

GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series

Issue No. 2

Planning for Long-Term Success

*Part two 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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(877) 99-GOTEX

www.gotexan.org

COMMISSIONER TODD STAPLES
TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series

Issue I Immediate Steps to Getting 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) 99-GOTEX
or visit www.gotexan.org.

Dear Rural Community Participant:

When we want to impress, we put our best face forward. First impressions can be lasting. For rural communities, the importance of making a good first impression can make 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 a nice extra step communities can take after more vital community needs are addressed, it is one of the most critical activities communities can do to support economic development and success. Investing in beautification, rural preservation and community economic development programs grows jobs, tourism and business investments for the future of Texas.

Your participation in the Texas Department of Agriculture’s GO TEXAN Rural Community Program — a 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 hardworking rural communities.

We are pleased to offer you this resource as the second in a series of GO TEXAN beautification quick-start kits, each designed to build on the other to 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) 99-GOTEX or visit us online at www.gotexan.org.

Best wishes for your beautification efforts!

Planning for Long-Term Success

Quick fixes can be catalysts to spark long-term development, but before allocating significant resources, beautification efforts should begin with a plan.

A good plan should be comprehensive in scope, but also dynamic enough to adapt to changes and new opportunities. As outlined in Issue I of the GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series, “Immediate Steps to Getting Started in the Right Direction,” time spent investing in a community’s appearance can bring big rewards.

What’s in a Plan?

The outcome of a plan is a reflection of the work that goes into developing it. To get started, consider the five questions listed below. Though seemingly simple questions, they each require an investment of time and thought to answer.

- 1. Where are we now?**
- 2. Where are we going?**
- 3. Where do we want to be?**
- 4. How can we get there?**
- 5. How do we know when we are there?**

Whatever process is followed to answer these questions for your community, include all downtown stakeholder groups: residents, business owners, civic group leaders, city officials and community partners. (For tips on building community buy-in, be sure to look for upcoming Issue III of the GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series.)

External agencies and representatives from neighboring communities may provide a fresh perspective, relative comparisons and regional leverage points. If resources allow, consider hiring a professional planning consultant. Local universities and colleges also may have expertise to lend.

But the community must own the process. You are creating the future you want for your community. As with any change management

“The ability to see the future of the community evolves out of participation. Communities embrace their future when they become an integral part of shaping it.”

*Mary Alice Torres-MacDonald, Associate Professor
Texas Tech University, College of Architecture*



program, there must be community and political support for the action, a long-term vision, a willingness to innovate, a detailed action plan and the financial resources to implement and operate the program.

Careful planning, community participation, collaboration and communication are keys to success.

Sample worksheets and exercises are included in this guide. Other more detailed planning and organization models exist and can be found through many of the resources included in Issue IV of the GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series.

**SPOTLIGHT
on
SUCCESS**

N A T A L I A

Stretching a dollar is no lost art in the small Hill Country town of Natalia where a \$5,000 GO TEXAN Rural Community Beautification matching grant generated more than \$21,000 in downtown improvements. The city parlayed an initial purchase of five streetlights into a total of 10 ornamental 1900s-era streetlights, each one now sponsored by a community member or business complete with a dedication plaque. And with a small investment in raw materials, the city also seeded a grassroots volunteerism program. With purchased sheet metal, the shop class at Natalia High School constructed park benches and trash cans which now line the town square, along with new native landscaping. The actual return on Natalia's investment can be measured in more than dollars alone — the sense of community pride and ownership, particularly by the students, is priceless. Natalia was one of 21 cities and counties awarded the 1:1 matching grant in 2008. As 21st-century rural Texas expands beyond farming and ranching, downtown beautification is a key ingredient for tourism, job growth and economic prosperity. GO TEXAN matching grant funds assist in creating opportunities for tomorrow, today. As in Natalia, TDA encourages the funded project be incorporated into a larger downtown beautification effort.

