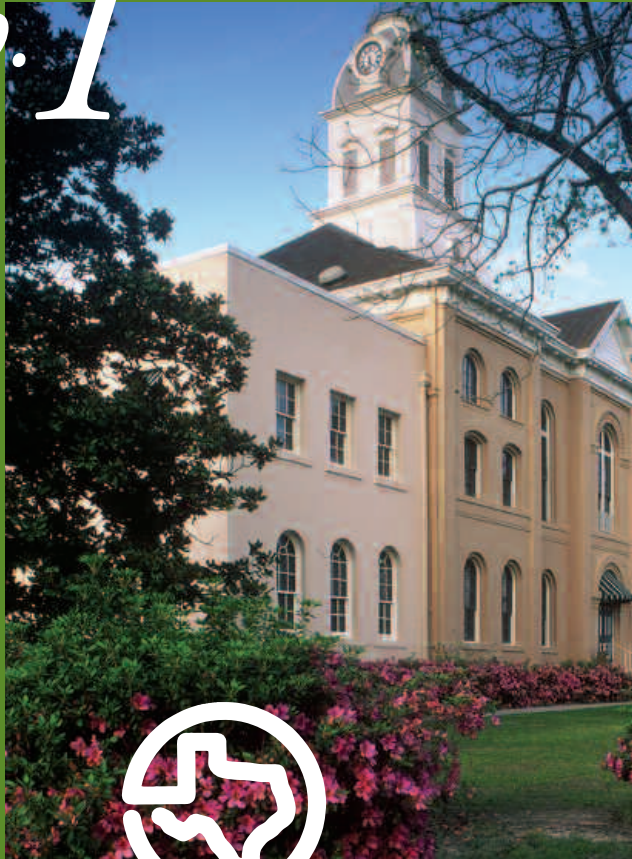


GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series

Issue No. 1

Immediate Steps to Get Started in the Right Direction

*Part one of a four-part
rural beautification
series produced by the
Texas Department of
Agriculture's GO TEXAN
Rural Community
Program to market,
promote and support
rural Texas.*



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COMMISSIONER TODD STAPLES
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series

Issue I Immediate Steps to Get Started in the Right Direction

Issue II Planning for Long-Term Success

Issue III Building Community Buy-In

Issue IV Resources to Help Pave the Way

For details on other issues in the series, call (877) 99GO-TEX
or visit www.gotexan.org.

Commissioner Todd Staples
Texas Department of Agriculture

Dear Rural Community Member:

When we want to impress, we know to put our best face forward. First impressions can be lasting. For rural communities, the importance of making a good first impression can mean the difference between visitors stopping to spend time and money or vehicles speeding by without a second look.

Though the term “beautification” may sound like an nice extra step communities can take after more vital community needs are addressed, it is one of the most critical activities communities can engage in to support economic development and success. Investing in beautification, rural preservation and economic development programs increases jobs, tourism and business investments for the future of Texas.

Your participation in the Texas Department of Agriculture’s GO TEXAN Rural Community Program – created to promote and showcase the best of rural Texas – gives you access to beautification and revitalization expertise, resources from state and federal agencies, and a network of other hard-working rural communities.

We are pleased to offer you this resource as the first in a series of GO TEXAN beautification quick-start kits. Each is designed to build on the other and provide you with real tools and resources to help your community put its best face forward.

Interested in more information to help pave the way for your community? Give us a call at (877) 99GO-TEX or visit us online at www.gotexan.org.

Best wishes on your beautification efforts!

Immediate Steps to Get Started in the Right Direction

Nowhere is the impact of beautification and revitalization greater than in the heart of rural Texas where a healthy downtown is the benchmark of a healthy community.

Why Beautify and Revitalize?

For seven simple reasons:

1. First impressions count. Though new sidewalks and pretty plantings alone are not enough to spur economic development, beautification is one of the first steps in the “packaging” or marketing of a community to locals and visitors.

2. Community pride rebounds. Downtown or uptown, community identities are often formed here. Celebrating what makes your community unique, preserving historical attractions or hosting cultural events creates reasons for residents and tourists to travel downtown. Encouraging community and youth involvement in revitalization efforts

helps nurture volunteerism, leadership development and ownership.

3. Occupancy rates improve. Repurposing historic or non-historic properties downtown fills empty buildings, reduces blight, stabilizes rents and encourages managed growth. Offering incentives for business development reduces financial risk for merchants.

4. Big (and little) business returns. A vibrant downtown helps in recruitment and retention of businesses throughout the community. Attracting a diversity of businesses downtown reduces pressure for sprawl development. And downtown often serves as an incubator for new and locally owned family businesses.

