

MASTER PLAN FOR THE CITY OF GREY FOREST

Fall 2015

(Approved by City Council on October 27, 2015)

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The City of Grey Forest (The City) Master Plan is part of a continuous process to provide a safe and satisfying environment for the citizens and to consider the general desire of the community to conserve, preserve, and protect the natural environment of our unique city. As part of this process, a foundation for plans and projections to meet the future needs of the community are established.

BACKGROUND

As a basis for the Master Plan, it is important to understand the history and characteristics of the community as well as the resources available to implement plans. The following sections provide this background.

History

The Scenic Loop Playground 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/weekend retreat area. Gradually, people made the summer/weekend cottages their permanent residences. The Scenic Loop Playground Club was established as a homeowners group that took care of the common areas and needs of the residents. After two decades of discussion with one failed attempt to incorporate and to maintain an independent status from future growth in the area, the residents of the Scenic Loop Playground area voted to incorporate into the City of Grey Forest in 1962 as a Type A, General Law City. As of 2014, the U.S. Census Bureau estimates the population of Grey Forest to be 503. There are approximate 220 residences within the city limits. The City encompasses approximately .7 square miles and owns a 43 acre Natural Area south of the City on Menchaca Rd within a short walking distance of the city limits.

Community and Residence Characteristics

The City is zoned R-1 which allows only single family dwellings and via ordinance prohibits 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 as the Grey Moss Inn 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 many National Park Rubble and wood architected structures. New structures built since the City was established have been encouraged to maintain the rustic theme. There are several original homes in the Grey Forest area that were built in the early 20th 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 impractical to move larger 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 could create a 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 impeding citizen's 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 up to the loop on Cedar Crest Drive. Some of the 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 is located on the edge of the hill country in northwest Bexar County. The City Hall is located at latitude 29°36'51N and longitude 98°41'05W. The incorporated area of the City is comprised of 448 acres approximately one mile long and three quarters of a mile wide with an extra territorial jurisdiction (ETJ) of one-half mile radius. The 43 acre Senator Frank L. Madla Jr. Natural Area is south of the incorporated city limits.

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, ranging from 100 to 300 hundred years old. These trees are threatened by the Oak Wilt disease that is steadily moving toward the City. The City has established and continues to enforce an Oak Wilt ordinance. 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 headwaters of the Helotes Creek to the north and Lee Creek to the northeast of the City converge inside the City and continue on to meet the Chiminea Creek just south of the city limits. They flow over the Trinity/Glen Rose Aquifer, which is the prime source of water for the City. Helotes Creek feeds into the Edwards Aquifer south of the City, which is the major water supply for the 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. Bexar County has established an extensive high water alert system and there are several monitors are on Helotes Creek in and around the city. The Grey Forest Police Department and the Grey Forest Area Volunteer Fire Department receive high water alerts along with Bexar County Public Works. Gates have also been installed at low water crossings in and around the City. The Grey Forest Police Department and the Grey Forest Area Volunteer Fire Department close and monitor these gates during high water events.

Land Use, Zoning and Subdivision

The City's Zoning Ordinance requirements are more stringent than many cities due to 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 original Requa 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 these undersize properties may be granted a variance via a public hearing and final approval by the Board of Adjustment before the start of any project that involves additions to an existing structure 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 45B and 28.

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, setbacks, 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 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 and to prevent septic and storm runoff/drainage contamination from outside the City. The City does not provide utilities or services for properties outside the City.

City Utilities

Gas and water service is provided by Grey Forest Utilities (GFU), a municipally owned utility whose operations are guided by the Board of Trustees appointed by the City Council. The City Council, as the governing body of the entity that owns the utility, and maintains 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. GFU provides natural gas service to the City and to a large area in Bexar County serving approximately 13,000 customers as of 2015.

The City owns the water system and GFU administers and operates the water system. Currently the water system serves only citizens and properties inside the City limits. During the drought period between 2012 and 2015, Stage 1 water restrictions were triggered calling for voluntary water use restrictions in accordance with the drought management plan in place. 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 citizen's needs. In addition to City water service, there are still some private wells in operation for household use, but the majority are used for irrigation. A more recent study in 2011, indicates that the availability of Trinity Aquifer groundwater is adequate to meet the city's future needs, although the current water system could be strained by events such as high water demand during a wildfire event, a pump failure, or extended drought conditions. The report analyzed possible solutions including deepening one of the wells, acidizing the wells, or drilling additional wells. The current drought trigger levels as currently defined are at a proper level.

The City receives electric, telephone and cable services from outside entities and has a franchise agreements in place with City Public Service and Time Warner Cable.

Facilities and Services

The City provides curbside garbage collection twice a week and recycling collection one a week. The City also supports an "Annual Junk Day" where citizens can bring old, broken, unused, etc. items for disposal. There are no public facilities other than City Hall where Council meetings, municipal court and all other City functions are conducted. There is a pavilion, open to the public and a cottage available for rent at Madla Natural Area.

