



# Chapter 1 Planning Framework

## Town of South Padre Island Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan document sets forth the Town of South Padre Island's vision for its future physical and economic development. It is designed to give form to the general statement of vision by specifying the necessary steps to accomplish the vision and realize tangible outcomes. Sound planning is equally important for the Town Aldermen, land owners, residents, and the millions of recreational visitors who are attracted to the Island's beaches and abundant natural resources. Most importantly, this plan is intended to accommodate the Island's future growth and seize its economic

development opportunities in a manner that is both livable and sustainable.

### Purpose

Why is this plan important? As it is discussed throughout this report, South Padre Island has and continues to experience growth through land development, visitor travel, and redevelopment of existing areas. Island residents and leaders recognize that the Island has finite resources. Based upon recent trends, future growth could exacerbate existing problems well before the Year 2025.

The intent of this Comprehensive Plan is to neither end nor accelerate growth, but to anticipate and manage it so that the Town government, other public agencies, and the private sector are well-equipped to:

1. Maintain the highest quality community living environment;
2. Protect and enhance neighborhoods for Town residents;
3. Invest in appropriately-scaled infrastructure improvements;
4. Provide for the safe, efficient movement of people and goods;
5. Protect the quality of the natural environment and conserve

"Sustainable development is positive socioeconomic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and society are dependent."

Source: South Padre  
Island Comprehensive Plan  
2008

- natural resources; and
6. Provide adequate public facilities and services.

“To have a vision means to look ahead: to imagine the future. The ability to imagine or dream the future – to create in our minds something beyond our present reality – is a distinctly human skill. History has shown that seeing something in the mind’s eye is often the first step to actually achieving it.

As used in planning, visioning is a process by which a community envisions its preferred future. It chronicles the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of a community and helps citizens agree on what they want their community to become.

If used correctly, this Comprehensive Plan will help Town leaders to evaluate future development proposals and decide if they appropriately reflect the Town’s goals and vision for the future.

## Plan Development

The planning process involved to create this document has taken a long time. In December 2002 and January 2003, the Town of South Padre Island convened a series of community forums, the purpose of which was to identify citizens’ concerns 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. These responses formed the basis of the Vision Statement for the Town of South Padre Island which describes the Town in 2020. *(Below is an excerpt from the document. Please see the Appendix for the entire document.)*

### *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 as 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. Where feasible, 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 islands 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 is 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 ecotourism are easily accessible by foot or bicycle.
- The transformation of the character and ambience of the island, 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 tennis courts, 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 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.

Later in 2005, a 12-person Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) was assembled to re-start the planning process using the Vision Statement above as a starting point. The committee met often throughout the process reviewing and editing the chapters provided to them from the consulting planning agency. The individuals committed to this planning process and involved with the CPAC are identified in the acknowledgments at the front of this plan.

This Comprehensive Plan represents more than an extension of earlier plans and previous studies; it has been the product of a considerable amount of original thinking and extensive deliberation. This plan consists of the following elements:

**Town Profile (Chapter 2):** This element provides an enumeration of existing conditions, issues, and assumptions regarding future growth. It serves as the foundation for the plan's subsequent elements.

**Land Use (Chapter 3):** This element provides a vision for the future physical form and character of development on the Island. Its purpose is to establish the needed policy guidance for future decisions relating to the type, scale, and pattern of development and its compatibility with the built and natural environments.

**Mobility (Chapter 4):** This element addresses the Island-wide mobility needs on all levels – from streets to sidewalks and trails to public transit. Fundamental issues in this chapter are the need for improved walkability, efficient traffic movement, and an alternative system to relieve tourism-induced congestion.

**Parks and Resources (Chapter 5):** This element consists of a plan for protecting the Island's beaches, shorelines, and related ecosystems. Protecting the Island's natural features is of fundamental significance, both as an economic asset and, indeed, for overall sustainability of the built-up community.

**Growth & Infrastructure (Chapter 6):** This element addresses the needs of parks, utility systems, and other public services to accommodate future growth, while reinforcing the cohesion of the Island's resident community. It also proposes guidelines and initiatives to beautify the Island and enhance the identity of key areas of the Town.

