government that balances these interest for the benefit of all, and to the detriment of none.



Chapter 8 Implementation

Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

With the vision in place, the Town should now direct its resources toward plan implementation. This element establishes general priorities and sets forth a process to ensure the plan is implemented and kept current over time. In order to be successful in implementing this plan, there should be a consensus of direction and a commitment to act. Directly associated with implementation is the designation of responsibilities for action, enactment of specific strategies to accomplish the goals of the plan, and guidance as to the process for updating the plan periodically.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the elements of the plan and to provide a clear path for sound decision making. Implementation is an essential step in the plan development process. It requires the commitment of the Town's leadership, including the Mayor and Board of Aldermen, Planning and Zoning Commission, other Town boards and commissions, and Town staff. It is also necessary for there to be close coordination with and joint commitment from other organizations that significantly influence the Island and its growth and development, including:

1. The private development community;
2. Cameron County;
3. Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT);
4. Neighboring cities such as Port Isabel and Laguna Vista;
5. Laguna Madre Water District;
6. Chamber of Commerce;
7. Convention and Visitor's Bureau;
8. Economic Development Corporation; and
9. Other organizations, agencies, and groups.

Each preceding chapter of this plan outlines specific issues to be addressed to achieve what is envisioned by Town residents, business's and land owners. In response are a significant 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 should be put in place to take the first step toward implementation. These strategies should 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 should be 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 Island.

Priority Goals

Chapter 3: Land Use

The purpose of the land use is to achieve a preferred and sustainable future for South Padre Island. Chapter 3 identifies goals and policies that will enhance South Padre Islands quality of life. The Board of Aldermen and the Planning and Zoning Board should review the Town's current zoning ordinances in the context of the priorities stated within the Land Use Chapter 3 of the Comprehensive Plan and determine if there are any changes needed.

Policies

- 3.1. Land Uses should harmonize so not to detract from the enjoyment and value of surrounding properties.
- 3.2. Land uses should concentrate similar uses and densities. Where mixed uses are the intended use, the physical appearance should be cohesive and coordinated.
- 3.3. Commercial and residential development should encourage a walking and bicycling convenience and experience.
- 3.4. Development zoning patterns should provide for suitable transitions and buffering between land uses and densities.
- 3.5. To preserve views and enhance values, in the northern extraterritorial areas of the Town, development should favor denser high-rise buildings on the inland center of the island and mid-rise and low-rise structures toward the Bay and Gulf shores.
- 3.6. Development or redevelopment of 'infill' lots, within a zone, should consider similar scale and density of surrounding

- properties.
- 3.7. High-density housing development should be concentrated where roadway and utility infrastructure and off-street parking can support it.
 - 3.8. Development should favor districts over strip centers.
 - 3.9. Small-scale neighborhood retail and service facilities should be located at the edge of neighborhoods at arterial intersections.
 - 3.10. Development should preserve and enhance the physical environment and natural features of the island. Nature reserve areas, greenbelts, and open areas should be set aside for preservation and recreation and to be used as buffering areas.
 - 3.11. Public beaches and Bay front shores, dunes, views, access, and ecological health should be proactively preserved and protected.
 - 3.12. A previously allowed use should not be prohibited after a major casualty loss. An affected person should be able to rebuild same or similar size for use that otherwise conforms with the existing zoning regulations.
 - 3.13. Zoning should provide for an alternative building setback rule that exchanges open space and views for building heights other than presently allowed under current building height and stair setback rules.
 - 3.14. Local ordinance should provide a process whereby a developer, development, or both may apply to the Town Board of Aldermen to negotiate a desired variation from a zoning ordinance. The variation must not negatively affect surrounding property values. If a variance is negotiated and the town receives compensation from a developer, development, or both, the compensation received must be used for a public purpose such as public sidewalks, public parking, parks and recreation, etc. The application process would not preclude the right to apply for a variance with the Board of Adjustments and Appeals.

Goals

- 3.A. Preserve the conformity and integrity of the existing development.
- 3.B. Provide for increased compatibility between adjacent uses.
- 3.C. Allow increased flexibility while also establishing improved minimum standards.
- 3.D. Streamline the review and permitting process.
- 3.E. Collaborate with neighbors and property owners prior to altering present land uses in a zoning district.
- 3.F. A "Main Street" enhancement program.

