



Envision Central Texas: Planning for Our Region's Future

Austin and the Central Texas Region are recognized as among the most desirable places to live in the United States. It is our nationally recognized quality of life that is our greatest competitive advantage. Increasingly, the economic health of a region will relate to its ability to attract and retain the "creative class" and entrepreneurs who can live anywhere they wish.

Preserving our cherished quality of life in the face of rapid growth however, is a tremendous challenge. The five-county Central Texas Region will add another million people over the next 20 to 40 years. The demands that accompany this growth will require us to address such issues as how and where land is developed for housing and jobs, the types of homes we live in, how we travel around the region and how we preserve and protect our environment. Choices we make today will dramatically impact the Central Texas we live in tomorrow.

In 2001, Envision Central Texas (ECT) was created to assist in the public development and implementation of a regional vision to address the growth of Central Texas and help us preserve and enhance our natural resources, economic vitality, social equity, and overall quality of living. The vision, which was derived from the input of thousands of Central Texas citizens, includes multiple choices of transportation and housing, compact walkable communities in key nodes, abundant open spaces and recreation opportunities and a strong emphasis on social equity and preservation of our region's unique character and history. Implementation of ECT's vision can help to ensure our region continues to be one of the best places to live and work in the country for generations to come.

ECT's vision has already had a significant impact on the public and private sector's thinking about long term planning for growth. Some of the exciting "visionary" ideas that have come to fruition since 2001 include:

- Creation of a 700-acre master development plan for the former Mueller Airport
- Successful public referendum for passenger rail
- New transit-oriented development ordinances and design codes in Austin
- 2,000-acre master planned transit-oriented development in Leander
- Introduction of new land use tools throughout the region
- Preservation of significant open space throughout the region

What has ECT accomplished so far?

■ **Two-Year Visioning Process.**

In 2002, ECT embarked on an extensive two-year "visioning process" which included working with thousands of Central Texas citizens to create a common vision to unite the region around strategies to address critical growth issues. The process included numerous meetings, studies, and scenario planning workshops that culminated with a region-wide survey completed by more than 12,500 Central Texas residents. The results of the survey were distilled into a regional "vision" which is the basis for ECT's implementation strategies.

- **Preferred Scenario: 2003.** ECT also compiled a "Preferred Scenario: 2003" using the results from the four ECT scenarios created in 2003, weighted by the public response to the vision survey, to illustrate the ideas that the vision describes.

- **Public Education and Dialogue.** In January 2005, ECT launched its first efforts towards implementation of the regional vision. Since that time, ECT has begun a public dialogue about some of the critical growth challenges in Central Texas through a number of large, successful events centered around such topics as transit-oriented development, growth along SH 130, the future of regional commuter rail, regional open space priorities and most recently, the first ECT Community Stewardship Awards Luncheon which recognized the innovative people, projects and processes that have already begun to address the challenges facing our region in ways that will help make the vision a reality.

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■ **Launched Seven Implementation Committees.**

ECT also launched seven implementation committees to work on strategies to address key growth issues.

The Committees are:

- Transportation and Land Use Integration (with an SH 130 Corridor Task Force)
- Economic Development Coordination
- Housing and Jobs Balance
- Density and Mixed Uses
- Open Space Funding Plan
- Social Equity
- Recognition of Best Practices

■ **Communications Outreach.**

ECT has also created an extensive communications network to share ideas and strategies. ECT distributes a quarterly e-newsletter about strategies for coping with the rapid growth in the region and the work of Envision Central Texas and other publications and maintains an ever growing website with abundant regional resources.

What is ECT currently working on and what is planned for the future?

■ **Continue Next Steps along SH 130 Corridor.**

ECT's SH 130 Corridor Task Force is exploring the possible strategies for improving the planning along the SH 130 Corridor that emerged from the Summit. These include cooperatively developing a vision/plan with the communities along the corridor as a framework that could be used to help guide growth and convening workshops in communities to discuss their specific challenges and issues relating to development.

■ **Planner Roundtables and Working Groups.**

ECT has already begun work on another of the suggestions from the Summit which was to create issue-specific committees of the planners along the corridor. Water/wastewater, transportation and land use working groups have been formed and are now working to gather information and devise strategies to address growth challenges along SH 130.

■ **Quality Growth Toolbox.**

ECT is developing an online Quality Growth Toolbox for Central Texas which will provide an array of tools, models and resources to assist local communities as they plan for the future growth. The toolbox will contain examples of development codes, design standards, and innovative planning strategies appropriate to Central Texas.

■ **Open Space Planning.**

ECT is investigating helping implement the Trust for Public Land's "greenprinting" idea for Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, and Williamson counties. This GIS modeling and inventory software project is nearly complete in Travis County.

■ **Continue the Work of the Seven Implementation Committees.**

Each of the committees will continue and expand the work that was begun in 2005.

■ **Continue to Develop Regional Resources.**

Maintain and improve the ECT website, e-newsletter, BLOG, white papers and reports.

■ **Convene Public Forums.**

ECT will continue to convene public forums to hear information about and to discuss topics affecting the growth and development of Central Texas.

ECT can only realize its visionary goals to the extent that our region's businesses, cities, counties and organizations provide the resources that enable the work to be done.

Why Should my Organization Support Envision Central Texas?

- Growth is inevitable. To accommodate the doubling of our population within 20 to 30 years, the leadership of the region must embrace new strategies.
- ECT has defined many effective strategies in its regional "vision" and is actively educating the community about new ways to address growth.
- ECT is tackling some of the region's toughest issues through its seven Implementation Committees made up of more than 200 area citizens.
- ECT has demonstrated it can educate, engage and convene on a large scale and can host significant events with meaningful dialogue.
- ECT has strong community support and is beginning to make a significant impact on the community. The level of dialogue about strategies for accommodating our rapid growth has been raised tremendously since 2001.
- A contribution to ECT demonstrates that your organization is a responsible and concerned member of the broader regional community.
- Contributors to ECT will be recognized on our website, e-newsletter and printed materials; will receive invitations to special events about key regional issues throughout the year, will have the opportunity to serve on ECT task forces and committees and will receive copies of white papers and reports related to the work of ECT and Central Texas.