

planning process



Introduction

The Planning Process for the Brownsville Comprehensive Plan is a detailed and multi-stage process to ensure community input and involvement throughout. This section of the report will describe the phases of the Planning Process, the role of the Task Force, the Stakeholder Interviews, the Community Outreach campaign, the Public Workshops, Industry Cluster focus group meetings, and the Plan adoption.

Phases of the Planning Process

There are five sequential phases in the Planning Process for the Brownsville Comprehensive Plan. Each phase is designed to incorporate and build on community goals and feedback from community members, and to include the input of the Consultant Team. A wide range of community members were involved throughout the process, including business leaders, educational leaders, community organizations, elected officials, and residents of Brownsville. The five phases in the Planning Process are as follows:

- **Phase I.** Establishing Community Vision and Objectives: This phase incorporates assessments performed by the Consultant Team on current and projected conditions in Brownsville with intensive community outreach and workshops to formulate goals and objectives for the Plan. Stakeholder interviews, the formation of a Task Force of community leaders, the beginning of the community outreach efforts, and the first Public

Workshop all take place during Phase I.

- **Phase II.** Defining Opportunities and Constraints: This phase refines the data gathering and vision formation performed in the first phase. The Task Force continues to be active in this phase by developing, scoring, and ranking dimensions, objectives, sub-objectives, and strategies for the planning goals.
- **Phase III.** Alternative Scenario Analysis: In this phase, several scenarios for growth and development in Brownsville are developed by the Consultant Team using state-of-the-art interactive communication technology and presented at the second Public Workshop. Community members are able to contribute real-time feedback to detailed questions at the Workshop, providing valuable data to the Consultant Team regarding community preferences and visions for Brownsville's future. Meetings are held with the Task Force to perform Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (S.W.O.T.) analyses.
- **Phase IV.** Selection of Preferred Vision: Based on the community feedback gathered in Phase III and through the S.W.O.T. analysis, a preferred vision is developed out of the alternative scenarios. Draft elements of the Comprehensive Plan are constructed by the Consultant Team and presented to the community in the third Public Workshop.
- **Phase V.** Implementation Plan: Strategies for implementation are developed by the Task Force, a series of industry focus group



meetings, and the Consultant Team. The final Public Workshop is held to present the Comprehensive Plan to the community, and presentations are made to City staff, the Planning and Zoning Commission, and the City Commission in preparation for formal adoption of the Plan by the City of Brownsville.

Early in the Planning Process, a vision for the Brownsville Comprehensive Plan was crafted and approved by the community. The vision statement is as follows:

Brownsville builds on its unique historic heritage and culture, strategic international location, people, and abundant natural resources to create a livable, prosperous, engaged, connected, and sustainable community led by effective and responsible leaders.

Stakeholder Interviews

Interview request letters were sent out on behalf of the Task Force to key stakeholders and leaders in the Brownsville community, and approximately 70 one-on-one interviews were conducted with these community members by the Consultant Team between May and August of 2007. The goal of the stakeholder interviews was to help identify the challenges, opportunities, strategies and priorities that should be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. Additionally, the interviews were an opportunity to increase awareness and build support within the community for the Comprehensive Plan process.



Because the interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes and were conducted in a one-on-one setting, the data provided was in-depth and highly personalized, allowing for immersion by the Consultant Team in the concerns of the community and a greater sense of involvement in the Planning Process by the interviewees. Finally, the stakeholder interviews contributed to the baseline set of reference points for use as the Planning Process moved forward.

Task Force

As a critical component of the Planning Process, a Task Force was established as an advisory and recommendation body, and to represent a broad cross-section of the City of Brownsville. The Task Force is ultimately responsible to the City Commission for reviewing, recommending modifications as necessary, and reaching a consensus on the policy and program recommendations made in the plan elements and reports. The Task Force has the following functions:

- Advise and make recommendations to GBIC/BEDC (Greater Brownsville Incentives Corporation/Brownsville Economic Development Council), BCIC (Brownsville Community Improvement Corporation), Planning and Zoning Commission, City Commission, City Staff, and the Consultant Team on policy matters and community issues.
- Review draft plan elements and reports prepared by the Consultant Team.



