
Vision Statement

South Padre Island Comprehensive Strategic Plan

S u b m i t t e d t o :
The Comprehensive Strategic Plan Steering Committee
Town of South Padre Island, Texas

S u b m i t t e d b y :
Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC

February 2003



Executive Summary of the Visioning Process

In December 2002 and January 2003, as an integral phase of the comprehensive planning process, the Town of South Padre Island convened a series of community forums. The purpose of the forums was to identify the current concerns of the citizens about the Island, and to record and prioritize their views on its future development potential. From these forums and a write-in response from those who could not be present, a clear consensus emerged. An analysis of these responses has been interpreted as a Vision Statement for the Town of South Padre Island in the year 2020. This Statement will be used as the basis for preparing the Comprehensive Strategic Plan.

The Vision Statement - South Padre Island 2020

Community Character and Quality of Life

- The Island has transformed its image; it is now a unique seaside community with a friendly small town character attracting a balance of permanent residents and tourists.
- It is noted for natural scenic beauty, Island-style buildings and lush landscaping.
- The Town has “raised the bar” of expectations for community aesthetics.
- Padre Boulevard is now a visually exciting, tree-lined corridor with underground utilities.
- Buildings and signage are harmonious, and excessive paved parking areas have been replaced with landscaping and sidewalks.
- New public buildings have set high standards and exemplify the distinctive “South Padre Style.”
- Parks, playgrounds, waterfront promenades, boat ramps and other recreational amenities are conveniently accessible to residents and visitors.
- The Town is noted for cleanliness of its beaches, parks and roadways. Vacant lots are well kept and free of litter.
- The Island’s natural resources are valued and well protected.
- There is a system of parks, greenways and open spaces linked by foot or bicycle paths.
- The transformation of the Island has created greater year-round opportunities for local business and employment.

Balanced Development

- New land-use regulations enacted to support the Comprehensive Strategic Plan are equitable, user-friendly and effective in achieving a higher quality of development.
- Tourism now has a year round family orientation with less reliance on Spring Break.
- A stable, better-trained work force supports a higher end tourism market.

-
- Land-use patterns for new development, infill and redevelopment form distinctive compact neighborhoods.
 - Shared parking and an attractive pedestrian network have reduced reliance on the automobile.
 - Livable neighborhoods, with a diversity of housing types, have a broad array of convenient amenities.
 - Businesses have diversified and improved in quality, and are conveniently located to serve their specific markets.
 - New attractions cater to residents and visitors of all ages.

Sound Infrastructure and Transportation

- Traffic congestion at special event and peak periods has been reduced, public transit made more available and a network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities are in place.
- Deficiencies in utilities and infrastructure capacity and services have been corrected and the town has the fiscal resources to support planned growth.
- A second causeway respecting the ecological and recreational functions of the Laguna Madre has been constructed.

Community Relations and Governance

- The Town has a form of government which allows greater control of fiscal matters and local public expenditure.
- Town government is well managed and is fiscally prepared for planned investment for short and longer-term capital projects.
- Citizens are active and deeply involved in civic affairs, and local associations are well supported.
- Effective communication allows citizens to be aware of local matters of concern.
- Government, citizens and business interests collaborate on a day to day basis to improve the island.
- The Comprehensive Strategic Plan is the reference for all public sector decisions concerning capital investment and regulatory measures.

The Visioning Process

Introduction

The Town of South Padre Island has significant locational advantages, unique climatic, environmental and natural resources, a wide range of both residential and tourist accommodations and a variety of recreational attractions. Growth is limited by the constraints of the barrier-island geography and environment and by a diminishing supply of developable land.

With a year 2000 resident population of approximately 2,500, visitation can cause the "effective population" to burgeon to an estimated 186,000 during peak periods such as Spring Break. Except during such events, the Town remains at a size and level of development that engenders a friendly, small town atmosphere and the feeling of "being away from it all."

