

Economic Development

Strategic Plan

for

Aransas County

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INTRODUCTION

PRESENTATION SUMMARY

The Economic Development Council has put together a working draft of a strategic plan that will proactively guide the growth of our community. The council has identified the attributes of our community, which we wish to protect, and the types of businesses that will maintain our core community strengths and values. This plan will be used to proactively contact and market to the types of businesses identified.

REASON FOR PRESENTATION

The vision is that the City of Rockport, Town of Fulton, Navigation District and Aransas County leaders will join with the Rockport Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce to jointly develop a unified Economic Development strategic plan, which will be used to proactively guide the growth of our community.

PRESENTED

Rockport Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce –	June 21
City of Rockport –	July 12
Town of Fulton –	July 5
Aransas County –	July 11
Navigation District –	July 5

Benefit and Use of a Unified Economic Development Strategic Plan

A unified plan will help each community group, which is involved in economic growth, to:

- Focus on a common growth objective
- Support each other during budgeting and activity planning for infrastructure improvements
- Show professionalism when negotiating with businesses evaluating for relocation to our community
- Protect our community's charm and values.

In addition, unification will enable our community to take advantage of the budget and marketing strengths of the Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation. As a Regional EDC, if they have a clear idea of what we have and what we want, they can represent our community and be able to match us with appropriate entities.

Economic Development Strategic Plan for Aransas County

Executive Overview

The purpose of this plan is to identify a growth pattern that will add good paying jobs to the community while building on the community strengths and maintaining the unique charm and atmosphere of the area.

The plan identifies the current strengths of the community as:

- Natural habitat (Floral vegetation, bird migration, wildlife, bays and gulf waters)
- Sportsman's paradise (Fishing, hunting, specie observation)
- Local Economy (Shrimping, fishing village, art community, tourist area)

The quality of life and unique charm of the community includes:

- Small town atmosphere (slower pace, friendly, quiet and family oriented)
- Geographic Location (Tropical climate, near Big town amenities, near international airport, near good medical facilities)

The current growth patterns highlight

- A growing retirement community
- A number of "ME TOO" retail establishments and tourist services
- A second home location

Targeted Growth areas are

- Education as an industry
- New Tourist Attractions (especially those that encourage repeat visits)
- Retirement Community Services
- Industries relying on telecommunications and internet services as the primary method for communicating and/or facilitating the delivery of purchased products or services to their customers
- Other opportunities include Industries that are:
 - trade labor intensive (especially after Technical College is established)
 - offer products and services to senior citizens
 - offer Products and services to disabled citizens

Implementation of the plan requires preparation of marketing materials that highlight the benefits of Aransas County in order to attract targeted businesses and partnering with The Corpus Christi Regional Economic Development Corporation as the primary marketing arm of plan.

PLAN OBJECTIVE

The plan objective is to identify desired growth opportunities and proactively recruit them to the area. This will be done in a manner that will endeavor to maintain the natural beauty and resources of the area and the family oriented small town atmosphere of the community. The intent of establishing a proactive growth strategy is to ensure the unique charm of the community is maintained while creating jobs that will increase overall wealth of the community's citizens.

Data will be gathered to support the attributes desired for preservation and the resources particular to the community.

The plan will attempt to slow the erosion of resources and the quality of life that is precious to the community and is endangered because of uncontrolled growth.

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT GROWTH PATTERNS

We are growing!

According to Juliet Wenger's article on the assessment provided by The Council of Government's Area Agency on Aging (date not supplied) Aransas County is the fastest growing county in the coastal bend with a growth rate of 29.6 percent.

Many of the new people coming to the area are retirees or folks who are starting late-life second or third careers with the intent of retiring here in the near future.

In a community assessment study conducted by The Council of Government's Area Agency on Aging, Aransas County was identified as a community with a current significant retirement population, which can expect ever increasing numbers of older citizens.

Over the past four years a national publication has, yearly, highlighted Aransas County as a desired location to live—especially for retirees.

While still a small community, we have:

- Five (5) Dollar Stores
- Eight (8) Banks
- Thirty Nine (39) Real Estate & Leasing Companies
- Eighty Seven (87) retail trade establishments
- Ninety Two (92) Food and Accommodation Establishments

Bluntly speaking we have a number of "Me Two" Businesses. What we need are some unique businesses, which will add appeal and diversification to our economy.

We have been, and will continue to be, a location of second homes and vacation dwellings.