**Economic Development (Chapter 7):** This element expands on earlier studies to enhance and diversify the Town's economic resources and opportunities. Of significance are the strategies to strengthen the tax base so as to moderate its reliance – and success or demise – on a naturally cyclical economy. The availability of advanced communication technology is fundamental to the success of any economic development program in this age; this element will provide particular focus on the Island's access to and distribution of highest-speed communication resources.

**Implementation (Chapter 8):** The purpose of this element is to identify a course of policy direction that will guide future investment and management decisions. It identifies those agencies and departments responsible for future initiatives and the processes and time frames for completion.

## Mission Statement

Early in the planning process, the CPAC composed the following strong and positive Mission Statement:

***South Padre Island is a unique, friendly seaside resort community that values its residents and tourists, preserves and protects the natural environment, and provides for quality sustainable growth and development that is highly diverse and responsive to changing economic conditions.***



The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee played a key role in the development of the plan, ensuing integration of the Island's values and expectations for its future.

## Public Involvement

Residents, land owners, business people, and investors all have many and diverse values. In order to enhance the quality of development and livability on the Island, both of which are integral to the overall vision, the continued involvement of these diverse values throughout the planning process was vital.

While much of the public input was received through the regular participation of CPAC members, the Town's Board of Aldermen, Planning and Zoning Commission members, and directors of the Economic Development Corporation, there were other opportunities for general public input to contribute to this plan. These included key person and small group interviews, planning workshops, and public meetings where all citizens were invited to attend

and express their views.

The decision to engage in a comprehensive planning process was done principally to influence the future of the Island, rather than reacting to change. This plan is the product of a deliberate decision to manage future growth and development instead of responding to development on a case-by-case basis without a balanced consideration of Town issues and objectives. It has been many years since the Town conducted a comprehensive planning process and adopted a plan,<sup>1</sup> which emphasizes the importance of the decision and timing to develop and implement this plan.

## Use of the Plan

This Comprehensive Plan belongs to the Town and its citizens who generously offered their time and talents to create it. The plan contains many components, such as providing information, identifying existing conditions and characteristics, and influencing future governmental policies and responses.

By its nature, the plan is intended to serve all interests and offer the following benefits:

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<sup>1</sup> South Padre Island, Plan 2010, prepared in 1990

1. **Certainty in future actions:** It states the intentions of the Town's governing body regarding future physical development and infrastructure investment.
2. **Development guidelines:** It provides the Town's Board of Aldermen, Planning and Zoning Commission, and others, guidance in policy decisions with the stated goals and recommended actions.
3. **Input to future investment decisions:** It identifies capital improvement needs and priorities that should be used in the Town's annual budgeting and capital planning processes.
4. **Consistency in land use regulations:** The plan serves as a foundation for zoning decisions and subdivision reviews.
5. **Economic development strategies:** It serves as an overall blueprint for the Island's future economic development and enhancement of existing and future businesses.

## Planning Area

The geographical planning area encompassed in this plan includes both the incorporated Town of South Padre Island and an outer perimeter area that includes the Town's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) area. Chapter 42 Section 42.021(b) of the Texas Local Government Code provides the Town with a five (5) mile ETJ to the north and to the south, but only on the island (i.e. "land") portion of this barrier island. The Town has no jurisdiction of submerged lands, unless those lands have been created lawfully, in uplands within the Town's limits and/or its ETJ.

## Summary of Goals

It is important that the specific policy and physical development recommendations contained in the remaining sections of this plan be based on stated community goals. Detailed goal statements are presented in



The form of development on the Island conveys its character and livability.



Retail businesses catering to Island visitors are the current economic mainstay of the community.