The Town's beaches and other amenities have been and remain particularly attractive to both pleasure-seeking tourists and visitors, as well as to permanent and seasonal residents attracted to the Island's setting and casual lifestyle. Although retirees and seasonal residents have tended to comprise much of the local population, the Island attracts an increasing number of households; those who both reside and are employed on the Island, as well as those who make a lifestyle choice to live on the Island, while commuting to employment on the mainland. Conversely, a final constituent group are the many who reside on the mainland but commute to Island businesses and who also have a stake in the Island's future.

The future success of the Town lies in satisfying the aspirations of all interest groups within this confined land area in a way that enhances the positive aspects of the Town. Two questions can help the Town determine its future path:

- *What are the priorities and aspirations of the different groups in the community?*
- *How can any conflicting desires be managed in a way that will allow these groups to live and work together to achieve their aspirations and provide the maximum benefit to all parties?*

Answering the first question requires the inclusive participation of the community in a process which clearly identifies their concerns and states their desires for the Town's future. The second question requires the preparation of a comprehensive plan to address these aspirations in the most effective way. Such a plan would also require the concerted will of the citizens to implement the policies which will ensure that the plan can be achieved over time.

By January, 2003, the residents and non-resident property and business owners of South Padre Island participated in community forums and responded in writing to a series of questions designed to identify their views on the Island's present conditions

and future potential. Despite a wealth of different ideas and comments recorded during six separate meetings and the write-in process, a clear consensus emerged on key issues pertaining to *present strengths and weaknesses* and *future opportunities and threats/vulnerabilities*.

KEY AREAS OF COMMUNITY CONSENSUS

Present Strengths

- 1. *Natural Attractions*** – beaches, Laguna Madre, Gulf of Mexico, birding opportunities.
- 2. *Recreational Activities*** – wind-surfing, fishing, boating, bicycling, etc.
- 3. *Small Town Atmosphere*** – friendly people, general lack of traffic, physical smallness of the community.
- 4. *Location*** – location of South Padre Island in the regional and international context –proximity to Mexico, “being away from it all.”
- 5. *Environment*** – clean air, water, and beaches.
- 6. *Food / Entertainment*** – wide variety of restaurants and the variety of entertainment venues for adults and children.
- 7. *Cultural Diversity*** – range of people who live year-round as well as the “Winter Texans” and the other seasonal visitors, proximity to Mexico, and the offerings of the region as a whole.

Present Weaknesses

- 1. *Community Appearance*** – tacky signage, loud colors, litter, poorly maintained commercial and residential structures, weedy vacant lots, overhead powerlines.
- 2. *Infrastructure*** – lack of drainage, lack of water and sewer facilities.
- 3. *Economic Development*** – lack of incentives for new businesses, unstable business market, unbalanced business types, lack of business diversity, inadequate and poorly educated labor-force, lack of professional level opportunities.
- 4. *Transportation*** – no second bridge, no immediate air service, traffic congestion, parking problems, no consideration for alternative forms of transportation.

-
5. **Government** – over-regulation in some areas and not enough control in others, poor communication with the public, lack of coordination between various levels of government.
 6. **Public Facilities** – lack of parks, no playground for children, no community center, no public restrooms near the beach.
 7. **Spring Break** – traffic congestion, rude behavior, littering, over-whelming volume of people, drinking.
 8. **Taxes and Revenue** – high property and school district taxes, lack of funds to implement improvements.

Future Opportunities

1. **Community Appearance** – beautifying Padre Boulevard, initiating architectural controls and review, implementing a landscape ordinance, keeping vacant lots mown, requiring structures to be kept up, putting powerlines underground.
2. **Transportation** – providing more parking at beach access points, improve the public transportation system, building a 2nd bridge or causeway to the north, consider the development of an airport, provide a ferry.
3. **Growth Management** – develop a comprehensive plan, improve zoning and building codes, limit the extent of development, control the type of development.
4. **Public Facilities** – develop a community center, provide a public park, develop a playground.
5. **Economic Development** – diversify the business base, provide opportunities for young professionals, provide more upscale retail shopping.
6. **Government Regulation** – reduce government regulation, increase control over the type and appearance of new development.
7. **Infrastructure** – improve drainage, provide sidewalks and curb and gutter, install high-speed internet connection, insure availability of drinking water for future growth.
8. **Marketing** – change marketing target to young professionals, retirees, and families, improve image of community, work with airlines, combine government marketing activities.

