

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Stephenville, Texas is the regional agricultural, commercial, medical, and educational center of the Cross Timbers area of Texas. Its history includes farmers, Native Americans, coal mining and the oil industry, all of which made indelible impressions on the landscape and created what is today an outstanding city with a population of over 15,000.

Aware of its past and faced with current development needs and issues, the City Council authorized the development of a new Comprehensive Plan in September 2002. This Plan, developed in a multi-stage process, provides the vision, goals, objectives and actions necessary to direct the City's progress over the next thirty years. It is an official public document that should serve as the guide for policy decisions relating to the physical, social, and economic growth of the community. In addition to providing goals and objectives, the Plan assesses the opportunities and challenges facing the City and sets priorities for an implementation program that outlines specific actions and practical results. It is highly important that the needs and aspirations identified in the Plan be balanced with the primary roles and duties of the City in providing mandatory and essential city services.

The new Comprehensive Plan is a principal part of the City's overall, ongoing planning process. Approval of the Comprehensive Plan by the City Council establishes the vision and direction of the community and represents an important first step toward achieving the City's stated goals. This plan should not be considered a static document. It is the result of a continuous process to gather and evaluate information and make informed decisions based upon constantly changing conditions. The Plan should be regularly reviewed, revised and updated as needed to maintain its applicability to current conditions and established priorities. At a minimum, the entire plan should be revisited every five years to ensure that it continues to reflect the true values and direction of the community. While Stephenville's Comprehensive Plan should be flexible enough to respond to changing needs, the community should remain steadfast in its vision and support for the core goals and objectives contained in the Plan.

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Stephenville's Comprehensive Plan is a guide with a foundation in state law. The Texas Legislature, through Chapter 213 of Texas Local Government Code, provides that "The governing body of a municipality may adopt a comprehensive plan for the long-range development of the municipality. A municipality may define the content and design of a comprehensive plan." Since Stephenville is a municipality with a population of more than 5,000 residents, it is permitted an extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) extending one mile beyond its borders. In these areas, the City has the right to review and approve subdivisions, and prepare plans for areas that have direct relationships to municipal planning.

Elements of the Comprehensive Plan

The elements of the Stephenville Comprehensive Plan are organized into 12 chapters, each of which includes existing conditions, issues, goals, objectives, and actions for identified aspects of the community.

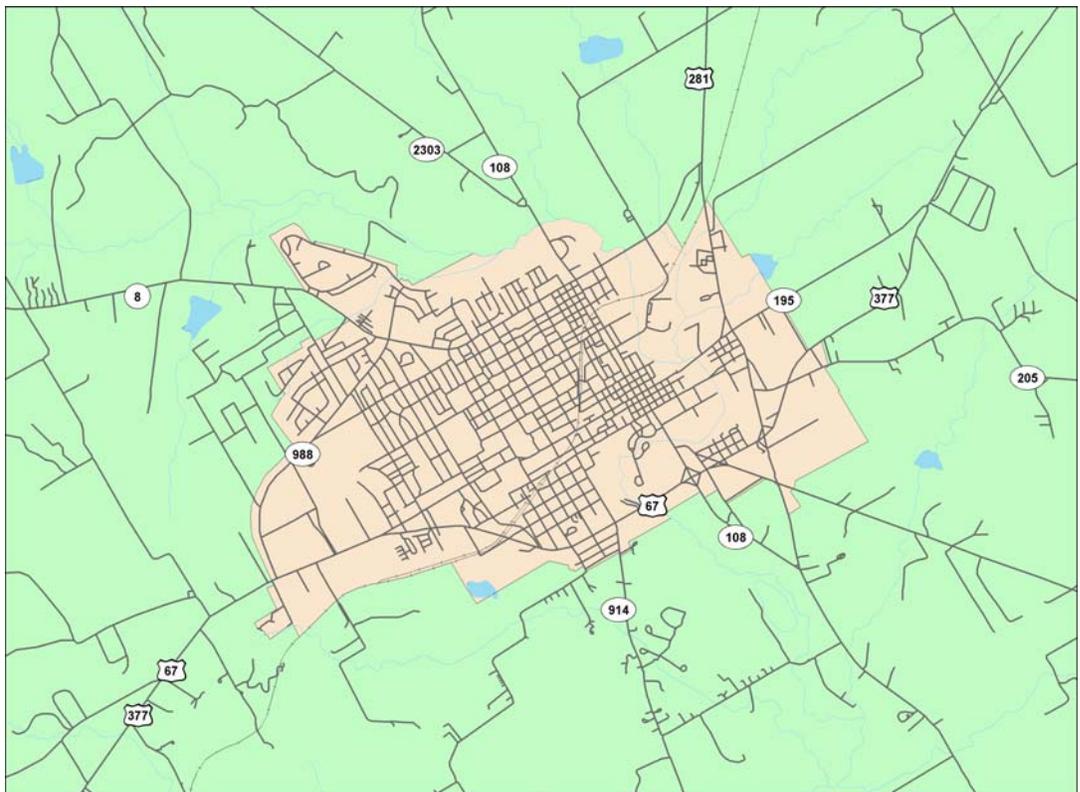
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Chapter 9	Utilities and Drainage
Chapter 10	Economic Development
Chapter 11	Capital Improvements Plan
Chapter 12	Plan Implementation