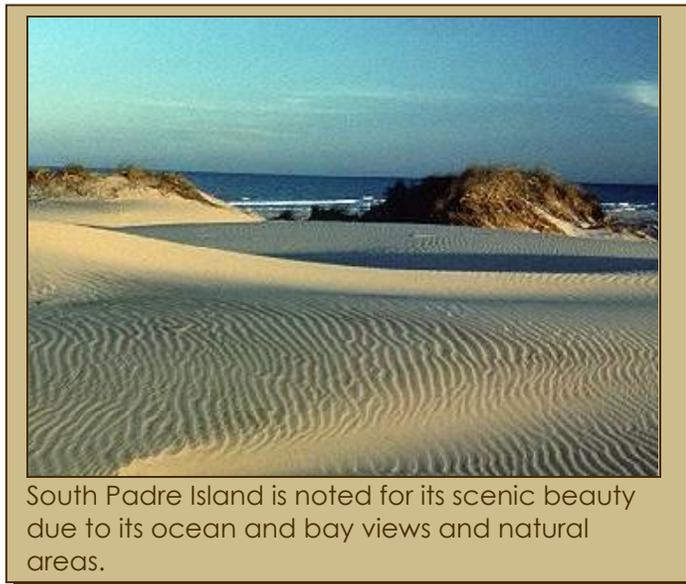
each section of the Comprehensive Plan. A summary listing of these goals is provided below:

#### Land Use and Community Character

1. New development and redevelopment must add value to the image and appearance of the Island.
2. Future development must be compatible with the character of surrounding areas.
3. Existing neighborhoods should be preserved and enhanced so as to foster a strong sense of identity.
4. A broad variety of housing types and price ranges are warranted to balance the residential market.

#### Transportation and Mobility

1. The plan must be responsive to the necessity that a second causeway will be constructed north of the Convention Centre. Since the only access to the Island is by bridge, the second causeway should not load Highway 100 or Highway 48.
2. Pedestrian mobility must be improved to enhance the Island's walk-ability and attractiveness for visitors.
3. The use of non-motorized vehicles should be supported on public and private thoroughfares.
4. The transit system must be expanded to facilitate employee commuting and to increase ridership by residents and visitors.
5. Improvements to the transportation system are needed to better accommodate peak traffic and parking demands without spoiling the livability of the community.
6. Parking must meet both public and private objectives while satisfying the daily and peak demands of motorists.



South Padre Island is noted for its scenic beauty due to its ocean and bay views and natural areas.

#### Parks, Recreation, and Resource Protection

1. Beaches, recreational amenities, and natural areas should be appealing to all persons, including areas for both passive and active recreation and indoor and outdoor facilities.
2. Protection of the environment and preservation of resources must remain of value so as to sustain the natural ecosystem and retain the physical character of the Island.

3. A continuous dune line must be constructed, maintained, and protected from encroachment as protection from high energy events.
4. Indigenous plants and landscape must be preserved and protected so as to sustain the ecosystem, contribute to the economy, and enhance the character and appearance of the Island.

#### Economic Development and Technology

1. The economy must be diversified so as to stabilize the general business environment and moderate the ebb and flow of the tourism cycle.
2. There must be programs to support existing businesses to ensure they are secure in their investment and remain economically viable.
3. The role of technology is an important consideration in the attraction of businesses and visitors.
4. Opportunities for attracting eco-tourists may improve the local economy through increased stays and spending.

#### Public Facilities and Infrastructure

1. The long-term availability of utilities must be secured to support the planned growth of the Island. The condition of utility infrastructure must be improved to meet current and future needs.
2. There must be improved agreement and coordination with other agencies responsible for many of the essential services that will be needed by the Island as development continues.
3. Drainage must be adequately planned for so as not to allow development that alters pre-development conditions and creates a flooding burden on adjacent properties.

#### Plan Implementation

1. The two primary ways for the Town to implement this plan are:
  - to budget appropriate monies and resources for capital items, and/or
  - to update and/or amend existing Town ordinances.
2. Since strict adherence and enforcement of building and development codes is vital to sustain the quality of development, the necessary ordinances must be updated and adopted promptly after acceptance of this plan.

3. Since the City Manager and town staff cannot dedicate appropriate resources except as authorized by the Board of Aldermen through an approved budget, all budgets need to clearly reflect the continued dedication to implement this plan.
4. The City Manager, all Town Directors, all Town Committee members and each of the Board of Aldermen and the Mayor need to review this plan on a yearly basis in order to make decisions that are consistent with the goals and recommended actions.