- 3.G. Enhance the standards and appearance of public right-of-way and properties.
- 3.H. Provide for reuse and redevelopment of older and underutilized structures.
- 3.I. Establish and enforce landscaping requirements.
- 3.J. Improve the quality appearance of new development.
- 3.K. Protect sensitive lands and conserve natural resources.
- 3.L. Use incentives and bonuses to encourage enhancements, preservation, and open space.
- 3.M. Encourage imaginative and 'unique' subdivision designs.
- 3.N. The Township should accumulate land throughout the Town to facilitate the building of additional public tourist attractions such as:
 - a. parks, bay front access, an aquarium with educational exhibits,IMAX theater, performing arts theater, historical museum, an amphitheater,and public boat ramps.
- 3.O. Encourage "Green" development and enhancement (energy, waste handling, renewable resources).
- 3.P. Amend the development ordinances to implement this plan.
- 3.Q. Apply standards and regulations legally, consistently, and equally.
- 3.R. Establish a review process to assess and re-evaluate the plan every five years, or sooner as needed.
- 3.S. The Town should add to its Emergency Management Plan for natural disasters and emergency beach re-nourishment strategy that, in advance, sets up a coordinated response from the Brownsville Navigation District, the Army Corp of Engineers, the Texas General Land Office, and any other agency or party whose participation is needed to begin immediate recovery action.

Chapter 4: Mobility Plan

Transportation infrastructure must be planned well in advance of development to ensure orderly and timely improvements as the Town's mobility and access needs continue to increase.

Recommended Action

- 4.1. Develop a safer pedestrian environment by installing crosswalks at set intervals along Padre Blvd., and developing a plan to add sidewalks in busy pedestrian areas.
- 4.2. Improve safety for bicycles and other non-motorized modes of travel by clearly delineating bicycle lanes along Padre Blvd., Gulf Blvd., Laguna Blvd., and select cross streets which align

- with the crosswalks on Padre Blvd.
- 4.3. Work with regional planning authorities, public and private stakeholders to develop an airport shuttle.
 - 4.4. Increase access public transportation by expanding the hours of availability and the areas that the WAVE or other public transportation options travel to, by working with other Laguna Madre area communities to expand bus stops to meet the needs of service industry workers, local residents, and tourists.
 - 4.5. Coordinate with Port Isabel to improve traffic flow during peak seasons.
 - 4.6. Consider traffic calming techniques in problem areas.
 - 4.7. Add covered bus stops with benches at set intervals, and utilize public art, native plants, and historical markers to beautify these stops.
 - 4.8. Support state and regional efforts to explore the feasibility of a second causeway.

Chapter 5: Parks and Resources

The tourism industry is based upon the natural resources that attract both residents and visitors. Ongoing success will rely on the existence and preservation of these natural resources.

Recommended Action

- 5.1. Preserve and protect the beach and the dune system.
- 5.2. Preserve and protect the Laguna Madre Bay.
- 5.3. Conserve environmentally sensitive lands and protect local Fauna.
- 5.4. Improve and protect the parks and recreational facilities to meet the needs of residents and tourists.
- 5.5. The Town should hire a Beach Manager (Coastal Resource Manager) to focus on the beach: beach maintenance, grants for improvements to beach access, and keeping tabs on beach renourishment opportunities and grants.

Chapter 6: Growth and Infrastructure.

While growth on the Island appears inevitable advanced planning of the infrastructure is needed. The following issues are central to the ability of the island to effectively manage its growth, infrastructure, and development in a wise and sustainable manner.

Recommended Action

- 6.1. Coordinate with utility providers to ensure continued quality services that meet the needs of the island as it grows.
- 6.2. Prioritize infrastructure improvements over public buildings
- 6.3. Support new technologies to improve island life (i.e. Green

- technologies, desalinization, artificial reef)
- 6.4. Encourage drainage improvements and promote the use of porous surface rather than asphalt.
 - 6.5. Insure public and private road and utility easements are developed and maintained.

Chapter 7: Economic Development

Residents and leaders of the Island are fully aware of the importance of its continued economic development. They realize it must reinforce the Island's development objectives, complement other local businesses, and offer gainful employment opportunities for Island residents.

Recommended Action

- 7.1. Develop a diversified economy to support economic activity.
- 7.2. Market tourism to the Island's realistic market areas as specified in Chapter 7.
- 7.3. Support economic policies that encourage permanent residents and businesses.
- 7.4. Support reasonable fiscal policy (taxing and spending).
- 7.5. Support regional marketing by partnering with the Laguna Madre communities.

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 Island. 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 should be revisited on a routine basis, with regular amendments and warranted updates.

Conclusion

In April 2006, the 12 member CPAC committee was appointed by the Board of Aldermen and worked diligently until February 2008 to complete the plan. The committee represented a diverse group of local individuals from a cross section of the community. The committee recognizes that implementation of this plan will require considerable sums of public funds, and the dedication of staff and elected officials to see it unfold. The committee recommends that the Board of Aldermen prioritize the plan's recommendations at their annual strategic planning sessions and allocate necessary funds as they become available to implement the plan. The committee also

recommends the Town provide for adequate public hearings to inform the public about the information contained in this Comprehensive Plan, and to receive public comments. The committee agreed that public comments received by the Board of Alderman should be in written form, signed by the author, and be included in the appendix portion of this plan. (See Appendix Attached)