Of our ten largest employers, who collectively employ 1,758 people, four of them are tax dollar supported and account for 866 employees. Four hundred ninety four other establishments account for 4,559 employees—or an average of 10 or fewer employees per establishment (2004 Aransas County demographic profile).

The tourist economy depends largely on our natural resources and our artist community. While festivals have added to our tourist attractions, they do not provide a weekly draw to the community. Dean Runyon & Associates Survey states that \$20.30 out of every \$100 is spent by tourists (20.30%). This survey states that in 2003 Aransas County realized \$65.6 million from travel spending.

ANALYSIS: COMMUNITY STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

QUALITY OF LIFE

- **Strengths:**
 - coastal living
 - small town atmosphere (slower pace, friendly, quiet and family oriented)
 - excellent public schools
 - near good medical facilities
 - strong volunteer community
 - a working fishing village
 - diverse list of activities
 - art, music and theater opportunities abound
 - diverse financial institutions
 - safety – low rate of violent crime

- **Weaknesses:**
 - no local hospital or emergency room
 - limited skilled labor pools
 - no public golf course
 - lack of affordable housing-need for middle & low income housing
 - high insurance rates for businesses and homeowners
 - fear of growth

- **Opportunities**
 - investors interested in developing waterfront for mixed land use
 - strong Downtown Merchant Organization in Rockport
 - strong volunteer community

- **Risks**
 - without economic growth that will increase community wealth, population polarization is a potential (very wealthy / very poor).
 - major tourist attractions may be depleted with unchecked growth (birding, fishing & small town atmosphere)
 - unique, locally owned businesses jeopardized by chain stores, restaurants and hotels

ANALYSIS: COMMUNITY STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

- Strengths
 - subtropical climate (mild and breezy)
 - large bay and coastal water systems
 - coastline, harbors & waterways
 - Oak trees
 - three-hour drive from four major metropolitan areas, 30 minutes from Corpus Christi
 - near big town amenities
 - near international airport
 - diverse wildlife / many wildlife areas
 - on migration path of hummingbirds, whooping cranes and other exotic birds

- Weaknesses
 - hurricane potential
 - corrosive environment (salt air)
 - high insect population

- Opportunities
 - near travel route for large Winter Texan population (traveling to the Valley and to Arizona)
 - develop more public access to waterfront
 - develop more walking, biking and ATV trails
 - market to new generation of RV travelers who, generally, keep moving—rather than parking for the season.

- Risks
 - road, airport and waterway development puts environment at risk
 - lack of good transportation alternatives (no busses, no shuttle to International Airport, public transportation into Corpus Christi)
 - further development may cause a change in migration paths of whooping cranes, hummingbirds and other exotic birds.

ANALYSIS: COMMUNITY STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS

POPULATION DEMOGRAPHICS

- **Strengths**
 - many artist & artisans,
 - retirees bringing professional expertise and skills
 - strong volunteer population
 - safe community – low violent crime rate

- **Weaknesses**
 - lack of technical training
 - high unemployment rate – 6.9 (Aransas County Demographics Tx Workforce Commission)
 - high percentage of county on welfare-est. 72% (source to follow)
 - growing retirement population

- **Opportunities**
 - technical college will build a skilled labor pool
 - technical college will bring and attract professionals
 - winter Texans are a source of volunteer professionals and tradesmen

- **Risks**
 - current growth and education trends could result in a polarized population of very wealthy and very poor
 - a thriving retirement community requires appropriate services

THE TARGETED GROWTH AREAS:

- Education as an industry
 - establishment of a nationally recognized Technical College
 - nurture and grow existing education capabilities
 - art instruction
 - cooking classes
 - sport instruction
 - stained glass article fabrication

- New tourist attractions (especially those that encourage repeat visits)
 - upscale food stores
 - Texas products sampling / order processing / product Shipping
 - history & artesian attractions

- Hospital & Medical Community
 - Superb training for EMS

- Retirement Community Services
 - offer products and services to retired citizens
 - multi-choice assisted living communities
 - Senior nutrition and exercise services
 - market existing services to State-wide elder community

- Industries relying on telecommunications and internet services as the primary method for communicating and/or facilitating the delivery of purchased products or services to their customers
 - insurance benefit call centers
 - order processing for catalog sales
 - online art gallery / art broker services

- Other opportunities include Industries that are
 - trade labor intensive (especially after the Technical College is established)
 - offer products and services to disabled citizens