Comal County Strategic Policy and Implementation Plan

2012
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Introduction

Comal County is rapidly evolving and developing and is in the process of changing from a rural area to suburban area. As the area develops and changes, aspects of living and managing Comal County are affected. In response to the changes and growth and realizing that many changes are needed in this fast-growing county, the Comal County Commissioners Court decided to develop a County-wide Strategic Plan in the hope that it will serve as a tool to help the Court with prioritizing, planning, and decision making now and in the future. The plan allows for long term decision making based on solid input from Comal County residents, staff, and elected officials. The intent of this planning effort is to arm the existing and future County leaders with adequate information to act proactively to address issues and opportunities identified in the plan rather than just simply responding to needs as they arise.

The effectiveness of planning is often questioned. Many communities can point to a number of plans that are ineffective, having been written and never looked at once adopted. This is a challenge; a plan in itself does not fix problems or issues within a community. Rather, it is the implementation of the recommendations that determines its effectiveness. A good plan allows a community or governing body an opportunity to manage how it will develop. It identifies common challenges and provides common solutions rather than each department or entity working alone. It allows for limited resources to be used most effectively. A plan will identify strengths and weaknesses in a community. It will provide direction on how to build on those strengths and minimize weaknesses. It gives direction to the future and allows leaders to make hard decisions based on solid data and input rather than simply responding to crises and the faction yelling loudest when a decision is made.

The purpose of this plan, as envisioned by the Comal County Commissioners Court, is two-fold. Primarily, the Court asked that the plan outline a list of recommendations to help the Court make budget, management, and regulatory decisions for the county. In addition, the process was an opportunity to educate Comal County citizens of responsibilities, restrictions, decisions, and functions that the government leaders must balance while managing the County. The “balancing act” required of county government leaders coupled with citizen education is an important aspect in managing growth. Often citizens expect the County to provide services, pass regulations, and manage land development, but budget restrictions and lack of legislative authority prevent the County from having the monetary or legal control to render these services. The mission and vision of this plan is to provide Comal County leaders clear direction based on priorities outlined by staff and the citizens of the County. The goal of this process was to identify what makes Comal County unique and build on the assets while working through the presented challenges.

The process yielded two primary outcomes. The two primary sources of input for this study came from County Elected Officials/Department Heads and the Comal County general public. These two groups focused their vision and recommendations on two distinctly different areas, although there was some overlap. The interviews and discussions with County Elected Officials/Department Heads led to a needs list for upgraded facilities, forecasted additional staff and equipment. The interviews and discussions with the Comal County general public led to a list of additional new services, acquisition of greater authority from the Texas Legislature, upgrading of land use and environmental regulations, improved
communications, and a general desire to administer the County in a way that preserves the “Hill County” ambiance and Comal County’s heritage.

There are a number of services that, by law, Texas counties must provide for their citizens. Ad valorem tax, sales tax, fines, and fees are collected and budgeted to provide funding for these required services. County responsibilities include county road and bridge maintenance, public safety, management of the judicial system and public records, property tax collection, voter registration and elections, vehicle registration and transfers, floodplain administration and subdivision platting, emergency management and emergency service districts, indigent health and legal defense services, public health, probation, auditing, and the adoption and oversight of the annual budget. In addition, county government leaders often choose to use tax funds to pay for programs not required by Texas law. Programs funded by Comal County but not mandated by the State of Texas include veteran services and programs, parks and recreation, support for senior citizens, historical preservation, economic development, agricultural extension programs, and recycling.

**Strategic Plan Development Process**

In order to develop a county-wide strategic plan, facilitators must collect data to have an understanding of area challenges and concerns as well as successes. In order to help with this data collection and assistance in translating the information into a list of recommendations and framework for decision making, the Comal County Commissioners Court appointed a Comal County Strategic Planning Steering Committee. The members who were selected to serve on this Committee are:

- Ben Appleby
- Geoff Barr
- Jim Bower
- Nacho Campos
- Sandy Carey
- David Huddleston
- Jerry Lovell
- Lisa Roper
- Jeanne Slupik
- Rhonda Zunker

The purpose of the Committee was to aid in overseeing and developing the plan by reviewing and sorting through the collected data. This group provided guidance on the development of the survey, spreading the word about the Town Hall meetings, and helping to develop the final recommendations included in the plan. In addition, the Committee is a sampling of county citizens and land owners, a group of people who are affected by the decisions of the Court.

The development of this plan also included an internal assessment and citizen input. The internal assessment provided the facilitators an opportunity to visit with key County staff and elected officials allowing those individuals the ability to voice concerns, needs, and challenges faced when providing services to the Comal County citizens. The public input portion of the data collection allowed the facilitators to have a ‘what do you want’ conversation with the citizens; in turn it also provided the citizens with educational information. The information presented during these public meetings outlined general County authority, existing County services, existing County regulatory controls, budget restrictions, and County population expectations for the upcoming years. This framework kept the participating public input focused. It also provided public participation that was informative for County leaders and citizens.
**Internal Assessment from Elected Officials/Department Heads**
The first step in developing this plan was an internal assessment of Comal County government operations (for interview notes, see Appendix A). Elected Officials/Department Heads across the County were interviewed. All participants were asked these questions:

1. What are the three main functions of your department?
2. What are your fiscal needs to carry out these primary functions?
3. What new resources (personnel, equipment, etc.) will your department need over the next 3 – 5 years?
4. What are the needs over the next 10 years?
5. What is your relationship with other governmental entities (cities, state agencies, etc.)?
6. What is your ‘wish list’ of additional resources that would help you improve service to Comal County citizens?
7. How much coordination is there across the County departments and elected officials?