Each chapter of the Plan was developed to specifically address the current and anticipated needs of the community. Although they are separate chapters, they are interrelated as land use influences transportation which impacts economic development, which in turn demands housing units which require parks and open space. Coordination is therefore required between the goals, objectives and actions of each chapter within the overall Comprehensive Plan.

Geographical Area for the Comprehensive Plan

The geographical planning area for this Plan is shown in **Figure 1.1 - Comprehensive Planning Area** and includes both the incorporated city and the one-mile extraterritorial jurisdiction. In these areas, the City has the right to protect surrounding areas and effectively manage growth patterns. Although legal limits are defined as within the extraterritorial jurisdiction, Stephenville's identity as a regional center requires the chapters of the Comprehensive Plan be responsive to factors and needs beyond the established one-mile boundary. Consideration to interlocal cooperation is needed to ensure the continued and improving quality of life in all of the Cross Timbers area.

**FIGURE 1.1
COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING AREA**



Development of the Comprehensive Plan

The Stephenville Comprehensive Plan is the result of many hours of consideration and input from community residents and leaders. It is an

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effort to answer five questions that are the basis for development of the Comprehensive Plan:

- ◆ Where has Stephenville been in the past?
- ◆ Where is the City now?
- ◆ Where are we heading in the future?
- ◆ Where do we want to be in the year 2030?
- ◆ How do we achieve our desired future?

Understanding the community's past and present conditions is necessary to determine the city's identity and its ability to successfully plan for the future.

Citizen involvement is the cornerstone of the Comprehensive Plan. In order to be a workable plan, it must be identified not just with the City's elected officials who adopt it, but also with the entire City and its residents who helped draft it. The Plan should be capable of being followed and maintained even as elected officials change. Through community involvement, the Comprehensive Plan sought to incorporate the community's values in terms of quality of life; character and scale of development; enhanced aesthetic appeal; and how new development should be integrated into the existing and future city framework.

These key participants in the planning process included:

- ◆ The citizens of Stephenville, through two Community Forums held at the outset and toward the end of the planning process;
- ◆ The Steering Committee, a group of citizens appointed by the City, who met regularly for over a year to discuss the issues and elements of the Plan and to provide initial input, overall review and monitoring of the planning process;
- ◆ Various "key persons", representatives of the larger population of Stephenville, through an interview process in the early stages of plan development;
- ◆ Focus groups and neighborhood representatives;
- ◆ City staff as the liaison between the Steering Committee, Planning and Zoning Commission, City Council and the Consultant team;
- ◆ The Planning and Zoning Commission as the appointed group of citizens responsible for developing and administering the Comprehensive Plan; and, The Mayor and City Council, who as the City's ultimate decision-making officials were involved at key stages so the resulting plan would fulfill their expectations and requirements.

- ◆ Meetings between various members of these groups and the planning consultant were held to discuss and develop the various aspects and directions of the Plan. The Steering Committee was involved in a thorough process of identifying issues, discussing alternatives and solutions, and determining needs and priorities. *The Planning and Zoning Commission will perform a key role in helping to make the decisions and choices that will shape the form and detail of the Plan. The Plan will eventually be recommended to the City Council for approval. As the City's chief governing body, it will have the opportunity to approve the new Comprehensive Plan that will assist in and direct their decision-making process. The resulting Comprehensive Plan should assure the citizens of Stephenville a future that meets their desires and aspirations for their community.*

A Plan for the Future

When Stephenville initiated this new effort in long-range planning, the City decided to manage its destiny rather than reacting to change. The results of previous planning efforts are reflected in very tangible accomplishments across the community achieved through dedication and commitment to a shared vision.

Planning for Stephenville's future is the continuous process of identifying issues and needs, building consensus, establishing goals and objectives, and determining the most effective means by which these ends may be achieved. With its emphasis on meaningful results, this Comprehensive Plan sets the stage for intelligent and coordinated actions instead of complacency and inaction. In light of the challenges and opportunities facing the City of Stephenville, the following chapters of the Comprehensive Plan are intended to provide guidelines for the next 30 years to ensure Stephenville's desired future.

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