The City Police Department, also located at City Hall, is a fully equipped Police Department that is on duty 24 hours a day. The Police Department maintains regular patrols throughout the City, responds to

calls for services, provides extra vigilance for citizen property while they are traveling, enforces ordinances, and performs many other functions as part of their many law enforcement duties.

As of October 1, 2015, fire and emergency services for the City are contracted with the Emergency Services District 8. Fire and emergency services are dispatched from the fire station located on Scenic Loop Road across from City Hall.

Previously, the City had contracted with the Grey Forest Area Volunteer Fire Department and has a rich history with the GFAVFD and its predecessors. In 1949, fire protection was provided by a small group of volunteers with a 1947 pumper, which was housed in the garage of the Scenic Loop Playground Club (SLPC) building. In the mid-to-late 1950's the SLPC donated property at the corner of Scenic Loop Drive (now Sherwood Trail) and Scenic Loop Road to the volunteer fire department. Volunteer labor and donated materials built the 2 bay/office fire station. In the early 1960's, after incorporation, the volunteer fire department offered to share their station with the new Grey Forest City government. By then, Bexar County had assigned coverage of the 72 square miles surrounding the City to what would become the Grey Forest Area Volunteer Fire Department (GFAVFD). The GFAVFD operated on donations and a small monthly stipend from Bexar County until it became a City department in 1990. By 1996, the GFAVFD was again operating independently from the City, contracting with the city to provide fire and first responder service. In the late 1990's, the City purchased 2 acres at 18515 Scenic Loop Road to be leased back to the GFAVFD on an annual basis. In 1999, GFAVFD built a 6 bay station at that address and continued to contract with the City, still receiving funds for service from Bexar County. In 2007, the Bexar County residents voted to establish an Emergency Services District (ESD). The GFAVFD began contracting with ESD 8 as well as with the City until the ESD absorbed the GFAVFD in 2015.

The City Public Works Department has work facilities on City owned property across the street from City Hall. The Public Works department maintains city owned land, buildings and streets. This includes trimming trees and brush in the right of way, mowing, patching and maintaining roadways and performs many other duties to keep the City attractive and functional. The Public Works Department also supports brush pickup and chipping at least once annually for citizens.

Transportation and Roadways

Scenic Loop Road is the primary route into and out of the City. In addition, Scenic Loop Road is one of the only roads in the area that directly runs between State Highway 16 (and the Helotes area) and Interstate Highway 10 (including Leon Springs/Boerne area and points between) and therefore bears the brunt of traffic between those two major thoroughfares. Maintenance and upkeep of the portion of Scenic Loop Road within the City limits is the responsibility of the City. Bexar County maintains the road on either side of the City. With the growth along Scenic Loop from the city toward IH 10, the traffic on Scenic Loop Road has increased in recent years. This increased traffic, especially large trucks, has caused consternation among many citizens concerning the potential for deterioration as well as safety due to the increased traffic. Additional safety and traffic concerns have also been expressed due to an increase number of bicyclist and runners traversing Grey Forest, particularly on Scenic Loop Road.

All other roads in the City branch off from Scenic Loop Road and are very narrow, curvy and in some cases are 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.

Sewage, Drainage and Storm Runoff

The residents throughout the City and the 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/septic systems, 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 is allowed by ordinance to 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 citizen's 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.

Parks and Programs

Originally known as The Scenic Loop Playground, the City of Grey Forest was developed as a rural retreat with its emphasis on natural resources and man's relationship to nature. Most citizens are in support of preserving green and public spaces. Within the City, a private voluntary homeowners association, the Scenic Loop Playground Club (SLPC), has remained active in the community since the late 1920s. The SLPC is supported by member dues and hard work by volunteers. It owns and maintains approximately 27 acres of land within the City including creek bank property, several small lots, and a large land tract on Sherwood Trail with a clubhouse, ball field, and basketball court. SLPC also hosts various club and community events throughout the year.

In the Fall of 2014, the SLPC approached the City to discuss the possibility of transitioning the SLPC property to the City in order to protect and preserve the land and facilities for use by the citizens of Grey Forest in perpetuity. A basic agreement has been worked out and is currently under consideration by both parties.

During the past several years, the City has also provided for programs and activities available to all citizens. As part of the City budget, opportunities to support citizen education programs have been available to organizations. In addition, the City has provided funding support for city wide activities conducted in conjunction with the Scenic Loop Playground Club.

As of 2014, the City owns one natural area park. The Senator Frank L. Madla, Jr. Natural Area is named for the late Texas State Senator who served the citizens of Texas for 33 years. Senator Madla and his

family have been long time residents of the Scenic Loop area. The 43 acre park was purchased through a matching funds grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and conservation easement funds from the City of San Antonio. Donations from individuals and businesses in the surrounding communities have aided in the park development. Given the nature of the grant, the Madla Natural Area is open to the public. Madla Natural Area is home to a great variety of native flora and fauna, walking trails and impressive vistas. The Madla Natural Area is located south of the incorporated city limits on Menchaca Road.