The questions, designed to develop an understanding of current operating processes, also provided an idea of future needs. Given the growth in the County, departments are experiencing growing demands on most County services, while staffing and budget levels have remained relatively level for the past several years. In recent years, the Comal County Commissioners Court and other County leaders have been successful at finding ways to improve efficiency and serve the additional County residents without a significant expansion of County government. The information gathered by this strategic planning effort has allowed the Commissioners Court an opportunity to better understand existing and long term needs for staffing and facilities to meet the needs of the County’s residents. This Strategic Plan will allow the Commissioners Court to better forecast future budgeting for major capital needs (buildings, equipment, etc.) as well as adding those programs and staff that are projected to be necessary to address the needs of the growing population. The plan will allow the Court to prioritize these existing and projected needs to ensure those most urgent needs are addressed in upcoming budget processes.

Despite the focus on efficiency and savings, there is a need for growth in some areas of Comal County government. The biggest challenge identified was facilities. Currently, County offices are spread across 16 buildings throughout the County. Space and security seemed to be issues that plagued the current courts setup. The current restoration effort of the historic Courthouse will provide some relief; however, a Facilities Plan is underway to address the long term needs for County operations as a whole. The plan will also include addressing a jail expansion, which will likely be necessary in the next several years. Other issues include technology upgrades, building security, public health and safety needs (especially staff to serve growing population), and providing adequate services to all parts of the County.

The focus of the medium to long-range needs assessment of the Elected Officials/Department Heads was on facilities and staff. Listed below is a summary of these needs:

**Adult and Juvenile Probation**

- Secure van for transport
- Additional vehicle
- Additional in-house programs (with staff training to provide) for substance abuse prevention, intervention, parenting, behavior, etc.
- 1 additional officer
• Full time satellite office
• Officer at each school would be ideal
• Need to bring existing holding cells up to standards
• Ability to take credit cards at jail
• Handheld credit card machines for warrants, allow on site payments

**Agri-Life Extension**

• Upgrades and repairs to the office

**Auditor**

• 1 additional staff
• Single office location for indigent health with better access for public
• Financial software conversion to combine HR, Auditor, Purchasing, Treasurer)

**Commissioners Court**

• Facilities Planning is critical
• Need to ensure adequate equipment, technology, etc. going forward
• Courthouse Security – lots of scattered offices and challenge to secure them all
• More County parks
• Improve communication with public
• Court Space – currently a lot of shuffling and sharing going on, summer 2012. The Historic Courthouse restoration will help
• Transportation, especially north and west of New Braunfels, TxDOT pass-through projects underway (306, 46 & 281)
• Completion of dam on Dry Comal (July ’12 completion)

**Constable Precinct 1**

• New Vehicle
• New Radar
• Justice Center

**Constable Precinct 2**

• 2nd paid deputy due to rising demands (needs next 1 or 2 years)
• Current facility is inadequate, lack of space, courtroom too small

**Constable Precinct 3**

• Full time staff
• Updated equipment in vehicles (video, radar)
Better pay for deputies
Adequate training to maintain certification

**County Courts at Law #1 and #2**

- Courtroom acoustics are a problem
- Need bigger courtroom
- Truancy Court program to nip truancy in the bud
- DWI Intervention programs to cut repeat offenders
- Video Jail Dockets
- Potential need for additional court clerks as demands grow
- DWI Specific court

**Indigent Healthcare**

- Need 1st floor, accessible space (possibly former Appraisal District space?)
- Possibly 2nd additional staffer as demand grows
- Full time driver with vehicle (van with lift)
- Waiting area space

**Justice of the Peace, Precinct 2**

- Current facility is inadequate, lack of space, courtroom too small, manage docket to minimize crowding
- Need additional clerk (request has been made)
- Security at existing JP location (no security alarm on building, etc.)
- Video Magistration
- Medical Examiner

**Justice of the Peace, Precinct 3**

- Additional Prosecutor to allow more cases to be processed
- Space is an issue – backlog generated because insufficient space in courtroom, Parking, AG Court uses Courtroom as well
- Video Magistration (especially if current magistrate leaves)
- Courtroom technology upgrades & improvements
- Death inquests – population may reach level requiring coroner
- Justice Center

**Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4**

- Video Magistration
- Bigger Courtroom
- More space in building (shared with other satellite county offices)
• Challenge for many to access services in New Braunfels

Maintenance

• 2 additional Maintenance Staff and 1 additional Administration Staff
• Vehicle

Public Health

• Sanitarian – to do restaurant inspections, pools, day cares, etc. (would bring in fee for service)
• Nurse – immunizations and epidemiology
• Clerical Staff for immunizations
• Additional Space (2 labs + space for additional staff)

Purchasing

• Financial software conversion to combine HR, Auditor, Purchasing, and Treasurer
• Additional Space with carpenter shop, warehouse with loading dock, print shop, conference area (for bids), Mail Room
• Delivery Truck

Sheriff & Jail Administration

• Jail at capacity, especially with increase in female population (20 year expansion lasted 11 yrs)
• Challenge to find parts for old electric doors, repair doors
• Existing office space inadequate (closets made to offices, major lack of storage, having to pay for off-site storage, 2 different electric systems in building)
• Existing site presents challenges for expansion
• Combined Jail with Justice Center would be ideal

Tax Assessor/Collector

• Boat Registration
• 2 additional staff
• Laptop
• Garden Ridge Office (shared space)

Veterans Services

• Permanent Space with parking, handicapped access, private office
• New computer, scanner, digital storage (or more file cabinets)
Possibly 2nd additional staffer as demand grows
Full time driver with vehicle (van with lift)

Citizen Input

Community Survey

The first step in public input was a community survey. This survey was available to the public online and in hard copy. The survey was not intended to be a scientific sampling, rather, it was meant to identify common issues in the community.