5. Dollars stay local. The downtown area already offers one-stop shopping for municipal services. Thriving

downtown retail shops and businesses will expand on this value, ensuring more money stays local. Residents will not need to shop outside the community as often.

6. Growth drives jobs (and jobs drive growth). More businesses downtown means more jobs downtown. More jobs downtown means more people downtown. More people downtown

means more consumer needs downtown. More consumer needs downtown means more businesses downtown. And the cycle begins again.

7. Tax revenues increase. Investing in downtown development protects property values and boosts tax revenues to fund improved community services.

“Success doesn’t just happen. It’s captured by those with guts and vision.”
Sheryl Hardy, Director of Economic Development, Perryton





**SPOTLIGHT
on
SUCCESS**

Y O A K U M

Though thousands of longhorn once gathered here for the long drive up the Chisholm Trail, it was an iron horse that laid tracks to the future for the small town of Yoakum. With hundreds of people from surrounding towns drawn to jobs in railroad shops and the large roundhouse, railroad employees developed a beautiful park along Front Street in the early 1900s. But memories of its beauty faded over time, and efforts by the city to acquire the land stalled. With many revitalization projects already complete, including the City Park Playground, Chisholm Trail Memorial Park, the Pershing Square Project, and new landscaping funded in part by a GO TEXAN Hardworking Rural Community grant, the city updated the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan in 2007. The community overwhelmingly chose to rescue the concrete and overgrown Front Street Railroad Park. Though long-timers had their doubts after some 25 years of effort, the city finally succeeded in acquiring the century-old 2.6-acre park, now cleared and ringed by a replica 1900s picket fence. By working together and persevering in the face of doubt, the community of Yoakum has shown that history can be preserved and success achieved.

Where Do We Start?

*By Mary Alice Torres-MacDonald,
Associate Professor
Community Design Laboratory
College of Architecture,
Texas Tech University*

Beautification is not a luxury.

It is a necessity in the community revitalization process. Beauty colors perception; perception drives experience. Experience defines how we feel about our community and how vested we are in its future by improving the quality of life and ensuring its economic security.

Like any building process, before a foundation is poured the site is surveyed. Successful beautification begins with a community assessment of strengths and weaknesses. As a next step, implementation of sometimes simple immediate actions can set the tone for the visual impression

intended and lay the groundwork for long-term revitalization initiatives.

Assess your community.

Walk, look, document and think. This is best done by jotting down first impressions. The act of truly “looking” is key. Look critically, with fresh eyes, as a first-time visitor. Be open to accepting flaws – these are opportunities to improve.

Photograph “the good, the bad and the ugly.”

Have several people participate in this process. It is important to collect a variety of perspectives to more clearly represent the whole community.

Talk about perceptions.

Take the information gathered and engage the community in a dialogue at multiple public forums – town halls, community organizations, garden clubs, rotary meetings and so on.

Create a list of visual obstacles.

After observing, documenting, photographing and discussing perceptions with the community, create a list of obstacles that are considered visual. They are likely the negative physical aspects of your community.

Categorize and prioritize this list.

Categorize the list of visual obstacles based on what can be addressed with short-term fixes and what will require long-term solutions. Group the obstacles based on time/complexity, not cost. For example, scheduling a cleanup day can be completed quickly; installing streetlights will require more time. Prioritize each of those two categories based on what changes will yield the greatest visual impact and what will require the least investment of funds. But decisions are not made at this point – a little more homework and community feedback are required.

Create a list of desires.

Identify a short list of important desires for your community, such as “I want people to see our community as beautiful immediately upon entering it” or “I want to have beautiful parks to play and walk in.”

Compare the wish list with the list of visual obstacles and refine by consensus.

See how the list of desires relates to the list of visual obstacles. Which of the short-term high-impact visual obstacles can be addressed to fulfill your wish list? These projects may be the first for your community to tackle.

Invite the community to comment and revise.

There is now a basic structure to work from that can be improved through broader community feedback. Host the second round of public discussion.

“Make a decision to do something. Look at your strengths and go from there. Don’t be afraid, just ask. Learn from failures and try again.

Success breeds success — keep on trying.”

J. W. Sollis, community catalyst, Crowell

Where Do We Start? *(cont.)*

Often, citizens not included in the initial process will come forward when they see a clearer, defined direction.

Develop specific actions to eliminate obstacles.

With consensus gained on prioritized opportunities, create a realistic plan with specific actions and estimated costs. Seek out expertise, funding and resources.

Take action.