Economic Status

The City adopts an annual budget that includes income from several funding sources and expenses for all city administration and services. Approximately 85% of annual revenue comes from the municipally owned Grey Forest Utilities. The remainder of annual funding comes from property taxes, public utility franchises, sales and mixed beverage tax, and miscellaneous sources. The City does not foresee any additional significant sources of income except an annual 5% increase of the Grey Forest Utilities contribution and property taxes as valuations increase. For fiscal year 2015, the City received revenue of \$633,196 from Grey Forest Utilities and the City's ad valorem tax revenue was \$33,814. The City has historically kept the property tax rate stable and low.

GOALS, OBJECTIVES & CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE MASTER PLAN

The City's paramount goal is to preserve the natural beauty and unique quality of the residential living environment. Adequate regulations, controls, and budgeting activities must be in place and enforced to enable the City to achieve its goals, objectives, and considerations while promoting the health and the general welfare of the citizens. The primary tenets include:

1. Secure safety for citizens from theft, harm, fire, flood, and other dangers
2. Promote orderly development of property while preventing the overcrowding of land
3. Support projects and programs that enable the citizens to enjoy and retain the natural healthy environment and wildlife habitat
4. Facilitate adequate provision and control for roadways and transportation
5. Facilitate adequate provision and control for water, utilities, and other public requirements

THE MASTER PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

In keeping with the goals and objectives for the Master Plan the following considerations, activities, and steps comprise the plan:

Secure safety for citizens from theft, harm, fire, flood, and other dangers

- Provide for an adequately trained and equipped City Police Department
- Provide for high quality fire and EMS services via contract or other available sources
- Provide for adequate public works staff and equipment as well as engaging outside organizations (e.g. SARA, Bexar County, etc.) as needed to support flood prevention projects such as debris and brush removal from creeks and low water crossings. Portions of this activity depend on City negotiations with the SLPC regarding property conveyance.
- Investigate increased security of mailbox facilities that will be on city property.

Promote orderly development of property while preventing the overcrowding of land

- Ensure all current and future land use and zoning regulations require the highest possible standards of development and enforcement
- Continue communication between the City and the County Public Works Department to ensure that current and future households have adequate septic systems
- Enforce the subdivision ordinance that requires 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. Developers will abide by ordinance and submit plans for review by the City Engineer prior to starting construction activities. The cost for this review is the responsibility of the developer.
- Continue to prohibit establishment of commercial and business developments
- Consider annexation carefully due to financial limitations to provide the extra required services.

Support projects and programs that enable the citizens to enjoy and retain the natural healthy environment and wildlife habitat

- Conclude discussions and accept if offered the agreed upon proposal by SLPC to sell its property to the City with the City's intend to preserve the property for use and enjoyment of the City's citizens
 - Via ordinance, put in place the Scenic Loop Playground Community board to establish and operate according to property maintenance/improvement and education/activity plans.
- Continue maintenance and support of the Senator Frank L. Madla Jr Natural Area
- Make the prevention of Oak Wilt a high priority because of its potentially devastating effect on the character of the City
 - Investigate a tree replacement/planting program utilizing disease resistant trees
- Enhance the City's Public Works Department in order to help in the maintenance and beautification of the City
- Discourage citizens from feeding wildlife causing their dependence on humans (i.e. they are no longer wildlife) and is typically detrimental to the health of the wildlife

Facilitate adequate provision and control for roadways and transportation

- Continue program started in 2015 on road improvement and maintenance based on the City Engineer's analysis of city streets and roadways. Based on this analysis, establish a long term plan to address the most critical road needs in a prioritized order
- Investigate and consider working with Bexar County to determine possible road improvement on Scenic Loop Road in conjunction with their planned improvements
- Investigate limiting traffic on Scenic Loop Road to include heavy truck thru traffic ordinance, stop signs to facilitate safety and access from side roads, and appropriate pedestrian crossing signage.
- Revisit parking ordinances on the narrow City streets and this has been a citizen concern
- Investigate transportation services for senior citizens (grocery, medical, etc.). What is the true need? Will it be utilized? What are the grant options available (e.g. Bexar County)?

Facilitate adequate provision and control for water, utilities, and other public requirements

- The City must continue to protect its water supply. The City should continue planning meetings with Grey Forest Utilities regarding the water systems. These plans should consider options including but not limited to expanding the existing water systems via pumps and storage tanks, or updates to existing wells. As plans are developed and implementation is considered, appropriate updates to the master plan may be needed.
- Conduct additional citizen education program regarding drought preparation and sustainment through drought conditions, encourage rain water harvesting, greywater recycling for reuse in toilet flushing, landscape irrigation, and other non-potable uses, rainwater catchment, etc. and water conservation techniques and practices programs in both Grey Forest and surrounding areas under development.
- Recognize that while citizen actions are important, it is equally important to monitor the expansion of the City of San Antonio and in Bexar County toward Grey Forest from IH10 on Scenic Loop Road and the Babcock area. Find avenues to determine what can be done to protect our water supply from the development moving in the City's direction.
- Investigate availability of other cable and internet suppliers for Grey Forest citizens or the ability to provide community wide wireless service.

REVIEW AND PLAN MAINTENANCE

The City of Grey Forest Master Plan is to be reviewed and updated a minimum of every three years.