The primary finding of the survey was that people lived in Comal County because of its quality of life. It is a good place for families, has a scenic environment, and access to larger cities. Residents showed significant support for economic development efforts, but wanted to protect the rural character and scenic beauty of the County. Residents were also concerned with water availability, drainage, and transportation. Maintaining low taxes was also a key issue. A general summary of the community survey is as follows:

Comal County Strategic Plan

1. What are the benefits of living in Comal County? Please select the answer that best represents your feelings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Agree Strongly</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree Strongly</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cost of living</td>
<td>16.7% (226)</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>1,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>49.8% (680)</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>1,365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job opportunities</td>
<td>2.9% (38)</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>1,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good place for families</td>
<td>42.1% (574)</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>1,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenic Hill Country environment</td>
<td>65.3% (897)</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>1,374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>25.6% (348)</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1,360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>40.5% (124)</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If other (please specify) 175

answered question 1,406
skipped question 8
2. If you are employed, in which city do you work? Please select the city where you work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Braunfels</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulverde</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden Ridge</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blanco</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Marcos</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 1,012
skipped question 402

3. Should the County encourage new job creation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75.6%</td>
<td>1,058</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

answered question 1,399
skipped question 15


### 4. If yes to question #3, what tools should the County use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property tax abatements</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales tax reimbursement</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax incentives</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure assistance</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **answered question**: 1,055
- **skipped question**: 359

### 5. If yes to #3, what types of employment are needed in Comal County?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Type</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail (grocery, clothing, etc.)</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional/Office (insurance, bank, etc.)</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing/Technology/Distribution</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td>703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism (hotel, attractions, etc.)</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service providers (plumbers, electricians, etc.)</td>
<td>27.0%</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **answered question**: 1,091
- **skipped question**: 323
A full copy of all of the comments provided through the community survey is attached to this report as Appendix B.

**Town Hall Meetings**

The community survey provided a good starting point for the conversation that occurred at the Town Hall meetings. Town Hall meetings were held in each Precinct within Comal County during May and June 2011.

The Town Hall meetings generated comments and suggestions that were very similar to the results obtained from the community survey. The results are summarized as follows:

**Key Findings:**
People live in Comal County because of the quality of life and access to larger cities. They feel safe and secure and appreciate the rural character and small town charm of the County. They support growth, but want to ensure it does not detract from their quality of life. Growth needs to be managed to reduce negative impacts.
They think the County has done a good job of maintaining an adequate level of service at a reasonable tax rate. County employees provide good customer service and Elected Officials are fiscally responsible.

**Issues:**

- Protecting community integrity and quality of life as Comal County grows
- Water Availability will become more pressing
- Drainage (some neighborhoods inaccessible during high water events)
- Transportation – ensure adequate connectivity to serve growing demands
- Communication – “how to get the word out” about County issues and activities
  - Seen as biggest obstacle to success of Justice Center project
  - Continuing education on role and limits of County government
- Focus growth on key corridors (Light/clean manufacturers, small businesses, technical industries, and service related businesses)
- Coordination among government entities across the County
- Equal Access to County services throughout the County
- Maintain Fiscal Discipline and focus on basics

The Town Hall meetings reinforced the findings of the community survey. County residents were concerned with maintaining the quality of life and ensuring growth does not negatively impact the region. Citizens understand that growth is inevitable, but want to limit the negative impacts by focusing development in the most suitable areas. Residents are concerned with access to County services in the outlying areas. County-wide communication is another challenge. Participants felt that the County needs to do a better job of providing information to residents, while acknowledging the challenge of doing so. Fiscal discipline is identified, with County leaders being recognized for their focus on maintaining a relatively low tax rate.

The Town Hall meetings served as an opportunity for County leadership to discuss the role of County government. Participants were given a breakdown of how the County spends tax dollars, what services are provided, and the limits of County authority. (For the Town Hall meeting presentation, see Appendix C.) This dialogue was a key part of the meetings because many residents do not really understand the role and responsibility of County government.

**Leadership Meeting**

The final step in the input process was a leadership meeting with County Elected Officials and department heads. This meeting was an opportunity to share information collected from the survey results and town hall discussions. In addition, participants heard discussions of the key issues identified by the public and through the interview process. The workshop allowed County employees to voice their opinions and refine the information gathered. This ensured the final recommendations will address the real challenges. A summary of general comments obtained from the leadership meeting is as follows:

**Comal County Leadership Workshop Notes**

- Suggestions for Education and Outreach to Residents:
  - Public Information Officer
• Precinct Meetings
• Local Radio with county-wide reception
• Promote County Websites
• Utilize Existing Organizations (i.e. Home Owners Associations, nonprofit and civic organizations)
• Social Media
• More videotaping of meetings, live streaming
• Publicize new and successful programs and projects
• County Commissioners Meetings at night and across County
• Regular Department updates to educate public on their role
• Herald-Zeitung as outlet – regular articles covering departmental functions
• County branding to connect community to County
• Identify individuals, each representing various areas within the County, to maintain close contact with County governmental actions
• Traveling workshops

• Share Information across County
  • Provide information where people regularly visit such as stores, churches, restaurants, etc.
  • Establish effective relationships to improve communication

• Infrastructure / Facilities
  • County Facility Plan
  • Focus on a county-wide approach to facilities needs
  • Plan to educate and build support for facilities

• Water Availability
  • Water purveyors have to show 20 year of availability of water resources
  • 1-acre and 5-acre minimum lot sizes are required, dependant on water supply source
  • Evaluate need for Groundwater Conservation District
  • County involvement to raise awareness of the importance of local water issues

• Transportation
  • Propose the creation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization with New Braunfels, Comal, and Guadalupe Counties
  • Evaluate Public Transit
  • Continually update County Major Thoroughfare Plan
  • Utilize Platting Process to have developers set aside right-of-way as building occurs
  • Educate residents on differences between State Road vs. County Road systems
  • Plan for increased connectivity to address limited access across the County

• Increase County Authority to Manage Growth
• Improve visibility and access for areas such as Garden Ridge, Spring Branch, Bulverde, and Canyon Lake
Recommendations

Once the input was gathered, the Committee and consultants developed the final list of recommendations to be included in the plan. This final list was reviewed and resulted in the goals and action items of this plan. It is intended that the Comal County Commissioners Court utilize these recommendations as they make decisions in the future. Based on the extensive input process and work with the Steering Committee, the following recommendations were identified. The list is intended to provide direction to the Court as they go forward:

1. Support Quality Growth that Protects Community Assets and Quality of Life
2. Develop a Communications Strategy to Share Information Across the County
3. Develop a Facilities Plan
4. Ensure Adequate Infrastructure for Growing Population
5. Ensure Adequate Staff Levels to Meet Growing Demands
6. Continue Focus on Efficiency and Cost Effective Services
7. Support Economic Development

The goals address the critical issues identified by both the public and county leadership. Each of these large goals will have a series of action steps to accomplish. Some will be low cost items that can be done fairly quickly, while others will require more investment. The recommendations offer opportunities to partner with other organizations, including Chambers of Commerce, cities, and non-profit and civic organizations. This plan is not intended to be solely a function of County government; it is meant to bring all entities of the County together to address common issues and opportunities.

