



# CIVIC LEADERS PLAN FOR STRONGER COMMUNITIES

By **Sarah Korpita**, Burditt Consultants; **Trey Job**, Public Works Director, City of Bastrop; and **Danny Zincke**, Parks and Recreation Director, City of Boerne

As Texas experiences unprecedented growth, communities are tasked with responding to increased demands on natural resources such as water; infrastructure; housing; and quality of life resources that include a wide variety of social and cultural amenities. These demands must always be balanced with the ever-evolving changes in expectations of the individuals served in these communities. The work of investing in strengthening communities and creating an environment for functional and social connections begins with understanding and translating these expectations into actionable, relevant plans for community development.

Communities located within commutable distances of larger urban areas are experiencing the challenges of growth. Many community leaders in these cities are demonstrating leadership through planning initiatives that specifically address growth management opportunities. The City of Boerne, located northwest of San Antonio along the I-10 corridor, is embracing an opportunity to manage dynamic growth while maintaining its character and sense of place;

the very attributes that have made the community an attractive, unique place to live. Community leaders have initiated the Comprehensive and Master Park planning effort to capture residents' vision for the future while laying a foundation for growth.

"Breaking down barriers, which separate people from connection to the community, is our business. Whether that comes in the form of designing a public library, holding a community conversation about natural open space preservation, choosing to walk or ride a bicycle to work to demonstrate our commitment to the environment, or the design of inclusive transportation facilities, we are in the business of building communities," said Danny Zincke, City of Boerne parks and recreation director. He believes strong communities begin with open conversations about connection to the place. This, followed by connection to the built environment and development of the place, enhances and fosters the environment for those connections to occur.

"People are drawn to Boerne because of its beautiful vistas and small-town charm. People choose to live in Boerne because the people and place are welcoming and provide a sense of belonging," said Zincke. "As a fellow neighbor

and friend, my hope is that as we plan for the future development of the community, we keep the value placed on environment, open space, and beauty at the forefront of policy and infrastructure development. This will ensure our community maintains the distinct charm which drew us to Boerne in the first place."


Other cities, like Bastrop, are facing similar challenges by taking a lead in art and cultural development to further develop their branding efforts which can set them apart from other destination communities. Trey Job, City of Bastrop director of public works and parks and recreation, is currently working with Bastrop Art in Public Places to facilitate a master park plan for an Arts and Culture Walk, located at its existing Bob Bryant Park. "Bastrop has a long history of art culture and we are looking to continue to develop this particular piece of the community's heritage through the Arts and Culture Walk project. Our hope is the project will serve as a new addition to ongoing public art projects which promote Bastrop as an art destination," Job explained.

The Arts and Culture Walk, led by the Bastrop Parks and Recreation board and the Bastrop Arts in Public Places board, demonstrates a collaborative effort between a citizen advisory group and non-profit organization. Members of the Bastrop City Council and City of Bastrop staff are also involved in the visioning sessions. Job stated, "We believe by involving key stakeholders in project planning efforts, communities create buy-in for the successful design, construction, and use of a facility. Additionally, we know our residents are creative and compassionate individuals invested in the positive sustainable growth of our community around the arts destination vision. It is important that we look to the future while preserving the past, and take this approach on all city projects. Working together helps solidify the relationships we rely on daily for this effort."

In both instances, community planning efforts involve citizen feedback through a combination of surveys, focus group meetings, and conversations. These feedback tools are an integral component of any planning effort and ensure an inclusive and transparent public decision-making

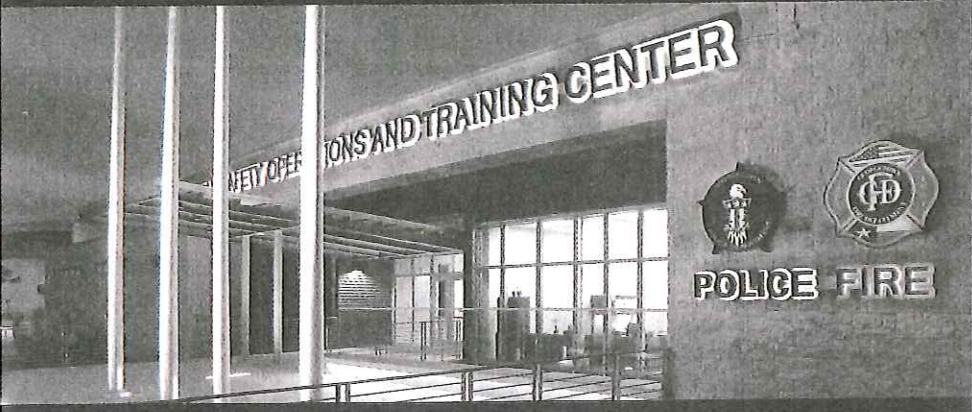
process. Planning exercises like comprehensive planning or park master planning are effective vehicles to document these discussions and present actionable plans for implementation. Without a plan, a clear path for the future is uncertain, and navigating challenges such as population growth or casting a vision for creating a destination community can create roadblocks for progress.

Bastrop and Boerne's examples demonstrate how community involvement and planning efforts can help create a clear vision, and incorporate the community's values which residents expect to be implemented in all policy decisions. As growth management continues to challenge many Texas cities, communities can meet these demands by collaborating, talking openly about community values, and working with local leaders to develop action plans that support a sustainable and healthy future. ★



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