Future Threats / Vulnerabilities

- 1. Environment** – erosion of beaches, air and water pollution, loss of natural resources due to development.
- 2. Community Resolve** – lack of follow-through for approved plans, lack of funding to implement, changing political agendas.
- 3. Transportation** – failure to construct 2nd bridge / causeway, another bridge accident, continued seasonal or event driven traffic congestion, poor traffic control, lack of access to air facilities, lack of connection to the Valley.
- 4. Growth Management** – over-development or restricting development too much, failure to maintain consistent zoning and building codes, granting too many variances, letting the Island get too crowded.
- 5. Infrastructure** – not enough drinking water to support growth, continued electrical service interruptions, continued poor drainage, lack of street improvements.
- 6. Environmental Disasters** – oil spills, red tides, hurricanes.
- 7. Taxes and Revenues** – continued high school district and property taxes, revenue shortfalls due to economic declines, insufficient revenue to undertake needed or desired public improvements.
- 8. Economic Development** – decline of business opportunities on Island, insufficient business diversity to attract repeat tourists, overall economic decline due to national or international trends.
- 9. Leadership** – lack of leadership from elected officials, appointed officials, or citizen groups.
- 10. Government** – poor services, inconsistent law enforcement, lack of law and code enforcement, lack of communication with the public, inefficient use of funds.
- 11. Community Appearance** – more tacky signs, lack of landscaping, poorly maintained buildings and lots, no architectural controls, weeds, resulting in decreased tourism.

A Vision Statement

The Vision is of the Town of South Padre Island in the year 2020

The Vision Statement has been structured under a number of closely-related themes which reflect broad categories of community concerns, as follows:

- Community Character and Quality of Life
- Balanced Growth and Development
- Sound Infrastructure and Transportation
- Community Relations and Governance

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND 2020

Community Character and Quality of Life

- South Padre Island has transformed its image to become a unique seaside community and a first-class resort destination, attracting a balance of permanent and seasonal residents and visitors who come to enjoy its beaches, protected scenic natural environment and its many recreational attractions in a family-friendly small town setting.
- A distinctive “South Padre style” reflects the relaxed seaside ambiance, the climate and international culture and encompasses well-designed buildings, lush landscaping, and themed way-finding signage and lighting.
- South Padre Boulevard has been transformed as an imageable and visually exciting tree-lined corridor. New and retrofitted buildings are harmonious in design, signage is appropriate in scale and understated in design. The visual impact of overhead utilities has been reduced by taking advantage of technological innovations and other opportunities to cost-effectively place utilities underground. To the maximum extent possible, excessive front paved areas have been removed and replaced with landscaping and generous sidewalks and bike lanes.
- A new Town Hall, community center, birding center and other public buildings and civic enhancements have set a high standards in exemplifying the “South Padre style” and are widely emulated by new and renovated commercial and residential structures.
- The Town’s beaches, parks, playgrounds, beach access points, waterfront promenades, boat ramps and other recreational amenities are well placed and conveniently accessible for residents and visitors. Recreational and sports facilities meet the needs of all age groups and are well-used by the Island’s growing number of families with children.

-
- The Town is noted for the cleanliness of its beaches, parks, roadways and public and private properties. The declining number of vacant lots are well kept and free of litter and debris.
 - The Island's unique natural resources - its beaches and dunes, wetlands, Laguna Madre waterfront and native flora and fauna - are valued and well protected.
 - A system of linked parks, greenways, open spaces, water-front promenades, nature trails and areas dedicated to activities such as bird watching and eco-tourism are easily accessible by foot or bicycle.
 - The transformation of the character and ambience of the Island, now the premier beach resort in Texas, the presence of longer stay families, more discerning tourists and a commitment to excellence by the Town has in turn created opportunities for greater employment and business opportunities year-round.