The recommendations in this plan are developed from input and data collected in the previously outlined planning process. The information was collected from both elected and appointed County officials as well as from the citizens of Comal County. The Steering Committee, appointed by the Commissioners Court, was invaluable in determining the final recommendations. Their role as stakeholders and the “voice of the community” was instrumental in ensuring the final product reflects the input and priorities of the County. This section will present each recommendation, give an explanation of why it is included, and provide a discussion on the benefits of implementation as well as ideas on how to do so. Following each recommendation is the proposed Implementation Guide, which is a detailed work chart on how to make the plan recommendations a reality.

Recommendation 1: Support Quality Growth that Protects Community Assets and Quality of Life

Managing growth was the single biggest issue identified during the Town Hall meetings. Residents were not opposed to growth, and showed overwhelming support for economic development; however, they want growth that retains or enhances the quality of life and character of Comal County. The challenge is that County governments have limited authority in managing growth in their unincorporated areas. Unlike cities, counties cannot regulate land use, and have limited regulatory authority over the subdivision of land. The Hill Country environment of Comal County is unique and fragile; its waterways
and groundwater are particularly vulnerable to development. This unique environment also makes it very attractive to new residents, and unmanaged growth can lead to negative impacts on water drainage, the environment, roads and bridges and community services. Although Texas Counties do not have the authority to manage land development related to population growth, citizens would like to see County officials work towards quality growth and the possibility of restrictive rights when implementing such development. This recommendation, developed in response to Question 1 of the public survey, seeks to preserve the scenic Hill Country environment. An overwhelming 65.3 percent of responses agree strongly that the “Hill Country Environment” of Comal County is a benefit of living in the area (See Appendix B).

Texas is set up with two primary forms of local government, municipal and county government. There are special districts and other authorities, but generally, the two forms of local governance are county and city. Municipal government generally has broad authority to regulate the behavior of the landowners and residents within their city limits (incorporated area). Cities, for example, have the authority to establish land use controls such as zoning. Cities can establish building codes that regulate building design and materials. They can require building permits prior to construction activities to ensure the building code is met.

On the other hand, in Texas, the county form of local government provides for limited regulatory control of the landowners and residents within the unincorporated areas of the County. County government only has the authority to regulate those matters that are specifically authorized by the Texas Legislature. In general, the authority to regulate land use (zoning) or authority to require building permits has not been authorized by the Legislature. The lack of such authority can present difficulties for counties like Comal County.

Comal County is developing quite rapidly. Vast portions of the County have recently and are currently being converted from the long-standing agricultural use of farming and ranching into sprawling single family residential land developments and commercial developments. Although there are several municipalities within Comal County, the bulk of this recent development activity has occurred in the unincorporated areas of the County.

This development trend has resulted in a situation where large areas of the County have been developed into a “municipal-style” land use, but without the level of regulatory control one would typically find in a municipally-controlled development. This often creates a situation where the regulatory expectations of the new residents that move into these developments are not met. Often, new residents that have recently purchased a lot within the unincorporated area and built large, expensive homes are shocked to find that the County cannot provide typical municipal services or regulatory controls.

The Comal County Commissioners Court and County Staff receive action requests from County residents continually. Listed below are a few examples of the type of complaints the Comal County Commissioners Court and County Staff receive on a regular basis:

- A neighbor is building a structure nearby, blocking the view.
- A large billboard has been erected adjacent to a residential area.
- A dog kennel operation has been opened adjacent to a residential area and barking dogs are a nuisance.
• An existing property owner expresses his dissatisfaction that homes of lesser quality are being built near their property.
• A neighbor is re-directing drainage and causing damage to an adjoining property owner.

Common to all of these concerns is the expectation that these regulatory matters, normally regulated by municipalities, can be addressed by the County.

The County’s authority is limited and residents in the unincorporated areas need to realize these limitations. Consequently, a major challenge for county government is to work to educate citizens on this limited authority in hopes that the general public will understand the role, function, and authority of County government. Additionally, in the situation where additional authority is needed, residents need to understand the process for revising laws in Texas to grant counties, or in some cases, Comal County alone, the capability to adopt the desired regulations.

**Study Best Practices in County Development Management**

There are few opportunities within existing law for Comal County officials to consider establishing higher standards for land development. Travis County has been able to utilize recent legislation to establish Conservation Subdivision regulations. A conservation subdivision is one in which higher density development is planned for a portion of an overall development property in order to preserve a large portion of the property as “open space.” This type of land development can be related to how a golf course is planned; instead of the open space land being used for a golf course, it is preserved in a natural state as a community resource or park-like area (see the provided illustration below).

As the caption indicates, despite the higher density in Figure B, it was rated as ‘Rural’ because of the access to large areas of commonly-shared, open space, as opposed to individual large yards. Another benefit to this type of development is the reduced cost of infrastructure needed to serve it. Comal
Comal County could consider adopting this type of subdivision regulation, following the example of Travis County. (Below is a link to the Travis County Order.)