Walk-Through Inventory Worksheet

Take a walking field trip downtown. On a scale of 1-5 (poor to excellent) evaluate:

Signage

- ___ Number of community welcome, directional signs
- ___ Location of community welcome, directional signs
- ___ Appropriateness of commercial signs
- ___ Quality and condition of commercial signs
- ___ Appropriateness of road signs (no parking, speed limits, etc.)
- ___ Quality and condition of road signs

Businesses

- ___ Mix of commercial businesses
- ___ Hours of operation
- ___ Product selection
- ___ Access to cash from a potential sponsorship standpoint
- ___ Availability of dining
- ___ Diversity of dining
- ___ Availability of lodging
- ___ Diversity of lodging
- ___ Storefront appearance from street
- ___ Storefront appearance from sidewalk
- ___ Quality of window displays
- ___ Building occupancy

Sidewalks and Traffic

- ___ Availability of sidewalks
- ___ Condition of sidewalks (accessibility, cleanliness, safety, width)
- ___ Condition of street crossings

- ___ Condition of street crossing lines
- ___ Volume of pedestrian traffic
- ___ Volume of auto traffic
- ___ Availability of street and pedestrian lighting
- ___ Condition and appropriate function of street and pedestrian lighting

Public Amenities

- ___ Availability of visitor information
- ___ Availability and condition of parks, green spaces
- ___ Condition of memorials
- ___ Condition of public buildings
- ___ Availability of convenient parking
- ___ Placement and condition of parking areas

SWOT Analysis

Based on perceived needs of both the community and visitors, use a standard business development tool called a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis, and identify:

- ☛ Downtown strengths
- ☛ Downtown weaknesses
- ☛ Opportunities to explore
- ☛ Threats to success

Then, gather early ideas to:

- ☛ Enhance strengths
- ☛ Overcome weaknesses
- ☛ Capitalize on opportunities
- ☛ Minimize threats

Strategic Planning: Basic Elements Defined

Trend Analysis

Look at current and historic rates for downtown vacancies, available square footage, sales tax revenues, property values and commercial rents, as well as your community's population, housing and job availability overall.

Look for trends: up, down or flat. Analyze state and federal data on regional economic trends and competitive pressures. Compare your findings with other communities in your region. This will aid in gap analysis — defining the opportunity between where your community is now and where you want it to be in the future.

Visioning

“Visioning” is another business planning tool communities can use to develop a shared image of the future. Visioning is the big-picture view to guide short-term decisions and long-term initiatives.

Warm Up

- ☛ Name three natural and/or man-made features that make your community special.
- ☛ What is unique to your community that is not found anywhere else?
- ☛ List three places in your community that you like to take out-of-town visitors.
- ☛ List three places in your community that you avoid taking out-of-town visitors.

Exercise

- ☛ Imagine you are reading an edition of your local newspaper in 10 years. What would the headline say about your community?
- ☛ If you left the community for 10 years and then returned, what would you hope to see happening downtown?
- ☛ What words do you want your children or grandchildren to use to describe the community?

Your community's shared vision will be the basis for decisions, policies, actions and resource allocations for your community.

A strategic plan is the blueprint for change within a community. It is the necessary step to move from visioning to action. But a strategic plan is not complete once written — action is required.

- **Vision Statement:** A description of what the community will look like if it successfully implements the strategies defined.
- **Values Statement:** A description of the core values of the community.
- **Objectives:** Milestones that must be met. They should be clear, concise and attainable; be measurable; have a target date for completion; include responsibility for taking action; and be arranged according to priority.
- **Goals:** Long-term target; what the community wants to accomplish.
- **Strategies:** How the community will reach the outlined goals and objectives through policies, programs, projects, actions, decisions and resource

allocation; supported by detailed action plans.

Evaluation: How and when will the process and output be evaluated? How and when will the strategic plan be reviewed and updated? How will members of the community be kept involved and informed? These are the final questions that a good plan addresses.

Texas Capital Fund

The Texas Capital Fund (TCF) program, administered by TDA, encourages business development, retention or expansion by providing funds to eligible applicants. TCF has four program areas:

- Main Street Improvements
- Real Estate Development
- Infrastructure Development
- Downtown Revitalization

**“COMMUNICATE.
Make sure everyone knows the plan and the part they can play in it;
make sure they understand the benefits that can be had once
the project is completed.”**

Rick Osburn, City Manager, City of Levelland

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.

Benefits for rural communities include the following:

Grant Fund Opportunities for Certified Communities

- ☛ Hometown STARS Program
- ☛ Bootstrap Bucks Program

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 certification 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 partner database
- ☛ Secrets to small town successes from other GO TEXAN members

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

Collaboration and communication are keys to the success of any plan. Tips for generating community buy-in are the focus of Issue III of the GO TEXAN Rural Beautification Quick-Start Series.



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