Each day, take one action that is short-term and one that leads to a long-term solution. Eliminate visual impediments in your community while adding visual improvements one step at a time. Enjoy the short-term successes while continuing to plan long-term.



10 Simple Steps for Quick Results

1. Keep your streets and sidewalks clean.

Place garbage cans and recycling bins in strategic locations throughout downtown. Organize a community-wide cleanup day. Invite civic groups and schools to participate. Offer businesses the chance to “adopt-a-spot.”

2. Provide safe and accessible sidewalks downtown to support customers and businesses.

Add fresh paint to crosswalks and signposts. Recognize merchants who clean up or improve their properties.

3. Provide visually pleasing entryways and exits.

Welcome visitors to your community. Add plantings and attractive signage at your community entryways and exits.

4. Identify “districts” to help visually organize your community.

Install signage to direct visitors to destination locations. Add streetlight banners to designate shopping districts, arts districts, special events or holidays.

5. Develop and implement a downtown landscape plan.

Add seasonal color to complement the downtown environment. Create small “pocket” parks in open spaces between buildings. No place to plant? Add planter boxes or hanging baskets. Establish a tree fund

for donations made in memory or honor of an individual.

6. Provide downtown signage that sets a tone for your “image.”

Offer rewards to encourage local business signage improvement efforts. Treat blank walls as a blank canvas. Invite artists to complete murals to reflect the community’s heritage.

7. Keep storefront windows visually pleasing.

This means that windows should be clean, clear of handmade signs and display an image about the store that is unique and clear. Decorate and light the windows of vacant buildings to attract new tenants. Display the work of local artists and craftsmen in vacant storefronts. Ask volunteer organizations to adopt windows for holiday decorating.

8. Create opportunities for walking that support health and shopping.

Create a map for walking tours of historic sites, antique shops or garden delights.

9. Provide downtown amenities that support a 24-hour environment.

Add lighting to encourage downtown dining in the evenings.

10. Promote the changes that are happening.

Start with small steps. Start today.

Put the Power of Texas Behind Your Rural Community!

The GO TEXAN Rural Community Program is an initiative launched by the Texas Department of Agriculture to help market and promote rural Texas. The rural community program creates a single rallying call for rural Texas, educating the public about all that rural Texas has to offer and encouraging rural communities to share and promote successful ideas. There is no cost to join.

Member benefits for rural communities include the following:

Grant Fund Opportunities for Certified Communities

- ☛ Hometown STARS Program
- ☛ Bootstrap Bucks Program
- ☛ GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Grant

Recognition for Qualifying Certified Communities

- ☛ Hardworking Rural Community Awards
- ☛ Statewide media coverage
- ☛ And more!

Marketing

- ☛ Statewide promotional campaigns
- ☛ Online events calendar
- ☛ Online rural destination guide
- ☛ Use of the GO TEXAN mark and tagline

Information

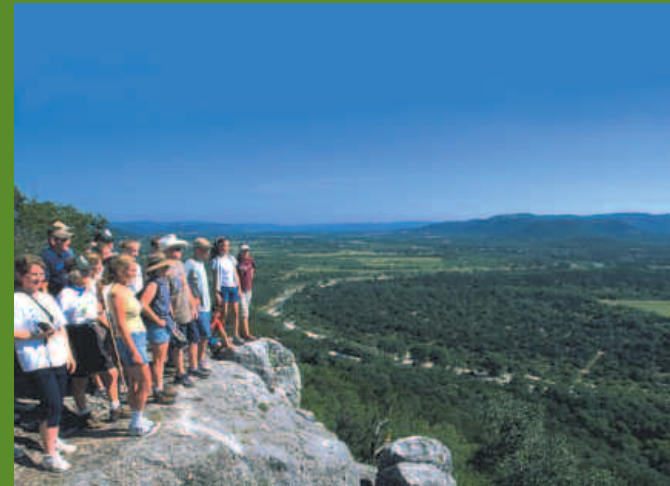
- ☛ Marketing and rural tourism workshops hosted across the state
- ☛ Guidebooks on event planning, downtown beautification and more
- ☛ Quarterly infoletters with action-oriented information
- ☛ E-mail alerts for the latest news and dates

Networking

- ☛ Contacts and programs at other state and federal agencies
- ☛ Online member database
- ☛ Secrets to small-town successes from other members

For all the details on the GO TEXAN Rural Community Program, call (877) 99GO-TEX, e-mail ruraltexas@TexasAgriculture.gov or visit www.gotexan.org.

While small changes can make a big difference, another key to success is the development of a long-term strategic beautification plan. The planning process is the focus of Issue II of the GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series.



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