[Link to Travis County Order]

Hood County has taken a unique approach to managing development growth. It has divided the County into three Districts, with sub-Districts: Water Quality Districts, Road Corridor Districts, and Rural Districts. Each district has a different set of standards and regulations regarding land use, including buildings and housing developments. The Districts are designed to protect the unique qualities of the features within it. Development within the Water Quality District is managed to minimize potential harm to riparian areas. Road Corridor Districts are intended to provide areas for more dense development and commercial growth along major transportation routes. Rural Districts are designed to protect the rural character of Hood County by strictly limiting density as well as services in these districts. The goal is to push development in order to preserve open space and agricultural lands in the rest of the County. While the order does not have zoning in its traditional sense, it does set standards within each district regulating different types of uses. For example, any office use development over 1,000 square feet, and all industrial use, within Water Quality Districts are required to have centralized water and wastewater systems. The order also allows for higher development densities in exchange for restricting development in sensitive areas, such as floodplains or areas containing “significant natural features” that contribute to recreational opportunities or preserve water quality. (Below is a link to Hood County's Order.)

[Link to Hood County Order]

The Texas Legislature granted special authority for Hood County to adopt such regulations. Although it will probably be difficult to get similar legislative authority for Comal County, these examples can serve as starting points for Comal County officials when reviewing its subdivision standards and regulations. The goal is not to turn development away; rather, it is to set standards for quality development within Comal County. Quality land development helps ensure improvements to the quality of life for residents rather than detracting from it. County Commissioners might consider reviewing the best practices from the two counties used as examples, as well as other counties, when considering updates to County regulations in support of quality developments in response to growth.

The District concept used in Hood County is an appropriate model to consider for Comal County, given the abundance, and importance, of water features, such as Canyon Lake, the Guadalupe River as well as numerous springs located throughout the county. Protecting these water features by controlling development adjacent to them, while encouraging development in other more suitable areas, such as the I 35 corridor could be beneficial to County residents in many respects. In moving forward, the County might consider appointing a Task Force, with Commissioners’ participation, to study the issue and create recommendations for updating the County’s regulations toward the goal of managing growth while maintaining quality of life and rural character.
**Implementation Plan: Study Best Practices in County Development Management**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appoint a Task Force to gather information on Best Practices</td>
<td>2 Months</td>
<td>Fall 2012</td>
<td>Commissioners Court, County Development Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Best Practices and Develop Recommendations for Updates</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
<td>Winter 2012</td>
<td>Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Public Input to Review Recommendations and Update</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
<td>Spring, 2013</td>
<td>Task Force, Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with Texas Legislative representatives to obtain authority to adopt new regulations.</td>
<td>9 Months</td>
<td>In advance of and during the 2013 session</td>
<td>County Citizens, Commissioners Court, County Staff, and Legislative Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update County Regulations to Reflect Best Practices and adopt any New Legislative Authority</td>
<td>3 Months</td>
<td>Begin 2013</td>
<td>Commissioners Court and County Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible Partners**
Developers, Land Owners, County Residents, and Staff from Other Counties

**Measurement of Success**
Best Practices Identified by 2013
Updates (if any) complete by December 2013

**Support Legislative Effort to Increase County Authority to Manage Development**
While Comal County can utilize existing precedent from Travis and Hood Counties to establish more intense development standards, there is still a need for greater county authority to regulate development. This is not to say that counties should advocate for all the authority that cities have, such as zoning; instead, it means that there is an opportunity to advance smart legislation that will give counties more tools to manage growth. A myriad of bills have been introduced in every legislative session for the last decade or more urging more County regulatory authority and each has generally failed. This is partly due to such factors as, property rights concerns, lack of support from counties, and more pressing legislative issues.

The Comal County Commissioners Court has taken an active role in addressing County authority issues; however, much more work is required. The County has adopted resolution after resolution in favor of good legislative bills that enhance county authority, but to no avail. Between legislative sessions, the County government works with local legislators to prepare bills that actually meet local concerns. Commissioners also work with other county leaders to garner support for these bills. The Hill Country County Coalition is a group of County Judges and Commissioners who have formed a group that
addresses issues pertaining to county authority. Comal County Commissioners should continue to participate in this organization. Comal County is also active in the Texas Association of Counties and the Conference of Urban Counties. During legislative sessions, County Commissioners actively stay in contact with their state officials and other county leaders to foster good legislation. Their goal is the passage of responsible and fair legislation that supports private property rights and allows maximum benefit to individual property owners while also protecting the community as a whole.

**Implementation Plan: Support Legislative Effort to Increase County Authority to Manage Development**

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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consider a Resolution Supporting Bills that Address this Issue</td>
<td>2 Months</td>
<td>Begin September 2012</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Legislators in Support of Bills</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Citizens and Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay Engaged with the Hill Country Coalition</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay Engaged with the Texas Association of Counties</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay Engaged with the Conference of Urban Counties</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible Partners**
Citizens, regional County Commissioners Courts, County associations, and State Legislators

**Measurement of Success**
Good Legislation is considered by the State Legislature
County Authority is appropriately increased to address growth concerns

**Encourage Development in Most Suitable Areas**
Comal County should strive to protect its rural character and exceptional quality of life. By studying and potentially implementing regulatory models from nearby counties, the County may discover solutions pertaining to growth management. Although County leaders have worked diligently to explore all options available to them under existing law and precedent, establishing strong development standards should be a continuous goal. The potential use of available voluntary methods and inducements to ensure responsible growth will possibly be beneficial to the residents of Comal County.
Implementation Plan: Encourage Development in Most Suitable Areas

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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review available voluntary methods and inducements for responsible growth</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court, County Staff, Economic Developers, and Citizens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with Local Land Trusts and Conservation Groups to Protect Highly Sensitive Areas</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court, Local Land Trusts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
Developers, Land Owners, County Residents, Environmental Groups, Land Trusts

Measure of Success
Adoption of available voluntary methods and inducements for responsible growth
Protection of Highly Sensitive Areas

Recommendation 2: Develop a Communications Strategy to Share Information across the County

County-wide communications was an issue identified throughout the data collection process. Staff and the public alike voiced concerns about the current information-sharing and communications processes. The need to share information in a timely and effective manner is a challenge facing many organizations as traditional lines of communication change. Adapting to a more diverse, and less engaged population is a difficult task, but should move forward. How the County communicates with residents will continue to change in the future. Currently, citizens and county staff feel there is a “disjoint” in how information is shared, so this recommendation to improve methods of communication is vitally important.