- Create subcommittees of the Task Force related to technical issues of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Monitor and assist with public participation and involvement during the Planning Process.
- Interact with citizens, citizen groups, and points of influence to develop and promote interest and involvement in the Planning Process.
- Contribute to the vision and strategies that shape the Comprehensive Plan.

The Task Force consists of an Executive Committee, co-chaired by Fred Rusteberg, President and CEO of IBC Bank Brownsville, Dr. Juliet Garcia, President of University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, and Irv Downing, former Regional President of Chase Bank, in addition to 13 other individuals from Brownsville, including Mayor Pro-Tem Charles Atkinson and Deputy Mayor Pro-Tem Ricardo Longoria. Additionally, over 275 members of the Brownsville community serve on the Task Force, representing a wide spectrum of business, educational, governmental, and civic organizations. Due to the diversity of interests on the Task Force, the group provides overall leadership, unifies the community and the Planning Process, and fosters leadership, consensus and community participation. The Executive Committee met 10 times during the Planning Process.

Five Planning Dimension Committees were created

within the Task Force to organize and direct the technical work on the Brownsville Comprehensive Plan. The five planning dimension committees are co-chaired by members of the Task Force and City Commissioners, as well as several members of the Brownsville community at large. The committees are as follows:

- **Economic Committee:** Focuses on the creation of economic wealth and economic growth. Sub-committee groups include: the public sector (public entities); the private sector (firms); and households related to labor and workforce development.
- **Social Committee:** Addresses the social and quality of life elements that describe how the benefits and costs of economic, infrastructure, and civic elements are distributed among the members of the community. Sub-committee groups include: healthcare; education; public safety; equity and income distribution; culture (downtown revitalization, historic preservation, and arts and entertainment); and land use (urbanization, housing, parks and green space, and public facilities).
- **Infrastructure Committee:** Deals with infrastructure improvements that provide a foundation for the creation of wealth, economic growth, and increased quality of life. Sub-committee groups include: transportation; utilities; drainage; and telecommunications.
- **Civic Committee:** Addresses the partnerships between civic and public/



private institutions that provide a foundation for the creation of wealth, economic growth, and increased quality of life. Sub-committee groups include: volunteerism and civic engagement; inter-institutional cooperation; and leadership development.

- **Environment Committee:** Focuses on the effect of economic, social, infrastructure, and civic/institutional elements on Brownsville's environment and natural resources, and the resulting impact on sustainability. Sub-committee groups include: natural resources and community aesthetics; waste and recycling; and emergency response.

The Task Force was heavily involved in the Planning Process from the beginning. In the initial stages, the Task Force created the five Technical Committees and 19 subcommittees, which were co-chaired by over 55 members of the Task Force, and had over 200 additional community individuals participating. Over the months of October 2007 through March 2008, the Task Force and Consultant Team facilitated 23 technical committee workshops attended by over 250 members of the community. The purpose of the workshops was to seek public input in creating the Comprehensive Plan's vision, outcome objectives, and indicators. This objective workshop process created 194 objectives and over 475 indicators with priorities for the Comprehensive Plan's planning horizon.

A Task Force Strategy Workshop was held on August 27, 2008, where committees spent a



half-day developing the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (S.W.O.T.) analysis. Out of the S.W.O.T. analysis, over 200 strategies were developed for each of the five planning dimensions (economic, social, infrastructure, environment and civic). The Task Force continued to assist with the Planning Process in the final stages, contributing to implementation and fiscal strategies, and providing review and recommendations on drafts of the Comprehensive Plan leading to the Plan's adoption by Brownsville's City Commission.

Community Outreach

Extensive community outreach efforts were made throughout the Planning Process in order to involve as many members of the Brownsville community as possible. A Kick-off Event was held in March 2007 to officially launch the Comprehensive Plan process, and it included a press conference by Brownsville Mayor Eddie Trevino, Task Force Co-chair Fred Rusteberg, and the Brownsville City Commission. In June 2007, a special event was held for over 100 community leaders to introduce the Planning Process in more detail and host a keynote presentation by Alfredo Gonzalez, the Secretary of Economic Development for the State of Tamaulipas.

