

MASTER PLAN FOR CITY OF GREY FOREST

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of a master plan is to present the current conditions of the economy, infrastructure, and density of population within the City. Upon this foundation, plans and projections to meet the future needs of the community are based.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

The old Scenic Loop Playground area was created by E.N. Requa in 1929. Originally, the area now known as Grey Forest was used by people from San Antonio as a summer home area. As San Antonio grew, the number of permanent residences increased. The Scenic Loop Playground Club was incorporated as the City of Grey Forest in 1962 as a Type A, General Law City. Today, the population is approximately 418 citizens.

COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

The City of Grey Forest is zoned R-1 which allows only single family dwellings and absolutely prohibits all commercial and retail business. The Grey Moss Inn is the only retail establishment in the City. An exception was made in the original zoning ordinance because it was an established business for many years before the city incorporated and has historical value to the community.

The ambiance and flavor of the community is rural and rustic, with mostly native rock and wood structures. New structures built since the City was established have maintained the rustic theme. There are several homes in the Grey Forest/Helotes area that were built early in the century. The Manufactured Home Act of 1995 mandates that a City cannot prohibit manufactured homes. However, due to the configuration of the City public rights of way, it is impossible to move buildings of such size through the City without damaging the building, trees on public/private property, private fences, public utility lines/poles, and the City infrastructure. Also, the size of the buildings would create total blockage of City streets for indefinite periods of time putting the safety and welfare of the citizens in jeopardy by preventing emergency vehicle access as well as citizens ingress/egress. An ordinance was passed in November, 1999 prohibiting all manufactured homes from being moved through the City streets with the exception of Scenic Loop Road and Cedar Crest Drive up to the loop. Mobile/manufactured homes that were in the area before the City was incorporated, have been brought up to code and upgraded with natural products to blend in with the rustic atmosphere of Grey Forest.

GEOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The City of Grey Forest is located on the edge of hill country in South Central Texas. The incorporated area of the City is comprised of an area one mile long and three quarters of a mile wide with an extra territorial jurisdiction of one-half mile radius. The four main types of soil in the Grey Forest area are Tarrant-Brackett, Krum complex, Patrick series, and Trinity-Frio. Each of these soil types have certain advantages as well as disadvantages relating to storm runoff/sewage filtration and road base.

The vegetation in the City is a direct result of the soil types and therefore quite varied. A crucial priority of the City is to preserve the many irreplaceable trees, especially live oak, that are 100 to 300 hundred years old. This varied terrain and vegetation and the many natural caves provide an excellent habitat for the many species of wildlife in the area, which prompted the City being designated a wildlife preserve in 1978.

The Helotes and Lee Creek flow from the County into and through the City over the Glen Rose Aquifer, which is the sole source of water for the City. Helotes Creek feeds into the Edwards Aquifer south of the City, which is the major water supply for City of San Antonio and most of Bexar County. There are many low water crossings in and around the City making it vulnerable to extensive flooding and both creeks are prone to flash floods, resulting in several areas being in the 100 year flood plain.

LAND USE AND ZONING

The Zoning Ordinance requirements are more stringent than many cities because of major concerns regarding traffic density, septic system density and contamination of the water ways. The Ordinance requires a minimum of three-quarter acre lots for all new construction in District A and one and one half acre lots in District B that include setback limits and road frontage requirements. It also prohibits more than one single family dwelling on each piece of property as well as multiple unit residential buildings. Existing structures on lots less than three quarter acre or with secondary dwellings on the same property were grandfathered when the zoning for the City was approved by the citizens. However, a requirement was included that these undersize properties must be granted a variance which requires a public hearing and final approval by the Board of Adjustment before any additions to an existing structure are done and before any type of accessory structure can be added to the property. No property can be subdivided in either district if any lot created will be less than the minimum size required in Ordinances 45A, 28, ~~28~~A/B.

SUBDIVISION

The subdivision ordinance for development within the City is consistent with the zoning ordinance for development of vacant land. It establishes minimum standards to the developer for providing streets, drainage, septic, block and lot size, set backs, road frontage for each lot, and specifies the improvements to be provided by the land developer.

It also enables the City to ensure that it has adequate rights of way to handle the additional traffic, as well as increased street maintenance, water, gas, police, fire, EMS and any other services the city is required to provide citizens.

The Ordinance for development outside the City in the extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) calls for close coordination between the City and Bexar County to ensure that logical ingress/egress routes are implemented so as to not unduly impact City streets with added traffic/pollution/safety problems. Also, to prevent septic and storm runoff/drainage contamination from outside the City. There are no utilities or services available from the City of Grey Forest for any property outside the City, except for natural gas.