Develop Countywide Communications Strategy and Consider Staff to Support
The challenge for the County in improving communications is that there is not one person tasked with the responsibility to manage the County’s message. It is difficult to craft a consistent message and put in the time needed for effective communication when nobody is tasked with it. Busy officials are trying to do their jobs and do not have time to develop an effective communication strategy. County leaders should consider either giving the responsibility to an existing County employee, or possibly hiring a County spokesperson or information officer. This person would be tasked with developing a strategy and implementing effective communications county-wide. This would include internal messages for County staff and information for the general public.
Implementation Plan: Develop Countywide Communication Strategy and Consider Staff to Support

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<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify County staff person to be responsible for Communication (either current staff or new hire)</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>September 2012 - January 2013</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop and implement a Communications Strategy to share information county-wide and internally</td>
<td>6 Months</td>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>Communications Staff, Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
County Staff, Local newspapers, Chambers of Commerce, Homeowners Associations, and other local organizations

Measurement of Success
Position created and staffed
Communications Strategy implemented
County staff and residents indicate they are receiving information in a timely manner

Utilize Internet and Social Media
The internet is probably the most effective medium for communicating with a diverse audience. Although the County utilizes its website as the focus of communication to its citizens and staff, its use could be expanded to provide an informational link between County activities and community opportunities for residents and visitors. Comal County might double its efforts to coordinate with the cities, Chambers of Commerce, and other community and state organizations to ensure that Comal County’s website link is prominent on others’ websites. The internet also provides an opportunity for the County officials to stream meetings for residents to watch; streaming audio-video recordings would enable more residents to see, follow and understand the focus and work of their County leaders and elected officials. Social media such as Face Book, Twitter, and others could be another opportunity to reach a different type of audience. These tools are being used effectively by many Central Texas governments to communicate with residents. For example, the City of Round Rock has a very effective presence on Twitter that it uses to provide information about City activities as well as to get feedback from residents. Constant contact with homeowners associations, civic groups, and other community organizations are other avenues for communication. County officials could reach out to several thousand citizens and visitors with one mass-communication effort.
Implementation Plan: Utilize Internet and Social Media

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establish partnership with Cities, Chambers of Commerce, and other groups to ensure all County web pages are linked and promoted</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Staff, Chambers, Cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide internet broadcast of County meetings</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain regular contact and communication with Homeowners Associations and other groups to help broadcast County news and information</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Communications Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain a Social Media Strategy and Presence</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Communications Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
County Staff, Local newspapers, Chambers of Commerce, Homeowners Associations, other local organizations, LCRA, GBRA, and other governmental agencies.

Measurement of Success
Residents indicate they are receiving information in a timely manner

Utilize Traditional Media
Traditional media is still an important tool for communication. County leaders could work more with area newspapers, publishing regular news-information features. Many residents do not fully understand the diverse roles of County government. A regular newspaper feature about each department could be very effective in closing the “communication gap” between County government and the residents. It would also serve to put a “face” on the many County government individuals as County employees are highlighted and their work presented.

Implementation Plan: Utilize Traditional Media

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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify Staff to produce regular stories to submit to local papers</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produce regular stories highlighting County activities and departments</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Communications Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
County Staff, Local newspapers, and other publications
Measurement of Success
Residents indicate they are more knowledgeable about the work of County government

Conduct County Meetings and Activities throughout the County
County government should continue “going to the people”. Most residents cannot attend regular Court meetings because regular meetings are held during the day when they are at work. If the Commissioners Court could hold some meetings in the evenings, perhaps more residents could attend. Additionally, some County offices maintain regular business hours in satellite offices in different parts of the County; however perhaps not enough services are provided.

Implementation Plan: Conduct County Meetings and Activities throughout the County

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hold Commissioners Court meetings in the evening and in other parts of</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the County on a regular basis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County Staff can hold Office Hours in outlying areas of the County</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not served by a full time office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
Cities, School Districts, Library Districts, Utility Companies and others (to provide temporary, occasional space)

Measurement of Success
County meetings held across the County
Additional Office hours are provided

Recommendation 3: Develop a Facilities Plan

The interviews with staff and County officials, both elected and appointed, revealed a critical need for a comprehensive facilities plan (See final page of Appendix A for Strategic Policy Planning Questions). County employees are currently housed within 16 buildings in New Braunfels and in satellite offices in locations around the County. Court space, in particular, is at a “breaking point,” with Judges having to juggle cases and share courtroom space. Security is a very important issue, both for the Courts, County employees and the public in general. The County Jail inmate population poses another issue that must be addressed, as jail space is limited and likely will require expansion in the near future. The County is currently working on developing a comprehensive facilities plan to address the needs for the Jail as well as other facilities.
The County recently faced the challenge of citizens’ resistance to building a new facility when they defeated bond-funding to build a downtown justice center designed to house the County-Courts-At-Law, District Courts, Criminal District Attorneys Offices, District Clerks, and County-Court-At-Law Clerks. Although County officials attempted to establish and maintain a transparent process that highlighted the need for a new facility, a strong communication strategy to overcome misperceptions and negativity with clear facts and positive information was needed. County governmental needs are subject to public sentiment which is based on many factors including vocal community-based leaders, the current economic climate, and other personal perceptions such as satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, with local, State and National elected leaders. If the County develops a clear plan for facilities that meets long-term County needs, is cost effective, and then can communicate the information clearly to residents, they will have an opportunity for citizens to support their efforts.