On-going outreach efforts included mailing bilingual flyers to households, schools and churches; displaying bilingual posters around the City; newspaper advertisements; Op-ed articles in the Brownsville Herald; leadership and community



briefings and presentations; panel broadcasts on Brownsville's public access television channel 12 and KVEO-TV Channel 23; online surveys; and the creation of a bilingual website dedicated to the Comprehensive Plan. The Imagine Brownsville website (<http://www.imaginebrownsville.com>) serves as a valuable resource that announces events and provides detailed, updated information on the entire Planning Process.

Bilingual telephone calls, email blasts, and flyers were used to spread awareness and updates of the Planning Process, and particularly of the Public Workshops. On several occasions, the Consultant Team utilized grassroots outreach efforts in cooperation with the school district, University, and local churches. Videos of the Public Workshops were broadcast on the public access television channel and could be watched on the project website for interested community members who were unable to attend the workshops in person. In these ways, the Planning Process was made open, transparent, and accessible for the entire Brownsville community.

Public Workshops

A total of four Public Workshops were held at key stages during the Planning Process. The following are themes of the Workshops:

- **Public Workshop I:** Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan Process
- **Public Workshop II:** Alternative Growth



and Development Scenarios

- **Public Workshop III:** Preferred Plan Scenario and Introduction to Plan Elements
- **Public Workshop IV:** Final Comprehensive Plan and Implementation

Public Workshop #1

The first Public Workshop served as an introduction to the Comprehensive Plan process and a major opportunity for community input. This Workshop was actually a series of five separate events, held on different days and in different locations around Brownsville, with the same program at each. During the last week of August 2007, one event was held in each of Brownsville's four municipal Districts, hosted by the City Commissioner of each District. Additionally, a fifth event was held in October 2007 on the University of Texas at Brownsville campus, which was geared specifically for input from students and the University community. The combined efforts of all five events drew an audience of over 550 people.

The program for each event began with an introduction to the City officials, Task Force co-chairs, and members of the Consultant Team involved in the Planning Process. An explanation of the Planning Process, preliminary assessment data, and draft goals as established by the Task Force, Stakeholder Interviews, and Consultant Team were included. One of the four district events was conducted entirely in Spanish and there were Spanish translation headsets available



at the four community events in order to increase accessibility for the Brownsville community.

The second half of each event consisted of two different methods for community input. First, community members in attendance were encouraged to share their goals and vision for Brownsville both through an open microphone and through submittal of written statements. Second, a sticky dot exercise was conducted. The draft goals and objectives identified to date were posted on the walls around the workshop space, and each person was given 15 stickers that they could use to select their top concerns out of all the posted goals and objectives.

The goals fit within one of five areas of interest, which are Economic, Social, Infrastructure, Civic, and Environmental. The top 15 goals from all the events were as follows:

1. Create safe schools and improve the quality of education (Social)
2. Improve and protect environmental resources (Environmental)
3. Increase waste recycling (Environmental)
4. Create a clean, safe, and efficient multi-modal transportation network (Infrastructure)
5. Maximize cooperation and use of our major assets (port, airport, bridges, island, University, etc.) and our partnerships with Mexico (Civic)



6. Create more and higher paying jobs and greater career opportunities (Economic)
7. Preserve historic Brownsville (Social)
8. Provide more parks and open space/recreation opportunities (Social)
9. Provide better, more accessible, and affordable health care (Social)
10. Create infrastructure systems that promote business growth and economic development (Infrastructure)
11. Create a managed traffic flow and thoroughfare system (Infrastructure)
12. Create safer communities (Social)
13. Improve conditions of City streets (Infrastructure)
14. Build a healthier community (Social)
15. Improve the community's workforce skills (Economic)

Public Workshop #2

The second Public Workshop was held on May 14, 2008 and focused on the presentation of and community input on several alternative scenarios. The evening before the Workshop, a special event was held for the Task Force to preview and seek input on the presentations. Assessment



data, including that on population and traffic congestion projections for the Brownsville area, were presented as background for understanding the different scenarios for Brownsville's future. Three scenarios were developed for this Workshop in order to better understand the community's preferences, and they are listed below:

- **Regional Scenario:** Approaches development from a regional perspective.
- **Village Scenario:** Creates and defines place through man-made, physical elements such as villages, downtowns, boulevards, etc.
- **Environmental Scenario:** Organizes development around natural systems such as floodplains, vegetation, riparian corridors, open spaces, resacas, etc.