ECONOMIC STATUS

The City annual budget of around \$500,000 is comprised of several funding sources. Approximately 60% of annual revenue comes from the municipally owned Grey Forest Utilities. The rest is made up of property taxes, which generate about 4% of the annual budget, public utility franchises, sales and mixed beverage tax, and miscellaneous sources. The City makes an annual revenue bond payment of \$100,000 for the debt incurred to provide a municipal water system to the citizens. There has been no added revenue to offset this debt obligation which will not be paid in full until 2015. The City does not foresee any significant sources available to increase revenue in the future except the small annual increase of Grey Forest Utilities revenue and property taxes as valuations increase. Although the City has historically kept property taxes very low, it could be forced to raise them in the future to comply with new mandates from Federal and State entities that provide no funding to help defray the cost of their ever increasing demands.

FACILITIES AND SERVICES

The City of Grey Forest provides curbside garbage as well as free brush and junk days for citizens. There are no public facilities other than City Hall where Council meetings, municipal court and all other City functions are conducted. The Police Department is also located at City Hall and is a fully equipped Police Department that is on call 24 hours a day. There are three municipally owned vehicles in the service fleet and two contract vehicles. The volunteer Fire Department is a separate entity contracted by the City for fire protection. They also are contracted with Bexar County and have several other funding sources. The Fire House was built in 1997 and is located on municipally owned property leased by the Fire Department.

CITY UTILITIES

Gas and water service is provided by Grey Forest Utilities and Water System, a municipally owned utility whose operations are guided by the Board of Trustees appointed by the City Council. The Council, as the governing body of the entity that owns the utilities, has final say and authority over

gas/water rates, issuance of bonds, policy making, and future extensions of water mains. The Mayor is a de-facto member of the Board of Trustees.

While the gas company serves a large area in Bexar County of approximately 8000 customers as of 2001, the water system serves only citizens and properties inside the city limits of Grey Forest. A study done by an engineering firm in 1996 revealed that 20 to 30 more customers will put City wells at maximum pumping capabilities and that anticipated development within the City will add that many customers. The study resulted in the Grey Forest City Council passing an ordinance in 1996 that prohibits all water service to any property outside the City in order to ensure that there is adequate water to meet the citizens needs. In addition to City water there are still some private wells in service for household use, but the majority are used for irrigation.

The City receives electric, telephone and cable services from outside entities and has a franchise agreement with each one.

TRANSPORTATION AND STREET CONDITIONS

Private automobiles are the only transportation available to the City and to travel within the City. Scenic Loop Road is the only route into and out of the City, so it bears the entire brunt of traffic from SH16 and Helotes going through our City to Leon Springs, Boerne and IH10. All other roads in the City branch off from Scenic Loop Road and are very narrow, curvy and in some cases quite steep. Intersections offer very limited visibility requiring low speed limits and stringent stop and yield controls. The amount of traffic the roads can tolerate is severely limited and because of the narrow rights of way space is not available to enlarge them. In some areas, private homes, property lines, and fences are 1 to 5 feet from the roadway. Any development outside the City, or in the ETJ, will not have traffic ingress/egress opportunities that other cities can offer because of the extreme size limitations of existing streets and the lack of space to build new ones. Also, the limited amount of revenues/finances to maintain existing roads with heavier traffic loads is of great concern. This is especially true regarding outside development, since there would not be money to help fund added financial burdens and even if the development was annexed in, the property tax revenue would not be adequate to cover the added expense. In addition, the probability of air pollution over the City is greater as it is surrounded by higher elevations. Any alternate mode of transportation to help control the pollution, congestion, wear and tear on City streets, and safety problems caused by an overload of vehicle traffic is non-existent now, or in the foreseeable future.

SEWERAGE, DRAINAGE AND STORM RUNOFF

The residents throughout the City and the extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) depend on septic tanks. There is only a thin layer of limestone composition throughout the City, which is necessary to filter out contaminants before they reach the aquifer that supplies the municipal water system. The possibility of

a sewer system/drainage lines being installed in the City are non-existent in the foreseeable future due to the exorbitant cost of installing lines and the lack of treatment plants or lift stations within feasible proximity of the City. This puts the burden on the City to keep septic systems out of the flood plain and to limit the total number of structures/septics, in order to avoid a greater potential for contamination of the public water system and health hazards for citizens. The City is near capacity in being able to handle the results of development in all these areas of concern. Currently, the County Inspector reviews/approves septic system plans on new and existing systems, issues permits, and inspects the installed system before giving final approval. The City Building Inspector requires a copy of the approved septic plan and permit issued by the County before he will issue a building permit, and a copy of the final inspection/acceptance of the installed septic system from the County before he will give final approval of a new dwelling for occupancy.