Implementation Plan: Work to Develop a Comprehensive Facilities Plan.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hire facilities planning consultant to develop detailed plan</td>
<td>1 Months</td>
<td>April, 2012</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With consultant, raise the level of the Facilities Planning and expand</td>
<td>6 Months</td>
<td>April–October 2012</td>
<td>Consultant, Commissioners Court, all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purview to all County facilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elected Officials, and all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize input from this process and follow up information gathering of</td>
<td>2 Months</td>
<td>October 2012</td>
<td>Commissioners Court, all Elected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff to establish initial needs and determine opportunities for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Officials, and all Department Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared facilities with Cities, School Districts, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oversee development of new County facilities as needed</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
County Staff, Cities, School Districts, other governmental entities

Measurement of Success
Construction of identified needed facilities

Recommendation 4: Ensure Adequate Infrastructure for Growing Population

The growing population will directly affect and increase pressure on the County’s infrastructure. Maintaining and expanding infrastructure is a complicated effort because there are many responsible
parties and necessary resources. The process of building and maintaining the County’s road network requires extensive coordination between the Texas Department of Transportation, County officials and engineers, adjacent cities, and land developers. Water and wastewater planning has proven to pose even more complicated issues as the County has limited legislative authority to influence the outcome and management of these resources. Groundwater conservation and drainage are significant issues that have a county-wide impact. There is much work to be done to maintain quality service to residents. County leaders must reach out to many others lawmakers, representatives, resource scientists, and consultants to ensure infrastructure is available to serve the population growth.

**Support the Creation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization**

Discussions are currently underway for the creation of a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) encompassing Comal and Guadalupe Counties, and most of the cities within them. This organization will be responsible for developing long range transportation plans and could be the conduit for State and Federal money to fund identified transportation projects. Having an MPO will allow Comal and Guadalupe counties autonomy in their planning and the opportunity to direct funding to local projects that are desired by Comal County, Guadalupe County and most of the cities within these counties. (Some areas of Comal County are currently included in the San Antonio/Bexar Metropolitan Planning Organization.

### Implementation Plan: Support the Creation of an MPO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue to support the creation of the MPO</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court, Cities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible Partners**

County Staff, Cities, and Guadalupe County

**Measurement of Success**

MPO Created

**Examine the cost effectiveness of utilizing private contractors in Road Department operations**

Certain road department activities could be bid out to the private sector. The activities could include, right-of-way mowing, right-of-way brush removal, final re-surfacing paving operations, and potentially several other work components of the Comal County Road Department. The County should evaluate these operations to see if savings could be achieved through privatization.
Implementation Plan: Examine the cost effectiveness of utilizing private contractors

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation job cost of existing operations including manpower, fuel, equipment and materials cost for all Road Department Operations</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>During 2012</td>
<td>County Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain proposals from private contracts to execute potential cost saving operations</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>During 2013</td>
<td>County Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget cost-effective private contracting operations</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>June/July 2013</td>
<td>County Engineer and Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bid private contracting operations</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>During 2014</td>
<td>County Engineer, Purchasing Director, and Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
County Staff, Private Contractors

Measurement of Success
Cost savings achieved through privatization of certain Road Department operations

Encourage Water Conservation, Groundwater District, and Rainwater Harvesting

Water conservation is increasingly important as the population grows. More and more residents are relying on groundwater, and there is currently limited authority to regulate this resource. There have been efforts in the past to create a Groundwater Conservation District; however, they have been defeated. The County continues to support efforts to examine the need to determine if such a District is needed to monitor and protect groundwater for all residents. The County also has taken a stance in encouraging rainwater harvesting as part of new development by helping residents learn to retrofit their existing properties. The County, serving as an advocate for water conservation, could utilize its emerging communication methods to encourage residents not to waste water. The County can also serve as a water conservation example by incorporating rainwater harvesting in new facilities and practicing xeriscaping methods in all new County facilities.
Implementation Plan: Encourage Water Conservation, Groundwater District, Rainwater Harvesting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support on-going efforts to examine the need for the creation of a Groundwater Conservation District for western Comal County</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide conservation information and promotion via County website and other media</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research best practices from other counties to promote rainwater harvesting</td>
<td>6 Months</td>
<td>January – June 2013</td>
<td>County Development Staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
Water Supply Corporations, Water Utilities, Cities, Residents

Measurement of Success
Public election on creation of Groundwater Conservation District
Per Capita Water Use is reduced
Rainwater Harvesting becomes more widespread

Support Drainage and Flood Control Initiatives
Water shortages have been a problem due to recent dry weather patterns and resulting drought conditions. However, too much water and flooding can also plague the County when development continues to expand without regulatory controls. New development can lead to additional storm water management challenges. The County has been involved in a project to upgrade several dams in the County, and this effort will continue. If the County encourages the utilization of low-impact development standards, these can help manage storm water on-site rather than when simply building large, off site detention ponds. These low impact facilities can be as simple as a small rain garden to a large, recreated “wetland” that slows and cleans water as it flows through. See http://www.lowimpactdevelopment.org/ for examples. Low impact development can be more efficient at managing water run-off as well as being more cost effective for developers. In addition, such development can be an effective management strategy to ensure groundwater is protected for the long term.
Implementation Plan: Support Drainage and Flood Control Initiatives

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue upgrading and improving existing flood control dams and facilities</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research best practices in low impact development for storm water management</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Engineer, County Development Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider incorporating low impact development standards in development regulations</td>
<td>1 Month</td>
<td>During 2013</td>
<td>County Engineer, County Development Staff, Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible Partners**
Developers, Consulting Engineers

**Measurement of Success**
Existing Facilities modified
Low Impact Development standards adopted for new development

**Recommendation 5: Ensure Adequate Staffing Levels to Meet Growing Demands**

In order to serve the citizens effectively, elected and appointed officials have an obligation to maintain their staffing at an adequate level. New employees may be needed to serve growing demands of an increasing population. As Comal County population grows, demand on County services will grow. Technology and efficiencies have allowed the County to meet growing demand with limited staff or budget increases for the last several years. However, as growth continues, the County will likely have to add staff and facilities to meet growing demand. This plan provides an outline of what is likely to be needed, allowing County leaders to make decisions and allocate resources most effectively to address critical as well as long-term needs.