Additionally, a scenario of downtown development and revitalization was developed by the Consultant Team for the community's input. The room had several boards on the walls displaying scenarios, maps, and community data. Again, Spanish translation headsets were made available in order to increase accessibility for the Brownsville community.

Over 220 community members attended this second Workshop. Each attendee was given an electronic selection device with which they could input their answer to a series of questions related to each scenario as the presentation proceeded. Turning Point software tabulated the answers and projected the results on a screen in the auditorium in real time, within seconds. In this way, everyone present received immediate feedback on what type of development was favored by the community. Based on the results of this data, it was determined by the Consultant Team that the Brownsville community favored a hybrid approach to development, combining elements from each of the three scenarios. Downtown redevelopment was also strongly supported by the community. This information formed the broad brush strokes that were then formed into the individual elements of the Brownsville Comprehensive Plan.

Public Workshop #3

The third Public Workshop was held on December 4, 2008, and served as an opportunity for the Consultant Team to introduce draft versions of the individual elements of the Comprehensive Plan. After a review of the previously determined goals and objectives for Brownsville, the structure, approach, and initiatives of the following Plan Elements were presented:

- **Planning Framework:** Visual representation of goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.
- **Economic Development Plan:** Explanation of the cluster initiatives to increase economic activity in Brownsville.
- **Environmental Plan:** Strategies to address environmental concerns, including habitat loss, poor water quality, underutilized open spaces, and flooding.
- **Transportation Plan:** Efforts to plan for mobility, connectivity, and safety; provide regional transit; and create a new roadway classification system for Brownsville.
- **Land Use Plan:** Description of the land use districts, including hubs, corridors, nodes, and cores, as well as an overview of the public safety and facilities components.
- **Downtown Revitalization Plan:** Elements and areas of emphasis that will recreate Downtown Brownsville as the vibrant core of the City.

Public Workshop #4

The final community workshop was held on May 13, 2009, and provided a starting point for the public to review the final draft of the Brownsville Comprehensive Plan. The particular focus of this workshop was on the implementation and fiscal strategies included in the plan to achieve the plan's vision and objective outcomes. All plan elements were in draft form and on display to the public via the Imagine Brownsville website, in



order to gain the community's input and support for the adoption of the Final Draft Comprehensive Plan by the City of Brownsville and the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Industry Cluster Focus Groups

Five cluster focus group meetings were conducted by the Consulting Team, in cooperation with the Brownsville EDC, with over 100 Brownsville area industry and institutional leaders participating. The focus and fact-finding group meetings were developed to assist with the strategy development of the Comprehensive Plan's economic development dimension. The five clusters are: heavy manufacturing, light manufacturing, healthcare, tourism and hospitality, and logistics and transportation.

These industries are identified as providing Brownsville with the greatest competitive advantage for the creation of economic wealth. Discussion transpired that identified the gaps within each of the five industrial clusters, with regards to missing components and challenges for industrial development. In addition, the identification of strategies to fill these gaps was discussed. These meetings also provided the opportunity to create more awareness of the Planning Process and invite more participation.

Community Survey

In the fall of 2008, an online opinion survey was developed and initiated to collect baseline condition information on the state of the City. Several community members were asked 43 questions covering topics in each of the five dimensions: economic, social, environment, infrastructure and civic. The online survey was sent out to over 800 Brownsville community members utilizing three email blasts. The online survey was conducted between October 2008

through February 2009. 250 responses were documented. The survey is referenced in several elements throughout the Comprehensive Plan document.

Plan Adoption

Meetings were held with Brownsville public institutions, Brownsville City staff, the City Commission, and the Planning and Zoning Commission at key moments throughout the Planning Process. This series of meetings culminated in July 2009 with meetings that presented the Final Comprehensive Plan for the City's review, comments, and ultimate approval for adoption.