Because the City is located in a low area and surrounded by higher elevations, the storm runoff flows down the streets, across citizens property, across several large natural areas into the two creeks and eventually into the aquifers. With uncontrolled development, huge areas of this natural environment of trees, grass and undergrowth that filters the runoff would be destroyed. Development would also create storm runoff contamination from composition roofs, oil/gas residue from roads and driveways, chemical fertilizer and pesticides from yards, and pet/livestock feces.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Ensure all current and future land use and zoning regulations require the highest possible standards of development and enforcement.
2. Continue communication between the City and the County Public Works Department to ensure that current and future households have adequate septic systems.
3. Enforce Subdivision ordinance updates that require any developer who plans five or more lots in a subdivision to present an impact study from a reputable environmental firm. The study must address the effects of the proposed development on traffic density, increased maintenance of public streets, air pollution, septic density and contamination, storm runoff contamination, drainage systems, public safety, and quality of life issues.
4. Due to a lack of feasible locations for commercial/retail because of traffic and density problems, as well as safety and pollution problems, any proposal to rezone for commercial/retail establishments must be thoroughly researched before any action taken.
5. Annexation should be carefully considered due to financial limitations to provide the extra required services. The City would have to provide all services such as Police, Fire, EMS, Water System extensions, twice weekly garbage pickup, brush/junk days, and street/bridge maintenance and upgrade. The additional property tax revenue generated from annexed properties would not begin to cover their portion of City funded services and infrastructure maintenance. Also, there is only enough

water supply to serve new growth within the current City area and since SB 1 has mandated cities have an alternate water source to provide water for every citizen during drought or emergency situations, annexation would increase the City's potential expense even more.

6. The City should place priority on keeping the streets and bridges maintained in order to delay replacement as long as possible. A study done by the City engineer determined it would cost approximately one million dollars to replace/upgrade the streets and bridges that need work. Because of the City's bond debt, and the high income level of our citizens, the City does not qualify for any type of financial assistance. Based on financial projections of City revenues, if funds are budgeted for one street or bridge project each fiscal year, these improvements could be completed within a few years. This will require a long-term commitment by present and future Councils/Mayors to budget and spend carefully to meet this goal and avoid an even greater expense created by long delays.
7. The City must continue to protect its water supply. The City has been very involved in complying to Senate Bill 1, the water development legislation passed in 1997. The City worked closely with other groups in the area to form a water district and perhaps share costs of providing alternate water sources, as well as establishing a Priority Groundwater Management Area (PGMA) designation for the Trinity Aquifer System. The PGMA will operate in tandem with the water district in providing protection from over-development and over-pumpage in the Glen Rose Aquifer/Cow Creek formation, which is part of the Trinity Aquifer System and the major source of water in this area of Bexar County and several other counties. These protections are imperative to preserve our only water source.
8. The City had the Texas Rural Water Division do a study and inventory of septic and unplugged wells so when Wellhead Protection is addressed by TEQM in the future, it will provide even more protection for the public well-site and public water supply. These requirements could include enforcement and penalty clauses for abandoned unplugged wells and septic violations in the Wellhead Protection area. It could also provide strict protection against hazardous materials.
9. The City was involved in the process of the State designating San Antonio/Bear County routes for the transport of hazardous materials. The Council's main effort was directed toward preventing SH16, which is three miles from our City limits, being the designated route to Bandera County. The effort proved to be successful, as SH16 did not become a designated hazmat route, and is limited to local deliveries only. The City will put any ordinance in place that the law will allow to further protect the area if it becomes apparent that Scenic Loop is being used as a short cut by hazmat haulers.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The City's paramount goal is to preserve the unique quality of the residential living environment. Adequate regulations and controls must be in place and enforced to enable the City to reach the following goals:

1. Lessen and control congestion in the streets

2. Secure safety for citizens from fire, flood, and other dangers such as brush growing in the creeks and blocking culverts; thus increasing flood potential.
3. Promote health and the general welfare and orderly development of property
4. Provide adequate lighting and air quality
5. Retain natural wildlife habitat
6. Prevent the overcrowding of land
7. Avoid undue concentration of population
8. Facilitate adequate provision for transportation, water, utilities, police and fire department services, EMS, and other public requirements.

THIS DOCUMENT WAS ACCEPTED AS THE MASTER PLAN FOR THE CITY OF GREY FOREST BY UNANIMOUS VOTE OF THE CITY COUNCIL AT THE JANUARY 25, 2000 REGULAR COUNCIL MEETING.
REVISION OF THIS DOCUMENT WAS APPROVED BY COUNCIL ON MAY 27, 2003

THE COUNCIL RESERVES THE RIGHT TO UPDATE OR ALTER THIS PLAN AS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN AT ITS DISCRETION.