**Encourage Collaboration and Cooperation Across the County**
Another opportunity for elected and appointed officials is to coordinate their activities and projects to reduce redundancy. Department heads already have regular meetings, structured in a way that supports collaboration and innovation across departments. Future needs for equipment and facilities should be considered in an effort to obtain maximum usage across the County, including local cities and school districts. Comal County officials should continue meeting with local city, school, and civic leaders to identify common issues and opportunities to cooperate.
Implementation Plan: Encourage Collaboration and Cooperation Across the County

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue regular department meetings and workshops</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Commissioners, Elected Officials, Department Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with cities, school districts, and others to identify opportunities to share facilities, equipment and purchasing</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Commissioners, School Districts, Cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct periodic meetings with elected and appointed leaders from all levels of local government to ensure strong relationships and sharing of ideas</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court, Cities, School Districts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
Cities, School Districts, other government agencies

Measurement of Success
Cooperation is increased across the County

Consider a Grant Writer
The County should consider refining its grant writing processes by having a grant writer on staff. Currently, grant writing is handled on an individual, departmental basis. Having a grant writer on staff would allow for a coordinated effort to be made, targeting those grants most needed by the County.

Implementation Plan: Consider Hiring a Grant Writer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meet with existing grant writers to determine feasibility</td>
<td>1 Month</td>
<td>January 2013</td>
<td>County Commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish role and responsibilities of grant writer</td>
<td>1 Month</td>
<td>June 2013</td>
<td>County Commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage grant writer</td>
<td>1 Year</td>
<td>During 2014</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possible Partners
Cities, School Districts, other government agencies

Measurement of Success
Grant Writer in place by 2014

Ensure Adequate Staffing Levels to Meet Growing Demands
While County leaders are open-minded and understand the growing demands, it takes time to provide justification for new hiring. The Commissioners Court understands that employees can only be asked to do so much and more staff will be needed. Department heads and Elected Officials should be ready to explain the need to get support for increasing their staff. Equipment and facilities are another part of this planning. County leaders should continue to work together to ensure major capital expenses, staffing needs, and facilities planning are scheduled in order to spread the additional funding needs over a number of years.

Implementation Plan: Ensure Adequate Staffing Levels to Meet Growing Demands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilize interviews in this plan to identify needed staff</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Commissioners, Elected Officials, Department Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize staff increases</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Commissioners, Elected Officials, Department Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget for needed increases as feasible</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possible Partners
Department heads and elected officials

Measurement of Success
Staffing remains adequate to serve growing population

Recommendation 6: Continue Focus on Efficiency and Cost Effective Services

Support Technology Improvements
Elected and appointed officials have been conservative in their budgeting for years. Comal County leaders manage to provide services to a rapidly growing population without major increases in budget, staffing or tax rate. This has been successful through technology improvements and other efficiencies.
As Commissioners Court continues its support of Information Technology (IT) improvements and other methods of “streamlining” services, employees will be able to continue serving a growing population more efficiently and effectively. One example of IT “streamlining” is to conduct video magistration; this technology allows the Justices of the Peace, and other Judges, to magistrate prisoners from their offices. While the price tag for innovative technology may seem high initially, it would be balanced against the long term costs of adding employees and transportation to do the same work.

**Implementation Plan: Support Technology Improvements**

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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prioritize needed upgrades and new systems</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Commissioners, Elected Officials, Department Heads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget for needed improvements as feasible</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible Partners**
Cities, School Districts, other government agencies that may be able to cost share

**Measurement of Success**
New technology utilized to full effect to improve efficiency and workflow

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7: Support Economic Development

Comal County is well-served due to the active role of their Chambers of Commerce in promoting economic development. The County currently provides some funding to the New Braunfels Chamber, which in turn provides active business recruitment and consulting services to the City as well as to the rest of the County. As other Chambers expand their capacity and economic development activities, the County may be able to provide support for those organizations as well. If these other Chambers provide services to the County which significantly contribute to the economic development of the tax base as measured by tax abatements, TIRZ, TIFF, Chapter 381 agreements or sales tax rebate agreements, the County may want to consider funding agreements with these Chambers.

County residents strongly supported economic development in the survey; however, they specified primary employment in the fields of high-tech and manufacturing, as opposed to more retail and service businesses. This may be an indication of residents’ expectations of further growth for the area. A economic development policy should target businesses that provide quality employment with minimal environmental or other negative consequences. The goal is a sustainable economy that provides good jobs and a solid tax base for Comal County. Data collected through the public survey strongly supported
economic development and job creation within Comal County (see Appendix B for survey questions and results).

**Implementation Plan: Incorporate Economic Development Countywide**

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<tr>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Who’s Responsible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue support for New Braunfels Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider supporting other Chambers of Commerce meeting specified criteria</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>County Commissioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review and Update Economic Development Policy as needed</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>On-going</td>
<td>Commissioners Court, Economic Development professionals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Possible Partners**
Cities, Chambers of Commerce

**Measurement of Success**
Update of Economic Development Policy as needed
New Businesses locate in Comal County
Existing Businesses expand

**Conclusion**

Comal County has the opportunity to create a community that supports growth without being defined by it. Citizens will have to be actively involved and committed to achieving the goals in this plan to ensure that their desires, as expressed within, are reflected in the decisions that are made.

With this plan, Comal County has taken an important step in defining its future. The purpose of this type of planning exercise is to plan for the future and have voice in how a community grows and changes. Good planning allows communities to build on strengths and address challenges effectively. This plan is not intended to constrain action; rather, it is intended to create a framework for decision-making that incorporates the desires of residents and County staff alike. The County Elected Officials and Department Heads will take the lead to implement this plan with the help of its citizens.

To be successful, County leaders and citizens must work together to implement the recommendations. This plan is simply a tool to protect the quality of life and heritage of Comal County for future generations.

Please note that an additional component of this study included the preparation of a Demographic Analysis of Comal County. This demographic analysis is attached to this report as Appendix D.