Balanced Development

- New regulations and development standards enacted to implement the Comprehensive Strategic Plan are clear and user-friendly and have served to streamline the permitting process while "raising the bar" of standards of development quality.
- Tourism has matured and diversified with a year-round orientation, longer stays, a broader array of family attractions and less reliance on Spring Break. The Island has developed a wide range of entertainment and amenities, more upscale hotels, shopping and a well-used convention center attracting group visitation from the region and nation-wide. The excesses of Spring Break and Texas Week have been moderated by strict enforcement. South Padre's reputation and market share have grown, making it a well-known, highly competitive destination for regional, national and international visitors. Hospitality training programs have improved service quality, producing a stable, educated and better paid workforce, while supporting a shift toward a higher end tourism market.
- Land use patterns have consolidated to form distinct neighborhoods and activity districts through carefully guided new development, infill and redevelopment. Neighborhoods are well defined and consistent in scale and use. Business, shopping and entertainment districts serving both tourists and residents are compact and well-defined. Through shared parking and a well developed pedestrian network, reliance on the automobile for local travel is greatly reduced.
- The array of housing types has diversified, with single family homes, Townhouses, apartments and condominiums sited compatibly and consistently in scale. With a broad array of amenities such as parks, playgrounds, sidewalks and landscaping, neighborhoods are liveable and attract growing proportions of families and permanent residents.

-
- Commercial uses have diversified with a wide array of quality shopping opportunities for local residents and tourists. Tourist-oriented commercial activities such as souvenir shops have diversified and improved in image and are located in close proximity to hotels and entertainment attractions.
 - There are many new attractions and amenities on the Island catering to both resident and visiting youths, adults and senior citizens. These include community meeting facilities, a library, eco-tourism and cultural attractions, public sports center, and improved public access to marinas and water sports. Travel in the region and across the border into Mexico is easily arranged with tours available to places of interest

Sound Infrastructure and Transportation

- Traffic congestion has been reduced during special event and peak periods by limiting access in selected areas and by strict and innovative traffic management. Congestion has been reduced by increased availability and convenience of public transit and a convenient network of bicycle and pedestrian facilities.
- Deficiencies have been corrected and measures instituted to ensure an adequate supply of potable water and water for irrigation. The supply of electricity is reliable and sufficient to satisfy all local needs. Flooding threats have been reduced in low lying areas through drainage improvements and development standards that reduce standing water and encourage detention and rapid percolation. The Town has the infrastructure capacity and fiscal resources to support planned incremental growth.
- A second causeway has been constructed providing an alternative link to the mainland and improved egress for emergency evacuation. The new causeway respects the delicate ecological balance and recreational functions of the Laguna Madre. The design of the causeway and its approach to the Island provides a distinctive image as an entry feature or gateway.

Community Relations and Governance

- The Town has become a “Home Rule” type of government, which allows greater control over fiscal matters and public expenditures. This allows for a more stable environment for effective decision-making.
- Town government is well-managed and has instituted measures to ensure fiscal health and remain well-prepared for planned short and long range capital investments.
- South Padre citizens are deeply involved in civic affairs and participate in decisions affecting their current and future lifestyle. City Hall provides effective

communication on day to day affairs and the various associations on the Island, representing a wide range of interest, are well supported by citizens of all ages.

- Government, citizens and business and civic organizations continue to collaborate effectively on initiatives to improve South Padre Island.
- Town staff and elected officials are committed to fulfill their obligations to provide high quality services and leadership.
- The Comprehensive Strategic Plan is the key reference for all government decisions, actions concerning budgets, capital spending, regulatory measures and development review and approvals.

#